



Vancouver Youth Model United Nations

The Nineteenth Iteration | October 25-27, 2024

Dear Delegates,

My name is Stella Humphrey, and I am beyond honoured to be serving as your director for VYMUN 2024. I have been in Model UN for almost four years, and I am in grade 11 at West Point Grey Academy. For this year's iteration of VYMUN, I have the privilege of staffing alongside your chair, Nila Ibrahim.

Upon joining the Model United Nations program at my school, I immediately felt like I connected to the community. Even though I was first anxious to engage in debate, I eventually came to appreciate not only the non-spectator sport, but the people involved in it as well. I sincerely hope that Model UN has the same rewarding, stimulating, and educational effects on you as it has on me.

In committee sessions, I recommend you try to join in the debate to further your VYMUN experience and improve countless diplomatic skills. Furthermore, I endorse you to read over the background guide, and conduct your own research oriented to your country about our topics, women in Afghanistan, and Press restrictions in Belarus to best prepare for the upcoming Conference. On behalf of your whole dais team, we look forward to meeting you and being impressed with the skills and perspectives you bring to the committee session. We truly hope that VYMUN 2024 will aid you in creating lifelong memories, connections, and learning experiences.

Best Regards,

Stella Humphrey

Director of United Nations Human Rights Council

Topic A — Women in Afghanistan

Overview

The current situation for women in Afghanistan is marked by a severe restriction of rights and freedoms following the Taliban's return to power in August 2021. The Taliban swiftly reintroduced strict interpretations of Sharia law, reversing many of the gains made in women's rights over the past two decades. This has led to the closure of secondary schools for girls and imposed severe limitations on women's ability to work outside the home, significantly impacting their participation in society. According to reports, over 3 million girls are now out of school, and women constitute only 22% of the workforce, highlighting the drastic restrictions imposed on their opportunities.

The international community, including organisations like UN Women and various NGOs, continues to advocate for the rights of Afghan women and works to provide crucial humanitarian aid. Efforts are focused on supplying access to education, healthcare, and legal protections despite the challenging nature of the situation. Humanitarian aid remains a lifeline for many, as the country faces a dire economic and social crisis exacerbated by the Taliban's policies.

Afghan women's rights activists continue their advocacy efforts by documenting human rights abuses and lobbying for international support to push for gender equality both within Afghanistan and on a global level. Regional and international dynamics also significantly influence the situation. Neighbouring countries and regional organisations have varied responses, balancing geopolitical interests with humanitarian concerns.

The issue of women's rights in Afghanistan remains a critical and urgent challenge, demanding international attention and action. Delegates must consider diverse perspectives and develop inclusive, sustainable solutions to uphold the rights and dignity of Afghan women in this complex and evolving landscape.

Timeline of Events

April 17, 1978 - The Saur Revolution begins, leading to the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. The new government introduced progressive reforms, including women's rights to education and access to the workforce, though these reforms faced significant resistance societally.

December 27, 1979 - The Soviet Union invades Afghanistan, marking the start of a decade-long conflict. During the Soviet occupation, there are efforts to promote women's rights, including increased access to education and employment.

February 15, 1989 - The Soviet Union withdraws from Afghanistan, leading to a power vacuum and ensuing civil war. The rights and freedoms of women become increasingly precarious with a large regression to conservative interpretations of Islamic law.

April 24, 1992 - The Mujahideen take control of Kabul, and Afghanistan is declared an Islamic state. The new government imposes restrictions on women's rights, particularly in terms of dress code, education, and employment.

September 27, 1996 - The Taliban seize control of Kabul and establish the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The regime imposes strict interpretations of Sharia law, and the restrictions are more aggressively and thoroughly enforced.

December 5, 2001 - The Bonn Agreement is signed, leading to the establishment of an interim Afghan government. The agreement includes commitments to rebuild Afghanistan with a focus on human rights, including women's rights.

January 26, 2004 - The new Afghan Constitution is adopted, guaranteeing equal rights for women and men explicitly stated in Article 22.

October 27, 2010 - The United Nations Security Council adopts Resolution 1960, addressing sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations.

July 12, 2012 - The Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan results in the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework, where international donors and the Afghan government commit to mutual accountability.

April 14, 2013 - The Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) law is enacted by presidential decree in Afghanistan, criminalising various forms of violence against women.

