

March 2016 **#15**



«ՆՈՐ ՍԵՐՈՆՆԵՐ» «NEW GENERATION»
ՄԱՐԴԱՍԻՐԱԿԱՆ ՀԿ HUMANITARIAN NGO

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DISCUSSIONS ON THE RA LAW ON ALTERNATIVE MILITARY SERVICE IN SEVEN REGIONS OF ARMENIA AND YEREVAN



Tavush region, Ijevan city, March 9, 2016

On March 2016 discussions on the RA Law on "Alternative Military Service" took place in seven regions of Armenia and Yerevan.

The discussions were organized by "New Generation" Humanitarian NGO in the scope of "Reinforcement of legislative mechanisms regarding protection of rights of of vulnerable groups for rule of law" project which is financed by the Embassy of the Netherlands in Georgia.

The goal of the discussions was to increase the level of the public awareness on the topic of protection of rights of vulnerable groups in the Armed Forces of Armenia and development of human rights protection mechanisms through relevant legislative mechanisms.



Gegharkunik region, Gavar city, March 9, 2016



Artur Sakunts; Chairman of Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Vanadzor Office

The speaker was Artur Sakunts, Chairman of Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Vanadzor Office. He presented suggestions on making relevant changes in in the RA Law on "Alternative Military Service".

After a number of appeals sent to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg in June 2012, which were related to violation of basic human rights, certain changes were made in the RA Law on "Alternative Military Service". Particularly the issue of the alternative military service of religious minorities was solved.



Armavir region, Armavir city, March 10, 2016



Yerevan, March 21, 2016

Though a number of pressing issues are still there and remain unresolved. Namely, while serving in the army, one is not allowed to apply for exemption. That is, a person cannot change his beliefs during the two years of mandatory service. This is a gross violation of human rights.

A. Sakunts also addressed issues regarding the content of "Military service" schoolbook.

As the speaker mentioned, instead of explaining the construction of different weapons, it would be better to refer to issues of military service rights.



Ararat region, Ararat city, March 21, 2016



Ararat region, Artashat city, March 21, 2016

While talking about the importance of protection of rights of sexual minorities in the Army A. Sakunts particularly emphasized the importance of interpersonal relationships.



Vayots Dzor region, Yeghegnadzor city, March 29, 2016

The speaker and participants assured that such kind of discussions help to speak up about the need for changes in the RA Law on Alternative military service concerning the rights of sexual minorities.



Kotayq region, Hrazdan city, March 29, 2016

The meetings were attended by employees of Legal and Pre-military preparation Departments of Regional Administrations; Municipalities of Regional Centers; representatives of non-governmental organizations and students.

LGBTI ISSUES RELATED "DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY 2015" MASS MEDIA AWARD CEREMONY WAS HELD IN YEREVAN



On March 21, 2016, "New Generation" Humanitarian NGO organized "The importance of cooperation of journalists and civil society in the name of protection of rights of LGBTI people". During the discussion presentations of "Manifestations of attitudes, hate speech towards LGBTI people and the violation of their rights in the online environment of RA" and "Needs of sex reassignment surgery of transgender people: assessment of legal barriers" reports as well as "Diversity and Equality 2015" Mass Media Award were held.

The organizers intended to speak up about the importance of ethically correct and comprehensive approach by journalists in writing about cases of violation of rights of LGBTI people, as well as the importance of cooperation of public journalism and civil society through building a dialogue between journalists and representatives of non-profit organizations and civil society.

The speakers of the discussion were Artur Sakunts, Chairman of Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Vanadzor Office; Mery Aleksanyan, Editor of "Human Rights in Armenia" website; Artur Minasyan, President of "Bekum" NGO; Hasmik Mkhitarian, President of "Progress of Gyumri" Civil Society Development Center, and Hovhannes Ishkhanyan, journalist of "As You" e-magazine by "Public Information and Need of Knowledge" NGO.



Sergey Gabrielyan, President of "New Generation" Humanitarian NGO and human rights defender, presented the achievements and future plans of the organization in the scope of the discussion. He highlighted the importance of encouraging those mass media representatives who have adopted non-discriminatory approach in commenting on LGBTI related issues and have provided people with accessible and unbiased information. As S. Gabrielyan observed, the main problem in commenting on LGBTI related issues is that mass media does not provide objective information, moreover, many of journalists are not aware of LGBTI terminology and issues, the other problem is that our society also is not properly aware of LGBTI related issues.

Human rights defender **Artur Sakunts** talked about *"The role of civil society in cooperation with journalists"* and referred to some essential issues, such as absence of pluralism, lack of knowledge, information and consistent work. "We need bravery and courage to speak up about what we think particularly in such authoritarian countries as Armenia, where pluralism, as a culture, does not exist. The diversity is the natural form of life given from the very beginning. Any expression directed to its rebuttal or denial should not be inadmissible, and this approach should be adopted from school",- mentioned the speaker. As A. Sakunts noted, the other problem is whether commentating on LGBTI issues is a priority for our mass media. For instance, there are sporadic articles on military service of GBT people in the Armed Forces, and journalists are not skilled enough to commentate on the issue. "Mass media also have policy, and in this regard we have either a conflict of interests or discrepancy of motives. Thus populism or shallow approach can act as a limiting factor", he concluded:



Artur Minasyan, President of "Bekum" NGO and journalist, presented a topic entitled *"Journalism ethics and literacy in addressing the issues of vulnerable groups"*. He assured that incompleteness of the Fourth Estate and limitations of freedom of speech are central problems and are deeply rooted in our society. The other problem is that sometimes journalists or editors are not homophobic but they are not literate enough and are not aware of LGBTI terminology. Though the most serious problem is illiteracy resulted from homophobia. In terms of journalism ethics A. Minasyan emphasized the fact that any journalist should not violate the logic of human rights

convention. "There are many verdicts of the European Court of Human Rights about media coverages on LGBTI related issues, which should be mandatory guidelines for Armenian journalists. From the other side we should require Armenian journalists to exclude any discriminatory approach referring to those ECHR verdicts",-said A. Minasyan.

