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An approach to globalization modelled on nature

Presentation by Philippe Roch, Director of SAEFL

(The spoken word takes precedence)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Political tensions, wars, migration, poverty and the destruction of nature are due not to chance but to imbalances for which humans themselves are largely responsible.

More than a billion and a half people lack access to clean water supplies, and the resources on which the livelihoods of the poorest depend are being constantly degraded. Every year, 10 million hectares of irrigated land has to be abandoned and more than 12 million hectares of forests are destroyed in the tropics alone. Around 24% of the world's mammals are critically endangered. Numerous regions are undergoing desertification, depriving entire populations of any hope of development.

These problems cannot be resolved by globalization in its current form. On the contrary, this process poses grave risks to the global environment, security and development, as it is one-sided, promoting the predominance of an economic and political system over all other systems.

Dynamic equilibrium based on diversity

Nature provides us with a model of globalization that has survived for millions of years without destroying itself, or collapsing, producing in the process unimaginable quantities of goods and an infinite diversity. In the course of the evolution, whenever a single species has multiplied and reached a position of absolute dominance it has suffered catastrophic setbacks, such as food scarcity or epidemics, which downsized the population to a reasonable level.

On the basis of simple biochemical building blocks common to all living organisms, nature has diversified endlessly, creating every possible variety of shape and colour in a vast biological community whose members are all interdependent.

Predators depend for their survival on the availability of prey, but the prey species are also dependent on the presence of predators to ensure that their populations remain healthy and reasonably sized. In nature, no one species is dominant, as all are dependent on each other in a state of dynamic equilibrium based on diversity.

Principles of respect

To achieve the objectives of development, peace and security, globalization should take its inspiration from nature and adopt a few basic principles of respect and solidarity:

- **Respect for all human groups**, and the diversity of their cultures and economies, which have developed in a close relationship with their environment.
- **Respect for nature and the environment** – the home on which we are totally dependent, despite the illusions of power and independence to which we may succumb as a result of our industrial strength and our arrogance.

- **The precautionary principle**, which states that products should only be developed or activities pursued once the potential impacts have been assessed and all the necessary measures have been taken to prevent damage to the environment.
- **The principle of liability**, which also requires manufacturers and operators to take responsibility for the risks associated with a hazardous product or activity. According to this principle, polluters are required to pay for any damage that may arise, and governments and individuals should be proactive in exercising their responsibility to prevent environmental damage.
- **Respect for limits**, which involves the adoption of modes of production and consumption that are compatible with the planet's ecological capacity, together with a development policy aimed at stabilizing or even reducing the global population, by means of educational and health programmes in particular.

Restoring the balance of globalization

Globalization based solely on an economic system is doomed to failure. Globalization needs to promote development within all the various systems, creating synergies between them through open but balanced exchanges.

Economic globalization needs to become part of a broader global process which includes the development of cultural and natural diversity, environmental protection, the alleviation of poverty and the promotion of ethical values.

On the occasion of World Environment Day, I would like to define five priorities for concrete environmental action to help restore the balance of globalization:

1. **Trade and environment:** Trade and environmental systems should be of equal status, respect each other and be mutually supportive. This is the aim pursued by Switzerland in the discussions at the WTO which are seeking to define, by the end of 2004, the relationship between trade regulations and multilateral environmental agreements (Factsheet no. 1). As regards production, it is vital to ensure that, in future, relocating operations to countries with less stringent environmental requirements and lower production costs is no longer an attractive option. In this area, globalization can play an important role: by harmonizing environmental standards for production worldwide, it will be possible to prevent "environmental dumping".
2. Following the adoption of three conventions in the **chemicals** field (Basel, Stockholm and Rotterdam), we must now ensure that these conventions are well coordinated, develop new agreements on heavy metals and endocrine disrupters, and shift the onus of responsibility for health and environmental risks to the manufacturers of chemical products. (Factsheet no. 2)
3. In order to slow down and stabilize **climate change**, the Kyoto Protocol needs to be ratified and rapidly implemented, and work should begin on a new, more ambitious protocol for the period after 2012. (Factsheet no. 3)
4. In the area of **water**, it is essential to reduce wastage, particularly in the agricultural sector. Sustainable water supplies of good quality should be ensured by protecting the ecosystems that naturally capture, filter, store, and release water, such as forests, wetlands, and well-managed soils. (Factsheet no. 4)

5. In order to conserve **biodiversity**, we need to establish protected areas and use other natural resources sustainably, reaping the economic benefits of biodiversity, especially in the areas of tourism, pharmaceuticals, agriculture, water supplies and the balance of the earth's ecosystems. Populations that protect or sustainably manage forests and other natural habitats should receive compensation for services carried out in the interest of humanity in general. (Factsheet no. 5)

Finally – on the occasion of World Environment Day – Switzerland is proud to be able to provide in **Geneva** an appropriate infrastructure to accommodate numerous international organizations that are active in the environmental and development fields. I would also mention the valuable and essential role played by the diplomatic missions of 134 different countries. Switzerland will continue to make available the infrastructure that is required to preserve and strengthen international organizations in Geneva, so that their collaboration and the synergies between them can be optimized. (“Geneva” information sheet)