

00:04

On August 12, 2020, two groups of girls went out to protest in Minsk, the capital city of Belarus. They put on white clothes and went barefoot out into the street. In the morning, some went to Komarovskiy Market in the center of town. Later that day, the other group gathered with flowers at the eternal flame under the victory monument. They stood together holding hands, and they started to sing the Belarusian lullaby, waiting for the police cars to arrive. They knew the police would pick them up just like that: barefoot with flowers in their hands, that they would take them to the police station, beat them up and try to humiliate them. And yet they did it anyway.

00:58

This year, something changed in Belarus, a country of more than nine million people that has been ruled by an authoritarian leader since 1994. These young women were protesting the latest rigged election result, which had taken [place] just a few days earlier. Their small expressions of protest very quickly expanded into massive, peaceful, women-led demonstrations all across the country.

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Within just a few days, a few hundred thousand people took to the streets and demonstrations have continued ever since, the likes of which Belarus has never seen before. All this despite the fact that the president proclaimed himself reelected and that more than 10,000 people have been detained, hundreds tortured and at least six killed.

01:58

Many people wonder why the people of Belarus are speaking up now. What makes them keep taking to the streets despite unprecedented police violence, despite state lawlessness? The answer I hear the most is that people have become fearless, and it's something we have become together.

02:25

Because fear is the province of one. It feeds on isolation. It doesn't discriminate: men, women, children, elderly -- all of us can feel fear, but only as long as we are on our own. Fearlessness takes two. It only works if and when we show up for each other. Show up so that your neighbor, your colleague, your friend has courage. And they will do the same for you.

03:01

A lot has been made of my own role in the presidential election of August 2020. How I stepped in to run for my husband, Sergei, when he was jailed and it became clear that the authorities would deny him his chance to run himself; how I rightfully won the election and became the elected leader of a democratic Belarus, but the official results only gave me 10 percent of the vote and I was forced into exile with my children; how I still fight for those who voted for me and whose voice the regime wants to steal; how "fearless" I am.

03:40

But there were many moments when I was frightened, and I wanted to step down. I was threatened and forced to believe that I'm alone in this fight. And yet the more cities I visited, the more people showed up for the rallies, the less fear I had. And then in the days before the election in Minsk, 60,000 people came to show their support for me, and I was no longer afraid.

04:12

I never wanted to do any of this. I was never overly political, and I never planned to run for office. I wanted to be a mom and a wife. But by fate and the will of my people, I was elevated to this position. And I accept this with a sense of duty and pride. I will not give up. And I will show up for people, because they show up for me. Our courage is born from unity. Our solidarity is our strength.

04:50

I also now understand that being fearless is a commitment. It is a decision you make every single day. It is a responsibility you take -- responsibility for one another. In this regard, I'm no different from my fellow Belarusians. Their support is tangible. Their solidarity grows in progression. When there are two of you, you are daring. When you're 100, you are brave. When there are thousands of you, you are fearless. And once you are tens of thousands, you become invincible.

05:31

Thank you.