

Dear colleague Ambassador Sibi George, esteemed guests, ladies and gentlemen,

A special welcome to all Indians living in Switzerland who joined us today. We are focusing on their contributions to Swiss business, research and innovation by gathering at this special location dedicated to intercultural dialogue. The house of religions, here in Berne, houses no less than five different places of worship, including Indian religions such as Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and Christianity.

2018 marks the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Swiss-Indian Friendship Treaty, and, at this important moment, let me give you a brief outline of Swiss-Indian relations, as seen from the Embassy in Delhi. Over the last two years, exchanges have intensified significantly: our countries had three meetings at the top level, including the State visit of Swiss President Doris Leuthard to India in August 2017 and the most recent working meeting in Davos between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Alain Berset. These exchanges symbolize the growing proximity between New Delhi and Berne. Economy, trade and innovation are at the center of our relationship. Switzerland is the 11th investor in India and the more than 250 Swiss companies present in India have created around 100'000 jobs. Furthermore, there are ongoing negotiations between the EFTA member States and India to achieve a Free Trade Agreement, which would contribute to exploit to an even greater degree the economic potential between the two countries. Switzerland is also supporting India in its fight against corruption. On January 1<sup>st</sup> of this year, the bilateral agreement on the automatic exchange of information in tax matters entered into force.

The official Swiss network in India comprises several agencies located in some of the most dynamic Indian cities: the start-up scene, research and vocational education and training are covered by Swissnex in Bangalore; trade and investment promotion by the Swiss Business Hub in Mumbai, climate change and energy efficiency by the Swiss Cooperation Office in Delhi and tourism by Switzerland Tourism in Mumbai. In ever increasing numbers, nearly 350'000 Indians visited Switzerland in 2017 and I am sure many of them enjoyed the landscapes of Interlaken, while remembering one of the most famous Bollywood productions filmed in that region, *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (The Brave-Hearted Will Take the Bride).

It is rather unusual and remarkable to see the Embassy of Switzerland in India and the Indian Embassy in Switzerland united in close collaboration around a common project, which makes this evening quite special. We usually act in parallel, in similar areas of diplomatic work. Our mandates are different, as we represent our respective country's interests. Preparing this event together offers the perfect example of identifying areas where these interests converge, becoming common interests. The strong partnership between India and Switzerland is based on common interests, but also very much on shared values, such as democracy, multiculturalism and diversity. These values have been shaped, built and influenced by flows of migration, who contribute to making our societies tolerant, creative and innovative.

Migration, of course, brings us back to our main topic tonight. As I was reading the *Times of India*, I came across a surprising fact: India has the largest diaspora in the world, with 16 million Non-Resident Indians across the globe, thus surpassing countries like Mexico or China. Although Switzerland hosts only a small part of the Indian diaspora - most Indian expatriates choose the US, UK or Canada - the Indian presence in Switzerland has been growing at an impressive rate. While the population with Indian citizenship was estimated to be 2'200 in 1980, it was close to 16'000 in 2017.

Among them, many have made a decisive contribution to Swiss society, to its business and research sectors. Let me, for instance, refer to Farrokh K. Kavarana, retired Director of Tata Sons Ltd, who headed the international activities of the Tata Group from 1975 on for several decades and was mainly based in Zug. Mr. Kavarana is a founding member of the Swiss Indian Chamber of Commerce and is still a member of the board. I would also like to acknowledge the first female Indian researcher at the renowned CERN in Geneva, Archana Sharma, who started her work as a physicist there in 2001, 17 years ago.

Let me also mention Bangalore based high tech artist Aparna Rao, who is currently in residence at the Wyss Foundation in Zurich, where she develops high-tech installations that playfully twist ordinary objects and behaviors: for instance a typewriter that sends e-mails or a camera that tracks you through the room and then makes you invisible on the screen.

The younger generation of Indians has shown outstanding entrepreneurial spirit and demonstrated a sense of global competitiveness to their Swiss colleagues. One can think of Srinivasan Murali, founder and CEO of the young and promising new medtech start up "Smart Cardia", who created a wireless device for patient monitoring. Such success stories have naturally helped Switzerland to finish 1<sup>st</sup> for the 7<sup>th</sup> consecutive year in the Global innovation index developed by Cornell University, the World Intellectual Property Organization and France's Institut Européen d'Administration des Affaires, INSEAD.

Without taking away the merit that fully belongs to the individuals cited, let me suggest another contribution in which you all participate: a diplomacy by the people for the people. Indeed, the core of Swiss-Indian relations is achieved by you, each and every day. We usually see international relations as complex relationships connecting States, businesses and NGOs, which they certainly are. However, diplomacy very much lives from individuals, who simply represent their unique culture, values, customs and countries abroad on a daily basis.

As I mentioned earlier, we are gathered on a special year for the Swiss Indian trajectory, as we celebrate 70 years of Swiss-Indian diplomatic relations. To give this celebration the full honor it deserves, the Embassy in Delhi, in close collaboration with the Consulates general in Mumbai and Bangalore, launched a public diplomacy campaign entitled "70 Years of Swiss-Indian Friendship: Connecting Minds - Inspiring the future". Dear guests, it is in this spirit, of looking back and forward at the same time, honoring what we have achieved together and imagining what we can still accomplish in the future, with this entrepreneurial, innovative and cooperative spirit, that I would like to thank you for being the true ambassadors and bridge builders connecting India and Switzerland.

I trust you will all recognize yourself in this famous quote from Indian writer Kiran Desai, who captured with her words, and expressed better than others, the true richness of double identities and sense of belonging: "The Indian diaspora is a wonderful place to write from, and I am lucky to be part of it".

Thank you.