

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus; the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism

Ref.: AL BLR 9/2025
(Please use this reference in your reply)

15 October 2025

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus; Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers and Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 58/19, 54/14, 59/4, 52/4, 53/12 and 58/14.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning **the designation of the Belarusian Association of Human Rights Lawyers (BAHRL) as an 'extremist formation' and the designation of the lawyers Mr. Dzmitry Lepretar, Ms. Natallia Matskevich, Ms. Tatsiana Lishankova, Mr. Uladzimir Pylchanka, Ms. Maryia Kolesava-Hudzilina and Mr. Dmitri Laevski as 'individuals involved in extremist activities'**.

According to the information received:

Between January 2020 and January 2025, the total number of attorneys in Belarus decreased by 597 to 1603. Since 2020, 14 lawyers have faced criminal prosecution, including three in 2025. Seven of them are currently serving prison sentences, including Mr. **Maksim Znak**, who is held incommunicado and subjected to enforced disappearance since 9 February 2023, and Mr. **Vitali Braginiec**. Attorneys considered "disloyal" to the authorities face disbarment through the certification process of the Ministry of Justice. Since the beginning of 2025, three attorneys have been disbarred. Today, 141 Belarusian attorneys are deprived of the right to exercise their profession.

In 2023, disbarred Belarusian attorneys in exile established the Belarusian Association of Human Rights Lawyers (BAHRL). In its resolution 2499 (2023), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe called for the recognition of BAHRL 'as the organisation entrusted with the promotion and protection of the human rights of lawyers deprived of the right to exercise their profession in Belarus, and with improving provision of legal assistance'. BAHRL's [website](#) offers legal counselling on issues related to risks of staying in Belarus, *in absentia* trials and submitting complaints to international human rights bodies and mechanisms.

On 18 August 2025, the State Security Committee of the Republic of Belarus (KGB) adopted Decision No. 3/3-1962 designating BAHRL as an ‘extremist formation’. The decision, which has not been published and whose grounds remain undisclosed, entered into force on 21 August 2025.

On 22 August 2025, BAHRL was added by the Ministry of Internal Affairs to its public ‘List of organizations, formations, and individual entrepreneurs involved in extremist activities’. Along with it, six disbarred lawyers whom the KGB considered to be affiliated with BAHRL were added to the list: Mr. **Dzmitry Lepretar**, Ms. **Natallia Matskevich**, Ms. **Tatsiana Lishankova**, Mr. **Uladzimir Pylchanka**, Ms. **Maryia Kolesava-Hudzilina** and Mr. **Dmitri Laevski**. Unlike the other five, Mr. Dmitri Laevski resides in Belarus and has no affiliation with BAHRL.

The designation of an organization as an ‘extremist formation’ exposes its members to criminal prosecution under article 361-1 of the Criminal Code (“Establishment of an extremist formation or participation therein”), which provides for punishment of up to 10 years of imprisonment. While Mr. Dmitri Laevski faces particular risks due to his remaining in Belarus, Mr. Dzmitry Lepretar, Ms. Natallia Matskevich, Ms. Tatsiana Lishankova, Mr. Uladzimir Pylchanka and Ms. Maryia Kolesava-Hudzilina risk being prosecuted and convicted *in absentia*.

Without prejudging the accuracy of these allegations, we would like to voice our utmost concern about the reported **continuing politically motivated persecution of lawyers in Belarus**. We would like to recall the [statement](#) made on 24 January 2025, on the Day of the Endangered Lawyer, by the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, denouncing the systematic persecution of lawyers in Belarus in retaliation for their defending civil society actors, protestors or political figures. We would also like to refer to the opinions of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention in which it found that Mr. **Maksim Znak** and Mr. **Vitali Braginiec** are arbitrarily detained in Belarus and called for their immediate release ([A/HRC/WGAD/2022/24](#); [A/HRC/WGAD/2023/64](#)).

We are extremely alarmed about the situation of **Mr. Maksim Znak, who has been held incommunicado and subjected to enforced disappearance since 9 February 2023**. We recall that special procedures mandate holders have repeatedly brought to your Excellency’s Government’s attention concerns about the alleged ill-treatment of Mr. Znak, including his prolonged incommunicado detention and enforced disappearance ([BLR 4/2023](#), [BLR 6/2024](#), [BLR 3/2025](#)), and we regret that your Excellency’s Government has not yet provided responses to the related queries. We reiterate that, under international law, any failure or refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty by State agents - or by individuals or groups acting with the State’s authorization, support, or acquiescence - constitutes an enforced disappearance, irrespective of the duration of the detention or the manner in which it is concealed. Accordingly, State authorities are obliged to take all necessary measures to ensure the effective protection of the rights of detainees, as they bear full responsibility for their lives, physical integrity, and wellbeing.

