

117TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. RES. 708

Expressing the sense of the Senate on the political repression in Belarus on the two-year anniversary of the August 2020, fraudulent presidential election.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JULY 13, 2022

Mr. DURBIN (for himself, Mr. TILLIS, Mrs. SHAHEEN, Mrs. FISCHER, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, Mr. RUBIO, Mr. MARKEY, Mr. CARDIN, Mr. KAINE, and Mr. COONS) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations

RESOLUTION

Expressing the sense of the Senate on the political repression in Belarus on the two-year anniversary of the August 2020, fraudulent presidential election.

Whereas Alyaksandr Lukashenka has ruled Belarus as an undemocratic dictatorship since the first presidential election in Belarus in 1994, dismantling the democratic institutions of Belarus and seeking to jail those who compete against him in presidential elections or protest his authoritarian regime;

Whereas the Lukashenka regime jailed leading opposition candidates that attempted to compete in the August 9, 2020, presidential election in Belarus;

Whereas Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya ran in the August 9, 2020, presidential election after the jailing of her husband, opposition candidate Siarhei Tsikhanouski, and was widely seen as the legitimate winner by the international community;

Whereas the August 9, 2020, presidential election, in which Lukashenka claimed victory, was marred by widespread concern over its legitimacy, as noted by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the European Council, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Department of State, and reputable international human rights groups;

Whereas the Senate, as expressed in Senate Resolution 658 (116th Congress) and Senate Resolution 345 (117th Congress), both of which passed with unanimous support, has stated its deep concern regarding the most recent fraudulent election that took place in Belarus on August 9, 2020;

Whereas, in response to the August 9, 2020, fraudulent presidential election, the people of Belarus staged the largest and longest sustained public protests in the history of the country, calling for a democratic Belarus;

Whereas, since the August 9, 2020, fraudulent presidential election, the Lukashenka regime has continued to pressure, harass, imprison, and persecute opposition leaders, civil society activists, human rights defenders, and independent media;

Whereas, according to the Viasna Human Rights Centre, the Government of Belarus has continued to keep at least 1,244 people imprisoned on politically motivated charges or under false pretense of terrorist threat, including op-

position candidate Siarhei Tsikhanouski, who was sentenced to 18 years in prison;

Whereas Russia provided critical support to the Lukashenka regime following the repression of the protests that followed the August 9, 2020, fraudulent presidential election, backing the Lukashenka regime's efforts to prevent the emergence of a democratic Belarus, including through the provision of financial assistance, propaganda support, and offers of military assistance;

Whereas, on May 23, 2021, the Government of Belarus unlawfully forced the landing of Ryanair Flight 4978 in Minsk to arrest journalist and activist Raman Pratasevich and his partner Sofia Sapega;

Whereas, since July 7, 2021, the Government of Belarus has weaponized vulnerable migrants by manufacturing a border crisis with Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland in retaliation for sanctions imposed by the European Union;

Whereas, on February 24, 2022, Russia launched an unprovoked war against Ukraine, using Belarus as a launching pad for its attack;

Whereas the Lukashenka regime has continued to allow Belarus to be used by Russian President Vladimir Putin for his illegal and unprovoked war against Ukraine, including via a sham February 27, 2022, constitutional referendum on provisions to enable Belarus to host nuclear weapons and undo Belarus' decades-long commitment to neutrality;

Whereas, since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Lukashenka has met with Vladimir Putin on at least four separate occasions, including most recently on June 25, 2022, when

Putin pledged to supply Belarus with missile systems capable of carrying nuclear weapons;

Whereas, despite support from the Lukashenka regime for Putin's war in Ukraine, hundreds of brave Belarusians have joined together to defend Ukraine, both on the battlefield in Ukraine and in the disruption of Russian supply lines;

Whereas the United States and allies of the United States have imposed sanctions on the Lukashenka regime for the August 9, 2020, fraudulent presidential election and ensuing repression as well as support for Putin's war in Ukraine;

Whereas, on December 15, 2020, Julie Fisher was confirmed by the Senate as Ambassador to Belarus, but her credentials were not accepted by the Lukashenka regime, resulting in President's Biden decision in October 2021 to appoint Mrs. Fisher as Special Envoy for Belarus; and

Whereas Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, in exile in Lithuania, continues to represent the widely shared desire of the Belarusian people for free and fair elections and democracy: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the Senate—

2 (1) continues, on the second anniversary of the
3 fraudulent presidential election that took place in
4 Belarus on August 9, 2020, to refuse to recognize
5 Alyaksandr Lukashenka as the legitimately elected
6 leader of Belarus;

1 (2) condemns the ongoing harassment and per-
2 secution of opposition leaders, civil society activists,
3 human rights defenders, and independent media car-
4 ried out by the Lukashenka regime, and urges the
5 immediate release, without preconditions, of all polit-
6 ical prisoners in Belarus, including Siarhei
7 Tsikhanouski, as well as for all representatives of
8 democratic forces, civil society, and independent
9 media in exile to be able to return home without fear
10 of persecution or prosecution;

11 (3) calls for new presidential and parliamentary
12 elections to be held in Belarus, conducted in a man-
13 ner that meets international standards and includes
14 independent election monitoring;

15 (4) condemns the shameful and self-serving
16 support provided by the Lukashenka regime for
17 Russian President Putin's savage war in Ukraine;

18 (5) welcomes continued and coordinated sanc-
19 tions imposed by the United States and European
20 Union and other tools to support democracy in
21 Belarus;

22 (6) recognizes the extraordinary support offered
23 by the Governments of Lithuania, Poland, and
24 Ukraine to support the people of Belarus, including
25 support for the political opposition, accommodation

1 of political refugees, and backing of independent
2 media;

3 (7) encourages President Biden to swiftly ap-
4 point a new Special Envoy for Belarus to support
5 the pro-democracy movement; and

6 (8) stands in solidarity with the many brave
7 Belarusians, such as Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who
8 continue to strive for a free and democratic Belarus.

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