



United Nations General Assembly

High Level Segment

The Civil Society and the Education on Human Rights as a tool for promoting religious tolerance

New York, 27 September 2012

H.E. Didier Burkhalter

Federal Councilor, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland

Mrs High Commissioner for Human Rights,

Mr Director General (of UNESCO),

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen

You all know the most famous symbol of New York and America, the Statue of Liberty. But do you know its real name? This landmark's name is, actually in French, "*La Liberté éclairant le Monde*" "*Liberty enlightening the World.*"

This is exactly what we have to do.

Liberty. People have the right to think freely, this is a core principle of human rights. Freedom of expression and opinion is non-negotiable. And we must at the same time fight against intolerance through education. Enlightenment. "*Dare to know*" as Kant once said.

Freedom of religion and freedom of belief is a human right and an integral part of Swiss foreign policy. So, any incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence because of nationality, race or religion is prohibited.

These limits are necessary. The goal of human rights is not restriction, but freedom. Respect and tolerance through knowledge and education is the basic value of human rights. A strong society must be driven by Liberty, Hope, Responsibility, Solidarity and Respect. Not by prohibition.

You don't build a bright future in building fences, but in building bridges.

To promote freedom of religion and belief and to prevent any form of religious intolerance, Switzerland participates actively in the relevant international organizations. We promote respect, tolerance and dialogue on the bilateral, regional and international level.

We are convinced that it is above all through experience and knowledge and through contacts and dialogue in everyday situations, that coexistence of different cultures and religions can be successful.

Cooperating on a specific project creates understanding and solidarity. It breaks prejudice. It is the first step to create trust. And on such a basis - of a shared positive experience – we can build dialogue and cooperation.

This practice-oriented approach is actually a very *human* approach, because it puts the individual at the center of our attention. It has the advantage of starting by identifying a common denominator. These are the pillars on which we can then build the bridge.

Switzerland – together with Italy and others [*Costa Rica, Morocco, Philippines, Senegal and Slovenia*] - is part of the “*Platform on Human Rights Education and Training*”. This platform worked for years in order to pass, in 2011, the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training:

- The Declaration recognizes that human rights education and training concerns all parts of society, at all levels. We are all concerned.
- It delivers to the international community a clear message that human rights education needs to be further strengthened, that human rights education is needed in order to build our common world.
- Governmental authorities have the primary responsibility to promote and ensure this human rights education and training.
- But the role of other stakeholders such as national human rights institutions and NGOs is also recognized. This is a collective work.
- Finally, the Declaration paves the way for follow-up initiatives at the national, regional and international level.

All States and political, intellectual and religious leaders must commit!

Thank you for your attention.