



Association of Former WHO Staff Members (AFSM) Association des Anciens de l'OMS (AOMS)

General Assembly, 5 October 2023

Executive Committee Report

November 2021 – October 2023

PLEA FOR YOUR HELP

We still have a list of over 220 AFSM members who have not yet shared their email address with us. If you have an email address, PLEASE let us have the details. We expect that some more senior members may not use email but we believe that many of you on the list do have an email address. If you do not receive email communications from us and are not sure if you are on this list, just send us an email message to aoms@who.int.

Needless to say, if we have your email address, it allows us to communicate with you more often and more rapidly. If you prefer, we do not need to include your email address in the Directory – just tell us.

In addition to the rapidity of information, sharing information with you by email helps WHO to reduce its mailing costs and saves some of our volunteer time in having to prepare communications for posting to you.

WHO wishes to reduce its carbon footprint and is asking the AFSM to reduce as much as possible its printing requests. We hope that we can continue with the printed version of the Quarterly News but we would welcome more volunteers to just receive the electronic version of the QNT – this version includes more graphics and gives you all the direct links to secure more information on topics.

We are counting on your cooperation and look forward to receiving more email addresses and more volunteers to just receive the QNT electronically.

Thanks so much for your help and understanding.

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic is now hopefully behind us but the biennium under review continued to be affected by it. We continued to hold our monthly online meetings without interruption until August 2022. The Executive Committee (the Committee) was able to resume its physical meetings on WHO premises from September 2022, although several colleagues decided to continue to attend online when convenient to them. We are most grateful to the WHO Administration for allowing those hybrid arrangements which are apparently becoming the rule all over the world. All restrictions to access the WHO premises by retirees were lifted in April 2023, the only requirement being to show evidence of a valid Covid-19 vaccination.

As you will see in the following sections, we have initiated or continued numerous activities for the benefit of our members e.g. organizing webinars on the Decade of Healthy Ageing and on pensions, calling for volunteers to become mentors, sharing offers of short-term assignments, and inviting members to participate in the celebration of the 75th anniversary of WHO. All these activities were only possible because of our increasing collaboration with various WHO and UN departments.

We have been given a new office (L71), opposite the Staff Association office and will resume our permanences when we receive adequate computer facilities. Meanwhile, some members of our Committee are able to monitor from their homes the email messages you send to aoms@who.int. On the other hand, it is still not easy to receive and respond to telephone messages from members. For a quicker response, please use email. We also receive requests from non-members: we do reply to them but more succinctly and encourage them to become members.

We hope you are pleased with our new logo, the previous one did not comply with the new WHO regulations.

2. Elections of the Executive Committee

As we could not hold elections in 2020, the Committee elected in 2018 was extended until October 2022. Fortunately, we were able to co-opt two new colleagues, Robert Bos and Ambi Sundaram.

Early 2022, we received 13 candidates for 12 members to be elected. Only the current members of the Committee declared themselves candidates, including those who had recently been co-opted. In the interests of the Association, to avoid the time-consuming and costly election process, one of the candidates - Ambi Sundaram - kindly agreed to remain co-opted.

In addition, it was clear that none of the 12 remaining candidates felt able to give enough time to the presidency of the Committee. It was provisionally agreed to have three Co-Presidents to share the tasks and not to nominate two Vice-Presidents. This construct of co-presidency is not provided for in the Statutes of the Association and is therefore the subject of a proposal for revision at the 2023 General Assembly.

The composition of the Bureau members of the Committee from October 2022–October 2024 is therefore as follows:

- Co-Presidents: Sue Block Tyrrell, Jean-Paul Menu and Dev Ray
- Treasurer: Anne Yamada
- Assistant Treasurer: Keith Wynn
- Administrator: Michèle Bernard Evans

The other members of the Executive Committee are: Robert Bos, Laura Ciaffei, Maria Dweggah, Barbara Fontaine, Edmond Mobio and Ann Van Hulle-Colbert. As mentioned above, Ambi Sundaram is a co-opted member.

