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IN THE MONTH OF MAY 2023, THE RIGHT SIDE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER NGO CARRIED OUT THE FOLLOWING 4 EVENTS IN THE ORGANIZATION'S SAFE SPACE

On May 17, the community meeting with Anush Gabrielyan – social worker of the Sexual Assault Crisis Center NGO "On domestic violence, sexual violence, violence against women and children", was attended by 10 Trans and LGBIQ+ people, sex workers, and supporters.

On May 17, a community meeting on the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT) was attended by 30 Trans and LGBIQ+ people, sex workers, and supporters.

On May 18, a community meeting on "Domestic Violence" was attended by 13 Trans and LGBTQ+, sex workers and supporters.

On May 25, the community meeting with Anush Gabrielyan – social worker of the Sexual Assault Crisis Center NGO "On domestic violence, sexual violence, violence against women and children", was attended by 10 Trans and LGBIQ+ people, sex workers, and supporters.

During the month of May, The Right Side NGO accepted a number of 184 Trans LGBIQ+ people and sex workers, who used the services provided within the legal, educational, and informational, social programs implemented by the organization.

MEETING-DISCUSSION ON THE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN ARMENIA, INITIATED BY FREEDOM HOUSE

On June 1 of this year, Right Side human rights defender NGO hosted a meeting-discussion dedicated to human rights issues in Armenia, which was initiated by the Freedom House organization.

The meeting was attended by Freedom House president Michael Abramovitz, Freedom Hosue director of Europe and Eurasian programs Mark Behrendt, who arrived in Armenia to participate in the Armenian Forum For Democracy, as well as Freedom House Armenian representative Andranik Shirinyan and Sona Mkhitaryan. The meeting-discussion was attended by members of civil society and representatives of the Women's Resource Center, Yezidi Center for Human Rights, Human Rights House Yerevan, Pink Armenia NGO, and Disability Rights Agenda NGO.

The issues of LGBTIQ individuals, national minorities, persons with disabilities, women and children, and other human rights challenges were on the agenda of the meeting.

The current situation of human rights, the main challenges, and the strategies to overcome them were discussed as well as the role of the Freedom House in establishing legal equality in the Republic of Armenia.

The Right Side human rights defender NGO highly values the constant dialogue and cooperation with organizations and interested parties in the field. By pooling our resources, and jointly analyzing and discussing the existing issues, we will continue consistently work to strengthen democracy and establish legal equality in the Republic of Armenia.











JUNE IS LGBTQ PRIDE MONTH

The Right Side human rights defender NGO congratulates the Trans and LGBIQ community on the occasion of Pride Month. Each year, representatives of the LGBTIQ community come together to celebrate June as Pride Month through parades, events, and celebrations. The purpose of Pride Month is to support LGBTIQ people and fight for equality, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. According to the 2023 Global Gay Pride Calendar compiled by the International LGBTIQ+ Travel Association, 83 events will take place during Pride Month around the world this year, the most significant of which are the parades in Madrid, São Paulo, San Francisco, and New York, which are attended by up to 5 million people each year.

During Pride Month, it is important to talk about the successes and achievements of the LGBTIQ community: this year, the institution of marriage became a reality for LGBTIQ couples in Andorra, Cuba, Curaçao, Mexico, Slovenia, and Switzerland, conversion therapy was banned in Cyprus and India, in Spain trans people can already change their gender without psychological counseling, LGBTIQ couples in Taiwan have been given the opportunity to adopt children, and the Cook Islands has joined the ranks of countries that have decriminalized homosexuality. Although the Republic of Armenia has not yet introduced proper legislative regulations to ensure the equality of LGBTIQ persons, there is also positive progress, for example, this year the provision of the 2013 order of the Minister of Health of the Republic of Armenia, according to which being gay was a ban on donating blood, was abolished.

"Right side" NGO actively deals with the issues of Trans and LGBIQ people in Armenia, providing hundreds of beneficiaries with free legal and psychological counseling, providing representation in courts, organizing various educational, and entertainment meetings and discussions, and providing the opportunity to participate in various professional trainings. Since 2016, as a result of the persistent work of the organization, the process of changing the name of trans persons has been facilitated, which is now possible without the testimony of 3 persons certifying that the person is transgender and a mandatory psychological conclusion. In 2017, for the first time in RA, the Right Side human rights defender NGO organized a Trans Camp, and in 2018, with the efforts of the legal team of the NGO, for the first time, the Court recognized discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity, which is a precedent decision in RA. In 2022, the Right Side human rights defender NGO established a community safe center that hosts hundreds of Trans and LGBIQ people, their family members, and supporters every month. The organization also consistently collects and documents incidents of discrimination and violence against Trans and LGBIQ people; unfortunately, Trans and LGBIQ people in Armenia continue to face stigma, discrimination, oppression, and violence in various aspects of their lives, as evidenced by the calls for physical violence and hate documented over the past year.

