**Opening address from Cantonal Councillor Christian Amsler, President of the D-EDK**

**Lucerne 2016**

Lucerne, International Conference on Education about the Holocaust, 15 February 2016

Ambassadors,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education, it is my pleasure to welcome you here to Lucerne to this international conference on research and education on the Holocaust. I would like to express my great thanks to Professor Monique Eckmann and Professor Peter Gautschi and his team for taking the initiative to organise this major scientific event. The venue is particularly appropriate, given that the University of Teacher Education in Lucerne is an institution dedicated specifically to teaching teachers. The memory must be passed on, and it is to the schools that this key task falls.

In Switzerland, where primary responsibility for education lies with the cantons, the decision to teach the memory of the Holocaust was a unanimous one, taken by the full body of cantonal ministers of education in June 2003. This is rather an unusual event in our multilingual, federalist system. As a rule, each canton decides for itself what should be taught in his own schools. The canton's consensus thus demonstrates the great political weight that they attach to the subject.

There has been considerable progress in Holocaust education since 2003. While there is still more work to be done, I am going to take the "glass half full" rather than the "glass half empty" perspective. The effectiveness and impact of education on a given subject over time, from generation to generation, is measured in terms of how deeply it is rooted in the school system concerned. The depth of those roots generally depends on three things:
firstly, the subject must feature in the relevant curriculum; secondly, properly adapted teaching materials must be developed; and, thirdly, teachers must be trained to use these materials in accordance with curriculum targets. Clearly, this is a long-term endeavour, which typically takes some ten years. It is the effort required to ensure that a subject becomes a lasting element of the school system.

As things stand today, Switzerland has completed the first two stages. Thanks in particular to the work of Monique Eckmann, Charles Heimberg, Nadine Fink and Peter Gautschi, we now have excellent quality teaching resources in both French and German.

The third stage – teacher training – is well under way. Two Universities of Teacher Education in two different language regions, Lucerne and Lausanne, have joined forces to promote Holocaust education. They have also entered into a partnership with the Yad Vashem memorial in Jerusalem. Students have been able to benefit from this programme and this partnership for several years now, and I would like to take this opportunity to express my most heartfelt thanks to the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation, for supporting the project financially from the very start

What do the years ahead hold for Holocaust education in Switzerland? The first task is to consolidate this third stage of work. Then it is important to develop certain parallel activities. Here I am thinking in particular of the study visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial organised for German-speaking teachers by the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities and the Platform for Liberal Jews in Switzerland. This year, the study trip will take place in November, and I would like to encourage as many teachers as possible to take part. It is worth remembering that a similar study tour has been running in French-speaking Switzerland for almost fifteen years now, thanks primarily to CICAD, the intercommunity coordination organisation against anti-Semitism and defamation.

Of course, there is still much more work to be done, especially in the current climate in which we are seeing a worrying resurgence of anti-Semitism and racism. The cantons and their schools have an enormous task ahead of them in this regard, and the coming years will require us to redouble our efforts.

While I am fully aware of the difficulties, I still have complete faith in the ability of this country's teachers to rise to the challenge.

Thank you.