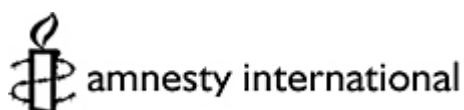


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Amnesty International Annual Report 2012 - Armenia

Head of state: **Serzh Sargsyan**
Head of government: **Tigran Sargsyan**
Death penalty: **abolitionist for all crimes**
Population: **3.1 million**
Life expectancy: **74.2 years**
Under-5 mortality: **21.6 per 1,000**
Adult literacy: **99.5 per cent**

The ban on public assemblies in the central square of the capital was lifted and an improved Law on Assemblies was adopted. However, concerns remained regarding the implementation in practice of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly. Torture and other ill- treatment in police stations also remained a concern.

Background

Large-scale protests led by the opposition Armenian National Congress started in February. They called for democratic reforms, the release of all opposition activists detained following the 2008 post-election protests and a new inquiry into clashes between police and protesters that left 10 people dead and more than 250 wounded. On 26 May, a general amnesty was declared for all the people imprisoned in connection with the 2008 protests. On 20 April, the President ordered a renewed investigation into the deaths of 10 people during the events, but at the end of the year no one had been brought to justice in connection with the deaths.

Freedom of assembly

There were a number of improvements regarding freedom of assembly. The ban on public assemblies in Yerevan's Freedom Square was lifted. The square had been closed to demonstrations since the March 2008 clashes.

However, concerns continued. The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights reported in May about the "unlawful and disproportionate impediments to the right of peaceful assembly, such as intimidation and arrest of participants, disruption of

transportation means and blanket prohibitions against assemblies in certain places".

The new Law on Assemblies was assessed by the Council of Europe's Venice Commission to be largely in accordance with international standards, but concerns remained. In this respect, the Commission highlighted the Law's blanket prohibition against assemblies organized within a certain distance from the presidential residence, the national assembly and courts; the seven-day notice period before a protest was allowed to take place as being unusually long; and the articles prohibiting assemblies which aimed at forcibly overthrowing the constitutional order, inciting racial, ethnic and religious hatred or violence as being too broad.

Torture and other ill-treatment

Torture and other ill-treatment remained a concern. In a report published in February, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention stated that many of the detainees and prisoners they interviewed had been subjected to ill-treatment and beatings in police stations. Police and investigators used ill-treatment to obtain confessions, and prosecutors and judges frequently refused to admit evidence of ill-treatment during court proceedings.

In August, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture reported that it had received a significant number of credible allegations of ill-treatment, some amounting to torture, by police during initial interviews.

Steps were taken during the year to establish a National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) – an independent body to monitor places of detention – in line with Armenia's obligations under the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture. A Torture Prevention Expert Council was set up within the Human Rights Defender's Office to act as the NPM, and the composition and guidelines for the NPM were discussed with NGOs and experts and approved. Recruitment for the NPM began in October.

- On 9 August, seven young opposition activists detained following a clash with police alleged that they were beaten and ill-treated while in police custody. The activists were reportedly beaten up and detained after they tried to intervene as police officers were searching another man. The activists circulated internet images described as being taken by themselves on their mobile phones, showing some of them with visible injuries on their faces and backs. All seven were charged with hooliganism and assault on state officials, but six were later released on bail. There had been no investigation into the allegations of police ill-treatment by the end of the year.

Prisoners of conscience

In December, 60 men were serving prison sentences for refusing to perform military service on grounds of conscience. The alternative service remained under military control.

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