

Nestlé must immediately stop funding state media in Belarus

Zurich, 24.06.2021

Open letter to

Paul Bulcke, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Nestlé

Mark Schneider, Chief Executive Officer of Nestlé

Dear Mr Bulcke, Dear Mr Schneider

We are writing to you today on behalf of 52 non-governmental organisations from 18 countries about Nestlé's advertising on Belarusian state television. Through your advertising, Nestlé directly finances the state propaganda of the dictatorial regime in Belarus and the associated discrediting of the Belarusian democracy movement.

Since the summer of 2020, more than 40,000 people have been arrested in Belarus for political reasons, and thousands of them have been tortured or ill-treated. Several opponents of the regime have reportedly been killed. Belarusian human rights organisations have currently recognised more than 500 detainees as political prisoners. All these human rights violations are ignored by the Belarusian state media, which are co-financed by Nestlé's advertising.

In an unprecedented act of state terrorism, on 23 May 2021 the Belarusian regime hijacked an Irish airline Ryanair plane en route from Greece to Lithuania in Belarusian airspace. When the plane was forced to land in Minsk, Raman Pratasevich and his girlfriend Sofia Sapega were arrested - both have since been designated political prisoners of the Belarusian regime by Belarusian and international human rights organisations.

Subsequently, the forced confessions of guilt and interviews by Pratasevich and Sapega were broadcast on Belarusian state television. In the case of Raman Pratasevich, traces of physical abuse were clearly visible.

As early as November 2020, the political prisoner Mikalai Dziadok was shown on Belarusian state television and forced to make a confession of guilt under visible torture. Numerous other opponents of the regime are regularly forced to confess their guilt on Belarusian state television.

Nestlé places advertisements for its coffee, chocolate bars and cat food alongside this terrifying display of frightened and abused opponents of the regime. Monitoring of advertising on Belarusian state television has shown that one in three commercials are from Nestlé. No other Western company finances the inhuman propaganda on Belarusian state television more than Nestlé.

The situation of media freedom in Belarus has been alarming for many years. In the Reporters Without Borders press freedom ranking, Belarus is ranked 158 out of 180 countries. On 18 May 2021, the most popular independent Belarusian website TUT.BY was shut down. According to the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ), 25 media workers are currently imprisoned, including 12 TUT.BY staff and 5 Press Club Belarus staff.

In response to the ongoing repression of media freedom and due to the lack of protection of independent journalism in Belarus, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), an association of 69 broadcasters from 56 countries, suspended the membership of Belarusian broadcaster BTRC on 28 May 2021.

We strongly welcome the EBU's decision and we expect Nestlé to do similar, and distance itself from the Belarusian regime. Nestlé must no longer be complicit in the crimes of the Lukashenko regime and the grave human rights violations in Belarus by financing Belarusian state television through advertising.

We call on you to immediately stop Nestlé's advertising in all state-controlled Belarusian media and the direct financing of the propaganda of a criminal regime that this entails.

Yours sincerely

Signing organisations	Country
ACAT Belgium	Belgium
ACAT Germany	Germany
ACAT Italy	Italy
ACAT Switzerland	Switzerland
Association UMDPI	Ukraine
Belarusische Gemeinschaft RAZAM e.V.	Germany
Campax	Switzerland
Center for Civil Liberties	Ukraine
Centre for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights	Russia
Citizens' Watch	Russia
Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Norddeutschland	Germany
Evangelisch-Lutherischer Kirchenkreis Nordfriesland	Germany
Evangelische Stimmen, Nordkirche	Germany
Flussschifferkirche Hamburg	Germany
Free Press Unlimited	Netherlands
Freedom House	USA

Helsinki Citizens' Assembly - Vanadzor	Armenia
Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights	Poland
Human Rights Center Viasna	Belarus
Human Rights House Foundation	Norway
Human Rights Movement "Bir Duino-Kyrgyzstan"	Kyrgyzstan
humanrights.ch	Switzerland
Index on Censorship	United Kingdom
Initiative Mittel- und Osteuropa e.V.	Germany
International Partnership for Human Rights	Belgium
Internationale Gesellschaft für Menschenrechte (IGFM)	Germany
Kazakhstan International Bureau on Human Rights and the Rule of Law	Kazakhstan
Kharkiv Human Protection Group	Ukraine
Kommunikation Ost-West	Switzerland
KRF Public Alternative	Ukraine
Legal Initiative	Belarus
Legal policy research centre	Kazakhstan
Libereco - Partnership for Human Rights	Switzerland / Germany
Menschenrechtszentrum Cottbus	Germany
National Anti-Crisis Management of Belarus	Poland
NESEHNUTÍ	Czech Republic
Östgruppen - Swedish Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights	Schweden
Pädagogisch-Theologisches Institut der Nordkirche	Germany
Pastoralkolleg Ratzeburg der Nordkirche	Germany
People in Need	Czech Republic
People's Embassy of Belarus in Germany	Germany
Prediger- und Studienseminar der Nordkirche	Germany

Public Association "Dignity"	Kazakhstan
Public Verdict Foundation	Russia
RAZAM.CH	Switzerland
Reporters Without Borders	Switzerland / Germany
Swedish OSCE Network	Sweden
Swiss Helsinki Committee	Switzerland
The Barys Zvozkau Belarusian Human Rights House	Lithuania / Belarus
The Netherlands Helsinki Committee	Netherlands
Union "Women of the Don"	Russia
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom	Germany