

TRACKING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ARMENIA'S
2023-2025 HUMAN RIGHTS ACTION PLAN:
**ACHIEVEMENTS AND GAPS IN TORTURE
PREVENTION IN THE ARMED FORCES**

A MID-TERM REVIEW
| 2023-2024

Publication of this report is supported by Democracy Development Foundation. The opinions and analysis expressed in the report are those of the authors and do not represent opinions and positions of Democracy Development Foundation.



The study was conducted by Peace Dialogue NGO with funding provided by the Democracy Development Foundation.



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INTRODUCTION

For over a decade, Peace Dialogue NGO has been dedicated to promoting human rights within the Armenian defense sector. Since 2015, the organization's monitoring group has conducted regular assessments of human rights conditions in this field. Peace Dialogue also serves on the Coordinating Council overseeing the implementation of the 2023-2025 Action Plan, which stems from the National Strategy of the Republic of Armenia for the Protection of Human Rights, in accordance with Government Decision No. 1674-L, dated 28.09.2023. In addition, the organization works to identify challenges within the defense sector and foster collaborative efforts to address them.

This report specifically focuses on monitoring the actions planned by the Armenian government for the 2023-2024 period, targeting the prevention of torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment in the defense sector.

The monitoring process was designed with two primary objectives:

- *To assess the relevance of the actions included in the Armenian government's 2023-2025 Action Plan, derived from the National Strategy for the Protection of Human Rights.*
- *To determine whether the activities were implemented according to the plan and to measure the contribution of these actions to the overall goals set by the government.*

According to the 2023-2025 Action Plan, the overarching goal related to the prevention of torture and ill-treatment is to " *Ensure the full realization of the right to be free from torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment in penitentiary institutions, the armed forces, psychiatric institutions, places of detention, and during criminal proceedings by organizing professional training and investing in the necessary tools and mechanisms.*" Specifically, the Armenian government outlined the following actions to protect the right to be free from torture within the armed forces:

- Establish a mechanism for the anonymous reporting of torture, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment within the armed forces.
- Provide training for the command staff of the armed forces and military police officers on the prohibition of ill-treatment.
- Ensure that the job description for one specialist position within the Center for Human Rights and Integrity Building of the Ministry of Defense of Armenia requires a higher education degree in psychology.
- Strengthen the capacity of the RA Investigative Committee, which includes a specialized unit responsible for investigating cases of torture, including those in the armed forces.
- Adopt guidelines on the interpretation and application of the terms "severe physical pain" and "mental suffering" in accordance with international best practices and standards.
- Establish support centers (legal, psychological, social, etc.) for victims of torture in Yerevan and at least three regions (marzes), to improve the health and well-being of individuals affected by torture.

ASSESSMENT OF THE STRATEGIC RELEVANCE OF THE ACTIONS

To assess the relevance of the actions included in the Armenian government's 2023-2025 Action Plan, Peace Dialogue submitted a series of inquiries to the Office of the Prosecutor General, the Ministry of Defence, and the Investigative Committee of the Republic of Armenia. In addition, Peace Dialogue conducted in-depth anonymous interviews with former conscripts across a broad geographic range, including Yerevan and nearly all regions of Armenia.

The inquiries and responses reveal that, while the Armenian government has taken steps to address torture and ill-treatment in the armed forces, significant gaps remain in reporting mechanisms, institutional capacity, and the speed and effectiveness of investigations. The high number of ongoing cases and the lack of reports through official channels underscore the need for stronger, more independent mechanisms for reporting and investigation, as well as comprehensive support for victims.

In their responses to Peace Dialogue's inquiries, the Office of the Prosecutor General and the Investigative Committee have confirmed a substantial number of cases involving torture and ill-treatment within the armed forces in recent years. The Prosecutor General cited 21 reports over the last three years, 16 of which involved military police personnel, raising particular concern as this suggests a systemic issue within certain segments of the military hierarchy. The Investigative Committee reported 17 cases since its specialized unit assumed responsibility for examining torture cases on July 28, 2022. This underscores that torture and ill-treatment remain significant problems in the Armenian armed forces, as evidenced by ongoing criminal investigations and prosecutions.

