

# FDFA Human Rights Strategy 2016 – 2019

**Corruption and human rights**  
Corruption is a potential obstacle for nearly all human rights. The protection of human rights in the context of corruption, Switzerland's role in negotiations at the Human Rights Council and the drafting of the resolution on human rights and corruption on human rights.

**Minorities**  
The protection of minorities is an important element in all of Switzerland's foreign policy. As a country founded on the principle of pluralism and the uniting of diverse communities, Switzerland works to guarantee the protection of minorities, particularly in the context of international law.

Art. 54 Foreign relations  
Foreign relations are the responsibility of the Confederation.  
The Confederation shall ensure that the independence of Switzerland and its welfare is safeguarded; it shall in particular assist in the alleviation of need and poverty in the world and promote respect for human rights and democracy, the peaceful co-existence of peoples as well as the conservation of natural resources.  
In Myanmar, Switzerland works to provide improved food security for ethnic minorities. Similarly, in the Western Balkans,

**Human rights defenders**  
The *Swiss Guidelines on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders*, published in 2013, reflects Switzerland's commitment to help remove ever-greater obstacles placed in the way of civil society, and to provide concrete support and protection for human rights defenders (HRD). To this end, Switzerland promotes capacity-building among civil society groups and encourages the establishment of supportive legal frameworks. In Guatemala and Honduras, for example, Switzerland works with local NGOs active in the areas of dealing with the past and fighting impunity, assisting them in their efforts to improve the monitoring of human rights violations and to develop communications strategies for HRD. Switzerland seeks to improve protection for human rights lawyers in China or makes use of cultural events (International Human Rights Day).

In Tanzania, Switzerland supports public health programmes for women and children. The country also supports human rights defenders and human rights activists within the framework of its bilateral cooperation. In addition, Switzerland supports national human rights institutions and the government in preparation for the review, and for the implementation of the recommendations that were received.

**Strengthening international human rights institutions**  
Switzerland places great importance on the role of international human rights institutions. In Bolivia, Nepal, Palestinian territories, and other countries, Switzerland plays an important advisory role for national human rights institutions and government.

**Dialogue**  
Switzerland promotes dialogue with national human rights institutions in Mali, Syria, and other countries. In addition, Switzerland supports the ongoing reform process for improving the efficiency of UN treaty bodies, and provides its members with a platform for the exchange of information and opinions.

Concrete example is Syria, where Switzerland is contributing to efforts to disseminate information on international humanitarian law among the armed groups that are involved in that conflict. At the same time, it also supports the work of the Commission of Inquiry established by the HRC to gather information on violations and to bring the

**Strengthening international human rights institutions**  
Switzerland makes an active effort to strengthen Geneva as the global centre of expertise for human rights issues (see below, p. 18). For this, properly functioning and efficient institutions and bodies are essential. Switzerland organises conferences of experts (such as, since 2014, the Glion Human Rights Dialogue) devoted to preparing recommendations that can meet the consent of States on how to strengthen the role of the Human Rights Council within the UN system or to increase the impact of its work on the everyday lives of people. Switzerland also works to ensure that the subjects on the agenda of the Human Rights Council are issues of relevance to the international human rights agenda. Thus, for example, it regularly presents a resolution on the question of the death penalty. In addition, Switzerland supports the ongoing reform process for improving the efficiency of UN treaty bodies, and provides its members with a platform for the exchange of information and opinions.

Concrete example is Syria, where Switzerland is contributing to efforts to disseminate information on international humanitarian law among the armed groups that are involved in that conflict. At the same time, it also supports the work of the Commission of Inquiry established by the HRC to gather information on violations and to bring the



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA



# Table of contents

---

<b>1. Foundations and principles</b>	<b>6</b>
<hr/>	
<b>2. Current context, challenges and opportunities</b>	<b>8</b>
<hr/>	
<b>3. Strategic objectives</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>I. Defend and promote the universality, the interdependence and the indivisibility of human rights</b>	<b>11</b>
Area of action 1: Switzerland seeks to ensure effective realisation of the human rights of every individual	11
Area of action 2: Switzerland actively opposes relativism and the instrumentalisation of human rights	11
<b>II. Establish a coherent international frame of reference and strengthen existing human rights institutions and mechanisms</b>	<b>14</b>
Area of action 3: Switzerland works to establish an adequate international normative framework	14
Area of action 4: Switzerland endeavours strong international, regional, and national human rights institutions	14
Area of action 5: Switzerland supports global monitoring and implementation of human rights	14
<b>III. Strengthen the commitment and inclusion of key human rights actors</b>	<b>21</b>
Area of action 6: Switzerland works to strengthen cooperation with other states	21
Area of action 7: Switzerland is actively committed to strengthening the civil society	21
Area of action 8: Switzerland promotes respect for human rights by the private sector	21
Area of action 9: Switzerland works to ensure that the responsibility of non-state actors in armed conflicts is adequately taken into account	21
<hr/>	
<b>4. Operationalisation</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>I. Bilateral action</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>II. Multilateral action</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>III. Action plans and other reference documents</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>IV. Consideration of human rights in Switzerland's foreign policy</b>	<b>31</b>
<hr/>	
<b>5. Conclusion</b>	<b>32</b>

# Introduction

The *Foreign Policy Strategy 2016–2019*, which serves as the strategic frame of reference and time period defined for the present document, emphasises the importance of taking human rights issues into account in a transversal manner in order to ensure peace, security and prosperity in the world, and in Switzerland itself. Over the past decades, Switzerland’s foreign policy with regard to human rights has been defined in various papers adopted by Parliament and the Federal Council, which reflect the stages in our country’s development of a committed and consistent human rights policy. Those documents constitute the historical and political foundations of this strategy.

More specifically, the first Federal Council report devoted exclusively to this issue (1982)<sup>1</sup>, reaffirms Switzerland’s commitment to human rights through our country’s step-by-step integration into, and in solidarity with, the existing international normative and political framework – in particular, as a member of the Council of Europe and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The Federal Constitution of 1999 consolidates the fundamental rights in a specific chapter. By defining the promotion of respect for human rights as one of the principal objectives of Switzerland’s foreign policy (Art. 54 para. 2 Cst), the new constitution also articulates the increasing consideration given to human rights issues in foreign policy. At the international level, by joining the United Nations (UN) in 2002, Switzerland has gained new policy instruments that have enhanced its ability to influence the international normative and political framework for the protection and promotion of human rights.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Report on Switzerland’s Human Rights Policy*, 2 June 1982.

