



ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԻ ՀԱՆՐԱՊԵՏՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՄՇԱԿԱՆ ՆԵՐԿԱՅԱՑՈՒՑԻՉ
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

2203/080/2014

Geneva, 27 February 2014

Dear Mrs. Frances Raday
Dear Mr. Frank La Rue,
Dear Mr. Maina Kiai,
Dear Mrs. Margaret Sckaggya,
Dear Mrs. Rashida Manjoo,

In reference to your letter dated September 10, 2013, I would like to inform that the Government of the Republic of Armenia has thoroughly examined the questions regarding the allegations of threats and harassment of women's non-governmental organizations and woman's human rights defenders in Armenia.

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Mrs. Frances Raday,
Chairperson-Rapporteur of the Working Group
on the issue of discrimination against
women in law and in practice,

Mr. Mr. Frank La Rue,
Special Rapporteur on the promotion and
protection of the right to freedom of
opinion and expression,

Mr. Maina Kiai,
Special Rapporteur on the rights to
freedom of peaceful assembly and of association,

Mrs. Margaret Sckaggya,
Special Rapporteur on the situation of
human rights defenders,

Mrs. Rashida Manjoo
Special Rapporteur on violence against
women, its causes and consequences.

The Government of the Republic of Armenia appreciates the efforts of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice, and its Special Rapporteurs for paying attention to the issues of human rights of women in Armenia.

Regarding the Communication of the Chairperson-Rapporteur of the Working Group, the Government of the Republic of Armenia stresses the following:

Guaranteeing full and comprehensive equality between women and men remains among Armenian Government's priorities in the field of protection of human rights. In recent years, a set of government projects have been implemented and documents triggering the policy in the field of gender equality have been adopted.

Upon the initiative and active participation of the civil society, the Law on Provision of equal rights and equal opportunities of women and men was drafted and was adopted by the National Assembly on May 20, 2013. However, recent developments regarding this law showed that despite the fact of adoption of the law, some of its elements require further modification.

Misunderstanding of some of the elements of the law and, among others, misinterpretation of the concept of "gender" initiated active public debate. As a result, strong supporters and strong opponents of this law made their voice heard in the media, the key factors of the debate being the goals and targets of the law. The Parliament has always paid great attention to the laws adopted by it in general, and particularly to this law. Active political debate in the civil society became the main reason of submission of amendments to the law. During the discussion of amendments in the National Assembly in October 2013 it was decided to postpone the adoption of amendments till next year.

Moreover, in response to this situation, the Women's Council headed by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia made the following statement on November 22, 2013:

"The Women's Council chaired by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia expresses concern at the current tension in society generated by misinterpretation of the terms "gender" and "gender equality". These misinterpretations are being articulated by certain non-governmental organizations, leaders of political movements, as well as politicians. The Women's Council finds it necessary to make certain clarifications concerning the meaning of the above-mentioned terms and in relation to their application in the context of international commitments by the Republic of Armenia.

In 1993 the Republic of Armenia assumed certain commitments aimed at eliminating all types of discrimination against women by ratifying a legally binding document, namely the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Types of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Article 2 of the Convention, in particular, refers to the problems related to the elimination of discrimination against women, to which the UN Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women has provided the following clarification: "Convention covers gender-based discrimination against women. The term "sex" here refers to

biological differences between men and women. The term “gender” refers to socially constructed identities and roles of women and men in society resulting in hierarchical relationships between women and men. This social positioning of women and men is affected by political, economic, religious and other factors. The application of the Convention to gender-based discrimination is made clear by the definition of discrimination contained in Article 1”.

In order to ensure the implementation of the provisions of Article 2 of the Convention, as well as Point 13 of the Committee’s recommendations (CEDAW/C/ARM/4/Rev.1) relating to Armenia, that is, accelerating the adoption of the law on gender equality, the law of the Republic of Armenia “On Provision of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men” was elaborated and adopted by the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia on 20 May 2013. The adoption of the law and its further implementation will represent serious progress in terms of ensuring equality between women and men in Armenia.

