

**CRACKDOWN IN BELARUS: RESPONDING
TO THE LUKASHENKO REGIME**

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BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPEAN AFFAIRS
OF THE
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THURSDAY, JANUARY 27, 2011

U.S. SENATE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPEAN AFFAIRS,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:18 p.m., in room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Jeanne Shaheen (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Senators Shaheen, Risch, and DeMint.

Also present: Senator Durbin.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JEANNE SHAHEEN, U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW HAMPSHIRE

Senator SHAHEEN. Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you all for coming.

The Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on European Affairs is meeting today to discuss the brutal crackdown on the citizens of Belarus following last month's fraudulent Presidential election.

I want to begin by thanking Chairman Kerry and Ranking Member Lugar for allowing us to go forward with this hearing while the full committee is still determining its agenda and structure and membership for the new session.

Before we begin—and I am delighted that Senator Durbin is here and is going to be making a statement as well. But I want to make it clear that this subcommittee stands firmly behind Secretary Clinton and calls on the Lukashenko regime to release all political prisoners immediately and without preconditions. We remain committed to the principle that the Belarusian people be allowed to express their political will freely and without threat of harassment, imprisonment, or violence.

The government's legacy of fraudulent elections has drawn the attention of the United States and our European partners, and the OSCE has repeatedly declared that the country's elections failed to be either free or fair. Violence against prodemocracy activists and arrests of political opponents have repeatedly revealed the nature of the cruel regime under President Aleksandr Lukashenko.

The United States will continue to make one thing clear: The pursuit of democracy, freedom, and improved human rights in Belarus is in the interests of not only the Belarusian people but of the government itself. The recent violence perpetrated by the police against a peaceful rally of thousands of Belarusians, the arrests of several opposition candidates for President, and the crackdown on

independent media and democratic forces show how far the cause of democracy has been set back in Belarus just in the last few weeks.

However, the recent crackdown is not an isolated occurrence. Unfortunately, it is part of an appalling pattern of abuses. As the government's intimidation tactics have broadened, so has its abuse of its legal system to charge opposition forces and threaten them with years in prison. Independent democratic forces must be allowed to make their case without harassment and the OSCE mission in the country must be allowed to resume its work.

In the days to come, the United States and our European allies will announce measures to respond to Lukashenko's tactics of intimidation. We should be clear that the pursuit of sanctions, asset freezes, and a ban on travel by the regime and those involved in the latest crackdown are intended to compel the government to treat its people fairly.

I would like to commend the European Parliament for its resolution last week condemning the crackdown and its calls to resume measures urging the government to change course. The United States and Europe will stand together in support of the Belarusian people, and we encourage other nations, including Russia, to do the same. The immediate release of opposition candidates, party leaders, and civil society members must be the first step and should occur without delay.

With these thoughts in mind, we are here today to discuss how the United States and Europe can ensure that the Government in Belarus lives up to its commitments to democracy and human rights. We will hear from members of the administration regarding the path forward and outside experts who have critical insights on the regime. I am delighted that we have two very knowledgeable panels here. Before I introduce them, I am going to ask Ranking Member DeMint if he would like to make a statement.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JIM DEMINT,
U.S. SENATOR FROM SOUTH CAROLINA**

Senator DEMINT. Thank you, Chairman Shaheen. Thank you for organizing this so quickly.

I want to thank the witnesses who are here today and particularly Senator Durbin for taking a special interest and sharing his recent experiences to give us perspective.

Europe and the United States share a common set of values and we have a long history that is founded on the ideas of freedom and economic opportunity. Today's hearing is important because Belarus is an exception to that. It remains isolated from Europe. Despite attempts to engage Lukashenko and his regime, often called "the last dictator in Europe," respect for human rights and political freedom has continued to decline in Belarus. The most basic freedoms—freedom of speech, religion, and assembly—are restricted by authorities.

The most recent reminder of this reality stems from last month's tragic post-election crackdown resulting in the detention of 700 people, including 7 of the 9 opposition candidates, the independent media, and civil society. Over 30 of these individuals are still being held and the situation is not improving.

The government's behavior is unacceptable in this day and age, and the regime must be held accountable for its actions. The United States and our allies in Europe have a responsibility not only to condemn its behavior, but to review the policy options at our disposal, including additional visa bans, asset freezes, and targeted sanctions.

I look forward to hearing from both panels of witnesses today and to discussing the ongoing situation in Belarus and our options for a coordinated and strong response in greater detail.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you very much, Senator DeMint.

Now we are delighted that Senator Durbin is here to share his recent experiences and his knowledge in this area.

Thank you, Senator.

**STATEMENT OF HON. RICHARD J. DURBIN,
U.S. SENATOR FROM ILLINOIS**

Senator DURBIN. Senator Shaheen, thank you very much. Senator DeMint, thanks for the kind words.

I just had a chance over the break to take a trip and visit two countries in Europe that are neighbors, but what a contrast.

The first country I visited was Lithuania, the land where my mother was born, a land which I have had a close attachment to emotionally and politically since I have been in public life and even before. And I was invited by the speaker of the Lithuanian Parliament to address them on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of what is known as Bloody Sunday. Bloody Sunday was that moment in time when the Lithuanians had mustered the courage to step up and say we are breaking away from the Soviet Union. It was an amazing thing for them to do. This is a small country. They do not have any indigenous army. What they had was a determination to reclaim their freedom, and they voted to do so and Gorbachev was mad. So Gorbachev sent in the tanks and the paratroopers. They were not met with armed resistance because the Lithuanians had no arms. All they could do was to stand with their signs and demonstrate.

I had gone there during this period of time and visited with what they call their Parliament, or Seimas, and the Seimas is a beautiful building but at that time was surrounded by sandbag barricades. And all of the people came to Vilnius and came to those barricades to show their unity with the effort to break away from the Soviet Union. Children would turn up from schools to say prayers and light candles and put little crosses next to the sandbags. And at one point they invited me in and said we want to show you secretly here the arsenal that we are gathering to fight the Soviets. Madam Chair, it consisted of about 10 rifles and guns that you would find in the home of a hunter or a farmer. No match for what Gorbachev sent in.

Twenty years ago, he sent in the tanks, and they went to one of the prominent places right outside Vilnius, the TV tower. And there was this huge gathering and the tanks rolled in. At the end of 24 hours, 13 people were dead and 1,000 people were injured. These people were not leading politicians. They were just common people in Lithuania who said we have had enough. We want to

make our own future. We want to have a right to make our own decisions about our church and our press, the things we take for granted.

So they invited me to speak to the Parliament and it was an inspiring moment for me. I do not know if it had any impact on them. But just to have that chance to be there.

And I remembered that time because I thought at the time that the United States was too slow in acknowledging what they were trying to achieve and providing the support that they needed, the moral support they needed. And not to take away from any President or administration, because ultimately we did the right thing, but others went before us. They had the former Prime Minister of Iceland, the first country to step up and recognize Lithuania as an independent country, and he is a national hero, and he came and spoke there. Well, it was a great gathering and I was proud to be there for the time that I was.

But then I took a little side trip. It is a 3-hour drive from Vilnius—this now capital of an independent, free, democratic country—to Minsk in Belarus, and it is such a trip back in history. In Belarus, they are led by an authoritarian figure, some call a dictator, Victor Lukashenko. I had met him a year before when our colleague, Ben Cardin, took a bipartisan Helsinki Commission trip to Minsk. So I have seen Lukashenko in his Presidential role.

But this time I was not there to see him. I came there because we had heard the stories about what had happened after the election. The election, December 19, was monitored by international groups and many had serious questions afterward. Lukashenko's supporters said, well, the fact that he did not get 95 percent of the vote shows it was a fair election. He only had about 79 percent of the vote.

But what happened the night after the election is what brought us to the point where we are today and the reason for my trip. There was a march of several blocks in the city of Minsk from one square to another by the opposition party leaders who were unhappy, feeling that they had been the victims of a rigged election. You know, this happens. People demonstrate in democracies and life goes on. It is an expression of their free speech and assembly that we take for granted. But at the end of that march, the police came in and arrested over 600, Senator DeMint—I do not know if it reached 700, but over 600 of these political activists—and arrested 6 of the 7 Presidential candidates who had run against Lukashenko. So not only did they lose the election, they threw them in jail. And today four of those Presidential candidates are still there.

I had a chance to meet with the parties backing these candidates, and I might tell you just as an aside—and Secretary Gordon can add this. We have not had much of a presence in Belarus for a long time. They expelled our Ambassador. We are down to literally five Americans who are representing the United States of America under these circumstances. Michael Scanlan is their leader. I am not sure of his official title, but he is the leader of this effort and we should be thanking him and all that are with him for literally risking their lives in an oppressive culture trying to

make sure there is a voice for democracy and representing the United States.

Well, Mike Scanlan said, “meet with the party leaders, but then I want you to meet with the families of the people who were in prison.” If I can, if you will bear with me, I took—I did not take—Chris Homan on my staff was with me and took a few photographs of those who were there, and I would like to introduce them to you because I think each of their stories tells us more than anything that I can say.

The first one was Svyatlana Lyabedzka. She is the wife of Anatol Lyabedzka, chairman of the United Civic Party. But Anatol has been regularly harassed, fined, and imprisoned for his political activities in 2004, severely beaten by Lukashenko’s police force. His wife told me in tears that her husband had been taken to jail 26 days before. She had no information on charges or what had happened to him. She does not know where he is. She does not know what is happening.

Tatsyana Sevyarynets is the mother of Paveal Sevyarynets, the head of Presidential candidate Vitala Rymashevski’s campaign. He has already served several years in prison for protesting sham elections in Belarus. Tatsyana’s letters have gone unanswered. Her complaints filed against the government have been ignored. She has been prevented from traveling. Her passport has been confiscated. She said it is impossible to find an explanation of what has been happening and my son has been persecuted for 16 years.

Kanstantsin Sannikau and Ala Sannikava are the son and mother of a detained Presidential candidate, Anrey Sannikau. Ala told me she had no contact with her son for 14 days. This little boy has been the subject of a lot of news stories because what Lukashenko did was to imprison not only the mother but the father and then say that the state was going to take their little boy into custody. The grandmother was there begging and pleading that she be allowed to keep custody of this little boy. And just last week—or this week, I should say, they have announced that they are going to allow her to continue to keep custody of this little boy. But it shows the kind of pressure they are putting on these people.

Meanwhile, they are systematically—the Belarusian KGB—searching their homes, detaining them, harassing them, sending phone calls their way that are bogus alleging certain things, if they cooperate, will happen. It is the old Stalinist tactics that are still alive and well in Belarus. Incredibly what Lukashenko did was not only arrest the mother and father but basically to threaten the child.

Milana Mikhalevich is a 34-year-old mother of two. I hope you get a chance to take a look at this lovely mom and her beautiful little girl. She is the wife of Ales Mikhalevich who was a Presidential candidate. Thirty-four years old, she has a 10-year-old son and this beautiful little baby who was crawling all over us having fun while we were talking about whether she would ever see her father again, and that is literally what is at stake. The harassment that this young lady has been subjected to is incredible. She tried to go to Warsaw, Poland, to appeal for help. They stopped her. They would not let her take the train out. They confiscated her passport, and they continue to search her home and come at her

regularly. When we tried to meet with some of these candidates, they said they cannot come because the KGB is coming by again today.

It has been a total nightmare for her and her little daughter, Alena, who is barely 2 years old. As I said here, her mom wonders if she will ever see her father again. That is what these families are up against.

Now, the surprise to me was they gave me a visa to visit Belarus and then said would you like to meet with Lukashenko. And I said under the circumstances, no, but I will meet with his Foreign Minister and we did, Sergei Martynov. Now, he has been an Ambassador to the United States. His English is flawless. And it was, as they say in diplomatic terms, a frank and candid meeting as I said to him, how can you claim to be a democracy and then turn around and arrest everybody who runs against your President. That is not what a democracy does. His response is classic, and I want to make sure I get it right. He said, Senator, you live in a country that has had democracy for 200 years. We have only had it for 20 years. Give us credit. When we arrested all these people, including the people who ran against Lukashenko, we did not use tear gas. There were no rubber bullets and no police dogs. So give us credit. Think about that for a moment. I said to him you cannot pretend to be a democracy when the people who lose the election end up in prison. It is a disincentive to run against your President if this is what you are going to face.

So we had the meetings and I gave these families my assurance that their story would be repeated, and I am glad you are holding this hearing for that purpose.

Right now, the European Union and European Parliament are stepping forward. I have spoken to Secretary Clinton. You mentioned earlier a reference to her. We have got to be there.

The reason I brought up the story of Lithuania is to put it in this context. Twenty years ago, the people who were killed and injured, the ones who had the courage to step out and demonstrate were just like these families. We applaud them today as defenders of freedom, heroes of their country, people who made a difference when you talk about this 21st century. People just like them in Belarus are struggling for the things that we take for granted and they are paying a heavy price. The United States cannot be silent. We have got to speak up for them.

Thank you.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you very much, Senator Durbin, for being here and for sharing the stories of those families.

As I said earlier, we have two panels this afternoon. I am going to introduce all of the panelists at once. So while the first panel is coming forward, I will begin the introductions.

Philip Gordon has served as Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs since May 2009. He previously served as Director for European Affairs at the National Security Council and at the Brookings Institution.

Thomas O. Melia—hopefully I pronounced that correctly—is Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor and is responsible for Europe, South and Central Asia, and international labor rights. He has also held

prominent posts at Freedom House and the National Democratic Institute.

Our second panel, when it comes forward, will include David Kramer who serves as the executive director of Freedom House. He has had a distinguished career in Government and in the private sector, serving as Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor and as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs.

Also on the second panel is Ken Wollack who is president of the National Democratic Institute and has had a long career in foreign affairs which has included extensive travel in the region of Belarus and Eastern Europe supporting democratic elections and civil society. Under his leadership, NDI has strengthened its outreach to more than 70 countries to support democratic institutions, civic engagement, and political empowerment abroad.

Our third panelist on that second panel—and again, I apologize if I do not get the name exactly correct—is Natalia Koliada. She is the general director and cofounder of the Belarus Free Theatre, a group that has shown enormous bravery in exercising its members' rights to free expression despite brutal repression. Just a few weeks ago, Ms. Koliada and other members of her company were detained in Belarus following the crackdown.

We thank you all for your willingness to be here and to speak to the challenges that we face in Belarus.

So I will begin with you, Secretary Gordon.

STATEMENT OF HON. PHILIP GORDON, ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EUROPEAN AND EURASIAN AFFAIRS, DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. GORDON. Thank you very much, Madam Chair and Ranking Member DeMint. Thank you for holding this hearing and for inviting me to discuss the situation in Belarus, and I would also like to thank you for your strong opening statements and very much appreciate the powerful message of Senator Durbin as well and his moving comments.

We should all be concerned about the very disturbing recent events in Belarus and specifically the government's crackdown on the opposition, civil society, and independent media in the aftermath of the disputed Presidential election. This is a crucial moment and I am glad the Senate is focusing attention on the actions of the Belarusian Government. I welcome the opportunity to speak on how the U.S. Government is responding.

As you noted, the United States has repeatedly condemned the actions taken on December 19 and the continuing suppression of political and human rights in Belarus. That this brutal crackdown occurred in the heart of Europe in the 21st century is particularly troubling. The international community must speak with one voice to support the democratic aspirations of the people of Belarus, and we are committed to doing our part.

The Obama administration has continued a bipartisan policy of principled engagement with Belarus that centers on our consistent advocacy of democracy and human rights. Long before the recent crackdown, we were pressing for reforms that would allow space for civil society, independent media, and the political opposition to

operate. I did this personally during my trip to Minsk in August 2009 when I made clear to the Belarusian Government that only steps toward democratic reform and respect for human rights could lead to better relations with the United States.

Let me also take the opportunity to commend Senators Cardin and Durbin and Congressman Smith and others who have been consistently pressing for democracy and human rights in Belarus and who helped secure the release of the American citizen, Emmanuel Zeltser, in July 2009, just a month before I went to Minsk myself.

Unfortunately, the failure of Belarus to respect human rights or uphold democratic standards is not a new development. In the aftermath of the flawed elections and the abuse of human rights in Belarus in 2006, the Bush administration first imposed sanctions against the Lukashenko Government and then expanded those sanctions in 2007 and 2008. Despite a release of political prisoners in August 2008 that led to the easing of some sanctions, Belarus continued to fail to implement democratic reforms.

In the runup to the Presidential elections of December 19, 2010, Belarus allowed in an OSCE monitoring mission and allowed nine opposition candidates to register to run against President Lukashenko. While voting was relatively uneventful, there were numerous irregularities.

On the evening of December 19, between 20,000 and 40,000 people rallied against the official claim of Mr. Lukashenko's overwhelming victory. The government's reaction was brutal, and its subsequent actions, the detection of a wide range of political activists, including five of the opposition Presidential candidates, raids on civil society groups and media outlets, and a refusal to renew the OSCE mission's mandate can only be interpreted as a campaign to crush the opposition and severely weaken civil society and independent media.

The United States responded immediately to the situation in Belarus. Within hours, the White House issued a statement condemning the violence and calling for the release of all detainees. Secretary Clinton and EU High Representative Catherine Ashton subsequently issued two joint statements reiterating this message. On January 6, Secretary Clinton met with Belarusian and Belarusian-American activists to hear firsthand their personal stories about the election's aftermath. The group that Secretary Clinton met with included Natalia Koliada of Belarus Free Theatre, and we are very pleased to see that she will be testifying to this committee later this afternoon. It is important to hear her experience and stories.

