

## **Press conference of 3 November 2016**

### **Address by Gottfried Locher, president, Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches and Community of Protestant Churches in Europe**

#### *The spoken text shall prevail*

Ladies and gentlemen of the press

I would like to welcome all of you here to the International Museum of the Reformation in Geneva.

There could be no better location for this press conference for the 500-year anniversary of the Reformation than the MIR.

The MIR sets out to explain to visitors the roots of the Reformation in Geneva without any missionary zeal or evangelisation.

And it is precisely in this same vein that we have decided to celebrate the anniversary of the Reformation.

For the Swiss Federation of Churches, what counts most is not Luther's posting of his theses, which is said to have taken place in Wittenberg 500 years ago. And our aim is not to pursue a cult of personality based on the great Reformers – Luther, Zwingli and Calvin, the great Reformer of Geneva – **but rather what we are concerned with is the Reformation as a movement. It is a movement whose cultural, societal and political importance still influences us 500 years on.**

The basic principle of freedom inherent to the Reformation has had a significant influence on democratic culture throughout Europe, and of course in Switzerland too. The idea of the modern secular constitutional and social state governed by the rule of law was profoundly shaped by the Reformation: **without the Reformation, Switzerland would not be the country it is today. In this anniversary year, our task is to communicate this message.**

**Accordingly, our aim is not to return to a mystical date in history, but rather to reflect on what the Reformation means to the generations of today and tomorrow.**

With this in mind, a prestigious patronage committee has been assembled to accompany our anniversary celebrations. The patronage committee is chaired jointly by Johann Schneider-Amman, President of the Swiss Confederation, and myself. The other committee members include not only the presidents of all the political parties, from the Social Democratic Party to the Swiss People's Party, but also many scholars, as well as – and this is something that was particularly important to us – women, and representatives of all religious denominations. The message that we are sending out together is clear: **the Reformation does not belong to the Protestant Church alone. The Reformation has meaning for Protestants, but also for people of other faiths, and for non-believers as well.** For that reason, we are particularly pleased that, following today's press conference, Federal Councillor Alain Berset, who is Catholic, will be giving the welcome address on behalf of the Swiss government.

In any event, for us, the ecumenical aspect is central to this anniversary year. The Reformers of 500 years ago did not intend to create a schism within the Church, but simply to renew the existing Church. And that is precisely what we will be commemorating at our major Ecumenical Celebration in Zug in April 2017.

From today's opening ceremony to the youth festival – in your press kit you will find a fact sheet with details on a selection of events that will take place over the coming months. At this point, in addition to the Ecumenical Celebration, I would like to point out two events in particular.

Firstly, the first major celebration of the Reformation in German-speaking Switzerland will be held in Zurich in early January 2017. The highlight of this will be the *Schattenwurf Zwingli*, a light show performed by the light artist Gerry Hofstetter.

Secondly, I would like to mention the World Reformation Exhibition taking place in Wittenberg from May to September 2017. Switzerland will be present with an artistic concept, and hundreds of thousands of visitors are expected to come to the exhibition. Without giving too much away, the pavilion will be designed by the Basel-based architects Christ & Gantenbein.

But enough about what's to come; let us return to today's anniversary celebration: once again, it is with great pleasure to start the anniversary year together with you here in Geneva, and the fact that Switzerland is at the heart of this Europe wide celebration today is a great honour. Without further ado, I would like to give the word to Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, Chairman of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany, who will tell us more about the European Roadmap Project.