December 17, 2014 - The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission concludes, transitioning to the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission. This marks a shift in international military involvement.

March 8, 2015 - International Women's Day is marked by widespread protests in Afghanistan calling for greater protections and rights for women.

April 1, 2019 - The Afghan government launches the Women's Economic Empowerment National Priority Program, aimed at increasing women's participation in the economy.

October 24, 2019 - The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) releases a report highlighting the progress and continuing challenges in promoting women's rights in Afghanistan.

April 14, 2021 - President Biden announces the complete withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan by September 2021, setting the stage for significant political changes.

August 15, 2021 - The Taliban take control of Kabul, marking their resurgence and leading to widespread fears about the rollback of women's rights.

September 2021 - The Taliban officially ban girls from attending secondary school, significantly impacting female education.

May 7, 2022 - The Taliban order all Afghan women to wear full-body coverings in public, further restricting their freedoms and mobility.

Historical Analysis

Early Reforms and Resistance (1978-1989)

The Saur Revolution of April 17, 1978, signified the starting point of Afghanistan's attempt to modernise its societal behaviour through progressive reforms, including focused improvements in women's rights to education and employment. However, these reforms faced extreme resistance from conservative and traditionalist factions, particularly in rural areas. The government's attempts to implement these changes nationwide were met with strong backlash, highlighting the deep-rooted cultural and religious values that opposed gender equality.

The Soviet invasion of December 27, 1979, further complicated the situation. While the Soviet-backed government continued to promote women's rights, the ongoing conflict with the Mujahideen fighters, who opposed Soviet influence, created an unstable environment for progressive actions. The war underscored the societal divide, with women's rights becoming symbolic of the battle between a modern mindset as opposed to a traditional mindset. The decade-long conflict left a lasting impact on Afghan society, making it difficult for any lasting progress on women's rights to develop.

Civil War and Taliban Rule (1989-2001)

The withdrawal of Soviet forces on February 15, 1989, led to a power vacuum and civil war. Various Mujahideen factions who had initially united against the Soviets subsequently turned against each other, plunging the country into a disorderly state. During this period, women's rights regressed significantly as conservative factions gained control and imposed strict restrictions on women's daily lives. The instability of this era made it extremely challenging for women to retain any semblance of the rights they had briefly enjoyed.

The rise of the Taliban on September 27, 1996, marked one of the darkest periods for women's rights in Afghanistan. The Taliban's strict interpretation of Sharia law resulted in severe restrictions on women's mobility, education, and employment. The regime's policies were enforced with horrendous brutality, drawing international condemnation and highlighting the extreme measures taken to control women's lives. This period underscored the ideological divide between the Taliban's ultra-conservative views and the broader international community's efforts to promote human rights.

Post-Taliban Era and International Efforts (2001-2019)

The fall of the Taliban following the US-led invasion in 2001 brought new hope for women's rights in Afghanistan. The Bonn Agreement of December 5, 2001, and the subsequent adoption of the Afghan Constitution on January 26, 2004, laid the foundation for rebuilding the nation with a focus on equal enforcement of human rights, including gender equality. These reforms, supported by international aid and development programs, aimed to empower women through education, healthcare, and economic opportunities.

Throughout the 2010s, international efforts continued to impact women's rights. The United Nations Security Council's Resolution 1960 on October 27, 2010, addressed sexual violence in conflict, emphasizing the protection of women and girls. However, despite these efforts, obstacles were still met. The Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) law, enacted on April 14, 2013, faced significant implementation hurdles due to cultural resistance and ongoing security challenges.

Modern Taliban Resurgence (2021-Present)

The modern resurgence of the Taliban, culminating in their takeover of Kabul on August 15, 2021, has once again placed women's rights in Afghanistan at grave risk. Following the withdrawal of US and NATO forces from Afghanistan, the Taliban swiftly reinstated their strict interpretations of Sharia law, severely restricting the rights and freedoms that Afghan women had begun to reclaim.

over the past two decades. The closure of secondary schools for girls, severe restrictions on women's ability to enter the workforce, and the imposition of full-body coverings have effectively erased many of the progressive actions made in education and economic participation.