While publicly and privately urging that the detainees be released, the United States has been putting together a package of actions if the Government of Belarus does not change course. There are three specific sets of actions we are planning to make clear to the Belarusian Government the consequences of continuing its current course. We are examining additional sanctions against Belarus, providing assistance to opposition forces and independent civil society groups, and working closely with the EU to send a unified international message to the government.

The specific steps we are taking include: One, the revocation of the general license authorizing U.S. persons to do business with the two subsidiaries of state-owned oil and chemical company Belneftekhim which first was issued in September 2008; two, an expansion of the list of Belarusian officials subject to a travel ban; and three, the imposing of additional financial sanctions against Belarusian individuals and entities.

As we consider measures against the government, we are simultaneously planning to increase our support for the democratic actors and the victims of repression. Last year the United States provided \$11 million in assistance toward supporting civil society, access to information and political competition, and providing opportunities for more interaction between Belarusian citizens and the outside world. In response to the recent events, we will increase such assistance by nearly 30 percent this year.

Finally, we are working closely with our European Union partners to make sure that policy toward Belarus is coordinated to send the strongest and clearest message to the authorities in Minsk. The EU Foreign Affairs Council is scheduled to decide on additional measures with respect to Belarus on January 31. We plan to announce certain additional measures against the government on that day as well.

In addition, a U.S. delegation will participate in a donor's conference in Poland on February 2 to assist nongovernmental actors in Belarus.

Madam Chair, Senator DeMint, we have no illusions that persuading the Government of Belarus to adopt a course toward democracy and the rule of law will be easy or happen quickly. Our commitment to enhancing democracy and respect for human rights in Belarus is long-term and it will not weaken. I hope we can count on continuing bipartisan support for this approach. We must maintain a resolute stance both with respect to the government and support of those seeking a democratic Belarus. As Secretary Clinton and EU High Representative Ashton said in their joint statement on December 23, "the Belarusian people deserve better."

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Gordon follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. PHILIP H. GORDON

Chairwoman Shaheen, Ranking Member DeMint, members of the committee, thank you very much for inviting me here today to discuss the situation in Belarus. We should all be concerned by the very disturbing recent events there, specifically the government's crackdown on the opposition, civil society, and independent media in the aftermath of the disputed Presidential election. This is a crucial moment, and I am glad the Senate is focusing attention on the actions of the Belarusian Government. I welcome the opportunity to speak with you today on how the U.S. Government is responding.

Today, I would like to do three things. First, I would like to give you an overview of U.S. policy with respect to Belarus in recent years, which will provide a backdrop to the current situation and our policy response. Second, I would like to describe the actions that the United States has taken so far to respond to the repression in Belarus and to support free political competition, civil society, and the independence of media. Finally, I will also discuss possible next steps we, along with our European partners, can take to address the situation.

The United States has repeatedly condemned the actions taken on December 19 and the continuing suppression of political and human rights in Belarus. That this crackdown occurred in the heart of Europe in the 21st century is particularly trou-

bling. The international community must speak with one voice to support the democratic aspirations of the people of Belarus, and we are committed to doing our part.

BACKDROP TO OUR CURRENT POLICY

The Obama administration has continued a bipartisan policy of principled engagement with Belarus that centers on our consistent advocacy for democracy and human rights. Long before the recent crackdown, we were pressing for reforms that would allow space for civil society, independent media, and the political opposition to operate. I did so personally during my trip to Minsk in August 2009, when I made clear to the Belarusian Government that only steps toward democratic reform and respect for human rights could lead to better relations with the United States.

Unfortunately, the failure of Belarus to respect human rights or uphold democratic standards is not a new development. In the aftermath of flawed elections and the abuse of human rights in Belarus in 2006, the Bush administration first imposed sanctions against the Lukashenka government. These sanctions included a travel ban and asset freeze on certain officials, followed in 2007 and 2008 by trade sanctions against the state-owned oil and chemical company, Belneftekhim. The Belarusian Government reacted in 2008 by asking that our Ambassador leave the country and requiring that we cut our Embassy staff in Minsk from 33 to 5. The European Union imposed a travel ban and assets freeze of its own in 2006.

In 2008, following the imposition of sanctions, the Belarusian Government released all of its political prisoners. Let me also take this opportunity to commend Senator Cardin, Senator Durbin, Congressman Smith, and others, who have been pressing for democracy and human rights in Belarus for many years, and who helped secure the release of American citizen Emmanuel Zeltser in July 2009. In recognition of the Belarusian Government's positive step in releasing political prisoners, the United States issued a general license temporarily authorizing U.S. persons to do business with two subsidiaries of Belneftekhim in September 2008. We told the government at the time that the United States would reciprocate if the government took further positive steps. Sanctions against Belarus—the visa ban and financial sanctions against selected officials and Belarusian entities—remained in place and were continued by the Obama administration. The EU suspended its travel ban, but it continued its assets freeze.

In the runup to the Presidential elections of December 19, 2010, the United States and many other countries urged the Belarusian Government to take steps to improve its respect for human rights and democracy, including an invitation for an OSCE international monitoring mission to observe the elections. The government did allow the monitoring mission and allowed nine opposition candidates to register and to run against President Lukashenka. On balance, the campaign represented an improvement over the one in 2006, despite continuing problems. Voting was relatively uneventful. However, the government did not conduct a transparent vote count and did not allow opposition parties to monitor that count. The OSCE election observation team subsequently singled out this major factor in its criticism of the process, saying that counting of votes in nearly half of the constituencies was deemed “bad or very bad.”

The evening of December 19, between 20,000 and 40,000 people rallied against the official claim of Mr. Lukashenka's overwhelming victory. While we may never know all the facts of what happened that night, we know one thing: the government's reaction was brutal, and its subsequent actions can only be interpreted as a campaign to crush the opposition and severely weaken civil society and independent media.

Some 600–700 individuals were detained, initially including seven of the opposition candidates for President. Many of the protestors were sentenced to 5–15 days of detention without legal representation after hearings before a judge that often lasted less than 5 minutes.

Five of the candidates, along with at least 32 others, however, now face charges that could lead to 15 years in prison if convicted. Twelve more remain suspects and may be charged. On January 11, Amnesty International declared 16 detainees “prisoners of conscience,” and urged the immediate and unconditional release of all detainees.

However, this is not just about what happened the night of December 19. In the wake of the protests, authorities have continued to raid homes and offices of activists and staff linked to the political opposition, civil society groups, including the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, and journalists.

The government has refused to extend the mandate of the OSCE office in Minsk. This office must now close by March 31 unless Belarus reverses its decision, as we and other governments have urged it to do.

THE U.S. POLICY RESPONSE AND NEXT STEPS

The United States responded immediately and directly to the situation in Belarus. Hours after the initial detentions on December 20, the White House issued a statement condemning the violence and calling on the government to release all detainees. On December 23, Secretary Clinton issued the first of two joint statements with EU High Representative Catherine Ashton calling the elections and their aftermath an unfortunate step backward and reiterating the call for the detainees' release. On January 6, Secretary Clinton met with Belarusian and Belarusian-American activists to hear firsthand from participants about the election aftermath and to emphasize our condemnation of the crackdown and discuss how we might help those facing the greatest pressure, including the detainees and their families.

While publicly and privately urging that the detainees be released, the United States has been putting together a package of actions if the Government of Belarus does not change course, which now unfortunately appears to be the case. There are three specific sets of actions we are planning to make clear to the Belarusian Government the consequences of continuing on its current course: We are pursuing additional sanctions against Belarus; providing assistance to opposition forces and independent civil society groups; and working closely with the EU to send a unified international message to the government.

The steps we are considering include: (1) the revocation of the general license authorizing U.S. persons to do business with the two subsidiaries of Belneftekhim that first was issued in September 2008; (2) an expansion of the list of Belarusian officials subject to the travel ban; and (3) imposing additional financial sanctions against Belarusian individuals and entities.

As we consider measures against the government, we are simultaneously planning to increase our support for democratic actors and the victims of repression. Last year, the United States provided \$11 million in assistance toward supporting civil society, access to information and political competition, and providing opportunities for more interaction between Belarusian citizens and the outside world. In response to recent events, we will increase such assistance by nearly 30 percent this year. Our assistance includes support for human rights advocates, trade unions, youth and environment groups, business associations, and think tanks. We continue to support independent newspapers, Web sites, and electronic media operating in the country and broadcasting from Belarus's neighbors. In addition, we provide assistance to democratic political parties and movements to more effectively compete in this challenging environment.

Finally, we are working closely with our European Union partners to make sure policy toward Belarus is coordinated, to send the strongest and clearest message to the authorities in Minsk. The Belarusian people seek to be part of Europe, and we wish to see the type of government in Belarus that can be part of Europe. The EU's Foreign Affairs Council is scheduled to decide on additional measures with respect to Belarus on January 31. To emphasize the strong transatlantic concern regarding the crackdown in Belarus, we plan to announce certain additional measures against the government on that day as well.

On February 2, a U.S. delegation will join Europeans in a donors' conference in Warsaw to assist nongovernmental actors in Belarus. At that conference, which is being organized by the Polish Government, we plan to announce our proposed increases in assistance to Belarusian activists and encourage others to do likewise. The United States and our European partners both understand that even as we take steps affecting the Belarusian Government, we must do what we can to protect and foster the organs vital to any democracy: political competition, a vibrant civil society, and an active independent media that provides citizens greater access to information.

CONCLUSION

Madame Chairwoman, members of the subcommittee, we have no illusions that helping persuade Belarus to adopt a course toward democracy and the rule of law will either be easy or happen quickly. Our commitment to enhancing democracy and respect for human rights in Belarus is long-term and will not weaken. I hope we can count on continuing bipartisan support for this approach. We must maintain a resolute stance, both with respect to the government and in support of those seeking a democratic Belarus. As Secretary Clinton and EU High Representative Ashton said in their joint statement on December 23, "the Belarusian people deserve better."

With that, I look forward to your questions.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Gordon.

Mr. Melia.

STATEMENT OF THOMAS O. MELIA, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR, DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. MELIA. Thank you, Chairwoman Shaheen and Senator DeMint, for inviting me to join Assistant Secretary Gordon in this timely discussion. I would like to ask that the complete written statement I had prepared be submitted for the record, and I will just turn to some current observations from my recent visit.

I returned on Tuesday, less than 48 hours ago, from Minsk where I went at the behest of Secretary Clinton to deliver a strong message to the government about the mounting outrage in the international community and the imminence of a sharp reply, which I did both in a face-to-face meeting at the foreign ministry with ashen-faced officials who realized that their hopes of rapprochement with the international community are going up in smoke before their very eyes and through the media with whom I spoke on several occasions. And also, I went to demonstrate the U.S. Government's support for the people of Belarus which I did by meeting with human rights activists, leaders of the political opposition, key figures in independent civil society, including the leader of the Democratic Trade Union Federation and the pastor of an independent evangelical church whose congregation is under bureaucratic siege from authorities that want to confiscate the plot of land on which they have built their church. I met also with independent journalists and, most importantly, with family members of those currently being held in custody by the regime. The families in particular, though anxious about their loved ones, were steely in their determination to continue to work for a democratic future for Belarus.

I must say, having traveled widely in this region over the years but on my first visit to Belarus, that I was astonished at what I saw in a few days in this country. Since Aleksandr Lukashenko rose to power in 1994 as an independent candidate in what is widely considered to be Belarus' last democratic election, he has consolidated virtually all power into his own hands through a series of fraudulent referenda and elections and at the same time suppressing all forms of dissent sometimes quite brutally. In today's Belarus, civil liberties are sharply restricted in almost every way imaginable. The government controls citizens' access to information through near total domination of television and print media. And through a restrictive Internet law that entered into force last summer, July, authorities are working to extend that control even further.

Belarusians live their lives under the ever-present eye of the KGB. Yes, it is still called the KGB in Belarus which employs wire-tapping, video surveillance, and a network of informers to keep the public in line.

I will refer to one particular provision of law that comes up again and again. Article 191 of the criminal code says that individuals who engage in activities on behalf of an organization that the government refuses to register face criminal prosecution with potential jail terms up to 3 years. In the present moment, this means that

the families of the imprisoned have decided not to call themselves a committee for the defense of political prisoners because that alone would make them liable to prosecution and potential imprisonment for 3 years for, "operating an unregistered NGO."

Moreover, just to give you a flavor of daily life in Belarus, on a monthly basis for more than a decade, quiet vigils have been organized outside KGB headquarters to mourn those who have disappeared at the hands of the state, sometimes 10 people, sometimes 100, holding photos of the disappeared. Frequently one or more of these individuals will be arrested on administrative charges and sentenced to 5 days or 2 weeks of detention. Virtually everyone with whom I met earlier this week, more than 50 people in different meetings, has been interrogated by the KGB in the last month for the supposed uprising the government alleges to have been planned for December 19 or has been in and out of jail on this "catch and release" program of continued harassment and incarceration.

Belarus under Lukashenko has well and truly earned its designation by the economist intelligence unit as an authoritarian country and its place on the Freedom House list of the "Worst of the Worst."

We will never know how the people of Belarus actually voted on December 19, though surely it was not the 80 percent for Mr. Lukashenko that he claims. It could have been as little as 50 percent or less for all we know despite or because of the heavy hand of his regime. This week's events in Tunisia and across the Middle East remind us once again that apparently stable regimes are stable until they are not, and that means that men and women everywhere want to live in freedom. That is no less true in Belarus than in any of the other countries that we are looking at these days. We, in the United States, have supported the people of Belarus through the dark period of Lukashenko's rule and they know that and they welcome it.

We, in the Department's Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, are proud to be part of America's diplomacy in this case and to contribute funds through grants to civil society and journalists in Belarus, and we look forward to working with you and the Congress to refine our policies going forward for Monday's announcements.

Senator Shaheen, I would like to conclude with a word about the terrific, hardy band of Foreign Service professionals that I met in Minsk. Senator Durbin referred to Mike Scanlan. I would like to point out that under Assistant Secretary Gordon's direction, five men and women—count them—five diplomats—led by Mr. Scanlan are working around the clock in a place that should have at least 35 or more American diplomats to represent American interests and to demonstrate what American values really mean to people living under repression. Belarus is a place where good people know, despite the crude propaganda of the official media, that the United States is on the right side of history. This is done by the forthright principal policies we have shaped together here in the executive and legislative branches and it is especially due to the effective diplomacy being implemented every day by Mike Scanlan and his team in Minsk.

If time permits, I would like to just provide today's update because even since I have been back in the last couple of days, people have asked if the regime is changing course, is responding to the imminence of sanctions and further isolation of the government. The overnight report from Mike Scanlan tells us that as of yesterday raids continue against civil society. Some of the groups I had met with earlier in the week had the KGB come in and confiscate their computers and their files and detain people twice in the last month. So just yesterday a particular political party was raided in the regional town of Homiel and all the equipment that they had bought to replace what had been removed on January 6 was stolen again, just yesterday.

And yesterday in a press conference, Interior Minister Kuleshov stated that the ongoing criminal case for, "organizing and participating in mass disorder that have been filed against 37 individuals, including five of the Presidential candidates, would go to trial in early February." Kuleshov took personal responsibility for the police actions calling them, "adequate and proportionate." He accused the organizers of what we know to be the peaceful December 19th demonstration of having planned a coupe d'etat and attempting to seize power by force of arms. He also refused to apologize to journalists in the press conference who had suffered from police brutality, instead accusing them of having beaten the police on December 19. He said he did not know who attacked the Presidential candidate Nyaklyaeu before the polls closed on December 19 but he said it was certainly not the police. So in the face of mounting international opposition and a determined citizenry, the Government of Belarus shows no imminent signs of yielding or acknowledging the truth of what has happened or the consequences that the government will face.

Thank you, Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Melia follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THOMAS O. MELIA

Chairwoman Shaheen and members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me here today to discuss the current crisis in Belarus. I just returned on Tuesday from Minsk, where I met with human rights organizations, opposition political leaders, independent journalists, and the families of many of those currently being held by the regime. I also expressed directly to representatives of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry our grave concerns over the present situation.

While the current crackdown may be notable in scale and scope, it fits within a clearly demonstrated pattern of behavior by the Belarusian Government stretching back to the mid-1990s. In light of these recent events, we must continue to speak out against the detentions, raids, and other human rights abuses, while at the same time continuing to demonstrate our unwavering support for the democratic aspirations of the Belarusian people.

OVERVIEW OF BELARUS' HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD

Alyaksandr Lukashenka rose to power in 1994 as an independent candidate running on an anticorruption platform; he won what is widely considered Belarus' last democratic election. Since that time, Lukashenka has consolidated virtually all power into his own hands. He has maintained his authority through a series of fraudulent referenda and elections, while at the same time suppressing all forms of dissent, sometimes brutally. Lukashenka oversees a bureaucracy, intelligence service and economy that remain largely unreformed since the Soviet period. In the past, political opponents and journalists have disappeared; security forces were presumed to be responsible. In today's Belarus, civil liberties—including freedom of speech, press, assembly, association, and religion—are sharply restricted. The government controls and limits citizens' access to information through near-total domi-

nation of television and print media. Through a restrictive Internet law that entered into force in July, authorities are working to extend that control even further.

