



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



**VOL. XXXIX, No. 1**

**NEWSLETTER**

**JULY 2025**

*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 64 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.*

‘Everything we knew before has changed’. Since the start of the year, this has become a commonly heard expression. The new mantra relates primarily to an extraordinarily febrile global situation as international agreements are upturned, the financial landscape is radically redefined, trade policies are aggressively reconfigured, established alliances are questioned, longstanding nation friends and allies are denigrated, academic and cultural institutions are attacked, the free press is belittled, and a range of other human and legal rights are questioned. On the international development front, the destruction of USAID, a once-proud defender of the poor, the deprived, the marginalized and those in need globally, ranks as a huge disappointment as its loss has immediately impacted food aid, malaria control initiatives, Ebola mitigation efforts, HIV/AIDS programmes and other key projects across the world. Aid delivery staff from sub-Saharan Africa to the Pacific were left, in an instance, scrambling for new donor support as funding ceased. Recipients of many key programmes were turned away as doors closed and the affected people, no doubt bewildered by decisions made by politicians and billionaire ‘change agents’ a world away, were cast into the abyss. Despite AAFICS being a non-political entity, it would be remiss of us, for the sake of historical record if nothing else, to not make note of the current situation. We also express concern about repeated attacks on the integrity of the United Nations as an international entity, and stand with our UN colleagues as agencies such as UNRWA, WHO and others are mercilessly demeaned amid unwarranted and untested claims of corruption and incompetence. In this, our winter edition of the biannual *AAFICS Newsletter*, we also seek to recognise, with pride, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our parent organisation, FAFICS, a body representing 64 like-minded Associations and some 18,000 former UN civil servants who served to uphold the UN’s goals of global peace, human rights and social equity.



**- Editor**

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## AAFICS PRESIDENT'S REPORT

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### FIRST STEPS

To say that the initial six months of my time in the role of AAFICS President have been eventful would be an understatement. Walking into a chaotic global political and financial situation, primarily brought about by the new administration in the USA, caused a great deal of correspondence and other interactions, not the least concerning the sustainability of the UN Joint Staff Pension Fund (UNJSPF). More on that shortly.

Links with our parent organization, FAFICS, the Federation of Associations of Former International Civil Servants, have continued to be strong over the past few months. Apart from updating our AAFICS publicity/membership form on the [www.fafics.org](http://www.fafics.org) website, we have also corresponded on a range of issues of relevance to our members, such as the Certificate of Entitlement (CoE), UNJSPF matters concerning survivors' benefits, and the election of FAFICS office bearers. Details of these interventions are included in this Newsletter

In passing, the page one Editorial of this issue displays the official logos of the two major UN agencies, UNRWA and WHO, currently under much stress, particularly from the USA which has resigned from both bodies. The UNRWA logo, with the black stripe presumably indicating distress over the Gaza situation, is reprinted from the official UNRWA website and is not a statement from AAFICS.

### THE PENSION – ARE WE OK?

Not surprisingly, the number one subject of interest to AAFICS members (as reported to me, anyway) is the sustainability of the UNJSPF. Huge economic turbulence on the international financial scene, especially in stock-markets, has worried our members. The Australian Federal Treasurer has even called the current environment 'a world of churn and change'. I fielded many queries from AAFICS members about the situation vis-à-vis our own UN pensions and sought to reassure members with a general note suggesting calm and noting the resilience of the UNJSPF investments.

In seeking to reinforce our confidence, I contacted Jerry Barton, FAFICS President, and circulated his views to AAFICS members on the situation. Jerry told me that *"Like you, I have received many questions in recent days. Please be assured that especially during uncertain geopolitical times, your FAFICS delegates are doing their due diligence vis-a-vis our Pension Fund. I urge you to read the Fund's statement on the solvency and sustainability of the Fund. Our Pension Fund is a long-term fund, with very diversified investment portfolio."*



**UNJSPF** Just for the record, I checked on-line the latest UNJSPF statement regarding sustainability. It is dated April, 2025 and reports as follows:

*Over the past few days, global equity markets have experienced significant volatility. In light of this extraordinary event, we would like to provide an update on your Pension Fund's current status. With a target allocation of 43% to public equities, the Fund has been affected by recent valuation losses. As of 4 April 2025, the market value of the portfolio stood at US\$92.9 billion, reflecting a 2.9% decrease in asset value over one week.*

*As a defined benefit pension plan, the Fund is designed for long-term stability,*

with diversified asset classes, and designed to withstand short-term market volatilities. Short-term market fluctuations do not impact the final pension amount received by beneficiaries.

