

**ARMENIA:
IMPRISONED CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS**

**PUBLIC
AI EUR 54/02/99**

May 1999

**CASE DETAILS OF CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS BELIEVED TO BE IMPRISONED
IN ARMENIA AS PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE (as of 4 May 1999)**

Full name	Year of Birth	Affiliation
SAMVEL MANUKIAN	1978	RELIGIOUS GROUPS - JEHOVAH'S WITNESS
YEREM NAZARETIAN	1976	RELIGIOUS GROUPS - JEHOVAH'S WITNESS
GAGIK OKHANIAN	1977	RELIGIOUS GROUPS - JEHOVAH'S WITNESS
ARTUR STEPANIAN	1976	RELIGIOUS GROUPS - JEHOVAH'S WITNESS
KAREN VOSKANIAN	1980	RELIGIOUS GROUPS - JEHOVAH'S WITNESS

Samvel MANUKIAN, a Jehovah's Witness, stood trial on **15 July 1997** in Vanadzor, and was sentenced to three years' imprisonment for the military crime of desertion (Article 255 part a) of the Armenian Criminal Code). He is serving his term in Kosh Ordinary Regime Corrective Labour Colony, and will be due for release on 16 May 2000, should he serve his term in full.

Samvel Manukian was born on 15 November 1978 and left Armenia in April 1996, before he reached the age of conscription. He lived in Russia for a while, before returning home on 28 November 1996. He was at liberty for only a few days, as representatives of the District Military and Registration Enlistment Office (DMREO) detained him at his home on 4 December and took him by force to military unit 63853 in Vanadzor. He reports that he was severely beaten there, and forcibly dressed in a military uniform after his own clothes were torn from him, in spite of his written statements that he wanted to be tried as a civilian for refusing military service (under Armenian law the offence of "evading regular call-up to active military service" does not fall under the separate section of military crimes, because the person concerned, having avoided conscription, had not legally fallen under army jurisdiction at that point).

After two days at the military unit Samvel Manukian managed to escape, and spent the next five months staying with a friend. During this time he sent several statements to relevant officials noting his refusal to perform military service, and the reasons for it, and requesting to be brought to trial rather than face forcible conscription. His family contacted the procurator's office and believed they had reached an agreement for him to face prosecution, so Samvel Manukian eventually returned home around 15 days before the trial was due to take place. On

16 May 1997, however, eight representatives of the DMREO detained him at his home and Samvel Manukian was held for the next two months in military custody in solitary confinement. He was also reportedly beaten severely during this time.

Yerem NAZARETIAN, also a Jehovah's witness, was born on 20 September 1976, was tried by Ararat District People's Court in the city of Vedi on **24 November 1997**, and sentenced to two years' imprisonment under Article 75 of the Criminal Code for evading military service. He is believed to have been recently transferred from Sovetashen investigation-isolation prison, to Kosh ordinary regime corrective labour colony. He will be due for release by October 1999 at the latest.

Yerem Nazaretian received notification of his call-up papers in autumn 1994. He underwent the medical examination, and also straightaway notified the Zod District MREO in Ararat Region that he was unable to perform compulsory military service on religious and conscientious grounds. He repeated these statements at various intervals, asking either to be able to perform alternative service or to be prosecuted for his refusal to perform military service. Like other young men in such a situation Yerem Nazaretian left his home, to avoid being forcibly taken into the army, and went into hiding. At one point he was caught and taken to a DMREO Assembly Point, but managed to escape. He married in August 1997 and went to live at the home of his father-in-law. He was eventually arrested there on 22 October - at around 10.00pm that evening some men are said to have gained entrance to the home saying they were plumbers, and then detained him.

On 23 October Yerem Nazaretian wrote to the public prosecutor of Vedi district, again explaining the reasons which underlay his inability to perform compulsory military service. Yerem Nazaretian stated that after studying the Bible and considering himself a true Christian, his conscience did not allow him to serve in the army. He was prepared to bear criminal responsibility for this, but emphasized that he was also willing to perform alternative work. "Article 23 of the Constitution of the Armenian Republic guarantees each the right to freedom of conscience and religion", he wrote, "Respect my human dignity".

