

Dear Chairman of the ICSSR, dear chair of the Indo-Swiss JRP

Dear representatives from Swiss and Indian universities and research institutes,

Ladies and gentlemen,

As the representative of the embassy of Switzerland in India, let me share my happiness to be with you this morning for the launch of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Seminar of the Indo-Swiss Joint Research Programme in the social sciences.

Before talking more specifically about the Research Programme, let me say few words on a related topic: the Year of Swiss Innovation in India 2015-2016. Since early last year, our embassy in Delhi, the Swissnex in Bangalore, the Swiss Business Hub in Mumbai, our two General Consulates in Mumbai and Bangalore, as well as the offices of Swiss Tourism and the Swiss Cultural Foundation Pro Helvetia, supported by a strong

sponsoring commitment from private companies, are promoting Swiss innovation in all its forms in India. Many activities, shows and conferences aiming at branding Switzerland as an innovation powerhouse have been and will be organised, the majority of them together with Indian partners. Indeed, around the world people know Switzerland as a country of watches, chocolate and beautiful landscapes. This is not wrong, but few of them know that Switzerland is leading for the 6<sup>th</sup> consecutive year the global rankings on innovation. My country is the one that invest the highest per capita amount in R&D. In addition, there is a general tendency to think that innovation concentrates mainly in hard sciences and technology. Wrong! In our mutating world, innovation is everywhere and today's programme is a testimony that research in social sciences is very much alive. And very much needed as well! Indeed, those who are afraid of change – and there are many in our contemporary societies – will be confronted both with their fear, and with

the changes. In that sense, research and innovation in social science are key to understand, accept and adapt to the challenges of our modern world. As a consequence, I am happy to say that, in my mind, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Joint Seminar falls under the umbrella of the Year of Swiss innovation in India. The joint programme is exactly what we want to achieve: to be mutually beneficial and inspiring, to create synergies, to make the most of understanding both Indian and Swiss challenges when it comes to dealing with topics as diverse as employment, trade, ecology, health, energy or urban planning. The breadth of topics covered in this seminar is vast and is a good indicator of where our common interests lie. The only regret one could have is that most of the joint projects look at India, while only one looks specifically at Switzerland. Due to its diversity, India will always be of interest to researchers in social sciences, whether it be economic, geographical, linguistic, ethnic, stage of social development or whichever other parameter one can imagine. This is well reflected in the research

being carried out under this programme. Switzerland, while being a smaller laboratory - in particular when it comes to the size of its population -, is nevertheless a very diverse and complex country, regularly studied by Swiss and European social scientists. In addition of being a society in rapid evolution, it shares with India a decentralized structure that engendered a sophisticated system of redistribution of wealth and power sharing.

Under these circumstances, it would be beneficial for us to have an outsider's look, namely an Indian look at us, reflecting a non 'European' or non 'Western' perspective on the Swiss society. I am also convinced that it would be beneficial for India to look at the fabric of the Swiss society, its political, economic and social system. I therefore encourage our Indian friends and partners to consider this invitation and the two funding agencies to design future calls for proposals which take this into account.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me finish my introduction with welcoming the fact that this Indo-Swiss cooperation is progressing very well and let me congratulate each one of you for partnering in such different projects. I particularly thank the Indian Council of Social Science Research and the University of Lausanne for the way in which they implement the programme, since their cooperation is excellent. The results of your deliberations over the next two days will also indicate the directions in which we could orientate our cooperation in the future.

Let me wish you all very successful deliberations at the Seminar and I look forward to meeting you more informally at the dinner-reception offered at the Swiss Residence tomorrow evening.