Pensions

Minutes of AFSM’s 2nd General Meeting last October showed some disquiet by colleagues over the state of the U.N. Pension Fund, affected as it is by low returns on recent investments, increased longevity (resulting in pensioners catching up in numbers to serving staff), plus war and terrorism. Had corporate gluttony occurred early in 2001, undoubtedly it too would have been added to their woeful list.

But not to worry! If there is an actuarial deficiency in the Fund, one colleague declared, then Article 26 of regulations provide that “there should be paid into the Fund by each member organisation the sum necessary to make good the deficiency.”

So, what’s to worry about? Well, Article 26, another colleague pointed out, has proved to be a “dead letter.” In the 70s and 80s when there were actuarial deficits, governments did not put money into the Fund, but instead reduced benefits. And so, knowledgeable sources claim, it is likely they would do so again in the event of another deficit. So, it is worrying.

But not to worry! The reduced benefits applied only to pensioners-to-be. Pensioners-in-place, like us, were protected by “acquired rights.” Will that hitherto sacrosanct principle be respected today, or tomorrow? In our times, when agreements signed have known to be “unsigned,” or “nullified,” it is hard to say. So, it’s back to Square 1, to worry or not to worry over the Fund?

Health Insurance

HÔPITAL DE LA TOUR ENDS PREFERENTIAL RATES

The arrangement for preferential rates between the Hôpital de la Tour, in Meyrin, and the health insurance of WHO, ILO, ITU, U.N. and CERN has not been renewed for 2002. This followed amendments proposed by the hospital during negotiations to the agreement then in force, which “the organisations were unable to accept.”

According to a circular dated 30 August from the WHO staff health insurance, the hospital wanted to cancel its all-inclusive price for several surgical procedures, as well as the 5 per cent discount offered on bills settled within 30 days. It would also increase room rates by an average of 15 per cent, and charge out-patient care at a higher fee than applicable to those covered by Swiss insurance.

Last year, the cost of health insurance in Switzerland, which is compulsory, increased by some 5 per cent. As preferential rates for La Tour did to p.3

STOP PRESS

According to the September minutes of the AFSM Executive Group, to hand as QN went to print, Chairman David Cohen reported that, despite the financial downturn world-wide, “the Fund is still in quite a good position and no problems are envisaged for a long time to come.” So why worry?

—Peter Ozorio
Editor
GREENHOUSE GASES, SELECTIVE BLINDNESS

Our familiar modern society actually dates back less than half a century. It is based on the massive use of non-renewable energy sources which are bound to disappear; so our present civilisation based on coal and hydrocarbons must be replaced by one using permanent and durable sources of renewable energy, including solar power and geothermal technology.

Exploiting hydrocarbons for energy produces greenhouse gases whose accumulation in the atmosphere threatens the climatic balance of the planet. For the same amount of energy produced, coal and brown coal emit the most of these gases and other pollutants, while natural gas produces the least.

The task of studying how climate evolves has been entrusted to an Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) set up 14 years ago and financed by the OECD member states. The conclusions of its latest report are highly trustworthy and deserve to be given worldwide publicity, which is not happening.

Almost every authority, national or non-governmental, in evoking the work of the IPCC, refers to the Rio Protocol of 1997 which urged the most industrialised countries to slightly reduce their emission of greenhouse gases with a view to doing much more later. So those authorities regard the Protocol's objectives as the definitive solution to the threat of global warming. That is not the case, and this phenomenon of selective blindness is preventing truly urgent decisions from being taken.

In fact the medium-term aim is to not produce more emissions than the biosphere can recycle. In the long run, such emissions should be reduced far below that level so as to recycle what has been excessively emitted in the past and ultimately reach a lasting equilibrium.

This would mean, during the 21st century, bringing down the annual emission from six billion tons to about 450 million tons. This ambitious goal implies a reduction in greenhouse gas emission from fossil fuels to less than 1 per cent of the present level in the U.S., to 2-4 per cent for the EU, and to 10-12 per cent for the big Third World countries.

Possible immediate solutions include: replacing fossil fuels by natural gas for all energy production and, in the home, using electricity and solar heating instead of gas; greatly reducing car speed limits; using rail (train, tram or metro); cycling and walking instead of driving cars; and replacing airliners by ships and trains; out-of-town supermarkets by local shops; meat by lentils and pulse; and frozen foods by daily purchases from the corner grocery.

