

Dear Colleagues,

I greet all of you and I want to thank you for the invitation, as well as for the opportunity to present about the projects implemented by the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Armenia in the direction of protection and promotion of the human rights of the personnel of the armed forces.

I am Gevorg Martirosyan, Head of Human Rights and Integrity Building Centre, Colonel, Ministry of Defence of Armenia.

Since the Ministry of Defence provides social and health services for all the personnel of the armed forces, their family members, and from the point of view of the realization of the right to education, also military education, the establishment of a specialized institution for the protection of serviceperson's rights in the system of the Ministry of Defence was urgent. In other words, the establishment of the Human Rights and Integrity Building Centre was conditioned on the one hand by the need to have a specialized institution in the field of strengthening the fundamental principles of human rights in the Armed Forces, protecting the rights of servicepersons and their family members, reinforcing the morale in the armed forces, and on the other hand, by the proper implementation of international obligations in the above-mentioned directions. The Centre was established in 2015 by the Decree of the Minister of Defence of the Republic of Armenia. To properly address the above-mentioned problems, the Ministry of Defence's quick response service, the "hotline" was launched under the authority of the Centre on January 11, 2017. According to its statute, the Centre carries out activities in two important directions: protection of servicemen's rights and strengthening of morals. Today I will mainly present about the protection of human rights in the armed forces.

I would like to mention that the protection of human rights in the Armed Forces is being carried out in 3 directions: protection of the rights of persons of pre-conscription age before getting involved in the military service, protection of the rights of servicepersons during military service, protection of the rights of the ex- servicepersons after the end of military service / who have acquired the right to long-term military service or military disability pension.

We also focus on the protection of the rights of servicepersons' family members, in other words, the Centre is considered an internal mechanism for raising awareness of the rights of serviceperson and their family members and for reporting the violations of their rights, which is very important not only as an effective means of combating such manifestations, but also it presents a preventive factor. As the experience shows, the servicepersons, being informed about their rights through the Hotline, are able to prevent possible violations or protect their rights through legal instruments.

Having organizational independence within the structure of the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Armenia, the Centre is directly subordinate to the Minister of Defence of Armenia and reports directly to him on problematic cases. Thanks to the activities of the Centre, public trust in the Armed Forces has been strengthened. After the end of each semester, a content and digital report on the calls received by the hotline is posted on the official website of the Ministry of Defence, which also ensures the transparency and accountability of our activities.

When talking about human rights in the armed forces, the human rights of "citizens in uniform" are often referred to, and given the special regime of compulsory military service and the status of the armed forces as a closed institution, special attention is paid to ensuring human rights guarantees and

defence legislation, so that it is consistent with the international obligations assumed by the state in the field of human rights and fundamental freedoms. In this regard, the Ministry of Defence carries out extensive cooperation with the international organizations, and the Centre is the coordinator and responsible for programs related to the field of human rights.

Today I will present about the one of our most successful co-operations, the co-operation between the Council of Europe represented by the Council of Europe office in Yerevan, which was launched back in 2016. Yearly, this co-operation has acquired an institutional character, the directions of co-operation have been improved and expanded, we have added new areas and developed the previous ones, that is, we have mainly focused our efforts on systemic reforms, which have created favorable conditions for the creation of a new value system in the armed forces. I believe that our key success is the targeted nature of the projects, based on the principle of assessing the needs of the Ministry of Defence and responding to them comprehensively and promptly.

I would like to mention here that in 2020 after the 44-day war, new needs appeared in the social and health sector, to which our CoE partners responded very quickly, carrying out a needs assessment and capacity building of the social protection department. CoE experts studied the legislation regulating the sphere of social and healthcare rights of the families of disabled, killed, dead, missing servicepersons, highlighted the existing gaps and developed proposals for improving the existing legislation.

The first co-operation project was called "Strengthening European human rights standards in the Armed Forces in Armenia".

Within the framework of the first phase of the project, the activities were carried out in several directions: improvement of the legislation regulating the military sphere, development of the capacities of the Human Rights and Integrity Building Centre of the Ministry of Defence of Armenia, raising awareness on human rights in the Armed Forces, including training courses. Methodological and expert assistance was provided to improve the efficiency of disciplinary policy and internal service organization, to prevent ill-treatment, non-combat deaths and other violations of human rights and to increase the effectiveness of other procedures in the Armed Forces.

A manual on "Council of Europe documents on human rights in the Armed Forces" was printed and delivered to the troops as a methodological tool.

During the first project, a number of reports were presented by the CoE office in Yerevan:

1. "On the assessment of the Military Legislation of the Republic of Armenia"
2. "On Assessment of Human Rights Training Needs in the Armed Forces"
3. "On the assessment of legal regulations and institutional frameworks for the prevention and investigation of human rights violations in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia"

The recommendations presented in the reports were thoroughly studied by the Ministry of Defence. The study process on the legislation regulating the Ministry of Defence coincided with the reforms of the military legislation underway in the Ministry of Defence and some of the presented recommendations were taken into account for the adoption of the Law "On Military Service and the Status of Servicepersons" in 2017.

