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From Pharaohs to Where?

During the first joint FIG/GSDI Conference in Cairo in April titled "From Pharaohs to Geoinformatics" the traditional meeting of the Presidents of all FIG member associations took place. One of the thrilling questions from the Presidents was: Shouldn't the surveyors try to leave the traditional connection with the civil engineering sector and faculties and instead join the information sector and faculties?

It seems that surveyors' work in the classical field of civil and survey engineering is decreasing more and more and is going to become marginalized. The importance of surveying is not well acknowledged either by politicians, university boards or society anymore, at least not in the developed countries. There is no doubt that at the moment information and information disciplines are important topics on political and scientific agendas across the world. This was clearly demonstrated at the Cairo conference. Information (disciplines) are also on the priority list in the developing countries. From its very beginning surveying has been an information service.

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It provides information about ownerships, land parcels (their size and changes etc) and now through modern technologies and broadened activities about the earth in general - even climate and environmental changes, land use, land management and more. From this point of view surveyors should not feel the need for joining information societies and faculties to automatically become more respected or more influential and powerful.

At the conference the Joint Board of Geospatial Information Societies (JBGIS) under the chairmanship of Prof. Magel was finally established with all leading surveying, geodesist and geomatics associations as members (ISPRS, IAG, ICA and IHO among others). The Joint Board decided already on two ad hoc committees, the first on disaster management (under the chairmanship of Prof. Bengt Rystedt, Past President of ICA) and the second on capacity building in Africa (with Prof. Ian Dowman, President of ISPRS as the chair-

man). These are the first steps of the Joint Board towards becoming a 'single and visible voice' in the world of geospatial information societies. It also demonstrates the need for coordinating similar activities and synchronizing collaboration in other areas.

Hereby the joint board explicitly shows joint responsibility and leadership in essential global and regional hot issues. For the first time there is hope that all surveyors, geodesists and spatial data experts form an alliance to better represent our social commitments and technical competence. Hopefully the joint board will even succeed in making a contribution to the World Summit on Information Society in Tunis later this year.

Up to now the organizers have not asked the geospatial information societies for contributions. All Geospatial Information Societies should support the efforts to join this important World Summit. If they succeed, the joint board meeting in Cairo was really a historic moment in this.

But what can we learn from this? Our contributions are still not very well-known and visible to decision makers and key persons in world information sciences. From Pharaohs to where? Before surveyors should decide to join information faculties and to leave the traditional faculties, they should do what urgently needs to be done, also against the background of too few students and endangered survey authorities. They should communicate better with politicians and society and deliver their commitments for serving society and 'our one world' more clearly. Surveyors should also better formulate their indispensable contributions to democracy, human rights, freedom, peace, combating corruption, enhancing good governance and sustainable living conditions like I have expressed in my closing speech in Cairo (see www.fig.net). Only after that surveyors are really free and have enough confidence to decide on the right strategy.

All Geospatial Information Societies should be able to better fulfil the needs mentioned above. Hopefully the joint board meeting in Cairo was a historic moment in this.