



Speech

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World Climate Conference 3 (WCC-3)

Opening address by President Hans-Rudolf Merz

Geneva, 31 August 2009

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the third World Climate Conference, and a warm welcome to Geneva!

Exactly four years ago, heavy rainfall in Switzerland led to flooding and landslides. Several people were killed. We need precise information, such as short-term weather forecasts or hazard maps, to have the time to act in future. This could also prevent deaths and reduce the extent of the damage.

Currently, various regions of Africa and Asia are enduring serious storms, flooding and drought. In many places, the humanitarian situation is a major concern. Many people have fallen victim to the extreme weather, many others are in danger. We need urgent advance climate forecasts and efficient early warning systems.

The consequences of climate change pose huge challenges for our economy. Long-term investments must be made. We need forecasts on the state of our environment in the coming decades. And these forecasts have to be highly detailed.

Extreme weather events and changing climate conditions affect us all. Often they result in humanitarian disasters and widespread damage. Preventive measures may avert the most serious consequences. Our conference has the aim of preventing the disasters that I have just mentioned and providing authorities with the tools they require - weather forecasts, hazard maps, early warning systems and long-term environmental prognoses.

Weather and climate forecasts form the basis for preventive action. These forecasts must be “translated” into meaningful information for decision-makers in the individual sectors such as food security, water management, health, tourism and others. It is time for a rethink of how meteorology and climatology are perceived: in order for society to make the most of climate information, it has to be regarded as a comprehensive and user-friendly service.

The future costs for the prevention of natural hazards (such as protective structures and regulating reservoirs for flood protection, nets to prevent rockfalls) in Switzerland alone have been estimated at federal level at around 500 million US dollars a year. Around the world, the costs of adapting to climate change will run to several tens of billions of US dollars every year, with more than half of the expenditure being required in developing countries. Switzerland is proposing a global CO₂ levy under the polluter-pays principle in order to make allowances for this financial burden.

A sustainable policy also requires us to tackle the root causes of the problem and substantially reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. To do this, we have to adopt an ambitious agreement in December at the COP15 in Copenhagen.

We all want our societies to be able to withstand the consequences of climate change in the long-term; all those involved will have to be able to react in good time to extreme events; scientists and experts will have to provide the information that makes this possible. At this conference, you will lay the foundations for a better future thanks to better climate information. For that you have my grateful thanks.