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**Bern, 13 September 2019 – Official welcome address by President Ueli Maurer at the State Visit of Indian President Ram Nath Kovind**

Mr President  
Mrs Kovind  
Excellencies  
Fellow federal councillors  
Ladies and gentlemen

Relations between Switzerland and India have long been characterised by mutual respect and appreciation. That applies to our respective political systems, economic opportunities and cultural exchanges.

- As far as the political system is concerned, we in Switzerland are proud of our system of direct democracy, and the fact that we are able to express our views on specific issues several times a year. As the world's largest democracy, India manages to hold parliamentary elections with 900 million voters. That is an incredible feat!
- Our two countries were quick to recognise the economic opportunities in our relationship. India is a priority country in Switzerland's foreign economic policy.
- In recent decades, many Swiss have taken a keen interest in Indian teachings and practices. And India's appreciation for our mountains is plain for all to see. Whether as expats or tourists, countless Indian and Swiss citizens have come to know the other's country.

At a political level, India and Switzerland created the basis for these good relations with Switzerland's swift recognition of Indian independence and establishment of diplomatic contacts in 1947, and the conclusion of our Friendship Treaty in 1948.

Last year we officially celebrated the milestone anniversary of our bilateral relations with a yearlong programme: 'Seventy Years of Swiss-Indian Friendship: Connecting Minds – Inspiring the Future'. But the aim was not so much to look back, but to look to the future.

The great risk with such celebrations though is that they are followed by a quiet phase. It is what you might see in family circles after a wedding or a big birthday celebration. This may not be too much of a problem within families, but it is something that states cannot afford to do: the world changes far too quickly for that.

That is why I am particularly delighted by your visit, Mr President! It underlines the fact that there is no lull in relations between Switzerland and India. In fact quite the opposite. Instead, we are entering our post-anniversary phase with renewed vigour.

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## Excellencies

Allow me, if you will, to mention just a few areas in which the dynamic relations between our two countries are especially important, namely trade, financial policy, environmental protection and infrastructure.

- In economic terms, India and Switzerland clearly already enjoy very close ties. Switzerland is the eighth largest investor in India and the seventh largest recipient of Indian investment. For that reason alone, we need a new bilateral investment protection agreement. I also hope that we will soon be able to conclude our negotiations on a free trade agreement, so that economic relations can be further strengthened.
- In terms of global financial policy, we observe that cooperation on taxation has improved. The Automatic Exchange of Information (AEOI) has been in force between Switzerland and India since January, and the first exchange of information is set to take place this month. This sends out a clear signal that Switzerland and India support the fight against tax evasion and tax fraud.
- One of the outcomes of this visit will be a memorandum of understanding on climate change. Above all, we want to focus on a sustainable approach to the use of natural resources and the sustainable development of mountain regions – but also on low-carbon urban development. I believe that a number of the programmes launched by the Indian government serve as a good basis for stronger cooperation in the field of environmental protection, transport and infrastructure. Switzerland and Swiss firms are reliable partners in implementing initiatives such as ‘Skill India’, ‘Clean India’ and ‘Smart Cities’.

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## Excellencies

2018 not only marked the anniversary of the Indo-Swiss Friendship Treaty, but it was above all a year to commemorate Mahatma Gandhi. His name is synonymous around the world with the desire for peace and tolerance.

The greatest honour we can pay him is to seek to live out these values in the twenty-first century. Domestically that means protecting minorities and seeking conciliation – a task, which is still relevant today for countries such as Switzerland and India with culturally diverse populations.

In international dealings, it is a matter of working for peace and non-violence. Switzerland has traditionally achieved this through its good offices and its support for conflicting parties in the search for negotiated solutions. In view of the differences that exist between many countries, we have to build bridges if we are to tackle global challenges together.

These bridges exist between Switzerland and India – in the form of ‘perpetual peace’ and ‘unalterable friendship’, as stated in the Friendship Treaty between Switzerland and India of 1948. Dear Mr President, dear Mrs Kovind, the Federal Council *in corpore* warmly welcomes you and your delegation to Switzerland! We look forward to the talks ahead, and to the time we can spend together.