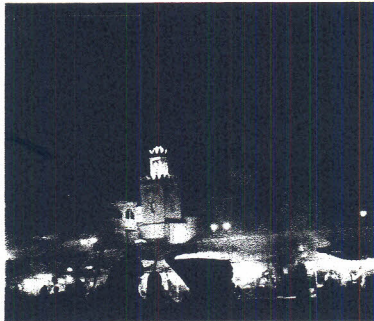


Marrakech is above all a city of colour, sound and drama, reports James Kavanagh. The fabled red city with its medieval ramparts and teaming medina and souks, nestles in the lap of the imposing high Atlas Mountains of central Morocco. For a few heady days during early December, the global surveying profession was treated to the most exciting and intellectually challenging FIG conference of recent memory.



## 2nd FIG REGIONAL CONFERENCE – Marrakech Urban-Rural interrelationship for sustainable development

By James Kavanagh

*'Standing next to the mountain, chop it down with the edge of my band' – with apologies to J Hendrix.*

With an intensive programme of high quality seminars, lectures, roundtables and plenary sessions, FIG worked closely with the Moroccan surveying institution (ONIGT) and the Arab Union of Surveyors (AUS) and many agencies of the United Nations such as UNEP, FAO, UN-Habitat, UN ECA. A packed and exotic social programme combining traditional Moroccan cuisine and hospitality with superb technical visits to the second largest zinc-copper mine and processing installation in the Arab world, local irrigation centres and a dam, gave delegates a glimpse into Moroccan life.

The conference was attended by 420 participants from 42 countries and the technical programme included three plenary sessions and 24 technical sessions with more than 120 papers.

### Every act is a political act

The conference was opened by two hard-hitting presentations from Don Okpala (UN-Habitat) and David Palmer (FAO). Delegates were invited to think political, to think and speak the language of policy makers and the world bank, but balanced with the hard edge

of survey technology. This was the common conference theme, the coherent thought that ran through this conference, from the excellent geodesy orientated papers such as the African Geoid project by Charles Merry (South Africa) to the closing comments on the 'Marrakech Declaration'. Surveyors need to operate in the real world and that world is governed by political policy. Rather than be simply agents of policy, we need to influence it for the common good.

Rob Mahoney gave a very influential presentation in fluent French on the geomatics faculty research 'geography jigsaw' which was translated and published in French especially for this conference. Delegates quickly snatched up over 300 copies of the French translation and over 100 of the English one.

The afternoon was given over to a roundtable discussion on surveying education in Africa. A packed room listened to several African delegates state their views: the overall picture is depressing but not irretrievable. Hopefully, together under the auspices of FIG, we can try to improve the situation.

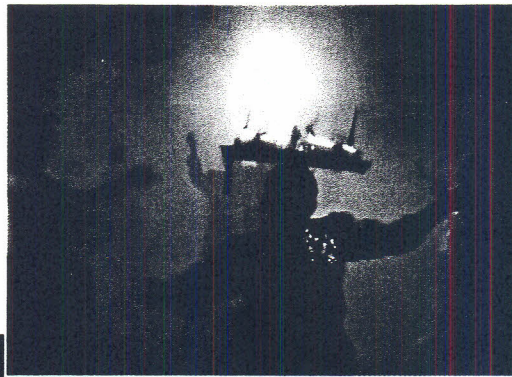
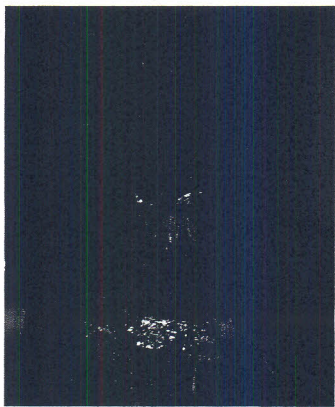
FIG President Prof. Dr.-Ing Holger Magel led the official opening ceremony. FIG is blessed to have such a president; the combination of intellect with a deep sense of humanity makes Prof Magel a formidable individual. He reiterated his belief in the interaction of surveyors and the political establishment. Aziz Hilali of ONIGT welcomed delegates to his homeland and Sarkis Fadous (AUS) gave a speech that made the conference sit up and take notice. Mr Fadous again called on surveyors to act politically and to challenge the status quo, whether it is the 'bleeding wound' of Palestinian refugees and inhumane conditions in the West Bank or western policy in the Middle East.

The day ended with a 'kebab' fest in the lobby of the Sheraton hotel. Then it all happened, who walks in but US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, on his whistle stop tour of the Middle East. I suppose I should have noticed something was up by the groups of large men with 'wires' stuck in their ears or the huge Stars and Stripes hung from the front of the hotel. This was surreal. And I promised my family that we would be inconspicuous in Marrakech, no chance!

