



**Universität
Zürich^{UZH}**

**Right
Livelihood**
CENTRE ZÜRICH

Sustainability Now!

**Inequalities as an Obstacle to Achieve
Sustainable Development**

«Political Repression as an Obstacle to the
Realization of Equal Rights»

Veranstaltungsbericht

Ronja Barelli

Nadine Kas

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Introduction

The "Sustainability Now!" lecture series, facilitated by the Right Livelihood Center UZH and the Sustainability Team UZH, seeks to promote inter-, trans-, and multidisciplinary ways of thinking among students. The first event of the semester was a lecture and panel discussion on political repression hindering the path to equality, representing the overall topic of sustainability and inequality of the lecture series. The evening was moderated by Ronja Barelli and Nadine Kas and welcomed Natallia Satsunkevich from Viasna and Iryna Herasimovich as guests. The absence of Ales Bialiatski, the founder of Viasna, due to his imprisonment, underlined the gravity of the topic. Viasna is a Belarus based Human Rights Center founded in 1996 by Ales Bialiatski to provide support for political prisoners. It has since become the country's leading non-governmental organization contributing to the development of a democratic civil society in Belarus through documenting human rights abuses and monitoring elections, even though their work has become increasingly dangerous since the political uprisings and the consequent human rights violations in connection to Lukashenko's re-election in Belarus in 2020. Natallia, representing the 2020 Right to Livelihood Laureate as a board member of Viasna, gave poignant insights into the plight of human rights defenders in Belarus. Iryna, an advocate of cultural understanding, enriched the discussion with her unique perspective.

Middle Section: Key Messages

The evening was characterized by in-depth discussions highlighting the link between political oppression and inequality. Natallia's presentation highlighted the escalating challenges faced by activists in Belarus and emphasized the central role of humanitarian activism in promoting social change. The panel discussion explored the complexity of inequality manifested in cultural expressions, gender dynamics and international relations. Through thought-provoking questions, speakers addressed topics ranging from the role of women in the democratic revolution to the complex relationship between Belarus and Russia. The insights gained from the discourse highlighted the importance of overcoming national boundaries and creating inclusive spaces for artistic expression and political dialog.

The panel discussion began with an exploration of oppression and discrimination in Belarus. Iryna Herasimovich, drawing on her expertise in literature and culture, made the connection between inequality, the Belarusian language, and the independent cultural scene. She pointed out the challenges faced by Belarusian artists at home and abroad and emphasized the need for more inclusive spaces for artistic expression across national borders. Natallia Satsunkevich expanded the dialog to gender inequality and its impact on the democratic revolution in Belarus, afterwards shifting into a more personal realm and centered around the challenges connected to activism for sustainable development of a just society and mental health. This introspective inquiry provided valuable insight into the resilience required for long-term advocacy work.

The discussion then turned to the Western perspective on Belarus, with a focus on relations between Belarus and Russia. Both speakers offered a nuanced view of this complex dynamic, challenging common misconceptions and emphasizing the multi-layered nature of the relationship. They also provided insights into the current situation in Belarus and made connections to the overarching themes of inequality and sustainability, which were discussed throughout the evening. Overall, the panel discussion provided a comprehensive exploration of the intersecting issues of political oppression, inequality, and sustainability in Belarus. Through insightful questions and thoughtful answers, the speakers illuminated the complexity of these issues and provided the audience with a deeper understanding of the challenges facing Belarusian society.

Take away

As facilitators, we come away from this event with a deep appreciation for the resilience of people like Natallia who persevere in the pursuit of justice despite formidable obstacles and Iryna, who keep fighting for the preservation of Belarusian culture. The evening was a poignant reminder that sustainability, equality, and human rights are closely linked. It inspired us to advocate for inclusive social structures that prioritize the voices of marginalized communities and uphold the principles of democracy and justice. Through collective action and unwavering determination, we strive to break down barriers to equality and promote a more sustainable and just world for all.