



01.08.2020

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, friends of Switzerland in Bhutan, friends of Bhutan in Switzerland,

Welcome to today's Swiss National Day celebrations, marking my country's 729th anniversary.

This year, unfortunately, we cannot be together. We are celebrating virtually and online. Let us therefore think back to our beautiful tradition of Swiss National Days in Thimphu. In 2018, we gathered at the National Textile Museum and marked the opening of the first Swiss Honorary Consulate in Bhutan, with Lyonpo Dr. Kinzang Dorji taking over this important function. In 2019, we assembled at the Royal Bhutan University, watched the movie Heidi together and launched the Heidi Bus on its 22 day tour of the whole country.

My last visit to Bhutan was in January. We were planning the year ahead, my fourth and last as Ambassador to the Kingdom, with many ideas taking shape, namely planning our participation in the International Relations Fair or looking at a potential Swiss contribution to Bhutan's National Service through VET capacity building. But, as you know, things turned out differently. Today, our countries are struggling with a pandemic, severely setting back any plans. Survival has become the order of the day.

In these difficult days, Switzerland, as always, is helping its Bhutanese friends. We are supporting His Majesty the King's relief fund and, with the help of the Swiss Agency for Development and cooperation, organizing the delivery of state of the art COVID-19 test kits. This in addition to our support for the Bhutan pandemic work through relevant UN funds. May these measures bring some relief to the more unfortunate among us.

As I will soon complete my mission, let me tell you what an honour it has been to serve the two countries. Swiss Ambassador to Bhutan is a gratifying, easy job, once you surmount the fear of landing in Paro. Easy, because you can build upon the beautiful story of friendship between two remarkable personalities, His Majesty the Third King and Swiss entrepreneur Fritz von Schulthess-Rechberg. Easy, because you have so much help. I think of our esteemed Honorary Consul and long-time President of the Bhutan-Swiss Friendship group, its Swiss counter-part, the Swiss-Bhutan Friendship group, the Canton of Zurich, the Swiss Red Cross, I think of course of Helvetas.

The overarching theme of our four years together has been the move from aid to trade, from one country helping the other towards a multifaceted partnership between equals, a friendship that is here to stay for many years to come.

I am proud of the projects we achieved together, the foremost of which was the first ever Swiss Business Delegation to Bhutan in June 2019. I am confident about the follow up, now and even more after the pandemic. We can look back on many other endeavours. I think of witnessing Bhutan's third democratic elections, of our support for Bhutanese civil society organizations, the study trip on spatial planning, the restoration of Dhrapam Dhzong, Professor George van Driem's expert work on Bhutanese linguistics, of Swiss based vocational education training projects in hospitality and construction. And there is much more to come.

I take leave from Bhutan and the Bhutanese with a heavy heart. I shall never forget Tiger's Nest, the cheesemakers of Bhumtang and Gogona, the black necked cranes of Gangtey, the many varieties of Momos. I will not forget my Bhutanese friends and their warmhearted, gracious hospitality, including at the highest levels. I hope you will soon overcome the current plight and emerge healthy and back on the path towards prosperity – and of course happiness. When this is over, I pledge to come back, as a tourist, to bid a proper farewell. I shall never forget you and will always remain a friend of Bhutan.