International efforts to support Afghan women continue, with organisations like UN Women and various NGOs attempting to provide humanitarian aid and advocating for women's rights. Despite the impossibly high stakes, Afghan women's rights activists persist in their advocacy, playing a crucial role in relaying the numerous and constant abuse of human rights. The situation remains precarious, with increased reports of gender-oriented aggression, restricted mobility, and systemic discrimination against women, highlighting the urgent need for sustained international attention and action.

Current Situation

Impact of Taliban Rule and Rollback of Women's Rights

The current situation for women in Afghanistan is deeply influenced by a complex web of historical context, recent political changes, ongoing conflict, and opposing cultural dynamics. Following the Taliban's resurgence in August 2021, they swiftly reinstated extremist translations of Sharia law, severely curtailing women's rights. This rollback has resulted in the closure of secondary schools for girls and limited job access, essentially negating the progress that had previously been worked for.

International Advocacy and Regional Responses

Afghan women's rights activists persist in their advocacy efforts despite facing heightened risks under Taliban rule. They play a pivotal role in documenting the tragic events that would otherwise be untold, pushing for international support, and advocating for gender equality within Afghanistan and on an international level. Neighbouring countries and regional organisations also play significant roles, with interests ranging from political stability to humanitarian assistance for Afghan women and refugees. However, the situation remains precarious, with reports of increased gender-based violence, restricted mobility, and systemic discrimination against women.

Challenges and Pathways to Sustainable Development

Effective solutions require a comprehensive approach that addresses the immediate needs of Afghan women, this includes robust international support, diplomatic engagement, and targeted interventions to protect and empower women across urban and rural areas. As discussions unfold

in international forums such as the UNHRC, the collective effort must prioritise the voices and rights of Afghan women, ensuring their agency and dignity in shaping their future.

Possible Solutions

Enhancing Education for Afghan Women and Girls

One solution is to focus on enhancing educational opportunities for Afghan women and girls. International organisations, NGOs, and regional partners could collaborate to establish and support informal and online educational programs that can attempt to bypass Taliban restrictions. These programs could include mobile classrooms, digital learning platforms, and community-based education initiatives. This approach can provide continuous learning opportunities despite restrictions, empowering women with the knowledge and skills necessary for future opportunities. It also encourages community involvement and can operate under the radar of restrictive authorities. However, such initiatives may face challenges in reaching remote areas, maintaining funding and resources, and ensuring the education of both educators and students. At the same time, past programs by organisations like UNICEF and the Malala Fund have shown that community engagement and local partnerships are vital for the success of educational initiatives in restrictive environments.

Economic Empowerment and Employment Opportunities

Promoting economic empowerment for Afghan women is essential for fostering their independence. This could involve supporting small businesses run by women, creating safe workspaces, and offering vocational training tailored to market demands. Economic empowerment can enhance women's independence and improve overall household and community welfare. It also helps in integrating women into the economic workings of society, fostering long-term stability and growth. On the other hand, Implementing these programs in a Taliban-controlled environment may be challenging, with a high risk of harassment and violence. Additionally, economic initiatives might require substantial initial investment and sustained international support. Despite this, Programs like those by the International Labour Organization (ILO) have demonstrated that linking vocational training with market needs and providing ongoing support and mentorship increases the likelihood of success.

Strengthening Legal Protections and Advocacy

Another solution to be considered involves strengthening legal protections for women and enhancing advocacy efforts both domestically and internationally. This could include supporting Afghan women's rights organisations, advocating for the enforcement of existing laws such as the EVAW law, and pushing for international pressure on the Taliban to respect women's rights. Strengthening legal frameworks and advocacy can lead to systemic changes and create a more supportive environment for women's rights. International pressure can leverage the Taliban's need for diplomatic recognition and aid. Unfortunately, Legal reforms and advocacy efforts may face significant resistance from the Taliban, and progress could be slow. There is also a risk of backlash against activists, further endangering their safety. Despite this, previous efforts, such as those supported by the UN, have shown that sustained international attention and support for local activists can lead to incremental but significant progress in women's rights with enough patience and resources.

Bloc Positions

Western Bloc

The Western Bloc, comprising Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, and the United States, highly prioritises promoting women's rights in Afghanistan. These nations have vocalised their interest in efforts to enhance human rights and gender equality. They support robust measures to protect and empower Afghan women, economic sanctions, and humanitarian aid to influence Taliban policies.

