

FAFICS 2024
MARCH SESSION
Bureau meeting on 22 March 2024

In attendance: *Delia Barcelona (Secretary), Jerry Barton (President) Abou Khadre Diakhate, Juan Casas-Zamora, Deborah Landey, Romesh Muttukumaru (Treasurer), Pierre Sayour, Marashetty Seenappa, Nancy Hurtz-Soyka (Rapporteur)*

Absent with notice: *Suzanne Bishopric, Jayantilal Karia*

Actions/decisions taken by Bureau

- 1. Bureau approved the three financial reports introduced by the Treasurer to be submitted to the Council.**
- 2. The numbering of Council decisions to be considered for easier future reference.**
- 3. SB and RM to discuss UBS accounts.**
- 4. The establishment of two new Standing Committees – Revitalization and Communications – to be placed on Council’s agenda for approval. The TORs/Composition of the Pension SC remains pending and President to discuss further with the Chair of the SC.**
- 5. The Bureau to decide on whether to put forward the membership of UPU.**
- 6. The President to talk to Jay Pozenel concerning becoming a co-chair of the SC on Pension Issues.**
- 7. The President to discuss with SB and GS the issue of multiple surviving spouses.**
- 8. The President to write to associations by end of April concerning Nomination letter for open FAFICS positions. Deadline to submit a nomination letter will be 10 June. All nominees will be required to sign an ethics policy/code of conduct (Declaration of Principles) to be submitted along with their nomination letter.**
- 9. Next Bureau meetings scheduled for 18 April, 16 May and 20 June.**

Agenda 1. Approval of agenda for hybrid meeting

- 1. The agenda was adopted with the inclusion of financial issues to be considered under agenda item 3.**

**Agenda item 2. Approval of the Minutes of the hybrid meeting
in Geneva, 26,27 and 28 February**

2. The draft Minutes of the Bureau’s hybrid meeting held on 26, 27 and 28 February were approved as amended.

Agenda item 3. Review of decisions/action points from the Geneva meeting

3. The President reviewed the thirty-four decision/action points that were taken during the last Bureau meeting held over three days – 26, 27, 28 February.
4. The Bureau took note of these action points and acknowledged that many of the points were already included in the President’s e-Newsletter. However, the Bureau noted an outstanding issue concerning UBS accounts and requested Suzanne Bishopric and Romesh Muttukumar to discuss options for the USB accounts. In addition, the President noted that the establishment of two new Standing Committees, which is for Membership/Revitalization of Associations and Communications, would be placed on the agenda of the Council’s session in July.
5. As concerns the Bureau’s recent approval of the Bureau’s travel policy, the President and Treasurer clarified that the new policy meant that the Bureau, beginning in 2025, would have one in-person Bureau meeting a year and this one meeting would be held the day before the Council session. Travel for this meeting, which would be a hybrid one, would be subsidized. However, if the Bureau would want a mid-year in-person meeting, travel costs would not be covered by FAFICS. The President added that If an Association wanted to fund their representatives’ participation that could be a possibility. It was noted that the in-person mid-year Bureau meeting in 2024 was considered a transitional one and Bureau members had a choice of a subsidy for the February hybrid meeting held in Geneva or the in-person pre-Council Bureau

meeting. In light of this clarification the document to be submitted to the Council would be reviewed by the Treasurer and President.

6. The Treasurer then introduced three documents requesting the Bureau's approval for submission to the Council as follows:
 - a. **Utilization of assigned reserves** – an information document (one page) outlining the use of reserves showing the Total Fund Balance from 31 December 2022 to 31 December 2023 and the related balances of the General Fund and Assigned Reserves.
 - b. **Interim report on the management of the 2024 budget** – showing a substantial increase in the 2024 budget mainly for travel subsidies due to and increased activities on behalf of Member Associations.
 - c. **Proposed budget for year 2025** – to be considered as a preliminary budget for 2025 which would be revisited following actual 2024 expenditures. This document highlights Income projections showing 19,000 members and income of \$38,000 and UNFCU's contribution that should continue in addition to the interest income using an average of 4% estimated at \$3,000 totalling an estimated income of \$51,000 with expenditures estimated at \$49,785. It was agreed that DL and RM and the President would collaborate on a presentation format that would emphasize the purpose of expenditures in addition to the items of expenditure (e.g. breaking down Travel to show the various purposes).

7. **All three documents were approved by the Bureau for submission to the Council.** However, the following points were raised:
 - as regards the terminology used in the reports, Deborah Landey agreed to provide track changes to revise some of the budget expenditure lines.
 - the President suggested that in future presentations there might more columns included especially one for special funding out of the reserves so it would be easy to see regular budget estimates as well as expenditures from reserves in one table.
 - It was proposed that Council decisions should be numbered for better referencing.

8. One Bureau member asked about the number of Associations who have paid this year's dues and the Treasurer reported that some 35/40 members

have paid but that he was still waiting for 23 more and usually makes this information available in April. The Bureau thanked the Treasurer for his hard work on producing these clear and important documents for the Council's session in July.

