To

President Gitanas Nausėda

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Dear President, dear Prime Minister, dear Minister of Foreign Affairs,

I am writing to you because I am concerned about the safety and security of Ms Olga Karatch (Volha Karach), a peace builder and human rights defender from Belarus who has sought refuge in your country. Recently, on the 18th of August, the Lithuanian Immigration Authorities rejected her application for political asylum.

Ms Olga Karatch is part of the Belarusian opposition and had to leave her home country in 2020 after the protests against the rigged presidential elections. Her organization “VšĮ Tarptautinis pilietinių iniciatyvų centras „Mūsų namai” is registered in Lithuania since 2014.

Olga Karatch and her organization are fighting for human and civil rights in Belarus and against a possible direct participation of Belarus in the war in Ukraine. For that, they repeatedly have been threatened by the Lukashenko regime. The Belarusian KGB labelled her as a terrorist, and recently there have been death threats against her. If she returned to Belarus, she would face immediate arrest and conviction to many years of prison; even imposition of the death penalty cannot be ruled out.

The UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders adopted in 1998 refers to "individuals, groups and associations ... who contribute ... to the effective elimination of all violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms of peoples and individuals'.

States have an obligation to protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms of all citizens, and, human rights defenders, as stated in UN General Assembly resolution 66/164, are exposed to grave risks through threats, attacks and intimidation that often endanger their very lives.

We express our deep concern that national security and counter-terrorism measures are often misused to target human rights defenders or hinder their work and compromise their security in a manner contrary to international law, as stated in UN Human Rights Council Resolution 22/6 of 2013 on the defence of human rights defenders, which commits all states to protect and not criminalise those who work to defend human rights.

Therefore, the situation is life threatening for her, and we ask you to extend your support to Ms Karatch and to allow her to stay in Lithuania and continue her work for human rights and peace under the secure status of being granted political asylum.

Regards

Date

(Signature)