According to both the Prosecutor General and the Investigative Committee, multiple criminal proceedings have been initiated under the Armenian Criminal Code, with some instances of torture or ill-treatment potentially linked to suicides and murders in the army. However, several cases have either been terminated, remain under investigation, or have been delayed due to the accused evading prosecution. There also appears to be a disconnect between the number of cases reported and those reaching resolution. The Investigative Committee has highlighted ongoing investigations, but some cases have been suspended or dismissed, raising concerns about the thoroughness and efficiency of the investigative process.

These responses indicate that while investigative bodies are actively pursuing cases of torture and ill-treatment, procedural delays and unresolved cases suggest a need for additional resources and training for investigators and prosecutors. Strengthening the capacity of the Investigative Committee, particularly the units handling torture cases, is crucial for improving the effectiveness and speed of investigations.

Interestingly, in the response to Peace Dialogue's inquiry the Ministry of Defence reported that in the last three years, no complaints related to torture or ill-treatment were received through its hotline, which is managed by the Ministry's Center for Human Rights and Integrity Building. It is noteworthy that Action 18 of the previous, 2020-2022 Action Plan, derived from the National Strategy of the Republic of Armenia for the Protection of Human Rights, also aimed at introducing a mechanism to guarantee the protection of those reporting torture or inhumane or degrading treatment in the armed forces. According to information provided by the Ministry of Defence in 2022, the Ministry's "Hotline" was supposed to fulfill this role, with the data of servicemen and their phone numbers kept confidential. However, the absence of reports suggests that the current reporting

mechanisms within the Ministry of Defence, particularly the hotline, are either underutilized or not perceived as reliable by servicemen and their families. In addition, in-depth anonymous interviews conducted by Peace Dialogue with conscripts who had completed mandatory military service between 2020 and 2024 indicated a lack of trust in the Ministry's reporting mechanisms, or the existence of barriers (such as fear of retaliation or lack of anonymity), preventing servicemen and their families from using these channels.

The Ministry of Defence also noted that a new internal regulatory law for its hotline is under development. However, future regulatory improvements, especially those addressing more comprehensive reporting mechanisms and clearer definitions of ill-treatment, will be necessary to enhance the protection of human rights within the defense sector. This emphasizes the need for more secure, anonymous, and independent reporting options.

Thus, the actions included in the Armenian government's 2023-2025 Action Plan are highly relevant for addressing issues of torture and ill-treatment within the armed forces. The responses from the respective governmental bodies, along with interviews with former conscripts, confirm the ongoing occurrence of such violations, underscoring the importance of the proposed mechanisms. However, there are several dilemmas and contradictions that need to be addressed for the efficient and timely implementation of these actions.

Establishing a formal anonymous reporting mechanism could further encourage victims to report violations without fear of reprisal. The absence of reports through the Ministry of Defence's hotline may also highlight the need for anonymous mechanisms that build confidence in reporting without fear of retribution. However, either there is underreporting due to a lack of trust, fear of retaliation, or perceived ineffectiveness of the hotline, or there is a gap in actual incidents being reported through this specific formal channel. This dilemma correlates with broader systemic issues in the defense sector, such as fear of retaliation, lack of anonymity, and gaps in institutional accountability, all of which hinder effective reporting. This raises the question of whether the focus should be on upgrading the hotline into an effective tool for reporting cases of torture or ill-treatment, or if alternative mechanisms should be established to foster safe and anonymous reporting.

Training command staff and military police officers on the prohibition of ill-treatment is critical. According to the Prosecutor General's response to Peace Dialogue's inquiry, 16 criminal proceedings have been initiated involving ill-treatment by military police personnel over the last three years, highlighting the necessity of this training. The persistent involvement of military police in alleged cases of torture further supports the need for improved awareness and understanding of human rights obligations within this institution. However, this raises the contradiction of reforming entrenched institutions and dealing with personnel who may perpetuate or tolerate abusive practices, which correlates with the need for more comprehensive reforms, such as better oversight and accountability within the military police.

The inclusion of a mandatory higher education requirement in psychology for a specialist in the Center for Human Rights and Integrity Building of the Ministry of Defence is directly relevant to addressing the psychological aspects of torture and ill-treatment. While the Ministry of Defence did not report receiving direct complaints, the presence of psychological expertise could improve the institution's ability to respond more effectively to potential human rights violations, including those related to torture. However, the presence of specialized professionals in the Ministry of Defence might not be sufficient without wider systemic trust in the reporting mechanisms.

