$12,000 LIMIT PLACED ON U.N. PENSIONERS

The General Assembly has placed a yearly limit on what the United Nations may pay pensioners employed as their consultants, according to a recent information circular (ST/IC/1995, 31 August 1995).

While making an exception for conference services during the U.N.'s fiftieth anniversary observances, the Assembly said in a resolution (49/222 B), that:

"...no former staff member who is in receipt of a pension benefit from the U.N. Staff Pension fund shall receive from any U.N. funds more than $12,000 in total in any calendar year."

The G.A. resolution does not affect WHO, at least for now.

On a related issue, the Assembly took aim at, in the words of the circular, "certain practices under which some retirees have been allowed to receive a series of short-term appointments interrupted by breaks in service."

These appointments — often referred to by representatives of serving staff as "craftily constructed contracts" — permit the favoured recipient to continue receiving a pension while being paid a salary.

"Such breaks," the U.N. circular said, "may circumvent the provisions" of the pension fund. Moreover, as the source of the funds are the same, the recipient is engaging in what is called "double-dipping."

The circular said pointedly it is "heads of departments and offices (who) are responsible to ensure that such practices do not occur" — an acknowledgement essentially that decisions to grant the contracts are not made by former staff.

The Association set out its position on this issue earlier. In a letter dated 19 May 1995, it declared that it "does not favour employment of former staff to established posts, or to positions that might block promotions of our serving colleagues."

And, in recognition of the concerns of serving staff, it is on record that it does not favour "short-term contracts so drawn up as to by-pass contribution to the pension fund."

"However, as long as WHO seeks and needs consultants, former staff wish to be considered, in a voluntary or paid capacity."

(See also Chairman's statement, "Goodies at the Association's Reunion," page 3.)

— Peter Ozorio, Editor

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**TAX AND PENSIONS:** See supplement
Invited Author

BUILDING DREAM HOUSES

(This is a follow-up to the letter "A House in France" that was carried in the Quarterly News No. 22, Summer 1995)

Over the years I have witnessed human drama revolving around aging parents who insist on living in their family home (even though unsuitable to their needs and means), or that their children live with them, or that they live with their children, or that they refuse to go to even a very good retirement home. Apart from the physical discomforts to both generations, there would be enormous — and unnecessary — tensions in such situations.

It became clear to me that society has not adequately addressed the question of acceptable living conditions for older persons. So after much thought and some basic research (for example into the physical requirements of the handicapped), I came up with the idea of establishing a community for those age 55 or older in Versonnex, France where I live, for persons with the same professional U.N. background, values and ideals.

Fortunately, this is possible because I have access to a plot of land, bordering a stream. There is no construction on it. Thus, participants in this plan would have houses they design according to their wishes (and not those of an architect), suitable to their furniture, and to their hobbies. They would choose the size of their land, which would be "privatised" with fences, gates, hedges and the like. Some land would remain common and be developed for walks, for informal living, where there would be benches for basking or reading in the sun.

There are other advantages to my proposal for "living together": shopping would be coordinated and home delivered with possibilities of a discount, services as well, including most health services. The problems of domestic help, of a handyman for repair and maintenance would be shared. Those who travel would not need to worry about the safety of their homes, or the feeding of pets. Neighbours would help. I could go on, but I think the point is made.

I have designed my dream house in which I intend to spend the rest of my life. It comprises approximately 110 m² of living space, for bedroom and bathroom, guest room and shower, study, living room, spacious kitchen, verandah, plus garage, cellar, and storage, on 826 m² of land. Total cost: 2.2 million FF, which includes everything, including taxes that are payable over three years! The costing has been done professionally. The cost will be less if six to seven houses are being built at the same time.

I have a complete file on the technical characteristics of my house, on the building regulations of the land, on scheduling and budgeting; I know the majority of good .....,tr.pr..r.,rrs needed "rr? I-hru. the support of many in the village and beyond.

I am available to help others design their dream house. Ask any questions, even those that are personal. All ideas are welcome.

—Amrita Seth-Mani
ILO
Versonnex, France

Tel. during day: 799 7628, from 19h.: 50 41 10 25

Changes, Changes, (more)

The following are recent staff appointments and other staff movements:

Assistant Director-General: • Dr Aissatou Koné-Diabi, formerly UNDP Resident Representative in Benin, has been appointed AD-G.

Family and Reproductive Health: • Dr Tomris Türmen, formerly Director, Division of Family Health, has been appointed Executive Director, Family and Reproductive Health.

Emerging, Viral and Bacterial Diseases: • Dr David Heymann, formerly Acting Programme Manager, Sexually Transmitted Diseases, Global Programme on AIDS, has been appointed Director of the newly-established Division of Emerging, Viral and Bacterial Diseases Surveillance and Control. Following the retirement of Dr G. Torrigiani, the Division of Communicable Diseases has been disestablished.

Health Technology: • Dr Ambrose Wasunna, formerly Medical Officer, Clinical Technology, has been appointed Director, Programme on Health Technology.

Noncommunicable Diseases • Dr M.S. Tsechkovski, formerly Director, Department of Disease Prevention and Quality of Care, EURO, has been appointed Director of Division of Noncommunicable Diseases.

Prevention of Blindness and Deafness • Dr Bjorn I. Thylefors has been appointed Director of the newly-established Programme for the Prevention of Blindness and Deafness.

Mental Health and Prevention of Substance Abuse: • Dr Jorge Costa e Silva and Mr Hans Emblad have been appointed as, respectively, Director and Associate Director of the newly esta-
GOODIES AT THE ASSOCIATION’S REUNION

Those attending the Association’s annual in November heard it first, from the chairman, Dr R. Pal — that beginning from the New Year, premiums for health insurance will be lowered. An official circular would follow.

