



## **Presentation of Swiss Voluntary National Review**

**at the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development HLPF**

**New York, 17 July 2018**

**by H.E. Federal Councillor Doris Leuthard  
Minister of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications**

**and**

**Sophie Neuhaus  
National Youth Council of Switzerland**

---

Madame President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC),  
Excellencies,  
distinguished delegates,  
ladies and gentlemen

Since its adoption in 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has driven Switzerland's commitment to sustainable development.

From the outset, Switzerland was a driving force behind the 2030 Agenda. At the same time, we have always advocated for a robust mechanism for follow-up and review. At the HLPF 2016, Switzerland already presented its *initial steps* to implement the 2030 Agenda. Today, I am honoured and delighted to present the current status of implementation.

Sustainable development and the protection of the environment in particular has been of high importance to Switzerland for a long time:

- About 150 years ago (1876) we introduced a law protecting the forests in our mountains, as we witnessed the negative impact of deforestation.
- Thanks to the purification plants existing all over the country, the quality of the water in our rivers and lakes is excellent today compared to sixty years ago.

Protection of the environment and other aspects of sustainable development are today underpinned by different articles of our federal constitution, and many laws. Last year, the Swiss government submitted a new Energy Act, the so called Energy Strategy 2050, for popular vote, and it was accepted by a solid margin. The Act follows the objective of

- Increasing energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy and
- A step by step withdrawal from nuclear energy.

Since 1997, the Swiss government has a Sustainable Development Strategy with priorities and concrete actions to foster environmentally sound economic and social development in Switzerland. The Strategy is renewed on a quadrennial basis, with the current one valid until 2019.

Immediately after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the Swiss Government commissioned a comprehensive baseline assessment and gap analysis of the implementation status at federal level. The analysis concerned all 169 targets of the Sustainable Development Goals and covered both Switzerland's domestic and international contributions.

Based on the monitoring system that already exists since 2003, the Federal Statistical Office adapted and expanded the indicator framework for the 2030 Agenda. It indicates that among the chosen 85 indicators 39 show a positive trend, 12 show no significant evolution, 14 show a negative trend, while for 20 no conclusive assessment was possible.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As you can see, also in our report in front of you, Switzerland has already achieved several SDG targets. For example, Switzerland is free from extreme poverty (target 1.1), and there is no hunger (target 2.1). Education (target 4.1) is free, compulsory and of good quality.

The assessment conducted for this Voluntary National Review also revealed that Switzerland is on track with regard to almost all targets of SDG 3 on Health; SDG 7 on Energy; SDG 8 on sustainable economic growth and employment; SDG 9 on Infrastructure and innovation; as well as SDG 16 on peaceful and inclusive societies.

However, the stocktaking also identifies areas where efforts at national and international level beyond our existing policies are needed in order to achieve the SDGs, for example:

- with regard to SDGs 12 and 15: While the use of resources *from within* Switzerland for consumption by its population is decreasing, the use of resources *from abroad* is increasing in an unsustainable way.
- Regarding the goal on Gender equality (SDG 5), further efforts are needed within Switzerland and in our international cooperation in order to fully achieve equal pay and equal opportunities for leadership.

My government has been aware of these challenges for quite a while, of course. That is why we have launched concrete measures in order to address them:

The certificate you see on this slide actually shows the UN Public Service Award, the Swiss Federal Office for Gender Equality received this year for its engagement in the field of equal pay.

- With regard to Sustainable Consumption and Production (SDG 12), we have produced several action plans in recent years which we currently implement, for example: a Green Economy Action Plan, one on Corporate Social Responsibility, one to implement the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, etc. Furthermore, the federal government promotes the circular economy, a smoothly functioning waste management, as well as sustainable public

procurement. With regard to the recycling of electronic waste for instance, Switzerland disposes of a longstanding experience: Thanks to an anticipated recycling fee which has to be paid when buying a new product, electrical and electronic devices can be given free of charge for recycling. This results in a high return rate.

- With respect to a sustainable use of natural resources (SDG 15 and others), there is still a lot to do. The Swiss government, and more specifically my own Ministry, has launched several initiatives within the last years. For example to prevent soil erosion and depletion, revitalise watercourses, reconcile biodiversity conservation, or to sustainably manage forest areas.
  - Our policy is: voluntary action instead of regulation – in other words, encouraging the development of a green economy through best practice.
  - Also the economy has an important role to play – in combination with education and research. Worldwide innovation is the key. It's the trigger for green growth.
  - Switzerland is well known for its innovative strength. Our capacity for innovation and the quality of scientific research institutions are two of the factors that brought Switzerland to the top of many rankings. Swiss companies invest in research and development and collaborate closely with universities. As a result, the Swiss cleantech sector is growing strongly and creates jobs.
  - Over the past ten years, more than 200 cleantech start-ups have been established – for example in the field of energy efficiency in buildings. This “industry” now accounts for almost 5 percent of Swiss GDP and the number of jobs in the Swiss cleantech sector has increased by 25 percent over the past five years.
- This leads me to the climate and energy goals (SDGs 7 and 13) which remain a major task to be achieved. In order to save and conserve our natural resources, to reduce the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> and to influence climate change, the use of fossil fuels has globally to be reduced dramatically. In Switzerland, a CO<sub>2</sub>-levy on fossil combustible fuels, such as heating oil and natural gas, has been levied since 2008. In making fossil fuels more expensive, it creates an incentive to use them more economically and choose more carbon-neutral or low carbon energy sources. We are well aware that the introduction of a CO<sub>2</sub>-levy or a CO<sub>2</sub>-tax can turn out to be a politically difficult task. However, we (would) recommend that carbon pricing will be introduced at global level.