Belarusians live their lives under the watchful eye of the KGB, which employs wiretapping, video surveillance, and a network of citizen informers to keep the public in line. Authorities arrest, detain, and imprison people for criticizing members of the government, for participating in demonstrations, and for other political reasons. Police routinely beat protesters, use excessive force when dispersing peaceful demonstrators, and employ physical and psychological torture during investigations. The regime works to suppress the activities of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), independent media, political parties, and religious groups through a mix of nonregistration, harassment, fines, and prosecutions. Moreover, individuals who engage in activities on behalf of any organization that the government refuses to register in any of these sectors face criminal prosecution with potential jail terms of up to 3 years. State-owned companies, which employ most Belarusians, routinely fire employees as retribution for their political activities or for attempting to unionize. Short-term labor contracts ensure that no citizens can take job security for granted. University students have been expelled for expressing their opinions, and young men with ties to the opposition have been forcibly conscripted. The country's judiciary suffers from blatant political interference, corruption, and inefficiency; trial outcomes are usually predetermined, and many trials take place behind closed doors. Over the years, the regime has held numerous political prisoners for extended periods of detention. Abuse of prisoners and detainees is pervasive, and conditions inside prison remain extremely poor; the government does not permit any independent monitoring of prisons. Belarus under Lukashenka has well and truly earned its designation by The Economist Intelligence Unit as an "authoritarian" country, and its place on the Freedom House list of the "Worst of the Worst."

While the broader situation in Belarus has changed little over the past decade and a half, during the past 2 years, the regime began to indicate at least some interest in exploring improved relations with the United States and European Union through the loosening of some restrictions on political and civil society activity. In early 2007, the United States took concrete action to press the government for the release of political prisoners through the imposition of unilaterally targeted sanctions against Lukashenka-controlled, state-owned petrochemical conglomerate "Belneftekhim." Lukashenka responded in early 2008 by forcing the departure of our Ambassador and the reduction, almost overnight, of our Embassy's American staff from 33 diplomats to five. But over the next few months, authorities released all of the political prisoners. During late 2008 and into 2009, the government took other small positive steps, including allowing the registration of a few civil society organizations, and allowing a small number of independent newspapers to be sold through the government monopoly distribution system. At the same time, however, authorities resisted pressure from the United States and EU to undertake any meaningful systemic changes. The government ignored requests to repeal Article 191 of the criminal code, a tool routinely used to harass members of unregistered organizations. In the runup to the 2010 Presidential election, the regime declined to follow through on repeated requests from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights to bring its election law into compliance with OSCE standards.

THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

The campaign environment leading up to the December 19 Presidential election included a proliferation of opposition candidates, nine of whom ultimately secured places on the ballot. In marked contrast with previous election cycles, authorities generally did not interfere with campaigning by the candidates. The challengers were allowed to appear together on state-controlled television for a live hour-long debate, which Lukashenka boycotted. At the same time, however, authorities were working diligently to ensure that the election machinery remained firmly in the hands of regime supporters. In order to bypass the legal requirement that a minimum of one-third of election commission members must hail from political parties and NGOs, the regime stacked local, municipal, and regional election commissions with state workers who claimed to be representatives of fabricated NGOs or non-existent proregime political parties. Of the roughly 70,000 precinct-level electoral commission members at 6,346 polling stations, only 183 members (0.27 percent) hailed from parties or organizations that could be considered truly independent of the ruling authorities.

On election day, OSCE and U.S. Embassy observers fanned out across the country, and reported on a heavily stage-managed voting process, with the regime leaving little to chance. Local "observers"—who claimed to be from government-

controlled NGOs but often struggled to recall the names of those organizations—were present at most polling stations, and in many instances provided written statements to international observers stating that the elections had been conducted fairly. Members of the OSCE mission reported meeting few truly independent local observers. While the voting process generally followed established procedures at most polling stations, OSCE observers reported instances of ballot stuffing and other manipulations, often involving mobile ballot boxes that disappeared from sight for long periods during the day.

When the polls closed and the vote count began, the situation deteriorated significantly. OSCE/ODIHR, in its preliminary assessment of the conduct of the vote, concluded that the vote count was either “bad” or “very bad” in nearly half of the stations observed. At many stations, commission members ignored the legal requirement to conduct separate counts of the votes from the early, mobile, and stationary election day ballot boxes, and instead mixed the ballots together. Even where officials conducted separate counts or placed votes for each candidate in separate piles, the count was generally conducted in a rushed and silent manner, making it impossible to follow whether the numbers actually added up. Furthermore, commission members at most polling stations kept observers at a distance of 10 feet or more from where the votes were being counted, making it impossible to independently verify the results. In some instances, OSCE observers noted that the vote totals for various candidates changed between the time election officials left their polling stations, and the time they arrived and submitted the results to the regional election commission.

The OSCE observation mission and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly noted “some specific improvements” in the election process, but underscored the fact that “the vote count undermin[ed] the steps taken to improve the election.” The OSCE also noted that “election night was marred by detentions of most Presidential candidates, and hundreds of activists, journalists, and civil society representatives.” Geert-Hinrich Ahrens, head of the OSCE/ODIHR observation mission, summarized the situation by noting at a December 20 press conference that “a positive assessment of this election isn’t possible.”

POST-ELECTION CRACKDOWN

Weeks prior to the election, members of the political opposition (including six of the nine opposition Presidential candidates) and other civil society leaders announced their intent to hold a large peaceful rally on election night to protest the already evident uneven playing field shaping the campaign environment and a clear lack of integrity of the state electoral machinery. In early December, Lukashenka’s Presidential administration declared that the opposition was preparing “groups of fighters, buying warm clothes, pyrotechnics, and even explosive materials” to create a “provocation” on election night. Well before the polls closed on election day, thousands of police took up positions in downtown Minsk in anticipation of the protest.

That evening, tens of thousands of Belarusians gathered in downtown Minsk, and held the largest public demonstration seen in the country in at least 5 years. We may never have a complete and accurate accounting of the events of that evening, but there are some things we do know. We know that Presidential candidate Uladzimir Nyaklyaeu and his supporters were stopped by police and beaten prior to the start of the demonstration, and that Nyaklyaeu was later removed from his hospital bed by security forces. We know that the demonstration proceeded peacefully for a few hours, until unknown individuals began breaking the windows of the Government House. In the period that followed, we know that security forces launched a broad and seemingly indiscriminate crackdown, holding some protesters on the ground with their boots, and beating people with fists and batons. Among those injured were Presidential candidate Andrei Sannikau and foreign journalists. In clearing the square, authorities ultimately detained between 600 and 700 people. According to human rights organizations, these detainees were held for an initial period with extremely limited access to physical necessities including water and toilets; they were subsequently given hearings before judges without the benefit of legal counsel, and were sentenced to between 10 and 15 days of administrative detention. The majority of these detainees were then released at the end of those sentences (in late December or early January).

In the aftermath of the crackdown on the square, authorities began assembling a group of the most well-known detainees at the KGB detention center, some of whom were taken from the square, but others who had been taken from their homes and offices in the days following the protest. At present, authorities have charged 36 persons with organizing or participating in mass riots, including five of the Presidential candidates and many of their campaign aides, as well as other political lead-

ers, youth activists, and independent journalists. Thirty-two of these individuals remain in detention, and authorities continue to deny family members access to the detainees and threaten the lawyers who have been retained to represent them. Lawyers are reporting extremely limited access to their clients; nine detainees have not seen their lawyers since December 29. We simply do not know the conditions under which these prisoners are being held, but there are reports that one Presidential candidate is on a hunger strike. Others, such as Nyaklyaeu and Sannikau were injured by security forces; we do not know—but are concerned—whether they are currently receiving appropriate medical attention. According to authorities, at least 12 others (including 2 additional Presidential candidates) remain suspects but have yet to be formally charged.

In the days that followed, authorities claimed that the events of December 19 were an attempt at revolution. State-owned newspapers printed allegations that German and Polish security forces had organized and financed a plot to overthrow the government. Belarusian security forces have continued day in and day out to raid the offices of dozens of independent organizations, media, and human rights groups, as well as the homes and apartments of leading activists. Targets have included the two leading Belarusian human rights organizations, the Belarus Helsinki Committee and “Vyasna,” both of which were involved in actively documenting the electoral fraud and the post-election repression. During these raids, security officials seized as “evidence” the files, computers, flash drives, cameras, and other equipment belonging to these organizations. Authorities have also arrested and detained additional activists. These raids are continuing up to the present.

CLOSURE OF THE OSCE OFFICE

In the wake of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Missions’ findings that the Presidential election failed to meet international standards, Belarusian authorities announced their intention to close the OSCE Office in Minsk, one of the few international organizations that had the ability to work on promoting democratic governance and respect for human rights inside the country. The office’s mission was to assist the Belarusian Government in developing democratic institutions, promoting the rule of law, and forging relationships between government and civil society. The office’s work was guided by OSCE principles and commitments to which all 56 participating states have agreed, including respect for the rule of law, freedom of assembly and association, and freedom of the media. Based on the conduct of the election and the government’s subsequent acts, it is clear that the OSCE office’s work was far from complete. We will continue to press vigorously for reinstating the mandate of the office, just as we did when Lukashenka briefly expelled the OSCE mission 8 years ago.

VISIT TO MINSK

The primary purpose of my recent visit to Minsk was to demonstrate the U.S. Government’s continued solidarity with—and commitment to—the brave men and women who have been working peacefully to promote democratic values and political reform. As our Ambassador to the OSCE Ian Kelly said on January 20, “[w]e need to make very clear to the Government of Belarus and to Mr. Lukashenka that business as usual cannot go on so long as members of the opposition, independent journalists, and peaceful protestors are detained.” And as Secretary Clinton and European Union High Representative Ashton said in their joint statement on December 23, “The people of Belarus deserve better.”

During my visit, I repeated the administration’s call for the immediate release of all those detained in the post-election crackdown. I met with human rights groups, NGOs, independent think tanks, members of the democratic opposition, religious groups, and independent media organizations. I gave interviews to both local and international media highlighting our commitment to the release of the detainees and to the longer term survival of Belarusian civil society.

It has also been tremendously heartening to witness the response of Belarusian human rights NGOs and civil society organizations to this crisis. The country’s embattled independent media has provided up-to-the minute factual reporting of the elections and crackdown, while NGOs have worked to document the names and locations of the hundreds initially detained. The fact that civil society groups from across the former Soviet Union have joined together to create their own Belarus monitoring and advocacy group further demonstrates the vital roles these organizations play, both locally and regionally.

Of course, with so many Belarusian political and civil society leaders now imprisoned, those who remain out of jail are facing unprecedented challenges moving forward. While we have long provided moral and other forms of support to independent

actors in Belarus, the needs now are significant. We are working diligently with our European colleagues to ensure that these immediate needs are met, and we are also reviewing our overall assistance approach to Belarus for the medium and long term.

What struck me most during my time in Belarus was seeing a brave group of independent journalists, political leaders, student activists, civic campaigners, and religious leaders—as well as their supportive families—who remain undeterred in the face of the Lukashenka regime's efforts over the past decade and a half to suppress them. In fact, they remain as dedicated as ever to fostering democratic change in their country. And I am convinced that there are millions of Belarusian citizens who—in spite of the repression, the brutality, and the propaganda—want more for themselves and for their children. As Europe's last remaining dictatorship, Belarus is the final barrier to what both President George H.W. Bush and President Obama have referred to as “a Europe whole and free.” We owe it to the Belarusian people to continue supporting them in this critical pursuit.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you both very much for your testimony, and I especially appreciate your calling attention to the five diplomats who are still on the ground in Belarus. I hope you will send them our thanks and let them know that we will try and do everything we can at our end to call attention to what is happening there.

Both of you talked about the effort or the sort of loosening of the regime's imprisoning and harassing of political prisoners prior to the election. So can you speak, if we know, to what their reasoning is to suddenly crack down again post election when, given the outcome, it appeared that Lukashenko was not in any danger of losing power? So have they decided that Western views of their behavior are unimportant, or what do you think has caused the most recent crackdown?

Mr. GORDON. I am happy to start and then Tom can weigh in as well.

I do not want to seek to get into the mind of Mr. Lukashenko, try to understand what led him to order his regime to exercise such a brutal crackdown. Madam Chair, you are right. We did believe that we were observing steps, limited steps but nonetheless steps, in a more positive direction over the previous 2 years. We noted that one of our key demands was the release of all political prisoners and with the help of some of your colleagues in the Senate, that goal was achieved and that is why we in a limited way suspended some of the sanctions that we had put on in reaction to the holding of political prisoners. That seemed to us, one, some evidence that our sanctions were noticed and possibly had some effect and, two, a sign that maybe the regime was interested in moving in the right direction.

They had also invited in the OSCE to observe the election. We had told them if they want this path toward a better relationship with the West and the United States, they would need to do the right things on democracy and human rights and have a free and fair election, and when they invited the OSCE to observe that election, we too thought that was a sign of their interest in moving in the right direction.

Why they then chose—and we had made clear. I underscored—when I traveled there in the summer of 2009, I laid out a clear roadmap of what Belarus could do and would have to do to have the better relationship that they told us that they wanted. And the European Union had done the same thing and even offered finan-

cial incentives if Belarus changed its ways in democracy and human rights. So the path forward was there.

What led the regime to choose not to take that path and use brutality we cannot answer for sure and I do not want to speculate about it. All we can say is that they clearly made the wrong choice and we need to signal to them that there are consequences for doing so.

Senator SHAHEEN. This probably goes without saying, but do you see an impact on the willingness of civil society leaders and those affected to come forward and continue to raise concerns about the oppression? And how can we best support those folks?

Mr. MELIA. I can report that the array of people and the groups they spoke for in the last few days remain undaunted in their determination to work for a better future for their country. There are lots of anecdotal stories they told about the way that they were getting silent and quiet encouragement from their friends and neighbors who are not so active in political life. As I said, we do not know how the people of Belarus really voted on December 19. We do not know if a majority voted for or against the guy in power. What we know is that there is this hardy band of people that are willing to incur real risks, and as I said, many of them go to prison often. Somebody told me that when you go to a demonstration, a peaceful rally, you wear clothes that you think you may be wearing for the next 2 weeks if you are picked up and detained under this administrative charge. So it is a regular part of their lives.

They do not show any signs of backing off or reducing their work. They are not going to respond in kind to the violence that the regime is meting out against them. They are going to remain peaceful and work through political means that they can inside and outside the system, and they are asking only that we support them, that we support them politically as we are doing through our visits and through our statements and that we look for ways to support them in other ways materially as well, as the Europeans and we are talking very concretely about doing.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, certainly the united front from the EU and the United States I think is very important. Can you also talk about Russia's role in what is happening in Belarus?

Mr. GORDON. Sure. Russia plays a major role in Belarus, obviously a part of the former Soviet Union. The two countries have linguistic, cultural, and geographic links that we do not question. And when I said earlier that we were seeking to provide Belarus a path to the West and a better relationship with the United States, I want to underscore we do not see that in zero sum terms. All of the countries in Europe should have the right to have positive relations not only with us but with Russia as well.

We have said, however, that we do not see any place for spheres of influence within Europe and that all countries in Europe should have their sovereignty and territorial integrity and independence respected and they should be able to choose their own alliances and their own relationships. And the Government of Belarus told us that they wanted a better relationship with the West, and in turn, we told them that there was a path to do that but it required movement on democracy and human rights. And as I said, we thought that they understood that. So now when they tell us they

still want a better relationship with the West, they do not want to be dominated by Russia, unfortunately I think the answer is they are making their own choice.

And let me be clear. We do not have any evidence that any outside country, Russia or any other, was involved in what took place on December 19. The responsibility for that is Mr. Lukashenko and his own regime, but in foreign policy terms, it is a real setback for any aspirations Belarus might have had to orient itself in a different direction.

Mr. MELIA. There is no love lost between President Lukashenko and his counterparts in Moscow. It is a very complicated and conflicting relationship in many ways. In the runup to the December 19 elections, for instance, Russian media, state-influenced media, was scathing in its criticism of Lukashenko's management of Belarus and his qualifications for office, et cetera. At the same time, Lukashenko's media in Belarus was complaining about undue Russian influence and supporting opposition candidates and problems were being stirred up by Russia.

After election day, his story changed in the days after. As the story to explain why the crackdown had come on December 19, evolved—and it has evolved day by day and week by week. It has become a different story over time—Lukashenko's complaint about foreign manipulation of his political system shifted direction. He was no longer complaining about Russia but he turned to the West. He complained that Poland and Germany in particular had fomented and supported this imaginary uprising that they have accused people of launching. So he is as mercurial in his assessment of who his friends and enemies are as he is in other ways.

But Russia is very much a part of this. I noticed in the last day or so that Foreign Minister Lavrov made a statement noting that the Council of Europe had denounced the election and the crackdown, and the Russian members of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly supported that. And Foreign Minister Lavrov noted that that Russians had supported the denunciation of the election and the aftermath.

So I think Russia's views are more complicated than they may seem at first glance. They clearly have commercial and other security interests in Belarus. They have two military bases there. So it is a complicated relationship. There is an opportunity for Russia here too to demonstrate an interest in democratic fundamentals.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Senator DeMint.

Senator DEMINT. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Secretary Gordon, you said that we already have significant sanctions, visa bans, assets we are freezing, but you are looking at ways to strengthen and widen. What are our options at this point that you think might make a difference?

Mr. GORDON. I outlined a couple of things that we are looking at. First of all, as I noted, when Minsk finally released the political prisoners that we had been insisting they release in 2008, we suspended sanctions on two subsidiaries of one of their major industrial conglomerates, Belneftekhim. And what we are looking at doing now and intend to announce soon is reimposing those sanctions, revoking the general license to do business with those sub-

sidiaries. There is a very clear link. We suspended those sanctions because they released political prisoners.

