Mr. Chairperson,
Mr. Executive Secretary (Officer in charge),
Excellences,
Dear colleagues,
Dear delegates
Ladies and Gentleman,

It is a great honor for me - on behalf of the Swiss Government, the host of this year’s Public-Private-Partnerships Days - to warmly welcome all delegations, speakers and participants to this conference. An important opportunity to discuss one of the most important challenges for development among experts of the public and private sector.

Infrastructure lies at the very core of economic and human development. It is far more than just the power plants, bridges, networks, roads or trains we build. Infrastructure is about access to water, electricity, mobility, education and health. It is about opportunities and perspectives for people, companies and governments.

The World Bank points towards an enormous lack of infrastructure around the globe. As we meet here, billions of people are still left without access to water, sanitation and electricity. And we know that tomorrow’s challenges will grow with our planet’s population. In the absence of access to infrastructure services, people are deprived of living up to their full potential. The public sector cannot always alone deliver the resources needed to provide access to public services to everybody. The result is an unacceptable infrastructure gap. This gap has to be bridged. Public-Private Partnerships – PPP – are one possible way to do so.

Switzerland is proud and grateful to have you here during the four upcoming days. We are anticipatory to hear and learn more about experiences and lessons learned from practitioners around the world. Furthermore, Switzerland is glad to present the
Cantonal Civic Center in Burgdorf, one of its own PPP projects, to an international audience of experts and practitioners, later this week.

Let me share some words on the Swiss experience. In Switzerland, the public and the private sector have a long tradition of working together. However, if you were to survey the use of traditional infrastructure PPP, you would come to note that there are not so many of them out there. There are various reasons for this. To mention just one, public entities like municipalities generally are in a relatively convenient position. They have sufficient capital assets and experienced human resources. Therefore, they fund and manage their investments in basic infrastructure and social services on their own.

In Switzerland, over the last decades, various cooperation forms involving both public and private entities have been successfully implemented. Formerly purely public services – for example in the field of energy or even art, sports and education – have been outsourced to privately managed companies, governed under public law. Specific examples are football stadiums and concert halls.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Often, the infrastructure gap mentioned earlier is first and foremost perceived as a pure financing gap. Financing is important, there is no doubt about this. However, other dimensions are at least as important if this gap is to be bridged successfully: Quality, accessibility and affordability of provided services are essential. Environmental and social concerns have to be met at all times. Policy and governance issues have to be dealt with. Transparency and procurement systems are key ingredients. All of these must not be neglected. Obstacles to bridging the global infrastructure gap are manifold. Missing project finance is only one. Others include the regulatory environment, for example:

- Deficient laws, regulations and institutions;
- Problems obtaining foreign exchange debt;
- Limited availability of local currency finance;
- High front-end risk and cost of project development;
- The difficulty of recovering costs of infrastructure service provision;
I’m afraid that the list could be completed much more…

PPP can be an extraordinarily powerful instrument to make infrastructure happen. They can help mobilizing private capital along with important technical and managerial know-how. And, PPP mobilize competition, which in turns fosters innovation. Switzerland is committed to the promotion and application of this kind of partnerships. This is also the case for the Swiss international economic cooperation and its efforts to alleviate poverty. Over the last years, Switzerland has - through partner institutions like the Private Infrastructure Development Group, the International Finance Corporation, or the Public-Private Infrastructure Advisory Facility - learned its lessons regarding PPPs in infrastructure.

PPP offer interesting opportunities, where public sector resources alone cannot meet growing demand for infrastructure maintenance and extension. However, they are not a one size fits all solution. PPP require clear objectives and strong public leadership. They do not liberate the public partner from responsibility and risk. They require a lot of skills and patience. They only work if well prepared. They fail if not marketed on transparent, fair and open grounds. And they need a credible, enforceable policy and regulatory framework. I am glad to see that all these issues are on the agenda of the PPP days 2012.

On behalf of Switzerland, I hope these four days can help tapping the full potential of Public-Private Partnerships. There will be opportunities to learn from best practices. There will be room to discuss strengths and weaknesses of this approach. With your presence, an abundance of experience is available for exchange of knowledge. You have four days to get inspired by new ideas and solutions.

It is our firm expectation that the PPP days 2012 will have an impact on the way we all look at PPP. As a starter, and for all of you to share with your colleagues in your respective countries, the PPP days 2012 have elaborated a PPP training package. An extraordinary tour de force has been necessary to finalize this video based package in time, and the result is very impressive. I am grateful to all experts and institutions who have kindly contributed to this.
Finally, I hope the site visit to the Cantonal Civic Center in Burgdorf on the fourth day offers you an interesting insight into PPP activities in Switzerland. I wish you four inspiring and successful days here in Geneva.

Thank you for your attention.