



**STATEMENT**

**by H.E. Mrs. Sandra Elisabeth Roelofs**

**First Lady of Georgia  
Special Envoy of the President of Georgia**

**High Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS**

**2 June 2006  
New York**

Thank you Mr. Chairman,  
Distinguished audience,  
Leaders of the world in the fight against HIV/AIDS,

In name of the Georgian nation and its President Mikheil Saakashvili I would like to reconfirm our appreciation for the efforts of the United Nations in its role to enhance peace, prosperity and well-being of the humankind.

Speaking in HIV/AIDS terms, Georgia is a low-prevalence but simultaneously a high-risk country with migration and transit flows, bordering Ukraine and Russian Federation, where the pandemic goes on taking its toll. There are other factors such as the wide-spread intravenous drug use in Georgia which gives us reason for concern.

Thanks to our strongly committed government we do have some good news as well: in the post-Soviet space, Georgia is the first country to have reached a 100 % universal access to free-of-charge comprehensive treatment, including ARV for all people living with HIV/AIDS. We have reached high control standards and have ensured universal access to voluntary counseling & testing and pediatric treatment for prevention of mother-to-child transmission.

Very recently, we have formulated a comprehensive and evidence-based roadmap within the scope of the Universal Access Initiative pledged by the G8 and the World Summit.

We know we should be alert and coordinate domestic and international efforts to avoid the virus to spread dramatically within the borders of our Caucasian state. And that's why we have come to you, leaders of the world, to share and to learn. To LEARN that it is not only a matter of RAISING funds to ensure sustainability but of SPENDING them wisely at the same time, efficiently and through good management. To LEARN from my colleague-first ladies of Latin-America and other regions that you can form health partnerships and coalitions of women leaders, a challenge which I am eager to pick up in the Eurasian region bringing together the first ladies and leading women of Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Moldova, Ukraine, the Russian Federation and likely including the Baltic States as well, with whom Georgia is in continuous close collaboration.

On the domestic level I am climbing –with my 5 months old baby- green hills and snow-peaked mountains to reach the mothers of Georgia, in the most remote areas, conducting frank talks on sexual and reproductive health, trying to break taboos on contraception, abortion and sexually transmitted diseases and reminding them of their personal share of responsibility in educating their children and making from them healthy-conscious adolescents:

All this thanks to the United Nations Population Fund who was ready to support this initiative. To reach behavioral change and make people say –like the Secretary-General Mr. Koffi Annan put it so well this morning- that 'AIDS stops with ME', it helps to include highly-committed high-profile men and women in your fight to achieve the

targets mentioned in the Political Declaration and in general expressed in the UN Millennium Development Goals. That is exactly the reason why I was approached two years ago to chair the Global Fund's Country Coordination Mechanism which is at the same time the single national AIDS coordinating authority in the country. The Global Fund, which is financing up to 70% of the HIV/AIDS response in Georgia and who is guiding us on the path of reinforcing the health system, connecting people and linking multi-sectoral health challenges with issues like stigmatization, anti-drug policy, palliative care and co-infection with yet another major killer, TUBERCULOSIS. On a monthly basis we bring together all players in the field of HIV/AIDS response: government, international and non-governmental organizations including self-support groups of those affected and representatives of religious, academic and business circles. We are welcoming innovative financing initiatives like the 'Red Campaign' brought about by the Global Fund. In Georgia, we do not have well-known brands like Armani, American Express or Motorola but we can offer an off-the-chart RED product, the high-quality Georgian red wine, which we call the 'freedom drink'.

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies,

As a final remark I would like to draw your attention to the fact that right here, in the garden adjacent to the UN building you can find an impressive statue of a well-known Georgian sculptor gifted to the UN and depicting Saint George killing the dragon and symbolizing victory over the evil. I am confident that - through common efforts- we also will win the battle over the pandemic.

I thank you all for your interest and wish you a safe trip back home.