Speech at the Inauguration of Vigyan Samagam
and the CERN exhibition 'Accelerating Science'
Auditorium, Nehru Science Centre, Mumbai
8 May 2019

Esteemed dignitaries, ladies and gentlemen,

When I look at this distinguished panel, I wonder what I am doing here. And then, I think, why not. I come from a small, landlocked country, without many natural resources - water and brains basically being the only ones. With this '*handicap'*, Switzerland has focused hard on the latter to create an extremely innovative and competitive economy. The focus on brainpower has also led to the creation of world-class universities and research institutions, which are leaders for innovation and generating new knowledge. Switzerland also participates in major international research projects, which are beyond the capacity of any country to carry out alone.

The European Organisation for Nuclear Research, CERN, also referred to as the European Laboratory for Particle Physics, is one such example. At the end of the Second World War, when European science was no longer world-class, a handful of visionary scientists imagined creating a European atomic physics laboratory, which would not only unite European scientists but also allow them to share the increasing costs of nuclear physics facilities. Given Geneva's central location in Europe, Swiss neutrality and the fact that it already hosted a number of international organisations gave it the edge and it was selected as the site for the laboratory. As you know, Switzerland loves referenda, and 70% of voters in the canton of Geneva approved of the choice. On 17 May 1954, the first shovel was struck on the Meyrin site in Switzerland.

Starting with 12 member states, CERN has grown, and today has 23 Member States, 2 Associated States preparing for membership, 5 Associated States, 6 organisations or states with Observer Status, 35 states with cooperation agreements and scientific contacts with a further 18 states. It employs around 2,600 scientific staff and 1,800 other staff. 14,000 scientists of 100 different

nationalities use CERN's machines. The Large Hadron Collider, the world's largest particle accelerator, buried 100 meters under the Swiss and French countryside, has led to key breakthroughs in science, including the discovery of the Higgs boson in 2012, the theoretical prediction of which had earned Peter Higgs and François Englert the Nobel Prize for Physics in 2013. India became an Associate Member Sate in January 2017. However, India's relations with CERN go back to the 1960s already and today Indian scientists contribute to most experiments at CERN.

CERN is truly international and Switzerland is very proud to be its host country. Swiss researchers from 12 institutes representing all universities are active in CERN experiments, primarily in the fields of particle physics, medicine and technological research. It is Geneva's top tourist attraction, welcoming almost 135,000 visitors per year.

Researchers from Switzerland also participate in other mega science projects such as the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor, the Square Kilometre Array and the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory, which are showcased in the "Accelerating Science" exhibition we are inaugurating today.

I look forward to visiting the exhibition, which explores the origins of the universe, the nature of the particles that constitute our bodies, and the power of fundamental science. For the first time, the exhibition is travelling outside Europe, and to multiple locations in any country. I am told that the "Accelerating Science" exhibition will tell us that we are all 13.7 billion years old.

Finally, as the Ambassador of Switzerland to India, let me say a few words on our bilateral relations. Switzerland has been an active partner of India for a long time. Only last year, we celebrated 70 years of Swiss-Indian friendship. Starting these days, our new initiative, *Swiss it!* – with the logo designed as a luggage tag - will take us on a journey with a Swiss touch. It will build on characteristics and competencies of "the Swiss way to do things", like quality, precision, reliability, the ability to innovate, visionary thinking, while acting pragmatically. The *Swiss it!* journey will take us through topics and activities linked to science, technology, innovation, education, skills, business, economics,

artificial intelligence, governance, arts, the environment, transport, connectivity, through a series of public events, including some within the framework of *Vigyan Samagam*, though India over the course of a year. These start with a Science Slam in this very auditorium on 11 May. Other events will involve scientists and industry of both countries. I invite you to participate in one or more of these events.

Thank you.