

## SOCAR Is Sponsoring a Propaganda Trip for Members of US Congress

WASHINGTON, DC. May 24, 2012. The State Oil Company of Azerbaijan (SOCAR) is sponsoring a visit to Azerbaijan between May 24 and May 28 for a group of Americans that includes some members of the US Congress and other individuals. Scheduled to overlap with the glitzy Eurovision song contest held in the capital Baku, this visit seems to be intended as a part of a propaganda campaign to bolster the image of the Aliyev regime in front of the international community.

The trip's sponsor, SOCAR, itself has been implicated in violations of human rights, including demolition of private houses and a brutal attack on the journalist Idrak Abbasov covering the those violations. One of the Americans selected for the SOCAR-sponsored trip, singer and song-writer Sara Hickman, refused to go, stating that by accepting the trip she would have become a human rights violator by association;

Elmar Chakhtakhtinski, chairman of Azerbaijani Americans for Democracy (AZAD), told Azeri Report that regardless to the intentions of SOCAR and the Azerbaijani government, the members of the US Congress can use this visit as an opportunity to meet not just the government representatives but also the representatives of the political opposition and civic organizations. "Such an approach would allow the US Congressmen to form a full opinion on the country and, more importantly, prevent the formation of a public perception that this whole venture is a paid advertisement operation with US Congress members playing as stars of the show to whitewash the dictator in Azerbaijan," said Elmar Chakhtakhtinski (Azerireport).

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