

BelarusBrief

News from the Belarusian Diaspora in the USA, MARCH 2021 aba-together.org

March 2021 marked eight months since the start of mass protests against the rigged presidential elections of August 2020. According to human rights observers, in March the human rights situation in Belarus “deteriorated significantly, indicating a further aggravation of the crisis.” (via [Spring96](#) and [UN Human Rights](#))

BELARUS

Detained since August: **>35,000**
Detained in March: **at least 1,139**
'Political prisoners': **322**

The police carried out **preventative arrests** of numerous activists and admins of local chats. The authorities sought to prevent the renewal of large-scale protests on March 25, Belarus Freedom Day. On March 25 and 27, more than 400 people were detained in brutal and random arrests, targeting journalists especially. (via [AP](#), [CPJ](#), and [Spring96](#))

631 peaceful protesters faced **criminal charges** in March. 400 were convicted, often receiving long sentences. (via [Spring96](#))

Several prisoners protested **inhumane detention conditions** by going on hunger strikes or harming themselves. (via [Spring96](#))

Nikita Zolotarev, a **16-year-old teenager** with epilepsy who in February was **sentenced to 5 years for “mass riots”**, is now also accused of allegedly attacking a detention guard. According to his father, the boy is held in **solitary confinement and is beaten regularly by guards**. (via [Belsat](#), in Russian)

A mother of five faces up to 7 years in prison for her “active protest activities.” She was the admin of a local chat and organized neighborhood tea parties, walks, and concerts. (via [Spring96](#))

Human Rights Center “Vyasna” is facing a criminal investigation and is accused of financing “unauthorized mass events.” (via [Amnesty](#))

More than 1100 students and professors were persecuted, including 31 professors fired and 243 students expelled. (via [Honest People](#) and [Belarusian Students' Association](#))

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

The U.S. State Department will impose sanctions for nine state-owned Belarusian companies. The sanctions were in place before 2015 but were paused then. The State Department calls for the release of all political prisoners. (via [RadioFreeEurope](#))

U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs held a hearing with Belarusian human rights activist and pro-democracy leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. (via [Committee on Foreign Affairs](#))

Belarusian pro-democracy leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya says the OSCE and UN are ready to facilitate negotiations between the opposition and the Belarusian government. (via [DW](#))

The UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on the human rights situation in Belarus. It provided independent UN experts with powers to examine human rights violations in Belarus in order to bring perpetrators to justice. (via [UN](#))

The U.S. State Department, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Bob Menendez, Chairman and Ranking Member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee Representatives Gregory W. Meeks and Michael McCaul, Representatives Bill Keating, Marcy Kaptur, Adam Kinzinger, Brian Fitzpatrick, and Jim McGovern released statements on March 25, Belarus Freedom Day. (via [Committee on Foreign Affairs](#), [StateDept](#) [twitter](#))

Representative Chris Smith called on the Biden administration to use the Belarus Democracy, Human Rights and Sovereignty Act of 2020 to help the people of Belarus. (via [Office of Chris Smith](#))

DIASPORA

“Face It: Faces of the Belarusian Protest” exhibition opened at Newman’s Art Gallery in San Francisco. It displays illustrations and photos of Belarusian artists inspired by 2020 election events. Another exhibition, “Come and See,” took place in Boston, MA, on Belarusian Freedom Day.

With the **project B4B Journey**, a white-red-white Belarusian flag travels from a Belarusian to a Belarusian worldwide to unite the diaspora. It arrived from Minneapolis, MN, to Chicago, IL, where a group of local Belarusians went on tour with it, covering iconic landmarks of the city. (via [Падарожжа БЧБ](#) and [Belsat](#) in Belarusian)

Rufina Bazlova’s online exhibition “The History of Belarusian Vyzhyvanka,” featuring protest-related comic embroideries, opened on the library platform of UCLA on March 3. (via [UCLA](#))

FUTURE DATES & HOW TO HELP

April 26 will mark **35 years since the Chernobyl nuclear accident**, the largest nuclear accident to date. 70% of the radioactive fallout covered the territory of Belarus. (via [BBC](#))

How to write letters to political prisoners if you are outside of Belarus. (via [Spring96](#))

Support workers of BelarusKali, GrodnoAzot, Naftan in their strike. (via [BelarusTogether](#)) **More than 100 workers of Belaruskali continue their strike amid a brutal crackdown** by the authorities. (via [RFERL](#), [Belsat](#))

Volunteer with the Belarusian Student Support Association helping persecuted students and professors. (via [BeSSA](#))

March 25: Belarusian Americans celebrated **Freedom Day** on an unprecedented scale. Between March 19 and April 3, **celebratory rallies occurred in more than 20 cities** in Arizona, California, Colorado, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Washington.



Belarusian communities gathered together in all major cities on the West Coast to Freedom Day. With the help of sponsors and local artists, activists in **Los Angeles** and **Orange County** organized an art fair. \$2,000 raised from its sales will go to Belarusian solidarity funds.



Belarusians of **Philadelphia** marked Freedom Day with outdoor performances from Belarusian, American, and Ukrainian bands. More than 300 guests arrived from **New York, New Jersey, Ohio, Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, DC** to savor delicious potato pancakes and a red-white-red cake.



Communities in **Houston, Dallas, and Austin, TX**, organized celebratory picnics. In **Dallas**, a family posted information about Belarus on a billboard to draw attention to the events there.



Viachka Statkevich, deputy of the BNR Rada, addressed the Belarusian community of **Miami, FL**, in his commemorative speech. Later, guests played guitar and sang popular songs.



In **Atlanta, Charlotte, Chicago, Honolulu, Minneapolis, Phoenix, Pittsburgh, South River, NJ, and Noblesville, IN**, local groups held festive dinners with Belarusian dishes and quizzes.



Belarusians in **Boston, Denver, Detroit, and Washington, DC** held their rallies near iconic landmarks in their respective cities. Along with many Belarusian American communities, they recorded celebratory addresses to the people of Belarus.