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## UK, Australia, Canada Condemn Belarus Repression

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The governments of the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada have jointly condemned ongoing human rights violations and repression in Belarus. In a statement released on Saturday, the three countries accused Belarusian authorities of conducting a widespread campaign aimed at suppressing civil society, independent media, and political opposition.

Thousands are reported to have been detained, subjected to torture, or forced into exile, the statement said. These actions represent a flagrant breach of Belarus' international law obligations and are a serious violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms." The countries urged Belarus to immediately end this campaign of repression.

Belarus has been ruled by President Alexander Lukashenko for more than three decades. Lukashenko was re-elected in January for a seventh term amid widespread accusations of election fraud. The opposition and Western governments widely condemned the election as neither free nor fair.

In 2020, Lukashenko's government violently suppressed mass protests that erupted in response to the disputed election. Leading opposition figures were arrested or forced to flee the country, while independent media outlets faced severe restrictions. Human rights groups estimate that over 1,000 political prisoners remain detained in Belarus.

Belarusian authorities deny holding political prisoners and reject allegations of systematic repression. However, international observers and rights organisations continue to highlight the ongoing persecution of activists, journalists, and members of civil society.

The joint statement from the UK, Australia, and Canada acknowledged recent releases of some political detainees but emphasised that the pattern of arrests and harassment persists. The governments expressed concern about continued violations of fundamental rights, including freedoms of expression, assembly, and association.

The three countries called on the Belarusian government to respect international human rights obligations and to allow civil society and independent media to operate freely. They reiterated support for the Belarusian people's right to peaceful protest and democratic governance.

Belarus's close ties with Russia have complicated efforts by Western nations to influence the situation. President Lukashenko is an ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has provided political and economic support to Belarus. Analysts suggest that Lukashenko's recent releases of some political prisoners may be an attempt to ease Belarus' diplomatic isolation in the West.

However, human rights advocates argue that these limited concessions fall far short of addressing the widespread abuses. They warn that continued repression undermines

stability in Belarus and the wider region.

President Lukashenko is an ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has provided political and economic support to Belarus. Similar measures have been adopted by Australia, Canada, and the European Union as part of coordinated international efforts to pressure Minsk to improve its human rights record.

As the situation remains tense, the international community faces ongoing challenges in supporting democratic change in Belarus. The joint statement underscores the importance of standing firm against repression and supporting those advocating for freedom and justice.