Strengthening the capacity of the Investigative Committee, specifically the specialized unit for investigating torture cases, is highly relevant. Increased resources could expedite the resolution of these cases and improve investigative outcomes. However, there is also a contradiction between initiating investigations and bringing them to a meaningful resolution. Slow progress and suspensions of cases raise concerns about the overall efficiency of the investigative process and judicial system.

The adoption of guidelines on the interpretation and application of terms like "severe physical pain" and "mental suffering" is crucial for ensuring a consistent and internationally compliant approach to addressing torture. Although none of the responses directly referenced these guidelines, the variety of criminal cases mentioned—particularly those dealing with torture and suicides—highlight the need for precise definitions in the judicial process. These guidelines would contribute to the proper categorization and prosecution of such offenses. However, this will not be a panacea when more systemic issues remain unresolved. For instance, pursuant to Article 309.1 of the Armenian Criminal Code of 2003 or Article 450 of the new Code adopted on May 5, 2021, torture is defined as the intentional infliction of severe physical pain or severe mental suffering by an official or other person acting on behalf of a state body or with their knowledge, for the purpose of obtaining information, confession, punishment, intimidation, or based on discrimination.

The Armenian Criminal Code does not provide for specific liability for inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Article 119 of the Criminal Code or Article 196 of the new Criminal Code establishes liability for inflicting severe physical pain or mental suffering, if the characteristics of the crime provided in Article 309.1 (450) are absent—i.e., if the person causing such pain or suffering was not an official or a representative of a state body, or if they did not pursue a specific purpose.

In legal practice, cases of torture or other ill-treatment in the armed forces are often categorized under exceeding official powers (Article 309 of the Criminal Code), or abuse of official position (Article 375 of the Criminal Code).

Finally, the government's plan to create support centers for victims of torture in Yerevan and three regions is critical. The Prosecutor General's Office and the Investigative Committee both reported significant numbers of cases involving torture and ill-treatment. Establishing these centers would provide essential legal, psychological, and social assistance to affected individuals. The fact that the Ministry of Defence hotline has not received any torture complaints in the last three years further underscores the need for external support structures that are independent of military institutions. At the same time, it raises the question of who will be the beneficiaries of these support centers, given the overall inefficiency of the investigative process and judicial system, where there are no final court decisions confirming cases of torture or ill-treatment. In other words, there is a disconnect between the existence of these centers and the judicial system's ability to provide legal validation for victims of torture, thus questioning their actual utility without improved systemic accountability.

ASSESSMENT OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ACTIONS IMPLEMENTED UNDER THE 2023-2025 ACTION PLAN, DERIVED FROM THE NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (2023-2024)

The following actions were planned to protect the right to be free from torture within the armed forces:

- Activity 2.2. Establish a mechanism for the anonymous reporting of torture, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment within the armed forces. Deadline: Second half of the year 2024.
- Activity 2.5. Provide training for the command staff of the armed forces and military police officers on the prohibition of ill-treatment. Deadline: First half of the year 2025.
- Activity 2.7. Ensure that the job description for one specialist position within the Center for Human Rights and Integrity Building of the Ministry of Defense of Armenia requires a higher education degree in psychology. Deadline: Second half of the year 2025.
- Activity 2.8. Strengthen the capacity of the Investigative Committee, which includes a specialized unit responsible for investigating cases of torture, including those in the armed forces. Deadline: First half of the year 2024.
- Activity 2.12. Adopt guidelines on the interpretation and application of the terms "severe physical pain" and "mental suffering" in accordance with international best practices and standards. Deadline: Second half of the year 2024.
- Activity 2.13. Establish support centers (legal, psychological, social, etc.) for victims of torture in Yerevan and at least three regions (marzes), to improve the health and well-being of individuals affected by torture. Deadline: Second half of the year 2025.

As of the first half of 2024, the Government of the Republic of Armenia has reported the full implementation of Actions 2.5, 2.8, and 2.12. The implementation of other activities remains pending.

RESULTS OF OBSERVATIONS OF PEACE DIALOGUE NGO

According to the Action Plan, two key expected outcomes are outlined for the group of actions aimed at protecting the right to be free from torture within the armed forces.

