
Armenia : Amnesty International Report 2007.

REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

Head of state: Robert Kocharian
Head of government: Andranik Markarian
Death penalty: abolitionist for all crimes
International Criminal Court: signed

Conscientious objectors continued to be imprisoned. There were reports of intimidation of independent journalists. The Ombudsperson was removed from her post in January by a presidential decree that she alleged was unconstitutional.

Conscientious objectors

Armenia did not release conscientious objectors to military service, in defiance of its obligations and commitments undertaken when acceding to the Council of Europe to respect the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and despite the introduction of an alternative civilian service to military service in national legislation in July 2004. Conscientious objectors continued to complain that in both its legislative framework and implementation, Armenia's alternative service was under the supervision and control of the military and so did not constitute a real civilian alternative to military service. As of November there were reportedly 48 Jehovah's Witnesses and one Molokan (a member of a Russian religious minority) in detention for draft evasion. Forty-four of the Jehovah's Witnesses had been tried and sentenced to terms ranging from 18 to 48 months' imprisonment. The remaining four were charged and awaiting trial.

In January an amendment to the criminal code was adopted making conscripts who refuse to perform alternative service liable to imprisonment. In May, 19 men, all Jehovah's Witnesses, filed an appeal with the European Court of Human Rights to prevent retrospective prosecution for their abandonment of the alternative service in 2004. Fifteen of the 19 applicants had been arrested in August 2005 and sentenced to between two and three and a half years' imprisonment under existing articles of the criminal code dealing with desertion from military service rather than refusal to perform alternative service. Although their convictions were later overturned and all were subsequently released, the courts refused to formally acquit the men. The case was dropped in November when all 19 were acquitted and all charges against them dropped.

¢ In October a decision of the Court of Appeal granted a prosecutor's request for a stricter sentence to be handed down to Jehovah's Witness Hayk Avetisian. His sentence was increased from 24 to 30 months.

Freedom of expression

Human rights activists and the Ombudsperson's Office expressed concern over incidents of intimidation and harassment against independent journalists, including two assaults, death threats and the stoning of personal property.

¢ On 6 September, Hovannes Galajian of the Iravunk newspaper was beaten by two unidentified men outside his home. The attack followed the publication of a number of articles criticizing prominent

officials.

¢ In July the network of independent journalists Hetq Online received threats of reprisals, including death threats, if its journalists continued to publish articles concerning the illegal acquisition of land for redevelopment.

Ombudsperson removed from office

Ombudsperson Larisa Alaverdian was removed from her post in January by presidential decree and her duties entrusted to an interim three-member commission. She alleged that her removal and replacement were unconstitutional because a presidential prerogative either to dismiss the Ombudsperson or to replace that post by another body was not provided for in Armenian law. She and other human rights activists alleged that her removal had been prompted by her criticism of government policies and practices. A new Ombudsperson was elected by the National Assembly in February.

Human rights lawyer released on bail

Lawyer Vahe Grigorian, known for his advocacy work for families resisting forced eviction for government-led redevelopment programmes in central Yerevan, was released on bail in February. He had been held since October 2005 on charges of fraud which he alleged were unfounded and politically motivated. The charges against him were not dropped and the case was still pending at the end of the year.

AI country reports/visits

Reports

¢ Europe and Central Asia: Summary of Amnesty International's concerns in the region, January-June 2006 (AI Index: EUR 01/017/2006)

¢ Commonwealth of Independent States: Positive trend on the abolition of the death penalty but more needs to be done (AI Index: EUR 04/003/2006)

Visit

AI delegates visited Armenia in April.
