

ARMENIAN BAR ASSOCIATION CONDEMNS POLICE ACTIONS IN YEREVAN

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The Armenian Bar Association condemns, with grave disappointment, the actions taken by police authorities during the early morning of June 23, 2015, in Yerevan, Armenia as *contrary to a state's obligations to its public*. In societies governed by the rule of law, the duty of authorities in the face of public demonstrations is patently straightforward: to ensure that the manner in which public demonstrations are conducted does not pose a threat to *public safety*. To be clear, the purpose of policing authorities is to ensure that the manner in which the people voice their message is peaceful—it is not to police the message itself.

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And herein lies the problem of June 23, 2015. The use of excessive force—including water cannons, civilian beatings and attacks on the press—was wholly unnecessary to *protect public safety* during the course of what numerous independent accounts establish was a peaceful demonstration. The Armenian Bar Association first voiced its objections to these acts *as they were occurring that morning* and has welcomed, since, the many statements echoing its condemnation issued by a number of international and diasporan organizations. The demonstrations continue, and this Association will remain vigilant in monitoring the situation. We further request that the international and diasporan organizations that have since voiced their condemnation of the actions taken on that fateful morning continue to afford due attention to events on the ground.

As the leading global organization of Armenian lawyers, it is incumbent upon this Association to remind government authorities that police force in a democratic society is not an agent by which the government seeks to control the message of civil demonstrators. Instead, police force is the agent by which the government seeks to protect citizens and demonstrators as they peacefully voice their

message to their government. It appears that, in the early morning of June 23, 2015, authorities in Yerevan believed nobody would notice the difference. *We did.*

The Armenian Bar Association demands an immediate, independent investigation and full, public accountability with respect to the decision to use unreasonable force against Armenian citizens on the morning of June 23, 2015.

This Association further reminds authorities that the voice of a civil society spills onto the streets only when that voice is denied access to the institutions of governance itself. This is, at its very core, why true democracy is so absolutely vital to the assurance of peace and progress in civil society: it is the legal mechanism by which the voice of a people assumes rightful ownership of its own destiny. It is also why the injudicious trampling upon the voice of civil society by brute force has been the final miscalculation of many the ruling oligarchy.

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