It is against this background that Parliament has granted the Federal Council with the means to reinforce Switzerland's political commitment in this area by granting a financial credit for human rights activities, as a complement to the means allocated for development cooperation and humanitarian aid. The *Dispatch on Switzerland's International Cooperation 2017–2020* will provide an opportunity to further fine tune the way in which human rights are taken into consideration in Switzerland's development cooperation and humanitarian aid policies and, more generally, in its overall foreign policy.<sup>2</sup>

The anchoring of human rights promotion in Switzerland's foreign policy is thus a relatively recent development, for which there does not yet exist a comprehensive strategic framework, despite the availability of various documents (strategies, action plans or guidelines, Federal Council reports)<sup>3</sup> dealing with some human rights issues. Our commitment in this area is in need of a more systematic, targeted, and considered approach that is consistent with all Switzerland's foreign policy activities and relations. This is the principal objective of this first Human Rights Strategy prepared by the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA). Drawing on the experience that has been gathered both in international forums and on the ground, and taking into account Switzerland's own particular opportunities, the purpose of the present strategy is, first, to define the underlying principles and objectives of Switzerland's human rights foreign policy. These have been broken down into three strategic objectives and nine areas of action, which apply to Switzerland's activities in all of the thematic areas, countries and regions where it is active. At the same time, the strategy is also designed to help reinforce the anchoring of human rights within the overall framework of Switzerland's foreign policy and the formulation of its objectives, and to accentuate the consideration given to human rights in that context.

---

2 *Foreign Policy Strategy 2016–2019*, 17 February 2016.

3 *Switzerland's commitment to human rights and to international humanitarian law*, a priority subject in the *2015 Foreign Policy Report*, 13 January 2016; *Report on Switzerland's human rights foreign policy: review 2011–2014 and prospects*, 9 January 2015

# 1. Foundations and principles

## **Values established in the Swiss political model**

Human rights are at the heart of the values represented by Switzerland and the Swiss political model, which is founded on the principles of democracy, non-discrimination, gender equality, peaceful coexistence, and mutual respect among population groups with different religious, linguistic, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Human rights make states responsible for their conduct towards their own peoples and, more generally, they render the interests of the government subordinate to those of its population.

The legal order of Switzerland, as established in the Federal Constitution of 1999, and its international commitments, particularly those deriving from the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights and the various UN conventions, give concrete expression to this circumstance by expressly guaranteeing the human rights and fundamental freedoms of every individual in Switzerland.

## **Peace, security and prosperity**

Switzerland's international commitment to human rights is based on the belief that realisation of human rights is an indispensable condition for genuinely sustainable economic and social progress in a manner that benefits every individual. Respect for human rights contributes to international security, to the security of Switzerland and of all individuals, including Switzerland's own citizens. It contributes to the prevention and transformation of conflicts, to the prevention of terrorism and violent extremism, to the reduction of poverty and the number of refugees, and to the development of all countries, including fragile countries. Respect for human rights strengthens the rule of law, increasing the stability and predictability needed for the smooth functioning of the domestic and international economies, for the protection of foreign investments by Swiss companies, and for long-term prosperity. It is part of overall efforts to promote a world founded on respect for the rules embodied by international law – an absolute imperative for a country such as Switzerland, which cannot rely solely on the balance of power to guarantee its independence, its prosperity and its security.

As current world events regularly demonstrate, a state that does not respect human rights and fundamental freedoms acts in a manner that is contrary to the interests of its own people – and is a threat, above all, to them. Such a state can also become a threat to other countries in terms of both international security and economic development. This intrinsic link between peace and security, development, and human rights, is reflected in the structure and activities of the UN, of which these three areas of action constitute the fundamental pillars. Switzerland's foreign policy follows this same line of reasoning. It is a policy that treats humanitarian action, development cooperation, security policy, promotion of peace, and the protection of human rights as mutually complementary. This means that human rights, international humanitarian law and refugee law are implemented in such a way that they reinforce one another – the implementation of the present strategy thus applies to situations where these other bodies of law apply.

## 2. Current context, challenges and opportunities

In a world where diverse global and regional powers – some long-standing, others now emerging – exist side by side, promotion of human rights, like the resolution of crises, conflicts and global challenges, has become increasingly complex. Owing largely to their growing economic influence, certain countries have established themselves as new centres of power, or aspire to such a role, and are making their presence felt with ever greater self-confidence on the international stage. The emergence of these countries as major players represents both an opportunity and a challenge for broader implementation of human rights. At the same time, more than two decades after the end of the cold war, antagonism between regional blocs persists, and may even be on the rise, particularly where human rights issues are involved. Moreover, those issues have come to be seen less and less as a matter to be discussed only between governments. Non-state actors – from civil society members to multinational corporations and armed groups – have taken on a steadily growing role.

### **Unprecedented challenges and opportunities**

A significant expansion of the existing legal and systemic human rights architecture in recent decades has established an international human rights framework that facilitates implementation of those rights. Nevertheless, this implementation remains insufficient, owing largely to the absence of a legally binding mechanism to encourage states to implement human rights and due to the fact that the perpetrators of violations go largely unpunished. Progress in information technology offers previously unknown possibilities for disseminating knowledge about human rights to the holders of those rights, and for reporting on alleged violations. There are many people in the world, however, who are unable to benefit from these rights, particularly those who live in countries where the state is no longer capable of performing its fundamental responsibilities (failed states) or who are compelled to live under the yoke of an authoritarian government. It is precisely those countries that are gaining in importance as the influence and appeal of the democratic model we hoped would become universal declines. The principle of universal application of human rights is today regularly questioned, while cross-accusations of selective application of international norms, and of their instrumentalisation for other ends,



increasingly dominate international discussions on human rights. Finally, ongoing armed conflicts, often of an asymmetric nature, have become incubators of violent extremism. Together, these developments have created an unprecedented challenge for the protection of human rights as well as for international security and the security of individual states.

## **Opportunities for Switzerland**

The Swiss political model and the values deeply anchored in its historical tradition and legal order lend legitimacy to Switzerland's human rights commitment. Among the specific values that Switzerland considers as fundamental are the rule of law, direct democracy, dialogue, consensus-building, the protection of minorities and solidarity. Switzerland's neutrality, its non-membership in permanent military alliances, and the absence of a colonial past or of a hidden political agenda provide our country with additional opportunities for making a unique contribution to strengthening respect for human rights.

While engaging in dialogue with all parties, Switzerland is creative in its efforts to discover, wherever possible, approaches that unite rather than divide. In this way it is able to assume the role of a bridge builder, while remaining faithful to its own values and interests. This approach also enables Switzerland to play a pioneering and leading role in fostering greater inclusion of the civil society, the private sector and other non-state actors in human rights efforts. Lastly, Switzerland's political continuity, reliability and humanitarian tradition – including the use of its good offices and mediation, its development cooperation activities, the historic role of Geneva in international humanitarian law and the promotion of peace and human rights, and a law-based foreign policy, together with its proven expertise in all of these areas – are other factors that exemplify Switzerland's unique qualities, qualities widely recognised around the world and particularly in demand in the current international context.

## **Consistency, priorities and added value**

Switzerland's reputation rests on the credibility of its commitment, which depends in turn on the consistency of our country's policies. Switzerland is taking human rights issues into consideration in the planning and implementation of all aspects of its foreign policy. It is also attentive to the fact that the human rights positions it adopts in its bilateral and multilateral relations, and in the various international forums, must be consistent and unified.

