

Vilnius Freedom Summit Statement

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, together with Freedom House, is proud to host the Vilnius Freedom Summit, bringing together democratic governments, civil society leaders, human rights defenders, independent journalists, and former political prisoners. At a time when authoritarian regimes are increasingly coordinating across borders, sharing repressive tactics, technologies, propaganda tactics, and political support, democracies must respond with equal unity and determination.

We reaffirm our commitment to supporting those on the front lines of freedom and democracy worldwide. Lithuania knows from its own history that democracy cannot be defended within national borders alone. We remain grateful for the principled position of the United States, including the Welles Declaration, during our struggle for freedom, and we know how important international solidarity is for those who continue to fight for their rights and liberties today.

We stand firmly with the democratic forces of Belarus, Russia, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, many of whose representatives – civil society and political activists, former political prisoners - are gathered with us here in Vilnius today.

We reaffirm our unwavering support for Ukraine, unequivocally condemn Russia's brutal war of aggression and the Belarusian regime's complicity, and reject all forms of support provided to the aggressor, including the involvement of Cuba and its nationals fighting alongside Russian forces in Ukraine. We will remain steadfast in pursuing an end to Russia's war of aggression, ensuring the return of all unlawfully detained and forcibly deported Ukrainians, especially children, and securing full accountability for the crime of aggression, all war crimes and other gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

Authoritarian regimes worldwide continue to imprison those who stand for freedom. Many political prisoners face inhumane and degrading conditions of detention, denial of adequate medical care, prolonged isolation, ill-treatment, and torture. We call for the immediate end of these practices and for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners. Stronger international coordination is needed to provide political, legal, humanitarian, and practical support to political prisoners during their detention and after their release.

While welcoming the diplomatic efforts of the United States that have contributed to the release of a number of political prisoners in Venezuela and Belarus, we call on the Belarusian and Venezuelan authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all remaining political prisoners, while ensuring their right to remain in their own countries and enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We remain steadfast in supporting the democratic aspirations of the Belarusian people and their right to determine the future of a free, democratic, and sovereign Belarus, expressing our

full solidarity with Belarus' democratic leaders, independent journalists, human rights defenders, who continue to fight for freedom despite increasingly severe repression.

We strongly condemn the Russian regime's mass persecution of its own citizens. Russia now holds more political prisoners than at any time since the Stalin era, among them opposition politicians, journalists, human rights defenders, and citizens persecuted for their anti-war views. Repression at home and aggression abroad are inseparable. The Kremlin dismantled independent media and criminalized dissent in the years before its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and it has used the war to justify an ever harsher crackdown on its own society. Russian political prisoners and Ukrainian civilians held in Russian detention alike suffer ill-treatment and the denial of their most basic rights.

We strongly condemn Belarus's designation of the European Humanities University (EHU) as an extremist organization. The growing practice by Belarus, Russia, and other authoritarian regimes of abusing legal frameworks to suppress civil society and justify hostile actions against other states must not be tolerated. The international community must unite in exposing and countering these practices, including transnational repression targeting dissidents and activists beyond national borders.

We remain deeply concerned about the continued deterioration situation in Cuba, including restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, reprisals against civil society actors, arbitrary detention, and the continued imprisonment of political activists. Lithuania maintains its principled decision to abstain from the ratification of the EU-Cuba Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement and encourages international engagement with Cuba to remain linked to tangible progress on human rights, democratic reforms, and the release of political prisoners.

We remain deeply concerned by the continued erosion of democracy, concentration of power, and restrictions on human rights and fundamental freedoms in Nicaragua. We call on the authorities to respect democratic principles, restore civic and political space, and ensure conditions for free elections that allow the Nicaraguan people to determine their country's future.

We express solidarity with the people of Venezuela in their democratic aspirations. We reaffirm our commitment to working with Venezuelans and our partners towards a peaceful, democratic transition.

Lithuania will continue working with transatlantic partners to ensure that the voices of free democratic forces are heard and amplified in our region and globally, including at the United Nations and other international organizations. We must also work together to prevent aggressors, systemic human rights violators, and authoritarian regimes from gaining additional influence through election to human rights and other elected bodies of international organizations.

Drawing on its democratic transition experience, Lithuania stands ready to share its knowledge and expertise with all democratic forces, as they pursue their own paths towards a strong democracy, accountable governance, respect for human rights, and a market economy.

Democratic solidarity must be measured not only in words, but through concrete and sustained action, including by involving new actors, including from the private sector in our societies, in the fight for freedom. Together, the democratic community will continue to stand with all those who peacefully defend human dignity, liberty, justice, and the right of every people to determine their own future.