

att. Samuela, Fiji Sun

## **Fijian products to break into the Swiss market**

Switzerland is a very attractive market place – with a market size of more than seven million potential consumers and a per capita GDP of US\$ 33608 (year 2000 figure).

It is still considered a safe haven for investors because it has maintained a degree of bank secrecy and has kept up the Swiss franc's long-term external value

But co-initiator of the Swiss-Fiji Business Association, Daniel Zender, said something was amiss – more available Fiji products in the Swiss market.

“If Mexico and other developing countries can get their products into the Swiss market, then why can't Fiji”, he added.

Mr. Zender said that with the association's website a pivotal point for promoting bilateral trade will be created. In other countries, business associations are lobby groups which have sometimes a greater voice than individual businesses.

The not yet constituted association's website has been continuously enhanced since last year and lists, for example, Fiji companies that have potential of making the break in a foreign market where there is no mineral resource available.

According to the Fiji Island Bureau of Statistics, the total value of Swiss products imported from Switzerland was over \$2.6m in the year 2000.

But he said there may be more to the figure because the country of origin of a product is traced only to the last port of call.

“There is neither a direct flight nor a shipping link between the two countries”, he said.

Products and services from Switzerland can be seen everywhere in Fiji, from the Monasavu power generation turbines to ISO 9000 quality control services to the meter readers of FEA. Swiss brand watches like Omega and Rolex, Victorinox knives and many pharmaceutical products can be bought in Fiji. Finally, the world's largest food producer, Nestlé, has its head office in Switzerland.

The idea of promoting Fiji products and services more creatively in Switzerland came in 1993 when Mr. Zender returned from

Switzerland (his homeland) after having worked for the government-owned Information Technology Centre (ITC) from 1987 to 1989.

“Through our website we have received a substantial amount of support from Swiss companies, trade promotion organizations and the authorities. We are hopeful that we will ultimately have the same response here even though so far only 10% of the Fiji companies written to have given us a sign of support.”

Fiji Island Trade & Investment Bureau chief executive officer Jesoni Vitusagavulu said one of the most difficult factors that affects the decision of venturing into the Swiss market is the high freight cost involved.

Ms. Zender said that people in Switzerland have a positive perception of Fiji, somehow unknown, exotic and different. With the right niche product in a high quality packaging some Fiji products should definitely have a potential market in this landlocked country.

There are many similarities between Fiji and Switzerland. Both are multiracial, multicultural and multilingual nations.

“Our organizing group has done the preliminary work. Now it is for the Fiji business houses to join in and set realistic goals and come up with strategies how to achieve these targets,” he said.

For Fiji, the economic benefit could be measurable – an increase in foreign reserves.