His address of welcome included a tour d’horizon of health insurance, a subject close to the hearts of members. “Our premiums will be reduced,” he told them “to the 1993 rate of 1.4 per cent” from the current 1.5 per cent. This means also that WHO’s share decreases to 2.8 from 3 per cent.

The limits for non-surgical medical care, for major surgery, for glasses and for hearing aids, will also be raised, he said, “to our advantage.”

For non-surgical care, the limit will increase to $30,000 from $20,000; for surgery, to $40,000 from $30,000; for glasses, to $300 from $100; and for hearing aids to $1,500 for each device, from $300.

Catastrophic benefits for pensioners will be calculated on full pension based on a minimum of 25 years service, rather than 30.

(Details are in IC/95/102 dated 13 Dec. 1995, which says “the rate of contribution for adults should be decreased by 6 per cent.”)

In turning to the roster of former staff who’ve indicated a willingness to carry out short-term assignments, the Association’s chairman said: “We are keenly aware of the financial crisis facing the U.N. system. If our expertise and our services can be put to use, we offer them whole-heartedly to WHO.”

And in reassuring serving staff, who are now experiencing the uncertainties of restructuring, he added “we are in no way competing for the availability of jobs.”

(The roster has been sent to administrations at Hq. and the regions, and the Chairman advises that he has been asked to speak to programme managers.)

The event drew an estimated 180, who were served these goodies:

- Gigot d’agneau à la brioche avec pain et mou-tarde; pain finlandais; mini sandwiches au saumon, crevettes et mouze de thon; crevettes géants à la provençale; tortilla espagnole; batonnets de légumes tartare; mini beignets d’ananas. And drinks à gogo.

DONORS & WINNERS

In addition to food and drink galore, there were other goodies as well at the Association’s reunion, thanks to generosity of donors who provided prizes for the raffle.

Here are those who gave and received, and thus “in the news,” that night:

- Donor of a watch: Société de Banque Suisse, representative Mr M. Spettel.
  
  Winner: Ms Monica Leigh-Jones.

- Donor of a return ticket to Mauritius: Mauritius Air, representative, Mrs B. Figueroa.
  
  Winner: Mr F. Buono.

- Donor of a return ticket to London: Wagon Lits, representative, Mr D. Haymoz.
  
  Winner: Dr Petros-Barvazian.

- Donor of a return ticket to Seville: Cross Air, representative, Mr G. Ludwig.
  
  Winner: Dr A. Vesceareau.

  
  Winner: Miss A.L. Spinner.

It also brought in 1,667 CHF to Association coffers: 1,227 CHF from contributions, and 440 CHF from the sale of raffle tickets.

Among former colleagues in attendance were Mr Aamir Ali, chairman, AAPI/AFICS, Mr Pierre Boulas, chairman, ILO association of former staff, Dr U Ko Ko, former regional director, SEARO. Among serving colleagues were Mr Denis Aitken, ADG, representing the Director-General, and Dr Rafe Henderson, AD-G, and wife.

(In Geneva, the decrease in health premiums results in approximately 15CHF, or less, a month on the average. Participants at the 4th Joint meeting of the Staff Health Insurance, held in June, were not unanimous in this decision. —Editor)
I was in the jury box of the supreme court for New York county (actually, Manhattan). After two post-retirement tours with the United Nations, as an information officer and election observer, talking with people in Cambodia and in South Africa about civic responsibility in a democracy, I was now playing a citizen's role in "a country I know well" — as a juror.

The "scam" that brought us all together took place on Broadway. It involved two malefactors, a man and a woman, plus the "mark," a young pre-med student, who was asked to believe — and, incredible as it may seem, did — that she had found $95,000 in a wallet on the sidewalk. It became "Exhibit A" in proceedings.

The student had just returned from Tiffany's. She was tapped on the shoulder by the woman and asked if the wallet lying on the sidewalk was hers. On examining the wallet, the two discovered a stack of notes secured with an elastic band. A "bystander," the man, joined the pair. There was no identification so the illusion foisted on the victim was that they had come across an ill-gotten hoard from gambling or drugs, of about $95,000. Enter the element of cupidity.

Because of the origin of the money, the two malefactors argued, it could ethically and safely — if not legally — be split among the three finders; they then attempted to extort some "good faith" money from the student. The critical moment in the scenario was for the victim to voluntarily hand over some of her own money. Instead, the man abruptly lifted the money from her hand. This taking of property involuntarily was the basis for the grand larceny charge. Unbeknown to all, this small nascent conspiracy was observed by a NYPD squad on routine street patrol. It swooped in for the arrest.

In court, the assistant district attorney presented "Exhibit A," a slim stack of notes perhaps half an inch high (15 cm). The judge, accepted the small stack. The defense counsel agreed to the evidence. The inscrutable defendant said not a word.

This was his first arrest so, unlike thousands of similar malefactors arrested each year in New York City, he faced a jury. His accomplice, a woman with two previous convictions would, if found guilty, be jailed for life. We later learned she was allowed to plea bargain, and thus received a lesser sentence.

In this Age of Plastic, nobody questioned the premise that so much cash, even in the largest $100 notes, could be a stack of half an inch. We had all lost the ability to visualize how real money looked.

The jury deliberations were well mannered, with each juror expressing an opinion, and all agreeing to accept only the facts supported by both the prosecutor and the defense, and to set aside intimations and hyperbole.