We have said publicly—I have stated publicly that if those detained on the December 19 crackdown were not released very soon, we would have to conclude that they are now political prisoners. When you arrest people who run for President and put them in jail, it is hard to escape that conclusion. And therefore, if they have political prisoners, one of the things we will do is reimpose those sanctions.

As I noted as you pointed out, we already had a significant travel ban on categories of officials from the regime and we are looking at widening those categories so that we make sure that all of those who were involved in the crackdown are not able to travel to the United States.

Senator DEMINT. But will the EU follow us on that? Will we be consistent in sanctions with them?

Mr. GORDON. We certainly hope so and that is why we have been working so closely together. Because our sanctions have been more extensive from theirs already, we had less additional room for maneuver, which is why we have tried to so coordinate with the EU which has greater relationships with Belarus on which Belarus relies even more. It is obviously for the EU to decide and announce, but we are hopeful that they too will be taking steps in similar areas to us so that this is a unified international message.

Senator DEMINT. I am sure you have gamed this out, but if we and the EU make it harder and harder to do business with us, are we pushing them into the hands of Russia? How do you see this playing out?

Mr. GORDON. We have, indeed, thought that through, gamed it out, however you want to put it. And as I said, this is a choice they have made. They had told us they did not want to be uniquely dependent on their big neighbor, and we made clear that there was a way for them to avoid that. And now I think we need to maintain our credibility and demonstrate that when we say something, we mean it.

We have tried to give them, even since December 19—the reason we did not act immediately was we would like to see these detainees released. And we said then release them or there will be further consequences. And again, for our credibility both with Belarus in the future—because as I had noted to Senator Shaheen, we would like to believe that past sanctions actually led them to think about and ultimately release political prisoners and take other positive steps. But also if I might in the broader picture, there may be other “leaders,” if that is the right word, around the world thinking about how they are going react to demonstrations. And if the message we send is there are no consequences, that might give them more space to act in ways that we do not want to see. So that is why we feel it is important to carry out these additional sanctions.

Senator DEMINT. And just a couple more questions.

Mr. Kramer, who will be up in the next panel, has said that Belarus is selling arms to places like Syria and Venezuela, the Sudan, and Iran. We know this regime is dangerous to its own

people. How big a factor are they in creating dangers in other parts of the world?

Mr. GORDON. It is something we follow very closely obviously. There have been cases in the past of Belarus selling arms to other unsavory regimes. Some of those have the potential of falling under legal restrictions and legislation passed by this Congress. And obviously, we will enforce our laws if we do have evidence of Belarus selling weapons that violate those laws.

Senator DEMINT. I guess I will ask this to Mr. Melia. Do we need to be looking at things, international broadcasting into Belarus, ways to communicate to people, encourage them? What do we need to be doing to assist the people to make sure they know the world is supporting their freedom?

Mr. MELIA. I think you are exactly right, Senator. Among the things that we are looking at enlarging is our support for independent media in Belarus. There is a network of printed newspapers and Web sites that operate inside Belarus almost entirely due to support from the international community in a very difficult environment. There is also broadcasting into Belarus. RFE/RL is doing that. I do not know if there is room for enlarging the hours per day or the nature of that programming, but that is certainly one of the things that we are looking at doing. But that is an important part of our work, to try to get the message in, just as we want to get the message out. We want to hear from the people of Belarus as we can, notwithstanding the difficulties they face in expressing themselves.

And that is a network that is working. The international assistance has not only kept hope alive, but it has kept organized communities of men and women in Belarus active in communicating with their neighbors and their larger society about democratic values, about what happens in the West, about what the future could look like for Belarus. So that is going on now, again thanks largely to international support.

As Secretary Gordon mentioned, we are planning to announce an enlargement of that support by the United States in tandem with enlargement by European allies who are also going to do that, make it easier for students who may be expelled from Belarusian universities for their political activism to find places in western European universities and other ways that they can be supported in their work so that we can mitigate some of the punishment that is being dealt to them by the government.

Senator DEMINT. One quick question, Madam Chairman. I guess this is back to Mr. Gordon.

How does this affect the highly enriched uranium deal that we signed last year? Are there any growing concerns?

Mr. GORDON. Thank you. We hope it does not in the sense that getting the highly enriched uranium out of Belarus is a high priority for this country. It is very consistent with the President's non-proliferation agenda and his desire to secure all unsecured nuclear materials, and this would be an important step in the United States interest. We did not do the HEU deal with Belarus that Secretary Clinton announced on December 1 as a favor to them. We did it out of the U.S.'s interest. And even as we move forward with additional measures, consequences in response to December 19, we

would still like to see Belarus honor its commitments to ship out all of the HEU out of the country by 2012, by the time of the next nuclear security summit. So we hope that these things remain separate and they uphold their end of the deal and get rid of the HEU.

Senator DEMINT. Thank you, Madam Chairman. I yield back.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Let me just follow up very quickly on that point. You said we hope they will do that. Do we expect them to do that?

Mr. GORDON. We expect them to do that. We have an agreement. The agreement said that Belarus would ship out of the country, by the time of the next nuclear security summit in 2012, all of its HEU. I should note that in recent months, they have already shipped out some HEU. So we have every reason to believe that—and we expect them to carry out what they agreed to do.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you. Thank you both very much.

Thank you for your ongoing efforts.

While we are switching over panels, let me just point out that the IRI has assisted the subcommittee in collecting additional testimony from opposition figures, and without objection, I would like to add those to the record.

We also as a subcommittee invited political opposition and civil society figures currently out of the country to offer written testimony for the hearing today, and I will also enter those into the record without objection.

[The above mentioned statements can be found in the “Additional Material Submitted for the Record” section of this hearing.]

Senator SHAHEEN. And we will ask our second panelists to come forward. Again, thank you all very much for being here. We appreciate your willingness to take the time today to share with us your knowledge of what is happening on the ground in Belarus.

Mr. Kramer, I will ask if you would go first.

**STATEMENT OF HON. DAVID KRAMER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
FREEDOM HOUSE, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. KRAMER. Madam Chairwoman, thank you very much for inviting us here today and for holding this very important meeting, and I am also delighted to see so many people in the audience reflecting an interest in what is going on in a country that is, in fact, in the heart of Europe and a country that is definitely going in the wrong direction posing a challenge not just to Europe and the United States but to all democracies around the world.

As you and Senator DeMint have said, we have seen real brutality conducted by Aleksandr Lukashenko’s security forces, including the arrests of more than 600 protestors. Those also include seven out of nine Presidential candidates, four of whom remain in jail, and Lukashenko is personally responsible for this.

But even in the past week alone, if I may, I would like to just read a few headlines that have been on Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty’s Web site that give a flavor that the repression of Lukashenko continues. “Belarusian Athlete Fired for Taking Part in Protest”; “Belarusian Activist’s Home Searched by Police”; “Belarusian Newspaper Sues Former Employee for Libel for Not Condemning the Protest”; Belarusian KGB Confiscates Opposition Activist Computers”; Journalist Temporarily Detained in Belarus”;

“Belarusian Union Leader Arrested in Minsk”; “Belarusian Opposition Activist’s Home Searched by KGB and Police.” These are just in the past week and they are just a snippet of the kinds of repressive measures that Lukashenko’s security forces have been undertaking since December 19.

And what we have seen is a reflection of Aleksandr Lukashenko that is not new. This is the Lukashenko who disappeared four political opposition figures in 1999 and 2000, who has, as Senator DeMint pointed out, engaged in arms sales to other repressive regimes. And so Lukashenko is a threat not only within his borders but beyond his borders as well.

In 2006, he oversaw a fraudulent election, major human rights abuses, and massive corruption in response to which the United States and the European Union imposed sanctions against him and others in his regime. Those sanctions, I would argue, and having been involved at the State Department at the time and working with other colleagues in opposing those sanctions, secured the release of the political prisoners in 2008. They demonstrated that tough measures do get Lukashenko’s attention and can produce results. They did not turn Belarus into a democracy, but they did force him to liberalize and take some positive steps. Those steps, of course, were all undone on December 19 even though the European Union was hopeful that its engagement policy toward Belarus might bring about a change.

There have been many in Europe who have been worried that pressure and sanctions against Lukashenko would push Belarus toward Russia. I think it is important to keep in mind that we should be adopting policies toward Belarus based on what happens inside Belarus not through a Russia prism. We saw a stream of visitors going to Minsk. We saw Lukashenko travel to Rome in April 2009 and have a meeting with the Pope. We saw Belarus being invited to participate in the EU’s Eastern Partnership, although the invitation to Lukashenko to come to Prague in May 2009 was done with the hope that he would actually not show. And offers of billions of dollars, \$3.5 billion, in assistance if the election passed the “free and fair” test. All of these things were put on the table for Lukashenko, and his response was essentially, if you will pardon the expression, a middle finger to the United States and to the European Union.

The United States also got involved in this with the HEU deal that has been referenced already. Secretary Clinton met with Belarusian Foreign Minister Martynov in Kazakhstan and signed the deal on HEU. But unfortunately, this broke with a longstanding U.S. policy of not having such high level engagement, a policy I must say that dates back to her husband’s administration, not just the Bush administration.

So what we saw on December 19 and what we have seen since then has been Lukashenko acting as Lukashenko. My guess is he got well below 50 percent of the vote and he knew it, and that is what triggered such a violent response to all those who were protesting in downtown Minsk. It seemed he flew off the handle and yet this was also fairly normal behavior for him. And now the situation is much worse than that in 2006 when the European Union and United States together imposed sanctions.

What do we do? We need to speak with one voice. The enemy is Lukashenko, and he is the enemy not just to the European Union and the United States. He is an enemy to all human rights and democracy advocates inside his country and in the whole region. Freedom and democracy are the common goals. We have to keep up the drum beat so that there is no deafening silence to those fighting for the right cause in Belarus. We have to support civil society. We have to support the opposition. We should be waiving visa fees for citizens, the average Belarusian citizens, and help students who have been kicked out of university for having participated in the demonstrations. We should be providing help to families and those in detention with lawyer bills, medical support, food, and other kinds of assistance.

Next week there will be a donors' conference in Warsaw. This is a very commendable step. The Poles will be hosting this and I know the United States will also be represented. It is very important that the United States and European Union, together, come up with concrete assistance for these individuals in need. We need to support more media to let the people inside Belarus know that we are on their side. We need to resume material support for opposition and civil society. Neutrality in the case of Belarusian politics is an enemy of freedom and we cannot continue. We need to meet with activists and opposition figures, and it is why I particularly commend Tom Melia for his trip to Minsk in which he provided very important moral support to those on the ground. And for Congress, I would strongly urge the passage of the latest iteration of the Belarus Democracy Reauthorization Act of 2011 which I understand is being introduced soon.

At the same time that we provide that kind of support, I hope that the United States and European Union also ratchet up the pressure on Lukashenko. Tough talk is not good enough. There have to be major consequences for what happened, and this is, as I said before, worse than what happened in 2006. I welcome the steps that Secretary Gordon announced here today that the United States will take, and I also understand that the EU will be taking significant measures when it gets together next Monday.

We should reimpose the visa ban. The EU should lift its suspension of the visa ban. And we should include Foreign Minister Martynov so that he cannot go around Europe peddling the lies of his dictatorial leader. We should extend the visa ban to the immediate families of those who engaged in human rights abuses so that the sons and daughters cannot live in or study or vacation in Europe or the United States. And they need to understand the reason they cannot do that is because their mother or father engages in human rights abuses for a dictator in Europe.

We need to expand the asset freeze.

We need to go after state-owned enterprises, as Secretary Gordon mentioned, with Belneftkhim. That worked in securing the release of political prisoners.

And we need to avoid meetings with senior Belarusian officials until they take the necessary steps.

No more international financial assistance for Belarus. No more IMF loans. No more World Bank loans. No more EBRD assistance.

I would strongly urge the European Union to consider kicking Belarus out of the Eastern Partnership. Another invitation to Lukashenko hoping that he actually would not show up for an Eastern Partnership summit is not good enough.

We need to understand that it is pressure. It is the fist that Lukashenko understands. That is the language that gets through his head. It is time to step up for democracy. This has not been a good couple of months or years in the region with the growing disregard in Russia for human rights, with concerns about Ukraine's possibly heading in the wrong direction.

Belarus is a real test for the West. We have tens of thousands of people, an unprecedented turnout, in the squares in downtown Minsk showing up to protest against a fraudulent election and the Lukashenko regime. Our support should be for those thousands of people, brave people, who turned out facing adverse circumstances and the brutality of the security services. We need to protest against Lukashenko's rule. They are the future of Belarus, and they need our support and solidarity now.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Kramer follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. DAVID J. KRAMER

Madame Chairwoman, members of the committee, it is an honor to appear before you here today to discuss the latest situation in Belarus, and I commend you for holding today's session. It is vitally important that the United States and Europe stay focused on the deteriorating situation in Belarus, support those in desperate need of assistance, and take decisive steps in response to the latest assault on freedom committed by Europe's last dictator, Aleksandr Lukashenka.

In just 4 days, European Union (EU) Foreign Ministers will meet and, I hope, vote to reimpose a visa ban and other sanctions against the Lukashenka regime. Frankly, anything short of that is unacceptable and would constitute a slap in the face to those victims of Lukashenka's repression. It would also send a signal to authoritarian regimes around the world that they can get away with massive human rights abuses cost-free. Five years ago, in response to Belarus' previous fraudulent Presidential election, human rights abuses, and corruption, the United States and EU together imposed sanctions against the Lukashenka regime. Over time, those sanctions—i.e., not engagement but pressure—secured the release of political prisoners held in Lukashenka's prisons.

ENGAGING LUKASHENKA HAS FAILED

Unfortunately, after the EU in particular eased its sanctions against the Lukashenka regime in October 2008 (the United States kept most of its sanctions in place) and launched an engagement strategy with Minsk, the pressure on Lukashenka went away, and he masterfully played the West and Russia off of each other. Fearful that continued sanctions and pressure would drive Lukashenka into Russia's arms, European leaders tried to lure him toward the West by including him in their Eastern Partnership initiative in May 2009, offering \$3.5 billion in assistance if last month's election passed the "free and fair" test, and paying lots of visits to him in Minsk in the lead-up to the election. Lukashenka and his 5-year-old son even visited Rome, where they met with Prime Minister Berlusconi and Pope Benedict XVI in April 2009. In the days before last month's election, some European leaders essentially endorsed Lukashenka's candidacy, arguing that he was the best bet against Russian pressure. There were even glimmers of liberalization in Belarus in the lead-up to the December 19 election, supporters of engagement claimed.

Europeans were not alone in softening their approach toward Lukashenka. Despite the fact that Lukashenka expelled the American Ambassador and almost 30 American staff from the Embassy in Minsk in March 2008 and has not allowed any of them to return, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met with Belarusian Foreign Minister Martynov in Kazakhstan on the margins of last November's Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Summit to sign an agreement on the transfer of highly enriched uranium (HEU). Such a meeting broke longstanding policy dating back to her husband's administration against such high-level encounters.

Securing HEU is important but no more so than standing by principle on freedom and human rights; moreover, the timing of such a meeting just weeks before the Belarus election sent an unfortunate signal that the United States was siding with Lukashenka, too. Only at the end of Clinton's joint statement with her Belarus counterpart did the two officials briefly mention human rights issues—and even then the statement praised Belarus for inviting international observers to monitor the upcoming election and offered no words of criticism for the grim situation there.

Despite European and American offers of engagement, the situation inside Belarus was, in fact, deteriorating, not getting better. The government increased pressure against opposition leaders, arrested civil society activists, violently broke up protests, harassed the Polish minority, and denied registration to newspapers. In certain respects, the regime was less blatant about its repression than it was in 2006; it avoided high-profile political-prisoner cases, which are easy for the international community to focus on and cause image problems for the regime. But make no mistake: The general political and human rights environment did not appreciably improve in the lead-up to the election. In Freedom House's Freedom in the World annual rankings, Belarus has not been rated as "Not Free" for years as its government keeps a vice-like grip on all institutions of democratic accountability. Meaningful changes have not been in evidence, and the regime's true essence shined through in this election.

ELECTION DAY TO THE PRESENT

Indeed, the final nail in the coffin came on December 19. Independent exit poll results, contrary to official rigged numbers, showed Lukashenka falling well short of the necessary 50-percent threshold to avoid a runoff second round. Apparently deciding to deal with the opposition the only way he knew how, Lukashenka ordered his KGB goons (and yes, they are still called the KGB) to engage in provocations and crack heads, literally, against peaceful protestors in downtown Minsk. Their crime: they were expressing their frustration with rigged elections and Lukashenka's dictatorial rule. The security services assaulted and arrested more than 600 people, including seven of nine Presidential challengers, and savagely beat dozens of people. The KGB has continued to conduct raids and attacks against journalists, opposition figures, civil society representatives, and their families.

The violence authorized by Lukashenka on December 19 and the abuses that continue to this day are much worse than those in 2006. If sanctions were called for in 2006, there should be no debate that they are warranted this time around, too. Far more people have been detained and beaten up in the past month than in 2006, and the raids on journalists and opposition figures continue unabated. Civil society representatives and opposition figures support the reimposition of tough sanctions against the Lukashenka regime. Spurning their calls would be a setback for freedom and democracy in Belarus and elsewhere around the world. Moreover, it's time to stop viewing Belarus through a Russia prism. In 2006, the EU and U.S. imposed sanctions against Lukashenka based on how he abused his own people, not on whether Minsk and Moscow had good or bad relations. We should not change that approach now and worry whether new sanctions will push Lukashenka toward Russia.

