Belarus: UN rights body should ensure accountability for rights abuses
Urgent debate on the situation of human rights in Belarus

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“The floor was dirty with blood and mud.... It was difficult to breathe. If we put our head to the side, they beat us....”

This is just one quote from dozens of testimonies by victims of police torture and ill-treatment Human Rights Watch recorded in Belarus in August, after mass protests erupted there over highly contested presidential elections and the authorities’ arrest of close to 7,000 people in just 4 days.

Male detainees we spoke to detailed beatings, prolonged stress positions, threats of murder, and rape. Some had had serious injuries, including broken bones, cracked teeth, skin wounds, electrical burns, concussions or kidney damage. One was raped with a truncheon. Women told us about police humiliating, threatening, and sexually harassing them, as well as pushing, shoving, and in some cases also beating them. All described torturous detention conditions. All of those interviewed said they were denied access to a lawyer.”

The abuses, according to former detainees, aimed to punish and deter them from joining anti-government protests. Dozens lodged complaints but to date, the authorities have not opened a single criminal case.

Recently, the government resumed mass detentions of peaceful protesters. Over 770 people were rounded up this past Sunday alone. Authorities forced into exile or jailed on spurious charges all but one member of the Coordination Council’s presidium. They expelled, harassed, or stripped of accreditation dozens of foreign and local journalists. Access to the internet is disrupted.

We supported the call by Belarusian rights groups for the Human Rights Council to take action and welcome this urgent debate. The Council should request the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to monitor abuses in Belarus, establish the facts and circumstances with a view to ensuring full accountability, and keep the Council regularly informed, including through an update later this year.