

The Rt. Hon William Hague MP Secretary of State for  
Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office King Charles Street  
London  
SW1A 2AH  
United Kingdom

Dear Foreign Secretary,

We are writing ahead of your planned trip to Baku to draw your attention to the many human rights violations in Azerbaijan. We would urge you to use your trip to raise these violations. In addition we are concerned about the support you are offering to President Aliyev and to the Shah Deniz consortium. The Southern Gas Corridor will mean Europe is dependent upon a corrupt and undemocratic dictatorship for their energy. We therefore request that you do not lend your support for this project by attending the signing ceremony for the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP).

Your trip to Baku follows the Presidential elections of 9 October. During the election there was video evidence gathered of many violations, in particular ballot-box stuffing and carousel voting. The observation mission of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) issued a Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, pointing to widespread violations in the campaign period and on election day, and concluded that the election fell far short of meeting international standards. A statement by the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center, Azerbaijan's largest domestic monitoring organisation, backed up these findings.

An extremely repressive climate in the run up to the Presidential elections ensured that free and fair elections were never possible, this has continued in the period since. The human rights situation in Azerbaijan is very bad, especially in relation to freedom of expression, assembly and association. According to the Human Rights Club of Baku, who conduct extensive on the ground research, there are now 142 political prisoners. The Azerbaijan authorities have used false charges to arrest many of these prisoners, including narcotics and weapons possession, hooliganism to arrest many political and religious activists, journalists, bloggers, human rights defenders critical of the government.

Some of those arrested are currently on trial. Among them are Ilgar Mammadov, chair of the opposition group REAL, and Tofiq Yagublu, deputy chair of Musavat, one of the country's opposition parties, on charges of 'inciting violence'. In addition, eight pro-democracy youth activists (Shahin Novruzlu, Mahammad Azizov, Bakhtiyar Guliyev, Rashad Hasanov, Rashadat Akhundov, Uzeyir Mammadli, Zaur Gurbanov and Ilkin Rustamzade) are facing up to 12 years in jail for false charges. Photojournalist Mehman Huseynov, currently on bail, continues to face the threat of up to five years' imprisonment if convicted of the fabricated charge of 'hooliganism' brought against him in June 2012. We urge you to raise these cases with the Azerbaijani authorities and to request the release of the 142 political prisoners.

Two opposition newspapers - *Azadliq* and *Yeni Musavat* - have had to temporarily halt publishing due to government-imposed restrictions on distribution, this is a threat to the paper's survival as they also face mounting defamation claims brought by officials and court-ordered freezing of their bank accounts. We urge you to use your trip to call for an end of the attacks on independent media in Azerbaijan and to meet with Azerbaijani journalists and civil society while you are there.

A key reason the Aliyevs have been able to create an unaccountable regime within Azerbaijan was the signing of the 'Contract of the Century' with a consortium of companies, including the operating company BP, in 1994. The revenue from oil and gas extraction has meant the regime is not dependent on citizens taxes, so there is little incentive to pay attention to citizens' voices or interests.

The state oil fund of Azerbaijan - SOFAZ - receives much of Azerbaijan's hydrocarbon income. SOFAZ was established to save wealth for future generations and to diversify the economy. This has not happened. In 2010 income to SOFAZ was \$7.2 billion, however predicted expenditure was \$6.6 billion, leaving less than 10% of the income for future generations.

Investigations by Azerbaijani journalists, and international organisations, like the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists have proven that large amounts of Azerbaijan's public money are being diverted into private bank accounts. These investigations have linked the companies involved in this corrupt practice to the Azeri elite – including the president and his family.

Since Margaret Thatcher's attendance at the signing of the 'Contract of the Century', with a consortium of international oil companies for the exploration and exploitation of offshore oil fields, the UK government have offered continued support for both BP's operations in Azerbaijan and the Aliyev regime. This support has hindered both human

rights and democracy within Azerbaijan. The Southern Gas Corridor, of which TAP is a crucial part, would mean Europe is dependent on this undemocratic and violent regime for energy and would continue to hinder the Azerbaijani struggle for democracy. We therefore ask you not to attend the TAP signing ceremony this week and instead spend your time meeting with Azerbaijani civil society and journalists. The previous Conservative and Labour governments demonstrated the dangers of befriending unaccountable regimes in the pursuit of fossil fuels, we urge you not to continue this policy.

Thank you in advance,

1. Arzu Abdullayeva, Azerbaijan Committee of Helsinki Citizens' Assembly
2. Intigam Aliyev, Legal Education Society
3. Mirvari Gahramanli, Azerbaijan's Oil Workers' Rights Protection Organization
4. Annagi Hajibeyli, Azerbaijan Lawyers Association
5. Rashid Hajili, Media Rights Institute
6. Nick Hildyard, Cornerhouse
7. Emma Hughes, Platform London
8. Khadija Ismayilova, Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty
9. Rasul Jafarov, Human Rights Club, Baku