Eventually, we found the defendant guilty of the lesser charge, but right to the end all jurors — save the juror now confiding to you — still believed that $95,000 in notes can be stuffed into a wallet. Justice is blind.

—Jerry Kilker
(formerly Information & Liaison Officer, WUN)
Health Corner

Dry Eyes

In a tale I heard some 70 years ago, a compassionate fairy was weeping day and night over all the misery in the world. Her tears dried up and eventually she went blind, but continued mourning mankind's distress instead of her own handicap. Such fairies are now probably extinct, but should some still be around, they might have plenty of reasons to weep because of the outbursts of epidemics of tribal hatred in various parts of the world. However, they need not lose their eyesight: treatment is available, simple, inexpensive and effective.

Dry eyes are common, particularly in the elderly. The condition may range from slight discomfort to a serious condition. As in the case of any symptom of undetermined origin, in outspoken cases first the cause of the condition should be investigated; for example, dry eyes may be the leading symptom of Sjögren's syndrome, a complicated, uncommon disease, or of a mycotic eye infection in a diabetic patient. In most cases, however, there is no serious underlying cause.

Lack of tears leads to itching or burning in the eyes, particularly in the morning; the lids are sticky, covered with a yellow crust; there is a feeling of a foreign body in the eye. Ophthalmologists have a simple test for measuring the output of tears produced: a strip of filter paper in the eye quickly shows whether and how much tear secretion is diminished. The missing tears then should be supplemented by suitable eye-drops.

There are several varieties of artificial tears: hypo-osmolar, hyperosmolar, mucin-containing drops, and solutions for cleaning the lids. Morning stickiness of the eyes require hypo-osmolar solutions (thin ones) for washing out the eyes. In the evening thicker, mucous drops may be more appropriate. With some exercise, anyone can learn self-administration of these drops; however, to make the good choice, the drops should be prescribed by a physician.

Some of these preparations contain conservants: these may be inappropriate for long-term treatment. And, in particular in the elderly, treatment should be pursued often for a long time. An important detail: most drops, once the seal has been broken and the vial opened, must not be used for longer than two weeks.

—T. Strasser, M.D.
(formerly CVD)

Changes, Changes, (more)

Established Division of Mental Health and Prevention of Substance Abuse.

Food and Nutrition: • Following the retirement of Dr G.R. Quinke, Dr G.A. Clugston has been designated Acting Director, Division of Food and Nutrition.

Staff and Management Development: • Dr Georg Axmann has been appointed Chief of the newly established Office of Staff and Management Development in the Division of Human Resources for Health.

Vaccine Supply and Quality: • Mr Peter M. Evans, formerly Acting Chief, Vaccine Supply and Quality, has been appointed Chief of this unit.

Immunization • Dr Bjorn Melgaard, formerly Health Coordinator of the Danish-funded Health Support Programme in Bhutan, has been appointed Chief, Expanded Programme on Immunization.

Personnel: • Mrs Arlette Miller, formerly Personnel Officer, EMRO, has been appointed Chief, Contract Administration and Information, Administration and Staff Support Service, Division of Personnel.

Research on Human Subjects: • Following the retirement of Dr J.F. Dunne, Dr J.E. Idänpää-Heikkilä, Director, Division of Drug Management and Policies, has assumed the functions of Secretary of the Secretariat Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (SCRIHS). Dr E.S. Antezana, AD-G, has assumed Chairmanship.

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LIVING LIFE FULLY AFTER WHO

Retirement is not exactly the word to use in describing my life after 30 years of service with WHO in WPRO, AFRO and LUN. Here is what I am doing now.

I teach on a part-time basis: journalism (news writing), development communication, sociology, Philippine history and contemporary national development at the Perpetual Help College of Rizal which has a student population of 11,000. I have 30 to 35 students, on an average, in evening classes.

My daytime hours are devoted to the Las Pinas Development Foundation funded by a group of business and political leaders in the community. For the past three years, it has sponsored livelihood and technical skills training among residents of so-called depressed or squatter areas and with the municipal government, it established a center for street children. I serve as General Manager of the Foundation on a voluntary basis, as with the other officers.

People in my community see me also as a politician. On my return to Manila from New York, the political atmosphere was rather tense, I joined the “uprising” against the dictatorship in the so-called Edsa revolution that brought down the Marcos regime. Towards the end of 1986, I joined the Cory Aquino government, as Director for Information, to help set up the Philippine Information Agency.

Local politics then beckoned. In 1988, I was a candidate for mayor of Las Pinas. I lost. Before the implications of my first political debacle could sink in, I was offered a series of short-term consultancies, until mid 1991, at WPRO.

Back to the political arena in January 1992; this time it was a presidential election and I joined the news media staff of Senator Jovito Salonga, candidate of the Liberal Party. It was somewhat of a rout for us. But I was not discouraged at all.

Next, with my students I made a survey of the residents along the banks of the heavily polluted Zapote River. Our report impressed the Dean of our college of arts and sciences. The new vice-mayor, who is also President of our school, has taken active interest in the project. We still hope to save the river.

In May 1995, we had another election for national and local officials. Again, I tossed my hat in the political arena. Why? Because I see public office as an opportunity for service. I think I imbibed this sense during my years with WHO. I have been exposed to the ill-health, deprivation and lack of opportunity for a better life among many of our people. I am not able to simply ignore this situation. I may not be able to do anything significant but at least I will try while I am still able to do something.

Again, I did not get enough votes. Will I try once more in the 1998 elections? Well, why not?

