

# From Pharaohs to Geoinformatics – Shaping the Change

## Opening Speech at the FIG Working Week and the 8<sup>th</sup> GSDI Conference Cairo, Egypt, 17 April 2005

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Honourable Minister Dr. Mahmoud Abu-Zeid, Presidents of sister organisations, member associations and universities, FIG Honorary President Robert Foster, distinguished delegates and guests, dear friends of LOC,

Welcome to an extraordinary event in an extraordinary country in an extraordinary city.

### 1. SURVEYORS OF THE ANCIENT EGYPT ARE STILL A MODEL

The wonderful FIG “article of the month” in March from our Australian colleague John Brock (2005) about **ancient pharaonic surveyors** has surely made curious and got many of us in a proper mood for our conference motto “From Pharaohs to Geoinformatics”.

And even if we do have very quick pictures, maps and analyses of natural disasters and environmental damages etc. – due to satellite positioning and imagery – these are finally based on one of the most important geodetic scientific works, which has happened in old Egypt made by **Eratosthenes** who has calculated the earth meridian by sun shadows measurements between Alexandria in the north, Syene in the middle and Meroe in the south (Lelgemann, 2005).

Both examples, the pharaonic surveyors and the later Eratosthenes, lead us to present and future times: Eratosthenes research was indirectly the start up for a extremely successful development towards real time information about our globe, towards continuous information about what is happening daily on the earth by satellites and GPS and towards so-called geoinformation as a basis for decisions on land-related aspects. As you all know 80 per cent of political, economic and other decisions are geo-referenced! Without Eratosthenes and his successors up to our partners like IAG we wouldn't have this high standard and service today.

And the first example about the pharaonic surveyors demonstrates the timeless contributions of surveyors to shaping and implementing land tenure, land reform and land management to the benefit of the state and citizens.

Has this role changed? Will it change? I think yes and no, up to now the surveyors have to contribute to public and private interests and actions, but nowadays surely more towards more equity, more security and more sustainable development. They explicitly have to contribute to democracy, good governance and establishment of civil society. Due to increasing globalization and – connected with it – more and more neo-liberal theories and purely

economic and private interests and pressure (Straßer, 2005), there is now a great danger for democratic structures on local, national and global level. More than ever we should underline the need and benefit of functioning and even strengthened democracy for all people and for good or at least better living conditions. More than ever there is a need for a balance between public and private sectors and between state and citizens. Surveyors have to adapt to these new socio-political dimensions and they have to deal with new technologies, methods and tools as it has happened every time.

So let me point out again: Egypt as our host country is an ideal and stimulating place for our Working Week 2005 and the 8<sup>th</sup> GSDI conference, the motto of our conference “From Pharaohs to Geoinformatics” fits perfectly to this country and figuratively to all countries and all members of FIG! The large interest in participating this event and the hundreds of papers demonstrate very clearly what the old Romans have called the “*genius loci*” or in English “*the genius of a place*”. Here in Egypt we feel both the honourable old spirit of scientific and professional surveying and the dynamic power of modern surveying and geoinformation. More than elsewhere these dynamics is personified by leading people of the Egypt government. I remember very well my courtesy call to the Prime Minister last year – when he still was in his earlier position as the responsible Minister for new technologies. He impressed me deeply by his ICT-visions and comprehensive idea of more combined activities of surveyors and geoinformation experts. Our first joint FIG/GSDI conference is an impressive demonstration of our confident mind and will “to shape the change”: to change from single activities to more joint and combined contributions like they for example are needed now for helping the tsunami hit countries and member associations in these countries (Kessler, 2005).

Following this understanding I also very much welcome the attendance of so many sister organizations and members of the global family of (geo)spatial information societies as we perhaps never had before. Welcome Mr. Presidents! We feel obliged to discuss joint steps without losing our single profiles and organisational individuality to strengthen our profile as “**the** geospatial information community and experts” and to jointly present our ideas and “**single voice**” at the global stage like we intend to do it at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Tunis this year. This conference in Cairo can therefore become a historic meeting of the joint board of all respective geospatial information societies.

## 2. SHAPING THE CHANGE: CHALLENGES TO FIG

Ladies and gentlemen, if you follow the last FIG conferences e.g. in Paris, Marrakech, Athens and Jakarta or if you have a look at the topics of the XXL dimensioned program of Cairo you can sum up a very clear conclusion: FIG is up to date. FIG has been trying to shape the change on its professional and technical level from the very beginning. But the speed and dimensions have increased and broadened. Therefore we all, especially our commissions, are challenged and forced not only to react but even to be pro-active. Our commissions must be the “**global laboratory**” for future trends and developments being composed of the best experts around the world! And if you have attended the last General Assemblies of FIG you could get the proof that FIG also has managed to adapt its old organizational structures to new

future orientated ones. In my midterm speech in Jakarta in October 2004 I have said more about this change (Magel, 2004).

Ladies and gentlemen, nobody can rest on its laurels anymore, no minister, no company, no NGO like FIG. The world is changing every day, therefore we all have to keep fit to even be better and faster prepared for global, continental and national changes and resulting challenges thus getting the chance to contribute to shaping our one world.

What does this mean?

There is no doubt that we both, the surveyor communities and the SDI family, have reached a very high standard and level of methods, tools and technical philosophy. There is no doubt too that there still exist lot of problems which have to be solved jointly e.g. between different GIS providers and users (Harlan Onsrud has mentioned some in his recent OGC column, 2005) or that the cooperation between surveying and GIS should be intensified to bridge the Gap (see ESRI's annual Survey and GIS Summit in San Diego). To discuss these and many other aspects we do have this Working Week, regional conferences and others. But ever we should remember that technology is no end in itself. All what we are doing, producing and delivering must be oriented to a higher and more comprehensive goal and vision: we want to address better social, economic and environmental issues, i.e. we want to address better sustainable development and to better serve society and our endangered and limited earth.

