

► **The Director-General**

His Excellency  
Mr Aleksandr Lukashenko  
President of the Republic of Belarus  
MINSK

9 September 2020

Dear Mr President,

I wish to inform you that by communication dated 26 August 2020, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) requested the ILO to intervene in respect of the alleged arrest, detention, imprisonment and mistreatment of workers' leaders in Belarus. The communication refers, in particular, to the reported detention and subsequent sentencing of Mr Sergei Dylevsky, Mr Alexander Lavrinovich, Mr Anatoly Bokun and Mr Nikolai Zimin for having organized and/or participating in workers' protests. The ITUC also refers to threats of dismissal and pressure suffered by trade unionists following their participation in peaceful strikes, protests and demonstrations. A copy of their communication is enclosed.

Since their request, I have been informed of the additional arrests of Ms Svetlana Volchek and Mr Mikhail Volchek related to their coordination of a strike committee at the Belarus State University and an additional sentence of administrative detention handed down for Mr Nikolai Zimin. I must express my deep concern over these serious allegations and recall that peaceful participation in strikes or demonstrations should not give rise to arrest or detention. No one should be deprived of their freedom or be subject to penal sanctions for the mere fact of organizing or participating in a peaceful strike or protest. It is incumbent on me to refer in this regard to the 2004 conclusions of the ILO Commission of Inquiry on Belarus, which in light of the serious infringements observed stressed the importance of ensuring full respect for the basic civil liberties of trade union members and leaders, including the right to freely express one's opinion and to freely seek and impart information and ideas through the media, as well as freedom of assembly. The Commission further emphasized the need to guarantee and protect these basic freedoms with an independent judiciary. While recognizing the historical traditions and socio-economic realities characteristic of the country, the Commission expressed its firm belief that its recommendations would be beneficial to Belarusian society as a whole.

The ILO has been committed to assisting your Government and the social partners in addressing the issues raised by the Commission of Inquiry for the past 16 years. While the ILO supervisory bodies have noted some progress, they have nevertheless been obliged to observe that the Commission's recommendations are far from being fully implemented.

As new reports of detentions and mistreatment of workers' leaders continue to reach the ILO, I must urge you to do all in your power to prevent the occurrence of human rights violations and ensure full respect for workers' rights and freedoms. I would ask you in particular to take measures for the release of all of the above-mentioned persons who remain in detention and the dropping of all charges related to participation in peaceful protests and industrial action. Regarding the reported cases of mistreatment of workers participating in such protests, I must recall that it is the responsibility of the Government to ensure a climate free from violence, threat or pressure against peacefully protesting workers. Any alleged instances of intimidation or physical violence must be rapidly investigated through the institution of an independent judicial inquiry that will shed light on the facts and circumstances surrounding these acts, identify those responsible, punish the guilty parties and thus prevent the repetition of similar events.

I would be grateful to receive any comments or observations your Government may wish to make in respect of the serious allegations made by the ITUC. In accordance with the regular practice, the contents of your communication will be duly transmitted to the organization concerned.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Guy Ryder". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "G" and a distinct "R".

Guy Ryder