



**AUSTRALIAN
ASSOCIATION
OF FORMER
INTERNATIONAL
CIVIL SERVANTS
(AAFICS)**



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NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2022

AAFICS represents retired officials from the United Nations and its agencies and funds. Former officials of other international organizations are also welcome to become members. We offer a link to UN retirees through occasional social events, as well as contacts for information and advice about retirement in Australia. We are affiliated to FAFICS in Geneva, the Federation of 63 Associations similar to ours and an essential source of advice on pension-related issues and on after-service-health insurance schemes. This newsletter has been prepared and circulated on a voluntary basis by the AAFICS membership.



As we come to the end of another year, the scourge of COVID-19 continues to cause angst across the globe, while the dreadful war perpetrated by Russia upon the people of Ukraine rightly dominates news headlines. That such an appalling catastrophe in all its human cruelty and physical destruction could visit us in the 21st century causes the entire international community to pause and reflect upon the diplomatic and peace-building mechanisms of the UN and other bodies. As we here in Australia look forward to enjoying a forthcoming holiday season in peace and safety, perhaps it would be appropriate at this time to take a few moments to contemplate the fate of dispossessed families and children facing danger and death in Ukraine. No doubt our colleagues in all the UN agencies working on Ukraine issues are doing their best to provide support, succour and relief to the people affected by the war, just as we were called to this type of challenge during our time as UN officers. We salute our successors as they go about their tasks. With the festive season now in full swing in Australia, we extend to all AAFICS members good wishes for a relaxing and enjoyable end-of-year break. Merry Christmas to those who celebrate the occasion and a Happy New Year to all. **Editor**

PRESIDENT'S REPORT: JENNIFER ASHTON

In a year when everything began to return to normal, AAFICS picked up its pace. State based convivial gatherings finally restarted and new retirees started heading home!

As usual, we are thankful to all the State Coordinators, who have organised the social events and kept in touch with you. I would especially like to thank Mike Patto for the service he has given as the AAFICS Victoria Convenor. He has held this position for over a decade and has decided that grandchildren should now be his top priority. We all appreciate the work he has spearheaded on developing documents for the about-to-be retirees and a membership application form. We welcome Peter and Ivy Steele as they assume the Victorian Coordinator role. You will know them as prolific and generous contributors to our newsletters. I also fondly remember meeting them when I travelled to Rome, and they showed me the sights of the ancient port.

FAFICS. I have been a Vice-President of FAFICS for the last year. For the first part of the year, I was occupied with FAFICS Bureau matters, meeting several times a month. Although Zoom is a remarkable technology, the downside is that there is still no solution for international time-zone differences. Many is the night I either got up at 3am or stayed awake until midnight to join a meeting. In the first half of the year, FAFICS concentrated on developing and implementing a new Rules of Procedure. Not the most riveting subject for a 3am meeting, but necessary in view of the complaints received about lack of transparency and accountability. At the annual FAFICS Council meeting, held in July in Vienna, new Bureau members were elected, and I could gracefully step down.

I should add, that FAFICS has established a Pool of Expertise, which could interest some of our members. Pool members, who are endorsed by their national Association, are needed for their expertise in pension matters, health/insurance, website design, communications and ageing issues. Please contact me if you wish to explore this opportunity.

We have found the new President, Jerry Barton, and Bureau to be very responsive to queries. For example, one member inquired about when we could expect cost of living increases to our pensions, given the current high inflation rate and the limited ability that those of us who are on small pensions have to meet rising expenses. The answer (and something I did not know) was that this inflation compensation is adjusted annually or when it has reached 2% if the rate is very low. Only if inflation hits 10% or more, is there a shorter time for adjustment. However, it looks as though we will all receive a significant rise in our pension next year.

A major task, still outstanding, is to revamp the FAFICS website. Most of our new members over the last couple of years, have found AAFICS through this site...so it is an important gateway that still reminds me of a gestetnered UN document collecting dust in the basement corridors of the UN building



The Pension Fund. As can only be expected in this time of global market financial fluctuation, we must expect changes in the assets of the Pension Fund, which have been in the range of \$78 to \$90 billion in the course of 2022. However, the basics of the investment strategies have remained firm and sound. The UNJSPF website is very informative about its investments, focus on sustainability and performance. One controversy this year has been the amount of funds outsourced for investment. This caused conniptions in the various UN staff associations and generated huge amounts of petition writing. However, the PF announced that this was meant to be a temporary measure until new staff were recruited and they desisted from this measure.



After Service Health Insurance. FAFICS noted that the General Assembly is reviewing whether new enrollees should continue as a 'pay as you go' scheme (as we have now) or move to a 'pay as you accrue' system. This ostensibly cost-saving measure may be needed as retirees are living longer. Another issue that FAFICS advocates is for home care assistance to be reimbursed. FAFICS notes that in-home care is preferred by most retirees and is certainly cheaper than residential care.

Certificate of Entitlement. Although the digital certificate of entitlement has won the Secretary-General's award for innovation, and is loved by some, others of us have had problems. The helpdesk is very user-friendly, has a dedicated line for Australians and will respond to any queries promptly and efficiently. However, having been unsuccessful for two years in a row in completing the photo download that finalises the verification, I prefer to use other methods of completing the CE. To repeat, once again, the old-fashioned but reliable method of receiving and sending the CE by snail mail is acceptable. Additionally, if you are not on the two-track payment (that is you have not opted for the A\$) you can download your CE from your log-in account, sign, convert to PDF and return it electronically.

As usual, AAFICS received a list of beneficiaries whose CEs had not been received in New York in 2021. You might have thought our State coordinators were just pretty faces, but they are the super-sleuths who managed, once again, to find most of the missing beneficiaries. Problems usually occur when older beneficiaries transfer to assisted living and have no identified carer who understands the UN pension system or the importance of that flimsy CE. But some had taken the opportunity to travel after the COVID restrictions were lifted. Our sleuths tracked them down in far-flung points of the globe.

Finally, my thanks go to all State coordinators. I think especially of Maurice Critchley who had to cancel an annual lunch for 28, with 15-hours' notice, due to a "chef emergency", whatever that maybe. Martin Hadlow has continued his sterling editorship of the *AAFICS Newsletter*. As it is published on the FAFICS website, I have received requests to republish articles of interest to other national associations. Mary Johnson who refuses to be a President Emeritus, is still a font of all knowledge and a gentle guide to the intrigues of the UN system. Tom Joel quietly and competently continues to treasure (if that is the active verb for a treasurer).

Jennifer Ashton, President, AAFICS, Canberra

[Editor's note: Sincere thanks to you, Jennifer, for all the duties you undertake on behalf of AAFICS. You go above and beyond the call of duty on so many occasions and we appreciate your commitment and hard work. Dealing with massive bureaucracies such as FAFICS and the UNJSPF takes patience, skill and perseverance. We greatly value your efforts.]

COOOE!

REPORTS FROM BRANCHES



QUEENSLAND

Our Queensland October lunch saw 21 of us get together in Brisbane. We were delighted to have two 'first-timers' and two 'occasionals' join us – every organization need fresh blood, so we hope you will become regular attendees.

Our numbers would have been higher still but for the inevitable regrets due to calendar clashes. Two particular apologies for absence caught my eye. Mardie Holton-Cleave (ex-UN, NY) wrote to say that she would be in Adelaide on the day of our lunch as guest of honour of the Greek Association of SA celebrating the 200th birthday of her g-g grandfather who was the first Greek settler in Adelaide. A worthy apology indeed, but a couple of days later an even more impressive one arrived from Tanya Smith (ex UN Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights). She advised that she had flown to Oslo at short notice to be with Russian friends for whom she has acted as a *pro bono* legal adviser for many years. Her friends were joint recipients of the 2022 Nobel Peace Prize.

Sadly, since our last lunch we have lost two regulars of earlier years. In June, we heard that Nuala O'Sullivan (ex-UN Field Service) had died, and in October news of the death of Paul McCosker (ex FAO) came through.



Mike Sackett delivers the goods to an appreciative luncheon audience. (Photos: M.Hadlow).



The world continues to be a challenging place with threats from the emboldened autocrats of this world, climate change, and the effects of an ageing population with relatively more of us and fewer people of working age. Recently, Phil Young (ex IFAD and UNDP) and I went along to Brisbane City Hall to hear Kevin Rudd speak. Based in New York, since 2015 he has been global president of the Asia Society Policy Institute think-tank. Rudd proposes a way forward for the US and China to avoid a superpower conflict in his latest book *The Avoidable War*. His knowledge and understanding of the Chinese view of the world are second to none in Australia and possibly globally, so it was a fascinating evening. A few days before the event, Biden and Xi had had a three-hour meeting on the periphery of the G20 Summit in Bali, which Rudd viewed as perhaps the start of a more constructive engagement. At the end of the evening, I could only reflect that Rudd was probably at last in a place where he could make a positive contribution to world affairs. His ambition to be Secretary-General of the UN after Ban Ki-moon is unlikely to have turned out so well, in my view.

By the time you read this piece, Eileen and I expect to be venturing out for our first overseas trip since COVID struck. We plan to go to that well-known tourist hotspot, Burkina Faso, visiting our daughter and her family. She shunned the UN and is working as Country Director for the NGO, Catholic Relief Services. For Christmas and New Year, we'll all move on to Ghana. What could possibly go wrong!?

With warmest best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

Mike Sackett, Queensland State Coordinator

WESTERN AUSTRALIA



*Seasons Greetings
and
A Happy New Year
from
AAFICS WA*

Monina S. Magallanes, Western Australia State Coordinator

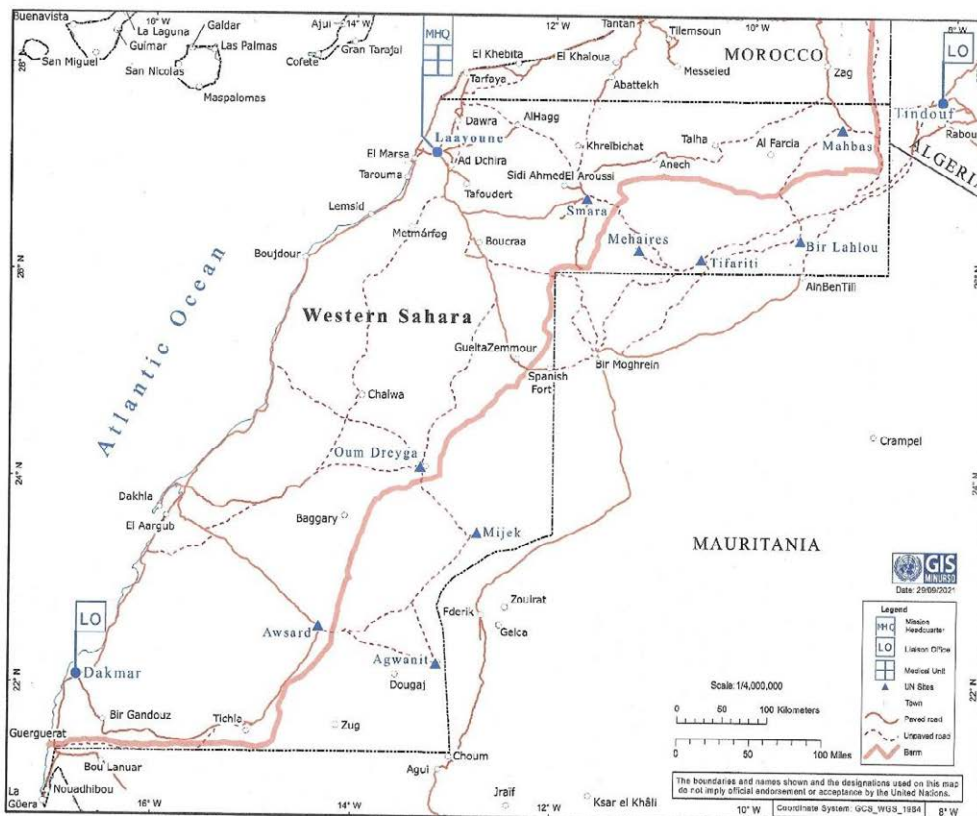
TEA IN THE SAHARA

Laayoune, Hotel Al Massira, nearly 30 years ago...

A sheik from Saudi Arabia crosses the restaurant room, a falcon resting on his gloved hand. He is joined by two other dignitaries from Qatar and Kuwait.

We see them getting out of their private cargo jets, with generators, jeeps and everything that a long stay in the desert requires to practice their favourite sport: falconry. Using trained falcons they hunt onyx, antelopes, mouflons, and other small game. This is an exception granted to the Gulf countries.

In Western Sahara, ex Rio de Oro once conquered by the Spaniards who mainly entrenched themselves in the Canary Islands, a 20-minute flight from Laayoune (or El Ayun), its capital, this spectacle is not unusual, although almost all of the hotel has been reserved for MINURSO (UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara).



No transatlantic airline is authorized to land in Western Sahara, an area of permanent conflict.

The flights therefore end in Casablanca, Morocco, including those transporting the troops making up the international Peacekeeping Force. It is the Royal Air Maroc (RAM) which will take over to bring these personnel to Laayoune where strong Canadian galliards will carry the military canteens of 100 kgs to HQ. The Force Commander will distribute the troops in the 5 surveillance zones delimited in this desert region.

The succession is done in principle every six months which can be renewed. One cannot imagine all the administrative processes that this peacekeeping operation entails. A waltz of faxes announcing arrivals and departures, hotel reservations at the Holiday Inn Casablanca when transfers to Laayoune must be deferred, requests addressed to the Government to give access to the VIP lounge at Casablanca airport to Ambassadors, mainly from the African continent, who have come to advance the discussions - as far as the diplomatic aspect is concerned.

