



Speech by UIA President Regina Gonthier on the occasion of the OAT's 50th anniversary

Dear organisers, distinguished guests, dear colleagues and friends,

It is a great honour to participate in the 50th anniversary of the Ordre des Architectes de Tunisie. On behalf of the International Union of Architects (UIA), I am grateful for the warm welcome and generous hospitality offered to us here in Tunis by the Ordre des Architectes de Tunisie, who invited us to Tunis for the 163rd Council meeting.

The UIA works around the world to unify architects, influence public policies and advance architecture in service to the needs of society. And society and its needs must be our main focus. Over the past few days, we have explored, debated, and worked towards the future of our profession, but we need to do it with a meaningful – and needed - impact on society and not solely on architects. And for that, today, I want to address other critical themes that might not be at the forefront of the day-to-day work of architects around the world.

We live in disturbed times, facing numerous challenges, from armed conflicts to climate instability, and we are not achieving the goals set out for sustainable development. Progress has been made, but it is not enough, and the world faces the difficult task of how to best and most quickly respond to today's climatic and social challenges. Acting in times of war, we are certainly not contributing to it.

Research reveals that the planet-warming emissions generated during the first two months of the war in Gaza were greater than the annual carbon footprint of more than 20 of the world's most climate-vulnerable nations. The effects of the war on climate catastrophe are enormous.

So, first, I would like to reaffirm the International Union of Architects' resolution from last November and call for an urgent ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, strongly condemning the ongoing conflict that has caused an unprecedented number of civilian casualties. We echo the urgent call made by the UN Secretary-General for a peaceful solution, for the immediate facilitation of humanitarian efforts, and for the protection of civilians, especially the vulnerable who cannot relocate from areas of active fighting.

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We stand with 3.5 million architects from 115 countries and express solidarity with all those suffering from this conflict.

For decades, we have witnessed the persistent suffering and devastation in the region without a lasting resolution. The architectural community must commit to advancing peace, sustainable development, and human rights, condemning the targeting of the civilian population in wars, and expressing concern about the loss of innocent lives and the destruction of homes, schools, hospitals, and vital infrastructure. As architects, we pledge to assist in the reconstruction and restoration of residential and public facilities, ensuring that our work respects human dignity and architectural heritage.

Turning to our host country, Tunisia, we recognise and celebrate the remarkable contributions of Tunisian architects, not only to our Union but to the value of world architecture. Their efforts to establish a significant place for our Union in society are commendable. Tunisian architects have shown that by valuing, listening to, and supporting the architects' capacities and work, society can benefit immensely.

As architects, we are trained to coordinate the know-how of other disciplines and specialists, to use technology intelligently, and to find solutions within the given economic and legal framework. But, as designers within the interdisciplinary team, we are the only specialists challenged to understand the needs of both users and investors and interpret them with spatial solutions in the interest of society.

Architects possess a multi-sectoral, multi-dimensional, and forward-looking vision. This broad and visionary approach is crucial for the transformation that is needed towards the sustainable development of our cities and communities. It is imperative to trust architects and provide them with every opportunity to play their role fully the safeguarding our natural and living environment, and globally, our societies. By embracing architects' insights and expertise, we can ensure that our urban and built environments are not only functional but also enriching and sustainable.

We stand at a crossroads where the engagement of civil society is crucial to addressing the numerous challenges we face today.



The UIA and national professional organisations must engage more with the international, regional and national organisations, highlighting the role of architects in shaping a sustainable future. And this transformation involves not only collaboration with specialists in the field of construction but also with civil society, towards a more inclusive built environment.

At the Buildings and Climate Global Forum the UIA, along with the Architects' Council of Europe and the Conseil National de l'Ordre des Architects, pledged to make architecture an economic lever at the service of inhabitants and the planet. As proponents of sustainable development and responsible practice, we outlined ambitious yet achievable goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and decarbonising our practices by 2050.

Our commitments include prioritising the rehabilitation of existing buildings, promoting local production channels for supplying eco-materials, influencing urban planning to prevent urban sprawl, protecting and promoting biodiversity, and advocating for high-quality *Baukultur*.

These actions emphasise culture, sustainability and quality of life as core elements of our work.

Cooperation between all stakeholders—engineers, architects, legislators, and community members—is vital. Promoting public awareness and education on the advantages of resilient and zero-emission buildings is essential.

The UIA will continue to engage in climate diplomacy, calling for policy changes and supporting global campaigns about the importance of a sustainable and inclusive living and built environment.

Our work as architects is not only about design and aesthetics but also about social and ethical responsibility. We must respect the culture, society, identity, nature, biodiversity and humanity, and advocate for long-term value instead of short-term cost, for responsible land use and settlements, for energy efficiency, and for the use of sustainable construction in harmony with local culture.



I call on all of us to take this message back to our own nations and to remember that, as architects, we have a vital responsibility to advocate for the quality of architecture and to create a sustainable, inclusive, and resilient built and living environment. But these messages can only be effective in the context of peace. Sustainability, resilience and inclusiveness are not compatible with wars and all damages they cause.