ENOUGH TALK—IT'S TIME FOR ACTION

Tough talk condemning what has happened in Belarus is simply not good enough. Lukashenka and his henchmen must suffer major consequences for what happened. A wider visa ban should be imposed on those responsible for the human rights abuses and be extended to their immediate families if we want it to have impact. It should also include Foreign Minister Martynov. While not directly involved in human rights abuses, Martynov acts as the mouthpiece for an abusive, corrupt dictator and should not be allowed to peddle his government's lies anywhere in the West. High-level meetings with him, as EU High Representative Baroness Ashton held a week ago, lend unwarranted legitimacy to him and his boss. Moreover, Belarus should be suspended from participating in the EU's Eastern Partnership; to allow it to remain a beneficiary of this program is to make a mockery of this initiative. Nor should Belarus be entitled to any assistance from any European or international financial institutions as long as political prisoners remain in jail.

The United States, too, should be doing what it can to ratchet up the pressure on the regime in Minsk, including imposing sanctions against state-owned enterprises such as Belneftkhim (the state-run Belarusian oil-refining enterprise in which Lukashenka himself reportedly had a stake and which the United States sanctioned in November 2007). Together, the EU and United States should be speaking with one voice and state publicly and repeatedly that Lukashenka is a

threat to freedom in his country and to the region. He is the reason why Belarus suffers from self-imposed isolation from Europe. He is why the families of officials who engage in human rights abuses should not be allowed the privilege to travel, live, or study in the West. He is why their assets are frozen and their credit cards won't work. If they want to fix these problems, they need to focus their energies on the reason for their hardships—Aleksander Lukashenka.

SHOWING SOLIDARITY WITH BELARUS CIVIL SOCIETY AND OPPOSITION

Secretary Clinton issued a good joint statement with EU High Representative Ashton on December 23 condemning the violence in Belarus. Unfortunately, President Obama remained silent, and the White House statement of December 20 was issued in the name of the press secretary. President Obama saw fit to issue a statement December 30 commending Ukrainian President Yanukovich on the transfer of highly enriched uranium to Russia, but opted to say nothing on the situation in Belarus (or on the verdict in the Khodorkovsky case in Russia or the arrest and sentencing of Russian opposition leader Boris Nemtsov). It matters in whose name such statements are issued, and the President's silence was noticeable.

Freedom and democracy should be the common cause uniting the EU and U.S. together with those inside Belarus who are fighting for a better, more democratic future. We must keep up the drumbeat—and that is why this hearing is so important I also want to commend Tom Melia, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, for traveling to Minsk last week. During his trip, he clearly condemned the regime's abuses while standing with those victimized by Lukashenka's abuses. Senior-level visits to Minsk these days, to the extent they occur at all, should be focused solely on lending support to those in civil society and the opposition who are under relentless attack. Photo-ops with Belarusian officials, to state the obvious, should be avoided at all costs.

Assuming the EU takes a tough stance next week toward Lukashenka and his regime, it should join with the United States in simultaneously extending significantly more assistance to civil society and opposition forces inside Belarus. We should be pressing for the release of the several dozen political prisoners still in jail, for a rerun of the election given the fraud that delegitimized the last one (and EU ambassadors were right to have boycotted Lukashenka's inauguration last Friday), and for restoration of full political rights and civil liberties. We should be demanding that the Lukashenka regime change its behavior completely—and if it is unwilling, then it should be sanctioned until it does. This is a regime that is not serious about engagement. This is a regime that only understands pressure and strength—that's the way to get Lukashenka's attention. It is a regime that a decade ago "disappeared" four prominent opposition figures for crossing the regime; their whereabouts remain unknown. It sells arms to such places as Syria, Venezuela, Sudan, and Iran, revenue from which lines not only the state's coffers but Lukashenka's pockets. Lukashenka's regime, in other words, is not only a threat to its own people but beyond its borders. By practically any measure, Belarus under Lukashenka is truly the last dictatorship in Europe, a view reinforced by developments on December 19 and since.

At the same time, it is critical that the West step up its support for the opposition and for civil society. This should include waiving visa fees for citizens to allow more Belarusians to visit the West. We should ramp up opportunities for university students to study in Europe and the United States, especially given that some have been expelled from their studies for participating in the protests. We must help the families of those in detention to pay for lawyers, medicine, food, and other needs. We should be expanding efforts to channel media into Belarus to let the people there know we're on their side. We should continue to meet with activists and opposition figures traveling around Europe and to the U.S. to show support for their efforts. In this regard, I commend Secretary Clinton for meeting with a group of Belarusians and Belarusian-Americans several weeks ago. These shows of support are critical. I also welcome next week's donors conference in Warsaw as an important opportunity to demonstrate support.

Congress has an important role to play as well. I urge Congress to take up and pass the latest version of the Belarus Democracy Reauthorization Act of 2011. I commend Members through joint letters and public statements for urging the EU to take a strong stand. We must remember that tens of thousands of people turned out in downtown Minsk—unprecedented numbers—to protest against a fraudulent election and the Lukashenka regime. They knew they were risking serious injury and worse at the hands of Lukashenka's repressive security services. And yet they stood for freedom and human rights. We should be standing with them. When President George W. Bush signed the original bipartisan Belarus Democracy Act in 2004,

he declared, “[T]here is no place in a Europe whole and free for a regime of this kind.” At the same time, there is very much a place in Europe for a democratic Belarus—but such a possibility is unlikely as long as Lukashenka remains in power and we in the West provide him succor as we did last year. Our support should be for the tens of thousands of brave people who turned out to protest Lukashenka’s rule. They are the future of Belarus, and they need our support and solidarity now.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you very much, Mr. Kramer.
Mr. Wollack.

**STATEMENT OF KENNETH WOLLACK, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL
DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. WOLLACK. Madam Chairman, Senator DeMint, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the subcommittee on behalf of the National Democratic Institute.

The continuing Belarusian crackdown on democracy activists that began on December 19 is tragic and extreme. It is deeper, wider, and more violent than any since the late 1990s. But it is not an exceptional act or a break with the past, rather, it is consistent with the pattern that the Lukashenko regime first established in the 1990s and has followed ever since. The regime may adjust its tactics over time—sometimes the government is more responsive to the international community, sometimes less so—but the strategy remains one of holding onto power at all costs.

Although Belarus conducts regular elections, they are empty exercises at best. Each has violated the country’s commitments as a member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The regime does not tolerate meaningful dissent or opposition; and it has also sought to suppress independent voices and organizations. It was 4 years ago, for example, that the government forcibly disbanded Partnership, a nonpartisan election monitoring group that was working with NDI assistance and in accordance with OSCE principles. Its offices were closed, its equipment confiscated, and its leaders arrested and imprisoned, along with NDI’s resident representative, for 6 months or more.

We are witnessing now a systematic and far-reaching roundup of journalists, civic and party leaders, and ordinary citizens, some identified from KGB videos of peaceful post-election protests.

Before December 19, reasonable people might have differed about the relative merits of “carrots versus sticks” approaches in dealing with Belarus. There were glimmers of liberalization that led some to hope that Mr. Lukashenko could be coaxed into constructive cooperation with the transatlantic community. But these changes proved illusory. Irrespective of its erratic moves toward the East or the West, the regime’s disrespect for the rights of its citizens remains a constant.

Government-to-government actions and stiff consequences should, of course, be the front line of the international response to these events, and coordination with the Euro-Atlantic community will be essential. In this context, we commend bipartisan international outreach efforts such as the recent Senate letter to European Union High Representative Ashton.

Last year, we witnessed failed elections in such places as Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Burma, Cote d’Ivoire, Egypt, and Haiti. Sadly, Belarus was the latest addition to this group. At the same time, there was evidence that the international commu-

nity has the capacity to react decisively. This has been most evident in Cote d'Ivoire where the United States, Europe, the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States, and the United Nations ultimately united behind a single message, a strong diplomatic response, and targeted political and economic sanctions. Moreover, Cote d'Ivoire was expelled from the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States.

Belarus is, of course, a member of the OSCE, which was founded on democratic principles. Ironically though, it was Mr. Lukashenko who expelled the OSCE Mission from Belarus. And the OSCE might consider finding a suitably reciprocal mechanism to censure a member's flagrant violation of its core principles. Likewise, it is difficult to imagine Belarus remaining a participant in good standing of the European Union's Eastern Partnership initiative.

At the same time, our assistance should focus on the citizens of Belarus—on defending, supporting, and expanding their own aspirations for democratic reforms. Helping the hundreds who remain in jail, their families, and those who are still being hunted by the KGB must be our first priority. Almost as pressing is ensuring the continued existence of the democratic organizations they represent. With their leaders jailed, equipment confiscated, and activists threatened, the survival of many political parties, civic groups, and independent media outlets is in jeopardy.

A third key priority is maintaining a broad array of avenues through which more Belarusians can become politically active. The citizens who signed petitions, gathered on the square, or were simply jarred out of complacency by the regime's repression must have ongoing communication links, organizations to join, projects to support, information to weigh, and opportunities for dialogue if any good is to follow from this tragedy.

As we consider assistance going forward, there are certain basics that have proven their worth in situations like these around the world.

First, the democrats inside Belarus need ongoing international attention. Vaclav Havel has spoken eloquently about how important outside voices were to dissidents behind the Iron Curtain—as a source of hope and proof that they were not alone. Meetings with high-level visitors, such as those that took place recently with Senator Durbin and Tom Melia, are invaluable.

Second, the activists need practical assistance that is both responsive to their requests and sensitive to their own assessments of the risks. Along these lines, there are a number of activities that merit consideration. First, helping political parties and civic organizations regroup, strengthen their structures, and conduct activities that engage citizens in political life. Second, ensuring that political groups have access to reliable information about the values and concerns of the population and the activities of both their government and the opposition. The Polish-based satellite television channel, Belsat, is very important in this regard. Third, assisting Belarusians to find a wide range of entry points into political life, from low-risk discussion groups and community development projects to high stakes advocacy on political rights or campaigning for office. Our emphasis should not be on promoting individual poli-

ticians, but rather on supporting democratic demand through organizations representing genuine citizen interests.

We would also caution against making rigid distinctions between “political” and “nonpolitical” organizations—so as to assist only the latter. Support should go to all groups that are responding to and engaging citizens.

What can the opposition reasonably accomplish in the current harsh environment, assuming its activists receive adequate moral and practical support from the international community? It can defend, expand, and strengthen the popular aspirations for democratic change. It can present alternative visions for the future of Belarus. Regardless of what precipitates a political opening, only grassroots demand will ensure a democratic outcome.

December 19 was a serious setback for the Belarusian democratic forces. But I am confident that, with international solidarity, they will recover and perhaps reemerge stronger. By continuing to invest in the aspirations of the Belarusian people, we will bring the country closer to its democratic potential. Moreover, we will find ourselves on the right side of history.

Thank you, Madam Chairman and Senator DeMint.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Wollack follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF KENNETH WOLLACK

Madam Chairman and members of the subcommittee, I appreciate this opportunity to appear on behalf of the National Democratic Institute before the subcommittee on the current situation in Belarus.

The continuing Belarusian crackdown on democracy activists that began on December 19 is tragic and extreme. It is deeper, wider, and more violent than any since the late 1990s. But it is not an exceptional act or a break with the past, rather it is consistent with the pattern that the Lukashenko regime first established in the 1990s and has followed ever since. The regime may adjust its tactics over time—sometimes the government is more responsive to the international community, sometimes less so—but the strategy remains one of holding onto power at all costs.

Although Belarus conducts regular elections, they are empty exercises at best. Each has failed to meet minimum international standards; each has violated the country’s commitments as a member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The Lukashenko regime has consistently demonstrated that it will not tolerate meaningful dissent or opposition; and it has also sought to suppress independent voices and organizations. It was four years ago, for example, that the government forcibly disbanded Partnership, a nonpartisan election monitoring group that was working with NDI assistance and in accordance with OSCE principles. Its offices were closed, its equipment confiscated, and its leaders arrested and imprisoned, along with NDI’s resident representative, for 6 months or more.

In testimony before Senator Cardin and the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe in advance of the 2008 parliamentary elections, NDI noted that “most forms of independent political activity, including [civic] and political party organizing, have been repressed.” We cited criminalization of political activity through denial of registration to all but the most progovernmental organizations, closure of media outlets and persecution of journalists.

Remarkably, the situation today has worsened. We are witnessing a systematic and far reaching roundup of journalists, civic and party leaders, and ordinary citizens, some identified from KGB videos of peaceful post election protests. Mr. Lukashenko’s claim that no more “senseless democracy” will be tolerated in Belarus makes clear his intention to decimate the democratic opposition and independent civic groups.

Before December 19, reasonable people might have differed about the relative merits of “carrots versus sticks” approaches in dealing with Belarus. There were glimmers of liberalization that led some to hope that Mr. Lukashenko could be coaxed into constructive cooperation with the trans-Atlantic community. But these changes proved illusory. In addition, the Belarusian economy is struggling and there is evidence from a variety of opinion polls that Mr. Lukashenko’s popularity is sinking. His capacity to rule through a so-called social compact is thus diminished. The

main tool he has left is repression. The very nature of the Belarusian regime has made it virtually immune to entreaties from its democratic neighbors. Any international response to the current crackdown must be shaped by that fundamental point. Irrespective of its erratic moves toward the East or the West, the regime's disrespect for the rights of its citizens remains a constant.

Government-to-government actions and stiff consequences should, of course, be the front line of the international response to these events, and coordination within the EuroAtlantic community will be essential. In this context, we commend bipartisan international outreach efforts such as the recent Senate letter to European Union High Representative Ashton.

Last year, we witnessed failed elections in such places as Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Burma, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, and Haiti. Sadly, Belarus was the latest addition to this group. At the same time, there was evidence that the international community has the capacity to react decisively. This has been most evident in Côte d'Ivoire, where the United States, Europe, the African Union (AU) and the United Nations ultimately united behind a single message, a strong diplomatic response, and targeted political and economic sanctions. Moreover, Côte d'Ivoire was expelled from the AU and the Economic Community of West African States. The outcome of this standoff remains uncertain, but the forthright international defense of fundamental political rights sends an important message to the people of Côte d'Ivoire.

Belarus is of course a member of the OSCE, which was founded on democratic principles. Ironically, though, it was Mr. Lukashenko who expelled the OSCE mission from Belarus. The OSCE might consider finding a suitably reciprocal mechanism to censure this flagrant violation of its core values. Likewise, it is difficult to imagine Belarus remaining a participant in good standing of the European Union's Eastern Partnership initiative.

At the same time, our assistance should focus on the citizens of Belarus—on defending, supporting, and expanding their own aspirations for democratic reforms.

The slight liberalization in the preelection period provided a glimpse of those aspirations and of the grassroots democratic potential in Belarus. Opposition leaders took advantage of the narrow opening to create a political environment that genuinely engaged and activated people. Democratic candidates, when they were briefly allowed to campaign, found volunteers to carry and sign their petitions in numbers far exceeding expectations. On election night, thousands of ordinary Belarusians imbued with a new interest in politics flocked to the central square in Minsk, despite the very real threat of violence. The recent crackdown has touched and angered many previously uninvolved citizens, fueling increased support for the democratic movement. Since the election, political leaders have put aside differences to rally in support of political prisoners, forming multiparty organizations such as Solidarity and the Coordinating Council. Indeed, this swelling of popular mobilization, along with signs that the regime was losing popularity, is what seems to have triggered the regime's violent reaction on December 19.

Helping the hundreds who remain in jail, their families and those who are still being hunted by the KGB must be our first priority. Almost as pressing is ensuring the continued existence of the democratic organizations they represent. With their leaders jailed, equipment confiscated and activists threatened, the survival of many political parties, civic groups, and independent media outlets is in jeopardy. A third key priority is maintaining a broad array of avenues through which more Belarusians can become politically active. The citizens who signed petitions, gathered on the square, or were simply jarred out of complacency by the regime's repression must have ongoing communication links, organizations to join, projects to support, information to weigh, and opportunities for dialogue if any good is to follow from this tragedy.

As we consider democracy assistance going forward, we should bear in mind that there is no silver bullet, no magic program formula that will lift Belarus out of its current crisis and toward greater freedom. But there are certain basics that have proven their worth in situations like these around the world.

- First, the democrats inside Belarus need international attention. Vaclav Havel has spoken eloquently about how important outside voices were to dissidents behind the Iron Curtain—as a source of hope and proof that they were not alone. We need to stand in public solidarity with the Belarusians now under attack. Meetings with high-level visitors, such as those that took place recently with Senator Durbin and the State Department's Tom Melia, are invaluable. In these conditions, political neutrality would only translate into support for the regime.
- Second, the activists need practical assistance that is both responsive to their requests and sensitive to their own assessments of the risk.

Along these lines, there are a number of activities, including some that NDI and others are already conducting, that merit consideration:

- Helping political parties and civic organizations regroup, strengthen their structures and conduct activities that engage citizens in political life.
- Ensuring that political groups have access to reliable information about the values and concerns of the population.
- Ensuring that citizens have access to impartial information about the activities of both their government and the opposition.
- Assisting Belarusians to find a wide range of entry points into political life, from low-risk discussion groups and community development projects to high stakes advocacy on political rights or campaigning for office.

Our emphasis should not be on promoting individual politicians, but rather on supporting democratic demand through organizations representing genuine citizen interests.

We would also caution against making rigid distinctions between “political” and “nonpolitical” organizations—so as to assist only the latter. Support should go to groups that are responding to and engaging citizens.

Even though Belarusian democrats bear no responsibility for the current crisis—on the contrary, they are its victims—nonetheless the responsibility for democratic progress going forward falls to them. What can the opposition reasonably accomplish in the current harsh environment, assuming its activists receive adequate moral and practical support from the international community?

