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It is mid-March, and we are overwhelmed with news - bad, sad news. Just when we thought it couldn't get any worse and we watched the rising death toll from the Christchurch earthquake with deep compassion and sadness, the news about the much stronger, much more devastating earthquake in Japan hit us. And no, that was not the end; the Japanese earthquake triggered a tsunami, and the tsunami caused thousands and thousands of deaths; you all saw the pictures on TV. I don't have TV, and in times like these I'm even happier about it than normal. And then even potentially much more disastrous news reached us: The nuclear power plants that had stood up to an earthquake many times stronger than they were designed for were damaged by the force of the tsunami. They are out of control, they leak, and at this moment when I'm writing nobody knows where this will lead to. Words like Chernobyl are in the air, and the headline in the Dominion Post reads "Apocalypse now". Photos can't show us radioactive clouds, and so we are left to our imagination - or our worst nightmares.

What is there for us, for every one of us, to do? I can't see how I can help get the nuclear reactors to behave, nor can I stop a tsunami wave, neither in Japan nor here. There is no reason to watch the same wall of black water again and again; it only leaves a paralyzing feeling of helplessness. Yes, I can listen to the radio and follow the advice given - if there is time to follow advice. But apart from that, I and the people around me are much better off if I do what I usually do, maybe with a bit more kindness and thoughtfulness than usual, a bit more tolerance than usual. I'll try and be aware of the fact that I am very, very lucky, and that my worries are not really worth worrying about. And I'll celebrate all the little and not so little joys that come my way every day. Many people have no reason for celebration, but I have, and I'm aware of it, and deeply grateful.

Inde

On a more light-hearted note:

Don't forget that 1st April is April Fools Day; can you spot the April Fools Day article in this Helvetia?



Our thoughts are with the people of Christchurch in these difficult times.

In recent years, particularly at the Swiss Society AGM's, general discussions have arisen, regarding the Society's emergency fund, a modest fund which can provide a small amount of financial assistance for Swiss Society members in 'urgent and deserving situations'. The 1947 constitution outlines the parameters of the fund, within section 2(c).

There are many people who were of the opinion that the fund is no longer relevant. However, the tragic earthquake in Christchurch has shown that the Swiss Society has a role in assisting Swiss citizens, in particular its members living in New Zealand.

Recent circumstances highlight the negative impact of potentially diminished incomes, and the cost to rebuild shattered infrastructure. Public agencies become overstretched, not only dealing with restoring basic infrastructure, but also balancing the challenges to support individuals and families in the longer term.

I have always believed in the importance of this modest fund, which provides a potential mechanism to assist each other in times of need. On reflection, as a small business owner, I am well aware of vulnerabilities and the impact of any interruptions, due to unpredictable circumstances. I think that the constitutional principles behind the Swiss Society still remain relevant today.

Uf Wiederluege

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