

**Ansprache  
von Botschafter Frank Grütter  
bei den Festlichkeiten des Jubiläums  
«20 Jahre UNO-Mitgliedschaft»  
im Boathouse, Central Park, New York**

**5. April 2022**

Excellencies,

Dear colleagues,

A little over 20 years ago, on 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 2002, Switzerland said "yes".

"Yes" to joining the United Nations as a full member state. "Yes" to taking responsibility that comes with full membership.

The importance of this responsibility is painfully clear: We are not saved from the scourge of war. Today, two billion people live in conflict areas. This is one quarter of humanity. Millions are and will be affected by the military aggression against Ukraine. This war is yet another example of how a conflict affects us all globally. Also in Myanmar, Syria, the Sahel and the Horn of Africa – to name just a few – war, violence and humanitarian crisis continue to have a terrible impact on the daily lives of the population.

As UN-member states, we are obliged and mandated to develop friendly relations amongst us, to achieve international cooperation and to maintain peace and security. For Switzerland, saying "yes" to responsibility also means "yes" to defending the UN Charter and "yes" to a strong multilateral system. The goal is clear: we must become the United Nations in the real sense of the term!

It took us quite long to finally join the UN. You might ask yourselves:

Why?

Tongue in cheek the answer would be that we Swiss have a reputation for “getting up early but waking up late!”

A more serious answer would be that the Swiss democratic process is consultative and inclusive. This makes decision-making sometimes a little slow. The decision to join the UN matured over decades. It was not a top-down government decision, but a well-discussed and well-reflected act of society at large. It began with an initiative of a grass roots committee. From a make-shift office in a private home, this committee started building support and collected the necessary 100'000 signatures for a referendum.

In the run-up to the vote, there was an in-depth discussion in the Swiss society: Some were of the opinion, that we would lose a cornerstone of our foreign policy: The famous Swiss neutrality. Others argued instead, that by joining the UN, Switzerland would actually regain a part of its sovereignty. Because it is better to sit at the table and to take part in the decisions. Or, as you can read on one of the campaign posters displayed tonight: “Les absents ont toujours tort”.

The result of the referendum was clear. It allowed us to finally join the family of nations. It allowed us to demonstrate, that our neutrality does

not prevent us from taking positions, that it is an added value to our membership. And that neutrality and UN membership go well together hand-in-hand.

But the result of the vote was not a landslide either. It showed, what is still important today: We need to honor those who did not get their way. Their opinion has to be taken into account. This is a constant reminder: Working for a common future, at home or here in New York, requires mutual understanding and respect. It is not the winner, who takes it all. Neither in Switzerland, nor at the UN.

Excellencies,

With your invitation, you have also cast a vote. A vote on the topic of my speech tonight. The majority of you voted for "A Plus for Multilateralism"! I am aware that brevity is the soul of wit. The shortest speech I could make on this topic would simply state: Multilateralism is part of the Swiss DNA. Through our humanitarian tradition, Switzerland has lived the ideals of the UN Charter long before it was written. Having the ICRC in the heart of International Geneva meant an early commitment to alleviating the suffering of people.

As a founding member of the League of Nations, Switzerland has also shaped an institution that was perhaps short-lived, but with an enduring impact on the very foundation of the United Nations.

It is clear, that a strong and reliable multilateral system is a core interest of our country. Today, we strive to make the UN stronger and more effective: In the last 20 years, we have served on the board of nearly all UN agencies. We have fought for improved working methods; we have advocated for better accountability mechanisms in sanctions regimes, which led, for example, to the appointment of an Ombudsperson. We were at the forefront of establishing the Human Rights Council. We are supporting the reform of the UN development system, where we draw from our long experience gained “on the ground” via our bilateral development cooperation in numerous countries around the world. And we see “Our Common Agenda” as an accelerator and urgently needed “booster” to implement the Agenda 2030.

Our actions are anchored in our humanitarian tradition and neutrality. Promoting peace through the multilateral system remains a fundamental tenet of our foreign policy. We continue to offer our good offices and to support peace processes around the world.

In short: We like to believe, as Kofi Annan once put it, that “Switzerland punches above its weight”. As late-comers to the UN, we are still enthusiastic about multilateralism. This means taking responsibility, pushing for a UN that serves the people around the world. With our candidature for the Security Council we are trying to do exactly this: taking our engagement to the next level – being A Plus for Peace!

I thank you for your attention.