



**PRESS RELEASE**  
(for immediate release)

**Eurovision Song Contest:  
Are some company sponsors ignoring  
concerns about human rights in Azerbaijan?**

**London, 23 May 2012** – As the Eurovision Song Contest gets underway, with the finals this Saturday in Azerbaijan, some companies sponsoring the event are refusing to respond to concerns raised about the human rights situation in Azerbaijan.

Business & Human Rights Resource Centre contacted 7 companies that are official sponsors or partners of Eurovision 2012, or of national entrants. The Centre asked each to respond to [concerns about human rights abuses in connection with the hosting of Eurovision in Azerbaijan](#).

Widespread and systematic abuses of human rights by the Government of Azerbaijan have been reported for years by Azerbaijani human rights advocates, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch. Recent allegations include the eviction of people to make way for the Eurovision concert hall, and reported attempts to "silence dissent" before the contest is held.

**Three Azerbaijani companies sponsoring Eurovision 2012 have so far failed to respond** to the human rights concerns:

- **Gilan Holding**
- **Silk Way Airlines**
- **State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR)**

*"We are disappointed that these 3 companies have not responded to serious human rights concerns relating to an event they are sponsoring – we hope that they will respond now. We will soon be informing the United Nations Working Group on Business and Human Rights how each company responded – or failed to respond,"* said Danielle McMullan, Researcher at Business & Human Rights Resource Centre.

**Four companies responded** – [click here to see their responses](#):

- **Azercell (Azerbaijan), part of TeliaSonera (Sweden)** – Azercell is the Presenting Partner of Eurovision 2012.
- **Schwarzkopf, part of Henkel (Germany)** – Schwarzkopf is an official sponsor of Eurovision 2012.
- **Metro Sweden, part of Metro Intl. (Sweden)** – Metro Sweden is the media partner / official sponsor of the Swedish selection for Eurovision 2012.
- **MTN Cyprus (Cyprus), part of MTN Group (South Africa)** – MTN Cyprus is a sponsor of the Cypriot entrant for Eurovision 2012.

*"We asked these seven companies to respond because Human Rights Watch and others have made the point that sponsoring events in a country where human rights abuses are widespread can be seen as endorsing the government",* said Christopher Avery, Director of Business & Human Rights Resource Centre. *"The United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights state that all companies 'should identify and assess any actual or potential adverse human rights impacts with which they may be involved either through their own activities or as a result of their business relationships.'"*

Last week Business & Human Rights Resource Centre issued another press release about Azerbaijan: ["As Eurovision Song Contest approaches, concerns about hidden cameras in Azerbaijan hotel rooms"](#). Marta Kasztelan, Researcher at Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, explains: *"We sought responses from companies that own leading hotels in Azerbaijan to reports that cameras have repeatedly been planted in hotel rooms in the country to record journalists and critics of the government having sex in order to blackmail them. One victim said*

*that visitors to Azerbaijan for Eurovision 2012 should be aware that cameras are sometimes planted in hotel rooms.” All the hotel companies responded to the Resource Centre – their responses are on [this webpage](#).*

If any organization or individual wishes to comment on this issue, or on the company responses, the Resource Centre will also post those statements on its website. If those comments criticise the response of a particular company, the Resource Centre will invite that company to respond to the criticism.

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## **About the Resource Centre**

[Business & Human Rights Resource Centre](#) is an independent non-profit organization that encourages companies to respect human rights, by promoting transparency and accountability. Our website links to reports on the human rights impacts (positive & negative) of 5100 companies worldwide, and provides guidance tools to assist companies, NGOs and others working in this field.

When human rights concerns are raised by civil society, we invite companies to respond, and post each company response alongside the concerns. The usual response rate to the Resource Centre is 75% globally. Since 2005 the Centre has invited over 1000 company responses, to a range of human rights concerns. A [record of all past responses and non-responses is here](#). Victims and NGOs thank us for bringing global attention to their concerns and for eliciting responses from companies. Companies thank us for including their perspective and for providing the opportunity to present their responses in full. This process often leads to real improvements on the ground.

Mary Robinson, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and President of Ireland, is Chair of the Centre's International Advisory Network. Our Academic Partners comprise 23 leading academic institutions. The Centre's researchers are based in Colombia, Hong Kong, India, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Senegal, South Africa, UK, Ukraine and USA.

For further details, see the ["About us"](#) section of our website.

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