General Assembly, 8 October 2013

Report of the President

November 2011 – October 2013

1. Introduction

The period covered by this report witnessed a number of positive developments: closer relations with sister associations of WHO and UN former staff worldwide, with local associations in the Geneva region and increasing activities with WHO. Thanks in great part to continued WHO support, your Executive Committee has been able to maintain and even improve its services to members. However, many of the elected members have served on the Committee for a long time and we are eagerly awaiting new candidates for the next Committee in 2014.

The previous biennium had been dominated by the involvement of the Committee in the reform process of the WHO Staff Health Insurance. In December 2011, the Director-General approved the recommendations of the SHI Joint Meeting and the long process which led to the worldwide elections of former staff representatives on the new SHI committees took up the whole of 2012. The results are included in section 5 of this report.

As of 1 September 2013, our membership totalled 1025, a slight increase from 2011: 928 life members (873 in 2011) and 97 paid-up annual members (147 in 2011). We strongly encourage life membership and welcome conversions from annual to life membership at any time.

2. Election of the Executive Committee and responsibilities

Elections for the Executive Committee took place in October 2012. There were 13 candidates for the 12 seats available. The persons elected (in descending order of number of votes) were: Ann Van Hulle, Dev Ray, Jean-Paul Menu, David Cohen, Sue Block Tyrrell, Yves Beigbeder, Pascale Gilbert-Miguet, Jean-Jacques Guilbert, Anne Yamada, Roberto Masironi, Samy Kossovsky and Maria Dweggah. Immediately after his election, Jean-Jacques Guilbert resigned. Laura Ciaffei, who came 13th, was therefore declared elected.

The composition of the Bureau for 2012-2014 is:

- **President:** Jean-Paul Menu
- **Vice-Presidents:** Sue Block Tyrrell and Dev Ray
- **Treasurer:** Anne Yamada
- **Vice-Treasurer:** Maria Dweggah
- **Administrator:** Roberto Masironi

The twelve members of the Committee share responsibilities for implementation of the activities.

*Representatives on the SHI HQ Surveillance Committee*:
David Cohen and Ann Van Hulle. In January 2013, David Cohen was replaced, at his request, by Jean-Paul Menu

*Representatives on the WHO Staff Pension Committee*:
Dev Ray and Pascale Gilbert-Miguet

*Quarterly Newsletter*
Chief Editor and layout: David Cohen
Editorial Committee: Yves Beigbeder, Sue Block Tyrrell, Laura Ciaffei, Maria Dweggah, Samy Kossovsky, Jean-Paul Menu, Dev Ray, Michel Thuriaux and Rosemary Villars

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1 The SHI HQ Surveillance Committee ceased to exist at the end of August 2013. See section 5 of this report.
3. Organization

The Executive Committee has maintained its past practice to meet once a month to discuss activities. Two Honorary Presidents (Alain Vessereau and Roger Fontana) participate in the meetings but have no voting rights. The third Honorary President, Stan Flache, moved from Geneva to the United Kingdom and no longer participates in the meetings.

There has been no change in our permanence system. Every Tuesday morning, by rotation, a Committee member is present in the AFSM office no. 4141. In addition, Roger Fontana is present on Wednesday mornings. On other days of the week, one or several Committee members are frequently present. Any question raised by a member of the Association, whether by telephone, electronic mail, letter or personally, receives either an immediate answer or, if necessary, is sent to the responsible Committee member for reply. Details of the question are recorded in a logbook and are used to improve our services. While we receive a number of personal visits, an increasingly large number of queries reach us by email.

The Committee members do their best to respond promptly to the requests that we receive. However, we all have other commitments and offer our services on a voluntary basis, without compensation.

4. Pensions

The turbulence in global financial markets continues. The UN Joint Staff Pension Fund (Fund) is affected by the global financial situation. The investments of the Fund reached a high of around USD 44.5 billion in May 2011, but dropped to USD 39.7 billion at the end of 2011, and then climbed back up to USD 44.6 billion at the end of 2012 – making up all losses. The Fund’s investments are managed by the Investment Management Division while the administration is handled by the Secretariat of the Fund. The actuarial valuation as at 31 December 2011 showed a deficit of 1.87%, i.e. the contribution rate should be 25.57% instead of the current 23.70%. However, actuarial valuations are based on a number of assumptions e.g. longevity of beneficiaries, the prospective rates of return from investments, age of retirement etc. and hence it is assumed that there is little reason for concern if the deficit is within 2%. On the recommendation of the Board of the Fund, the UN General Assembly has increased the age of retirement to 65 years for those who enter service after 1 January 2014. The International Civil Service Commission has recommended that current staff be allowed to also serve until 65 years of age without prejudice to their current entitlements. This will decrease the deficit considerably.

