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## A SERIES OF INTERVIEWS WITH LGBTIQ PEOPLE, PART 2

The Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO initiated this series of interviews to value Trans and LGBTIQ activists, sharing their stories, raising awareness of cases of violence, and highlighting the current issues in Armenia. This time, our interlocutor is a 21-year-old LGBTIQ activist who shares what problems he faced in educational institutions, during military service, and in the family and mentions what changes he would like to see in RA laws that can improve the lives of LGBTIQ people and sex workers.

### **What kind of relationship do you have with family members?**

I have a very good relationship with my mother, I also have a good relationship with my sister and younger brother, they know about me. We don't talk about it with my mother, but it seems to me that she understands. I only exchange "hello-goodbye" with my dad, if we meet, even though we live in the same house.

### **Tell us about your school years, were they aware of your sexual orientation at school?**

They didn't know about my sexual orientation at school, but years after I graduated, I found out that 70 percent of my classmates were either lesbian, gay, or bisexual, even one person was trans, it was a bit of a shock to me, because in those years we didn't talk about it, those who knew about each other, they talked about it secretly. We didn't talk because we were afraid of a bad reaction, especially because there was an emo boy in our class, and the teacher of Armenian church history said that it was a disease, he needed to be treated, and when I defended him, the teacher also told me that I am also sick, I am perverse. There was a Jehovah's Witness in the class, and they treated him very badly. It was clear that if someone's sexual orientation was known, they would be targeted much more, so everyone in our class kept it a secret, but there was one student at school who openly talked about his orientation, and he was treated terribly.

### **Have you received a higher education, if not, what is the reason why you did not enter the university?**

I studied in college and graduated, but every day there were fights, if one of the boys was gentler, they were hurt a lot. In college, I started to get complex about my voice, I started smoking, drinking, and my voice changed. Before that, I sang in the church choir, and my voice was very thin. In college, when I was answering a lesson, they made fun of me, and I started not even answering the lessons, when they called me, I would say "I didn't study". I stopped singing, I tried to never hear my voice recorded, if I suddenly heard it, I would become hysterical. Now all that has passed a little, because I worked on myself for a long time. I did not apply to the university because I thought that the same thing would continue in the university, the same fights.



...the teacher of Armenian church history said that it was a disease, and he needed to be treated, and when I defended him, the teacher told me that I am sick too, I am perverse.

### **Have you ever experienced discrimination in medical facilities?**

No, I didn't go there and say I'm bisexual so I was not discriminated against or rejected, but there were times when I went with my friends because they didn't want to go alone, and I witnessed terrible discrimination, especially towards trans people, they didn't even examine them, they gave unreasonable reasons, for example, there was a female doctor who said: I will not examine you because I do not understand if you are a boy man or a woman girl, I don't know what to open and look.

### **Have you been discharged from military service due to your sexual orientation?**

I was released, but before that, I had done military service, I went to "Patani Erkapah" camp of ECM together with the college, and when I turned 18, I signed up as a volunteer for the RA volunteering organization, and I did military service for 6 months. The attitude towards me was good, although some people still made fun of me, and I was still getting complex because of my voice. Then, when I already went to the military commissariats for the army, they treated me normally, only at the end, when I went to the head of the commissariat, who had to sign the deferment paper, it turned out that he was my military education teacher. And he said, "You are making it up, lying that you are an LGBT person so that you don't go to the army". When I went to the military commissariat for the first time at the age of 18, the reason for my release was written nervous problems, and after the law was changed, when I went the second time, they wrote irritability.

### **Have you been subjected to domestic violence: psychological, physical, sexual, or economic?**

I was subjected to violence many times by my father, my uncles, my cousin, my grandmother. One of the most serious cases was when I was 14 years old, they once sent me to the store, while crossing the street, a car hit me, threw me aside, and at that moment one of my classmates, who was there, called my class teacher, and my teacher called our house. When I came back home, my dad and my cousin attacked me, shouting about why I get hit and so on. And dad tried to hit me, and I hit him back. And it was very terrible for me, because I was still in pain from the accident, and they attacked me instead of taking care of me. And there have been a lot of similar fights and psychological pressures, one of my uncles was a drug addict and very often used to inject in our house right in front of my eyes. My other uncle is from the circle of thieves by law, he has mental disorders, and he and his son live with us, the son also has a mental problem – schizophrenia. They are not aware that I am an LGBT person, but they know that I am friends with LGBT people. Once I posted a story with trans people and titled it "My angels", and one of our relatives saw it and showed it to my father, he called me and said, "I'm coming to slaughter you."