The objective of this mission is to ensure in all serenity the process of the referendum determining the status of Western Sahara. Its independence is claimed by the Polisario Front representing the Sahrawi people comprising several ethnic groups, whose culture is oriented towards nomadism, and by Morocco which considers it an integral part. In addition to the representatives of the diplomatic corps, there are the military units detached by the governments, i.e., 22 French soldiers, the same number for the British and Italy, some for Latin America (Chile, Ecuador, etc.) about 40 for the United States, 42 Australian soldiers, 4 for South Korea, some for China etc. This ends up being a lot of people to support.

The purpose of these units is to maintain relative security and act as a buffer during the daily clashes between Moroccan partisans and the Sahrawi guerrillas who will often have the upper hand, even though the media will not report it. It will be necessary to supply these troops with water, food, medicine, showers, chemical toilets, tyres for the jeeps, and other necessities.

We fly in a Russian Antonov to pay them and are warmly welcomed by a smoking barbecue near the canvas tent rooms, the insides of which have been decorated with photos of pin-up models!

Setting camp is a difficult affair with the trucks getting bogged down in the quicksand near the Algerian border; and we ended up hiring the largest from Russia to transport all the elements.

There we have our own medical unit and a dentist, and treatment is provided in tents. Finally, there is a small medical outpost in case of emergency to help the Sahrawi groups who fled the conflict.

We fly over the belligerents while carrying cases stacked with banknotes to pay the military. But how could they suspect that the inconspicuous Antonov with its uncomfortable canvas seats harbours such a fortune?

The last camp is in Tindouf, a border post with Algeria. We were instructed not to leave the Antonov. An immediate unpredictable relaunch must be anticipated in the event of an attack. This unfortunate event happened to a previous team being held hostage for several weeks. It is agreed that the soldiers will board the plane to receive their pay, of which they will spend a good part in Agadir or the Canary Islands.

The medical team intervening with the Sahrawi fugitives has small Pilatus Porter aircraft that can move quickly but prove dangerous when the desert wind picks up, bringing this light plane, designed for a minimum load, to the ground with a wing swoop. Powerless and horrified, we witnessed an accident where the Pilatus Porter suddenly ignited and the medical team of 6 people perished, including a young Australian doctor on her first assignment.

In addition to their dialect, the Sahrawis have retained some Spanish from their previous occupant and also speak some approximate French because of the essential trade with Morocco, whose commercial language is French.

Tensions are palpable between Algeria, which openly helps Western Sahara gain its independence, and Morocco, which takes it for granted as part of a southern province.

The Sahara is a supplier of wool, goat and sheep skins and camel meat. This desert zone of over 250,000 square kilometres is rich in phosphate and pockets of oil spotted by American and French probe planes and has both countries siding with either the Moroccans or Sahrawis, adding fuel to the fire.

Traditionally, the essential transport of food crops is done along the north/south axis, towards the Cherifian Kingdom. Control of this area has recently become crucial due to the danger posed by militant Islamist groups trying to establish themselves there.

As for the ordinary food such as frozen chickens, mineral water, etc. the transport is ensured by the fleet of Antonovs piloted by Russians.

We sometimes take a break from the extended working days to run this mission in one of the luxurious hotels with an open-air swimming pool of Agadir, further north of Morocco on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean, a city very popular with Europeans.

The Moroccan government grants us significant discounts. We also have the possibility of going to one of the 7 Canary Islands: Gran Canaria, Lanzarote or Fuerteventura. But in Gran Canaria (capital Las Palmas) we find a very European atmosphere and we go shopping at El Corte Ingles for chic clothes, purchases of alcohol or branded cheeses not found in Morocco.

When at work, we immerse ourselves in the Bedouin culture which is made of warm welcomes and invitations in small groups to eat the local delicacy of camel meat skewers accompanied by couscous. The dining partakes under the Al-Khayma, a large traditional tent made of sheep's wool, seated on camel skin pouffes, where we all drink from the same Tazwah, a sort of flared bowl containing up to 5 litres of camel milk.



MINURSO

UNITED NATIONS MISSION FOR THE REFERENDUM IN WESTERN SAHARA

But talking about the sense of Sahrawi hospitality would be incomplete if we forgot to address the tea ceremonies which can happen at any time and on any occasion, but more commonly in the middle of the afternoon. Sahrawis obtain tea in Morocco and its price is high, the cost of several camels for a small quantity. It is served in the traditional Mouchager, a pot made from yellow copper - the binding force of Sahrawi cohesion made up of various ethnicities. Being a tea-maker, Al-Qayyām, is an honorary duty whose selection is won by eloquence, beauty, high mindedness and knowing how to recite poetry!.

This ritual also allows you to make your voice heard, and to make endless observations or comments. In the meantime, the women's occupation is weaving wool and making carpets of camel, sheep or goat wool while tending the charcoal fire.

On the other hand, Saharawi women show more emancipation than their Moroccan counterparts. We see them driving cars, their hair blowing in the wind, their faces only half hidden by the veil of the same indigo blue as their long blue dress imported from neighbouring Mauritania.

For the locals, the favourite source of entertainment remains the camel races where up to 500 camels compete - a sight to behold! Another event not to be missed are the wedding ceremonies; forty days of feasting and other festivities will follow. The camps are set up with a number of camels shackled at the entrance to the tents. Big tears run down their cheeks: resigned, they have understood the disastrous fate reserved for them.

But it was necessary one day to say goodbye to what makes the charm of a country but can surprise or inconvenience a European: the awakening at 5 am by the prayer sung by the muezzin from the top of the minaret and amplified by the loudspeakers.

A stork from Alsace has settled there for the winter. Lower down, on a few palm trees close together around the mosque, sparrows in abundance survive thanks to desalinated water from a semblance of a swimming pool (the Laayoune seawater desalination plant located near the Atlantic also provides us with water for the showers)..

If the mosquitoes are not found, on the other hand the flies swarm there up to the edge of the imposing pots where the heads of sheep bubble at the local market, all day long. The merchants' endless chatter to sell us overpriced trinkets (we divide the price by three and increase it a little and everyone is happy - with the essential glass of mint tea offered) will now be spared to us.

We will no longer have to face the appalling dry heat of the desert which can exceed 50 degrees. To get a little sleep we have to wrap ourselves in wet sheets to try and stay cool. Nor will we have those incomprehensible winter nights. So cold, these few droplets of sand on our cars, make it a miraculous annual rain that evaporates before reaching the ground, and the terrible desert wind that suddenly rises. We will probably dream of dunes silhouetted against the pure azure of the sky.

But again ladies, before resuming your flight to Europe, if a local approaches you and asks "How many camels?" don't be offended, but take it as a compliment. It's a prelude to a marriage proposal, Inshallah!

Salam aleykoum, Sahara!

Regine Digiovanni, formerly MINURSO

[Editor's note: Thank you so much, Regine, for your beautifully eloquent contribution and for introducing us to MINURSO. It is another of those amazing UN agencies doing sterling work under difficult and dangerous circumstances, but with few (if any) accolades. We appreciate the fact that you have brought this extraordinary story to our attention. Now that you are part of the AAFICS cohort in Adelaide, we look forward to hearing more of your experiences.]



NEW HEAD OF ILO



Gilbert Houngbo is the first African to be elected Director-General of the United Nations International Labour Organisation (ILO) since its establishment over 100 years ago. ILO was founded in 1919. He is the 11th Director General since the birth of ILO.

He began his 5-year term from 1st October 2022. Mr. Houngbo is a former Prime Minister of Togo, a country of over 8 million population situated in the west of the African continent.

ILO is unique amongst the specialised agencies of the UN. Its uniqueness is in its structure which is made up of tripartite participants; the Governments, Employers and the Unions. Tripartism is reflected in its governance, decision-making and working at regional and national levels. The three parties have equal say and participation in the ILO. The unique structure also brings along with it its advantages and challenges. The DG being the head of the IL Office will need to create a balance amongst the three parties in the work of the ILO.

His vision could be seen in a press statement issued by the ILO soon after his election:

“Although my origins are African, my perspective is global. In an age, unfortunately, of dividedness, my commitment to be a unifying Director-General stands firm. I will be the Director-General of nobody and the Director-General of everybody. Governments, Employers and Workers alike, from all regions across the world, can rely and should rely on my total readiness to represent and advocate the views of all tripartite constituents of the organization.”

“I commit to represent the voices of those who rely on us in ILO. I’m thinking about the four billion people around the world who do not have access to social protection. I’m thinking about the 200-plus million of women and men who face unemployment. The 160 million children in child labour. The 1.6 billion people in the informal sector. The enterprises, particularly the small and medium sized enterprises that are facing supply chain disruption or closure due to crises’ including the pandemic, climate change and armed conflict. I’m thinking about the women and men who face discrimination, violence and harassment in the workplace and elsewhere. These are all expressions of unacceptable social injustice that we are morally, if not legally, bound to address.”

Mr. Houngbo had also served as a Deputy DG at the ILO for a few years and, like many Australians who are former ILO staff, I had the opportunity to work with him during that time in the 2014-15 period before my retirement.

Raghwan, formerly ILO

OIL AND GAS PROFITS CRITICISED BY UN SECRETARY-GENERAL

The UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, has described the record profits of oil and gas companies as immoral and urged governments to introduce a windfall tax, using the money to help those in the most need.

Speaking in New York on Wednesday, Guterres said the “grotesque greed” of the fossil fuel companies and their financial backers had led to the combined profits of the largest energy companies in the first quarter of this year hitting almost \$100bn (£82bn).

“It is immoral for oil and gas companies to be making record profits from this energy crisis on the backs of the poorest people and communities, at a massive cost to the climate,” he said.

“I urge all governments to tax these excessive profits, and use the funds to support the most vulnerable people through these difficult times.”

Earlier this week, BP was the latest fossil fuel giant to announce huge gains, revealing it had tripled its profits to nearly £7bn in the second quarter of the year amid high oil prices during Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Guterres said such profits were unacceptable as people around the world faced financial ruin.



“Household budgets everywhere are feeling the pinch from high food, transport and energy prices, fuelled by climate breakdown and war.

“This threatens a starvation crisis for the poorest households, and severe cutbacks for those on average incomes.”

He said that alongside a windfall tax on excessive profits, governments must do more to manage energy demand and accelerate the transition to renewable energy sources which are cheaper than

oil and gas.

He called on developing countries to offer more “social, technical or financial support” to help developing nations transition to renewable energy.

“Developing countries don’t lack reasons to invest in renewables. Many of them are living with the severe impacts of the climate crisis including storms, wildfires, floods and droughts. What they lack are concrete, workable options.”

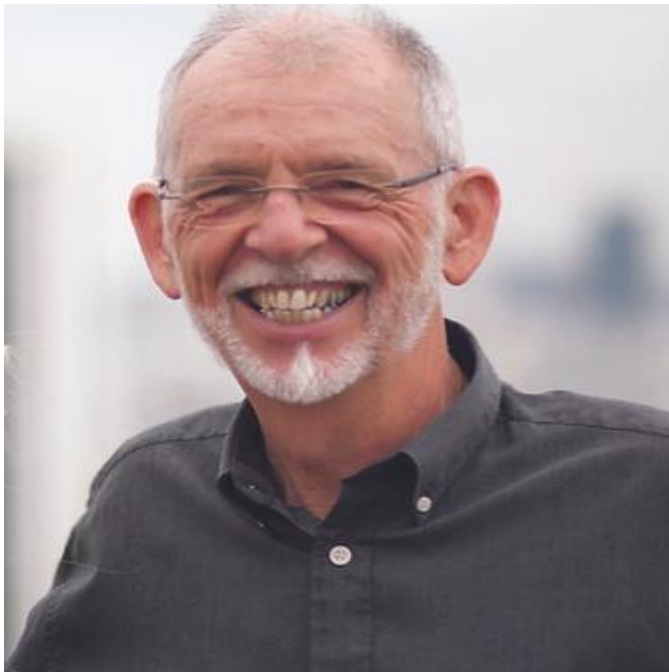
He added: “Some of those same developed countries are introducing universal subsidies at gas stations, while others are reopening coal plants. It is difficult to justify such steps, even on a temporary basis.”

- *The Guardian*, 4th August 2022

WRITING BOOKS IS NOT FOR BEGINNERS

I had no intention of writing a book. It was never on my 'to do' list. My beloved wife died last September and out of the ashes of disaster rose the idea of a book. I jotted a few ideas down and found there might, just might be enough to make up a book. In fact, I wrote with gusto and finished it in two months (a world record?) Some who have not trodden this path themselves may say, "Well that is that" and move on. Well, let me tell you it is only the beginning.

How do you convert the manuscript, albeit a virtual one, into a real book that is on the shelves of booksellers? I still don't know. But I contacted a publisher who, for a fee, agreed to print 500 copies of a paperback. They sent me 100 copies and dispatched the remainder to Amazon, where they are to this day. That was not too hard.



