

Surveyors Key Role in Accelerated Development

Opening Speech

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1. WELCOME

President Joseph Krauss, Dr. Haim Srebro, Dr. Ron Adler, FIG Honorary President and members, Presidents of GSDI and ISPRS, dear Colleagues and Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of FIG, I am happy to welcome you all to our annual Working Week this time in Israel at this beautiful setting at the coastline of Red Sea and with wonderful views of the waters. But not only the scenery is special the location is also unique, an intersection of international borders – Jordan to the east and Egypt to the west are both only a few kilometres away. The location is also an intersection of different and ancient cultures that relates well to the global perspective of the FIG community.

A special thanks to our host - the Association of Licensed Surveyors in Israel (ALSI) – and especially to President Joseph Kraus and the Conference Director Haim Srebro - for all their efforts of organising this event jointly with FIG. I am convinced that we will have an excellent conference and will all enjoy the Israeli hospitality. This Working Week was admitted to Israel to take place already in 2003 but was postponed until now. We are happy to be here for the second time. The first time was the PC Meeting in 1972 in Tel Aviv. I am delighted to see Dr. Ron Adler, the chair of the organising committee for that event among us today. FIG is highly recognising the continuing commitment of ALSI to FIG over all these years.

2. THE GLOBAL CHALLENGES

The world is currently facing two major challenges: The first is the global financial crisis and the second is climate change. They both require immediate as well as long term action.

With regard to the financial crisis, nobody knows at this stage whether we have reached the bottom yet but the current recession will turn – eventually. FIG is well aware of the problems this crisis imposes on our members, but we should also look at the opportunities. As Barack Obama said during his election campaign in the US: “You never want a serious crisis to go to waste”. That means “no crisis should be overlooked with regard to the opportunities it provides as well”. The opportunities in this regard relates to the possibility of addressing the issue by large scale political means simply because the problems are so big that almost any intervention is acceptable.

The current financial crisis of course also affects the surveying discipline in our member countries throughout the world. But it also present opportunities for the surveying profession e.g. in terms of arguing for the need and benefit of having sustainable cadastral infrastructures and land governance serving as a backbone for mortgage and systems for complex property commodities. Another opportunity is in the building of public infrastructures that are likely to be initiated as an incentive to boost the economy.

With regard to the second challenge - climate change - the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has said that this is the “defining challenge of our time”. He said that combining the impacts of climate change with the global financial crisis we risk that all the efforts that have been made by countries to meet the Millennium Development Goals and to alleviate poverty, hunger and ill health will be rolled back.

On the other hand the global challenge of climate change also provides a range of opportunities. The Executive Director of UN-HABITAT Dr. Anna Tibaijuka has said that prevention of climate change can be greatly enhanced through better land-use planning and building codes so that cities keep their ecological footprint to the minimum and make sure that their residents, especially the poorest, are as protected as possible against disaster. Now here is a major challenge and opportunity for the surveying profession. This also relates to sea level rise and the fact that some 40 percent of the world’s population lives less than 100 km from the coast mostly in big towns and cities. A further 100 million people live less than one metre above mean sea level. Again, costal zone management represent a great opportunity for our profession.

Furthermore, all responsible countries throughout the world will have to contribute to reducing carbon pollution and everyone needs to do their small bit to tackle climate chance by reducing carbon pollution. Opportunities for surveyors relate especially to the trading of carbon rights in connection to forests and the land and usufruct right connected to such trading schemes.

3. SURVEYORS KEY ROLE IN ACCELERATED DEVELOPMENT

Coming back to the conference theme of “The key role of the surveyors in accelerated development” this is of course very relevant in Israel that is developing so fast and being one of the most densely populated countries in the world. But more generally, there is no doubt that the global phenomena of urban growth will represent both a key challenge but also great opportunities for the surveying profession.

More people are now living in cities than in rural areas and during over this century we will see cities of more than 50 million people. How can we deal with the social, economic and environment consequences of this development – such as the resulting climate change, insecurity, energy scarcity, environmental pollution, infrastructure chaos, and extreme

poverty? One thing is certain: all these issues relate to governance of land in terms of rights, restrictions and responsibilities.

4. LAND GOVERNANCE

In my keynote presentation on Wednesday I will talk about Land Governance being about the policies, processes and institutions by which land, property and natural resources are managed. This includes decisions on access to land; land rights; land use; and land development. Land Governance is about determining and implementing sustainable land policies. The control and management of physical space is the basis for the distribution of power, wealth, opportunities and human well being.

Good governance of the land sector will be essential to deal with the inter-linked challenges of the new millennium such as climate change; rising prices of commodities and food; management of natural disasters, and population growth and attendant urbanization and environmental degradation. All of these include an explicit spatial element: namely that they relate to land. And modern surveying and mapping tools are an essential part of good land governance and underpins the basic positioning infrastructure for dealing with these issues.

As I said already last year at the FIG Working Week Stockholm: Land Governance and land management are going to be a core area for surveyors as the land professionals. This area requires high level geodesy to create the models that can predict future changes; modern surveying and mapping tools that can control implementation of new physical infrastructure and also provide the basis for the building of National spatial data infrastructures; and finally sustainable land administration systems that can manage land rights and its use and development.

5. FINAL REMARKS

Dear colleagues - as you are all aware, FIG has had a lot of focus on the Middle-East region in recent years – both in term of visits and organising conferences. The meeting here in Eilat is a natural continuity to the previous meetings. Four years ago we had the FIG Working Week in Cairo, Egypt and FIG has co-sponsored several meetings in the region meanwhile, the next being the First International Symposium of the Arab Union of Surveyors to be held in Beirut, Lebanon at the end of June.

FIG is a non-governmental, non political organisation and thus cannot and will not intervene in national politics. FIG is of course aware of the situation in the region, but we are also convinced that surveyors as land professionals have a key role to play in addressing some of the issues especially those related to land. FIG is committed to this objective professional approach. The programme in Eilat combines international inputs with an admirable number of presentations from the local surveyors and researchers.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me conclude by saying that FIG has a long history. FIG is – maybe because of that – a very vital, mature, and dynamic organisation which is recognised world wide. We as surveyors are needed to meet many of the future challenges. Many of those challenges are land related and we are the world wide organisation of Land Professionals. Our task is to build the capacity to deal with these big challenges – and this conference is an important means in that regard.

I wish you all an enjoyable conference with a high professional level and also a lot of fun.

Thank you very much.