In the face of these obstacles, the continued work and determination of Trans and LGBIQ activists and organizations operating in the field have great importance. The Right Side human rights defender NGO thanks all Trans and LGBIQ activists who have shouldered the hard work of fighting for equality and safety and are paving the way for progress. Today in Armenia, the adoption of a law criminalizing discrimination against LGBTIQ persons, the legal recognition of genders, access to medical services for trans persons, as well as the elimination of behaviors that perpetuate the atmosphere of impunity and inaction of the police are on the agenda.

We will continue to fight for every RA citizen to be accepted and respected, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender self-expression.

TWO MEN BEAT A TRANS WOMAN IN HER APARTMENT AND STOLE HER PHONE AT KNIFEPOINT

Yesterday, on the 11th of June of this year, between 11:00 and 00:00 pm, two men attacked a trans woman in her apartment and severely beat her. The men threw the trans woman to the floor and hit her on various parts of her body, causing physical injuries and bruises. Then, threatening to use a knife, they stole the mobile phone of the trans woman and left.

The trans woman immediately contacted the police regarding the incident.

The legal team of the Right Side human rights defender NGO is involved in this case and will provide legal representation at all stages of the case. The trans woman will receive rapid response financial assistance for abused trans people, provided by the Right Side NGO, with the support of the Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights, so that she can quickly recover from the violence against her and ease the challenges she faces during this difficult phase.

The Right Side human rights defender NGO condemns gender-based violence and will pursue the entire disclosure of the incident and bring the perpetrators to justice. We would like to emphasize that in recent times there has been an increase in cases of physical violence against LGBTQ people, as evidenced by the cases of physical violence and hate speech documented during the last year. Unfortunately, today in the Republic of Armenia there is an atmosphere of impunity that perpetuates violence against Trans and LGBIQ persons due to incomplete legal regulations, the absence of a law criminalizing discrimination against Trans and LGBIQ persons, and imperfect legal practices, which has created a fertile ground for harassment and violence against Trans and LGBIQ persons.

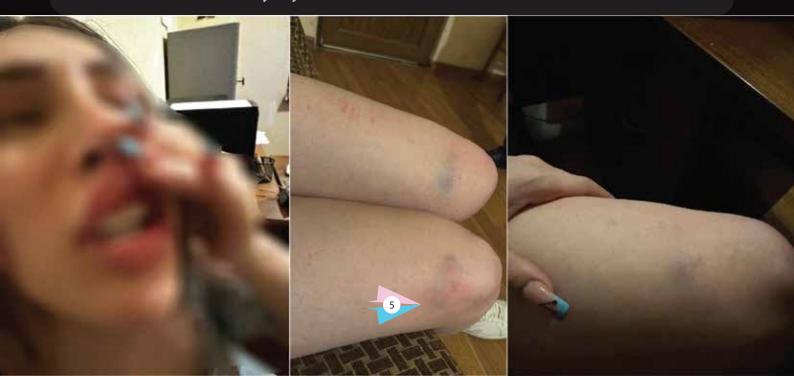
The Right Side human rights defender NGO consistently collects and documents cases of discrimination and violence against Trans and LGBIQ persons and urges the RA Police to conduct a proper investigation to identify the perpetrators and hold them accountable to the full extent of the law.

Once again, we are calling

RA police, prosecutor's office, Human Rights Defender, and relevant bodies to ensure the safety of trans-LGBTQ persons, and all the rights granted to them by the RA constitution,

Diplomatic representatives, and international funders, who direct their resources and funds to the improvement of justice and establishing equality in RA, to take steps to prevent discrimination against community members and others.

No one of us can be free until everybody is free.













HOW TO OVERCOME CRISES: TRAINING FOR LGBTQI YOUTH





The Right Side human rights defender NGO organized a "Crisis Response Training" for Trans and LGBIQ youth. The training was funded by the Global Fund for Women and aimed to equip Trans and LGBIQ youth with the skills to effectively respond to the various crises and challenges they may face in their lives. 20 Trans and LGBIQ young people took part in the training, and the trainer was Lilit Martirosyan, the founding president of the Right Side human rights defender NGO.