Despite the recent market impact, the Fund remains financially strong. The current market value of assets at US\$92.9 billion exceeds the accrued benefit liabilities of US\$83.2 billion, a key stress test indicator of the solvency of our Fund. This confirms that the Fund has sufficient resources to meet all expected future benefits, even in the theoretical scenario where all participants were to separate immediately.

## **FAFICS@50**

FAFICS celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year and I have great pleasure in reporting that a longstanding AAFICS member, Maurice Critchley, has kindly agreed to disrupt his forthcoming UK/Europe holiday to attend the special FAFICS conference and AGM due to be held in Vienna (14<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> July). Maurice is our State Coordinator for NSW and, when asked, kindly agreed to step forward to take up the challenge. Sincere thanks, Maurice.

To mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, a special panel discussion will be held on the final day of the conference. The subject is *FAFICS: Achievements, Challenges and Opportunities* and a distinguished panel comprising Rosemarie McClean, Chief Executive of Pension Administration (CEPA); John Lewis, President and CEO of the United Nations Federal Credit Union (UNFCU); Ann Van Hulle, Former Director, Administration and Finance, WHO, and Member of the FAFICS Standing Committee on After-Service Health Insurance (ASHIL); Michael Atchia, President of AFICS/ Mauritius; and, Wadzanai Garwe, President, International Civil Servants' Associations (FICSA) will be present.



**Celebrating 50 years  
of Representing  
Retirees and their  
Families in 2025**

AAFICS was invited to send one question to be put to the Open Forum. In the interests of transparency, and rather than simply formulating a question myself, I circulated a message to all AAFICS members asking for some ideas as to how we could best frame a query. Maurice kindly stepped aside in the process to enable other members to have their say. Grateful thanks to those who responded.

It goes without saying that several members asked whether the UNJSPF could rise above financial market difficulties arising from the current international turbulence in stock markets and investment bodies. While this is a vital question, it is clear from correspondence that the distinguished panel will address this subject area.

Thus, our AAFICS query takes a more longer-term approach:

*“Currently, FAFICS is represented on the UN Pension Board with non-voting seats. Given the immense importance to beneficiaries in terms of the management, viability, sustainability, and performance of the Fund, does the panel consider that it might be justifiable in the future for the governance arrangements at the Pension Board to be amended so that FAFICS would be represented with voting seats, thus providing the UN retiree community with a more direct say in the decision-making processes at the Pension Board.”*



**18 JULY 2025**

**1:00 P.M.**

- Welcome Remarks, FAFICS PRESIDENT
- Video Messages (SQ, PQA, BKM)
- Keynote address (TBC)
- Video presentation

**1:30 PM**

PANEL DISCUSSION on FAFICS achievements, challenges, opportunities

**3:00 PM**

VIRTUAL (Global) OPEN FORUM

**4:00 P.M.**

CULTURAL EVENT

Conclusion of the FAFICS 55th Council Session  
Vienna International Center

Thank you to AAFICS member, Andrew Larcos (formerly ICAO), for the question. During his ICAO career, Andrew was a staff representative of the agency on various UNJSPF committees, thus his knowledge of the subject is more than comprehensive.

Apart from providing a question to be put to the panel, we have also made available a congratulatory statement and photographs to mark the celebration.

We wish our representative, Maurice, a most enjoyable time in wonderful Vienna and feel absolutely confident that he will be ensuring that the interests of AAFICS members are more than well put forward. Have a

great time, Maurice! Watch the next *Newsletter* for a report on the event.

As we go to press, FAFICS has just released the draft agenda and other papers for the conference commencing on the 18<sup>th</sup> July. Please go to [www.fafics.org](http://www.fafics.org) to keep updated with all the latest details.

## STATE BRANCH EVENTS

AAFICS members in several jurisdictions have enjoyed social events during the first half of this year. We thank our ever-energetic State Coordinators for initiating these occasions.

Peter and Ivy Steele organized for members based in Victoria to gather in the city of Melbourne for a meeting to discuss a range of joint concerns, while Jane Wilson did the same in Tasmania. Their extensive reports are available in this *Newsletter*.

