

Text of Speech by Mr. Ignazio Cassis, Swiss Foreign Minister during his September 2020 visit to Tehran marking the 100th anniversary of Switzerland's diplomatic presence in Iran at the venue of Negarestan Garden Museum, University of Tehran. 6 September, 2020

Switzerland–Iran: 100 years of diplomatic presence

Surrounded by photographs bearing witness to the history of the friendship between our two countries, I am delighted to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Switzerland's diplomatic presence in Iran with you. We could not be gathering in a more fitting location: Negarestan means 'place full of pictures'. These photographs are not only art or records of a particular time and location – they are memories. The friendship between Iran and Switzerland has produced a wealth of fascinating images over the last 100 years. Celebrating our friendship surrounded by the cultural treasures of the Negarestan Museum underscores not only the great value of this long-standing partnership but also our shared love of art.

The friendly relations between Iran and Switzerland date back to 1873, when our two countries signed a treaty of friendship and trade. Switzerland was one of the first European countries to establish trade relations with Persia, at a time when the peoples and governments of both countries already held one another in high esteem. It was nevertheless not until several decades later that our two countries established official diplomatic relations. Iran took the first step in 1919 by sending a diplomatic representative to Switzerland. A few months later, Switzerland responded to Iran's hand of friendship, opening an honorary consulate in Tehran on 28 June 1920. The man at the centre of this photograph taken at the inauguration ceremony is Heinrich Hildebrand – Switzerland's first diplomatic representative to Iran. Hildebrand was the director of the Swiss Trading Company for Persia and was intimately acquainted with the country and its commercial practices and developments. He had also lived and worked in the country for a number of years, was used to its climate and was conversant with its language and culture. In short, he knew Iran and its people.

It's important for a diplomat to have a connection to the country where they serve and to have an interest in its history, its culture and above all its people. Diplomacy means showing an interest in the person across the table. And like art, diplomacy often calls for soft notes. Diplomats employ soft notes to build bridges, trust and understanding. Soft notes have been a recurring feature of diplomatic relations between Iran and Switzerland over the past 100 years. Our main aim has always been to promote the interests of both sides. Iran and Switzerland are different. And

that's a good thing. Diplomacy is not about seeking uniformity but about showing an interest in differences and a willingness to embrace them. Diplomacy has allowed our two countries to grow closer and make progress together over the past 100 years. I could cite many examples of the numerous issues we have addressed together.

Let's take education: the garden we have gathered in today is not only a museum but was once also a venue of University of Tehran lectures. Switzerland and Iran have maintained educational links for decades. Knowledge exchange plays a pivotal role in relations between our two countries. The many Iranian students who travel to or study in Switzerland and the Swiss students in Iran are a testimony to this fact. Another example of this transfer of knowledge is the cooperation between the Iranian State Geological Service, the Geological Institute at ETH Zurich and the Swiss Federal Office of Topography. Swiss scientists have surveyed and mapped large swathes of Iran together with Iranian colleagues and provided training in cartography for Iranian geologists.

We are also gathered in a place that is a symbol for art: for many years, Negarestan Garden housed the Kamal-ol-Molk Art School. His paintings can now be admired in their own wing in the Negarestan Garden Museum. Iran and Switzerland also maintain close cultural exchanges. For decades, Persia was an unrivalled source of inspiration for the Swiss art scene. Annemarie Schwarzenbach, for example, travelled to Iran to work on scientific excavations, photographed hauntingly beautiful landscapes and took portraits that bear witness to another time. Some of her photographs are displayed in this museum. Georg Gerster was another Swiss photographer who worked in Iran. In the 1970s, this pioneer of aerial photography made over 100 flights recording Iranian landscapes. We can also admire his work in this museum.

Iranian and Swiss artists have not only communicated with one another through visual language but also through sound. The two musicians at my side are a living embodiment of a harmonious coming together of two cultures. The Iranian santoor and the Swiss hammered dulcimer are closely related musical instruments. The origins of this Swiss instrument are thought to go back to the Persian santoor. The hammered dulcimer has a prominent place in traditional Swiss folk music but few people are aware of its origins.

Harmony is not only a goal in exchanges between musicians. Peaceful coexistence is also a goal in relations between states. The aim is not to produce uniformity, but to respect each other's differences and individuality in a spirit of friendship. Iran and Switzerland have nurtured mutual respect for 100 years. The good offices

Switzerland provides, which require a great deal of trust on all sides, play a key role in our exchanges. Iran places its trust in Switzerland to protect its interests in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Canada and allows Switzerland to represent the interests of the United States and Saudi Arabia in Iran. For 40 years, we have maintained consular services and relayed messages fast and reliably with complete confidentiality. I would like to express my sincere thanks for the trust you have placed in Switzerland.

This trust is what enables us to count on one another in crisis situations. Let me cite a couple of examples. The Swiss Disaster Relief Corps, as the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit was then known, was deployed following the devastating Manjil Rudbar earthquake of 1990. It provided emergency relief supplies and epidemiological advice and helped to rebuild the water supply infrastructure. Switzerland also sent emergency relief and assistance following the 2003 Bam earthquake and the floods of 2019. Being able to count on your partner in an emergency is key in any long-term and robust relationship.

This relationship is also very much predicated on a common understanding of the Declaration of Human Rights. As equal partners, we are engaged in a bilateral dialogue on human rights based on coherence and trust. We have a shared interest in issues such as juvenile criminal law and alternative forms of punishment. It is very important to me that our two countries cooperate even more closely on these issues in the future.

Education, culture, good offices, disaster relief and human rights: these five pillars of our 100-year relationship cannot exist without regular dialogue. Iran and Switzerland are different nations, each with its own interests. However, our nations also share a generosity of spirit and intellectual curiosity. The photographs on display in this museum show the enthusiasm with which the Iranian and Swiss people have built their relationship over the last 100 years. Let us create more such images together. Let us create more memories together.

Thank you for your attention.