

Federal Councillor of Foreign Affairs Dr Cassis, Leaders of the Jewish Community, Maestro Zubin Mehta and the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra, Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen, I'm very proud to be here this evening as Minister of Foreign Affairs of Israel, at this festive and moving event marking 70 years of Israel's diplomatic relations with Switzerland.

As a son of Holocaust survivors – my father Meir passed away 12 years ago and my mother Malka passed away recently – this event has special meaning for me.

In my mind, tonight's event connects past and present. It connects the painful past with the present optimism of Jewish life in Europe.

For me, the performance here in Switzerland of the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra, among the finest in the world, conducted by the wonderful Maestro Zubin Mehta, brings all of this together.

Excellency, Dr Cassis, I would like to express my deep appreciation for jointly heading this "festive event" with us, and for your personal commitment to promoting our bilateral relations.

Our thanks to all of you who have joined us today, to the KKL, to the Luzern Festival and to the city of Luzern for kindly hosting us. Of course, our thanks also to Maestro Zubin Mehta and to the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra.

Dear Friends,

It's hard to think of Zionism without thinking of the beautiful cities of Basel, Geneva, Zurich and Luzern, where so many Zionist Congresses were held, starting with the first in 1897.

Perhaps the congresses were so successful because of the lovely cafes and streets of your charming cities. Theodor Herzl clearly knew what he was doing...

Of course, our two countries are connected by more than this history. We are connected by deep values: democracy, freedom and human rights. In addition, we are connected by our innovative cultures. Our economies are based on the most valuable resource of all: a hardworking and highly skilled workforce.

Recent years have seen strong growth in our economic and scientific cooperation, with many senior visits, including a meeting between Prime Minister Netanyahu and former President Berset in Davos last year. We have signed new agreements and business ties are expanding.

As minister of transportation, last year I had the pleasure to sign our new agreement on air services. We have established close cooperation with SBB and welcomed the new cars of the Haifa "Carmelit" that we bought from Switzerland in 2018.

Before concluding, I would like to wish the Jewish community of Switzerland continued prosperity.

The State of Israel will always stand with you in the fight against Anti-Semitism.

We will continue to work together to raise awareness about the Holocaust among the younger generations.

In this regard, I want to commend Switzerland for being a member of the "International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance" and for leading it in 2017.

Dear friends,

Switzerland is well-known for its commitment to peace.

In our region, you have even hired barn owls to help you foster peace, by supporting cooperation between Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians in a great project of organic pest control.

In addition, over the years, Switzerland has represented Israel's interests in places where direct diplomatic channels have been blocked. It says something about Trust and it says something very deep about friendship.

We in Israel are proud of our strong friendship with Switzerland. We remain committed to expanding our ties even further.

May the first 70 years of our bilateral relations be just a beginning to the cooperation and friendship, which lie ahead.

Thank you.