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Statement Renew FEMM in support for women in Belarus

We write this statement in support of the many women in Belarus who have been marching, protesting and campaigning for their rights and freedom. As Renew Europe Members of the European Parliament's Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee (Renew FEMM), we strongly condemn the actions taken by President Lukashenko, which undermine the principles of democracy and women's participation in politics, as well as propagating harmful gender stereotypes of women.

Women have been the drivers of change in the movement, both during and since the recent Presidential election. Under the leadership of Maria Kolesnikova, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya and Veronika Tsepkalo, women have joined forces to challenge Lukashenko and his quarter century rule, and are on the frontline collecting signatures, campaigning and ensuring peaceful and non-violent protest on the streets, even during the crackdown against democratic dissent.

However, this has not gone without repercussions by the current regime. We have seen worrying actions that are inhuman and undemocratic. Women political leaders such as Tikhanovskaya and Tsepkalo have had to flee the country and/or been expelled and an attempt was made to forcibly deport Kolesnikova, who is now in jail.

We call for the immediate release of Kolesnikova and the safe return of Tikhanovskaya and Tsepkalo and their families to Belarus. We further demand for these undemocratic practices to cease immediately and for women's participation in political life to be unhampered by use of force or intimidation practices. These actions are completely abhorrent to our European values and the principles of gender equality. We will not stand for it.

Lastly, as Renew Europe Members fighting for gender equality, the statements made by President Lukashenko where he propagated harmful gender stereotypes to undermine the swell of support to the opposition movement and its leaders appall us. These women have had to endure disappointingly predictable regressive and sexist attacks during their campaign, stating women could not carry the burden of leadership - such claims have been patently refuted by the bravery and sacrifices displayed by women across Belarus. Nevertheless, this rhetoric damages the progress of gender equality, women's participation in politics and democracy.

We continued to be inspired by and encourage the Belarusian movement, and the many women in Belarus, who continue to fight for true democracy. These women are in desperate need of support and as Renew Europe, we are joining the chain of support and solidarity for women rising in the name of democracy. They are not alone.

*Samira Rafaela
María Soraya Rodríguez Ramos
Sylvie Brunet
Chrysoula Zacharopoulou
Karen Melchior*

Radka Maxová
Irène Tolleret
Susana Solís Pérez
Abir Al-Sahlani
Hilde Vautmans