

# Advocacy and Assistance Centers (AACs)

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### Are YOU a victim of CORRUPTION?

Your local Advocacy and Assistance Center can Help!

Take advantage of a quick and easy process in a confidential setting:

1. Call the hotline number of your marz (see back cover)
2. Set up an appointment with an AAC legal expert
3. Visit us and begin receiving free legal advice

You may also file a complaint on-line at [www.aac.am](http://www.aac.am)  
[www.shpak.am](http://www.shpak.am)

## AACs: FREE LEGAL ASSISTANCE TO FIGHT CORRUPTION IN ARMENIA

Citizens now have available a practical tool to fight corruption in Armenia, -- Advocacy and Assistance Centers (AACs). Spread throughout the country, these centers are corruption complaint offices where members of the public who have been victims of corrupt acts can walk-in or call-in to receive *confidential* and *free* legal assistance.

Through the AACs, Armenians now have a voice to fight corruption on both a local and national level. The centers provide support for those who engage in the anti-corruption cause and demand their rights. Staffed with legal experts to file and process complaints with the appropriate government agencies, the centers stand ready to pursue actions in court if needed.

The AACs receive inquiries from the general public on a variety of corruption-related matters, ranging from bribes in health care services to land disputes involving forged

documentation, as well as cases police power abuse, among others. Citizens are able to seek help within their own marz with a simple phone call, in-person visit or online at [www.aac.am](http://www.aac.am) or [www.shpak.am](http://www.shpak.am). Once a complaint is filed, the AAC staff sees the process through. AAC actions may include immediate consultations with concerned government bodies, the referring of cases to public prosecutors and/or courts, if necessary, and overseeing their timely and efficient response.

Operated by Armenian non-government organizations, the AACs are funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Mobilizing Action Against Corruption (MAAC) Activity. In addition to providing the public with *free* legal assistance, the AACs conduct public awareness and education activities. They also help identify trends and areas prone to corruption and legal loopholes and use this information to stimulate regulatory reforms.

## PASSPORT DENIAL IS OVERTURNED THANKS TO SHIRAK MARZ AAC

What a coincidence for Mr. Gevorgyan when he learned about the newly established Advocacy and Assistance Center (AAC) in Gyumri during a televised public service announcement (PSA), just as he was dealing with his passport problem. Upon his return from the Russian Federation, this 40+ year old Armenian citizen found himself having to apply for a new passport because his old one had been taken by a guard at the Armenian-Georgian border.

The local police department responsible for

issuing passports had denied Mr. Gevorgyan a new one on the grounds he lacked a registered address. However, it is common knowledge based on the Conscription Law, that only young men under the age of 27 (the age limit for military eligibility) are required to have registered addresses. Rather than resolving the matter by paying a bribe to the head of the passport department, which Mr. Gevorgyan believes is what was expected of him, he took his case to his local AAC.

(Continued on page 3)

Passport

## UP CLOSE WITH...



Arthur Sakunts,  
Vanadzor AAC coordinator

In a recent interview with AAC Coordinator Arthur Sakunts, he shared with this publication his recent experiences, challenges and the impact the Advocacy and Assistance Centers (AACs) are having. Founder of the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly of Vanadzor, Mr. Sakunts is a licensed attorney and the coordinator for the AAC Vanadzor in Lori marz where he oversees a staff of five legal professionals and a public relations specialist.

How did you get involved in the fight against corruption?

I began my activism in Human Rights by establishing the Vanadzor Citizens' Assembly 11 years ago. From its onset, the Assembly was involved in helping resolve corruption cases, making it a natural expansion to incorporate itself under the AAC project.

Where would you say is the bulk of the work your AAC is carrying out? Since opening in December (2008), we have been involved in a variety of tasks, primarily providing legal advice to citizens, filing complaint letters on their behalf and representing victims in court.

Are you receiving a lot of inquiries via the toll-free hotline? What are the more prevalent issues?

