

UN Watch Statement  
UN Human Rights Council, 18<sup>th</sup> Session  
Agenda Item 4 General Debate

*Delivered by Mattia Zanazzi*

Thank you.

Madam President,

In 1997, political dissidents in Belarus came together and published a call for freedom, democracy and human rights, for all citizens of the country. The manifesto has come to be known as “Charter ’97.”

Fourteen years later, activists, writers and journalists every day face what *The Wall Street Journal* has described as “Soviet-style intimidations.” In March 2010, secret police raided the office of the Charter 97 news organization and beat Natalya Radzina, the editor-in-chief, in the face. She was recently granted asylum in Lithuania.

UN Watch is alarmed by the grave situation of human rights in Belarus. According to reports by human rights organizations, in the 30 days following June 15, more than 1700 peaceful protesters were arrested by Belarusian authorities.

Madam President, young students in Belarus are particularly victimized by repression and harassment. In 2001, the Belarus Student Association was officially closed down after it mobilized students during the presidential campaign.

Students have been exposed to pressure and persecution from the Belarus authorities, and even from their own universities. Three hundred were expelled after the 2006 presidential campaign. In 2010, young students were among the 650 detained in the aftermath of the December elections. Last June, students were informed that they were being monitored by the Belarus Public Prosecution Office. They were warned to stop their activism, or else they would be arrested.

Madam President, we who truly believe in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights must send a message to the government of Belarus. It is time for this Council to adopt a resolution embracing the dream of Charter ’97. So long as innocent students are targets of persecution, the highest human rights body of the United Nations can no longer be silent.

Thank you, Madam President.