

Statement Regarding the Judge's Ban on Covering the Open Court Session

April 14, 2016

On April 13, in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Shengavit Administrative District of Yerevan a groundless attempt was made to obstruct the legitimate professional activities of Aravot.am correspondent Ami Chichakian. The journalist had come to the court to cover the open session of Venera Torosian, chairperson of precinct electoral commission, accused of voting instead of other persons on the day of referendum on amendments to the RA Constitution held on December 6, 2015.

Prior to the start of the session, judge Nelly Baghdasarian informed Aravot.am correspondent that Venera Torosian did not want the session to be video recorded. Then Venera Torosian announced that she did not want the session to be covered at all. To the journalist's objection that it is an open court session and the case is a matter of public interest, the judge replied that it is a question of person's immunity and protection of personal data.

Armineh Fanian, the lawyer of the accused, threatened Aravot.am correspondent, saying that if her defendant's name appeared in any publication, the website would have problems.

The court granted the motion of the accused and her lawyer, putting a ban on the coverage of the session.

After consulting with lawyers and media experts, Ami Chichakian, nevertheless, covered the court session.

Taking into consideration the actuality of the issue and referring to a provision of Article 4 of the RA Law "On Mass Communication", which states that "it is prohibited (...) to compel a person carrying out media activity or a journalist to disseminate or to refrain from disseminating information", we, the undersigned, demand from:

- The judge to annul the decision, as the ban on the coverage of an open court session has no legal basis, especially taking into account the public significance and importance of this case;
- The lawyer of the accused to abstain from making threats to journalists, taking into account the fact that it implies liability under Article 164 of the RA Criminal Code, and to apologize to Aravot.am correspondent Ami Chichakian.

We call on Aravot.am and other media not to yield to this and other similar unlawful obstructions, to resist them, remain committed to their professional principles and cover all the events of public importance.

COMMITTEE TO PROTECT FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

YEREVAN PRESS CLUB

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