First, we should acknowledge that there are no quick fixes. Democracy assistance is a long-term process with an unpredictable timeline. The objective is to support democrats with networks, skills and bases of support so they can fill the political vacuum when openings occur.

Until then, the leaders of the Belarusian opposition can defend, expand, and strengthen the popular aspirations for democratic change. They can present alternative visions for the future of Belarus. Regardless of what precipitates a political opening, only grassroots demand will ensure a democratic outcome.

December 19 was a serious setback for the Belarusian democratic forces. But I am confident that, with international solidarity, they will recover and perhaps re-emerge stronger. By continuing to invest in the aspirations of the Belarusian people, we will bring the country closer to its democratic potential. Moreover, we will find ourselves on the right side of history.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you very much, Mr. Wollack.
Ms. Koliada, you may begin.

STATEMENT OF NATALIA KOLIADA, GENERAL DIRECTOR AND COFOUNDER, BELARUS FREE THEATRE, MINSK, BELARUS

Ms. KOLIADA. Madam Chairperson, distinguished members of the committee, thank you so much for giving me a chance and the floor to speak today on behalf of those people who are today in jail. They do not have voices. I still have the voice, so I will speak on their behalf.

If you allow me to start, I will start.

My name is Natalia Koliada. I am cofounder of Belarus Free Theatre, together with my husband, Nikolai Khalezin, and Vladimir Shcherban, and a great group of actors. We gathered together in order to make the theatre and say whatever we think wherever and whenever we want and to whom we want by means of arts. We wanted our spectators to think and this is the most scary part for the Belarusian dictator, when people start thinking. As a result of our artistic works, the company experienced all possible types of repression, from dismissal from their jobs to arrest of the whole group, together with all spectators.

But I am here today not as a theatremaker. Today I am here just as a human being. I am a person who was lucky enough because of a very simple judicial mistake to leave Belarus after a 1-day imprisonment. Now my parents and my husband’s parents are under

constant control and pressure of the KGB. My apartment and my husband's apartment was searched three times. It was under attack of the KGB three times. And of course, it is not possible to compare a pain of our parents whose children are free but not with them to the pain of those with relatives in the KGB jail now. Everything that happens in Belarus now reminds only Stalin times.

I am here today to talk on behalf of my friends, people with who I worked and who I even never met in my life, but all of them are now in the KGB jail, and they face from 5 to 15 years of imprisonment. If I have a voice, I will speak for them.

I am here today on behalf of all their relatives who do not have any news about their loved ones because lawyers are not allowed to those who are in custody. Nobody knows their destinies and health conditions.

Everything that happened on December 19, 2010, was a big surprise for the world, but not for us who live under a dictator for the last 16 years. Belarus has now entered the third era in its most difficult stage of life beginning a decade ago. In 1999–2000, Lukashenko eliminated public and political leaders using a death squad.

Then there was 2006, the year of previous Presidential elections when European politicians essentially denied help to the democratic forces of Belarus. On the eve of the election, one must put the question, Can the European Union really put pressure on Lukashenko and start exercising sanctions? One of European diplomats said only if people are starting to be killed in the streets. Five people are not enough to be killed in the streets of Minsk?

On September 3, 2010, our friend and journalist, Oleg Bebenin, founder of the most influential and independent Web site, Charter 97, was found dead. He was found hanged in his country cottage. Ridiculously staged suicide would be one of the key elements in the upcoming election campaign. The killing led to a so-called international investigation, but European politicians even then turned a blind eye to the death, limiting their intervention by the arrival of two experts whose names were not even announced officially to examine documents offered by the Belarusian authorities. And Charter 97 Web site was under the first attack on the night from December 19–20, just showing to the world that nobody should know what is happening in Belarus. Nobody needs witnesses.

That should have been the moment when the world stops talking to the last dictator of Europe. This is the person who kidnaps, kills people, puts innocent people in jail, and uses them for blackmail, sells arms to Iran, Venezuela, Syria, Iraq. The world should call such a person as a terrorist and place him on the "most wanted" list. Generally such people are hunted down and put on trial, but somehow the rule does not apply to Lukashenko.

Belarus was one of the main five countries that traded arms. Lukashenko's elder son, Victor, is in charge of trading arms, national security's border control and it is obvious that he was one of those who led the crackdown on a peaceful demonstration on December 19. His middle son is in charge of gambling. Such a family. And the whole country is under their control.

Nevertheless, the West continued to engage this monster. We felt betrayed by those who we thought should be helping us. Human rights and democracy took second place to geopolitical interests, business profits, and historical fears of Russia.

It was a strategic mistake for Europeans to count on Russia and hope that this country that never cared about any human's life such as Khodorkovskiy, Politkovskaya, Estimirova would start to care about human rights in Belarus.

Lukashenko played EU with his fake preelection liberalization and the EU ate it up. Why did the Europeans buy this? Belarus is a country without oil, gas, or seaports. Belarus just has its people. Who needs such things as people?

It was a very bad sign when there was discussion on December 1 on uranium. It showed Lukashenko a support from both sides, the visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Germany and Poland to Belarus and discussion on uranium on December 1 by Secretary of State.

In the year preceding the 2000 Presidential election, Lukashenko's claims of liberalization were taken seriously by the West. We have not experienced this for the most notorious liberalization ourselves. Talks on the liberalization and flirting with the dictator led to a wave of terror that began on December 19, 2010, and continued until now.

I cannot describe the reality of everyday life in Belarus on December 19 because it would take months to describe all personal tragedies that take place now in Belarus. But I could give you just a story of my personal experience and experience of our theatre manager and those people who I met in jail from December 19–20.

On December 19, about 50,000 people gathered at the square. Then it was attack. Then it was provocation by the government. There were a few attempts to provoke people from the side of the government. People tried to resist, but it was not possible to resist. An enormous attack by thousands of people in black, in uniforms in helmets with their shields moved to people to arrest.

My husband and I—we were close. But when a company of riot police struck at the crowd, we became separated. The only thing that happened next—it was me in a van with total darkness. The only thing that the special division of police referred to us at the first moment there were five people at that mobile jail. The “animal”—this was the lightest word that we heard regarding to ourselves.

In the van, there were absolutely darkness. Gradually the paddy wagon was filled with the detained and eventually 68 people were crammed inside. First we heard: “Lie on the floor. Do not move. One move and I'll kill you.” But by the time there were about 70 people, it was necessary for people to stand up despite the fact that the metal shed measuring about 2 by 5 meters.

The car started to move around the city. We had been in the car for about 4 hours, and we stood on the territory of the jail where that van came. Two people started to lose their consciousness, but doctors did not appear, of course.

In the 4 hours, we started to be taken one by one. We had been told that we need to go to jail head to head. And when I got to the jail, I saw the corridor. To my right hand, I saw hundreds of men

who were staying along the sides of corridors, both walls, and they faced the walls with their hands back. And the only thing that is possible to recall would be from Soviet films about Nazis. So it was exactly this kind of story.

Women were separated from men and we were moved to the second floor. And when I got to the second floor, I could not believe my eyes because it was the same that it was on the first floor, but they were women facing the walls and with their hands back. It was the moment when the head of the special division of police said that Nazis will be like a dream for you. And it is a very horrible moment to hear because every third Belarusian was killed by a Nazi, and knowing that the Belarusian citizen is saying this thing to another Belarusian citizen, it just shows you the leverage of hate and dictatorship that exists in Belarus.

Through the night, more than 600 people were arrested, including six Presidential candidates, two of them Andrei Sannikov and Vladimir Neklyayev, in horrible health condition. Nobody knows what is happening to them.

In the detention center when we stood overnight, nobody even provided us cells. We were not allowed to sleep. We were not allowed to drink. We were not allowed to use the toilet. If you asked to get some water, you would say that go and use the toilet.

In the case of our theatre manager, Artem Zheleznyak, when he confessed to me, when he was released on December 31, he had never experienced anything like that during his entire life. For almost 3 days, he was either in the paddy wagon or in a stone glass, a tiny concrete cell about 80 centimeters square, less than 1 square meter, and above all, he was stuffed in with two other detainees in that tiny cell. He was allowed to use a bathroom once within 3 days after his arrest.

Many of those who had been sentenced for administrative arrest were immediately arrested by the KGB after their release and taken to a KGB jail. These people were charged under the article of the organization of mass disturbances.

My husband, Nikolai Khalezin, now is also charged under this article. When we were separated at the square, he managed to escape, picked up our youngest daughter who was with friends, and got home. Early in the morning, KGB officers tried to infiltrate into our house, but my husband, parents, and daughter stayed silent and gave no sign that anyone was there. KGB officers returned several times during the morning, but my husband managed to escape from the house with the help of our friends.

What began to happen in Belarus on December 20, I would term a true "witch hunt." Only about two dozen of political activists could escape from the secret service. All others were arrested. From the very morning, the all-out searches of the apartments of social activists began. Editorial offices of independent newspapers and Web sites were destroyed. Human rights defenders were detained and interrogated. Almost everywhere computer equipment and any information media, flash memory cards, video, and photo cameras, CD, DVD, external computer disks were confiscated, Belarusian authorities afraid of any witnesses.

There were no mobile coverage at the square. There was no Internet. When people referred to Belarus and said that it is pos-

sible to have a Twitter revolution, as it was in Iran; no, it was not possible because Belarusian authorities bought Chinese filters and there was no Internet in Belarus.

The country plunged into a deep depression, not knowing how to resist the total violence and absolute arbitrariness. At the same time, people increasingly began to show their public initiative to help the repressed and their families.

We managed to flee the country. On January 3, we were supposed to fly out on a tour from Minsk to New York. And with great help—today we were referred to Michael Scanlan and the U.S. Embassy several times, and it appeared that this is the Embassy that really helped—we left the country. But the next day, the KGB came to apartments of our parents and they said where are your children. How did they manage to leave the country? And from all the discussion, it was absolutely obvious that the KGB said organization of mass disturbances is referred to your children. Already three times, KGB officers came to a house of our manager. The husband of our actress was arrested. They also actively searched for the president of We Remember Foundation, Irina Krasovskaya, who is present today at these amazing hearings.

Today the number of imprisoned in the KGB jail constantly varies. Depriving prisoners of information and health treatment is a secret service tactic for pressuring them to confess to crimes which they did not commit. Not only do prisoners undergo this enormous pressure, but it extends to their relatives. On the day when I met, together with Irina Krasovskaya and the representatives of Belarusian diaspora in the United States, with the U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, intelligence officers in Minsk tried to win over the wife of Dmitry Bondarenko, coordinator of the European Belarus movement. She was offered to influence her husband so he would begin to cooperate with the investigation and then would receive a prison term much less than Sannikov. The next day after the meeting with the Secretary of State, apartments of my parents were attacked by KGB again.

Unfortunately, today the simple desire of Belarusians to get rid of dictatorship is not enough. Lukashenko has created a huge machine of repression which has no analogs in Europe. We can resist it only by leaning on the help of those who are able to influence the last dictatorship of Europe from the outside.

Here in America, we have amazing support of American artists, Steven Spielberg, Michael Douglas, Tony Kushner, Oskar Eustis, Catherine Coray, Leigh Jameson, Jeramie Irons, Michael Lawrence; many, many of them. I can enumerate for a long time names of those tremendous and great people who rushed to our aid and embarked on the protection of political prisoners.

I have a dream that we will be able to pronounce with the same pride the names of American and European politicians who decide to help a country of 10 million people. But if any way politicians do their job and think only such the ways, there is just one political and geopolitical challenge. If there is no dictatorship in Belarus, it will be for the first time in the world history when European Continent would be free from dictators. What a shame if the European Union and the United States cannot solve this issue.

I would like to get just a few moments of your attention. This is just a few moments that I need from you and pay attention just to the names of people who are now in the KGB jail, and these are just people: Aliaksandr Atroshchankau, Aliaksandr Arastovich, Bandarenka, Breus, Fiaduta, Fedarkevich, Khalip, Khamichenka, Klaskouski, Kobets, Korban, Kviatkevich, Likhavid, Liabedzka, Loban, Malchanau, Martsaleu, Miadzvedz, Mikhalevich, Novik, Niakliayeu, Palazhanka, Parfiankou, Paulau, Pazniak, Radzina, Sannikau, Seviarynets, Statkevich, Vazniak, Vinahradau. No oil, no gas, just people. This list is growing now.

I wanted to bring you a portrait, but it was not allowed to bring it here. It is staying on the first floor. It is a portrait of a son of our friends, Andrei Sannikov and Irina Khalip. You saw his portrait today. He is only 3 years old but he personifies all parents. He personifies all children who are now without parents, and parents who are now without children. And could you imagine if you put yourself on the position of his parents, that they would see him or he would see his parents only when he is 18 years old. He is 3 now.

When we talk about Belarus, let us talk about it like people, not as politicians or theatre makers, not as businessmen and geopolitical strategists, but just people. The American Senate is the voice of American people, and we need those voices of people of America to stay together with us and help us to fight against dictatorship.

Our patron, Sir Tom Stoppard, who came to Belarus underground and met with many of those who are now in KGB and relatives of those whose relatives were kidnapped and killed by the regime said: Dictatorship is not a political problem. It is a moral problem. Let us think about morality in politics toward Belarus, as well as to other countries that stay under dictatorships as well. Words are not enough. It is time to act.

Thank you so much for your time and patience.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Koliada follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF NATALIA KOLIADA

Madam Chairperson, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to share my experience of the political and social upheaval surrounding the recent fraudulent Presidential elections in my country, Belarus. With your permission, I would like to present my story.

My name is Natalia Koliada. I am a director of the Belarus Free Theatre. I believe that in order to present a complete picture of what is happening in Belarus, I should start with a history of our theater itself, an independent creative company which has become a pariah in its own country.

OUR THEATER

My husband Nikolai Khalezin and I created the theater in spring of 2005. A month later, after a director, Vladimir Scherban, joined us, we were able to release the first show, "Psychosis 4.48" based on a play by British playwright Sarah Kane. Even the first performance provoked a squall of discontent on behalf of the power structures, and the next show, "Breathing Technique in a Vacuum" based on a play by Russian playwright, Natalia Moshina, led to the prohibition of the theater. In the first months of our existence, we could rent small clubs for the performances. Later, when the theater became known to intelligence agencies and the Presidential administration, our managers were visiting on average 30–40 different public spaces, offering to perform for free, but they were rejected every time.

Exercising our right to freedom of expression, we began to show performances underground, using every opportunity. We presented them in the guise of private

parties and birthdays in cafes or in private homes, and even under the guise of weddings at a farm in the forest.

The result was that the professional theater company has become a pariah, and members of the troupe throughout the 6 years of the theater's existence experienced all possible types of repression: expulsion from the universities, dismissal from their job, denial of residency, beatings, arrests, prison time, and psychological pressure on members of the troupe and the audience. Three members of the group were imprisoned, and everyone has been arrested. One of the most heinous cases occurred in August 2007, when the entire troupe was arrested along with the audience—more than 60 people. Then the mass repression was avoided only through the intervention of international celebrities: British playwright, Sir Tom Stoppard, and Nobel Laureate, Harold Pinter, along with a rapid response of the leading world media.

Pressure on the theater grew in proportion as the company became popular abroad. We presented performances on four continents, traveled more than two dozen countries on tour, receiving brilliant critique in the world's leading publications. But at home in Belarus, we still showed performances in secret: we were not allowed to register the theater officially, rent space, nor sell tickets. The regime continued to pressure not only actors and managers of the theater, but resorted to pressure spectators and family members of the troupe.

In the year preceding the 2010 Presidential election, many European politicians were taking President Alexander Lukashenko's claims of liberalization seriously. We have not experienced for a single day of this most notorious "liberalization" ourselves. The pressure on the theater changed its forms, but it has not slackened or faltered for a moment, being amplified after each great success abroad. Talks on the liberalization and flirting with the dictator led to a wave of terror that began on December 19, 2010, and continuing until now.

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The morning of Election Day did not herald the bloody outcome, which occurred later in the evening. The authorities cornered about 20 percent of voters on a preliminary vote and all bulletins of those who had voted before the official Election Day were enrolled in Lukashenko's advantage. At 4 p.m. the first exit poll data began to appear. Based on that information it became clear that Alexander Lukashenko gained no more than 32 percent of the votes whereas the share of the remaining eight candidates had more than 43 percent. Knowing the Belarusian political situation in which the overflow of the votes from opposition candidates to the dictator is impossible, and taking into account the fact that among the opposition candidates the majority of the votes were distributed between two leaders—Andrei Sannikov and Vladimir Neklyayev—it was easy to understand that the reality of the second round of elections would become absolutely obvious, in which a Democratic candidate would undoubtedly win.

Based on the exit poll data and information from a number of polling stations, the indicative results of the first round of the Presidential elections were as follows: Alexander Lukashenko gained 33–40 percent; Andrei Sannikov—23–25 percent. In the second round of voting Sannikova would receive votes from his colleagues in the Democratic opposition—Vladimir Neklyayev (about 12–15 percent), Yaroslav Romanchuk (10 percent) and other opposition candidates (about 5–7 percent). Most likely, the realization of his imminent defeat prompted Lukashenko to radical actions against peaceful demonstrators who had gathered in that evening in the center of Minsk in order to hear the final figures of the results of the Presidential elections.