—Jose Abcede
(formerly Inf. Officer)
AFRO, WPRO, LUN, New York

RESTITUTION WILL BE MADE TO FORMER COLLEAGUES

Restitution will be made to former colleagues from Russia, who retired between 1981 and 1990, the years when they were forced to turn over— “transfer” — pensions to the ex-Soviet Union. It will come surely, but slowly, stage by stage, according to an agreement between representatives of the pension fund, the country and former staff in Moscow.

“The Russian government assumes responsibility for the pensioners who had transferred their pension to the USSR Social Security Fund,” FICSA declared in announcing what it described as “good news.”

Under terms of the agreement, restitution will begin with pensioners “age 60 or over, with five or more years of contributory service” as from a date yet to be agreed upon. It would be made from payments to the pension fund by Russia in instalments over “ten years or more.”

While there is agreement over such adminis-
tative arrangements, there are differences between the parties over how much is to be reimbursed to the fund. On the one hand, according to the U.N., some $38 million had been made to the USSR Social Security Fund, representing 1,647 “transfers.” On the other hand, Russia’s “preliminary estimate...would be in the order of $23 million,” the report said.

Just two years ago, the plight of pensioners in the country led the ILO staff union to make $30 monthly grants to former colleagues who were receiving pensions equivalent to $20 a month from the Soviet authorities. With this agreement, relief is in sight.

To protect their rights, FICSA is calling for “nationals of other republics of the former USSR (such as Belarus, Kazakhstan, Ukraine), who would be eligible (for restitution)” to contact associations of serving or former staff.

THE TWILIGHT ZONE

Re: “Pension Fund Pays the Piper” (Quarterly News, No. 22), you have merely touched upon the tip of the iceberg. If locally employed staff in low-cost duty stations are promoted to professional grade, or if they are transferred to high-cost duty stations at the end of a career, their pension benefits increase by more than five times.

One case involved someone being promoted two years before mandatory retirement, who was kept on for a further 11 months to reach three years of service to make sure he benefited to the maximum from the pension fund.

It may be asked, why was the person promoted just before mandatory retirement age after two decades of service?

(The lump sum alone in such a case could be more than 100 per cent of the combined contribution by the staff member, WHO, and the interest earned over the career of the staff member, while still leaving sizeable monthly pension.)

This is, of course, within the rules and regulations of the fund. The individual is not to blame for a loophole that benefited him. But is it fair to those who have made higher contributions throughout their career and to those who did not benefit from twilight promotions?

One case does not break a pension fund but, alas, the example cited is one of many and WHO is not the only offender. The impact on the morale of those not rewarded with twilight promotions is bad for WHO as a whole.

Also you mention 700 short-term staff who are “essentially non-contributors”. This is, in fact, the case if their contract is written deliberately not to exceed the magic five months 29 days. Retired staff who are given such contracts are essentially permitted to double-dip. By way of contrast, short-termers who are not former staff contribute to a fund that they may not draw from, and thus they are being exploited to help long-term staff, including those who receive twilight promotions.

There clearly is a problem that must be solved if those of us who plan to retire in the next five to ten years do not want to see our pension cheques stop forever in 20 years’ time. The fund seems to be very well run and protected, but a solution to twilight promotions and double-dipping needs to be found.

Three steps in the right direction would be that: (1) Any length of service, as an STC or STP, be subject to deduction for pensions (2) Contributions in totality be used in calculating pension benefits, and not just the last three years and (3) A twilight promotion “tax” be imposed on the employing agency to bring the pension contribution in line with eventual benefits.

— Garry T. Presthus

LUMPT IT OR LEAVE IT: ADVICE FOR RETIRES-TO-BE

ASFM members reading this have already made the choice of whether or not to take a lump sum payment against pension on leaving WHO. And if they took it, whether it was for a third, the maximum amount allowed, or less. Most decided after anguished thought.

However, the soul-searching is yet to come for Association members to-be, those who are retirees to-be. It may be less of a wrench now for them, thanks
to "The Lump Sum: Take It or Leave It," a one-page information sheet issued by AAFI/AFICS. Among general considerations put forward:

— **If you take a lump sum.** (1) You pay less income tax, because it is based on a smaller pension. (2) You receive a sizeable amount in cash (which could be used for major expenditure, or, which you can invest yourself — a consideration for those only with a proven ability to play the market).

— **If you don’t take a lump sum.** (1) You receive a higher pension, which means there’s more spending money, but you pay more in income tax as well. (2) You receive cost-of-living adjustments based on a full, rather than a reduced, pension.

However, whether or not a lump sum is taken, in the case of your death, your spouse receives half of the full pension due you — which is a point in favour of taking it. Two further considerations in the mix:

First, in certain countries the lump sum is free of tax, but earnings are, naturally enough, subject to tax. (For those retiring in Switzerland, it is taxable. If resident in the canton of Geneva, according to the Swiss Bank Corporation, “you will be taxed...at the end of the year after the capital payment, while a resident of Vaud will be taxed from the first day of retirement.”)

And second, if you ask for payment of the lump sum in local currency, the dollar amount is converted at the “spot” rate of exchange, and not on the U.N. practice of the 36-month average.

These are not all the factors to be reckoned with in the decision to lump it or leave it, but at least they’ll do as starters.

(Those interested in the full AAFI/AFICS text, please drop a note to WHO’s AFSM, room E18.)

**LIFESTYLES**

**GRAND-PARENTING**

Entering the grand realm of grand-parenting, for the first time, Dorothy Hoffmann (formerly HED, INF), thanks to son Mark, his wife Isabelle and grandson, Paul, born 17 November 1995 in Paris, weighing in at 2.9 kg.