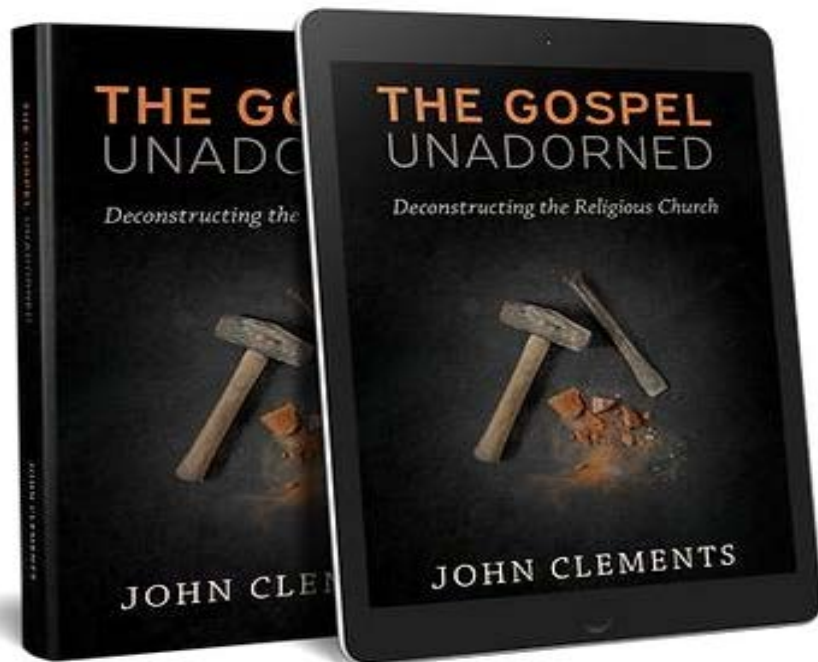
But who knows that this latent masterpiece exists? Where is my audience? Because I was completely out of my depth in promotion and marketing, I employed a publicist. I am not sure she knew much more than I did, but I went along with her ideas. She created a website, an Instagram page and a Facebook page, all of which I had previously abhorred and avoided like the plague. I am now officially an on-line freak. I sent out 120 emails to my friends, family, the milkman, and someone I met at the dog park. As a result, I now apparently have "a following". Are you keeping up with this?

My publicist has me talking to camera about the book and she posts it on-line.

She is booking me for interviews and podcast with all sorts of people I would not normally want anything to do with. She is hoping to elicit book reviews in the right periodicals, and she tells me that a terrible review would be the best publicity I could hope for! This is all new territory for me. But I look at it this way. If my reputation goes up in flames (or down in tatters), I cannot be sacked. I have no one to seek permission from before publishing (that rings a few bells with many of you!). What can go wrong?

I know you want to know about the book. It is called *The Gospel Unadorned, Deconstructing the Religious Church*. If I am going to burn, I want real flames. The first part is OK, but the deconstructing-the-religious-church part is likely to go down like a lead balloon. Cardinal Pell will probably have me before the Inquisition. In case you are a passionate Christian, so am I; the book is only taking a swipe at the hierarchical religious church system. As I point out in the book, it was all going so well till Emperor Constantine took over the Christian Church in 315AD. It was downhill after that. You need to read the book to learn more! The book and the ebook are available on Amazon.

John Clements AM, formerly WHO



www.thegospelunadorned.com

and <https://www.facebook.com/johnclementsaus>

The website publicity includes this explanation of *The Gospel Unadorned*:

Is it faith or religion?

Targeting the mature Christian in easy-to-understand language, the book explores the difference between faith alone in Christ alone, and those elements of church religion that have been hoisted onto the backs of believers. One travesty after another has been committed in the name of the religious church throughout 2000 years of its history. Many of what we think of today as essential parts of the Christian Church are not scriptural at all, and worse, may have pagan origins. The author distinguishes between those elements that are scriptural and those that are not. This book is not for the faint-hearted, and it may offend many who are wedded to the church system. Deconstructing the religious church reveals a wonderful simplicity in trusting in Jesus Christ alone for our salvation. For some it will be a wonderful relief to have confirmed what they have long suspected about the church system. The curtain is drawn aside to reveal the Christian Faith in all its simplicity and beauty.

[Editor's note: Congratulations, John, on this really great effort. And you have chosen a subject not based on your experiences relating to your UN service! Well done. Your book theme is certainly fascinating and, as you point out, potentially confronting. However, books are supposed to bring new ideas and opinions, while also introducing us to viewpoints previously less explored, so you may well be on to a winner. Simply writing a book of 151 pages is a huge victory in itself and we wish you well with sales both in paperback and Kindle. If any of our other AAFICS Newsletter readers have read the book, please send us a review.]



WORD OF THE YEAR

Asked to sum up 2022 in a word, the public has chosen a phrase.

Oxford Dictionaries said recently that "goblin mode" has been selected by online vote as its 'word of the year'.

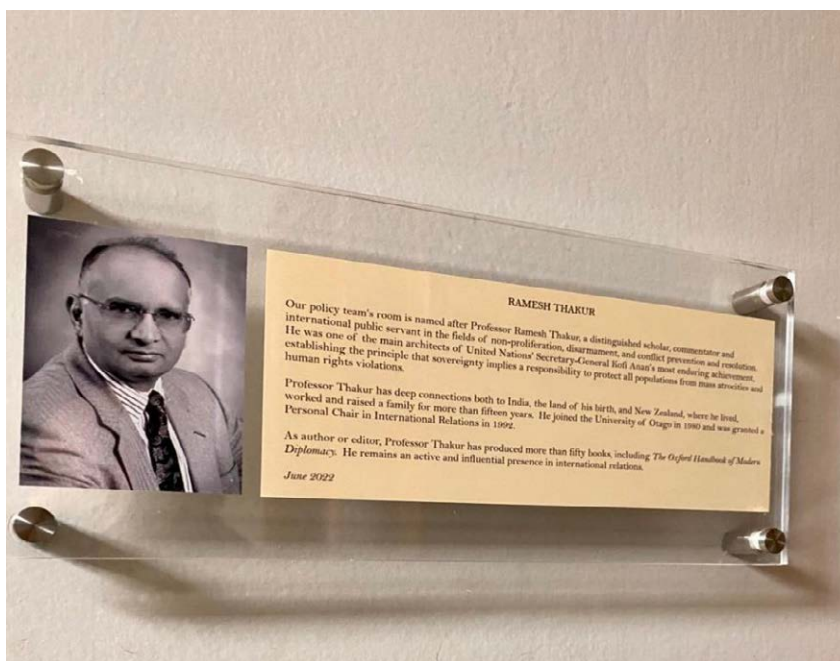
It defines the term as "a type of behaviour which is unapologetically self-indulgent, lazy, slovenly, or greedy, typically in a way that rejects social norms or expectations."

- AP News, December 2022

HONOUR FOR AAFICS MEMBER

The New Zealand High Commission in New Delhi recently decided to name their Policy Room after someone with intimate links to both New Zealand and India who had made a significant contribution to the development of New Zealand foreign policy or international policy. AAFICS member, Professor Ramesh Thakur, was chosen. He worked at the University of Otago for 15 years (1980–1994) and was officially in the UN system as a NZ national. However, he acquired Australian citizenship after moving to the Australian National University in Canberra.

The staff of the High Commission in New Delhi collectively chose Ramesh to be honoured by having the Policy Room named in his honour. The plaque was put in place in June with Ramesh in attendance. He was in Kathmandu for a conference in late November and travelled from there to New Delhi specifically and solely for the purpose of the formal unveiling on 27 November, at which the High Commissioner HE Mr David Pine officiated.



[Editor's note: Well done Ramesh on receiving this great honour. We have valued your perceptive contributions to the AAFICS Newsletter over the years and we are also well aware of all the erudite journal articles and media pieces flowing from your pen.]

BOHEMIAN TRAVELS: ARCHITECTURE IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Used to living overseas on postings, we've had no option but to travel vicariously for several years. The Island State (Tasmania) was my home for the COVID years so there was some sense of being marooned. Overseas travel was as rare as it was in my childhood. Leaving the country was complex, negotiating a mine of updates.

Even recently, my daughter, travelling back to Jakarta with her Indonesian husband, was grappling with the changing COVID regulations such as how to load their vaccination certificates to the *Peduli Lindungi* app, where users are color-coded: red for unvaccinated, yellow first dose and green fully-dosed.

And now we're bombarded with stories of lost luggage and the ethics of travel. There's also an increased emphasis on slow travel, with many newspaper and on-line articles on the subject.

When I took the plunge with friends last September for a long-anticipated holiday, it had a surreal feeling. Armed with masks, RAT tests, a lingering COVID-cough and a thumping travel insurance policy, I was prepared for anything. For months, I had tossed up the pros and cons of carry-on versus check-in luggage only. I was anxious and alert to all possibilities.

Having not been out of the country in some years, the schedule was carefully curated. - a couple of trips with a cultural tourism company including modernist architecture in the Czech Republic, plus time in London staying a stone's throw from the Victoria and Albert Museum, plus some exploration of England's South-West Coast. Most important were plans to reconnect with friends.

As it happened, plane travel was super easy. Flights left on time and checked luggage obediently re-appeared without a hitch. The Omicron strain of COVID was in decline so that after a week of mask-wearing it no longer seemed necessary, except in the London Underground or on the flight to Prague. Even my COVID-cough took the hint and cleared up.

There was sheer exhilaration in going back to the familiar places, such as exploring the V&A, using the London Underground, walking the streets of London and train-travel in the country. Time stood still in the unfamiliar adventures where we were immersed in new architectural works, the visual arts and the striking personalities and lives of those who had created them. After years of living in densely-populated Asia cities, Hobart has its pluses, but I miss big-city life with its rich cultural diversity.

The Ukraine conflict was ever-present in the Czech Republic, whether demonstrations from tiny to large scale in Wenceslas Square in Prague, and fund-raising for Ukrainians. According to the Czech Minister for the Interior, 350,000 people sought asylum and 75-80% are estimated to still be living there.

The Rondo-Cubism Bank of the Czechoslovak Legions by Gocar, completed in the early 1920s, is an astonishing example of its style. Gutfreund's white marble frieze on the front of the building depicts the epic march by the Czechoslovak Legion across Siberia.



En route to lunch at the Art Cafe Manes, situated on the site of a twelfth century Sitkov Mill, we passed Geary's exuberant 1996 Dancing House. The **Štítkov Water Tower** was built to store water and was used to supply that water for a fountain in New Town for about 200 years until 1913.



Who could forget the provocative sculptures everywhere in Prague. David Cerny's mocking Upside-Down Statue of King Wenceslas Riding a Dead Horse, 1999, is now, ironically, in a shopping centre.

Meanwhile his crawling babies can be found on the side of the 93 metre high Zizkov TV tower and in the Kampa Park. The babies were added to the Tower in 2000 when Prague was designated the Cultural Capital of Europe, but so popular they returned as a permanent installation in 2001.



Throughout Prague are wall plaques with names and dates that need no text to explain them.

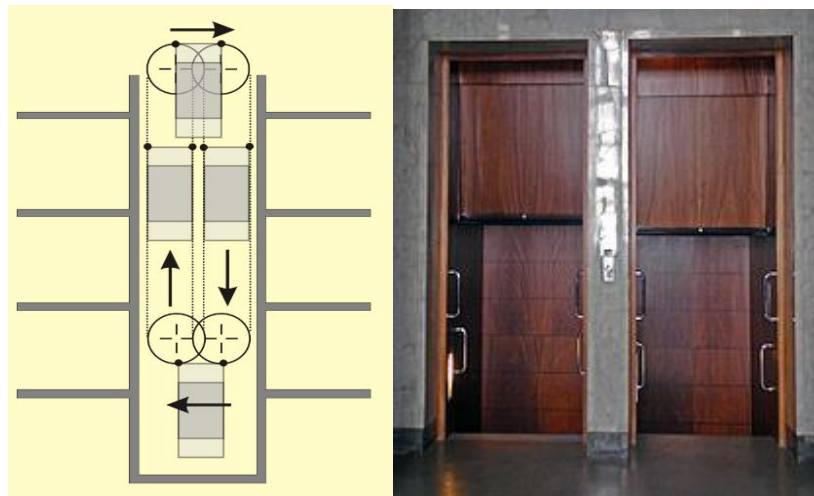


Several hours east of Prague, we visited the headquarters of the Bata shoe empire in Zlin. As children, we all wore Bata school shoes, right? Tomas Bata established a huge factory complex as well as residences and facilities for his workers. One building was a 17-storey office block, modest by American standards, but when erected in 1939 it was one of the tallest buildings in Europe. It was designed by Vladimir Karfik, a Zlin architect who had worked with both Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier. (Tomas Bata himself never saw it. He was killed in a plane crash in 1932.) Bata successfully expanded into new markets throughout Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. Under his leadership, the Bata Shoe Organization had unprecedented growth. It became the world's largest manufacturer and marketer of footwear selling over 300 million pairs of shoes each year and employing over 80,000 people.

Memorable was Bata's capacious office in the corner of Building 21 which operated as a lift.



I also saw my first Paternoster lift, an endlessly looping chain-like passenger elevator with two side-by-side openings at each level.



Passengers step in and out of either lift on each floor. Designed in the 1860s by Peter Ellis, these lifts are, apparently, a dying breed from an OHS perspective but have a huge fan base.

Our visit to the Czech Republic was book-ended by beautiful villas. Villa Muller (Loos and Lhota 1929-30) and Villa Rothmeyer (Rothmeyer 1928-29) are both in Prague.



Finally, we visited the exquisite Villa Tugendhat in Brno, designed by Mies Van der Rohe in Brno in 1930. It's one thing to see the images of these famous buildings on-line and quite another to experience them first-hand.