- *First, it is anticipated that effective mechanisms and means for reporting torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, or punishment will be established.*
- *Second, by the end of 2025, cases of violence by superiors against subordinates in the Armed Forces, as well as instances of self-harm by servicemen, are expected to decrease by at least 70%.*

The document also provides baseline data:

Cases of violence by superiors against subordinates in the armed forces:

2020: 16 cases

2021: 18 cases

2022: 35 cases

Cases of self-harm by servicemen in the armed forces:

2020: 94 cases

2021: 94 cases

2022: 107 cases

It is noteworthy that the baseline data categorizes incidents as "cases of violence by superiors against subordinates," which, according to Armenian legislation, implies that the actions did not have the purpose of obtaining information, confessions, punishment, intimidation, or discrimination. However, during anonymous interviews conducted by Peace Dialogue with former conscripts, some respondents specifically described instances of violence by superiors that appeared to be aimed at obtaining information, confessions, punishment, intimidation, or were motivated by discrimination. This raises a separate issue: how these cases were categorized in a way that allegedly ignore the aforementioned purposes, and to what extent Armenian legislation aligns with international standards for the prohibition of torture and ill-treatment.

Activity 2.2. Establish a mechanism for the anonymous reporting of torture, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment within the armed forces.

The deadline for this activity is set for the second half of 2024.

As a baseline for this specific action, the following data has been established:

- *The armed forces currently lack dedicated mechanisms and structures for the anonymous reporting of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, or punishment.*
- *Reports can be submitted to the Center for Human Rights and Integrity Building of the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia via a hotline on weekdays, or to the Human Rights Defender through their hotline.*

As a measurable indicator:

- *Sub-legislative acts (government decrees, ministerial orders) establishing the legal basis and procedures for submitting anonymous reports have been adopted, backed by a study aligned with international standards and best practices.*

-
- *Legislative proposals introducing amendments and additions to the Armenian Law "On Military Service and the Status of Servicemen," and related laws, have been submitted to the National Assembly.*
 - *Anonymous reporting procedures are now in place.*

Although the deadline for this activity is in the second half of 2024, Peace Dialogue requested information from the Ministry of Defence regarding the progress and whether international experience had been considered when establishing mechanisms for anonymous reporting of torture, inhumane, or degrading treatment or punishment, as part of Action 2.2 of the Action Plan. However, the Ministry's response does not directly address the inquiry about the use of international experience. Instead, it focuses on domestic regulations, internal systems, and adherence to government decisions, noting that reports can be submitted via the email address hotline@mil.am and that, according to a government decision, internal and external alert reports are recorded in separate registers (in order to guaranty anonymity). This lack of clarity highlights a gap in addressing a key measurable indicator—ensuring alignment with international standards.

The response confirms the existence of the Ministry's "Hotline" as a perceived mechanism for anonymous reporting. However, it does not address the absence of dedicated means and structures (as indicated in the baseline) beyond the existing hotline and email submission method. This suggests that while a reporting system exists, it may not fully meet the baseline expectation for a more robust and specialized system for anonymous reporting. Additionally, the response does not provide details on any new legal frameworks specific to this initiative (Action 2.2), nor does it reference any study or analysis supporting these mechanisms in line with international best practices.

Overall, the response shows partial progress in establishing anonymous reporting mechanisms, but further clarification and development are needed to fully meet the baseline expectations and measurable indicators outlined under Action 2.2.

Activity 2.5. Provide training for the command staff of the armed forces and military police officers on the prohibition of ill-treatment.

According to the document, the activity is ongoing and will continue until the second half of 2025.

