

PUBLIC

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19 March 2008

UA 70/08 Arbitrary arrest/Fear of torture or other ill-treatment

ARMENIA Aleksandr Arzoumanian (m)] Opposition politicians
 Ararat Zurabian (m)]
 Dozens of opposition activists

Opposition politicians Aleksandr Arzoumanian and Ararat Zurabian were arrested on 10 March in the capital, Yerevan. Dozens of opposition activists have also been arrested before and since the disputed presidential election of 19 February. All are at risk of torture or other ill-treatment; there have been numerous reports of the beating of detainees while in police custody, while others believe they have been imprisoned solely on account of their political beliefs.

Aleksandr Arzoumanian and Ararat Zurabian were taken to the National Security Service headquarters in Yerevan, and according to government sources have been charged with "plotting the violent overthrow of government". Warrants have been issued for the arrest of a number of other prominent opposition figures, and they have reportedly gone into hiding.

Aleksandr Arzoumanian was foreign minister in the late 1990s under the presidency of Levon Ter-Petrosian and was head of his campaign headquarters for the recent election. In May 2007, Aleksandr Arzoumanian was arrested on charges of money laundering, but was released on 6 September after investigators were apparently unable to substantiate the charges. Ararat Zurabian is Chairman of the Board of the former ruling party, the Armenian National Movement.

According to official results the presidential election of 19 February was won by Serge Sarkisian, Prime Minister and designated successor to outgoing President Robert Kocharian, with 52.8 per cent of the vote, while his main rival, Levon Ter-Petrosian, came second with 21.5% of the vote. Levon Ter-Petrosian and his supporters claim that in fact he won the election. International observers said the election was broadly in line with international standards, but noted various shortcomings, especially with the count.

Following the elections Levon Ter-Petrosian's supporters mounted constant demonstrations in central Yerevan. Police dispersed the crowds early in the morning of 1 March, using excessive force, according to many reports. Eight people were reportedly killed, and 131 injured; further violence was reported in the city later that day, and President Kocharian declared a state of emergency. At that time Levon Ter-Petrosian was reported to have been placed under house arrest, although the authorities denied this. The authorities also claimed that some of the protestors were armed, while the opposition, as well as some human rights activists, have claimed that the authorities planted arms caches at Freedom Square.

The state of emergency included tight limits on reporting, with only government reports able to be published by Armenian media outlets. However, Amnesty International has received reports from several human rights organizations alleging that nationwide up to 100 activists have been arrested, among them members, and especially campaign staff, of the Armenian National Movement, which supported Levon Ter-Petrosian. Members of another opposition party, the Republic Party, and officials who allegedly refused to give false statements against opposition activists, have also been arrested. Amnesty International has further received allegations that some of those arrested have been tortured or otherwise ill-treated.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Armenian, English, Russian, French or your own language:

- expressing concern that Aleksandr Arzoumanian and Ararat Zurabian appear to have been arrested solely to prevent their political activities and seeking assurances that they will not be tortured or otherwise ill-treated;
- urging the authorities to ensure that Aleksandr Arzoumanian and Ararat Zurabian are given full access to legal representation of their own choosing;
- expressing concern at reports that large numbers of opposition activists are being detained and have not been given access to legal representation or their families;
- expressing concern at allegations that some of those arrested have been tortured, and urging the authorities to ensure that all such allegations are investigated promptly and impartially.

APPEALS TO:

Foreign Minister

Vartan Oskanian
Foreign Minister of the Republic of Armenia
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
2 Republican Square
Yerevan 0010, Armenia

Fax: +37410 543925

Salutation: Dear Minister

Police chief

Hayk Harutyunyan
Chief of Republic of Armenia Police
130 Nalbandian Street,
Yerevan, Armenia

Fax: +37410 520 310

Salutation: Dear Lt-Gen Harutyunyan

Prosecutor-General

Agvan Hovsepyan
Prosecutor-General
5, V. Sargsyan Street
Yerevan 375010
Republic of Armenia

Fax: +37410 511 646

Email: info@genproc.am

Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General

COPIES TO:

Dr Armen Harutiunian
Ombudsman of the Republic of Armenia
56A Pushkin Street
Yerevan 0002
Armenia

Fax: +374 10 530 858

Email: ombuds@ombuds.am

and to diplomatic representatives of Armenia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 30 April 2008.