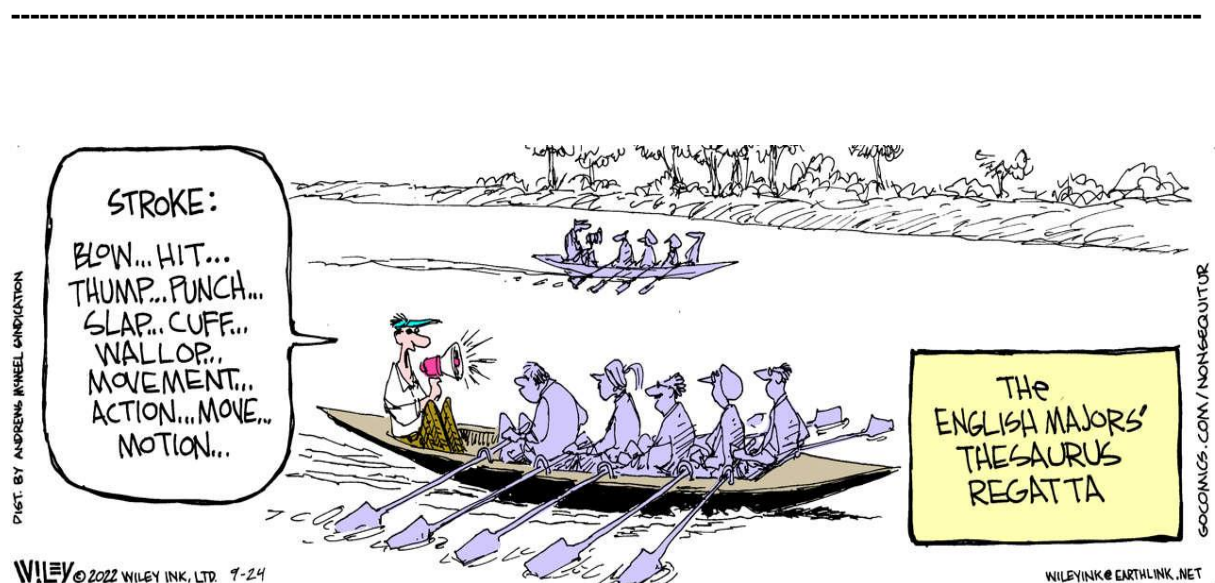


It had been some years since I visited a country where I knew little history and no language. A few weeks was such a short time to be immersed and understand a little of the Czech Republic. As always it was the visual arts and architecture that spoke the loudest.

I'll be digesting my various experiences for many months. At the same time, I will also be travelling vicariously with my daughter to Indonesia. In Jakarta we will enjoy that sense of home-coming, as well as the unmistakable aroma of kreteks.

Jane Wilson, formerly UNAIDS

[Editor's note: Thank you, Jane, and well-done on breaking out and launching back into the international arena. Your travels sound wonderful. AAFICS Newsletter readers might be aware that Jane is also Coordinator of our Tasmania group. Jane advises us that the Branch is a small one and has been relatively quiet, due to travels and waves of COVID. However, they value hearing news through the Newsletter from larger groups around the country.]



NEW SECRETARY-GENERAL OF ITU APPOINTED

Ms Doreen Bogdan-Martin (USA) has been appointed as ITU's next Secretary General.

Ms Bogdan-Martin is the first woman to lead the ITU, the UN's oldest specialised agency, in its 157-year history. Her new position as Secretary-General will begin on 1 January 2023.

She is currently the Director of the International Telecommunication Union's Telecommunication Development Bureau. Ms. Bogdan-Martin is a strategic leader with over 30 years of high-level experience in international and inter-governmental relations, as well as a long track record of success advising governments worldwide on policy and regulatory issues.



She has led the implementation of a results-based management system, improved internal accountability frameworks, and initiated a comprehensive review of reporting mechanisms across BDT's global network of field and area offices, all with the goal of creating a more dynamic, responsive, and fit-for-purpose organisation.



- ITU Secretariat news

UKRAINE FUNDRAISER

Dear fellow AAFICS member,

The English version of my father's biography, *Otto Papesch – His Fate of Having been Born in Vienna in 1898*, is about to be published in London. All royalties from the proceeds of the sale will go towards the European account of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Fund for Ukraine.

Should anyone be interested in reading the book in English, rather than battling with the original German version, please find below the different ISBN numbers:

Paperback: 9781398410084
Hard cover: 9781398410091
ePub e-book: 9781398403086
Audiobook: 9781398410107



Should anyone wish to contribute to my fund-raising efforts here in Australia, please send your contributions to:

Account Name: Christine Moeller
Westpac
BSB: 032097
A/C: 640624

Description under my account should read: OP UNHCR appeal

A receipt will be sent out by email. In order to avoid an overload of administrative work, UNHCR has requested to send only a lump sum once the fund-raising exercise has finished.

With kind regards and best wishes for the coming festive season!

Christine Moeller, formerly FAO
Email: coachman@pnc.com.au
Mobile: 0438 843265



[Editor's note: This Ukraine fundraiser is a personal initiative of the writer and is not an official appeal of AAFICS. We have simply published the details at Christine's request and wish her well with her efforts. A very worthy initiative. Thank you Christine.]

UN IN THE NEWS

Former prime minister Scott Morrison has urged churchgoers not to trust in governments, warning it would be a mistake to do so based on his experience in the upper echelons of power.

In a sermon to Perth's Victory Life Centre, the Pentecostal church run by controversial former tennis champion Margaret Court, Morrison encouraged the congregation to put their faith in God rather than the government.

"We trust in Him. We don't trust in governments. We don't trust in United Nations, thank goodness," Morrison said in the Sunday sermon.

"We don't trust in all of these things, fine as they might be and as important as the role that they play. Believe me, I've worked in it, and they are important.

"But as someone who's been in it, if you are putting your faith in those things, like I put my faith in the Lord, you are making a mistake. Firstly, they are fallible. I'm so glad we have a bigger hope."

- *Sydney Morning Herald on-line, 18th July 2022*

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has criticised his predecessor's use of a "nonsense throwaway conspiracy line" about the United Nations in a church sermon on the weekend, suggesting it was unhelpful as he tries to rebuild Australia's international standing.

Scott Morrison used an address on Sunday to Perth's Victory Life Centre, the Pentecostal church run by controversial former tennis champion Margaret Court, to urge the congregation not to put their trust in governments or the United Nations, warning it would be a mistake to do so based on his experience in the upper echelons of power.

Speaking on ABC Radio on Thursday morning, Albanese said he was taken aback by the former prime minister's comments.

"I just thought: 'Wow. This guy was the prime minister of Australia and had that great honour of leading the government'. And I found it quite astonishing.

"It provides some explanation perhaps of why, in my view, clearly he didn't lead a government that was worthy of the Australian people. I find it astonishing that in what must have been, I guess, a moment of frankness, he has said he doesn't believe in government.

"And the idea that he's out there and pressing the United Nations button again, I've spent the first two months since our election ... trying to repair our international relations. And that sort of nonsense throwaway conspiracy line about the United Nations, I think isn't worthy of someone who led Australia."

- *Sydney Morning Herald on-line, 22nd July 2022*

HISTORICAL ARLES AND THE VAN GOGH CONNECTION

Arles is an ancient Roman City in the Provence region of southern France. It was also a source of inspiration for the impressionist painters of the 19th century. Living and working in Rome but with family links to the UK, travel back and forth by road became a popular annual routine for Family Steele. Friends and family came to visit and stopover. Travel reached a peak over a period of 10 years during the children's university years, with much of this through Provence in Southern France. During the latter part of the 19th century the town of Arles hosted many impressionist artists of whom Vincent Van Gogh is perhaps the best known.*

Convenience of living in Rome

For many of us our professional time with the United Nations provided an opportunity for exploring the countries/region in which the different agencies and programs maintain their headquarters. For many ex-UN people this has meant the countries of Western Europe wherein the first of these specialized agencies/programs were established, for example in Rome, Paris, Geneva and Vienna.

As Europe reconstructed after the devastation of WW2 – physically, economically and politically - the continent opened up. Networks of modern road, rail and aviation provided the basis for travel. The small-size of the western-half of the continent meant that distances were short. The collapse of the USSR from 1991-on and the subsequent expansion of the European Community/Union provided similar access to the eastern half of the continent.

From Rome, for example, it was little more than an easy 2-3 days on the road by car to everywhere in Europe. Low-cost air travel from the 1970s-on cut this back to an hour or two flying (but typically half-day was required given the demands of airport procedures). Europe has never been so small.

When our children reached their late teens, the universities in the UK dominated planning for the family and annual road journeys became a regular feature – typically in summer but, the reality, just about any time of the year as the need to shift/collect people, carry personal effects, change vehicles and more arose. The 2,000 km routes north-south became well-known and too people/places along the routes that linked to the family, for example, ex-school friends in Paris, grandad's final resting place at a military cemetery close to Béthune, sight-seeing-exploration and others.

The A6/A7 south of Paris and through Lyon was an easy low-hassle route from/to Rome skirting the Alps by travelling through Provence in Southern France - by-passing the cities for the delights of the local towns: Aix-en-Provence, Nîmes, Avignon and, of course, Arles. For many, including Family Steele, Arles will always be Van Gogh country.

Ancient Arles

The Romans established the first true Roman colony outside the Italian Peninsula 400 years BCE and called the place Provincia. With their administration centred upon Arles, the colony quickly expanded, reaching its heyday around 400 CE, but then contracted during the subsequent 1,600 years. Greek colonialists, who had predated the Romans by 200 years, were quickly absorbed into the wider community.



Once located on the estuary of the River Rhône, Arles was a natural trading post providing sheltered lagoons and access to the sea for the small wooden ships that made up the majority of coastal traders of the day. Importantly, it enabled the movement of minerals, food and people southwards from Central France, from Paris and across the English Channel, from the mines of southwest Britain; and, in the opposite direction, the armies of occupation.

The Roman city was at the cross-roads of the three principal highways of the Roman world: Via Domitia, Via Agrippa and Via Aurelia, the latter linking Rome with Cadiz and crossing the Rhône by means of a floating bridge. Much of the Roman infrastructure of Arles remains intact and in use today. The Roman amphitheatre dominates the centre of the ancient town and is the largest in France.

City of light

Arles is on the edge of the Camargue, an area >930 km² and the largest river delta in western Europe much of it comprising lakes and marshlands. Large brine lagoons are encircled by reed-covered sandbars that separate them from the sea.



Modern-day Arles may have changed its ancient ways to accommodate the modern-day tourist, and this is a tourist city *par excellence*, but the light, colour and approach to life of the region remains.

This was captured to great effect in the late 19th century by Claude Monet and others, in an art form that came to be known as 'impressionism', and the artists as 'impressionists'. These artists shifted from the formality of lines and contours and, instead, captured scenes using short brush strokes and mixed colours; their paintings put visuals before detail and impression before form. Much of this artwork was created out-of-doors wherein colour, play of light and sky came to dominate - and where time was of the essence.

You can glimpse this period in Arles in the work of the Dutch painter Vincent Van Gogh. Born in 1853, the young Van Gogh spent his formative years in The Hague, London and Paris working as a dealer in art, before taking up painting in his late 20s. In little more than 10 years, and before his death at 37, he produced >2,100 art works, of which 860 were in oil.

Appreciating Van Gogh

For two years of his life, 1888-1889, Van Gogh lived and painted in Arles, producing >300 pictures and drawings from his time there. These were years of progress and quality, despite the mental health problems that are always reported from this period of his work.

His paintings in and around Arles remain some of the most powerful of his legacy. Follow these pictures and their location courtesy of a guided tour that tracks various Van Gogh paintings – *The Yellow House*, *Vincent's Bedroom* and *Vincent's Chair*, *Starry Night* and, a personal favourite, the *Cafe Terrace on the Place du Forum, Arles, at Night*.

The Place du Forum is still home to Van Gogh's Cafe Terrace, which is hugely popular. Follow the Van Gogh trail around the town and at each key location there is a concrete pillar with a picture of the original Van Gogh painting and a brief introduction attached.



A brisk 45 minutes walk south of the town on the Arles-Bouc Canal at the site of a defunct lock – with the auto route in the distance and houseboats parked bow to stern in places – is the bridge now called Pont Van Gogh. This bridge replaced the original Langlois Bridge that features in four paintings by Van Gogh (and named for the bridge-keeper of the day). The original bridge no longer exists; it was replaced in the early 1930s by a reinforced concrete design that was later destroyed in WW2 by the retreating German Army. The replica Langlois Bridge of today is much photographed by the travelling Van Gogh fraternity.



Arles remains a spiritual home and must-see destination for lovers of Van Gogh's artwork.

**This article steers clear of the debate of whether Van Gogh can be considered an 'impressionist' artist or not. His time (and his work) clearly overlaps with mainstream impressionism – he learned the techniques and used them during much of his earlier work – his later (more famous) work represented his unique post-impressionist approach – wherein his perception, appreciation and artwork shifts beyond what he was painting. Some would define him as a 'post-impressionist' artist.*



The National Gallery of Victoria's winter exhibition 'Van Gogh and the Seasons' of 2017 resulted in the publication of the text: 'French Impressionism'. Van Gogh is mentioned in passing. Take the tour at:

<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/virtual-tours/french-impressionism/>

Photographs:

Arenes d'Arles. The largest Roman amphitheatre in France and now a popular modern entertainment venue.

Camargue horses. An ancient breed of horse indigenous to the Camargue area. Origins remain largely unknown, although it is considered one of the oldest horse breeds in the world.

Langlois Bridge. What the bridge used to look like according to the artistic license of Van Gogh. Compare the scale of the horse/carriage on the bridge with the washer-women below.

Van Gogh Bridge. The lookalike bridge that eventually replaced the original is part of the popular Van Gogh walking route around Arles.

Sunflowers. Always a painter's delight, sunflowers are widely grown in the agricultural lands of the Camargue and were immortalized in the artwork of Van Gogh when he lived in Arles.

Van Gogh's Yellow House. Follow the Van Gogh trail around Arles and the picture on the concrete post is the only reminder of his yellow house. It was demolished following damage by allied bombing in 1944. The replacement building is in the distance behind the post. (Courtesy: Chamelle Photography).

Peter Steele, formerly FAO

[Editor's note: Sincere thanks, Peter, for another fascinating travelogue. Indeed, for those who have had the good fortune to travel to the Camargue area, they can only be stunned by the natural beauty, the pink flamingoes, the culture and deep history. And let's not forget those wonderful restaurants where lunch, comprising locally produced food and wine, becomes an experience to be remembered forever.]



greenpeaceusa

...



"How else would I keep my solar panels in the sun all day?"



AFICS ARGENTINA ART CONTEST 2022-23

Free theme

**PAINTING, SCULPTURE, CERAMICS, TAPESTRIES, AND
WORKS MADE IN DIFFERENT MATERIALS AND
TECHNIQUES**

We invite you to send to argentina.afics@gmail.com a photo of your work in JPEG format with a minimum definition of 300 dpi, with the title, a brief description of the technique, and your name.