We are highly concerned about the reported **public designation as ‘extremist’ of BAHRL and of the lawyers Mr. Dzmitry Lepretar, Ms. Natallia Matskevich, Ms. Tatsiana Lishankova, Mr. Uladzimir Pylchanka, Ms. Maryia Kolesava-Hudzilina and Mr. Dmitri Laevski and about the associated risk of their criminal prosecution.** We would like to remind your Excellency’s Government that Special Procedures mandate holders have on multiple occasions expressed concerns about the **incompatibility of the Belarusian counter-terrorism and anti-extremism legal framework and law-enforcement practice with international human rights standards,** and have repeatedly called on your Excellency’s Government to bring domestic legislation in compliance with Belarus’s international obligations ([BLR 2/2021](#), [BLR 3/2022](#), [BLR 3/2023](#), [BLR 4/2023](#), [BLR 9/2023](#), [BLR 10/2023](#), [BLR 12/2023](#), [BLR 5/2024](#), [BLR 6/2024](#); [BLR 8/2024](#); [BLR 9/2024](#); [BLR 1/2025](#); [BLR 2/2025](#); [BLR 3/2025](#); [BLR 4/2025](#); [BLR 5/2025](#); [BLR 7/2025](#); [BLR 8/2025](#); [A/78/327](#)). We urge once again your Excellency’s Government to take immediate steps to bring its national counterterrorism and security-related provisions, the Belarusian legislation on countering terrorism and extremism, and the related Criminal Code provisions into compliance with international law, including international human rights law standards.

In this regard, we are preoccupied by the fact that the above-mentioned individuals have been publicly designated as ‘extremists’ by executive authorities through a non-transparent procedure based on undisclosed legal and factual grounds, without a possibility for the affected individuals to contest this designation and in violation of their **presumption of innocence.** We are also concerned that, according to the allegations received, Mr. Dmitri Laevski was arbitrarily included in the list of individuals associated with BAHRL, which suggests that the public designations of individuals as ‘extremists’ by the KGB and the Ministry of Interior may not be preceded by thorough factual verifications. Regarding the risk of *in absentia* prosecution of Mr. Dzmitry Lepretar, Ms. Natallia Matskevich, Ms. Tatsiana Lishankova, Mr. Uladzimir Pylchanka, and Ms. Maryia Kolesava-Hudzilina, we would like to reiterate our concern about **the lack of fair trial guarantees in *in absentia* trials** in Belarus ([BLR 8/2024](#)).

We are concerned that the designation of BAHRL, Mr. Dzmitry Lepretar, Ms. Natallia Matskevich, Ms. Tatsiana Lishankova, Mr. Uladzimir Pylchanka, Ms. Maryia Kolesava-Hudzilina and Mr. Dmitri Laevski as ‘extremist’ may have been done **in retaliation for their legitimate professional legal activities and human rights defense work.**

We are also concerned that the alleged facts appear to form part of the **systematic crackdown on freedom of association** in Belarus, an issue repeatedly raised with your Excellency’s Government by Special Procedures mandate holders (see, among others, [BLR 9/2024](#) and [A/HRC/56/65](#), paras. 74-124). The right to freedom of association includes both the right to freely determine the association’s purposes and activities and to define its own internal governance structures. Any impact, whether intentional or unintentional, on these two freedoms seriously affects the exercise of that right; interference in the conduct or direction of an association constitutes a restriction on the right of association (see [A/HRC/20/27](#), paras. 64-67, and [A/HRC/44/50](#), paras. 26-30). The designation of BAHRL and the aforementioned individuals as

“extremist” seriously affects the right to freedom of association.

Furthermore, given the fact that BAHRL specializes in submitting complaints to international human rights bodies and mechanisms, **we note with profound alarm that this designation may have amounted to reprisals for engaging with the UN human rights system.**

The undue interference and restrictions placed on the legal profession in Belarus risks opening the door to systematic violations of the right to a fair trial and to equality before the law in the entire country. We are concerned that by restricting lawyers from fulfilling their legal duties to their clients, Belarus is creating a chilling environment for the handling of certain kinds of cases. Some clients, especially human rights defenders and opposition figures, may be deprived of independent legal representation if lawyers face consequences for representing them.