A blessed event, a family achievement? Share it with us, and we’ll share it with others. —Editor)

**SCANDINAVIANS SPEAK OUT**

Just out: “In the Service of Peace and Humanity,” a fascinating collection in English of experiences of Scandinavians as international civil servants from 1945 to 1995. Marking the 50th anniversary of the United Nations, it is published by NAFICS (Nordic Association of Former Int’l Civil Servants), Copenhagen, whose chairlady is Inga Poulsen (formerly INS).

Says WHO’s Dr Halfdan Mahler in the preface: “This book tells the stories of hard-working and dedicated Scandinavian women and men who ... contributed to improving — somehow, somewhere — the lot of their fellow beings.” He was WHO’s third D-G, serving from 1973 to 1988. Their qualities are reflected in the personal accounts of 22 former UN, UNESCO, FAO, ICAO and WHO staff — including WHO’s Lennart Hesselvik, Per Owe Petersson, Eilif Liisberg, Erik Kjolbye, Tage Egsmsos, Ragna Kopp Egsmsos, Minna Madsen, Anna-Liisa Tuohenmaa, Britta Pagh-Jensen.

Their positive memories — as put by WHO’s Liisberg, “who would not feel gratified to work for such an organization” — are a healthy antidote to the current mood of depreciating all that the U.N. stands for. “Perhaps the first staff members, now in retirement,” suggests Dr Mahler, “had more of a missionary spirit, or were more personally committed to their work, than the average civil servant of today.”

(To order write I. Poulsen, Lonesvej 162, 9800 Hjorring, Denmark with a cheque of DKK 100; approx. 20 CHP).

—Yves Beigbeder
(formerly PER)
Thonon-les-Bains, France
EASY LIVING

Jacques Lannoix, formerly Hq, and wife Sophie, summer in Maine, where it is cool, and winter in Florida, where it is warm — thereby enjoying the best of all possible weather.

“We live in Sarasota, Florida, which is our permanent abode. However, since 1992, our secondary home is in Naples, Maine, where we bought a condominium, with its own beach by nearby Long Lake, he explains in a letter.

The average summer temperature in Maine is in the tolerable mid-70's F (about 23 Celsius), with little humidity, which makes for comfortable living. They spend six months there, from May to October. “In this way, we escape the long and hot Florida summer,” he says.

In both summer and winter time, for them the living is easy.

ANYTHING BUT RETIRED

— Michel Bovay, formerly INF, is deep in research for a book about the history of writing, “from the Summerian cuniform cylinders, Egyptian hieroglyphics, Chinese calligraphy to our present-day alphabet,” he explains. A founding member of WHO’s Medical Society, he has made himself an expert today, to “add years to life,” of the hormone DHEA (See Letters.) He commutes between two homes, one in Tuscany, Italy and the other in Ferney Voltaire, France.

— Dr. Rene Collas, formerly AFRO, from 1963 to 1984, has written Les Joutes à Semène (“The Tournament at Semène”). Just published, it consists of accounts of the life of a young artist, seen through the eyes of his old teacher, his brother, a snobbish friend, and a woman who loves him.

This is a work of pure fiction — unlike Les chemins retrouvés published last year, which is to a large degree autobiographical. Both titles are on sale in bookshops, or on order from Anne Collas, 20 rue de Lancy, 75010. Price: 115 FF, or 30 CHF each.

— Eilif Liisberg, formerly editor Forum, has been named Professor colaborador (Associate professor) at the School of Public Health, Madrid, after showing his stuff over three years of lively lecturing — in Spanish — two to three times a year.

— Roberto Masironi, formerly TOH, father of WHO’s first World No-Tobacco Day in 1988, has been elected President, European Medical Association on Smoking and Health. Among the aims of that NGO, founded in 1986 in Bordeaux, France, is the promotion of non-smoking among the health professionals, and of smoke-free hospitals.

— Inayat Khan, formerly psychotropic drugs, has completed a two-month lecture tour of Pakistan. As a consultant for EMRO, he spoke at 16 schools of medicine, two schools of pharmacy and three military institutions in seven cities, promoting the rational use of essential drugs.

He says he is still in good voice, and raring to go again.

MORE ABOUT DHEA

DHEA (DesHydroEpiAndrosterone), a natural hormone produced by the adrenal glands, has been associated with a range of healthy effects — among them the ability to stay thin, to build muscles to prevent death from breast cancer, and, particularly among men, from cardiovascular disease. Also, it appears to improve memory, reduce stress, and produce a sense of general well-being.

The hormone comes in two forms: DHEA and DHEA-sulfate (or DHEA-S), whose ratios are constant over a lifetime. DHEA peaks between ages 25-30 and then drops by 85-95 percent by age 70. We lose DHEA because an enzyme essential for synthesis of DHEA is functionally reduced. The adrenal gland, which makes DHEA, atrophies, and thus it is not possible to activate or replace the enzyme.

The surprisingly good news is that, whatever the cause of DHEA loss may be, it is — at least partially — reversible according to experts at the meeting on “DHEA and Aging” held under the auspices of the New York Academy of Sciences in Washington D.C.

The drop in hormone levels may be due, in part, to a normal age-related rise in insulin levels, which are correlated with obesity, hypertension and Type II diabetes. Certain drugs can reverse this pernicious trend and, in so doing, restore DHEA levels to what they were in middle age or even youth.
Clofibrate, an anti-cholesterol agent, also raises DHEA and DHEA-S.

Prof. Etienne Emile Beaulieu of INSERM, Kremlin-Bicêtre, France told the meeting that DHEA caused both female and male rats to drastically curtail their aggressive behaviour towards intruders.

