

# Newsletter

of the Embassy of Switzerland to Ghana, Togo and Benin

December 2015

English edition

## Editorial

Dear fellow citizens,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The end of the year is a time for sharing and exchanges, on one hand with our families and friends, and on the other hand with all those who are part of the more extended network. It is in this spirit that I want to reach out to you, before this year comes to a close.

I hope you find a moment to see through the different sections of this Newsletter, giving an account on the various activities and projects the Embassy has been kept busy with in 2015. As you might have noted, the Embassy team has changed considerably due to regular rotation of the expatriate staff and also due to changes in the locally employed staff. I use this opportunity to formally introduce the new Swiss colleagues to you, and invite you to familiarize yourselves with the new names in your favorite Embassy.

Are you aware, that 3 officers of the Swiss Armed Forces are working on an official assignment in Ghana? You find their story in this Newsletter. 2015 is the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of a surprising number of historically important events. The Battle of Waterloo, the Valais becoming a member canton of the Swiss Confederation, the Vienna Congress which restored order in Europe and also the establishment of the Basel Mission society which through its missionary work had an important impact on the development of society in Ghana. You find more about their endeavors and how we commemorated their legacy through some projects during the year.

2016 promises to be an exciting year for Ghana and Benin. The main reason being the upcoming presidential elections and the expectations any presidential campaign raises. Representing a nation as democratic as Switzerland, I sincerely wish that as many citizens as possible will make their voices heard and participate by voting peacefully and orderly for their preferred candidate.

Whether you will spend time in Switzerland, in Western Africa or elsewhere, I wish you a wonderful Christmas and a happy New Year in good health.

Gerhard Brügger  
Ambassador  
Accra, December 2015



Please send information, contributions, and ideas for the following issues of the newsletter to [acc.vertretung@eda.admin.ch](mailto:acc.vertretung@eda.admin.ch)

# News About the Embassy

## GHANA

### Consular conference

From the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> of October 2015, a consular conference organized by the Embassy of Switzerland was held in Accra. More than 36 participants came for this conference, which assembled representatives from the Swiss Consular Directorate in Bern, Ambassadors and Deputy Heads of Mission; Chancery Chiefs and Honorary Consuls. The presentations and the discussions that took place during the conference concerned the current challenges impacting the consular sector, such as the ones emanating from regions touched by mass migration.

Mr. Burri, the Director of the Consular Directorate, closing the conference on the evening of Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> October, underlined the fruitful discussions that took place and the importance of enhancing the cooperation between the different Swiss representations in Western Africa. He also noted that the main characteristic of this region of the world was the consistency of its diversity.



### 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of the Basel Mission

2015 has reminded us of the importance of the work of the missionaries, which also reminds us to reflect on their achievements in the core fields that were as relevant then as they are now. After the creation of the Basel Mission Society in 1815, it took another 20 years to build up the capacity and resources of the mission, to plan for and train the first Basel missionaries made up of artisans, farmers; and also doctors and teachers trained as catechists, to arrive in the then Gold Coast. The vision of these pioneers and the impact of their modest efforts is what we have celebrated in the past 12 months.

Having initiated a number of projects with the help and funding of Swiss companies, we started in February by welcoming a delegation of students and professors from the University of Basel. During what was essentially their “pilgrimage” retracing some of the steps of the missionaries, we held in cooperation with Oseadeyo Addo Danquah III; Paramount Chief of Akuapem, a Durbar with all the Divisional Chiefs and a photo exhibition in his Palace in Akropong. The exhibition showcased the life and the works of the missionaries who lived in those communities. It is by happy coincidence that it was the first Nana Addo Danquah who welcomed the Basel Missionaries to the Akuapem Ridge 180 years ago.



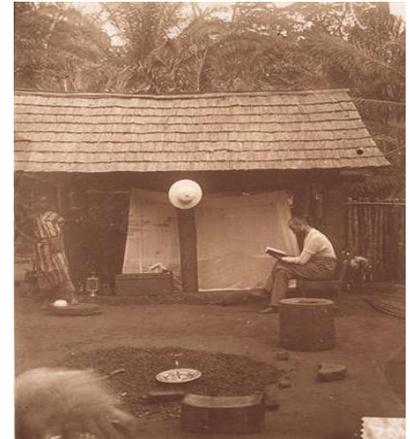
In April, with the support of the National Museum, we organized another exhibition of historical photographs of the Basel Missionaries and their work in and with local communities. This time, the exhibition was held in Accra and put side by side with the modern works of an up and coming Ghanaian artist named Kwame Osa.

