



People, Power & Protest: Protecting & Promoting Human Rights in Belarus

Date: Thursday, 3rd September 2020

Location: Online via Zoom

Time: from 6pm

For 26 years Alexander Lukashenko has been widely referred to as "the last dictator of Europe". Belarus, under Lukashenko's tenure, is not a democratic society. As with all totalitarian regimes, power resides in Presidential authority. There is no meaningful accountability. Human rights are neither universal nor accessible. Periodically, there is a vote for the President. This is an opportunity for Lukashenko to inform the people of Belarus of his popular mandate. He chooses his majority and the results are engineered to reflect his demands.

On 9 August 2020, such a presidential election was held. Lukashenko had decided his percentage of the vote on this occasion would be 80%. Accordingly, the official results awarded the President an impressive 80% of voters. Lukashenko had miscalculated. This result was untenable and unacceptable. The EU pointed out the absurdity of the result and refused to recognise it. The UK followed suit.

More importantly, incredulous Belarusians immediately took to the streets to express their disbelief. In an unprecedented challenge to Lukashenko's power, large numbers of Belarusians protested peacefully across the country. The authorities sought to brutally disperse these protests, detaining thousands. The result has been the most serious human rights violations and a political crisis which is far from being resolved. The protests continue, as do the human rights violations. Lukashenko's hold on power is being challenged.

A Webinar to Explore the Belarus Crisis

To help understand and explain what is happening in Belarus a number of organisations including the Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales (BHRC), Doughty Street International, the International Bar Association Human Rights Initiative (IBAHRI) and the International Law and Human Rights Unit of the University of Liverpool (ILHRU), as well as key individual human rights defenders, have organised a webinar.

The aim of the webinar is to explore and discuss what options there are in the short, medium and long term to resolve the crisis in Belarus. The webinar will map the recent events from a human rights and a political perspective.

Speakers:

Chair, Baroness Helena Kennedy QC (DSI & IBAHRI)

Panellists:

Natallia Satsunkevich (Human Rights NGO Viasna, Belarus)

Elena Korosteleva (University of Kent)

Kanstantsin Dzehtsiarou (University of Liverpool)

Miriam Lexmann MEP

Sergey Dikman (Council of Europe)

Laurynas Jonavicius (University of Vilnius)

Discussants:

Bill Bowring (Birkbeck College & BHRC)

Boriss Cilevics (Parliament of Latvia, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe) (TBC)

On behalf of the ILHRU at University of Liverpool, Kanstantsin Dzehtsiarou says:

"In the aftermath of the Presidential Elections in Belarus, the authorities have brutally violated almost all known universal human rights. These violations have to be investigated and the perpetrators need to be punished."

On behalf of IBAHRI, Baroness Helena Kennedy QC says:

"The yearnings of the people of Belarus to live in a free and just society cannot be ignored. The international community has a duty to support their struggle for real democracy. The Rule of Law does not mean rule by authoritarian diktat and lawyers everywhere should be supporting the call to assert the fundamental rights of the people - to protest, assemble, to have fair trial and access to independent lawyers and independent judges, free from torture and coercion, free to speak their beliefs, free to live in dignity."

On behalf of BHRC, Stephen Cragg QC says:

"Belarus is party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the UN Convention against Torture (CAT). The ICCPR guarantees all the relevant rights that have been violated in Belarus, including the rights to life, liberty and security of person, freedom from arbitrary arrest, freedom from torture and ill-treatment, and the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Belarus needs to comply with its duties under international law."

On behalf of the Global Europe Centre at Kent, Elena Korosteleva says:

"Academic collaboration with Belarus supported by the EU and UK capacity-building initiatives, has been growing year on year breaking all possible boundaries. The current crisis in the country is just another testimony to how far the capabilities of Belarusian society have now outgrown the restrictive and increasingly oppressive nature of the regime, which can no longer contain the people's zest for freedom and dignity."

On behalf of DSI, Jonathan Cooper OBE says:

"The human rights crisis in Belarus shows the importance of international organisations and the oversight they provide. Belarus needs to become a full member of the Council of Europe and be under the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights. The Council of Europe can assist the Belarusian authorities guarantee human rights in Belarus and the European Court ensures protection."

To register your place, please [click here](#).