According to international standards, the free exercise of the legal profession contributes to ensuring access to justice, oversight of State power, protection of due process and judicial guarantees. States must guarantee that those who practice law can do so free from intimidation, obstacles, harassment, or interference.

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights law** attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and/or comment(s) you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.
2. Please provide information about the fate whereabouts and state of health of Mr. Maksim Znak and Mr. Vitali Braginiec. Please explain which follow-up measures have been adopted to implement the opinions of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention A/HRC/WGAD/2022/24 and A/HRC/WGAD/2023/64 and in response to communications BLR 4/2023, BLR 6/2024 and BLR 3/2025.
3. Please provide information about both the factual and legal grounds for the designation as “extremist” of the Belarusian Association of Human Rights Lawyers, Mr. Dzmitry Lepretar, Ms. Natallia Matskevich, Ms. Tatsiana Lishankova, Mr. Uladzimir Pylchanka, Ms. Maryia Kolesava-Hudzilina and Mr. Dmitri Laevski. Please explain how such designations comply with international legal standards, including the requirement of legal certainty under article 15 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
4. Please detail what legal remedies are available to challenge these designations and explain how these conform with international law, including the right to an effective remedy under article 2 of the

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

5. Please provide information about the steps taken to repeal the category of “extremism” in national law and bring its national counterterrorism and extremism-related legal framework in line with international law.

This communication and any response received from your Excellency’s Government will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) within 60 days. They will also subsequently be made available in the usual report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to prevent any irreparable damage to the physical and psychological integrity of Mr. Maksim Znak and Mr. Vitali Braginiec, to halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person(s) responsible for the alleged violations. In particular, we would like to request your Excellency’s Government to refrain from initiating any criminal proceedings against Mr. Dzmitry Lepretar, Ms. Natallia Matskevich, Ms. Tatsiana Lishankova, Mr. Uladzimir Pylchanka, Ms. Maryia Kolesava-Hudzilina and Mr. Dmitri Laevski based on their designation as ‘extremists’ by executive authorities.

The case of Mr. Maksim Znak has already been transmitted to your Excellency’s Government under the humanitarian procedure of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances. This communication is without prejudice to the consideration of the case under that procedure and should be addressed through separate correspondence.

We may publicly express our concerns in the near future as, in our view, the information upon which the press release will be based is sufficiently reliable to indicate a matter warranting immediate attention. We also believe that the wider public should be alerted to the potential implications of the above-mentioned allegations. The press release will indicate that we have been in contact with your Excellency’s Government to clarify the issues in question.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Nils Muižnieks

Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus

Gabriella Citroni

Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances

Gina Romero

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Mary Lawlor

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Margaret Satterthwaite

Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers

Ben Saul
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freedoms while countering terrorism

Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, we would like to refer your Excellency's Government to the principles and international standards applicable to this communication.

Prohibition of arbitrary detention

Under article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ratified by Belarus on 12 November 1973, everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention. No one shall be deprived of their liberty except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedure as are established by law. As noted by the Human Rights Committee, any detention due to the peaceful exercise of rights is arbitrary (general comment No. 35, para 17). The Human Rights Committee has also noted that “[e]nforced disappearances violate numerous substantive and procedural provisions of the Covenant and constitute a particularly aggravated form of arbitrary detention” (general comment No. 35, para. 17).

Right to fair trial and rights of lawyers

Under article 14(1) of ICCPR, in the determination of their rights and obligations in a suit at law and in the determination of any criminal charge, everyone is entitled to a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal established by law. Under article 14(2), everyone charged with a criminal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law.

Article 14(3)(b) protects the right of anyone charged with a criminal offence to have adequate time and facilities for the preparation of their defence and to communicate with counsel of their own choosing. As noted by the Human Rights Committee, the right to communicate with counsel requires that the accused be granted prompt access to counsel (general comment No. 32, para. 34).

The Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers sets forth international standards that States must abide by to ensure that lawyers can perform their professional duties independently, safely, and effectively. Paragraph 16 of the Basic Principles requires Governments to ensure that lawyers: “(a) are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; (b) are able to travel and to consult with their clients freely both within their own country and abroad; and (c) shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics”. The Basic Principles also provide that lawyers, like other citizens, are entitled to the rights to freedom of expression and association, including by forming or joining professional associations (paras 23 – 24).

