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բռնության կոալիցիա

Coalition to stop violence
against women



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Dear Reader,

Since 2010, the Coalition to Stop Violence against Women (CSVW) acts as a platform for joint advocacy of several local non-governmental organizations in their fight against violence against women in Armenia. Throughout these years, we united our efforts to push for legislative amendments, policy changes, nation-wide awareness raising and campaigning.

Elimination of violence and discrimination against women is the responsibility of the State and of the Government of Armenia. This is, unfortunately, an issue with deep roots and a wide scope and unless it is addressed and solved, dignity, human rights and democracy cannot be upheld in Armenia.

Our team calls all the stakeholders to join the efforts in combatting violence against women. The “New Armenia”, which we are all trying to build, must be the state where every woman is confident that her rights to be free from violence and discrimination are protected and realized fully.

Coalition to Stop Violence against Women

Yerevan, 2020

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● ● ● Beginning of the Year Conference: “Gender-based Violence in Armenia: Problems and Legal Regulations”

[February]

The aim of the conference was to publicly present the report “Silenced Voices: Femicide in Armenia”, discuss the package of CSVW recommendations on Law of the Republic of Armenia (hereinafter, RA) on “Prevention of Violence within the Family, Protection of Victims of Violence within the Family and Restoration of Peace in the Family” (hereinafter, the Law) and launch the Coalition’s online database of domestic violence cases.



● ● ● “Silenced Voices: Femicide in Armenia” Report



This is the second report on femicide in Armenia, prepared by the Coalition. The report¹ is focused on the stories of femicide cases from 2016 to 2017. It presents and discusses the relevant court decisions and the legal gaps that exist in Armenia’s legislative and law enforcement systems when it comes to the investigation of femicide cases, particularly the issue of access to justice and the systemic root-causes of femicide.

¹ <http://coalitionagainstviolence.org/en/publication-en/femicide2018en/>

● ● ● Online Database of Domestic Violence Cases

This online platform was initially developed by the CSVW member organization – “Society Without Violence” NGO, with an aim to document and rapidly respond to the cases of domestic violence (DV). With the support of the Coalition, the database was developed further and undergone some changes. It now serves as a joint platform² and tool for the members of the Coalition to document the data related to DV cases.

● ● ● Gaps in the Law of RA on “Prevention of Violence within the Family, Protection of Victims of Violence within the Family and Restoration of Peace in the Family”

Since the adoption of the Law in 2017, the members of the Coalition have brought up gaps and challenges related to its content and the mechanisms for implementation on numerous occasions.

To name a few concerns, the Law does not use the term “domestic violence” as it is recognized and defined under the relevant international documents, replacing it by the term “violence within the family”. The Law also used to recognize “reconciliation” between the person subjected to violence within the family and the persons who inflicted violence as a subject for the regulation under the law, which in principle contradicts norms and approaches adopted by the relevant women’s rights instruments. Domestic violence is not criminalized in Armenia, and the Law does not define and fully encompass all the internationally recognized forms of domestic violence.

Throughout this year, the Coalition put a lot of efforts in advocating for legislative amendments and changes to the Law. For this, cooperation with relevant state actors was established. As a result, in November 2019 the RA Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (hereinafter, MoLSA) came up with a draft proposal³ for several important amendments to the Law. Thus, the provision, recognizing “reconciliation” as a subject matter of the Law was changed, with the Law no longer referring to it.

A comprehensive revision of Armenia’s legislation for due protection of victims of domestic violence and gender-based violence (GBV) is necessary. Criminalization of domestic violence remains one of our key demands alongside with the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (“Istanbul Convention”), since the latter will lead to necessary policy and

² <https://rru.swv.am>

³ <https://www.e-draft.am/projects/2008/about>

legal reforms in the field. The issue of the ratification of the document, however, is in the target of manipulations and disinformation by local, radically determined groups. In their campaigns against the Convention, these groups also systematically attack human rights defenders and activists who work for women’s rights and stand against gender-based violence. We will talk more on this in the last section of the newsletter.

● ● ● “Domestic Violence Prevention in Armenia: Challenges and Opportunities” National Conference

[May]

The next important event of this year was the National Conference on the local agenda for combatting domestic violence. The scope and the depth of the problem, the tools and the mechanisms for its due solution and many other key topics were discussed by the participants of the Conference.

