

Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l

Avenue d'Auderghem 61/16, 1040 Brussels

Phone/Fax: 32 2 3456145

Email: international.secretariat.brussels@hrwf.net – Website: <http://www.hrwf.net>



OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Warsaw, 23 September 2015

Working Session 4 : Freedom of peaceful assembly and association

Armenia: Repression of peaceful demonstrations

Recommendations

Human Rights Without Frontiers calls upon Armenia

- to promptly, thoroughly and effectively investigate all incidents of disproportionate use of force by law enforcement officers and attacks against peaceful protesters by unidentified assailants;
- to effectively investigate the threats against human rights defenders;
- to shorten the 7-day notification requirement prior to an assembly to set a reasonable framework for notification of an event;
- to stop police interference and obstruction of peaceful assemblies under the pretense of “not authorized” events;
- to conduct impartial and transparent investigations of incidents where freedom of assembly has been restricted and police has used force; identify and prosecute police officers for excessive use of force, provide effective remedies to the victims.

Peaceful demonstration against corruption and lack of justice in January

On Sunday 31st January 2015 the civic movement “Centennial without this Regime” organized a peaceful motorcade to Artsakh on the model of the AutoMaidan in Kiev to raise awareness among the citizens about corruption and lack of justice in Armenia.

The police, including Special Forces units armed with sniper rifles and automatic weapons, blocked the motorcade demonstration on the highway in Berdzor and then brutally attacked the participants and their vehicles. Despite the fact that the participants obeyed the demand of the police to turn back, the police attacked them as they were trying to leave. Several of the participants were brutally beaten and were hospitalized. Others, including women and children, were assaulted.

As a result of this violent attack, 20 vehicles were damaged, 3 professional cameras were seized from the journalists, numerous smart phones used to record the mayhem, were violently taken from the participants. The total amount of the damages is around \$40,000.

The "Centennial without this Regime" movement and the “Founding Parliament” (FP), a civil initiative, were the driving forces of the socio-political opposition to the President of the Republic of Armenia behind the demonstrations. Their events have always been peaceful and have remained within the limits of the law, leaders insist.

Planning a peaceful demonstration in April

In early April, Yerevan municipality authorised a series of rallies that were to start on 24th April but in the meantime a crackdown on the two organizing movements was decided on the basis of *suspicious of wrongdoings*.

On 7th April, ten apartments belonging to members of the movement and five offices were searched by the National Security Service and police Special Investigative Division. They were conducted on the sole grounds of a “suspicion of preparation for mass disturbances.”

On 9th and 10th April 2015, the court of the administrative districts Kentron and Nork-Marash in Yerevan sentenced several leaders of the movement to two months’ pre-trial detention for allegedly planning to “organise mass disturbances” at a rally on 24 April; Jirayr Sefilyan, Garegin Chugaszyan, Varuzhan Avetisyan, Pavel Manukyan and Gevorg Safaryan.

The lawyers representing Jirair Sefilian and other prominent members of the group then announced their intention to appeal the court decisions regarding the custody of their clients at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg.

Peaceful demonstration against the electricity price rise in June

In June, protests in Yerevan and other Armenian cities broke out for over a week, following the state regulatory commission's June 17 decision about increasing the electricity fee from August 1.

In Yerevan, on 22nd June 2015, 4000-5000 people participated in a peaceful demonstration against the electricity price rise and walked toward the parliament and president's office. When police blocked the street, a sit-in strike began right in the middle of it. The number of participants diminished during the night and at that point, the police used water cannons to disperse those remaining. On the next day, the police also beat a number of protesters. About a dozen of them required intensive care. 237 demonstrators as well as journalists were arrested and released on the same or next day.

Overall, 600-700 police officers participated in the operations.