

Human Rights Council, 52nd Session

22nd March 2023

Item 4: Interactive dialogue on the OHCHR report on the situation of human rights in Belarus in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election and in its aftermath

Oral statement delivered by the International Fellowship of Reconciliation.

Mr. President, Madam Deputy High Commissioner,

International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR) is very alarmed by the increasing militarization in Belarus and in particular by Belarusian military training programs of children and [the institution of] *military-patriotic clubs for children and youth*.ⁱ According to the statistics, in the summer of 2022 over 18.000 children underwent training in militarized patriotic camps, where children as young as 6 have been trained to use firearms, for instance. [Those camps result to be under the patronage of the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Ministry of Emergency Situations.]ⁱⁱ

IFOR is also very concerned by the ongoing violations of the human right to conscientious objection to military service [and the conditions of military service itself].ⁱⁱⁱ

Although in September 2022 it was stated that there would be no mobilization in Belarus, starting from October it has been declared that Belarus would participate in a 'special operation' and joint activities with the Russian militaries started^{iv}.

On October 12, 2022, the Belarusian parliament adopted in the first reading a draft law which, among other things, updated the grounds for granting the right to defer conscription, reducing the number of persons receiving deferment of conscription.

In August-December 2022, there have been at least six cases of men charged under Article 435, Part 1 of the Criminal Code (evasion of regular call-up to active military service). [One of them was fined 2,240 BYN (approximately 907 EUR)^v. On September 29, 2022, a 24-year-old man who wanted to avoid military service and went to Poland was tried. He was detained on his return to Belarus and sentenced to a two-month arrest^{vi}.

On August 18, 2022, a criminal case was brought against two women in Vitebsk who tried to protect their son and nephew from military service. They have been arrested and face up to seven years in prison^{vii}.]

On February 21, 2023, the deputies of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly approved in the second reading amendments to the Criminal Code, in particular, they introduced criminal liability for discrediting the army and death penalty for high treason, and thus for desertion.

In May, 2022, an amendments to the Criminal Code introduced death penalty for attempted acts of terrorism. It has been reported a possible link between the adoption of this amendment and similar ones and the so-called phenomenon of "Belarusian railway partisans" who are conducting non-violent actions blocking military railway transportation, mostly Russian^{viii}.

IFOR calls on this Council to ensure the universality and non-derogability of human rights and urge Belarus to respect children rights and conscientious objectors' rights and respect General Assembly resolution 77/222 on death penalty,^{ix} as restated by the High Commissioner Mr. Volker Türk at the opening of this session.^x

Thank you.

ⁱ <https://president.gov.by/ru/documents/ukaz-no-160-ot-4-maya-2022-g>

ⁱⁱ http://world_of_law.pravo.by/text.asp?RN=W21124351

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iii <https://news.house/43956>

iv <https://news.house/56492>

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v <https://pinsknews.by/archives/28663>

vi <https://nash-dom.info/112247>

<https://minsknews.by/minchanin-buduchi-prizyvnikom-uehal-v-polshu-no-nakazaniya-izbezhat-emu-vse-ravno-ne-udalos/>

vii <https://nash-dom.info/95234>

viii <https://news.house/44379>

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