



Minister of Foreign Affairs Jonas Gahr Støre

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Pb 8114 Dep

0032 Oslo

Oslo, 18 May 2011

Subject: Plans for the visit of H.R.H. Crown Prince to Azerbaijan in June 2011.

Dear Minister of Foreign Affairs Jonas Gahr Støre,

The attached letter is sent to the Royal Palace today. The Norwegian Helsinki Committee, Rafto Foundation and the Human Rights House Foundation appeal to the Crown Prince to refrain from participation in the opening ceremony of the *Caspian Oil & Gas 2011*, the 18th International Caspian Oil & Gas Exhibition and Conference Incorporating Refining & Petrochemicals, planned to take place on 6 -7 June in Baku, Azerbaijan. His Royal Highness's participation could communicate signals which can be abused by Azerbaijan, one of the remaining authoritarian regimes in Europe.

The human rights situation in Azerbaijan has aggravated since the beginning of the 2011. On 21 March 2011, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Thorbjørn Jagland, expressed in an unusual and personal letter to the President Aliyev his deep concern with the latest developments in the country, pointing to increasing lack of pluralism in the public opinion, systematic infringement of the freedom of expression and the freedom of assembly, arrests and imprisonment of a number of young activists and politicians from oppositional parties. Both OSCE and the EU have also expressed similar concern. In the present situation, it is unfortunate that H.R.H. Crown Prince Haakon plans to visit Baku.

We are however not negative to the Minister of Petroleum and Energy, Ola Borten Moe and the State Secretary visiting the *Caspian Oil & Gas 2011*, as this is a display of Norway's foreign and economic engagement natural for Norwegian political leaders. Moreover, the visit by Norway's political leadership provides an opportunity to raise human rights issues with the Azerbaijan authorities and express Norway's view on the improvements urgently needed in this field. We hereby thank you for the invitation to the dialogue about the program of the visit with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on May 30th 2011. During this meeting, we wish to come with the concrete suggestions to Azerbaijani civil society actors it

is interesting the delegation should meet, and concrete suggestions to issues and cases hat should be raised with the authorities during the visit. The Norwegian Helsinki Committee has greatly appreciated the previous opportunities to contribute with advice and comments in connection with the Petroleum and Energy Minister's visits to previous *Caspian Oil & Gas* conferences in Baku.

Unlike Norwegian political leaders, a representative of the Royal Family cannot raise these challenging issues during the visit to Baku. This gives room for misinterpretation of the Crown Prince's role and can easily be twisted and give an idea of his direct support to the authoritarian regime of president Aliyev.

The fact, that the freedom of expression is impaired and there is no possibility for a balanced public debate in Azerbaijan, gives the necessary room for the Azeri authorities to present their own version of the reasons for the Crown Prince's visit to Baku. This does not serve the best interests of the Royal Family, or, for that matter, Norway's interests.

We attach the letter to H.R.H. Crown Prince Haakon for your information. The letters will be made public.

Respectfully,



Bjørn Engesland
Secretary General
Norwegian Helsinki Committee



Maria Dahle
Office Manager
Human Rights House Foundation



Therese Jebsen
Office Manager
Rafto Foundation

A duplicate of this letter is also sent to:

Minister of Petroleum and Energy, Ola Borten Moe

Copy: Secretary of State, Espen Barth Eide