**Statement Regarding the violence and pressure against journalists**

**11 May 2024, Yerevan**

On May 9, 2024, during the march organized by the “Tavush for the Motherland” initiative, on Amiryan Street in Yerevan, the professional activities of xosnak.am news website representatives were obstructed, and violence was used. In particular, journalist Naneh Israelyan sought a comment from Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan, who was leading the march, but the latter urged the journalist to leave. The Archbishop’s supporters, in turn, snatched the camera from Vahe Aghryan, the cameraman of the same media. They removed the chip, threw the device on the ground, smashed it, and then left using offensive language. As reported by the RA Investigative Committee, criminal proceedings were initiated on the incident under Article 237, Part 1 of the RA Criminal Code.

This is already the 6th case of violence against media representatives, stemming from protests against the ongoing border demarcation in Tavush region over recent weeks, along with the accompanying series of clashes.
Moreover, in three of them, the police abused their authority resorting to unjustifiable force against journalists and cameramen. In the other three cases, media representatives faced violence either by the participants of the protest actions, or the supporters of Bagrat Galstanyan, when these actions occurred outside the context of protests.

We, the undersigned journalistic organizations, strongly condemn this surge of attacks and violence against media professionals, regardless of the perpetrators. We are convinced that the harsh rhetoric and careless remarks from high-ranking government officials on one side, and opposition figures and protest leaders on the other, directed at media, create fertile ground for these acts to occur.

Let us present just two examples. Firstly, on May 6, during a session in Parliament, Alen Simonyan, the Speaker of the National Assembly, remarked: “Do you believe I don’t want to beat a journalist? I don’t have the right to do that, nor do I have the right to even think about it…” This statement suggests that if the NA Speaker had such a right, he would beat a journalist due to his expressed desire. Secondly, on May 10, during his speech from the podium at Yerevan’s Republic Square, Bagrat Galstanyan labeled the leadership of Araratnews.am as “scum” and “murderers” for distorting his words. Such language is clearly offensive, provoking in nature and has the potential to incite further violence against media representatives.

Based on the above, we urge:

• the law enforcement agencies to demonstrate a uniform approach in their investigations into the facts of physical violence and obstruction against journalists and cameramen, ensuring objectivity and impartiality, irrespective of the affiliations of media they work for;

• the ruling and all other political forces to demonstrate restraint and tolerance towards media representatives, resolving information disputes and disagreements in a civilized manner;

• the clergymen and politicians leading the protest actions of the last days to take responsibility for the actions of the demonstrators, oversee the situation, ensuring the decency and legality of the supporters’ behavior, including in their interactions with journalists;

• the media to show greater responsibility, impartiality and tact in their coverage of the current socio-political situation in the country, strictly adhering to the norms of journalistic ethics.

**COMMITTEE TO PROTECT FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION**

**YEREVAN PRESS CLUB**

**MEDIA INITIATIVES CENTER**

**MEDIA DIVERSITY INSTITUTE-ARMENIA**

**JOURNALISTS’ CLUB “ASPAREZ”**

**“JOURNALISTS FOR THE FUTURE” NGO**

**“JOURNALISTS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS” NGO**

**GORIS PRESS CLUB**