In April and in May, a Swiss company and the biggest cocoa processor in the world, Barry Callebaut, funded a pharmacy at the Tema Ebola Emergency Centre. During that time, the company also built and opened a Kindergarten in the Central Region.

During the first 6 months of the year, a Resource Center at Ghana's very first primary school in Akropong was built and will serve the population as a library and as an avenue to improve on education for all by giving easy access to the Internet and the other learning resources it will provide.

On health care, with funding from Roche, another Swiss company, we are about to start a pilot project: the construction of a Cancer Information Centre to be associated with the KOM Presby Clinic at Aburi. The objective is to improve the level of information on breast and cervical cancer for women in rural communities.

You realize that we did not celebrate for the purpose of just having a nice party and spending funds for something we would have forgotten the next day. Quite to the contrary and exactly in the spirit of the missionaries, we have allocated resources in a way that benefits the communities best and hopefully in a most sustainable manner.



## TOGO

### Sisters hospitalieres

In the context of an official visit to Benin and Togo in September, a delegation from the Embassy of Switzerland visited a project it funded in the Togolese countryside. This project was the construction of a solar power system in a dispensary run by Swiss Catholic sisters, who have built an impressive center that treats more than 13,000 patients a year. The dispensary is located in Soko Tomety, a small village in the Togolese rural area. Because the dispensary is in a remote area devoid of any infrastructure, it is a great help to many women who are in need of a safe environment to give birth ( about 250 per year). The center also takes care of people suffering from malaria, accident victims, and HIV-AIDS patients.

The Catholic sisters settled in Momé Katihoé in 2002. They decided on this after realizing the needs of the local population during a trip to Togo aimed at sharing their skills in Afagnan’s hospital (south of Togo). Since then, they have been relentlessly developing and running two healthcare centers in this region. It was in this context of development that the catholic sisters approached the Swiss Embassy in September 2014 to find support for the enlargement of an existing but inadequate solar power system. The request quickly grabbed the attention of the Embassy, and the involvement and devotion of the Swiss Catholic sisters and of their Togolese counterparts won a lot of admiration. The most recent center now benefits from more electricity, which will enable it to treat more patients.



## BENIN

### NGO Bouge

In the context of the same official visit to Benin and Togo, the delegation from the Embassy of Switzerland visited another admirable project at Sékou on the outskirts of Cotonou. This project is run by the NGO Bouge, funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and monitored by its office in Cotonou. The SDC’s support was for a period of over 4 years and involved the installation of a water tower, supported by a solar powered system. This installation is located in the NGO’s training center, which trains disadvantaged young orphans in the sector of agricultural entrepreneurship. The specializations vary, from the development of fish farms, aviculture, to cuniculture and production of vegetables. Participants are also taught how to organize the retail of their produce.

The development of this program, and subsequently of the center, has had a highly positive impact on the local population as it has enhanced the



independence of its disadvantaged young people. Moreover, it illustrates how the indigenous population could sustain itself with local production.

Because the SDC's support will terminate at the end of the current year, the center is aiming at becoming self-sufficient and consequently sustaining its activities on a long term basis. These efforts and the achievements of the NGO did not go unnoticed by the Deputy Head of Mission who praised the hard labor of the center's director as well as the deep involvement of the young participants.



# Peace and Security

## Accra

### Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Center (KAIPTC)

*The KAIPTC seeks to become the leading and preferred international center for training and research in Africa peace and security.*

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of November, a representative from the Embassy of Switzerland visited the KAIPTC in order to present to this Newsletter's readers the activities of the three Swiss citizens working there. The KAIPTC was created in 2003 and offers training to militaries, police officers and civilians in the areas of peacekeeping operations in Africa and worldwide, in order to promote peace as well as the UN principles. Switzerland, among other nations, supports the activities of the center technically and financially.

Furthermore, the Swiss Government also makes available three Swiss officers who are currently part of the center's staff; Colonel Fabio Ernst who is in charge of training evaluation, Major Gaudenz Schaerer who is a Course Director, and Lieutenant Gilles Tornay, the Press and Information Officer.

Colonel Fabio Ernst is supervising a team of 7 people at the center's training evaluation and development section. His team is assessing the impact the courses have on the participants' careers or studies. Furthermore, the Colonel's unit is currently in charge of developing the e-learning platform, which will enable students to do pre-course studies and consequently maximize their stay at the KAIPTC.

