



YERKIR

Union of Non- Governmental Organizations for Repatriation and Reinsertion
Union d'ONG pour le Rapatriement et la Réinsertion
Союз общественных организаций «Еркир» по репатриации и реинтеграции
Հայրենադարձության և հիմնավորման հասարակություն

Press Release

Yerevan, January 14, 2009.

“Yerkir” Union Expresses its Deep Concern about the Attitude of Indifference Demonstrated by Certain Human Rights Institutions with respect to Violations in Political Trials against the Javakheti Armenian Political Activists

The events that took place in Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia in June 17-21, 2008 under very obscure and strange circumstances, i.e. the explosion that occurred near the house of the head of the regional police, and the death of two ethnic Armenian policemen, were used by the Georgian authorities as a pretext to destroy the “United Javakhk” Democratic Alliance” political movement and deal shortly with its leader -Vahagn Chakhalyan.

As a result, dozens of members of the organization were taken to the police headquarters being subject to beating and use of force, and were interrogated; the youth radio run under the auspices of the organization was closed; numerous illegal searches and arrests were made. Finally, early in the morning of July 21 the Georgian Special Forces broke into Vahagn Chakhalyan’s apartment and arrested Vahagn Chakhalyan, his father and his juvenile brother.

It should be mentioned that Vahagn Chakhalyan is charged according to the Georgian Criminal Code with illicit purchase and possession of fire-arms and ammunition (Article 236, part 1), organizing mass disorder actions (Article 225), organizing of the group actions which grossly disrupts public order (Article 226), showing group resistance to a police officer or any other government representative (Article 353 part 2), and, finally, with hooliganism... perpetrated: both a) by a group’s conspiracy; and b) against a government representative (clause A and B of paragraph 2 of article 239).

Since Vahagn Chakhalyan was arrested, the Georgian authorities have been continuously delaying the trial under various pretexts. Thus, although the case brought against Vahagn Chakhalyan together with the conclusion rendered by the prosecution was sent to court as early as August 8, 2008, it was not until September 17 that the case was proceeded by the Akhaltskha court, whereas the first hearing took place on November 6 and was immediately postponed to November 19 on the initiative of the judge.

From chronological perspective, the last (third) hearing took place on December 3, during which the prosecutor informed the court about the new criminal charges brought against Vahagn Chakhalyan based on certain events that had taken place in March 2006. The judge immediately postponed the trial of Vahagn Chakhalyan for an uncertain term.

Up to now all the applications presented by the defense asking to provide the materials of the new criminal charges, and to resume the trial remain unanswered. In fact, six months after the arrest of Vahagn Chakhalyan, his trial hasn't even started.

Instead, the Georgian authorities continue to impose political and economic pressure on the members and supporters of the "United Javakhk" Democratic Alliance", as well as on the relatives and friends of Vahagn Chakhalyan. They open new criminal cases, initiate other trials which are held summarily, under very vague circumstances and result in sentences affirming the conclusion rendered by prosecution. The Georgian authorities also create artificial obstacles for registering a well-known French lawyer Patrick Arapian as a defender of Vahagn Chakhalyan.

"Yerkir" Union has repeatedly applied to appropriate international structures and human rights' organizations calling them, above all:

- a) To recognize Vahagn Chakhalian and all persons on related trials as political prisoners;
- b) To investigate immediately the systematic and continuous violations of human rights in the Javakheti region;
- c) To monitor and closely follow the proceedings of the trials;
- d) To impose pressure on Georgian authorities, in order to stop the persecutions of the Javakheti-Armenian political activists and to release all the political prisoners.

A number of bodies have responded to the appeal of "Yerkir" Union. In particular, the OSCE Office in Georgia and the Office of the Human Rights Defender of Georgia has sent observers to monitor the trials of the Javakheti-Armenian political activists.

However, contrary to other international organizations, the office of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as "Amnesty International" did not show any reaction to the appeals of "Yerkir" Union, although that was supposed to be the mission and duty of the mentioned institutions.

Thus, we want to believe that the strange silence demonstrated by the mentioned international institutions with respect to the trials of Javakheti-Armenian political activists accounts solely for technical reasons and there is no other concealed intent behind it.

"Yerkir" Union again appeals to the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Thomas Hammarberg, and "Amnesty International" to react to the processes which take place in connection with the Javakheti-Armenian political activist Vahagn Chakhalyan's case from July 2008 up to present.

“Yerkir” Union is alarmed by the fact, that the indifference toward this crisis shown by international community is actually empowering the Georgian authorities to strengthen the pressure on the Javakheti Armenian political activists, as well as the members of their families and supporters, by this contributing to further escalation of situation and getting the processes out of control.

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