

Human Rights Council – 29th session (15 June – 3 July 2015)

**Interactive dialogue with Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in
Belarus**

Statement by Ireland

Mr. President,

Ireland welcomes Special Rapporteur Miklós Haraszti and thanks him for his comprehensive report, as well as for his untiring work despite the difficulties with which he continues to be faced, including the lack of cooperation from the authorities of Belarus and the denial of access to the country. However, as the Special Rapporteur's work over the past several years makes clear, in the modern world physical access to the country, while desirable, is no longer a necessary precondition in order to monitor and document developments there. Modern technology, including the Internet, e-mail, Skype and other forms of communication, render it possible to follow developments and to engage in contact with a wide range of people within the country. The recent restrictions on Internet-based media introduced in Belarus by the new Mass Media Law, adopted in December 2014, show that the authorities are well aware of the potential of the Internet and are taking steps to control it. Of course, it is possible for the authorities to argue that the Special Rapporteur is exposed to information which is not objective. The obvious course of action to address this concern, in our view, is to allow him to visit the country and form his own opinion about the situation there based on personal observation.

We have carefully studied the Special Rapporteur's latest report, which makes depressingly familiar reading. While very many aspects of the human rights situation in Belarus are of concern, we would highlight in particular the practical impossibility for civil society to function normally in accordance with the law, and the continued imposition and use of the death penalty. We fully agree with the Special Rapporteur's assessment that it is critical that this Council maintain its scrutiny of the serious human rights situation in Belarus, even more so in the light of the presidential elections to be held later this year.

We would like to ask the Special Rapporteur the following question:

What, in your opinion, are the most important steps which the Government of Belarus could easily and quickly take in order to improve the human rights situation in advance of the presidential elections?