



XXIX UIA General Assembly
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Item 7.3 on the agenda

ACTIVITY'S REPORT BY REGION III VICE-PRESIDENT SAM OBOH

REMARKS AND ACTIVITIES

First and foremost, I want to express my deepest appreciation to the General Assembly for entrusting me with the position of UIA Vice President for Region 3 (VPR3). I am truly honored and grateful for this opportunity.

With great honor and pleasure, I present my report as the UIA Vice President for Region 3 (VPR3). I have had the privilege of working alongside my esteemed colleagues, the four Council Members from Region 3: Rim SAFAR SAKKAL from the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Antonio Carlos MORAES de CASTRO from Brazil, Augusto Xavier BALLEEN REY from Colombia, and David Ignacio ROJAS ESCARREGA from Mexico. We were elected to these positions at the Rio General Assembly in July 2021. Since then, our dedicated team has been committed to working closely with all member sections in our region and beyond, with the shared goal of promoting responsible architecture and excellence.

Our primary focus has been on **raising awareness about the relevance of architecture in our daily lives** and its profound impact on communities, people's quality of life, and the architectural profession as a whole. With a particular emphasis on the Americas and beyond, we have actively sought to empower communities and strengthen the practice of architecture in various ways. I want to express my sincere gratitude to my colleagues and Council Members from Region 3 for their unwavering cooperation and support throughout my tenure. Despite facing difficult circumstances and numerous challenges, we have worked tirelessly together to advance the affairs of our region, and I am immensely thankful for their dedication.

During this short term, I prioritized several key objectives, and one of the most significant achievements was **leading the establishment of the UIA Indigenous Peoples Work Programme**. Detailed information about this program can be found in my reports to the 146th and 147th Council meetings, which are available in the members section of the UIA website. I had the pleasure of working closely with the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC) to set up the program's secretariat. I am delighted to report that the UIA Indigenous Peoples Work Programme successfully commenced in Madrid in May 2022. I hope that those attending this assembly had the opportunity to explore the inspiring work displayed by the members of this program at their exhibition booths in this Congress in Copenhagen.

I am pleased to inform the General Assembly that the beta test of a new national mentorship program, NEXUS, championed by the American Institute of Architects, has evolved into a **cross-continental mentorship initiative with opportunity to collaborate with the UIA**. This transformative initiative, which I discussed in detail during my reports at the 145th, 146th, and 147th Council Meetings, is now being championed through the UIA Professional Practice Commission (PPC) in collaboration with my friend and respected colleague from the AIA, James Wright. I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to the AIA Global Practice Committee, AIA International Emerging Professionals Co-Chair Michelle Montgomery, NEXUS national mentorship program leader Carl Sergio, and James Wright for their exceptional collaboration, which has turned this initiative into a reality.

Furthermore, I would like to highlight several other significant events during my tenure. These include participation in the SSHRC (the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council) **Multisectoral and Multidisciplinary Initiative: Quality in the Built Environment**, attending the **2022 Pritzker Prize Award Ceremony where Diébédo Francis Kéré** was honored as the first black architect to receive the prize, and various engagements with esteemed institutions and organizations. These endeavors provided me with valuable opportunities to promote excellence, international cooperation, and the active engagement of emerging professionals within the architectural field.

One of the major challenges we encountered was the lack of clear and concise communication during the tenure of the 2021-2023 Council, under the President's leadership. Despite numerous calls from Bureau Members, there was no strategic plan or vision in place, which exacerbated the communication issue. As a result, many of us struggled to stay fully informed and track the progress made within the organization.

This situation also revealed the absence of a comprehensive finance and accountability framework, leading to the discovery of potential conflicts of interest among a couple of international officers who were responsible for making financial decisions within the Finance Committee. These incidents compromised transparency and eroded trust in the UIA's operating procedures. While the organization admirably maintained semblance of stability and continued its work, this inadvertently created the impression that the UIA secretariat was plagued by inefficiency and a lack of accountability and corporate discipline. It is crucial for the next council to address these challenges by updating the accountability framework and governance structure, ensuring a higher level of transparency and accountability in line with the expectations of an international organization.

Consequently, it is crucial for the incoming administration to address these challenges head-on and significantly improve the effectiveness and transparency of the UIA's communication, reporting processes, and governance. Implementing clear and concise communication policies, as well as a comprehensive accountability framework, will provide a platform for addressing the challenges faced and ensure that the UIA is seen as an invaluable resource for the architectural profession.

