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Belarus: UN rights chief condemns violence against protesters, calls for grievances to be heard



UN News/Daniel Johnson | Michele Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. (file)

12 August 2020 | [Human Rights \(/en/news/topic/human-rights\)](#)

The flow of free information is “crucial” in a democratic society, the UN human rights chief said on Wednesday, spotlighting the landlocked eastern European nation of Belarus, “especially in a context of crisis and social unrest”.

“People have the right to speak up and express dissent, even more in the context of elections, when democratic freedoms should be upheld, not suppressed.”

Ill-treatment during detention

Citing accounts that more than 6,000 people had been detained over the last three days, including bystanders and minors, Ms. Bachelet observed “a trend of massive arrests in clear violation of international human rights standards”.

Against the backdrop of reports that police officers have beaten protestors – some while in custody – and that at least 250 people were injured, one of whom died under unclear circumstances, the UN rights chief reminded the Belarusian Government of “the absolute prohibition on torture and other ill-treatment of detainees”.

The High Commissioner called for the immediate release of everyone unlawfully detained, and for prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigations into all allegations of human rights violations.

“Those arbitrarily detained or ill-treated for peacefully expressing dissent are entitled to justice and redress”, she stressed, maintaining that the authorities “should also hear and respond to people’s grievances regarding the elections”.

Information blackouts

Since Sunday, intermittent internet shutdowns, social media platform stoppages, and blocked NGO and news websites have curtailed the right of freedom of expression, including the right to seek and provide information, according to UN human rights office.

Moreover, journalists covering the demonstrations have been harassed, sometimes attacked, and their equipment destroyed or confiscated.

And more than 50 reporters and bloggers have been detained, with criminal investigations opened against some of them.

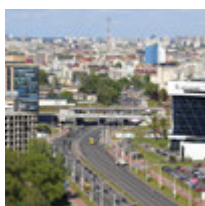
“Free flow of information is crucial in any democratic society, and especially in a context of crisis and social unrest”, said the UN rights chief, “but even more so, in the current situation of the COVID-19 (<https://www.un.org/coronavirus>) pandemic, and where people might feel compelled to express dissent online rather than on the streets”.