### **How safe is Armenia for sex workers?**

I did sex work, but for a very short time, and I was not discriminated against or abused during that time. From a general safety point of view, I think the conditions for gays are relatively bad, and if it's known, it's a big shame, even if heteronormative men do sex work with women, they're still stigmatized, and gays face much more stigma. In the case of trans people, there is a lot of violence, in the case of cis women, they are fined, and taken to police stations, where the police treat them very badly, especially if they work on the street. I think that if sex work is legalized, they will pay taxes and their old age will be more secure, they will have insurance, they will have a pension. It would also be good if there was a separate clause in the anti-discrimination law for both LGBT people and sex workers.

## THE RIGHT SIDE NGO HELD A MEETING WITH LGBTIQ INDIVIDUALS AND THEIR PARENTS

**B | S | T** The Black Sea Trust  
for Regional Cooperation  
A PROJECT OF THE GERMAN MARSHALL FUND

**RIGHT SIDE**  
HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER NGO

With the financial support of the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation, the Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO organized a meeting that brought together LGBTIQ people, their parents, and family members, with the aim of fostering an environment of solidarity, overcoming conflicts in families and building stronger parent-child relationships.

Researches conducted in recent years show that almost half of LGBTIQ adults around the world are estranged from their families, and one-third believe that their parents will never be able to accept them. As members of a society living with a traditional value system, LGBTIQ people in Armenia also face difficulties in telling their parents about their sexual orientation or gender identity, parents often reject their children's gender identity, gender self-expression, and sexual orientation, which unfortunately sometimes leads to relationship breakdown.

During the event, panel discussions were held to share personal experiences and stories, during which both LGBTIQ people and their parents had the opportunity to speak about the difficulties they faced in their families. Parents mentioned that sometimes they are not prepared to respond appropriately to the unique needs and challenges of their LGBTIQ children, even though they want to help them.

LGBTIQ people generally prefer to maintain a relationship with their parents, even if the parents reject their identity, but they need conflict management and crisis response skills to maintain the relationship. These discussions provided a platform for LGBTIQ individuals and their parents to share their struggles, hopes, and achievements, creating a safe space where they could find support from others who share their challenges.

By organizing meetings as such, the Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO gives great importance to establishing harmony in LGBTIQ families and building stronger relationships between parents and their LGBTIQ children by promoting inclusion and creating dialogue.



**RIGHT SIDE NGO HAS CONDUCTED A GENERAL FINANCIAL AUDIT OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR 2020-2022 BY AN INDEPENDENT FINANCIAL AUDITOR**

Strengthening the transparency and accountability of its activities, the Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO passed a comprehensive financial audit covering the period from 2020 to 2022. An audit was a process of checking the organization’s financial statements and giving an opinion on their accuracy, which was carried out by an external, independent expert group. This process aimed to thoroughly assess and document the NGO’s financial transactions over the past three years.

The Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO, reviewing its financial policy and introducing a new policy, has decided to conduct not only a financial audit but also a program audit every year. By conducting regular program and financial audits, the organization provides clear and tangible evidence of responsible resource management, thanks to which our funders can be sure that their investments are being used effectively, for the beneficiaries, it will be visible how much money is provided and spent for the implementation of the programs and initiatives of the NGO.

From now on, you can find out about the conclusions of the annual financial and program audits on our website.

The completion of the financial audit and the responsibility to conduct an annual audit reaffirms the commitment of the Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO to ensure and maintain a high level of transparency and financial accountability in its activities.