They are assisted by two Honorary Presidents: David Cohen and Alain Vessereau, as well as by two Honorary Members, Yves Beigbeder and Roberto Masironi (the latter deceased since then).

The Committee members share the responsibilities for different activities, notably:

- Health insurance matters: Jean-Paul Menu and Ann Van Hulle-Colbert
- WHO Staff Pension Committee: Barbara Fontaine and Edmond Mobio (observers)

- *Quarterly News*: Keith Wynn, Editor-in-chief, with Yves Beigbeder, Sue Block Tyrrell, David Cohen, Maria Dweggah, Lindsay Martinez, Jean-Paul Menu, Dev Ray and Rosemary Villars on the Editorial Board.

3. Relations with the Director-General

Our relations with Dr Tedros are exceptional and he is so supportive of our Association and members. He walks his talk about “Once WHO, Always WHO” and emphasizes that we are part of the “One WHO Family”. Despite the Covid situation and the fact that our previous biannual face-to-face meetings with him could not be held, he has continued to demonstrate his support.

He keeps us in mind and we were invited to be represented at the Global Management Meeting held at HQ in December 2022. It was an opportunity to meet staff from around the world and share information informally about AFSMs, not only at HQ but especially those in the Regional Offices which are trying to work more closely with staff in the offices at country level, as of course many members have retired to those countries.

Dr Tedros is delighted that our collaboration with our sister associations in the Regional Offices has been strengthened and he participated personally in our online March 2023 meeting which was hosted by our AFSM at HQ. At the meeting, he promised to invite representatives from each AFSM to observe the World Health Assembly and encouraged us to submit to him a list of requests on how he could help to support AFSMs, especially to fill the gaps and meet the challenges they face. Dr Tedros believes that WHO can benefit from AFSM support and in turn it should support the AFSMs. His commitment is extraordinary, and we are deeply grateful to him, and to the staff in his office.

In addition to the invitation to the World Health Assembly, Dr Tedros invited the Council members to hold their first face-to-face Council meeting at HQ in April 2024 which will allow them to celebrate the end of WHO’s 75th anniversary which runs from April 2023 to April 2024. Thanks to his direction, the communications team has reached out to us to seek input from former staff into the 75th anniversary and we have called upon members to provide us with stories/anecdotes/photos/poetry, and the team invites us to be present at various events (see item 5). Staff are becoming much more aware of the AFSM thanks to the DG’s actions.

Dr Tedros spent World Health Day on 7 April 2023 in a very special way: with members of his communications team and representatives from the Staff Association and the AFSM, he went to visit one of our members who had just celebrated her 100th birthday – Gwendoline Carnelley. Two cakes were taken – one for Gwen’s birthday and the other for WHO’s 75th birthday. It was indeed an exceptional event. Dr Tedros also invited Gwen to speak (online) at the closing ceremony of the World Health Assembly – delegates were delighted.

We hope that, somehow, we can institutionalize this closer collaboration before the term of office of Dr Tedros has to end. We look forward to renewing our biannual meetings with the DG now that the Covid situation has improved.

4. Relations with the WHO Administration

We have continued to enjoy excellent relations with the WHO Administration, especially all the teams involved in the printing and distribution of the *Quarterly News* and the Directory (see items 6.1 and 6.4); the Staff Health Insurance team (item 8); the Pension team (item 7); the Staff Health

and Welfare service, notably regarding influenza vaccinations (item 5); the Staff Counsellor for participation in the WHO pre-retirement seminars (item 6.5) and for advice and help as needed; the Global Service Centre and the IT team at HQ; the teams dealing with meeting room reservations and videoconferencing which have helped us on so many occasions; the communications team, notably for reaching out to us on the occasion of WHO's 75th anniversary (item 5) and also for their help concerning our logo; the team at the main HQ reception desk and the security team whose members have also helped us on many occasions; the archives team; the team dealing with the WHO website (item 6.3); the interpretation team; and many other teams whose members willingly support us when needed. When programmes in the main building had to move due to the renovation of the building, our request to remain close to the Staff Association was heard and the AFSM offices are opposite the Staff Association Secretariat offices which greatly facilitates our collaboration (item 10).

