

The Terre des Hommes movement in Switzerland

When Edmond Kaiser saw a report on the terrible conditions in refugee camps during the war in Algeria, it was the trigger for him to found the aid organization Terre des Hommes in 1960 with the aim of getting help to children in need in the fastest and most direct way. Hundreds of seriously ill children from war-torn regions in Algeria arrived in Switzerland for treatment. In subsequent years, Kaiser organized other activities to help children in Vietnam, Biafra, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lebanon and Palestine.

Alongside these actions, working groups were formed throughout Switzerland, including Geneva and Basel-City, creating a national movement in Switzerland. At the same time, Terre des Hommes movements were created in France, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. In 1966 they united in the "International Federation Terre des Hommes".

Differing views between working group representatives and Edmond Kaiser about the structure and future direction of the work from development to cooperation led to a separation in April 1972 at the AGM of the Swiss Terre des Hommes. Kaiser continued to operate under the name, Terre des Hommes, in Lausanne, formally creating a new association. In 1988, the association became a foundation with headquarters in Lausanne, expanding its activities throughout Switzerland. The working groups in Geneva and Basel continued their action within the umbrella organization Terre des Hommes Switzerland / Terre des Hommes Schweiz, with headquarters in Basel for Switzerland and in Geneva for French-speaking Switzerland and Ticino.

From then on there were two organizations addressing the public in Switzerland with a very similar name:

- Terre des hommes - child welfare
- Terre des Hommes Switzerland / terre des hommes schweiz.

The Foundation and the two associations grouped in the umbrella organization have evolved in how they work, how they guide their activities and fundraising, and have become entities that are entirely independent both legally and financially. They do, however, work in complementary areas:

- The Terre des hommes Foundation specializes in health projects and child protection. Active in 34 countries, the Foundation develops and implements field projects that enable improvements year on year in the lives of over one million children and their families. They work in close collaboration with the public, non-governmental organizations and local and national government bodies to ensure that changes are as sustainable as possible. Annual budget of CHF 58 million, 100 employees in Switzerland, 1,300 in the field, not including staff from other local organizations involved in implementing projects on the ground.
- Terre des hommes schweiz specializes in the target group of "young people", working in Latin America and Africa. Projects are developed and implemented by local partners. The main areas of intervention are psycho-social support, prevention of violence and youth participation. In Switzerland, the association develops outreach programs for young people on the topics of racism - discrimination - violence. Annual budget of CHF 8 million, 18 staff at headquarters, 6 national coalitions and 58 partner organizations in 10 countries in the South.

- The objective of Terre des Hommes Switzerland is to improve the living conditions of disadvantaged people in developing countries, especially women and children. The association works with local partners and focuses on prevention through community development programs, food security, education and training. In Switzerland, the association has developed an awareness campaign, particularly directed at young people, on child rights, the North-South inequalities and sustainable development.
Annual budget of CHF 7 million, 15 employees at headquarters, 8 national coalitions and 60 partner organizations in 11 countries in the South.

The Terre des Hommes organizations in Switzerland therefore cover a wide range of programs. They are able to work simultaneously on different themes, with various methodologies and in an in-depth manner (specializations). In this way they reach a large donor audience.

The organizations work together wherever possible and wherever it is viable in terms of content and place of intervention, using their common infrastructures eg on the theme of psycho-social or political lobbying on child protection. They also meet annually at different institutional levels to exchange information. They have jointly developed a "General Convention" (code of conduct) and a "Code of Ethics" (ethical guidelines), which set important rules in their dealings with the public and their sponsors.