

Statement by John P. Dietz, President
AFICS/NY Annual Assembly
Tuesday, 23 June 2020

As President of AFICS/NY it is my pleasure to welcome all of you to this important Annual Assembly of our Association. It is held virtually, due to the ongoing new corona virus pandemic. It is also our 50th such Assembly, AFICS/NY having been founded in 1970, with the personal involvement of then Secretary-General U Thant. The Association was established, with a close link to the UN that has continued and only strengthened since that time - it is an Association of members who choose to join and become dues-paying members, but with the wider mission to advocate for and protect the interests of all UN-System retirees and beneficiaries. Through the UN's intranet, iSeek, we have also invited to this unique virtual Assembly, active UN staff and hope that the audience includes many of them, particularly those close to retirement who may be interested in becoming our members. (Incidentally, you can join AFICS/NY while still serving as an active UN staff member.)

Later this year, we are planning to hold a Special Event to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of AFICS/NY. We very much hope that the Secretary-General will be able to join us on that occasion. We will keep you posted about plans and developments for the Anniversary celebration, which we hope many of you will be able to attend.

I would now like to thank Ms. Catherine Pollard for representing the Secretary-General at our meeting, and for reading his highly appreciated message on the 50th Anniversary of our Association. We at AFICS/NY are reassured by her statement, confirming that the Secretary-General and his entire senior management team continue to recognize the contributions made by retirees to the UN system and that they remain committed to ensuring that UN retirees receive the important services from the UN that they depend on, particularly in the areas of pensions and health insurance.

I can proudly report that since our last Assembly, AFICS/NY, through its Governing Board and Committees, and particularly the two Vice-Presidents, Debbie Landey and Jay Karia working closely with me, has continued to do its best to protect the interests of UN retirees, by engaging in constructive discussions with senior managers across the UN system. As could be expected, those discussions concerned primarily pension administration, Pension Fund investments and health insurance.

We communicated on a regular basis last year with the Acting CEO, Janice Dunn Lee, and since January with the new Chief Executive of Pension Administration (CEPA), Rosemarie McClean; we did the same with the former Representative of the Secretary-General (RSG) for the Fund's Investments, Sudhir Rajkumar, and the Acting RSG since the end of March, Pedro Guazo. These contacts were particularly important this year, after we were all confronted and challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences; our recent focus was on confirming that both sides of the Pension Fund

remained fully operational, performing all their important functions while forced to work remotely.

With respect to pension administration, the main subjects we discussed with senior officials included the need to provide to stakeholders clear, accessible and regularly updated information on operations, particularly as regards the processing of new pension benefits; the need for systematic follow-up in incomplete cases with both employing organizations and the Fund participants concerned; the need for employing organizations to verify personal information and to transmit to the Pension Fund all required separation documentation much more rapidly, particularly for staff at field duty stations; improvement in client servicing and in communications with Fund participants and beneficiaries; and the impact of decisions and actions in recent UN GA resolutions on Pension Board governance issues, including the report requested from an independent outside expert on some specific governance issues.

On the investments side, we stressed in our discussions: the need to remain cautious and conservative with so-called alternative investments; the need for an operationally effective Investments Committee, with full membership; the importance of full staffing and effective management of the Office of Investment Management; meeting, long-term, the actuarial assumption of an annual real, net-of-inflation, return of 3.5 per cent on the Fund's investments; and providing regularly clear and timely information on the Fund's investments.

Shortly, you will be hearing directly from both the Pension Fund's CEPA (Chief Executive of Pension Administration) and the Acting RSG for the Fund's Investments. But before that, I have asked Warren Sach to summarize the significant developments concerning the Pension Board and the Pension Fund's investments, from the perspective of UN retirees. Warren is an elected member of the AFICS/NY Governing Board and Chair of its Pension Committee; for the past several years he has also been one of the FAFICS representatives on the Pension Board.

With regard to health insurance, AFICS/NY is represented on the UN HLIC (Health and Life Insurance Committee) by experienced Governing Board members: Jay Karia, former UN Medical Director Dr. Sudershan Narula, Nancy Hertz-Soyka and Marianne Brzak-Metzler. They are very active participants in all meetings and discussions of the HLIC, striving to secure the best possible coverage at the lowest cost to retirees under ASHI (After-Service Health Insurance). I have asked Jay Karia, AFICS/NY Vice-President and Co-Chair of its Insurance Committee, to report on developments concerning health insurance, including the work of the HLIC, client services to retirees and the resolution of individual cases brought to our attention. Within the UN, ASHI administration is the responsibility of the Health and Life Insurance Section, now headed by Genc Osmani; you will also hear from him directly about the latest developments concerning ASHI.

There are six established Committees of AFICS/NY: Pensions; Insurance; Membership; Ageing Smart; IT; and Social Events. We continue to strive to make all the Committees active, with annual work plans and targets, and to involve more AFICS/NY members in their work - please consider joining any Committee of interest to you and become an active participant in its work.

The Information Technology (IT) Committee, Co-Chaired by Joan McDonald and Mac Chiulli, and ably assisted by our Consultant, Elba Lages, as well as our own in-house IT expert, our Office Assistant Velimir Kovacevic, has been the key to our ability as an Association to function fully remotely since mid-March. The Committee has worked very closely with UN/OICT and we are very grateful for all the assistance we have received from the UN, enabling the AFICS/NY leadership and Committees to continue to remain active albeit remotely. If there are members in the audience with IT experience and expertise, coupled with an interest to become more active in AFICS/NY, I would like to urge you to consider joining our IT Committee.

The Membership Committee, with Co-Chairs Dr. Sudershan Narula and Nancy Raphael, finished their work on a new Membership Directory, the first one we have issued since 2013. This project involved a great deal of rather tedious but essential work by the entire Committee, ably assisted by our Office Assistant, Velimir Kovacevic.

AFICS/NY participated in the activities of UN Staff Day in September 2019; we have now participated every year since 2017, in close cooperation with the UN Staff Union. We also continue to work with the UNFCU, to assist them in improving the services they provide to retirees - in that regard, I would like to thank the UNFCU for its generous financial contribution to AFICS/NY in this and past years.

With regard to social activities, led by the Co-Chairs of the Social Events Committee, Barbara Linardo and Susan DeSouza, we continue with both traditional as well as new activities. Our plans called for two Luncheons each year, but due to the new corona virus we had to cancel the Winter/Spring Luncheon scheduled for March 2020. We also hosted for our members two well attended (and free) Mix-and-Mingle events in our Office last year, one in June and the other in December.

Most recently, on 15 June, the Ageing Smart Committee, chaired by Mac Chiulli, organized a successful and well-attended Zoom webinar on the subject of "Yoga and Anxiety", clearly a very appropriate topic at this time. There are plans by the Committee for similar webinars, workshops and seminars in the future. Two issues of our Bulletin were published, thanks largely to the efforts of its long-time editor, Mary Lynn Hanley.

Before closing, I would like to thank the Officers who have worked with me closely over the past year: Vice-Presidents Debbie Landey and Jay Karia, Treasurer Angel Silva and Assistant Treasurer Mac Chiulli, and Secretary Dimitri Argyriades. A big thank you goes also to all the Committee Chairs and Co-Chairs, all the members of the Governing Board, our Office staff and volunteers.

I hope that you and your families remain healthy and safe, following smartly the advice of medical experts during these difficult times, so that you will enjoy a long, healthy and happy retirement.