Members of this bloc might emphasise the importance of maintaining international human rights standards. Countries like Canada, the UK, and Germany could push for educational and healthcare initiatives targeted at women and girls, while the United States and Australia tend to focus more directly on using economic and military leverage to ensure women's rights are upheld. This bloc is likely to advocate for strong international monitoring mechanisms and continued humanitarian support to ensure Afghan women and girls can access education, healthcare, and economic opportunities.

Regional Stability Bloc

The Regional Stability Bloc consists of China, India, Russia, Belarus and Turkey. These nations are primarily concerned with regional stability, security, and the containment of extremism. While not as vocally committed to women's rights as the Western Bloc, they recognize the importance of women's empowerment in contributing to long-term stability and economic improvements.

Within this bloc, China and Russia may focus more on economic and security aspects, seeing women's empowerment as part of broader development. India and Turkey, with cultural and historical ties to Afghanistan, might advocate for balanced approaches that consider both humanitarian and security concerns. This bloc is likely to support practical and strategic initiatives, such as vocational training programs for women that contribute to economic stability, and legal reforms that ensure basic protections.

Latin American and Moderate Interest Bloc

The Latin American and Moderate Interest Bloc includes Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Japan, South Africa, and Nigeria. These nations, while having less direct geopolitical stakes in Afghanistan, are committed to global human rights and gender equality. They might focus on providing diplomatic support and participating in international forums to advocate for Afghan women's rights.

Countries like Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico may support international resolutions and aid initiatives that promote women's rights in Afghanistan. Japan, South Africa, and Nigeria might engage in diplomatic efforts and contribute to multilateral humanitarian assistance programs. This bloc is likely to support educational and healthcare programs for Afghan women and girls, emphasising the importance of international solidarity and human rights.

Discussion Questions

1. How can the international community effectively support the education of Afghan girls under the current restrictions imposed by the Taliban?
2. What role should neighbouring countries and regional organisations play in advocating for and protecting women's rights in Afghanistan?
3. What strategies can be employed to economically empower Afghan women while navigating the harsh restrictions of the Taliban regime?
4. How can international pressure be applied to the Taliban to improve women's rights without exacerbating the humanitarian crisis?

5. In what ways can Afghan women's rights activists be supported by the international community to continue their advocacy safely and effectively?
6. What are the potential risks and benefits of integrating women's rights initiatives into broader counter-terrorism and regional stability strategies?
7. How can overarching cultural values be respected while promoting gender equality in Afghanistan?
8. What lessons can be learned from past international interventions in Afghanistan regarding women's rights, and how can these inform future actions?

Additional Resources

[Women in Afghanistan: The Back Story](#)

[Photo essay: A glimpse into the lives of Afghan women](#)

[Afghan Women in History: The 20th Century](#)

[How has life changed for Afghan women since the Taliban - video](#)

[PBS NewsHour | Women in Afghanistan find ways to make their voices heard under taliban oppression](#)

[BBCAfghanistan: What happened to the women who protested against the Taliban?](#)

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Topic B — Restriction of the Press

Overview

The issue of press restrictions in Belarus highlights the broader struggle between authoritarianism and democratic freedoms. Under President Alexander Lukashenko, who has been in power since 1994, the country has become emblematic of how media suppression can be used as a tool to maintain political control and stifle dissent. This situation raises critical questions about the role of the press in society, the impact of international responses, and the resilience of civil society in the face of repression.

At the heart of the issue is the Belarusian government's systematic approach to silencing independent media. Legislative measures that allow for the blocking of websites and social media accounts without judicial oversight illustrate a broader strategy to control information and limit public discourse. The crackdown following the contested 2020 presidential election, which saw widespread protests and a surge in state violence against journalists, underscores the lengths to which the regime will go to maintain its grip on power. The dynamic of international moral standards versus sovereign governance raises important considerations about the limitations and potential of international interventions in promoting human rights and democratic values.

Civil society and independent journalists play a crucial role in countering government repression. Despite the risks, these actors continue to advocate for transparency and provide crucial information to the public. Understanding the issue of press restrictions in Belarus requires a nuanced view of how authoritarian regimes operate, the role of global solidarity, and the power of resilient civil society. This overview sets the stage for delegates to explore these themes and consider comprehensive strategies to promote and protect press freedom in Belarus.