Another speaker reported that humans with aggressive traits tend to have low DHEA-S levels, raising the possibility that DHEA-S affects personality. Low levels are also associated with a Type A personality, which in turn is linked to an increased risk of cardiovascular diseases and early death. It is not known why administering DHEA would inhibit aggression.

One clinician who prescribes DHEA for his patients stated that it definitely increased their libido, so some connexion between DHEA and sexual response must exist. And according to a participant from Australia, oral contraceptives lower DHEA, although not DHEA-S. This suggests that women taking contraceptives should also take DHEA to counteract this depleting effect.

Although other reports presented shed more light on DHEA, further research will be needed to determine the role this hormone plays in the aging process. It is worthwhile to follow progress.

(DHEA is can be obtained in Switzerland, but only at one address: The Alzheimer's Buyers Club, Postfach, Ober Rifferswil, CH-8911, Switzerland. The price is $73 per bottle of 100 capsules of 100 mg each.)

—G. Michel BovaY
(formerly INF)
Ferney-Voltaire, France

DISEASES: NEW AND REEMERGING

A host of new and re-emerging diseases are today threatening the health of the world, according to a WHO announcement. During the past two decades at least 29 new infectious diseases have appeared, including the HIV virus, Ebola haemorrhagic fever and Legionnaire's Disease.

In addition, older diseases like tuberculosis, dengue fever and diphtheria are returning with renewed vigour — a problem complicated by antibiotic resistance.

To meet this threat, WHO has established the Division of Emerging, Viral and Bacterial Diseases Surveillance and Control (EMC) under Dr David Heymann.

Among the major re-emerging diseases:

- **Bubonic Plague**: More than 2,000 cases in 1993 and 1994, the highest number since 1954, when data on the disease was first collected.
- **Cholera**: Nearly 385,000 cases reported in 1994, a more than four-fold increase over 1990.
- **Cryptosporidiosis**: A water-borne cause of diarrhoea which recently affected more than 400,000 people in a single outbreak in the United States.
- **Dengue**: More than 200,000 cases in Latin America alone during 1994. It is the first time that dengue has been reported in some Latin America and Caribbean countries in half a century.
- **Diphtheria**: Some 54,500 cases in 1994, an increase of more than 140 per cent over 1990.
- **E. coli 0157:H7**, which causes food-borne outbreaks of severe bloody diarrhoea and kidney failure.
- **TB**: The largest killer among infectious diseases. An increase of nearly 28 per cent in cases has been reported from 1990-93 to 1984-86.

**At hq. staff raised 14,000 CHF in December to aid colleagues laid off by the budget cuts. It was done through a programme comprising bake sale, raffle, auction, Sri Lankan dinner, and more — including this tap dance revue by the fitness group, the first ever at WHO. (photo: Gilberte Millasson)**
NEXT FOR ERADICATION: GUINEA WORM

Guinea worm will be the first disease to be eradicated after smallpox, WHO has declared in a press release (WHO/86, 4 Dec 1995). It will be more than 95 per cent eliminated by 1995.

Of the 70 countries at risk originally, 52 have eliminated transmission of the disease. An International Commission for the Certification of Dracunculiasis Eradication has been created. From March 1996, country by country certification procedures will commence.

Despite progress the disease still causes devastation in India and Yemen as well as in 16 countries in Africa south of the Sahara. The population still at risk of infection is estimated at 130 million people, of which 99 per cent live in Africa.

LETTERS

(Unless stated to the contrary by correspondents, letters received are routinely considered, and edited, for publication to encourage an exchange of views among colleagues. — Editor)

(Excerpted from the IHT 6 Sept 1995

Votes To 2 Critics

(The following are two responses to the article “How the World Health Organization Has Let the World Down” by Paul Dietrich and Voldemar Ermakov, carried in the Int’l Herald Tribune, 21 Aug 1995)

1) From a former colleague

That WHO has lost much prestige in the past decades is indisputable, but the authors do not correctly focus on the causes. The decision not to run direct aid from Geneva by experts and other specialized health personnel has been due to the pressure of developing countries, especially in Africa, increasingly resentful of what they saw as “colonialism.” They pressed WHO to be allowed to distribute aid funds themselves even though they often did not possess the necessary technical expertise.

Bureaucrats in many national health ministries, therefore, are no longer counterbalanced by brilliant, internationally-minded health experts, as was the case in the early years of the WHO.

Surely WHO is a necessity and, as the authors of the article acknowledge, another body would be necessary if the international community did not take stock of what went wrong and neglected to introduce the reforms needed.

—J.M. van Gindertael
(formerly INE EURO)

2) From a serving colleague

Contrary to what the two writers say, WHO’s rapid response to the Ebola outbreak in Kikwit, Zaire, in May and June helped ensure that the epidemic was contained quickly.

As far as control of diseases is concerned, WHO is now successfully eliminating polio, leprosy, neonatal tetanus and guinea worm globally, as well as Chagas’ disease in the Americas, and eradication is expected to be certified within the next five years. These efforts received increased priority funding in the program budget for 1996-97, and expenditure now amounts to more than $20 million.
The writers are concerned that the success of WHO’s Tobacco or Health program may divert resources from disease control. They need not be, as less than half a million dollars is spent on this program each year. However, they should consider the fact that three million people die prematurely each year due to tobacco.

There is no report by our external auditor that finds WHO “riddled with financial irregularities”. And finally, spending on conferences is down some 25 percent and not up as was stated in the article.

