



## **Open Letter to International Ice Hockey Federation President René Fasel**

### **Call to Suspend Plans to Host the 2014 Ice Hockey World Championship in Minsk**

May 10, 2012

President René Fasel, DMD  
International Ice Hockey Federation  
Brandschenkestrasse 50  
Postfach  
8027 Zurich  
Switzerland

Dear President Fasel:

As the annual Congress of the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) prepares to gather in Helsinki this month, we write to urge that the 2014 Ice Hockey World Championship be convened in a country other than Belarus. By rewarding the brutal authoritarian regime of Alyaksandr Lukashenka with the status and recognition that hosting this premiere global sporting event affords, the IIHF and its members would tacitly condone the actions of a repressive dictatorship. This regime is responsible for gross human rights violations aimed at former presidential candidates, leading pro-democracy opponents of the government, civil society organizers and independent journalists.

Belarus has been on a steep negative trajectory from bad to worse. Since 2009, when the IIHF selected Minsk as the 2014 Championship host city, the Belarusian regime has unleashed a severe crackdown on the basic human rights of its citizens and nearly all forms of public assembly and free speech. During this same period, it has arrested hundreds of protesters and civic leaders, including seven presidential candidates from the most recent election in December 2010. To this day, there are political prisoners still incarcerated in Belarus, sentenced to lengthy terms by a judicial system that has long been used as a political tool of the regime. And the presidential election was widely and harshly condemned by independent observers.

The international community has already demonstrated that there are consequences. In response to Lukashenka's harsh treatment of his own people, and his government's pattern of violations against fundamental human rights, the European Union (EU) and the United States have enacted stiff sanctions against companies linked to the regime and imposed travel and financial restrictions on state officials responsible for the ongoing crackdown. We fully agree with EU High Representative Catherine Ashton and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton that "the people of Belarus deserve better." Likewise, we support the views of the European Parliament and the U.S. Congress, as well as parliamentarians and governments in Germany, Finland and Poland all have called on the IIHF to suspend its plans to hold the 2014 Ice Hockey World Championship in Minsk until Lukashenka unconditionally releases and rehabilitates all political prisoners and acts in accordance with accepted standards of governance in the treatment of Belarusian citizens.

We note that a relocation of the IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship on account of a change in the on-the-ground environment is not without precedent, as was the case in 1969 when the tournament was moved from Czechoslovakia to Sweden in the wake of the Prague Spring and subsequent Soviet invasion.

Significantly, we do not believe this is a question of comingling politics and sport. Instead, it is an issue of basic human dignity. Countries must demonstrate worthiness for hosting such prestigious events by upholding universal human rights. As such, we urge you and all members of the IIHF to stand on the right side of history by joining the international community in support of the people of Belarus and choosing to relocate the 2014 Ice Hockey World Championship from Belarus to a more democratic country.

Your consideration of these concerns is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

**Victor Ashe**  
Former U.S. Ambassador to Poland

**Ian Brzezinski**  
Atlantic Council

**Susan Corke**  
Freedom House

**Pavol Demeš**  
German Marshall Fund

**Peter B. Doran**  
Center for European Policy Analysis

**Joerg Forbrig**  
German Marshall Fund

**Laurence E. Hirsch**  
Center for European Policy Analysis

**Bruce Jackson**  
Project on Transitional Democracies

**Donald Jensen**  
Center for Transatlantic Relations

**Dakota Korth**  
Halifax International Security Forum

**David Kramer**  
Freedom House

**Irina Krasovskaya**  
We Remember Foundation

**Robert Kron Jr.**  
Center for European Policy Analysis

**Edward McMillan-Scott**  
Member of the European Parliament  
Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

**David Merkel**  
Center for Transatlantic Relations

**Wess Mitchell**  
Center for European Policy Analysis

**Stephen B. Nix**  
International Republican Institute

**Robert Nurick**  
Atlantic Council

**Kristiina Ojuland**  
Member of the European Parliament  
Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

**Rodger Potocki**  
Georgetown University

**Peter Šťastný**  
Member of the European Parliament  
European People's Party

**Guy Verhofstadt**  
Member of the European Parliament  
Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe  
President

**Sir Graham Watson**  
Member of the European Parliament  
European Liberal Democrat Party President