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Message by Dr. Dieter Chenaux-Repond
Ambassador of Switzerland to Japan
on the occasion of the National Day,
August 1.

Better Understanding as a Result of
Mutual Belief in Diversity

Today, nearly six million Swiss at home and abroad, citizens of a small country, celebrate once more the first step towards independence, which occurred on August 1st, 1291. It is an established tradition for foreign envoys in Japan on such occasions to describe and to show their satisfaction over the mutually beneficial development of manifold ties between their countries. Indeed, relations between Switzerland and Japan, officially established 120 years ago, can be looked upon with great satisfaction. Both countries are in a similar situation with regard to their dependence on import of raw materials and export of finished products. I am happy to state that Japan has joined the not too strong group of countries who vigorously defend and promote a multilateral policy of free trade and that Japan is also determined to gradually open its financial markets and to cut back non-tariff barriers. All these are prerequisites for international economic growth unhampered by bureaucratic interventionism.

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But is such success achieved through common effort sufficient? National anniversaries are an occasion to boast the "ever increasing density" of such and such bilateral cooperation. This is certainly done with the best intentions. Yet, the front pages of newspapers betray the impression of overwhelming harmony one draws from the reading of such messages. One major reason for this discrepancy seems to be that better understanding between people and peoples requires infinitely more than increased economic exchange, although there can be no doubt that closer contact in business relations is an important step in the right direction. However, the real secret of a nation's strengths and weaknesses, of its potential and its limitations lies deeper than its sales. It lies in the patterns of its social behaviour, in its commonly shared values. For instance, the extraordinary degree of day-to-day Japanese social discipline - for me a continuous lesson - explains much more about economic success than most statistics. On the other hand, Western Europe's liking for the deployment of man's individuality and creative forces tends to reduce social discipline, but it explains the outstanding contribution of those countries to the development of art, science and technology over the centuries.

There seems to be no ideal mix of these individual and collective qualities. What I can perceive, however,

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in a modern world of technical communication is a unique chance to listen to and to look more closely at each other in quest for clues capable to explain differences and affinities. Such a process - a process to bridge the cultural gap - is likely to produce a two-fold positive result: it teaches us to accept (or to learn) what can be accepted or learned from a partner who, for some reason or another, has an advance over us, and it allows us to live happily and free of futile jealousy with "the rest", i.e., those differences in culture, which for the time being cannot be bridged and which, indeed, stand for the wonderful diversity of a pluralistic world society. The freedom of choice within such a system, the possibility to learn from each other - and then accept or reject - brings about more respect and understanding than the illusion of more and more similarity through comparable legal systems or intense trade relations.

Economic exchange in the interest of mutual benefit, intellectual and spiritual exchange in the interest of learning what is within reach and what, for the sake of the preservation of one's own identity, is not - these seem to me valid aims both for world diplomacy and for any citizen travelling abroad. I am deeply grateful to Japan that it offers its visitors an immense field to collect experience within a more and more pluralistic, open, free society and in an

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atmosphere of unmatched politeness towards the foreign
observer. Such respect for and mutual belief in
diversity is to my mind a valid contribution to a
future in secured peace and freedom.

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