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| PD-LOGO | WINKEL | 14.7.2013, 18.00 - 19.30  International Biology Olympiad IBO 2013 Opening Ceremony  Kulturcasino Bern, Herrengasse 25 Grosser Saal  Speaking notes of the President of the National Council  Mrs Maya Graf | | |
| Die Präsidentin CH-3003 Bern |
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|  | 14 July 2013 |  | | |
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Representatives of the Swiss IBO Association and the Swiss National Science Foundation,  
Representatives from the political authorities,  
Donors and strategic supporters of the International Biology Olympiad 2013,  
Competitors and biology teachers,  
Guests, families and members of the public,

Switzerland is extremely proud to play host to the International Biology Olympiad. I would like to thank the University of Bern and IBO Switzerland for having set up this event – a first for this country.

I would like to most warmly welcome the 62 teams gathered from the four corners of the planet and their coordinators. I would particularly like to welcome the candidates from Switzerland and Liechtenstein: Alexander Eichenberger from Birrwil, Thomas Schneeberger from Thunstetten, Leo Caratsch from Trelex, Sebastian Stengele from Rothrist and David Hälg from Vaduz.

A few days ago at the 42nd WorldSkills in Leipzig, the finest young professionals of our country have been in competition with a thousand talents from the whole world. They won 17 medals and 18 awards and made Switzerland the second best within 54 nations and regions. But participation is already winning – for all of you too!

You are here in Bern to defend the pride of your schools and your countries. I hope that you will be stimulated by the tests you are due to take over next week. Take advantage of the occasion to get to know the other participants and expand your electronic address book. You are surrounded by young people who share an equally avid interest in solving life’s mysteries!

I’m also delighted that you’ll be able to meet swiss people as part of the event organised by IBO and *Science et Cité* on the main square in front of the Parliament Building.

Maybe you’ll have time to discover our small country at the heart of Europe, with the Jura mountains to the north and the Alps to the south. A small country where two major European rivers, the Rhine and the Rhône rise and where German, French, Italian and Romansh are spoken, depending on the region.

Most of its 8 million inhabitants live on the plateau between Lake Geneva and Lake Constance. They have a taste for nature and discoveries. They are passionate about life sciences, developed in particular within the pharmaceutical industry. The treatment of auto-immune diseases such as rheumatism and diabetes, the production of artificial skin for burns victims, medical technology for diagnostic, therapeutic or surgical uses: these are just a few examples of where pioneering work is being carried out in Switzerland.

Biologists are helping Switzerland towards sustainable farming and to better protect its natural resources. Ten per cent of them teach while others work on projects in collaboration with scientists from the southern hemisphere.

Researchers, lab directors, experts, industrial partners: biologists interact with a wide range of social actors. I meet them while preparing draft legislation and development policy because it is also their job to inform decision-makers and the public when society is faced with choices.

Biology helps us to improve our understanding of how human beings function. Thanks to biology, our vision of humanity and its place in the universe is continually evolving. Biology is at the service of mankind and life.

Dear Olympiad participants,

Knowledge without conscience is the ruin of the soul, said Rabelais. To become responsible scientists, citizen- biologists, you have to hone your skills in critical thinking. Never be afraid to question what you are taught. Complement your studies through personal research, consult multiple sources. Ask yourself, what evidence is there for what is being said; try to find out who it is who’s talking, what interests does the speaker represent and what are their qualifications.

Demonstrate good judgement, independence and courage because you will often come under pressure. That is how biotechnologies can be put to good use.

When you enter your chosen career, I hope that you will seek out doctors, agronomists, sociologists, economists, philosophers and politicians. These partners will help you to gauge the consequences of your future discoveries and apply the precautionary principle which serves as a guarantor of sustainable development.

Good luck. Give your best and enjoy Switzerland.

Thank you.