

Ombudsman furthers religious freedoms in Armenia

On the 19th of September, 2012 Ombudsman of Armenia initiated a round-table discussion on the draft law on “On Freedom of Conscience and Religion”. The discussion was attended by representatives of the Armenian Apostolic Church, 9 churches of the Armenian Evangelic Family, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and other churches as well as outstanding public activists and experts, such as Hranush Kharatyan, Vardan Khachatryan, Stepan Danielyan, Hovhannes Hovhannisyanyan and others. Furthermore representatives from the RA Government, RA Ministry of Education and Science as well as delegates from non-governmental organizations such as Helsinki Committee of Armenia, Open Society Foundation – Armenia, Collaboration for Democracy NGO attended the meeting. During the discussion participants exchanged ideas and observations about the law and its positive and negative modifications. The partakers were then asked to present their amendments and recommendations which were later summarized and analyzed by respective staff of the Ombudsman institution.

As a follow-up to the round-table discussion, Ombudsman proposed a number of recommendations and suggestions concerning the draft law aimed at promoting religious freedoms and removing all forms of restrictions on the activities of religious organizations in Armenia for further presenting them to relevant state body.

Some of the provisions in the draft law lack clear legal formulation and give space for their arbitrary interpretation in the future. For example, there is a need to provide an unambiguous definition of “proselytism” in the draft law, to clarify what constitutes “social benefit” that is provided to a person, “control” over community members, etc. As well as the restriction of financing the religious organizations from abroad, monopoly of the Armenian Apostolic Church on many areas of public life were discussed.

The detailed package of suggestions and recommendations is available at http://pashtpan.am/en/library/view_news/article/830.

Siranush Harutyunyan,

Head of International Cooperation and
Strategic Development Department
Staff of the Human Rights Defender
of the Republic of Armenia

Address: 56A Pushkin str, Yerevan, Armenia

Tel: (37410) 53 88 42; (37477) 36 11 49

Email: s_harutyunyan@ombuds.am

siranush.harutyunyan@yahoo.com

Website: www.pashtpan.am