

Distinguished delegates, colleagues,

The VNR just presented does not reflect the reality in Belarus.

We face a deep human rights crisis that hinders progress on all Sustainable Development Goals and harms vulnerable groups, including women, youth, and national minorities. The healthcare system suffers from a growing personnel shortage, demographic decline, and political pressure on health workers that limits access to timely medical care for the most vulnerable people, including political prisoners. Women continue to endure gender-based violence. All independent trade unions have been forcibly dissolved and the ILO measure of last resort - Article 33, is ignored by the Government, the system of State-run forced labor is widely used in the penitentiary system, and environmental rights steadily deteriorate. Over 80% of gender-affirming care requests were denied in 2023–2024, while mental health support for youth in exile remains largely inaccessible.

Since 2020, the authorities have eliminated more than 2000 NGOs that were vital partners in achieving the SDGs. No youth-led or independent civil society initiatives remain active within Belarus to monitor or implement the SDGs

Despite relentless repression, Belarusian civil society has prepared an alternative report to expose the true situation. We acknowledge that some formal progress exists, but these limited achievements are overshadowed and neutralized by widespread human rights violations. Belarus's approach to the SDGs becomes performative rather than transformative. Pardons do not annul a criminal record, do not cancel preventive supervision and inclusion in the lists of extremists. As a result, from 5 to 10 years "liberated" by the mercy of the State are excessively limited in freedom of movement, the right to a profession, access to banking services and are deeply stigmatized. Sustainable development cannot be achieved through coercion, exclusion, and propaganda. It requires a democratic and rights-based environment in which civil society is empowered, individuals can speak freely, and institutions are accountable.

Civil society in exile believes the path forward must begin with releasing political prisoners — but it must also end the ongoing repression. **We are convinced that an open dialogue between the state and civil society can become a key tool for achieving sustainable development goals in Belarus — and we are open to this dialogue.** We call for the restoration of legal space for civil society and independent youth initiatives to re-engage in SDG processes in a transparent and inclusive manner. Such an approach will strengthen trust, increase the sustainability of social institutions and demonstrate Belarus's commitment to fulfilling international obligations.