I was invited to attend the Melbourne event in person, but, due to family health issues, was not able to make it. Instead, I participated electronically by *Zoom* and enjoyed the extensive and in-depth discussions initiated by the group. Thank you all for the kind invitation.

Mike Sackett planned for a winter's day lunch for Queensland members during May. However, with many overseas on holiday in Europe or facing health issues, this event has been postponed until July. In NSW, members enjoyed lunch together thanks to the ever-efficient Maurice Critchley. Both Maurice and Mike have provided reports for this *Newsletter*.

Several key issues arose from the Victoria and Tasmania meetings, particularly matters relating to the Certificate of Entitlement (CoE), the state of the UNJSPF during a period of global economic turbulence, better publicity about AAFICS for prospective UN retirees, and the Undeducted Purchase Price (UPP) system of the Australian Taxation Office.

I promised to undertake some research in each of these subject areas and have provided responses in each case in this *Newsletter*.

## PENSIONS AND SURVIVOR BENEFITS

One very distressing and important query came from both the Melbourne and Hobart State Branch meetings, namely concerning UNJSPF Survivor's Benefits. This is not an issue we usually wish to think about, but we must. Following the demise of their partner, two spouses reported long delays, 7 months in one case, to be able to access the survivor's proportion of the pension. I naively believed that as this situation must be, sadly, a regular occurrence, the UNJSPF would have an allocated office and a streamlined system to handle such situations. It seems only partly so.

For more information on the subject, I initially contacted several AAFICS members who, not unexpectedly, were also a little unclear on the matter, so I resorted to again seeking advice from our expert FAFICS President, Jerry Barton. As always, he provided a goldmine of useful details. Jerry wrote:

*"Surviving Spouse" issues are often contentious. One major reason is that the Pension Fund has no official relationship with the surviving spouse. That relationship has to be established (with all the paperwork) once the former staff member dies. It is one of the FAFICS recommendations that this should change and that a staff member's spouse should be able to have a UID and a legal existence in the Fund's database before the staff member or former staff member passes.*

Jerry also brought up an extremely important point of interest for AAFICS members who may have divorced and be cohabiting with a partner, but not married to that person. Given his comments, I urge AAFICS members in similar circumstances to review their situation vis-à-vis their spouses and their pension benefits.

*I sit as a FAFICS representative on the Fund's appeals committee ("Pension Board Standing Committee") and we have had several cases where anomalies have been documented: A staff member abandoned his first wife but never divorced her and lived for many years with a second wife and raised children. This second wife is not entitled to a benefit. Or the couple lived together without marriage in a country that does not recognize this status. Or the marriage was one day after retirement. Or several wives apply for the benefit, especially from countries where official marriage certificates are unusual.*

His comments only exemplify the extraordinarily confusing and multi-dimensional nature of each individual's relationship with the UN pension system. Despite all of these variables, Jerry kindly indicated that he is prepared to go into bat for spouses who may need his assistance during lengthy periods of awaiting a resolution. Jerry said:

*You are totally correct that this adjudication of the request should never take seven months or over a year. A letter to Rosemarie McClean sometimes works wonders - but the Fund is very insistent on privacy, so the letter, with written signature, must come from the applicant. On the other hand, she is improving relationships with AFICs, so a letter from you might help, or, if the spouse(s) would give me permission to inquire, I could at least find out what the issues are.*

Jerry then went on to provide additional information as follows:

*I assume that you are aware of the numerous training/info pages on the Fund's website, for example: <https://www.unjspf.org/for-clients/death/> on how to report a death. Here the email address [unjspf-deathrelated@un.org](mailto:unjspf-deathrelated@un.org) is specific for death issues and surviving spouse issues, and a 'government issued death certificate' must be provided.*

<https://www.unjspf.org/for-clients/survivors-benefit/> on applying for a survivor's benefit. The many restrictions are listed. The point here is that the Fund must check each of these restrictions after the submission is made, for example - was the spouse married to the staff member during ten continuous years of employment, did the staff member put in his/her Will that the spouse should not get the benefit, did the staff member list his spouse while employed, etc.

I do hope that Jerry's very professional and important advice has assisted you in defining your own relationship with the UNJSPF. Please feel free to contact me should there still be issues requiring clarity and I will do my best to assist.

And, may I also say a big thank you to Jerry, a very busy gentleman, for answering our specific queries.