During the course, participants developed a comprehensive understanding of financial, political, economic, environmental and other types of crises, with a special focus on the unique needs of Trans and LGBIQ people, the crises they face in different areas of their lives. Many economic and geopolitical processes that have taken place in the last few years have left their mark on the lives and needs of trans and LGBIQ people in Armenia, and the Right Side human rights defender NGO has developed an appropriate strategy in each case to effectively respond to these problems.

In 2020, due to the global pandemic caused by Covid-19, an economic crisis began all over the world, and many Trans and LGBIQ people in RA also lost their main source of income and found themselves in an extremely vulnerable financial situation. Despite the many aid programs that have been implemented, the effects of this crisis for Trans and LGBIQ people have not completely disappeared to this day.

In 2021, the Artsakh 44-day war further deepened the existing crisis, during which the existing economic crisis became worse, as well as Trans and LGBTQ people became targets of hate speech.





Already in 2022, global political developments in the form of the Russian-Ukrainian war led to a large influx of immigrants to Armenia, and many LGBTIQ people moved to Armenia, adding to the number of beneficiaries of Right Side human rights defenders NGO, which caused the organization to revise its strategy and change it according to the crisis. Due to this immigration, there was inflation in the Republic of Armenia, in particular, a sharp increase in the prices of rental apartments was recorded, which had a direct impact on the economic situation of Trans and LGBTQ people living in rent, many people found themselves outside or had to pay double the price for the apartment. It should also be noted that in addition to the crises caused by the political context, many pending problems continue to exist in RA, for example, the lack of medical services for trans people, hormone therapy, domestic violence, etc., which make Trans and LGBTQ people more vulnerable to any external crisis.

Through the study of contemporary examples and precedents, and the example of the response of the Right Side human rights defender NGO to them, the participants of the anti-crisis course learned the skills of crisis prevention, effective strategies and post-crisis recovery.

By organizing such trainings, the Right Side human rights defender NGO aims to empower and increase the capacities of Trans and LGBIQ youth, contributing to their well-being and professional development. The skills acquired during the course will not only enable participants to overcome personal crises, but will also help them effectively solve various problems facing their communities.



ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION WORKSHOP FOR TRANS AND LGBIQ YOUTH





The Right Side human rights defender NGO, within the framework of Pride activities and programs, organized a course on "Advocacy and Activism for Social Inclusion" for Trans and LGBIQ youth. The training was funded by the Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice and aimed to equip Trans and LGBIQ youth with advocacy skills so they can effectively advocate for their rights and effect lasting change in their communities. 25 Trans and LGBTQ youth from Yerevan and RA regions participated in the training.

During the course, the participants received comprehensive knowledge about the history of the LGBTIQ movement and current issues and problems on the agenda. They talked about the principles of activism and campaigning on online platforms, as well as protection against stigma, discrimination, and calls for violence targeting LGBTIQ people online. In recent years, along with the development of social networks, online gender-based violence has also gained momentum, and there are still no adequate regulations to protect victims of such violence, leaving the responsibility of creating a safe online environment on the shoulders of each individual.

The other part of the course was dedicated to the promotion of social inclusion of Trans and LGBIQ people and the development of skills to face challenges through mutual aid. A relaxed environment was created where each participant was able to express their opinions and participate in discussions, group work, and various practical activities, which were entirely aimed at building advocacy skills, overcoming intra-personal and social conflicts, online and offline activism, etc. Participants learned how to properly work with individuals who do not yet have adequate knowledge about gender identity and sexual orientation and developed activism strategies to support the Trans and LGBIQ movement.

The Right Side human rights defender NGO will continue to regularly organize various trainings for the purpose of empowering Trans and LGBIQ people and equipping them with all the skills necessary to fight gender-based violence, conduct online and offline activism against hate speech in social networks, hate crimes and discrimination to protect themselves, prevent human rights violations, face challenges and promote social inclusion.



OPEN CALL FOR TRANS AND LGBIQ SOLIDARITY FORUM





Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO is pleased to announce that a Trans and LGBIQ Solidarity Virtual Forum will take place on July 3rd with the financial support of ILGA Europe. This event aims to bring together representatives of the Trans and LGBIQ community in Armenia and Trans activists from the Western and Central Asian regions to exchange experiences and knowledge in order to strengthen solidarity among Trans and LGBIQ people.