Incommunicado detentions and enforced disappearances

We would like to draw the attention of your Excellency's Government to the fact that prolonged incommunicado detention is incompatible with article 2(1) of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (*CAT, decision of 8 November 2013, CAT/C/51/D/376/2009, para. 6.4; CAT, decision of 11 August 2017, CAT/C/61/D/654/2015, para. 7.6*), and with article 7 of the ICCPR (*Human Rights Committee, views of 8 July 2022, CCPR/C/135/D/3321/2019, para. 8.6; Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 20 (1992)*).

The General Assembly has repeatedly affirmed that "prolonged *incommunicado* detention or detention in secret places can facilitate the perpetration of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and can in itself constitute a form of such treatment" and urged "all States to respect the safeguards concerning the liberty, security and dignity of the person and to ensure that prolonged *incommunicado* detention and secret places of detention and interrogation are abolished" (*GA, Resolutions of 15 December 2022 (A/RES/77/209, para. 18), 18 December 2019 (A/RES/74/143, para. 17), 19 December 2017 (A/RES/72/163, para. 16), 17 December 2015 (A/RES/70/146, para. 13), 18 December 2013 (A/RES/68/156), para. 27), 19 December 2011 (A/RES/66/150, para. 22), 18 December 2009 (A/RES/64/153, para. 20)*).

Incommunicado detention is also contrary to the right to access a lawyer, including immediately after arrest, as mandated by principle 9 and guideline 8 of the United Nations Basic Principles and Guidelines on Remedies and Procedures on the Right of Anyone Deprived of Their Liberty to Bring Proceedings Before a Court. The right to access a lawyer immediately after arrest is an essential safeguard of the right to challenge the legal basis of one's detention under article 9 of the ICCPR. In addition, rule 58 of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) provides that prisoners must be allowed contact with the outside world, including through regular communications with family and friends.

We would like to recall the Declaration on the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance, adopted by the General Assembly resolution 47/133 on 18 December 1992.

Pursuant to article 7 of the Declaration, "no circumstances whatsoever, whether a threat of war, a state of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked to justify enforced disappearance." The absolute prohibition of enforced disappearance has attained the status of *jus cogens*.

Notably, the failure to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty of an individual by State agents constitutes an enforced disappearance even if it is of a short duration. In a joint statement, the Committee on Enforced Disappearances and the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances "confirmed that there is no duration element in the definition of enforced disappearance under international human rights law." In this regard, "the obligations incumbent on States under the relevant instruments are the same regardless of the duration of an enforced disappearance." State authorities "must inform the prosecutorial or judicial authorities promptly and within the time

frame provided by law,” and have “the obligation to allow the person deprived of liberty to notify their family or a lawyer of their choice” ([CED C/11](#)).

Moreover, articles 9 to 12 of the Declaration establish the guarantees to be afforded to any person deprived of liberty. In this connection, we stress that a failure to acknowledge deprivation of liberty by state agents and refusal to acknowledge detention constitute an enforced disappearance, even if it is of a short duration. Article 13 of the Declaration sets forth the State’s obligation to investigate promptly, thoroughly and impartially any complaints of enforced disappearance. Article 19 of the Declaration requires that victims of acts of enforced disappearance and their family obtain redress and integral reparation for the harm suffered. The Declaration also proclaims that “each State shall take effective legislative, administrative, judicial or other measures to prevent and terminate acts of enforced disappearance in any territory under its jurisdiction”.

Enforced disappearances amount to violations of article 6 (right to life), article 7 (prohibition of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment), article 9 (liberty and security of person), article 10 (right to be treated with humanity and dignity) and article 16 (right to recognition as a person before the law), read alone and in conjunction with article 2(3) of the ICCPR (right to an effective remedy) (*Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 35, para. 17; general comment No. 36, paras. 57-58*).

We would like to remind your Excellency’s Government that enforced disappearances have a different impact depending on whom it targets. For instance, according to the Study on enforced or involuntary disappearances and economic, social and cultural rights by the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (A/HRC/30/38/Add.5), human rights defenders are also targeted to intimidate and prevent others from claiming and exercising their rights. Due to the collective character of certain economic, social and cultural rights, the disappearance of one person may have a negative effect on the larger community. Similarly, the General comment on women affected by enforced disappearances adopted by the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (A/HRC/WGEID/98/2) stresses, *inter alia*, the differentiated effects of enforced disappearances on women and girls. In particular, States must acknowledge disappeared women, and recognize the particular types of harm they suffer based on their gender, including instances of sexual violence, and the resulting psychological damage and social stigma as well as the disruption of family structures.

We would also like to bring to your attention the report of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances on Enforced disappearances and elections (A/HRC/57/54/Add.4), which among others reflects on the situation in Belarus.

