

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting  
Working Session 4, Freedom of Assembly and Association

September 21, 2016

As delivered by

Mr. Vaheh Gevorgyan, Head of the OSCE and Conventional Arms Control Division, Arms Control and International Security Department, MFA of Armenia

Ms. Moderator,

First I would like to congratulate all participants for the international Day of Peace. The UN General Assembly has declared September 21 as a day devoted to strengthening the ideals of peace, both within and among all nations and peoples.

September 21 Armenia celebrates the day of independence. We are happy that international day of peace and our national day of independence coincide in rather symbolic manner.

Armenian people achieved independence through claiming and exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms, particularly freedom of peaceful assembly and association. These rights turned to be an unprecedented national mobilization asset and throughout twenty five years of independence it ensured strong participation of political forces and civil society in democratic processes.

I would like to seize this opportunity to present our recent national practice in this regard. Armenia closely cooperated with the ODIHR and Venice Commission to produce an appropriate law governing peaceful assembly.

Yet it is one thing to have good laws and another to implement them efficiently on the ground given the reality of different situations that may arise during or before demonstrations and rallies. Apparently, not each and every situation can be prescribed by legislation. However, there is an essential condition which empowers freedom of assembly and that is its peaceful nature and objective. The international law particularly ICCPR which is also mainstreamed in the OSCE commitments recognizes freedom of the peaceful assembly.

There are situations when the borders between peaceful protest and armed violent actions are very blurred. The support of armed and violent actions and demands in the immediate venue of the standoff cannot be considered as peaceful assembly. This was the case when an armed group violently seized one of the main police stations in Yerevan on July 17. As a result of these actions three policemen were killed and public order was also threatened by group of people who tried to approach the venue of standoff in support of the armed group.

Fortunately, no other casualties were reported and the police was able to restore the public order. The actions of the police are still being assessed in all their details. The Preliminary assessment revealed certain deficiencies. On 15 August 2016 the Police of the Republic of Armenia informed that on the grounds of the preliminary results received in the course of the internal disciplinary proceedings set up to examine the events that took place in the vicinity of the seized police station on 19 July 2016 and from the night of 29 July 2016 to 30 July 2016, 13 policemen have been subjected to disciplinary liability by the order of the Head of the Police. The disciplinary liability was imposed for improper performance of duties.

Based on the data received during the disciplinary proceedings opened into the excessive use of force by certain policemen, the official duties of five of them have been terminated and the Special investigative service will make a legal assessment of their actions.

Also eight persons were arrested with charges of impeding and attacking journalists. The investigation was accomplished and the case of four persons has been already submitted to the court.

Armenia is strongly committed to ensuring freedom of peaceful assembly and will further create enabling conditions to this end.

Thank you.