



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

The Federal Council

Switzerland's priorities for the 75th session of the UN General Assembly

Federal Council report to the Foreign Affairs
Committees

of 24 June 2020

Switzerland's priorities for the 75th session of the UN General Assembly

Drawing on the four thematic focus areas of its Foreign Policy Strategy 2020–23 (peace and security, sustainability, prosperity and digitalisation) and with a view to its candidature for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council in 2023–24, Switzerland will pursue the following four priorities at the 75th session of the UN General Assembly:

1. Dealing with the consequences of COVID-19

COVID-19 will have a significant impact on the world. The UN and its specialised agencies and programmes will have to draw lessons from this pandemic and act accordingly. Switzerland will work to ensure that the UN's analyses are based on scientific findings and lead to concrete measures. Any response must centre on those worst affected by the pandemic and its consequences.

2. UN reforms

The 75-year-old UN system must continue to adapt to the challenges of the 21st century. Therefore, Switzerland supports the Secretary-General's reforms in the areas of peace and security and in favour of a modern management culture at the UN, and will closely monitor action taken to implement the reform of the UN development system. In this regard, it will focus on strengthening the Resident Coordinator system¹ – including its sustainable financing – and on implementing the new UN country strategies and reforms at the regional level. Switzerland will also facilitate the negotiations on the quadrennial review of UN system operational activities. The Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review is member states' main opportunity to provide the UN development system with policy guidance. Switzerland will support the efforts to improve the working methods of the Security Council, UN development agencies, the Human Rights Council as well as UN treaty bodies and take part in the review of the status of the Human Rights Council in 2021. Switzerland also supports the zero tolerance policy towards harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse in UN field missions and in the workplace.

3. Cybersecurity and digital governance

Many of the challenges related to digital governance are global in nature. The UN is therefore well-suited as a platform to debate how to exploit the opportunities and minimise associated risks. Switzerland is committed to a free, open and secure digital space, to the implementation of international law and to clarifying how international law applies in the digital world. It will raise these concerns in the UN processes on cybersecurity, cybercrime and digital governance, and thereby contributing actively to the recommendations of the UN Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation. Respect for human rights and international humanitarian law must also be guaranteed in cyberspace; the protection of the privacy of individuals' personal data collected as part of humanitarian operations must be ensured.

4. International Geneva

Based on the Federal Council's strategy to strengthen Switzerland's role as a host state, International Geneva will be promoted as a global centre to debate the issues that will occupy the world in the decades to come. In addition to peacebuilding and human rights, these include the challenges of cybersecurity, digital governance, artificial intelligence, genetics and all of the new technologies that will change 21st century society. Switzerland will thereby position Geneva even more strongly as a centre of excellence in global governance for the future.

¹ The Resident Coordinator (RC) is now the highest-ranking UN representative in the country, which gives him/her the necessary legitimacy vis-à-vis the state authorities, and coordinates all UN organisations active in the country.

Further activities:

In addition to these priorities, which will guide Switzerland's actions in all thematic areas, Switzerland will continue to pursue its efforts in long-standing areas of activity. These efforts highlight the stability and breadth of our engagement and reflect the three UN pillars: peace and security, sustainability and human rights.

1. Peace and security

The strengthening of conflict prevention, inter alia through the systematic inclusion of human rights in security policy debates, as well as the commitment to "women, peace and security" in the 20th year of Security Council Resolution 1325, will be continued. Switzerland will also continue to prioritise the promotion of a modern understanding of the concept of sustaining peace, for example as part of the peacebuilding architecture review. As chair of the Burundi Configuration of the UN Peacebuilding Commission – and as a candidate for a seat on its Organisational Committee in 2021 – Switzerland will work to prevent violent political crises. Switzerland's candidature for the UN Security Council 2023–24 is another major priority in this area. For the Seventh Review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, Switzerland will focus on promoting compliance with international humanitarian law, upholding human rights and tackling the causes of terrorism. Furthermore, during the Special Session of the General Assembly Against Corruption, Switzerland will emphasise preventive measures (including the separation of powers, freedom of the media), due process and international cooperation in the fight against corruption. Arms control and disarmament remain central issues this year, which marks the 50th anniversary of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. In the humanitarian field, Switzerland's focus will be on the protection of the civilian populations, humanitarian access to people in need and compliance with international humanitarian law.

2. Sustainable development

Climate change and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will remain central. Sustainable development continues to gain importance in the UN as we enter the last decade to meet the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ("decade of action"). The availability of reliable data is essential to measuring progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. For this reason, Switzerland plans to organise the next World Data Forum in Bern. In the wake of climate change, the loss of biodiversity, dwindling resources and crisis resilience, the transformation towards sustainable food systems and improved food security is of great importance. Switzerland will pursue this focus at the Food Systems Summit in 2021 and through its efforts to achieve goal 12 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (responsible consumption and production). In addition, Switzerland will strive for ambitious results in international environmental policy matters through contributions in the areas of chemicals, waste management and climate. It will take part in the Biodiversity Summit in New York in September 2020.

3. Human rights

The rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association are indispensable fundamental rights which must also be protected in the context of peaceful protests. Women's rights and violence against women also remain highly topical. In the effort to abolish the death penalty, Switzerland and Mexico will take the lead in the negotiations of the General Assembly resolution for a moratorium on the use of the death penalty.. Switzerland will also participate in the relevant forums on human rights and the environment in order to further highlight the relationship between these two issues and the resulting policy implications.

Other human rights issues that will remain high on the Swiss agenda are the prohibition of torture, the fight against impunity, dealing with the past and the protection of human rights defenders.