

## **Discours de Mme Svetlana Tikhanovskaia, cheffe de l'opposition biélorusse**

### **Séance du Conseil municipal de la Ville de Genève**

9 mars 2021

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, on behalf of all Belarusians, I would like to express my gratitude for closely following the events in Belarus.

Geneva is known as the center of peace, diplomacy and human rights.

To many, human rights may sound abstract today, detached from the everyday reality, one's own needs and aspirations.

Human rights sounded abstract to me too. But last year everything changed. You can truly understand the value of human rights once you don't have them. Once your husband is behind bars for his political views. Once your life, your family and your very existence are in jeopardy. Once your fellow citizens are being beaten and tortured for telling the truth, for not hiding away, for fighting for the future of our children.

It has been seven months since the outbreak of the peaceful protest movement in Belarus, the largest in our country's history. Millions of Belarusians have expressed their wish for a peaceful, democratic transition of power. Thousands of Belarusians have experienced intimidation, brutality, and violence. Lukashenka has brought Belarus on a path of self-destruction for the sake of personal power. We are dealing with a human rights crisis in Belarus and need to be vocal about the ongoing repressions against innocent citizens.

There are 269 political prisoners in Belarus. Belarusian authorities have initiated over 2000 new cases against activists, journalists, human rights defenders and common citizens. Last week, a criminal case was initiated against the human rights organization Viasna – an organization that documents human rights violations, and provides information on political prisoners and detainees.

Among the detainees and political prisoners are also Swiss citizens – Luzia Tschirky and Natalia Hersche.

Luzia Tschirky, journalist of the SRF TV Station, was detained in Minsk while meeting an acquaintance and her husband for a coffee. The arrest happened despite the fact that she had an accreditation for Belarus. Tschirky was released three hours later, thanks to the negotiation of the Swiss Government, while her acquaintance and her husband remained detained. Wearing a press vest in Belarus doesn't protect you – it makes you a target. It is only recently that two Belarusian TV journalists, Katsiaryna Andreeva and Daria Chultsova were detained and sentenced to two years in prison for covering protest demonstrations.

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Another is Swiss-Belarusian Natalia Hersche, who has been living with her family and children in St. Gallen for over 12 years, was sentenced to two and a half years in prison for taking off the mask of a police officer. She was visiting her friends in Belarus. Now she has been on hunger strike for two weeks, and even her relatives don't know about her health condition. I came here to fight for her and other political prisoners' release.

The regime thinks it can use sticks and stun grenades to crush our ideals. But this will never happen. Millions of Belarusian hearts are beating in synchrony to the rhythm of freedom.

Switzerland, I also call on you to support Belarusians in our fight for freedom and dignity!

I call on you to be vocal about the horrific situation in my country.

I call on you to help Belarusian people, civil society, families of the repressed or those participating in national strikes, independent trade unions, and independent media.

Your concrete actions and plans to solve the situation is what really matters. It brings us closer to a new Belarus.

And I am convinced that free and democratic Belarus is in the interest of Switzerland. It will pave the way for closer cooperation – political, economic and cultural between our two countries in the near future. Switzerland is a great example for us. Your country's neutral position in international affairs as well as the principle of direct democracy are governing practices that democratic Belarus would greatly benefit from.

Thank you for your solidarity and Let's defend our shared ideals together!