

September 23, 2023



Statement

After the large-scale attack on Artsakh by the Azerbaijani armed forces on September 19 and the statement of non-interference by the authorities of the Republic of Armenia, mass protests and acts of civil disobedience are taking place in Yerevan and in other places of Armenia. During the observation of the video recordings available on the Internet, as well as the direct observation of the protests, many cases of disproportionate and illegal intervention by law enforcement officers were identified.

Since the beginning of the acts of protest there have been clashes between some of the protesters and the police, in response to which the police used force and special measures. A number of participants of the gathering threw bottles and other objects in the direction of the police chain and the seat of the RA Government, and the police used flash-bangs directly towards the throng of assembly participants, without warning and without observing the instructions for use. A number of protesters suffered injuries of varying degrees.

During the gatherings that took place on September 19 and the following days, the police used disproportionate force against the protesters in many episodes, detaining them en masse. There are many reports of beatings and violence against protesters, with at least four incidents of police beatings of protesters taking place on camera¹. Cases of violence against minors, such as restricting freedom by almost suffocating, have been recorded². Alarms were raised by the lawyers that the police departments are hindering their work in providing legal support to the detained participants of the gathering³. Criminal cases were initiated, participants of opposition gatherings were detained, which is a classic example of political persecution.

The current tension due to the political crisis is aggravated by some statements of the authorities and the impunity of the police officers who used violence. With regard to the protests, the RA Prime Minister stated in his speech about harsh response to the protesters⁴, and high-ranking police officials claim that the force used is proportionate⁵. No police officer has been held accountable for the violence.

The Helsinki Committee of Armenia continues the monitoring and calls on:

¹ https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1a5yX-2A27i21dFMjq0ADrfBHBoY_Jv0c?usp=sharing

² <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xi63dNDtXNJM0BdY50FIZl1illyvJp5p/view?usp=sharing>

³ <https://www.aravot.am/2023/09/22/1371111/>

<https://www.facebook.com/sos.hakobyan.9/posts/pfbid02L4eYqFSdsTRNsenXfGStSVbeZ54ZFRRBRqj6PMRy61iMmP2C31B9YyXTPJofc2UwI>

⁴ <https://iravaban.net/442520.html>

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B8TU8MtbEAU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iq-fyHAtHY>

The Police:

1. Exclude exposure of violence and other illegal means against the participants of the gatherings;
2. Exclude the use of special measures against the participants of the gatherings in violation of instructions for use;
3. Support the progress of peaceful assemblies within the scope of their powers. Where it is necessary to interfere or stop peaceful assemblies held in violation of the law, minimize the use of force and be guided by the principle of proportionality;
4. Properly investigate any disproportionate interference with the right to freedom of assembly, use of disproportionate force and violence; hold accountable law enforcement officials who overstepped their authority and committed gross violations.

The organizers and actual leaders of the assembly:

1. Continue to request the participants of the gathering to refrain from clashes with the police officers;
2. Constantly cooperate with the representatives of the police performing service at the assembly site. In all cases of the presence of persons violating the peaceful and normal course of the gathering, contact the police to remove those persons from the assembly site.