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August 6, 2020

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(1936-2016)

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Mr. Michael Ray Stevenson (“Tyga”)  
c/o Dre London  
London Entertainment Inc.  
*Via email*

Dear Mr. Stevenson,

According to reliable information obtained by the Human Rights Foundation, you are scheduled to perform a concert at Hip Hop Fireworks in Minsk, Belarus on August 8, 2020.

To be clear, your performance is organized and funded by the Belarusian dictatorship, led by Alexander Lukashenko. I am writing to urgently inform you of the human rights crisis in Belarus; to explain the reason why Lukashenko has invited you to play the concert; and to request that, in light of your status as a global personality, you cancel your appearance as an unambiguous symbol of solidarity with the Belarusian people, especially its persecuted artists and musicians.

There have been no free elections in Belarus since 1994. For the past 26 years, Belarus has been ruled by one man, Alexander Lukashenko. Under his regime, there is no freedom of speech, no freedom of assembly, and no freedom of association.

Opposition leaders are imprisoned, forced into exile, or murdered. The police in Belarus is particularly brutal, frequently resorting to excessive force and arbitrary arrests. Police brutality is never punished in Belarus; on the contrary, it is encouraged in order to intimidate the people further. The regime violently responds to any challenge to its authority, and crushes all public protests.

However, the past few months have been particularly important for the Belarusian people. In the midst of the global pandemic, Lukashenko dismissed the coronavirus as a “psychosis” and joked that people should protect themselves by drinking vodka and going to the sauna. As of today, and despite substantial underreporting on the number of infections, Belarus has almost 70,000 cases, an enormous

number for a country of only 9 million people. The fact that the authorities are even considering music concerts should give you an indication of just how lightly they have treated this health crisis.

It was this very attitude toward the crisis that spurred thousands of Belarusians to take to the streets in the past few months, demanding an end to the corrupt and brutal dictatorship of Alexander Lukashenko.

These protests have been met with police brutality and extreme repressions. Protestors are grabbed off the street at random, and many are beaten bloody. The two most popular candidates in the upcoming presidential election, Viktor Babaryka and Sergei Tikhanovsky, were both arrested on trumped-up charges. Many opposition activists have had to flee the country, along with their children, after receiving threats from the government.

All hope seemed lost, until an unlikely alliance formed between Tikhanovsky's wife Svetlana, Babaryka's campaign manager Maria Kolesnikova, and the wife of a third presidential candidate who had to flee the country, Veronika Tsepkalo. Together, these three women have galvanized Belarusian society.

Svetlana, who was allowed to stand as a candidate for election in the place of her husband, has organized the largest ever political rallies in Belarus. And not just in the big cities. Even in small towns, remarkable crowds have turned out to support the women fighting for a peaceful, fairer, democratic country. Much like the Black Lives Matters protests in the United States, citizens in Belarus are determined to speak up against injustice and brutal police force.

However, in the past week, the regime has realized its "mistake" in allowing political rallies. In towns and cities all across the country, the opposition's rallies have been cancelled, and even legal gatherings have been broken up by the police.

Your performance, scheduled for the day before Belarus' elections, is no coincidence. It is an excuse to cancel the opposition's final electoral rally, and prevent ordinary Belarusians from showing their support for freedom and democracy. It is also a deliberate attempt to turn attention away from the massive electoral fraud that is already taking place across the country.

Simply put: Your concert will serve as propaganda for Lukashenko's authoritarian regime the day before the election.

You have publicly shown your support for the Black Lives Matters protests, encouraged fans to donate to social justice organizations like National Bail Out, and urged followers to vote in local elections. You even posted such a message on your Instagram, writing: "TIME IS NOW TO STAND UP. FIGHT BACK!! VOTE VOTE

VOTE!!!! PROTEST, SCREAM, SHOUT, BE HEARD, BE SEEN, DONATE!! SUPPORT THE ONES IN THE FIELD & FAMILIES AFFECTED. LETS KEEP THIS ENERGY!"

Yet if you move forward with this performance for a concert sponsored by Lukashenko and the Belarusian government, you will be in league with a regime that has murdered political opponents, beaten peaceful protestors, and jailed thousands for the crime of disagreeing with the government. We hope you can consider showing consistency in your support for human rights and peaceful, democratic protests against the authoritarian regime in Belarus.

Considering the information above, HRF believes that your participation in a performance sponsored by a murderous, repressive regime involved in gross human rights violations — especially by the police — would be highly unfortunate. Furthermore, it would be disastrous for a public figure of your standing who has articulated a commitment to democracy, prison reform, and social justice.

Instead, you could use your extensive following on social media to galvanize further support for ordinary people in Belarus, and help them in their courageous struggle for a country free of violence, censorship, and corruption. The time for them, it would appear, is now.

HRF asks you to urgently consider canceling your performance, scheduled for August 8, in Minsk, Belarus.

Sincerely,



Thor Halvorssen  
President  
Human Rights Foundation

CC: Alex Chaykin, Agency for The Performing Arts