## A NEW SOCIAL SUPPORT PROGRAM WAS PRESENTED TO RUSSIAN AND UKRAINIAN IMMIGRANT LGBTIQ PEOPLE



On August 7 of this year, the Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO organized a meeting with LGBTIQ persons who immigrated from the Russian Federation and Ukraine, the purpose of which was to familiarize them with the new social support program implemented by the organization. The social support program is implemented with the financial support of OutRight International and aims to alleviate the challenges faced by LGBTIQ immigrants who find themselves in difficult situations as a result of conflict and persecution.

The meeting was chaired by Lilit Martirosyan, the founder and president of the Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO who welcomed the attendees and presented the goals and implemented programs of the organization. She noted that the beneficiaries of this program implemented with the support of OutRight International organization can be those LGBTIQ persons who immigrated from Russia and Ukraine, who found themselves in a difficult situation due to the Russian attack on Ukraine, the subsequent mobilization, the crisis and the adoption of a new bill by the State Duma of the Russian Federation, which exclusively prohibits any “medical intervention to change a person’s sex” and also invalidates the legal recognition of gender in official documents for trans people. In addition, Lilit Martirosyan urged the attendees to inform their LGBTIQ friends about the program, as a total of 25 people can receive social support, which they can use to pay for an apartment, utility bills, hormone therapy, or food.

To apply for assistance, it is necessary to fill out the attached application. The Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO guarantees the confidentiality of provided personal data.

In the second part of the meeting, Russian and Ukrainian LGBTIQ persons presented the situation in their countries, the reasons for leaving the country, how they managed to find their lives in Armenia again, and what problems they face here as members of a vulnerable group. The majority of attendees cited the Russian invasion of Ukraine and subsequent mobilization as the reason for the move, but there were also individuals who had a desire to leave Russia before the war due to pressures on LGBTIQ people and family problems.

The Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO has always stood by the side of marginalized groups and has been at the forefront of protecting and supporting the rights of the LGBTIQ community. In addition to this social support program, the organization also offers LGBTIQ people legal and psychological assistance, as well as regularly organizes courses, camps, and other events that LGBTIQ people can participate in both from Armenia and abroad. Thanks to such programs, we aim to create an environment of solidarity and an equal and inclusive society, where the rights and dignity of each individual will be protected and respected.





# HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORKS, SOCIAL PROTECTION, AND SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

## MEET THE WINNERS OF THE SUB-GRANT PROGRAM FOR ADVANCING SEX WORKERS' SOCIAL INCLUSION



The Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO summarized the tender stage of the sub-grant program implemented with the financial support of the Red Umbrella Fund, which was announced on the occasion of the International Day of Sex Workers and aims to promote the social inclusion of sex workers in Armenia. The formed special tender committee evaluated the submitted projects according to the feasibility of the planned activities, needs assessment, cost-effectiveness, clarity of the project description, and compliance with the competition objectives and chose 4 winning projects that had been presented by the Dignity Movement NGO, DiverCity Social-Cultural, Human Rights Defender NGO, Global Foundation for Trans Rights Protection and journalist Anna Yeganyan.

The Dignity Movement NGO will implement an online awareness campaign to challenge prejudices against sex workers and support their social inclusion, during which informative digital content on the issues and rights of sex workers will be created in the form of articles and publications on social networks.

DiverCity Social-Cultural, Human Rights Defender NGO will implement the “Youth Work for the Fundamental Rights of Sex Workers” program, the goal of which is to organize a three-day training for 5 to 10 sex workers, during which they will be informed about youth programs and methods of working with young people, and will later apply the knowledge gained in their communities.

The Global Foundation for Trans Rights Protection will implement the program “Raising Awareness of Trans Sex Workers to Have a Safe and Harmonious Life”, within the framework of which a seminar will be organized, which will bring together 15 trans sex workers from Yerevan and RA regions. During the seminar, a discussion will be held about the issues related to the safety and well-being of sex workers in Armenia.

Journalist Anna Yeganyan, the last beneficiary of the sub-grant program, will conduct a series of interviews with sex workers and human rights defenders to give voice to sex workers and increase the visibility of their problems and needs.

