

Newsflash

of the Embassy of Switzerland to Ghana, Togo and Benin

May 2013

English edition for Ghana

Editorial

Dear fellow Swiss citizens,
Dear friends of the Swiss Embassy in Accra,

In our new series “Swiss Expat Portraits” we present a dynamic Swiss woman with strong roots in Togo who wears more than one hat: Myrna Tabchoury is not only the General Manager of Hotel Palm Beach but also the Honorary Consul General of Switzerland in Togo. The Hotel Palm Beach, which hosts the Consulate of Switzerland, has become an emblem of Lomé’s skyline and the gate to Togo’s capital, standing prominently on the main transit route between Benin and Ghana. Myrna Tabchoury introduces herself on page 3.

In many African countries, including Ghana and South Sudan, traditional authority leaders are still the political and moral backbone of society. The re-definition of their role within the political system of the 21st century is a necessity. “Reinvent yourself”, may be the mantra for a lot of chieftaincies there. A South Sudanese delegation of 20 traditional leaders and representatives from local and central government met with their Ghanaian counterparts in January 2013. The Swiss Embassy supported and accompanied the traditional leaders on their Study Tour to Ghana (page 4).

Ghana is a model for peace and stability in the sub-Saharan region. A particularly interesting contribution to peace and stability is being provided by the National Peace Council (NPC), an autonomous body of 13 members representing various religious, social and political groups which is supported by the Swiss Embassy. More information on the NPC can be found on pages 4/5.

Not as stable as on land is the situation at sea. The Gulf of Guinea has become a target of piracy attacks over the past few years, and this calls for urgent international cooperation. In response, the Swiss Embassy, in collaboration with the Australian and British High Commissions, organized a workshop on Maritime Security in April 2013. The guest speaker from Switzerland, Alexander von Ziegler, Professor in international maritime law at the University of Zurich, gave a lecture on the Commercial Environment of International Shipping (page 5).



Andrea Semadeni, Swiss Ambassador

Please send information, contributions, and ideas for the future issues of the newsflash to:

acc.vertretung@eda.admin.ch

Swissness is not all about watches and cheese, but also about wine. From 16th - 30th of March 2013 the Swiss Embassy organized three events dedicated to Swiss wine during the *Francophonie Festival*. Mr Pierre Thomas, a journalist and wine expert from Canton Vaud, held a public wine degustation at Alliance Française (page 8).

Last but not least, I would like to remind our readers that you can send contributions or feedback on the newsflash. The newsflash is primarily a source of information for the Swiss communities in Ghana, Togo and Benin, but it also offers an opportunity to Swiss citizens to make themselves heard.

Andrea Semadeni, Swiss Ambassador

Swiss Expat Portraits

Myrna Tabchoury, Swiss Honorary Consul General and General Manager of Hotel Palm Beach, Lomé, Togo

My name is Myrna Tabchoury, I am the Swiss Honorary Consul General in Lomé, responsible for the 125 people constituting the Swiss community here. I have been the Honorary Consul General since March 2010 and I am enjoying the relationship with my fellow Swiss citizens.

The Consulate, hosted within the premises of the hotel, does not issue visas; however, we do the sign-off on the 'Certificat de Vie' for the Swiss citizens and also handle administrative work for the Embassy in Accra which is also accredited to Togo.

In fact, being the General Manager of the Hotel Palm Beach in Lomé, I would be happy to welcome any Swiss citizen passing through Lomé either from Ghana or Benin. Hotel Palm Beach has been ranked No. 2 of 22 hotels in Lomé by Trip Advisor, featuring lovely and well stocked bars and lounges, as well as a fully equipped gym and an outdoor rooftop swimming pool.

Each of the 67 entirely refurbished rooms is overlooking the sea and has free wifi access.

Check out our website www.palmbeachtogo.com

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Myrna Tabchoury with the Swiss community...



...and the Togolese President Faure Gnassingbé

Visit by Traditional Authority Leaders from South Sudan to Ghana

What do South Sudanese chiefs and Ghanaian traditional authorities have in common? The answer is: a lot. Both groups face similar challenges with regard to their role within the political and legal systems of a modern State and the maintenance of their traditions, customs and values.

