

AFICS/NY Annual Meeting

23 June 2020

USG Pollard's Remarks

Dear colleagues

It is a pleasure to be with you at today's Annual Assembly of the Association of Former International Civil Servants in New York, and to mark with you the 50th anniversary of the Association. I am delighted to see the names and faces of so many old colleagues, friends, mentors and supervisors joining this remote event.

I would like to congratulate the Association on this important milestone and extend the Secretary-General's appreciation for your work, both for UN retirees and the Organization at large.

In this regard I am pleased to convey a personal message from the Secretary-General on this occasion. He has written a letter which I will read it to you now on his behalf:

“Dear Friends,

On the occasion of your annual meeting, being conducted remotely for the first time on 23 June 2020, I am delighted to extend warm congratulations to the Association of Former International Civil Servants in New York (AFICS/NY) on its fiftieth anniversary.

Over the past five decades, AFICS/NY has provided invaluable support to retiring and retired United Nations personnel and their families. You have promoted the well-being of international civil servants, fostered friendships among your members and provided useful guidance on matters of common interest to them.

The Association has also been a strong ally in advocating the purposes, principles and programmes of the United Nations. At a time of profound challenge for the world, compounded by an unprecedented global health crisis

with severe economic and social impacts, your spirited work is more important than ever before.

I thank the members of AFICS/NY for their service as active international civil servants and for continuing to be champions of the United Nations. As the Organization marks its seventy-fifth anniversary, we recognize your role in our history and count on your commitment for the crucial period ahead.

I wish you a successful annual meeting.

Yours sincerely,

António Guterres”

As the Secretary-General highlighted in his letter, 2020 not only marks the 50th anniversary of AFICS, but also the 75th anniversary of the United Nations.

We entered this year at a time of dramatic changes and complex challenges – and this has been compounded since then by the worst global health crisis in the UN’s history.

In addition to the tragic human consequences of the current health crisis, its impact on the stock market and the global economy has prompted concern about the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund, not only among current beneficiaries and staff who may soon retire, but also among all staff members. Let me therefore touch on some matters of interest to all of us regarding the pension fund.

While it is undeniable that the present volatile state of the financial markets has affected the value of the Fund’s assets, I would stress that we do not foresee any disruption for beneficiaries: it is fully funded and its liquidity is strong.

I can assure you that all pensions will continue to be paid in full.

The Secretary General, who takes his fiduciary responsibility for the assets of Pension Fund very seriously, is closely following the work of the Fund.

For my part I know that the Secretary-General will continue to work to strengthen the management and operations of the Fund, in order to ensure the most prudent and capable handling of its assets, and to achieve a long-term annual real return of 3.5%.

Earlier this year he appointed Pedro Guazo as acting Representative for Investments, who now provides the Secretary-General with regular updates on the position of the Fund. Pedro is with us today, together with Rosemarie McLean, and they will provide you with a detailed update on their work.

Besides efforts to ensure the continued health and sustainability of its assets, the Fund is also working to ensure that pensions are paid expeditiously upon receipt of the complete file from the separating staff member and entity.

I would note, however, that some employing organizations and entities do still need to do better in getting the files to the Pension Fund for processing.

The Secretariat was previously hampered in this regard by manual and time-consuming separation processes which were very labor intensive and opaque. Bottlenecks and delays were a common problem, especially for our field entities, who before the implementation of management reform worked with various intermediaries at HQ.

This has changed for the better with the new direct structures, and I am pleased to note that today the pension fund is able to process most cases within 15 business days.

In January of this year the Secretariat introduced a new solution to improve the management of separation clearances with an automated workflow that is client-oriented and transparent. This makes it easier for all parties involved in the separation process to track every step until completion. It better enables the Organization to monitor and evaluate the timeliness and status of separations.

I would further note that the Secretariat is also undertaking a project to review the use of paper-based forms and signatures – an initiative that is very timely in the context of COVID-19. The project aims at proposing fully automated and

electronic HR processes, which will further improve the separation process and expedite pension benefits processing.

At the same time, individual staff members have an obligation too. We all need to ensure that the data in our files is accurate and up-to-date, that there are no pending obligations that need to be settled (such as a travel claim) that might hold up processing, so that the organizations can move swiftly to complete files and get them to the Pension Fund.

We also continue to place great importance on the need for good communication from and with the fund. The Fund's website (unjspf.org) is being updated and enhanced so that important information can be made widely and transparently available to all our plan participants, beneficiaries and stakeholders.

Colleagues, I know that you have a busy agenda today, including a presentation from my team in the Health and Life Insurance Section, with whom AFICS representatives are very constructively engaged.

The administration values the views and commitment of its retirees in these important matters.

I thank you for your continued and spirited support to the United Nations, and for your advocacy for retirees. As those of us who are currently-serving staff members all look towards someday becoming retirees ourselves, I am very conscious of the vital work which AFICS undertakes for all of us.

I wish you a successful virtual Annual Assembly, and congratulations again on the 50th anniversary of your founding.

Thank you.