In order to maintain the credibility of its human rights policy, Switzerland is also mindful that its domestic policy and its foreign policy in this area must remain consistent. This

requirement can pose challenges in the face of domestic developments inherent in the nature of direct democracy and Switzerland's federal system of government, and in the face of criticism to which Switzerland is occasionally subject. Because of this, the form and substance of Switzerland's international human rights efforts must be regularly reviewed and adapted.

Switzerland takes care to define thematic, geographic and operational human rights priorities that are consistent with its overall policy objectives. These priority areas must reflect pressing and real-world human rights challenges, in response to which Switzerland's experience and commitments enable it to make a specific, credible and substantial contribution, and to bring added value to the efforts of other actors. In doing so, Switzerland also takes into account other actors already active in the domain of human rights, be they other states or organisations that do not share Switzerland's objectives in this field, or like-minded ones.

As concerns the latter, particular attention must be given to the complementarity of the efforts made by the different actors, both in terms of the development of synergies and with regard to the division of tasks. While avoiding counter-productive competition with its partners, Switzerland works to raise its profile in the field of human rights and the policy areas which it treats as priorities. When taking action, Switzerland makes use of synergies between the policy areas of humanitarian aid, peace promotion, development cooperation and human rights, as set forth, in particular, in the *Dispatch on International Cooperation 2017–2020*.

While it is necessary to maintain continuity in certain key thematic areas of Switzerland's human rights action, the setting of priorities must not hinder its ability to respond quickly in the face of needs created by the political context and to contribute added value also in emergency situations.

# 3. Strategic objectives

## I. Defend and promote the universality, the interdependence and the indivisibility of human rights

Area of action 1: Switzerland seeks to ensure effective realisation of the human rights of every individual

Area of action 2: Switzerland actively opposes relativism and the instrumentalisation of human rights

### → Area of action 1: Switzerland seeks to ensure effective realisation of the human rights of every individual

#### Realisation of human rights at the individual level

Human rights are the warrant of societies founded on the duty of respect for the rights of all individuals. Conversely, any violation of human rights infringes upon the entire system that has been put in place for the protection and promotion of such rights, and in that way undermines both that system and – in varying degrees, depending on the circumstances – the collective security of society. Switzerland is committed to ensuring the concrete and effective realisation of human rights for the benefit of every individual. Gender equality in the enjoyment of human rights is a cross-

cutting objective of this commitment. Here, Switzerland’s international activities are motivated by the same convictions that guide its domestic conduct.

#### Gender equality

Switzerland’s commitment to gender equality and the realisation of women’s rights is founded on the principles of political and economic empowerment, sexual and reproductive health, and protection against violence. Switzerland attaches high priority to the inclusion of these subjects in its bilateral and multilateral exchanges, and considers the gender dimension in all of its development cooperation and humanitarian activities. It takes an active role in promoting implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Declaration, and the gender components of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It endeavours to influence the drafting of norms and in political processes, in particular, within the UN bodies, including the Commission on the Status of Women. It provides financial and political support for the mandate of UN Women, and endeavours to make certain that the other UN agencies also integrate the gender perspective into their activities.

Whenever Switzerland provides assistance in other countries, this includes activities and projects designed to provide direct support for the victims of human rights violations. When taking a political stance or, as the case may be, when criticising breaches, it regularly endeavours to give a human face to its intervention by calling attention to specific, individual cases – be it in confidential discussions with the states concerned, in public statements, or within the framework of multilateral forums, whether acting alone or together with other states.

### **Effective implementation**

In recent years, substantial efforts have been made to codify the international human rights framework and to increase the number of states party to the various conventions. Nevertheless, despite a steady expansion of the human rights architecture, violations remain a reality, irrespective of whether they are committed deliberately, whether they are downplayed by invoking imperatives that ostensibly outweigh human rights considerations – such as national security or the fight against terrorism – or whether they are simply ignored.

In its human rights activities, Switzerland considers the effective realisation of those rights as the primary criterion for the assessment of every situation. It regularly reviews the human rights situation in each country, paying particular attention to developments in the legislation or practices of other states that may threaten or be inconsistent with the protection of human rights. In addition, Switzerland's development cooperation programmes are founded on human rights principles and take into account human rights principles and norms in order to contribute to concrete improvements.

Switzerland works to strengthen the rule of law and a system of democratic institutions capable of protecting the political and legal foundations of human rights, drawing attention to the Swiss political and institutional model where expedient. It shows particular concern for the promotion and realisation of the rights of women and is similarly active in efforts to ensure protection of the rights of members of minorities and particularly vulnerable groups. Switzerland also works to foster respect for the rights of people in situations where the need for protection is particularly necessary or urgent, as in the case of refugees and migrants. Through its financial contributions and its political dialogue with the agencies of the United Nations, Switzerland also provides support for the effective realisation of human rights via those multilateral agencies and their programmes. In discussions within multilateral forums and in talks with other states, it points out specific implementation deficits, founding its arguments on the international obligations and commitments undertaken by the states in question.

## → Area of action 2: Switzerland actively opposes relativism and the instrumentalisation of human rights

### Universality, interdependence and indivisibility of human rights

The universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated nature of human rights is enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and is reaffirmed in the 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action on human rights. Nevertheless, the process of globalisation – and the parallel fragmentation of international legal norms – has placed renewed strains on the relationship between human rights and the national sovereignty claims of individual states. The assertion of particularistic national, ethnic, linguistic, religious or cultural identities, and appeals to individual national requirements based on unique political, economic or geographic circumstances have become increasingly common. This tendency only serves to further exacerbate the tensions between the universality of human rights and national sovereignty. It threatens to reopen deep divisions in the understanding of human rights – along the North-South divide, for example – that many believed were in the process of being overcome.

#### Minorities

The protection of minorities is a core element in all of Switzerland's endeavors. As a country founded on the principles of pluralism and the uniting of diverse communities, Switzerland works to secure guarantees for the protection of minorities, particularly ethnic and religious minorities, of whom discrimination in all its forms – including economic discrimination – is the source of more than 70% of the conflicts in the world. Switzerland works to achieve realisation of the rights of those who belong to minorities in order to make certain that they are not excluded from the political decision-making process and are able to benefit fully from access to services and resources. Thus, for example, in Myanmar and the Mekong region, Switzerland works to provide improved food security for ethnic minorities. Similarly, in the Western Balkans, Switzerland supports efforts to ensure that the Roma are socially integrated and have access to education.

While mindful of the need to adapt its activities to the contexts in which it operates, Switzerland works at all times to promote and defend the universal, interdependent and indivisible nature of human rights. It is an active advocate for civil and political, economic, social and cultural rights, and for the rights of members of specific groups. It seeks out opportunities to develop initiatives relating to new aspects of those rights. Switzerland considers gender equality to be a fundamental principle underlying all its activities in these areas. It works to counter attempts to question certain human rights by invoking 'traditional values' and assertions that the latter should take precedence over the universal application of the rights in question.

Switzerland encourages substantive political dialogue with other countries as a means of promoting the universal validity of human rights. In keeping with the universality of its foreign policy, Switzerland is consistent in its response to violations of human rights and deficits in their implementation, and addresses them with equal concern and commitment in no matter what country they may occur.

