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**KUĆA
LJUDSKIH PRAVA
ZAGREB**

-MEDIJIMA-

Zagreb, 9th March 2013.

Big competition – Azerbaijani president Aliyev visits Croatia

Letter of concern

At this moment Croatian political elites are competing on who will entertain Azerbaijani president Ilham Aliyev during his visit to Zagreb. Human Rights House, Zagreb is expressing its concern with this situation. Therefore, we are issuing this public appeal and urging the winner of the competition while talking about possible economic cooperation to also bring up the worrying situation in Azerbaijan concerning human rights abuses.

Human Rights House Network, which we are a member of, issued a number of letters of concern to international institutions as well as to the Government and the President of Azerbaijan. Restrictions of freedom of expression, arrests of journalists and lawyers representing them, shutting down of the Human Rights House in Baku, the refusal to answer questions made by the UN Special Rapporteur in relation to the arrest of photographer and blogger Mehman Huseynov are only some but evident cases of non-democratic rule of Ilham Aliyev and his political party.

The latest proof of the repressive regime were the protest held on the 23rd January in Ismayili and 26th January 2013 in Baku. The citizens were protesting against corruption. Police and plain clothed agents started to arrest the protesters. In Baku 47 demonstrators were detained and among them were some prominent human rights activists: blogger Emin Mili, the human rights defender and Rafto Award laureate Malahat Nasibova, the human rights lawyer Intigam Aliyev, as well as the investigative journalist and Fritt Ord Foundation and ZEIT Foundation Award laureate Khadija Ismayilova. The arrests happen two days after the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) adopted a resolution on the human rights situation in Azerbaijan and call upon the authorities to stop attacks and harassment against human rights defenders.

We have noticed that the Azerbaijani state authorities are more than willing to invest abroad in return for non-criticism and silence about the human rights abuses in their country which occurs on an everyday basis. The Croatian Government has recently adopted three cooperation agreements with the authoritarian Azerbaijani Government (in the area of enterprise, energy and science). As Croatian citizens we cannot accept cooperation policies that are based on protection of specific interests and are in contradiction with human rights abuses in those countries. These cooperation agreements should not be signed unless there is a direct and clear criticism indicated to president Aliyev on the unacceptable human rights violations in Azerbaijan. Also, these agreements should not be made until we conceive a foreign policy that enables to empower the powerless, abused and detained citizens of Azerbaijan.

We would like to warn Croatian Government that cooperation with countries that are known for their gross human rights abuses gives them legitimate right to continue such practices and makes Croatian Government a responsible co-actor in international human rights abuses.

We are holding the opinion that avoiding the truth and indulgence of the Croatian Government official towards President Ilham Aliyev is shameless and unacceptable.

For Human Rights House, Zagreb:
Sanja Sarnavka
Chair or the Board