



5 June 2009

STATEMENT

Armenia: Human Rights Defenders' Office Must Be Recognised as an Important Actor in Protecting Fundamental Rights

ARTICLE 19 believes that the Armenian government must recognise the Human Rights Defenders' Office of Armenia as an important actor protecting fundamental human rights. Repression of freedom of expression in Armenia remains of great concern.

ARTICLE 19 congratulates the incumbent Armenian Human Rights Defender, Armen Harutyunyan, on the fifth anniversary of the establishment of his office and stresses the continued importance of his work in the area of human rights and, in particular, freedom of expression. The Human Rights Defenders Office is independent and non-political, established to monitor and report on human rights violations and examine individual complaints. It also has the authority to instigate its own investigations.

ARTICLE 19 welcomes Mr Harutyunyan's commitment to freedom of expression, as a central element of the national debate on human rights. This was clearly demonstrated by last week's conference on the right to freedom of expression and fair trial, organised by the Human Rights Defender's Office, to celebrate their fifth anniversary.

However, ARTICLE 19 would also like to use this opportunity to once again raise concern about ongoing repression and erosion of the right to freedom of expression in Armenia.

We call on the Armenian government to:

- Reform Armenian legislation to bring about greater independence, pluralism and diversity of its broadcasting services, in particular by lifting the moratorium on the distribution of frequencies. We specifically call on the government to implement a European Court of Human Rights 'decision'¹ to allow *AI+* to take part in a public tender process under equal and fair conditions.
- Further amend media legislation, to ensure that the National Commission on Television and Radio is fully independent from the influence of the government and that its composition represents the diversity of Armenian society.

¹ See:

http://www.institute.am/images/Document_files/ECHR_Judgments/case%20of%20meltex%20Ltd%20and%20mesrop%20movsesyan%20v.%20armenia.doc

- Ensure safety for journalists, effectively investigating attacks and intimidation of journalists, and bringing to justice those who have instigated and carried out attacks.

ARTICLE 19 urges the Armenian government to enter into constructive dialogue with the Human Rights Defender and civil society organisations in order to facilitate a serious programme of reform.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

- For more information: please contact Anoush Begoyan, Programme Officer Europe, at anoushb@article19.org or telephone +44 020 7278 9292.
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.