As a baseline for this activity, the government defined the following data:

- *Between December 2020 and January 2022, 14% of the command staff of the armed forces and 17% of the leadership and non-leadership ranks of the military police were trained on the prohibition of ill-treatment. Additionally, the aforementioned statistics on cases of violence by superiors against subordinates in the armed forces, and cases of self-harm by servicemen, are also referenced as baseline data to justify this activity.*

Three measurable indicators have been defined for this activity:

- *80% of the command staff of the armed forces, as well as leadership and non-leadership staff of the military police, will be trained.*
- *The training will be based on international legal standards from the United Nations and the Council of Europe, with a minimum duration of four academic hours.*

- *Following the training, participants will demonstrate at least 80% knowledge based on a post-training assessment.*

According to the Government Report on the implementation of the 2023-2025 Action Plan, stemming from the National Strategy of the Republic of Armenia for the Protection of Human Rights, as of the first half of 2024, in collaboration with the Yerevan Office of the Council of Europe, two training courses on the "Right to Life" and "Prohibition of Ill-Treatment" were conducted. During this period, awareness-raising activities on the "Right to Life," facilitated by international and local experts, were regularly held in military units.

As a result, 20% of the command staff of the Armed Forces, 20% of the command staff of the Military Police, and 20% of the general personnel of the Military Police received training.

To gather more details on the implementation of Activity 2.5, Peace Dialogue asked the Ministry of Defence to answer the following questions:

1. According to data from the General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Armenia, provided to Peace Dialogue NGO, 16 out of 21 criminal proceedings initiated in the Armed Forces over the last three years involved Military Police personnel. How many of the Military Police servicemen involved in these 16 proceedings participated in the training courses conducted for Military Police employees under the previous 2020-2022 Action Plan?
2. Are there any mechanisms in place to provide the knowledge gained from the previous training courses to Military Police employees hired after those sessions?
3. As a result of the previous 2020-2022 Action Plan, 29% of Military Police personnel received training on the topics of torture, inhumane, or degrading treatment. Has the training plan been updated, and do the previously trained servicemen still need to participate in the current training sessions?

In their response, the Ministry of Defence stated that no nominal data is available on the Military Police servicemen involved in the criminal proceedings. This suggests that the Ministry lacks specific tracking mechanisms or detailed records linking personnel involved in criminal proceedings with their participation in training sessions. The absence of such data raises concerns about the Ministry's ability to monitor and assess whether training programs are effectively reaching the personnel most involved in problematic incidents, such as those facing criminal charges. Without this tracking, it is difficult to measure the impact of training on those who are more likely to engage in misconduct.

The Ministry also indicated that new Military Police personnel participate in various training sessions, including those on the prohibition of ill-treatment, and that educational programs are conducted repeatedly across multiple topics. While the Ministry emphasizes that training is ongoing, the lack of clear mechanisms to ensure that new hires are specifically trained on critical topics like torture and ill-treatment creates a dilemma. There is no indication that structured follow-up mechanisms are in place to guarantee that all staff, especially those who joined after the initial sessions, are properly educated on these issues. This raises questions about the consistency and comprehensiveness of the training.

The Ministry mentioned that servicemen continue to participate in various training sessions and that mentoring programs are conducted repeatedly, but it did not specify whether the training plan has been updated or if previously trained servicemen need to participate in ongoing sessions. While the Ministry asserts that educational programs are repeated and involve servicemen from various ranks, there is no direct answer to whether the training

plan has been revised. The lack of clarity on whether previously trained servicemen need to attend updated sessions suggests a potential gap in ensuring continuous improvement and reinforcement of knowledge.

Despite ongoing training programs aimed at prohibiting ill-treatment, reports from former conscripts indicate that instances of rudeness and violence by officers remain widespread. Of the 60 interviewees who completed their military duty between 2020 and 2024, 20 reported experiencing cruelty firsthand, while 36 observed similar treatment toward their fellow soldiers.

Two individuals reported experiencing disrespect (including threats, cursing, hitting, and other forms of mistreatment) from Military Police or investigative bodies. Six noted that their fellow soldiers faced similar disrespect in these institutions. Additionally, two respondents mentioned that their fellow soldiers were taken to these institutions, where they were coerced into testifying or confessing.

The disconnect between the ongoing training programs, on-the-ground realities and the number of criminal proceedings raises a broader concern. If a significant portion of personnel who have undergone training are still involved in criminal misconduct, it calls into question the effectiveness of the training programs. Are these programs adequately addressing the root causes of ill-treatment, or is there a lack of follow-up to ensure that the lessons are being applied in practice?

Peace Dialogue will continue monitoring this activity as it progresses.

Activity 2.7. Ensure that the job description for one specialist position within the Center for Human Rights and Integrity Building of the Ministry of Defense of Armenia requires a higher education degree in psychology.