## **Objective and constructive discussions**

In multilateral forums – where discussions are often characterised by mutual accusations of a selective consideration of human rights and of their instrumentalisation for the advancement of political, geopolitical, economic or security agendas – Switzerland makes every effort to defuse tensions so that debate can be conducted in a constructive manner. While remaining faithful both to its own values and positions and to the requirements of international law, Switzerland acts as a bridge builder and as a facilitator of dialogue between the differing parties. Switzerland also endeavours to build transregional alliances with regard to specific issues wherever this is appropriate.

## **II. Establish a coherent international frame of reference and strengthen existing human rights institutions and mechanisms**

Area of action 3: Switzerland works to establish an adequate international normative framework

Area of action 4: Switzerland endeavours strong international, regional, and national human rights institutions

Area of action 5: Switzerland supports global monitoring and implementation of human rights

### **→ Area of action 3: Switzerland works to establish an adequate international normative framework**

#### **Adequacy to the needs of the current context**

Switzerland's human rights policy is designed to contribute to the strengthening of the international human rights framework and to its implementation. The steady increase observed in recent decades in the number of international human rights instruments and in the number of states parties to international treaties has without question extended the protection of those rights. At the same time, however, this tendency raises questions as to the ability of the international human rights architecture to keep pace with the growing need for human rights protection in the face of violations committed on the ground, whose number is not decreasing.

Switzerland works to promote universal ratification of existing treaties and seeks to ensure that the normative framework is adequate to current and future needs. Switzerland supports efforts to fill the normative gaps in international law and to

strengthen enforcement of human rights. At the same time, it is attentive to the need to avoid conflicts of law through an unbridled expansion of differing international law regimes (for example by increased voluntary sharing of human rights responsibilities with non-governmental actors). It thus also seeks ways to prevent disputes over responsibility and authority between the numerous international monitoring bodies. Switzerland actively contributes to the drafting and implementation of non-binding instruments that can offer a frame of reference that is adequate to new human rights challenges.

### Corruption and human rights

Corruption is a potential obstacle to the realisation of nearly all human rights. Conversely, inadequate protection of human rights can facilitate the rise of corruption. Switzerland actively participates in negotiations at the Human Rights Council on the drafting of the resolution concerning the negative effects of corruption on human rights. The objective is to ensure that the human rights dimension is fully considered in the deliberations, over and above its implications in terms of criminal law. Switzerland also supports the NGO Transparency International in its efforts to draw attention to the human rights implications of corruption. In addition, Switzerland actively contributes to the fight against corruption in public services. Through support for a campaign against corruption in Romania, for example, a significant rise in the number of complaints filed by the population has been achieved.

### Human rights, conflicts and terrorism

The current international context is marked by the multiplication of asymmetrical conflicts, the major threat posed by organised crime, and the rise of terrorism and violent extremism – phenomena that must be taken into account by the international human rights governance. These developments are symptomatic of the relative weakening of the state, which in principle is primarily responsible for ensuring the fulfilment of human rights obligations. Moreover, terrorism is increasingly provoking government responses that give rise to both legal and practical dilemmas in terms of human rights law, international humanitarian law and international refugee law, and which may even include measures that are in violation of those norms. These responses thus threaten not only to weaken the international legal framework, but also, through such violations, to feed instability and radicalisation which contribute to the development of terrorism. Switzerland is thus a strong advocate of conducting the fight against terrorism in a manner that is in strict compliance with states' human rights obligations and makes the prevention of violent extremism a core focus of its action.

International humanitarian law (IHL) and human rights share certain common objectives, such as the protection of life and human dignity, but they differ in their scopes of application. The principles of human rights apply at all times and in all situations (and thus constitute the *lex generalis*), while IHL applies only in cases of armed conflict (and thus constitutes a *lex specialis*). Switzerland works to protect, invoke, and promote the substance of IHL in multilateral forums, and to ensure its implementation. At the same time, it also advocates for the principled integration into IHL of relevant regimes for the protection of persons and in particular IHL and human rights.

## → Area of action 4: Switzerland endeavours strong international, regional, and national human rights institutions

### International framework

The UN is the international organisation of reference in all human rights matters, owing in particular to the universal nature of those rights. Switzerland is actively involved in promoting human rights in the Human Rights Council, the General Assembly and its Third Committee, and in the bodies of the Economic and Social Council and other specialised agencies. It is also active in this regard in institutions whose mandate is not directly concerned with human rights questions, but which nevertheless play an important role in this connection.

In those forums, Switzerland is an active participant in the discussions concerning human rights, and in negotiations on resolutions or other political declarations with the aim of contributing within the scope of its leverage and of the influence at its disposal to promoting greater international protection for human rights. It also participates actively in deliberations on optimising the working methods, the effectiveness and the impact on the ground of those bodies and of institutions to which Switzerland contributes funding.

#### **Strengthening international Switzerland**

Switzerland makes an active effort to strengthen Geneva as the global centre of expertise for human rights issues (see p. 29). For this, properly functioning and efficient institutions and bodies are essential. Switzerland organises conferences of experts (such as, since 2014, the Glion Human Rights Dialogue) devoted to preparing recommendations that can meet the consent of States on how to strengthen the role of the Human Rights Council within the UN system or to increase the impact of its work on the everyday lives of people. Switzerland also works to ensure that the subjects on the agenda of the Human Rights Council are issues of relevance to the international human rights agenda. Thus, for example, it regularly presents a resolution on the question of the death penalty. In addition, Switzerland supports the ongoing reform process for improving the efficiency of UN treaty bodies, and provides its members with a platform for the exchange of information and opinions.

Switzerland supports efforts to mainstream human rights issues throughout the entire UN system and, more particularly, within those agencies whose work focuses on the other two pillars of the UN (peace and security, and development). The protection of human rights must be at the core of every effort to prevent conflict. Human rights violations often constitute a marker of conflict escalation. In this context, Switzerland encourages together with other states regular and more systematic exchanges between the human rights bodies based in Geneva (Human Rights Council and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Security Council so that greater consideration is given to human rights concerns in the work of the Security Council. Switzerland also sees the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as an important instrument for according greater consideration to human rights in the global governance system and the institutions it comprises.



In addition, Switzerland advocates increasing and restructuring the resources of institutions that play a key role in human rights governance, such as the OHCHR. Switzerland is also actively committed to strengthening the ability of these entities to intervene on the ground, and provides direct support for various regional and national UN offices engaged in human rights activities. In all of these efforts, Switzerland pays particular attention to the manner in which these processes can reinforce the standing of Geneva as the world capital of human rights.

## **Regional framework**

As a member of regional organisations such as the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Switzerland takes an active part in discussions on human rights and supports efforts to strengthen the existing instruments and mechanisms for their protection. As it does at the UN, Switzerland advocates providing regional human rights entities with adequate funding and seconds numerous experts to them. It takes the initiative in efforts to bolster the work of these institutions on the ground, particularly in spheres of activity or contexts where their position gives them a strategic advantage and enables them to contribute added value to the work of UN bodies.