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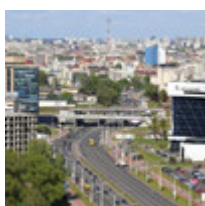
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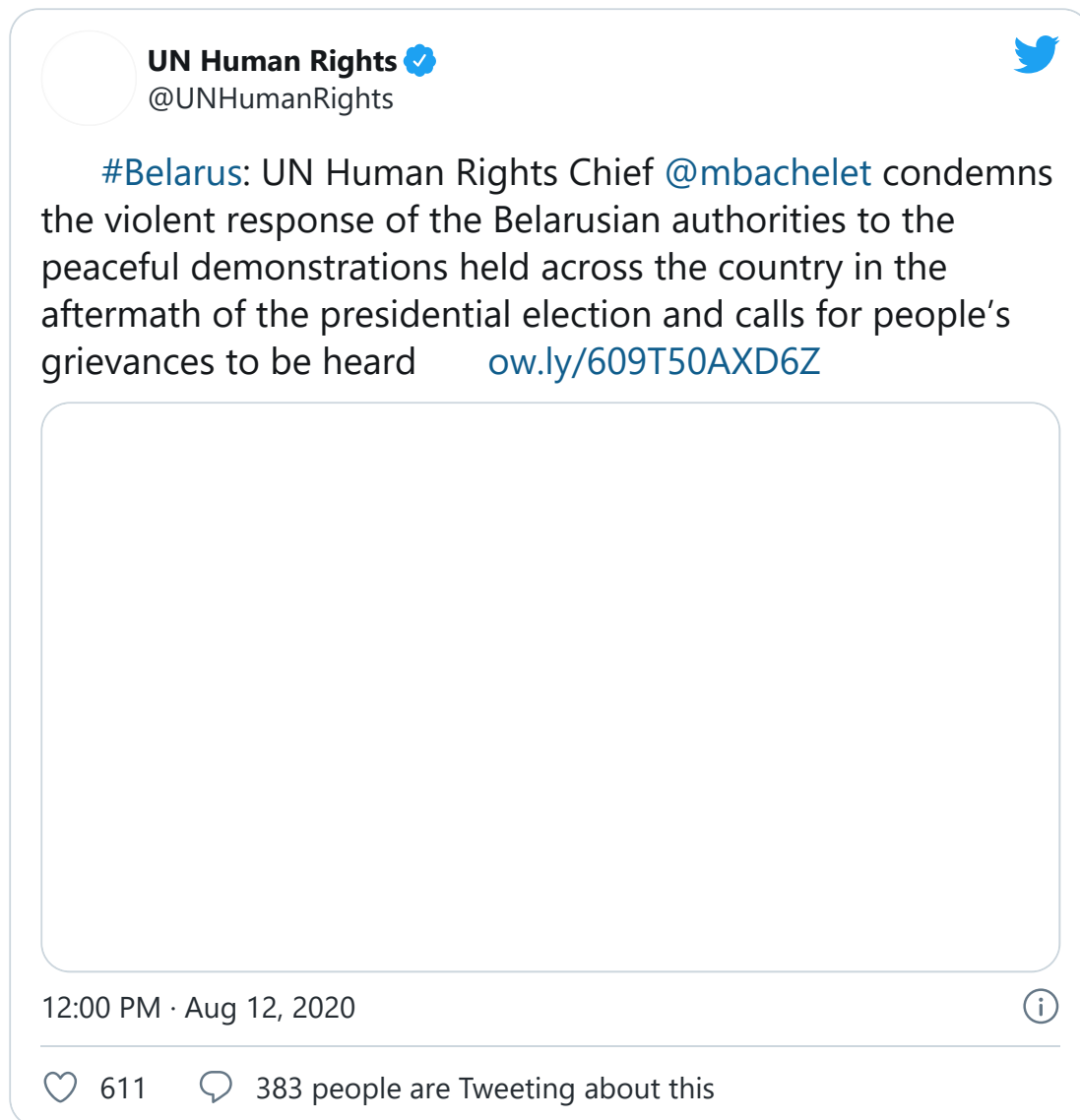


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UN rights experts express 'outrage' at Belarus police violence against peaceful protesters
(<https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/08/1070172>)

Following the announcement by the authorities of the preliminary results from Sunday's presidential election, immediately questioned by opposition parties, largely peaceful protests erupted throughout Belarus, prompting a heavy crackdown by the security forces.

