

[Slide 1]

“The Status of Human Rights Defenders in Armenia”

Distinguished delegates, dear colleagues,

I am honored to present the joint submission by Human Rights House Yerevan on the status of human rights defenders in Armenia. This report addresses key areas, including the right to life, liberty, and security, fundamental freedoms, and the right to participate in public and political life. It also highlights the growing concern of strategic lawsuits against public participation—SLAPPs.

[Slide 2]

In the last UPR in 2020, Armenia accepted all recommendations related to the protection of human rights defenders, committing to fostering a safe and supportive environment for civil society, HRDs, and journalists. However, despite these commitments, the Armenian government has failed to provide public support for HRDs—an internationally recognized responsibility of the state.

[Slide 3]

Civil society organizations continue to face attacks from radical opposition forces, who seek to undermine their work for political and economic gain. This became particularly evident following the November 9 ceasefire agreement between Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia. The political crisis that followed led to violent protests, during which radical groups attacked government institutions, looted media offices, and issued threats against civil society organizations.

Despite numerous complaints filed by CSOs regarding these threats and harassment, the prosecutor general’s office and state investigative bodies have largely ignored them. This failure to act has fostered a climate of impunity, further endangering HRDs.

[Slide 4]

While the government generally respects the right to freedom of assembly, serious concerns persist regarding the disproportionate use of force by law enforcement. Protesters and journalists have been subjected to police brutality and arbitrary detentions, often without legal justification.

Despite clear evidence, law enforcement authorities have failed to prosecute officers responsible for injuring dozens of anti-government protesters. In some cases, the Armenian Investigative Committee has even defended such actions as necessary to prevent "mass disturbances."

Moreover, some protest groups have engaged in violent rhetoric, hate speech, and physical aggression toward those who do not share their political views. This alarming trend threatens democratic principles and must be addressed.

[Slide 5]

To address these issues, we call on the Armenian government to:

- Ensure accountability for law enforcement officers who use excessive force by conducting independent investigations and prosecuting those responsible.
- Promote de-escalation training for police and establish clear protocols to protect protesters, journalists, and the public.
- Safeguard the right to peaceful assembly and take firm action against both state and non-state actors engaging in violence.

[Slide 6]

Nationalist campaigns targeting HRDs remain a serious concern. False criminal complaints are used to intimidate activists and divert their energy away from their work.

Particularly at risk are **women's rights defenders and LGBT rights defenders**, who are frequently subjected to online harassment, public smear campaigns, and even physical attacks. These activists are often portrayed as threats to "traditional values" by far-right groups, nationalist media, and some political actors. Many have been doxxed, received death threats, or faced pressure to stop their work altogether.

On February 2024, there had been an attempted arson of the car, belonging to Daniel Ioannisyan – Program Coordinator at "Union of Informed Citizens" NGO. The attack, which took place outside his home, posed a direct threat not only to him but also to his family. Despite launching an investigation, authorities have failed to identify or prosecute the perpetrators. This is just one of many examples where HRDs—including those advocating for **women's rights and LGBT rights**—have faced life-threatening attacks without any accountability.

[Slide 7]

We recommend Armenia to

- Carry out an independent prompt, effective and impartial investigation into attacks on human rights defenders and end the atmosphere of impunity against human rights defenders.
- Register and compile statistics of threats and attacks against human rights defenders, along with information relating to their investigation and rates of prosecution.

[Slide 8]

Another alarming trend is the increasing use of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) to silence HRDs, journalists, and environmental activists. These lawsuits, often filed by powerful corporations or government officials, drain financial and emotional resources, discouraging others from speaking out on critical issues such as corruption and environmental protection.

Recent SLAPP cases include legal actions against media outlets critical of the government and environmental activists opposing controversial mining projects. Women's rights defenders, especially those advocating for sexuality education, have also faced targeted harassment through defamation lawsuits.

[Slide 9]

And we recommend Armenian government to

- Strengthen judicial training on SLAPP cases to ensure that judges can recognize and dismiss these abusive lawsuits promptly.
- Ensure that public officials and political figures refrain from using the legal system to suppress criticism and engage in constructive dialogue with civil society.

[Slide 10]

Human rights defenders play a vital role in protecting democracy and fundamental freedoms. However, in Armenia, they continue to face intimidation, violence, and legal harassment. If Armenia is committed to its human rights obligations, it must take concrete steps to ensure their protection.

We urge the Armenian government to take immediate action and for the international community to hold Armenia accountable for its commitments.

I thank you.