The mentioned projects are planned to be implemented from August 15 to September 20 of this year. We will provide additional information about the development of the projects on our website.

The Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO gives great importance to collaboration with and empowerment of organizations operating in the field and hopes that these projects will have a positive impact and contribution to the social inclusion of the sex worker community.





# TRANS WOMAN BRUTALLY **KILLED** IN YEREVAN

MEET THE WINNERS OF THE SUB-GRANT PROGRAM  
FOR ADVANCING SEX WORKERS' SOCIAL INCLUSION



The Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO reports with deep pain and grief that 28-year-old trans woman Adriana was brutally murdered in her own apartment in Yerevan. The incident took place on August 20 of this year, after the murder, the apartment was burned.

The friends of the murdered trans woman called Lilit Martirosyan, the founder and president of the Right Side NGO, yesterday at around 4:30 p.m. and reported the murder. According to them, Adriana said a week ago that she was being persecuted.

Then, one of the news outlets affiliated with the police wrote that at 4:55 p.m., an alarm was received that smoke was visible from the window of one of the apartments on the 11th floor of the 1st building on Yeznik Koghbatsi street. Firemen broke the door and extinguished the fire. The body of a 28-year-old citizen was found in the apartment. “According to the coroner’s conclusion, there were 4 marks of a sharp cutting-piercing object on the body, and it was not excluded that the forensic medical examination of the body appointed by the investigator would reveal that there were more stab wounds.” “After killing her, the apartment and the body were burned.” A criminal proceeding was initiated in connection with the case, according to the features of Article 155, Part 1 and Article 264, Part 2, Clauses 2 and 6 of the RA Criminal Code.

Today, on August 21, at 02:40, the 26-year-old suspect from Armavir region was found at the Bavra border checkpoint, arrested, and transferred to the Central Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. He was presented to the body conducting the proceedings and questioned about the circumstances of the incident, during which he admitted that he had committed the murder, after which he had set the apartment on fire and tried to cross the RA state border through the Bavra border checkpoint.

According to the decision of the preliminary investigation body, the young man was arrested. Administrative and evidentiary operations continue to be carried out with his participation. The investigation is ongoing. Measures are being taken to find all the circumstances of the case, the instrument of the crime.

The Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO calls on the RA police to conduct an impartial investigation, punish the culprit with all the rigor of the law, and take steps to eliminate the atmosphere of widespread impunity.

We urge media representatives to avoid spreading misinformation, using wrong and misleading terminology, and to stop promoting hatred towards transgender people. The unabated level of hatred is further exacerbated when various radical groups and other sectors of society make hateful calls and threats against transgender people and remain unpunished.

The cases of violence and hate speech that have been reported for months do not receive an adequate response from the police, which leads to more serious crimes, in this case, murder.

We remind you that a similar incident happened a few years ago, they tried to burn a trans woman in her apartment. Fortunately, the woman did not die, she managed to crawl out of the apartment. Another example is the case of Vahe Yeghiazaryan, who attacked and beat a trans woman and broadcasted it live on July 30, 2022, and now he is free.

The Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO shares the pain and sorrow of the relatives of the brutally murdered trans woman and the entire LGBTIQ community of Armenia at this tragic moment. In memory of Adriana, who became another victim of transphobia, stabbed and burned in her apartment, today, at 8:00 p.m., the Right Side NGO is holding a candlelight vigil. Those who want to join can write to our Instagram or Facebook pages to find out about the location of the candlelight.

Supporters of the LGBTIQ community, organizations operating in the field, human rights defenders, and public and political figures, today the transgender community of Armenia needs your active support. Please stand up and raise your voice against targeted violence and injustice against Trans and LGBTQ people.

# Candlelight vigil in memory of **A**driana

The Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO shares the pain and sorrow of the relatives of the brutally murdered trans woman and the entire LGBTIQ community of Armenia at this tragic moment. In memory of Adriana, who was stabbed and burned in her own apartment, today, at 8:00 p.m., the Right Side NGO is holding a candlelight vigil. Those who want to join can write to our Instagram or Facebook pages to find out about the location of the candlelight.