According to the 2023-2025 Action Plan, this activity is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2025.

- *The absence of a psychologist position within the Center for Human Rights and Integrity Building of the Ministry of Defense is identified as the baseline for this activity.*

The following measurable indicator has been defined for this activity:

- *The job description for one specialist must include a mandatory requirement for a higher education degree in psychology.*

No progress on this activity has been reported in the Government's Report on the implementation of the 2023-2025 Action Plan.

At this stage, Peace Dialogue has no further observations to report regarding this activity.

Activity 2.8. Strengthen the capacity of the Investigative Committee, which includes a specialized unit responsible for investigating cases of torture, including those in the armed forces.

The activity was scheduled to be completed by the first half of 2024.

The baseline data for this activity is defined as follows:

- *A separate specialized unit for investigating torture and abuses involving violence by officials has been established within the Main Department for Investigation of Particularly Important Cases of the Investigative Committee of Armenia. The staffing plan for the department includes eight positions: chief (1), deputy chief (senior investigator for particularly important cases) (2), senior investigator for particularly important cases (2), and investigator for particularly important cases (3). Six of these positions are currently filled. The department is overloaded, which impacts the speed of case consideration.*

The following measurable indicator has been defined for this activity:

- *The composition of the RA Investigative Committee's specialized unit investigating torture has been expanded.*

The Government's Report on the implementation of the 2023-2025 Action Plan states that this activity has been successfully completed, explaining that "Two autonomous post holders were appointed to fill two vacant positions, resulting in all eight posts being filled."

Peace Dialogue has no further observations to report regarding Activity 2.8.

Activity 2.12. Adopt guidelines on the interpretation and application of the terms "severe physical pain" and "mental suffering" in accordance with international best practices and standards.

The deadline for this activity was set for the second half of 2024.

- *The baseline data for this activity indicates that the Armenian Ministry of Justice has already developed a guide on the interpretation and application of the terms "severe physical pain" and "mental suffering," based on international legal standards and best practices.*
- *Measurable indicator: The content of the terms "severe physical pain" and "mental suffering" has been clearly defined, providing a foundation for their interpretation and application.*

Additionally, the 2023-2025 Action Plan sets two specific targets for 2024:

- *1st semester: The Academy of Justice of the Republic of Armenia is to adopt a guide for law enforcement officers on the interpretation and application of these concepts, to be utilized in courses and training sessions.*
- *2nd semester: Based on the guidelines, internal legal acts ensuring the application of these concepts are to be adopted by the heads of investigative bodies and prosecutor's offices.*

It is worth noting that Activity 15 of the previous, 2020-2022 Action Plan was identical, but by the end of that plan, the activity had not been realized. However, in the Government's Report on the implementation of the 2023-2025 Action Plan, it is stated that this activity has been successfully completed ahead of its deadline. The report explains that during the reporting period, the Academy of Justice utilized various manuals produced with the support of the European Union and in cooperation with the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law. These materials were used for training

programs, capacity-building courses, and professional development programs, and are available on the Academy's official website.

However, it is unclear from the Government's report what is meant by the "successful completion" of this activity—whether it refers only to the target planned for the first half of the year or if the entire activity is considered complete. This is particularly significant in relation to the second indicator, which involves adopting internal legal acts by investigative bodies and prosecutor's offices to ensure the application of these concepts.

Activity 2.13. Establish support centers (legal, psychological, social, etc.) for victims of torture in Yerevan and at least three regions (marzes) to improve the health and well-being of individuals affected by torture.

Deadline: Second half of 2025.

- *The baseline data for this activity indicates that, until 2022, there was a torture victim support center in Yerevan, but it ceased operations due to a lack of funding. Currently, there are no support centers for torture victims in the Republic of Armenia.*
- *Only one measurable indicator is defined for this activity, stating that one support center for victims of torture will operate in Yerevan and one in one of the regions of Armenia.*

However, Activity 2.13 specifies that at least four centers should be established: one in Yerevan and one in each of three other regions of the country.

No further information can be presented by Peace Dialogue at this stage, since the information on the progress is not available.

CONCLUDING NOTES

The 2023-2025 Action Plan, which stems from the National Strategy of the Republic of Armenia for the Protection of Human Rights, demonstrates progress in several key areas. However, while the government has reported the completion of some activities, there remain several open questions and unresolved issues that require further clarification.