Switzerland also works together with regional organisations on other continents, including organisations of which it is not a member. Here, it seeks to develop specifically targeted joint initiatives in its priority areas of action. In all of these efforts, Switzerland also pursues the more general objective of improving cooperation and the development of synergies between regional organisations and between those organisations and the UN.

## **National and local structures**

Finally, strengthening institutions and working in synergy with the various actors involved is also a central element of Switzerland's human rights endeavours in numerous countries where it provides active support for the national human rights architecture. This commitment is expressed both in support to state institutions in their efforts to fulfil their human rights obligations and in support granted to independent human rights institutions.

Switzerland advocates the strengthening of accountability procedures and of participation and oversight mechanisms that can have a positive influence on the overall human rights situation. This involves efforts at both the national and local levels, working with the judiciary, parliaments, national oversight bodies, the various security agencies, and government ministries responsible for

### **National human rights institutions**

The work of independent national human rights institutions continues to gain in importance. Switzerland has committed itself to a long-term effort to strengthen such institutions, for example in Bolivia, Nepal, Peru, Afghanistan, the occupied Palestinian territories, and Bangladesh. These institutions document important human rights developments, respond to complaints from the population, encourage people to learn about their human rights, and perform an important advisory role for governments and parliaments. They also constitute a key interface between international and national human rights institutions, and between the civil society and governments.

implementation of specific rights, such as those of access to sanitation, health care, or education. These efforts are mirrored in the assistance Switzerland provides for strengthening local community structures, civil society and the media so that they are capable of exerting a positive influence towards a better respect for human rights.

## **→ Area of action 5: Switzerland supports global monitoring and implementation of human rights**

The primary responsibility for ensuring the genuine and effective implementation of the obligations incumbent on states under the human rights treaties they have signed, and of their relevant voluntary commitments lies principally with the states themselves. Nevertheless, experience has shown that there is a need for international and national monitoring bodies and mechanisms in order to guarantee effective implementation of human rights. Switzerland attaches great importance to efforts to strengthen these oversight mechanisms, particularly in situations where human rights violations are of a systematic nature or where the states refuse to recognise their deficits in this area.

### **Human Rights Council**

In line with the important role it played in the creation of the Human Rights Council (HRC) and of its instruments, Switzerland supports efforts to strengthen the monitoring mechanisms of the Human Rights Council. It actively participates in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process, and encourages others to do the same. This instrument makes it possible to take inventory at scheduled intervals of the human rights situation in all member countries of the UN and to provide each country with specific recommendations in that regard. Switzerland advocates continued universal use of this mechanism. In the countries where Switzerland is active, it also supports participation of the relevant actors at the national level, and makes use of its own network of representations abroad to monitor in priority the implementation of the recommendations it addresses to those countries.

Switzerland also advocates the importance of the monitoring mechanisms established by the HRC that focus on a specific right or country (special procedures). Where called for by the human rights situation in a given field or country, Switzerland supports the creation of such mandates or the establishment of fact-finding missions, independent commissions of inquiry, or OHCHR missions in order to investigate allegations of serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. Switzerland also provides operational support for some of these mechanisms, either through the seconding of experts or by supporting specific projects.

## **Monitoring by treaty bodies**

Switzerland contributes to efforts to strengthen the status, the authority and the impact of global and regional monitoring bodies, in particular, those responsible for the implementation of specific obligations, such as the UN treaty bodies or the committees of the Council of Europe. With the aim of strengthening their ability to act and their credibility, Switzerland encourages cooperation between all relevant actors – the states parties to treaties, monitoring bodies and civil society groups – so as to preserve the independence of the monitoring mechanisms and enhance the efficiency of their working methods.

### **HRC mechanisms**

Switzerland works in close collaboration with the HRC's thematic and country-specific special procedures. Thus, for example, it has provided support for the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of assembly and association, since that mandate was established in 2010, including by funding a staff position. Switzerland also provides financial support for a joint project conducted under the auspices of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, for improving the management of public assemblies and demonstrations by security forces – a project that was established as a follow-up to the Human Rights Council resolution regularly put forward by Switzerland since 2011 concerning respect for human rights in the context of peaceful protests. Collaboration with national actors is also crucial to strengthening the international monitoring of human rights. Switzerland is thus active in efforts to ensure implementation of the recommendations from international mechanisms at the national level. Within the framework of the UPRs of Bolivia and Tajikistan, for example, it supported national consultation procedures between NGOs, national human rights institutions and the government in preparation for the review, and for monitoring implementation of the recommendations that were received.

## Judicial entities, responsibility and accountability

A commitment to strengthening the rule of law and to fighting impunity is integral to Switzerland's human rights action. Switzerland is actively involved in efforts to improve the working methods of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) and

### Dealing with the past in the Western Balkans

Switzerland supports right-to-know initiatives for the documenting, archiving and identification of DNA as an aid to discovering the fate of persons reported disappeared. Simultaneously, it also supports the work of national and international judicial authorities by providing, among other things, assistance to victims and witnesses. In doing so, Switzerland focuses particularly on capacity building as a means of ensuring the independence of the judiciary – an indispensable prerequisite for the establishment of a resilient society. Switzerland also actively supports efforts to create and maintain inclusive and innovative government mechanisms designed to address in a holistic manner the challenges of dealing with the past. The identity conflicts at the root of the wars in the region during the 1990s have still not been fully resolved. Particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Switzerland considers it a matter of primordial importance that greater efforts be made to ensure there is no recurrence of past atrocities and to encourage public discussion and open criticism of what occurred.

supports continuation of its reform process. The ECHR system, which allows for the submission of applications to the Court by private individuals, is the only existing regional human rights procedure with binding legal effect. It provides individuals, also in Switzerland, with an unparalleled system for protecting their rights.

Switzerland works also to strengthen the bodies with international jurisdiction in criminal matters. It encourages states to accede to the competent bodies, and thus seeks, for example, to increase the number of states parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Switzerland also supports the work of ad hoc and hybrid tribunals, both national and international, that are

vested with the authority to issue enforceable judgments, and promotes execution of their decisions. Where national mechanisms prove ineffective, Switzerland encourages the referral of urgent cases to the International Criminal Court.

In order to provide effective remedies for serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, Switzerland actively promotes the establishment of fact-finding missions and initiatives for providing reparations, which are designed to protect the rights of victims and to recall the obligations and duty of states to prevent violations. It works together with partner countries to promote and accompany legislative and institutional reforms designed to strengthen mechanisms for assigning responsibility, providing access to justice, and ensuring accountability – all within the larger overall framework of its efforts to promote the rule of law and democracy. Finally, Switzerland complements its action in these areas to reinforce human rights monitoring through a strong stance in favour of the fight against impunity.