As President of a globally acting NGO I don't hesitate to confess that FIG still believes in the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG), that FIG still supports e.g. the comment of UN Habitat chief analyst Naison Mutizwa Mangiza (2005), that there still must be a hope for the billions of poor slum dwellers in Africa, Asia and the Americas to get secure tenure and thus secure living conditions.

FIG does not belong to the increasing critics and sceptics of MDG that these goals are merely an utopia and not reachable anymore. We accept the need of supreme goals, visions, dreams and even utopias because we do believe in the experience of life: **"If you are not able or keen to have dreams you never will get the power to act."** And finally FIG feels challenged by the statement of the President of Club of Rome HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal from Jordan (2004). He asked for a global Marshall plan to implement the MDG in a sustainable way, a Marshall plan which respects the rights of local indigenous people and protects local resources, which enhances resource efficient new technologies like renewable energies or which forces ICT education and capacity building. Prince El Hassan finally pleads for a more just distribution of the resources of our globe to the "welfare of all humankind".

May be that this is an utopia – but please consider: *"The existence of an utopia is the precondition for that she will end to be a mere utopia furthermore"* (Martin Walser). *"Welfare to all people"* of the world either in urban or rural areas: This includes for example that FIG everywhere wants to contribute to new tools in land administration in cooperation – like Clarissa Augustinus (2005) from UN Habitat has demanded – with social scientists, lawyers, GIS experts, planners etc. FIG and its partners want to support politics and policies against

increasing poverty and crime in (mega)cities and more and more divided cities: on the one side the “urban sprawls” with wealthy people and non-sustainable land use and land consumption and on the other side “slum sprawls” with poor people and non-sustainable conditions as well (Steinberger, 2005). On these overall goals we are partner of national governments, sister NGOs and of global players like UN, World Bank and many others.

### **3. ABOUT INTENSIFIED PARTNERSHIP AND CONTRIBUTIONS**

With regard to these important partnerships especially with GSDI and our present joint board members I would like to give some incentives for discussions within FIG and with our partners:

1. How can we better help countries and member associations which are hit by natural disasters like tsunamis, hurricanes or typhoons, land slides, earth quakes, floods, fires or hit by civil wars etc. Should we give e.g. more engagement in and advice on how to deal with landless people and informal settlements or should we reduce on purely technical issues? How can we improve the cooperation, especially how can we establish immediately functioning links with responsible UN- or EU-organizations? What do we and what can we expect in this field from our Commission 8 Working Group about disaster and risk management? How can and should we collaborate with our sister organisations and others?
2. How can we better contribute to the respective draft processes of e.g. spectacular “Africa” or “NEPAD action plans” to better fit in issues like security of tenure or access to land and water etc. What can we do both, FIG Council, Commissions and the member associations, to influence political leaders to listen to their professionals? What can we – regarding this matter – learn from Hernando de Soto, who plays exclusively on the level of prime ministers and parliaments? Our concept of world crossing FIG Regional Conferences is one attempt to bridge the distance between regional politicians and politics and our experts! That’s the reason why I am still deeply concerned about a too much eurocentric FIG! We need much more responsible officials from Africa, Asia and the Americas etc. in our Commissions! Developing countries should be more present(ed) at our conferences and applying for conferences!
3. FIG as a part of civil society has more than ever to discuss the role of civil society and NGOs in a changing world. The more the state is withdrawing to an only activating role, the more the economic sector becomes (too) dominant, the more a strong civil society is needed. FIG strongly supports the approach of UN Secretary General to strengthen the role of NGO’s in the implementation of the Millennium development goals and the action plan. In his recent report “In larger freedom. Towards development, security and human rights for all” Kofi Annan (2005) points out again his philosophy of subsidiarity and “help for self help”: “Each developing country has primary responsibility for its own development – strengthening governance, combating corruption and putting in place the policies and investments to drive private sector-led growth and maximize domestic resources available to fund national development strategies.”

And he continues with the expected role of developed countries to support the developing countries. All will happen only “with transparent, accountable systems of governance, grounded in the rule of law, encompassing civil and political as well as economic and social rights, and underpinned by accountable and efficient public administration”.

Ladies and gentlemen, surveying and SDI are an essential part and provider of such frameworks of transparency, rules of laws, individual and public rights or of functioning administration. Surveyors know very well the weaknesses or strengths of good or bad frameworks for the future of the countries. And FIG and its partners more than ever should feel confirmed and inspired by what Kofi Annan has said about the task of NGOs: “delivering services to people at the scope required by the MDG and catalysing nationally and internationally a lot of actions”.

“Delivering services to the people and catalysing a lot of actions”: Ladies and gentlemen, it must be clear to each of us: **If we don’t succeed to improve living conditions in developing countries, developed countries will have no future as well.** FIG as an umbrella of developing and developed countries and as an umbrella of the global surveyor family is a model for the needed mutual exchange and for catalysing national and international support. Together with our partners of UN, sister organizations and the geospatial information societies we are willing to serve all people and our “one world”, we are ready for intensified contributions to shaping the change of our world and our professions.

Against this inspiring challenge and vision of joint activities I wish you all a very enjoyable stay in Cairo and due to outstanding efforts and organisation of our Egyptian friends and colleagues a successful conference!

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