
ARMENIA

Republic of Armenia

Population: 3.0 million (819,000 under 18)

Government armed forces: 43,600

Compulsory recruitment age: 18

Voluntary recruitment age: 18; 16–17 as a cadet

Voting age: 18

Optional Protocol: ratified 30 September 2005

Other treaties ratified (see glossary):

CRC, GC AP I and II, ILO 138, ILO 182

There were no reports of under-18s on active duty in the armed forces, but cadets under 18 in military higher education were considered to be military personnel. Under a pilot scheme children as young as 11 received weapons training in school.

Context

Negotiations with Azerbaijan continued under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to end the dispute over the status of the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh.¹ The government insisted that the people in the enclave had to be guaranteed the right to exist within safe borders and that a link with Armenia had to be maintained.²

Government

National recruitment legislation and practice

Military service was regulated by the 1998 Law on Military Duty and the 2002 Law on Performance of Military Service. Conscription was provided for in the constitution. The 1998 Law on Military Duty (Article 11.1) stated that male citizens between the ages of 18 and 27 were liable for call-up in peacetime. In 2005 the law was amended to oblige graduates of military educational institutions to sign up for professional military service or else to refund the costs of their education.³

There were reports of physical and mental abuse, murder and rape of army conscripts.⁴ Three soldiers who in 2005 had been convicted of killing two fellow conscripts in December 2003 had their sentences increased in May 2006 from 15 years' to life imprisonment by the Court of Appeal. One of them stated that military investigators beat him and threatened him with rape, coercing him into signing a confession in which he named the two others as accomplices.⁵ The three, who had consistently maintained their innocence, were released by the Court of Cassation in December 2006. Shortly afterwards

the judge who ordered their release was removed from his post.⁶ The three soldiers submitted an application to the European Court of Human Rights, complaining of ill-treatment during questioning and unlawful detention. The Court's decision as to the admissibility of the case was still under consideration at the end of October 2007.⁷

The Law on Alternative Service, which gave legal recognition to conscientious objection, entered into force in July 2004.⁸ A government order of 9 July 2006 made available just 45 places for alternative service and a further 300 non-armed military positions.⁹ Many conscientious objectors, mainly Jehovah's Witnesses, refused to enlist for alternative service on the grounds that it was controlled by the military and not a fully civilian alternative.¹⁰ In 2006, 40 Jehovah's Witnesses were convicted for their refusal to do military service and by May 2007 over 70 were in prison.¹¹

The army of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR), which was not internationally recognized as an independent state, was estimated at 18,500–20,000, of whom over half were reportedly citizens of Armenia and included Armenian army conscripts.¹²

Military training and military schools

Military training was compulsory for school students aged about 16–18. Boys and girls in grades 8 and 9 in weekly classes learned how to handle automatic weapons. Girls could begin a nursing course from grade 9.¹³

In 2006 in one school in a poor suburb of Yerevan, the capital, military training started much earlier. A class of 18 boys and six girls aged 11 and 12, many of whom were orphans, were chosen to pilot military training for pre-adolescents, with the stated aim of improving school discipline. They were taught by a former paratrooper to march, handle automatic weapons and use combat skills. The Ministry of Education and Science reportedly planned to extend the course to 11 other "special schools" with disadvantaged pupils around the country, and to allow children who wanted military careers to transfer to those schools.¹⁴

Military training after secondary-school was provided through officer training at the Vazgen Sarkizyan Military Institute, the Military Aviation Institute, and the Military Medical Faculty of Yerevan Medical University. Cadets could be accepted for military higher education from the year they turned 17. During their studies, they were considered to be military personnel, with all the corresponding rights and duties.¹⁵ The inclusion of under-18s among this group was not explicitly mentioned in Armenia's declaration on ratifying the Optional Protocol.

Developments

International standards

Armenia ratified the Optional Protocol in September 2005, stating in its declaration that under Armenian law citizens under 18 could not be called on for either obligatory or contractual (voluntary) military service.¹⁶

In January 2006 Armenia ratified the ILO Minimum Age Convention 138 and the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 182.

* Titles of non-English-language sources have been translated by the Coalition.

- 1 “Armenian, Azerbaijan Envoys Meet over Nagorno-Karabakh”, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), 14 March 2007, www.rferl.org.
- 2 Armenia Country Profile, BBC News, 4 March 2007.
- 3 Confidential sources, April 2007.
- 4 “Violence in the Ranks: Army conscript says he was raped by comrades”, ArmeniaNow, 17 February 2006, www.armenianow.com.
- 5 *Human Rights Watch World Report 2007*.
- 6 Gayane Abrahamyan, “Free at last: struggle to prove soldiers’ innocence ends with surprise victory in court”, ArmeniaNow, 12 January 2007.
- 7 *Arayik Zalyan, Razmik Sargsyan and Musa Serobyanyan v. Armenia* (Application Nos 36894/04 and 3521/07), European Court of Human Rights, admissibility hearing 11 October 2007, www.echr.coe.int.
- 8 Marc Stolwijk, *The Right to Conscientious Objection in Europe: A Review of the Current Situation*, Quaker Council for European Affairs, April 2005, www.quaker.org/qcea/coreport.
- 9 Confidential sources, above note 3.
- 10 Emil Danielyan, “New alternative service falls flat in Armenia”, Eurasianet, 10 March 2006, www.eurasianet.org.
- 11 International Helsinki Federation, *Human Rights in the OSCE Region: Armenia*, 27 March 2007, www.ihf-hr.org (IHF reports); Felix Corley, “Armenia, 72 religious prisoners of conscience is new record”, Forum 18 News Service, 2 May 2007, www.forum18.org.
- 12 International Crisis Group (ICG), *Nagorno-Karabakh: Viewing the Conflict from the Ground*, Europe Report No. 166, 14 September 2005, www.crisisgroup.org.
- 13 Confidential sources, above note 3.
- 14 Gegham Vardanian, “Armenian pupils march to new step”, Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), 20 July 2006, www.iwpr.net; Armenian Helsinki Federation, above note 11.
- 15 “Armenian National Army – 15 years old”, *Respublika Armeniya*, 31 January 2007, www.ra.am.
- 16 Declaration on accession to the Optional Protocol, www2.ohchr.org.