AFICS Argentina members (and their relatives) and other Latin American similar associations, AFSM, the IDB Retirees Association, are invited to participate.

Reception of works: UNTIL DECEMBER 15, 2022

The works will be exhibited at www.aficsargentina.net.ar
and in our Newsletter during 2023.



[Editor's note: This notice concerning the AFICS Argentina Art Contest reached us a few months ago. Jennifer, our AAFICS President, responded and informed our colleagues in Buenos Aires that the contest details would be published in the December AAFICS Newsletter but that this might be too late for entries from Australia to be received in Argentina. Jennifer asked if AAFICS members wishing to submit an entry might be provided a little latitude with the closing date. We suggest that you contact the organisers at the e-mail given should you intend to proceed.]

UNJSPF AND FAFICS NEWS

A recent edition of *Lien*, the magazine of the Association of Former UNESCO Staff (AFUS) contained an interesting few pages (*Votre Pension/Your Pension*) on UNJSPF matters from the Fund's Chief Executive, Rosemarie McClain. The material is in easy-to-read form and covers many areas of general interest to UN retirees. It is reprinted later in this *Newsletter* (in both the English and French languages) for your general information.

We are also publishing an end-of-year message from Jerry Barton, the President of FAFICS, the global body of which AAFICS is a member. From his commentary, he seems to be a down-to-earth person who doesn't shrink from expressing a few concerns about the slow pace of bureaucracy. Jerry's UN career was mostly with IAEA in the IT field.

INTERESTING UN LINKS

During the year, the *AAFICS Newsletter* Editor receives from readers many links to interesting UN-related stories and articles. These incoming messages from AAFICS members are, of course, most welcome. However, sometimes the material is out-of-date by the time the *Newsletter* goes to press, so the link is discarded. On other occasions, the link relates to an article of anything between 12 and 100 pages, far too large for our little publication. There is also the issue of links being hard to access by *Newsletter* readers as we distribute in pdf form and click-on links can become difficult. If you have difficulty reading the material on the link, please note the originator and go to that organisation's web-site to access the story.

Australia's Road to Geneva

[Australia's road to Geneva | Lowy Institute](#)

Peacebuilding – It's Time to End Australia's Neglect

[Peacebuilding – It's Time to End Australia's Neglect - Australian Institute of International Affairs - Australian Institute of International Affairs](#)

It's Time to reform the UN Security Council

[It's Time to Reform the United Nations Security Council - Australian Institute of International Affairs - Australian Institute of International Affairs](#)

Thank you to Margaret O'Callaghan, ACT for all these links and also for several cartoons, some of which appear elsewhere in this edition of the *Newsletter*.

BANGING HEADS... SORTING THINGS OUT IN CHILE

A major project of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), of which I was Marine Programme Manager, in the late 1980s early 90s was the conversion of the traditional shore-based radio communications system for the exchange of meteorological information between ships at sea and shore, to one using geostationary satellites. In particular, this was to maintain alignment with the International Maritime Organization (IMO), which had implemented the International Maritime Satellite (INMARSAT) system in 1982 as its future communications system for shipping. This new system required, in particular, a completely new structure and set of responsibilities for transmitting meteorological forecasts and warnings to ships at sea.

After a protracted drafting and approval process, the new Marine Broadcast System was approved as part of the WMO Technical Regulations (and therefore binding on Member States). Under this system, a limited number of Members were designated to cover specific areas in the global ocean. All accepted these new responsibilities and most implemented them without major glitches. As an aside, Australia and New Zealand together have responsibility over around half the Southern Hemisphere oceans.

Chile was one of those with new responsibilities. Unfortunately, it was the Chilean National Meteorological Service, part of the Chilean Airforce, which had signed up. However, responsibility for marine meteorological services rested with the Chilean Navy. Consequently, nothing actually happened to implement the new system, so eventually I decided that I would have to go to Santiago to bang a few heads together and sort out the mess. In the event, after a couple of days of explanations and negotiations, a workable solution was arrived at, and the new system operated there subsequently without further major problems.



In order to save some money for my programme, I had arranged for this visit to occur on my trip back to Australia on home leave. Thus, Robyn and Ben came with me, and we flew into Santiago via Buenos Aires, since in those days we would have to return there for the connecting flight to Australia. We needed visas to transfer through Buenos Aires, but I had an existing one from a previous visit which I thought would be fine. In any case, we arrived without a problem in Santiago for my meetings and a week or so of being tourists. We stayed in a reasonably upmarket hotel in Santiago, where the highlight for Ben surely was to be taken out to the kitchen to assist the pastry chef put together a splendid dessert for all of us.

Nevertheless, the real highlight for all of us was a trip some 750 km south in a hire car to a



beautiful little town called Villarrica, nestled in the foothills of the Andes and on the side of the active volcano of the same name. We had pre-booked in a small hotel on the outskirts, and when we arrived, we noted the flag, which featured a bear. We thought immediately that it was the flag of the Swiss canton of Bern, also the Swiss capital. But no, it was the flag of Berlin, the hometown of the hotel owner. He swore that his family had emigrated to Chile in the 1930s. However, one room there was adorned with a myriad of figurines of Hitler's Nuremberg rallies, which was just a bit sus! However,

he was a genial host, a great raconteur, and had the most wonderful cellar of classy Chilean wines.

The Villarrica volcano is very active, with still warm lava on the slopes. However, where the lava from much earlier eruptions had cooled, you could already see plant life springing up. Apparently, the volcano erupted again not long after we left! We had been told that there were some really beautiful lakes up in the mountains behind Villarrica, a climb of around 400m. Being moderately fit in those days, we set off undaunted – even Ben. Fortunately, the climb wasn't too steep, and the lakes certainly justified the effort

After another evening enjoying the best of the Chilean wineries, it was back to Santiago the next day. We decided to do the return in one go, to catch an evening flight to Buenos Aires. This proved a challenge, 750 km on the Chilean "highways" with only the last 100 km or so resembling a motorway. The car, by the end, looked much the worse for wear, but the hire car company didn't bat an eye, obviously expecting as much



So we made it, only to be told at check-in that my Argentinian visa had expired, and they couldn't let me on the plane. Ah!! A frantic call to my now very dear friend Miriam in the

Argentinian Air Force, who assured me that she'd fix everything. Sure enough, I was shortly invited to board the aircraft. Miriam met us on airside in Buenos Aires, escorted us through a special border channel for a ritual passport stamping, assuring all and sundry that she would look after these important UN people. The next day she took us back to the airport from the hotel and we were on the long flight to Australia (via Ushuaia).



Sometimes it pays to know people in the military, especially in Latin America.

Peter Dexter, formerly WMO

[Editor's note: Another great UN story, Peter. Thank you. And, in the line of duty, you were even forced to visit some Chilean wineries. Nice work!]

RETURN OF THE TALIBAN – A TRAGIC REPEAT OF HISTORY FOR GIRLS IN AFGHANISTAN.

Sunday 15 August 2021 was the bleakest of days for any humanitarian who has worked in Afghanistan. Following the precipitate withdrawal of US forces scarcely hours before, President Ashraf Ghani fled the capital city, Kabul, for the United Arab Emirates as Taliban forces advanced on the city. By the following day, the Taliban had taken control of Kabul having moved uncontested into key regional centres in the preceding days. Just three weeks short of the twentieth anniversary of 9/11, the Taliban were back in charge throughout Afghanistan.

In the days following their return to Kabul, moderate Taliban spokesmen issued statements claiming that the movement had learned from earlier experience and would pursue more enlightened policies. These included allowing girls to continue education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Optimists crossed their fingers, while the more sceptical doubted such a transformation was possible.

The academic year in Afghanistan runs from *Nowruz*, the festival of the Persian New Year, celebrated around 21 March, the Spring Equinox in the Northern Hemisphere. At that time in 2022 Australian TV news bulletins showed scenes of modestly-dressed Afghan teenage girls being ejected from schools on the very first morning of the new academic year. Their disappointment and dejection were all too apparent. Clearly nothing had changed for the conservative, hard-line Taliban running Afghanistan again. For them, a girl's place was in the home, not out and about, gaining an education.

The writer was interested to compare this experience with what had happened almost a quarter of a century earlier when the Taliban previously controlled most of Afghanistan.

In late 1999, the World Food Programme (WFP) Executive Board approved what was termed a *Protracted Relief & Recovery Operation* for the following two calendar years costing US\$88 million. It aimed to provide assistance primarily in the form of Afghans' staple food, wheat, to 1.5 million impoverished people who were termed "food-insecure". Cutting through the jargon, these were people who woke up in the morning literally not knowing where their next meal was coming from. Men went out as day labourers hoping to get work that day. What they earned would likely be fully spent buying around 4kg of wheat, which depending upon the size of their families, would keep them going for a day or so. After more than a decade of civil war

many women were widowed. They lived from begging, charity, and sometimes meagre earnings as in-house seamstresses.



In rural areas the ubiquitous wheat crop was often supported by ancient and amazingly intricate *khariz* irrigation systems. However, much of the cultivation was rainfed. In the 1999/2000 winter, rain and snowfall failed. In the following summer the writer recalls talking to tearful farmers who described how even their hardy almond trees were dying from drought. Drought leads to crop failure, reduced rural day-labour opportunities, escalating food prices, and consequent additional misery for many landless rural dwellers.

At country level, a rough indicator of the extent of poverty, hunger and food-insecurity is provided by the nutritional status of children aged under 5. UNICEF updates this annually in its “State of the World’s Children”. Data are provided on child stunting (below standard weight for age – an indicator of chronic malnutrition) and wasting (below standard weight for height – an indicator of episodic, short-term malnutrition e.g. where food is short due to crop failure following drought). UNICEF reports that 35% of children under in Afghanistan are stunted and a further 5% wasted. This is slightly worse than the mean for Sub-Saharan Africa where 32% of children are stunted and 6% wasted.

WFP faced a number of challenges in getting assistance to the most needy. Firstly, they had to raise resources from donor governments, usually in fierce competition with needy folk in other parts of Asia and many countries in Africa. A portfolio of highly-targeted and cost-efficient programme activities appropriate to the local environment was always the most potent weapon in securing resources. Secondly, there was the logistic challenge of moving over 100,000 tonnes of food per annum almost literally to the doorstep of the poor people whose lives depended on it. As an extreme example, WFP used to receive vegetable oil and pulses in the Baltic sea port of Ventspils in Latvia, trundle it over 4,000km through the ex-Soviet railway system to Osh in Kyrgyzstan. That was the easy bit. It was then loaded on to 5 tonne trucks for 500km crossing of the Pamir Mountains (where the highest road pass was over 3,600m in altitude) to Faizabad in then non-Taliban controlled Badakhshan Province. The final challenge was to ensure that as much as possible of this food ended up in the bellies of the most vulnerable, and not in the hands of the greedy, grasping and corrupt.

WFP's food distribution modalities at that time had a number of variants. The major modalities were:

- Emergency feeding of up to 667,000 victims of natural disasters (drought, earthquakes) and civil war;
- An urban bakery programme providing Afghan flat bread (*naan*), at 10% of its cost in commercial outlets, to 432,000 designated widows, orphans, elderly, disabled and destitute;
- A temporary food ration to 220,000 returning refugees returning from camps in neighbouring Pakistan and Iran;
- Food for 66,000 in-patients and out-patients at maternity, tuberculosis and leprosy-recovery clinics;
- Food for education as an incentive for up to 60,000 girls and 40,000 boys to attend school.



To focus on the last category, in Afghanistan there is some public appreciation of the benefits of education and of attending the often rudimentary, far-flung schools which function. However, two main factors inhibit attendance. In the more conservative areas there is a parental reluctance to send girls to school after about 10 years of age. In the poorest households and communities, children as young as 5 are regarded as an economic asset able to care for livestock or earn a meagre wage to supplement the income of families living hand-to-mouth. WFP devised a programme whereby the poorest boys and girls received a bag of wheat to take home in return for a full month's attendance at school. Reflecting the added difficulty of getting girls to attend school they received an additional can of vegetable oil, a much sought-after commodity in poor households. In this way parents found that their children who regularly attended school were able to contribute more to the household budget by going to school, than by working in the local fields and quarries, or in the case of girls performing domestic duties in the house.

In conclusion, at the turn of the last century, Afghanistan had experienced over 20 years of turmoil. This compounded the problems of under-development and poverty, such that many people had fled the country as refugees, while those that remained eked out a precarious living. WFP was able to significantly assist this dire situation, not only by helping to nourish people who would have otherwise starved to death, but also helping to lay the foundations for a better future through supporting the country's education and health systems. When asked in 2000 about his expectations for the future of then Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, the writer would furrow his brow and offer the view that things would look rather better in a couple of generations' time. Given the circumstances in again Taliban-controlled Afghanistan today, sadly he was guilty of supreme over-optimism.

Mike Sackett, formerly UN, UNDP, WFP

[Editor's note: This article was prepared by Mike at the request of Palms, an Australian NGO. It is reprinted here with his permission. Mike worked in Afghanistan from January 1999 to May 2002 in a number of roles including Country Director for the UN World Food Programme and as Resident Coordinator for the UN. He also returned as a consultant for WFP in mid-2011.]

NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT AND UN REFORMS

This paper is divided into three parts. I first describe the journey from the prioritisation of nuclear non-proliferation in the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to the 2017 UN Nuclear Ban Treaty's reprioritisation of nuclear disarmament. In the second section, I discuss the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on the global nuclear discourse. In the final section, I address the question: What does all this mean for the agenda of UN reforms?

Introduction

In January last year, for the first time, a global treaty came into force outlawing the bomb. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW or Ban Treaty) is the most significant multilateral development in nuclear arms control since the NPT's entry into force in 1970. It establishes a new normative settling point on the ethics, legality and legitimacy of the bomb.