Timeline of Events

December 19, 2010 - Belarus holds a presidential election, and widespread protests erupt in response to allegations of electoral fraud. The government reacts by detaining opposition leaders and journalists.

January 20, 2011 - The Belarusian government enacts a law that tightens control over internet media, requiring all online publications to register with the Information Ministry.

May 27, 2011 - Independent news website "Charter 97" faces a series of cyber-attacks, resulting in significant downtime and loss of data.

August 4, 2011 - Security forces raid the offices of the independent newspaper "Nasha Niva," seizing computers and documents, the government justification being extremist activities.

December 21, 2014 - The Belarusian Association of Journalists reports an increase in harassment and detention of journalists covering protests, with many facing fines and imprisonment.

November 24, 2016 - Amendments to the Media Law come into effect, expanding the government's ability to restrict foreign media operations and making it easier to shut down media outlets without a court order.

March 25, 2017 - On Freedom Day, a significant number of journalists are detained while covering anti-government protests.

August 7, 2018 - The offices of independent news agency "BelaPAN" and the website "Tut.by" are raided by police, who confiscate equipment and documents, claiming they are investigating unauthorized access to state-run news agency databases.

May 9, 2019 - Belarusian journalist and blogger Eduard Palchys is arrested on charges of inciting hatred and insulting the president.

August 9, 2020 - Following the disputed presidential election, massive protests break out across Belarus. Journalists are targeted, with over 200 reporters detained, beaten, or stripped of their accreditation.

August 27, 2020 - The Belarusian Foreign Ministry revokes the accreditation of numerous foreign journalists, accusing them of biased reporting.

September 17, 2020 - The Belarusian authorities raid the offices of the Belarusian Press Club and detain its members, accusing them of tax evasion.

October 13, 2020 - Prominent journalist Katsiaryna Barysevich of "Tut.by" is detained for reporting on the death of a protester. She faces charges of disclosing medical secrets.

May 23, 2021 - Belarusian authorities force a Ryanair flight to land in Minsk to arrest dissident journalist Roman Protasevich, effectively drawing international attention.

October 27, 2021 - The government introduces new media regulations that require all journalists to be accredited by the state, further tightening the already stringent control over the press.

Historical Analysis

Historical Context

In 1994, Alexander Lukashenko was elected president, marking the beginning of a gradual shift towards authoritarianism in Belarus. The consolidation of Lukashenko's power led to the systematic breakdown of democratic institutions, including the free press and unrestricted media expression. The 2010 presidential elections were a turning point, with allegations of electoral fraudulence inevitably leading to widespread protests and a harsh retaliatory crackdown on opposition leaders and journalists. Lukashenko's regime has worked to maintain power by suppressing opposing narratives, their means of being shared and holistically controlling the flow of information. The media, as a critical pillar of democracy, faced significant and severely enforced controls over their ability to report. Considering the developments of the 2010 election, the harsh and drastic relation towards press members effectively set a precedent for future restrictions.

Legislative Measures

The Belarusian government has enacted various laws to control the media landscape. In 2011, laws requiring online publications to register with the Information Ministry effectively stifled independent online journalism. Amendments to the Media Law in 2016 further expanded the government's ability to restrict foreign media operations and shut down media outlets without a court order. This newly instated authority was largely seen through digital media control. The government uses cyber-attacks and internet censorship to suppress dissent. For instance, the cyber-attacks on independent news websites like "Charter 97" in 2011 illustrate the aggressive stance towards non-state media outlets. These attacks disrupt the flow of information, intimidate journalists, and discourage complete honesty while reporting.

International Condemnation

The systematic harassment, detention, and imprisonment of journalists serve as tools to intimidate and silence dissenting voices. Understanding these tactics provides insight into the challenges faced by the press in Belarus and the priorities held by the Belarusian government. These stretch

measures towards the press naturally attracted international attention. Since the 2020 presidential election and subsequent crackdown on protests, the European Union, United States, United Kingdom, and other countries have imposed sanctions targeting key Belarusian officials, state-owned enterprises, and sectors such as potash and oil. These sanctions aim to increase the economic and political cost of the government's repressive actions. While sanctions have constrained the Belarusian economy and signaled international condemnation, the Lukashenko regime has demonstrated a stubborn tolerance to the sanctions. Diplomatic pressure, including the withdrawal of ambassadors and Belarus's suspension from international organisations like the Eastern Partnership, seeks to isolate the regime diplomatically and push for changes in its behaviour.