As a result of the report "On the Assessment of Human Rights Training Needs in the Armed Forces", the educational programs of military educational institutions on the curriculum of "Human Rights" were reviewed, the programme was introduced in additional education and master's education degrees, the lecturers were trained by international experts, and within the framework of the second stage of the project "Human Rights and Women in the Armed Forces of Armenia" the Human Rights lecture room was opened at the Military University which technical re-equipment was provided by the Council of Europe Office in Yerevan.

The next project "Human Rights and Women in the Armed Forces in Armenia" was launched in July, 2019.

The objective of this project was to contribute to the protection of human rights in the armed forces, particularly the rights of female servicepersons, and to strengthen the effectiveness of legal processes in military cases by supporting the development of skills and capacities in drafting legal acts. Here I would like to emphasize that both the first and the second projects contributed to the implementation of the National Strategies for the Protection of Human Rights and the action plans, approved by the Decree of the Government of the Republic of Armenia.

3 reports have been published within the framework of the 1st phase of the Project:

1. Regarding the whistleblower protection legislation in the Republic of Armenia and its applicability in the Armed Forces,

2. Analysis of the Armenian legislation on the involvement of women in the armed forces from the perspective of European and International Standards of Human Rights,
3. RA Armed Forces servicepersons' perceptions regarding mechanisms for protecting their rights, as well as reporting about possible violations.

Within the framework of the project, training courses on the topics of right to life, prohibition of torture, fair trial were carried out for the personnel of the Armed Forces. Training courses dedicated to human rights and psychological aspects of military service, to the issues related to the examination of the cases presented against RA in the ECtHR and the processes of fulfillment of the obligations undertaken by RA within the framework of the Council of Europe were also delivered.

Informational posters and manuals on human rights have been produced, short video materials on the human rights of servicepersons and mechanisms of protection of human rights were produced and disseminated via mass media.

The second phase of the "Human Rights and Women in the Armed Forces in Armenia" project was launched in June, 2020. Within the framework of this project most of the activities were aimed at assessing the needs and capacity building of female servicepersons of the armed forces.

Within the framework of the project, a number of activities aimed at promoting and strengthening the rights of female servicepersons were carried out, in particular, a visibility and communication program for women's councils of military units, also the standard internal labour regulations and questionnaires for conducting internal research were developed. With the participation of the

members of the women's councils, seminars and trainings were carried out aimed at development of their practical capabilities. Informational manuals entitled "Women in the armed forces: Be aware", "Social Rights and Guarantees of Military Women" and "Political and Civil Rights of Military Servicepersons" were produced and delivered to military units.

The Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Armenia, in collaboration with the Human Rights Defender Office, prepared a series of informative videos on the human rights of women in the Armed Forces, which is going to be continuous.

As in the previous projects, within the framework of this project, we had study visits to different countries, had a study of international experience, as a result of which we are initiating the localization of best practices in the field of defence. I would like to note that as a result of the localization of international experience today we have developed:

1. For the females a temporary service on a voluntary-compulsory basis for a period of 6 months is being introduced in the Republic of Armenia.
2. The women's platoon has been formed and is being recruited, which will later operate as a battalion.
3. The position of an Assistant to the Minister of Defence on the matters of female servicepersons was created.

I would also like to talk about two important initiatives that are currently being implemented. Those are:

The launch of a mobile phone application, which will be carried out in collaboration with the Human Rights Defender Office, and will enable the citizens to get any information about military service, human rights in the Armed Forces. Besides, another very important aspect is the research aimed at studying

behavioral norms of informal relationships in the Armed Forces, and revealing the social and psychological problems of the manifestation of criminal subculture among soldiers and violations of Human Rights in the Armed Forces.

The technical characteristics of the implementation of the mobile application and the methodology of the research implementation are already prepared and we fully hope that both initiatives will be implemented within the framework of the new project "Fostering Human Rights in the Armed Forces in Armenia".

Summarizing my speech, without mentioning the names, I would like to thank all our CoE partners, experts, especially the previous and current Heads of the Council of Europe Office in Yerevan, the staff, for always constructively responding to our needs, for effective and cordial co-operation.

I would also like to express my special thanks to the UK Government, because without the funding from the UK Government's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, the activities of the first project I have already presented would not have been possible. The next project was implemented within the framework of Council of Europe Action Plan for Armenia 2018-2022, which was financed by Germany, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Sweden.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to the partners who financially support the Council of Europe Action Plan for Armenia 2023-2026, within the framework of which the current project "Fostering Human Rights in the Armed Forces in Armenia" is being implemented.

Summarizing my speech, I could confidently mention that our cooperation has a huge potential, the results of which are visible both for the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Armenia, and for the society and international partners.

Thank you for your attention.