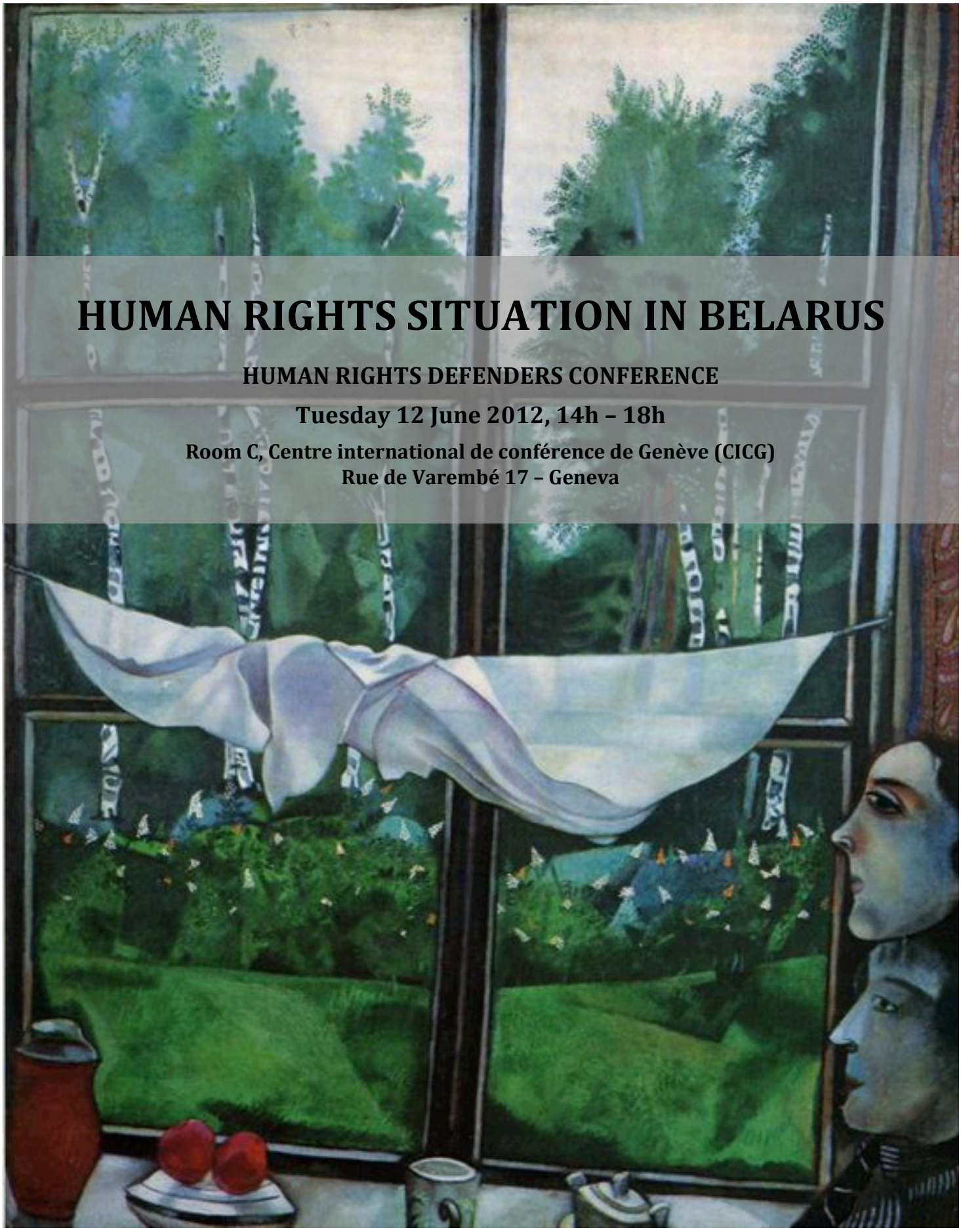

HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN BELARUS

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS CONFERENCE

Tuesday 12 June 2012, 14h – 18h

Room C, Centre international de conférence de Genève (CICG)
Rue de Varembé 17 – Geneva

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

CIVICUS
World Alliance for Citizen Participation

HUMAN RIGHTS HOUSE FOUNDATION

fidh
Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'Homme

HUMAN RIGHTS HOUSE VILNIUS

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN BELARUS

Human rights defenders conference

Tuesday 12 June 2012, 14h – 18h

Room C
Centre international de conférence de Genève
Rue de Varembé 17 – Geneva
http://www.cicg.ch

Public conference on the human rights situation in the Republic of Belarus. Simultaneous Russian/English interpretation will be provided.