In conclusion, while the outgoing administration faced challenges, without sugar-coating the reality, we fell short of achieving significant progress due to the absence of a strategic vision. However, the incoming administration has the opportunity to address these challenges and improve the effectiveness and transparency of the UIA's communication, proper financial management, and accountability. With the right policies and procedures in place, the UIA can continue to be an invaluable resource for the architectural profession, addressing the challenges faced by member sections.

REFLECTIONS

Allow me to end with a poignant reflection I recently offered on the 75th Anniversary of the UIA:

What's in a story?

A few years ago, while working as the prime architect for a high-profile project commissioned by the Government of Alberta, I stumbled upon intriguing stories surrounding the construction of the Alberta Legislature Building, completed in 1912. Rather than focusing solely on the creative classical detailing of the building, I found myself immersed in the remarkable political machinations deployed to control the spiraling construction costs. These debates eventually revolved around the choice of materials to depict the authority, affluence, clout, and coming-of-age of Canada's newest province at that time. One of the materials hotly debated was aluminum.

Once considered one of the rarest and most expensive commodities on Earth, aluminum was tightly bonded to oxygen in the form of bauxite, and its scarcity made it highly prized. However, in 1886, Charles Martin Hall's invention of an inexpensive electrolytic reduction method revolutionized the extraction of aluminum from bauxite, rendering it abundant and significantly increasing its usefulness, albeit with a sharp decline in monetary worth. Today, aluminum features prominently as an indispensable material in our daily lives.

This story of aluminum poses a profound question: Was aluminum more valuable when it was rare or when it became ubiquitous? As the Vice President of the most geographically expansive region of the UIA, Region III, spanning North and South America and blessed with abundant bauxite, the story of aluminum and the UIA's 75th anniversary provokes a deeper sense of connection, prompting us to derive a profound understanding of the concept of value. I wonder what story posterity will tell in another 75 years, in the year 2098, about the present-day UIA and the actions or inactions we took.

On the surface, the UIA, as the only global architecture organization for the past 75 years, could be perceived as a geriatric apparatus that derived its value solely from rarity, characterized by a rigid *modus operandi* that prioritizes insularity over visibility and transparency. However, we must not overlook the noteworthy accomplishments of the organization, such as the establishment of the UNESCO/UIA World Capital of Architecture program or its firm stance against apartheid in South Africa, albeit intermittent.

In recent years, the UIA's somewhat lackluster approach to engagement with relevant stakeholders and advocacy on behalf of the architectural profession at the international level has been described as insipid. Consequently, it is imperative for the UIA to relinquish rarity, insularity, and rigidity in favor of ubiquity, transparency, and future-mindedness. The organization must prioritize leading people and the planet to thrive habitually in a world where the next generation of leaders and emerging professionals take the helm of the UIA.

To achieve this, the UIA must reimagine a new post-pandemic normal that actively focuses on advancing global ethical practices, environmental stewardship, wellness, and equitable communities through practical initiatives. One such transformative initiative is the cross-continental mentorship program, which I championed in 2022 as the Vice President of Region III, in collaboration with Michelle Montgomery from the American Institute of Architects. This program aims to empower emerging architects to advance solutions for equitable, resilient, and sustainable communities. It should not take another 75 years for the UIA to assume a leadership role in meaningfully engaging with the world, advancing and implementing robust global policies to address the urgent need for equitable, resilient, and sustainable communities. We cannot afford to wait another 75 years to approach global policymakers, offering them architectural solutions essential in tackling critical societal issues, such as the climate emergency of our time.

Let the story of aluminum serve as a poignant reminder to the UIA that what was once rare and valuable can become ubiquitous and useful. The UIA must take heed of this invaluable lesson and act upon it by prioritizing transparency, future-mindedness, and ubiquity. Waiting another 75 years to establish proper fiscal control measures, embracing transparency, implementing good governance principles, and integrating emerging professionals into the leadership structure is simply not an option. The UIA must undergo a profound mindset shift and embrace its rightful leadership role in shaping the built environment of the future. As architects, we possess the power to shape the world we inhabit, and it is time for the UIA to harness that power for the greater good, lest we risk being replaced by others who will step up to the challenge.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate my deepest gratitude to my colleagues and Council Members from Region III for their unwavering support, as well as to the General Assembly for their trust in electing me as the VP RIII. I take great pride in the achievements and humbled by the challenges and quest to leave UIA a better organization made during my tenure, and I eagerly look forward to further advancing the goals and vision of responsible architecture globally.