Regardless of the NPT's historical record in underpinning strategic stability, in recent years nuclear risks have grown with heightened geopolitical tensions, additional roles for nuclear weapons, blurred boundaries between nuclear and precision conventional munitions, and between nuclear, space, cyber and AI domains, and sharpened rhetoric normalising nuclear weapons discourse.

The transformation of the Cold War-era nuclear dyad into interlinked nuclear chains, some in geographical theatres of contiguous nuclear-armed rivals in our own Indo-Pacific region, diminishes the relevance of traditional approaches to managing strategic stability among nuclear-armed states. As Norway's Sverre Lodgaard put it: 'The NPT is in miserable shape, betrayed on the disarmament dimension, stuck in the Middle East and mostly irrelevant to the Asian nuclear-armed states'.

The mounting frustrations among NPT non-NWS gradually turned into anger and a determination to seize control of the disarmament agenda. The Ban Treaty's new normative standard is not an effort to undermine the NPT, but to strengthen it: redress the weakness and complete its disarmament agenda.

Reframing the debate from disarmament as a national security issue into a pressing international humanitarian concern was critical to the successful conclusion of negotiations. The old paradigm had proven unable to break through 'the wall of the nuclear deterrence dogma'. The reframing of a traditional security debate into a humanitarian discourse had an important precedent in the Ottawa Treaty that banned landmines. Another feature of the Ottawa Treaty was the role of a state champion in the carriage of state–civil society partnership to successful conclusion at an international conference. In forging a global coalition of civil society groups and like-minded states, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) was to the Ban Treaty what the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) was to the Ottawa Treaty. This also facilitated a democratic shift in the nuclear debate, with non-NWS using the UN General Assembly, the central democratic body of the international system, as the site and forum of negotiations and adoption.

There's no legal incompatibility between the NPT and Ban Treaty. Yet the Ban Treaty impacts non-NWS countries like Australia that have relied on the nuclear deterrence-based security architecture of US nuclear weapons. The NPT had camouflaged the underlying inconsistency in professing support for nuclear disarmament – just not yet, like St Augustine's plea on chastity – while hosting nuclear weapons and infrastructure, relying on nuclear deterrence for national security and sheltering under the US nuclear umbrella. While the NPT had enabled the umbrella states to fudge the tensions between membership of a nuclear alliance and commitment to nuclear disarmament, the Ban Treaty has compelled them to confront the hypocrisy head on.

This might well explain the ferocity of their opposition: it shows the mirror of their disingenuousness to their own peoples and they do not like it. The Ban Treaty forces the issue: do the nuclear-dependent states intend to continue to shelter under the nuclear umbrella or start behaving like non-NWS? Thus, the treaty has the potential to embarrass umbrella states by reopening fundamental domestic debates on the role of nuclear weapons and deterrence strategies.

At the same time, says former Canadian disarmament ambassador Paul Meyer: 'To fold the metaphorical "nuclear umbrella" it will be necessary to convince those sheltering under it that it is safe to come out and to recognise that the umbrella may be more of a danger than a protection' – a nuclear lightning rod more than a repellent.

The Ban Treaty has converted a long-standing *political aspiration*, into a *legal framework*. The legal obligations of the treaty cannot apply to non-signatories. The possession of nuclear weapons by nine countries did not suddenly become illegal with the treaty's entry into force in January 2021. Equally, however, the claim that a UN-negotiated treaty, following a UN-authorized process and conference, has *no* implications for the legality and legitimacy of nuclear-weapon possession and practices is also disingenuous and implausible. For an

Australian of Indian origin, the schadenfreude of Australia's discomfort considering the effort to harness UN legitimacy to pressure India on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1996 is delicious.

Ukraine

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has profoundly shaped the global discourse on nuclear weapons over the utility and limits of nuclear weapons as a deterrent and as tools of coercive diplomacy, the wisdom of having given them up, the incentives to either acquire them or shelter under others' nuclear umbrella and, above all, the cataclysmic risks of an all-out nuclear war that no one wants, but everyone dreads.

At the Ban Treaty's inaugural meeting of States Parties in Vienna in June, participants expressed alarm and dismay at the 'threats to use nuclear weapons and increasingly strident nuclear rhetoric', condemned unequivocally 'any and all nuclear threats, whether they be explicit or implicit and irrespective of the circumstances', and also their use, not to preserve peace and security, but 'as instruments of policy, linked to coercion, intimidation and heightening of tensions'.

The first, most important lesson is that the existence of 11,405 nuclear weapons in Russian (5,977) and US (5,428) arsenals (90 per cent of world totals), far from helping to stabilise the crisis and calm the tensions, has added to the dangers and threats of the Ukraine war. That is, the world would have been infinitely less dangerous had the bomb become history already.

A popular pastime, going back to the Euromaidan revolution in 2014 and the annexation of Crimea, is to claim that Russia would not have dared to attack and dismember Ukraine had the latter not given up its nuclear arsenal after the Soviet Union imploded. The claim doesn't withstand serious scrutiny. Like US nuclear sharing arrangements with some NATO allies (and in the past also South Korea), the bombs were not owned by the host, but by Russia which retained exclusive operational control and launch authority. Not one of the P5, who are also the only five recognised nuclear weapon states under the NPT, would have tolerated the emergence of another nuclear power with a stockpile of 1,900 strategic and 2,500 tactical nuclear weapons: several times more than Britain, China and France combined. Ukraine would have struggled to survive as an international pariah state and the whole history of the region would have been so different that the deterrent claim for the events of 2014 and 2022 are simply not a credible counterfactual.

Eight months into the war, what I find most striking with respect to nuclear weapons is their near complete lack of utility. The presence of nearly 6,000 bombs in Russia's arsenal as a back-up for the biggest ground war in Europe since 1945, and none in Ukraine's, failed to intimidate Ukraine into surrendering. Kyiv has simply got on with the job of defending its territory confident that, having failed as a tool of coercive diplomacy, nuclear weapons are not militarily useable. Their global political costs would exceed any battlefield gains.

Repeated reminders of nuclear weapons signal Russian weakness and desperation more than strength and self-confidence and, probably, more of an effort to intimidate NATO than a threat

to incinerate Ukraine. Ukraine's heroic resistance, led by the larger-than-life persona of President Volodymyr Zelensky, highlights both the power of the weak when fighting for the homeland, and the fragility of the strong when engaged in imperial adventures.

Having already suffered severe damage from the illegal invasion, Russia's reputation would tank completely were it to use the bomb. Nor could Russia protect its own troops, the Russian-speaking enclaves of Ukraine and even parts of Russia proper from the radioactive fallout. Thus the bomb exercises a self-deterrent function.

It's true that President Vladimir Putin has pointedly and repeatedly reminded NATO of his formidable nuclear arsenal, publicly placed them on 'special alert' and warned of 'unpredictable consequences' if outsiders dared to intervene. None of this has stopped NATO from providing increasingly lethal and highly effective arms to Ukraine that have taken a deadly toll on Russia's military.

Of course, NATO has refrained from introducing its own ground troops or jets over Ukraine. Yet it's debateable how much of this caution rests in consciousness of Russia's nuclear capability and how much arises from internalised memories of the failure of NATO military operations in Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

Who would want to 'own' the chaos of the vast Russian landmass even if battlefield military victory was achieved? The catastrophic miscalculations of Napoleon and Hitler too, surely, play some role in injecting caution into rushing into a direct military fight with Russia, nukes or no nukes. Russia's stakes and vital interests in Ukraine are greater. NATO's stakes in Ukraine are simply not high enough to risk a major ground war with Russia which would then be fighting grimly for its very existence.

Yet, the Ukraine crisis is likely to damage the already enfeebled efforts to promote nuclear arms control and disarmament. Russia's actions will not reassure the 184 non-nuclear weapon states on their security concerns. On the contrary, it might confirm North Korea in the strategic foresight of having gone down the nuclear path and encourage Iran to do the same.

It has already reopened debates in some Western allies in the Pacific as well as Europe about nuclear-sharing arrangements as an insurance policy, in the belief that the presence of US bombs on their territory, even if they remain in American hands and control, will create new facts on the ground and serve as tripwires against aggression.

The fact that Finland and Sweden – the latter a major champion of nuclear disarmament and the former of a regional nuclear-weapon-free zone in the past – are the latest to join NATO is yet more evidence that history does irony. For NATO's unbroken eastwards expansion is a major *explanation* – albeit no justification – for Russia's actions in Ukraine. NATO's northwards expansion into the Baltic in turn becomes a major *consequence* of Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

Several Russian generals have been killed with the help of intelligence provided by the US. Washington also supplied information that helped Ukrainian forces to locate, strike and sink the *Moskva*, the flagship of Russia's Black Sea fleet. Britain likely helped Ukraine plan and

train for blowing up the Russia-Crimea bridge. Based on motive, means and opportunity of classic whodunnits, the US remains a leading contender for responsibility for the Nord Stream pipeline explosions.

Despite these provocations, Russia has not hit supply depots and lines beyond Ukraine's borders. Lewis and Stein argue that 'American nuclear weapons, as well as those of France and the United Kingdom, have deterred Russia from striking lethal arsenals piling up across the border in Poland for delivery into Ukraine'. But President Putin has said absolutely nothing to indicate any insane desire to widen the geographical theatre of the conflict to a NATO country directly. The existence of nuclear weapons is simply irrelevant to his calculation. He has enough problems trying to subdue and digest the Donbass region of Ukraine and to hold on to Crimea.

Implications for UN Reforms

The UN is the biggest incubator of global norms to govern the world and the vital core of the rules-based global multilateral order. The 15-member Security Council is the world's only body with the authority to make war and peace decisions that are legally binding and enforceable on all countries. The P5 can protect their interests with the veto. All this makes it the geopolitical cockpit of the global security order.

But the normative centre of gravity is the 193-member General Assembly, for the UN's unique legitimacy flows from its universal membership and one-state-one-vote formal equality in its decisions. With the adoption of the Ban Treaty in 2017, for the first time in UN history, the General Assembly asserted its normative primacy over the united opposition of the P5 geopolitical heavyweights. The NPT embedded the geopolitical preferences of the two superpowers in 1968. The Ban Treaty reflects the normative vision of the global South, backed by like-minded states from the North. Rebalancing the SC-GA relationship is critical for restoring the legitimacy, and therefore the effectiveness, of the UN.

The **pandemic** has demonstrated inadequacies in the existing architecture of international health governance centred on the WHO. The crisis reaffirms the indispensable role of the WHO in addressing global health emergencies but also revealed critical flaws in its operations. It's a sharp reminder of the limits of unilateralism in an age of shared threats and fragility but unequal resilience.

The health, economic and environmental crises underscore the inter-connectedness of peoples' security. These threats will persist in the wealthy industrialised countries so long as they are still active in the developing countries. Thus they also highlight the policy utility of reconceptualising security threats within the analytical framework of human security that has been promoted by the UN system since 1994.

The concurrent crises together demonstrate the need, without neglecting the harsh reality of hard security, to broaden our conception of security, the importance of North-South partnership in addressing security vulnerabilities, the indispensable role of the UN system in

coordinating and leading global efforts, but also the flaws that result in a suboptimal performance and hence the need for continual reforms.

They underscore the need to reboot the ethic of global cooperation. The UN system is a trusted agent for the necessary tasks because of its universality and the resulting legitimacy; its expertise accumulated over decades of experience; its scientific objectivity alongside its political neutrality; its presence in the field in so many countries around the world that gives it a truly global footprint; and its unmatched convening authority and mobilising capacity. Conversely, the damage to any one of these attributes spills over into the others.

In the broad and extensive agenda of UN reforms, the most critical and pressing is that of the Security Council. Tackling incremental reforms that are doable, while shelving the one transformational reform most necessary, has become a political tactic of deflection. The ossified Security Council remains trapped in the power equations of 1945 and is therefore out of sync even with its core defining logic. Russia is not the only P5 member to have contributed to the growth of the widespread perception that powerful countries can break the rules of the Charter regime with impunity. Just conduct a simple thought experiment. Which country can you think of that could still function efficiently and effectively with its governmental structure essentially unchanged since 1945? Yet the world is vastly more complicated than any single country.

During the UN's 77-year history, African and Asian states have increased from one-fifth to over half the total UN membership. The Western group has shrunk from one-fourth to one-sixth. Yet the global North retains its dominance in the Security Council, with 40 percent of its total and 60 percent of the permanent membership. Non-Western countries make up 85 percent of the world's population but only 53 percent of the total and 20 percent of the permanent membership of the Security Council. Because of Security Council's crucial role in selecting the Secretary-General, the North's dominance infects the choice of senior personnel throughout the UN system, including heads of departments, funds, agencies, and SRSGs and special envoys.

This erodes the representative legitimacy of the Security Council as the UN's most critical organ and weakens its ability to make decisions guided by a full understanding of the development, security, human rights, and environmental dynamics in areas where peace is most threatened. It diminishes the UN's capacity for effective implementation of all four normative mandates (peace and security, human rights, development, and environment). Absence from the UN's top table ensures that the global South is limited to being mostly on the UN's menu. This is why structural reform of the Security Council's composition, particularly permanent membership, is critical. But because it is highly improbable in the foreseeable future, the most likely trajectory is for the UN's legitimacy, effectiveness, and authority to continue to erode, and the organisation, in turn, to become increasingly marginalised and irrelevant.

The Flickering Flame of UN Optimism

UN officials along with UNA members the world over are, at heart, optimists. We hold human beings to be fundamentally decent and institutional change for the better to be necessary but also possible. The underlying decency means intergroup relations need not end in destructive conflict. There's no question but that the flame of UN optimism is flickering, but in both senses. Yes, it is under assault on multiple fronts but no, it has not yet been extinguished but continues to burn determinedly. The Ban Treaty represents that flickering flame of hope and optimism. Hence I would prefer to end with that tiny light of hope shimmering across the bleak global landscape we see today.

