

Speech of Mr Nicolas Brühl, Ambassador of Switzerland to Uzbekistan for

International conference on "The most important reserves for the implementation of food

programmes in Uzbekistan" 6th June 2014

Dear Mr Chairman,

Your Excellences

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As ambassador of Switzerland, I am grateful to be given the opportunity to speak to you about the important and exciting subject; food security.

Food security and nutrition is a major global challenge. Three quarters of the one billion of hungry people live in rural areas of agriculture-based economies, which are, and will be most affected, by demographic growth, environmental challenges as well as changing consumption patterns in emerging economies. . For the 70 per cent of the world's poor people who live in rural areas, agriculture is the main source of income and employment.

The right to food is enshrined in the constitutions of many countries. A secure access to land and water is also one of the conditions that must be ensured at national level. Agriculture is the biggest consumer of water: 70% of the world sweet water is used for agricultural production, a large share for food production. Most of the cropping area of Uzbekistan is under irrigation; hence efficient use of irrigation water is a major challenge.

Agriculture is the leading sector of the Uzbek national economy. Uzbekistan has favourable conditions for a rich agricultural production such a grains, vegetables, fruits and cotton, etc. Uzbekistan is in the lucky position of being the bread basket of Central Asia. It is producing 7,6 Million tons of wheat a year on 1,4 mln. hectares of irrigated land in 2013. Food security and water are closely linked. No food can be produced in the absence of water. Our country is in the lucky position of being the water castle of Europe; we feel privileged to share our experiences with you. Water is close to our heart and a key resource for Central Asia. We are therefore contributing to the water management sector in Uzbekistan for the last 15 years.

Switzerland began contributing to the reform of the irrigation sector in Central Asia in 2001, investing 21 million CHF. Our activities regarding irrigation mainly concentrate on the Fergana valley, the fertile valley producing about one third of Central Asia's irrigated agricultural output. With your support our projects aim at enhancing water productivity and reducing loss of irrigation water. Over the past years, considerable results have been achieved as for example successfully identifying and addressing the water-related problems and issues at plot level and in establishing water user associations in the Fergana valley. Our programs are promoting Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM). .

This approach stands for a process which promotes the coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources, in order to maximize the resultant economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems.

The access to water resources and services has improved on 430,000 ha of irrigated land in the Fergana valley and other areas of Uzbekistan. Project outcomes are: increased water

saving, decrease drainage flow and soil salinity as well as reduced water-related tensions and disputes between farmers.

This has helped to improve agricultural productivity and consequently led to increased income as well as food security for about three million rural people. The amendment to the Water and Water Use Law incorporating the key IWRM principles in 2009 by the Uzbek government was a future milestone in improving water productivity.

Due to climate change, food security will be a major challenge also for Uzbekistan. Issues as glacier melting, irregular water flows (floods) and water shortage (droughts) are among others consequences of climate change. For this reason, Switzerland is active in Disaster Risk Reduction, contribution towards preparedness activities and the mitigation and prevention of disaster risks.

Water is a precious good and will increasingly be so in the future. The crucial way to tackle these challenges is cooperation between the different actors involved. Learning from each other and proposing sustainable and innovative solutions will foster the welfare of the population, who are the first beneficiary.

Today, we have the opportunity to look at a range of successfully projects which made a real difference in people's life. Making a difference was only possible thanks to the strong commitment and partnership of both Uzbekistan and Switzerland.

Switzerland strongly supports a world free of hunger. If topics as food security and access to water are not addressed in common effort and with the intensity deserved, the vision of eradicating poverty will not come true. In the name of Switzerland, I would like to congratulate you for the great success in the water sector.