

**USG POLLARD'S REMARKS TO THE ANNUAL MEETING
ASSOCIATION OF FORMER INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVANTS
(AFICS)**

New York, 10 June 2022

Mr. John Dietz, President of AFICS,
Members of the AFICS Governing Board,
Honorable former staff members of the United Nations System,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good day, and welcome.

It is an honor for me to once again open the Annual General Assembly of the Association of Former International Civil Servants/New York on behalf of Secretary-General António Guterres, who has asked me to convey his deepest gratitude to you for all your Service and ongoing commitment to the Organization. I am delighted that we can meet together in person again.

As you're all very aware, the last two years of the Covid-19 pandemic have been exceptionally challenging, but they also presented a lot of new opportunities. The pandemic has changed how we work and relate to one another. A number of these changes are here to stay. These are changes that will form a major part of our '*Next Normal*', which is not actually about a radical change. Rather, it is about our ability to draw upon the lessons learned from the past two years, to consolidate the

gains we have made, and to avoid falling back into outdated working methods and habits.

To do this effectively, we are taking a decentralized approach to the global “*return to work*” given the fluctuating nature of local epidemiological conditions as well as the unique mandates in our various duty stations. All duty stations, for example, have been asked to tailor their “Next Normal” plans to the unique circumstances of their local environment, and to harmonize their plans to the extent possible across the United Nations system organizations at each location.

In New York, and with improvement in local pandemic conditions, we entered our “Next Normal” phase on 4 April. A defining feature of our “Next Normal” is a hybrid working model whereby personnel can request to telecommute up to three days per week or avail of another flexible working arrangement based on whether the work can be performed as efficiently and as well under the requested modality. There are currently no occupancy limits for personnel in the UN buildings at UNHQ, and I am pleased to say that all retirees and guests with passes have been able to visit the premises since April.

The intergovernmental bodies are holding in-person meetings, and guided tours are being given. In early May, UNJSPF Geneva office also partially reopened within the UNOG Client Support Centre (CSC), after more than two years of unavailability due to the pandemic. The New York Office’s walk-in service is planned to be reopened in July. Personnel are traveling, including to attend in-person meetings in other duty stations. I think we have all missed those types of interactions and have a greater appreciation of their value to our work and to developing and maintaining our professional relationships.

That said, and given the advances in technology and our ability to successfully hold meetings on-line (which often allows us to involve a larger number of people), I do not think we will ever go back to the level of travel we engaged in prior to the pandemic. In fact, one of the guiding principles for the “Next Normal” is to use every opportunity to reduce the Organization’s environmental footprint. Flexibility to adapt will continue to be critical as we continue this journey, and we will adjust as necessary based on lessons learned and as the evolution of the thinking progresses.

And while the pandemic is certainly not over yet, the war in Ukraine is serving as an additional stress test for the UN system’s ability to respond to a global crisis. I know a lot of people continue to ask about the impact of the war in Ukraine on our operations and service delivery. Fortunately, the war has had no impact on payment of pensions by the Fund to retirees and beneficiaries into and through Ukrainian banks. However, due to sanctions and suspension from the SWIFT platform on Russian banks, international wire transfers into and through Russian banks were temporarily suspended in March 2022, but since then the Fund has worked with the UN Treasury to establish new payment channels. US dollar payments for April 2022 benefits were successfully remitted to US and European banks operating in Russia as well as to some local banks.

I can assure you that the fund remains financially sound despite the turmoil. The UNJSPF remains in a robust and stable position due to its strong governance and managerial oversight. The UNJSPF entered 2022 in a strong position after two years of outstanding results, where the market value of the assets reached a record high US\$91.5 billion. There are several measures that have contributed to the success and will remain central going forward. I note that we have *pension matters* on the agenda, so I will not go into the details of those measures.

It is clear that 2022 presents many challenges due to the situation in global markets, slow economic growth and inflationary pressures, compounded by the uncertainty around the evolution of the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

Governance, however, remains high on the agendas of both the Pension Board and the General Assembly. In July 2021 the Pension Board adopted a governance reform plan, which was endorsed by the General Assembly in December 2021. The Board has been implementing the reforms since the beginning of the year with more frequent virtual meetings.

I know you are all very interested in the after-service health insurance, so let me assure you that the Secretary-General attaches high importance to the programme, as it provides a vital element of social security for retiring staff members. I also take note that matters relating to ASHI are on the agenda for today, so yet again I will not go into too much details. Let me however highlight that the report of the Secretary-General on managing ASHI liabilities was submitted to the General Assembly at its seventy-sixth session. The 5th Committee, however, could not reach a consensus on a resolution on this matter and decided not to take any action. So, although there is no mandate to present another report to the GA, the Secretary-General shall continue to search for a solution to this important issue.

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me assure you that the administration values the views and commitment of its retirees in all the important matters I have highlighted. You are the embodiment of the decades of selfless sacrifices that have built the United Nations

into what it is today. We all owe you our thanks for your immense contributions to the United Nations.

On behalf of the Secretary-General and on my own behalf, I thank you all once again for your outstanding service in the advocacy for retirees and for your ongoing support to the Organization, as well as to us future retirees.

I wish you a successful event, and I am looking forward to your questions and comments.

Thank you.