

India Arch Dialogue 2017, FCDI, 3 February 2017
Introductory address by Ambassador Dr. Andreas Baum

Esteemed members of the audience, dear friends,

Thank you for inviting me to the opening of the 2nd India Arch Dialogue. As a rather new arrival in this city, I am impressed with the huge variety of contemporary art, architecture and knowledge that India offers. The potential for exchanges at the global level is immense, exactly what FCDI is promoting. Allow me to congratulate them for organizing and bringing together such inspiring experts and ideas under one umbrella - or rather one tree. I also wish to congratulate Mr. Verendra Wakhloo and Mr. Rachit Srivastava for their excellent curatorial work in putting the exhibition and the talks together.

Switzerland can look back on a long tradition of high quality architects, which left their traces around the world, from seventeenth century Italy to the imperial court of St. Petersburg. Le Corbusier, a leading Swiss/French architect, influenced the architecture of modern and post-independent India by planning, designing and building the city of Chandigarh. More contemporary names like Botta, Zumthor, Herzog and de Meuron, Miller, Maranta, Olgiati, Lacroix or Chessex are making us proud. We can find buildings by some of these Swiss architects in Noida, Hyderabad, and Calcutta. I thank you for honouring today another prominent Swiss name in this series, Roger Diener.

I have always been attracted to architecture, which is a most rewarding interest for a traveling diplomat. Architects see the concrete results of their work, leave a lasting imprint on cities and communities of the future, this in marked contrast to my own job, where results are often marginal and intangible. Many Swiss diplomats come into direct contact with a Roger Diener building while working at our Embassy in Berlin. His renovation of this nineteenth century city palace, that somehow managed to survive successive wars, was at the time quite controversial, but today remains one of his most iconic works, a bridge between the centuries, between Switzerland and reunified Germany.

I had the pleasure of last interacting with Roger Diener two years ago in Haifa, Israel, during my last posting. Today, I am very happy to have another chance to further my understanding of his works and his philosophy. While reading a *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* portrait, I noted these elements: “for Diener, the single building is less important than its urban context and fabric, including the political, economic and social aspects. In historical contexts, his aim is not conservation, but the continuation of life”. Such thoughts could well be relevant to today’s young architects, town planners and urban designers.

With such an engaged gathering of experts like you all, I look forward to a most stimulating evening. Thank you.