The Conference united experts of the field, representatives of local and international organizations, decision makers and governmental agencies and most importantly domestic violence survivors.

The Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Zaruhi Batoyan, members of RA Parliament, representatives of State Social Support Centers, the head of the Delegation of the European Union in Armenia and other stakeholders



talked about several key issues and challenges, emphasizing the need for better cooperation, joint efforts and large-scale activities in the field. The Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Zhanna Andreasyan, noted that the Ministry receives numerous domestic violence alerts: their number is the second highest after the applications for social assistance. However, as she mentioned, “the State response to these cases cannot be still viewed as adequate”. Member of the Coalition, Gohar Shahnazaryan, then emphasized that even with the Law in place, since the beginning of 2019, 6 murder cases of women as a result of domestic violence had already been recorded. Other participants of the Conference talked about the scope of domestic violence, its forms and peculiarities among different groups of women, among minors and elderly people.

The Conference was concluded by the presentation of the package of recommendations of CSVW for the ammendment of the Law on domestic violence and other relevant legislative acts.

● ● ● Ongoing Work: Court Monitoring, Public Events, Training and Capacity Building

Since the beginning of the year, the Coalition continued monitoring of trials on domestic violence cases. In our focus were the cases of Taguhi Mansuryan and Siranush Galoyan which our team have been monitoring during previous years as well. The court trials on these cases are still on-going.

During 2019 the Coalition members were actively involved in public awareness raising, participated in several TV programs and public talks, issued official statements, published DV/GBV content in Coalition’s website and social media platforms.



In June the Coalition came up with a statement on replication of gender stereotypes, gender-based violence and discrimination in media. In particular, the statement referred to one of the series on local channel (“Armenia” TV company), where, in one of the scenes, a man is trying to cut the nose of a woman.

Upon the demand⁴ of the Coalition, the Commission on TV and Radio of Armenia examined the TV program and the scene in particular and initiated administrative proceedings against the company. As a result, the decision was issued on September 11 ordering the TV company to pay a fine in the amount of five

hundred folds of the minimum wage under the Article 60 of RA Law on “Television and Radio”.

This year, as previously, training and capacity building of stakeholders was in the primary focus of the work of the Coalition.

In 2019 comprehensive training were held with the representatives of the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The trainings were organized within the EU funded "Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in Armenia" Project implemented by UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF in partnership with the Coalition to Stop Violence against Women.

From 26-28 June and 9-11 July the Coalition in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs organized two-stage training courses for the staff members of the state support centers for domestic violence victims, the staff of MoLSA and the staff of hotline of the Ministry of Emergency Situations (911). 40 specialists were trained during the first stage of the training and 26 specialists participated in the second round.



The CSVW team introduced the participants with the concept of gender equality, talked about different forms and manifestations of gender-based discrimination and violence, including sexual violence, as well as specificities of domestic violence among persons living with HIV, persons with disabilities, LBT people and other groups most vulnerable to DV and GBV. The thematic discussions were focused on the long-term support for victims of domestic violence, management of domestic violence shelters and requirements of the work with the survivors, as well as mapping of social support services of the state.

The training was also an important opportunity for creating a platform for mutual support, communication and exchange of experience between representatives of these state institutions and the NGOs. The participants

were offered support in their everyday work and were invited to contact service providers from member organizations of the Coalition whenever they need advice, contacts or information.

Training efforts were also carried out for representatives of healthcare and education sectors. On November 16, a training was held for 15 employees of the RA Ministry of Health and RA Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport.

The focus of the course was domestic violence as a public health problem and the key characteristics of domestic violence and preventive mechanisms from the perspective of health and education systems.



In the course of these capacity building events a special Glossary of Accepted Terminology was developed by CSVW expert team. The Glossary introduces the key terminology that is operational for the experts in the field while talking about DV, GBV and marginalized groups, and explains the main rules and principles that need to be followed when working with domestic violence survivors.

● ● ● National Day to Combat Domestic Violence

[October]

Every year since 2010, the Coalition to Stop Violence against Women celebrates October 1 as the National Day to Combat Domestic Violence. This year, October 1 events took place in Spitak, Vanadzor and Yerevan.