By 8 p.m. at the October Square in Minsk there were about 50,000 people. They were people of different ages belonging to different social groups. Many came as entire families—even with young children. For the first time in the last 10 years, so many people took to the streets. It was a peaceful demonstration—there were no aggressive or intoxicated people in the crowd; any provocations by dressed in plain clothes security officers were stopped by the protesters. On the square a rally with the Presidential candidates, heads of their staffs, and culture figures took place.

There at the square, it became known that half an hour before the rally security forces attacked a group of members of the headquarters of a Presidential candidate, Vladimir Neklyayev. The attack was carried out with firearms and light stun grenades. The attackers seized a set of sound-amplifying equipment and took away part of the video and photography equipment from journalists present there. Nyaklyayev himself was brutally beaten, and after the attackers withdrew, he, being unconscious, was moved back into the candidate's headquarters.

After the meeting ended at the square, the demonstrators marched to Independence Square, where the Central Election Commission was located at the Government Building. When about 50–60 thousand people came to the square the final

results of the Presidential elections, announced by the Central Election Commission, became known. According to the authorities, Alexander Lukashenko had scored more than 79 percent of the votes.

It was clear that the dictator would not part with his power, even if nobody voted for him.

The rally at the square continued—one Presidential candidate after another gave a speech during which they declared their opposition to the fraudulent results that had been announced by the Central Election Commission. At some point, there was a sound of breaking glass—a few unknown people tried to break the glass door in the building that housed the Central Election Commission. Demonstrators surrounded the area close to the doors, and did not let anyone to approach them. Presidential candidate Vitali Rymashevsky, getting to the microphone, announced that it was a provocation of the intelligence services, but suddenly another group of sports-dressed young people appeared there and continued even more actively smashing the glass doors of the Government Building. Only a few days later, with the active help of bloggers, journalists, and, thanks to leaks from law enforcement of audio conversations between special security services, people managed to reconstruct the event completely, and with absolute certainty to establish that the destructions of the doors of the Government Building had been staged by the secret service. Today, all the relevant audio communications can be found publicly on the Internet.

From the audio communications of special services it became clear that the breaking of glass in the door of the building was the signal for the use of the force against peaceful demonstrators. A few minutes later, after the raid leaders ordered the sweep, the area was filled with about 7–10 thousand troops. It consisted of different groups of armed men: from organized riot squads to semicriminal groups without any recognizable insignia, dressed in black clothes. These groups are part of semilegal armed forces, carrying out special assignments of the Presidential structures. They behaved horribly, screaming obscenities and furiously smashing and brutally beating the peaceful demonstrators.

My husband and I were close, but when a company of riot police struck at the crowd, we became separated on different sides of armed men. I, along with a small group of protesters was shoved aside to a waiting paddy wagon, and we were pushed inside of it. We, the first few people, were more fortunate than others—we mostly avoid the beatings. Riot policemen initially only gave orders, interspersing them with foul language: “Lie on the floor!”, “Do not move!”, “One move and I’ll kill you!” The gentlest treatment was the word “animals.” In the car there was absolute darkness. Gradually the paddy wagon was filled with the detained, and eventually 68 people were crammed inside, despite the fact that it is a metal shed measuring about 2 by 5 meters.

The car started to move around the city—the moving lasted about an hour, then we stayed in the car for another 3 hours. There was not enough air, there was no water and we weren’t allowed to go to the toilet. A few hours later after we arrived at a detention center, which was a jail, where political prisoners sentenced to short prison terms are usually taken; a few groups were conveyed to the toilet. To our question whether it was possible to drink somewhere, the guards replied: “Drink from the toilet.” Threats and insults rained incessantly on us. That evening one of the guards told us: “Fascists will look like a fairy tale for you.” It was true—it was unbearably difficult to stand the insults, beatings and humiliation for the young people, the vast majority of whom were in that situation for the first time in their life.

Throughout the night more than 600 people were arrested, including six Presidential candidates. At the detention center they did not even take us to the cells. We were left standing in the hallways waiting for trials that were due to start in the morning. The guards continued psychological pressure, periodically giving the command: “Form up a file,” “Face the wall,” “Place your feet shoulder-width apart.” It was senseless torture of people throughout the entire night.

DECEMBER 20, 2010

In the morning they started to take us to the courts. They had to sentence more than 600 people, so all the courts of the city were overcrowded. Trials that were taking place one after another, sometimes took just a few minutes. Police officers were the witnesses, and all protocols were written in the same way: “was in the square,” shouted the slogans,” “violated the order.” Insisting on the presence of a lawyer was futile. Without exception, all the trials were behind closed doors. Lawyers were not allowed in and even the relatives of the arrested could not find out where the trials on their loved ones had been taken place. In the most cases the sentences imposed

were of two types—10 or 15 days of imprisonment. In some cases, mostly for young women with small children younger than 12 years old, they were fined for 30 basic units (about \$400).

In my case a judge was about to pass sentence, but asked me: “Do you feel guilty?” I replied that I did not, and then the judge turned to me with the words “Anna Yegorovna . . .” I immediately responded to challenge the judge, because my name is Natalia Andreevna, and not Anna Yegorovna. It turned out that I was tried, not only without any witnesses, but also based on a charge-sheet which contained someone else’s name. The conflict began to flare up, and the judge decided that the best solution was to stop it, and announced the sentence—a penalty.

The manager of our theater, Artem Zheleznyak, was not as lucky—he was sentenced to 11 days in jail after being arrested in the editorial office of the most influential independent socio-political Web site, Charter’97. He had accompanied the Web site editor in chief, Natalia Radina, to her office to help her with the translation of articles into English. Natalia was beaten so badly in the square she got a concussion. That night, the entire editorial staff, including Artem, was arrested. As he confessed to me, he had never experienced anything like that during his entire life. For almost 3 days he was either in a paddy wagon, or in “a glass”—a tiny concrete cell about 80 centimeters square; less than 1 square meter. And, above all, he was stuffed in with two other detainees in that tiny cell.

Many of those who had been sentenced for administrative arrest were immediately arrested by the KGB after their release and taken to a KGB jail. These people were charged under the article of the organization of mass disturbances, the maximum penalty for which is 15 years imprisonment.

My husband, Nikolai Khalezin, now is also charged under this article. When we were separated at the square, he managed to escape, picked up our youngest daughter, who was with friends, and got home. Early in the morning KGB officers tried to infiltrate into our house, but my husband, parents, and daughter stayed silent and gave no sign that anyone was there. KGB officers returned several times during the morning, but my husband managed to escape from the house.

What began to happen in Belarus on December 20, I would term a true “witch hunt.” Only about two dozens of political activists could escape from the secret service—all others were arrested. From the very morning the all-out searches of the apartments of social activists began, editorial offices of independent newspapers and Web sites were destroyed, human rights defenders were detained and interrogated. Almost everywhere computer equipment and any information media: flash memory cards, video and photo cameras, CD, DVD, external computer disks was confiscated.

Mobile phone operators provided the authorities with information on all subscribers who were present at the center of town in the evening of December 19. Based on these lists, they started calling in everyone for questioning in the State Security Committee. Queues for questioning by the KGB are still there, and searches and new arrests are continued without interruption. Today we are talking about tens of thousands of people who have been questioned and who will be called for questioning in the nearest future.

The country plunged into a deep depression, not knowing how to resist the total violence and absolute arbitrariness. At the same time, people increasingly began to show their public initiative to help the repressed and their families, disseminating information, creating new professional groups of influence.

TODAY

We managed to flee the country. On January 3, we were supposed to fly on a tour from Minsk to New York. As it turned out, secret services were waiting for the troupe at the airport, but we managed to escape from the country by other means, but on the very next day our apartments were searched. The main questions they asked our parents were, “Where are they?” and “How could they manage to leave the country?” From the interrogation of our parents, it became clear that my husband and I were incriminated under the same article as everyone else who is still imprisoned in the KGB jail: “organization of mass disturbances.” Already three times KGB officers came to a house of Artem Zheleznyak’s parents. They also actively search for the President of the “We Remember Foundation,” Irina Krasovskaya.

Today the number of imprisoned in the KGB jail constantly varies. Weekly the authorities arrest new people whom they impose the same absurd accusations. Lawyers are not allowed to see the suspects; they are deprived of medical care, and denied even the slightest access to information. To date, the lawyers cannot get to see their clients for 29 days.

Depriving prisoners of information and health treatment is the secret service tactic for pressuring them to confess to crimes which they did not commit. Not only do prisoners undergo this enormous pressure, but it extends to their relatives. On the day when I met with the U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, intelligence officers in Minsk tried to win over the wife of Dmitry Bondarenko, coordinator of the “European Belarus” movement. She was offered to influence her husband so he would “begin to cooperate with the investigation, and then would receive a prison term much less than Sannikov.”

Vladimir Khalip, father of arrested journalist, Irina Khalip, and father-in-law of Andrei Sannikov, suffered over the past 2 weeks three operations on his eyes because of the sudden drop in vision. My father, a professor of elocution, Andrew Koliada, now cannot practice his profession—because of the nervous system breakdown a spasm of the vocal cords occurred.

Belarus has now entered the third era in its most difficult stage of life, beginning a decade ago. In 1999–2000, Lukashenko eliminated opposition leaders using a “death squad.” Then the militia under the command of Colonel Dmitri Pavlyuchenko kidnapped and killed opposition leaders—Deputy Speaker of the Parliament, Viktor Gonchar, former Interior Minister, Yuri Zakharenko, Anatoly Krasovski—a businessman who financed the democratic forces, and Gennady Karpenko—another Deputy Speaker of the Parliament and Head of the Congress of Democratic Forces also perished under mysterious circumstances.

Then there was 2006—the year of the previous Presidential election, when European politics essentially denied help to the democratic forces of Belarus. On the eve of the election, when was put to the question “Can the European Union put pressure on Lukashenko?” one of Europe’s politicians replied, “Only if they start shooting in the streets.”

On September 3, 2010, the journalist, Oleg Bebenin, one of the leaders of the electoral headquarters of Andrei Sannikov, was found hanged at his country cottage. Ridiculously staged suicide would be one of the key elements in the upcoming election campaign. The killing lead to an international investigation, but European politicians even then turned a blind eye to that death, limiting their intervention by the arrival of two experts to examine the documents offered by the Belarusian authorities.

Unfortunately, today the simple desire of Belarusians to get rid of dictatorship is not enough. Lukashenko has created a huge machine of repression, which has no analogues in Europe. We can resist it only by leaning on the help of those who are able to influence the last dictatorship of Europe from the outside.

Here in America we have many friends in theater. When those people heard about our problems, they, without even thinking twice, began to do everything to help Belarus: Steven Spielberg, Michael Douglas, Tony Kushner, Oskar Eustis, Kevin Kline, Stephen Spinella, Laurie Anderson, Lou Reed, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Olympia Dukakis, Jude Law, Kevin Spacey, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Jay Sanders, Ian McKellen . . . I can enumerate for a long time names of these tremendous and great people who rushed to our aid and embarked on the protection of political prisoners.

I have a dream that we will be able to pronounce with the same pride the names of American and European politicians who decide to help a country of 10 million people that may not have oil or gas, mountains or a sea, but does have great people who live there.

Danik, a son of Andrei Sannikov and Irina Khalip, is only 3 years old now. His parents are in KGB prison only because they wished well for their fellow compatriots. They may only be released when Danik is 18 years old. It is in your power to make sure that this won’t happen. Let’s try!

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you very much, Ms. Koliada, for your compelling words and for your courage in being here today.

I am going to ask Senator DeMint if he would begin the questioning because he has to leave.

Senator DEMINT. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Ms. Koliada, I have to thank you for your courage. Thanks for being a voice for the people of Belarus who want to live free, and I hope we can take your testimony and actually be of some help.

Mr. Kramer, I am sure you heard the testimony and the suggestions from Secretary Gordon about how we can put more pressure on the government there in Belarus. Your recommendations were

much tougher and much more specific in trying to—whether it be family members or whatever. Where is the difference? Do you believe—and I might ask Mr. Wollock to comment too because I think that is what we are trying to sort here is we know we have got a problem. We know that the government has not been responsive to requests. Again, just comment on whether you think we should be as harsh, or is there a way to pull them along without maybe pushing them away?

Mr. KRAMER. Senator DeMint, I think we cannot be harsh enough, frankly. That we will reimpose the sanctions on the two subsidiaries of Belneftkekhim is a good step, but we need to be looking at other state-owned enterprises where Lukashenko benefits personally. When we imposed a sanction in November 2007 on Belneftkekhim, 2 months later a representative of his administration came to the U.S. Embassy and asked what would the United States do if we release the political prisoners. In other words, we found his weak spot. We found where he keeps his money. We found where he is vulnerable. And the United States, as well as the European Union, need to continue to find the weak spots of Lukashenko, go after where he keeps his money, go after where people in his regime keep their money, deny them the opportunities to come to the West, extend this to the families. And I do think the European Union is prepared to take these steps.

We need to make very clear that we will not support any international financial institution assistance to Belarus.

And we should also, I would argue, stop talking about the possibility of reengaging with Lukashenko if he releases the political prisoners.

The ball should be in his court. He is the one who knows what he has to do. Unfortunately, I do not think he has any intention of doing it unless he has no choice through pressure. And so I would hope that the United States, together with the EU, would take the toughest stand possible and impose the most rigid sanctions where Lukashenko really has no out but to release the political prisoners for starters.

Senator DEMINT. But you would agree that if we attempt to be harsher than the EU is willing to be, then our sanctions really will not mean that much.

Mr. KRAMER. It takes both sides. In 2006, when we first imposed the sanctions after the February 2006 election, it took a lot of diplomatic effort but cooperation with Europe to make sure that the Europeans and the United States move forward on sanctions together. And in fact, the EU beat us to the announcement of sanctions that summer, but it was very important to do this in coordination.

Senator DEMINT. Mr. Wollock, what do you think about that balance?

Mr. WOLLACK. Well, first of all, I want to say, I think it was positive that the United States maintained a sanctions policy prior to the December 19 election when the Europeans were moving in a different direction.

I think that there are two issues and I think you are correct, Senator. I think, first of all, that we have to have a broad sanctions policy, but it is equally as important, if not even more important,

that this be coordinated with the Europeans so this is a unified approach. And that is why I talked a little bit about the recent elections in Cote d'Ivoire. If we can get the Europeans on board, we can get the intergovernmental organizations on board, the individual countries to a broad base, coordinated, and consistent sanctions policy, it will have, I think, a much greater impact on the regime than if we all go in different directions—both the EU and the United States and the individual countries within the European Union.

Senator DEMINT. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Senator DeMint.

I certainly agree with what both of you are—really, everybody who has testified has said about the importance of a coordinated effort between the United States and the EU to address what is happening in Belarus.

But given our past experience, how do we avoid responding to the regime then, assuming we put in place some of the tough measures that everyone is advocating and they then release the political prisoners, they then appear to be moving in a more positive direction, so we then reduce the sanctions—how do we avoid having this cycle repeat itself over and over again and political prisoners being used as bargaining chips for whatever Lukashenko was trying to do? Whoever would like to respond to that.

Mr. KRAMER. Senator, I think it is important that Lukashenko not be rewarded for undoing bad things. The release of political prisoners is not something for which he should then get the lifting or suspension of sanctions. The behavior that he demonstrated on the 19th of December and since then is something that he cannot really take back. So releasing political prisoners would be welcome but not sufficient in my view for there to then, in turn, be a suspension of the sanctions again because you are absolutely right. This will be a circle where we will be right back where we started.

And that is why, as Ken pointed out, the United States lifted very little in the way of sanctions in 2008 in response to the release of the political prisoners of that time. The EU suspended its visa ban. It kept its asset freeze in place. And the EU, therefore, does have more it can do to pressure Lukashenko than we do, but at the same time, we have to understand this is a leader, a dictatorial leader, who has demonstrated disdain for the West, disdain for freedom and human rights, and those kinds of leaders in my view do not deserve the benefit of the doubt.

Senator SHAHEEN. You all talked a little bit about Russia's actions, what appeared to be a distancing between Russia and Belarus and now what appears to be a coming back together. Is there more that we should be doing to engage Russia with us in trying to put pressure on Belarus and Lukashenko?

Yes, Ms. Koliada.

Ms. KOLIADA. If there is engagement of Russia, then it is necessary to understand that Russia would never care about human rights. So the only thing that is possible to use is just to explain to Russia that it is in their geopolitical interest, that it is good for them to stop it because Russia has announced that they are main partners, the European Union and the United States—so how they look in front of the European Union and the United States. Know-

ing such political situation that they have in their own country, they need to exercise some steps toward changing their situation and changing Belarus' situation. But in the reality, we do not need Russian influence.

And it is necessary for us to understand that one of the fears that appeared before the elections on behalf of the Lithuanian President who came to Belarus and who sat in some unofficial meetings, that it is better to keep Lukashenko in power because he would protect us from Russia. What a shame for a European leader to make such a statement.

Belarus could protect itself, and the European Union could protect itself, its borders. But it is necessary to remember when we talk about Russia, that Russia will never be interested in human rights. They are only interested in their business profits and their geopolitical situation. But it is important to engage and make pressure on them.

Senator SHAHEEN. Mr. Kramer.

Mr. KRAMER. I would just add, Senator, that I agree with everything Natalia said. I would also say that the leaders in Moscow are the ones who are happiest about the current situation. In the summer, they sent clear signals to Lukashenko through an anti-Lukashenko campaign, including documentaries that they aired on Russian TV, that they can mess with him anytime they want. Then a week before the election, they signed an energy deal with Lukashenko to help him out come the election.

They also love the fact now that the West is about to apply sanctions on him, which means that Lukashenko essentially has nowhere to turn but to Moscow. From the Russian leadership's perspective, this is an ideal situation.