Agenda item 4. Updates on FAFICS pillars

Pension Issues

9. The President provided updates from the last Pension Board meeting in the absence of Suzanne Bishopric. He noted that at the Pension Board's February meeting, the Representative of the SG on Investments, RSG Pedro Guazo, made an exceedingly short presentation to the Board which made its position clear that it wanted more information. At the end of February, the Pension Board Secretariat reached out to the four groups that make up the delegations to the Pension Board requesting each one to provide information on what they thought was important to include in the RSG's February reporting. In this connection, the FAFICS delegation put together a Note to the Secretary of the PB saying that they did not want a brief note about what had gone well, but wanted to know about the challenges faced by the investments team and what activities had been tried to mitigate these challenges. They also wanted reinstated at least one of the standard benchmark measurements which had been stopped by the previous RSG. In its response, the FAFICS delegation tried to be positive and requested that the RSG's report should be akin to a mini annual report providing information on what went well what did not and what projects were planned for improvements. The President said that he had also seen the submission from the Participants group which he found to be fairly similar to the one submitted by FAFICS noting, however, that they wanted more explicit information on investments of each of the investment areas and how it aligned with policy. The FAFICS delegation felt that this information would be better if provided at the July Pension Board session.
10. The President also noted that the CEPA would soon be starting her annual tour of the SPCs especially in Europe (Rome, Geneva, Vienna) where she would be briefing some retiree Associations. He also noted that FFOA/Rome

had put forward a note to the CEPA requesting information on the issue of the existing rules concerning the surviving spouse benefit which had been increased many years ago and should have been increased retroactively for those that had become a surviving spouse before the increase to 50% as before it was a flat rate. The question though was how many surviving spouses were still under the old system. The President thought that this information could be obtained and discussed by the SC on Pension Issues which could decide on whether it should be something that FAFICS should support.

11. The President also noted that the term of the Plan Review Group was coming to an end and they were putting forward some forty different simplifications of Regulations and Rules. These would be presented to the Pension Board in July and therefore were still confidential, but once issued the FAFICS delegation would have work to do. He noted Suzanne Bishopric's and Gerhard Schramek's dedication to this important work of the PRG.
12. Considering some of the negative statements circulating on social media sites, the President noted that in his recent communication to all Associations, he stressed the positive actions taken by FAFICS in its working procedures. In this regard, he felt that based on FAFICS policy, no comments on blog issues or involvement in internal UN management would be appropriate.
13. The President also noted that the Terms of Reference of the Standing Committee on Pension Issues and its Core Team were still open issues despite having sent to the Chair of the Standing Committee two months ago a draft of the Terms of Reference for her to work on. He added that he had also sent a suggestion to the Chair that the Bureau/President could send out to Associations a note asking who among the retiree representatives serving on the Staff Pension Committees in the various Organizations and who could very well become Core Members of the Standing Committee on Pension Issues, but had not heard back. As a result of this, he said that he would have to take some more specific action with the Chair during the next month.
14. Deborah Landey referred to the issue of transparency of the Pension Fund and the perception that information does not get shared in a timely

manner noting that this situation of not sharing critical issues comes up often and has also come up in AFICS/NY's Pension Committee meetings. She thought the President's letter of 13 March was an effective way to get out the word and to demonstrate the Bureau's awareness of this situation. On the Core Team, she thought that at some point the Bureau had talked about a Co-Chair to assist Suzanne Bishopric with all the work that she has to do and asked about the status of this position. The President added that he would talk to Suzanne Bishopric about replacing Alnoor Nathoo on the Pension Board delegation and the possibility of asking Jay Pozenel or Vladimir Youssifov to become Co-Chair so she can delegate some of her tasks to the Co-Chair. The President said he would contact Jay Pozenel to ascertain his interest and provided additional background on Vladimir Youssifov.

15. Referring to the SPCs again, the President noted that according to the Rules and Regulations of the Pension Fund there should be retirees on the SPCs in every Organization, but it seemed that this was not always the case and that the Organizations themselves have not followed the Rules and Regulations. This situation might be an issue that FAFICS could bring back to the Pension Board noting that not all Organizations (specialized agencies) have retiree Associations representatives on their SPCs.
16. Deborah Landey questioned whether it was the President's idea to approach some of these people for the Expertise Pool and draw on them for the Core Team. The President said he would like to go to the Associations informing them that it is the Bureau's intention to expand the Core Team for the SC on Pension Issues asking them if their representative on the SPC would be a knowledgeable person on pension issues and if so, then to have them complete the Expertise Pool form to be forwarded to FAFICS.
17. Abdou Khader brought up the issue of widows' pensions in Africa and referred to the specific problems of the UN only recognizing one spouse but noting that some staff in Africa may have had two or three wives. This situation creates problems for many families after the death of the staff member. The President noted that there was a long history of discussion on the issue of multiple spouses dating back maybe 15/20 years or so when it was decided to remain with one acknowledged spouse. This issue could be researched, and he could ask Gerhard Schramek and Suzanne Bishopric

whether this issue was being reconsidered by the Pension Board and whether or not the Plan Review Group had included this situation in its review. One aspect to this issue was the complication of keeping track of acknowledged spouses when there was change in marriages which had somewhat been handled by the Pension Fund where sequential spouses might now share in the surviving spouse benefit. He noted, though that with any changes in Rules the first question always asked was what this would mean financially for the Fund.

