

Human Rights Council – 26th session

Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus

18 June 2014

Statement by Ireland

Mr. President,

Ireland welcomes the Special Rapporteur and thanks him for his comprehensive report to the Council. We would like to make some remarks in addition to those made on our behalf in the statement of the European Union.

The situation of human rights in Belarus continues to be of serious concern. As the Special Rapporteur has documented, concerns exist across the whole spectrum of rights: economic, social and cultural as well as civil and political. The human rights of the population are negatively affected in a wide variety of ways, ranging from the widespread use of short-term employment contracts, which places up to 90% of all workers in a precarious situation, to restrictions

on the exercise of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, assembly and association.

I would like to highlight in particular the issue of the death penalty, which, as the Special Rapporteur has pointed out, is used in Belarus with no guarantee of due process. The passing of death sentences in closed trials, public comments by top-level officials on the need to impose death sentences in particular cases, lack of information on the carrying out of executions and the fact that the bodies of executed persons are not released to their families for burial are all grounds for serious concern. In the light of these, we call on Belarus to impose an immediate moratorium on the use of the death penalty, with a view to its abolition.

We are also concerned at reported widespread arrests and detention of persons, including journalists, lawyers, human rights defenders and members of political organisations, and at the use of arrest and detention as a means of intimidation or as a preventive measure. We fully share the Special Rapporteur's alarm that any person can be arrested and detained at any time in reprisal for disagreement with or criticism of the authorities or for engaging in the promotion of human rights.

We underline the importance of the Special Rapporteur's recommendation to repeal article 193.1 of the Criminal Code that criminalises public activities without official permission, and fully review legislation affecting the work of non-governmental organisations and human rights defenders to bring it into line with this Council's resolution 22/6 of 21 March 2013, which was adopted by consensus.

We would like to ask the Special Rapporteur *which steps, in his view, are the most urgent to take in order to create and maintain, in law and in practice, a safe and enabling environment in which civil society can operate free from hindrance and insecurity.*

Finally, we call on the government of Belarus to cooperate with the Special Rapporteur and to invite him to visit the country.

I thank you, Mr. President.