### III. Strengthen the commitment and inclusion of key human rights actors

Area of action 6: Switzerland works to strengthen cooperation with other states

Area of action 7: Switzerland is actively committed to strengthening the civil society

Area of action 8: Switzerland promotes respect for human rights by the private sector

Area of action 9: Switzerland works to ensure that the responsibility of non-state actors in armed conflicts is adequately taken into account

#### → **Area of action 6: Switzerland works to strengthen cooperation with other states**

##### **Corporation with key states**

States continue to play a central role in the international human rights architecture, which is founded upon a community of sovereign states which bear the principal responsibility for the protection and promotion of the human rights of their respective population. Nevertheless, owing largely to their growing economic influence, certain countries have established themselves as new centres of power, or aspire to such a role, and are making their presence felt with ever greater self-confidence on the international stage. Their role in the management of global issues, in the resolution of crises, and in the discussion on human rights, continues to expand.

In this context, Switzerland must make use of the existing opportunities for cooperation on human rights issues with other states, including, in particular, the permanent members of the UN Security Council, other states with regional influence and the capacity to

##### **Human rights dialogues**

Switzerland deploys a wide range of policy instruments in the conduct of its bilateral human rights cooperation activities. The means used are chosen in accordance with the policy opportunity, the context of the bilateral relationship in question, and the availability of resources. Switzerland thus conducts bilateral human rights dialogues (see p. 28) with selected countries (in 2015: China, Nigeria, Russia, Senegal, Tajikistan and Vietnam). Switzerland also initiates exchanges on human rights policy with countries whose international influence in this area is becoming increasingly important – such as South Africa, Mexico, Brazil and Poland – while firmly anchoring these exchanges in the overall policy framework of the bilateral relation in question. Switzerland favours, as a matter of principle, an approach based on dialogue. Nevertheless, it does not hesitate to respond more critically in certain cases, with the use of diplomatic demarches that complement other policy instruments and are carried out in accordance with a case-by-case assessment of the situation.

play a pivotal role in international discussions, and emerging economies. In order to increase the efficacy and impact of its efforts, Switzerland also continues to seek enhanced cooperation with like-minded countries, in particular, with those whose international leverage is greater than its own. In addition, Switzerland's development cooperation and humanitarian aid enable it to assume an active role where protection – including the protection of human rights – is most urgently needed, particularly in fragile contexts.

### **Universality of Switzerland's commitment**

Switzerland also addresses human rights issues when dealing with countries with which cooperation is more difficult – owing, in particular, to their poor record in this area, which they deny. In such circumstances, Switzerland pays specific attention in remaining even-handed in its dealings with countries from different regions of the world. Whenever possible, Switzerland finds such cooperation in the field of human rights on a privileged bilateral relationship that has already been established.

### **→ Area of action 7: Switzerland is actively committed to strengthening the civil society**

#### **Necessary complement to the state**

Human rights policy is today less and less considered as a matter to be dealt with solely between governments. This being the case, it is in Switzerland's interests to cooperate with the full range of actors capable of contributing both to greater respect for human rights and to their adequate promotion. Foremost among these is civil society and the various groups around which it is organised, and which help to make its voice heard (non-governmental organisations (NGO's), interest groups, local or religious communities, academic circles, the media).

Switzerland recognises the crucial importance of an independent civil society, whose role is to maintain a constant watch over the activities of their government, to make it accountable, and to maintain a critical attitude towards it. In addition, civil society organisations can play an important role as a liaison between the concerns of the population groups they represent and the government. Civil society thus plays a central role in monitoring the implementation of human rights, promoting them and furthering their dynamic development.

## Strengthened participation and cooperation

NGOs are important operational and political partners of Switzerland at both the bilateral and the multilateral levels. Switzerland routinely includes civil society in all of its bilateral human rights cooperation activities. It supports greater participation of civil society representatives in multilateral forums and works to strengthen their inclusion in human rights governance decision-making processes. It encourages NGOs to attend and to participate directly in the discussions of multilateral organisations – particularly in Geneva – and provides them with assistance for that purpose. It also provides financial support for NGOs based in Geneva, whose presence contributes to the dynamism and effectiveness of the human rights bodies headquartered there.

When working in the field, Switzerland seeks to acquaint itself with all of the civil society actors in the context of their activities. It supports them in capacity-building and facilitates their networking efforts, both within their own countries and regions and with Swiss civil society. It contributes to the dissemination of knowledge concerning human rights, making use of, and providing support for, such instruments as cultural events, film, and human rights education. It supports the development of structures that favour involvement of the young and the preparation of new leadership within NGOs. In all of these activities, Switzerland is aware of the challenges that can be entailed in cooperation activities with civil society. This is particularly the case where civil society organisations present themselves as organisations independent of government control, but are in fact being used as a vehicle by a government. Difficulties are also encountered in cases where NGOs do not truly represent society, or where cooperation activities can themselves place civil society groups in jeopardy by exposing them to government reprisals.

## Protection of human rights defenders

Switzerland recognises the crucial and positive role played by individuals who actively commit themselves to promoting respect for human rights, whether in Switzerland or in other countries. It strongly supports the active involvement of human rights defenders, both at home and abroad, and their

### Human rights defenders

*The Swiss Guidelines on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders*, published in 2013, reflects Switzerland's commitment to help remove ever-greater obstacles placed in the way of civil society, and to provide concrete support and protection for human rights defenders (HRD). To this end, Switzerland promotes capacity-building among civil society groups and encourages the establishment of supportive legal frameworks. In Guatemala and Honduras, for example, Switzerland works with local NGOs active in the areas of dealing with the past and fighting impunity, assisting them in their efforts to improve the monitoring of human rights violations and to develop communications strategies for HRD. Switzerland seeks improved protection for human rights lawyers in China or makes use of cultural events (International Human Rights Film Festival and Forum on Human Rights in Geneva) to highlight the work of HRDs. In Tanzania, Switzerland promotes, with the support of civil society, efforts to establish greater transparency for public health services. Similarly, through targeted programmes for strengthening the media and media freedom, Switzerland contributes to efforts to give the people of the country a greater voice in public affairs.

work with multilateral bodies without risk of reprisals. Switzerland is active politically and diplomatically, and through the conduct of various programmes and projects, to provide protection for human rights defenders. It works to defend the room for manoeuvre and freedom of action of human rights defenders and civil society whenever they are confronted by obstacles.

## → **Area of action 8: Switzerland promotes respect for human rights by the private sector**

### **Role and responsibility of business**

As home to the headquarters of some of the largest multinational corporations and sports federations in the world, Switzerland has a particular duty to encourage respect for human rights by members of the private sector. It expects all entities domiciled on Swiss territory to respect human rights in all of their activities, in particular in their operations abroad in zones affected by conflicts or in complex or fragile contexts.

