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ARMENIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS FOR INVESTIGATIONS INTO
BEATINGS OF OPPOSITION SUPPORTERS FOLLOWING ELECTION PROTESTS

Amnesty International is alarmed at reports that a number of opposition supporters were beaten in Armenia during and after their detention by law enforcement officials following protests which turned violent over last month's disputed elections.

"It is totally unacceptable for law enforcement officials to ill-treat anybody," Amnesty International said today. "The authorities should ensure that all alleged beatings are the subject of prompt, impartial and comprehensive investigations, with the findings made public and anyone identified as responsible brought to justice."

The human rights organization is also demanding that all those detained be granted prompt access to a defence lawyer of their own choice.

Official results from the 22 September presidential elections in Armenia which returned the incumbent, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, for a further five-year term were fiercely disputed by supporters of opposition candidate Vazgen Manukyan. Tensions came to a head after three days of street protests in the capital, Yerevan, on 25 September. Supporters of Vazgen Manukyan forcibly entered the grounds of the parliament building leading to clashes with law enforcement officials. Those injured as a result, put at 59 by official sources, included the parliamentary speaker and his deputy, were reportedly assaulted by members of the crowd.

A ban on demonstrations is now in force. Criminal proceedings are said to have been instituted against eight members of parliament on charges which include an attempted coup d'état. Unofficial sources, however, claim that more than 100 opposition supporters were picked up in a wave of detentions after the events at parliament. Many were beaten while being detained or when in custody.

Seven men, for example, were allegedly beaten by armed men in camouflage who detained them on 26 September at the headquarters of a small opposition party close to Liberty Square in Yerevan. According to an eye-witness the men were dragged out to a police van, while being punched and kicked. Agassi Arshakyan, campaign manager for an opposition presidential candidate, reported following his release on 3 October that he was beaten while in custody and he also witnessed the severe beating of opposition journalist Gagik Mkrtchyan. Ruben Akopyan, a member of parliament of the suspended opposition Armenia Revolutionary Federation, is said to have a damaged eardrum and facial injuries from beatings in custody. Although he has been seen by a prison doctor, it is alleged that his injuries have not been officially recorded.

Amnesty International does not dispute the right of law enforcement agencies to take all legitimate measures to maintain and restore public order. However, the organization has repeatedly addressed the Armenian authorities about allegations of ill-treatment by law enforcement agencies, and about concerns regarding unfair trials in two major ongoing political trials.

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