Armenia’s government must protect LGBTI citizens

Press Release, Armenia, Bias-motivated Speech, Bias-motivated Violence

> In recent days, Armenia’s LGBTI community has been seriously failed on multiple occasions by national authorities after concerted attacks by conservative groups. This is a grievous betrayal of their responsibilities under international human rights law.

On 6 November, the organisers of the annual Eastern European and Central Asia Forum Conference of LGBTI+ Christians were forced to cancel the 2018 event, scheduled to take place in Yerevan on 14-18 November.

This decision was forced upon the organisers after a series of death threats, vandalism and homophobic acts directed at (perceived) LGBTI people in Armenia.

“ILGA-Europe are demanding a swift response from national authorities in Armenia – they must investigate these attacks, hold the perpetrators accountable and defend their LGBTI citizens.” said ILGA-Europe Executive Director Evelyne Paradis. “Attacks of this nature cannot be dismissed or ignored.”

Local host organisation ‘New Generation’ had to suspend its work after staff members were intimidated by anti-LGBTI activists and its director’s car was vandalised. Several tourists who were thought to be Forum attendees were violently assaulted on the street in early November and Forum participants received hundreds of death threats on social media.

Politicians and law enforcement agencies alike have failed to live up to their responsibility to protect the lives and physical integrity of their citizens. Even more worryingly, in some cases, they have actively escalated the tension.

Not only have the police failed to offer significant protection to the victims of these death threats, opposition political parties have mobilised right-wing extremist groups and been the source of these threats themselves. Also, on 24 October, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan referred to LGBTI equality as a ‘headache’ during a parliamentary discussion of the Forum, saying that ‘family values’ are the most important thing for him.

“The Prime Minister’s statements have contributed to a claustrophobic climate, making it almost impossible for LGBTI human rights defenders to work. LGBTI human rights defenders stand for family values for all people – and every family is deserving of the state’s protection.” commented ILGA-Europe’s Programmes Director, Bjorn van Roozendaal.

In the wake of death threats and increasingly violent hate speech directed towards the LGBTI community, Armenia’s government and law enforcement agencies must provide adequate safeguards for the LGBTI community and its allies.

ILGA-Europe call on regional and international organisations to utilise all mechanisms available to them in order to ensure Armenia adheres to its human rights obligations.

- As of 2018, Armenia currently sits at 48th place (out of 49 countries) in the Rainbow Europe ranking on LGBTI law and policy.

- The latest update from the European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups and the “New Generation” Humanitarian NGO is available here.
- The Forum Conferences of LGBT Christians of Eastern Europe and Central Asia has taken place since 2004 in various countries (Ukraine, Russia, Estonia, Moldova, Romania). The event brings together 60–70 LGBTI people of faith, activists, church ministers, and psychologists for several days of intensive networking, discussions, sharing, and prayer.