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Et tu quoque Brute!

Lausanne, March 16, 2017

Ms. Doris Leuthard
President of the Swiss Confederation
The Federal Palace
Bundesplatz 3
3005 Bern

Subject: The decision by the Confederation to ban the import of seal products

Madam President,

Few human beings can benefit and enjoy the privileged position of mine: I am a Canadian citizen and I have been living in Switzerland for 35 years. In other words, I share my existence between the two countries that are in the top two of the world rankings for their quality of life. Two countries that advocate the sustainable use of natural resources as a conservation mechanism. Two countries that want to be ardent defenders of human rights. And in this sense, I fully subscribe to those who make Switzerland the undisputed champion of humanitarian causes - all categories combined. It is precisely humanitarian considerations that have motivated my involvement in the international conservation scene for nearly forty years.

Allow me, Madam President, to express my surprise, not to say my dismay, at the recent decision by the Confederation to ban the import of seal products. This decision affects not only the livelihoods of Canadians, Greenlandic Aboriginals and fishermen, but also the survival of their cultures and traditions. The European Union highlighted the exception which states that "imports of seal products are permitted if they are derived from traditional forms of hunting by Inuit communities or other indigenous communities and if hunting contributes at the same time, to ensure the subsistence of the community." This exception, ridiculous as it is, is repeated in the decision of the Confederation. However, and this is the odious of the decision of the European Union, this exception has had no effect and has served, on the contrary, to accelerate the destruction of the cultural link between Inuit and seal. One has only to watch the documentary "Inuk angry (Angry Inuk)" to be convinced.

So, Madam President, can you explain the reasons for this rather surprising decision of the Confederation. An agreement with the European Union? No agreement can allow a nation to become an accomplice to the destruction of a culture; moreover, no agreement should

lead a nation to behave like Panurge's sheep. Protect seals? All the species being harvested are superfluous. Is it to please the animal rights extremists? This can only be done to the detriment of human rights. Has it simply been forgotten that this decision runs counter to the five strategic objectives adopted by FAO - the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations - to eliminate, at least reduce, malnutrition and poverty? So what?

For a time, I thought of plagiarizing Emile Zola and titling this letter "J'accuse". But conscious of the fact that the decision of the Confederation is more a result of the political drift than its betrayal of those whose means of subsistence, culture and traditions pass through the harvesting of natural marine resources, I have abandoned this idea.

It is nonetheless true, Madam President, that those who depend on marine resources, including seals for their survival, were certainly in a position to expect a different response from a country like Switzerland, be only as a moral support in the constant struggle - where they are left to defend themselves - that opposes them to the animal extremists.

Madam President, I should be grateful if you would kindly find a way to comfort them in this respect.

Accept, Madam President, the expression of my highest consideration,

Eugène Lapointe, President
IWMC World Conservation Trust
Former Secretary-General of CITES (1982-1990)