The conclusions of the IPCC's 2002 report are being ignored by national decision-makers and their advisers for reasons which may not reflect badly on their honesty or political courage, but which do indicate a certain degree of selective blindness.

—Jacques Hamon
(formerly Assistant D-G)
Gaillard, France
(Excerpted from the Bulletin, Natural History Society of Haute-Savoie)

THE CAREFUL SHOPPER

On grounds that the money saved is ours, be it from our 20 per cent contribution or from WHO's 80 per cent, the Staff Health Insurance is urging those living in Geneva to consider shopping in France. A check of three medicaments by an investigative colleague shows savings so substantial that crossing the border seems sensible. The comparisons, with the Swiss franc converted to Euro @ 1.50 CHF to 1 Euro, follow:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medicament</th>
<th>Switzerland (CHF price per pill)</th>
<th>France (CHF price per pill)</th>
<th>% Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nexium/Inexium (Fr.) (for gastric problems)</td>
<td>3.61 ea.</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>-47 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norvasc/Amlor (Fr.) (for hypertension)</td>
<td>2.45 ea.</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>-59 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lescol (for cholesterol)</td>
<td>1.55 ea.</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>-19 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moduretic, a diuretic (also for hypertension)</td>
<td>Prices are comparable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Colleagues are also invited to patronise the Sun Store, the Krieg and the Rieu Park pharmacies in Geneva, and the Levrette pharmacy in Nyon. They do not charge the taxes levied on prescriptions in Switzerland since July 2001, which amounts to 11.85 CHF, or for service after hours.
**Remembering a Russian Colleague**

Until the era of Mikhail Gorbachev and *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring) in the late 1980s, the lot of colleagues from the former Soviet Union was a pretty miserable one. Continuous surveillance by, and reporting to, their mission and a fragile tenure of duty; they would go on home leave and never return, or be subject to recall at very short notice. The state also plundered their salary, pension contributions and other emoluments. At the time of writing, despite the promises of the new government, proper restitution of U.N. pension rights has still not been made to retirees, though today the status of serving Russians has been regularized.

However, there were a few individuals from former communist states who had repeated and extended tours of duty. One such was Dr Robert Leonidovich Kouznetsov, a malariologist of repute from the Martsovsky Institute. I first met Robert in the 1960s, when we were both visiting the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean. At that time he was assigned to the Yemen, having already served in Sudan, Nepal and India. Later, he collaborated in field training projects in the Sudan and Tanzania, and then worked in various malaria units in Geneva.

Over the years, Robert stubbornly maintained a sterling defence of his right to his post in Geneva and managed to fight off determined efforts by high-placed civil servants to get him replaced by one of their own candidates — usually relatives.

Unfortunately, whilst in his thirties, Robert developed the first signs of a severe degenerative skeletal disease (deforming spondylitis) which over the years was to prove increasingly debilitating. But he never, ever complained. He was consistently cheerful and serious, enjoying excellent rapport with all with whom he worked. He always insisted on undertaking his full share of field missions, usually to the developing countries.

In 1985 while on a weekend outing with his family in the hills of the Jura outside Geneva, he mistook a turn and his Volvo plunged down the precipitous mountain side. Fortuitously, the car finally came to a halt wedged between two trees and the accident was witnessed by a forester working in this normally deserted area. All the family received injuries of varying seriousness, but particularly so Robert and his son, Roman. After emergency treatment in Nyon, they were transferred to the University Hospital in Geneva. Robert soon emerged encased in what can only be called a plaster-of-Paris carapace which covered him from the top of his head to the base of his spine. Despite this encumbrance, he was soon back at work part-time.

In 1996, Robert took his retirement and, whilst continuing to serve as a WHO consultant malariologist, accepted an assignment to Tajikistan, then newly independent. Whilst on duty there, assisting the national authorities in controlling the resurgence of malaria, he became ill with an abdominal problem brought on by recent radiotherapy for cancer. For one reason or another, proper treatment was delayed and, sadly, he died shortly afterward aged 60.

