



Location of all AACs and their reception centers

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 below)
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 www.shpak.am

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

*Reception Centers



MAAC
Mobilizing Action Against Corruption Activity

ՀՊԱԿԿ

Advocacy and Assistance Centers (AACs)

AAC Newsletter • Issue 2 • September 2009

AACs Continue Expanding their Free Legal Services throughout Armenia

Since the first Advocacy and Assistance Center (AAC) opened in October 2008, Armenia's AACs have received close to 1,500 requests for free legal support. AACs are complaint offices where citizens victimized by corruption can call or visit to receive free and confidential legal assistance. The 11 centers are located in the largest city of all ten marzes and in Armenia's capital, Yerevan.

Citizens can also seek help online at the centers' newly launched website, www.shpak.am. The website offers news about the centers' recent activities, a directory of national and local government agencies, anti-

corruption related legislation and publications, and contact information for each AAC.

Whether registering a property, fighting police abuse or processing official documents, you can rely on AACs whenever and wherever they encounter corruption. AACs also support citizens who face corruption while seeking their rightful labor and social security benefits or in connection with the provision of healthcare services.

To contact a center for legal support for your corruption-related concerns, please see the telephone numbers and addresses listed on the back of this publication.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- AACs Continue Expanding their Free Legal Services throughout Armenia.
- Parents' Right to Join Child in Hospital Upheld (Yerevan).
- Up Close with Levon Barseghyan, Shirak AAC Coordinator
- Elderly Citizen's Unjust Eviction Suspended (Lori)
- One Call to Free Telephone Line Wards Off Corruption (Syunik)
- AACs' Directory and Map

Parents' Right to Join Child in Hospital Upheld

When a couple brought their newborn child to Yerevan for medical treatment, they had no idea they would be denied the right to stay in the hospital premises with their ailing daughter. The family had traveled from Gegharkunik to a Yerevan hospital so their one-month-old baby girl could receive medical care. Much to their surprise, the medical staff allegedly demanded a bribe in exchange for allowing the mother to remain with the baby throughout hospitalization and threatened to remove her from the premises if they did not comply. The baby's indignant father came to the Advocacy and Assistance Center (AAC) of Yerevan for help. The Yerevan AAC is one of eleven centers located throughout the country, operated by local NGOs, where victims of corruption receive free legal

assistance on a walk-in or call-in basis. Noting the urgency of the matter, the AAC immediately contacted the Ministry of Health, as well as the hospital's chief doctor. As a result, the chief doctor ordered his staff to provide the baby's parents with accommodations at the hospital without delay, as required by law. The AAC followed up with the baby's parents to make sure that the doctor's orders had been carried out. "I can't thank the Yerevan AAC enough for the quick help they gave to my family," said the relieved mother. "In fact, I believe you saved my daughter's life, since, as a one-month old, she needs her parents' constant presence." Noting how effective the AAC's action had been, the happy mother concluded by saying, "I

encourage others to apply to the AAC if they have similar problems."

Acts of corruption, such as requests for unofficial payments, are a recurring problem in the provision of public healthcare services in Armenia. AACs stand ready to help victims of healthcare corruption and have begun to identify regulatory reforms and other measures to prevent it.



UP CLOSE WITH...



Levon Barseghyan

Levon Barseghyan is a former journalist, community activist, and chairman of the Shirak-based NGO's Council. Now the coordinator of the Shirak AAC, Levon Barseghyan took a few minutes to share his thoughts about the AAC, corruption, and serving the community.

When did your AAC open?

The Shirak AAC was launched on 9 October 2008. We have seven staff members: the AAC coordinator, two lawyers, two legal assistants, a public relations specialist, and an accountant.

How did you get involved in the fight against corruption?

I noticed that corruption in Armenia is at the point where it is threatening the viability of the state. During my career as a journalist and work in the community, I came across hundreds of cases of corruption. As I became acquainted with the factors that led to corruption, I denounced them and began to search for justice. As the chairman of the NGO's Council, I filed ten cases in court concerning violations by government officials.

How have local residents reacted to the AAC opening up in their backyard?

Many residents are coming into the center to present their problems and receive legal support. Some are applying for legal assistance to solve problems that have gone unresolved for years.

