

10 April 2019

Armenia: Death threats against LGBT rights defender Lilit Martirosyan

On 5 April 2019, LGBT rights defender **Lilit Martirosyan** gave a speech at the National Assembly of Armenia in which she discussed the issues faced by the LGBT community in the country. This caused severe criticism by the chair of the Standing Committee on Human Rights and Public Affairs, which forced her to leave the room. Since the day of the speech, the human rights defender, her colleagues and family have faced intimidation and death threats.

[Lilit Martirosyan](#) is an LGBT rights activist from Armenia who has been working to promote equal rights for all, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. She is also the current president of the [Right Side NGO](#) which focuses on transgender issues and works with the members of the Armenian trans community.

On 5 April 2019, Lilit Martirosyan participated in the “National human rights agenda: UN Universal Periodic Review” discussion, led by the Standing Committee on Human Rights and Public Affairs, which took place at the National Assembly of Armenia. The human rights defender talked about the dangers faced by the transgender community in Armenia. However, the chair of the Committee, Naira Zohrabyan, claimed that the LGBT rights issues were not part of the agenda and that “nobody violates” the rights of transgender people in Armenia. Upon hearing these comments, Lilit Martirosyan and other civil society representatives left the discussion.

After giving the speech, the human rights defender and her colleagues received a number of threats coming from radical nationalist and religious groups. Unknown assailants contacted her parents, threatened them and told them to move away from their village. On 8 April 2019, a group of demonstrators appeared before the National Assembly demanding that the tribune be cleaned with incense, which they brought to the demonstration, as according to them, the presence of a transgender person had desecrated it.

On 9 April 2019, the Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan noted when commenting on Lilit Martirosyan’s case: “It was a sitting of the parliamentary Human Rights Committee. Now I am asking you all: is Lilit Martirosyan, who received a passport of the Republic of Armenia, a human being or not? Let everyone answer this question - the clergymen, members of the Republican and Prosperous Armenia Parties and the conservatives.”

The human rights defender filed a complaint with the Human Rights Defender for the Republic of Armenia, the office of the Armenian ombudsman, and reported the death threats made against her and her family to the police. Lilit Martirosyan and her relatives are currently under police protection.

Front Line Defenders welcomes the protection granted to Lilit Martirosyan and her family by the police. At the same time, it is seriously concerned about the death threats and intimidation that Lilit Martirosyan, her colleagues and family members have been subjected to. Front Line Defenders believes that the aggression against Lilit Martirosyan did not only result from her peaceful and legitimate work for the protection of LGBT rights in Armenia but that it was also triggered by the stigmatizing statements regarding her human rights work, made by government officials.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Armenia to:

1. Take measures to ensure that government officials and other public figures refrain from making statements stigmatising the legitimate work of human rights defenders;
2. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Armenia are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

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