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[Previous](#) - [Home](#)

Amnesty International

Armenia

Covering events from January - December 2004

The police reportedly used excessive force when they detained scores of protesters calling for the resignation of President Robert Kocharian. Dozens of opposition activists and supporters, including women, were reportedly beaten and ill-treated by police. Journalists, opposition political activists and a human rights defender were assaulted by unknown assailants. Conscientious objectors to compulsory military service continued to be imprisoned, despite Armenia's commitments to the Council of Europe.

Background

From February onwards, opposition party deputies boycotted parliament in protest at its refusal to approve a referendum of confidence in the President. Opposition political parties then launched a two-month campaign of mass public protests, including street demonstrations, demanding the President's resignation. The authorities described the campaign as a coup attempt and opened a criminal investigation into the opposition Artutyun (Justice) alliance. This investigation reportedly ended in September without any charges being brought. The opposition denied calling for the violent overthrow of the constitutional order. During their campaign, hundreds of opposition supporters were detained and dozens were sentenced to 15 days' administrative detention after trials that reportedly fell far short of international fair trial standards.

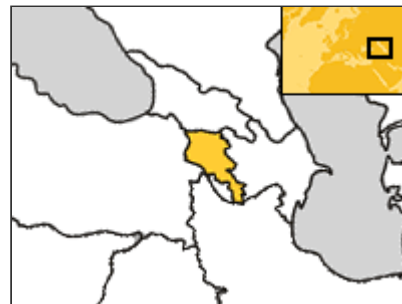
In October the Justice Ministry finally registered the Jehovah's Witnesses, which had sought registration for nine years.

Police ill-treatment and excessive use of force

Scores of people were injured and detained when special police units used water cannons and stun grenades to break up a peaceful opposition demonstration in the capital, Yerevan, on 13 April. Four journalists covering the demonstration were reportedly severely beaten by police. Dozens more opposition activists and supporters, including women, were reportedly ill-treated during armed police raids on the head offices of the main opposition parties that same night. According to reports most of these activists were detained in police cells for up to 48 hours. According to human rights groups and opposition parties, those detained at the demonstration and at party offices continued to be beaten and ill-treated at police stations.

On 28 April the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) issued a resolution condemning the use of force by police during the opposition protests in Armenia and calling on the authorities to investigate alleged human rights violations and to release opposition members. Vagharshak Harutiunian, a member of the opposition Hanrapetutian (Republic) party and a former Defence Minister, was held in pre-trial detention for two months on charges of calling for the "violent overthrow of the constitutional order" and "publicly insulting senior government officials". He was released following international pressure. In an address to PACE in June President Kocharian defended the use of force by police against opposition activists during the 13 April demonstration.

- In May Edgar Arakelian, a 24-year-old opposition activist, was sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment for "attacking a state official performing their duties" during the 13 April demonstration. He admitted hitting a police officer with an empty plastic bottle but claimed he had acted in self-defence after the



Armenia

Republic of Armenia

Head of state: Robert Kocharian

Head of government: Andranik Markarian

Death penalty: abolitionist for all crimes

International Criminal Court: signed

UN Women's Convention: acceded

Optional Protocol to UN Women's Convention: not signed

Further information

[Europe and Central Asia: Summary of Amnesty International's concerns in the region, January-June 2004: Armenia](#)
(AI Index: EUR 01/005/2004)

[Belarus and Uzbekistan: The last executioners – The trend towards abolition in the former Soviet space](#)
(AI Index: EUR 04/009/2004)

[All AI documents on Armenia](#)

police officer had hit him, breaking his front teeth. He alleged in court that he had been tortured in pre-trial detention. In August the Appeals Court upheld his sentence. He was released in September after serving a third of his sentence.

In July the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) published its first report on Armenia. The report concerned the CPT's visit to Armenia in 2002. It concluded that people detained by police ran a significant risk of being ill-treated, and recommended professional training for police officers as a priority. The report also raised concerns about overcrowding in prisons, conditions of detention for people sentenced to life imprisonment, and shortcomings at a psychiatric hospital.

Assaults on activists

At an opposition rally on 5 April police reportedly refused to intervene when around two dozen men, described as athletically built with shaven heads, disrupted the event and attacked journalists, kicking and beating them and breaking their equipment. In June a Yerevan court ordered two men to pay a small fine for their part in the incident. Three men of a similar description allegedly assaulted and critically injured opposition politician Ashot Manucharian in Yerevan on 22 April. Police reportedly suspended the investigation into the assault in June after failing to identify the perpetrators. In September police questioned a man identified by Ashot Manucharian as one of the perpetrators. However, no charges were brought.

- Human rights activist Mikael Danielyan was attacked outside his home by four unknown assailants on 30 March. He was reportedly punched in the head and kicked after he fell to the ground. He believed that the attack was related to his human rights work. President Kocharian reportedly ordered an investigation into the attack. However, the investigation failed to identify any perpetrators.

Conscientious objectors imprisoned

Conscientious objectors continued to be sentenced to prison, despite parliament's adoption in December 2003 of a law providing for unarmed military service or alternative civilian service, and despite Council of Europe requirements to free all those so imprisoned. The law, which provides terms of service of punitive length for conscientious objectors, entered into force in July.

As of the end of 2004 prison sentences of between one and two years had been imposed on 13 men, all Jehovah's Witnesses, as a result of their conscientious objection. Another was fined, and a further 11 had been released on parole.

[Previous](#) - [Home](#)

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