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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to bring you greetings from the International Federation of Surveyors and the FIG Bureau. I express also the best wishes from Robert W. Foster, President of FIG, and Prof. Holger Magel, Vice President and President Elect of FIG who was invited to this seminar, but is unable to attend.

The FIG Bureau has decided that its representative will attend - at least once - the annual meeting or a seminar of each of the ten FIG Commissions. In this year the Bureau planned to participate meetings on Commissions 2, 3 and 7. I am happy to be the representative of the Bureau here in Athens and I am convinced that next year the Commission 3 Annual Meeting and Seminar in Nairobi will be attended by at least one Bureau member.

As you know, a lot of things have happened in FIG during the past couple of years. After the establishment of the permanent office in Copenhagen the General Assembly decided in Prague to change the FIG governance structure to a more democratic one. This decision means that after a transition period FIG will get a fully democratic Council, whose all members will be elected by the General Assembly. This new structure will be in full operation in the beginning of the year 2007, but the first elected members will start their work already in 2002.

In addition to the new administrative structure of the Federation the professional part of the FIG work is under review. A new task force was established in Prague to study whether any changes are needed into the structures of the Commissions and Permanent Institutions and to the concept how we use task forces and ad hoc commissions. The new Task force will present its preliminary ideas for discussion already in Seoul, Korea in May 2001. The final proposal will be circulated so that the General Assembly can make its decision at its meeting during the FIG Congress in Washington, in April 2002.

The current theme of the Bureau is "Advancing the Global Role of Surveying". This includes two topics that are in the focus of the discussion in the beginning of the new century. These are globalisation and sustainable development. Both topics are also included in the new FIG work plan.

The Bureau will focus on certain themes during the next three years. These include a close co-operation with the United Nations and its agencies. FIG will be strongly involved with projects and events related to urban development and the security of tenure which are closely linked also to the Commission 3 expertise. FIG is e.g. one of the main professional partners of UNCHS(Habitat) and is actively participating in the arrangements of the UN General Assembly Special Session on Istanbul+5 to be held in New York in June 2001. Furthermore, FIG will participate to the follow-up conference of the Earth Summit called Rio+10 in 2002.

FIG is also preparing its own Agenda 21 that will be presented at the Istanbul+5. The Commissions have been consulted to participate in the preparation of this document, the FIG Agenda 21.

Another topic that the Bureau focuses is to encourage member associations to participate in the work of FIG. The Bureau thinks that the Commissions play a key role in this work and, therefore, the Bureau assists and supports the Commissions with their work on encouraging national delegates to increase their participation in the Commission activities.

The Bureau is very impressed on the activities that have already been taken by Commission 3. I would like to mention especially the active input of this Commission in establishing a working group to prepare guidelines for 'Spatial information and knowledge management for decision support in urban management to be included in the Habitat Best Practices Database'.

I am happy to mention already now the active participation of the Commission in seminars and symposia in developing countries and especially in Africa. These visits result now in an FIG / UN seminar to be held in Nairobi in October next year. At the same time it will be the first ever Commission 3 event in that continent. Besides, for FIG it is not only a Commission event but an excellent way to show to our members in developing countries that FIG cares about its members outside the rich countries. One of the topics during the days in Athens is to discuss the preparations of the Nairobi event and I am happy to participate to these discussions.

The name of Commission 3 was changed some years ago from Land Information Systems to Spatial Information Management. This was a wise and successful decision. I don't need to be polite to say that Commission 3 has become one of the most active Commissions of FIG during the past few years.

The concept of Commission 3 is functioning well. By organising high-quality sessions during the FIG working weeks and by hosting, in addition, a separate annual meeting with a technical seminar is totally in conjunction with the recommendations of the Bureau. The seminars organised last year in Budapest and now here in Athens show that this concept is really working. Indeed, it is an excellent way to get the local surveyors involved in the Commission activities and at the same time a good way to distribute the expertise of the Commission delegates to the hosting country. I would like to suggest that you should consider organising seminars in the future also in other continents. Finally, I congratulate you on the roundtable that you managed to organise in Prague with the keynote presentation by Professor Ian Masser.

A concept that the Bureau wants to encourage you is to continue the presentation of national reports at the congresses and working weeks and in the Commission newsletter. One of the main goals of FIG is to offer a platform for discussions between professionals on current problems and this is one example on its implementation.

Finally I would like to encourage you all to actively participate to the next FIG Working Week in Seoul, Korea in May 2001 and the FIG Congress 2002 in Washington.

The programme here in Athens looks extremely fascinating and I hope that there will be also time for good discussion. The meeting is not only professional sessions but also fun between friends, and knowing Dr. Chryssy Potsiou and her team and the Greek hospitality I am sure that there will be a lot of fun. For the organising committee this seminar is at the same time good rehearsal for the FIG Working Week to be held in Athens in 2004 before the next Olympic Games.

On behalf of the FIG Bureau I wish all the best for this seminar. Thank you!