Supporters of the LGBTIQ community, organizations operating in the field, human rights defenders, and public and political figures, today the transgender community of Armenia needs your active support. Please stand up and raise your voice against targeted violence and injustice against Trans and LGBTQ people.





## DURING THE CANDLELIGHT VIGIL IN MEMORY OF ADRIANA, A GROUP OF PEOPLE THREW EGGS, BOTTLES, AND STONES AT THE CROWD

In memory of Adriana, a trans woman who was stabbed and burned in her own apartment the previous day, the Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO held a candlelight vigil in Komitas Park, Yerevan, yesterday, August 21, at 20:00. Nico Schermers, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the Republic of Armenia, Chris Perkins, Head of the Political and Press Section of the British Embassy, representatives of various organizations operating in the field, human rights defenders, Adriana's friends, more than a hundred LGBTIQ activists, and supporters participated in the candlelight ceremony. Adriana's family members were also present.

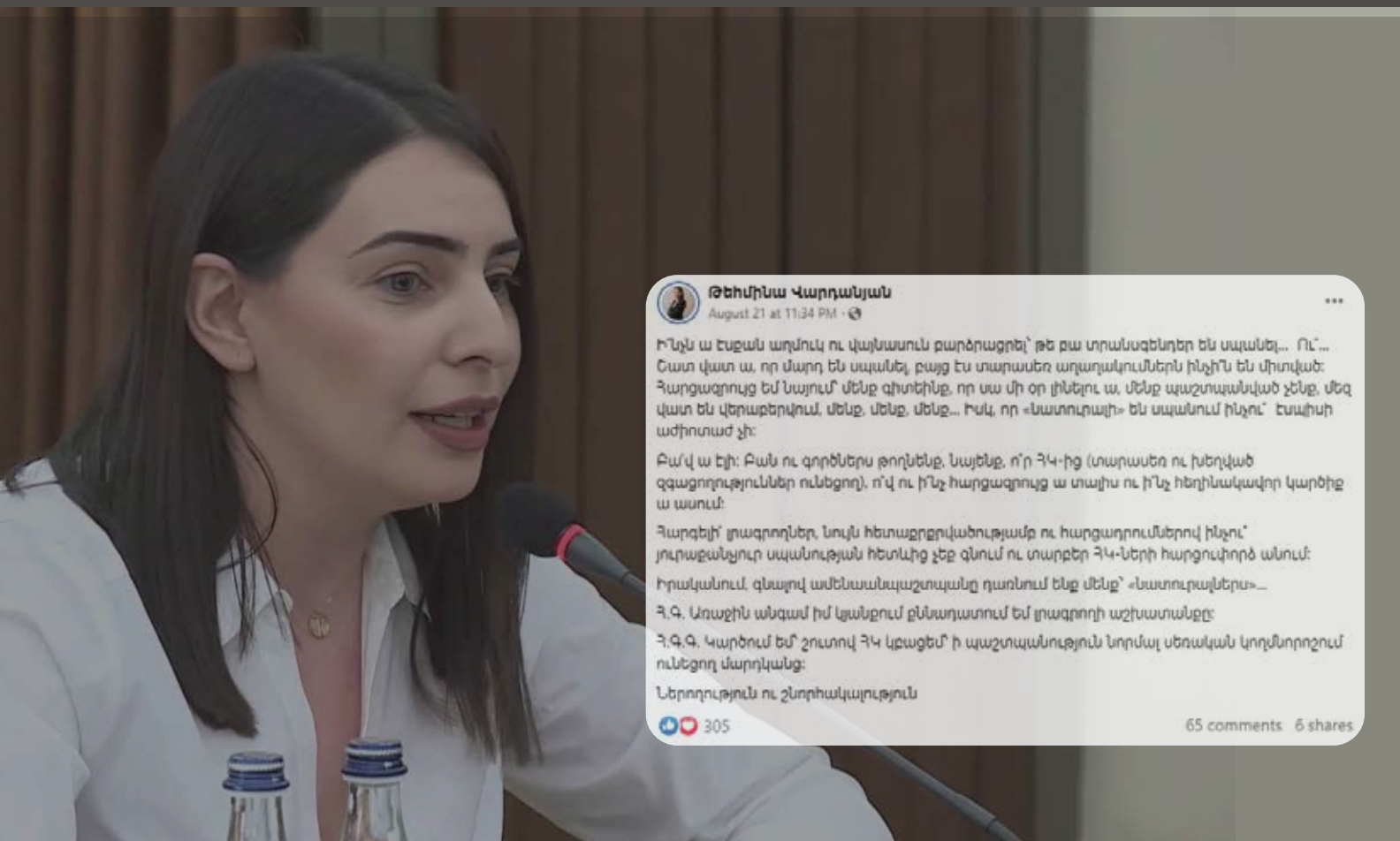
We have repeatedly mentioned, that cases of hatred and violence against Trans and LGBTIQ people do not find an appropriate response, which has already led to the formation of an atmosphere of impunity. Unfortunately, even at this tragic moment, when the LGBTIQ community and the relatives of the brutally murdered trans woman were sharing their pain and grief by holding a symbolic candlelight vigil, a group of people dared to attack and throw eggs, bottles, stones, and sand at the gathered people, causing anxiety and panic among persons who already were in a tough psychological situation. It should also be noted that the Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO notified the police in advance about the candlelight vigil, but the police officers in the area did not react to the incident in any way and approached only after the activists themselves approached and called them. Right after the candlelight vigil, Lilit Martirosyan, the founder and president of the Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO filed a report to the RA police about the incident. We call on the police to immediately identify and hold accountable those persons who disrespect human grief and commit violence with undisguised hatred, as well as to focus attention and give an appropriate response to the thousands of comments containing hate speech, physical violence and death threats, and justifying violence under the news circulating on the Internet since the murder of a trans woman.

