

Fiji in virtual link with Swiss

By SOPHIE HILDEBRAND

IF you're wondering what on earth Switzerland has to do with business here, think Nestle, Rolex, Tissot, Omega, Rado, Raymond Weil, Victorinox, Tobler Toblerone, Credit Suisse-First Boston investment and banking services, Sulzer turbines.

In fact, the list can grow even bigger with the variety of goods and services coming out of that country.

Now, Swiss living and working in Fiji have set up the Swiss-Fiji Business Association.

Aiming to foster trade links in goods and services between Fiji and Switzerland, it will also look at investment in the two countries.

Last night, the association was kicked off by the Swiss Ambassador to Fiji, Sylvie Matteucci, and Fiji Trade and Investment Bureau chief executive, Jesoni Vitusagavulu.

The Ambassador was keen on potential here.

"In a globalised world, every country, every firm is an attractive partner.

"Fiji has a good location in the middle of the Pacific Rim, a buoyant economy, good communications, and a willing and skilled work force.

"Political conditions are stabilising. The fact that people in Fiji have created this initiative is a sign that there is widespread business confidence in the future of Fiji."

On what the country could export to Switzerland, she says the imagination is the limit.

"Fiji has specialised textile companies, it has top level IT firms, or sought after agricultural specialities. It is a magic tourist destination.

"Fiji can find a niche in the Global Value Chains that now span the globe. The Asian



Swiss ambassador, Sylvie Matteucci, at the launch of the Swiss-Fiji Business Association last night

Development Bank has pointed this out. New Zealand foreign minister Phil Goff has given a similar view in a recent speech at USP. I can only join them and point out that GVC have long been a mainstay of the Swiss economy. It is an economy that is fully integrated in Europe, one of the most dynamic markets world-wide."

She believes that as the political situation stabilises here, the country will be an attractive investment destination.

"As the political situation stabilises and Fijians work more and more together to overcome poverty and underemployment, investment becomes an attractive

option. Closer links between Switzerland and Fiji would seem to me a logical consequence."

The Ambassador, who learned to scuba dive off Taveuni says it is always difficult to leave Fiji — a quality the country should utilise.

The Swiss-Fiji Business Association also launched its website, www.swissfiji.com.

"We want to make it easy for Fijian entrepreneurs to enter the Swiss market," says organiser Daniel Zender.

"They can log into the site and get a wealth of information, contacts, and tips on how to go about it. We plan to improve the site, by

creating links to many Swiss firms that are interested in trade."

Plans are to integrate the website into the Swiss trade promotion IT networks, so that the site is always up to date.

"Then we dream about a trade and investment mission to Switzerland," he says. "Finally, we would like to branch out into the other Pacific Islands and become a regional focal point for trade with Switzerland."

Considering the big brand names involved in business in Switzerland, it's a wonder more such developments haven't happened already.