

Contact: Diana Altman, [diana@karabakhfoundation.org](mailto:diana@karabakhfoundation.org)

## Karabakh Foundation Delegation Visits Azerbaijan; Baku and Regions



Left to right: Executive Director Diana Cohen Altman, Associate Tural Kerimli, and Administrative Assistant Andrea de Souza visit the National History Museum in Baku.

*Washington, D.C. July 15, 2010* From July 3 through July 14, 2010, newly appointed Karabakh Foundation staff Diana Cohen Altman, Executive Director, and Andrea de Souza, Office Assistant (Student Foreign Affairs Liaison), visited Azerbaijan. The first visit for both staff members, the tour revealed a world of culture and tradition unlike any either one had encountered in their travels.

Accompanied by Foundation Associate Tural Kerimli and his staff, the delegation visited cultural sites, met with members of the Azerbaijani media, mingled with Azeri university students, and otherwise immersed themselves in the experience of “tasting Azerbaijan.”

The trip’s itinerary included a stay in Baku’s Old City and extensive tours of the city’s many cultural monuments and museums. Sites visited included Martyr’s Alley, a tribute to those who died in the tumultuous days of the collapse of the Soviet Union and Azerbaijan’s transition to an independent republic once again (some 75 years after the country first established itself as an independent republic).

Other sites included the State History Museum, which captures the extraordinarily complex and fascinating historical epochs of Azerbaijani history, to the Shirvanshakh Palace in Old City, which still exudes the architectural splendor of its 15<sup>th</sup>-century construct.

Members of the city’s various ethnic communities welcomed the delegation to a mosque, a synagogue, and a church. The religious leaders offered support for the Karabakh Foundation’s mission to raise awareness for Azerbaijani culture. Throughout the two-week visit, members of Azerbaijan’s largely secular Muslim minority consistently expressed pride in the country’s record of tolerance of national minorities.

The delegation also spent several days traveling throughout Azerbaijani regions, visiting Sheki, Zagatala, Balakən, and Garanboy. Near Sheki, the important archaeological site of Kis, a 5<sup>th</sup>-century Caucasian Albanian church, suggested insights into the Caucasus Albanian centuries-long sojourn in Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan's distinctive cuisine played an important role in the Foundation's visit. The delegation enjoyed the pronounced variations in regional flavor. The guests, who experienced regional specialties such as olive jam, tarragon soda, and Sheki's famed halvah.

"The first thing that struck me, from a cultural perspective" said Executive Director Altman, "was the sense I got from so many Azerbaijanis of a deep cultural identity. True, many of people we met are involved with culture on a daily basis. But I was surprised at first by the number of young people in particular who were visiting, say, the monument to 12<sup>th</sup>-century poet Nizami Ganjavi."

"Just as our Foundation will share the prodigious Azerbaijani cultural legacy," Altman stated, "we also must share connections to the modern Azerbaijanis who have inherited and who venerate this legacy."



Administrative Assistant Andrea de Souza tries her hand at the ancient Azerbaijani art of carpet weaving.

Administrative Assistant de Souza focused on the way that Azerbaijani culture has endured and enriched itself over centuries of foreign influence and occupation. "I received constant reminders," remarked de Souza, "that the country acquired its much desired independence not so long ago. I remained impressed by how the country had maintained its rich culture over centuries in the

face of many obstacles."

Staff members expressed a deep appreciation for the welcome they received. Throughout Azerbaijan, individuals of many different backgrounds stepped forward to express support for the Karabakh Foundation's mission of sharing Azerbaijani culture in the United States.

On their return to Karabakh Foundation headquarters in Washington, D.C., staff wasted no time in writing about their experiences and planning for cultural programs in the United States. A

concert, a cookbook, partnership with various textile experts, and the launch of the Foundation's grants and fellowship programs are all on the agenda for 2011.

### **About the Karabakh Foundation**

*The Karabakh Foundation seeks to increase awareness and understanding in the United States of the cultural heritage and traditions of the country of Azerbaijan, the Caucasus area, and the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. While coalescing significant artistic and scholarly talent, the Foundation is nurturing a new generation of artists and scholars toward important accomplishments.*



Left to right: Administrative Assistant Andrea de Souza, Executive Director Diana Cohen Altman, Founder/Board of Directors Member Dr. Hamlet Isaxanli, and Associate Dr. Tural Kerimli discuss Foundation goals over a traditional Azerbaijani lunch.

*The Foundation serves as a dynamic facilitator and clearinghouse raising the public profile of Azerbaijan, its Karabakh region, and the Caucasus region in general. Main activities include preserving and disseminating cultural content via archival collecting, public programs, publications, exhibitions, speaking forums, international collaborations, scholarly exchange, artistic*

*sponsorship, and related venues.*

*Foundation support comes primarily from Khazar University, the first private university in Azerbaijan and one of the country's leading institutions of higher*

*learning. Additional information about the Karabakh Foundation may be found at [www.karabakhfoundation.org](http://www.karabakhfoundation.org).*

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