
OPPOSITION WAR VET RESUMES PROTEST AFTER RELEASE FROM JAIL

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A prominent Karabakh war veteran who was released from prison under an amnesty act having served more than half of his controversial six-year term resumed his protest in front of the Armenian government, deploring fraudulent elections and demanding social justice to thousands of people like him.

Volodya Avetisian, a retired army colonel, was arrested in September 2013 after organizing anti-government protests joined by fellow veterans of the 1992-1994 war in Nagorno-Karabakh.

His campaign began four months earlier that year with a lone protest staged in Yerevan's Liberty Square. Avetisian was joined by hundreds of other war veterans in the following weeks. They staged a series of demonstrations outside key government buildings in Yerevan.

A district court in Yerevan convicted him the following year of having embezzled \$2,000 from another man through a false promise to have his grandson exempted from compulsory military service. Avetisian and his supporters strongly denied the charge, calling it government retribution for his campaign for a sizable increase in modest pensions paid to the veterans.

The authorities, however, denied any political motives behind the high-profile case. Seyran Ohanian, the then defense minister, who is also a war veteran, repeatedly met with the colonel and his comrades in summer 2013 to discuss their demands. He subsequently accused Avetisian of breaching unpublicized agreements reached by them.

In front of the government office today Avetisian declared that he wants Armenia to become a law-abiding country.

He said he knew Ohanian participated in the April parliamentary election on an opposition platform. But it is one thing to have an opposition stance and another thing being an oppositionist. I was released from prison today, after spending three years and eight months there, I did not even go home, but I came here to the government building for the tyrants to hear my protest and to deliver a message to the people to rise and fight against these authorities, the activist said to the media.

Avetisian, a father of six children, claimed that the authorities could have paroled him still in 2015 as he was a disciplined convict. Does the Republic of Armenia have a justice minister?.. They are speaking about law on television, lying to the entire nation without feeling ashamed, he said.

The activist said he intended to continue his sit-in until, due to my sacrifice, Armenia becomes a

country where law prevails and until we make a revolution. Avetisian said all must go into the streets and as a nation demand the resignation of the government.

We must awaken the people, let them stop being frightened hares. That's why I've come here today, he said, without elaborating on his immediate plans. Avetisian did not rule out that reprisals could resume against him for his current actions.

Kaynak/Source: