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UN policy of Switzerland



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Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA

Switzerland joined the United Nations (UN) as the 190th member state on September 10 in 2002. Since then it has used its membership in the world's most important international organisation to defend its interests and convictions. For example, the Geneva-based Human Rights Council and the Office of the Ombudsperson on UN sanctions policy have been created, to a great extent, thanks to Switzerland's efforts. Switzerland, host to the UN headquarters in Geneva, has achieved recognition in the international community as an enterprising and self-confident team player as well as a believer in solidarity. Peace and security, human rights, and sustainable development are high on the list of Swiss priorities, as are efforts for more transparency, efficiency and effectiveness of UN institutions. Switzerland is a candidate for the UN Security Council for the 2023–24 period.

In a national referendum on 3 March 2002, 54.6% of the electorate voted in favour of Switzerland becoming a member of the United Nations. The main argument for membership is as valid today as it was then. The UN is the main decision-making body for many key questions facing the world. Moreover, its objectives are to a large extent the same as those enshrined in the Swiss constitution: peace and security, human rights, alleviation of suffering and poverty, and sustainable development.

As the world's only universal organisation, the UN provides the international community with an extraordinary platform for discussing questions of global importance, developing new concepts, negotiating new international standards and achieving consensus for what is politically possible. As a UN member state, Switzerland can influence and participate in the international decision-making process. It can play an active role in defending Swiss interests and voicing its concerns, and at the same time assume a responsible role in resolving international problems. Indeed, the most urgent matters – challenges and problems in the areas of security, well-being and sustainable development, as well as the environment and migration – extend beyond national boundaries. No nation can expect to solve its problems alone.

Switzerland enjoys an excellent reputation in the UN and is seen as a credible partner and bridge-builder. It has access to all states, not least because it does not belong to any standing political alliance. Switzerland's strengths and influence lie in initiating new approaches, innovative solutions and improvements to developing proposals. The main concerns, which reflect Switzerland's national values, include human dignity and fundamental freedoms, international humanitarian law, safeguarding natural resources, cost awareness, and the transparency and efficiency of UN institutions.

Results so far

The fact that virtually all of the countries of the world are represented gives the UN a uniquely universal legitimacy. But it also poses limits to its ability to act and its effectiveness. Notwithstanding this ambiguity, Switzerland concludes that the outcome of UN membership is clearly positive.

Human Rights Council: the UN Commission on Human Rights was replaced in 2006 by the Human Rights Council (HRC), a step in which Switzerland played a major role. The HRC was endowed with instruments designed to make it more effective. These include Special Procedures (working groups, commissions, and special rapporteurs who investigate human rights problems and make recommendations) and Special sessions which can react quickly to worrying new developments. Universal Periodic Reviews (UPRs) enable periodic inspections of the human rights situations in all UN member states to be carried out, with the participation of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and provide for critical questions and recommendations to be discussed in open hearings. Due to the heightened interest of the media and debates which are often highly politicized, the Geneva-based HRC is today one of the most prominent UN organs. On several occasions, the HRC has demonstrated its ability to act. As an example, special rapporteurs and commissions of inquiry were deployed in Syria, Sudan, Iran, and Myanmar. However, a consistent response to serious violations of human rights remains a challenge.

Development policy: Thanks to its good reputation, neutrality and over half a century of experience in development cooperation, Switzerland is an important player in the UN's economic, social, and environmental fields of activity. Switzerland has played a key role in improving the directives and guidelines for UN agencies, funds and programmes in the area of

development-cooperation. The aim is to ensure that the use of UN instruments at the operational level is better coordinated in order to achieve optimum effectiveness and efficiency (“One UN Strategy” or “Deliver as One”). Switzerland is committed to both, the establishment of norms and their implementation in the field. Swiss efforts are focused on the following areas: combating poverty, supporting fragile states, achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as well as developing a new set of Sustainable Development Goals for the post-2015 development agenda. The MDGs have so far proven to be the effective instrument for political mobilisation in the history of global development policy.

Sanctions policy and the rule of law: with the creation in 2009 of the Office of the Ombudsperson for persons targeted by the UN Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee, the Security Council reacted to criticism expressed by Switzerland and other member states. These criticisms concerned the absence of recourse or right of appeal, which ran contrary to the rule of law and to fundamental rights. The Office of the Ombudsperson can look at the Sanctions Committee decisions as well as at listings of persons and make recommendations, which may include removal of names from the sanctions list (“delisting”). These recommendations have considerable weight, for unless the committee objects to them by consensus within 60 days or refers the delisting decision to the Security Council, they automatically acquire legal force.