Most residents prefer to walk into the office rather than call. However, the hotline garners a stable flow of calls; most complaints have been linked to the education sector, social benefits' issues and police bribes.

What are some of the more common complaints your AAC is handling in person?

The majority of cases and inquiries we are currently seeing involve alleged abuse of police power. Some involve incidents where the police are said to have resorted to violence, threats, and even forced citizens to sign illegal confessions.

Which gender/age group has been more active in using your AAC?

Most of the applicants our AAC has processed have been middle aged and senior women.

How many cases do you currently have in the courts?

We currently have seven pending court cases, four were initiated by our AAC lawyers and three we are handling in the appeals process.

What thus far has been the most interesting case you have encountered and resolved?

There are two particular cases that come to mind, both of which had to do with land allocations. One case involved a land auction where the signature of the auction winner was reportedly faked for personal gain. We took this case to court on appeal and won in favor of the original lot owner. The other case also involved an alleged forged document used in illegally obtaining property. The citizen who allegedly obtained the property using the fake document is still in criminal trial and we are waiting to see whether the town hall official purportedly involved in the forgery will also be prosecuted.

## AACs OPEN THROUGHOUT ARMENIA

Eleven Advocacy and Assistance Centers (AACs) have been established throughout Armenia. The largest city of each marz, as well as the capital city of Yerevan all now form part of a nationwide network of centers that provides *free* legal assistance to victims of corruption. Since their opening, the AACs have greeted over a thousand citizens and successfully handled cases in areas such as land allocations, pension payments, extortions in state-owned hospitals as well as police power abuse.

The first four centers opened in the marzes of Shirak, Lori, Tavush and Syunik last December. These AACs were established in the cities of Gyumri, Vanadzor, Ijevan and Kapan in addition to three satellite offices in Sisian, Goris and Meghri, run by the Kapan AAC.

The final seven AACs were launched earlier this year completing the first national network of its kind. The Yerevan AAC has been operational since March and the final six centers opened in May in the marzes of Aragatsotn (with two reception centers in the towns of Aparan and Talin), Ararat, Armavir, Gegharkunik, Kotayk and Vayots Dzor. These centers were established in the cities of Ashtarak, Ararat, Armavir, Gavar, Hrazdan and Yeghegnadzor, respectively.

With all 11 AACs now fully operational, citizens can visit the center in their own marz to address corruption-related issues relevant to their everyday life. Each AAC is also equipped with a toll-free hotline for legal consultations and is able to receive inquiries online as well at [www.aac.am](http://www.aac.am) or [www.shpak.am](http://www.shpak.am). Through the coordination of local NGOs and USAID's MAAC Activity, Armenia is now benefiting from a national network of AACs which provide local residents with *free* and confidential legal advice and assistance in addressing a wide range of corruption-related complaints.

## ARMAVIR AAC ENSURES RETIREE RECEIVES PENSION OWED

When 63 year old Armavir resident H.A.'s time came to retire, never did he expect he would face a 30% decrease in his monthly state pension. A former truck driver who had recently retired was confronting this devastating possibility after his local Social Security office refused to acknowledge ten years of his work history clearly registered in his labor book.

At first H.A. attempted to seek help from lawyers in the region, but was unable to because he could not afford their services. With nowhere else to go, he visited the newly opened local Advocacy and Assistance Center (AAC) in his marz in hopes they could help him seek some recourse. Upon explaining that he was expected to pay a bribe to resolve the dispute, the AAC sent a letter to the local Social Security office. In it, they advocated for H.A.'s rights under the law by enclosing references to his labor record as well as legislation which favored he receive the

higher pension amount. The Social Security Service continued to adhere to their original decision of the lesser pension amount and refused to accept the AAC's legal arguments.

The AAC's legal staff however insisted with their legal course of action and took the matter to the courts. Upon being notified of the legal process, the Social Security Service modified its position and immediately proceeded to adjust the monthly pension amount.