Public awareness campaigns were launched in Spitak, central square. According to Coalition member, Ashkhen Babayan, president of the Spitak Helsinki Group, it is important and necessary to bring awareness-raising actions out of Yerevan.

The 2017 study⁵ by the organization, "Research Report on Women's Issues in Lori Region" shows that awareness among women about the issue of domestic violence is very low. "Family violence is perceived as mere physical violence, and awareness of protection mechanisms is almost non-existing," Babayan says.

The action launched in Spitak continued in Vanadzor, and a candlelight vigil commemorating the victims of domestic violence took place in Yerevan's Misak Manushyan Square in the evening.

The Coalition recorded 11 cases of femicide in 2019. During the candlelight vigil, pictures of the deceased women were placed at the square, the circumstances of the murder were described, and information on hotlines and other protection mechanisms was distributed to passers-by.



● ● ● 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence: “The Perpetrator Is the One to Blame”

[November]

On November 25, the Coalition held its yearly public awareness action in Yerevan to announce the launch of the international “16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence” campaign.

The focus of this year’s public awareness campaign was sexual violence. The action targeted the public perception that sexually abused individuals are guilty of abusive behavior. Through the action, the Coalition

team "turned" the vector from victim to rapist, stressing that "the culprit is the rapist."



"I was the one to invite my classmate to coffee and rape her despite her saying "no"",

"I was the one to threaten my student to fail her exam if she does not have sex with me",

"I was the one to beat and rape my wife and threaten to kidnap children and I did it in their presence."

These stories were attached to men's clothing and appeared like self-confessed testimonies.

Booklets and information were also distributed to passers-by during the public awareness campaign. According to Coalition representative Anna Nikoghosyan: "People often do not know what sexual violence is, and there is a misconception that if sexual violence is perpetrated in the family, it is not violence because the wife is the property of her husband."



● ● ● Cooperation with State Bodies for Enhancing the Efficiency of Legislative Mechanisms

In 2019, the Coalition established cooperation with government stakeholders and the key decision-making body for the issue of domestic violence - the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

The established cooperation was aimed to enhance the efficiency of existing state response mechanisms for support of women subjected to gender-based violence and discrimination. Our main priority was to sensitize

respective professionals, especially service providers at MoLSA to make sure that survivors of domestic violence will receive victim-centered, gender-sensitive and multi-sectoral response from the state entities.

In the scope of this cooperation several important documents and studies were delivered by our team. Below we will discuss in short those key outputs.

Need Assessment of Family and Child Support Centers

Need assessment of 6 day-care centers in Yerevan, Vanadzor, Gyumri and Kapan was conducted in the framework of the EU funded “Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in Armenia” project. The project was implemented jointly by the Coalition, UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF and in collaboration with the RA Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

In September, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of Armenia has made a verbal decision that hereinafter day-care centers, operating in Armenia, will also serve as Domestic Violence Support Centers. This need assessment aimed to evaluate the capacity of given centers to provide quality services to victims of domestic violence.

The final document prepared by the CSVW working group - “*Need assessment of Family and Child Support Centers*”, came up with several important conclusions and recommendations, among which, in particular is:

- the need for amendments to the Law on domestic violence and its mechanisms, development of clearer and more detailed procedures,
- the need of the provision of appropriate training and supervision system for field professionals,
- the need for large-scale public awareness-raising activities about Domestic Violence Support Centers and provided services, etc.

Earlier in May, RA Government decree⁶ was issued which also regulated the terms of references for the operation of DV shelters and the requirements for the work of the staff of the shelters.

Development of Monitoring Guidelines for MoLSA

The Monitoring Guidelines were developed for the use of MoLSA (“*Guidelines on Monitoring of Domestic Violence Support Centers for the Use of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs*”) with an aim to offer an understanding of Armenia’s obligations to protect victims of domestic violence and to provide measurement, accountability and reporting tools for the Ministry to monitor the performance of Domestic Violence Support Centers and ensure their qualitative assistance to victims of domestic abuse.

⁶ <http://www.mlsa.am/?p=21102>

Technical Assignment on Development of a National Unified DV Database

This activity supports the establishment of a database for DV cases that will be used jointly by NGOs and relevant state bodies, including the Office of Human Rights Defender and the National Personal Data Protection Agency.