Swiss in prominent positions: Swiss citizens have been appointed to a number of key UN positions. Carla del Ponte served as chief prosecutor in the UN’s International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda in The Hague from 1999–2007 and was appointed Commissioner of the Commission of Inquiry of the Human Rights Council on Syria in September 2012. Former Swiss Federal Councillor Adolf Ogi served as the UN’s Special Adviser on Sport for Development and Peace (2001-2007). Nicolas Michel served between 2004 and 2008 as Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and United Nations Legal Counsel. Former Swiss Federal Councillor, Joseph Deiss, was elected president of 65th Session of the UN General Assembly (2010–11). In his capacity as President of the General Assembly, Deiss chose global governance, a topic important to Switzerland, as the leitmotif of his presidency, making a real contribution to closer cooperation between the UN and the Group of 20 (G20). In May 2013, the Secretary-General appointed Thomas Gass to the post of Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). In November 2013, he appointed Pierre Krähenbühl as Commissioner General of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Since the beginning of 2014, Philippe Lazzarini has held the post of Deputy Special Representative for the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM).

UN: the UN enjoys universal legitimacy thanks to its 193 member states, but it is precisely this universality which renders decision making difficult. Resolutions adopted by the General Assembly are often compromises. And they are not binding. Coercive measures to guarantee peace and security can only be taken by the Security Council, but given the different political agendas of the five permanent members with veto rights it is seldom able to act. As an organization, the United Nations can only be as effective as its member states allow it to be. This fact, however regrettable, is the political reality. What is certain is that the community of nations cannot manage without mechanisms for exchanges, coordination, and decision making in an increasingly interconnected world. In other words, if there were no United Nations it would be necessary to invent one. As the former UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld put it: *“The UN was not created to take mankind to heaven but to save it from hell”*.

There are many achievements of the UN and its constituent bodies that are worth mentioning:

Thanks to *UN Security Council Resolution S/RES/1970 (2011)* on protection of the Libyan civilian populations tens of thousands of people in Benghazi and the rest of Libya were saved from being massacred by the forces of the Ghaddafi regime.

UN troops help to keep the peace in situations of conflict. There are at present *120,000 “blue helmets”* deployed in 15 peacekeeping missions on four continents including the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Darfur, South Sudan, and the Middle East.

UN Specialized Agencies labour to prevent unnecessary sickness and death. The UN Children’s Fund UNICEF carried out *2.5 billion vaccinations* in 2011. Thanks to vaccinations against diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, and measles 2 to 3 million deaths are prevented each year according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

The UN has facilitated the holding of *democratic elections* in more than 40 countries, for example in the Ivory Coast, South Africa, Cambodia, Namibia, El Salvador, Eritrea, Mozambique and Nicaragua.

The UN enables millions of refugees to survive. The World Food Programme (WFP) distributes more than *two million tonnes of food-stuffs* each year to some 22 million refugees.

Priorities

Switzerland focuses on the following areas:

Reform of the UN Security Council: the structure of the Security Council still corresponds largely to the geo-political balance after World War II. The aim of its reform is to strengthen the Council's representative nature and thus to enhance its legitimacy and capacity to act. On the question of enlargement, Switzerland supports the creation of a new category of non-permanent members with a mandate exceeding the current two years that can also be renewed without interruption. Switzerland's main focus however is on improving the Security Council's working methods in order to enable the Council to carry out its mandate in a more transparent, participative and effective way. Switzerland pursues this goal as coordinator and member of a group of states called ACT (short for Accountability, Coherence and Transparency), a network of 23 states from all geographic regions. It recognises and commends past Security Council efforts in the domain of working methods but also calls for further measures needed to enable the Council to genuinely and efficiently carry out its mandate. They refer to better use of prevention measures, improved cooperation with regional organisations and voluntary renouncement of the right of veto in cases of atrocity crimes.

Sanctions: Switzerland calls for widening the area of competences of the Ombudsperson with regard to appeals by persons concerned by sanctions against Al-Qaida. and demands the introduction of internationally recognised procedural guarantees. The longer-term objective is to extend the Ombudsperson's mandate to all UN sanction regimes. But the ultimate goal is to guarantee due procedure and the right to appeal to an independent judicial body

with the power to make binding decisions. In this context, Switzerland promotes the implementation of the four pillars of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, namely measures to reduce the causes of terrorism, measures to prevent and combat it, measures to build up state capacities, and measures to ensure respect for human rights and the rule of law. In Switzerland's view, respect for human rights, international humanitarian law, and the rule of law must be at the core of counter-terrorism efforts.

Geneva: The UN office in Geneva is one of the most important centres of competence worldwide focusing on global and good governance. Geneva hosts 33 international organisations, more than 250 international NGOs, numerous multinational companies or academies, a very well-developed academic sector, and an international community of more than 42,000 persons. The city is thus one of the key centres of global governance in the world. Every year it welcomes more than 2700 international conferences and meetings with around 270,000 delegates or experts from the entire world, as well as 3000 visits by heads of state, heads of government, and ministers.

Disarmament and non-proliferation: Switzerland's position is that the deployment of nuclear arms makes no strategic sense, furthermore it is immoral as well as illegal. In view of the disastrous humanitarian consequences for civilian populations, use of any weapon of mass destruction violates international humanitarian law. For this reason, Switzerland favours stronger and more far-reaching international instruments to eliminate nuclear weapons and would like to see the nuclear disarmament debate extended to humanitarian, development, climate, and health policy issues. Furthermore, Switzerland is advancing discussions on decreasing operational readiness of nuclear weapons (de-alerting). Switzerland also seeks the comprehensive elimination of biological and chemical weapons. Having ratified all related international treaties, Switzerland aims to make them universally valid and to close any loopholes they may contain.

With regard to conventional weapons, Switzerland would like to see a world without anti-personnel mines. Within the UN framework, Switzerland is also fighting against the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. More than half a million people, mainly civilians, lose their lives by weapons belonging to this category, which is why small arms are arguably true "weapons of mass destruction". Switzerland was one of the first countries to sign the international treaty regulating trade in conventional weapons (Arms Trade Treaty - ATT) and will promote its rapid entry into force and implementation. Weapons should not be exported to conflict regions or to regions in which humanitarian law or human rights are being violated. *Peacebuilding:* About half of the states that find themselves in "post- conflict situations" end up in a new armed conflict within five years. Therefore,

UN member Switzerland: statistics

Switzerland is the 17th largest contributor to the UN budget with a share of 1.047% of the overall total. In 2013 Switzerland's regular mandatory contribution to core UN activities amounted to roughly CHF 122 million, including peace missions and the war crimes tribunals. In addition, assessment-based contributions are made to multilateral funds and specialised agencies (such as the WHO, FAO, and ILO). Voluntary contributions are also made, e.g. for food aid. Prior to becoming a member of the UN, Switzerland contributed around CHF 500 million to the UN system.

In the framework of UN peacekeeping missions, Switzerland deployed more than 20 military personnel and police in Lebanon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, and South Sudan, making it the 99th ranked donor country. A further 230 Swiss military personnel are deployed in other peace missions in Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Korea.

More than 1000 Swiss citizens are employed by the United Nations, of which some 70 are in high-ranking positions.

Switzerland is strongly committed to peacebuilding efforts and favours a multi-dimensional approach. One such example is its chairmanship of the Peacebuilding Commission's Burundi Configuration. To ensure a lasting peace, all key players must be integrated in dialogue following a war. Furthermore, there is a need for better coordination of the various United Nations' instruments and programmes in the areas of peace missions, development aid and humanitarian relief. Switzerland focuses particular attention on strengthening the civilian capacities of the UN in post-conflict situations and on instruments of mediation.

Development cooperation/sustainability: Switzerland intends to devote more of its efforts to improving coordination at the operational level and introducing a results-oriented approach. Swiss contributions in the area of multilateral support for development cooperation focus on seven carefully selected institutions of the UN system. Switzerland's thematic focus is on governance, fragile states and conflicts, water, climate change, food security, migration, and health. Switzerland is also actively engaged in the preparations of a new sustainable development agenda for the period following 2015 («Post-2015 Agenda»). Switzerland is committed to a universal agenda, reflecting all three dimensions of sustainable development (social, economic, and environmental). In addition, Switzerland supports a single agenda, merging the process to follow-up on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with the process to define Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as set up by the Rio+20 Conference. In this context, Switzerland has defined a national position and promotes, among others stand-alone goals on water, gender equality and health.

Human rights: in the Human Rights Council (HRC) and the General Assembly, Switzerland's priorities include combating the death penalty, torture, extra-judicial killings, trafficking in human beings, violence against women and girls, and racism, while defending religious freedom and the rights of the child. Since the beginning of the Arab protests and uprisings, Switzerland has strengthened its efforts to move the issue of protecting demonstrators' human rights to the top of the HRC agenda. As a result of an initiative which Switzerland launched together with Argentina, a special rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence was appointed in September 2011. Their task is to support states manage post-conflict issues such as punishing the perpetrators (no impunity), dealing with the past, restoring the rule of law, and rehabilitating the victims. After serious breaches of human rights, such issues can be decisive in building long lasting peace.

