



Armenian Bar Association

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Armenian Bar Association Launches A Stand-Alone Domestic Violence Committee

The Armenian Bar Association has established a standing committee on domestic violence to address the crisis and correction of this continuing affliction in Armenia and the diaspora. The committee seeks to increase access to justice for victims, strengthen the letter and enforcement of existing domestic violence law in Armenia, and provide support to non-governmental organizations (NGOs), non-profit organizations and other activists in Armenia to educate the citizens of Armenia on the deleterious impacts of domestic violence. The committee will also raise awareness about domestic violence in diasporan communities.

The committee's formation follows the Armenian Bar's steadfast and outspoken efforts to help counter the ill effects of domestic violence in Armenia. In 2016, through its Armenian Rights Watch Committee (ARWC), the Armenian Bar urged for the passage of a domestic violence law in Armenia in a letter to the President and Parliament. In 2018, during its Annual Meeting in Artsakh and Armenia, the Armenian Bar, together with the Women's Support Center in Armenia (WSC) and the Glendale Police Department, provided a domestic violence training program featuring Detective Vahe Abramyan, a ten-year veteran of the Glendale Police Department, and Judge Amy Ashvanyan of the California Superior Court, County of Los Angeles.

The committee began its work in earnest in March of 2020, spurred by the outrage at yet another femicide, this time the murder of a woman in Gyumri at the hands of her partner, who also brutally beat her 13-year-old daughter leaving her to fight for her life. It was the fourth femicide in Gyumri since the beginning of 2020. The statistics on domestic violence in Armenia are staggering -- 1 in 4 women experiences domestic violence and 60% report domestic violence. Domestic violence is physical, emotional, sexual and financial and the victims are often too traumatized to verbalize the abuse they endured. Maro Matosian, Executive Director of the Women's Support Center (WSC), a non-governmental organization, that is a women's organization dedicated to assisting survivors of domestic violence in Armenia, reported that the two shelters the WSC runs in Yerevan are at capacity. To exasperate further this dire predicament, it has been widely reported that domestic violence in Armenia and worldwide have increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Domestic Violence Committee is comprised of seasoned family law practitioners on the east and west coasts, including Ruben Stepanian, Marina Manoukian, Natalie Diratsouian, Alfred Movsesyan, Ani Garikian, Marina Arshakyan, Zepur Simonian, committee secretary (and aspiring lawyer) Ella Nalbandyan, as well as representatives from the Armenian Bar's Board of Governors, including Lucy Varpetian, Raffi Sarrafian, and Armen Hovannisian. Combating domestic violence has been a cause dear to the heart of the committee chairperson, Anahid Ugurlayan. Her engagement on this issue started many years ago when she played an integral role in the preparation of the Bar's letter to the President and Parliament of Armenia advocating for the passage of the domestic violence law.



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The committee has met regularly via Zoom since March 2020, up to the start of the September 2020 hostilities against Artsakh, at which time committee members redirected their efforts to the attack against the homeland. Those meetings have included presentations by advocates in Armenia and Georgia, discussions about memorializing significant, suggested changes to the domestic violence law, and strategizing on ways to assist in developing more civil society. In particular, the committee is formulating strategic action plans to help educate the community about outdated stereotypes, fostering healthy relationships and increase awareness about domestic violence, and promote police to properly respond to domestic violence calls. This will be a laborious and long-term project for the committee which is dedicated to uprooting domestic violence which has no place in any civilized society.

Lucy Varpetian, Chairwoman of the Armenian Bar Association, commented, “At its core, the mission of the Association is to help improve the predicaments facing our people – both collectively and individually. One of those predicaments is the very serious and enduring problem of domestic violence in our community just as much as it exists outside of it. What we hope to do is strengthen the applicable laws, encourage their enforcement, and most importantly, to embrace and empower those who have suffered most from it.”

For more information about the Domestic Violence Committee, please contact info@ArmenianBar.org.