Since May 2014, Major Gaudenz Schaerer has been a Course Director at the center, programming the courses, determining the content of each module, and selecting the participants and the facilitators. The KAIPTC offers three main categories of courses; Peace Support Operations, Conflict Management, Peace and Security Studies. Within these categories, each course lasts two weeks. Since its creation, 12'063 people have attended lectures at the KAIPTC, out of which 26% were women and 77% from Western Africa.

As the center's Press and Information Officer, Lieutenant Gilles Tornay is responsible for the communication with the public through press releases and articles in newspapers. He covers the preparation of official ceremonies and events, as well as the French updates of the center's website. Acting as the face of the media section, he is at the forefront of the center's relationship with the media and journalists.

The three Swiss citizens view their presence and involvement at the center as important as they can ensure certain standards by giving their expertise, but also learn from the center and bring this knowledge back to Switzerland.



## Introducing the Swiss Staff of the Embassy

**François Schmidt** is the Deputy Head of Mission and the Chief of Chancery. Mr. Schmidt has been working at the Embassy since the 15<sup>th</sup> of July 2013 in many sections and with various tasks. He is in charge of the consular, cultural and administrative affairs of the Embassy, as well as the defense of Swiss interests. His last two positions at the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs were in Washington D.C. from 2009 to 2013 and prior to that in Switzerland as the Director of the Geneva Welcome Center from 2004 to 2008 (<http://www.cagi.ch/>).

François Schmidt truly enjoys Ghana, particularly the kindness and peacefulness of Ghanaians, but on top of everything he loves the Ghanaian weather!

**Matthias Feldmann** is the Head of Cooperation and Economic Counsellor at our embassy. He started on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2015, succeeding Ms. Brigitte Cuendet. In this position he is responsible for managing Switzerland's development cooperation program in Ghana on behalf of the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO). In addition he also heads the economic and commercial office of the Embassy. Prior to his assignment, Mr. Feldmann was Deputy Regional Director of Cooperation in the South Caucasus, based in Tbilisi, Georgia and Baku, Azerbaijan. He moved to Accra together with his spouse and his three children, two boys and one girl. Mr. Feldmann is no stranger to Ghana, as he has been the SECO country manager for Ghana based in Berne from 2008 to 2012. He is looking forward to rediscover the country with his family after a four-year hiatus.

**Daniel Lauchenauer** has been working at our embassy as Deputy Head of Cooperation since the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2015. In this newly established position, his main task is to support the Head of Cooperation (Mr. Matthias Feldmann) in the coordination and monitoring of the Economic Cooperation and Development portfolio of the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO in Ghana. He likes the broad area of topics and the cooperation with the different partners from public and private sectors. Prior to this position Mr. Lauchenauer was working as a project manager for the Federal Institute of Intellectual Property where he has been implementing projects on behalf of SECO mainly in Colombia and Indonesia. He moved to Accra together with his spouse and his two girls who all settled well. They are looking forward to exploring the coastal regions thoroughly in the coming holiday seasons.

**Martina Garamendi-Laim** joined the Embassy of Switzerland in Accra in April 2015 as Vice Consul in charge of consular affairs and accounting. She began her career at the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs in 1999 and has been posted abroad ever since, namely to Egypt, Spain, India and the UK. Being born and brought up in the Swiss canton of Bern, Mrs. Garamendi-Laim remains very much attached to her home country, where she spends much of her holidays in the company of her husband and two children.

**Sophie Regamey** started to work at our Embassy as Vice Consul on 3<sup>rd</sup> of August 2015. She handles consular matters in the chancery in collaboration with Mrs. Martina Garamendi. She is responsible for the Swiss citizens living in Benin and in Togo. Mrs. Regamey already has a lot of experience in Africa as she worked for the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation in Chad. Later on, she moved on to a consular career at the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and has been sent to various Swiss representations abroad such as Madagascar, Tanzania, Riyadh and Barcelona. Mrs. Regamey moved to Accra together with her spouse and her two boys. She will be happy to welcome you at the Swiss Embassy.



# Consular Affairs

## Crisis and Security Plan

The Embassy is currently finalizing the update of the Crisis and Security Plan for Swiss nationals living in Ghana, Togo and Benin, with the purpose of making it as useful as possible.

