GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2019
Speech by President Vincent Cassar

As we come to the end of my term as President of the Commonwealth Association of Architects I wish to take a look at those tasks, activities and initiatives that as a Council we aimed for during the last three years and give an account of those that we have achieved, and perhaps even those that we might not have achieved.

When I took office in 2016 I found an Organisation that had just celebrated its first 50th anniversary having been formed in 1965 at its first meeting in Malta, my home country. It was a time when we were looking forward in taking this organisation into its second half century.

We had also just approved a revised version of the CAA Constitution which regulates the way how we operate and move forward and which needed to be revised, and updated, in line as to how the Organisation was operating and developing. The last time that the Constitution had been revised was thirteen (13) years before.

The CAA had already formulated in 2013 its Vision 2025, however, it was decided to take this initiative forward and formulate a Vision 2030 in line with the UN Sustainable Goals, and in particular with Goal 11 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals: to make cities safe, inclusive, sustainable and resilient. In fact, the Council had, late in 2016 approved the setting up of a Task Force, made up of Council members, in order to take this initiative forward.

At its first meeting the Task Force had decided that in order to be able to formulate a vision it was necessary to explore first and foremost the state of the architectural profession in the Commonwealth. This led us to the launch in 2017 of the first edition of the “Survey of the Architectural Profession in the Commonwealth”. The main aim of this survey was to understand the challenges to be faced in terms of capacity as well as weaknesses with built environment policy, especially where these impact on the ability to deliver Goal 11 of the UN SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals). Participation in the survey from Member Organisations was very encouraging and the results, figures and outcomes were very enlightening although somewhat worrying.

The results mainly showed that there was a lack of architects in most of the Commonwealth Countries, particularly in Asia and Africa to tackle the rapid, and sometimes uncontrolled urbanisation that was taking place in these countries. We had also managed to encourage the Commonwealth Association of Planners to carry out a similar survey among their members. Not surprisingly, this survey also showed a lack of urban planners in most of the Commonwealth Member countries.

Our aim was to have the survey completed early in time in order to publish the results of the survey at CHOGM 2018. This we managed to do and through the hard work done by our Vice President (Europe) Peter Oborn, CAA managed to get the topic of urbanisation to the attention of the Heads of Government at their 2018 CHOGM meeting.

In fact CAA was represented at the various fora for CHOGM 2018 and used the occasion to launch the first part of the Survey of the Profession at a round table
meeting of the UK Built Environment Advisory Group (UKBEAG) which was attended by a variety of organisations including UN Habitat, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for International Development and other Commonwealth professional groups such as Commonwealth Association of Planners (CAP) and Commonwealth Association of Surveyors and Land Economists (CASLE). Subsequently a joint statement “Towards a Common Future” was issued. CAA also hosted a working lunch to coincide with CHOGM and the launch of the survey which was attended by representatives of CAP, CASLE, UN Habitat and the Princes Foundation.

CAA collaborated with the Prince’s Foundation in publishing its “Toolkit for Mayors and Urban Practitioners” alongside the Survey of the Profession and which gave guidelines for “Planning for Rapid Urbanisation”.

The Survey was also discussed at a roundtable held in Accra, Ghana during a visit by HRH The Prince of Wales in November 2018. The round table was attended by the Ghana Institute of Architects, the Ghana Institute of Planners together with two RIBA Council Members. The challenge of rapid urbanisation, and the CAA, were also referenced by the HRH The Prince of Wales during his final speech prior to departing from Ghana.

Peter Oborn also had the opportunity to discuss the results of the Survey at the ICE Global Engineering Congress which took place in London towards the end of October 2018 and that attracted delegates from 82 countries alongside 18 Government delegations and over 200 speakers.

Various Council members, including yours truly attended the UIA 2017 Congress in Seoul, South Korea and the ARCASIA 2018 conference in Tokyo and presented the survey to attendees. I also had the opportunity to give a presentation on the survey at an International Meeting at the American University in Cairo earlier this year.

