

Visit of his Excellency Shri Nath Kovind, President of India
12 September 2019

Speech of Rector Prof. Dr. Christian Leumann

The spoken word applies

Dear guests of honor and friends of the University

It is with immense pleasure that I welcome today his Excellency, the honorable President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind, here at the University of Bern during his official visit to Switzerland.

Switzerland and India have longstanding and excellent relations, not only in economy but also in research and education. This becomes evident in the exchange of students and the setup of mutual research programs, as for example the Indo-Swiss Research Program, supported jointly by the Swiss National Science Foundation and the Indian Department of Biotechnology.

In a typical Swiss tradition, the University of Bern is an open University. About 45% of our professors and PhD students are non-Swiss citizens. This has always been a recipe of success for the high quality of the Swiss academic system, and this certainly contributes to the fact that the University of Bern belongs to the top percent of all Universities worldwide.

We are a comprehensive University with 18'000 students that are enrolled in close to 150 Bachelor, Master and PhD programs. Besides our eight faculties, we have nine strategic research centers, focusing on cutting edge, interdisciplinary research to provide scientific facts for the most pressing questions of society. These research centers are focusing on the fields of sustainability, medicine

and health, intercultural knowledge, matter and universe, as well as politics and administration.

Climate change is probably the most challenging global threat of these days and this can be seen by simply looking at the speed in which glaciers disappear in the Alps and in the Himalaya, to pick up elements of the title of our guests note. Climate science has been a research focus at the University of Bern for more than half a century. We have significantly contributed in providing hard data on the evolution of greenhouse gases over the last 1.5 million years. With this the University of Bern has considerably shaped the Paris agreement of 2017, which defines the important climate goals for the future. This treaty has been ratified by 185 countries, including also Switzerland and India. India, being the second largest country in the world, and Switzerland both have a strong responsibility in taking effective measures towards climate neutrality.

Both countries have demonstrated in the past to take responsibility in the international community. India was presiding the intergovernmental panel on climate change, while the University of Bern was co-leading the IPCC scientific working group, responsible for setting the climate goals in the Paris declaration. In addition, Prof. Peter Messerli from the University of Bern was leading the international expert group for the UN global sustainability report that was presented only yesterday in New York.

We are proud that the President of India is now going to address his note to us, which is entitled «India-Switzerland New Age Partnership: Connecting Himalayas with the Alps». May I kindly ask the President to step up to the speakers desk.