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A Threat to Lawyers' Independence: Upholding Free Expression and Judicial Accountability in Armenia

The Armenian Bar Association expresses its serious concern about the infringement of the fundamental and professional rights of lawyers in Armenia following a recent, public statement by the country's Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), a 10-member body whose membership is dominated by appointments from the current ruling party. In its statement, the SJC broadly admonishes lawyers to cease any commentaries deemed critical of judges. While recognizing the SJC's mandate to safeguard judicial independence, the SJC's blanket censure directed at the legal profession risks creating a chilling effect on lawful, good-faith professional expression and advocacy.

Lawyers are independent professionals whose constitutional and statutory guarantees—including Article 64 of the Armenian Constitution and the Law on Advocacy—protect their basic right to provide legal analysis and, when appropriate, offer both positive and critical commentary on judicial decisions. International law, including Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, reinforces this principle, ensuring lawyers may fully participate in public discourse without fear of intimidation.

The Armenian Bar Association supports the Chamber of Advocates of Armenia which has, in turn, called into question the SJC's unwarranted overstep of its domain. Constructive, ethical criticism is not an attack on judicial independence; it is an essential element of accountability and the rule of law. Silencing lawyers undermines democratic governance, public confidence in the justice system, and the protection of human rights.

Background Note:

On February 20, 2026, the Supreme Judicial Council issued a statement asserting that certain social media posts by lawyers were inconsistent with professional ethics and could discredit judges and the judiciary. In response, the Council of the Chamber of Advocates of Armenia condemned the SJC statement as unacceptable, emphasizing that concerns about lawyer conduct must be addressed through legal mechanisms established under the Law on Advocacy. The Chamber reaffirmed the independence of lawyers, the legitimacy of reasoned critique of judicial decisions, and the importance of protecting lawyers from intimidation or interference in professional activity.