For those of us who knew him, he was a sterling worker with the highest standards of rectitude and attention to duty, whilst bearing his pain and physical discomfort stoically and with great good humour. Truly, a brave gentleman.

—David Payne
(formerly CTD/TDR)
Penarth, Wales

(Excerpted from a chapter in the second edition of his book now under preparation "40 Years of Chasing Malaria But Never Catching It")

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La Tour (cont’d from p.1)

As a result of the break with La Tour, two new agreements have been concluded, one with the Clinique Générale Beaulieu (for surgical, medical and obstetrical services), and the other with the Clinique Champel Élysée (for surgery requiring short hospitalisation) at an 8 per cent reduction on hospital rates for a two-bed room. (For a listing of all agreements and details, see circular.)
The world’s fixation today on “weapons of mass destruction” reminds Rajindar Pal, formerly Chief, Vector Biology Control, of the crisis he faced over allegations that WHO had been collecting data in India useful to the United States for biological warfare, under cover of a research project supported largely by U.S. funds.

Unfortunately for WHO, this was in the early seventies when events were often seen through the prism of East-West rivalry and CIA plots – even a project as thoroughly scientific as the genetic control of the carriers of diseases through sterilisation of the male mosquito. The premise of the project was this: as it is the female mosquito that bites and transmits disease, if females mate with sterile males and lay sterile eggs, a mosquito population would be reduced. The species targeted in the New Delhi area were the vectors transmitting human filariasis, yellow fever and malaria.

Administered jointly by WHO and the Indian Council of Medical Research, the project was staffed by about 150 scientific and administrative personnel. Our colleague was the responsible official in Geneva and the liaison between headquarters and SEARO.

Unfortunately, too, it was also the era of Watergate, but while Indian journalists reported, willy-nilly it turned out, they did not investigate. What began as criticism by an anti-U.S. journalist in 1972 developed into a thoughtless, vitriolic campaign by 1974-75, despite the attempts by the Indian government to clear up points of contention. For instance, that the work was not carried out in “secrecy” as alleged, and that the chemosterilants used were not banned in Western countries.

“While there was world-wide appreciation of our research, there was strong condemnation in India,” our colleague told QN in recalling those turbulent times. “I was criticised not only in the Indian press but also by several members of the Indian Parliament. Even worse, its Public Accounts Committee put out two adverse reports without talking to any member of our New Delhi staff, nor to visiting scientists, like myself.”

His vindication came with the “White Paper” published by WHO in 1976 (Chronicle, now defunct) defending the project, and with Pugwash, an organisation that won the Nobel Prize, supporting it. Nonetheless the “project as such closed,” he says, adding “though the work continues.”

Vectors have long been his passion. Earlier, while at the School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, London, he sprayed fluorescent dust on mosquitoes, then aimed an ultraviolet beam at them to track their flight path at night. Released from his post as deputy director of India’s malaria eradication programme, he joined WHO on World Health Day, 1962, then served for 20 years, earning a listing in the 1982-83 edition of “Who’s Who in the World.” Like others of our generation, he believes whole-heartedly in WHO, saying that it deserved the Nobel Peace Prize for its work, especially for wiping out smallpox.
SEARCHING FOR CONFLICT-OF-INTEREST

"Have you, or your partner, any financial or other interest in the subject matter of the meeting, or the work in which you will be involved, which may be considered as constituting a real, potential or apparent conflict-of-interest?"

It may be late, but then better late than never, for that to be asked. Now, the question is a key part of a form that outside experts, including former staff whose skills and experience are still needed by WHO, are required routinely to fill before being recruited as consultants.

The form, “Declaration of Interests for WHO Experts” and the amendment of Staff Rule 110.7 (that requires disclosing any “entity …which has a commercial interest in the work of WHO”) follows release earlier of a 240-page exposé on tobacco.

At that time investigators had urged WHO to “introduce a formal process of vetting prospective employees,” and, as well, specifically to fire those “who conceal relationships with the tobacco industry.”

A SPLENDID ESPLANADE A-COMING

The Swiss Permanent Mission to the U.N. announced last July that the Place des Nations is to be transformed into an “Esplanade des Nations” as part of a project of urbanisation by the city and canton of Geneva.