Although this conference is public, **please rsvp**:
geneva@humanrightshouse.org

Organised by:

HRHF Human Rights House Foundation

Co-sponsored by:

Amnesty International
Belarusian Human Rights House
CIVICUS World Alliance for Citizen Participation
FIDH International Federation for Human Rights
HRW Human Rights Watch

HRHF Human Rights House Foundation

Rue de Varembé 1, PO Box 35
1211 Geneva 20
Tel: +4122 33 22 554
Fax: +4122 33 22 559
E-mail: geneva@humanrightshouse.org

Illustraion
© Marc Chagall. Window in the Country (Fenêtre à la campagne), 1915
Oil on canvas - 100 x 80.5 cm. The Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow (Russia)

CONFERENCE AGENDA

14h – 14h30 **Welcome messages**

- Belarusian Human Rights House
- Amnesty International

14h30 – 15h15 **Freedom of association: Recent amendments to legislation and restrictions to registrations**

Moderation: International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH)

Speakers:

- Belarusian Human Rights House
- Legal Transformation Centre / Foundation for Legal Technologies Development

15h15 – 15h45 **Break**

15h45 – 16h30 **Arbitrary detentions: Situation of political prisoners and right to legal counsel**

Moderation: Human Rights House Foundation (HRHF)

Speakers:

- Wife of a political prisoner
- Human Rights Centre “Viasna”
- Disbarred lawyer

16h30 – 17h30 **Use of torture and ill-treatment**

Moderation: Human Rights Watch (HRW)

Speakers:

- Informational-Educational institution "Platform"
- Disbarred lawyer

17h30 – 18h **Closure**

- Belarusian Human Rights House
- Human Rights House Foundation

Due to the travel ban by Belarusian authorities against human rights defenders and lawyers, and for other security reasons, the names of the speakers are not published on this programme.

The organisers would like to underline that the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Belarus to the United Nations in Geneva has been invited to take the floor either at the opening or at the closing of the conference. This invitation has been declined on 8 June.

BELARUS FACES BOTH CHRONIC AND URGENT HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES

Systematic abuses regularly documented by Special Procedures and Treaty Bodies for many years, such as the routine use of torture to extract confessions from detainees, restrictions on the rights to freedom of assembly, expression and the press, and fair trial violations have increased since the last presidential election, having worsened even in the last months. As stated by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in her report to the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/20/8), "The already restrictive laws regulating civil and political rights were further tightened by amendments to various laws adopted by Parliament on 21 October 2011". The High Commissioner also stressed that the information collected "suggests a pattern of serious violations of human rights since 19 December 2010" and that a number of actions "were clearly aimed at curtailing the rights to freedoms of association, assembly and expression, and the right to a fair trial." **The situation of human rights defenders and political opponents has continued to deteriorate, making a bolder response from the Human Rights Council necessary.**

At the same time, for years, Belarus has **avoided any meaningful engagement with the special procedures mechanism**. Since the establishment of the Human Rights Council, Belarus only granted access to the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, but has failed to respond to key requests for visits by the Special Rapporteurs on freedom of association and assembly, on human rights defenders, on torture and the Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearances.

In this context, and given Belarus' increasing closure to human rights scrutiny, the Human Rights Council should establish a **country-specific mandate, such as a Special Rapporteur, on the situation of human rights in Belarus** for at least two years. Such a mechanism would also play an important role independently documenting abuses and monitoring implementation of recommendations put forth by the various United Nations mechanisms, in particular the most recent formulated in the High Commissioner's report.

A country mandate is the only mechanism that would allow daily interaction with human rights defenders and actual victims of human rights violations. It would provide support to local civil society that is currently under threat, and would help building a greater political space for civil society action on human rights issues. It would also provide advice and recommendations to the Government of Belarus on reforms needed to ensure the full enjoyment of the rights to freedom of association, assembly and expression, to prevent torture and ill-treatment in custody, as well as to address the lack of independence of the judiciary. Finally, it will increase pressure on the Belarusian government with a view to securing the release of all political prisoners and human rights defenders, including "Viasna" President Ales Bialiatski.

Sustained international engagement and monitoring, including the creation of a Special Rapporteur mandate to monitor the situation of human rights violations in Belarus and report back to the Council, is the most adequate response to the systematic nature of the abuses currently taking place in Belarus.

The organisation of this conference is supported by:

OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS

VILLE DE GENÈVE

REPUBLIQUE ET CANTON DE GENEVE

POST TENEBRAS LUX