

## "Eiger-Climate-Schools" – the balancing act

Check against delivery

*Pascale Bruderer Wyss, President of the National Council*

First of all, I think it's terrific that you have all come here to Grindelwald to see with your own eyes what climate change really means.

When we sit at home in front of the computer or TV, fly off on holiday, fetch a cold drink from the fridge, drive around in the car, or buy strawberries from South Africa, we don't immediately think of the impact of our actions on the environment.

While we are not exactly unacquainted with climate change, in our day-to-day lives it often comes across as an abstract and relatively intangible concept. We don't feel immediately affected. Because where you and I live, there are not glaciers or permafrost right on our doorstep. We know about global warming and have noticed that the weather is becoming more unpredictable, with mudslides covering houses and streets, and yes, we also realise that these events have come closer to home and perhaps also more frequent in recent years. But how close can we afford to let them come?

In the mountains people take a very different view. For the people who live here, climate change is not only a tangible but also a visible reality: and for many a bitter one.

For each half-degree increase in the earth's atmosphere, the average snowline creeps up to 100 meter higher. Over the past 160 years, 100 glaciers have disappeared from the Swiss Alps: this has resulted in the loss of one-third of glacier surface area and half of glacier volume. That's an enormous loss. Or let's look at the past 10 years: Over this period alone, Swiss glaciers have lost on average 27 cubic meters of ice per second.

Yet glaciers are our most important water reservoir. Once the glacier ice has melted for ever, we will have no more water and our rivers will be reduced to mere trickles. But the Alps, the ice and the snow are also part of our national identity. And they are absolutely essential for our tourist industry. Snowmaking equipment will not help in the long run.

In 2004 I was here in Grindelwald on a long hike; I was shown where the glacier originally ended, and how dramatically the landscape had changed since then. Now, only six years later, the situation has changed yet again – that's how quickly things are developing. The newly created lake in the lower Grindelwald glacier, the shrinking of the Eiger glacier, and the growing incidence of rock fall on the Jungfrauoch are not local phenomena. They are stark examples of climate change in the heart of Europe. The effects are also being seen in other countries, but often in a different way. The consequences of global warming are as varied as the people that are causing them.

I am convinced that a new approach is needed to climate change. And I am equally convinced that all of us – you and I – can make a contribution.

Have you ever had the feeling that the powers that be in this world talk too much about climate and do too little to improve the situation? I can well understand such feelings – indeed, I often feel the same way. And then I say to myself: Don't just wait until politicians finally agree on binding targets and define how these targets are to be achieved. Rather than waiting, we must change now what we can change ourselves. Start by taking small steps! All progress starts with a single step; and no matter how small that step, it takes us in the right direction.

That's exactly what has happened here, in the Jungfrau region. People took the initiative themselves and, in association with Jungfrau KlimaCO<sub>2</sub>operation, launched several projects to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and protect the climate.



You are here today because this region has an important message for all of us. That message is: "Look and learn – climate change is not a figment of your imagination! It's real, we are affected and it's threatening our livelihood". This is a message we must take seriously – also because we can see the threat with our own eyes.

Year after year, the Jungfrau region is a magnet for thousands of tourists from all over the world. The message which these visitors receive en route is valid throughout the world. Because climate change affects us all – even if the consequences are more obvious and visible more quickly in some places than in others.

As a country severely affected by climate change, Switzerland was quick to recognise that the world was heading for a disaster unless people managed their resources more carefully and were willing and able to reduce CO2 pollution.

Here in Switzerland we conduct world-class research. Geneva is the seat of the most important climate organisation, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and the University of Berne plays a key role within this organisation. We have no heavy industry, increasingly opt for low-carbon technologies, and produce electricity that is largely carbon-neutral. Efforts and advances are being made, but they are not being made quickly enough or consistently enough. Switzerland must set an example to other European countries and achieve a massive reduction in its emissions over the next few decades.

"We can stop global warming because we must stop it," said our Minister of the Environment Moritz Leuenberger at the Climate Summit in Copenhagen. But that will only happen if today's generation of adults and future generations pull together. This is the only way to achieve a change in mentality, a genuinely new way of thinking.

So that's why I say once again: It's marvellous that you have come here to take part in this extraordinary project that will set a new example. Seeing with your own eyes and hearing with your own ears what climate change means – that's the aim of this project.

This is an important message – and not just for you. Hence my appeal: Act as ambassadors, pass on your findings and experiences, get involved, take part in the debate and demand action on the part of politicians.

Because you are the future and have the right to demand sustainable resource management today, to ensure your future quality of life.

I'm sure that if we join forces across generations and make a concerted effort, our collective weight and commitment will be enough to restore more equilibrium to our planet.

Many thanks!