

**ADDRESS**  
by  
**H.E. Mr. Beka DVALI,**  
**Ambassador of Georgia**  
**In the Republic of South Africa**  
On the occasion of  
**of the Independence Day of Georgia**  
**26 May 2020**  
**Pretoria, Republic of South Africa**

Dear South Africans,  
Dear Fellow Georgians in South Africa,  
Dear Colleagues from the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO),  
Dear Colleagues from South African Governmental Departments,  
Dear Ambassadors and High Commissioners,  
Members of the Diplomatic Corps in South Africa,  
Dear Members of Southern Africa Georgia Chamber of Commerce (SAGCC),  
Dear Honorary Consuls of Georgia in Cape Town, in Johannesburg, in Port Louis, in Antananarivo, in Lusaka, in Luanda, in Maputo,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, on 26 May 2020, we are blessed to celebrate, yet once again, Independence Day of Georgia, albeit in totally unusual global environment and circumstances related to COVID-19 pandemic. First time during last 9 years, the Embassy of Georgia in South Africa is not able to host traditional Georgian Reception in Pretoria and to greet, hug and entertain our friends and colleagues, to raise toast with epic Georgian wine to the independence and wellbeing of our beloved country. Pandemic derailed such celebration this year as much as it stalled our extraordinary and long-matured plans we had envisaged for Georgia-South Africa relations in 2020.

At this moment in time, first and foremost, on behalf of the Government of Georgia and Georgian people, I extend heartfelt condolences to all South Africans, to all the families and loved once of COVID-19 victims. I also wish fast recovery to the patients currently fighting the virus. The very resilience displayed by South Africans throughout history makes us hopeful that this Rainbow Nation will beat the epidemic and then will continue steadily one of the exceptional transformation processes of our lifetime.

Georgia also grapples with sober consequences of the pandemic. We also lost lives of our compatriots. Three months ago, in late February 2020, COVID-19 overtook Georgia at a very positive juncture: country moving forward firmly on its unshakable path of European and Euro-Atlantic integration, developing multifaceted and diversified economy, strengthening state institutions and solidifying system of human rights protection.

And three months after our first encounter with COVID-19, it is comforting to note that the Government of Georgia and Georgian people stand out globally in managing the virus in exceptionally effective manner.

Our country is now accelerating movement towards post-crises and recovery stage. Well-coordinated efforts of Georgian Government and our healthcare professionals allow Georgia to emerge from the abyss of pandemic with ever more strengthened posture allowing to position itself as a safe tourism destination as well as pursue vigorously new economic opportunities. We are confident now that after unavoidable worldwide recession of 2020, our concerted efforts in the face of pandemic will catapult Georgia rapidly into much-needed economic growth in 2021 and beyond.

To our dismay, I cannot but recall that as Georgia and the whole world endures the pandemic, joining forces, whenever possible, in this extraordinary fight of humankind against the virus, Russian Federation, in its already customary blatant disregard of international law and the UN Charter-Based principles, carries on and even aggravates its detrimental policies of occupation and creeping annexation of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region – two indispensable parts and historical lands of our beloved Georgia. Hundreds of thousands of my compatriots subject to ethnic cleansing by the Russian occupation regime from the occupied territories are still deprived of the possibility of returning to their ancestral homes. Entire international community continues to witness destructive and unabated steps of the occupation regime manifested in moving occupation lines, erecting and expanding barbed wire fences, separating lives and destroying livelihoods on the sovereign territory of Georgia within and along those two Georgian regions. We take note of this opportunistic policies, we stay resilient, we feel international support and hence we are confident that this virus of occupation and creeping annexation will also end, it will be terminated, sooner rather than later.

Georgia and South Africa were on the verge of accelerated cooperation right before the pandemic struck and this year was supposed to bring never-before-seen interaction between our countries at Governmental level, in business, in sports like rugby, in people-to-people contacts and in many other dimensions. Notwithstanding the obstacles and delays caused by the pandemic in moving forward our bilateral agenda, now it is time for all of us to persevere, to recuperate, to recover and to reenergize our joint efforts in post COVID-19 era. And in this approach, we are happy to have our South African colleagues as our allies – colleagues from DIRCO, from other Governmental Departments, all members of Southern Africa Georgia Chamber of Commerce (SAGCC), Georgian Community in South Africa, Georgia's Honorary Consuls and all our friends in South Africa and indeed in Southern Africa.

At the Embassy of Georgia in Pretoria we are honoured to be responsible directly for forging Georgia's partnership, in addition to South Africa, with 12 more Southern African Nations: Angola, Botswana, Eswatini, DRC, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. On 9 January 2020, I presented my letters of credence to H.E. Professor Arthur Peter Mutharika, the President of the Republic of Malawi, thus successfully completing the accreditation process in all 13 countries falling under our area of diplomatic coverage. On behalf of Georgian Government, I extend words of solidarity to all these nations and wish them success in managing the virus as well as in achieving accelerated economic growth and prosperity in the aftermath of the crises.

Long Live Georgia!

Long Live South Africa!

Long Live our evolving friendship with South African and Southern African brothers and sisters!