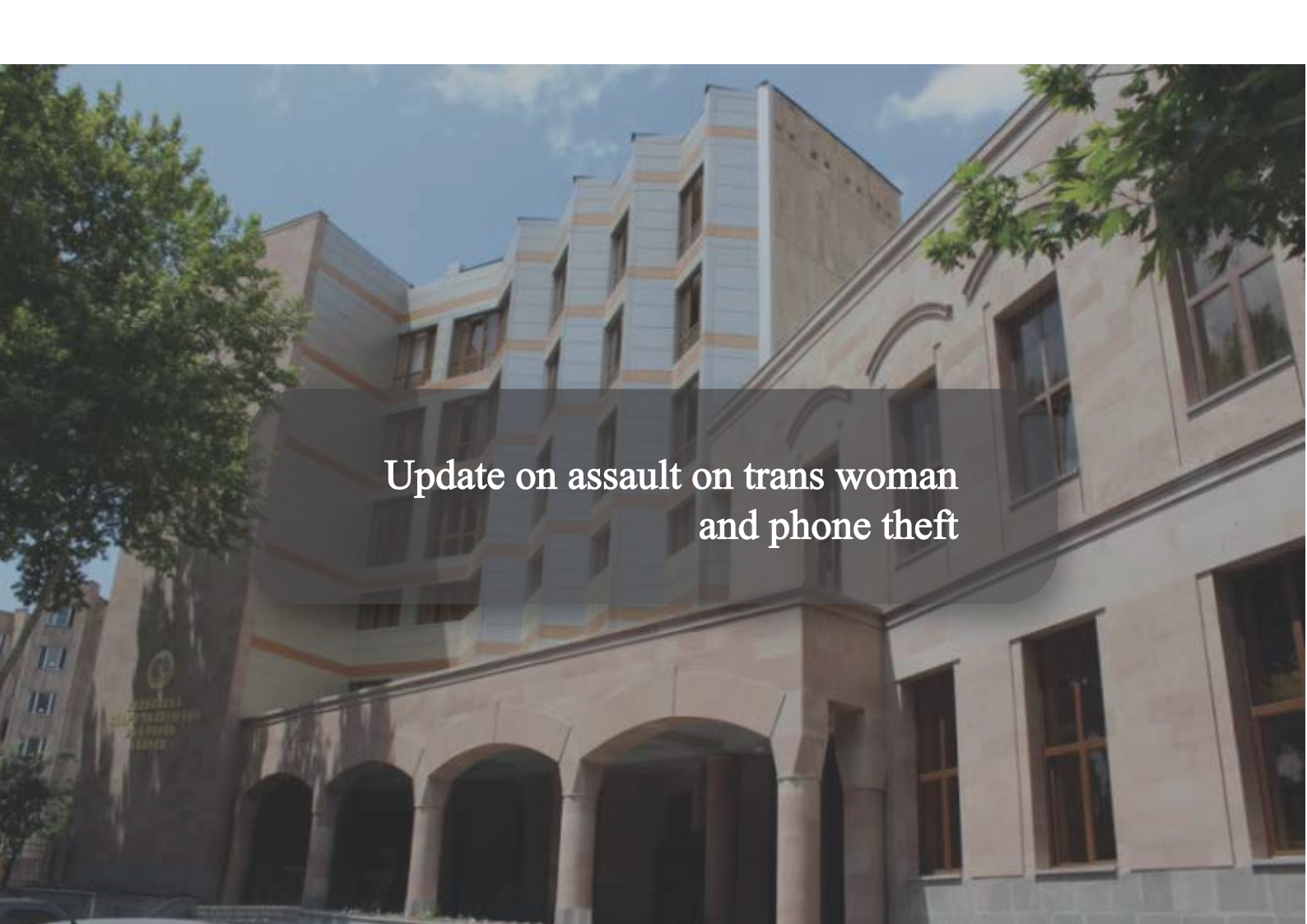
## RIGHT SIDE NGO CONDEMNS THE TRANSPHOBIC POST OF TEHMINA VARDANYAN, A MEMBER OF THE YEREVAN COUNCIL OF ELDERS

Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO strongly condemns and draws professional and public attention to the post of Tehmina Vardanyan, an independent politician, and a member of the “Luys” alliance of the Yerevan Council of Elders, where she uses wrong terminology referring to transgender people, and which contains transphobia, homophobia, stigma and discrimination. In particular, after the brutal murder of a trans woman on August 20, in her Facebook post, Tehmina Vardanyan called transgender people “heterogeneous”, the alarm about the murder “bluster“, the human rights defender organization “an NGO with heterogeneous and mutilated feelings”, heterosexual people “people with normal sexual orientation”, and at the end of the post she stated that “in fact, we, the “naturals”, are becoming the most defenseless, soon I will open an NGO to protect people with normal sexual orientation.”

It is unacceptable for a politician engaged in public activity not only to have such misconceptions about gender issues, but also to express on the public platform her transphobic, homophobic, and discriminatory views, that hide apparent violence and discrimination against vulnerable groups, and have an impact on public perception. We call on Tehmina Vardanyan to remove her post, avoid using incorrect terminology in the future, and refrain from an approach that conceals discrimination and violence against Trans LGBTIQ people, and ignores the problems.

It should also be noted that in 2018 Tehmina Vardanyan graduated from the Institute of Liberal Politics NGO, which aims to contribute to the formation of a human-centered society and which has published the “Hate speech on media platforms, social networks, and television broadcast” manual this year. We expect the Institute of Liberal Politics NGO and other public organizations to join our call and issue a statement urging the prevention of hate speech, discrimination, and the perpetuation of a climate of impunity against LGBTIQ people.





## Update on assault on trans woman and phone theft

### PUBLIC STATEMENT REGARDING THE INCIDENT OF ASSAULT ON A TRANS WOMAN

As we already reported, on June 12, 2023, a trans sex worker D. contacted Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO and reported that a day before that, she was attacked, and beaten by a person named Sevak and his friend in her apartment, and that they, threatening to use a knife, stole her mobile phone and money in the amount of 35,000 AMD.

On the same day, trans person D. was recognized as a victim by the body conducting the proceedings.

The legal team of Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO is involved in this case and provides legal representation at all stages of the case.