Our focal point at HQ continues to be Jennifer Linkins, Director of Human Resources and Talent Management (HRT). Despite her heavy workload, she manages to devote time to facilitate our requests and shares ideas on new areas in which the AFSM can be involved. We have continued to help the HRT team in trying to find former staff willing to accept short-term assignments and also in trying to find mentors for their mentorship programme (item 5). Hopefully, the Covid situation will continue to improve and some initiatives that were put on hold can be taken forward.

Our collaboration with the editorial team of the *newSpecial* (which replaced the former *UN Special magazine*) continues and their monthly magazine is shared with us for forwarding to all AFSM members.

We are indeed lucky and privileged to work in such a collaborative environment and we thank all the teams involved.

5. Collaboration with WHO programmes and WHO organized activities

Some activities have been referred to under items 3 and 4 above. On the human resources side, in addition to the forwarding to AFSM members details of short-term vacancies, we have been collaborating with the mentoring programme. Several calls for mentors have been sent out to AFSM members. Four retirees are taking part as mentors in the 2023 Structured Programme and there are 12 in the Global Programme. We encourage more of you to sign up. We are starting discussions with the Health and Multilateral Partnerships team which is exploring opportunities for mentoring members of the WHO Youth Council whose goal is "to raise the profile of youth contribution to public health at a global, regional, national and local level and to support WHO in its efforts to strengthen youth contributions to public health systems through advocacy actions". In addition, we will be discussing how we can help with introductory sessions for groups of students who visit WHO. Another opportunity may arise soon to explore how former WRs could assist WRs working in complex countries.

Regarding WHO's 75th anniversary, in addition to requesting contributions of stories etc. for the WHO75 campaign website, in collaboration with the communications team and the Staff Association, AFSM members were invited to a staff party held on 5 April; the inauguration on 6 April of a photo exhibition in Geneva displaying WHO's activities over the past 75 years; a free concert held in Geneva on 8 April; and the annual Walk the Talk event on 21 May prior to the start

of the World Health Assembly. We believe that invitations to other events during the year will be forthcoming.

We welcome these opportunities to collaborate and join with staff and thank the communications team and the Staff Association for keeping us in mind and sending us invitations.

In the course of 2022, contact was established between the AFSM and the WHO Programme on Healthy Ageing. Through this programme, WHO serves as the Secretariat for the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030). This led to the joint organization of a 90-minute webinar on 6 October 2022 “Joining Forces for Healthy Ageing” which was attended by some 110 participants from around the world. Dr Tedros gave an opening statement, followed by an introduction to the UN Decade by WHO staff, and presentations on already ongoing AFSM engagements with the Decade from PAHO and WPRO and on new initiatives for collaborative action from the AFSMs in HQ, PAHO, WPRO and AFRO. As an immediate follow-up, it was decided to create a dedicated AFSM hub on the Decade’s website.

In October/November 2021, due to the persistence of the Covid-19 pandemic, the wisest solution was to give up our influenza vaccination sessions where all retirees could meet and catch up with each other. The vaccinations took place by individual appointment with the Staff Health and Welfare (SHW) service. In October/November 2022, the same vaccination campaign for retirees was organized. It was a great success and the SHW team was very efficient and helpful.

6. Information and communications

The Executive Committee continues its efforts to communicate with members and electronic communications have increased since the pandemic. Fortunately, as mentioned above, a few of us have access from home to the AFSM email account but it has been hard to respond promptly to telephone messages left on the AFSM answering machine and correspondence sent by post due to less access to the AFSM office. We repeat our encouragement to members to send their messages to us by email – aoms@who.int.

We have been requested by WHO to reduce as much as possible our requests for printed copies of documents etc. which then entail postage costs. Currently we have about 240 names of members in our database who do not have an email address or have not shared it with us. Please help us to respond to WHO’s concerns and send us as soon as possible your email address if you have one.

