

## USAID HONORS RITA BALIAN FOR INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN VOLUNTEER EFFORTS *Rita S. Balian among the Very First to Receive "Outstanding Citizen Achievement Award"*

Washington, D.C - Rita S. Balian received the USAID *Outstanding Citizen Achievement Award* in a public ceremony at the USAID headquarters, Ronald Reagan Building, on Friday, January 17, in Washington, D.C. Mrs. Balian received the award in recognition of her humanitarian and volunteer efforts in Armenia.

USAID's Outstanding Citizen Achievement Award, very recently established, recognizes volunteerism in international development. USAID's goal with this award is to increase the public's awareness of individuals and organizations that are working to further the mission of USAID in the United States and abroad.

Recipients of this award are recognized for achievements that have contributed to the realization of USAID's mission to provide economic, development and humanitarian assistance around the world. Rita Balian is among the very first to receive his award.

Rita S. Balian has been an educator, a businesswoman, a political and humanitarian

activist, a fundraiser, promoter of the arts and Armenian culture and a community leader. Mrs. Balian has also distinguished herself as a spokesperson for women and children in Armenia.

**Dr. Kent R. Hill, USAID Assistant Administrator for Europe and Eurasia**, in his opening remarks said, "Rita Balian has distinguished herself through her efforts to improve the lives of people, in particular women and children, in Armenia. Among her other achievements, Mrs. Balian founded the *Armenian American Cultural Association (ACA)*, a non-profit organization through which she initiated and organized the *Armenian American Mammography University Center (AAMUC)* in Yerevan, Armenia, which was opened in April 1997. *Renamed the Armenian American Wellness Center (AAWC)* in January 2002, this Center is credited with having provided mammography screening to over 40,000 women and saved the lives of nearly 1,000 women diagnosed with breast cancer.



**Keith Simmons (on the L), Director, USAID Armenia Mission Director, and Dr. Kent R. Hill, USAID Assistant Administrator for Europe & Eurasia presenting the award to Rita Balian, President & CEO of ACA & Founder of the Armenian American Wellness Center (AAWC) in Armenia, previously known as the Armenian American Mammography University Center (AAMUC).**

Mrs. Balian currently serves as the President of ACA and

AAWC Board of Directors, and is in charge of overseeing the Center's operations, development and expansion".

Dr. Hill continued stating that, "Rita Balian exemplifies the definition of volunteerism in America. It is contributions such as Rita's which show the true human spirit of coming together to help those in need during times of crisis and despair."

Dr. Hill then invited **USAID Deputy Administrator Frederick W. Schieck** to speak about the importance of the award. Mr. Schieck said, "Last January when President Bush announced the creation of the *USA Freedom Core*, he spoke of the *quiet heroes of our society*. Rita is one of those, whom the President clearly had in mind when he spoke of those quiet heroes. At that time the President also said: *Part of being a responsible society is to love your neighbor and serve your*

*community. Rita Balian has done both – both in Armenia and in the United States."*

**H. E. Amb. Arman Kirakossian** also spoke at the event. "Rita Balian is a recognized community leader, she has an excellent command of the issues at the center of U.S.-Armenian relations, and she uses her knowledge and experience to advance a better understanding of the Armenian issues in the United States, to promote economic and social reforms in Armenia. One of the best success stories is the establishment of the *Armenian American Wellness Center* in Armenia. The Center's success is the best testimony to the devotion, kindness, hard work, and diligence of Rita Balian."

**Keith Simmons, the Director of USAID Mission in Armenia**, who specially traveled from Yerevan to be present at the ceremony said, "I've known Rita and Vartkess for two years while I've been serving in Armenia. I don't know anybody that better exemplifies the American spirit of charity, of volunteerism, of giving than Rita Balian. She has not only created a Center, not only brought in hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of medical equipment, supplies and rehabilitation, but that Center has become a Center of excellence. That Center in Armenia, which represents the state-of-the-art and the best that you can even find in the US, is right now in downtown Yerevan. Even people from the Caucasus Region can come and benefit from that



**Rita Balian flanked by US and Armenian Government dignitaries. L to R are: H.E. Michael Lemmon, former US Ambassador to Armenia; Keith Simmons, USAID Armenian Mission Director; Frederick W. Schieck, USAID Deputy Administrator; Vartkess Balian, President of Tekeyan Cultural Association, USA & Canada; The Hon. former Congresswoman Connie Morella (R-MD); H.E. Arman Kirakossian, Armenian Ambassador to USA, H.E. Harry Gilmore, First US Ambassador to Armenia and Vardan Barsegyan, NK Representative in US**



**H.E. Arman Kirakossian, Armenian Ambassador to USA with his wife Susanna (far left) and Carmen Ducaru, Wife of Romanian Ambassador to USA sharing the joy and pride of Rita Balian on behalf of the Armenian people.**



**Dr. Susan Blumenthal, US Assistant Surgeon General & Rear Admiral, (US Department of Health and Human Services) with Rita Balian following the award ceremony.**

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Center. In addition, that Center represents professionalism. It is well organized. The staff is professional and has customer oriented approach. It is a model of how to do business in an open and transparent manner."

