

# Working together for a strong UN – for the benefit of us all

**Statement by the President of the Swiss Confederation,  
Son Excellence Doris Leuthard,  
for the High-Level Week of the 72nd session  
of the United Nations General Assembly  
in New York, 19 September 2017**

*The spoken word is final!*

President of the General Assembly

Secretary-General

Heads of State and Government

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

Humanity has indeed made considerable progress since the beginning of this century in the fight against the worst evils in the world, such as hunger, extreme poverty and poor access to education. Nevertheless, there are still 795 million people going hungry, and every ten seconds a child dies of starvation and malnutrition. In addition, we face further challenges: climate change, global inequality, conflicts and humanitarian disasters, as well as forced displacement and migration.

No country, no actor alone can find solutions to the challenges of today. They are simply too big; they are too complex; they do not stop at borders; and they concern the whole community of nations.

We therefore need a forum where we can meet. We need a forum where we can develop solutions and monitor their implementation. We need an actor with the necessary legitimacy throughout the world to help implement solutions.

In other words, we need the UN, and we need a strong UN. That we are living at a time when this has to be re-affirmed is a warning sign! In order to maintain and strengthen the UN's ability to act, we need to make new investments. Switzerland is actively working to this end.

Investments in content are our top priority. It is important that the UN focus on issues that are of high relevance both now and in the future. In this respect the UN member states have taken decisive steps in recent years. I am thinking of the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Climate Agreement, and efforts to shift resources from post-conflict activities towards prevention – in order to sustain peace.

It is essential to drive implementation forward. The 2030 Agenda is a good example in this regard. Its success will be measured by what it achieves.

Important steps have also been taken within the UN. Switzerland especially welcomes the reforms that Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is implementing in the three areas of peace and security, development, and management.

In the area of peace and security, Switzerland supports the Secretary-General's focus on prevention. The reason is clear: the cost of a conflict is a multiple of what it costs to prevent one – in humanitarian, economic and financial terms.

Human rights are a key factor in strengthening prevention. Switzerland therefore calls on all countries to support the 'Appeal of 13th June', which aims to put human rights at the heart of conflict prevention. Reinforcing mediation capacities also strengthens conflict prevention. Furthermore, yesterday the High-Level Panel on Water and Peace initiated by Switzerland made recommendations here in New York on how water-related conflicts can be better prevented. The UN and regional organisations can make major contributions in this respect.

Switzerland is actively involved in efforts to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons – the use of which would have disastrous humanitarian consequences – and to eliminate them completely. It firmly believes that a solution to the issue of nuclear weapons and security on the Korean peninsula can only be found through negotiations and a diplomatic process.

Trust is also an important aspect. Success in prevention requires the trust of the people concerned. For the UN, this means that a good partnership with the host state and its people is crucial. Sexual exploitation and abuse destroy such trust. Switzerland therefore supports the commitment of the Secretary-General to fight any form of sexual exploitation or abuse by UN staff in the field. As part of its commitment, Switzerland will make a contribution to the UN Trust Fund for victims of sexual exploitation and abuse.

In the area of development, we welcome the trend towards encouraging more joint initiatives by different UN agencies.

I would like to highlight two areas as examples of where we are confronted with major challenges: migration and digitalisation.

At the end of 2016, there were so many displaced people in the world as there had been at the end of the Second World War. Most of them are displaced within their own country. In Europe for instance, individual countries must agree on a solution to the migration issue that is based on solidarity and in Libya the political situation must be stabilised.

Switzerland is working to ensure that the Global Compact for Migration addresses at the international level not only the challenges but also the opportunities that migration entails. There is still a long way to go, and the willingness of every state is needed. We are pleased that we are able to make a concrete contribution to the success of this undertaking through the co-facilitation of the Global Compact for Migration by our permanent representative in New York.

Digitalisation is changing the world at an incredible pace. It also presents a huge opportunity. At the same time, it is a challenge that stretches across borders. Issues such as access to the internet for all, the impact of digitalisation on sustainable development, and cybersecurity must be jointly addressed. The 12th Internet Governance Forum, which Switzerland will host in December 2017, will provide us with the opportunity to discuss these issues.

In order to maintain the ability of the UN to act, we must also invest in processes. Because the UN not only stands out for the nature of its work but also for its way of working. A strong UN system means an efficient and modern UN system. For this purpose we need management reforms.

An especially important aspect of our interconnected world is dialogue. Dialogue needs time and commitment on all sides.

It must be broad-based and include all relevant actors. Climate protection, for example, demonstrates that political dialogue among states is not enough.

Extreme weather events, such as hurricanes, clearly demonstrate that the Paris Climate Agreement must be rapidly implemented. Scientists have come to the conclusion that such events will become the new norm if action is not taken.

The private sector, in dialogue with scientists and policymakers, is working on solutions and is an essential factor for innovation, progress and development. Science diplomacy and an exchange with scientists will enable us to make the right decisions. As political decision-makers we must ensure our policies are evidence-based.

Switzerland firmly believes that investing in a well-functioning multilateral system – and especially in an effective and efficient UN – is worthwhile. In view of the challenges and the interconnectedness of the world today, going it alone is not an option.

Thank you for your attention.