The success of the 2017 survey lead us to try and intensify the results of the survey and get a more accurate state of the built professionals working in the Commonwealth by launching a second survey. With this aim in mind we managed to rope in not only the Commonwealth Association of Planners (CAP), but also the Commonwealth Association of Surveyors and Land Economists (CASLE) and the Commonwealth Council of Engineers (CEC) for this second edition of the survey.

This second survey was carried out earlier this year and we hope that the final results of this survey will be published in advance of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Rwanda in 2020 and the Tenth World Urban Forum (WUF10) due to be held in Abu Dhabi in 2020.

Later today Peter Oborn will be giving us a presentation of the preliminary results of this second edition.

Where does this take us? In my opinion we need first of all to refresh the results of the survey at least once every three years in order to keep us abreast and up to date with developments in the architectural profession in the Commonwealth. Secondly, we need to get our act together and now concentrate on formulating our Vision 2030
based on adequate policies and actions to address the goals of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and the SDGs.

I wish to thank my colleagues on the Task Force who have worked with me on these two editions of the survey, namely, Senior Vice President Kalim Siddiqui, soon to become President, the Hon Secretary/Treasurer John Geeson, Vice President Europe Peter Oborn and Vice President Oceania Dik Garman. I also wish to thank Joseph Walters who was responsible for analysing the results of the two surveys and CAP, CASLE and CEC for their participation.

Validation
As you are all aware one of our major activities is the validation of schools of architecture. This is a process which the CAA puts great importance upon.

Early in 2016 the Validation Executive Committee was reconstituted and new members of the Validation Panel were appointed. Here I wish to appeal to all Member Organisations to put forward names of suitable and experienced professionals, both from the practicing and the academic fields, in order to take part in this process. I can assure you that it will be a beneficial experience.

During the past three years CAA has validated a number of schools and universities including the University of Durban, the Cape Town University, the University of Nairobi, the Caribbean School of Architecture in Jamaica, the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture & Technology, the University of Free Estate Bloemfontein, the University of Hong Kong and the University of Witwatersrand South Africa.

The CAA is a founder member of the Canberra Accord and participates actively in the activities. It was our honour to host the Canberra Accord Annual Meeting in Colombo in May 2017 and here I wish to thank the Sri Lanka Institute of Architects for their invaluable help in organising and hosting this meeting.

During this year the review of the CAA Green Book on the validation process for architectural education courses across the Commonwealth was ongoing with a workshop held in April in Larnaca, Cyprus attended by Chris Landorf and Alan Jones, both members of the ExCom and six (6) Council Members. Although it was our intention to have this revision completed and presented at this General Assembly we did not manage to do so. Most of the ground work is now complete and I hope that the next Council will take this up in earnest and complete the process as soon as possible.

I wish here to thank first of all the Architects Association of Cyprus who through the good offices of Council member Christos Panayiotides hosted the meeting in Cyprus. I also wish to thank Council member Sithabile Mathe, who not only chairs the ExCom and is thus responsible for all Validation issues and visits but who was also instrumental in leading the process for the revision to the Green Book. I also wish to thank Ms Katlego Mwale who helped Sitha in co-ordinating the required revisions.

Work Groups
Early in 2016, thanks to an initiative taken by my predecessor Rukshan Widjalankara a number of Work Groups, namely a Work Group on Education, a Work Group on
Designing City Resilience, and another on Socially Responsible Architecture were formed. Although members from various Member Organisations were appointed to sit on these Work Groups it does not seem that the idea has caught on successfully and that we have achieved what was originally intended with the setting up of these Work Groups.

The only initiatives that we had were (i) from the Chair of the Work Group on Education, Mark Olweny from the Uganda Association of Architects who wrote a paper on “The potential to develop a solution to the problem of carrying out critiques of work by architectural students who are geographically remote from their school campus” and (ii) from the chair of the Work Group on City Resilience, Peter Oborn who not only attended meetings of the Global Alliance for Urban Cities but who also managed to secure representation of CAA on the committee of the Alliance.

However, the interaction with members of the Work Groups, and more importantly with their respective Member Organisations and other Member Organisations, did not take place. This is disappointing as the idea behind the setting up of these Work Groups was to have a more active participation of our Member Organisations.

