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**Re: Treatment of Advocacy Community in Belarus in Aftermath of Elections
December 2010**

Dear Sirs

Following post-election protests in Belarus, it has been reported that more than 700 people, including 30 opposition leaders, are being detained in circumstances that contravene international human rights standards.

Over and above concerns as to the circumstances and conditions of that detention, we understand that those detained are being denied the right to legal assistance. Lawyers attempting to provide representation have accused the authorities of limiting access to their clients. The Ministry of Justice has even threatened to have them disbarred for bringing their complaints to the news media. We are troubled by attempts of the Ministry of Justice to silence our Belarusian colleagues. Such actions disregard the independence of the legal profession, and consequently the right to a fair trial.

As the representative charity of the Law Society of Ireland and the Bar Council of Ireland on matters of Rule of Law, we would like to lend our support to the Presidium of the Minsk City Bar in its commitment to uphold the independence of the legal profession. Despite government pressure, the Presidium of the Minsk City Bar has refused to punish the lawyers involved in politically sensitive cases, saying that there has been no breach of their professional code of ethics.

We also appeal to the head of the Belarus Republican Bar Association to support the activity of self-governing advocacy bodies in Belarus in upholding the principle of independent advocacy.

We are extremely concerned by the interference of the Belarusian State into lawyers' activities and we therefore call upon the Belarusian Ministry of Justice to cease harassment of lawyers and their professional bodies, and to respect the Rule of Law, democratic principles and human rights in Belarus.

Yours sincerely

The Board of Directors

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