Current Situation

The current state of press freedom in Belarus is marked by severe restrictions, systemic harassment of journalists, and strictly enforced government control over media outlets. The Belarusian government remains the primary driver in enforcing press restrictions. Security forces, including the KGB and police, are instrumental in carrying out raids, detentions, and censorship orders. Independent media outlets such as "Tut.by," "BelaPAN," and "Nasha Niva" continue to operate under severe pressure, managing increasing risks and consequences. Journalists face harassment, detention, and criminal charges for their unbiased work. Notable journalists like Katsiaryna Barysevich and Eduard Palchys have been targeted for internationally exposing government corruption and human rights abuses.

The international community, including organisations like Reporters Without Borders, Human Rights Watch, and various foreign governments, plays a critical role in advocating for press freedom in Belarus. Sanctions, diplomatic pressure, and public condemnation have been employed to address the situation. There has been a sense of appall at the Belarusian government's violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The UDHR, particularly Article 19, which guarantees the right to freedom of opinion and expression, is a foundational document for discussions on press freedom in Belarus that has been repeatedly ignored. Another hypocritical action and violation is Belarus is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which includes provisions for freedom of expression. Articles 19 and 21 of the ICCPR are particularly relevant for putting the previous and contemporary actions into legislative perspective.

Reports from organisations like Reporters Without Borders, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch provide detailed accounts of press freedom violations in Belarus. These documents

are essential for understanding the current situation and formulating responses. According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Belarus is ranked 158th out of 180 countries in the 2021 World Press Freedom Index. Human Rights Watch corroborates these findings, noting that the Belarusian authorities have intensified their repression of independent media and critical voices. The organisation details numerous instances where journalists have been subjected to arbitrary detention, physical violence, and prosecution for their reporting.

The Belarusian government justifies its actions as necessary for maintaining national security and public order. It accuses independent journalists of spreading misinformation and inciting unrest. Independent journalists argue that the government's actions are aimed at silencing dissent and preventing exposure of corruption and human rights abuses. They call for international support and protection to carry out their unfiltered work safely. The international community views press restrictions in Belarus as violations of human rights and democratic principles. Sanctions and diplomatic efforts are aimed at pressuring the Belarusian government to respect press freedom and release detained journalists.

Press restrictions in Belarus are more pronounced in urban areas, where protests and political activities are concentrated. Rural areas experience less direct harassment but still face limited access to independent information due to government control over media distribution on both a global and national level. Academic studies and research by think tanks provide insights into the effectiveness of various strategies to combat press restrictions. For example, the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) has analysed the impact of targeted sanctions and found that while economic sanctions against key Belarusian officials and enterprises have put financial pressure on the regime, they have not yet led to significant policy changes due to the regime's ability to adapt. This think tank study suggests that a multifaceted approach combining economic sanctions, diplomatic pressure, and support for independent media and civil society is necessary to effectively challenge press restrictions in Belarus.

Possible Solutions

Sanctions and International Pressure

One potential solution to the issue of press restriction in Belarus is strengthening international sanctions and diplomatic pressure on the Belarusian government. Enhancing sanctions can target key officials, government entities, and economic sectors critical to the regime's stability. Coordinated diplomatic pressure from a coalition of countries and international organisations can

amplify the call for press freedom. The main advantage of this approach is that it increases the cost of repressive actions for the Belarusian government and signals strong international condemnation, potentially deterring further restrictions. Additionally, it provides moral allegiance to independent journalists and media outlets. However, this strategy has its drawbacks, including the risk of further isolating Belarus, which limits engagement opportunities and could worsen economic conditions for the uninvolved population. There is also the potential for government retaliation with increased repression to maintain control in a more desperate situation. The success of this solution hinges on coordinated and sustained efforts from multiple countries, targeted sanctions that minimise harm to the general population, and diplomatic engagement that offers incentives for reforms alongside punitive measures.

