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ARMENIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL APPEALS AGAINST THE DEATH SENTENCES OF THREE POLITICAL PRISONERS

President Levon Ter-Petrosyan of Armenia should immediately commute the death sentences of Arsen Artsruni, Armen Grigorian and Armenak Mjnoyan -- three political prisoners who were sentenced to death yesterday amid continuing allegations that their year-long trial was unfair, Amnesty International said today.

“The President has stated that he is personally opposed to the death penalty. We ask him to show this commitment in a more concrete way -- by not only refusing to sign execution warrants but also actually commuting all pending death sentences,” the human rights organization said.

Amnesty International is calling for a thorough and impartial judicial review of the case.

“We are particularly concerned about allegations that several defendants were beaten or ill-treated in order to extract confessions, and that some had difficulties in getting access to a lawyer of their own choice,” Amnesty International said.

The 11 defendants have been on trial in the so-called “Dro case”, accused of forming a clandestine terrorist group within the opposition Armenian Revolutionary Federation. Charges against them ranged from withholding information to illegal possession of weapons and premeditated murder. A 12th defendant, Ardavast Manukian, died in custody in May last year amid allegations that before his death he was denied adequate medical care for a range of health problems for several weeks.

President Levon Ter-Petrosyan has stated that he is personally opposed to the death penalty, and his office has assured Amnesty International that no executions have taken place, or will take place, during his term of office. It appears, however, that the President has not correspondingly used his authority to commute pending death sentences. This means that those currently on death row, believed to number 13 before this trial, may have been waiting years without knowing when they may expect their clemency appeals to be heard, or what the outcome may be.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases, on the grounds that it is a violation of the right to life.

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