Under plans, the re-modelling will preserve the tradition of the square as a site for peaceful, democratic protest while being turned also into a place for walking (“espace de promenade”). Material for construction, notably granite, is expected to be contributed by U.N. members in recognition of the “universalité de spirit of international Geneva,” the announcement said (“la notion d’universalité et l’esprit de la Genève internationale.”) Work will be completed in 2004.

Either deliberately or accidentally, the Place des Nations has been situated in the ideal place for protest, right at the front door of the U.N.’s European headquarters, the old League of Nations. Diplomats hurrying through the now heavily barbed-wired gate, pedestrians, passengers in buses and cars that go around the square are not likely to miss the demonstrators, the placards, the banners and the messages that they bear.

WHO DENIES STUDYING BLONDES (SIGH!)

On a dark day in journalism -- though not on April 1 when a certain frivolity from the media is pardonable -- WHO found itself the headline story in London tabloids and U.S. networks as the author of a study that found the human blonde an endangered species, to be extinct in 200 years. “A blonde-shell,” one tabloid hollered.

Blondness is carried by a recessive gene that is dying out, not being as strong a gene as that for brunettes, the reports alleged. How the story originated is not exactly known, but unidentified continental agencies that serve the U.K. media are believed to be the source. From Britain it went to the United States.

It all sounded plausible, except that it was not, leaving the editors of London’s Sun, Star and Express, as well as ABC, CBS and CNN television news with egg on their respective faces following a denial from WHO. Excerpts from its text (No. 05, 1 October 2002) follow:

“In response to recent media reports citing an alleged WHO study predicting the extinction of naturally blonde hair, WHO wishes to clarify that it has never conducted research on this subject. Nor has WHO issued a report predicting that natural blondes are likely to be extinct by 2202. WHO has no knowledge how these news reports originated, but would like to stress that we have no opinion on the future existence of blondes.”
Einar Helander left WHO on account of the rules in 1989 but never had the intention to retire. Arguably, his most daring venture since the early 1980s, long before he left, had been in the acquisition and rehabilitation (his favourite word) of a small château set on extensive grounds close to the Loire Valley, 120 km south of Paris. It boasts a 30-metre high, 13th century keep, the first orangerie in France, and an ornamental well both designed by the distinguished 16th century architect, Jean Goujon.

He and his wife, Margarida, who is from Lisbon, then painstakingly converted it into an exclusive, luxury hotel, worthy of a Châteaux de France listing, making an auspicious debut into the magic world of hospitality in the mid '90s. Later, they sold it, having decided to spend time in Brittany and Portugal.

In essence, on leaving WHO, he merely doffed one hat for another — from that of chief, rehabilitation to that of UNDP staff member, putting the experience acquired over a lifetime, and 15 years with WHO, at the service of a sister agency’s newly-established Disability Action Group. He remained so engaged until 1998, while maintaining contacts with governments and NGOs the world over, but particularly in Sweden, his own country.

With a group of friends he set up an NGO, the International Association for Community-Based Rehabilitation, which has organised courses for participants from 60 countries. His technical advice is sought frequently, this year by Jordan and Romania. At a youthful 74, he will visit Bucharest in the months ahead to advise the government on ways of replacing sub-standard residential institutions for children who are mentally handicapped, with community- and family-based support activities and day centres.

During 13 years post-WHO, he has written six books in English about rehabilitation, an echo of his final hectic days at WHO, where he, as one of three co-authors, worked without let-up to complete a comprehensive technical manual, which has since been translated into 51 languages, selling all told 13,000 copies. The title, “Training in the Community for People with Disabilities.”

To Jens Jorgensen, formerly BMR, the success of our new website depends on one word, “use.” It has to be useful to us, “the WHO alumni” — his phrase — and for us to use it. “To keep it alive and kicking, colleagues are invited not only to use it, but to post information and questions - in English or in French - on it,” he told QN.

In his capacity as our Webmaster, pro bono, and through his internet site “clubs.org,” he states the site would help us “stay in touch, raise issues, share ideas, save time. It would be useful for the Executive Group also, facilitating communication with members.” Operating out of Brussels, he manages sites of other associations as well, with notable success.

He reports that our site has now been redesigned to include new sections, such as a Home Page, Committee News, a Discussion Forum, Classified Ads, a page of Daily Essentials and, of course, Alumni News. Some of the sections are only available through a password. However, WHO staff, former and serving, —the latter will eventually become alumni— need only to enter “appia” to log on. He’s offered to set-up a separate page on the Web for alumni groups in a region.

