

SAIA inaugurates Amira Osman as new president at high-profile event

The South African Institute of Architects (SAIA) inaugurated Amira Osman as its 70th president at an event on Thursday, 2 February, attended by government, industry, academic and professional leadership.



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Keynote speaker Judge Albie Sachs, who commented on his previous experience as an adjudicator for the SAIA Awards, reflected how buildings that had social and spatial significance and impacted on the lives of communities needed to be acknowledged.

Sachs spoke about his experience in the building of the Constitutional Court on the historical site of notorious apartheid prisons and where diverse Johannesburg neighbourhoods meet. He explained how an international architectural competition saw the transformation of the site into a building and a space that resonated with the users and the community. He felt a sense of joy whenever he approached the site, explaining how he perceived that as a transformed architectural practice.

Regenerating Africa's socio-ecological systems

Tokunbo Omisore, International Union of Architects (UIA) vice-president, Region V trustee, and past president of the Africa Union of Architects, who joined via Zoom, drew parallels with the UIA World Architectural Congress held in Durban in 2014 and the upcoming UIA Congress in Copenhagen in July 2023.

Omisore explained how Africa's Great Green Wall, which promotes sustainable development and climate change mitigation, will feature in Copenhagen, exploring how the profession can contribute to regenerating the socio-ecological systems of the continent and making them more resilient in the face of climate change and degradation, all while supporting and promoting indigenous knowledge and traditional technologies.

"Our world is facing climatic challenges that are subjecting many to poverty. To survive and thrive, the architectural profession must think creatively and engage collectively in the Conference of Parties on Climate Change to address these challenges," urged Omisore.



The changing role of architects as new technologies emerge

20 Jan 2023



Multi-dimensional transformation

Osman, the South African research chair in spatial transformation (positive change in the built environment), said "Transformation is multi-dimensional."

"Transforming our profession is about how we teach, research, and practice, as well as the demographic profile of the architectural community. Every project and site level intervention has the potential to be transformational."

She invited the Department of Human Settlements to partner with the built environment professions to implement innovative pilot projects where experimentation is promoted. These are seen as critical as policy change.

Architecture a scarce skill

Osman pointed out that the Department of Home Affairs identifies architecture as a scarce skill, citing President Cyril Ramaphosa's statement in the National Assembly on 3 November 2022 that there is a lack of suitably qualified town planners to assist with urban planning. She questioned whether these are true and why there is a constant side-lining of the South African disciplines that can most assist in achieving spatial transformation, namely the spatial experts, town planners, and architects.

Osman complimented the Department of Human Settlements on the recent passing of new norms and standards for rental housing gazetted in January 2023. An architect was part of the team that helped in this important milestone, which should be a game-changer in achieving quality housing environments "because design matters. At the heart of the policy is the pursuit of integrated housing environments that provide amenities for residents and seek to transform our cities".



Innovative double-storey housing project for Khayelitsha

Marecia Damons 21 Nov 2022



Reclaiming what architecture is

In keeping with the theme of the event, SAIA vice-president architect Mokena Makeka moderated a discussion about the importance and urgency of spatial transformation. Makeka said there is a need for a sustained dialogue to discuss the relationship between architecture and cities.

“All too often our profession is perceived as the arbiter of good taste when it comes to good buildings. We are seen as aesthetic purveyors that work in elitist spaces and are obsessed with details. We need to reclaim what architecture is, which is the creation of society and cities,” said Makeka.

The event concluded with the following awards:

- Gold Medal of Architecture (2019) in Recognition of Outstanding Contribution to Architecture - Carin Smuts and the late Rodney Choromanski
- Gold Medal of Distinction (2019) in Recognition of Outstanding Contribution to Architecture through Distinguished Service to the Profession - Professor Roger Fisher
- Architectural Critics and Writers Award (2019) in Recognition of a Distinguished Contribution to Architectural Criticism and/or Writing - Professor Ora Joubert and Professor Lindsay Bremner
- Life Membership (2019) conferred upon Michael William Kidd Sutton and Abdool Aziz Ahmed Tayob
- Honorary Membership (2019) conferred upon Adele Naude Santos

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