

Item 6: Universal Periodic Review of Ukraine

19 March 2018

ARTICLE 19

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ARTICLE 19 remains concerned by authorities' failure to respect the right to freedom of expression, especially for journalists, minority groups, and those speaking out against corruption.

Impunity for attacks on journalists remains a problem. There has still not been justice for the murder of journalist Pavel Sheremet in 2016. The Institute of Mass Information recorded 276 incidents of violations of press freedom in 2017. Since the UPR of Ukraine took place, in February 2018, Chetverta Vlada, an investigative online news portal working on corruption, was subject to an arson attack in Rivne, Western Ukraine. On 3rd March, police officers attacked three journalists covering anti-corruption protests in Kyiv.

Investigations by law enforcement agencies into attacks on journalists remain ineffective. To implement recommendations on freedom of expression, Ukrainian authorities must dedicate the resources necessary to investigate and prosecute attacks, and publicly condemn all violence and attacks against journalists.

We remain concerned at the harassment of civil society, including criminal proceedings against civil society organisations involved in exposing corruption schemes. In March 2017, the Parliament adopted the law "on preventing corruption" which introduced restrictive measures on civil society, requiring activists to disclose personnel assets. Moreover, draft laws no. 6674 and no. 6675, proposed by the President in July 2017, would oblige civil society organisations and persons working for them, to submit detailed financial reports on funds received from international donors. This would significantly curtail civil society's ability to operate in the country.

ARTICLE 19 is also particularly concerned by pressure on representatives of marginalised groups. Olena Shevchenko, a Ukrainian human rights activist, was arrested and faced administrative charges under 185-1 Administrative Code of Ukraine, in relation to a banner displayed during a public rally she organised on International Women's Day. Though the case was dropped last week, it evidences harassment by the authorities against persons protesting increasing right wing nationalism in the country.

Though we welcome the government's adoption of The Action Plan for the National Human Rights Strategy 2020, that sets out tasks for all actors to improve human rights situation in the country, we note that progress in implementation of the Action Plan has stalled, and efforts to ensure the effective participation of civil society have been under-inclusive.

At the adoption of this UPR, ARTICLE 19 strongly urges the Ukrainian government to protect and promote freedom of expression both in law and practice, including by ending impunity for attack on journalists and civil society organisations. Authorities must do more to facilitate the free expression of all groups, including by guaranteeing the safety of participants in events and protests, and ensuring attacks on journalists and activists are properly investigated.