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Visit of the President of the Swiss Confederation Alain Berset to Bangladesh

Press Statement made at the Prime Minister's Office

**Dhaka, Bangladesh
6 February 2018**

Prime Minister

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

First of all, I want to thank you, Dear Prime Minister, you and the people of Bangladesh, for the very warm welcome here in Bangladesh.

This morning, it was an honour to visit the National Martyr's Monument. I was moved by the visit of the house of Bangabandhu.

INTRODUCTION

I am very pleased to be here with you today.

Relations between our countries are good and they have a long tradition. For more than four decades, Switzerland has been a strong and committed development and trade partner of Bangladesh.

That's why, Dear Prime Minister, It's a privilege for me to visit your country, for the first official visit at presidential level between Switzerland and Bangladesh.

- With this visit Switzerland demonstrates its support and solidarity for Bangladesh during the Rohingya crisis.
- And we are seeking to strengthen our bilateral relations.

DEEPENING OF BILATERAL RELATIONS

The bilateral relations between our countries are good. We have had the opportunity to exchange today on areas where both countries see a strong potential for development of our relations:

- in trade
- development cooperation
- cultural exchanges
- and climate change, an important topic of cooperation between Switzerland and Bangladesh in multilateral organisations. For the proper implementation on the Paris Agreement, we need a robust rule book, to be adopted by the end of this year.

We must continue to work as partners in the negotiations, in the climate change, but also in all the areas where Bangladesh and Switzerland have a strong cooperation in multilateral institutions, in particular the UN.

We appreciate Bangladesh's efforts in further strengthening democracy and rule of law and we appreciate the challenges that go with it

I welcome the joint declaration between Bangladesh and Switzerland. It will help to further strengthen our relations.

ECONOMIC GROWTH and BILATERAL TRADE

Thanks to its continually high rates of economic growth and its impressive achievements in poverty reduction, Bangladesh is approaching the status of a middle-income nation.

I congratulate on these results!

We also welcome efforts in improving the business climate, legal security and the need for a sustainable business environment, including respect for human rights.

Bilateral trade between our countries has almost doubled over the past seven years. It is my firm belief that the Swiss-Bangladeshi trade and investment will reach new heights in the future.

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Switzerland is very much interested in continuing this path with the Government of Bangladesh, the private sector and civil society organizations.

A particular focus in the next couple of years will be on

- social inclusion,
- economic development,
- governance and
- safe migration.

CULTURE

Culture is strongly linked to development and it helps to build bridges.

In this spirit, Switzerland and Bangladesh have regular cultural exchanges.

I will have the opportunity to experience first-hand Bangladeshi art and culture during a visit to the Dhaka Art Summit, which is collaborating with the Swiss foundation Pro Helvetia.

ROHINGYA CRISIS

The situation of the Rohingya refugees is of great concern to my country.

I will visit Cox's Bazar tomorrow.

Switzerland commends your Government and the people of Bangladesh for the solidarity, assistance and protection offered to the Rohingyas.

Switzerland pledged eight million Swiss Francs at the Conference in Geneva in October for emergency humanitarian aid for the Rohingya refugees in the country.

And I am very pleased to announce today that this year Switzerland will provide an additional twelve million Francs for the Rohingya refugees.

The agreement on repatriation between Bangladesh and Myanmar is a positive step towards a solution of the current crisis.

It will be important that all returns are voluntary and safe, and carried out in dignity.

CONCLUSION

Switzerland values its long-standing friendship with Bangladesh.

We look forward to a continued partnership, based on mutual trust and a shared vision for the future.

This visit is a contribution to promoting relations between Switzerland and Bangladesh.

Thank you!