

'SCIENCE NOT SILENCE'

Geneva marches again – this time for science

By [Celia Luterbacher](#) in Geneva

APR 22, 2017 - 13:50



Saturday's march comes just three months after the Women's March on Washington, which also inspired sister marches in Switzerland and around the world.
(KEYSTONE / MARTIAL TREZZINI)

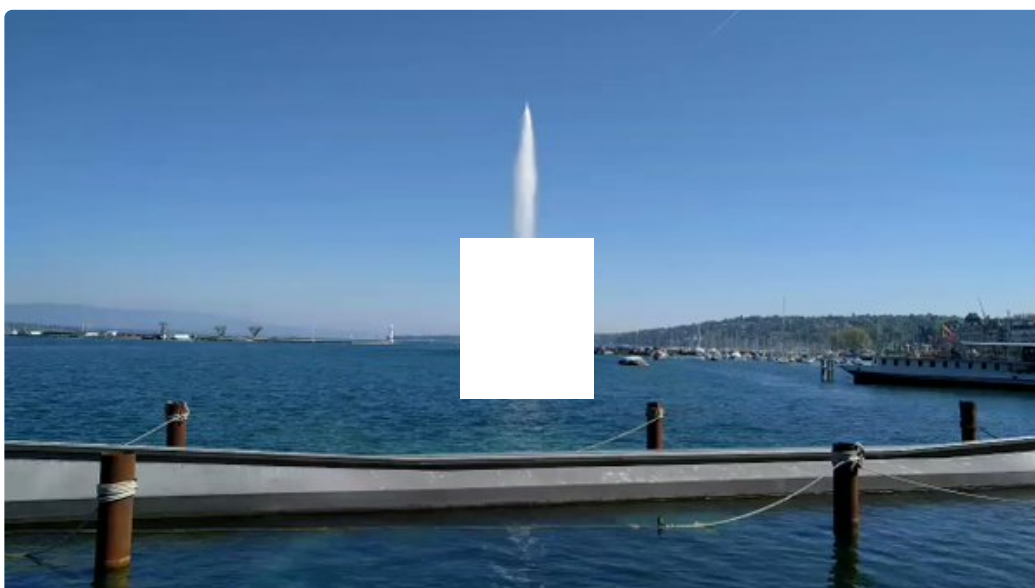
Some 600 science enthusiasts took to the streets of Geneva on Saturday – Earth Day – to march in support of scientific inquiry and empiricism as part of an international March for Science event.

The event was one of more than 600 “satellite marches” that took place all over the

globe, in parallel with a March for Science event in Washington, DC.

Organisers aimed to use the event as a platform to advocate for accessible science and affirm science as a democratic value, as well as to celebrate “the Swiss commitment to science as an example to communities worldwide.” Climate change was a major theme, as was participation of scientists in research communication, and public support of science.

“I am very happy to see all of you here, because the fact that you are here is reliable evidence that I am not crazy. This is good, because I feel like I’m going crazy when in hear someone suggest that robust funding of basic scientific research is an optional budget item, like an extra bench in a public park,” CERN physicist and march organiser James Beacham told the crowd at the pre-march rally.



Science March Geneva

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‘Science belongs to everyone’

Between 500 and 600 marchers met at the Jardin Anglais on the shores of Lake Geneva in the morning for the rally, which featured speeches in English, French, German and Italian. The crowd then proceeded east to the famous Jet d’Eau fountain, led by a marching band and amid chants of, “people for science, science for the people!” and “science, not silence!”

The afternoon programme featured a “Celebration of Science” event with talks by

researchers from the Swiss Federal Institutes of Technology, CERN, the World Climate Research Programme, and others.

Participants, both scientists and non-scientists, were of all ages, and even species; Sarah, from Canada, marched with her dog who bore his own protest sign.

“We believe in evidence for policy, and that science-based evidence is the best way to find the proper way forward to advance humanity,” she told swissinfo.ch.

Other attendees saw the march as an opportunity to join forces with related movements.

“Politicians should be speaking about what we can do about the climate, be they right wing or left wing solutions – but they shouldn't be taking about whether it's real or not,” said Yvonne Winteler, from the Association Climat Genève.

A contingent from the association for the Women's March Geneva also attended with their banner.

“There are cuts being made across the world and across the board that affect women, so it seemed like a natural fit,” association co-director Paula Read told swissinfo.ch.



Representatives from the Women's March Geneva Association pose with their posters. (swissinfo.ch)

Policy, not partisanship

The mission statements of both the Geneva march and the umbrella march in Washington contain no explicit reference to US President Donald Trump. However, calls for the organisation of a science march on Washington began gathering steam on social media shortly after his inauguration in January, which was followed by an order to remove mentions of climate change from the White House website. The march's mission also reflects funding cuts proposed by the Trump administration to US scientific programmes.

In February, the Swiss science community found itself affected by Trump's policies when a temporary ban on the entry of travellers to the US from Muslim-majority countries left at least one Swiss-based researcher stranded.

Nevertheless, the organisers of both the Washington and Geneva events stress that the March for Science movement is non-partisan, and that science should be seen as an independent “universal tool” that can be used to inform policy.

“We are not marching for or against a specific person group or political party,” said Hilal Lashuel, head of the Laboratory of Molecular and Chemical Biology of Neurodegeneration at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne (EPFL), at the pre-march rally.

“As scientists and global citizens we are alarmed and deeply concerned about any politically motivated assault on the integrity of the scientific enterprise and blatant disregard of scientific evidence.”