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Geneva Engage: Where innovation meets diplomacy

‘Innovative e-participation can increase the visibility and inclusiveness of the important work done across International Geneva, raising awareness about its direct impact on people everywhere and enabling us to listen to the voices outside of Geneva.’ This was how Michael Moller, Director-General of the UN Office at Geneva, summed up the aims of the Geneva Engage conference during his keynote address.

Participants at the Geneva Engage conference, taking place on 27 - 28 January 2016, looked for ways to foster effective links between International Geneva and communities worldwide that are affected by digital, climate change, migration, human rights, trade, and other policies discussed and negotiated in Geneva.

Ambassador Alexandre Fasel, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the UN in Geneva, stressed that ‘E-tools need to be adjusted to a wide range of scenarios. They can support the work of a select and focussed group, for example twelve negotiators around the same table. They can also support creating a highly inclusive environment, for example reaching out to the more than three billion mobile users worldwide and helping them to voice their views.’

Olivier Coutau, Delegate for International Geneva of the Republic and State of Geneva, asked participants: ‘How do we make sure that the farmer growing rice in Matara (Sri Lanka), the combatant in Kunduz (Afghanistan), the teacher in Juba (South Sudan) and the factory director in Zenica (Bosnia and Herzegovina) are all aware of the decisions taken in Geneva?’ He concluded that ‘e-participation can help to make international Geneva more accountable, more impactful, more relevant and, at the end of the day, more sustainable.’

Jovan Kurbalija, Director of DiploFoundation, suggested that ‘Lac Lemman can become the ‘European Bay Area.’ He explained: ‘With a unique blend of scientific, business, and policy institutions concentrated in a small space, Geneva can become a magnetic pool for the creative industry, think-tanks, and policy actors

worldwide. The use of e-tools, including e-participation, can reinforce the local and physical relevance of Geneva, very much like what happened in the San Francisco Bay Area.'

The Geneva Engage Awards for effective use of e-participation tools were presented in four categories: permanent missions in Geneva (France), international organisations (WHO), non-governmental organisations (WWF), and small non-governmental organisations (Child Connect).

During the first day more than 100 participants conducted a real-life experiment in e-participation by having both presenters and participants both online and *in situ*. A particularly lively session was on the way how e-participation tools can help persons with disabilities. With close to a billion people with some form of disability, their inclusion in global policy is one of the important challenges of global policy.

During the second day, the conference will focus on ways of widening and broadening participation. It will also be attended by the first 'robot e-diplomat'.

The Geneva Engage Conference is organised by [DiploFoundation](#) and the [Geneva Internet Platform](#) in co-operation and with the support of the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN in Geneva, the Canton of Geneva, and with the support of ICANN.

Please see the conference website to learn more: [Geneva Engage](#)

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