### **CERTIFICATE OF ENTITLEMENT 'DEFAULTERS'**

Every year, we are all required to return a Certificate of Entitlement (CoE) to the UNJSPF in New York to prove that we are, actually, still alive! We can undertake this rather macabre administrative process by either signing a small document received through the post and then mailing it back to NY, or through electronic channels. If you are having difficulties in accessing the electronic version of the CoE, please go to the UNJSPF web-site at [www.unjspf.org](http://www.unjspf.org) where all will be revealed. If you are still having difficulties, please contact your State Coordinator for advice.



What happens if you do not return your CoE to NY in the allocated time? Well, they come chasing you! In fact, they come to AAFICS and ask us to seek the whereabouts of those they describe as either 'defaulters' or 'UNJSPF recipients slated for suspension.' This year, we sought six people, three in NSW, two in Victoria, and one in South Australia who had not returned their CoE.

Sincere thanks to Jennifer Ashton and State Coordinators Maurice Critchley (NSW), Peter and Ivy Steele (Victoria) and Christine Elstob (SA) for their sleuthing in assisting me in this task. We found four out of six. After no response to e-mails, a Registered Letter to two in Victoria was returned to me as 'Unknown at this address' so it seems that they might have travelled overseas. On advising the UNJSPF of our search result, we were provided with documentation to inform the 'defaulters' that they had just over a month to return a CoE to NY, or they would lose their entitlement. A salutary lesson for us all.

In passing, two of those sought this year are suffering from dementia, with one living in a care home. Perhaps all AAFICS members could kindly ensure that a family member has the Power of Attorney, or some other legal authorization, to help enable a signature, or thumb print, of the beneficiary to be placed on the CoE by the UNJSPF recipient. Either of those two identification marks must be made by the pensioner themselves, if necessary in the presence of a medical practitioner. This is rather important as the UNJSPF will definitely temporarily cease any entitlement to those who do not return the CoE. Restarting the process might well be rather complicated. Please check the UNJSPF website for additional information.

Interestingly, none of those 'slated for suspension' this year are AAFICS members. We simply carry out the search task in a collegial spirit to support fellow former UN colleagues.

## UNDEDUCTED PURCHASE PRICE (UPP)

While newly retired colleagues may be aware that their UN pensions are taxed in Australia as 'foreign income', they may not know that something called an Undeducted Purchase Price (UPP) can be claimed each year when they file their income tax return. This UPP reduces the amount of tax payable by an amount as calculated by the Australian Taxation Office (ATO).

How do you claim for your UPP to be determined? This question is often asked and, while I have contacted many AAFICS colleagues for their thoughts, it is probably wisest to suggest that interested members go directly to the ATO website and then consult a tax accountant for expert advice. The whole matter is too important to rely on unprofessional, but well-meaning, views. This ATO page gives some initial details:



Australian Government  
Australian Taxation Office

## Request for a determination of the deductible amount of UPP of a foreign pension or annuity

Complete this form if you have received a foreign pension or annuity and want to know the amount you can claim as a deductible amount in relation to the undeducted purchase price (UPP). **The response we provide to you will be as a private ruling.**

### WHEN COMPLETING THIS FORM

- Print clearly in BLOCK LETTERS using a black pen only.
- Use BLOCK LETTERS and print one character per box.
- Place  in ALL applicable boxes.

Only some foreign pensions and annuities have a UPP.

You are able to claim 8% of your annual pension income (expressed in Australian dollars) as your deductible amount if you:

- receive a category A or B United Kingdom State (UK State) pension (previously known as British National Insurance Scheme pension), and
- it is paid from The Pension Service.

This method generally results in the maximum deduction you are entitled to. If you think your deductible amount will be greater than the amount calculated using the above percentage, you will need to complete this form.

You are able to claim 25% of your annual pension income (expressed in Australian dollars) as your deductible amount if:

- you receive an old age, widow's, widower's or orphan's pension, and
- the pension is from the Sociale Verzekerings Bank (SVB) under the Netherlands social insurance (NSI) system.

If you have paid more than the compulsory contributions into your fund and believe that your deductible amount will be greater than the amount calculated using the above percentage, you will need to complete this form.

