

**Intervention of Professor Nicolas Levrat,  
UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues,  
at the Swiss diversity Awards night, Bern, 7 September 2024**

Dear Friends of diversity,

It is a pleasure and an honour to be among you tonight.

I would like to thank the organizers for the invitation.

I would also like to congratulate them for organizing such an event.

Diversity in society is as important for the sustainability of a society as is biodiversity for the sustainability of life on earth. Why?

Because diverse societies are more robust, vibrant, resilient and creative than monolithic ones.

So congratulations for organizing this Swiss diversity Award night.

Now about this award, in the category “Nationality and Ethnicity”.

I’ve been asked whether this category of diversity is relevant in Switzerland.

That’s a good question and the answer is yes. Switzerland is a country proud of its diversity, being build on a federalism that allow the peaceful coexistence of four national languages, and two major religions (which in other countries have been a reason for war). This is true and this is commendable. But this is not enough. What I just described is the Switzerland of 1848. It has much evolved since, thanks to different waves of immigration. And now, the Swiss population is much more diverse, including on terms of nationality and ethnicity. Therefore, the relevance of that award,

Now coming to the award itself:

Congratulations to ***Radgenossenschaft der Landstrasse*** for their great and important work promoting the recognition of ethnic diversity in Swiss society.

I shall seize the opportunity of the attribution of this Award to address two important issues, to pass messages, linked to the work of *Radgenossenschaft der Landstrasse*. Messages not only to you, present here tonight, but also to Swiss authorities.

First, your work aims to promote the cause of Jenish, Sinti and Romas in Switzerland.

As attested by several Council of Europe Reports, Jenish and Sinti are to some extent recognized as minorities in Switzerland. Not Romas. Why?

Because in the European conception of minorities, a community has to be “long established” in a Country to be considered as a minority. This European conception is at odd with the reality of minority issues in Europe. It needs to change. The permanent flux of populations in our globalised world results in minority situations to emerge, even on a short time period. Further, it is a paradox to ask for a minority community whose lifestyle

is nomadic, to be long established in a Country. And third, think about European Countries; several of them have been established (as countries) some 30 years ago; like Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, etc. How can a minority community be long established in a Country which only exists since 30 years.

So this European conception of minorities is non-sensical and at odds with reality. I therefore call on the Swiss authorities, keen to promote diversity and to appear as a model of tolerant and open society, to help change this non-sensical European understanding of minorities, by recognizing Romas as a minority in Switzerland. Switzerland could on this account lead by example.

Second, I have to address one of the fights that your organization pursues: the Scandal of *Pro Juventute* practices as regards Jewish children. You call it a cultural genocide. Whether a genocide or not – you're certainly aware of the many debates in the international community about the scope of this legal qualification – it is at least a series of serious criminal behaviours.

Confronted to a similar criminal national behaviour, with what is known as the "Indian Residential schools", which also lasted for decades and had the same "purpose" as the *Pro Juventute* scandal – the Canadian authorities established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to deal with this dark memory. It successfully worked from 2007 to 2015. It allowed Canadian and indigenous communities to start a healing process. It is not only about legal responsibility and financial compensation; it is a necessary process in a responsible liberal (meaning not autocratic) society facing such a past scandal.

I expect Switzerland to do no less than Canada on the *Pro Juventute* scandal. I call on the Swiss Authorities to create a Truth and Reconciliation Commission on that issue. And in order for me to be proud of my Country (I am a Swiss national), I expect our authorities to do it on their own initiative, and not wait – as was the case with the establishment in the late 1990's of the "Bergier Commission" – until an unbearable international pressure compels them to abide. Also, unlike the Bergier Commission, it shall not be an expert body. It needs to be a participatory process (in Canada, more than 6'500 hearings were organized) to which all stakeholders have the possibility to contribute. It is a necessary condition for the Jewish Community, but also for the Swiss society as a whole, to start a healing process on this hideous part of our history.

I know the continuous work of *Radgenossenschaft der Landstrasse* on these two issues. So please accept this Award as a recognition and a support to your contribution to diversity in Swiss Society.