

## The Federal Authorities of the Swiss Confederation

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### **Bilateral visit by Vice President Doris Leuthard to Japan and Hong Kong**

**Bern, 17.02.2009 - Vice President Doris Leuthard, the head of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, will visit Japan and Hong Kong on 19 and 20 February. On 19 February she will meet the Japanese Foreign Minister, Hirofumi Nakasone, in Tokyo to sign a bilateral Free Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement. On 20 February, Vice President Leuthard will be in Hong Kong to hold bilateral talks with Rita Lau Ng Wai-lan, Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development.**

On the first stage of her visit, Vice President Doris Leuthard will travel to Tokyo where she will meet the Japanese Foreign Minister, Hirofumi Nakasone, to sign the comprehensive bilateral Agreement on Free Trade and Economic Partnership (FTEPA) negotiated by the two countries during eight rounds of negotiations between May 2007 and September 2008. Meetings are also planned with the Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry, Toshihiro Nikai, the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Shigeru Ishiba and the Minister of Finance, Shoichi Nakagawa. In addition to questions concerning the ratification and entry into force of the FTEPA, discussions will focus on efforts to combat the financial and economic crisis and WTO-related issues.

On the second stage of the visit, the Vice President will travel to Hong Kong, China. There the programme includes official talks with Rita Lau Ng Wai-lan, Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, and a courtesy visit to Donald Tsang, Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. The main topic of discussion will be a free trade agreement between Hong Kong and Switzerland/ the EFTA states. Vice President Doris Leuthard will also take the opportunity to meet local representatives from Swiss firms.

Japan and Hong Kong are two of Switzerland's most important trading partners in Asia with which it enjoys a significant trade surplus. In 2008 Swiss trade with Japan reached a new high of over CHF11 billion. Both exports (7bn, +4.8%) and imports (4bn, +18%) rose significantly last year. Swiss firms are among the largest investors in Japan with a total of almost CHF14 billion. The first Agreement on Trade and Amity between Switzerland and Japan was concluded in 1864. The FTEPA provides a new solid basis for the already close Swiss-Japanese economic relations and will serve to further consolidate them. Economic exchanges also intensified with Hong Kong last year: Swiss exports to Hong Kong grew by 17% to CHF 6.2 billion, imports by 22% to CHF1.4 billion. Switzerland is also an important provider of direct investment in Hong Kong: As of the end of 2007, Swiss firms had invested CHF4.5 billion.

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