The Secretary-General of the UN, on the recommendation of the Board, appointed Mr Sergio Arvizú as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Fund from 1 January 2013 and the Board approved the appointment of Mr Paul Dooley, currently Chief of the Information Management Systems Service, as Deputy CEO from 1 January 2014. The last session of the Board in July 2013 approved a budget of USD 179 million as expenditure of the Fund, including its investments. Ms Beatriz Sperandio de Llull continues as the Secretary of the WHO Pension Committee which meets annually just before the World Health Assembly. FAFICS (Federation of Associations of Former International Civil Servants) continues to play an active role in the deliberations of the Board.

The AFSM is currently represented on the WHO Pension Committee by an Observer and an Alternate (Dev Ray and Pascale Gilbert-Miguet).

As in previous years, we would like to remind all our members of the importance of keeping the Fund informed of any change in country of residence (especially for those on the local track), change of address or bank account and of course to return Certificates of Entitlement in a timely manner.

5. Staff Health Insurance (SHI)

As indicated in the introductory section above, in December 2011, the Director-General approved the recommendations of the SHI Joint Meeting of October 2011. Among the major changes were the abolition of the Headquarters Surveillance Committee - but not of the Regional Surveillance Committees - and the creation of the Global Oversight Committee and the Global Standing Committee, both including elected representatives of former WHO staff affiliated to SHI. Working out the modalities of the election, the call for candidates, and conducting the election itself took the whole of 2012. The results of the elections were communicated to all former staff affiliated to SHI at the beginning of 2013. Those elected are as follows:
Global Standing Committee: Jean-Paul Menu and Marjory Dam (members)  
Françoise Héry-Persin and Carol Collado (alternates)

Global Oversight Committee: Ann Van Hulle-Colbert (member)  
Clas Sandström (alternate)

Much to our regret, there was a considerable delay in implementation of the new structure. The first meeting of the Global Oversight Committee was held on 24 and 25 September 2013. In accordance with its terms of reference, the Committee will review the financial status of the Fund, including actuarial and investment matters, and the levels of contributions and benefits. It will have an important role to play in ensuring the adequacy of the SHI secretariat’s direction and management. Cost containment and best practice in health insurance will also be on its agenda at future meetings. The first meeting of the Global Standing Committee will be held on 23 October 2013.

Meanwhile, the HQ Surveillance Committee (HSC) continued to meet frequently whilst awaiting its replacement by the Global Standing Committee. Recently, the Annual Report for 2012 was reviewed in detail and submitted to the Director-General. The HSC reviewed many individual cases related to HQ participants. The Regional Surveillance Committees continue to review cases related to participants in their respective regions. The HSC also reviewed the revised SHI rules which came into effect on 1 September 2013. The changes relate to decisions taken at the last Joint Meeting held in 2011. A further revision of the SHI rules has been discussed and will be submitted to the Global Oversight Committee for implementation on 1 January 2014.

The representatives of former staff on the HSC put a number of issues of interest to former staff on the agenda of the HSC. These include complementary insurance and the way SHI deals with claims of persons who have additional insurance for the non-reimbursed portion of expenses (normally 20% up to the catastrophic limit). The SHI secretariat has taken the preoccupations of former staff into account and is trying to find a solution. Another issue raised is the threshold for direct payment of large medical bills for those with less than 30 years of service (i.e. for the majority of former staff). This matter will be referred to the Global Oversight Committee for consideration. We have also raised the problem encountered by some former staff in the United Kingdom and many other countries due to the lack of recognition of the WHO SHI guarantees in the case of hospitalization. Sometimes, a large up-front deposit is required when entering hospital and this poses problems and stress when faced with admission to hospital. The secretariat has again indicated that this matter will have to be reviewed by the Global Oversight Committee.

A number of measures have been taken in recent years to correct the actuarial imbalance in the SHI Fund due largely to the ageing of the insured population and to the increases both in the cost of healthcare and new healthcare techniques. The situation will require close monitoring by the Global Oversight Committee which will have to identify innovative ways of delivering health insurance at reasonable cost. This is in the interest of us all if further increases in contributions are to be avoided/postponed.

6. Information and Communication

The Executive Committee continues to give priority to its communications with members wherever their place of residence. We strongly encourage members to let us have their email addresses which enable us to communicate more rapidly and at less cost. Currently, the proportion of members with email addresses is around 50%. We remain very grateful to WHO for continuing to cover the costs of printing and postal dispatches.

