Ambassador Dr. Ralf Heckner

H.E. Dr. Ralf Heckner serves as Switzerland's Ambassador to the United States of America. Born in Davos, Switzerland, Dr. Heckner has forged an impactful diplomatic career, representing Swiss interests on four continents. His work with the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) has included leadership roles in bilateral and multilateral relations, with a focus on advancing Switzerland's foreign policy and international cooperation.

Before his current posting in Washington, D.C., Dr. Heckner served as Switzerland's Ambassador to India and Bhutan, where his priorities included the successful negotiation and signing of a Free Trade Agreement. He also worked to develop a more strategic innovation relationship with India, overseeing Switzerland's largest visa center abroad, which processes 200,000 visas annually. His time in India was marked by efforts to enhance trade and innovation ties between the two nations, fostering deeper economic and technological partnerships.

Throughout his career, Dr. Heckner has taken on noteworthy diplomatic roles, including postings at the Swiss embassies in Rome and Washington, D.C. His work has encompassed U.S. foreign and security policy, U.S. relations with Europe, and multilateral diplomacy. He was instrumental in implementing Switzerland's protecting power mandate, representing U.S. interests in Iran and working closely with the U.S. Department of State.

In addition to his diplomatic duties, Dr. Heckner has been an advocate for human rights. As Office Director of Human Rights Policy at the FDFA, he led a multi-stakeholder initiative to create an International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers. This initiative set high human rights standards for the industry globally, in cooperation with the U.S. administration, and established external oversight mechanisms to ensure accountability.

Dr. Heckner also served as Deputy Head of the United Nations and Other International Organizations Division, where he was Switzerland's primary liaison with the United Nations. He also led Switzerland's Crisis Management Center, overseeing emergency responses for Swiss citizens affected by global crises, including conflicts, natural disasters, and terrorist incidents. Additionally, Dr. Heckner was in charge of diplomatic security for all Swiss missions abroad.

During his tenure as Ambassador to Kenya, Burundi, Rwanda, Somalia, and Uganda, and as Permanent Representative to the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON), Dr. Heckner achieved significant milestones, including his work on the Framework for the Return of Assets from Corruption and Crime in Kenya (FRACCK). This pioneering agreement focused on ensuring the transparent and accountable return of stolen assets to benefit the local population and support sustainable development.

Dr. Heckner holds a Ph.D. in Contemporary History from the University of Fribourg. Fluent in German, Italian, French, and English, he brings a wealth of academic and diplomatic expertise to his role, along with a deep understanding of international policy and cultural diplomacy. In his private life, he enjoys alpine sports, running, and history.

Dr. Heckner is married to Dr. Ilaria Macconi Heckner, and they have two children.