Being faithful to its commitments to respect, protect and promote women’s rights, to ensure the development of women, their progress, as well as actual and legal equality with men, the Republic of Armenia will continue realizing programs aimed at solving the abovementioned problems, including the 2011-2015 strategic program on gender policy and against gender-based violence. The Republic of Armenia will continue cooperation with international organizations, through preparing and presenting to the UN the 5th and 6th joint reports as required by CEDAW, and the 2nd report on the Universal Periodic Review process. The Republic of Armenia will also proceed with the implementation of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy for the years 2014-2017 and other important documents.

At the same time, being strongly concerned by the fact that representatives of some women NGOs are intimidated and harassed in social networks and offensive articles are published by some media outlets, we firmly advocate to end such behavior. We also urge the law enforcement bodies of the Republic of Armenia to be more vigilant in order to prevent any such cases and, if needed, to punish the perpetrators.

On 25 November, on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the Women’s Council reiterates its determination to continue efforts towards prevention and elimination of violence against women.

The Women’s Council finds it appropriate to attract more attention to the coverage of women’s rights and gender equality in the future, in cooperation with NGOs and international organizations”.¹

On November 25, 2013, during the press conference at the UN House representatives of international organizations in Armenia made the following Statement:

¹ The Statement is also available online on the Armenian Government official website - <http://gov.am/am/announcements/>

On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, representatives of the UN, US, EU, OSCE and Council of Europe Office in Yerevan welcome the 22 November statement of the Women's Council chaired by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia reaffirming the Government's commitment to gender equality.

'We highly commend the determination of the Women's Council to adhere to Armenia's international commitments on gender equality, including the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Types of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), to which Armenia is signatory since 1993. We also encourage Armenia's signature of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.

Furthermore we also support the Council's call to ensure the effective implementation of the law "On Provision of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men."

We also support the call to the law-enforcement bodies to undertake all the necessary measures to prevent and prosecute intimidation of individuals and organizations working on gender equality and women's rights.

We acknowledge the Armenian Government's efforts towards harmonization of domestic legislation with international standards, as well as implementation of provisions and commitments of international legal documents to which Armenia is party.¹

Gender equality is a cornerstone of democratic governance and sustainable development. We reiterate our willingness and determination to support the Government of Armenia in the further implementation of legislation on non-discrimination and equal rights and opportunities of men and women.²

According to the information received from the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Armenia there are 88 registered NGOs working in the field of women's human rights protection and none of them was ever exposed to any oppression from the state. They have always operated freely, without any territorial limitations. Recently Armenia has also co-sponsored UN resolution on "Promotion of the declaration on the rights and responsibility of individuals, groups and organs of society to promote and protect universally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms: protecting women human rights defenders.

Regarding the complaints of Women's Resource Center NGO we would like to inform the following:

According to the information provided by the Police and the Prosecutor's office of the Republic of Armenia, Mrs Lara Aharonyan, Head of the "Women's Resource Centre" NGO, submitted an allegation to the Police that on August 20, 2013 somebody named

² This Statement is available on UN webpage –

[http://www.am.undp.org/content/armenia/en/home/presscenter/speeches/2013/11/25/joint-statement-on-gender-equality/.](http://www.am.undp.org/content/armenia/en/home/presscenter/speeches/2013/11/25/joint-statement-on-gender-equality/)

“Mark Hovhannissyan” in Facebook social network has threatened her organization. During the same day at the Central Police station Lara Aharonyan explained aims of organization’s activities. In particular she stated that they assist victims of violence by providing them judicial consultations and through organization of various trainings. Next allegation Lara Aharonyan made on September 3, 2013 stressed that somebody under nickname “Vazgen King” threatened “Women’s Resource Center”.

With the effective work of the Police of the Republic of Armenia the perpetrator was identified and interrogated. He claimed receiving communications including non-appropriate content from the “Women’s Resource Center” since May 2013. According to the perpetrator he wrote obscene words in response to continuing flow of such communication from the Center.

The subsequent investigation has shown that in the actions of this person could not be qualified as a crime under article 137 of the Criminal Code – Threat of murder, to inflict serious damage to one’s health or to destroy property. At present the prosecutor’s office is carrying out additional verification actions.

Meanwhile, in case of further inquiries the Armenian Government would be ready to provide additional clarifications and information.

Please accept the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Charles Aznavour", with a stylized flourish above it.

Charles Aznavour