

Conference: Skilling India – Experiences with the Swiss dual VET Model
19 April 2017, Pune

Esteemed guests, dear friends,

It is a special pleasure for me to address words of welcome to you, an audience that is passionate about Vocational Education and Training (VET). I warmly thank the Swiss-Indian Chamber of Commerce, which has played a leading role in bringing us all together today.

Having arrived in September last year, I am still very much in the discovery phase of this fascinating country. I am happy to be visiting the city of Pune for the first time, as this is one of the major centres of Swiss manufacturing in India. It is also the venue of the future Indo-Swiss Centre for Excellence, which will provide vocational education and training in the manufacturing and agriculture sectors. I had the privilege of symbolically inaugurating the Centre yesterday, where the first training courses in agriculture have already begun.

The Indian population is a young one, with several million young people entering the job market every year. It is a major challenge to provide them the necessary skills to find appropriate employment.

The Indian Government is acutely aware of this and has set itself ambitious targets for skilling the youth. It has also undertaken reforms and put in place several initiatives to pave the way for the introduction of vocational education and training in India.

In Switzerland, VET constitutes an important pillar of the education system. It is credited with being one of the driving forces of Switzerland's global competitiveness, innovation and thriving economy. Two-thirds of all young people coming out of compulsory

education enrol in VET. This path enjoys wide recognition, support and respect within the Swiss population.

These last few months, I gradually discovered the rich and varied world of Swiss VET in India. Valuable efforts are being made by many different players and stakeholders. I have visited several Swiss companies offering vocational education and training to young Indians and was impressed by what I saw. Ten years ago, the *Swiss VET Initiative India* was launched as a pilot project. In Jaipur, the Bharatiya Skills Development Campus was set up by the Joshi Foundation and has now become the first skills university in India. On the official side, Switzerland and India have signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2016 covering skill development and VET. The first meeting of the Joint Working Group under this MoU will take place in New Delhi on 21 April, and its deliberations will set the direction for the future of our cooperation.

You are well aware that Switzerland is by far not the only VET actor in India. The German Embassy was recently instrumental in the launch by leading Indian industrialists of an “Alliance of Dual VET”, with the goal of implementing a dual system, learning on the job as well as in school at the same time. The Australian Prime Minister’s recent visit to India had an important skills component.

This brings me to a set of newcomer’s questions. With many different players involved, is there competition or rather added value to be sought through closer cooperation? With many bottom up, pilot experiences, how can the top down, intergovernmental track add an umbrella of coherence, direction and sense of common purpose? These are questions which I hope we can discuss at this conference today and at the Joint Working Group on Thursday.

The experiences and needs of both Indian and Swiss actors, be they officials, institutions or private investors, should be the starting point. On this basis, we can identify together

concrete actions and steps forward: sharing of good practices, development of curricula, scaling up of pilots, fostering contacts between relevant institutions, these could be some of the paths we could consider.

In closing, may I invite you to look at the logos behind me? Next year India and Switzerland will be marking a special anniversary: 70 years of official diplomatic relations. Over this time, our relations have transformed into a full-fledged partnership. The official Swiss network in India wants to celebrate this partnership with a series of public events. Today's conference is the first of many more such exchanges. It is also the first occasion to discover our new logo and to say thank you to our valued sponsors. The initiative aims at encouraging what we do here today: connecting Swiss and Indian personalities innovating in all fields, in business, research and technology, governance, art and social inclusion.

We want to celebrate our common past: in the field of VET for example, Switzerland has been present in India since the early 1960s. Even more, we want to look forward, by connecting minds, minds that inspire and shape our common future; I look forward to such inspiring discussions over the next hours, focused on the future of our societies and our youth, seeking concrete paths to endow their lives with quality and purpose.

Thank you.