### Belly dancers and dodgy prancers

Wednesday (3rd of Dec) was again opened by two excellent presentations from the UN. Svein Tveitdal (UNEP) spoke on informal settlements and envi-

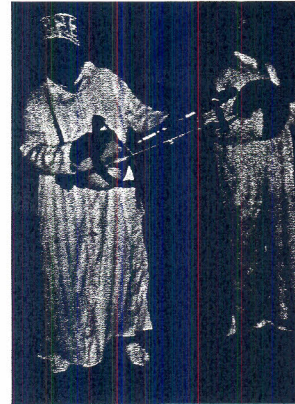
*It's not just junkets and feasting  
FIG conferences . . .*



ronmental consequences (did you know that 70% of Dar es Salaam is informal). Dosie Ezigbalike (UNECA) than gave an excellent presentation of SDI Africa. After a long day of seminars and lectures, the delegates were led through the narrow streets of the medina (walled city), flanked by Berber musicians and torch-carrying men with their faces covered by Arabic scarves. It should be remembered that this area of Morocco is the 'Hollywood' of the Middle East and for good reason. We were then treated to a meal of sumptuous and exotics flavours with accompanying traditional music from musicians from the High Atlas, Western Sahara and even Mali. Belly dancers moved amongst the tables and many FIG delegates had dressed in local garb. By the time we got back to the hotel, Colin Powell was gone . . . ah well! Although I believe that FIG Director Markku Villikka did invite him along, he probably declined due to a lack of pizza! A short mention must be made of the small but perfectly formed, exhibition. The exhibit from the Morocco mapping agency was superb. Can we send some Ordnance Survey GB people over there for some lessons?

Thursday was education-driven with an excellent opening paper from Stig Enemark and Pedro Caveró (Spain). Frances Plimmer also gave a very well received RICS education paper. The closing ceremony was opened by an exuberant Holger Magel who once again spoke of the need to view rural and urban issues in a holistic manner and to engage politically. Rob Mahoney then summed up the work of the small group, which was in the process of drafting the Marrakech Declaration. This declaration will form the basis of FIG policy in this area and is ongoing until the Athens working week in May 2004. The day ended in a spectacular gala dinner. Words genuinely fail me in doing justice to

*Musicians from the High Atlas and fire jugglers entertained delegates.*



many aspects of this conference.

**Technical tours and Djemaa'en Fna**

The Friday was taken up with a trip to a local dam and irrigation projects followed by a jaunt down a 350m deep mine shaft, not for the faint hearted or claustrophobic! As with all of this conference, it was extremely well organised and really showcased Morocco and the surveying profession there. No trip to Marrakech is complete without a visit to the souks (haggle mania) and the intense experience of the Djemaa'en Fna, the Square of the Dead but it is far from dead. Dancing monkeys, Berber storytellers, snake charmers, acrobats vie with juice sellers and a phalanx of food vendors. Be it squid, sheep's heads, tagines, or couscous, Marrakech has something for everyone.

My heartfelt thanks to the surveyors of ONIGT who really gave their all in giving the FIG delegates an unforgettable experience. A more intensive report from all FIG delegates will be produced and made available from [www.rics.org/geo](http://www.rics.org/geo) and in *Geomatics World*. **GW**



RICS Geomatics

**Evening lecture programme 2004**

**Thursday 5 February 2004  
Geodesy**

Title: Developments in geodesy at Ordnance Survey  
Speaker: Paul Cruddace  
Location: RICS, Parliament Square  
Time: 1800

**Thursday 4 March 2004  
Joint lecture with RSPsoc**

Title: GPS, satellite imagery and ecology in Belize  
Speaker: Duncan Moss, Ordnance Survey and Dr Neil Stuart, University of Edinburgh  
Location: RICS, Parliament Square  
Time: 1800

**Wednesday 31 March 2004  
One day event in conjunction with ICES and RSPsoc**

Title: one day symposium – Digital Aerial Sensors for Photogrammetry  
Speakers: TBC  
Location: University of Newcastle  
Time: 1030

**Thursday 22 April 2004  
Joint lecture with AGI and RICS Environment Faculty**

Title: GIS and the marine environment  
Speaker: Caroline Faulkner, Port of London Authority  
Location: RICS, Parliament Square  
Time: 1800

**Thursday 13 May 2004  
In conjunction with AGI and RICS Environment Faculty**

Title: GIS and historic landscape assessments  
Speaker: Lynn Dyson-Bruce, Essex Local Authority  
Location: RICS, Parliament Square  
Time: 1800

Tea and coffee will be served at all RICS lectures from 1715.

Lectures are usually one hour long and are free unless otherwise stated. Non-RICS members are also welcome.

The lectures may count towards RICS CPD.

More information on each lecture can be found on our faculty website [www.rics.org/geo](http://www.rics.org/geo) or contact: James Kavanagh [jkavanagh@rics.org](mailto:jkavanagh@rics.org)

