

## **Statement Regarding the Attacks on “Asparez” Journalists’ Club**

March 21, 2008

On March 21, 2008 at 01.05 AM there was an arson attack on the car of Gyumri Journalists’ Club “Asparez” President Nadezhda Hakobian, which at that time was in use by the Club’s Board Chairman Levon Barseghian.

Levon Barseghian is sure, that this incident is directly related to his efforts to protect “GALA” TV and the strict criticism of authorities voiced by him on that and a number of other occasions, as well as the number of threatening phone calls addressed to him and the Club, and the arson attempt of “Asparez” office on the morning of January 19, 2008.

Let us also remind, that on February 25, 2008 the Gyumri Mayor publicly insulted and threatened “GALA” TV and “Asparez” Club, stating, that “in our city there are a couple of sections that disgust people. This is the “GALA section” and “Asparez section” (...), let them come to their senses, too”. “Asparez” appealed to the local police to file a criminal case against the Mayor for insulting, libeling and threatening, but was refused “due to lack of corpus delicti”.

We state that this assault in Gyumri against the independent journalistic organization is the direct consequence, from one side, of banning any form of dissent, political persecutions, hindering the work of opposition and independent organizations and media, from the other – preferential permissiveness of persons and bodies amiable to the authorities. The unprecedented activity of citizens in support of the freedom of speech and “GALA” TV under such conditions has probably caused the dislike of some persons and especially the Gyumri Mayor, who on March 20 urged the citizens not to support “GALA” speaking on another TV channel in Gyumri.

We strictly condemn this illicit act against our colleagues, and as none of the attacks against “Asparez” has been so far disclosed by Gyumri law-enforcement bodies, and this failure has made the criminals further unrestrained, we demand that investigation of all these incidents should be conducted by national law-enforcement bodies.

**Yerevan Press Club**

**Committee to Protect Freedom of Speech**

**Media Diversity Institute-Armenia**

**Internews Media Support NGO**

**Transparency International Anti-Corruption Center**

**“ArmlInfo” news agency**

**“Antenna” NGO**

**Radio “VAN”**

**Vanadzor Press Club**

**Helsinki Citizens Assembly Vanadzor Office**

**“Haykakan Zhamanak” daily**

**Freedom of Information Center of Armenia**

**“Zhamanak-Yerevan” daily**