Who can participate:

Trans and LGBIQ people, representatives of organizations operating in the field, sex workers, activists and people interested in the topic from all regions of RA and other countries in the region can participate in the Trans and LGBIQ Solidarity Virtual Forum. The working language of the forum is English, accompanied by Armenian interpretation. To participate, please fill out the attached form:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/JSTTQP6

Speakers at the Trans and LGBIQ Solidarity Forum are trans activists from the Middle East and Central Asia, who will share their experience of defending Trans and LGBIQ rights, presenting the unique features of their country's Trans and LGBIQ rights situation. The event will also include an interactive question and answer session, which will allow participants to directly engage in conversation with the speakers and get answers to their questions.

Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO hopes that, by getting to know the perspectives and journeys of each trans activist, the participants will improve their understanding of Trans and LGBIQ activism in different regions, and that the forum will serve as a platform for networking, sharing experiences, and being inspired by each other's activism. We believe that by coming together and learning from each other, we can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all LGBTQI people.



CALLS ON TIKTOK TO JOIN AN ORGANIZED GROUP TO COMMIT VIOLENCE AGAINST LGBTIQ PEOPLE

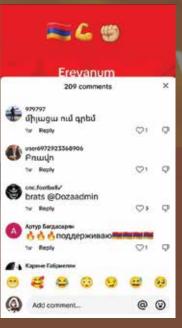
A week ago, on June 13 of this year, a user registered with the name "@maxutka_arm" posted a video on the TikTok social media platform, calling for committing physical violence against LGBTIQ people. In particular, this user wrote that a new group is forming in Yerevan, which will free the city from gays, write a direct message to join. The TikTok has collected more than 37,800 views and more than 200 comments within a week. The vast majority of comments welcomed the initiative, many people called for murder and violence, and several dozen people expressed their willingness to join the group. Some users publicly provided their phone numbers or Telegram account names to join the organizing group, and many wrote that they informed the admin of their details by direct message. Another user named "@xx_armiran_xx_official" offered in the comments to cooperate with them, as they are also planning to form a similar group. On the same day, the user "@maxutka_arm" posted another video, in which they inform that they are "14-15 years old, and those who want to join should write their information to form a Viber group and discuss". In the comments of this video, many people provided their information and expressed their willingness to join the group as well.

The legal team of the Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO is preparing materials regarding these posts to apply to the RA police.

The Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO strongly condemns violence based on sexual orientation or gender identity and will pursue the identification and prosecution of the authors of these publications. We would like to emphasize that over the past year, there has been an increase in calls for violence and physical violence against Trans and LGBIQ people, as evidenced by the documented cases of physical violence over the past year.

The Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO consistently collects and documents cases of discrimination and violence against Trans and LGBIQ persons. This year, the RA Investigative Committee and TikTok reached an agreement on the implementation of mechanisms for rapid response and urgent exchange of necessary information in cases of publication of information on crimes on the social platform, so we urge RA Investigative Committee to conduct a proper investigation to quickly identify the violators, bring them to justice, and eliminate the atmosphere of impunity that perpetuates violence against Trans and LGBIQ persons.













WORLD REFUGEE DAY: PUBLIC STATEMENT

June 20 is World Refugee Day, every year on this day the United Nations, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and many civil organizations around the world organize World Refugee Day events to draw public attention to the struggles of the millions of refugees and displaced people around the world, who had to flee their homes due to war, conflict and persecution.

Since 2016, the Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO has included among its priorities the provision of social assistance and protection of the interests of the LGBTIQ refugees who have found refuge in the Republic of Armenia. Especially in recent years, there has been a massive flow of refugees to Armenia from the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine due to the internal political developments and international relations of those countries. Among the people who moved to Armenia, there is also a large number of LGBTIQ people who had to leave their country to avoid discrimination and persecution. The Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO has included LGBTIQ refugees among its beneficiaries, implementing social assistance programs and providing urgent legal assistance for asylum, document applications, and other issues.

In the framework of World Refugee Day, it is important to emphasize that unfortunately there are also many Trans and LGBIQ people who are forced to leave Armenia due to continuous discrimination and violence against LGBTIQ people. In the Republic of Armenia, there is an atmosphere of impunity that perpetuates violence against Trans and LGBIQ people due to incomplete legal regulations, the absence of a law criminalizing discrimination, and imperfect law enforcement practices, which has created a fertile ground for harassment and violence against Trans and LGBIQ people: in the last year alone, at least 8 trans people have been documented to leave the country and seek asylum in European countries or the USA.

The Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO stands by the Trans and LGBIQ individuals who have become refugees and will fight for the protection of their interests and ensure equality of rights. Together, we will continue to work to ensure that all Trans and LGBIQ people have the right to international protection and safe haven when fleeing violence, persecution, war, or disaster in their home countries.



THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE RIGHT SIDE NGO WERE INVITED TO THE RECEPTION ORGANIZED BY THE US AMBASSADOR ON THE OCCASION OF PRIDE MONTH

On June 21, the representatives of the Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO were invited to the reception on the occasion of Pride Month organized by the Ambassador of the United States of America to the Republic of Armenia.

Representatives of the LGBTIQ community of Armenia, human rights defenders, employees of various organizations operating in the field, and LGBTIQ rights supporters participated in the event.

Ambassador Kristina Kvien welcomed guests to her residence, noting that everyone deserves to enjoy equity, dignity, and protection, regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability status, age, religion, or belief.

Supporting LGBTIQ people is integral to strengthening democracy and establishing legal equality in the Republic of Armenia. The Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO gives high importance to the organization of such events by the US Embassy and highly appreciates the embassy's work in increasing the visibility of LGBTIQ persons and achieving legal equality.



A SERIES OF INTERVIEWS WITH LGBTIQ PEOPLE PART 1

The Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO initiated this series of interviews with the aim of valuing Trans and LGBIQ activists, sharing their stories, raising awareness of cases of violence, and highlighting the current issues in Armenia. Our first interlocutor, who chose to remain anonymous, is a 21-year-old trans person who studies at Yerevan State Medical University after Mkhitar Heratsi and, witnessing the limited access to medical services for trans people in Armenia and the lack of specialists, aims to specialize in endocrinology.

What is your relationship with your family members?

My father died when I was two years old, I live with my mother. Certain changes in my behavior were noticeable even from a young age, and there came an age when I realized that I can't just live like this and told my mother straight away the whole situation, about my gender identity. Of course, it was a bit difficult in the beginning, but now she accepts me the way I am. In general, my relatives and I rarely communicate, and as far as I know, it is mostly related to my orientation. I keep in touch only with my sisters, I am very close to them.

What is the difference between members of the LGBTIQ community living in Yerevan and the regions?

Hrazdan is a small town, people are noticeable and know each other by face. It is natural that every time they see me they are not indifferent, they are interested. At one point, that interest turns into discrimination and violence. And there were fewer cases in Yerevan, the main difference is that there is relatively little discrimination in Yerevan.

Where do you study? What education did you receive?

I had quite good progress in school, and I was considered a kind of educational standard. Discrimination became more noticeable in the last years, because most of our class were boys, and they constantly singled me out, and I self-harmed and it was publicized at school. When I was young, the children of our class, together with the children of other classes, were waiting for me to come out of the class so that they would hit and beat me. And every time I turned to my class teacher, I got a negative answer. I had two close girlfriends, and my teacher convinced and encouraged them and the other girls not to communicate with me so that I could integrate into the circle of boys.



Now I am studying at a Medical University and from the very first day I realized that people are completely different here, they are indifferent to me, and in some cases, they even treat me positively. The same with the teaching staff, I went to class with piercings, and they always told me that I am very beautiful.

Were you able to find a job in your profession?

In the beginning, I worked as a sex worker, but later I worked as a consultant in a body care store, at first I was very scared, but the director was quite adequate, he even gifted me earrings for Christmas. But now the shop is closed and I am not working. Trans people, if we compare them with other LGBIQ people, are more visible, other people can work and hide their gender identity, and sexual orientation and avoid problems.

Have you ever been subjected to violence?

The biggest incident of violence, which was a turning point for me, happened on June 24 last year. In Hrazdan, a group of teenagers attacked me with sticks, clubs, and knives, and surrounded me from all sides. I don't know what heavenly power was at that moment that I saw a kindergarten, went in, and asked for help. The police did not respond at all, I waited for more than an hour for the police to arrive, they did not arrive, I went to the police. The application was not processed, because my complaint was mainly against one of those participants, who was their leader. But since he was not yet 16 years old, and despite the fact that he was already registered for various crimes, he was not subjected to any legal responsibility. After that, I have been visiting a psychologist for a year.