From 22nd to 29th of January 2013 the Swiss Embassy accompanied a South Sudanese delegation of 20 traditional leaders and representatives of the Government of South Sudan during their Study Tour through Ghana. Professor Prah, Director of the Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society in South Africa, and Swiss Human Security Advisor, Oliver Humbel, were the organizers of the program.

The purpose of the Swiss-sponsored tour was to enhance the exchange between the South Sudanese chiefs and the Ghanaian members of the National House of Chiefs. The trip led the group to the Courts of the Chiefs of Nungua, Akropong and Ho. The event was crowned with a cocktail at the Swiss Residence accompanied by vibrant music from the Ayekoo Drummers, to which representatives of the Ghanaian Ministry for Chieftaincy and Culture were also invited.



Switzerland supports National Peace Council

In 2011, the National Peace Council (NPC), an autonomous body, was launched by the Ghanaian President. The NPC consists of 13 members, representing various religious, social and political groups. It underpins the Government's efforts to promote stability throughout the country. Some regions in Ghana are affected by conflicts between ethnic groups. For instance, in June 2012 there was a clash between two communities, the Zongo and the Gbi, in Hohoe.

With Switzerland's financial support, the NPC engages in conflict management in Hohoe in order to achieve a mediation process between the conflict parties. It aims at collaborating with representatives from regional and local authorities in order to foster peace and rebuild trust between the two communities.



The NPC played a crucial role in preventing conflicts during the 2008 and 2012 general elections, when it appealed to all parties to maintain calm and refrain from pre-emptive actions before the announcement of the final outcome of the presidential runs.

Gulf of Guinea Maritime Security Workshop

From 8th - 12th of April 2013 an intensive workshop on maritime security took place in Accra. It was organized by the Australian Government, the British High Commission and the Swiss Embassy.

Dr. Alexander von Ziegler, a Swiss lawyer from Schellenberg and Wittmer and also a renowned expert and incumbent professor in international maritime law at the University of Zurich, presented a lecture on the “Commercial Environment of International Shipping”.

This successful workshop was educational and practice-oriented. Around 30 participants from Ghana’s Armed Forces, Marine Police and Maritime Authority took part in the workshop. Furthermore, nominees from Sierra Leone, Benin and Togo attended the course and shared their individual experience.

Switzerland has a fleet of 41 ships flying the Swiss flag, some of them in the Gulf of Guinea. While trading with West African countries, especially in cocoa and natural resources, Switzerland is committed to partake in a cooperative approach to maritime security in this region.



Switzerland signs agreement with the West African Development Bank

On 26th of March 2013, an agreement between Switzerland and the West African Development Bank (BOAD) was signed by the Swiss Ambassador, Andrea Semadeni, and the President of the bank, Christian Adovelande.

The Swiss government signed the agreement on behalf of the Swiss Development Cooperation, represented by Jean-Luc Virchaux, Director of Cooperation in Benin.

The West African Development Bank is thus granted a contribution of CFA 3.4 Billion (about CHF 6.3 Mio) which will be used for the set up of a crop insurance program in eight UEMOA (West African Economic and Monetary Union) countries: Benin and Senegal (priority countries), Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Niger, and Togo. With the implementation of crop insurance, the farmers will be able to protect themselves against losses of their harvest due to natural disasters or climate change related challenges.

The BOAD is a shared institution of the UEMOA and its eight member governments. It is funded by member states, foreign governments and international agencies. The BOAD focuses on promoting balanced development between the member States and encourages economic integration by financing projects in infrastructure, agriculture, telecommunication, energy, industry and transport. Its headquarters are in Lomé.



Swiss Ambassador, Andrea Semadeni, and President of the BOAD, Christian Adovelande

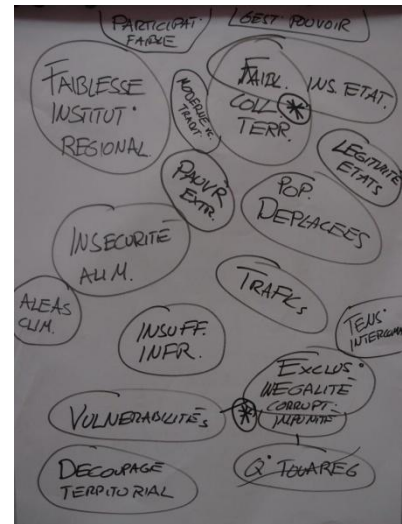
Biannual Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) Conference in Accra

What are the characteristics of fragile states? How do the interventions of the cooperation offices have to be adapted to meet the challenges arising from political and economical fragile contexts?