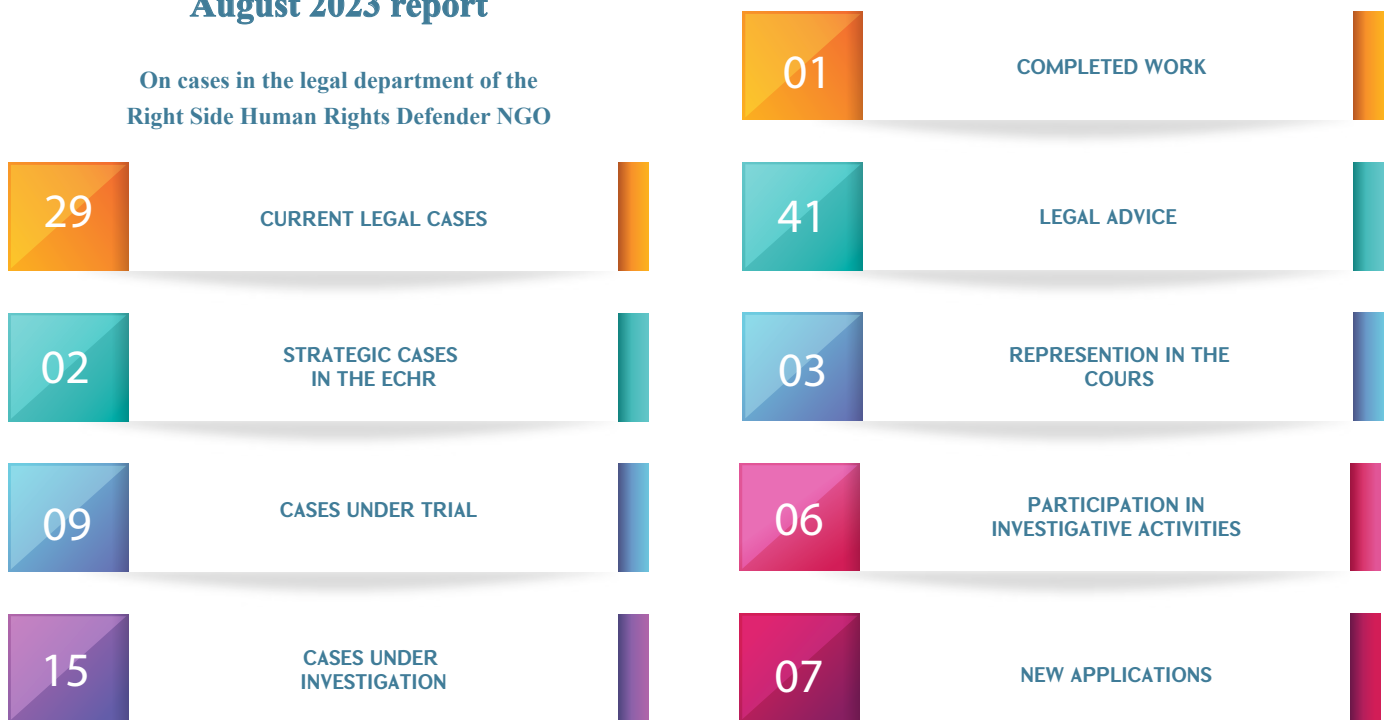
On August 29, 2023, with the participation of our lawyer, a trans person D. was interrogated face-to-face with a person named Sevak, who during the interrogation attacked the trans woman and also uttered sexual insults. After the police officers handcuffed the said person, the questioning continued, and trans person D. insisted that the crime was committed by the mentioned person.

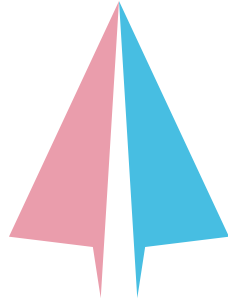
A person named Sevak was detained.

Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO will follow up the matter of imposing a fair punishment to the person who used violence against the trans woman and restoring justice.

## August 2023 report

On cases in the legal department of the  
Right Side Human Rights Defender NGO





# RIGHT SIDE

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