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3 November 2003

Press Release

Exactly three months after the official launch by the Swiss Ambassador to Fiji in New Zealand, H.E. Mrs. Sylvie Matteucci, the first Annual General Meeting of the Swiss-Fiji Business Association took place in Suva on 18 October 2003.

The members present at the meeting elected Mr. James Rafoi as President, Mr. Gerhard Stemmler as Vice-President and Mr. Daniel Zender as Secretary. Other elected members of the Executive Council are Ms. Thomasina Ah Ben as treasurer and Ms Melisa Vatubua as ordinary member. Mrs Christine Tawake-Bachofner has been elected as internal auditor.

"As Fiji's smallest business organization I can definitely see challenging times ahead", says President James Rafoi, a director of Rotuma Holdings Ltd. who imports Swiss products for their shops 'Daisy's Boutique Ltd'. Vice-President Gerhard Stemmler, who exports Noni products, echoes similar sentiments. "I just came back from a business trip to Switzerland and other European countries. Because Switzerland is not a member of the European Union, their import laws and other regulations relevant to Fiji exporters are different." He adds that Switzerland has extremely low tariffs thus making it an attractive market for quality products from Fiji.

According to data from the Fiji Bureau of Statistics, the imports from Switzerland totalled F\$2,854,574 in 2002 while a mere F\$64,686 of Fiji products were exported.

"While we have already received words of encouragement from reputable Swiss companies like Rolex, Omega, Rado, Victorinox, Roche, ABB, Swatch Group, Longines, Blancpain and others, we still lack support from companies in Fiji", says Mr. Rafoi. "It will be one of the tasks of the association to create awareness about trade opportunities with Switzerland", he adds.

For Fiji companies wanting to export to Switzerland, the Swiss-Fiji Business Association has made a questionnaire available for download on their web site. Companies who fill out the form will be included in the Exporter's List of the SIPPO. The Swiss Import Promotion Programme promotes imports from emerging markets and markets in transition and operates under the patronage of the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs or SECO.

"As soon as we have the required software, the exporter's list will also be included in our home page thus allowing for online research", says Mr. Mario Braesco, the Manager Information Services at SIPPO. "We will also try to link interested Fiji companies according to its products or services to the respective Swiss sites or contacts. Our first priority is business matchmaking. The Fiji company would later have to do all other negotiations with the interested parties in Switzerland and/or Europe." he states.

The form can be downloaded from www.swissfiji.org/sippo-exporterlist.htm

"Our website has extensive information about Switzerland, Swiss companies and business associations", says the new secretary, Mr. Daniel Zender. "A lot of how-to guides and market information can be downloaded from our site. In addition we have a library of useful printed media as well as CDs and DVDs. Now that the Executive Council has been formed, we can now start making Swiss business organizations around the world aware of the trade opportunities here in Fiji and the South Pacific region".

signed: D. Zender, Secretary