“Just because you’ve got a pension doesn’t mean you can retire.”

Our address <http://www.clubs.org/aoms.html>. To answer his plea for a contribution to the Web, reach him through e-mail: <jens@jorgensen.com>.
SavEd FROM THE FLOODS

Only the previous evening, 8 September, on a visit to the Pont du Gard museum, near Nimes, we learnt that in matters of hydraulics the ancient Romans had skills that it has taken us 17 centuries to match. But have we really mastered them? The deluge that swamped the three French departments of Hérault, Gard and Bouches-du-Rhône that night and all the following day made us doubt it. In 24 hours roughly one billion cubic metres of rain fell -- an average of 60 cm or nearly the equivalent of a year's rainfall!

That morning we left Tarascon to return to Geneva, but the autoroute A7 was blocked by flooding near Orange, so we thought we could make a detour up the right bank of the Rhône. Alas, after passing the Tavel vineyards, which were totally devastated by flooding and mud, firemen directed us to a reception centre set up in the sports hall at Roquemaure. The very existence of such a refuge and the presence of military personnel equipped with inflatable boats made us realise the scale of the catastrophe. Evacuees from the neighbourhood mingled with holiday-makers, while everywhere torrents of muddy water surged between the houses.

But there was no panic among the volunteers who served coffee, made meals and did their best to comfort one and all. In front of us, two young volunteer firemen who had been busy since midnight were eating their first hot meal.

Some hours later, when the rains had stopped, we decided to retrace our steps to Tarascon. But the small roads proved just as impassable as the highways. We were totally stuck and just had to wait for the flood to subside. So it was in the village hall of Fournès, transformed into a temporary shelter, that we spent the night with some 30 refugees, most of them brought in by helicopter.

The people who looked after us were themselves badly shaken. The graceful Provençal lady who served us coffee had seen her twelve beehives swept away, the fruit of several years of effort. A villager contained his emotion as he told us he had lost eight of his ten beasts, including the baby donkey which he had failed to save. What grace under pressure!

That night, the bursting of a dyke a few kilometres away at Aramon caused still more victims and heavy damage, requiring a further effort from the exhausted rescuers. And yet, from six in the morning Monsieur le Maire was there to see everyone on their way. Moments later we were bowling along the re-opened autoroute A9 up the Rhône Valley and reminding ourselves that we had had a close shave.

— J. M. Leclercq
(ex-TRA)
Divonne-les-Bains, France

(In at least 26 lives were lost in the flooding and many thousands of homes were without electricity after over 24 hours of deluge affecting a vast area in the Midi, according to press reports).

In Memoriam

(Tributes for “In Memoriam” must include, at least, the following: the date and place of death, when the deceased joined and retired from WHO, the last position held, a personal assessment of the deceased, and when possible the names of survivors. Also, a photo. The contributor’s former office should also be given. Because of space requirements, please limit tributes to no more than 300 words. —QNI)

Robert Weil. I first met Robert in Geneva when he was fresh from five years in Manila and full of enthusiasm for everything Western Pacific. We soon became permanent friends as did our families. I will remember him always as an honest man in the noble sense of the 16th century.

Born in 1919 in Alsace, he loved France but saw himself above all as an internationalist. He earned degrees in German literature and law, and a doctorate from the Institut des Hautes Etudes Internationales in Geneva. As a young man he was decorated for his work with the French Resistance. After World War II he joined the U.N. Relief and Rehabilitation Agency for Refugees and later the International Refugee Organisation. There he soon met an equally dedicated Dutch col-
league named Wendela who became his wife and the mother of their two children, Alain and Roland.

In 1954 Robert joined CERN and in 1959 WHO. He was especially proud of being a Personnel Officer for WHO and served remarkably in Manila and Geneva. With some regret he moved into administration and finance work and had postings in New Delhi, Brazzaville and Copenhagen. He became a Director of Administration and Finance in 1969 and retired in 1981. Over the next ten years he undertook consultancies in Bangladesh, the Philippines and Geneva. At 71, he decided to “really retire” with his wife to his books and his Mas de Provence.

