



## Priorities of Switzerland's future commitment in Sri Lanka (as at Feb. 2016)

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**The new government's far-reaching programme of reforms and reconciliation offers Sri Lanka an opportunity for national reconciliation. It also affords significant opportunities to strengthen the rule of law, further economic development and normalise foreign relations. Against this backdrop, Switzerland intends to**

- **support the reform and reconciliation process**
- **and to continue the intensification of bilateral relations initiated in 2015, in particular with respect to political contact, cooperation on migration and the economy, and cultural exchanges.**

Almost 30 years of armed conflict in Sri Lanka displaced hundreds of thousands of people. More than 50,000 Sri Lankans, mostly Tamils, now live in Switzerland, and close to 24,000 of them have obtained Swiss citizenship. In response to the civil war, Switzerland began its peacebuilding and human rights efforts in Sri Lanka in 2001 under the leadership of the FDFA's Human Security Division. Switzerland has additionally been providing substantial humanitarian aid since 2003 with a view to contributing to a peace dividend and later helping to deal with the after-effects of the tsunami. The SDC office in Jaffna makes Switzerland one of the only foreign states with a presence in the Northern Province. The SDC's Global Programme Migration and Development has been working in Sri Lanka since 2010. The State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) has been providing individual reintegration assistance for Sri Lankans returning to the country for many years and has supported a vocational training project in the north and east of the country, as well as other projects, since 2014.

After Maithripala Sirisena was elected president on 8 January 2015, his government launched reforms, particularly concerning the rule of law, and took the first steps towards reconciliation after more than two decades of conflict. This reform and reconciliation process was endorsed with a clear mandate from the electorate in the parliamentary elections on 17 August 2015. This has opened up significant opportunities for Sri Lanka. Sustainable peace and economic development in Sri Lanka will also prevent a renewed increase in conflict-driven migration flows. But big challenges remain. The reform process that has now begun encompasses many areas and will need time to take lasting effect. Support is all the more important in this delicate reconstruction phase.

That is why the transformation and intensification of bilateral relations begun in 2015 must be continued and consolidated. Federal Councillor Didier Burkhalter travelled to Colombo and Jaffna as early as March 2015. Further testaments to the improved relations between the two countries were a meeting between the President of the Confederation, Simonetta Sommaruga, and President Sirisena on the margins of the UN General Assembly in September 2015 in New York and a meeting between the President of the Confederation Johann Schneider-Ammann and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe in January 2016, as well as an evaluation mission by the SDC (global cooperation) and a working visit by SECO (bilateral economic relations) in May 2015. In addition, in 2015 the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP) and the International Centre on Asset Recovery in Basel established contact with Sri Lanka. In August 2015 a round-table was held with Swiss civil society stakeholders to discuss the future strategy.

Switzerland will continue to work in Sri Lanka as part of a whole-of-government approach. Accordingly, synergies are to be created and exploited wherever possible. Switzerland can build on its long-standing experience in providing support in the areas of humanitarian aid and peacebuilding. The humanitarian programme will conclude in April 2016. Sri Lanka remains however a focus of Switzerland's peacebuilding efforts, in particular through support in the difficult area of dealing with the past and strengthening human security and the rule of law. Switzerland is to expand its contacts and involvement in the area of migration on the basis of an equal balance between different interests. The promise of greater economic openness also offers new prospects to intensify trade and investment. Targeted promotion of cultural exchange and vocational education and training is also needed in certain areas.