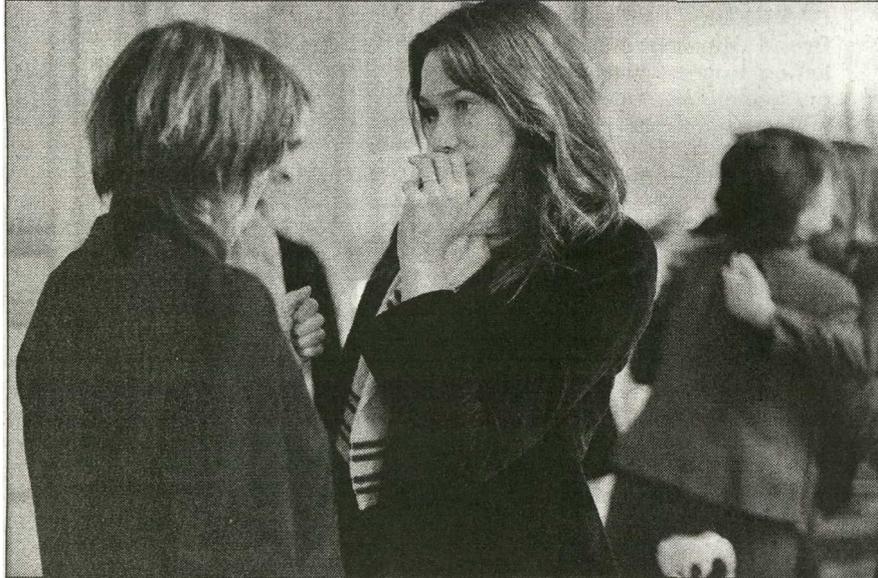


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French First Lady Carla Bruni-Sarkozy (right) speaks with the president of the international medical association Solthis', Christine Katlama (left) after a meeting with French associations fighting against AIDS as part of the World AIDS Day on Dec 1, 2009 at the Marigny hotel in Paris. - AFPphoto

French First Lady says AIDS is a personal affair

PARIS: French first lady Carla Bruni-Sarkozy said she had witnessed firsthand the toll that AIDS took on the fashion industry in the 1980s and spoke about her brother's death from the disease.

"I have witnessed the damage that HIV has caused for humanity for some 20 years now," said Bruni-Sarkozy in an interview to TV5Monde television on World AIDS Day.

Recounting her years as a supermodel, Bruni-Sarkozy said "the fashion world was hit head-on by the AIDS pandemic. It really did lose members of its family."

"The fashion industry became aware about this disease very, very early on, because it was a victim of it," she added.

Bruni-Sarkozy, who lost her brother Virginio to AIDS in 2006, last year became an ambassador for the

Geneva-based Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

The supermodel-turned-singer has called for greater access to AIDS-fighting drugs to eliminate mother-to-child HIV transmission in poor countries by 2015.

"I am personally very sensitive about this issue," she said in the interview.

But the wife of President Nicolas Sarkozy stressed that her decision to join the global AIDS campaign was not directly linked to her brother's death.

"My brother unfortunately contracted HIV and he died from it," she said. "But my role with the Global Fund is really not linked to my brother's situation."

"My brother was lucky to live in France, to be treated in France, to have access to care, have access to the best hospitals.

"I am now a spokeswoman for people who have access to nothing." - AFP