

# **Indo-Swiss Round Table Discussion on Women in AI and in Technology**

**Swiss Embassy Residence**

**Thursday, 7 November 2019, 18:00 onwards**

Esteemed guests, dear friends,

Welcome to the Swiss Embassy and this Indo-Swiss Round Table discussion on Women in Artificial Intelligence and in Technology.

Underrepresentation of women in the world of employment in the technical fields is a global phenomenon. Moreover, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development reports that “the tasks that AI and robots cannot do are shrinking rapidly” and that many jobs are “highly vulnerable” to automation. And this will primarily affect women.

The problem is real and both India and Switzerland are affected, as all available statistics indicate. It seems that India is doing slightly better than Switzerland.

Why is it important to address these issues? Some questions that come to mind immediately are:

- Is there a need for gender diversity in the artificial intelligence and technology spaces?
- How to attract more women into STEM (*science, technology, engineering and mathematics*) education, which provides future workers in these domains?
- What are the cultural and other challenges that women face in entering employment in these areas?

- How to retain the women who join them?
- How to enable women to assume leadership roles in such a male dominated environment?

Let us take the example of artificial intelligence. Artificial intelligence has already been introduced into many common business practices. It can help generate consumer insights based on knowledge gathered from data, make services more accessible, and improve processes. The people who are shaping this new world are predominantly men. However, to develop systems that will be truly representative, it is crucial that women be involved in the development and rollout of artificial intelligence, so that the goals that are represented are those of all humans, and not only half.

To respond to the problem and to convince more women to join these professions from which they had been largely excluded, for social reasons or due to lack of access, many women's groups have formed, both in India and in Switzerland. With the objective of ending gender disparity in high-tech industries, which often provide very highly paid employment, they mentor and coach, empower and encourage, promote active collaborations through education and research and by organising events which bring women together. They do make a difference, and we will hear from them today.

Why is the Swiss Embassy interested in this topic, focused on women, one which would appear to be far from the preoccupations of a diplomatic representation? Actually, we have had quite some activity lately which were women-centric. Federal Councillor Simonetta Sommaruga, the Swiss Minister responsible for Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications was in India in October and actively engaged with many women interlocutors to get a better understanding of

issues pertaining to them. In Bhutan, the Embassy organised a film screening followed by a panel discussion on the political participation of women earlier this week.

Switzerland and India have a long standing cooperation in research and innovation that covers diverse areas, from ICT to medical sciences, from social sciences to renewable energy. With this event, we wish to open another avenue of dialogue between Switzerland and India.

But we also have with us today a delegation of Swiss businesswomen and entrepreneurs. This is the very first time that such a delegation has visited India. This past week they have been to Mumbai and Bangalore and are now in New Delhi for the last programme on their busy agenda in India. They have visited a women's university, interacted with start-ups and women entrepreneurs, met a Swiss company to learn about strategies for success in India, and toured Indian and Swiss manufacturing plants.

I hope that the impressions of India that they will carry back to Switzerland will be stimulating and positive. I have been told that they liked what they saw in India and that they will come back. The entire official Swiss network in India contributed to their successful mission and is at their disposal for follow ups to their visit.

The topic of women in technology being one that one does not encounter often, I am curious to learn what our panellists will have to say and look forward to some fascinating debates.

I thank the speakers who have travelled long distances to reach us and wish you an informative and inspiring evening with us today.