OMBUDSMAN DECRIES ARMENIA'S 'OLIGARCHIC' SYSTEM

Posted on March 10, 2009 by Keghart

Category: Opinions

Transcribed from Asbarez , Tuesday March 10, 2009

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) -- Armen Harutiunian, the state human rights ombudsman, made a damning assessment of Armenia's system of governance on Tuesday, saying that it has been “oligarchic” and “repressive” ever since the break-up of the Soviet Union.

Transcribed from Asbarez , Tuesday March 10, 2009

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) -- Armen Harutiunian, the state human rights ombudsman, made a damning assessment of Armenia's system of governance on Tuesday, saying that it has been “oligarchic” and “repressive” ever since the break-up of the Soviet Union.

Harutiunian voiced the harsh criticism in an annual report on human rights practices in the country. It not only scrutinizes relevant problems reported in the past year but also analyzes what he sees as their root causes, including a selective and discretionary enforcement of laws by successive Armenian governments.

“Since the independence, oligarchy and bureaucracy have subordinated the state to themselves,” Harutiunian said, presenting the 250-page report to journalists. “Political decisions are solely made in government structures. There are no free economic relations in Armenia.”

“Without liberal economics it is meaningless to talk about human rights protection. It is time to renounce the culture of opportunities in favor of a culture of law,” he said.

According to Harutiunian, the current and previous Armenian administrations have preserved and cemented a “repressive system” inherited from Soviet times. “Today the Office of the Prosecutor-General and the Special Investigative Service are key pillars of that system,” he charged. “The proof of that is the work of the Special Investigative Service, as a result of which the Office of the Human Rights Defender receives numerous complaints that people are forced to make confessions or give testimonies against third persons.”

The ombudsman went on to allege that Armenian law-enforcement bodies are also incompetent. “That non-professionalism is a heavy burden on all of us and, first of all, the government system, which has become hostage to that non-professionalism,” he said.

The extensive report makes little mention of last year's deadly post-election unrest in Yerevan and ensuing mass arrests of opposition members and supporters. Harutiunian argued that he already assessed those dramatic developments in a special report issued in April.

That report accused the authorities of using excessive force against thousands of supporters of opposition leader Levon Ter-Petrosian who staged daily protests in Yerevan against the alleged rigging of the February 2008 presidential election. It was rejected by departing President Robert Kocharian.