These and other questions were discussed during the SDC conference which was hosted by the Swiss Embassy from 21th to 26th of April 2013 in Accra. 60 participants from the central administration in Bern as well as from the Swiss cooperation offices and the Embassies in West Africa (Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin, Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria and Liberia) shared their experiences on conflict-affected states.

The SDC is concentrating its efforts on the areas of basic education/professional training and rural development/local economies. It supports processes of public affairs management at the communal level. The SDC also provides humanitarian aid in Mali to help with the reconstruction and to other countries in the region according to need.

The regional conference of the West Africa Division of the SDC takes place every two years.



Swiss Events in Ghana, Togo and Benin

Francophonie Festival: Swiss Wine and Gastronomy

During this year's Francophonie Festival, the Embassy organized three events about Swiss wine and Swiss gastronomy. Flown in especially for this occasion, Mr Pierre Thomas, a journalist and wine and food expert from Switzerland, was present at all three events, sharing his inspiring knowledge about Swiss wine and gastronomy.

A wine seminar with wine tasting took place on March 19th, 2013, at Alliance Française in Accra. This sociable event, open to the general public, attracted close to 100 visitors - far more than expected by the organizers, challenging the logistics of the evening. As a result, visitors arriving late had to taste the delicate Swiss wines from plastic cups. Nobody complained, though, and appreciation was the dominating reaction – this in turn was much valued by the Embassy! A particular joy for the Embassy was to see that many members from the Swiss community honored the event.

The next day, Ambassador Semadeni invited to a typical Swiss meal (“Zürich Geschnetzeltes”) at his Residence. The evening aimed at bringing the little known Swiss gastronomy closer to Ghanaian and other non-Swiss guests.

A real treat for cheese lovers was the Raclette- and Fendant-stand, organized by the Embassy at the traditional “Dîner de la Francophonie” at the French Ambassador's Residence, on March 21th, 2013. Many Ghanaian and international guests lined up to get a taste of Switzerland.

The Embassy is happy to have marked the cultural agenda in Accra by organizing these events and would like to thank everybody who in one way or another contributed to this success.

The newspaper “La Liberté” published an article, written by Mr Pierre Thomas, on Swiss Wine in the tropics:

<http://www.laliberte.ch/gastro/des-vins-suissees-degustes-sous-les-tropiques>



Pierre Thomas and Deputy Head of Mission, Claudia Fontana Tobiassen

Introduction of the Schengen Visa Information System in West and Central Africa

On March 14th, 2013, the Schengen representations in Accra introduced the Visa Information System (VIS). The VIS is a tool to centralize and harmonize biometric data in order to ensure better and more efficient controls across the borders of Schengen countries. Applicants for a Schengen visa are requested to give their biometric information (10 fingerprints and a facial image), which is then entered into the VIS where it remains stored for five years.

In conjunction with this change in procedures, a new waiting area and an additional counter were built at the chancery. There are now three counters in two waiting rooms, one of which (the newly constructed one, see pictures) is predominantly reserved for Swiss citizens. The new facilities will contribute to improve the Embassy's customer service.



New counter and...



... new waiting area

The Embassy has published further information about VIS on its website:
<http://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/home/rep/afri/vgha/repgha/swinef.html>

OSA – Organisation of the Swiss Abroad

The Organization of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) represents Swiss expatriates' interests in Switzerland. It informs Swiss citizens living abroad about what is happening in Switzerland and provides them with a wide selection of services. The OSA is supported by some 750 Swiss expatriates' associations and Swiss institutions all over the world. It was founded in 1916 and is recognized by the authorities as the representative organ of the "Fifth Switzerland". Information and advice on all types of legal, social security, insurance and training matters are also provided by the OSA, as well as the magazine "Swiss Review" and a wide variety of activities for young Swiss abroad.



Auslandschweizer-Organisation
Organisation des Suisses de l'étranger
Organizzazione degli Svizzeri all'estero
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