—Ilona Kickbusch
Director Health Promotion, Education and Communication
(Excerpted from the IHT, 29 Aug 1995)

AFSM DUES: HOW TO PAY

Re: Contributions to AFSM (Quarterly News, No. 22 Summer)

A member of AFSM living in Portugal sent a cheque on a bank other than Swiss for 20 CHF to pay his yearly contribution. Only 1.58 CHF was credited to our account. The rest, 18.42 CHF, was kept by the Swiss Bank Corporation as bank charges.

Consequently, it is highly recommended that members pay their contributions as follows:
(1) by payment or postal order to our Postal Account No. 12-17440-4 Geneva, Switzerland, or (2) by payment or bank cheque on a Swiss bank to our account No. D3-102,973.0, Swiss Bank Corporation, WHO Branch, 1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland.

—Joe Chang-Wailing
Treasurer, AFSM

AFSM CARD: HOW TO USE

I knew that the identification card I had just received implied no commitment whatsoever on the part of WHO. It simply states that the card holder has worked for WHO.

At any rate I decided to see how it might be put to use. My first attempt was unsuccessful. I was told it could not be used for a free visa. In some African countries, however, I was, as a matter of courtesy, given a free visa. Presenting the card at an international hotel resulted in my being given the same discount that is awarded to U.N. members on duty in that country. By sliding the card into my national passport, I was awarded the courtesy of passing through customs without opening my suitcases.

Showing of the card does not automatically guarantee that the cardholder will be given these privileges. That courtesy depends strictly on the discretion of the people one comes into contact with. I was perhaps lucky. But I will certainly try the card again on my next vacation.

—Errol Williams
Lithonia, Ga, USA

AFSM DIRECTORY OF (PAID-UP) MEMBERS

During my holidays to the West Indies in September, I was stranded for five days in Antigua by ferocious Hurricane Luis. Through the AFSM directory of members I was able to contact Sir Dr L.J. Charles in St John’s. We both had not met since AFRO, Brazzaville in 1973. Dr Charles accommodated me and provided for all my meals, including a continuous supply of gin and cinzano and a very rare blend of rum punch.

You may wish to help me record my appreciation for his kindness in the Quarterly News. Dr Charles was 82 years on 4 September 1995. He is very healthy except for noticeable backaches resulting from his daily gardening.

—J.W.Kwamina Duncan
Lagos, Nigeria

MAKING CONTACT

In reference to your circular letter of 4 September 1995 about telephone listings: when anyone wants to contact us, a quick method to do so is desirable. I would even suggest that those who have e-mail or InterNet (or similar) addresses include these in
our directory of members, in addition to telephone and fax numbers.

Contact would be further enhanced if listings include (1) the country access codes, (2) the internal national area codes and (3) the local number. With all this said, my telephone number is (I have no other electronic address): TP + 1 212 410 9067 (international form) and (212) 410 9067 (domestic form). I suggest because we are essentially an international community, that only the international form be used.

Thanking you for your work on behalf of AFMS.

—Jerry Kilker
(formerly Hq, LUN)
New York

**IN THE PRESS**

**FRANCE REDUCES CONTRIBUTION**

France has chosen to drastically reduce voluntary contributions to UNICEF, UNHCR, the World Food Programme, UNDP and — in part — to WHO.

The hardest hit is UNICEF, which should receive 30 million French francs in 1995 (about 50% less than for 1994). Yet three months from the end of the year, not a franc has been paid.

"It will be a catastrophe if France contributes nothing," says Dr François Rémy, chairman of the French Committee for UNICEF. An announcement by Jean Arthuis, Minister of Finance, of a new round of budget savings is anything but reassuring.

"I would like France to increase its public contribution to the work of UNICEF, since that contribution is not yet up to what it should be," Jacques Chirac declared in Paris at the closure of an International Colloquium of mayors supporting child welfare on 9 December 1994. It is hardly worth saying that the President has not kept the promises he made as a candidate.

The recent nomination of an American woman to head UNICEF, in preference to a European, may well have played a part in this U-turn. But it could well rebound against Paris; in exchange for the 55 million FF per year which France has paid in recent years, UNICEF has bought French goods worth 150 million FF in medical equipment, including large quantities of vaccines. This is a well that could easily run dry.

—Jean-Pierre Tuquoi
(Excerpted from Le Monde, 11 October 1995)

**TAKING CHARGE OF PENSIONS**

Henry Ouma is worth $14.2 billion! This is the person responsible in New York for the manage-
ment and investment policy of the U.N. pension fund, which covers 102,000 contributors and pensioners in the U.N. and 16 agencies. The wealth of the fund is invested in 30 currencies and in 46 different countries. The sole adviser is the American Bank Fiduciary Trust. Its advice must have been on the mark since at the end of June, in a single year and in dollars, the funds showed a profit of 9.7 percent.

Ouma attributes this success to wide diversification of assets, which has made it possible to limit the fluctuation of the greenback while profiting from the strength of other currencies, and from a greater investment in shares. The latter represents 62 per cent of the gross against 29 per cent in bonds, 6 per cent in real estate and the balance in liquid assets or short-term investments.

—Paul Coudret
(Excerpted from Journal de Genève, 22 Sep. 1995)

WIPO SNUBS SAN FRANCISCO

The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) will not be dismantled and will not transfer part of it to the United States. Its General Assembly rejected a U.S. proposal which sought to transfer the Patent Cooperation Treaty Service to San Francisco, a service which employs some 200 people, or about one-third of all staff.

WIPO is now planning to build a major extension behind its present Geneva headquarters, at an estimated cost of between 80 and 100 million Swiss francs. It is this price, which the Americans considered too high, that led to the San Francisco card. A senior official in the Geneva public works department said that alternative sources of finance are being sought. The Confederation and the Canton could become partners in the operation. "Nothing is yet decided," the official stressed.

