

Reply from the Armenian authorities to the information regarding Armenia published on the Platform for the protection of journalists on 7 July 2015

On 23 June 2015, following an un-authorised sit-in protest against electricity price increases that took place the day before on the Baghramyan Avenue in Yerevan, the police of the Republic of Armenia launched an operation to restore traffic on this important road in the capital. Before commencing to deblock the avenue, police officers issued several warnings to journalists indicating that the policemen's legitimate orders should be respected by all citizens in a mandatory fashion¹.

Despite renewed calls addressed among others, to the journalists present on site to stand at a reasonable distance from the rally and to not hinder the police forces' legitimate actions, the latter disregarded orders issued by police officers. Some journalists attempted to take pictures within the range of the water canons' perimeter of action and went as far as trying to move under the water jets (the footage recorded is available on demand). During the Baghramyan Avenue operation, some journalists did not wear their press badges, which led to police officers escorting them to the competent police station. These journalists were released once the nature of their mission was confirmed.

For that reason, the information on the journalists' arrests does not match with the reality of the situation. During the operation on 23 June, no journalist was either arrested, or subjected to an administrative or criminal sanction.

With regards to cases of use of violence against journalists (including the circumstances described by the "Armenian TV" channel's correspondent Davit Davtyan and by the "Panarmenian.net" press agency's journalist Nikolai Torosyan), it must be noted that on 3 July 2015 a criminal case was opened by the Special Investigative Service of the Republic of Armenia, which is currently under investigation.

On a parallel, by decree of the Police Chief of the Republic of Armenia, on 25 June 2015, an internal inquiry was opened and is currently under way with the aim of shedding light on eventual abuses of power and violations of rules of ethics by police officers during the dispersion of the demonstration and during the transfer of certain individuals, including some journalists by other police officers towards the relative police station. As a result of this investigation, 12 police officers have been subjected to disciplinary measures.

¹ According to Article 182 on "administrative offenses" of the Administrative Code of the Republic of Armenia, the violation of legitimate orders from a police officer on duty aimed at maintaining public order and guaranteeing public safety, is a criminal matter. According to Article 261 of the Administrative Code of the Republic of Armenia, "administrative detention", as a coercive measure, can be applied to persons who committed an offense following a violation of the legitimate order of a police officer.

To date, the internal inquiry has not revealed that any journalist was victim to any physical violence during the operation of 23 June. However, the inquiry has revealed damages to audio visual equipment. Five journalists have sued the police force for material compensation for the damages incurred. The police have acknowledged their claim.