

Press Release

Zurich, 19 September 2014

Green Cross Switzerland celebrates its 20th anniversary:

Nuclear disarmament for an unburdened future

For the last 20 years, Green Cross Switzerland has worked to overcome the consequences of industrial and military disasters through its Legacy and Social and Medical Care programmes. In specific terms, Green Cross Switzerland stands for a global phase-out of nuclear power and the environmentally friendly elimination of nuclear and chemical weapons through the Legacy programme. With a focus on nuclear weapon-free zones, round-table discussions are held on expanding the Non-Proliferation Treaty into a nuclear disarmament treaty, ending the existing approach to nuclear sharing.

On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of Green Cross Switzerland in Zurich, Mikhail Gorbachev calls upon the official members of the nuclear club and other countries to freeze their nuclear arsenals and continue negotiations on limitation and reduction. "It is time for the USA to honour the commitments they made in Prague in 2009 regarding nuclear disarmament," says Gorbachev. However, he also points out the importance of concomitant arms control. "If the issues about demilitarising global politics, reducing nuclear weapons budgets, halting the development of new weapon types and preventing the militarisation of space are not addressed at the same time, any discussions about a nuclear weapon-free world will be meaningless," says Gorbachev.

"The world has changed and will continue to do so, while our political decisions lag behind these accelerated processes of change. We are still reluctant to abandon our stereotypes and outdated concepts, even though they have dangerous and catastrophic effects in a globalised world. Perestroika, glasnost and the concept of new thinking precipitated a dramatic shift in politics. Back then, in the mid-1980s, we became fully aware not just of the danger of heightened confrontation between the opposing political systems, but also the need to move from confrontation to cooperation," explains Gorbachev. According to him, transparent governments combined with an open and clear information policy and a good general level of education among the population, particularly the youth, are critical to solving the world's problems.

In the last 20 years, the Social and Medical Care programme has been continuously developed and adapted on the basis of the findings of the Chernobyl study to meet the needs of the population living in areas contaminated with radiation. Through this international health and education programme, Green Cross Switzerland works on the ground in Japan, Moldova, Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and the countries affected by Agent Orange: Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. Every year, more than 1,100 children and young people recover in therapy camps. To strengthen their immune system and mental state, they spend four weeks in clean air, receiving unpolluted food and comprehensive medical care. Radiation levels in their bodies are reduced by 30 to 80 per cent. More than 1,200 mothers participate in the mother-and-child project each year with their babies. They receive psychological and medical care and attend nutrition courses to help them deal with contaminated foods.

Just as the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement offers global assistance in humanitarian crises, at the Rio Conference Mikhail Gorbachev proposed the foundation of an organisation to provide solutions to environmental problems across national borders. The

idea of a “Green Cross of the Environment” was born. In 1992 the Rio Conference adopted the proposal and formally agreed to establish the new organisation, “Green Cross International”. Meanwhile, a group of Swiss citizens led by the former Zurich MP, Roland Wiederkehr, took a completely different approach. Their petition of April 1992 demanding the establishment of an organisation to combat environmental disasters was signed by 100,000 people and actively supported by 233 parliamentarians.

In September 1994, the petition led to the foundation of Green Cross Switzerland. The organisation focuses on improving the quality of life for people affected by chemical, radioactive and other types of contamination, as well as promoting sustainable development in the interests of cooperation instead of confrontation. The objectives of the ZEWO-certified environmental organisation are supported by the non-party Green Cross Parliamentary Group, which comprises 25 members of the Council of States and 83 members of the National Council.

Green Cross International (GCI), founded in 1993 by Mikhail Gorbachev, is an independent, charitable non-governmental organisation that campaigns through high-level lobbying and local projects to overcome the interlinked global challenges of security, poverty reduction and environmental degradation. Based in Geneva, GCI maintains a growing network of national organisations in more than 30 countries.

For further information, please contact Nathalie Gysi, Executive Director of Green Cross Switzerland, tel. 044 043 499 13 10 or mobile 079 620 18 14.