Funding and Fueling Independent Journalism

Another solution involves establishing an international fund for independent journalism in Belarus. This fund would provide financial resources, training, and safety measures for journalists, managed by an international coalition or a reputable non-governmental organisation. This approach can offer financial and technical support to independent journalists, enhance the quality and reach of independent media content, and provide safety and legal assistance to those facing physical harassment or legal challenges. However, there are risks associated with this solution, such as potential government crackdowns on journalists receiving foreign aid and accusations of foreign interference in domestic affairs. Moreover, it requires substantial and continuous funding from international donors. The success of this solution depends on transparent management and allocation of funds, collaboration with local media and journalists to identify needs and priorities, and systems to protect the anonymity and safety of independent journalists.

International Discussion

A third solution is promoting legislative reforms through international engagement. This involves engaging the Belarusian government in dialogues aimed at promoting changes in media laws and regulations, involving international organisations, human rights groups, and other stakeholders. The advantage of this approach is that it addresses the structural issues underlying press restrictions and provides a platform for constructive engagement with the Belarusian government, potentially leading to long-term improvements in press freedom. However, this solution requires the government's willingness to engage in targeted dialogue, and progress may be slow and require enduring efforts. There is also the risk of the government backtracking on commitments if international attention wanes. Success in this approach relies on strong backing from influential

international organisations and countries, persistent efforts to maintain dialogue, and the inclusion of diverse stakeholders in the reform process.

Bloc Positions

Western Democracies Bloc

This bloc comprises countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, and Australia. The Western Democracies Bloc stands united in advocating for robust measures against press restriction in Belarus. These nations share core values of human rights, democracy, and press freedom, viewing Belarus's actions as a direct challenge to these ethical principles. They are likely to push for stringent international sanctions targeting Belarusian officials and economic sectors, alongside diplomatic isolation measures aimed at exerting maximum pressure on the regime. Additionally, they support initiatives to bolster independent journalism in Belarus through international funds and safety programs for journalists. Their approach emphasises Belarusian cooperation, legislative reforms, and holding the Belarusian government accountable for human rights abuses.

Emerging Democracies and Regional Powers Bloc

Countries like India, Japan, Brazil, South Africa, Argentina, Turkey, and Mexico adopt a more nuanced stance on the issue of press restriction in Belarus. These nations balance their foreign policy priorities with regional stability concerns, advocating for dialogue and cautious engagement over aggressive sanctions. While they recognize the importance of press freedom and human rights, they will prioritise diplomatic solutions and non-interference in domestic affairs. They may support targeted measures such as limited sanctions and international funds to support independent media initiatives in Belarus. This bloc seeks constructive engagement through purposeful dialogue, aiming for incremental progress on press freedom issues while avoiding actions that could escalate tensions or destabilise the region.

Sovereignty and Non-Interference Bloc

Belarus, Russia, and China form a bloc centered on sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs. These nations strongly oppose external interventions and sanctions targeting Belarusian authorities, viewing such measures as unwarranted interference in sovereign state affairs. They support Belarus's right to manage its internal media policies independently and resist international

pressure to change course. This bloc emphasises state sovereignty, non-interference, and state control over domestic media regulations as fundamental principles guiding their positions on global governance issues.

Discussion Questions

1. How do international norms regarding press freedom intersect with national sovereignty in the context of Belarus?
2. What role does a free press play in upholding democracy, and how can international actions support democratic resilience?
3. In what ways do technological advancements and digital media influence press freedom and government control in Belarus?
4. What are the strengths and limitations of using international sanctions and diplomatic pressure to address press restrictions in Belarus?
5. How might neighbouring countries and international stakeholders be affected, and what collaborative strategies could mitigate these impacts?
6. What lessons can be drawn from historical and comparative contexts of press freedom struggles globally?
7. What are the potential unintended consequences of economic sanctions on the Belarusian population?
8. What strategies can be employed to build a resilient and diverse media ecosystem in Belarus that can withstand government repression?

Additional Resources

[Belarus | RSF](#)

[New Belarusian media law allows for bans on foreign media - Committee to Protect Journalists](#)

[FREEDOM OF THE MEDIA IN BELARUS](#)

[Press freedom index: Belarus drops to last place in Europe | DW News](#)

[Liubakova on the state of press freedom in Belarus](#)

[Belarus: Freedom on the Net 2022 Country Report](#)

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