**The Hon. Esther Coopersmith, former US Representative to the United Nations**, a philanthropist and "a good will Ambassador to the world" spoke at the ceremony and said, "The clarity, precision, accountability and responsibility of Rita's actions are without equal. She continues to inspire and encourage all of us to do what we can to make the world a better place. I applaud her effective leadership, her boundless courage, her determination, and her love for Armenia and its people."

Mrs. Balian has been noted for her work assisting the people of Armenia following a devastating earthquake in 1988. In addition to her various humanitarian efforts to help Armenians during this period, she worked with then Mayor of Alexandria, VA - now Congressman Jim Moran - and other local officials to realize a sister city exchange program between Alexandria and the Armenian city of Gyumri.

**Philanthropist:** she, together with her husband, sponsors many educational institutions, including an elementary school she and her

husband, Vartkess, opened in 1995 in the village of Karpi, Armenia, named as: *the TCA Vartkess & Rita Balian Grade School* where 400 children study. In 1995, together with her husband, she has also established an endowment fund of \$450,000 with the *Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU)* to benefit the *American University of Armenia*, the *Yerevan State University*, the *AGBU New York Summer Intern Program*, the *Tekeyan Cultural Association of USA & Canada*, and the *AGBU summer Camp Nubar* in Catskill Mountains.

In 1982, together with her husband, she had also established another endowment fund (\$100,000) with the *Tekeyan Cultural Association of USA & Canada*, for the *Balian Press Award* (\$2,000) to be given annually to Armenian journalists from around the world.

Since 1986, along with her husband Vartkess, she *Co-Chairs the AGBU President's Club*, and in 1987, *co-founded the AGBU New York Summer Internship Program (NYSIP)*, which together they still supervise and raise all the necessary funds. To date over 500 college and graduate students have participated and graduated from the Program.

**Other awards:** in October, 2001 Mrs. Balian received the *St. Nersess Shnorhali Medal*,



*US medical specialists of AAWC Medical Advisory Board. L to R are: Michelle M. Parsons, R.T.R.N.; Dr. Kent R. Hill, USAID HQRT; Dr. Susan Blumenthal, US Assistant Surgeon General; Rita Balian, Founder of AAWC; Dr. Ann Archer, Chair of Med. Advisory Board, Radiologist, WHC; Keith Simmons, USAID Armenia Mission Director; Prof. Julia Albright, Immunologist, GWU; Dr. Emma Zargarian, OBGYN of GBMC and Jasna Basaric Keys, M.P.H. from IRD.*

the Armenian Church's highest Medal of Honor, bestowed upon her and her husband by a Pontifical Encyclical given by His Holiness Catholicos Karekin II. She holds *three Honorary Doctoral Degrees* from the *Yerevan State University*, *Yerevan State Medical University* and *Gavar State University of Armenia*.

Additionally, in 1989 she received *two humanitarian awards* from the *American Red Cross* and the *Armenian Government* for her extensive assistance to the people in Armenia after the 1988 earthquake.

In 1995, she received the *Annual Achievement Award* from the *Armenian International Women's Association (AIWA)* in London. In 1996, the *United Nations Association* honored her on "*Human Rights Day*" in Washington, DC as an advocate for the human rights of women and children. In October 2002, she received another award from the *Armenian General Benevolent Union* at their 82<sup>nd</sup> Biannual Assembly, as an *Honor Member of AGBU* for her 40 years of dedicated service to the Organization.

Along with many VIP guests

and doctors, also present at the Ceremony were: Rt. Rev. Fr. Vertanes Kalayjian, representing H.E. Arch. Khajag Barsamian, the Primate; Tom Adams representing Amb. William Taylor, Coordinator of US Assistance to Europe & Eurasia; Col. Charles Hardesty of US State Department; Vardan Barseghian the Official Representative of Karabakh in the US; Dr. Levon Avdoyan, Scholar from Library of Congress, Herschel Blumberg former National President of UJA and wife Goldene. Also present were: AACA Board Members and Chairs of AAWC Friends, heads and representatives of many Armenian and American organizations throughout the USA. Among them were: the Armenian General Benevolent Union; Tekeyan Cultural Association of USA & Canada; Armenian Assembly of America; Armenian National Committee; Armenian National Institute; American International Health Alliance; International Relief & Development; Counterpart International & Carelift International.

Following the award ceremony, Mrs. Coopersmith gave a sumptuous reception for all the guests at her mansion in honor of Rita Balian.



*L to R are: Vartkess Balian, President of Tekeyan Cultural Association, USA & Canada; Rita Balian, the awardee; Congressman James Moran (D-VA) and Keith Simmons, USAID Armenia Mission Director.*



*Rita and Vartkess Balian surrounded by family members and friends. L to R are: nieces Lena and Rita; Haigouhie Koudoussian and Marie Balian (sisters-in-law); Nairi Balian (daughter-in-law); Keith Simmons, Cong. Jim Moran; Dr. Simon Simonian (brother); Ani Simonian Totah (sister); Sevag G. Balian (son) & Arpi Simonian (sister-in-law).*



*Speakers at the award ceremony for Rita Balian at the USAID headquarters, Ronald Reagan Building, Washington, DC.*