The anguish and distress caused to family members of the disappeared persons due to lack of information about the fate of their loved ones amounts to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, prohibited by article 7 read alone and in conjunction with article 2.3 of the ICCPR, and article 16 of the Convention against torture (*Human Rights Committee, Quinteros v. Uruguay, CCPR/C/19/D/107/1981, para. 14, Sarma v. Sri Lanka, CCPR/C/78/D/950/2000, paras. 9.5 and 9.6; CAT, Francisco Dionel Guerrero Larez v. Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, decision of 15 May 2015,*

CAT/C/54/D/456/2011, para. 6.10).

Misuse of anti-extremism legislation

We remind your Excellency's Government that any measures taken to combat terrorism or violent extremism must comply with the obligations of States under international law, in particular international human rights law, refugee law and international humanitarian law.¹ Further, according to the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, "the term 'extremism' has no purchase in binding international legal standards and, when operative as a criminal legal category, is irreconcilable with the principle of legal certainty; it is therefore per se incompatible with the exercise of certain fundamental human rights" ([A/HRC/43/46](#), para. 14).

The requirement of legal certainty under article 15(1) of the ICCPR requires that criminal laws are sufficiently precise so that it is clear what types of behaviour and conduct constitute a criminal offence and what would be the legal consequences of committing such an offence. This principle recognizes and seeks to prevent ill-defined and/or overly broad laws which are open to arbitrary application and abuse, including to target civil society on political or other unjustified grounds (A/70/371, para. 46(b)) and suppress the exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms (A/HRC/40/52).

Freedom of association

We would like to refer your Excellency's Government to article 22 of ICCPR, which guarantees everyone's right to freedom of association with others.

Article 22(2) provides that no restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those which are prescribed by law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (ordre public), the protection of public health or morals, or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others. The Human Rights Committee explained the scope of article 22(2) in *Aleksander Belyatsky et al. v. Belarus* (CCPR/C/90/D/1296/2004, paragraph 7.3). It clarified that restrictions on the right to freedom of association must meet the following three requirements: (1) they must be provided by law; (2) they may only be imposed to protect national security or public safety, public order (ordre public), public health or morals, or the rights and freedoms of others; and (3) they must be 'necessary in a democratic society' for achieving one of these purposes. The reference to the notion of 'democratic society' indicates, in the Human Rights Committee's opinion, that the existence and operation of associations, including those which peacefully promote ideas not necessarily favourably received by the government or the majority of the population, is a cornerstone of a democratic society. The State party must demonstrate that the prohibition of an association is necessary to avert a real and not only hypothetical danger to national security or democratic order, and that less intrusive measures would be insufficient to achieve the same purpose.

¹ Security Council resolutions 1373 (2001), 1456 (2003), 1566 (2004), 1624 (2005), 2178 (2014), 2242 (2015), 2341 (2017), 2354 (2017), 2368 (2017), 2370 (2017), 2395 (2017) and 2396 (2017); Human Rights Council resolution 35/34; and General Assembly resolutions 49/60, 51/210, 72/123 and 72/180, among others.

Protection of human rights defenders

We would like to refer your Excellency's Government to the fundamental principles set forth in the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted on 9 December 1998 (the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders). Articles 1 and 2 of the Declaration state that everyone has the right to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels and that each State has a prime responsibility and duty to protect, promote, and implement all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In particular, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government the following provisions of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders:

- Article 9(1), which establishes that in the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the promotion and protection of human rights, everyone has the right to benefit from an effective remedy and to be protected in the event of the violation of those rights.

- Article 12(2) and (3), which provides that the State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of everyone against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure, or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of their legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the Declaration. In this connection, everyone is entitled, individually and in association with others, to be protected effectively under national law in reacting against or opposing, through peaceful means, activities, and acts, including those by omission, attributable to States that result in violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and acts of violence perpetrated by groups or individuals that affect the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Furthermore, we would like to refer your Excellency's Government to recommendations in the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders focusing on the long-term detention of human rights defenders (A/76/143), in which the Special Rapporteur emphasized that States should immediately and unconditionally release all detained human rights defenders and cease jailing them for their legitimate work (para. 158(a), (b)). States should also stop subjecting them to unfair trials, torture, or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, and ensure their legal rights, including prompt access to their lawyers (para. 158(c)-(e)). Furthermore, adequate care should be provided to detained defenders, including through ensuring that they have access to: family (especially regular access to children when a defender is a parent), phone calls, and medical treatment (para. 158(j)).