

Statement Regarding the Obstruction of Professional Activities of the Correspondents of “A1+” TV Company and Radio Liberty by the Security Guards of Armenia Marriott Hotel

April 23, 2015

On April 22 at about 14.00 in downtown Yerevan the security guards of the Armenia Marriott hotel used force against the correspondent of Armenian Service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Sisak Gabrielian and correspondent of “A1+” Robert Ananian and obstructed their professional activities. The journalists were near the hotel to take pictures of the “System of a Down” rock band members.

The journalists noticed a group of publicly known persons sitting together in the open café of Armenia Marriott hotel, namely RA MP Samvel Aleksanian, Russian-Armenian businessman Samvel Karapetian, RA Minister of Transport and Communications Gagik Beglarian, former Yerevan Mayor Karen Karapetian, and tried to videotape them. Security guards of the hotel approached the journalists and demanded to stop videotaping, bringing absurd reasons.

Journalists explained that the people in the café are public figures and the law allows to videotape people in the public space. In response to this, one of the security guards twice hit Radio Liberty correspondent Sisak Gabrielian, and the other guard, noticing that “A1+” correspondent Robert Ananian is filming the guard who assaulted his colleague, demanded to turn off the camera and hit the journalist on the arm.

The journalists turned to policemen patrolling the area and demanded to restore the order, but they did not take any measures.

We, the undersigned, are once again forced to state that those who physically assault journalists in Armenia as a rule are not held responsible and the climate of impunity leads to new crimes. Thus, out of 9 similar incidents that took place in 2014, not a single perpetrator was found and held accountable. In these circumstances the Armenian authorities’ effort to persuade the society and the international community that the media and the journalists are free in our country, are at least ridiculous.

It is unfortunate that such an incident occurs these days when we mark the 100th centenary of the Armenian Genocide.

Herein we express our indignation with the incident of April 22 and demand:

- The RA Prosecutor’s Office to accept this statement and the media pieces about the incident as a crime report and institute a proper oversight of the case;
- The RA Police to find the perpetrators who used physical violence against the journalists and obstructed their professional activities, and hold them accountable;
- The administration of Marriott hotel to penalize the security guards for abuse of power and use of physical force against the journalists, and take measures to prevent such incidents in the future.

Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression
Yerevan Press Club
Media Initiatives Center (former Internews Armenia)
“Asparez” Journalists’ Club
Media Diversity Institute-Armenia
“Journalists for the Future” NGO