I still feel that the establishment of these Work Groups was a good idea and I believe that with a little bit of more effort and pushing these Work Groups could produce interesting and useful studies, opportunities and information for the CAA and its members.

**Archive**

During the past three years we have tried to tackle the problem with the CAA Archive. There are loads of boxes filled with material such as minutes and records of past Council and General Assembly meetings, copies of correspondence between CAA and Member Organisations, books, journals, etc. Although the first stage in the organisation and assessment of the CAA archives has been completed a permanent home to house such archives is still being sought.

We would not like to have these stored and locked up in some place which is not accessible to members. This archive holds the history of the Organisation and it would make sense to have these documents catalogued and made easily available. Through the good offices of John Geeson, the Hon. Secretary/Treasurer, who has very kindly accepted to temporarily house these boxes in his office in London, contact was made with RIBA to try and have a room at the RIBA offices where we could house and display the archive. At the same time this room could serve as a meeting place for CAA. Discussions are still ongoing and it is hoped that a workable solution can be found and that finally we will be able to make the archive available to all members of the profession.

**70th Anniversary of the Commonwealth**

It is opportune to note that this year the Commonwealth is celebrating its 70th anniversary since it was formation. Early in the year the Commonwealth Secretariat had issued a call to all Accredited Organisations requesting them to indicate their interest in forming part of a Commonwealth@70 Task Force in order to be responsible for organising and coordinating activities for such celebrations, CAA had shown interest and submitted an application in my name. In fact, I was then chosen by other
Accredited Organisations to lead and co-ordinate the twenty-six (26) Accredited Professional Organisations.

As CAA we had submitted two proposals for funding and as coordinator of the Professional Accredited Organisations I had submitted another proposal for funding the organisation of a one or two-day Conference with the theme “The Professional Organisations in the Commonwealth: Their Influence in its Development”. I had approached all the twenty-six (26) Professional Accredited Organisations and most of them had subscribed to the idea.

Unfortunately, although officials from the Commonwealth Secretariat had expressed their agreement to the three proposals and had even requested further information on the three proposals no feedback was received from the Com Sec. Surprisingly enough on the 16 July 2019 the Com Sec issued a notice addressed to all Accredited Organisations saying that “In commemoration of the 70th Anniversary, the Commonwealth@70 Committee welcomes requests for funding from Accredited Commonwealth Organisations for modest grants up to a maximum of £5000 to support events and activities” and that such requests have to be submitted by the 2 September 2019.

As soon as I get back to Malta I will re-submit all three proposals hopefully to try and get in our way a trickle of funds.

Council Meetings
Over the last three years the Council met on fifteen (15) occasions, three (3) of them being face to face meetings held in London, Lahore (Pakistan) and Seoul (South Korea), with the rest in the form of teleconferences. In fact, we made it a point to hold a teleconference every quarter.

Robert Matthew Award
In honour of our first President, Sir Robert Hogg Matthew, the CAA has since 1982 been organising the Robert Matthew Award. This award recognises the life-long contribution to Architecture in the Commonwealth.

The last edition of the award was made in March 2016 in Lahore and the award was shared between Pervaiz Vandal & Associates from Pakistan and Sir Nicholas Grimshaw from the UK.

This evening, at the RM Award ceremony, we will be announcing the name of the winning architect and here I wish to thank Kalim for his interest in co-ordinating the process that led us to the finalisation of this year’s event and for taking care of the manufacture of the winning trophy.

This is a prestigious award that recognises a life time achievement in the advancement of architecture and in this scenario I would like to see a more active participation from architects and Member Organisations.

Financials
Our income depends entirely on the Membership Fees that we receive from our Member Organisations and the level of this income has a direct impact on our
expenditure and on the way how we operate always keeping in mind to try to keep our expenditure as low as possible. At the end of 2016, after having had in the previous year taken a significant decision regarding the Secretariat, we saw our reserves shooting to circa 80,000 Pounds. Over the last three years the amount of this reserve has been kept at the same level with the end of 2018 showing an amount of 75,000 Pounds.

