

The Honorable Nikol Pashinyan
Prime Minister of Armenia
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Yerevan, Armenia
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Dear Prime Minister Pashinyan,

I am writing to support Advocates for Human Rights' call for action to protect human rights defenders in Armenia from threats of violence and to hold the perpetrators of these abuses accountable. The Advocates holds special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

In light of the unjust treatment of the Sexual Assault Crisis Center (SACC) and the Women's Resource Center in Armenia, I am writing to urge you to take immediate action on their behalf. After their release of a book to prevent sexual abuse of children, these organizations have become the targets of an extremist nationalist group of violent men. These men have made threats of death, rape, and violence to members of these organizations. Law enforcement agencies have failed to take sufficient action to investigate the men's actions and provide protection to the women under threat. Instead of holding the alleged offenders accountable, the authorities have begun investigating activities of the women's NGOs, including their website on sexual education, www.serakanutyun.org, on the misinformed basis that this work to prevent sexual violence and promote healthy relationships is a guise to spread pornographic materials. Such investigations restrict individual rights to freedom of expression and freedom of association and assembly. Armenia has ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and has an obligation to respect and protect these rights. Due to the nature of these threats, these organizations have been forced to cease crucial psychological and legal support for victims of sexual violence. This leaves many women without access to resources and services.

I would like to remind you of the due diligence standard, which requires states to take reasonable steps to prevent, investigate, and punish actions of private or state actors that violate human rights. I further remind you that CEDAW General Recommendation 35 reiterates that states may be held responsible for private acts "if they fail to take all appropriate measures to prevent as well as to investigate, prosecute, punish and provide reparation for acts or omissions by non-State actors which result in gender-based violence against women."

I respectfully request that you to launch a thorough and impartial investigation into the hateful attacks and violent threats committed by these private actors and to take immediate and effective measures to ensure the safety of the women's rights defenders and their families. I also call you on you to end the unnecessary investigation of the SACC and the Women's Resource Center, and to redirect resources from this investigation into preventing such incidences from occurring again.

Sincerely,