The technical assignment, developed for this purpose by our team, aims to describe the modalities for creation of an online platform where all the necessary data on the cases of domestic violence and the process of response and assistance for the victim in the case is collected.

The technical task briefly presents the information required by the Decision No. 1381-N “***On Establishing the Procedure for Centralized Registration of Domestic Violence Cases***”⁷ which is based on the RA Law on “Prevention of Violence Within the Family, Protection of Victims of Violence Within the Family and Restoration of Peace in the Family” and was adopted by RA Government on 10.10.2019. The information is necessary for digitalization of the registration procedure.

This output is of a significant importance and the document was presented for the consideration of Domestic Violence Prevention Council⁸ under MoLSA.

The Memorandum of Understanding

On 7 June 2019 the CSVW member organization – “Women’s Support Center” NGO, “Hayastan” All Armenia Fund and the RA Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs signed a memorandum of understanding.



From right to left. Executive Director of “Hayastan” All Armenia Fund Haykak Arshamyan, the RA Minister of Labour and Social Affairs Zaruhi Batoyan, the Director of “Women’s Support Center” NGO Maro Matosian

⁷ <http://www.irtek.am/views/act.aspx?aid=151923>

⁸ http://www.mlisa.am/?page_id=19914

According to the Memorandum, this three-sided cooperation should contribute to the better implementation of the Law on “Prevention of Violence within the Family, Protection of Victims of Violence within the Family and Restoration of Peace in the Family”, as well as to the enhancement of the quality, efficiency and capacities of Domestic Violence Support Centers and their staff.

● ● ● International advocacy: Armenia under the Universal Periodic Review

[December]

2019 was wrapped up with the presentation of reports on international human rights commitments undertaken by the Government of Armenia and the implementation of international advocacy on the existing issues within the framework of the UN Universal Periodic Review Mechanism (the UPR).

Prior to the monitoring, Coalition member organizations presented a number of important studies for the UN Working Group's joint study with local and international partners. In particular, Women's Resource Center and Sexual Assault Crisis Center (SACC) presented reports on the issues of sexual violence⁹ in Armenia. Women's Resource Center also presented a report on sexual and reproductive health and rights¹⁰ and gaps in the legal regulation on domestic violence¹¹.

In December 2019, representatives of our member organizations also participated in the UN General Assembly Preparatory UPR Session in Geneva, meeting with the members of the Monitoring Working Group, as well as giving speeches during the session.

Representatives of local NGOs - The Non-Discrimination and Equality Coalition, Helsinki Citizens' Assembly-Vanadzor, and the Helsinki Committee of Armenia, together with CSVW member organizations - Women's Resource Center NGO, Pink Human Rights Defender NGO and Society Without Violence NGO - made the following statement¹², reflecting on the importance of criminalizing domestic violence in Armenia, ensuring legal anti-discrimination regulations, including the need for the adoption of a stand-alone anti-discrimination law, and the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by Armenia.

⁹ <http://www.saccarmenia.org/files/uploads/UNUPR.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://womenofarmenia.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/UPR-Armenia-Report.pdf>

¹¹ https://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/uploads/armenia_3rd_cycle_upr_final_cover_page_and_report_3.pdf

¹² https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/document/armenia/session_35_-_january_2020/4._non-discrimination_and_equality_coalition_ngo_ppt.pdf

● ● ● People Fighting against Gender-Based Violence - Targets of Discrimination and Oppression

While it was a year of important achievements, 2019 was also a year of facing pressures and continuing our fight despite them.

Women's human rights defenders and activists, especially those working to fight against gender-based violence and discrimination and promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights, continue to be the target of various extremist groups in Armenia.



“When we are talking about women, we often see only one type of woman - mother, sister sometimes and that's it! But I want to remind us that we are also single mothers, we are mothers, who have lost their children in the military, we are women, that do not want to become mothers, we are elder people, we are trans women, we are lesbians and bisexuals, that want or do not want to adopt a child, we are women living in the borderline villages, we are poor, we are Yezidi women, we are women with disabilities and when laws are being drafted, we all must be careful that women of one image should not benefit from those laws. You should have in your mind the image of all these women that I have mentioned including women living with HIV, sex worker women, and many others.”

