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| *Statement by Ambassador Grover Joseph Rees, acting U.S. Representative to the United Nations Economic and Social Council, on Resolution on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus****, in the Third Committee of the General Assembly, November 21, 2007*** |
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| Mr. Chairman,It gives us no pleasure to observe that Belarus has ignored multiple and longstanding calls from this body and from the Commission on Human Rights to change course, to meet its international obligations and to accord its citizens their basic human rights.  Belarus has also ignored recommendations on its human rights practices made by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.  Instead, the government of Belarus has chosen to mount a vigorous campaign of denial of its abysmal and deteriorating human rights record. The government seems determined to continue repressing its people, and to prevent them from realizing the freedoms and rights that citizens of other countries take for granted.Over the last year, the Belarus government has continued to use imprisonment as a political strategy for dealing with opposition figures and movements.  Former presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin and Malady Front leaders Dmitry Dashkevich and Artur Finkevich are in prison.  Andrey Klimov was briefly released this year, but then re-imprisoned after a secret trial for the so-called crime of posting an article critical of the Belarus government on the internet.   Other efforts by the Belarusian authorities to dismantle what remains of democratic processes and institutions are evident, as well.  Observation of elections by independent international observers is not permitted, and local observation is severely restricted.  Belarusians are also deprived of the right to assemble or to join together in legitimate and peaceful organizations.  Political parties have been de-registered on miniscule pretexts, after which all of their activities can be deemed illegal.  The authorities have used similar artifice to storm into private residences of those suspected of harboring opposition political views, confiscating computers and printed material and hauling suspected opponents off to jail. Members of opposition groups and NGOs are detained, arrested, fined and jailed frequently.  Some of their trials have been held behind closed doors.  We note with particular concern that young people have been pressured to testify against their peers, and students have been expelled from their universities for membership in political organizations.In addition to a lack of political choice and participation, the people of Belarus have little access to alternative or independent sources of news and information, given increasingly severe restrictions on media.  Print runs of newspapers and leaflets about demonstrations are regularly confiscated.  The authorities pressure state-run printing companies not to print independent newspapers and kiosks not to sell them, and even pressure those who hold the leases of independent media companies to break those leases on spurious, clearly political grounds.  The post office just announced that even independent Russian newspapers will no longer be available for delivery. Independent websites are consistently blocked and interfered with, and activity in internet cafes is closely monitored by the regime.  Civil society in Belarus continues to struggle against harsh and repressive restrictions designed by the government to deny the people of Belarus a voice in the administration and future of their own country.  Mr. Chairman, The regime in Belarus has established a well-worn pattern of escalating human rights violations; unfortunately, it is a pattern that some other countries – including some that we consider today – have followed as well.   This body needs to preserve its own record of calling the government of Belarus to account and of denying it impunity.  As we and our co-sponsors prepared the resolution under consideration today, we reached out to the Belarus delegation in an effort to find common ground, we regret that effort did no succeed.  Mr. Chairman, contrary to some of what has been said and will be said today, this resolution is an honest and truthful account of the unfortunate facts on the ground in Belarus.As we begin the 60th anniversary year of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, we must continue to stand up for the freedoms and rights that all people everywhere should enjoy, including the brave people of Belarus who continue to struggle under their oppressive and abusive government. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. |