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Belarus Vote Challenger Calls for 'Peaceful' Protests in All Cities

By AFP

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AP / TASS

The main challenger in Belarus's disputed presidential election called Friday for mass weekend rallies across the country in support of her claim to have defeated strongman Alexander Lukashenko.

"Belarusians will never want to live with the previous government again. The majority do not believe in his victory," Svetlana Tikhanovskaya said in a video address.

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"I ask the mayors of all cities to organize peaceful mass gatherings in every city on Aug. 15 and 16."

Tikhanovskaya, who left the country for neighboring Lithuania on Tuesday, said Belarus had

undergone momentous change and condemned a police crackdown on protests that has seen thousands of people arrested, hundreds wounded and at least two dead.

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"Six months ago, no one believed that Belarusians would be able to unite and say 'no' to the old government. But it happened," she said.

"The government turned the peaceful demonstration of citizens in the streets into a bloody massacre," Tikhanovskaya said.

"The situation is critical. We need to stop the violence on the streets of Belarus's cities. I call on the authorities to stop this and start a dialogue."

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