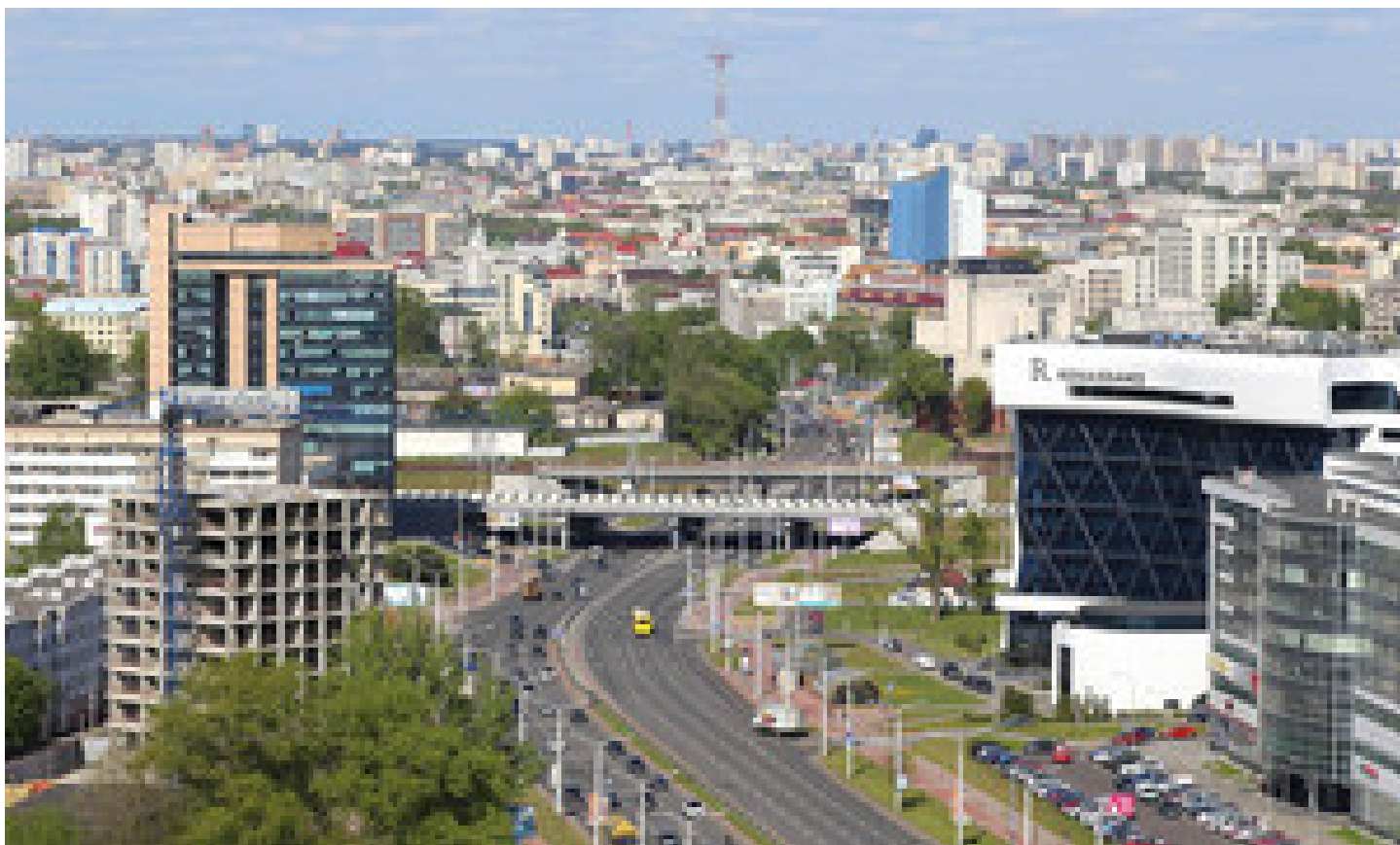
UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, condemned (https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26162&LangID=E)the authorities' violent response: "I remind the Belarusian authorities that the use of force during protests should always be exceptional and a measure of last resort" she said, "clearly differentiating between any violent individuals and peaceful protesters, against whom force should not be used."



Listen to grievances

In response to reports that police had used unnecessary and excessive force, firing rubber bullets, water cannons and stun grenades, Ms. Bachelet said people's complaints must be heard.

"State authorities must allow and facilitate the exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and of peaceful assembly and not repress it", added the top rights official.



[\(/en/story/2020/08/1069852\)](/en/story/2020/08/1069852)

Belarus: UN chief following post-election developments ‘with great concern’ [\(/en/story/2020/08/1069852\)](/en/story/2020/08/1069852)

10 August 2020 | **Peace and Security** (</en/news/topic/peace-and-security>)

The UN Secretary-General has appealed for restraint in Belarus, where ongoing clashes between police and demonstrators continue following disputed elections held on Sunday.



(/en/story/2020/07/1069211)

How do you define lawful peaceful protest? The UN Human Rights Committee has a clear answer (/en/story/2020/07/1069211)

29 July 2020 | Human Rights (/en/news/topic/human-rights)

People have the right to demonstrate peacefully and Governments should respect international law and let them do so, senior UN-appointed independent rights experts said on Wednesday.