The Ukraine crisis currently and a China-US clash prospectively add to global fears of a nuclear Armageddon, if not by design then inadvertently by accident (system error) or miscalculation (human error). The Ban Treaty equips us with the normative framework within which the agenda of nuclear risk reduction measures, on the long pathway to eliminating nuclear threats by abolishing the weapons, remains critically important.

Some steps that we can actively promote to/through our government include:

- Reduce reliance on nuclear weapons by possessor and umbrella states;
- Take concrete steps towards fulfilling the NPT article 6 obligation to nuclear disarmament;
- Acknowledge the normative step forward of the Ban Treaty;
- Holdout US allies should engage with instead of distancing from the Ban Treaty. Germany's statement to the inaugural June conference was especially constructive in urging TPNW supporters and critics to work together in the shared goal of achieving a world free of nuclear weapons;
- Resume and revitalise nuclear arms control negotiations; and
- Universalise no first use of nuclear weapons, including by China and the US in the context of Taiwan.

Ramesh Thakur, formerly UN, NY

[Editor's note: On the 30th October, Ramesh delivered this address, the Doug Everingham Peace Lecture, to the Queensland branch of the UN Association (Australia). Given the topicality and current relevance of the subject, we have reprinted his presentation in full. The text has also been published by the Toda Peace Institute at: Toda Policy Brief No. 139 (November 2022). Thank you, Ramesh, for sharing your knowledge. Readers might also be interested in a complementary article later in this Newsletter regarding observations of a site visit made by the Editor to a once top-secret Cold War nuclear testing site.]

A FEW THOUGHTS FROM THE EDITOR

As readers will note from Jennifer's *President's Report*, there has been a changing of the



guard in Victoria with AAFICS Coordinator, Mike Patto, stepping aside after many years of sterling service. In his place, Peter and Ivy Steele, well-known to *AAFICS Newsletter* readers through regular articles (including one in this edition), have come forward to take up the role. Greetings to you both. Sincere thanks to Mike for all his efforts, particularly for supporting me when I took up the job of *Newsletter* editor. Mike's wise counsel and practical advice was hugely welcomed. As this is our final *Newsletter* for 2022, may I also thank all

contributors who have kindly sent articles, links, cartoons and other material for publication during the year. This edition is, arguably, one of our biggest ever, being 53 pages. Please continue to support us in the New Year. Our next edition is due in July/August 2023. In the meantime, Christmas greetings and all good wishes for a happy, peaceful and productive New Year.

DEATH OF DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD: INVESTIGATION COMPLETED

The 2022 report of the UN's '*Investigation into the conditions and circumstances resulting in the tragic death of Dag Hammarskjöld and of the members of the party accompanying him*' has now been published.

It was submitted to UN Secretary General António Guterres by Mohamed Chande Othman, the Eminent Person leading the investigation.



In his letter of transmittal to the President of the UN General Assembly, Secretary General Guterres concludes as follows:

"...It remains our shared responsibility to pursue, with renewed urgency, the full truth of what happened on that fateful night in 1961. We owe this to Dag Hammarskjöld, to the members of the party accompanying him and to their respective families. We owe this also to the United Nations.

I consider this to be our solemn duty and I will do everything I can to support this endeavour. I call on the General Assembly to remain seized of the matter and to endorse the report of the Eminent Person and his recommendations."



The report and the letter of transmittal may be found here: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/447/98/pdf/N2244798.pdf?OpenElement>.

Other languages are available by searching for document symbol A/76/892 at <https://documents.un.org/>.

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[Editor's note: Readers will recall that the second UN Secretary-General was killed, along with his entire entourage, when his aircraft crashed in a forest near Ndola in what was then Northern Rhodesia, now Zambia. He was on a mission to seek to prevent civil war in the newly independent Congo. Thank you to Margaret O'Callaghan, ACT for this interesting item.]

UNJSPF COMMENTARY

Members' Forum

Santé et société

Votre pension / Your pension

La Caisse commune des pensions du personnel des Nations Unies (CCPPNU) : Une mise à jour

Le 20 mai 2022, Rosemarie McClean, Directrice de l'administration des pensions de la CCPPNU, a rencontré, à Paris, des membres du Comité exécutif de l'AAFU (et, cette année en a présidé l'Assemblée générale).

Elle leur a présenté une mise à jour de l'administration des pensions et a discuté des difficultés rencontrées par les membres de la CCPPNU.

Elle a mis en lumière quelques chiffres clés des états financiers de 2021 non encore apurés :

► La Caisse compte actuellement 137 261 participants (2 % de plus qu'en 2020) ; la population qu'elle sert continue à croître d'année en année depuis 2018, davantage de retraités vivant plus longtemps.

► Elle verse 82 312 bénéficiaires (2,4 % de plus qu'en 2020) pour un montant de 2,97 milliards de dollars US (contre 2,79 milliards en 2020).

► Elle reçoit 2,97 milliards de dollars US de contributions des employeurs et des participants (contre 2,85 milliards en 2020).

Le fonds se porte bien. La valeur de ses avoirs a atteint 91,45 milliards de dollars US au 31 décembre 2021. Néanmoins, en raison de la volatilité des marchés financiers il est possible qu'elle soit récemment revenue aux chiffres du 31 décembre, soit 81,5 milliards de dollars US.

Le traitement des pensions dans les 15 jours ouvrables a atteint, au 30 avril 2022, le remarquable ratio de 92,5 % (et même 95 % pour le Bureau de New York) pour un objectif de 75 %.

En ce qui concerne le paiement des pensions, Mme McClean a mis l'accent sur le fait que les versements mensuels ont continué à être faits en temps et en heure, y compris durant la pandémie de Covid-19, grâce au dévouement du personnel de la Caisse.

Elle a précisé que les problèmes de paiement en francs CFA au Mali et dans/par les banques russes sont presque entièrement résolus : des voies alternatives ont été trouvées en partenariat avec la Trésorerie des Nations Unies. Des solutions sont également à l'étude avec ce département pour couvrir les frais bancaires dans certains pays latino-américains (par ex. le Chili et le Pérou).

Les ajustements pour coût de la vie ont pu être notifiés par emails à 38 000 souscripteurs et bénéficiaires



The United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund (UNJSPF): An Update

Rosemarie McClean, Chief Executive of Pension Administration of the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund, met in Paris on 20 May 2022 members of the Executive Committee of AFUS (& this year's president of its General Assembly).

She took this opportunity to present them with an update on pension administration and exchange with them on difficulties encountered by UNJSPF members.

She highlighted a few key figures of the unaudited financial statements for 2021:

► The Fund has currently 137,261 participants (+2% from 2020); the population it serves continues to grow annually since 2018, with more retirees getting older.

► It serves 82,312 benefits in payment (+2.4% from 2020) amounting to US\$ 2.97 billion (against US\$ 2.79 billion in 2020).

► It receives US\$ 2.97 billion of contributions from employers and participants (against US\$ 2.85 billion in 2020).

The Fund is in solid shape. The value of its assets reached US\$ 91.45 billion as at 31 December 2021. However, due to the volatility of the financial markets it may have recently receded to the 31 December figure of US\$ 81.5 billion.

Pension processing within 15 working days has reached the remarkable ratio of 92.5% (and even 95% for the New York Office) against the 75% benchmark target as of 30 April 2022.

As for Pension payments, Ms McClean emphasized that monthly payroll payments have continued to be issued on time, including during the Covid-19 pandemic, thanks to the unswerving commitment of the Fund's staff.

She informed that issues with payments to Mali in CFA Francs and into/through Russian banks are mostly resolved, and alternative ways have been found through partnering with the UN Treasury. Solutions are also being worked out with this department to cover the banking fees charged in some Latin American countries (i.e. Chile and Peru).

Notification of cost-of-living adjustment through emails went to the Member Self-Service (MSS) 38,000 subscribers and beneficiaries; another 28,000 were mailed to beneficiaries for whom the Fund has no email

grâce au Self-service des membres (MSS) ; 28 000 autres notifications ont été envoyées par la poste aux bénéficiaires. Elle a insisté sur la nécessité d'augmenter la digitalisation pour les communications urgentes ou en cas de problèmes avec les banques, et a invité les associations de retraités à favoriser les enregistrements à MSS et les contacts par email, d'où l'importance d'adresses email exactes et de signatures vérifiées. Une augmentation du taux d'inflation en comparaison de l'Indice des prix à la consommation (IPC) a également été mentionnée.

Le Centre de service des clients doit faire face à une augmentation de la charge de travail (emails et appels) par rapport aux années précédentes. Néanmoins, cette situation est susceptible de s'améliorer sous peu, les Nations Unies ayant levé les restrictions en relation avec la Covid-19, à New York et Genève, et le personnel travaillant au bureau au moins deux jours par semaine. Les réunions en personne avec les clients devraient reprendre en juin 2022 à New York et Genève, sur rendez-vous et avec les mesures de précaution anti-Covid. À Genève, le personnel est en nombre adéquat et les deux bureaux ont été renforcés grâce à la régularisation de certains postes obtenue du Comité consultatif pour les questions administratives et budgétaires (CCQAB) et de la 5^e Commission de l'Assemblée générale de l'ONU. Davantage de personnel et de ressources seront éventuellement requis dans le prochain budget biennal (après 2023) afin de développer l'expertise légale, l'analyse des données et la gestion des situations de crise. Deux unités plus petites fonctionnent également à Bangkok et Nairobi.

La stratégie future de l'administration de la Caisse visera en priorité à simplifier l'expérience du client : 11 modules de *e-learning* ont été complétés et seront lancés dans les prochains jours. Plus de 9000 certificats digitaux d'ayant-droit (DCE) ont déjà été soumis au 31 avril 2022 – plus que dans toute l'année 2021. Les deux websites courants (gestion et investissements) seront également fondus en un seul site CCPU à partir de septembre 2022 en français et en anglais.

Mme McClean a confirmé que les retraités et les bénéficiaires peuvent remplir les formalités de l'exercice annuel du Certificat d'ayant-droit en soumettant la version papier du formulaire soit par la poste soit électroniquement en le chargeant dans le portail MSS, ou encore en l'inscrivant au "DCE App" et en le soumettant digitalement. Actuellement, la moitié des bénéficiaires continue à envoyer le formulaire papier par la poste, l'autre moitié avec l'application biométrique. Elle a assuré que les deux options, digitale et papier, sont maintenues. Ces formulaires seront reçus par courrier en mai-juin et devront être renvoyés dès que possible. L'exercice 2022 de DCE doit être terminé au

contact. She insisted on the need for further digitalization for urgent communications or when issues with bank payments arise, and invited retiree associations to help in increasing MSS registration and encouraging email contacts. The importance of providing accurate e-mail addresses and verified signatures of the beneficiaries was emphasized. An increase of the inflation rate in comparison to the consumer price (CPI) index was also mentioned.

The Client Services Centre is experiencing higher workloads (email and calls) than in previous years. However, this situation is likely to relax soon as the UN has lifted Covid-related restrictions in both New York and Geneva, and staff is working at least two days per week in the office. In-person meetings with clients are planned to reopen in June 2022 in New York and Geneva, by appointment and with Covid-related safety measures. The Geneva office has an adequate number of staff now and both offices have been reinforced with the regularization of some posts obtained from the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) & 5th Committee of UN General Assembly. More staff and resources will eventually be required in the next biennial budget (after 2023) to develop legal expertise, data analysis and management of crisis situations. Two smaller units are also operating from Bangkok and Nairobi.

The future strategy of the Fund administration will aim as a priority at simplifying client experience: 11 e-learning modules have been completed and will be launched in the coming days. Over 9,000 Digital Certificate of Entitlement (DCE) had already been submitted as of 31 April 2022 – more than in all of 2021. The current two websites (respectively for management and investments) will also merge into a single UNJSPF website as of next September and will be available in both English and French.

Mrs McClean confirmed that retirees and beneficiaries can fulfil the requirements of the annual CE exercise by submitting the paper-based version of the CE form either by mail or electronically by uploading it to the MSS portal, or by enrolling in the DCE App and submitting the CE digitally. Currently half of the beneficiaries are still sending the paper form by mail or uploading it to the MSS portal, while the other half is comfortable using the biometric App. She guaranteed that these processes would remain unchanged and the digital and paper form options maintained. These forms will be received by mail in May-June, and should be returned as soon as possible. The 2022 CE exercise has to be completed by 31 December 2022, to avoid any subsequent suspension of benefit payments.

Both systems have been greatly improved, made easy to use, and distinguished with a nomination for the

31 décembre 2022 afin d'éviter toute suspension subéquente du paiement des prestations.

Les deux systèmes ont été considérablement améliorés, rendus faciles à utiliser et distingués par l'Innovation Award du Secrétaire général des Nations Unies. Ils sont également très sûrs et les contrôles de sécurité se poursuivent. Elle a assuré que le mécanisme de reconnaissance faciale biométrique est sûr, solide et entièrement protégé par un pare-feu vérifié.

Mme McClean invite les bénéficiaires qui rencontreraient des difficultés à contacter le Service Center, à consulter le site de la Caisse qui a été redessiné et modernisé. Sa nouvelle version devrait en être complétée (en français et en anglais) au cours du troisième trimestre de 2022.

Le COMEX a demandé si la CCPPNU pourrait aider à assurer la participation des représentants de l'AAFU au Comité local des pensions et notifier aux retraités en France non membres de l'AAFU le détail de ses contacts (comme c'était le cas dans le passé pour plusieurs associations d'anciens fonctionnaires internationaux).