Humanitarian aid / international humanitarian law: Switzerland has been a member of UN special bodies in the humanitarian field since they were founded,

long before Switzerland itself became a UN member state. Switzerland has played an active role in developing mechanisms to protect civilians in armed conflicts. Swiss humanitarian aid assists persons facing emergencies, without regard to their race, gender, language, religion, political views, or social status. Switzerland is committed to strengthening the international coordination of relief operations so that humanitarian aid reaches those in crisis situations as directly and quickly as possible. In the UN framework, Switzerland works in particular with the World Food Programme (WFP), the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and the UN Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR).

Budget / management reform: Switzerland is committed to ensuring that member states' contributions are used sensibly and efficiently. It is also committed to improving the budget process to make it more transparent and rational. As far as management is concerned, the focus must be on consolidating and further developing a number of major reforms. In particular this concerns the introduction of an integrated system for Enterprise Resource Planning (UMOJA) and new accountability frameworks.

Global governance: in the framework of the informal 3G (Global Governance Group), Switzerland is committed to enhanced dialogue between the UN and the G20, greater involvement of non-members in the G20 efforts, and greater transparency in cooperation between the G20 and international organisations. Switzerland has an interest in ensuring that the United Nations can continue to fulfil its central role as a universal body with a high level of legitimacy in the face of increasing globalisation.

Outlook

Security Council candidacy: Switzerland submitted its candidature for a non-permanent seat in the UN Security Council for 2023–2024 at the beginning of 2011, after majority approval in the two parliamentary committees for foreign affairs. The fundamental purpose of the United Nations "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war", as stated in the Charter (Preamble), is consistent with the mandate of the Swiss Federal Constitution to help create an international order founded on peace and justice. Participation in the debates and decisions of the UN Security Council is a logical continuation of its multilateral commitments that enable Switzerland to better pursue its priority concerns. These include, for example, protecting civilian populations in armed conflicts, fighting impunity following a conflict, and preventing armed violence. As a member of the Se-

Being a member of the UN Security Council is consistent with Switzerland's neutrality. The coercive measures, including of a military nature, that can be taken by the Security Council as stated in Chapter VII of the UN Charter, do not constitute an inter-state conflict in the sense of the Law on Neutrality. The only difference to the status quo would be that as a member of the Security Council, Switzerland would have the right to vote or to abstain on such decisions. Even as a member of the Security Council, Switzerland would be under no obligation to participate in coercive measures of a military nature.

curity Council, Switzerland would continue to meet its responsibilities at the international level even more consistently, sharpen its profile as an honest broker, and strengthen its commitment to and reputation in areas such as preventive diplomacy and post-conflict peacebuilding.

International Geneva: Geneva, seat of the former League of Nations, is today the second ranking headquarters of the United Nations after New York. It is through Geneva in particular that Switzerland has a long tradition as a host country to international organisations and a venue for conferences and multilateral meetings. "International Geneva" serves Switzerland as a platform for maintaining and developing a network of relations with the world's leading actors, giving it greater political weight, and playing a key role in achieving Switzerland's foreign policy objectives. Geneva is particularly prominent in the five following clusters: i) peace, security, and disarmament, ii) humanitarian affairs and human rights, iii) health, iv) employment, business, and science v) sustainable development and the preservation of natural resources. Despite its success, Geneva also faces strategic and material challenges such as the fragmentation of global governance, international competition between cities to host international organisations, as well as an overstretched real estate market and the strength of the Swiss franc. In order to meet these challenges, a new strategy was launched in summer 2013 by the Federal Council and Geneva to strengthen the attractiveness and competitiveness of Switzerland as a host state.

Additional information

FDFA Information (for the media)

Tel. +41 58 462 31 53, info@eda.admin.ch

Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN in New York

633, Third Avenue, 29th floor, New York, NY 10017-6706, United States of America

Tel.: +1 212 286 1540, www.eda.admin.ch/missny

Mission permanente de la Suisse auprès de l'Office des Nations Unies et des autres organisations internationales à Genève

Rue de Varembe 9-11 (6th floor), Case postale 194, CH-1211 Genève 20

Tél.: +41 (0)22 749 24 24, www.eda.admin.ch/geneva

Ständige Vertretung der Schweiz bei den Vereinten Nationen und den internationalen Organisationen in Wien

Wächtergasse 1, A-1010 Wien

Tel.: +43 1 263 41 18, www.eda.admin.ch/missvienna (de)

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