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Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)
LEGAL AID BOARD

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Current information on freedom of assembly

Reporting in June 2010 *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* states:

"A senior United Nations official accused Armenian authorities of restricting civil liberties and banning dissenting viewpoints from the airwaves as she ended a fact-finding visit to Yerevan on June 18, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reports. Margaret Sekaggya, the special UN rapporteur on human rights defenders, met senior government and law-enforcement officials, judges, lawmakers, as well as opposition leaders and civil society representatives during the five-day trip. Speaking at a news conference at the conclusion of her trip, Sekaggya expressed concern about Armenia's human rights record and, in particular, "significant constraints imposed on the exercise of freedom of peaceful assembly in Armenia." "(Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (19 June 2010) *UN Official Deplores Rights Abuses In Armenia*)

The *United Nations in Armenia* in June 2010 quote from their Special Rapporteur Margaret Sekaggya, noting:

"I note with concern the significant constraints imposed on the exercise of freedom of peaceful assembly in Armenia. While regulation by the authorities of freedom of assembly is legitimate, I have received reports of unreasonable and arbitrary restrictions being imposed by law enforcement agencies. In a democratic society, the right to hold peaceful, open and public demonstrations should be available to all individuals without undue restrictions. I also note reports of restrictions being imposed upon indoor assemblies such as meetings and conferences, with regard to which human rights defenders have faced difficulties in gaining access to meeting space and facilities." (United Nations in Armenia (18 June 2010) *Statement of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Margaret Sekaggya, as she concludes her visit to Armenia*)

In May 2010 a report published by the *European Commission* states:

"In 2009, a few applications to organise rallies submitted by the opposition were rejected by the authorities. The Law on Rallies and Demonstrations is broadly compliant with Council of Europe standards but some of the provisions concerning the grounds for prohibiting conducting an assembly need further clarification. However, cases of police interference in dispersing participants during the rallies and the partial unavailability of public transportation from the regions to Yerevan in coincidence with opposition rallies were reported on a number of occasions in 2009." (European Commission (12 May 2010) *Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2009: Progress Report Armenia*, p.6)

The *International Federation for Human Rights* in May 2010 in a human rights compilation report includes the following commentary on freedom of assembly:

“Many delegations expressed concerns about the ongoing limitations to the right of peaceful assembly following amendments to the Law on Meetings, Rallies and Demonstrations in March 2008.” (International Federation for Human Rights (19 May 2010) *Armenia urged to investigate March 2008 violence and to guarantee freedom of expression and assembly*)

PanARMENIAN in May 2010 reports:

“Armenia’s Ombudsman Armen Harutyunyan presented an Ad-hoc Public Report on the Right to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly in the Republic of Armenia. The situation with the right of freedom of assembly in the Republic of Armenia in its current state does not correspond to the international standards in a number of respects, Harutyunyan told journalists during the report’s presentation.” (PanARMENIAN (25 May 2010) *RA Ombudsman presents report on right to freedom of peaceful assembly*)

In April 2010 a report released by *Freedom House* covering events of 2009 stated:

“In the aftermath of the 2008 postelection violence, the government imposed restrictions on freedom of assembly. The majority of opposition requests to hold demonstrations in 2009 were rejected, and the authorities allegedly restricted road access to the capital ahead of planned opposition rallies. Police also reportedly continued to use force to disperse some opposition gatherings.” (Freedom House (April 2010) *Freedom in the World - Armenia (2010)*)

Reviewing events of 2009 the *United States Department of State* in a document published in March 2010 note that:

“The constitution provides for freedom of assembly; however, authorities restricted this right in practice, particularly the assembly of individuals considered by the government to be political opponents.” (United States Department of State (11 March 2010) *2009 Human Rights Report: Armenia*, Section 2b ‘Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association’)

This report also notes:

“According to the local NGO Helsinki Committee of Armenia human rights, there were numerous instances of restricting freedom of assembly during the first six months of the year. Many of these involved authorities denying requests to hold rallies or demonstrations and marches in venues initially requested by organizers. Many of these requests were submitted by the political opposition.” (ibid)

Human Rights Watch in November 2009 note:

“Armenian authorities continue to restrict freedom of assembly by frequently banning rallies from taking place, usually on technical grounds. Of 84 times when opposition groups lodged notification of plans to hold demonstrations and rallies in 2009, only 28 were allowed to proceed. Opposition parties allege particular difficulties in securing meeting venues for indoor events.” (Human Rights Watch (15 November 2009) *UPR submission Armenia*, p.3)

A report published in 2009 by the *Armenian Helsinki Committee* states:

“The monitoring conducted during the period from 1 October 2008 to 31 March 2009 showed that about 60% of the demonstrations took place without serious obstacles, but in many cases, the conduct of demonstrations by the opposition and other non-governmental organizations was restricted...” (Armenian Helsinki Committee (2009) *Monitoring Of The Freedom Of Peaceful Assembly In Armenia*, p.24)

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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