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Armenia must protect all forms of free expression

The Armenian authorities must respect the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and non-discrimination for all, Amnesty International said in a report published today.

“The ability to exercise the right to freedom of expression, even when the views expressed may be deemed controversial, and the ability to gather and demonstrate peacefully are essential for the defence of human rights and for a functioning civil society,” said Natalia Nozadze, Amnesty International’s researcher on Armenia.

Armenia: No space for difference exposes the harassment and intimidation suffered by civil society activists and journalists who question the mainstream view of the country’s conflict with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh as well as expose abuses in the army, whose reputation as a backbone of nation remains current due to unresolved conflict.

Through national and international obligations the Armenian authorities have committed to ensure that activists can carry out their work without interference, obstacles, discrimination or fear of retaliation.

“This contrasts starkly with the reality in Armenia – public officials condone violence against those with dissenting opinions. The targets of such attacks are often left without adequate protection and offences against them go unpunished, which has a chilling effect on others,” said Nozadze.

“Frequently the result is that journalists and human rights defenders self-censor on contentious issues, which further contributes to the shrinking space for difference of opinion within Armenian society.”

The report also reveals discrimination and attacks on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (LGBTI) people and the unwillingness of the authorities to protect them.

It documents cases of discrimination and suspected hate crime against LGBTI people in Armenia, as well as incidents of harassment and attacks including on human rights defenders, activists and journalists.

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