

**Opening session of the
Sixth MDR-TB Working Group Meeting
Tbilisi, Georgia
20-22 September 2007**

**Welcoming speech by the
Minister of Labor, Health and Social Issues, Georgia
David Tkesheashvili
20 September, 2007**

Dear Guests,

On behalf of the Government of Georgia and the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs I'd like to welcome all of you to the Sixth Stop TB Partnership MDR-TB Working Group meeting.

As you already know, the third regional meeting for Countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, organised by the Global Fund and dedicated to problems of the AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria control, with rather a high representation was held in Tbilisi. Today's meeting can be considered as a logical continuation of the aforementioned conference. I am glad that these two measures were planned one after another. It will give us a chance to be consecutive in raising and discussing problems and working out methods and action plans for settling them.

The world entered the 21st century with new, more cruel face of TB. It does not respect borders; therefore it is a problem for each of us, rich and poor, developed and developing countries. Today's meeting is an excellent demonstration of understanding this fact. That is why, the representatives from many different countries worldwide have gathered to make changes in Global TB control.

There is a need more than ever for strengthening the management of TB control. The Stop TB Partnership and WHO are instrumental in guiding this process. Saying that, I mean the development of the Global Plan To Stop TB and the Stop TB Strategy. The first step has been made: we have strategies and plans. Now it is time for action. We all should work together to deal with the problem of drug resistance. When I say "We" I mean: medical and public health professionals, governments and society.

After the Rose Revolution, the Georgian government has intended to make changes and has demonstrated unprecedented political commitment to TB control: budget for TB control is increasing each year, the Georgian Government has invested million dollars to build a hospital for the National Center for Tuberculosis Lung Diseases. Some of you will have a chance to visit the hospital building. The hospital will serve the first MDR-TB patients from October, 2007.

Political commitment has become one of the important factors for National TB Control program success in different areas of TB control. The role of the First Lady of Georgia, Mrs. Sandra Elizabeth Roelofs deserves to be mentioned particularly. Her active involvement in advocating for TB control as a Stop TB Partnership ambassador has engaged governments in different countries of the Region.

All the above mentioned give an opportunity for Georgia to set an ambitious goal of providing universal access to MDR-TB diagnosis and treatment nationwide by the year 2008. International support plays a great and role in achieving this goal.

In ending, again I would like to welcome all of you to Georgia, and wish you success for your meeting and a prosperous fight against drug resistant TB.

David Tkesheashvili

Minister of Labor, Health and Social Issues