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Belarus Nobel-Winner Alexievich Urges Lukashenko to Go

By AFP

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Svetlana Alexievich. **Christian Charisius / DPA / TASS**

Belarusian Nobel Prize-winning writer Svetlana Alexievich condemned police violence against protesters in her country and urged strongman Alexander Lukashenko to go peacefully in an interview published Wednesday.

The 72-year-old author won the 2015 Nobel Literature Prize for her work chronicling the horrors of war and life under the repressive Soviet regime including the 1986 Chernobyl disaster.

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In her first public reaction to the protests that have broken out across Belarus over Sunday's disputed presidential election, the writer told Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe that

Lukashenko should step down peacefully to prevent a bloody civil war.

"Leave before it's too late, before you've thrown people into a terrible abyss, into the abyss of civil war," she appealed to Lukashenko, whom she has long criticized.

"You just want power and your desire will end up with blood," she said, accusing the Belarusian authorities of "declaring war on their own people."

She expressed shock at the "inhumane, satanic" actions of riot police, saying this was previously unimaginable and suggesting Minsk may have brought in reinforcements from Russia.

Before Sunday's presidential election, Alexievich said she would vote for Lukashenko's main opposition rival Svetlana Tikhanovskaya.

The writer said she understood why Tikhanovskaya, a political novice and until recently a stay-at-home mother, left Belarus on Tuesday for the safety of neighboring Lithuania.

"She was and remains a symbol of change, of striving for a new life," Alexievich said.

"She did what she could. I have nothing bad to say about her. Now let the men take the fore."

She said she backed opposition politician Valery Tsepkalo, a former diplomat whose wife was on Tikhanovskaya's campaign team.

Tsepkalo on Wednesday announced a plan to form a political movement called the National Salvation Front to further the opposition cause.

Alexievich expressed her admiration for the Belarusian protesters saying: "I've simply fallen in love with my people over the last few weeks."

"These are completely different people, their strength is completely different. Before I used to be a bit disillusioned — not now."

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