## Section A: Your details

1 Tax file number (TFN)            You don't have to provide your TFN. However, your

The relevant ATO website also makes the following points:

*You can claim a deduction to reduce the taxable amount on income you receive from a foreign pension or annuity that also has an undeducted purchase price (UPP).*

*Only some foreign pensions and annuities have a UPP. The UPP is the amount you contribute towards the purchase price of your pension or annuity – your personal contributions.*

*The part of your annual pension or annuity income which represents a return to you of your personal contributions is tax-free. This tax-free portion is the deductible amount of the UPP.*

You will need to [request a determination of the deductible amount of UPP of a foreign pension or annuity](#), if you want to know the deduction you can claim for UPP. This applies if you or another person contributed to the purchase price with direct contributions and receive either:

- a foreign pension or annuity
- a foreign pension or annuity that passes to you from the other person.

As mentioned, AAFICS earnestly advises you to speak with an experienced, independent taxation specialist who knows about the structure of the UPP system and can guide you on this important matter. Additional details here:

[Undeducted purchase price of a foreign pension or annuity | Australian Taxation Office](#)

## **AAFICS BY THE NUMBERS**

Did you know that, at the latest count, there were 765 recipients of UNJSPF entitlements with an Australian mailing address? Of these, 366 are members of AAFICS. This is an increase of 10 on the previous year. Already in 2025 we have five new members to add to the total. (Welcome one and all!) At last count, AAFICS members were distributed as follows:

Tasmania	11
ACT	36
South Australia	20
Victoria	103
NSW	125
Queensland	47
Western Australia	24

AAFICS pays an annual fee to FAFICS depending upon our membership numbers. At US\$2.00 per person, this year we contributed US\$732.00 to FAFICS as our annual financial dues.

## **ASHI**

Questions occasionally come from members concerning After Service Health Insurance (ASHI) entitlements. It is rather difficult to provide general advice or even individual support in such instances as each UN agency seems to have contracted its own commercial provider to handle ASHI for that agency's beneficiaries. Each of these insurance firms manages entitlements in keeping with the UN agency's requirements and instructions. Therefore, it is important that AAFICS members with specific questions should, in the first instance, approach their former UN agency for clarity and advice. If no satisfaction is achieved, please get back to AAFICS and we'll seek to assist as best we can.



# United Nations

## Health & Life Insurance Section

It is also vital that AAFICS members carefully read the entitlements of their specific health insurance provider. For example, if you are travelling overseas on holiday, do not take it for granted that, in the event of serious accident or illness, medical evacuation by air ambulance or airline is covered in your ASHI. A recent check disclosed that one provider enables ambulance transport by road to the nearest hospital/health centre, not by air. Particularly check on the fine print if you intend to visit a remote location in a foreign country far from main roads or other services. Hospital and medical help might well be covered in your ASHI, but possibly not expensive medical evacuation by air. You may well consider a commercial travel insurance option to cover any gaps. Please check.

### **PUBLICITY FOR AAFICS**

Questions were raised at both the recent Victoria and Tasmania State Branch meetings about publicity for AAFICS to gain new members and for existing members to stay in touch. Some queries also came about concerning group linkages within AAFICS, such as *WhatsApp* or *Facebook*, to enable exchanges to be made amongst members.

All of these ideas have great merit and we encourage Branches to maintain and operate their own electronic linkages as they see fit. The idea of establishing an AAFICS website has also been canvassed. While this proposal has definite merit, the difficulty arises in having someone set up the site and then manage it on a day-to-day basis. Any volunteers? This task is beyond the current President!

In the interests of seeking to inform newly retiring UN officials of the existence of AAFICS, I have written to the Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in Canberra with AAFICS information material, asking that Australian diplomatic posts overseas might be briefed so they are equipped to acquaint any interested parties, such as retiring UN officers, with our organization and its role.

### **THE WORLD TODAY**

As we go to press with this edition of the *AAFICS Newsletter*, tragic wars continue in Ukraine, Gaza, Iran/Israel and many other places throughout the world. Sadly, when some political leaders call for dialogue and diplomacy to lower the temperature, they are shouted down by those advocating confrontation. The fact that dialogue is now seen as displaying weakness, rather than a step of diplomacy towards peace-making, is disappointing. Even more unfortunately, the UN as an organization seems to be increasingly marginalized and sidelined in the handling of global events, with even its Charter being questioned.

