

Statement Regarding the Restrictions on the Activities of Media Representatives in the Parliament and the Violence Used Against Them

25 August, 2021, Yerevan

We, the undersigned journalistic organisations, hereby express our deep concern about and disappointment with the unacceptable situation and processes taking place at the National Assembly in the recent two days, including the facts of unlawful obstructions or discontinuance of the activities of journalists and cameramen covering them.

On 24 August, when heated polemic between the members of the NA developed into a brawl, the security officers forcibly removed the representatives of the media from the box foreseen for the press, thereby preventing them from continuing filming the incidents. The work of journalists and cameramen was obstructed also at the entrance to the plenary session hall. The said obstacles included threats by security officers directed at Hayk Tonoyan, cameraman of the online website www.news.am of depriving him of his NA accreditation if he continued shooting the incident, then the footages were allegedly deleted.

The same situation was repeated on 25 August. To prevent the parliamentary brawls from being filmed, the media representatives were again removed from the box, including by using violence. Their professional activities were again obstructed at the entrance to the plenary session hall.

We insist that these acts in respect of the journalists and cameramen accredited with the National Assembly violate the law and are directed against freedom of speech and the right of the public to receive information. They are also contrary to the substance and essence of the discussions held during the 23 August meeting between the leaders of the three journalistic organisations – Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, Center for Media Initiatives and Journalists' Club Asparez – and the NA Speaker Alen Simonyan.

It goes without saying that all RA citizens have a right to be informed of the manner of work and conduct of each and every MP. Moreover, any information in respect of the parliament, which does not contain state or other secrets, must become public property. This can happen first and foremost through uninhibited journalistic work.

In the light of the aforesaid, we demand that:

- The NA leadership discontinues without a delay the practice of violence, pressure and unlawful restrictions in respect of the journalists and cameramen accredited with the parliament, regardless of the events they cover whilst performing their professional duties;
- The Speaker of the NA participates by all means in the discussion foreseen on 30 August by the Standing Committee on Human Rights Protection and Public Affairs, which will be

dedicated to the above problems and to maximally meet the reasonable expectations of journalists;

- The officers of the security service stop exceeding their powers by applying ungrounded restrictions on journalists and cameramen working in the parliament and putting forward ungrounded demands, as well as stop obstructing their professional activity.

COMMITTEE TO PROTECT FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

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