

ANNEX III**Opening address by Ms Martine Brunschwig Graf,
State Counsellor, Head of the Swiss Delegation**

Mr President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Ministers and Heads of Delegation,
Mr Director-General of UNESCO,
Madam Director of the IBE,
Ladies and gentlemen representing teachers, parents, the world of science and civil society as a whole,
Dear friends and conference guests,

On behalf of the Swiss Confederation and the Republic and Canton of Geneva, I have the pleasure to extend warmest greetings to you. We are very proud to host in Geneva a conference that, for the 46th time, has placed education and the future of all the world's young people at the forefront of its concerns. Geneva, the seat of the International Bureau of Education, the centre of activity where Jean Piaget chose to carry out his most important work, is thus honoured and ready once again to fulfil its vocation as host and venue open to all those who are working to improve people's living conditions.

During the next four days we will have the opportunity to get to know each other better and strengthen our ties in the discussion workshops and plenary meetings and on the less formal occasions of the scheduled fringe events. Here and now I have the pleasure of inviting you to the reception to be held by the Swiss delegation this evening at the Hotel Intercontinental.

We can only thank the International Bureau of Education, which organized this conference, for having scheduled the meetings in such a way as to afford opportunities for exchanges of views and socializing so that we can strengthen our ties as education officials from all over the world. We will thus demonstrate that the expression "living together", the common thread running through our work, is not a mere slogan – far from it. We will be able to show that we intend to apply the values and principles that underlie this goal, in particular the respect and willingness to listen that are indispensable to all democratic debates.

International dialogue, exchanges of experience or, to use the terms suggested by UNESCO, "the dissemination and sharing of information and best practices" are the core of the IBE's mission and the goal of the 46th session of the International Conference on Education. In that regard, I wish to stress that we already have an excellent point of departure thanks to the Conference's preparatory work.

I should now like to pay tribute to the Director and staff of the IBE for the quality of the documents submitted to us, which provide valuable considerations for our debates. They encourage us to compare ideas and bring us face to face with our responsibilities.

For example, by showing us that social cohesion and cultural diversity are two of our societies' major challenges in a globalizing world, they remind us that schools play a central role in the training of the world's citizens.

I could hardly say anything else since, being responsible for educational policy in the Republic and Canton of Geneva, I see every day the challenges of communal life in educational institutions attended by students of over 80 nationalities in some instances and with different

mother tongues! And what about Switzerland, with its 26 autonomous cantons and school systems, and its 4 national languages? We shall certainly be keenly interested in the topics discussed during the next few days, particularly those concerning the role of languages in people's ability to live together in a climate of respect for each other!

You experience similar problems that are often compounded by very different financial, economic and social conditions. We all know that we must endeavour to combine the need for an identity with the obligation to respect diversity. We all feel that school is a crucial factor, even though we must be brave enough to say that it cannot do everything. Defining its future role and agreeing on innovative and indispensable educational procedures does not mean that we should be silent about the responsibility of all sectors of society.

Blaming schools for all the world's problems is as dangerous as disregarding them and depriving them of all scope for action. We must commit ourselves to quality education for all. We need to be able to rely on the competence and professional commitment of teachers, on educational tools that are suited to the learning processes and on adequate structures and financial resources. But schools cannot live without support from the members of society and the goodwill of all, parents, families and citizens, in applying and transmitting the principles that teachers undertake to develop in educational establishments.

Respect, receptiveness, a feeling for debate and democratic practice are values and principles that schools must apply and develop. But these values and principles must not remain the exclusive preserve of the school or stop at its doors.

We are here to reflect together and to share our successes and our problems. No country, no expert can claim to have miracle solutions in the field of education. We all face the same need to change and adapt education systems to the needs of those who will tomorrow be responsible for our planet's future. That makes us modest and enquiring. I also hope it will encourage us to be willing to listen, to dialogue and to share. That would no doubt be the best guarantee of this conference's success!

Thank you for your attention.