

Facing the Challenges – Building the Capacity

Opening Speech

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FIG President

Welcome

Honourable Governor Marie Bashir, Honourable Minister Tony Kelly, Surveyor General and Registrar General Warwick Watkins, FIG Honorary Presidents, Presidents of sister organisations, a special welcome to the FIG corporate members and conference sponsors, Dear Colleagues and Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of FIG, I am honoured and delighted to welcome you all to the FIG XXIV International Congress in this spectacular City of Sydney. But not only is the city scenery spectacular – the whole setting of this congress is spectacular and sets the scene as an exciting meeting place for the global FIG community. Expectations have been overwhelming and now we are finally here – the show can begin.

A special thanks to our host – the Australia Surveying and Spatial Sciences Institute – and especially the Congress Director Paul Harcombe - for all their efforts of organising this congress in a joint venture with FIG. I am convinced that we will have an excellent congress and will all enjoy the famous Australian hospitality.

As many of you will know the standing of the surveying profession in Australia is very strong and especially here in New South Wales and the city of Sydney. In fact, the Surveyor General was originally, in the colonial days, considered the number two at the top of the ladder just after the governor. This was of course due to the fundamental role of the surveyors for opening up the country for settlements in the early days of colonising this continent. This led to development and implementation of the famous Torrens System for security of land rights as a cornerstone in the process of building the modern and prosperous society that Australia can proudly present today.

Even if the surveyors today have a more modest position they still play a very key and recognised role in underpinning and administering this modern society. I am sure the many local surveyors present will use the opportunity of this congress to display and explain this core role.

Ladies and Gentlemen, allow me to also make a more personal remark. I have experienced the beauty of Sydney and the wonderful Australian lifestyle through many visits over the year. The reason for that is that my dear daughter Karin is an Australian resident living and working here for many years. Karin will also be with us during this congress which you will understand is a great pleasure for me.

Facing the Challenges – Building the Capacity

Now, this is not supposed to be a long speech about the strength of FIG and our achievements over the recent years. I will address this in the plenary session just after lunch.

Let me instead refer to the conference theme: “Facing the Challenges – Building the Capacity”. At the global scale the key challenges of the new millennium are clearly listed already. They relate to climate change; food shortage; energy scarcity; urban growth; environmental degradation; and natural disasters. These issues all relate to governance and management of land. This means that it relates directly to each of you and your national associations. Let me briefly touch upon this starting from the global to the individual level.

With regard to climate change - the UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon has stated 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.

At the regional level the challenges relate very much to the Small Island Developing States as here in the South Pacific region. This is why we have organised a special full day seminar with invited representative from the region to discuss these issues and how to build the capacity of the land professionals to deal with these challenges. We will publish the outcome of the seminar as a legacy of this Congress.

At the National scale The Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd says that Australia is determined to be on the front foot in global efforts to tackle climate change. He has stated that Australia is more exposed to the impact of climate change than perhaps any other developed economy. Our keynote speaker in this opening session Tim Flannery will address the issue of climate change in both an Australian and global context.

At the more individual level the challenges can only be met through international engagement and cooperation such as through this FIG Congress. This is where you can all really engage. Also, FIG has developed a whole range of publications in support of building the capacity of the global surveying profession. About ten new publications will be launched during this congress.

Dear colleagues, the linkage between climate change adaptation and sustainable development should be self evident. Sustainable land administration systems provide clear identification of the individual land parcels and land rights attached to these parcels. This information on the people to land relationship is crucial and plays a key role in adaptation to climate change and in prevention and management of natural disasters.

The land management perspective and the operational component of integrated and spatially enabled land administration systems therefore need high-level political support and recognition. The surveyors – the land professionals – are in a very core position.

The FIG Congress in Sydney is the ideal place for analysing the challenges ahead and building the capacity at all levels to deal with them. The Congress will include a range of fascinating plenary sessions dealing with the core issues for our profession. This is your congress. The total program will include more than 800 papers from throughout the world and covering all aspects of our profession. The Congress is attended by more than 2000 delegates – it is the biggest FIG conference ever.

Final Remarks

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 worldwide. We as surveyors are needed to meet many of the future challenges. These challenges are all land related and we are the worldwide organisation of Land Professionals. Our task is to build the capacity to deal with these big challenges – and this congress is an important means in that regard.

Dear colleagues and friends, I wish you all an enjoyable Congress with a high professional level and also a lot of fun.

Thank you very much.