Parmi les remarques présentées par l'AAFU, on notera:

► Les insuffisances administratives de la Caisse, dont l'adresse mail du Bureau de Genève, erronée ;

► La rumeur concernant la privatisation de la gestion du portefeuille des placements à revenu à taux fixes, voire l'externalisation des avoirs de la Caisse des pensions (ce qu'a contesté Mme McClean) ;

► La sécurité des données personnelles et le renforcement des mesures contre la cybercriminalité, notamment pour les transactions financières (à noter, dans ce cadre, le recrutement d'un responsable Éthique et Confidentialité, M. Peter Liria) ;

► La récupération des 0,50 % déduits du premier ajustement de pension qui aurait dû être déjà réalisée, conformément à la Résolution qui l'avait mise en place;

► Les moyens de communication à définir par la Caisse pour présenter l'AAFU aux retraités en France.

(Traduction de l'original anglais)

innovation Award of the UN Secretary-General. They are also very safe and security checks are on-going. She reassured that the newly introduced biometric facial recognition device is safe and secure, fully protected by a tested firewall.

Ms McClean invites beneficiaries who experience any difficulty to reach out to the Service Center and consult the Fund's website that contains a wealth of information. It has been redesigned and modernized, and its new version is scheduled for completion (in the English and French languages) on the 3rd quarter of 2022.

COMEX members enquired whether UNJSPF could help ensure the participation of AFUS' representative(s) in the local SPC, and also to notify to UNESCO retirees in France who are non-members of AFUS its contact details (as was apparently done in the past with several associations of former international civil servants).

Among the remarks made by AFUS, one should note the following:

► The administrative shortcomings of the Fund, including the incorrect e-mail address of the Geneva Office;

► A rumour concerning the privatization of the fixed rate investment portfolio management, i.e. the outsourcing of the assets of the Pension Fund (which is being contested by Ms. McClean);

► The security of personal data and reinforcement of measures against cyber-criminality, particularly concerning financial transactions (one should mention in this connection, the recruitment of Mr Peter Liria); who will be responsible for Ethics and Confidentiality;

► The recuperation of 0.50% which is still deducted from the first adjustment to pensions and which should already have been applied, in conformity with the Resolution adopted to this effect;

► The communication methods which will be defined by the Fund for presentation to retirees in France.

FAFICS PRESIDENT'S REPORT



FEDERATION OF ASSOCIATIONS OF FORMER INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVANTS
FÉDÉRATION DES ASSOCIATIONS DES ANCIENS FONCTIONNAIRES INTERNATIONAUX
FEDERACION DE ASOCIACIONES DE EX-FUNCIONARIOS INTERNACIONALES
Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland Secretary@fafics.org www.fafics.org

Office of the President
Room C0249B, PO Box 100, Vienna International Centre, Vienna Austria
President@fafics.org

November 2022

[*Pour la version française (traduite par DeepL), voir ci-dessous. Para la versión en español (traducida por DeepL), véase más abajo.*]

Greetings from me, and of course from the FAFICS Bureau. This third letter is another in a series I hope to continue, in order to keep the information channels open between us. As always, I welcome feedback and suggestions for future messages. Please note that I am using the email address president@fafics.org for all my communications to you as President. Please feel free to distribute this note to your members if you wish.

Information and Congratulations: The end of 2022 is rapidly approaching, and I know that this means annual assemblies many of your associations. I recently had the honour of addressing the AFUNPI annual meeting in New Delhi (via a recorded message), and to attend (via Zoom) the FFOA annual meeting. Feel free to contact me if you feel that a few words from the FAFICS President might add to your meeting. Which reminds me that our member association AFICS-Kenya will be celebrating their 15th anniversary at an assembly in March, and I know that they would welcome words of support and congratulations from the FAFICS membership. If so, then please respond soon, so that they can publish them in a December newsletter to their members. Please send messages to afics-kenya@un.org, and John O. Kakonge john.o.kakonge@gmail.com, the president of AFICS-Kenya.

I also recorded a general message about FAFICS that is now available on our web site (<http://www.fafics.org/FAFICS%20General%20Intro%202022.mp4>). It may be useful when you host pre-retirement seminars as well.

52nd FAFICS Council Report: I am rather disappointed that the report of the 52nd FAFICS Council has not yet been published. As I wrote in my August message, the English version was all but finished, and the final version was agreed mid-October. I asked for it to be distributed and put on our web site, but it seems to be waiting for completion of the French and Spanish translations. I believe we need to speed up this process – even if it means spending a bit of money.

Council Decision: G. Qualia appointed vice-chair of SC-ASHIL: By the time you read this note, the deadline will have passed for responding to my proposal that Giovanni Qualia be appointed by the Council as vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Health Insurance and Long-term Care. Many positive comments have been received and no negative ones, so I thank you for agreeing to this process and for appointing Giovanni. Together with Georges Kutukdjian, he will ensure that the necessary work in these areas continues throughout the year. His first term will end at the Council meeting in the summer of 2024. Let me take the opportunity of this message to thank Katia Chestopalov for her great contributions during several years as a Vice-chair of the Standing Committee.

Feedback and 53rd Council: Many thanks to all of you who responded to our requests for updating your contact information and for providing feedback on the Council session last July. Both of these will make our planning more accurate for the next summer Council meeting, that it tentatively being planned to be held in London at the International Maritime Organization during the week of 17 July 2023. I have been in contact with BAFUNCS for the very early stages of thinking about next summer. ARICSA has agreed to provide its planning experience <smile>.

Pension Fund: I have attended (virtually) two useful briefings by Rosemarie McClean and Pedro Guazo. The various Pension Board committees are meeting, with the newly elected FAFICS representatives taking up their roles. For example, the SPEC (Success Planning and Evaluation Committee) on which Theresa Panuccio and I now sit, is starting the task of advertising and selecting a new Ethics Officer for the Pension Board. There are almost weekly meetings with Pension Fund officials (email, virtual, physical) by FAFICS Bureau members, which I support.



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Double Pension Payments in August 2015: The Pension Fund now has about 4,000 beneficiaries 90 years old or older. Some of these may have retired before 1984, when pensions were paid "in advance", i.e. at the beginning of the month. In August of 2015 all the remaining "in advance" recipients were changed to the standard "in arrears", i.e. the end of the month, payments. In August 2015 they received two payments, with the promise that the double payment will be recovered upon the death of the beneficiary. Most such recipients have forgotten about it, and their survivors never knew about it. In your support of surviving family members who are wondering why there is no last month's payment, this may be the reason. I mention it so that your support staff can be informed.

Communications Working Group: I have attended the last couple of meetings of this WG. As requested by the Council, a communications strategy is being developed. A new web site is being designed. I am hopeful that we can perhaps have a strategy and web site in time for a possible "single topic virtual" Council meeting in early February.

Work Plan: The items mentioned above are part of a complete Work Plan and Financial Resources that the Bureau has developed and which we are working through. There are about 30 tasks, some of which are not necessary every year (for example, I had no need to address the 5th Committee this year). Several tasks include supporting existing associations and aiding the creation of new associations. We look at these tasks in Bureau meetings and will prepare a work report for the Council next summer.

Expertise Pool: FAFICS has important tasks in front of it. I as President and the Bureau team will work to ensure that these tasks are delivered with integrity, transparency, and collegiality and that due process is respected. We will continue to look for talent from across the whole Federation. I would appreciate your support in looking for talent among your members and supporting their inclusion in the FAFICS Expertise Pool.

Donations: At this time of year, I am always reminded that one of our mandates is to support UN goals and activities. This support can mean donating funds to support people in emergencies around the world – the wars, the hunger, the refugees, the survivors of natural catastrophes. The UNHCR has almost twenty emergencies listed where you or your association can donate directly (<https://www.unhcr.org/emergencies.html>).

I remain highly impressed by all of you who serve in your local Associations. Important tasks, done for others. Stay in touch – I will do my best to stay in touch as well. If you are celebrating at this time of year, I wish you joy, hope, and friendship for your festivals.

Jerry Barton, FAFICS President

THE LAST WORD

GROUND ZERO – WALKING AN ATOMIC WASTELAND

Whether disquieting rhetoric or possible future reality, the Russian President's ominous words on the potential use of nuclear weapons in the Ukrainian conflict have brought fear to the entire world. The Russian stockpile of nuclear weaponry is huge and the use of even one device would, surely, trigger a global confrontation and consequences too terrifying to imagine.

The current nuclear discussion reminded me of a visit I made to the former Soviet nuclear testing site, known as The Polygon, in Semipalatinsk in remote northern Kazakhstan. The area had been designated during the Stalin era in 1949 as an above-ground atomic bomb facility when the region was part of the USSR as the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic. Some 460+ nuclear devices were detonated at the site (either atmospheric or in tunnels) until testing concluded in 1989. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the site closed in 1991 at the direction of the Government of the newly independent nation of Kazakhstan. All nuclear materials, and even the Soviet ICBMs located in silos on Kazakhstan soil, were repatriated to Russia.



The nuclear testing site, The Polygon, marked in red. (Wikipedia)

In the early 1990s when I was based in Almaty, Kazakhstan as UNESCO's Representative in Central Asia, the Government organised a visit to the testing site to give credence to its desire to politically move away from a Cold War mentality and into more openness. The closure of the site was also testament to the success of the efforts of the *Nevada Semipalatinsk Movement*, one of the few NGOs to actually be allowed to exist in the final days of the old Soviet Union. The NGO brought together citizens living near both the US and USSR testing sites to protest the scourge of nuclear weapons.

We flew by Presidential jet from Almaty to Semey, the largest city adjacent to the testing site and visited a museum and medical centre dedicated to the horrors of nuclear contamination and its effects on human beings. Given the secrecy of Soviet times, local people living

downwind of The Polygon detonation site were never informed to seek shelter when atmospheric tests took place. Nomadic herders on the expansive grassy steppe often saw the mushroom cloud after a bomb was detonated, but had no idea that the radiation mist approaching them would cause cancers and genetic mutations. The medical museum at Semey contained photographs of the damage caused to the health of survivors and equally horrific actual examples of disfigured fetuses and still-born babies.



Kazakhstan citizens supporting the Nevada-Semey anti-nuclear movement

A Mil Mi-8 helicopter took us from Semey to the test site, a very remote place in one of the most distant parts of the great Central Asian steppe. The borders with China and Mongolia are close by. After crossing an endless, uninhabited plain of grass and undulating low hills, much of it now irreparably radiated by fallout and unusable for farming or habitation for countless generations to come, our helicopter touched down in The Polygon itself. The only small building in sight proved to be the opening to an underground tunnel leading to the control centre from where the bombs were detonated. A technician carrying a rudimentary Geiger counter followed us as we entered the tunnel and walked along corridors to the control room, the only sound being the disconcerting non-stop clicking noise of the equipment as it checked us for any signs of unusually high radiation.

Nuclear scientists awaited us in the control centre, a place far from the high-tech, glitzy Hollywood version of the havens of evil James Bond villains. It was strictly Soviet in style with chunky and solid equipment. Despite the mundane surroundings and the apparent unsophistication of the technology, this was from where hundreds of massive nuclear explosions had been detonated. It was completely surreal to be in such a place and some of the white-coated scientists were equally bemused to have foreigners now visiting what was, until just a year or two previously, one of the most secret places on the planet. The scientists answered our questions, but not before looking for approval from the Government officials accompanying us on our visit.

A final helicopter ride took us over the main detonation site on the steppe where huge holes, many water-filled, were evidence of the enormous impact power of nuclear weapons. At

Ground Zero, a concrete structure stood forlornly, its role as a marker now gone. Elsewhere, a row of buildings used to observe the effects of blast damage from a nuclear weapon was beginning to fall into greater disrepair.

During Soviet times, scientists from Moscow, Novosibirsk and other key scientific hubs of the USSR were brought to the nuclear testing area to undertake the design, development, construction and testing of atomic weaponry. To enable them to enjoy a relatively pleasant life (although without families) despite being part of the most secret Soviet military operation, a town was built to house those whose employment needed them to live locally for long periods. This was named after an early Soviet physicist and atomic scientist, Igor Kurchatov. Given its importance, the town was stocked with the best-quality merchandise and leisure amenities.

Kurchatov was a 'closed city', meaning it was so top-secret that it was not even marked on maps of the Soviet Union. To get there for our overnight stay, we travelled on a long road in an old Soviet-made car, a Volga, and passed through a high, barbed-wire fence into the township. A checkpoint was still being manned by armed Interior Ministry guards at the main gate, just as they and the KGB had controlled entry (and exits) during Soviet days. They no longer had a security role in this remote part of Kazakhstan, but continued to operate as if the world had not changed.

A standard, small Soviet town, Kurchatov was built close to the delightful Irtysh River. It has a main administrative building, Palace of Culture (opera/ballet theatre), apartment blocks, a dormitory hostel/dining room for visitors, the obligatory Lenin statue and another of Igor Kurchatov. By the time I visited, this once-bustling, top-secret scientific/military base was beginning to die as it now had little reason to exist. Eventually, it will probably just fade away.



Kurchatov City administration building and statue of Kurchatov (RIA/Novosti)

Let us also not forget that this general area of Kazakhstan was a huge, brutal gulag (*Karlag*) in Soviet times, one of the best-known prisoners being Alexander Solzhenitsyn. How many political prisoners died while being forced to labour on activities related to the development of the nuclear facilities will never be known. The number of Kazakhstan citizens irradiated by nuclear fallout and killed by cancer and genetic illnesses is also a State secret.

Martin Hadlow, formerly UNESCO

ABOUT US

The *AAFICS Newsletter* is an informal communication tool designed to keep former UN staff members residing in Australia in touch with each other and their Association's activities. Editorial responsibility for articles is held by the individual contributor. The Editor appreciates any stories or articles of interest and thanks all who have contributed to this edition. Photographs and cartoons are either supplied or taken from public Internet sources such as Wikipedia, Cartoonstock.com or the UN and its agencies for non-commercial, private use.



Please send any articles to the office of the President, to the Editor, or through your local State/Territory Coordinator.

The next *Newsletter* will be released in July/August 2023.

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