His happy retirement became clouded by the onset of Parkinson’s and other ailments but he bore them well and with good cheer.

Robert passed away on 30 May 2002 in Tourettes in the south of France. His death was nevertheless quite unexpected and was deeply felt. His immediate family, his daughter-in-law, Mahes, and three grandchildren survive.

—Herbert Crockett
(Formerly Director, CGS)
Crozet, France

Jimmy Magee: A fine writer and journalist, he was known to the many who worked with him in WHO. He had a keen mind and a sharp pen that he employed in the eradication of smallpox, the anti-smoking newsletters and countless other programmes.

His photo appears twice in the 1,500-page book “Smallpox and its Eradication” which WHO published to tell the story of smallpox, the first disease ever to be wiped out from the face of the earth.

He was also thoroughly well known in the Irish community, especially as he had founded the Geneva Irish Association and was its president for seven years. Like his close friend Seamus Gallagher, of CIOMS, who eulogised him so affectionately, he spoke Irish Gaelic, coming himself from the Belfast area.

Sadly, he passed away on 2 August 2002. He will be missed by his family, the Irish community and all of us at WHO who knew him.

—Nedd Willard
(formerly INF)
Geneva

Dudley Neville Wijeyaratne. In 1969, he joined the WHO as a sanitary engineer stationed in Jakarta. After five years in Indonesia, he was transferred to Bangkok, and in 1977 to Rangoon. He also worked in Bangladesh and Nepal. At this stage his two daughters were enrolled as full boarders at Geelong Grammar School, in Australia, eventually graduating.

An engineering graduate from the University of London, he followed this up with post-graduate studies at the Imperial College, London, and the Institute of Technology, Delft, Netherlands. He was a chartered civil engineer and a member of the Institute of Civil Engineers, London.

In 1959, he married the daughter of the ambassador of Sri Lanka to the former USSR. In an attempt to show religious tolerance, Soviet Government officials assisted with wedding preparations and even flew in two Buddhist monks from Mongolia to take part in the ceremony. Television cameras followed every move. Madame Khrushchev, wife of the Soviet premier, brought presents and personal greetings, and the guests included Foreign Minister Mikoyan and the army chief of staff, Marshal Zhukov, of World War II Stalingrad fame.

In 1988, on retiring, he became a permanent resident in Australia and moved to Melbourne. Thereafter, he carried out short-term assignments for WHO and the Australian Government. He played golf, tennis and bridge and was a member of the Probus Club of Forest Hill. He was in demand to speak to local groups about his U.N. experiences and also for his knowledge of Buddhism.

He passed away on 2 June 2002, age 73, and is survived by his wife Anoma, his daughter Mayanti and his grandson Patrick.

—Ron Webster
(Public Service, Victoria, Australia)
(Excerpted from The Age, Melbourne)
After reading reports by the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees and WHO staff, the D-G issued an appeal to all parties to “respect the neutrality of health workers in the Middle East.” Excerpts follow:

“The latest escalation of violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, in Israel, and in the refugee camps in the West Bank and in Gaza represents a new and serious threat to the health of affected people – Palestinians, Israelis, and others.

“The targeting of civilians in the conflict is a deplorable development. Beyond the immediate death and injuries there is a long term price that will be borne, particularly by children, whose psychological health is being directly affected.

“I am particularly concerned about the difficulties for people in need to reach and receive health services. This applies especially to children, pregnant women and the disabled. I am deeply troubled by the fact that several of the casualties of the fighting have been health workers responding to people’s acute needs and distress.

“I appeal to all sides in the conflict to accept the critical role of doctors, nurses and paramedical workers on duty, to respect their neutrality, equip them to save lives and relieve suffering, and allow them to do this vital work in safety.”

(Excerpted from Statement of 13 March 2002)

Timor-Leste (not East Timor) Joins Up

Timor-Leste has become WHO’s 192nd Member, depositing its instrument of acceptance of WHO’s Constitution with the S-G of the U.N. on 27 September 2002.

According to a Cluster Note (2002/31), its formal name is Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste. The short form is Timor-Leste, and not East Timor, and the adjective of the nationality is: “of Timor-Leste”.