A campaign of hate speech against one of the members of the Coalition, the co-founder of “Women’s Resource Center” NGO Lara Aharonian started in the aftermath of her speech On March 8, 2019. The speech was delivered by Aharonian in the framework of the Civil Society-Parliament cooperation platform for gender equality and equal opportunities of women and men. In her speech, Ms. Aharonian talked about the rights of women in poverty, women with disabilities, single mothers, lesbian, trans and bisexual women, aiming to emphasize that women are diverse and each of them should be equally protected. As a result, Aharonian became a target for intense online attacks and hate speech.

In November, L. Aharonian filed a defamation lawsuit against the head of the “Luys” Information Analytical Center Hayk Ayzvazyan who insulted Ms. Aharonian at one of his press conferences, saying she was involved in pedophilia. The case is currently in court.

On May 4, one of CSVW member organizations - “Sexual Assault Crisis Center” NGO, which is the only human rights defending NGO in Armenia that provides specialized services to the victims of sexual violence, organized presentation of an interactive book “My Body is Personal” (developed by the organization) at Bookinist café in Yerevan. During the event 25 people broke into the café and made a disturbance because of which the organizers had to stop the event.

As mentioned in a statement¹³ released by "Sexual Assault Crisis Center" NGO, among the individuals who attacked the staff of the organization during the event were the ones who had been spreading misinformation, threats, and hatred towards women's rights organizations and human rights defenders since 2013. Some men threw eggs at the participants at the entrance to the Bookinist café. To date, however, no one has been held responsible.

Another wave of misinformation, coupled with pressures against women working on gender issues, was linked with the ratification of the Istanbul Convention which has been a subject of heated debate and speculation this year in Armenia.

People currently "fighting" against the ratification of the Convention are the same people who for years fought against the adoption of legislation against domestic violence and the equal rights between women and men, by spreading manipulative information and materials about both domestic violence and international conventions/legislation.

The Armenian Apostolic Church, political and public figures have joined the criticism of the Convention. The President of the Chamber of Advocates Ara Zohrabyan even created a petition against the Convention on the popular change.org platform. However, change.org removed the petition, after which a special website was created by the opponents of the Convention.

To counter the wave of misinformation, some government agencies disseminated information¹⁴ on the content of the Convention, Minister of Labor and Social Affairs Zaruhi Batoyan¹⁵ and Deputy Minister of Justice Kristine Grigoryan¹⁶ spoke about the importance of ratifying the Convention. In August, however, Justice Minister Rustam Badasyan said in an interview¹⁷ that the Parliament would not discuss the ratification of the Convention in 2019.

Thus, the state still fails to fully implement its legal obligations to fight against violence against women, ensure a safe and conducive environment for human rights defenders and guarantee the protection of human rights defenders. All of this is the obligation of the Government undertaken under a number of international human rights treaties.

Continuing our advocacy work on these issues, we hope that in 2020 the state will take more urgent and effective steps to address them.

¹³ <https://bit.ly/2xu9uxZ>

¹⁴ <http://www.mlsa.am/?p=21702>

¹⁵ <http://www.mlsa.am/?p=21661>

¹⁶ <https://bit.ly/33akpZe>

¹⁷ <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/30129815.html>

Let's Talk Numbers

CSVW member organizations received 4592 calls on domestic and sexual violence hotline services throughout 2019.

This high number has a lot to do with awareness-raising campaigns of the Coalition. Only in the scope of October 1 campaign, we distributed around 7000 handouts and leaflets in Yerevan, Spitak and Vanadzor, targeting some 3000 people.

As for the official statistics, in 2019 Investigative Committee of Armenia proceeded and investigated 635 cases of domestic violence, whereas 519 cases were investigated last year. The majority of the cases concerned violence against women on the hands of their husbands. Cases of violence committed by other family members were also recorded.

Within the same period of time, the Police of RA issued warnings on the occasion of 796 reports of domestic violence received by the special units of the Police. In 260 instances Emergency Intervention Orders were issued.

According to CSVW data, 11 cases of femicide took place in 2019.



11 women were killed

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Report prepared by Anahit Simonyan

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