

Nigeria International Business & Investors Forum

Exploiting Business & Investment Opportunities in Nigeria

20 - 21 November 2009, Universal Post, Weltpoststrasse 4, Berne

Goodwill Message by Ambassador Dr. Pierre Helg

Bern, 20 November 2009

Excellency,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

I am very pleased and honoured to be with you today here in Bern and would like to extend my gratitude to the organisers for associating me to this event.

Switzerland, located at the crossroads of the main historic communication routes in Europe, having hardly any natural resources and having a domestic market of minor relevance, considers networking as the backbone of her welfare.

We strongly encourage and welcome the initiative to this Forum, which provides an excellent opportunity to build a network, and hopefully successful business prospects for both sides. I would like to express my warm thanks in this regard to Dr. Martin Uhomobhi, the Ambassador of Nigeria to Switzerland, for doing so much to consolidate our bilateral relations and opening this Forum beside his numerous activities. Just to mention that his responsibilities as the Permanent Representative of Nigeria to the UN and the International Organisations in Geneva are regarded, in diplomacy, as among the most demanding ones. Many thanks, dear Martin; you're doing an outstanding job.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

My intention today is not to deliver a long speech, but to merely address three particular subjects: 1st the Swiss - Nigerian relations today, 2nd prospects and challenges, and 3rd some personal thoughts and experiences.

Firstly,

As regards our relations today and over the last years, Africa in general became more and more important to Switzerland from a political and economical perspective.

I am very happy to see that the relations between our two countries are excellent. Nigeria is and remains an important partner for Switzerland.

This picture is further enhanced by regular visits at the highest level: Micheline Calmy-Rey, Swiss Minister of Foreign Affairs, just had a very successful and closely followed visit to Nigeria earlier this year.

Nigeria is the second economic and trade partner of Switzerland in Africa, while most of our global companies are present on its territory and offer thousands of jobs to Nigerian citizens.

But there is room for improvement: The Swiss community living in Nigeria as well as our business relations with Africa in general are comparatively still modest and we have to deepen and consolidate them ambitiously. Our small and medium-sized companies, which produce 60% of the Swiss GNP, are still hesitating in investing in the sub-Saharan markets.

But, why? This leads me to prospects and challenges.

Many of our companies are still worried of the legal, financial and administrative environment they might face. Not documented fears and rumours regarding uncertainties, infrastructural discomfort such as insufficient energy supply, sometimes lengthy administrative procedures or security issues are keeping them away.

It should be our common interest to prove them wrong. There is a lot of work on information and persuasion to do, and this is why your Forum is so important, useful and necessary.

Nigeria is undertaking ambitious efforts in the strengthening of the judicial system, in an ambitious increase in infrastructure services, as well as in its fight against corruption. These are certainly positive signals to the afore-mentioned uncertainties of foreign investors.

As regards security and stability, Nigeria takes the leading role in promoting peace and security in this very important region and is one of the central pillars for stability in West Africa.

Investors will further welcome Nigeria's efforts in promoting ECOWAS, a key player for promoting integration and stability in the region.

Nigeria, being amongst Africa's most important oil industries, has for many years primarily focused its business on the export of oil and gas. But it knows encourages diversification and sustainability, and focuses particularly on investment possibilities in the areas of energy, infrastructure, health, education and agriculture.

We Swiss shall take advantage of these opportunities, export not only our products, but also our know-how and expertise, and act in a common interest (+ information about the Swiss Business Forum in Abuja 5-6 x a year).

Third and last

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to conclude on a personal note and tell you how much I enjoyed serving as an Ambassador to Nigeria from 2004 to 2008. I spent in your country one of the most exciting periods of my life: I had the opportunity to meet great, initiative, professional, dedicated and always very generous and hospitable citizens (+ synergies between Nigerian rhetoric and Swiss logistics). 5

I was in first line to witness the tremendous efforts undertaken by the Nigerian Authorities to promote transparency, to improve the functioning of the country and to develop and enhance the non-oil economic sector. No doubt, Nigeria is promised to a solid future and is eager and promising in strengthening its leading role on the African continent.

I am convinced that this Forum will encourage companies to begin their activities in Nigeria as it may provide quick and efficient support to newcomers, but it may also serve more experienced companies in having a direct and efficient exchange on current issues, and to discuss practical procedures and certainly offers best ways to settle and build a useful network.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Swiss Government, I would like to welcome you warmly to Switzerland and wish you a very fruitful and constructive Forum.

Thank you