In this regard, the Embassy would like to remind you of the following crucial points:

- Swiss nationals residing in Ghana, Togo and Benin **MUST INFORM** the Embassy in Accra of every change of address, Tel (private), Mobile (private) and Email.
- Swiss nationals residing in Ghana, Togo and Benin **MUST INFORM** the Embassy in Accra of every change of civil status and marital status.

It is extremely important for the Embassy to possess the most accurate and up to date information, as it is the only way your security can be guaranteed in case of crisis.

We thank you for your understanding and cooperation.

## The Swiss Abroad Act entered into force

On 7 October the Federal Council set the entry into force of the Swiss Abroad Act for 1<sup>st</sup> of November 2015 and adopted the Swiss Abroad Ordinance and the Ordinance on Fees of the FDFA. The Act brings together in a single piece of legislation, the most important provisions on Swiss nationals living abroad. The two ordinances contain provisions for its implementation. The new rules take into account the increasing international mobility of Swiss citizens.

The following are of particular importance for Swiss nationals living abroad:

### ▪ GUICHET UNIQUE

The concept of the *Guichet unique* (single counter) is now codified in the Act, providing a one-stop shop for Swiss citizens with questions about travel abroad and other matters of interest to Swiss nationals living abroad. The *Guichet unique* can provide information and advice and if necessary direct the client to the competent office. It is a virtual counter service provided by the relevant Swiss representations and the units responsible at head office in Bern, such as the FDFA Helpline (tel. +41 800 24 7 365). **You can therefore continue to contact us or the FDFA Helpline at any time.**

#### ▪ OBLIGATION TO REGISTER

For Swiss citizens living abroad, registration with the competent representation remains mandatory. This is also the case for changes in **civil status**. **Registration with your representation is therefore still required and changes to civil status must be announced. Please provide us with your email address so that we can contact you more easily.**

#### ▪ REGISTERING A CHANGE OF ADDRESS

The Act simplifies the procedure for registered persons to notify a change of address. If you move house abroad and acquire a new domicile, simply inform the representation of your new address. The representation will then make the necessary change in the Register of Swiss citizens abroad. **When moving house abroad, you no longer need to de-register and re-register; simply notify the representation about the change of address.**

#### ▪ POLITICAL RIGHTS

The previous rules for the exercising of political rights by Swiss citizens living abroad have been largely incorporated into the Act. The law has been simplified in some details. You are now only entitled to exercise your political rights in the **commune** where you were last domiciled in Switzerland. Swiss citizens living abroad who have never been domiciled in Switzerland can vote in their commune of origin, or if the person has more than one commune of origin one of them can be chosen. However, nothing changes for persons who are already registered in an electoral commune.

Furthermore, in its section in the Swiss Review the federal government provides official information concerning legal matters and about upcoming elections and referendums. The Organisation for the Swiss Abroad will also publish information in the Review's main section about referendums and elections. Other sources of information include Swissinfo and the public service television and radio stations.

In addition, the procedure has been simplified: voters no longer have to renew their registration every four years. However, the electoral commune can remove persons from the electoral register if the voting material is returned three times in a row because the recipient could not be reached at the given address. **You can continue to exercise your rights as before and keep informed via the usual channels.**



#### ▪ PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

The Act specifies that personal responsibility is the basis of the federal government's relationship with Swiss citizens whose rights it guarantees and to whom it provides assistance. The federal government expects each and every citizen to exercise personal responsibility in preparing their stay or conducting business abroad. Under the FDFA's Ordinance on Fees, persons who a) disregard the recommendations of the federal government, especially the travel advice and the individual recommendations of the FDFA, b) violate the laws of the receiving state or c) lack adequate insurance cover or lose insurance cover because of a reason for exclusion, are deemed to have acted negligently.

***As before, plan well, travel well. Make sure that you are properly insured and consult the travel advices of the FDFA!***

#### Services for Swiss citizen:

We are pleased to remind you that Swiss citizens are welcome to visit the Embassy on the following issues.

- Civil status registration (marriage, divorce, birth, death, family reunion, adoption).
- Passport and ID renewal.

For further information please go to the following website:

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/ghana/en/home/vertretungen/botschaft.html>

The Embassy is open every day from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. for consular affairs and Tuesdays from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. for civil status issues. Do not hesitate to contact us if you have any question. The Embassy team will be more than happy to help you and answer your questions.

## Contact Information

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