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(21)

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Statement by AUSTRIA

Austria welcomes the delegation of Belarus to the second cycle of the UPR and thanks for the submission of its national report. Let me start by commending the more constructive engagement of Belarus with its partners in Europe and beyond on a number of important issues recently, which we hope will be extended also to the field of human rights.

With presidential elections scheduled for November this year, a thorough reform of the electoral system of Belarus remains pending. Austria therefore recommends that Belarus bring the electoral system in line with its OSCE commitments and principles for democratic elections, in close cooperation with ODIHR. In this context, we appreciate the invitation of Belarus to ODIHR to observe the presidential elections as a step in the right direction.

Since Belarus is the last country in Europe that practices executions, Austria again recommends to introduce a moratorium on the death penalty as a short-term objective, and to consider the full abolition of the death penalty and the accession to the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR;

Austria is furthermore worried about reports of continued violations of the right to freedom of expression in Belarus, including harassment and intimidation of journalists. We therefore recommend to promote and uphold the freedom of the media and the right to freedom of expression and to ensure that legislation and practice are brought in line with Article 19 ICCPR, as well as to conduct impartial investigations into all cases of attacks, harassment and intimidation of journalists and bring perpetrators to justice;

Austria furthermore recommends to grant unfettered access to Belarus for international human rights monitors, including the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus and other special procedures mandate holders;

and to ratify the Rome Statute of the ICC.

I thank you.