

Press Release

Universal Periodic Review of Armenia:

Armenia urged to investigate March 2008 violence and to guarantee freedom of expression and assembly

Yerevan, Geneva, 19 May 2010 – On the occasion of the Universal Periodic Review of Armenia, which took place in Geneva, FIDH, its Armenian member organisation Civil Society Institute and the Helsinki Committee of Armenia welcome the numerous important recommendations addressed to the authorities and call on Armenia to implement them rapidly.

"We nevertheless deeply regret that the Armenian authorities consider more than half of the recommendations made by the delegations as being already implemented instead of recognising certain shortcomings in their human rights record and pledging to remedy them,"- noticed FIDH president Souhayr Belhassen.

Our organisations welcome the fact that a number of countries condemned the March 1 and 2, 2008 violence and recommended that Armenia fully investigates the events and brings perpetrators to justice. After the 2008 presidential elections, continuous demonstrations, lasting for nine days, were organised by the opposition in Freedom Square. On March 1 and 2, the authorities violently dispersed the demonstration and used unjustified force, which resulted in 10 deaths and more than 130 injuries. Our organisations regret that the Armenian delegation, instead of demonstrating their willingness to investigate fully those cases, merely affirmed that there was no evidence of violations committed by the police and considered these recommendations as already implemented.

The lack of independence of the judiciary was also criticised by a number of States. Germany and Hungary recommended that Armenia invites the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers.

The review of Armenia was further dominated by the issue of freedom of expression and assembly of citizens, journalists and human rights defenders. Many delegations expressed concerns about the ongoing limitations to the right of peaceful assembly following amendments to the Law on Meetings, Rallies and Demonstrations in March 2008. Armenia was also repeatedly urged to set up transparent criteria for broadcasting licenses. In the case of Meltex LTD and Mesrop Movsisyan v. Armenia the European Court of Human Rights had found a violation of Article 10 due to unlawful denial of a broadcasting license. Police violence against journalists since the 2008 elections was further denounced.

A number of countries were also concerned about the working conditions of human rights defenders. The US underlined that civil society activists should be able to work normally. Norway stressed that attacks against them should be investigated and perpetrators be brought to justice.

Serious concerns were expressed regarding the rooted practices of gender-based violence, particularly domestic violence against women, their misrepresentation in decision-making processes and the lack of specific legislation on discrimination against women. The relevance of strong protection for women at risk of being trafficked, as well as broad support and shelters for the victims was also emphasized.

Our organisations welcome the recommendations that were formulated and will continue monitoring the situation and promoting genuine reforms. However, the result of this exercise will only be achieved if the Republic of Armenia follows the recommendations closely and makes all necessary efforts to improve the situation on the ground.

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