**Statement Regarding the violence against Zhirayr Voskanyan, the commentator of 1in.am**

**7 May 2024, Yerevan**

On the evening of May 5, 2024, 1in.am commentator Zhirayr Voskanyan was subjected to violence in “1896” restaurant on Tumanyan Street in Yerevan. According to the journalist, blogger Mika Badalyan and several companions seated at his table approached him, displayed indecent behavior and provoked a conflict. When Zhirayr Voskanyan alerted the police, right in front of them, individuals from that group hit Voskanyan several times and snatched the phone from his hand. The brawl continued in the street, and the footage of the entire incident has been made accessible online.

Despite the arrival of additional police officers at the scene, similar to their colleagues already present, they did not take any visible action against the perpetrators of the violence. Meanwhile, the majority of those engaged in the brawl managed to escape through the restaurant back exit.

We, the undersigned journalistic organizations, have to point out once again the increase in cases of attacks and physical violence against media representatives in recent weeks. All of these incidents are directly or indirectly related to the border demarcation in Tavush region, the coverage of the ensuing protests and intense political struggle. In some cases, the police use completely unjustified force against journalists and cameramen carrying out their professional duties at the heart of events. In other cases, media representatives are targeted and subjected to violence for already published pieces, as a rule, by groups with opposing viewpoints and beliefs.

The attack against Zhirayr Voskanyan stands out due to the fact that it was instigated and perpetrated by another person operating in the media sphere, a blogger, and his associates. Moreover, the disagreement was related to professional activity, specifically, expressed views, and was manifested by indecent behavior and physical violence instead of a meaningful response. This is even more infuriating and reprehensible.

Taking note of the fact that Zhirayr Voskanyan reported the crime, we expect:

• the prosecuting authorities to carry out a comprehensive investigation and provide a thorough legal assessment of the actions committed against the journalist. At the same time, it is important that an identical approach is applied to all recent incidents of violence against journalists, regardless of their media affiliations.

• the Ministry of Internal Affairs to initiate an internal probe against the police officers who witnessed the incident and appeared to show inaction, and if the above-mentioned testimonies are substantiated, take measures to hold them accountable.

Given the multiple documented facts of recent unjustified use of police force against media representatives and the hindrance of their legitimate activities in reporting on events of public significance, we reiterate our demand to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. We urge them to organize a meeting involving high-ranking officials from law enforcement agencies and media representatives to discuss the existing issues and prevent violence against journalists.

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