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Switzerland outlines policies

Three days after joining the UN, the Swiss Foreign Minister outlined the country's policy priorities to the General Assembly in New York.

Joseph Deiss said that Switzerland aimed to use its membership of the world body to foster peace and security by promoting human rights and development.

Deiss told the UN that Swiss neutrality will not be compromised. Switzerland voted in a referendum last March to accede to the UN after considerable debate about the impact such a move would have on the nation's independence and sovereignty.

Deiss reiterated that Switzerland's membership of the world body should not alter its neutral status.

"But our neutral status in no way diminishes our desire for co-operation," he noted. "On the contrary, it is an advantage for our peace activities."

While Bern has said it is committed to reaching peace and global security, it has ruled out any participation in UN peace enforcement operations.

Rather, Switzerland intends to use its position in the UN to promote "human security", Deiss told the Assembly.

"This includes stopping the recruitment of child soldiers, eliminating anti-personnel mines, and stopping the proliferation of small arms."

On the sensitive topic of Iraq, Deiss said that any action to force Baghdad to disarm should be done through the UN. He warned that "only the UN can confer international legitimacy to an action against Iraq."

Deiss made an impassioned

plea to the Assembly to work to uphold human rights and fight the exploitation of men, women and children.

Switzerland will adopt the draft Optional Protocol to the UN Convention Against Torture this year, Deiss said. "It is most necessary, and we have been supporting this initiative for years."

Deiss also told the UN that fighting poverty and disregard for the rights of minorities were top priorities for Switzerland.

In its capacity as the depository state of the Geneva Conventions, Deiss said that Switzerland felt a special responsibility to defend international humanitarian law.

He highlighted Switzerland's recent efforts to encourage the conflicting sides in the Middle East to respect the conventions.

"We advocate two mechanisms: one for promoting dialogue to allow the Parties to settle problems concerning the application of international humanitarian law; the second, a monitoring mechanism," Deiss said.

He also reiterated Swiss support for the new International Criminal Court (ICC) and said Bern was committed to convincing countries like the United States to sign or ratify the court's founding statutes.

Deiss ended his speech by reminding the Assembly that Switzerland is the home of the UN's European headquarters and pledged full Swiss support to the international organisation."

source swissinfo.org

Book throws doubt on Vatican murders

The mysterious circumstances surrounding the 1998 murder of the head of the Vatican's Swiss Guard and his wife are once again in the spotlight.

A new book disputes the official Vatican version of what happened.

The elite Swiss Guard is responsible for Vatican security.

"Murdered in the Vatican, May 4 1998" was written by two French lawyers, Jacques Verges and Luc Brossollet, who are representing the family of Cedric Tornay, the Swiss guard accused of the murders.

The book refutes the Vatican's version, according to which Tornay shot guard commander Alois Estermann and his wife, Gloria, in a "moment of madness" after being denied military decoration, before turning the gun on himself. The authors believe instead that Tornay was murdered because of something he saw or knew and have asked the Vatican to reopen the case.

Luc Brossollet, lawyer and co-author of the new book, has spent four years researching the case.

"What we do know is that some people in the Vatican know more about this case than they want to say," said lawyer, Luc Brossollet."

source swissinfo.org