

## **Peter Kenny address at Club Suisse de la Presse 16 October 2023**

Je tiens à remercier Isabelle Falconier et le Club Suisse de la Presse d'avoir mené cette discussion. Genève est une ville si importante dans ce pays et dans le monde qu'elle le justifie. Si cela ne vous dérange pas, je parlerai en anglais car certains disent que mon français sonne comme un hachoir à viande.

My name is Peter Kenny. I am the president of APES (The Foreign Press Association in Switzerland and Liechtenstein) – the oldest foreign press organization in Switzerland. We have about 100 members from many nations of the world.

The British thriller writer John Le Carre wrote a novel in 1968 titled A Small Town in Germany, a reference to the city of Bonn, which was West Germany's capital after World War II and where a lot of intrigue took place. With all the intrigue that apparently take place in Geneva, could a creative writer compose a novel called a Small town in Switzerland.

Certainly, the image of war and peace comes to mind for Switzerland's second biggest city. But one of its most prominent features is place where war is often spoken about and where people try to hammer out peace deals.

So, when you think of the name Geneva. What does it conjure up? Do you think of Switzerland or something else?

I asked a friend in South Africa what the name Geneva conjures up. He said international institutions and diplomacy. A French friend who lives in another part of Switzerland said Geneva is a rich and beautiful city.

In global terms Greater Geneva has a relatively small population of just over half a million, but to use a boxing image it certainly punches above its weight.

- Growing up in Zambia

The first time I heard of Geneva was when I was a child growing up in Zambia in Africa.

A family friend of ours of Italian descent and a whizz at languages got a job in Geneva as an interpreter. At that stage I hardly knew of Zurich and Bern, so back then I developed a fascination for this exotic city far away in Europe where our family friends would work. Geneva.

So, I knew about Geneva before I knew about Switzerland.

Of course, Geneva is a Swiss city, not a typically Swiss city some Swiss say, but it is truly international. It hosts the European headquarters of the UN and some of the oldest key agencies of the UN such as the International Labour organization in 1946, even before I was born.

There is also the World Health Organization, WIPO, and other UN organizations as well as the World Trade Organization where hard-nosed and complex negotiations often take place that impact the world of international commerce.

- Religious tolerance

But it has also been at the fore as a centre of religious tolerance. Back in 1533 the Grand Council of Geneva passed a statute of compromise which permitted every Genevan to choose his or her religious affiliation.

Another religious occurrence was that Geneva was a place of refuge for the thousands of protestant refugees fleeing persecution in France, Germany, and other places in Europe during many years of wars between Catholic and Protestant Christians, establishing itself as a Protestant enclave.

So, it is no coincidence that the World Council of Churches a grouping of more than half a million Protestant and Orthodox Christians is based in Geneva. The Reformation Wall at Place de Neuve is a notable historical monument in Geneva.

Unfortunately, in recent years there has been an uptick of hatred expressed against Jews and Muslims in the city that prides itself in its tolerance. But the stature of the city as an international centre that often seeks to resolve irresolute conflicts continues to grow.

Hundreds of important NGOs are based here, the UN is big here and we have us journalists working on the banks of a beautiful lake.

So, this is an important city on the world map, that can be proud of its heritage, but it must always work hard to keep that place.

Peter Kenny works for All Africa Global Media and Anadolu Agency and contributes to Geneva Solutions and Global Geneva