Some might say that this is very good considering that a few years ago CAA was almost in the red. On the other hand one has to take into consideration that we are not a commercial entity with an aim to make a profit. Keeping such an amount of money in reserve does not look good and here I appeal to our MOs to come forward with projects that can be funded by CAA. We have funded a number of projects in the past and we would be happy to fund more projects which can contribute to give an added value to the Member Organisation itself and to CAA in the wider sense.

Trustees

Being registered as a UK Charity obliges us to have a Board of Trustees. According to the Constitution the Board of Trustees should be made up of five (5) members of which not less than three shall be resident in England and Wales. The Honorary Secretary/Treasurer shall be a member of the Board.

I wish to thank the current members of the Board, namely, John Geeson, Annette Fisher, Llewelyn van Wyk and Dik Jarman. I would also like to thank Gordon Holden, a past CAA President and member of the Board who resigned as a Trustee some time ago.

It is now up to the new Council to re-constitute the Board of Trustees.

Membership

The current fully paid up members for 2019 stands at seventeen (17) with Bahamas, Bangladesh, Botswana, Cyprus, Hong Kong, Kenya, Malta, Namibia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Rwanda, St Kitts & Nevis, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Trinidad & Tobago, Uganda and UK.

This represents 39% of the 44 in number Commonwealth Countries where an Architectural Association is established. Associations like those from Jamaica, Ghana, Antigua & Barbuda and Guyana, who are usually prompt in paying their Subscription Fee have not as yet done so for this year.

Two years ago the Australian Institute declared that they were in financial difficulties and could not afford to pay their CAA Subscription fee. In previous years we lost Canada and New Zealand and our efforts to bring back India and Malaysia into our fold have up to now not had a positive outcome.

We have not lost heart and our efforts in order to get those organisations, once valid and active Member Organisations of CAA, back into CAA will not cease. Discussions as to how some lapsed members could be encouraged to participate more fully is needed and a concerted effort from all current members of CAA is needed and I urge the next Council to take this into account.
The General Assembly

This brings me to the next topic I wish to talk about, that of the frequency of the General Assembly. Although the Constitution says that “the General Assembly shall meet at least once in every three years” there is nothing that inhibits us to meet more frequently.

This is a proposal that I have put forward at one of our last Council Meetings and I hope that this will be followed up in the future. This is one way how we can be closer to our members and how we can increase our presence among our Member Organisations. Another way is to have conferences, seminars and/or workshops organised at a regional level. This would definitely make it easier for Member Organisations from that particular region to participate. We need to explore such possibilities if we want to get closer to our members and increase our membership numbers.

Allow me here to say a word to our Vice Presidents who represent each of the five regions into which CAA is organised and to impress upon them the need to be more proactive and to be closer to the Member Organisations which they represent. Holding of activities, such as conferences, seminars and/or workshops is one way of keeping in touch and a way of creating that interactive platform that we much need.

Miscellaneous Activities

During these three years there were other activities and initiatives that the CAA involved itself in. I will mention just a few:

- During 2016 the CAA funded the attendance of two students at the Nottingham University’s schools project in Tshela in South Africa.

- Although, early in 2016 the British Board of Agreement were in discussions with CAA regarding a model for product accreditation systems in various Commonwealth countries and a questionnaire was issued to various interested MOs the initiative did not proceed beyond this point due to a lack of response from the MOs.

- Yours truly attended the Commonwealth Meeting of Accredited Associations in London in 2016, which meeting was chaired by the Commonwealth Secretary General, Baroness Scotland to discuss the implementation of the sustainable development goals. Moreover, in 2018 Peter Oborn attended a meeting with the Commonwealth Secretary General as part of the bi-annual meeting with Commonwealth Organisations.

- CAA was represented at the 2017 Union of International Architects General Assembly in Seoul, South Korea where we had a booth showing a video documentary on various CAA activities and provided information about the State of the Profession survey.

