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ORAL STATEMENT  
Item 4 Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Belarus

UN Human Rights Council  
Forty-First session  
24 June – 12 July 2019

Mr. President,

Amnesty International welcomes the Special Rapporteur on Belarus, Ms Anaïs Marin, thanks her for her report, and calls on the Council to renew her mandate this Session. Constructive international scrutiny must be maintained at this critical moment. Despite some positive human rights developments, the situation overall remains concerning, particularly in the lead up to the presidential and parliamentary elections which, in the past, have served as catalysts for a notable crackdown on human rights.

Belarus still retains the death penalty, with at least one death sentence imposed in 2019. An inexcusable secrecy continues to surround the implementation of death sentences, which amounts to inhuman treatment of death-row prisoners and their families. In June, unconfirmed reports broke that Alyaksandr Zhylnikau has been executed while the fate of another death-row prisoner, Viachaslau Sukharko, remains unknown. We call on Belarus to impose an immediate moratorium on executions as a first step towards full abolition.

Civil society organizations, human rights defenders, independent media, political activists and ordinary online users routinely face restrictive legislation and reprisals rather than enjoying freedom of expression and other rights. The changes to the “Law on Mass Media” introduced last year worsened the situation online and offline.

The repeal of the Article 193.1 of the Criminal Code that criminalised activities on behalf of unregistered organisations is welcome. Regrettably, it was replaced with administrative liability for the same purported “offense”. This should change, and the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly must be fully respected.

Belarus has repeatedly failed to provide international protection to those entitled to it. In this light, we welcome the decision to grant a one-year temporary residence status to Iranian citizen, Mehrdad Jamshidian, for humanitarian reasons. We urge Belarus to fully ensure he is not forcibly returned to Iran, where his life would be at serious risk, and to provide international protection to all individuals in need of it.

Madame Rapporteur, could you elaborate on key benchmarks, grounded in international human rights law, that could be applied to evaluate developments between now and the scheduled elections?

Thank you, Mr. President.