6.1. Quarterly News

We are greatly relieved to be producing the magazine again under relatively normal conditions, meeting with contributors and translators, and being able to take the printing files and proofs to the printshop.

The magazine remains the Association’s principal means of keeping in touch with you, our members, and for enabling us to keep you in touch with one another and, of course, provide you with news about what is happening at WHO. It is our aim to find a mix of interesting items to publish along with the more serious articles which bring you up to date on subjects such as pensions and health insurance. We all owe a big thank you to our dedicated voluntary members of the Executive Committee and Editorial Board, who are motivated to follow and report

developments on our behalf. For general interest articles we would like to be able to count a lot more on you, our members, to provide texts.

The digital version of the current issue of the *Quarterly News* is always posted on the AFSM web pages – hosted by WHO – as soon as the paper edition is published. The electronic editions will often contain interesting, but non-essential, extra material that space limitations prevent us from publishing in the printed editions. The added advantages of consulting the electronic versions are that they show all photos in colour and at a resolution which can be enlarged on your screen, and all web-links and email addresses are directly clickable.

For the moment, the archived electronic versions of back issues of the *Quarterly News* – from the first (pilot) issue published in 1989 through to the most recent – are not available for consultation. When WHO updated its website, it could no longer host our back issues on the AFSM web pages. The Committee is actively seeking a solution to re-establish this availability, with emphasis on accessibility and ease of use for our members.

6.2. Information notes and messages

There have been less Information Notes, but more email messages sent to you with news, calls for volunteers and events such as the 2023 General Assembly.

6.3 Website and electronic hosting platform

Since WHO reorganized its website the size of the AFSM website www.who.int/about/former-staff (English) or www.who.int/fr/about/formerstaff (French) has been drastically reduced and only contains the most recent issues of the *Quarterly News* as well as other key documents, such as the AFSM Statutes and the booklet on formalities concerning the death of a WHO retiree. The site shows several links to conferences and cultural events scheduled in Geneva and nearby, as well as Associations of interest to our members.

The AFSM is also actively exploring collaborative application options (SharePoint, Yammer etc.) for AFSM and its members that are easy to use and administer. Ideally, the chosen browser-based app should connect AFSM members through their respective web browsers to the AFSM platform where members can access information, read announcements, peruse the QNT (current and back issues) and also share and exchange information in a secure and simple way.

6.4 Directory of members

The Directory 2023-2024 has been completed but, due to WHO's policy to preserve the environment, save paper and reduce its mailing costs, only a minimum number of copies will be printed and distributed for members who are unable to use email. We are exploring how to share the Directory electronically with members who have sent us their email address - this needs to be shared through a read-only mechanism in order to protect the details of members and avoid them being forwarded. As of end April 2023, AFSM had 906 life members and 21 annual members in 71 countries.

6.5 Pre-retirement seminars

We continue to take part in the pre-retirement seminars held annually at WHO/HQ, emphasizing the benefits of joining the AFSM and encouraging upcoming retirees to subscribe. The 24 November 2022 seminar was held virtually with a few staff attending in person. Unfortunately, and greatly missed is our practice of serving light refreshments outside the meeting room, which encourages participants to stop by and ask individual questions.

7. Pensions

During the last two years, the Executive Committee has been actively involved in pension issues, participating in numerous meetings and availing itself of various documents to keep abreast of developments in order to inform AFSM members regularly via the *Quarterly News* and electronic communications, in addition to responding to members' individual enquiries on pensions as well as tax related issues.

The highlight of the biennium was the hugely popular and successful 2023 In-retirement webinar organized by the AFSM Executive Committee in collaboration with the Client Services team at the Pension Fund's Geneva Office. Over 180 WHO retirees from around the world zoomed in to listen to Pension Fund representatives address the issues retirees were invited to submit in advance of the webinar. We are extremely grateful to the Fund's team for agreeing to hold the webinar.

During the biennium, the AFSM Executive Committee undertook a complete update of the 2019 survivors' guide which will be shared with all AFSM members.

