

### Message from the Message from the Ambassador



Dear Readers,

Switzerland and Bangladesh have very good bilateral relations and a strong partnership on a wider range of issues, like economic and development cooperation.

The bilateral relations reached a new height with the official visit of the President of the Swiss Confederation, H.E. Mr. Alain Berset, earlier this year. The leaders of the two countries have strongly committed to achieving the sustainable development goals and establishing closer bilateral relations. The Swiss President also expressed solemn solidarity with Bangladesh for its humanitarian efforts toward the on-going Rohingya refugee crisis. We sincerely acknowledge the role of the Government and the people of Bangladesh for their continued assistance and protection offered on humanitarian grounds to the Rohingya influx despite various socio-economic challenges and demographic pressure on resources of the host community over the past year.

Bangladesh is heading towards national elections and it is my sincere wish that the upcoming election will be held in a free, fair and inclusive manner and that all citizens will be able to cast their vote free from violence, intimidation and fear. Marking the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the UN this year, Switzerland will continue to cooperate closely with the Government of Bangladesh and civil society in the area of democracy and human rights.

I hope you will enjoy reading this latest issue of Swiss Talk. Thank you very much!

René Holenstein  
Ambassador of Switzerland to Bangladesh



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

Embassy of Switzerland in Bangladesh

### Stand Up for Human Rights

In order to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Embassy of Switzerland, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Dhaka and the Geneva-based International Film Festival and Forum on Human Rights (FIFDH) have joined together to celebrate and underline the importance of human rights.



On 10 May 2018 at the Goethe Institut in Dhaka a national film tour featuring the Swiss movie "Sonita" was launched followed by a panel discussion with senior human rights experts. Civil and women's rights, freedom of choice, gender equality as well as the recently concluded third Universal Periodic Review of Bangladesh in the Human Rights Council in Geneva were discussed. The audience actively participated in a lively interaction with the panelists and the event was widely attended by young Bangladeshis, human rights defenders and civil society activists and members of the diplomatic community.



The human rights film tour will travel across 5 districts of Bangladesh including Rangpur, Khulna, Rajshahi, Barishal and Chattogram between August to October. Over 200 young participants had attended the Rangpur and Khulna film tour; where they enthusiastically expressed their daily-life struggles in exercising basic human rights.

## Pilot project focusing on human rights and protection for Rohingya refugees

To ensure Switzerland provides support to humanitarian as well as longer term development needs for the crisis-affected Rohingya refugees, a pilot project has been initiated with Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) in June. ASK's work supports the development of a better understanding between the Rohingya population and the host community through mutual interaction. With the help of community and religious leaders as well as government, ASK manages the camp mediation to resolve household level disputes related to marital violence, physical abuses, divorces and other issues. The project creates greater awareness on issues related to human rights, prevention of gender based violence, psychosocial counselling which supports women who are generally vulnerable due to the conservative society and limitations placed on their movement.



## Swiss Humanitarian Aid

The Swiss Humanitarian Aid (SHA) in coordination with partners in Cox's Bazar has been successfully operationalizing the commitments made during the Swiss Presidential visit for the Rohingya crisis, whereby the President had declared that Switzerland will stand beside Bangladesh during this crisis, and the humanitarian efforts for the affected Rohingya refugees and the host community will continue to engage in Cox's Bazar with additional support of 12 million Swiss Francs for 2018. As an extended portfolio of the Swiss Development Cooperation, SHA has been providing assistance in key areas such as WASH, protection, and nutrition. SHA has started to devise a long term plan with regards to their support in Bangladesh and continues to work with the Embassy to develop more long term interventions addressing both humanitarian and development needs.

## Swiss Contribution to Wage Earners' Welfare Board Bill, 2018

In 2016-17, with support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC, the International Labour Organization has provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Expatriate Welfare of Bangladesh to draft the Wage Earners Welfare Board Act, 2018 to improve the accountability and transparency of how the welfare fund of outgoing migrants was being utilized. This Act was approved in July 2018 and the law has been gazetted into full usage. The Act details out exactly for which purposes the welfare

fund can be used and how the fund can provide support to migrant workers if they are caught in a crisis situation. Following its enactment, the law would prohibit any misuse of the fund and it further incorporates welfare issues of migrant workers that were missing from the previous Overseas Employment and Migrant Act 2013.

## Bilateral trade update

The 8th Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Switzerland Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry SBCCI took place on 11 May in Dhaka. Bilateral trade and investment relations between Switzerland and Bangladesh are increasing rapidly which have almost tripled since 2010. Ambassador René Holenstein observed that with further ease of doing business in the country, Bangladesh will become a more preferred destination for Swiss businesses in the coming days.



## Book on legal stories launched in Dhaka

"Legal stories of life"- a book authored by Barrister Omar H. Khan was launched in Dhaka at a colorful event on 27 June. An interesting aspect of this book is that it contains solutions to real-life legal problems of people from various backgrounds on diverse topics. Ambassador René Holenstein, who attended the event as a special guest, said Switzerland is a long-standing development partner of Bangladesh with a strong rights based approach. This is one of the reasons why the Swiss Embassy supported the publication of this book which highlights the importance of citizens' legal rights.



## Embassy of Switzerland in Bangladesh

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