



Swiss Confederation

3003 Bern, FDFA, DB

To the people of the United States of America
via the Abraham Lincoln
Presidential Library & Museum
112 North Sixth Street
Springfield, Illinois 62701
USA

Bern, 13 April 2015

Statement on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the death of President Abraham Lincoln

150 years ago, a father of Liberty passed away. President Lincoln believed that all men are created equal and fought wholeheartedly for the United States' values.

In Switzerland the loss was deeply felt. For were the two countries not sister republics? Democracies among the monarchies of the 19th century? Their mutual influence was considerable before the American Revolution, and the US Constitution of 1787 inspired to a great extent the young federal Swiss nation of 1848. Two sister republics dedicated to the same ideal, both engaged in civil war – mercifully short in Switzerland, but long and terrible in America – testing whether each could long endure. Two nations whose leaders had the wisdom to create a future based on peace, through reconciliation and the sharing of power.

President Lincoln's assassination on 14 April 1865 caused an outpouring of emotion, as witnessed in the words of the Swiss governmentⁱ, the General Consulⁱⁱ and the cantonsⁱⁱⁱ. Abraham Lincoln embodied the sense of duty, genuine concern for his fellow citizens, and the courage to show political commitment to his beliefs. Through his struggle to build one nation, to free men from their chains, he remains today a source of inspiration as a great statesman.

Contrary to his speech at Gettysburg, the world will long remember his words as well as his acts. He bestowed much glory on the sacrifices made in the name of Liberty. It is for us and our future generations to pursue the work so nobly advanced by our two nations. We must continue to ensure that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Didier Burkhalter
Federal Councillor

ⁱ "A thrill of horror and deep indignation (...) pervades the entire civilised world, and more particularly Switzerland, considering herself united by the most cordial and nearest ties to her great sister republic."

"You will not fail to express (...) our sincere hope that the American Union reunited in love and conciliation, now mightier than ever, will, with renewed energy, strive to accomplish the great destiny which Providence has assigned her, and thus present to the world herself as the greatest monument reared in commemoration of the great dead."

Extracts, translated into English, from the letter from the Federal Council (Swiss government), signed by the President of the Confederation, Karl Schenk, and the Federal Chancellor, Johann Ulrich Schiess, to the General Consulate of Switzerland in Washington (April 1865).

ⁱⁱ "When (...) the representative of the time-honoured republic of Switzerland expresses, in her behalf, sincere sympathy for the irreparable loss sustained, just in an hour of triumph, by her great sister republic the United States, I pray it may be accepted as the heartfelt emotion of a national heart which has ever beat in unison with that of the United States, and with those great principles of free government whereof his excellency, your late esteemed president, Abraham Lincoln, appeared to be the embodiment."

Extract from the letter from the General Consul of Switzerland, John Hitz, addressed to H.E. William Seward, United States Secretary of State, 15 April 1865.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Willingly following the example of other cantons, (...) we have unanimously resolved to ascent to the general address of sympathy and condolence of the Swiss Confederation to the North American Union, on account of the assassination of its excellent President Abraham Lincoln. We have no doubt but this sympathy is universal (...)"

Extract, translated into English, from the letter from the Cantonal Parliament of the Canton of Uri to the Swiss Federal Council (for forwarding to the United States government), 8 May 1865.