

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In recent years, relations between China and Switzerland have intensified considerably – a development in which I take great satisfaction. Our economic exchanges have grown impressively: Switzerland has made major investments in China; the number of Chinese tourists wanting to visit Switzerland is steadily increasing, and scientific exchanges are becoming ever more frequent.

It is also my great pleasure that the 2nd Holcim Forum for Sustainable Construction is held here in Shanghai. That the choice to hold the Forum overseas for the first time fell on Shanghai seems only natural. This metropolis, which is re-inventing themselves almost from day to day, recommends itself as the place to be when discussing issues regarding our future. But the choice is also proof of the fact that Switzerland, private or public, is eager to share know-how with China to contribute to its development.

Moreover, I would like to congratulate Tongji University, the co-organizer of the Forum, in the year of its 100th birthday. It is thus almost twice as old as the diplomatic relations between our two countries, which have enjoyed close and longstanding relations since 1950, when Switzerland was one of the first Western countries to recognize the People's Republic of China.

Sustainability touches upon the question, what world do we want our children and grandchildren to live in? Certainly, we all want them to live a better life than us. Sustainability, sustainable development, is the key to make sure that we do not live at their expense. What sustainable policy in general, and sustainable urban development in particular, means in details is an issue that is still in need of extensive discussion. Changing our actions to accommodate the requirements of sustainability will ask for negotiations between various stakeholders.

The Holcim Forum dedicated to the topic of urban transformation precisely offers the space for such discussions and reflections. Initiatives like the Holcim Foundation are very important because they offer the opportunity for communication and for the exchange of interests.

I also warmly welcome the fact that the Forum, enabled by Holcim Ltd, a significant Swiss based building materials company with over 90,000 employees in 70 countries, is held here in China because it demonstrates two outstanding qualities of Switzerland: its internationality and its contributions to raising the quality of life.

Providing an excellent opportunity for discussion and exchange, the Holcim Forum stands in a great Swiss tradition of facilitating international dialogue. Switzerland is host to numerous international organizations and conferences. Geneva is one of the world's most important centres for international cooperation and hosts the European UN headquarters. In relation to sustainability, I would like to mention that the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Environment Programme's Regional Office for Europe (UNEP) and the World Conservation Union (IUCN) are all based in Geneva. Other influential institutions include the World Economic Forum (in Davos) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in Lausanne. All in all, 25 international organizations have their headquarters in Switzerland.

The Forum will also provide an opportunity to witness the contributions that Switzerland has made to enhance the quality of urban life – achievements which relate directly to the Expo 2010's theme "Better City, better life". Switzerland's has advanced the quality of life in the city through

the implementation of innovative technologies, progressive social environmental concepts and global initiatives such as the Holcim Awards competition for sustainable construction projects.

The Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH Zurich), which houses the global Technical Competence Center of the Holcim Foundation, is ranked as the best university on the European continent by Shanghai Jiaotong University. Its Architecture Department has produced such world renowned masters as Herzog & de Meuron who designed the National Stadium in Beijing, the “bird’s nest”.

The ETH Zurich played a crucial role in the largest Sino-Swiss cooperation project on city planning: the urban development project in Kunming. This project was launched within the framework of the city partnership between Zurich and Kunming, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year.

The Kunming project encompassed a vast array of issues in urban development: heritage protection, the development of an Urban Public Transportation Master Plan with a tram line as its backbone and separate bus lanes, and the supply of drinking water.

The achievements made through this co-operation have had an effect not only in Kunming but in other cities in China as well. In 2000, Kunming was listed as one of four Chinese national pilot cities in transportation and environmental treatment.

An initiative put forward by the Swiss Federal Institutes is the vision for the “2000-watt society”. The objective of this initiative is to reduce energy consumption per household in Switzerland from the current 4900 to the global average of 2000 watts. The envisioned 2000-watt society is more than just a drastic reduction of energy consumption. It entails a vision of a society based on sustainability.

This will require substantial technical innovation, but also a change in our lifestyles. It will mean adopting a smarter way of life and rethinking current business practices, including increasing the level of professionalism in the areas of planning and investment and the operation of buildings and installations.

Several main cities in Switzerland have adopted the 2000-watt vision as a guiding principle for their long-term development, and the Federal government has commanded the elaboration of a scenario on how to realize this vision nationwide. The greater city of Basel has been designated as a pilot region for implementing the 2000-watt concept. Numerous projects in the area have sustainable urban development as their objectives; these include inner-city zones, as well as individual buildings, that are being remodelled to function as examples for a future 2000-watt society.

This is just an example of the innovative drive that a commitment to sustainability can develop. And the construction industry is the decisive lever for promoting sustainability. In many countries, and definitely here in China right now, it plays an important role in employment, energy consumption, and GDP.

In the end, sustainable construction is not only about safeguarding the earth’s resources for our children. It is very much about making our living environment healthier and thus improving our own quality of life. Switzerland will be glad to contribute as much as it can to the cooperation with China to achieve this in Shanghai, Kunming, and other cities in the country, true to the motto “better city, better life”.