

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting  
WORKING SESSION 10

Fundamental Freedoms I (continued), including freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly and associations, national human rights institutions and the role of civil society in protection of human rights, and freedom of movement

As delivered by Mr. Davit Knyazyan, Head of the OSCE and Conventional Arms Control Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia

Mr. Moderator,

We thank distinguished speakers for shaping agenda of our discussion and highlighting current challenges in upholding fundamental freedoms. Our special thanks go to the Human Rights Defenders of Armenia, Mr. Tatoyan for sharing experience of his Office in context of recent popular movement in Armenia.

The Government of Armenia is committed to protection and practical application of fundamental freedoms. Freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly and association are indicative of the overall human rights situation and level of democracy in countries.

The citizens of Armenia were able to freely exercise their freedoms in the course of popular movement this spring. Law enforcement agencies exercised exemplary restraint and responsible behaviour and facilitated exercise by the citizens of their rights to freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly and association, while at the same time ensuring law and order. The close and constructive cooperation of Armenian authorities with the OSCE institutions, in particular ODIHR and RFOM and OSCE Office in Yerevan was instrumental in promoting implementation of relevant OSCE commitments. The visible result of such cooperation is political maturity and legal literacy of the Armenian society.

National human rights institutions and civil society are important partners for governments of participating States in protection of fundamental freedoms. Having said this, I would like to stress the word "independent" in regard to both. The Office of Ombudsman of Armenia, Armenian NGOs and media have closely monitored the popular movement and rallies and communicated their concerns and proposals on alleged incidents of misconduct by law enforcement agencies. Authorities have closely cooperated with the Office of Ombudsman to address the concerns, raised by the latter. Indeed, trust towards Office of the Ombudsman by both Government and civil society enabled it to efficiently monitor and address human rights situation.

Severe limitation of the freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly and association create conducive environment for radicalization of society, in particular youth. Limitation of space for democratic public debate creates serious risks of growth of intolerance, discrimination and hate crimes, which can be diverted against ethnic or religious group. Therefore continuous and

systematic violation of fundamental freedoms poses serious security risks. We recommend the ODIHR and the RFOM to thoroughly monitor and examine such violations and address in line with their early warning mandate.

Thank You.