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Armenia: Attack on LGBTI activists must be investigated and perpetrators brought to justice

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The mob attack on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) activists in Armenia's Syunik region is a deplorable act of homophobic violence that needs effective response from the law enforcement authorities of Armenia.

Amnesty International spoke to one of the victims who explained that on 3 August in the village of Shurnukh in the southern Armenian region of Syunik, more than 30 people, most of them the village residents, attacked nine LGBTI activists. The victim said some of the attackers were using stones in what he described as "an attempt to lynch".

Local LGBTI group PINK Armenia told Amnesty International that seven LGBTI activists sustained injuries, including body bruises and scratches. Two people required hospitalisation.

The activists were visiting a house of one of their friends in Shurnukh, planning to spend a few days to rest there. One of the victims Amnesty International spoke to explained that two men from the nearby town of Goris who knew about their sexual orientation arrived in Shurnukh and mobilised local residents to attack the activists. Attackers used homophobic slurs as they chased the victims for half-an-hour. Eventually, police sent from the town of Goris intervened and helped activists to leave the village.

According to information available to Amnesty International the police launched an investigation, questioned the victims and detained several suspected attackers on 3 August, releasing them the next day. We are not aware of any criminal charges being brought.

Amnesty International calls on the Armenian authorities to fully and effectively investigate the attack and bring the perpetrators to justice. The Armenian authorities must take all necessary steps to unmask any discriminatory motive based on sexual orientation behind the attack.

Article 63 of the Armenian Criminal Code provides for criminal responsibility and aggravating circumstances when a crime is motivated by "ethnic, racial or religious hatred", but not on any other protected grounds, including sexual orientation and gender identity. Amnesty International calls on Armenia to introduce laws that explicitly include sexual orientation and gender identity as grounds for prosecution of hate crimes.

Background information

Even though consensual sexual relations between men were decriminalized in Armenia in 2003,¹ LGBTI people face discrimination in many areas of life and LGBTI human rights defenders and

¹ Consensual sexual relations between women were never criminalized in Armenia.

activists face challenges in the face of social and political homophobia.² Homophobia and transphobia are deeply ingrained in the society in Armenia,³ while politicians and media often engage in advocacy of homophobic or transphobic hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence.⁴

Authorities in Armenia have generally failed to respond to discrimination and violence perpetrated on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, and in some cases, have even condoned such attacks. Few victims of hate crimes on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity report those crimes to the police, for reasons including: the risk of public exposure, and in particular, that their families will find out about their sexual orientation or gender identity; lack of trust in the police, and fear of further victimization at the hands of the police.⁵ When LGBTI people do report hate crimes, these are not effectively investigated. The local LGBTI group PINK Armenia recorded 198 cases of hate crime on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity between 2010 and 2015, of which 50% had been recorded in 2015. Many such cases were not reported to police, largely due to lack of trust in police and a lack of knowledge on how to deal with law enforcement authorities.⁶

Public Document

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² Amnesty International, "Less Equal: LGBTI Human Rights Defenders in Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, And Kyrgyzstan", EUR 04/7574/2017, 2017.

³ Research by the Pew Research Center found that 98% of people aged 18-34 in Armenia felt that homosexuality "should not be accepted by society" - Pew Research Center, "Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe", Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2017.

⁴ Amnesty International, "Less Equal: LGBTI Human Rights Defenders in Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, And Kyrgyzstan", EUR 04/7574/2017, 2017.

⁵ Amnesty International, "Armenia: No Space for Difference", EUR 54/002/2013, 2013; PINK Armenia, "Hate Crimes and Other Hate Motivated Incidents against LGBT People in Armenia," 2016.

⁶ PINK Armenia, "Hate Crimes and Other Hate Motivated Incidents against LGBT People in Armenia," 2016.