

DISCRIMINATION AND TOLERANCE

All the international documents concerning Human Rights contain fundamental principles of non-discrimination and equal rights. Both according to the legislation and in practice, besides any type of discriminatory manifestations the states must take effective steps aimed at integrating different groups and promoting tolerance in the society. In the context of creating equal opportunities and equal conditions and enhancing tolerance, the attention of international community was traditionally on protection of more vulnerable groups of the society, such as national, religious and sexual minorities, as the danger of being discriminated by the majority of public is much greater.

1. According to the census data of 2011, the total population of Armenia was 2.773.266 people, 2.721.414 of which were Armenians, 31.600 were Yezidis, 11.179 were Russians, 2.528 were Assyrians, 1.894 were Kurds, 1.137 were Ukrainians, 849 were Greeks, 593 were Georgians, 447 were Iranians, 1533 were of other nationality, 92 refused to answer. Belarusian, Polish, Jewish and German communities still live in Armenia.

Coordinating Committee of National Cultural Organizations for National Minorities in the Republic of Armenia received state grants of AMD 10 million formerly, which later became 20 million, however 10 million was contributed among 11 communities though the communities have different needs depending on their size. And the other 10 million was allocated to the communities as an additional funding for meeting the needs for their initiatives and events. The minorities which have statehood get some support from the state they ethnically belong to, for example the Russian, the Greek, the Polish and many others.

Although national minorities have their community schools in their compact residential places, where they learn their national languages, there are no pre-school institutions on their national languages. In separate communities the level of children's education is very low, and among the girls, depending on their traditions and customs, often meet cases of

early marriages, as a result of which children drop out of educational process and do not attend schools.

Russian-speaking communities, such as Russians, Belarusians, Ukrainians and others, living in Armenia constantly express their dissatisfaction on the fact that, their names and surnames in their birth and marriage certificates are written according to Armenian grammar rules, which does not correspond to Russian language rules and transcription. As a result they meet some problems in translating their documents into other languages, as their Middle names are written according to Armenian inflection rules. The state needs to take measures on regulating this problem.

The schools belonging to national minority groups have strong need for specialists of their languages, as well as low level of the qualification of specialists.

According to the analysis of applications addressed to the Human Rights Defender by the representatives of national minorities, it became clear that violations of their rights, if that happened, were mostly of common nature, and had no connection with their national or ethnic origin (such as housing problems, difficulties encountering in the field of social services, complaints on judicial acts made by the judicial authorities of the Republic of Armenia, etc.). The majority of these complaints are related to the socio-economic situation of the country that requires global solution. Similar complaints were presented to the Defender by native Armenians.

2. According to the census data of 2011, the followers of Armenian Apostolic Church are the majority in Armenia, and then according to their number dominate the followers of Evangelical, Catholic, Jehovah's witnesses, Orthodox church/organization.

Public's attitude toward the religious minority organizations and its members continues to be negative, and very often even intolerant. These religious organizations are called "sects," which has a negative meaning and are perceived as a deviation from the main direction, which, as they claim, split the nation, spread denationalized values, endanger national security, etc.

On the other hand, it is rather worrying that separate groups acting in Armenia, performing pressures on citizens, presenting false information about them and misleading the citizens, target to the representatives of most socially vulnerable groups of people to replenish their ranks. Besides, such groups allocating material/social advantages under the name of support, make use of social and material dependence of the individual in order to involve them in their group. The reason for misleading the citizens is the lack of these citizens' awareness on the activities of such groups. In order to prevent such phenomenon, there is a need to provide an unambiguous definition of the term "proselytism" /improper proselytism/, which will enable, on the one hand, to protect citizens from the negative influence of such groups, and on the other hand, not to limit their right to freedom of conscience and disseminating their own beliefs. Such a definition is provided in the draft law on regulating Law for activities of religious organizations processed by the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Armenia.

Another problem is that some representatives and followers of the church representing the majority of the population, in some cases spread intolerance towards other religious organizations aiming to keep the followers of Armenian Apostolic Church and to include new members. While, the most effective way to involve followers is the proper behaviour of the clergy representing that church and the relevant social activism of that very church.

Intolerant attitude and hateful calls towards different religious organizations is often elucidated by mass media, introducing the latter as a threat to national security. In this regard, necessary measures have not been taken to eliminate discrimination and ensure equal rights, as well as to exclude intolerant and hateful calls by mass media.

Numerous complaints have been received that the representatives of different religious organizations constantly visit citizens' houses to preach their beliefs, which, in some cases, turn to persecution and pressures. This issue is still not regulated by the legislation as well.

The conditions of alternative military and alternative labor services have been reformed, which is a significant progress in the implementation of international commitments. As a

result of the legislative changes of the RA Law on “Alternative Services” in 2013 the duration of alternative military services was reduced to 30 months, and the duration of alternative labor services was reduced to 36 months, which is proportionate from the view of Human Rights and meets the international norms, that is, the terms of alternative services should not exceed the military services more than one and a half times. Besides, the conditions of alternative labor services have been clearly defined, which concerns to those people, whose religious beliefs and convictions contradict the military services in general. Moreover, military control cannot be set over the alternative labor services, which meet the requirements of European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms ratified by the RA.

A number of human rights defenders expressed their concern on the biased nature of the subject “Armenian Church history” taught in public schools. In particular, Armenian Apostolic Church has the right to participate in the elaboration of training program and textbooks of the abovementioned subject, and define criteria for selecting the teacher for this subject. In this respect, it is necessary to take steps aimed at spreading tolerance towards various religions and beliefs in public schools, as well as to publish and spread Toledo’s Guiding Principles among the teachers and specialists of the field in public schools.

Yerevan Municipality and some other communities took measures to eliminate leaflets full of hateful calls posted in the streets, where certain religious organizations are targeted and calls are made to fight against them.

Negative attitude towards sexual minorities continues to dominate in the society, observing homosexuality as a disease, while since 1990 the World Health Organization (WHO) does not consider homosexuality to be a disease. The homosexuals are often isolated from the society, exposed to stigma at workplace, in educational institutions, penitentiaries and in other institutions. And those homosexuals who revealed their identity and sexual orientation avoid compulsory military services, usually on the ground of psychic health problems.

A number of transgender people were regularly engaged in prostitution and performed sexual acts in the area of Children's Park named after N.Stepanyan in Yerevan (more commonly known as Komaygi). This illegal phenomenon itself presents double danger; on the one hand, the lawless acts held in the Children's Park have not been prevented because of inactions of the Police and Yerevan Municipality, which endanger public's health and morality; and on the other hand, the ongoing lawless actions give rise to homophobia and strengthen already existing negative stereotypes towards sexual minorities.