18. Marashetty Seenappa reported that this issue comes up from time to time and that the Pension Fund's Legal Unit has a colleague from Zimbabwe who has experience in handling similar cases. He suggested that she could be invited to discuss the issue with the Bureau. Her name is Dulcie Mapondera and her email is mapondera@un.org

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19. The President, in the absence of the Chair of the Standing Committee, Jay Karia, reported that the SC had extended its deadline for replying to the questionnaire to 20 March.

Communications

20. The Chair of the Communications Committee, Juan Casas, reported that the new brochure was ready to be printed and be available digitally. In terms of the web development, the contract has been signed and work has begun on the structure of the website. It was hoped that by the next Bureau meeting there would be some concrete news to be shared from the contractor. Payment options for the website contractor (SWIFT codes) also discussed between the Chair and the Treasurer.

Membership

21. Marashetty Seenappa reported that following the plan a visit to Nigeria was being worked on to meet with the Association members at the end of April. He also noted that a new Resident Coordinator had been named for Nigeria

who was ready to assist in providing UNICEF offices for the retiree meetings. He congratulated Abdou Khader for working with Cote d'Ivoire and the receipt of their recent payment.

Agenda item 5. Updates on FAFICS 54

22. The Secretary provided the following updates:

a. Contract signed with ESCAP: an additional meeting was held with ESCAP and subsequently the contract has been signed.

b. INDICO/registration period: a letter will be sent with instructions at the beginning of April on how to register with INDICO.

c. Elections

1. Nomination letter - a letter is required to be sent to all Associations indicating the open positions and the President thought that, exceptionally, he would send out the letter emphasizing that for those who are considering running that FAFICS was looking for people who would be active and who would try to implement change and was aware of the need for transparency and real outputs and with the understanding of the need for developing relationships with all Associations as well as adding expertise. Those intending to run for a position did not have to be in the Expertise Pool but must provide an explanation of what he/she intends to provide and have the support of their Association. It was also noted that there should be a requirement that anyone placing themselves into running for a position must be willing to sign the Declaration of Principles. No one should be nominated if they were not prepared to sign this document and **10 June should be the deadline for submissions**

2. Polling Officer/Training: for electronic elections, a suggestion was made that a virtual assistant be hired from the Philippines who could also be trained to handle the elections. An admin person will be available for the Council session from ESCAP as part of the contract. A decision also, must be made on whether to use MS Teams or Zoom. Options need to be continued to be explored for these issues.

- d. **Succession Planning:** List of President's proposal for Council's approval will be taken up after the President's report.
- e. **List of documents for FAFICS 54: Deadline for submission is 1 July** to allow for the required time frame of three months. If Executive summaries are needed, then that needs to be added to the timeline.
- f. **Limit to number of participants per Assn.:**Member Associations can send up to a maximum of 4 participants, which include up to a maximum of 3 in person delegates. Juan Casas asked if the Communications item could be placed early on the day of its schedule as otherwise the time may be too late.
- g. **Request for support from Member Assns.:** Bolivia is the only Association that has so far requested support. Could consider three more - with one from Africa and two from Asia
- h. **Bureau travel plans to BKK:** all Bureau travel plan dates have been submitted
- i. **Other concerns:** negotiations with a hotel have been finalized and they will provide a code when Bureau members register individually on their website. Draft program could be prepared for next Bureau meeting. Pre-retirement seminar will be held with ESCAP on Friday, 26 July as a hybrid meeting

Agenda item 6. Follow up to UPU visit

- 23. The President reported on the Bureau's visit to UPU at the end of February. He noted that UPU was abiding by ISCS Regulations, and it was their intention to join the Pension Fund as soon as possible but estimated that to be around year 2045 – another twenty years – as they are still under funded as opposed to the standard contribution rates. The President also noted that there was no discussion about them being under the umbrella of AAFI-AFICS but it could be a possibility if AAFI-AFICS would extend an invitation to them. He added that there might be some critical voices at the Council, but he did not see any objection to putting forward a motion to the Council for having the UPU (or as it would be called ARPUPU with a membership of currently about

80 retirees) to the Federation. He was therefore recommending this action to the Bureau for discussion and approval. It was also noted that they had offered to host the next Council meeting.

**Agenda item 7. Schedule of next Bureau meeting
leading up to FAFiCS 54**

24. The Secretary announced the following dates for the next Bureau Meetings before the Council session in July: **18 April, 16 May, 20 June.**

Agenda item 8. Any Other Business

25. The Secretary announced that she may join the Bureau meeting in May from Bangkok as she will be in there to oversee preparations at ESCAP at that time.
26. The Secretary said she was preparing a thank you letter of appreciation, also supported by the Communications Committee, to be submitted to Douglas Helland for his assistance with all the website work and especially as regards his help with the website contractor

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