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Débat général

Déclaration de

S.E. M. Hans-Rudolf Merz

Président

de la Confédération suisse

Check against delivery

**General Assembly
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General debate

Statement by

H.E. Mr. Hans-Rudolf Merz

President

of the Swiss Confederation

New York, le 24 septembre 2009

Mr. President of the General Assembly

Heads of State and Government

Mr. Secretary-General

Excellencies

Ladies and gentlemen

We look back on an exceptional year. Twelve months ago, a bank only a few hundred meters away from here collapsed and brought the global financial system to the verge of breakdown. The ensuing turbulence in the finance sector led to a severe global economic downturn which increased the vulnerability of many developing countries and exacerbated unemployment, poverty, hunger and insecurity.

This example illustrates the interconnectedness of our world. It reminds us that other issues such as climate change, the food crisis, migration, pandemics, terrorism, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are not confined to national borders. Rising to these global challenges requires determined and coordinated action at the national, regional and international levels. International cooperation has become vital. The UN is the place where this cooperation happens. Today, the world needs the UN more than ever.

The UN should continue along its reform path in order to reinforce its legitimacy. At the same time, the exchange between the UN and other fora such as the G-20 – which is meeting today – must be strengthened. The G-20 has taken over a role in discussing important global issues. This development must not take place at the expense of other nations or global institutions such as the UN. The G-20 lacks legitimacy, basic considerations of due process are absent in the sanctions procedures. The members of the G-20 themselves are not subject to the same scrutiny. Switzerland advocates a level playing field and a much better consultation among non-members of the G-20.

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen

The financial and economic crisis continues to preoccupy us all. Governments and central banks put together stabilization packages of a staggering size. However, quantity is not everything. What counts is quality. Economic activity must revert to fundamental values

and virtues. It must focus on economic, social and environmental sustainability. Through institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and UNDP, the UN has the knowledge and the necessary instruments to combat the financial and economic crisis. It is important to ensure that the voices of these institutions be heard within the G-20.

In some quarters, the present crisis has been used as an opportunity to question the market economy and globalization as such. I do not dispute that there is a need for reform. The failures and abuses have been too big to ignore. But we should remind ourselves that thanks to a liberal economic order and open markets many people in this world have been lifted out of poverty. In this regard, we share the concern of many who think of the growing trend towards protectionism as a recipe for disaster. Therefore, my country welcomes that the UN conference on the financial and economic crisis called for the swift conclusion of the Doha Round.

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen

People in developing countries have been hit particularly hard by the financial and economic crisis. There is a significant risk that the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals will be delayed. As for Switzerland we have pledged to maintain our level of development aid despite tough budget constraints. Developing and developed countries are jointly responsible for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The former are required to implement political and economic reforms and to ensure "good governance". The latter have to support these efforts in a predictable and reliable manner. Next year, the UN conference marking the tenth anniversary of the Millennium Declaration will provide us with the opportunity to reinvigorate this partnership and to improve the effectiveness of development aid.

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen

Sustainability must also be our guiding principle in the fight against climate change. This is why the climate conference in Copenhagen must be a success. Switzerland is willing to set a good example. We will achieve our CO-2 reduction targets for 2012. For the period until 2020, we are prepared to cut our CO-2 emissions by 20%. At the global level, the costs of adaptation to climate change will amount to several tens of billions of dollars per

year of which more than half will be at the expense of developing countries. Switzerland has therefore proposed a global carbon tax which is based on the polluter-pays principle in order to counter these emerging needs.

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen

Violent conflicts continue to plague this planet, rendering a life in dignity, peace and security elusive for too many people. The UN has a unique legitimacy to play an active role in conflict prevention, mediation, protection of civilians, peacekeeping, and peace-building. My country welcomes the greater involvement of the UN in these areas and especially advocates the strengthening of the UN's prevention and mediation capacities. Switzerland is also active in the area of peace-building. It has taken over the chairmanship of the country-configuration of the Peace-building Commission on Burundi and will continue its initiative on Armed Violence and Development.

This year we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. For all this time, the Conventions have set indispensable rules for situations of armed conflict. New forms of armed conflict and new means and methods of warfare make it more and more difficult to ensure respect for these rules. It is unacceptable that the civilian population is so often the target of deliberate attacks and that humanitarian aid personnel is regularly denied rapid and unimpeded access to the populations in need. In an effort to identify ways of improving compliance with the Geneva Conventions, Switzerland is organizing a ministerial side-event on Saturday here in New York. In November, we will hold an international expert conference in Geneva, open to all State Parties to the Geneva Conventions, on the current and new challenges faced by international humanitarian law.

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen

Human dignity is an inalienable right of all human beings, regardless of their gender, origin or religion. The Human Rights Council is the principal forum for discussing human rights within the UN. Both its Special Procedures and Universal Periodic Review have proven to be effective instruments in the promotion and protection of human rights. Having said this, a number of challenges remain. Switzerland will continue to work vigorously for an effective Human Rights Council and will present its candidacy for a second term starting in 2010. The protection of human rights, along with the promotion of democracy and the

strengthening of the rule of law, will also be the priorities of the Swiss presidency of the Council of Europe from November 2009 to May 2010. Under the Swiss presidency, efforts will be made to increase cooperation between the UN and the Council of Europe.

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen

2010 will be a symbolic year for the UN. Five years will have passed since the adoption of the World Summit Outcome Document and ten years since the signing of the Millennium Declaration. Next year's summit will be an opportunity to assess the status of implementation of these declarations and to initiate new and comprehensive reforms. These are necessary steps because only a reformed UN will be capable of finding appropriate responses to global challenges. In this context, I am pleased to announce that Switzerland has put forward the candidature of former President Joseph Deiss for President of the 65th session of the General Assembly.

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen

The challenges we have to face are huge. But there is no reason for pessimism. In the course of history, humankind has proven time and again that we can all achieve great things with courage, imagination and persistence. The Swiss writer Max Frisch once said: "A crisis can be a productive state. You just have to take away the aftertaste of disaster." I absolutely agree. So let us be productive and seize the opportunity to create a prosperous, just, peaceful and sustainable world.

Thank you.