

Open Letter to the Swiss Bundesrat

February 16th, 2020

To Whom It May Concern,

Through this letter, a number of Swiss Citizens residing in China would like to highlight a few important points and summarize their difficulties and experiences concerning the Coronavirus outbreak.

On February 17th the current situation of the Covid-19 on a global scale as reported by John Hopkins is:

- 70,278 confirmed cases
- 1,778 deaths
- 8,582 recovered patients

The majority of the cases are in China with 70,200 (99 per cent).

Quarantine measures have been put in place by the Chinese Authorities.

As reported in numerous publications, Swiss citizens cannot rely on a good healthcare system in China, particularly in second and third tier cities. As reported, there is a lack of test kits available for Covid-19 as well as a shortage of medicine to treat admitted patients.

Furthermore, the outcome of the Covid-19 outbreak is difficult to predict and could evolve according to the three scenarios below:

- Good: Containment of outbreak
- Medium: Covid-19 becomes like influenza and is to stay
- Bad: Pandemic global spread

Some guidance about the appropriate behavior and the right support for each possible outcome would be highly appreciated.

Situation as of January 23rd, 2020:

As you probably imagine, the majority of us spend most of our days locked up in our apartments to avoid a potential exposure. Schools have been suspended without any information on when they will resume normal operations. Some of the educational institutions have developed and implemented a web-based distance learning system to ensure the continuous education of our children. Professionals

are requested to work remotely and will follow local and corporate guidance to resume on-site working.

DFAE EDA Communication from 23rd January until 13th February 2020

Most of us have received two official e-mails since the outbreak, but unfortunately, some of us have not received any notification at all. As much as we appreciate the proper representation of our government in China, a lot of us are currently upset with the lack of communication and support from the Swiss authorities. The gap in understanding of the current crisis between the Swiss living here and the government in Bern appears significant. We are somewhat disappointed after witnessing the weekly or even daily communication between other countries and their citizens across China.

(Enclosed in this letter you will find emails for your review, which underline the above mentioned.)

Actions by the DFA

Up until now, we have only seen measures taken for Swiss Citizens in Wuhan and within the Hubei province (in conjunction with the French Authorities).

Unfortunately, the situation for the rest of the Swiss community in China is far from over as this outbreak spells an unforeseen future for us in terms of existence and livelihood. Therefore, we would appreciate an improvement of communications and support from our Government in Switzerland.

Additionally, we would like to mention is that; currently most Swiss citizens in China are no longer working on expat contracts and therefore do not have large organizations or companies behind them for support.

For many of us here in China, it is not possible to leave the country within a short period. We have personal commitments to tend to such as foreign spouses, children, and pets. A substantial number of us also have professional commitments, which do not allow us to leave unless the current situation dramatically deteriorates and force us to evacuate.

For over a decade or so, we have been good citizens; properly representing our country abroad. Among us are pioneers who have opened doors for trade between Switzerland and China. Today, the Chinese government and people regard our country to be one of the most outstanding ones in the west. Please do understand

that without these veteran traders and entrepreneurs, our community in China would not exist nor would we have the current levels of economic interaction between our countries that we so highly regard.

Now during this time of crisis, our livelihoods and health are in jeopardy. We believe it is fair to ask for support from our homeland as many of us feel we have been forgotten. A lot of us, as mentioned before, are disappointed and frustrated with the insensitive communication received at the beginning of this ordeal and the lack of proper follow-ups.

The majority of the e-mails we have received – if received at all - from the DFAE indicates that we are personally responsible for our situation. As well as that, we cannot rely on the Swiss authorities and that it is difficult or even impossible for them to support us in any way.

We understand if the government wishes to avoid a mass evacuation plan unlike other countries and that individuals should plan their evacuation and bear the financial costs. However, for most of the Hubei province, and us outside of Wuhan we feel as if the Swiss government has put the issue to rest and has moved on.

Additional recommendations we received from Swiss channels of communication are:

- Listen to the local government and contact them if necessary.
Please do understand that 95% of the communications are in Chinese and addressed to Chinese Citizens. China relies on foreign authorities to inform their citizens and to evacuate them if required.
- To contact the family doctor and other institutions such as banks and travel agencies.
Most of us live in China and do not need the services of a travel agency. The family doctor statement shows that the communication is based on the Swiss mindset where a family doctor is common. The same does not apply to us living in China. In case of fever, the only way to handle it is to go to a hospital, which exposes us exponentially to being infected with the Coronavirus. The recommendation to contact a bank is also questionable as it does not apply

to the situation and they are not in any capacity to assist us about a viral outbreak.

An SMS was sent to the Swiss in China by the FDFA informing them that the travel information had been updated. This SMS has not reached most Swiss here, despite registration with the Swiss authorities in the Embassy, Consulates, online or on the "Travel Admin" APP.

We have followed the recommendations of the authorities and have registered with the consulate or embassy. Furthermore, most of us have tried to register via the Travel App so that the DFAE has our locations and contact details. However, for some of us, something went wrong with the registration process and many of us do not know whether the registration was successful.

The last information we received was a video from the Swiss Ambassador in Beijing. It was a great political speech, which shows great support to China in this difficult time and indeed a great initiative. To our surprise however, the Swiss living in China were not mentioned nor addressed with words of support or empathy. For the Swiss community in China this was very disappointing and it was taken very offensively by most of us. The Swiss Ambassador is our highest-ranking government contact in China and we would have expected to hear him reassure us that the Swiss authorities are there for us in a time of emergency

Expected actions by the Swiss Government

What we expect from our government is to act similar if not better than our neighboring countries such as France, Germany, or Austria:

1. Proper information to be sent to Swiss citizens in China every few days so we can get an actual picture of the situation rather than to rely on the inaccurate or misleading information circulating.
2. To ensure that the EDA registration is working and informs citizens clearly if the registration was successful or not with a confirmation e-mail.
3. Support summarizing the emergency equipment needed and offering a secure logistical support, deliveries in China being limited or interrupted like in the

case of Swiss Post:

4. Embassies and Consulates should be provided with the right stock of equipment (masks, sanitizer, etc.) to counter any stock shortfall by Swiss citizens
5. The set-up of a medical Hotline for Swiss Citizens in need of medical consultation or support.
6. The set-up of an Emergency Hotline for any general enquiry (not health related)
7. The set-up of a WeChat Group administrated by the Embassy or Consulate Area to keep all Swiss officially informed. (WeChat is a local APP for Mobile Phones and Computers and requires no finances to set up – similar to the well-known WhatsApp.)

Additionally, to see how our motherland Switzerland is currently encountering the possible threat of the Coronavirus spreading within its own territory does really worry us expatriates.

We shockingly wonder why still nothing is being done to protect our beloved country and its citizens and that minimal actions have not yet been implemented, such as placing temperature checks at its borders and airports as well as recommending people not to visit crowded places, considering that now the Fasnacht is approaching.

We thank you for reading this letter and hope for your understanding of our concerns. We would also appreciate a response to our letter within a reasonable timeframe.

Sincerely yours,

370 Swiss Citizens out of 1100 in China.

(The remaining ones probably have not been informed that there is a WeChat group for this purpose):