



Strategic response to the human rights and security crisis in Eastern Europe

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IMAGE: MAPBOX

The 24 February 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine must be considered within the broader regional human rights crisis which encompasses Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine.

For the last two decades, Russian authorities have systematically attacked and rolled back fundamental freedoms, shut down independent media, targeted civil society, and banned peaceful protest in Russia. They have supported and enabled the authoritarian government of Alexander Lukashenka in Belarus and actively sought to destabilise the democratically elected governments of Ukraine.

The international community must respond to the growing human rights and security crisis in Eastern Europe with a systematic and strategic approach.

Ensure accountability

The regional nature of the human rights crisis requires that the UN Human Rights Council establishes specific accountability mechanisms to collect, preserve, and document violations in Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine. Member states must also ensure that new and existing mechanisms are fully resourced.

Russia

- Establish a UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Russia during HRC49.
- Suspend Russia's membership of the Human Rights Council.

Ukraine

- Establish an independent UN human rights investigative mechanism to collect, analyse, and preserve human rights violations related to the Russian invasion of Ukraine at HRC49.
- Ensure that the United Nations Monitoring Mission in Ukraine is fully equipped and resourced, including to assist a new investigative mechanism in Ukraine.

Belarus

- Renew the OHCHR Examination of human rights violations related to the August 2020 president election during HRC49.
- Renew the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus during HRC50.

Protect human rights defenders

The human rights crisis in Eastern Europe is affecting human rights defenders in Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia. In Belarus, HRDs continue to be targeted by Belarusian authorities for their association with now-banned human rights organisations. In Ukraine, both Ukrainian HRDs as well as Belarusian HRDs who fled Belarus are now the targets of the Russian authorities. Recent reporting suggests that the Russian authorities have lists of political leaders and HRDs to detain. In Russia, the situation for HRDs has deteriorated for years with further repression taking place daily. At present, those voicing public opposition to the war in Ukraine are being detained and independent media channels providing objective information about the invasion have been forced to close.

- Provide **flexible and speedy visa processes for Russian-, Ukrainian-, and Belarusian HRDs and their families** seeking to relocate temporarily or permanently (or those wishing to have a visa in case a rapid relocation becomes necessary) as well as logistical and financial support for them to continue their work in exile.

In Ukraine (in addition to Ukrainian HRDs, Ukraine is also home to many Belarusian HRDs who were forced to flee Belarus following the August 2020 crackdown)

- Identify, assist, and call international attention to individual HRDs in Ukraine (Ukrainian or Belarusian) at significant risk and facing imminent threat by Russian authorities for their legitimate human rights work.
- Use diplomatic presences in Ukraine to endeavor to protect HRDs (Ukrainian and Belarusian) and their families at significant risk, and facing an imminent threat by Russian authorities for their legitimate human rights work.

In Russia

- Ensure safe, secure, and reliable communication channels are open for HRDs to share information with diplomatic missions.
- Prepare for possibility of massive crackdown on HRDs and human rights organisations which could result in the need to exit from Russia.
- Consider HRDs and their families remaining in Russia when designing sanctions, flight bans, and other punitive measures against the Russian authorities
- React swiftly to reprisals against HRDs, including journalists, who have engaged with international organisations and monitoring mechanisms.
- Request access to trials and detention facilities where political prisoners are held.

In Belarus

- Ensure safe, secure, and reliable communication channels are open for HRDs to share information with diplomatic missions.
- React swiftly to reprisals against HRDs, including journalists, who have engaged with international organisations and monitoring mechanisms.
- Request access to trials and detention facilities where political prisoners are held.

Support independent media and journalists

In Belarus and Russia, independent media and journalists are under attack by the authorities. Any outlet or journalist which does not conform with strict censorship rules face criminal prosecution. In Ukraine, independent media and journalists run the risk of being targeted by the Russian authorities.

- Provide **flexible visa processes for Russian-, Ukrainian-, and Belarusian journalists and their families** seeking to relocate temporarily or permanently as well as logistical and financial support for them to continue their work in exile.
- Provide **funding** to independent media outlets and journalists still operating within Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine.

More info

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