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Farewell from the Ambassador

Dear fellow Swiss citizens

In mid-June, I will be leaving New Zealand for Berlin after four intense and enriching years as the Ambassador of Switzerland to New Zealand, the Cook Islands, Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and Tuvalu and as the Consul-General to American Samoa.

It has been a great pleasure and privilege getting to know you, learning about your lives and finding out the reasons for your emigration to New Zealand. Four years ago, in my welcome message, I mentioned my interest in you, the Swiss living here. I am very pleased to let you know that upon my suggestion, a Swiss journalist and author, Susann Sitzler, together with the renowned Limmat Verlag, will be working on an essay collection on Swiss living in New Zealand and their views of Switzerland, seen from the other side of the world.

Swiss Kiwi personalities were also at the centre of our biggest project celebrating the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between New Zealand and Switzerland in 2013. I am very proud of our YouTube video project "Swiss Kiwi stories", showcasing Swiss and Kiwi personalities with strong connections to each other's countries. If you haven't watched the videos yet, why not do it now? Just click on www.youtube.com/swissem-bassynz.

Good consular services to Swiss citizens have very much been a priority for me and for the consular division of the embassy. In 2013, for the very first time, the embassy was able to offer passport services to Swiss citizens outside of Wellington. A consular officer travelled to Christchurch and Auckland with a mobile biometric unit. The huge demand and overwhelmingly positive feedback proved that this new service was well received by the Swiss community. Another round is planned for late 2014.

The embassy has also worked hard on a revamped website, providing relevant information on consular services in a concise, easily accessible way, be it passports, births/deaths/marriages, military service or any other topic. Furthermore, in a newly created chapter "News & Events", the embassy regularly informs about topics of interest. Please have a look at our new website: www.eda.admin.ch/wellington.

One of the highlights of my past four years was without any doubt the visit of Minister of Foreign Affairs and at the time Vice-president Federal Councillor Didier Burkhalter in Auckland in October 2013. It was the first ever visit of a Swiss Foreign Minister to New Zealand and therefore a truly historic one. Federal Councillor Burkhalter and New Zealand Minister of Foreign Affairs Murray McCully signed a Joint Statement on Bilateral Relations and Cooperation, agreeing to explore opportunities for practical cooperation and consultation. Since, it was agreed that New Zealand will provide support to Swiss citizens in emergency situations through its network of representations in the Pacific region. New Zealand and Switzerland are also looking into the possibility of sharing offices in third countries, thus pooling resources.

New Zealand and Switzerland have always had very friendly relations. But in the past few years relations have intensified and deepened, a goal every ambassador and every embassy works hard on. Once the elections in New Zealand are over, we will see more high-level visitors coming to New Zealand and I

hope to see a parliamentary delegation of the newly founded - New Zealand Switzerland Parliamentary Friendship Group go to Switzerland.

In the past years, interest in the Swiss direct democratic system has been more pronounced than in earlier days, particularly in the context of the referendum on the partial sale of state-owned assets. In numerous discussions, on panels and in contributions to media, I have explained our unique and much cherished direct democratic system; a system that allows citizens to influence to a much larger extent and a system many New Zealanders envy us for.

I cannot look back on my past four years without mentioning the earthquakes in Christchurch. Shortly after I arrived, in September 2010, there was the first earthquake, causing considerable damage to infrastructure. But that first earthquake faded in the wake of the second one of February 2011, when 185 people died. Switzerland immediately offered help with an Urban Search and Rescue Team. It was only after a full week that the embassy received the confirmation that no Swiss was amongst the dead. It was a very intense week that taught us the importance of crisis prevention. The earthquake took a huge toll, also on many Swiss Cantabrians. Some are still struggling, psychologically and financially. It was touching to see how supportive members of the Swiss Club have been to each other.

My family and I have had a wonderful time Down Under. And while we look forward to new adventures, we know we will miss New Zealand, which has become home. I would like to thank the Swiss Clubs and the Swiss Society for warmly welcoming me and always being of support to the embassy. A special thank you goes to the Swiss Club in Wellington for their wonderful help on numerous occasions, and the Swiss Society/Helvetia for a very fruitful and rewarding cooperation.

Goodbye and all the very best to you!

Marion Weichelt
Ambassador of Switzerland



Happiness also came along. Peter found a soul mate in the lovely Cora from Davao, Mindanao in the Phillipines, to whom he has been married to for 24 years. The youngest in a harmonious and closely-knit family with five siblings, Cora gave Peter the courage and inspiration to create a new life. On some spare land on the Vogel estate, he built their Ticinese haven "Orgnana", named after a small village above Magadino. Stone by stone, timber by timber, he lovingly created a Ticinese cottage, large covered pergola with abundant grapes, and of course workshops where he can attend to his passion of wood working. He cannot enter the New Zealand bush without spotting a piece of timber or a branch – preferably curved – on which he can make his impression.

Entering Orgnana is like being "helicoptered" to the Ticino and one of its grottos. It is filled with Peter's creative pieces, testament to his great artistic talent. He loves cooking on his mother's old stove from the Ticino which he imported after she passed away, although these days he has to be bit watchful what he eats. In his pergola, the wine barrel brews away. Of course, grappa is always on the agenda, as is "Nocino", a grappa liqueur infused with walnut.

Peter's heart definitely is still implanted in the Ticino, as is Cora's in the Phillipines. Both miss their childhood homes acutely, but find companionship in dealing with this. Peter walks up the road to visit his brother John where together they contemplate their lives – a conversation that is ongoing. He spends time carving another piece of wood or

playing one of his many handcrafted alphorns. The couple trundles around Auckland in their cozy campervan, occasionally venturing further afield – maybe to Ahipara up North for a spot of fishing. Cora is Peter's rock, always there with a beautiful smile, taking care of Peter and managing the essentials of life. She is the "technology-savvy" of the two and has good computer skills

– essential for keeping in touch with her large family. Peter has managed to get back to Switzerland occasionally, the first time after 30 years in New Zealand and once with Cora. There have been visits to the Phillipines, too.

It was inspiring to spend an afternoon with Peter and Cora at Orgnana, and we thank them very much for their hospitality and openness.

Farewell to Swiss Ambassador Marion Weichelt Krupski

The Swiss Society, on behalf of its members, extends grateful thanks to Swiss Ambassador Marion Weichelt Krupski for her service in New Zealand.

We have appreciated the Ambassador's approachability, thoughtfulness and innovation during her time in New Zealand. This includes of course her diplomatic activities on behalf of the Swiss Government, but also services provided to Swiss people in New Zealand. Many of us have been able to meet the Ambassador at the various functions she held and attended, and to take advantage of the Mobile Passport Unit touring around New Zealand. Most recently, we enjoyed the celebrations on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Swiss-New Zealand diplomatic relations, including the creative YouTube series about outstanding Swiss-Kiwi personalities. We also thank the Ambassador for the many speeches and articles she provided for the Helvetia magazine, giving us a greater understanding of her professional role and views.

We wish Marion and her family the very best for the future and her next appointment.



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