



**An open letter from the representatives of organizations
defending women's rights, gender equality and peacebuilding in
the OSCE region in support of women of Belarus**

During the last month, Belarus is at the center of world news as everyone's attention is riveted to mass demonstrations which take place in the country. Beyond doubt Belarus has one of the most enduring leaderships out of other countries of former Soviet Union. After presidential elections held in the country on August 9, 2020 mass protests started to take place all over the country. However, while, hundreds of thousands of people are protesting against the ruling regime demanding free and fair elections, the government prefers to ignore the requirements of the population and enforce harsh measures to dispel demonstrators and intimidate civilians. Hundreds of people are politically persecuted. Independent journalists are arrested, while any other civilians who shows their dissent are suppressed and silenced. In this way the government wants to “teach a lesson” to those citizens who are disobedient. Many intellectuals, journalists, political analysts had to flee the country to escape “punishment”. According to the official data, during only three days starting from 9 to 12 August, 2020 more than 7,000 peaceful protesters have been detained.

During these challenging times for the country women took important and leading role in political life of the trying to shape “country's path towards change”. Belarusian women played a special role in the election campaign and the subsequent protest movement. Three women became the face of the opposition which became direct evidence of the absurdity and discriminatory nature of the authorities' assertion that a woman in Belarus cannot become a president.

After the elections and the start of the protest movement, it was the women who came out for a peaceful rally in the center of Minsk on August 12. They introduced the life chain of solidarity which demonstrated the peaceful nature of their protest against electoral fraud. With this movement they also called for the end of violence and the release of all detainees and political prisoners. During the following days women's marches and chains of solidarity became an irreplaceable part of street actions throughout Belarus. Women dressed in white and holding flowers became not only a symbol of Belarusian protest but also demonstrated the importance and strength of the women's movement. According to independent estimates, over 10,000 women took part in the Women's Solidarity March on 29th of August.

With this letter, we, representatives of organizations defending women's rights, gender equality, and promoting peacebuilding in the OSCE region, would like to express our solidarity with the women of Belarus, our admiration with their fortitude, courage and unbreakable principles.

In support of the peaceful protest and the demands of civil society, we emphasize the need for an immediate end of violence against civilians. We call for the end of persecution of

peaceful protesters and release of political prisoners. We urge to stop the pressure imposed on the independent media and journalists, highlighting the importance to investigate cases of torture and ill-treatment of detainees, as well as encourage holding new elections based on OSCE standards.

We emphasize that security and strength of any modern state does not depend on the quantity and sophistication of arms, but depends on protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms of each citizen, equal participation of women and men in state building and guarantee of democratic principles within the state.

We call on the OSCE participating States to support civil society in Belarus.

1.9.2020 In the name of the WG, with participants from Germany, Italy, Armenia, Austria, Ukraine, Albania, Georgia, Switzerland

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<https://www.civicsolidarity.org/member/1451/working-group-women-and-gender-realities-osce-region>