Untapped Riches

The AFSM Executive Group is to be congratulated for making the “special appeal to our female colleagues” last July to stand for election in October 2002. Without doubt, their presence would make for a “better balanced” committee, but I believe also that their talent should be tapped for the benefit of us all.

I note with satisfaction that three new female candidates have responded to the appeal, and it is my hope that my colleagues would see their value and vote accordingly. We shall soon see.

Speaking of untapped riches, another source is our English-speaking colleagues of any nationality, whose numbers have dwindled over the years, I believe, to our collective loss. As a person from Mauritius, I was brought up tri-lingual, English, French as well as Creole, so I have no language axe to grind. I heartily congratulate our francophone colleagues, who make up the majority of the Executive Group, for their “civic-mindedness,” while I urge anglophones, now a tiny minority, to step forward and to serve, specially those newly-retired.

I suggest therefore that when the next elections come around in two years’ time, that the Executive Group issues another “special appeal” -- this one urging and encouraging English-speakers of all nationalities to stand for office. Their skills and cultures too are needed for our common good.

—Joe Chang-Wailing
(formerly WHO Ombudsman, and formerly AFSM Hon. Treasurer/Vice-Chairman)
Geneva
Hearing from Argentina


I have recently received (in June) the issue of QN with the article about the Staff Health Insurance. This is to request a copy of the circular, dated 11 February, which gives more details. In the event it can be attached, my e-mail address is <shaiabri@hotmail.com>

—Chaja di Pasquale
Buenos Aires, Argentina

(Sent by mail, which is simpler. Attaching would have involved an office other than AFSM. — Editor)

In the Press

A New HQ for UNAIDS

A new building is about to blossom in Geneva’s international garden constructed by an Austrian firm, Baumschlager and Eberle, according to an announcement in late June of an architecture competition organized by the Building Foundation for International Organisations (FIPOI). The aim is to construct a headquarters for UNAIDS on a plot of land adjoining WHO by June 2005, at a cost between 50 and 55 million CHF.

Switzerland will advance this sum through FIPOI, a private non-profit-making foundation created jointly by the Federal and Geneva authorities. The loan is being made to WHO and UNAIDS on particularly favourable terms: repayment over 50 years without interest. Switzerland, however, is not just dispensing largesse.

In 1995, in the hope of fixing the new AIDS programme firmly in Geneva, Bern let it be known that it would conjure up for it a worthy headquarters for personnel now scattered on three floors of the World Council of Churches and in an annexe of WHO. The new headquarters will have 480 work stations over a surface area of 14,000 square metres. It will house the 200 UNAIDS staff but also 280 from WHO, which considers that its 2,200 employees are too cramped and, in addition, wants to take on 40 to 50 more each year.

WHO is booming. Although it is true that its regular budget has reached its ceiling, the agency is not finding it difficult to get Member States to fork out extra-budgetary funds for targeted and time-limited goals. Introduced in 1998 by the then newly appointed DG, Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland, the financing through special funds is today comparable to the regular budget, and is increasing by 20 per cent a year.

As for the WHO annexe where staff now work, in theory it will be demolished after the UNAIDS headquarters is complete. A plan directly linking the international agencies with the autoroute foresees that a road will pass over that site.

—André Allemand
(Excerpted from Tribune de Genève 29/30 June 2002)

Food Prices in Geneva Highest

Geneva’s food prices in 2001 were the highest among 11 of the major cities of the world, higher than even Tokyo, according to a study made by Japan’s Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing.

Starting from a baseline of 100 in the Japanese capital, the index for Geneva rose in 2001 from 84 to 105. The index for New York rose from 78 in 2000 to 95, for London from 66 to 75 and for Paris from 59 to 74.

“The gap between Tokyo and the other main foreign cities is narrowing because of Japanese deflation, which continues to push prices down," explained Takuya Watanabe, a ministry spokesman. In 2001 the yen’s decline against the dollar also provoked technically lower prices in Tokyo compared to those of other capitals, he went on. “Although the gap is closing, prices in Japan are still generally high.”

A study published in Singapore showed that the cost of living for expatriates was now highest in Hong Kong, rather than in Tokyo, as used to be the case. Tokyo dropped to third place, after Moscow, according to the Mercer Human Resource Consulting firm.

(Excerpted from Le Courrier, 10 July 2002)

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