Hamik Mkhitaryan, President of "Progress of Gyumri" Civil Society Development Center, also referred to issues of journalism ethics and literacy. She stressed the importance of educating journalists, particularly editors, to have literate articles about LGBTI related issues.

Hovhannes Ishkhanyan, journalist of "As You" e-magazine by "Public Information and Need of Knowledge" NGO, referred to *"Issues of comentation of violation of rights of vulnerable groups, particularly LBGTI people"*. He talked about certain articles that are linked to LGBTI people rights violations and emphasized the fact that journalists take interviews about LGBTI related issues from incompetent people whose opinions are important only because they appear in headlines. As Hovh. Ishkhanyan noted, on one hand journalists are not aware of LGBTI related issues, on the other hand editorial offices employ such kind of journalists.



After the discussion presentations of "Manifestations of attitudes, hate speech towards LGBTI people and the violation of their rights in the online environment of RA" and "Needs of sex reassignment surgery of transgender people: assessment of legal barriers" reports were held.



Afterwards **Arman Sahakyan**, Coordinator of "New Generation" Humanitarian NGO's Diversity Promotion Department, presented the results of LGBTI issues related **"Diversity and Equality 2015" Mass Media Award**.

As A. Sahakyan mentioned, the goal of the Mass Media Award was to unite the potential of journalists from 10 regions of Armenia and Yerevan who address LGBTI related issues and encourage them. The assessment committee members were Artur Sakunts, Chairman of Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Vanadzor Office; Artur Minasyan, President of "Bekum" NGO;

Hasmik Mkhitarian, President of "Progress of Gyumri" Civil Society Development Center, and Nane Bagratuni. The best journalistic material was evaluated by the following criteria: impartiality, urgency of the theme, rendering form, literacy, versatility, comprehensive presentation, journalism ethics, and content



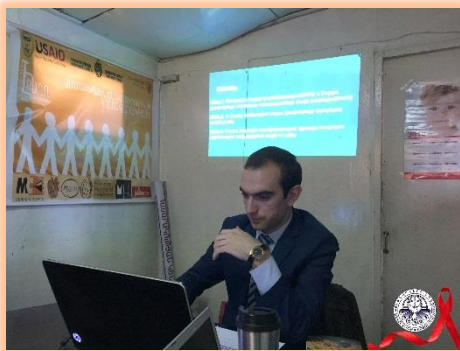
The article by **Arman Gharibyan**, *"Sexual exploitation and 'dirty work': homosexual prisoners living in 'hell'"*, which was published on July 20, 2015, on medialab.am. The author of the article, who joined the ceremony through a skype-call, thanked the editor of medialab.am for suggesting the theme, and "New Generation" Humanitarian NGO for creating this ceremony which promotes professional and objective media coverage of LGBTI related issues. "Unfortunately, the whole media field is occupied by homophobic information full of stereotypes, and LGBTI related materials are marginal.

There are sporadic editors who encourage professional media coverage of similar topics", mentioned A. Gharibyan.

The article by **Hovhannes Ishkhanyan** entitled *"Self-hatred: Hidden Homophobic Homosexuals"* and the video by **Robert Ananyan** entitled *"My transvestite and transgender friends live a cruel life"* were given encouragement awards.

"PREVENTION OF HIV/AIDS AND IMPORTANCE OF HIV TESTING, HUMAN RIGHTS AND HIV" TRAINING IN GYUMRI

On March 18, 2016, "New Generation" Humanitarian NGO organized "Prevention of HIV/AIDS and importance of HIV testing, human rights and HIV" training in Gyumri, Shirak region. The training's slogan was "It refers also to those who seem to have nothing to do with it". The goal of the training was to contribute to prevention of HIV and AIDS among the youth aged 18-30, to increase their awareness on the issue, to highlight the importance of HIV testing and to aware them of rights of people with HIV.



During the training glossary of HIV/AIDS and their differences, ways of HIV transmission and vital fluids, correct use of condoms and HIV testing and other useful information were introduced to the participants. The participants were also introduced to human rights genealogy and stages of development; human rights and fundamental freedoms; human rights international treaties ratified by the republic of Armenia; as well as the statements of the RA Law on Prevention of the Disease Caused by HIV. "It refers also to those who seem to have nothing to do with it" video was also shown, which refers to the importance of HIV prevention and testing and was translated into Armenian by "New Generation" Humanitarian

NGO. At the end of the training legal consulting was provided.

SCREENING AND DISCUSSION OF "SUFFRAGETTE"



"...Women are well presented by their fathers, brothers, husbands. Once the vote was given, it would be impossible to stop at this. Women would then demand the rights of becoming MPs, cabinet ministers, judges".

On March 11, 2016 "New Generation" Humanitarian Ngo organize the screening of "Suffragette", which begins with these words. It represents the struggle of women for their electoral, economical and other rights at the beginning of the last century in Britain.

The movie tells about the women's movement, which originated in England at the beginning of the 19th century. A drama that tracks the story of the foot soldiers of the early feminist movement, women who were forced underground to pursue a dangerous game of cat and mouse with an increasingly brutal State. These women were not primarily from the genteel educated classes, they were working women who had seen peaceful protest achieve nothing. Radicalized and turning to violence as the only route to change, they were willing to lose everything in their fight for equality – their jobs, their homes, their children and their lives. Maud was one such foot soldier. The story of her fight for dignity is as gripping and visceral as any thriller, it is also heart-breaking and inspirational.