

Congressman Mike Quigley (D-IL), Assistant Senate Majority Leader Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Peter Stastny, National Hockey League Hall of Famer and Member of European Parliament sent a letter to the International Ice Hockey Federation today, urging them to postpone the 2014 Ice Hockey Championship in Minsk, Belarus over human rights concerns. ***“We write to urge the International Ice Hockey Federation to suspend its 2014 Ice Hockey Championship in Minsk, Belarus until that country’s long-time dictator, Alexander Lukashenko, releases all the country’s political prisoners, many of which were arrested during the country’s recent December 19 presidential election. Often known as the “last dictatorship of Europe,” the Lukashenko regime has earned international notoriety and scorn for its appalling human and political rights record.***

Quite simply, his regime should not be rewarded with the prestige associated with hosting the 2014 International Ice Hockey Championship while his citizens languish in jail for peacefully trying to exercise minimal political freedoms.

Accordingly, we urge you to consider such action to ensure that Lukashenko’s totalitarian nightmare does not receive the international sanction or legitimacy that would be conveyed by hosting the 2014 Championship until he releases all political prisoners in his KGB prisons,” they wrote.

Belarus has defied the democratic transformations in Europe following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The country’s 10 million people became independent in 1991 and have been ruled with an increasingly iron fist since 1994, when Alexander Lukashenko was first elected president. Opposition figures are subject to harsh repression, including imprisonment for organizing peaceful protests. Over the years, several opposition politicians who might have been alternatives to Lukashenko have disappeared or been imprisoned. Insulting the president, even in jest, carries a prison sentence.

On December 19, Lukashenko claimed a fourth term as president in a vote broadly criticized as failing to meet minimal international standards. The election was followed by violent confrontations in the capital, Minsk, as government security forces, still known as the KGB, beat, arrested, and jailed opposition presidential candidates and activists protesting the fraudulent election. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) described the election as seriously flawed and criticized the vote count and violent backlash against opposition candidates. Both the White House and the U.S. State Department strongly condemned the election process and the subsequent crackdown on opposition leaders and the U.S. and EU imposed an initial round of travel and financial sanctions against Lukashenko and his inner circle in late January.

The United States Senate unanimously passed a Resolution last month condemning the December election and calling for the immediate release of all political prisoners, new elections, and for the International Ice Hockey Federation to suspend its 2014 International World Ice Hockey championship until all political prisoners in Belarus are released.

[The text of the resolution can be found by clicking here](#)

The text of today's letter is pasted below and a copy of the letter is attached.

April 11, 2011

President René Fasel

International Ice Hockey Federation

Brandschenkestrasse 50

Postfach

8027 Zurich

Switzerland

Dear President Fasel:

We write to urge the International Ice Hockey Federation to suspend its 2014 Ice Hockey Championship in Minsk, Belarus until that country's long-time dictator, Alexander Lukashenko, releases all the country's political prisoners, many of which were arrested during the country's recent December 19 presidential election. Often known as the "last dictatorship of Europe," the Lukashenko regime has earned international notoriety and scorn for its appalling human and political rights record. Quite simply, his regime should not be rewarded with the prestige associated with hosting the 2014 International Ice Hockey Championship while his citizens

languish in jail for peacefully trying to exercise minimal political freedoms.

Lukashenko and his security services, still called the KGB, have ruthlessly ruled Belarus for almost twenty years. Under his reign, elections have been consistently unfair and undemocratic; politically motivated arrests and detentions are common; the Belarusian judiciary has been stripped of its independence; beatings, poor treatment, and disease are widespread in prisons (where detainees lack access to food, proper clothing, and medical treatment); and the public's basic freedoms of press, speech, assembly, association, and religion are severely restricted. Most recently, he had an opportunity to ease the iron grip of his police state and move closer toward the international community by holding a legitimate presidential election on December 19, 2010.

Tragically, Lukashenko squandered this opportunity by orchestrating a fraudulent election that was widely condemned by election monitors and the international community. When opposition candidates and Belarusian citizens protested the rigged election, Lukashenko detained or arrested over 600 additional people, including journalists, civil society representatives, political activists, and ordinary Belarusians. Incredibly, five of the six opposition presidential candidates were also arrested – one of which was severely beaten. Another who was just released, Ales Michaelavic, told of being beaten, stripped naked, and hung by his hands while in KGB custody. Many such political prisoners are still in jail and face prison sentences as long as 15 years (some have already been sentenced to up to four years).

That such barbaric behavior is still practiced in Europe is deeply disturbing. The governments of the United States and European Union have strongly condemned Lukashenko's actions and called for the immediate release of all political prisoners and a tightening of targeted sanctions against Lukashenko and his immediate enablers. A resolution that unanimously passed the United States Senate earlier this month (a copy of which is included) echoed those demands and also called on the International Ice Hockey Federation "to suspend its 2014 International World Ice Hockey championship to be hosted in Minsk, Belarus until all political prisoners in Belarus are released." An almost identical resolution in substance, also calling for relocation of 2014 Championship from Belarus until all political prisoners are released, was recently adopted by European Parliament as well.

Accordingly, we urge you to consider such action to ensure that Lukashenko's totalitarian nightmare does not receive the international sanction or legitimacy that would be conveyed by hosting the 2014 Championship until he releases all political prisoners in his KGB prisons.

Sincerely,

Richard J. Durbin

United States Senator

Assistant Majority Leader

Mike Quigley

United States Congressman

Co-Chair Congressional Hockey Caucus

Peter Stastny

Member European Parliament

National Hockey League Hall of Fame

cc: IIHF Secretary General Horst Lichtner
IIHF Councilmember Shoichi Tomita

IIHF Councilmember Miroslav Subrt

IIHF Councilmember Kalervo Kummola

IIHF Councilmember Murray Costello

IIHF Councilmember Frederick Meredith

IIHF Councilmember Ernest Aljancic

IIHF Councilmember Frank Gonzalez

IIHF Councilmember Juraj Siroky

IIHF Councilmember Christopher Englund

IIHF Councilmember Alexander Medvedev

IIHF Councilmember Tony Rossi

IIHF Councilmember Beate Grupp

IIHF Councilmember Monique Scheier-Schneider