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An Appeal of the South Caucasus Network of Human Rights Defenders Concerning protection of freedom of expression and assembly in the Republic of Armenia

Yerevan, 16 April 2010

Your Excellencies,

On 6-8 April 2010 people gathered in different places of the City of Yerevan to publicly and openly condemn human rights violations in the Republic of Armenia and demand immediate and unconditional release of political prisoners.

Protests were held while the 37th Forum “Justice – New Challenges” of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) was ongoing in Yerevan. International and national human rights defenders and many others raised their opinions on ongoing human rights violations in Armenia in the Forum and on the streets of Yerevan. Some activists also expressed their opinions while representatives of the Armenian authorities were making speeches.

The South Caucasus Network of Human Rights Defenders¹ welcomes the fact that people were able to peacefully and freely express their views in public about ongoing human rights violations and the lack of commitment to the rule of law. However, we are aware that during the FIDH congress some of its participants became targets of unofficial intimidation and threatening from the side of law enforcement authorities. ***The South Caucasus Network of Human Rights Defenders*** calls for immediate termination of such acts and hopes that threats towards those who were involved in that process during the last days in Yerevan will stop and no persecutions or other ways of pressure after the Forum will be applied.

Freedoms of expression and assembly are guaranteed under the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia and international treaties to which the Republic of Armenia is a party, e.g. the European

¹ The South Caucasus Network of Human Rights Defenders unites 30 human rights NGOs in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The Network seeks to facilitate creation of a safer and enabling environment for human rights defenders in the South Caucasus and to strengthen their voices in the region and internationally. The Network is financially supported by the EU and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. *The South Caucasus Network of Human Rights Defenders* calls upon the authorities to insure the protection of all those who express their opinions, and to insure that no state agents retaliate against the ones having raised their voices during the FIDH Forum against ongoing human rights violations. If anything happens to these persons, the Armenian authorities will bear the whole responsibility.

The South Caucasus Network of Human Rights Defenders will continue to follow and monitor the developments in Armenia and to call upon international bodies to do the same.

Copies sent to:

- Ombudsman, Office of the Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia ombuds@ombuds.am
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