In all these fields, Switzerland is also active at international level. Our international cooperation has fully adopted the 2030 Agenda and is aligning its development and humanitarian activities with the SDGs. With all instruments and activities of our bilateral and multilateral engagement we support developing countries as well as several middle income countries in implementing the 2030 Agenda and, eventually, in achieving the SDGs.

But to give you a more comprehensive and differentiated view on Swiss achievements and challenges, I would herewith like to invite Sophie Neuhaus, our representative from the National Youth Council of Switzerland, to share her view, and the assessment of Swiss non-state actors in general, with us.

*<Comment by Sophie Neuhaus, National Youth Council of Switzerland>*

Thank you, Excellency, for giving me the opportunity to speak on behalf of the young people of Switzerland and the advisory group that has been closely monitoring Switzerland's implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The 2030 Agenda is a matter of great significance to all members of this advisory group: we support the Agenda and want to contribute to achieving its objectives. We have therefore identified three framework conditions we consider necessary to achieve the 2030 Agenda's Sustainable Development Goals. We believe that:

- the 2030 Agenda must be defined as a strategic priority with high-level institutional anchoring at all political levels.
- Resources and funding should be made available, in particular at federal level, for awareness-raising activities, research and the transfer of knowledge, as well as for concrete measures
- We must ensure policy coherence and examine the main positive and negative repercussions of all legislative and policy measures on natural resources, the populations of disadvantaged countries and future generations.

We recognise that Switzerland is on the right track with respect to a number of targets. But we still see significant challenges. In this advisory group – which represents perspectives as diverse as those of the businesses community, young people, the development and environmental sectors, and the scientific community – we have identified, with the support of the Federal Administration, 20 issues in 8 different areas where we see a need for immediate action by Swiss society to ensure sustainable development for Switzerland and by Switzerland.

These areas are:

- A society that shows solidarity
- Sustainable production and consumption
- Conservation of natural resources
- Ensuring access to care for all
- Strengthening Switzerland as a business location and the Swiss labour market
- Designing sustainable urbanisation
- Strengthening the sustainable economy
- Enhancing education and training

We are working on these issues and we also want to see Switzerland take measures to fill these gaps with us.

In parallel with Switzerland's voluntary national review, a group of civil society organisations drafted a report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Switzerland.

The 2030 Agenda represents a great opportunity for young people around the world. First, because it gives them a global perspective. The 2030 Agenda urges us to consider the impact of our individual and collective actions on our immediate environment and on the rest of the world. It calls on us to care for our neighbours and the world's oceans, even if we happen to live in a landlocked country. The rights and the participation of all are the centrepiece of the Agenda. A majority of young people in Switzerland enjoy the benefits of living in a prosperous and democratic society. The 2030 Agenda calls on us to ensure that nobody is left behind, in Switzerland and worldwide.

'Leave no one behind' is the most important demand of the 2030 Agenda. This implies that we cannot enjoy wealth while others live in want and cannot be satisfied with progress that raises average incomes but leaves many others behind. And as Switzerland's voluntary national review indicators make clear, inequality is on the rise in Switzerland. Moreover, some segments of the population are excluded altogether from official statistics – undocumented people, for example. Yet they also have the right not to be left behind. We therefore recommend that the next Swiss national voluntary review should focus more closely on the most vulnerable, take account of gender and young people, and assess the situation of people with disabilities, people with migration backgrounds and other marginalised and disadvantaged groups.

To strengthen the 2030 Agenda's roots in Swiss society, a concerted effort must be made to raise young people's awareness, enabling them to take ownership of the Agenda and implement it. A 2030 Agenda that is known and supported by a broad spectrum of individuals is an Agenda that can be implemented right across the board – which is why a thorough and substantive approach is required to raise public awareness and ensure wide participation.

The preamble of the 2030 Agenda declares: "We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path." This is a call for structural change. Furthermore, the Agenda recognises "young people as critical agents of change". Young people are therefore essential partners in the necessary transition towards a system in which the economy exists to serve society, within sustainable environmental limits.

---

Thank you, Sophie. I agree with most of the conclusions of your analysis regarding the challenges we all still face. And I agree with you that young people are the actors of change! Thank you for your engagement and to all non-state actors for their great support.

This actually leads me to quickly elaborate on *how* we implement the 2030 Agenda in Switzerland:

This Voluntary National Review actually provides an excellent opportunity to adapt, streamline and fine-tune our efforts to address all the mentioned challenges in a targeted and intensified manner. Of course, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at federal level is mainly taking place within the framework of regular sectoral policies. However, the nature of the SDGs requests us to work across sectoral silos, at all levels of government, and to invest more in multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Given the federalistic system of Switzerland, the 2030 Agenda is also being implemented at the cantonal and communal levels. Many cantons and communes have defined their own strategies for sustainable development. The federal government supports them, for example through exchange platforms and networks.

Switzerland's private sector, civil society and science community have also been committed to sustainable development for a long time. Therefore, we have involved them from the beginning of the intergovernmental negotiations on the Agenda, and they become even more important in the current phase of implementation. The Advisory Group composed of non-state actors, of which Sophie is a member, forms the institutional basis for further dialogue with the federal government and partnerships.

While I herewith reaffirm that my government remains highly committed to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs, I am very happy that many non-state actors support us in this endeavour.

Together we can multiply our results, together we reach more people, together we strengthen accountability, and together we are definitely stronger!