(a) Quarterly News

Published four times a year, our Quarterly News (QNT) is our principal link with and among members of the AFSM and their main source of information. It seems to continue to be a popular magazine.

We continue to do our best to make the newsletter as attractive as possible and welcome articles and any comments from you, whether critical or encouraging, to help us improve it. In every issue, we try to include a medical subject, the latest news about our health insurance, our pensions and news from WHO. We publish obituaries and notify deaths that are known to us. Lastly, there is almost always a lighter side.
Our priority is to strengthen links with the Regions, as witnessed by our article on the creation of AFSM (Manila) in the October 2013 issue.

(b) Information notes
We have continued our electronic information notes – AFSM INFO AOMS - to keep members rapidly informed of events which occur between the dates of production of the Quarterly News. Some are sent out on general distribution, e.g. for the General Assembly, and others are issued for members living in the Geneva area, e.g. concerning the influenza vaccinations. In addition to these information notes, an increasing number of other messages are sent out to members electronically.

(c) Website
Our website (English and French) is regularly updated and receives between 400-500 visits a week. The site contains all useful information concerning the Association, current and past issues of our Quarterly News, souvenirs and interviews of former staff, photos and announcements of important events as well as links with other related associations and offices of interest to retirees.

(d) Directory
The 2013 edition was sent to our members in April. The distribution is strictly limited to members who have paid their annual contribution and life members. For that reason, and also to respect confidentiality, it is not available on our website.

In early September 2013, we sent a letter to members with email addresses asking their permission for us to divulge their addresses for legitimate WHO related purposes such as opinion surveys about WHO. Your wishes will be strictly respected.

Inevitably, the directory is soon out of date after dispatch. Please inform us of any change of address, especially of your email address, as we prefer using this method of correspondence. Whenever possible we inform you of the changes in the Quarterly News.

(e) Pre-retirement seminars and welcome to new members
We continue to take part in the pre-retirement seminars held annually at WHO/HQ. The presentation on the AFSM focuses on the advantages of joining the Association and continues to attract new members. The DVD of the pre-retirement seminar, including the AFSM presentation, which was produced in 2011, has been posted on the HQ intranet site and we understand has been made available to Regional and Country Offices around the world.

Our practice of writing to new members to welcome them to the Association continues, together with letters to those members who convert from annual to life membership. On occasion, such letters lead to an exchange of information with members and an article by the member in the Quarterly News.

7. Participation in WHO events

(a) World Health Day 2012
The theme of World Health Day 2012 was Good Health Adds Life to Years. AFSM participated in the ceremony held in HQ on 4 April and had a stand in the hall of the main building. The WHO Medical Service and AAFI-AFICS also had stands. AFSM members and UN retirees living locally were invited to attend.

This event gave us a good opportunity to strengthen our relations with the Director of the WHO Department of Ageing and Life Course.

(b) International Day of the Elderly
AFSM was one of the sponsoring associations in the organization of the celebrations for the International Day of the Elderly, held on WHO premises on 1 October 2013. AFSM members living locally were invited to attend.

(c) Other events
We also participate in other events at WHO/HQ in order to promote the Association and endeavour to seek new members. For example, for the past few years we have had a stall at the annual Solidarity Fair in
December, running a tombola; and in September this year, following the initiative of a former staff member, and in collaboration with the Staff Association, we were able to organize a poetry session led by former staff.

8. Relationships with other associations

(a) WHO Staff Association

Our relationship has been very strong since the foundation of our Association. We appreciate the continuing support of the President and members of the Staff Committee, and of course of the Staff Association secretariat – they are always willing to help.

(b) Relationships with former WHO staff in the Regions

The Executive Committee continues to place great emphasis on building up and reinforcing our relationships with regional associations of former WHO staff, and with other former WHO staff who are responsible for defending the interests of WHO and/or all UN former staff in their region or country.

In September 2012, the President of AFSM (Geneva) was invited to Washington DC by Nancy Berinstein, the President of AFSM for the American Region, to present our Association to their Executive Committee and later on to participate in the annual meeting of former PAHO staff in Panama City. Of course these travels were done at no cost to our Association. Nancy was able to pay us a visit in Geneva in September.

In May 2013, we were informed of the creation of AFSM (Manila) intended in the first instance to bring together all former WHO staff residing in the Philippines and any former staff having worked in the Regional Office for the Western Pacific. In July, we welcomed the visit of the President, Romy Murillo, in Geneva. We are pursuing the same objectives and are ready to collaborate to the fullest extent.