WIPO’s Assembly, which sits every two years, adopted a budget of 300 million francs for the next two years, an increase of 70 million. Unlike other specialised agencies, WIPO has managed to balance its budget.

—P.-E. D./C. B.
(Excerpted from Journal de Genève, 5 October 1995)
PENSIONS AND TAXES

Ever since Rolande Cuvillier (formerly ILO, Geneva), Dr A.E. Brown and Mrs M. Ghess have raised the question of the taxation of U.N. pensions (News Nos. 19, 20 and 21) and the Association of Former WHO Staff (AFSM) invited Madame Cuvillier to explain her views on the legality (or rather illegality) of the taxation of U.N. pensions by governments — a meeting which, incidentally but not surprisingly, evoked even more interest on the part of serving WHO staff than among former staff members — hopes have been raised among pensioners and future pensioners that perhaps they could look forward to a bright future without taxes.

Nobody likes to pay taxes, and the interest that this issue has aroused is thus easily understandable. The enthusiastic support on the part of many staff members and pensioners for bringing the case of taxation before a national or international tribunal appears to have its source in the belief that exemption of our pensions from national taxation would necessarily be beneficial to all of us. How could it be otherwise? We do not have to take issue with the legal arguments against taxation outlined by Madame Cuvillier (News No. 19) or with the feasibility of her proposals, but before we jump into the fray we should give some consideration to the likely practical effects that a general exemption of U.N. pensions from national taxation mandated by the General Assembly of the United Nations would have on our pensions and our lives as pensioners.

Many supporters of exemption from taxation seem to think that the level of U.N. pensions would remain unchanged in the event that their proposal is adopted. They tend to forget that the level of our pensions is based on the assumption that they will be taxed by governments. Pensioners residing in countries such as, for instance, Austria, which officially exempt U.N. pensions from taxation are already painfully aware of this fact: their pension benefits have been reduced by the U.N. General Assembly to take account of this element of non-taxation.

Some former staff members will remember that it was not their net (tax-free) salary but rather their pensionable remuneration which, together with the number of years of service, formed the basis for the calculation of the initial level of the pension. This pensionable remuneration was substantially larger than the net salary precisely because most countries are taxing U.N. pension benefits. There is therefore not the slightest doubt that a general exemption of U.N. pensions from national taxation would be accompanied by at least a proportionate reduction in the level of our pensions. It is possible that some pensioners with relatively large pensions residing in countries having steeply progressive tax rates might end up with tax-free pensions which are slightly larger than their present after-tax pensions, but for many, if not most, pensioners the result would probably be the reverse.

But there is an even greater risk. Those of us who have participated in the deliberations of the U.N. Joint Staff Pension Board or have closely followed the pensions discussions in the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly will recall the constant efforts over the last two decades — more often than not successful — of the majority of governments of the developed countries to reduce the level of pension benefits under one pretext or another. There are still many governments which claim that U.N. pensions are far too generous, particularly in comparison with their government pensions. Today, with the
The actuarial deficit of the U.N. pension fund again on the increase and in an atmosphere of financial crisis, with U.N.-system budgets being cut and governments either not paying their assessed contributions or seeking to reduce their assessments, it is not inconceivable that the General Assembly would use the revision of pension levels from a taxable to a non-taxable basis as an opportunity to take up once again a review of the question of the "appropriate" level of pensions. It is likely that such a general review would once again result in lower pensions for everybody—lower than would be warranted by a mere shift from taxable to non-taxable pensions. In that event all pensioners, and all future pensioners, would be the losers.

One should also consider the situation of the many pensioners who reside in countries which have not officially exempted U.N. pensions from taxation but where such pensions, or some of them, because of some legal ambiguity, local tax officials' oversight or ignorance, or for other reasons, are in fact not being taxed. The level of pensions in these countries has not been reduced by the United Nations, in contrast to what has occurred in countries which officially exempt U.N. pensions from taxation. It is evident that all pensioners residing in the former countries would be losers, as their presumably taxable, but in fact tax-free, pensions would be reduced to a lower, officially non-taxable level by the U.N. General Assembly.

Finally, it is reasonable to doubt that pensioners with tax-free pensions would be readily accepted as residents in countries other than their own. With tax-free pensions U.N. pensioners might find it rather difficult to obtain permanent residence permits in some countries which are now very popular with them. For instance, does anyone really think that the Swiss authorities—particularly those in the cantons of Geneva and Vaud—would be as liberal as they are today in granting "permis C" to thousands of foreign U.N. pensioners if they could no longer collect taxes on their pensions?

Apart from these practical considerations, there is also a public policy issue involved in the question of whether U.N. pensions should or should not be taxed. As most of us have become aware, the tax-free status of officials of the U.N.-system organizations is not particularly popular with the public in most Member States. There is a feeling that when such an official's employment ceases, there is no further reason to maintain the privileges and immunities that he or she enjoyed as an international civil servant. On the contrary, it is generally felt that the U.N.-system pensioner should be fully integrated in the life of the country as an ordinary citizen or resident and share with the rest of the population the burden of paying through taxation for the services and facilities he or she receives from the country of residence. Exempting U.N. pensions from taxation where they have been taxed for nearly half a century would be a public relations disaster in many countries for both the international organizations and the pensioners. Thus, if it should come to making a choice between a taxable pension at the present level and a tax-free pension at a lower level, most Member States and organizations of the U.N. system and perhaps a good many international officials and pensioners would, and probably should, opt for the former.

The Executive Committee will of course continue to monitor carefully all developments relating to this important issue.

AFSM Executive Group
— 30 November 1995