In a world where there are multinational companies whose sales revenues rival the gross domestic product of some of the largest economies in the world, no endeavour to ensure effective protection of human rights can ignore the private sector. The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights constitute an internationally

#### **International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers (ICoC)**

The ICoC is a voluntary, multi-party and inclusive initiative that was launched in 2010 together with its control-mechanism, the International Code of Conduct Association (ICoCA), an association incorporated under Swiss law. The latter comprises mechanisms for monitoring and certification, along with a system for handling complaints. Based, notably, on the terms of the 2008 Montreux Document on private military and security companies, the ICoC establishes principles of respect for human rights and international humanitarian law. A key factor in its success is the growing number of governments that contract security service providers that have joined the ICoCA as well as the consideration given to the ICoC in the national legislation of different countries. In Switzerland, for example, the Federal Act on Private Security Services provided Abroad makes membership in the ICoCA compulsory for companies based in Switzerland or hired by the Confederation for assignments in complex environments.

recognised framework that establishes the responsibility of private companies to respect human rights. States, citizens, consumers and investors increasingly expect all companies, and especially transnational corporations, to respect not only the rights of their employees and of consumers, but also the human rights of individuals affected by their activities and of the communities where they conduct their operations. Moreover, through their employees, companies are legally bound by international humanitarian law whenever they conduct business in the context of an armed conflict. At the same time, by taking into account in their business planning the – real or potential – negative human rights impact of their activities, companies



are also able to limit risks, create new markets, and respond to the expectations of consumers, investors and employees. Switzerland encourages taking these different matters duly into account, both in the appropriate international forums and in its bilateral exchanges, notably by systematically including the issue of business and human rights on the agenda of the political and economic consultations and of the human rights dialogues.

### **Multi-stakeholder dialogue**

Switzerland works to advance the principles that promote respect for human rights in private sector activities. It supports implementation of the UN Guiding Principles and multi-stakeholder initiatives that focus on specific industries. It is active in efforts to raise the awareness of private companies of the importance of their responsibilities in this area. It encourages and facilitates dialogue between the private sector, civil society, academic institutions and governments, seeking ways to implement sustainable solutions for strengthening the contribution of business to respect for human rights and international humanitarian law, to peace and to stability, while maintaining a framework that is favourable to investment and sustainable development.

Switzerland seeks to contribute to the search for practical and realistic solutions for ensuring respect for human rights and international humanitarian law and to provide guidance for companies – particularly those operating in fragile contexts or in zones of armed conflict – to help them meet this objective. Switzerland also takes the view that, in its activities in the field, increased efforts should be made to pool its own resources and expertise with those of private enterprise, in particular, through public-private partnerships.

### **→ Area of action 9: Switzerland works to ensure that the responsibility of non-state actors in armed conflicts is adequately taken into account**

#### **Challenge to the international order**

The question of the approach to take in dealing with armed non-state groups is a subject of debate in all international forums. On the one hand, these actors exercise a growing influence on international politics and often operate beyond the bounds of existing national and international legal structures, most notably terrorist networks and organised crime. On the other hand, as parties to conflicts they are subject to the obligations imposed by international humanitarian law. From the perspective of the victims, it makes little difference whether responsibility for the

### **Dialogue with armed groups**

Switzerland is participating in efforts in Columbia and Mali to mediate and promote dialogue between all parties involved, including armed groups, in order to ensure that respect for human rights is included as an integral part of the transformation of those conflicts. In keeping with the FDFA's *Strategy on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflicts 2013–2017*, Switzerland also seeks to promote dialogue with non-state armed groups in order to improve the protection of civilians and, in particular, to guarantee that they have access to humanitarian aid. A concrete example is Syria, where Switzerland is contributing to efforts to disseminate information on international humanitarian law among the armed groups that are involved in that conflict. At the same time, it also supports the work of the Commission of Inquiry established by the HRC to gather information on violations and to bring the perpetrators to justice.

injustice they suffer lies with a state or non-state actor.

Switzerland takes an active part in international discussions concerning the responsibility of non-state actors for violations of human rights and of international humanitarian law, and on ways to define that responsibility more precisely. It advocates recognition of the responsibility that international humanitarian law imposes on armed groups, including terrorist groups, when they are parties to armed conflicts. These issues arise with particular urgency in situations where no state has the de facto ability to monitor

and guarantee respect for human rights. In view of the rising number of these situations, Switzerland endeavours to engage in dialogue with all parties with the aim of contributing to improving respect for international humanitarian law and human rights, strengthening human security, and achieving conflict transformation. It also endeavours to contribute constructively to multilateral discussions that focus increasingly on non-state armed groups. It attaches particular importance to ensuring that human rights abuses committed by non-state armed groups are dealt with in an adequate manner, without minimising or questioning the primary responsibility of states for the protection of human rights.

# 4. Operationalisation

## I. Bilateral action

Switzerland's bilateral action is undertaken with the dual objective of encouraging concrete improvements in the human rights situation in partner countries and of constructing transregional alliances and coalitions that can increase its political leverage. At the bilateral level, and within the limits of its possibilities, the aim of Switzerland's human rights policy is to influence political decision-makers and to support actors capable of contributing to an improvement in the situation, advancing the cause of greater respect for human rights and better protection of individuals in the country in question. Switzerland's network of representations abroad (embassies, cooperation offices and consulates) plays a key role in the implementation of these efforts.

### **Bilateral exchanges**

As a general rule, human rights issues are addressed in all of the FDFA's bilateral exchanges with other countries. This may be done in the form of separate exchanges focusing on human rights within the overall framework of bilateral political consultations, or may constitute a specific chapter of those consultations. Policy dialogues conducted with development cooperation partner countries also provide an opportunity to address human rights issues. Switzerland also conducts bilateral exchanges on multilateral and international human rights issues at the expert level.

Where circumstances demand, Switzerland adopts ad hoc bilateral measures in response to concrete violations or other specific developments. It also endeavours to incorporate the question of respect for human rights also in bilateral cooperation activities whose primary focus is on other matters, such as trade, migration or legal issues.

## **Human rights dialogues**

With some countries, Switzerland structures its exchanges on human rights issues as *human rights dialogues* – separate discussions held at regular intervals and devoted specifically to human rights questions. It adopts this framework in countries where the government has displayed a willingness to engage in a serious, critical and constructive exchange on the subject and where there is a bilateral and multilateral interest in cooperation of a more general nature, also in areas other than human rights. As measures designed to accompany these structured dialogues, Switzerland finances exchanges of experts and projects on the ground whose purpose is to promote concrete improvements in the domain of human rights. Inclusion of civil society groups in some of the activities carried out under the auspices of a human rights dialogue is, for Switzerland, an indispensable prerequisite for the use of this instrument.

## **Cooperation programmes and projects**

In most cases, Switzerland's development commitment takes the form of strategic cooperation on a country-by-country or regional basis, which normally involves all entities of the Swiss government and includes operational means. Programmes and projects carried out within that framework may be implemented by the government of the country concerned, an international organisation, civil society, the private sector, or in conjunction with one or another of these actors. These cooperation programmes are conceived as long-term measures and are intended to contribute directly to the remediation of structural deficits in the protection of certain human rights. In addition, Switzerland supports projects and carries out other initiatives more flexible in nature and designed for the short or medium term in order to respond to new opportunities as they arise and to reinforce the effectiveness of its policy instruments.

## **II. Multilateral action**

Multilateral institutions constitute for Switzerland an essential foreign policy instrument. By their very nature, they provide an opportunity to build coalitions with other actors and thus to amplify the scope, the leverage, and the effectiveness of Switzerland's own endeavours. Participation in multilateral forums strengthens and complements our bilateral human rights efforts, and vice versa. Switzerland is among the ten principal donor countries to the OHCHR and to the most important international development agencies, whose role is key to the development and implementation of human rights norms.