- CAA sponsored a number of architectural students from the CAA validated schools to attend a design charrette at the RIBA's International Week event in London in 2017, underwriting their travel and accommodation costs to attend the event. Students from Jamaica, Kenya, New Zealand, Hong Kong, South Africa, Ghana and Australia.
• CAA along with CAP, RIBA and RTPI, sponsored the presentation of a paper on sustainability at the Youth Forum of CHOGM 2018 “Urbanism in the Commonwealth: A Youth Manifesto” with contributions from young urbanists from Australia, the Caribbean, Malaysia, Nigeria, South Africa and the UK.

• I represented the CAA at the Commonwealth Day events of 2017, 2018 and 2019 and attended the High Commissioners Banquet in 2019 where the theme was “A more sustainable future”.

• Another ongoing activity during the three years was the production and publication of the Association’s online E-Journal and the upkeep of the website and here I wish to thank Jayantha for co-ordinating this activity as Chair of Communication.

• CAA has submitted an application for Consultative Status with ECOSOC the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs. We hope that our application will be accepted when the ECOSOC Committee meets in the New Year. If successful, this registration will provide for the CAA to have a voice at many of the political forums such as the COP’s, the World Urban Forum and the High-Level Political Dialogue.

• Earlier this year I was invited by RIBA, together with other Presidents from various other International Organisations to take part in the RIBA International and Gold Medal Week. There I had the opportunity to meet Sir Nicholas Grimshaw, the joint recipient of the 2016 Robert Matthew Award besides being bestowed with the RIBA Presidential Medal to acknowledge the mutually beneficial collaboration and to stimulate further dialogue between RIBA and the CAA.

• Finally, the CAA together with the Commonwealth Association of Planners and the Commonwealth Engineers Council are hosting a reception to mark the occasion of a visit to London by the UN Habitat Executive Director, Her Excellency Maimunah Mohd Sharif. The event will be held on the 10th September and forms part of a week of activity which will include a series of roundtables with High Commissioners and Civil Society groups the aim of which will be to consider how Commonwealth countries can effectively engage with the challenge of rapid urbanisation and the delivery of SDG 11; ‘to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable’. The event forms part of a programme of activity aimed at advancing sustainable urbanisation as a subject for consideration at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting to be held in Rwanda in June 2020 and builds on the work currently being undertaken in connection with the 2019 Survey of the Built Environment Professions in the Commonwealth”.

Conclusion

In conclusion I would like to thank my colleagues on Council who supported me during the past three years and who were an inspiration to me in moving forward the CAA Agenda. Whilst thanking Jalal, Jayantha, Chandana, Christos and Peter who are all standing for re-election to the next Council, I wish the next President Kalim my best wishes in his new post. I am sure that he will ably lead the CAA during the next three years.
Similarly, the three-year term of Immediate Past President Rukshan Widyalankara will come to an end and we will surely miss his valuable contribution on the CAA Council.

CAA will be losing the services of John Geeson, our Hon. Secretary / Treasurer who has held office for the last six years and who has decided not to stand again for re-election. However, John has offered his services to continue as a Trustee and it is up to the next Council to accept that.

CAA will also be losing the services of Dik Jarman who over the past three years was the Vice President Oceania but who was also instrumental in the organisation of the 2017 and 2019 Surveys. I hope that the next Council will find a niche to engage this valuable gentleman in some worthwhile activity.

Similarly, we will be missing Wycliffe Morton, who was the Vice President (Americas) and who has not presented himself again for re-election.

CAA will also be losing the services of our Executive Director, Nadeesha Yahampath, who has been of service to CAA over the last four years. This is in consequence of a decision taken by Council that the Secretariat will move in the same country of the President. I wish Nadeesha every success for her future.

I will end my address by wishing the CAA many more years of activity for the benefit of architecture in the Commonwealth which activity will not only be of benefit to our communities but also to all communities around the world especially at this time that we are experiencing so many changes to the environment that we live in.

I will just leave you with the three principles of architecture as asserted by Vitruvius FIRMITIS, UTILITAS and VENUSTAS that is Durability, Utility and Beauty. In other words, Architecture should stand up robustly and remain in good condition, it should be useful and function well for people using it and it should delight people and raise their spirits.

Vincent Cassar
President CAA
14 August 2019