Articles in the *Quarterly News* have covered the Pension Fund's activities during the last biennium, managerial as well as operational, in addition to keeping readers informed of the state of the Fund's investments. Of note is the new Pension Board ethics policy that came into effect during the biennium. It requires all attending Board members, both virtually and physically, to sign a declaration certifying their compliance with the ethics policy and code of conduct. The unruly behaviour exhibited by some Board members in the past no longer troubles Board sessions. Should disruptive behaviour spoil a session, an Ethics Advisor is now in place to handle the situation.

The last biennium witnessed highly volatile markets. The Fund's overall value was not spared, rising to USD 91.5 billion (end 2021) before dropping to USD 77.9 billion (end 2022). Since January 2023, the value has hovered between USD 80 to 82 billion. Actuarial studies determined that even at the low point of USD 79 billion, the funding ratio is a solid 113% (ratio of income over disbursements) and superior to the December 2019 ratio of 107.1%. The investment team's conservative, sound investment approach has helped to weather the turbulent markets.

The Fund's Administration continues to modernize its work processes with the increasing use of electronic documents. By end December 2022, over 11,000 beneficiaries had made use of the Digital Certificate of Entitlement and many more access the Member Self-Service section on the Pension Fund website for certain administrative tasks instead of resorting to postal communications.

The AFSM Executive Committee continues to assist the Pension Fund, through a coordinated approach with the WHO Pension Office and counterparts in WHO Regional retiree associations, in the annual exercise of tracing retirees whose previous year Certificate of Entitlement has not been

returned to the Fund. Much effort goes into this activity so that those concerned will be located and the missing Certificate can be dealt with in order to prevent the suspension of the retiree's monthly benefit payments.

Finally, the AFSM Executive Committee expresses its gratitude to the staff of the Geneva Pension Fund Office who are always so helpful and prompt in responding to requests to solve problems presented to the Committee by our members. We also thank our colleagues at the WHO Pension Office for their excellent collaboration with the AFSM.

8. Staff Health Insurance (SHI)

SHI remains a very important topic for our members. We frequently deal with queries and comments in relation to health insurance and access to quality health care services. We exchange information and views on this topic with the Regional AFSMs. When necessary, concerns or requests for assistance are conveyed to the SHI secretariat whose members are very responsive to our communications. We are kept informed of developments through frequent interaction with the elected retired staff representatives on the two SHI Global Committees. These elected representatives participate very actively in the work of the Committees. The members elected for the four-year period 2019-2023 are as follows:

Global Standing Committee: Marjory Dam and Jean-Paul Menu (members)

Carol Collado and Françoise Héry-Persin (alternate members)

Global Oversight Committee: Ann Van Hulle-Colbert and Thierry Lambrechts (members)

As you are aware, elections are currently under way for the next four-year period 2023-2027. We encourage our members to exercise their right to vote.

The Global Standing Committee takes decisions on individual cases referred to it under the SHI rules and proposes to the Global Oversight Committee amendments to the SHI rules in the light of experience. It also submits an annual report on its work to the Global Oversight Committee.

The Global Oversight Committee advises the Director-General on SHI management, operations, and financial status of the SHI Fund. It organizes periodic actuarial studies, reviews investment strategy and performance and audit reports.

9. Collaboration with Associations of Former WHO Staff in the Regions

At the 2021 General Assembly, we reported on the first virtual meeting held with the Regional Associations of WHO Former Staff in March 2021.

Since then, our Associations have formed a Global Council of AFSMs. Its role is not to govern, but to coordinate between Geneva and the Regional Associations, share information, provide mutual assistance, present a stronger voice when needed and be a mechanism for consultation. There is no secretariat and each AFSM remains independent and is responsible for its own affairs.

Virtual meetings of the Council have followed every six months hosted in succession by AMRO/PAHO (September 2021), EMRO (March 2022), AFRO (September 2022), HQ (March 2023) and again AMRO/PAHO in September 2023. As mentioned above, the Director-General addressed the meeting in March 2023 and encouraged all Associations to make requests for improving their recognition by the Administrations and repeated his earlier statement that former staff remain part

of the WHO family. Representatives of all AFSMs were invited as observers at the World Health Assembly in May 2023.

