

Lukashenko Challenger's Ally Calls for End to Belarus Protest Crackdown

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Svetlana Tikhanovskaya and Maria Kolesnikova. **Tatyana Zenkovich / EPA / TASS**

A key ally of Belarus' main opposition candidate in the country's disputed presidential polls has urged the authorities to end violence against protesters after three nights of post-election unrest.

Law enforcement officials were filmed beating and shooting rubber bullets at protesters in the days after official results declared strongman leader Alexander Lukashenko the winner. One protester has died, hundreds have been hospitalized and thousands arrested since Sunday.

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“We see ordinary people who want change on the streets,” Maria Kolesnikova [said](#) in a video address shared online Tuesday.

“These people won't go away now and won't forget what happened. They won't be able to live

the way they used to,” she said.

Kolesnikova, a campaign partner of opposition candidate Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, has remained in Belarus amid the unrest even after Tikhanovskaya left for Lithuania shortly after challenging the election results.

Tikhanovskaya’s second partner Veronika Tsepalo had left for Moscow ahead of Sunday’s vote.

Responding to the Belarusian authorities’ claims that foreign powers are orchestrating the nationwide anti-Lukashenko protests, Kolesnikova said “it’s not imagined puppeteers from abroad but Belarusians themselves who want change.”

“We ask the authorities to find the strength to face the will of the people. We ask the authorities to listen to Belarusians,” she said.

Kolesnikova joined forces with Tsepalo to back Tikhanovskaya in July after the prominent candidates they had backed were either jailed or fled the country amid a crackdown on opposition forces. Tikhanovskaya herself joined the race after her husband, popular blogger Sergei Tikhanovskoy, was jailed on charges of planning “mass unrest.”

Related article: [In Belarus, 3 Women Unite to Fight Strongman Lukashenko](#)

Kolesnikova's video is at least the fourth video statement from the trio of women in a 24-hour period.

Tikhanovskaya announced Tuesday that she had “made a very difficult decision” to leave the country for Lithuania. The 37-year-old stay-at-home mother came second with 10%, according to the official results, but has claimed victory in the polls.

Belarusian state media released a second video where Tikhanovskaya urged supporters not to protest, which her allies said was apparently recorded under duress.

On Tuesday, Tsepalo released a video statement from Moscow calling on the international community to help end the “chaos and bloodshed” in Belarus and recognize Tikhanovskaya the election winner.

AFP contributed reporting.

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