

Ladies and gentlemen, dear guests, young leaders of today and tomorrow, of India and Switzerland, welcome all of you to the Swiss Residence. Your energizing presence makes me feel young again.

On this 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Swiss-Indian friendship, the Embassy of Switzerland is focusing on connecting young minds, who will shape the future. The Indo-Swiss Future Leaders Forum does exactly that, by creating a new digital networking platform, thus tapping into the potential of bright, aspiring young leaders of all walks of life. I wish the founders and members all the best and may the platform prosper and lead to further cooperation and exciting opportunities between our two countries.

If you are among us tonight, it is because someone has recommended your attendance at this event. In other words, you already embody for some of your peers the hope of a better future. And let me ask you a simple question: "How do you see the future?" Indeed, as future leaders, your vision for the next 10, 20 years is of paramount importance. In the coming decades, you will be given or taking over the responsibility of developing our countries further.

The Indo-Swiss Future Leaders Forum can be a platform or bridge between our two countries, by connecting people who would otherwise never meet; a platform which will help prepare the younger generation to better engage with the global issues of the 21st century, in the collaborative and innovative spirit required to find solutions.

Leadership does not only require analytical and debating skills. It requires most of all creative minds, with the right solutions as well as the will and endurance to implement them against all odds. Our times seem ready to embrace disruptive ideas, which are changing our world at breathtaking speed.

Humanity is facing political, economic and ecological challenges that will demand leadership. Some of today's recurrent themes will remain with us to the dawn of the 22nd century and beyond: fighting against poverty and inequality, all the while ensuring security, prosperity and stability; dealing with challenges to the existing multilateral order, preventing real and looming trade wars; protecting our universal values such as human rights and dignity, freedom and democracy; finding the right balance between identity and multiculturalism; addressing the urgency of climate change; ensuring that the digitalization of our lives and workspaces doesn't lead to an unacceptable shrinking of our private space. A tall order for any generation!

Both our countries have a share in this challenging new world. Many say this will be the Asian century. With its growing human capital, its modernization drive and thriving business climate, India is on its way to becoming one of the upcoming world powers. This process will be led by India's energetic and optimistic youth.

My country, at the heart of vibrant Europe, is the perfect partner to accompany India's booming society through the challenges and opportunities of the coming decades. Indeed, Switzerland, as a small landlocked country without many natural resources, did not have any other choice but to focus on its brains, on innovation and attracting talent. It has, over recent years, become a hotspot for innovation, by bringing together policy makers, the private sector and researchers under optimal conditions.

To illustrate this, let me share with you some key figures:

- Nearly 3% of our GDP is dedicated to research and development, making us one of the countries with the highest spending on research and innovation worldwide.
- Switzerland has been ranked #1 in the Global Innovation Index for the last 7 years.
- 11 of our 12 public universities feature in one or more of the four best ranking systems. And, in 2017, almost 1000 Indian students completed their Bachelor's, Master's degree or PhD in the Swiss public university system, one of the highest contingents from a non-European country.

Let me give you some resulting examples:

- The Swiss start-up ecosystem is booming, with the Crypto-valley in Central Switzerland becoming a hotpot for cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin or Ethereum.
- New ideas are being developed at our universities, in cooperation with the private sector, for a sustainable, climate friendly future, such as the zero emission "edumper", the world's largest electric truck, which can carry a payload of 65 tons.
- Indian students have shown remarkable entrepreneurial spirit within the Swiss start-up landscape, for example with startups in the Med-tech sector, such as "Smartcardia", a wearable digital patient monitoring device.

But, as the Indian writer Abha Dawesar explains in her excellent TedTalk, one should not lose oneself in the "digital now". Facebook, Instagram or Twitter may have enabled us to communicate instantly our thoughts or opinions from anywhere to everywhere, but these platforms have also trapped us in a digital routine, with psychological and political consequences that your generation will have the duty to tackle and improve upon. Indeed, the many challenges ahead of you will demand a proximity, a solidarity and a friendship that can only be found "offline".

Tonight we are celebrating such a friendship, the one between our two countries. The Embassy of Switzerland, together with the entire official Swiss network in India, is marking 2018 with our public diplomacy initiative "70 years of Swiss-Indian Friendship: Connecting Minds, Inspiring the Future". Needless to repeat that the Indo-Swiss Future Leaders Forum embodies the very essence of this initiative. The future is in your hands. Thank you.