SWITZERLAND – Summit for Democracy – Written Statement

Democracy is a defining and uniting element of Swiss political identity. It has its roots in early local democratic governance in the Middle Ages and the liberal constitution of modern Switzerland in 1848. The Swiss political system is characterized by two important features: federalism and semi-direct democracy, which allows citizens not only to elect its representatives, but also to vote via referendum on concrete issues. To this day, Switzerland remains a vibrant participatory democracy on all three levels of government.

Based on its constitution and federal law, Switzerland promotes democracy abroad. As the Swiss Foreign Policy Strategy 2020–2023 sets out, "Swiss foreign policy serves to both protect and promote freedom. This relates to Switzerland's self-assertion as a nation but also its constitutional mandate to promote democracy, the market economy, and the liberal international order".

As such, the Swiss approach towards the promotion of democracy is a principled one— not against someone, but for democracy. Switzerland is convinced that democracy can bring justice and freedom for individuals as well as peace, stability, and prosperity among nations. Despite the many challenges they have faced, democracies have proven to be resilient and capable of delivering for their citizens.

During this year of action and beyond, Switzerland will continue its support of initiatives contributing to the three overarching themes of the Summit for Democracy. Given Switzerland's federal nature and vibrant democratic culture, many initiatives for fostering the development of a democratic society are taken at the sub-national level. These do not form part of the commitments described below, which are limited to the federal level.

Defending against Authoritarianism

Upholding Transparent and Credible Elections

In its Foreign Policy Strategy, Switzerland is committed to upholding inclusive, transparent, and credible elections and to supporting electoral processes through

preventive diplomacy, dialogue facilitation, and mediation at the request of local actors. Furthermore, Switzerland focuses on the facilitation of voluntary codes of conduct between political parties and other relevant actors in the electoral process to prevent electoral violence.

Digital Democracy

Switzerland is committed to supporting the conflict- and context-sensitive implementation of digital democracy, and to fostering civic education and issue-based political engagement as well as transparency and the accountability of the overall electoral process in developing and fragile countries. For example, Switzerland supports a project by the Swiss non-profit Politools that aims to encourage young democracies to introduce a digital application called smartvote, which is already well-established in Switzerland and contributes to transparency and better-informed political choices by enabling voters to compare their issue preferences with those of candidates and parties. Additionally, Switzerland will support the Global Forum on Modern Direct Democracy planned for this year in which digitalization will be a theme.

Addressing and fighting corruption

Enhancing Transparency Measures on Real Estate Ownership

Switzerland will improve access by competent authorities to timely information on real estate ownership.

Exchange of Expertise between Human Rights and Anti-Corruption Experts

Switzerland will, in line with measure 42 of the Federal Council's Anti-Corruption Strategy 2021–24, promote exchanges of expertise and experience among human rights and anti-corruption experts, encouraging them to get to know and use each other's international instruments.

Asset Recovery and Public Private Partnership

Combatting new and sophisticated methods to hide stolen assets is in the common interest of states and financial centers. Public and private actors have gained valuable experiences in this endeavor and, today, it is crucial that they share their expertise. On

2-3 September 2021, Switzerland organized the first of a series of expert seminars to boost public-private collaboration in asset recovery (within the framework of the Lausanne Process). Further seminars will be organized in the coming years.

E-Governance for Accountability and Participation

Switzerland is determined to combat corruption, in particular also as corruption disproportionately affects poor and vulnerable communities. With the "E-Governance for Accountability and Participation" (EGAP) program in Ukraine, Switzerland supports national, regional, and local authorities in more efficiently and transparently providing public services thanks to enhanced capacities and new e-governance policies and tools developed in an inclusive manner. Through EGAP, citizens and businesses gain better access to and make more use of public services and become less exposed to corruption.

Promoting respect for Human Rights

Freedom of Expression and Support to Free Media

Switzerland is supporting the gathering and dissemination of information that allows citizens to receive independent and quality media content as a basis for informed opinions and debates.

Starting in 2022, Switzerland will therefore support the International Fund for Public Interest Media (IFPIM), which promotes media in low- and middle-income countries in order to ensure access to trustworthy information to all citizens, in particular also the poor and disenfranchised.

Switzerland also supports the Global Forum for Media Development to establish the International Media Policy and Advisory Centre (IMPACT) which will bring together knowledge resources, leading experts, and media support organizations to ensure that assistance becomes more responsive to the concrete needs of the media in low-income and fragile countries.

Moreover, Switzerland is committed to strengthening the international legal framework and the international recognition of freedom of expression in the digital space. To that end, it is involved in various diplomatic initiatives. Particular attention is paid to the

protection of journalists, for example through new financial commitments to the Global Media Defense Fund and the OSCE Safety of Female Journalists online project. On the national level, Switzerland is currently elaborating a national action plan for the safety of journalists. Finally, as a member of the Freedom Online Coalition (FOC), Switzerland pledged to uphold and advance the Coalition's shared goals and values. The FOC in return provides Switzerland with a range of new tools to promote and implement existing human rights more effectively and to improve international collaboration.

Transparency in the Extractive Sector

Switzerland is committed to the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights by the commodity and extractive sector. The Swiss federal administration, NGOs, and the private sector have developed a practical guide that provides technical assistance to commodity trade companies in implementing a human rights due diligence system. Switzerland is also a member of the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights, a multi-stakeholder initiative that provides guidelines to extractive companies operating in fragile contexts for identifying human rights risks when working with state forces or private security companies to protect their operations and take steps to prevent human rights abuses or avoid exacerbating certain conflicts.

National Human Rights Institution

Switzerland will establish a permanent and independent National Human Rights Institution by the beginning of 2023.