



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
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# **Speech by the President of the Swiss Confederation Guy Parmelin**

**"Cultivating a resilient world like a vineyard"**

**Speech for the General Debate of the 76th United  
Nations General Assembly**

**New York, 21 September 2021**

*Unofficial translation*

Mr President of the General Assembly,  
Mr Secretary-General of the United Nations,  
Heads of State and Government,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

For most of my professional life, I have been a winegrower. Winemaking has taught me patience, perseverance and confidence. A vine takes years to grow and produce. Improving grape varieties is a subtle science to produce the best wines. You have to respect nature and work in tune with it.

Why am I talking to you about this here in the sanctuary of the United Nations?

The COVID-19 pandemic is a bit like hail or frost that can suddenly ravage vines: unexpected and destabilising. Good winegrowers live with this risk and know how to recover from such twists of fate.

The **pandemic** is a human, social and economic catastrophe that is also affecting international peace and security. Our thoughts are with all the victims, direct and indirect.

The pandemic has made us realise that we must **anticipate** future crises, be **prepared** to deal with them and **show solidarity** in order to build **a resilient world**.

Too often we get carried away by short-term thinking and the prospect of rapid gain. We need to rediscover a sense of **anticipation** and the awareness that fate may strike at any moment. What will happen next? Scientists work to identify future threats and alert us to them. They also provide us with information and data as elements of the solution. The proper management of this data is of paramount importance. This is why Switzerland is proud to be hosting the next UN World Data Forum in Bern in October.

We know the risks, we must be **prepared for** them and **invest in prevention**. We must provide ourselves with the means to achieve this. Research, **education** and **vocational training**, especially for girls and women, must be at the heart to develop access to knowledge, promote innovation and enable action. More broadly, access to knowledge and skills gives us the keys to anticipate and prepare for our future.

When hail or frost strikes, Swiss winegrowers help each other, and they call on the insurance funds which they have paid into. When a crisis affects entire regions, or even the planet, **solidarity** must be global and solutions common. The United Nations is the place where knowledge and resources are pooled. The organisation itself arose from lessons learned from past crises.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Let us continue to **defend** rules-based **multilateralism**. Switzerland is committed to an effective and efficient United Nations and supports reforms aimed at improving conflict prevention, strengthening the UN development system and modernising management methods. Switzerland has much to contribute to the challenges facing the world. Twenty years after joining the United Nations, we are ready to contribute to the work of the UN **Security Council** for the 2023/24 term.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accentuated existing **protectionist tendencies** and highlighted resilience shortcomings in global production and supply chains. Policies to promote reshoring and investment controls are therefore gaining momentum.

With the continuous acceleration of our economic processes, made possible by **technological change and digitalisation**, our societies have become complex.

As the adverse weather and fires of recent months around the world have painfully reminded us, it is clear that the climate is being disrupted as a result of human activity, and human action is also putting pressure on the biodiversity of our planet.

**Power rivalries** are worsening and armed conflicts are raging on almost every continent. International humanitarian law and human rights are violated on a daily basis, and this sows the seeds of future conflicts.

It is our responsibility to find answers before we hit the wall. The **2030 Agenda** already gives us the framework we need to achieve this goal. In view of these challenges, Switzerland would like to emphasise five points:

*First*, in order to defeat the pandemic, we must ensure that **vaccines are accessible to everyone in the world**. Switzerland is committed to ensuring fair and affordable access to vaccines, treatments and diagnostics. Our country contributes to the Vaccine Alliance and supports the COVAX AMC initiative for low- and middle-income countries with USD 155 million (CHF 145 million). As the host country of several international health organisations, including the World Health Organization, Switzerland provides resources and promotes reforms that enable effective action in this area.

*Second*, the crisis has revealed the interdependence of our modern societies and the importance of **international value chains**, particularly in essential goods. We need to strengthen their resilience without resorting to protectionist measures that threaten global economic recovery. The legal framework for international trade must work to enhance legal certainty and predictability even in times of crisis. The World Trade Organization has a key role to play here.

*Third*, **technological** developments and **digitalisation** offer solutions to many of the challenges we collectively face. In Switzerland, there is close cooperation with universities and the private sector to find innovative technological approaches for development and poverty reduction projects. Yet there are risks involved. The virtual world is not a lawless zone. In the General Assembly, Switzerland works to promote responsible state behaviour and the application of international law in cyberspace. It also participates in efforts to combat cybercrime. Geneva plays a role as a global centre for digital policy and networking for the actors involved.

*Fourth*, let us take **climate change** seriously. As the latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change shows, human activity can still determine the future course of climate. I will personally be present at COP26 in Glasgow to reaffirm Switzerland's commitment to the effective and consistent implementation of the Paris climate agreement. At the national level, Switzerland is committed to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. It is implementing concrete initiatives, such as infrastructure projects that promote the modal shift from road to rail. I call on all countries to aim for climate neutrality by 2050 at the latest and to submit ambitious climate targets for 2030. Switzerland is also committed to the preservation of biodiversity.

*Fifth*, in a polarised world, it is more important than ever to **return to dialogue**. Switzerland's International Geneva traditionally provides a neutral platform for discussion. Earlier this year, one of the events it hosted was the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF), which resulted in the appointment of a Unified Executive Authority – a first for the country since 2014 – which is tasked with preparing national elections. Switzerland is very concerned about the plight of the Afghan population. It welcomes the humanitarian conference on Afghanistan convened by the Secretary-General last week in Geneva. Switzerland is also working hard to promote international law, including humanitarian law, in order to avoid conflicts or reduce their effects. Switzerland is proud to have prepared its report on the implementation of international humanitarian law. I call on all UN member states to do the same. Such reports enable states to assess their good practices and the challenges to be faced.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Hail and frost will continue to ravage the vines in my country from time to time. Our world will continue to face crises in the future.

Let us create the means to face them together, in a spirit of cooperation and solidarity. Let's work to make the world ever better educated, more innovative, more resilient and more just.

Let's be inspired by Saype's land art, "World in Progress II", currently on display on the North Lawn. Let's take a cue from the two children building the world as they imagine it. And let us cultivate this world of ours, as I have learned to tend my vines.