



**International Technical Conference on Animal Genetic
Resources for Food and Agriculture
FOAG/FAO
Tuesday, 4 September 2007, 10 am, Interlaken**

Doris Leuthard, Federal Councillor

**Switzerland and Animal Genetic Resources for Food and
Agriculture**

Ministers,
Assistant Director-General of the FAO,
Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity,
Representatives of the canton of Bern and town of Interlaken,
Delegates,
Friends,

Welcome to Interlaken,
Bienvenue à Interlaken

On behalf of the Swiss government, I am delighted to welcome you to the beautiful town of Interlaken for the first International Conference on Animal Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture organised by the FAO. It is an honour for Switzerland to host this conference.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
As you know, there are some 800 million people throughout the world who continue to suffer from chronic malnutrition. Agriculture has a key role to play in combating hunger and helping to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Genetic resources are vital given the new challenges facing us. I am thinking particularly of climate change, cross-border diseases and food security.

The international community has become aware of this issue, and the result is the adoption of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture under the aegis of the FAO. We now need to focus on animal genetic resources, which are being eroded at an alarming rate, as shown by The State of the World's Animal Genetic Resources.

It is up to us to take action at international level in order to conserve genetic resources. Conservation alone, however, is not enough. We must also ensure the sustainable use of these resources, as far as possible through the market.

Switzerland considers it crucial that the FAO takes the lead in this. It will work in close collaboration with the international organisations concerned with particular emphasis on the Convention on Biological Diversity. The Interlaken conference is an important step in this respect. A Global Plan of Action needs to be adopted. This plan will combine the Strategic Priorities for Action which became clear during the preparation of the report on the State of the World's Animal Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.

It is also vital that your deliberations lead to the adoption of the Interlaken Declaration. This declaration will reflect the commitment of all of us to the structured management of animal genetic resources. Our aim is to achieve food security and sustainable development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Interlaken Conference is a historic opportunity for the international community.

What we must do is:

- make strategic choices with regard to the future management of animal genetic resources, and
- aim for a consensus on priority measures for the sustainable use, development and conservation of animal genetic resources.

Switzerland is aware of the importance of this meeting and of the issues you will be examining this week. By ratifying the Convention on Biodiversity, my country has undertaken to make a contribution to the conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources. Switzerland has a stock of some 90 breeds of cattle, horses, pigs, sheep and goats.

The exhibition "Biodiversity, Food and Culture: Discover farm animal diversity", organised as a fringe event to this conference and which I recommend you visit, shows you specific examples.

My country has for several years been taking steps to preserve this diversity. Support programmes have been set up for all Swiss breeds threatened with extinction, and have been given the necessary financial resources. These programmes are run by breeders' organisations and by the Pro Specie Rara Foundation, which came into being 25 years ago.

Efforts to support the diversity of animal genetic resources are not isolated cases for Switzerland. On the contrary, they are part and parcel of a coherent agricultural policy focusing on sustainability.

By means of our agricultural policy, we wish to preserve diversified production systems, maintain a natural balance, ensure the vitality of rural space including disadvantaged regions and, last but not least, bring a plus to consumers with quality products that have a lasting identity.

It is part of a broader picture in which the conservation of genetic resources has its place and the future mapped out. I hope that your visits to various regions of our country have convinced you of this reality.

An analysis of the situation was undertaken in Switzerland in 2002. The measures taken have had positive results. We have succeeded either in increasing or at least stabilising the number of livestock for all the breeds concerned.

I am aware that not all countries are in a position to provide such financial support. Our aim would be to guarantee the sustainable use of genetic resources through the sale of produce.

The measures taken in Switzerland are only a small contribution towards solving a worldwide problem, which needs the whole international community to rally round and take action.

For my country, Interlaken is an important step in the right direction. However, it is only a step. There is still a long way to go and much remains to be done. The implementation of the Plan of Action will require financial investment, which is an issue you will also be discussing.

In this regard, I can assure you that Switzerland will continue to support FAO efforts and work alongside the appropriate international authorities. We all need to redouble our efforts towards guaranteeing the conservation and sustainable use of animal genetic resources and ensuring the sustainability of these steps.

Finally, I would like to extend my thanks to all those who have contributed in some way to the organisation of this conference. Many of them are here with us today. I am thinking in particular of the group of FAO employees. I thank the Assistant Director-General, Mr Müller, for his presence at this opening. My thanks go to each and every one of you.

I sincerely hope that your work achieves what it has set out to do and that this conference will provide the impetus for specific measures and decisions.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is our responsibility towards future generations that is at stake! Enhancing genetic resources in a sustainable manner is a challenge that we must take up as a united front!

I trust your discussions will be rewarding and wish you an excellent stay in Interlaken.