

National Day Celebration Rütli

Speech by Nora Wilhelm, co-founder of collaboratio helvetica

August 1, 2022

According to the origin myth of Switzerland, 1291 was the year in which the cantons of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwald allied against the foreign domination of the Habsburgs by way of the Rütli vow.

In 1848, the War of Sonderbund led to the constitution that united Switzerland, thereby it shifted from a federation of states to a federal state. And this occurred, despite the major differences of belief between Catholics and Protestants.

2022,

- Our glaciers are likely to disappear almost completely by 2050.
- We have seven years to reach zero CO² emissions and avoid the worst.
- Global economic inequality continues to increase, and conflict will follow.
- The invasion of Ukraine by Russia and authoritarian and colonial movements in different parts of the world.
- And with the transition to renewable energy sources proceeding too slowly, European economies continue to finance these ventures through imports.
- And, also in our own backyard, polarisation constantly increases without solutions in sight.

Our systems and their consequences threaten the very survival of our species on this planet. Existing strategies have made progress, but we are not on track to address these challenges in time.

Switzerland contributes much more than we think, much of the smog in Shanghai is “made in Switzerland”, and we are not immune to the consequences.

It’s a little gloomy, isn’t it? A little dark for a day of celebration?

Yet, I am here today to share with you what still gives me hope, despite it all: Switzerland has a long tradition of cooperation and dialogue across language barriers and religious divides. We have found common solutions to complex challenges in the past, despite these differences.

Can we not use this cultural legacy to meet the challenges of our time?

Whether it's environmental degradation, discrimination or global inequality - these are global issues that require both local and global solutions.

And we already know the answer: In unity, there is strength, even if we don't agree on everything. We seek solutions through dialogue and are willing to compromise. We believe that everyone should have the right to make their own choices, as long as no harm is done to others. We let the municipalities, the organisations closest to those impacted, decide, as long as there is no reason to coordinate at a cantonal or federal level. We have created democratic institutions that protect minorities, that serve the common good and that have ensured Switzerland's stability and development to this day. And, even if we are not the fastest, we change our approaches and our thinking patterns when they no longer serve us, or when we know better.

Can we not therefore deal with today's complex challenges in the same way?

Peaceful struggle is a part of Switzerland's DNA. It is a culture that we have been cultivating throughout the centuries. In order to live up to this potential, we founded collaboratio helvetica. For more than five years, we have been working for the Switzerland of tomorrow by creating spaces for dialogue, as well as new forms of collaboration and participatory approaches.

To meet the challenges of the 21st century, we need approaches that not only tackle the symptoms but address the root causes. Doing this calls for a collaboration across sectors, disciplines and views, developing the capacity to understand how the systems we have created work, so that we can change them. It is only by involving both those in power and the marginalised, that we would be able to take the necessary steps to co-create the right solutions.

Ask yourself: who really wants the glaciers to melt? No one is actively and intentionally making our glaciers melt, yet, it is the sum of all our choices. Today's challenges call for a serious rethinking of our systems, and of the choices made by each and every one of us.

Easy answers and separating the 'good' and the 'bad', are often a sign of over-simplification and manipulation, especially when it comes to complex challenges.

Polarisation doesn't help us find solutions. And when the complexity of these challenges seems too great to bear, we must remember that "federalism rests upon the love of complexity, by contrast with the brutal simplicity which characterises the totalitarian spirit".

Denis de Rougemont

Too often we fight in camps, judging each other, without seeing that we are all suffering because of the same system. We fight and compete with each other even if we share the same objectives. We blame others without considering the context or taking responsibility.

When we converse with someone from a different background or of a different opinion, what if we approached them with curiosity instead of letting our preconceived notions prevent us from listening?

I know that some politicians want to make us believe that we have to be afraid of others. But here's what I also know: Denying the humanity of others so that we don't empathise with them, is the beginning of fascism. Whether it's people from a different culture, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity, it's the same principle. The Genevan, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, said "the freedom of mankind does not lie in the fact that we can do what we want, but that we do not have to do what we do not want." Someone else's freedom to love does not take away mine. The antidote to fear is compassion.

Peaceful struggle is necessary for the freedoms of those less privileged than us, as well as the future generations that will inherit this world. What if we were brave in the struggle for a better future, and in the embodiment of our values in our own lives?

I have more difficult questions than answers, but I have faith in our collaborative and humanitarian legacy to help us move towards a future where humanity as well as other species can thrive.

I invite you to take charge of your power. To make our decisions knowing that we are voting for the future we want. And to defend the right of others to have the same privileges as us. "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." Margaret Mead

And if you don't know where to start, ask yourself: *"What does the Switzerland you want to live in look like?"*

I leave you with three words that have always inspired me: Curiosité, Compassion et Courage.
Neugierde, Mitgefühl und Mut. Curiosity, compassion and courage.

Thank you very much!