

STATEMENT ON THE CANDIDACY OF BELARUS FOR MEMBERSHIP IN THE UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

On 17 May the UN General Assembly will decide on new members of the Human Rights Council, the UN's main body for supporting and protecting human rights around the world. One of the countries applying for membership is Belarus.

I have been following the developments in Belarus for a long time and the state of human rights in this country is a source of constant concern for me. The persecution and criminalization of democratic activists, independent media and non-governmental organizations continue, and those who are still holding out are fighting for their very survival. The situation is not improving; to the contrary. Among other things, the Belarusian government has thus far not admitted into the country the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Belarus. For this reason in December of last year, the UN General Assembly in its Resolution 61/175 expressed deep concern over the Belarusian government's unwillingness to cooperate with the Human Rights Council. The European Union and many respected international organizations have directed criticism at the situation in Belarus. Even Belarusians working in organizations supporting human rights reject the candidacy of their own country. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe has concluded that no elections held thus far have complied with democratic standards, and Belarus is the only country in Europe which has not fulfilled the criteria for membership in the Council of Europe.

For these reasons, I consider Belarus's attempts at membership in the UN Human Rights Council to be a mockery of the efforts of all liberal-minded Belarusians and the international community to achieve free and democratic conditions in the country.

I therefore call upon UN member states to reconsider Belarus's candidacy and to return to the original arrangement, under which new members are elected from a larger number of nominated candidates. This principle is contravened, however, in the case of only a single candidate from the regional group (Eastern Europe, Latin America and Asia).

I would welcome support for this view among other citizens and organizations who are concerned about not only the state of human rights in Belarus but also the good reputation and general respect which the UN Human Rights Council enjoys.

Prague, 7 May 2007

/signed/

Václav Havel

This statement is also undersigned by other members of Civic Belarus: Anna Šabatová, Jan Ruml and Igor Blažević.

The International Association Civic Belarus strives to achieve universal support for democratic initiatives and diverse ways of developing civil society in Belarus, in accordance with Czech and international law and the general principles of democratic states. The Association endeavors to support non-governmental and non-profit organizations in Belarus, including those civic initiatives which have been deprived of the ability to operate legally by the regime of Alexander Lukashenko.