



His Excellency Mr. Serzh Sargsyan
President of the Republic of Armenia
Baghramian Avenue/0010Yerevan
E-mail: meri@president.am

Oslo, 04.06.2014

Your Excellency,

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee is a human rights organisation based in Oslo, Norway. We have followed the democratic development and human rights situation in Armenia closely since 2008, with a particular focus on elections, the conditions in closed institutions, and the development of civil society and civic activism.

We work according to the principle that a vivid civil society with active citizens is a great resource to the development of any state, providing the authorities and lawmakers with information and recommendations they would not have access to in any other way, thus enabling them to make appropriate decisions that are respected and inspire the citizens. Armenians are right to be proud of their beautiful country and ancient history and should be given the opportunity to contribute positively to its further development.

In order to contribute in a positive way, citizens need to trust that the authorities act to the best of the nation. Thus, they are entitled to objective information on questions of particular importance, they should be able to discuss and express their opinions freely in society, and choose their representatives through fair and free elections.

Unfortunately, this is not completely the case in Armenia today. Although the Republic of Armenia has carried out a number of positive reforms over the last years, several issues remain in order to regain the trust of the citizens and rebuild the nation's greatness for all its diverse inhabitants.

In our new report, "Armenia: between hope and distrust", the NHC discusses some of the reasons for the lack of trust, and presents a number of recommendations that could address it. We present the recommendations from the report here and hope Mr. President will find time to read the report also;

Facilitate civic activism and civil society:

- Ensure that peaceful demonstrations are allowed to take place without interference;
- Ensure that the police are present to defend the security of the demonstrators;
- Establish safe working conditions for all activists, in particular those advocating controversial issues, including on diversity;
- Implement your legislation on freedom of expression and ensure that the public have adequate access to information on matters of their concern;
- Guarantee a fair chance of access to public television for activists and human rights defenders in order to present alternative views on the political and human rights situation in Armenia.

Build trust and confidence:

- Take immediate and concrete steps to combat corruption at all levels of society, in particular the judicial system;

- Investigate and adequately explain the circumstances surrounding the 27 October 1999 parliament shootings;
- Investigate and adequately explain the circumstances surrounding the 10 deaths on 1 March 2008, including: identify the perpetrators; investigate the command responsibility; and provide compensation to the victims' relatives.

Ensure free and fair elections:

- Refrain from extensive use of administrative resources and pressure from employers in connection with elections;
- Consider election-related complaints in a timely manner;
- Grant domestic election observers the possibility to submit complaints;
- Remove the compulsory exams for domestic election observers and replace the system of permission by a system of notification;
- Legal provisions for civic election observation should be further improved and methodological support reinforced in order to further develop civic scrutiny and control over electoral processes;
- Ensure that voters' lists are accurate and do not allow for abuse of absentee or multiple voting.

Promote tolerance:

- Follow up on stated intentions on tolerance during the Council of Europe Chairmanship;
- Include civil society activists in the process of developing effective anti-discrimination legislation that also addresses intent and hate-crimes against all minority groups;
- Officially discourage and prosecute homophobic and intolerant statements by public figures and derogatory terminology in the media;
- Prosecute offenders of hate crime;
- Protect representatives of minority groups and their defenders.

A pdf version of the report is attached to this letter in Russian and can also be downloaded at http://nhc.no/no/nyheter/Increasing+restrictions+on+civic+activism+in+Armenia.b7C_wljS1c.ips.

Interviews on the report can be studied at <http://armenia.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/238438/> and <http://civilnet.am/lene-wetteland-report-armenia-civil-society/>.

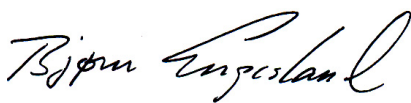
Please do not hesitate to contact us should you wish to discuss any of the above recommendations.

A good occasion for such a discussion can be when the Norwegian Helsinki Committee Secretary General Bjørn Engesland and Armenia advisor Lene Wetteland will be in Yerevan on 16 June.

We will appreciate highly if the President can find time to discuss our recommendations and challenges with us on this day.

We look forward to hearing from you,

Sincerely,



Bjørn Engesland
Secretary General
Norwegian Helsinki Committee