



The UIA Institute for the Rule of Law

STATEMENT

Paris, August 3, 2023

Authorities Must Adequately Safeguard Lawyers' Security in Armenia

The UIA-IROL expresses its grave concern over recent acts of violence perpetrated against lawyers in Armenia. It calls upon the relevant authorities in Armenia to take all necessary steps to adequately ensure that lawyers can do their work safely, freely, and independently in all circumstances.

The UIA-IROL was informed that on June 7, 2023, at the Police Central Department of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, a group of police officers beat, arrested, and subjected lawyer Karen Alaverdyan to a search in connection with the performance of his professional activities.

More precisely, Mr. Alaverdyan reportedly arrived at the Police Central Department to provide legal assistance to one of his clients, including inquiring about the reasons for his client's arrest earlier that day. It is UIA-IROL's understanding that, despite his requests, the lawyer was initially denied access to his client. However, when Mr. Alaverdyan eventually entered the room, he saw his client lying on the floor, "handcuffed from behind," while several police officers were beating him. It was reportedly at that moment that the lawyer tried to intervene in defense of his client, but he was himself subjected to undue physical force, pushed to the ground, handcuffed, beaten, and sprayed in the face with a substance similar to tear gas. Mr. Alaverdyan was also briefly detained and, in contradiction to national legal requirements, the information about the detention was not promptly communicated to the President of the Chamber of Advocates.

According to the information received, following a complaint filed by Mr. Alaverdyan a preliminary investigation was launched, and as more recently reported, the National Security Service (NSS) initiated a public criminal prosecution against several police officers, who were suspended as a preventive measure. It is our understanding, however, that, following the incident, the police officers denied the incident, and Mr. Alaverdyan was subsequently charged with "hooliganism" and obstruction of legitimate police actions.

The UIA-IROL firmly condemns the violence used against lawyer Karen Alaverdyan while performing his professional duties. This situation is particularly worrisome since similar incidents of violence against lawyers Marzpet Avagyan and Emanuel Ananyan occurred at another Yerevan police station last February.

Acts of violence against lawyers not only affect the directly impacted legal professionals but also undermine the crucial role lawyers play in upholding the Rule of Law and defending human rights. This role must be adequately recognized, supported and protected, in law and in practice, in accordance with customary international law and international principles.

UIA-IROL

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In this regard, the UIA-IROL recalls the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers that explicitly provide that: “(g)overnments shall ensure that lawyers (a) are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference (...)” (Principle 16) and “(w)here the security of lawyers is threatened as a result of discharging their functions, they shall be adequately safeguarded by the authorities” (Principle 17).

The UIA-IROL has been further informed that the Chamber of Advocates of the Republic of Armenia strongly voiced its support for Mr. Alaverdyan, requesting appropriate investigation and tirelessly drawing the attention of both the Armenian authorities and the international community to this worrisome situation, including by organizing strikes on June 26 and July 11-13.

The UIA-IROL welcomes the Chamber of Advocates’ commitment to the defense and promotion of the core principles of the legal profession. It is our understanding that, thanks to this mobilisation, several favorable measures to protect lawyers against police violence are currently being considered by the Armenian authorities. The UIA-IROL welcomes these initial positive developments and encourages Armenian authorities to engage in and/or continue a constructive dialogue with representatives of the Chamber of the Advocates so that concrete, successful, and comprehensive strategies are promptly planned and implemented in order to prevent, in law and in practice, all future incidents of violence against lawyers.

The UIA-IROL particularly urges Armenian authorities to:

- Take immediate and effective steps to ensure that lawyers are able to perform all their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment, interference, or fear of reprisal;
- Guarantee lawyers’ physical and psychological integrity in all circumstances, and particularly during and immediately after exercising their professional duties; and
- Ensure that acts of violence and threats against lawyers are adequately investigated and prosecuted and perpetrators of such acts are brought to justice.

The UIA-IROL takes this opportunity to express its support for and solidarity with the Chamber of Advocates of the Republic of Armenia, as well as all Armenian individual lawyers who continue to fully assume and defend their core role in the defense of human rights and the Rule of Law in the Republic of Armenia.

More about UIA-IROL

The Institute for the Rule of Law of the International Association of Lawyers (UIA-IROL) promotes the Rule of Law and supports and defends, in particular, (1) lawyers, judges and human rights defenders who are harassed, threatened and/or persecuted in the exercise of their professions, (2) the independence of the legal and judicial professions, and (3) the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, especially in defense of human rights.

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