



# BELARUS RUSSIA Strategic response to the human rights and security crisis in Ukraine

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IMAGE: MAPBOX

The renewed invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation on 24 February 2022 must be considered within the broader regional human rights crisis which encompasses Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine and addressed accordingly by the international community.

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

- Suspend Russia's membership of the Human Rights Council.
- Establish a UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Russia during HRC50.

### Ukraine

- Fully resource the Commission of Inquiry established by the Human Rights Council 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.

- Support renewed presence of multilateral institutions, including monitoring missions, in Ukraine.
- Utilise the OSCE's Moscow Mechanism to report on human rights violations surrounding the war and recommend appropriate responses.

### Belarus

- Ensure the rapid and full operationalisation of the renewed OHCHR Examination of human rights violations related to the August 2020 presidential election approved by the Human Rights Council at 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, Ukrainian HRDs, Belarusian HRDs who fled Belarus as well as HRDs from other countries are now the targets of the Russian authorities. Recent reporting suggests that the Russian authorities have lists of political leaders and HRDs to target. 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).
- Prolong the possibility for Russian and Belarusian HRDs to stay in the Schengen area longer than for 3 months.
- Provide possibilities for Russian and Belarusian HRDs to apply for visas from the third countries.
- Ensure immediate and longer-term logistical and financial support to HRDs and their families so they can continue their work in exile.
- Ensure support to local protection infrastructures and civil society in countries that face Russian occupation and unresolved armed conflicts (such as Armenia, Georgia and Moldova) and that now provide support to fleeing HRDs from the countries affected by the war.
- Recognise the expertise of Ukrainian, Belarusian and Russian HRDs by inviting them to thematic events and involving them in expert groups
- Stand ready to provide support to Belarusian and Russian HRDs in Eastern Europe and Caucasus who run the risk of harassment due to association with the aggressor state.

**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.
- Support necessary adjustments to working and communication methods and/or exit from Russia of local civil society partners in response to the massive crackdown on HRDs and human rights organisations.
- 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.

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## 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 are at high risk of being targeted by the Russian authorities. Several journalists have already lost their lives reporting on the war.

- 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 as well as those working in exile.

## Empower and support Ukrainian civil society

International attention and funding has shifted rapidly to support efforts to document war crimes, crimes against humanity, and grave human rights violations in Ukraine. In addition to working relentlessly to provide humanitarian aid, Ukrainian civil society has undertaken the critical work of documentation, often with international partners. The international community and donors must recognise the strength and resiliency of Ukrainian civil society and ensure that Ukrainian civil society remains at the center of this work.

- Design support and other interventions which maintain the agency of Ukrainian civil society and provide, if necessary, a supporting role for international civil society and other international partners.
- Consider shifting programme or project funding to core support in order to allow Ukrainian civil society to adjust to rapidly changing local situations.
- Build, where necessary, the capacity of Ukrainian civil society to document, analyse, and preserve evidence in a manner consistent with international accountability and prosecutorial requirements.

### More info

**Dave Elseroad**  
Head of Advocacy  
dave.elseroad@humanrightshouse.org  
+41 78 344 36 18

**Matthew Jones**  
International Advocacy Officer  
matthew.jones@humanrightshouse.org  
+41 79 741 73 21