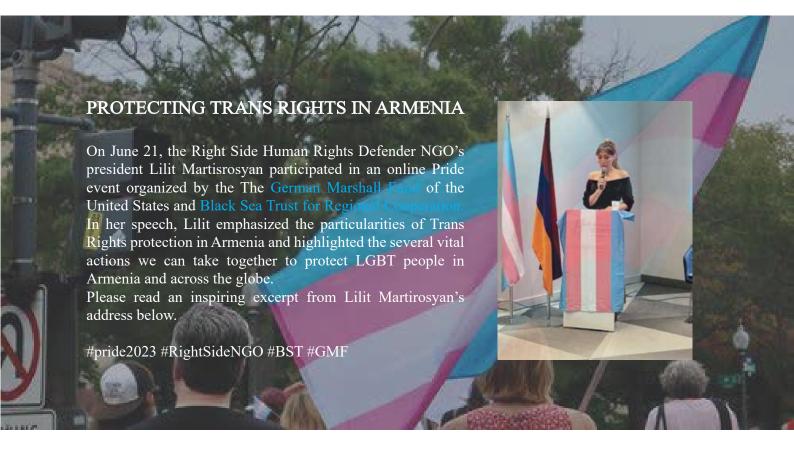
The other incident happened on August 13, 2020. I worked as a sex worker in Yerevan for some time, and I met with a man in his car. It all started when he asked me for my phone to call his friend, and then he just pulled out a knife and threatened to hurt me if I didn't give him the phone. Regarding the case, I applied to the Arabkir Police Department, and the attitude of the investigator was disgraceful: there was no psychological support, no empathy, no help, and even somewhere he was protecting that man. I even wanted to change the investigator, but I was not given that opportunity. And so the case was closed.

As a future doctor, what do you think, are the necessary medical services provided for trans people in Armenia?

First of all, for me, as a future doctor, it is important the way the patient presents themselves, representatives of the LGBTIQ community should know where they are going, how they should present themselves, and what problems may arise. Regarding the reforms, I would say that doctors should definitely undergo training on communicating with LGBTIQ people. I don't go to the doctor quite often, but recently I went to our local polyclinic, I was treated very terribly, that even after listing the symptoms, the doctor says some diseases, without tests, or analysis, based on stereotypes due to my gender identity. And there is a concept of medical deontology, that is, attitude, and communication with the patient, and that all was missing in them. One of the doctors even wanted to prescribe me male hormone medication, considering that I have a deviation. And that is of course still a narrow part of the problem. There is a problem with the lack of a specific specialist in Armenia because when an endocrinologist is trained and becomes a doctor, his education does not include the transformation of trans persons, hormone therapy, or the specifics of working with the LGBTIQ community. Therefore, if the educational part is included in university education, it seems to me that the issue will be resolved quickly. In the current situation, besides that, one of the biggest problems is the lack of medication, some kind of contraceptives for women or menstrual cycle-regulating medicines are used by trans people as hormone therapy, which is simply absurd, especially since specific dosages are also not defined for each one individually. I want to stay in Armenia, of course, and from time to time go abroad for training, but I want to become an endocrinologist in the future, and I think that there is a great need for that specialist in Armenia.







I am Lilit Martirosyan, a trans woman and activist from Armenia. I am the founder and president of Right Side, a nongovernmental organization working to protect the rights of trans LGBIQ people since 2016. Right Side is proud to be a Black Sea Trust grantee for the last five years.

I am here today to celebrate Pride Month with you. We celebrate the LGBT community and its fight for equality. We celebrate the progress that has been made, and we recommit ourselves to the work that still needs to be done in Armenian society.

For too long, LGBT people have been discriminated against and treated as diseased or ill in Armenia. Community members have been denied jobs, housing, and healthcare. For many years we have been subjected to violence and harassment, neglect and ridicule. But I want to say: We are not alone. There are many people in Armenia who are fighting for our rights. We have allies in the international organizations like GMF, in the media, and civil society. We have activists in the LGBT community who never give up, who fight for the rights of the community, and make great progress. I want to thank all of them, as we are growing stronger every day with their support.

 $https://www.gmfus.org/news/protecting-trans-rights-armenia?fbclid=IwAR086RPnx-jgco0OY-qMbhusa_bZjhRug48DZ_ujN_Zx_KnJhb7k6E4U6bo$



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