**ACTIVITIES OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER OF ARMENIA**

**IN THE AREA OF DISCRIMINATION DURING 2016-2019**

**Cooperation with ECRI**

The Office of the Human Rights Defender of Armenia (HRDO) has a strong cooperation with Council of Europe’s Anti-Racism Commission (ECRI). As a result of which, the HRDO representative participated in the conference on revising standards for Equality Bodies in 2017 and in the launch event of the given standards in 2018.

In June 2018, a round-table discussion on “Combating racial discrimination and intolerance in Armenia” was held organized by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and the HRDO and Ministry of Justice of Armenia. The event aimed at promoting national discussion on combating racial discrimination and intolerance. During the meeting, issues related to the legislative and institutional framework for the fight against discrimination, integration policy, refugees and other immigrants were discussed. Among other topics, the ECRI’s 2016 report on Armenia was also presented. Problems encountered in the practice were also brought up and possible directions toward their solution were discussed. Both state authorities, representatives from international organizations, as well as civil society organizations attended the conference.

**COOPERATION WITH the Council of Europe**

A new cooperation project with regard to strengthening access to justice through non-judiciary redress mechanisms for victims of discrimination, hate crime and hate speech in Eastern Partnership countries has been initiated. The HRDO is one of the main partners of the project. This cooperation project is implemented by the Anti-Discrimination Department of the Council of Europe from February 2019 – December 2021, and funded by the European Union under the Partnership for Good Governance phase II for the Eastern Partnership Countries. The project aims to improve access to justice for victims of discrimination, hate crime and hate speech through non-judiciary redress mechanisms; to strengthen the capacity and cooperation of Equality bodies/Ombuds offices with NGO’s partners; to raise awareness towards non-discrimination and to increase the visibility of national redress mechanisms.

**PROTECTION OF RIGHTS OF LGBTI PERSONS**

As a National Human Rights Institution, the Human Rights Defender of Armenia (Defender) is entitled to protect and promote all human rights and examine a wide variety of issues, including the ones related to gander based discrimination. Accordingly, the Defender also receives and thoroughly investigates complaints that relate to the protection rights of LGBTI persons. Furthermore, the HRDO also review and provided its recommendations with regard to the draft law on anti-discrimination, as well as HRDO representatives took part in all meetings and discussions on the draft law. In general, the HRDO aims to strengthen its anti-discrimination mandate, in particular regarding LGBTI and women’s rights.

As an example, on August 3, at 21:08, the hotline of the HRDO received a call from the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Vanadzor Office that the residents of the village of Shurnukh, Syunik Province, demanded a group of people to leave the village, based on the sexual orientation of the group members.  The caller also expressed concern about the possibility of the aforementioned group being subjected to violence and asked the Defender’s support.[[1]](#footnote-1) Following the phone call, the Defender took all necessary steps within his mandate concerning the named incident, as well as for ensuring the safety of the group members.

Another example of the activities of the HRDO with regard to the protection of rights of LGBTI persons concern the incident that took place on 14 August, 2018 at the Kentron Police Unit. The HRDO received a phone call via hotline regarding the necessity of curtain actions to be taken to ensure the safety of the participants of the incident conditioned by their sexual orientation. The HRDO immediately contacted the Police and raised the issue. As a result of good cooperation, the video published by the Police was edited and the relevant participants’ faces were blurred.

Earlier this year, the Defender applied to the Police and Investigative Committee on the basis of publicly available information about the attack on E.T based on the latter’s sexual orientation[[2]](#footnote-2). The HRDO requested clarifications in respect of the process of the case, and the question of comprehensive, complete and objective examination of the circumstances of the case has also been raised. Besides, non-official discussions have also been held with competent authorities.

Within the action “Promotion and Protection of Human Rights” financed by the European Union and being implemented by UNDP, in partnership with UNFPA and UNICEF, as a part of the European Union’s Human Rights Budget Support Program, a number of capacity development and awareness raising activities are implemented for the HRDO focusing, inter alia, on such areas as human rights monitoring and evaluation, prohibition of torture and ill-treatment, child rights and anti-discrimination. Within the same project, the HRDO is envisaged to be designates as Equality Body by the adoption of the Law on Equality (law against discrimination).

1. See <http://www.ombuds.am/en/media/79568.html> , <http://www.ombuds.am/en/media/8949.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See <https://news.am/eng/news/438787.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)