

LUNCHEON WITH SEPP BLATTER

Date: 22nd June 2009
Venue: Johannesburg Country Club, Woodmead
Speaker: Sepp Blatter, President, FIFA

The long awaited event with Sepp Blatter, President of FIFA, was held at the Johannesburg Country Club in Woodmead.



Sepp Blatter addressing SwissCham Southern Africa – South Africa Chapter

SwissCham President, Jürg A Schalch welcomed the more than 160 guests. A special welcome was extended to the Queen Mother of the Royal Bafokeng Nation, Dr. Semane Bonolo Molotlegi and Princess Tirolo Molotlegi Madiba as well as the Swiss Ambassador to South Africa, HE Rudolf Baerfuss. Among the many distinguished guests were prominent faces from business and sports.

After an excellent first course and main course Sepp Blatter took to the podium and delivered his address in a most relaxed and humorous manner. He was very complimentary about South Africa. He pointed out that this was the “dress rehearsal” for 2010 and assured the audience that he had no

doubt South Africa would be ready in time to host the 2010 World Cup.

Sepp Blatter’s biggest worry was the shortage of accommodation for the 450 000 foreign visitors expected, particularly in some of the smaller host cities, such as the landlocked city of Bloemfontein. He said, however, that fans would not necessarily be seeking four- or five-star hotels, but rather “decent and secure” places to stay during the month-long tournament.

He stressed, however, that he was not “looking for problems, only solutions”, and that various options were being investigated to deal with the accommodation challenge.



Jürg A. Schalch, President of SwissCham

“But together with our partners we will solve those problems even if it means bringing ships into Cape Town and Port Elizabeth harbours to deal with

shortages in those coastal cities”, he said. He noted that Greece’s capital Athens had shown this to be a viable alternative during that city’s hosting of the Olympic Games in 2004, as Barcelona in Spain, had proved previously.

“Our concern is that the tournament is too popular”, Blatter said, noting that over two-thirds of the 760 000 tickets that had been released during the first round of bidding had been snapped up “outside of South Africa”.

Interestingly, the single highest number of purchasers came from the US, whose team surprised many by beating Egypt on Sunday night to book one of the four slots in the semifinals of the Confederations Cup which is being played in South Africa as something of a curtain raiser to the main event next year.

There had also been strong demand from Brazil, Argentina and the UK.



FIFA anticipated that despite the economic chill created by the global financial crisis, the fans would still travel to the event next winter. He also mentioned that in the context of yearly tourist arrivals of more than ten million, South Africa should have few problems overall, in dealing with the additional tourist numbers. Nevertheless, there were definitely real accommodation shortages in some of the smaller host cities.



FIFA’s initial analysis of the Confed Cup also highlighted public transport to-and-from the games as an area of concern, with a number of problems having been reported about the functioning of the “park-and-ride” system. But, Blatter is of the opinion that these could be managed.

Refuting some of the criticism that had been prevalent by the international press, he asked the media to “criticize but not to lie”. He said that most of the nay sayers claiming that SA cannot pull it off “say it out of jealousy and envy”.

Blatter told the media to listen to the people who matter – the players. He said the top Italian and Brazilian players have been pleasantly surprised at the organisation of the Confederations Cup, which is a pale shadow of the main event for next year.

Regarding preparations, he confessed that at one stage “when people in SA were still singing and dancing and not working I told them I had a plan B”. “I didn’t tell them my Plan B was also for South Africa”.



SwissCham directors and manager with Sepp Blatter

Blatter came vigorously to the defence of the vuvuzela. He said it would be presumptuous for FIFA to intervene against the indigenous instrument. “In Africa, you expect music, dancing and noise and that’s great”, he said. “In fact, I will blow one of the vuvuzelas at my press conference in Johannesburg on Friday”.

Asked what disadvantaged South Africans could expect from the World Cup, Blatter said FIFA was currently holding a three-day seminar on Football for Hope. He was shocked to hear that 60% of the African players in the under-17 World Cup competition had never seen a doctor in their lives.

FIFA intends to come up with a programme addressing education, health and football in schools and communities across the country.

At the conclusion of Sepp Blatter's address, SwissCham President Jürg A. Schalch thanked the FIFA President for speaking to our members. Gifts were then exchanged between FIFA and SwissCham. FIFA President Sepp Blatter presented SwissCham with a commemorative flag of the FIFA Confederations Cup South Africa 2009.



Sepp Blatter presenting SwissCham President with the FIFA flag

In turn, SwissCham President Jürg A. Schalch presented Sepp Blatter with a Swiss Army Knife with the SwissCham logo, a Swiss/South African lapel pin, the SwissCham flag and a plate made by the craftspeople of an empowerment project in Limpopo.



The plate made by craftspeople in Limpopo presented to Sepp Blatter by SwissCham President Jürg A. Schalch





SwissCham President Jürg A. Schalch thanked all the guests for their attendance at the luncheon and invited them to stay for dessert and coffee.

All had an enjoyable time and the event proved to be most successful.