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ARMENIA: DEATH IN CUSTODY HEIGHTENS FEARS ABOUT TREATMENT OF  
POLITICAL DETAINEES

Armenian authorities should explain how opposition activist, Ardavast Manukian, died in detention while awaiting trial, Amnesty International said today.

News of Ardavast Manukian's death on 16 May follows allegations of human rights violations, including torture, of other defendants in this case.

Amnesty International is calling on the Armenian authorities to carry out prompt and impartial investigations into the allegations that defendants were tortured in detention and into assaults on defence lawyers.

Ardavast Manukian -- who was in his thirties and a father of three -- died reportedly from extensive blood loss in hospital in Yerevan, the capital, 10 days after being transferred from the prison infirmary. It has been alleged that for several weeks prior to his death adequate medical care was denied to Ardavast Manukian for a range of health problems.

Ardavast Manukian was among some 20 members of the opposition Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) who were arrested in December 1994 on charges ranging from withholding information to murder. They are in the custody of the State Directorate for National Security. At least three defendants were reportedly beaten in detention, as a result of which one is said to have a broken wrist and another a broken jaw.

Lawyers for the defendants have also been physically attacked by unknown assailants. It has been reported that several defendants were denied prompt and regular access to their lawyers in the period immediately after their arrest, and that on 13 March all access by defence lawyers to the defendants and to case materials was suspended by the Procurator General pending completion of the prosecution investigation.

Amnesty International is pointing out to the authorities that denial of adequate access to legal counsel is a violation of international fair trial standards.

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