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In conversation with Abbas Rajabifard

SSSI is pleased to have nominated Professor Abbas Rajabifard for the position of Federation of International Surveyors (FIG) President for the period 2023–26. With his strong international senior executive experience and wide connections (including links into the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the UN), Australia has put forward a very strong candidate for this important role.

Professor Rajabifard is Director of the Centre for Spatial Data Infrastructures and Land Administration, University of Melbourne. He is also Discipline Leader, Geomatics, Department of Infrastructure Engineering, a director on the board of UN-GGIM Academic Network and in 2020 was made an Honorary Fellow of SSSI.

SSSI CEO, Tony Wheeler, spoke with Professor Abbas Rajabifard to get his views on the road ahead.



TW: What would the FIG Presidency mean for you and for Australia, especially with the FIG Working Week coming up in Brisbane in 2025?

AR: I am a proud surveyor, scientist and engineer, with passion and proven experience of leading professional organisations and science panels. It has never been a more strategic and exciting time for us and our professional associations like SSSI and FIG, to be more actively engaged in the internationalisation and opening of opportunities for our members and practitioners and expanding our services and education to a wider jurisdiction.

However, the risks are real in terms of skills quality, market concentration, other disciplines expanding into our core activities and external geopolitical factors. Moreover, FIG's commitment to be a global institution contributing to improve our quality of life, must be reiterated in their strategies. I am excited by the prospect of bringing my breadth of my professional and academic experience over the last 30 years to add value to these aims, particularly in enhancing the FIG's emphasis on a deeper engagement with the emerging market.

An effective president in this role can significantly improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the association and its future directions and strategic pathways. At the same time, FIG must develop a better focus on preparing the next generation of practitioners and formulate activities and training in alignment with the needs of emerging markets and industry.

In the context of Australia, with our plan of hosting the FIG Working Week in Brisbane 2025, we have a great opportunity to leverage that trend by working together to maximise the return on our investments and creating a better and bigger market for

our industries and members. Therefore, as a SSSI member, I am motivated and very keen to be part of the journey to improve our international standing.

TW: How would you strengthen FIG's relationships with other global institutions?

AR: A global association like FIG needs to re-examine its vision and develop a smart plan and strategic activities that ensure it remains relevant and serves the needs of the market and its members, and prepares them for the world we have today and into the future.

By leveraging my international leadership experience and network and my involvement at the strategic level with several major international initiatives, I would help shape and advance FIG's direction to guarantee its international standing. Engagement and a consultative process would be a strong feature if I am successful. I enjoy the challenge of bringing together multiple disciplines to build a cohesive team — this approach will be key to the future success of the FIG when it engages externally.

My vision for FIG is centred around converging its aims, objectives and mission in line with all changes in the market. This vision resonates with FIG's current stated mission, and by adapting to the emerging trends will help to ensure the disciplines of land and surveying and all who practice them meet the needs of global markets and communities.

TW: How can FIG assist surveyors and spatial professionals to play a role in digital transformation and the move to Surveying 4.0?

AR: Digital transformation and global

challenges such as population growth, urbanisation, land availability, climate change, sustainability and resilience, are increasingly altering all aspects of our societies and our economic stability.

Technological advancements are offering new ways to design, produce, consume and manage by providing a 'live' system to model, measure and monitor changes. At the same time the dependence of projects on land and location information, and the role that surveyors and land administration (cadastre) are playing in them — and the use of location information in everyday life — is growing dramatically. Our professional societies must adjust their strategic plans and services to ensure their members are ready to provide better services and be confident in moving to Surveying 4.0 with strong new and multi-faceted skills in using big data, IoT, cloud computing, AI and AR, digital twins and so on.

TW: How do you see FIG changing to meet these global challenges?

AR: A number of strategic global initiatives have emerged from authorities and global entities, such as the UN, World Bank etc. These agencies mostly have initiated major projects of work around new strategic frameworks or roadmaps (SDG, IGIE, NUA) to assist global communities to maximise the return of their efforts, as well as improving the efficiency and effectiveness of actions. In all these initiatives, land and geospatial information are crucial components. We need to map and understand these relationships to better respond. Therefore, an organisation such as FIG has a major role to play in this changing market, and we as surveyors, spatial and land practitioners can play a strategic role in the process. ■