10. Relations with the HQ Staff Association

We continue to maintain close collaboration with the HQ Staff Association which provides us with valuable assistance for various administrative issues, including the procurement of office equipment. The Staff Association secretariat continues to be of great support to us and we are very grateful to the team. We are invited to attend their General Assemblies and in turn invite them to attend our Assemblies. As mentioned above under item 4, our offices remain close to theirs. In celebration of the Staff Association's 70th anniversary last year, we were invited to share insights and stories from the past to be included in an informational video and to participate in its 70th birthday party held on 14 October 2022.

11. Activities and relations with other associations

11.1 Association of Former International Civil Servants (AAFI-AFICS)

We participated in the monthly Committee meetings of AAFI-AFICS Geneva as well as their General Assemblies in 2022 and 2023. As in the past, this is a valuable opportunity to keep ourselves informed of new developments particularly concerning pensions and to compare the experiences of associations of former staff of other UN Agencies.

11.2 Other associations of retirees

The Plateforme du Réseau Seniors de Genève (formerly known as the "Plateforme des Associations d'aînés de Genève") brings together member associations and public bodies as observers, committed to the quality of life of seniors. It comprises 55 members (including AFSM) and 25 observers dealing with topics affecting seniors. The Plateforme plays a monitoring and communication role on the realities of the field and the evolution of age-related needs. Two of our Committee members are responsible for attending the meetings and the general assembly and other activities organized by the Plateforme.

We placed a link on our website to the CLIC ("*Centre local d'information et de coordination*") in the Pays de Gex since many of their activities could be of interest to our members living locally.

AFSM also maintains relations with the British Association of Former UN Civil Servants (BAFUNCS) which includes many WHO former staff members.

12. Social activities

Due to the Covid situation, there has not been a Solidarity Fair held since 2019. If one is planned for December 2023, we will be pleased to organize our traditional tombola, donate the prizes and give the proceeds to the Solidarity Fund to help staff in financial difficulty.

12.1 Annual receptions

Our last reception was held in 2019. Provided the Covid situation does not deteriorate, we plan to organize a reception after this General Assembly on 5 October 2023. As you know, we have asked

members whether they would attend a reception this year and we have received many positive responses. So, we hope to be able to go ahead and look forward to seeing many of you there.

12.2 Trips

Our long-postponed cruise on the Douro River took place from 31 May to 5 June with 11 participants.

We are planning another cruise in Andalucia and Algarve from 26 September to 3 October 2024.

13. Thanks

Our sincere thanks go to:

- The Director-General and his office
- Director HRT, our focal point in HQ, and the mentoring team
- The Administration, including the SHI and Pension offices as well as the Printing and Distribution services, also the team dealing with healthy ageing
- The Global Service Centre and the HQ/IT team
- The Staff Health and Welfare service for the influenza vaccinations and advice on Covid vaccinations, including the assistance of the Staff Counsellor when needed
- Ms Marie-Pierre Austin for her invaluable help in the use of our mailing lists and securing the printing and mailing of our communications until her retirement in May 2023
- The Staff Association and its secretariat
- The reception and security services
- The team handling the conference room bookings and videoconferencing
- The interpretation team
- The archives team
- The communications team
- The WHO website team
- Other associations of seniors in the Geneva area and in the Regions.

14. Conclusion

Our contacts with the Director-General's Office and the WHO Administration have steadily increased. Our Association is better known and consequently offers to retirees to participate in WHO activities have multiplied. In addition, much effort has been spent in reinforcing links with Regional AFSM Associations. And last but not least, we have done our best to respond to your requests which are more and more numerous and varied.

While that is good news, we are reaching our limits at the expense of our personal activities. We are all volunteers, without any financial or other compensation. We always welcome offers of collaboration from our members to undertake responsibilities for specific functions as co-opted members.