"I am very pleased with the assistance I received from the AAC," stated H.A. "I am sure without their help I would have lost a big portion of my pension simply because officials were abusing their discretion and not following legal procedures. I have already told all my friends and family where to go when their rights are violated."

In a matter of approximately 20 days, the Armavir AAC and their legal experts solved this case, which may have otherwise gone unresolved. Without the AAC's successful and expeditious intervention, H.A. would have had to settle for a lesser pension amount or may have succumbed to paying a bribe.



Coordinator of Armavir's AAC, Naira Arakelyan, and USAID's Deputy Mission Director Cynthia Pruet

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## PASSPORT DENIAL IS OVERTURNED THANKS TO SYUNIK MARZ AAC

The Gyumri AAC in Shirak marz immediately sent a letter to the local passport office requesting an explanation on legal grounds as to their refusal to issue Mr. Gevorgyan a new passport. In the letter, they cited the legislation absolving him of needing to maintain a registered address. It was not long before they responded by issuing a new passport to Mr. Gevorgyan and responded to the AAC's inquiry by explaining the matter had been resolved in his favor.

"I appreciated the support and I thank the AAC lawyers for helping me obtain a new passport," expressed Mr. Gevorgyan. "I hope other residents of Gyumri will also come to the AACs for help with similar issues."

Helping Armenia's citizens overcome these corruption-ridden situations is what the AACs were created for. The more citizens like Mr. Gevorgyan resort to taking their cases to their local AACs, the more officials will be pressed to adhere to legal procedures at hand, rather than commit corrupt acts.

### Protect your rights against CORRUPTION

Advocacy and Assistance Center  
For assistance, contact your local  
Advocacy and Assistance Center  
Assistance Center

The AAC in your marz provides expert and confidential legal advice, free of charge, which can include:

- Explanation of your rights and recourses under the law
- Assistance in reporting corrupt acts to proper authorities
- Legal counsel in support of your claims
- Representation in court if required

Call your local hotline number,  
visit us in person, or on-line at  
www.aac.am

www.shpak.am

We can defend you  
against corruption



Location of all  
AACs and their  
reception centers

### AAC Directory: Addresses and Hotline Numbers

Marz/City	Address	Hotline	Implementing Partner
Aragatsotn/ Ashtarak	Ashtarak, V. Petrosyan 51/2 *Aparan, 13 Baghranyan St. *Talin, 2 Spandaryan St.	0800 01 122  (0249) 2 21 23	Armenian Young Lawyers Association
Ararat/ Ararat	Ararat, Charents 2/4	0800 01 117	Armenian Young Lawyers Association
Armavir/ Armavir	Armavir, Shahumyan 68a	0800 01 118	Armavir Development Center
Gegharkunik/ Gavar	Gavar, Sayadyan 2/1	0800 01 116	Gegharkunik Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Kotayk/ Hrazdan	Hrazdan, Kentron A-2 district	0800 01 119	Armenian Young Lawyers Association
Lori/ Vanadzor	Vanadzor, Tigran Mets 59	0800 01 112	TI- Helsinki Citizen's Assembly of Vanadzor
Shirak/ Gyumri	Gyumri, Pushkin 96	0800 01 121	TI- "Asparez" Journalists' Club
Syunik/ Kapan	Kapan, Shaumyan 4 *Sisian, 5 Charents *Goris, 41 Khorenatsi *Meghri, 36/1 Zoravan Andranik	0800 01 114 (02830) 32 12 (0284) 2 23 17 (0286) 4 23 13	Civil Society Development Center of Syunik
Tavush/ Ijevan	Ijevan, Ankakhutyan 4/14	0800 01 113	Armenian Young Lawyers Association
Vayots Dzor/ Yeghegnadzor	Yeghegnadzor, Narekatsi 18a	0800 01 120	Armenian Young Lawyers Association
Yerevan	Aygestan 9th Street, House 6, Yerevan 0025	0800 01 110	Transparency International Anti-Corruption Center NGO (TI)

\*Reception Centers



MAAC  
Mobilizing Action Against Corruption Activity

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