We continue to exchange our publications with AFSM (SEARO) and have frequent relations with Jill Conway-Fell, a member of our Association who also represents AAFI-AFICS in Copenhagen. She is very active in sharing information with and assisting WHO and UN retirees in Nordic and other European countries.

(c) Association of Former International Civil Servants in Geneva (AAFI-AFICS)

As in the past, our relations with AFICS are excellent and productive. There have been changes in AFICS - after the chairmanship of Gilbert Ferrari for one year (he could not continue), Odette Foudral has been elected as President - the first time a woman holds this position. Four members of our Executive Committee are also elected members of the AFICS Committee (Yves Beigbeder, David Cohen, Samy Kossovsky and Dev Ray) and two are honorary members (Roger Fontana and Stan Flache). The work of AFICS continues in health insurance and pensions. A new menace is looming on the horizon - the efforts by some countries to levy higher taxes on UN pensions. For example, France has started to tax the lump sum withdrawals (hitherto exempt) at 7.5% - the same rate of social security taxes. In spite of protests from the UN Legal Counsel, there has been no response. In addition, any retiree who has worked in France and thus has contributed to the social security or is a beneficiary, is also being subjected to social security taxes on the UN pension.

The President of AFSM is an ex officio member of the AFICS Committee. In this capacity he was part of the AFICS delegation to the 2012 annual meeting of the Council of the Federation of Associations of Former International Civil Servants (FAFICS), held in Paris on 26-29 June 2012. This participation gave our Association first-hand knowledge of the current pension issues as well as of the other after service health insurances in the UN system. The current President of FAFICS is Roger Eggleston, former President of AFICS and a member of our Association.

(d) Other associations

For several years, AFSM held observer status at the Plate-forme des Associations d’Aînés de Genève. Convinced that a closer collaboration with the Plate-forme would be of benefit for our members living in the Geneva region, AFSM became a full member in April 2013.

AFSM also collaborates with other associations for the elderly in Geneva, including the City and Cantonal authorities on an ad hoc basis.
For several years now, AFSM is represented at the annual meetings of the British Association of Former United Nations Civil Servants (BAFUNCS).

9. Social activities

(a) Annual reception
This reception is traditionally organized on the first Thursday of December. The next one will be on Thursday 5 December 2013.

Since there were some fears that a reception in December could be disrupted by bad weather, a questionnaire was distributed during the General Assembly in 2011. Out of the 12 responses, 7 opted to keep December. This outcome confirmed the results of a previous survey carried out in 2009.

Last year’s reception was attended by about 200 persons, including some WHO staff who have been particularly helpful to the AFSM. The financial contribution requested from participants was set at CHF 15 per person (an increase from CHF 10) to reflect the costs more realistically. The 2011 General Assembly had agreed to raise the contribution to CHF 20.

(b) Influenza vaccination
Free influenza vaccination, organized jointly by the Medical Service and the AFSM (David Cohen and Roger Fontana) and financed by the Staff Health Insurance, continues to attract many of our members, with the added bonus that it provides an opportunity to meet former colleagues and enjoy a cup of coffee: it has become a meeting place. In 2012, 248 persons were vaccinated on 18 and 23 October. This year’s dates are 15 and 22 October.

(c) Organization of trips

Following on the two sea cruises organized by Daniel Flahaut and the trip to Bavaria with Carole Modis and Renate Wiedmer, David Cohen has organized trips to Morocco (twice), Andalucia, Portugal, Croatia, Sardinia, Germany and the Canary Islands. Several of them were river and sea cruises, a mode of travel particularly favoured by colleagues who do not appreciate daily unpacking and packing, and which permit daily excursions to visit the areas along the way. These trips have always been very popular and participants number between 23 and 40; several of them have participated in all the eight trips organized by David who is looking for a replacement organizer. The next trip, not yet fully decided, should take place in May 2014.

10. Thanks and acknowledgements

The Executive Committee would like to acknowledge the contributions made by the following teams in helping the Association:

- The Director-General’s office
- The Administration, including Staff Health Insurance and Pensions
- The Medical Service for the influenza vaccinations
- Ms Marie-Pierre Austin for her invaluable help in developing our mailing lists and for her help in securing the printing and mailing of our communications
- The Staff Association Committee
- Reception and Security Services who are always helpful to the retirees
- And most importantly the Printing and Mailing teams who never fail to extend all their help with a smile.