What would you say is the bulk of your center's work: providing legal advice, filing cases in court, or mediating with government entities?

We mainly provide legal documentation and advice, but we expect an increase in court cases in the near future.

How do citizens contact your center?

Most citizens visit the center directly, although a few reach us through the hotline. The hotline is used most frequently for confidential advice about government corruption.

What are some of the most common complaints?

We receive a lot of complaints about how different government agencies are abusing their authority.

Is there one particular government agency in your marz that receives the highest number of complaints?

So far we have not identified any trends in the complaints against government entities. We have received complaints against a variety of agencies including the Ministry of Defense, the Social Security

Administration, local authorities, and the governor's office.

In Shirak marz, which segment of the population is the most active in contacting the center?

Most of our clients are middle-aged women and then, to a lesser extent, the elderly. We receive the least complaints from the youth.

How many cases do you have in the courts and how are they going?

We currently have 13 appeals at a Yerevan court. These were filed on behalf of construction workers employed by the government to build houses for survivors of the 1988 earthquake. For several months, the employees were underpaid: instead of the agreed salary of 160,000 AMD per month they received only 50,000 to 60,000 AMD. At a later date, we may combine the individual cases of the construction workers into a single case.

We have also had cases turned down by the courts and we are now preparing to appeal to the European Court of Human Rights. Another case was suspended because the applicant passed away. In that case, the client was accusing the city hall of abusing their authority while supervising the school board.

Do you think the existence of the Shirak AAC is helping people understand that they do not have to tolerate corruption?

Yes. In fact, we believe that the AAC's existence and operations help keep people informed and prevent them from being victimized by corruption.

Elderly Citizen's Unjust Eviction Suspended

Olya Kazaeva, an elderly resident of Vanadzor, recently learned that she and her family were being evicted from their townhouse. The house had been sold at a public auction by local authorities using what she believed were forged documents. With no prior notice and facing immediate eviction, Olya went to court, where she was told her case was groundless. With nowhere else to go, Olya visited her local Advocacy and Assistance Center (AAC).

Olya told the AAC staff that a creditor was pursuing one of her neighbors for an outstanding debt. According to her, the creditor collaborated with the local land title office to obtain a forged certificate of ownership which stated that Olya's townhouse actually belonged to her neighbor. This certificate was the basis for the auction in which Olya's property was sold. To make matters worse, officials from the agency responsible for carrying out the public auction allegedly forged a signature, making an in-law of the creditor the winning bidder.

AAC legal staff mobilized on two fronts. First, they filed an appeal in the civil court and won, getting the case referred back to the general court and suspending the immediate eviction of Olya and her family. Second, they initiated two criminal cases with the regional prosecutor's office: one against the local land title office for supposedly tampering with official documents and another against the public auction agency for allegedly forging signatures. Both of these cases are pending.

Olya thanked the AAC's staff, stating that without their intervention her "family could have been thrown out on the street with no place to live." Olya's success illustrates how AACs are empowering citizens throughout Armenia to fight corruption in areas such as property registration.



One Call to Free Telephone Line Wards Off Corruption

Obtaining a residence certificate from the municipal office should be a simple task, but it was quite the opposite for Karen,* a resident of a village near Kapan. Certificates should be issued free of charge and without conditions. However, when Karen applied for this document, local officials allegedly presented him with a series of additional requests in exchange for their services. This led Karen to believe that they expected a bribe. When local government officials ultimately refused to issue his certificate, Karen called the toll-free telephone number of the Advocacy and Assistance Center (AAC) in Kapan.



AACs empower citizens to fight corruption

staff immediately contacted local government authorities. AAC legal experts reminded the officials that Armenian law requires local governments to provide residence certificates to citizens free of charge and without conditions. This single phone call was all it took for Karen's residence certificate to be granted immediately.

"The AAC was of great help," said Karen. "It saved me a lot of trouble caused by red tape, which I know other citizens also experience." Helping Armenians overcome corruption is precisely what AACs and their toll-free hotlines were created to do. Karen's success illustrates how AACs are empowering citizens throughout Armenia to fight alleged corruption.

** The name of the citizen in this article has been changed for confidentiality purposes.*

Over the phone, Karen told AAC staff that government officials were inventing requirements that prevented him from obtaining a residence certificate. The center's legal