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President's Message

September started out as just an ordinary month.... at least until the 11th. And then, everything changed....

We have all been very well informed, through a range of media, about the recent tragic and devastating events in the United States.

On our television screens especially, we have witnessed such a wide range of emotions - the grief, the disbelief, the anger - of American citizens in New York and Washington DC, mourning the loss of family and friends, as well as the carnage inflicted on their cities.

And although the focus, quite rightly, has been mainly on America, the tragedy has affected the whole world, and probably very few countries have remained unaffected. From New Zealand, too, one life was claimed.

But many of you will not have had much information about how Switzerland has been affected.

Unfortunately, so far (as at time of writing, mid-Sept), two Swiss lives have been confirmed lost - both were passengers in one of the airplanes involved. As well, it is presumed that a further six Swiss citizens are presumed buried in the rubble of the World Trade Centre.

On behalf of the Swiss Society of New Zealand, I would like to convey our sincerest condolences to the Swiss Embassy and the Swiss Government.

On Wednesday, 19th September, at 1.00pm, the bells of Swiss churches all over the country were rung in a gesture of respect for the victims.

In addition, a special church service was held at the Abbey of Payerne, canton Vaud, attended by the Swiss Federal President, Moritz Leuenberger.

He told the congregation that, "no one could escape responsibility for their own actions, either before the eyes of God or the eyes of man".

He also remarked that the strikes on the United States were a reminder of the fragility and limitations of human beings, and that "all individuals must contribute to creating and building a more fair and just world. Nobody should have to do a day's work and then still not have enough to live on". The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also sent two psychologists to New York

to assist and counsel the survivors, as well as relatives of those killed or missing, in dealing with their trauma and grief.

In respect of security, this has been increased in particular around the embassies of the United States and Israel in Berne, as well as at international airports. According to the Defence Ministry, police and special forces are on duty, but no regular army troops would be involved.

It was also reported that Switzerland has made it a priority to find out whether there were any groups of Islamic extremists based in the country.

On a much lighter note, many thanks

to the large amount of "Society Only" (non North Island Club) members for the prompt payment of 2001 Subs payments. For those which are still unpaid, you will find a reminder notice enclosed inside this *Helvetia* issue.

Springtime is here, and it's great to see the gardens coming to life again. It's also the time of year when many of our members return from the annual "pilgrimage" or holidays in Switzerland - so to all those people, welcome home !!

Beatrice

Swiss Embassy - INVITATION

Ambassador Walter Thurnheer, Head of the Service for the Swiss Abroad of our Federal Department of Foreign Affairs in Bern, will visit the Swiss Communities in New Zealand and give a talk on

Switzerland Today / Situation of the Swiss Abroad

and will also answer questions in relating to topics concerning Swiss Abroad.

Walter Thurnheer was born in 1963 in Muri, Canton Aargau, Switzerland. He read theoretical physics at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich, graduating in 1985. He entered the Swiss Diplomatic Service in 1989 and completed internships in Bern and Moscow.

From 1991 to 1995 he was employed in the Secretariat for Foreign Policy Planning in Bern. In 1993 he was assistant to the Special Envoy for Georgia to the United Nations Secretary-General, and later went on to represent Switzerland at the negotiations concerning the conflict in Nagorny Karabakh within the framework of the Swiss chairmanship of the OSCE. From 1995 to spring 1997, still within the framework of the Swiss chairmanship of the OSCE, he returned to Moscow as Minister to the Swiss Ambassador.

In March 1997, he was appointed personal assistant to the Head of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, and in May 1999 took up the position of deputy head of Political Affairs Division VI with the rank of Minister. In May 2000 he was appointed Ambassador and Head of Political Affairs Division VI (Swiss Abroad).

The meetings will take place at the following destinations:

CHRISTCHURCH Saturday 1st December, 7.00pm
at the Historical Boatshed Café, 2 Cambridge Terrace, Chch.

WELLINGTON Sunday 2nd December, 5.00pm
at the Swiss Club House, 21 Moores Valley Road, Wainuiomata.

TARANAKI Monday 3rd December, 8.00pm
at the Swiss Club House, Kaponga

HAMILTON Tuesday 4th December, 7.30pm
at the Quality Hotel. Te Rapa, Hamilton

AUCKLAND Wednesday 5th December, 7.30pm
at the Newmarket Club, 13 Teed Street, Newmarket, Auckland.

For further information, please contact either Mrs Bernadette Hunkeler Brown at the Embassy of Switzerland in Wellington (Ph. 04 472 1593) or your local Swiss Club.