

23 April 2018

Armenia: Detention of human rights defenders during peaceful demonstration

On 20 April 2018, human rights defenders **Lara Aharonian** and **Anna Nikoghosyan** were detained during a peaceful protest in Yerevan against the appointment of former president Serzh Sargsyan as prime minister. Lara Aharonian was observing and documenting the protest and had reported numerous unlawful detentions on social media, including the detention of minors. Anna Nikoghosyan was among the protesters when she was detained. They were released from detention after two hours.

[Lara Aharonian](#) is a women's rights defender, a board member of Human Rights House and director of Women's Resource Center, Armenia. [Anna Nikoghosyan](#) is women's rights defender and chair of the board of FRIDA, the Young Feminist Fund.

The protests began on 13 April after parliament voted former president Serzh Sarkisian, who has been Armenia's main political figure for a decade, in as prime minister. Tens of thousands of citizens gathered in Yerevan's Republic Square to express their discontent at Serzh Sarkisian's appointment and at Armenia's transition to a parliamentary republic, which will enable the new prime minister to keep many of his presidential powers. According to reports, up to 100 protesters - mostly students and youths - have been detained.

After being brutally pushed into police cars, Lara Aharonian and Anna Nikoghosyan were brought to Shengavit District police station in Yerevan. Lara Aharonian had a Front Line Defenders human rights defender identity card on her person, and would have been identified as an observer on being detained. No reason was given for their detention.

The human rights defenders had access to their lawyers and representatives from the Human Rights Defender's Office (Ombudsman) were also present. Police officers had told Lara Aharonian and Anna Nikoghosyan that they would be kept for 3 hours, the maximum legally permitted time-frame. They were released after both human rights defenders strongly opposed this decision.

Lara Aharonian and Anna Nikoghosyan are among several human rights defenders who have been detained for their participation in peaceful demonstrations in recent days. On the morning of 17 April 2018, Vardan Hambardzumyan, an LGBT rights defender and Pink Armenia board member, was detained while participating in a peaceful protest. He was handcuffed and dragged into police car, where he was thrown on the floor and severely beaten, while the police shouted sexual slurs at him. He was not given a reason for his detention and his telephone was taken from him. After two hours of detention, he was brought to Erebouni Medical Center and released following medical assistance.

Front Line Defenders is concerned about the treatment of human rights defenders in Armenia and calls on the Armenian authorities to immediately release those who have been detained for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of assembly.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Armenia to:

1. Guarantee that human rights defenders are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.