Senator SHAHEEN. Mr. Wollack, did you want to add something to that?

Mr. WOLLACK. I would just say I am not somebody that is against engagement policy as long as engagement is based on fundamental principles, and if we have a broad diplomatic strategy based on those principles, I think we would be willing to talk to anybody, including the Russians. And there have been situations in other countries where countries have abysmal records domestically but are willing to take certain actions outside their borders that are positive. So I would not give up hope completely, but I would push this very vigorously and very hard so the Russians understand where we stand and what hopefully that we would ask from them.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Can I also get you to enumerate, if you will? You talked a lot about the importance of taking certain actions to help democratic forces in Belarus, some of the civil society groups. What specifically would you like to see Congress do, for example, to help respond to some of those recommendations?

Mr. WOLLACK. Well, first of all, I think we are all grateful for what Secretary Gordon said in terms of increasing funding for Belarus. I think Congress can play a role to ensure that the assistance package for Belarus be robust and to respond to what the needs are on the ground. And the needs are great, particularly since events that have occurred since December 19. So, therefore,

I think we have a responsibility to respond to those needs. And those needs in a way should be defined in large measure by the needs that are defined by the people on the ground and also by the recipients of the assistance. I think there should be a wide array of recipients of that assistance that includes both political and non-political organizations, civil society, political parties, and they have to determine the risks that they have to take in terms of the assistance that they receive from the outside. But I think the assistance should be robust and assistance should include both material assistance, as well as technical assistance, and Congress I think can play a role in that, working with the administration.

Mr. KRAMER. If I could just add two things.

Senator SHAHEEN. Sure.

Mr. KRAMER. I think one is to continue to shine a spotlight on the situation, and this hearing is a terrific example of how to do that. Bringing someone like Natalia to testify before the U.S. Senate is a wonderful thing to do to make sure that people do not lose focus on what is happening.

The other I mentioned is support for the Belarus Democracy Reauthorization Act which I hope the Congress will move forward with quickly, and that, too, would send a signal of both support for people in civil society and the opposition but also a clear message to the regime in Minsk.

Senator SHAHEEN. Yes, please.

Ms. KOLIADA. If I can make a very short comment. It is wonderful to hear such numbers like \$11 million and that it would be increased for 30 percent. But it is necessary to understand that there is a need in very deep analysis of the situation, who will receive this money, and there is a need for experts to stay in Belarus or it should be a person who is coming and going to Belarus on a constant basis because there is a problem of people coming and to be changed by other people and there is no expertise in Belarus.

It is necessary to understand, for example—just a short example. Even if we talk about Belarus Free Theatre, the last time we received help connected to the American Government, it was 2 years ago and it was from German Marshal Fund and it was \$10,000. And we have a group of 17 people.

So it is a great need in expertise of who does what, and there is a need in supporting, for example, Web sites like Charter 97 or Nasha Niva newspaper. And some of them like Charter 97 is located now out of Belarus, and they need protection from other governments as well in order to continue their jobs there. And there is a need in millions of independent underground newspapers like it was in Poland, Somerstat. And it should be just distributed because there is just hunger on information. There is terrible hunger on information.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Senator Risch.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Senator Shaheen.

I want to follow up on where Senator Shaheen started her question. It seems to me that if you put sanctions on and you are not willing to take them off simply because he is undoing what he did, there has got to be some type of a standard; that is, there needs to be something in place that says, OK, here are the sanctions and

there has got to be an end game, in short. I do not think the sanctions should be put on without a clear idea of where we are going. We have done too much of that as far as government is concerned.

So I would like to hear your thoughts on that. Let us set aside that it is an absolute given that you have got to undo the bad things you did. What do you have to do to get the sanctions off? I think that is really critical, it seems to me.

Mr. KRAMER. In December 2006, the European Union presented the Lukashenko government with 12 steps that it needed to take for an engagement policy and for real establishment of strong diplomatic relations. Lukashenko never paid any attention to those 12 steps, but the United States endorsed them at the time. Those 12 steps, as far as I know, are still on the table should he ever show any interest in following through on them.

There have been efforts over the years, even before the 2006 election, step-by-step, selective engagement to work with Lukashenko and the Belarusian Government, as well as with other organizations and civil society in the country, to move forward and try to get relations on a better track. Unfortunately, he has never shown interest. And the only reason the sanctions got suspended by the EU in 2008 is because of the pressure sanctions implied to force him to release political prisoners. And that, I think, is an example where Lukashenko only understands pressure, and he has shown no interest in liberalizing society. If he were to do that, I too would join with those who supported an engagement kind of policy with him.

Mr. WOLLACK. I think it has been frustrating for those of us who have worked in the region over the years that over almost two decades, there have been a series of failed, flawed, and deeply flawed elections that have taken place in this region of the world. And the OSCE spends an enormous amount of resources doing good work to monitor those elections, and usually the reports of those elections can be recycled. After each election, the OSCE declares an election not meeting international standards, not meeting the country's commitments to the OSCE. But there are very few consequences for these countries holding elections that do not reflect the will of their people.

In the case of Belarus, not only do you have a failed election, but you had brutality that took place after the poll. So, as one condition, I think we ought to go back and not allow failed elections to stand, and I think there should be a new election being held for President.

I think that there are other issues, as David said, with regard to other conditions and freedom of assembly, free expression, independent media, but I think we should not just look to the future. The next election is for Parliament. The next Presidential election is 5 years from now, but I think before we look to the future, we ought to look at how the past is dealt with. And I would say redoing that election is something that should be on that list.

Ms. KOLIADA. If I may. I mentioned that in 2006 before the Presidential elections, we talked with some European diplomats and we asked about sanctions even at that time because it was already too many years of Lukashenko in power and there were political kidnappings and murders at that time. But we got the reply that

I told, that there will be sanctions only when people are killed in the streets. So there are Presidential candidates who are now in jail.

I was arrested in a particular moment when I was talking to a British journalist, and there was this crackdown and hundreds of policemen arresting people and beating them. And he was asking me, Natalia, do you think this is the end? And I just started to scream at him because I cannot manage myself, and I said, could you imagine that you have Prime Minister elections in the United Kingdom and on the day of the election, people gather to get to know the results, and suddenly all British policemen are coming to the streets, they are arresting all candidates for Prime Minister positions, putting them in jail, and hundreds of people arrested. Is it the end to the U.K.?

So this is the time when it is necessary for us to ask the world to start sanctions. First of all, this is the immediate release of all political prisoners without any negotiations with the dictator and organize new Presidential elections. There is no other way out of the situation. It is not possible to continue these circles. He gets new political prisoners. After that, he started to blackmail the European Union. The European Union gives him 3 million euros. He released one political prisoner and he continues to live for some years. And then it would be forever. He has sons. The youngest one is 6 years old. So it means that there will be no end to it. So it is necessary to insist on immediate release of all political prisoners and new Presidential elections.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

I would like to just follow up a little bit on your suggestion or statement that we should require new elections, which I certainly would agree with and think that makes sense. But talk practically about how that would work. In your statement, Mr. Wollock, you talked about the situation in Cote d'Ivoire and the coordinated effort there to bring pressure on the current leadership, but there is still a standoff. So how practically do you see that working? Is that one of the things that we keep on our list as demands from Lukashenko, or do you think there is other action that could be taken in terms of trying to force a new election?

Mr. WOLLACK. Well, ultimately he holds the cards. I do not know how you can force him back to an electoral process. But I do not think that that issue should be taken off the table. I think in a sense, in addition to the political prisoner release, that issue has to be first and foremost on the agenda. So this notion of impunity that you can hold elections, you can treat citizens in a way that violates the fundamental principles of international and intergovernmental organizations that you belong to should not be allowed to stand. I do not know how one forces him.

In Cote d'Ivoire, it is slightly different since the international community, including the United Nations which had the authority to accredit the result of the election, has determined that Mr. Ouattara is the winner. This is a different situation.

We do not know what the results of the election in Belarus was. The integrity of the process was so bad we do not know what the results of the process were. And so, therefore, the integrity of the

elections was so flawed and so bad that it requires that election to be held again. So I think that is an issue that should be on the agenda and stay on the agenda, along with all the other actions that are taken.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Mr. Kramer.

Mr. KRAMER. Senator Shaheen, I think in thinking about your question, I cannot help but go back to November 2004 when the United States and the European Union and hundreds of thousands of people in downtown Kiev protested against a fraudulent election there. And Secretary Powell went out into the press briefing room and said the United States cannot accept as legitimate these results.

Now, I was struck and pleased that the White House spokesman issued a similar statement in response to the December 19 election in Belarus. I wish President Obama had said it, not the White House spokesman.

The leadership of the United States, the leaders of the European Union need to take a strong stand and reinforce the message that you and Ken and others have spoken about, which is we do not recognize these results, and therefore engaging in the business-as-usual diplomatic relations with a government that is headed by a leader whom we do not recognize is hard to imagine. And so I think supporting the tens of thousands—it was not hundreds of thousands as it was in Kiev in 2004, but it was tens of thousands of people in Minsk who turned out to protest this fraudulent election and protest against this dictatorial leader. We have to stand with them. They face tremendously adverse circumstances there. But they are the ones we should be siding with and they are the ones who also did not recognize the results of this election.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

And, Ms. Koliada, I think we are all grateful for the courage that you and so many in the opposition have shown, your willingness to stand up and take on the repression. One question that I have for you—and you alluded to this a little bit in your statement—is where those who have been silent in Belarus are. Do we have any sense—I am sure the Lukashenko regime is not polling the people of Belarus. But is there any reason to believe that the majority of people in Belarus share this frustration with the repression that everyone is experiencing?

Ms. KOLIADA. I am not sure it is an appropriate story, but I tell you anyway. Before the elections, 2 days before the elections, knowing the fact that last time in 2006 people stood up at the square for 4 days, and 1,500 people got arrested. At that time our theatre manager was arrested because she brought two blankets to us, and she was arrested right in her car. The police just stopped her car and they found two blankets. She stayed in jail for 7 days. She was 19 years old at that time.

But it is not about previous elections. It is about feeling of people who plan to go to the square this time. We went together with my husband to buy thermal underwear because everyone thought that we need to stay for many days in order to defend our rights. And we were absolutely sure that there was enough time for us, and we thought that we will go and buy it. We came to a sports super-

market and we did not believe our eyes. It was packed by people, and there were lines of people. It was just one joke that, guys, we need to get underwear tents and we will be skiing there. And it was an amazing feeling what people wanted to do. All of them wanted to go and defend their right. And what is vitally important, that they planned to stay for many days in order to defend this right.

The only thing is I could tell you that my daughter, who is 12 years old, made a big few liters thermos of hot tea. She was planning to go there. And many people with who I was in jail—they came with families, wife, husband, child—wife, husband, children. And it was absolutely amazing when all this force of people were split and wives and husbands were at different floors.

And if you just go back for a second about sanctions and about new Presidential elections, one of the Dutch deputies of the Parliament said, if OSCE does not recognize the Presidential elections in Belarus and Aleksandr Lukashenko is not a legitimate President, then it means that we could recognize those people who were Presidential candidates as a legitimate government and start to appeal and refer to them as those who would be winners if there is a second tour.

There were independent social exit polls done by independent Russian agency. Again, it is interesting that Lukashenko won only from 32 to 37 percent.

There is one more point. We need to use favorite toys of Lukashenko. His favorite toy is ice hockey. I understand that it does not connect to the American Senate, but if we talk about this, there is a World Cup of ice hockey should take place in 2014 in Belarus. It is not possible for sport to be connected to the dictator. It is necessary for sport committees all over the world to start to make the statements as well.

And it is not possible to have Martynov, who is Minister of Foreign Affairs, allowing him to travel or to meet with Senators of the U.S. Government. It is not possible even to start to talk to them. They should start to feel that they are isolated.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you. I think the Senate recognizes the ability to use sports in a way that makes a statement. In New Hampshire, we have ice hockey and we appreciate how important that is. So I hear what you are saying.

Do you have any?

Senator RISCH. No, thank you.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you all again very much for your testimony. Obviously, we will continue on this committee and in the Senate to watch very closely what happens and to do everything we can to try and address the repression that you are experiencing. So thank you all again.

The hearing is over.

[Whereupon, at 4:20 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

PREPARED STATEMENT OF LEV MARGOLIN, VICE PRESIDENT OF
UNITED CIVIL PARTY (UCP)

The Presidential election was held in Belarus on December 19, 2010, when nine opposition candidates challenged President Alexander Lukashenko. In the evening of the same day, tens of thousands of Belarusians protested on Independence Square in the capital, calling Presidential election a farce and accused Lukashenko of keeping the post-Soviet country locked in dictatorship.

More than 700 participants of the peaceful demonstration against falsified election were detained and penalized with administrative arrest for up to 15 days. Anatoly Lebedko, the UCP's chairman, as well as four former Presidential candidates—Uladzimir Nyaklyayew, Alyaksey Mikhalevich, Andrey Sannikaw, and Mikalay Statkevich—have been charged for organizing mass disorder and imprisoned in the KGB pretrial detention centre. They might face up to 15 years of prison. KGB officers still summon opposition activists, media, and civil society representatives and conduct searches of their offices and apartments. UCP's offices in Minsk, Gomel, Grodno, Brest were searched too. All our office equipment and campaign materials were seized.

Lukashenko's cruel actions against opposition, activists and journalist destroyed all our democratic efforts undertaken within the last 3 years to completely transform Belarus into a democratic country. In these circumstances, all our foreign partners must act in solidarity and have a common policy regarding Belarus. Lukashenko understands force. That is the only way to gain his attention. All possible political, diplomatic, and economic sanctions must be applied against him and other officials who acted illegally during December 19 crackdown and afterward. I am referring here to effective sanctions such as those applied when releasing Alexander Kazulin from prison. We must isolate this regime. The position of the United States and of the European Union has to be a severe one. Both of them must demand the release of political prisoners and complete abolishment of all criminal charges, instead of a simple change of preventive measures for those imprisoned. Second, there is a need to start building the opposition parties through providing them with necessary equipment and other resources. Third, we need to support independent media. Belarusian state media continues to provide biased information; many of Belarusians still do not know what happened in the evening of December 19. We must use all available resources to tell people the truth about the Presidential campaign, Election Day, December 19 events and post election situation. One million DVDs—that should be our answer to the false propaganda. We must end the terror in this country. We are ready to consolidate with each other and fight. We want a democratic Belarus.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF YURY LAVRENTIEV AND OLEG KORBAN, "YOUTH
DEMOCRATS," UNITED CIVIL PARTY (UCP)

While taking office as President of the Republic of Belarus, Lukashenko solemnly swore to serve the people of the Republic of Belarus faithfully, respect and protect their rights and liberties, and obey the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus. None of these happened during Lukashenko's regime. The actions that the Government of Belarus has taken to undermine the democratic forces and use of force against political activists, civil society representatives and journalists can not be accepted or tolerated anymore. Lukashenka has once and for all shown his true colors, a dictator for whom there must be no longer a place in Europe. The events of December 19, the violent treatment against demonstrators and the repressions against opposition activists every day since then, have put an abrupt end to the growth of our UCP party, and opposition in general.

Even so, we have the will and desire to continue the fight against Lukashenko's regime. We must continue this work or our country will never change. We currently do not have the resources to do that however. This is where we need the help of the U.S. Government. First, we need immediate direct party support to replace the equipment which has been confiscated in all our offices. Second, we need resources to run information and issue campaigns leading up to the parliamentary elections scheduled in 2012 such as the ability to travel to meet with voters, conduct Democratic Party meetings and to print campaign materials in an effort to get our word out and fight the regime hegemony in the media sphere. Third, we also need continued training from our partners like IRI and NDI—who provide valuable transfer of political skills and knowledge, expert consultations and strategy. Last, but not least,

we need strong USA diplomatic support which sends an unmistakable message to Lukashenka that such actions and treatment against his own citizens are not tolerable, and ideally will provide us with the space necessary to continue working with our citizens inside Belarus. We know, America is with us, we are not forgotten.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DZIANIS SADOUSKI, THE BELARUSIAN CHRISTIAN
DEMOCRACY PARTY (BCD)

In the evening of December 19, tens of thousands of Belarusians protested against Lukashenko's regime and falsified election. People gathered with peaceful intentions to demonstrate solidarity in their desire to live free. The violent manner in which the protest was put down displayed that the authorities had planned and intended to exterminate the existing opposition as much as possible. After the brutal crackdown, the BCD Party is in a very difficult situation. BCD's candidate to Presidential election—Vital Rymasheuski is under house arrest. Pavel Sieviarynets—BCD's co-chair and campaign manager—is in KGB pretrial prison. Both of them, as well as 20 other party activists are accused of organizing mass riots and face up to 15 years of prison. Many other party activists faced 10 to 15 days of administrative arrest, during which they were maltreated by police and KGB forces. They were also denied access to their lawyers and families. The following weeks after the crackdown, the BCD's headquarter and regional offices were searched and raided by KGB officers. Nine computers, three laptops, six printers, a camera and a copy machine were confiscated. BCD's party members and activists continue to be interrogated and arrested. Their apartments and repeatedly searched.

The BCD Party is not willing to give up. We are ready to continue our fight toward a democratic Belarus. We need a strong cooperation and support of the United States of America and of the European Union. Together, we need to isolate the regime, start building democratic opposition in Belarus from scratch, provide material assistance through office equipment and informational campaigns, and support independent media. The United States and the European Union must call for unconditional release of all political prisoners. Those who are still in jail, as well as their families must be provided with material, legal, and psychological assistance.