## **Inclusive engagement**

Switzerland regularly takes the initiative within the formal framework offered by multilateral forums and is an active participant in their work. It also grants targeted support to various bodies and mechanisms that are part of the multilateral human rights system. In addition, Switzerland promotes ad hoc diplomatic initiatives that are undertaken outside the formal institutional framework, or are of a voluntary nature, whose purpose is to provide platforms for reflecting on a given subject, to strengthen protection of human rights in a specific area, or to promote and provide better protection for women's rights. In its multilateral policies, Switzerland includes and consults with all of the relevant stakeholders, in particular, civil society and the private sector.

## **Geneva, world capital of human rights**

Switzerland devotes particular attention to strengthening the role of Geneva as the world capital of human rights, which also provides an important vehicle for increasing the impact and visibility of Swiss human rights policy. Geneva plays a major role in the development of human rights standards and international humanitarian law. It also offers multiple platforms for exchange between the key actors in international human rights governance. The OHCHR is headquartered in Geneva, which also serves as the venue for most regular sessions of the UN treaty bodies. Moreover, with the creation of the Human Rights Council in 2006, Switzerland became, for the first time, permanent host country to a major UN body. The dynamism of the local academic community, the hundred or so human rights NGOs based or represented in Geneva, and the presence of a strong private sector economy have also helped to cement Geneva's position as a leading centre of human rights policy debate. Switzerland works actively to further develop Geneva's role and influence in the area of human rights. When necessary, it also takes steps to defend this strategic advantage against the growing competition from other countries, particularly of the global South that seek to attract human rights activities to their shores as they are aware of the political appeal and development potential of this domain.

## **Universal consideration of human rights**

Lastly, Switzerland supports efforts aimed at firmly anchoring the commitment to human rights in all international cooperation activities and within the entire UN system. In dealing with the major current and future challenges, such as migration and the environment, Switzerland advocates an approach that invariably takes into consideration human rights concerns. Switzerland also seeks to ensure that organisations or multilateral forums whose primary focus is not on the promotion of

human rights nevertheless perform their mandates in a way that positively affects the human rights situation. Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which will serve as the frame of reference for development cooperation in the coming decades, must also be considered as a valuable vehicle for strengthening the protection of human rights.

### **III. Action plans and other reference documents**

This strategy outlines the overall principles of Switzerland's human rights commitment. It will be supplemented by the formulation of concrete measures and the definition of specific objectives in the various thematic areas/countries/regions where Switzerland is active, in keeping with the priorities that are established.

These specific measures and objectives are set forth in various types of reference documents. In some cases, these may be strategic or operational tools devoted to themes specifically linked to our human rights commitment, or of which human rights are a central element. In other cases, they can take the form of strategies concerning specific countries or regions, which provide the guidelines for Switzerland's activities in those contexts, and in which the promotion of human rights is but one of many aspects taken into consideration. These cooperation strategies reflect objectives and plans as they are defined at the national level and are very much context-oriented. Finally, reference documents that deal in greater depth with a specific aspect of the implementation of Switzerland's human rights policy, such as diplomatic demarches, will also play an important part in the operationalisation of this strategy.

In future, more explicit consideration will be given to the fundamental principles and objectives of Switzerland's human rights commitment when there is a revision of existing strategies concerning a theme, country, or region, and in the drafting and implementation of future reference documents of this kind.

## **IV. Consideration of human rights in Switzerland's foreign policy**

As part of the step-by-step process of anchoring human rights issues in Switzerland's foreign policy principles and objectives, the present strategy is designed to provide a framework capable of giving further impetus to the mainstreaming of human rights issues in the implementation of Swiss foreign policy as a whole.

In concrete terms, the day-to-day implementation of the strategy is to be accomplished through consistent use of the existing coordination instruments and through optimisation of the consultation process between the various offices of the FDFA and with the other departments active in foreign policy. Interests relating to Switzerland's human rights commitment must be fully integrated into internal decision-making processes. The consideration given to them must be fine-tuned when weighing Switzerland's interests and different foreign policy objectives in a given situation, particularly in cases where conflicts exist between those different interests. In such situations, and more generally, the objectives set forth in the present strategy should serve as general guidelines that can be of assistance in the decision-making process and add a further dimension to the context analysis that precedes implementation of Switzerland's foreign policy decisions.

As a complement to implementation of the present strategy, the FDFA will continue to take measures for human rights awareness-raising and capacity-building among FDFA staff members. Human rights training, both in general and with regard to specific themes, will therefore be expanded at all career levels within the FDFA.

# 5. Conclusion

Switzerland's commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights is anchored in the country's legal order and integral to its tradition. This strategy provides a frame of reference for the systematic fulfilment of Switzerland's commitment in that area in keeping with three principal objectives:

- **Defend and promote the universality, the interdependence and the indivisibility of human rights:** Switzerland seeks to ensure effective realisation of the human rights of every individual and actively opposes relativism and the instrumentalisation of human rights
- **Establish a coherent international frame of reference and strengthen existing human rights institutions and mechanisms:** Switzerland works to establish an adequate international normative framework and endeavours strong international, regional, and national human rights institutions. It supports global monitoring and implementation of human rights
- **Strengthen the commitment and inclusion of key human rights actors:** Switzerland works to strengthen cooperation with other countries and is actively committed to strengthening civil society. It promotes respect for human rights in the private sector and works to ensure that the responsibility of non-state actors in armed conflicts is adequately taken into account



In Switzerland itself, protection of human rights is indispensable to the realisation of direct democracy, for it is on those rights that the liberty and security of every individual are founded. Internationally, the protection of human rights contributes to peace and international security, to the prevention of conflicts and violent extremism, to sustainable development and to prosperity. It is also in our own country's interests. In all of Switzerland's actions, human rights constitute an integral part of its policies.

The present strategy will be subjected to a review upon completion of the initial period that it is intended to cover. That review will be carried out jointly by the internal services of the FDFA and external experts, who together will form an advisory committee on FDFA human rights policy. The review will conclude with recommendations for amendments to the present strategy after 2019, which may also serve, if appropriate, as a basis for the drafting of a foreign policy human rights strategy on behalf of the Federal Council.





## **Impressum**

### **Editor**

Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA  
3003 Bern  
[www.eda.admin.ch](http://www.eda.admin.ch)

### **Layout**

Visual Communication FDFA, Bern

### **Specialist contacts**

Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA

- Human Security Division HSD, [pd-ams@eda.admin.ch](mailto:pd-ams@eda.admin.ch)
- Directorate of International Law DIL, [dv@eda.admin.ch](mailto:dv@eda.admin.ch)
- Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC, [southasia.sekretariat@eda.admin.ch](mailto:southasia.sekretariat@eda.admin.ch)
- United Nations and International Organisations Division UNIOD, [pd-aio@eda.admin.ch](mailto:pd-aio@eda.admin.ch)

Bern, 2016