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ARMENIA

Republic of Armenia

Head of state: **Vahagn Khachaturyan (replaced Alen Simonyan in March, who replaced Armen Sarkissian in February)**

Head of government: **Nikol Pashinyan**

No progress was reported in investigating war crimes and other crimes under international law during the 2020 Armenia-Azerbaijan armed conflict and its immediate aftermath. Law enforcement officers used excessive force during anti-government protests. Freedom of expression was restricted as hundreds faced criminal prosecution for allegedly insulting officials. Amendments to the Mining Code made it easier to bypass public opposition and environmental concerns. Laws to combat discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity remained inadequate.

BACKGROUND

The security situation along the Armenia-Azerbaijan border remained tense with frequent skirmishes. Azerbaijani shelling inside Armenia proper, with strikes in the Syunik, Gegharkunik and Vayots Dzor provinces, resulted in over 200 deaths including two civilians. In October, Azerbaijan and Armenia agreed on the short-term deployment of an EU monitoring mission along their border.

The large-scale migration of Russians to Armenia prompted by the war aided economic performance but also contributed to an increase in rental prices and the cost of living generally.

In March, the European Committee of Social Rights expressed concern over insufficient measures taken by Armenia to improve occupational safety and health, the lack of a clearly defined policy on occupational health and safety and the failure to guarantee social security to all workers and their dependents.

VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

No substantive progress was made in investigating war crimes and other violations of international humanitarian law during the 2020 Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and in its immediate aftermath, or in bringing suspected perpetrators to justice.

People continued to be killed and injured by mines planted by Armenian forces in territories where they had ceded control to Azerbaijan. Azerbaijani authorities reported in October that 266 people had been injured by mines since the 2020 conflict, maintaining that the maps of minefields provided earlier by Armenia were not reliable.

According to an ICRC report issued in August, over 300 Armenians remained missing or unaccounted for since the 2020 fighting.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

Freedom of peaceful assembly was curtailed by the violent and disproportionate response of law enforcement authorities to protests.

A series of anti-government protests took place from April to June demanding the resignation of prime minister Nikol Pashinyan over negotiations on the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. The protests often took the form of large-scale demonstrations with protesters blocking streets and setting up tents. The response of the authorities on occasions was disproportionate, dispersing and arresting hundreds and injuring dozens.

In one of the most violent clashes, which took place on 3 June, police fired stun grenades and used excessive force to prevent thousands of demonstrators from approaching the Armenian parliament building. Fifty people, including 34 police officers, were said to require medical attention and dozens were arrested for taking part in “mass violence”.

Media rights watchdogs reported that at least 11 journalists were injured while covering protests from April to June; some were also obstructed from covering the demonstrations. By the end of the year no police officers had been charged with using

excessive force in connection with the anti-government demonstrations.

On 25 August, police dispersed a peaceful protest in the capital, Yerevan, against the Russian invasion of Ukraine, arresting 22 people. Detained protesters were held without access to a lawyer, or an interpreter for those who did not speak Armenian, for several hours and released without charge later that day.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The right to freedom of expression continued to be unduly restricted. Criminal prosecutions over the legitimate expression of criticism of the authorities had a chilling effect on free speech.

The trial of Yazidi human rights defender Sashik Sultanyan continued on fabricated charges of “inciting ethnic hatred” for voicing criticism of the authorities’ treatment of national minorities.

Following the passing in 2021 of legislative amendments criminalizing insulting public figures, more than 200 criminal cases were initiated on charges of grave insults against officials.

On 4 July, new amendments proposed by the Prosecutor General giving the government powers to block online content it considers harmful, without prior judicial oversight, prompted concerns regarding ever-increasing government censorship of free speech on the internet.

ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

On 18 June, parliament amended the Mining Code which makes it easier to bypass public opposition and environmental concerns, allowing mining projects to proceed despite protests. Local environmental activists raised concerns that the new law served the government’s intention to restart the Amulsar gold mine project in southern Armenia, halted due to environmental and other concerns and civil society protests.

LGBTI PEOPLE’S RIGHTS

LGBTI people continued to face discrimination on grounds of sexual

orientation and gender identity as laws to combat discrimination remained inadequate.

The authorities failed to address the recommendations made in 2021 by the Council of Europe’s Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, which included adopting effective legislation and “policies to strengthen action against discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sexual characteristics”.

On 17 May, the European Court of Human Rights found that the authorities had failed to protect an LGBTI bar owner from homophobic violence, including arson and physical and verbal attacks in 2012, and to carry out an effective investigation.

AUSTRALIA

Australia

Head of state: **Charles III (replaced Elizabeth II in September)**, represented by **David Hurley**

Head of government: **Anthony Albanese (replaced Scott Morrison in May)**

New laws restricted the right to peaceful protest in several states and territories. Discrimination against First Nations peoples continued. The rights of child detainees were violated. Australia accepted an offer by New Zealand to resettle refugees, but indefinite detention of asylum seekers continued. New carbon reduction targets were enshrined in legislation, but fell short of required levels.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

New South Wales, Tasmania and Victoria adopted new laws carrying large fines and prison sentences for participating in unauthorized protests.

In August, police in New South Wales arrested 34 peaceful protesters and a legal observer at a demonstration in Sydney against government inaction on climate change. Twenty-one people were charged under the Roads and Crimes Legislation Amendment Act 2022 and faced a two-year