Gagik OKHANIAN, a 21-year-old Jehovah's Witness, was reportedly removed from his home on 8 December 1998 by three men in civilian clothing. They showed no documents, but are believed to be from the Military Office of the Sovetakhan district of Yerevan, the capital. Gagik Okhanian had written to the office on 24 January that year, stating that his convictions prevented him from performing military service and expressing his willingness to serve an alternative, civilian service. He is believed to be held in military unit No. 70179 in the Vajots region. His family allege that on 12 and 13 December Gagik Okhanian was beaten by a senior officer at the unit when he refused to put on military uniform. The military police in the city of Baik, to whose custody the military unit wished to transfer Gagik Okhanian, reportedly refused to accept him because of his visible injuries and he was returned to the unit's guardhouse, dressed only in his underclothes. Amnesty International does not know whether Gagik Okhanian has been formally charged or tried but believes him to be still detained.

Former inmates of Kosh Ordinary Regime Corrective Labour Colony have reported that **Artur STEPANIAN**, a 22-year-old Jehovah's Witness from Yerevan, is serving a sentence for desertion there, having declared himself a conscientious objector on religious grounds. No further details are as yet known.

Karen VOSKANIAN was sentenced on *6 September 1998* under Article 257a of the Criminal Code to three years' imprisonment for desertion, to be served

in a disciplinary battalion. He is believed to have been transferred first from Gyumri investigation-isolation prison to Kosh ordinary regime corrective labour colony and then to a disciplinary battalion in Khrazdan to serve his term of imprisonment.

He was born on 11 April 1980 and received education up to secondary school level. He became a Jehovah's Witness in 1993.

On 8 May 1998 two military personnel came unannounced to Karen Voskanian's home in Yerevan. They took him to the Mashtots DMREO. Karen Voskanian attempted to escape, knowing that otherwise he would be forcibly conscripted, but his attempt failed. On recapture, he was heavily beaten, reportedly in front of his mother. According to his parents, Karen Voskanian was detained by the military police for nearly six days before being sent to military unit number 56952 in Gyumri on 14 May; there he continued to be ill-treated. Throughout this time he apparently repeated his conscientious objection to military service and requested that he be allowed to perform alternative service.

On 20 June 1998 Karen Voskanian refused to take a military oath and was taken into the custody of the military police in Gyumri. His parents applied to *Artur Bagdasarian, the Chairman of the National Assembly Commission on State and Legal Problems, who reportedly communicated with the military prosecutor. The reply received from the military prosecutor was reportedly to the effect that Karen Voskanian had been invited to the military prosecutor's office of Gyumri; there he was informed that military service is not considered to be a violation of freedom of conscience nor in breach of the constitution, and that in the case of refusal to perform military service Karen Voskanian would face charges.*

Amnesty International is calling on the Armenian government to:

- release immediately and unconditionally, Samvel Manukian, Yeram Nazaretian, Gagik Okhanian, Artur Stepanian and Karen Voskanian, and all others imprisoned for their refusal on conscientious grounds to perform military service, and to refrain from imprisoning anyone else as a conscientious objector;
- introduce without delay legislative provisions to ensure that a civilian alternative of non-punitive length is available to all those whose religious, ethical, moral, humanitarian, philosophical, political or other conscientiously-held beliefs preclude them from performing military service;
- establish independent and impartial decision-making procedures for applying a civilian alternative to military service;
- and to ensure that after the introduction of a civilian alternative service, all relevant persons affected by military service, including those already serving in the army, have

information made available to them about the right to conscientious objection and how to apply for alternative service.

ARMENIA BEFORE THE UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE (HRC)

At the end of October 1998, Armenia's report under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (to which Armenia acceded in 1993) was considered by the United Nations Human Rights Committee (HRC). In advance of the hearing, a document, *Armenia: Comments on the Initial Report submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Committee* (AI Index: EUR 54/05/98) was produced, which formed the basis of a well attended briefing meeting at the UN. Amnesty International's key concerns were raised with the Armenian delegation by members of the Committee and were reflected in the Committee's *Concluding Observations*, as adopted on 2 and 4 November. The Amnesty International Public Statement (AI Index: EUR 54/06/98) is a useful summary of the *Concluding Observations*. The main parts of the Observations concerning conscientious objection are as follows:

- The HRC, in Point 18 of its Concluding Observations on the report submitted by Armenia as part of its obligations under Article 40 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), "*regrets the lack of legal provision for alternative service to military conscription in case of conscientious objection.*";
- In the same Point the Committee "*deplores that conscientious objectors have been conscripted by force and punished under military courts and that there have been instances of reprisals against their family members.*"

The date fixed for submission of Armenia's second report to the HRC is October 2001.