



International Conference on Nepal's Reconstruction 2015

Statement of the Delegation of Switzerland

H.E. Urs Herren, Ambassador to Nepal

The Government of Switzerland and the Swiss people have been deeply touched by the tragic disaster and human tragedy that has hit Nepal. The emergency relief phase has therefore been closely followed by Swiss people and media. Let me reiterate therefore that Switzerland as a long-term friend and partner stands by government and people of Nepal in the difficult reconstruction phase before us.

First, Switzerland congratulates Nepal to the timely convocation of today's international conference. We also appreciate the strong leadership of the Government of Nepal in the elaboration of the PDNA, which with solid support from development partners has become an excellent basis for addressing the huge reconstruction challenges Nepal is facing.

We appreciate the presentation made by the government with regard to the setting up of the Reconstruction Authority. We expect procedures to be put in place for swift decision-making and implementation of measures, while maintaining adequate transparency and fiduciary safeguards. We hope that the Reconstruction Authority and the government's reconstruction plans will enjoy the broadest possible support from all political quarters for their effective implementation. While central coordination is certainly crucial, Switzerland also feels that local authorities need to be further strengthened to be able to cope with the additional tasks in the reconstruction phase. In our view the disaster response has again shown the need for local elections to create democratically elected and accountable local bodies.

Second, Switzerland has immediately reacted to support Nepal after the earthquake. Switzerland has **already spent 5 million USD on emergency relief**, including the deployment of a medical team to the Gorkha hospital and the distribution of shelter kits for around 40'000 households. Contrary to statements made recently that relief funds have been mainly spent on expatriate salaries and overheads, I would like to point out that we have – as an example – locally procured 25'0000 shelter kits and distributed them with local Embassy and project staff, through the local authorities and the airlift support of the Nepali and Indian armies, which I would like to thank for their quick and pragmatic support. For this initiative of about 1 million Swiss Francs, overhead costs were close to nil.

As we move towards reconstruction on the basis of the PDNA, Switzerland would nevertheless like to reiterate that emergency relief will still be needed, with new challenges certainly coming up during the monsoon season. We therefore urge the government to solve issues around taxation and customs duties for necessary relief materials.

Third, **Switzerland will allocate grants of USD 25 million of official development assistance for reconstruction up to the end of 2017**. This support will be covered by agreements with the Government of Nepal or be implemented through joint financing mechanisms where feasible. Switzerland will concentrate on areas where we can build on

existing competencies, experience and knowhow and primarily on affected districts where we have longstanding relations with local authorities and communities, such as Dolakha, Ramechhap, Okhaldhunga and Khotang. As far as possible and where feasible, the reconstruction support will be developed out of existing programmes with our partner ministries, in areas such as rural infrastructure, vocational training for building trades and support to the full resumption of local service provision. We will also support affected districts in adapting their District Periodic Plans to the new situation. We urge the Government of Nepal to put in place the necessary procedures to allow the swift approval of reconstruction initiatives and the quick amendment or conclusion of agreements. Of course, we do not forget that the areas fortunately spared by the recent earthquakes still face significant development challenges. Switzerland will therefore fully continue its ongoing support to poor and disadvantaged people in these areas in parallel to the reconstruction efforts.

Forth, as said in the beginning, the earthquake has led to a wave of solidarity in the Swiss public at large. **More than USD 25 million have been donated by Swiss individuals and companies.** These private funds will be utilized for reconstruction efforts over the next 3-4 years by Swiss NGOs duly registered in Nepal and their civil society partners. We therefore urge the Government of Nepal to create the necessary conditions for a well-coordinated and transparent, but also rapid and effective use of these generous private contributions.

Fifth, Switzerland is encouraged by the prudent macroeconomic policy implied in the PDNA, and its emphasis on enhanced DRR. We equally appreciate the clear focus of the PDNA on social inclusion and gender equality and its commitment to the poorest and most disadvantaged members of society, who have been disproportionately affected by the earthquakes, and who have always been at the center of Swiss support to Nepal

Let me conclude by reiterating the assurance of Switzerland to further close collaboration and full support to Nepal for the reconstruction after this terrible disaster.