



## **Opening Remarks by Dr. Andreas Baum, Ambassador of Switzerland to India and Bhutan, on the occasion of the Movie Screening “The Divine Order” and the Panel Discussion on the Political Participation of Women (Check against delivery)**

Excellencies, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for joining us tonight to this special event on women’s political participation, held on the occasion of the 4<sup>th</sup> bilateral consultations between Bhutan and Switzerland, which took place earlier today. I would like to use this opportunity to thank the Royal Government of Bhutan for the hospitality and excellent cooperation they have – once more – awarded us today.

For most of you who are not in the diplomatic world, the term “bilateral consultations” might not mean much. For us, however, it is an important highlight in our bilateral relations. The consultations, which are held once every two years, allow the two foreign ministries to take stock in detail of the relations between our two countries as well as on the international situation, and to identify areas where we can work even closer together.

For me, it became evident again in today’s consultations how rich the connection between Bhutan and Switzerland is. What started decades ago as a personal friendship between His Majesty the third King and Swiss entrepreneur Fritz von Schulthess is today a full-fledged partnership covering a large spectrum of topics, with political, economic, scientific and cultural priorities.

Earlier this year we brought the first ever Swiss Business Delegation to Bhutan. Twenty businesspeople representing seventeen Swiss companies spent four days in Bhutan, to learn about the country, about business opportunities and the potential for increasing economic ties between the two countries. We know that several of those companies are planning concrete follow-ups and specific steps to build upon the connections made. For example, a medical company is in contact with the Ministry of Health regarding a CSR

project to support diabetes diagnosis, while a big Swiss retailer is planning an in-depth visit of its CEO for 2020 in order to identify possible products to import to Switzerland.

Even more recently, on the first of August, we celebrated the Swiss national day in Thimphu – and many of you present tonight celebrated this day with us. Switzerland was honoured by the presence of several Ministers of the Royal Government of Bhutan, including as our guest of honour his Excellency the Foreign Minister Tandi Dorji. And as a special recognition, their Majesties sent a cake to mark the Swiss National Day. I am personally most grateful for this gracious gesture of goodwill.

On that occasion, and I am sure all who were present remember, we launched our *Swiss Films on Wheels* project in Bhutan. For 22 days, a special bus travelled over 2000 kilometres to sixteen Dzongkhags, where we showed the Swiss movie “Heidi” to over 9000 students. We hope it was an unforgettable memory for all who saw the movie. I know it was a unique experience for my colleagues who toured with the bus. For days after their return to the Embassy I heard them praise the beauty of Bhutan and the kindness of its people.

Tonight, we will show a very different movie, titled “The Divine Order”, which portrays the difficult discussions surrounding the introduction of the women’s right to vote in Switzerland, a milestone my country only achieved in 1971. In our recent national elections, women’s representation in the lower house of parliament increased to 42%, a significant increase of 10 percentage points compared to the previous parliament. Progress is hence being made, but there is also still a long way to go – in Switzerland and in many other countries. We would hence like to use this movie as a base for reflection on the complex challenges related to the political participation by women. This is why the screening will be followed by a panel featuring H.E. Lyonpo Dechen Wangmo, Minister of Health and Chair of the newly established Women’s Parliamentary Caucus, Gerald Daly, UN Resident Coordinator, and Ms Phunthok Chhoden, the Executive Director of the civil society organisation “Bhutan Network for Empowering Women”. A big thanks goes to all the panel participants. We will end the evening with closing remarks by Lyonpo Kinzang Dorji, the Honorary Consul of Switzerland to Bhutan and co-host of tonight’s event, after which you are kindly invited to join us for a dinner reception.

It is now my pleasure to give the floor to our Assistant State Secretary for Asia and Pacific,

Ambassador Raphael Nägeli who led today's Swiss Delegation at the bilateral consultations. Ambassador Nägeli will reflect on the current state of women's political participation in Switzerland.

Excellencies, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen, I wish you all an informative, stimulating and pleasant evening. Thank you.