Swiss Deputy State Secretary Krystyna Marty Lang: preventive diplomacy and mediation

18 December, Minsk

We all know that **conflict is omnipresent**. Sometimes it is constructive, when it is resolved in a civilized and peaceful manner. Sometimes it is destructive when it results in violence and destruction. Our ambition is to prevent conflicts from becoming destructive. *This is where the instruments of preventive diplomacy and mediation come into play.*

There are different ways to use these instruments.

Let **me give you a short account of the Swiss approach to mediation.**

Good offices, facilitation and mediation are important instruments of Swiss foreign policy. We are supporting conflict parties to find difficult compromises at the peace negotiation table. And we help societies to find lasting mechanisms that enable peaceful, constructive conflict resolution. **Switzerland has developed its capacity to act as a small, trusted, neutral and impartial mediator over**

a long period of time. And here, Switzerland's history has played an important part.

The **culture of peaceful coexistence** is at the core of Switzerland since it emerged as a modern state in 1848. Following the Vienna Congress in 1815, which laid the foundations for Swiss neutrality, it was the civil war of 1847 – the last military conflict on Swiss soil – which contributed to the establishment of this culture of peaceful resolution of conflict. This objective was enshrined in the first federal constitution of Switzerland as a nation state in 1848. Based on the principle of neutrality in its foreign affairs, Switzerland started to offer its **Good Offices** to other states entangled in violent conflict.

Nowadays, the **Swiss Good Offices include three types of services**: First, *protecting power mandates*, second, Switzerland as host for *peace negotiations*, and third *mediation activities*. Let me elaborate a little more on Switzerland's activities in the field of mediation:

First, Switzerland, with the consent of the parties, does act as a mediator or facilitator of peace talks.

Second, when required, we are providing support to mediators and their teams. Such a support can entail for

example expert knowledge on questions like cease fires or power sharing.

Third, we do – with the consent of a mediator - support specific conflict parties. As a matter of principle, we are always offering our support to all the parties involved in a given conflict context.

Fourth, we provide facilitation: Upon request, Switzerland can host peace talks in Switzerland and provide the necessary venues and facilities. Switzerland can also act as a facilitator to help clarify issues and prepare for future peace processes;

Fifth, we give dialogue support: Switzerland facilitates and structures dialogue between conflicting parties to deepen mutual understanding. This is often done in an informal, discrete manner.

In recent years we have been asked to provide mediation services in a number of conflicts. For example in 2014 and 2015, the Swiss diplomat Heidi Tagliavini acted as the OSCE's Special Envoy and Head of the Trilateral Contact Group in Minsk. With Ambassador Toni Frisch, the Coordinator of the Working Group on Humanitarian Issues, Switzerland continues to support the Minsk format. Further

examples include Colombia, where Switzerland delivered negotiation support during the Colombian government's negotiations with the FARC rebel movement in Havana 2014 – 2016. Due to our engagement, the ceasefire can be implemented with relative success today.

Whenever Switzerland engages in mediation activities as outlined just before, my government is always guided by **five fundamental principles:**

- **The principle of non-interference:** Switzerland is only active upon request of the parties to a conflict. We do not get involved in a conflict without the wish of the parties.
- **The principle of impartiality:** Switzerland will not take sides in a conflict and we are treating all the parties in a fair, equal manner. Our mediation activities are never intended to favour one party over the other.
- **The principle of voluntariness:** Switzerland will not use pressure to expedite a peace agreement. Signature of any agreement must be a voluntary act of the parties.
- **The principle of withholding judgment:** In the role as a mediator, Switzerland is not there to judge over right and wrong, over bad or evil. Our job as a mediator is to first and foremost help building trust between

warrying parties. It is not our goal to impose our agenda and norms onto others.

- **The principle of coordination with others:** As you know, conflicts and peace processes have become increasingly complex and long lasting. We are aware that many other actors are needed to bring about lasting peace and we are very open to work hand in hand with other actors.

The experience that we have gained over the past decades has also allowed us to develop a body of good practices that are now being galvanized into a professional, structured approach. Switzerland, together with its partners Germany, Finland and Sweden, and with the support of the UN and the OSCE, promotes the professionalization of peace mediation. In 2017, we have created the Master of Advanced Studies in Peace Mediation at the Federal Institute of Technology in Zürich (ETHZ). We enable the emergence of a common "mediation language" and we are training the next generation of peace mediators. The programme is the only one of its kind worldwide.

Having said that, I am also aware of the fact that there is no *one-size-fits-all approach* to mediation, as resolving today's complex crises and conflicts is exceedingly difficult. There are

limits to what we can accomplish from outside, which is why we should be guided by a spirit of humility in this regard.

Nevertheless, I still believe that what matters most is that we remain committed. It is important that we discuss our differences, build and re-build trust and find common solutions to the many challenges we face. In this sense, I am positive that today's discussions will contribute to this goal.