

Opening Address
The Honorable Dominik Furgler,
Ambassador of Switzerland
Caravan Festival of the Art-Maadi, Cairo
9 May 2013

Excellencies,
Distinguished (representatives of different religions),
Dear Paul-Gordon Chandler,
Dear artists,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me enormous pleasure to take part for now the third time at the opening of the Caravan interfaith arts festival, and I am particularly delighted to be directly associated to this wonderful initiative for the first time.

When Paul-Gordon asked the Swiss Embassy whether it could sponsor Caravan 2013 we hadn't to think for long. Lucky to have some funds, convinced of the importance of promoting interfaith harmony and goodwill and based on the positive experience of past Caravans we agreed with pleasure.

In a world and time where sectarian tension, prejudice or ignorance as well as fear and rejection of "the other" seem to prosper ever more, we must do whatever we can to further dialogue and the mutual knowledge about our religious traditions and convictions. And while respecting differences and refusing egalitarianism, we should promote the understanding that our religions do above all share a large set of key values, or in the words of the renowned catholic theologian Hans Küng, a common world ethos.

This can be done in many ways as we know: by adopting UN resolutions, holding big symposia and discussions among intellectuals or publishing countless bright articles and papers by bright people, to give a few examples. And while this is all important and good, it seems to me particularly important to do it at grass-roots level and in a way that reaches the souls and minds of ordinary people of different background like you and me.

That's exactly what the Caravan festival is doing by using the Arts as a tool: the Arts uniting us as a language of love and peace, as the actress Yousra said last year; the Arts as a language we all understand, a language satisfying our need for beauty and contemplation, a common language expressing our humanity and used so many times to enhance our religiosity.

Ladies and Gentlemen: This Caravan year is the Caravan year of the donkey! Although I should – as a Swiss – prefer cows, this is a great idea! We had painted and otherwise decorated cows many years ago in Zürich and other Swiss cities, before the successful idea made its way to the United States and elsewhere. But what could be closer at hand than using the donkey in the particular interreligious context we face in this region? And as the cows before, some of the wonderful donkeys we can see this evening will make their way out of Egypt to Geneva and London, where they will continue to spread the message, a message which needs to be understood in the whole world.

Alf mabruk and shoukran gazilan to all the artists, to the curators and above all to Paul-Gordon Chandler, the heart and soul of Caravan. Knowing that you will be leaving soon, I would like to thank you for your tremendous efforts and engagement in promoting interfaith understanding and harmony. We will all miss you, and we wish you and your loved ones all the best for the future. Paul-Gordon, I am already now looking forward to seeing you again in November, both of us having new positions, when a herd of donkeys will reunite us in London!

Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you for your attention, enjoy the marvelous donkeys and the Caravan Festival "In peace and with compassion!"