



## **Signing of MoU between the state government of Gujarat and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation supported CapaCITIES project, 20<sup>th</sup> January 2021**

Address by Ambassador Dr. Ralf Heckner

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Mr. Mukesh Puri, Additional Chief Secretary, Urban Development and Urban Housing Department,

Mr. S. J Haider, Principal Secretary, Climate Change Department,

Mr. Lochan Sehra, Secretary, Urban Development and Urban Housing Department,

Mr. Mukesh Kumar, Commissioner of Ahmedabad,

Mr. S. Swaroop, Commissioner of Vadodara,

Mr. Udit Agrawal, Commissioner of Rajkot,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

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I am honoured to be part of today's important event. Switzerland has a long history of cooperation with India in the area of urban planning. In the 1950s, the Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier contributed to the design of the new capital of Punjab: Chandigarh. Today, Chandigarh still ranks as one the most attractive cities in India.

What made this project successful was a close cooperation between the Swiss and the Indian people. And I am happy to say that Switzerland and India have incredibly strong people-to-people relations: every year, my Embassy issues 180'000 visa for Indian business people and tourists. My colleague, the Indian Ambassador to Switzerland, issues 40'000 visa to my fellow citizens. This is huge!

But there is more. Gujarat has been successful in attracting Swiss investments. Eight Swiss companies are located in Gujarat creating more than 4'000 jobs. An important Swiss machine tool company is manufacturing in Ahmedabad. Switzerland is the 11<sup>th</sup> biggest foreign investor in India. There is room for more Swiss businesses in Gujarat.

What I am trying to say is: What a single person does, has consequences. Thanks to Indian policy makers, and Swiss and Indian architects there is Chandigarh. What our citizens do, has consequences. Today a quarter of a million people are visiting our respective countries on a yearly basis. What the government of a Union State does, has consequences. Thanks to a good investment policy, Swiss businesses have set up shop in Gujarat. And what a city does, has consequences too. That is the reason why we are gathered here today.

Cities are emerging as one of the most important global actors. Decisions by local city authorities have far reaching consequences for their citizens and for the people of our planet. No doubt, today is an important event – locally and globally. The importance of cities is evident when it comes to climate change. Cities are often more ambitious in concretely tackling climate change than their respective central governments. And what a central government formulates as policies in order to fight or mitigate climate change, needs to be implemented. In federal states like Switzerland and India, most of that implementation is being done by the Union States and the cities. In Switzerland, over 400 municipalities have adopted their own climate adaptation action plans. And what is true for Swiss cities is true for cities in Gujarat.

Swiss and Indian cities are facing the same climate change challenges. Today's event is about our partnership to find solutions to those challenges together. For this reason, I am here with the head of the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) exclusively working on fighting and mitigating climate change. SDC is partnering with the central government, the state and city governments on energy efficiency in buildings, low carbon cement, air quality, renewable energy, disaster risks management, and urban planning. In doing so, Switzerland is responding to the Indian government's objective of developing "Climate-Smart Cities".

One of Switzerland's flagship projects in India is the *Capacity Building for Low Carbon and Climate Resilient City Development project* (also known as **CapaCITIES project**). This project is implemented by the South Pole Carbon Management, E-concept, ICLEI South Asia and the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA).

The project CapaCITIES was initiated in 2016 with four cities in two States: Gujarat and Tamil Nadu. Through the project, the four partner cities – among them Rajkot – have prepared Climate Resilient City Action Plans. These cities were amongst the first in India to have climate action plans and to allocate municipal budgets to implement them. These cities are putting the money where their mouth is. They are walking the talk.

During the second phase, the CapaCITIES project will now include four more cities, among them Ahmedabad and Vadodara.

I am sure that what is being done at the city level can help the policy makers in New Delhi to assess and maybe adapt their climate change policies. I am also sure that the state of Gujarat and the cities of Ahmedabad, Rajkot and Vadodara, will be imitated by other cities in India when it comes to concrete climate action plans to fight and mitigate climate change. You are leading by example!

Let me conclude by congratulating the Indian authorities as well as our implementing partners for strengthening this important partnership for a better life of the citizens in the cities of Gujarat and for a better life of the citizens in the “Global Village” – planet earth.

Thank very much.

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