One of the key challenges is ensuring that the implemented mechanisms, particularly those for reporting and addressing torture, align with international standards. There are gaps in both the clarity of reported outcomes and the consistency of progress across the various activities outlined in the plan. This inconsistency highlights the need for stronger accountability and transparency in reporting progress, as well as clearer communication on the status of key actions.

Moreover, several contradictions and dilemmas persist. While the government is making strides in areas such as training and institutional capacity-building, the effectiveness of these efforts is undermined by ongoing concerns about systemic issues within the defense sector. The lack of trust in reporting mechanisms, as well as the persistence of misconduct even after training initiatives, suggest that deeper structural reforms may be needed to fully address the underlying causes of ill-treatment and abuse.

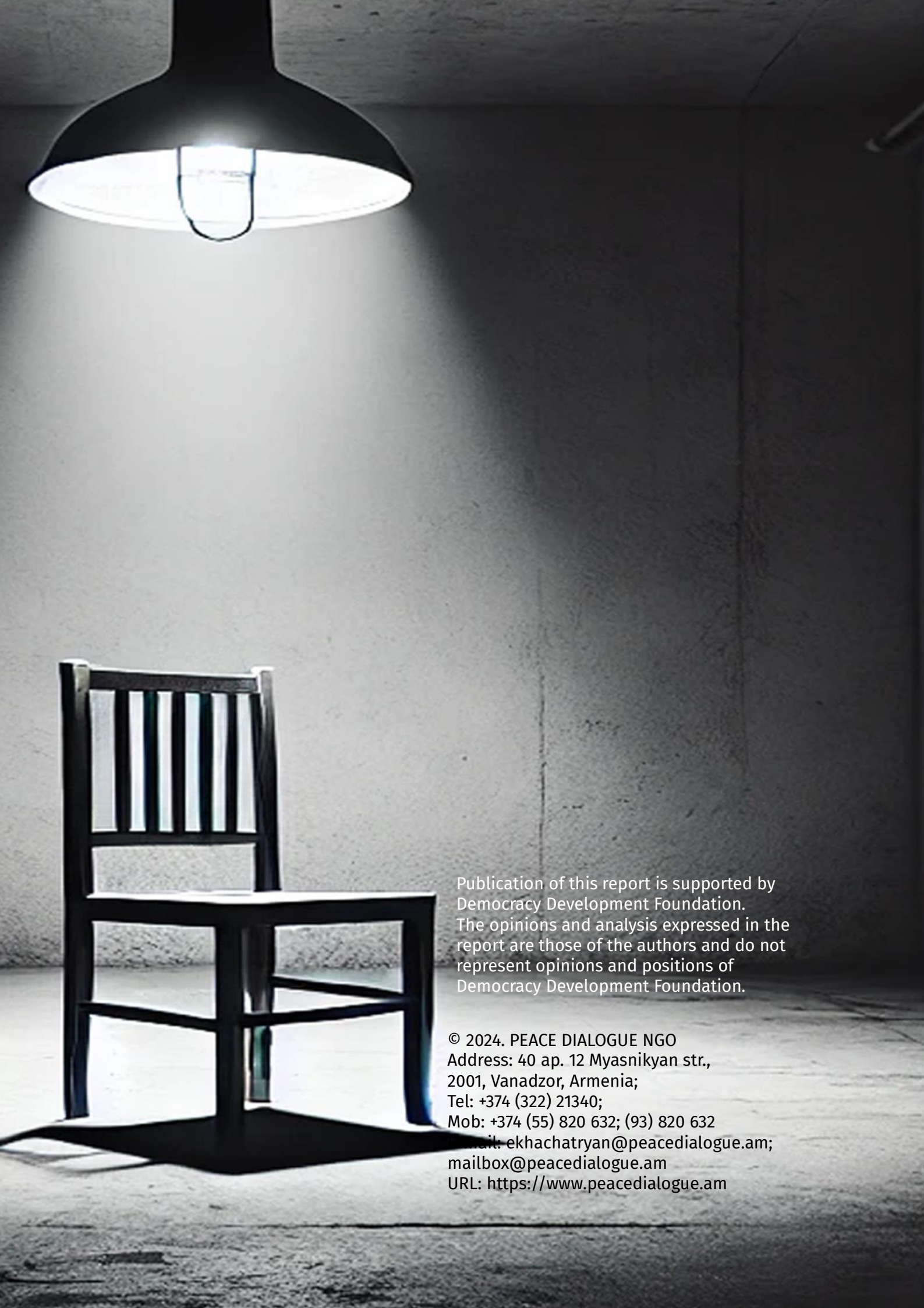
Overall, the following types of issues have been identified:

