

Barred Belarus Opposition Candidate Flees to Moscow

By [AFP](#)

July 24, 2020



Belarussian leader Alexander Lukashenko has cracked down on the opposition ahead of the country's August presidential election. **BelTA / TASS**

A Belarussian opposition politician barred from presidential elections has fled to Moscow fearing arrest, his campaign team told AFP on Friday.

Belarussian leader Alexander Lukashenko is running for a sixth term in the Aug. 9 election and his regime has cracked down on the opposition ahead of the ballot, detaining protesters and would-be candidates.

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Valery Tsepkalo, who was not allowed to register as a candidate, has "gone to Moscow with

his children, fearing for his safety," Alexei Urban, a spokesman for the former diplomat, told AFP.

Tsepkalo told Belarussian news site Tut.by in a telephone interview that he left after friends in law enforcement agencies warned "an order had gone out for my arrest."

Tsepkalo said he planned to give news conferences in Russia, Ukraine, Western Europe and the United States to expose "the true nature of the Belarussian regime."

His wife, Veronika Tsepkalo, is remaining in Belarus to help the campaign of the leading rival to Lukashenko standing in the polls, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya.

Veronika Tsepkalo spoke at an election rally in the northern Belarussian town of Glubokoye on Friday.

She said her family received warnings that the authorities were seeking to remove their two young children, who started school this year, by claiming she was a "bad mother."

"Of course we had no choice. We took this decision in five minutes," she said of her husband's departure from Russia with the children.

Lukashenko "will use any grounds to put dissenters in prison," she said.

Lukashenko, a former collective farm director, has ruled the ex-Soviet country since 1994, suppressing and jailing opposition figures and holding elections not ruled free and fair by European observers.

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Previously, Tikhanovskaya, the one serious opposition candidate allowed to stand, said that she had also sent her two children abroad for their safety.

Tikhanovskaya said that while touring the country to gather support for her campaign, she had received an anonymous phone call threatening to jail her and take her children into care.

An English teacher and translator, she is standing for president after her husband Sergei Tikhanovsky, a popular YouTube blogger, was detained and barred from standing himself. He is currently in prison.

Tikhanovskaya has joined forces for her campaign with an all-women team made up of Veronika Tsepkalo and Maria Kolesnikova, the campaign chief of ex-banker Viktor Babaryko who was detained after announcing his presidential bid and had his candidacy thrown out.

Amnesty International last week condemned the authorities' "misogyny" in their treatment of women activists, citing threats of sexual violence and the forced removal of children.

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