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**NGO: ARMENIAN JOURNALISTS UNDER 'GROWING HARASSMENT'**

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Voice of America (13 February 2020)

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) is raising alarm over an "increase in the harassment" of journalists in Armenia, who the watchdog says are being subjected to defamation suits and attacks on their right to protect their sources.

"We are disturbed by the tendency for Armenian media to be sued or prosecuted," Jeanne Cavelier, the head of RSF's Eastern Europe and Central Asia desk, said in a statement Wednesday.

Cavelier said Armenia's judicial system "is being manipulated for partisan purposes to bring abusive legal proceedings designed to gag and obstruct media by forcing them to dedicate a lot of resources to defending themselves."

The number of lawsuits alleging defamation or insult has tripled in the past four years, with Armenia's justice department reporting 74 cases last year compared with 24 in 2016, RSF said.

It said the lawsuits against journalists and media outlets were usually brought by politicians or businessmen, and sometimes by other media.

*Nonjudicial methods urged*

Cavelier urged the authorities to promote the use of existing nonjudicial solutions to settle disputes in order to "avoid criminalizing journalism."

RSF cited the case of Sona Harutyunian, a journalist working for the news website 1in.am, who was sued by pro-opposition news site News.am for suggesting in a Facebook post that News.am was owned by former President Robert Kocharian.

A court has ruled that she should have "quoted her source" and "verified the facts" although she was "just expressing an opinion on an informal platform," the Paris-based media freedom group said.

As a result, Harutyunian had to post a retraction of her comments on Facebook on January 31.

Another victim of harassment is Qnar Manukian, the editor of the daily Zhoghovurd, who is facing criminal proceedings for refusing to reveal her sources, RSF said.

"More and more journalists are being summoned for questioning about stories they have covered although Article 5 of Armenia's mass-media law supposedly guarantees the confidentiality of their sources," according to RSF.

<https://www.voanews.com/press-freedom/ngo-armenian-journalists-under-growing-harassment>

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