- The hotline operated by the Ministry of Defense is viewed as a mechanism for submitting anonymous reports. The Ministry does not consider the importance of having specialized structures and mechanisms in addition to the hotline and electronic communication, despite the fact that no direct complaints regarding torture or ill-treatment have been received through the hotline to date.
- Although the Ministry of Defense has not received any complaints through the hotline concerning torture or ill-treatment, specifically, due to lack of trust in this reporting mechanism, the Ministry believes that the presence of an experienced psychologist in the hotline could enhance its ability to respond more effectively to potential human rights violations. However, the presence of such a specialist within the institution may be ineffective unless trust in the reporting mechanism is restored.
- Despite the Ministry's claim that educational programs on torture and ill-treatment are regularly conducted, with participation from personnel of various ranks, there is a lack of clarity regarding the appropriateness of including previously trained personnel in the revised training programs. This raises concerns about ensuring continuous improvement and enhancement of knowledge. There is no mention of any systematic and consistent mechanisms that can guarantee that all personnel, particularly those who joined after the training programs were introduced, will acquire adequate knowledge on the subject.
- The Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia does not clearly establish responsibility for the use of inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment. In legal practice, cases of torture or other cruel treatment within the armed forces are often classified as abuse of official powers or authority.
- The significant discrepancy between the number of cases initiated and those brought to a logical conclusion concerning torture and ill-treatment raises concerns about the effectiveness of investigations and the overall efficiency of the judicial system.
- Given the absence of final decisions by any judicial authority confirming cases of torture or cruel treatment, the question arises as to who the beneficiaries of support centers for victims of torture will be.

In summary, while the government has taken important steps toward addressing human rights concerns, much remains to be done to ensure the full and effective implementation of the Action Plan. Continued monitoring, clearer accountability, and alignment with international best practices will be essential to achieving the plan's objectives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- It may be beneficial for the monitoring proposes to provide more detailed updates on the progress of the activities outlined in the Action Plan. Clarifying the status of each phase of ongoing activities could help avoid ambiguity and promote better alignment among all stakeholders.
- Considering the importance of trust in anonymous reporting mechanisms, it could be valuable to explore incorporating international best practices. Strengthening these mechanisms through external oversight and more robust anonymity protections might help build greater confidence in the system, particularly within the defense sector.
- In addition to implementing individual activities, it might be valuable to focus on addressing deeper systemic issues within the defense sector. Strengthening oversight and accountability mechanisms could help address challenges like impunity and fear of retaliation.
- To ensure training programs are effectively reaching the right personnel, especially those involved in misconduct, the development of a comprehensive tracking system might be worth considering. Additionally, periodic evaluations of the training programs could help assess their impact and identify areas for further improvement.
- It may be helpful to introduce structured follow-up mechanisms, such as refresher courses or mentoring programs, to reinforce the knowledge gained from initial training and ensure continuous improvement in compliance with human rights standards also for new hires.
- Expanding the support centers as originally planned could offer a broader range of services to victims of torture. Ensuring that all four centers are operational by the second half of 2025 would enhance the availability of comprehensive legal, psychological, and social support. At the same time, it will be important to address the question on who will be the beneficiaries of these support centers, given the overall inefficiency of the investigative process and judicial system, where there are no final court decisions confirming cases of torture or ill-treatment.
- Improving the efficiency of judicial proceedings related to torture and ill-treatment cases, in line with international best practices, could be a valuable step. Clearer timelines and more transparent processes would likely help build greater trust in the legal system and enhance the effectiveness of support systems for victims.



Publication of this report is supported by Democracy Development Foundation. The opinions and analysis expressed in the report are those of the authors and do not represent opinions and positions of Democracy Development Foundation.

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