As former UN officials, we are probably inured to receiving bad news and dealing with discouraging situations. However, with the established global order, human rights and democracy all under stress, not to mention nuclear weapons again on the table, it is probably an appropriate time to re-commit ourselves to the promotion of a culture of peace, and seek to shun a slide into a state of violence. Who was it who said 'jaw jaw is better than war war'?

## END NOTES

This edition of the President's report is a little more elongated than I had planned. However, I wanted to answer a myriad of questions posed by members, especially as I had promised follow-up to specific queries posed. I trust that I have answered all those questions. If not, please get in touch directly and I will do my best to find a relevant answer.



A couple of very good websites for seeking useful and timely information are [www.fafics.org](http://www.fafics.org) and [www.unjspf.org](http://www.unjspf.org). Please make these places your first ports of call. Although the FAFICS site is a little clunky to use, taxation information and the excellent *Recording Your Personal Details/Instructions: An AAFICS Handbook to Help You and Your Next of Kin* is available at [AAFICS-Australia - FAFICS](#)

As always, my grateful thanks to all AAFICS members for their support. Special thanks to State Coordinators and our Treasurer for their ceaseless assistance and guidance in the interests of the Association.

After giving years of selfless service to AAFICS, stalwart State Coordinators, Jane Wilson (Tasmania), and Peter and Ivy Steele (Victoria), have advised that they will be stepping aside from their roles at the end of 2025. It goes without saying that we all highly appreciate the enormous contributions they have all made to the successful operations of the Association. Without leaders at the State level, AAFICS would not be able to fulfill its role. We urge members in Tasmania and Victoria to come forward to take on the role of State Coordinator in each State. Thank you Jane, Peter and Ivy.

I am reminded that the position of AAFICS President also becomes vacant at the end of this year. Under new administrative arrangements, the role will rotate through all our State Branches, thus ensuring that we more equitably share a position that bears much influence in the day-to-day interests of UN retirees. Please do let me know if you would like to be considered for the role of President in 2026. Thank you.

My own situation as both President and *AAFICS Newsletter* Editor has proved demanding and I would welcome a member stepping into the top role. I have now edited the Newsletter for some 7 years and a fresh hand is also required in this position. Having said that, I will commit to continuing to work as Editor to assist the incoming President, thus taking that part of the load from their shoulders. However, any member keen to chance their hand as Editor should contact me and I would willingly step aside.

And, finally, please do continue to support the AAFICS Newsletter through your contributions. The next edition will be produced just before the festive season at the end of the year, so please let us have your contributions to [aaficsnewsletter@yahoo.com](mailto:aaficsnewsletter@yahoo.com) by mid-November.

Thank you.

**Martin Hadlow,  
President, AAFICS**

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## COOEE!

### REPORTS FROM BRANCHES

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## VICTORIA

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The third consecutive annual AAFICS AGM/Social meeting was held at the Kathleen Syme Centre in North Melbourne on Saturday 24 February 2024. We were pleased to have the incoming AAFICS President, Martin Hadlow, attend/officiate courtesy of a Zoom link from QLD.

We were encouraged to have two people new to AAFICS/Vic attend. We were saddened to acknowledge the passing of two AAFICS/Vic regulars. We benefitted from the support of other AAFICS/Vic regulars with their wealth of background experience/knowledge. We were stimulated by the formal session which ran through four hours.

In a carry-over from the 2024 meeting, we covered an appreciation of Jennifer Ashton (outgoing AAFICS President), the WhatsApp network (slowly gathering momentum into a second year), value/AAFICS newsletter, selected issues concerning AAFICS, UNJSPF and on-going challenges/opportunities of AAFICS membership in-country; capturing ex-UN people returning home and compliance/understanding of existing ATO tax requirements.

In summary – we had 17 people attend, contributing to a stimulating exchange around the table. This included five separate presentations re-WhatsApp, taxation/pensions definitions/options, personal experience/UNJSPF and registering digital CoE. Such was the energy/exchange/intensity of debate we completely failed to take advantage of the facilities in the comfortable common room next door. It had been an interesting and highly rewarding meeting.

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### **Officiating and Attending**

Ivy & Peter Steele AAFICS/Vic State Coordinators officiated at the meeting. Formalities, however, were shared with Martin Hadlow, AAFICS President, courtesy of a Zoom link\* and with Mike Patto the previous Victoria State Coordinator.

*\*We were/remain indebted to Tomoko Marjoram for her Zoom expertise.*

### **AAFICS/Vic Community & AGM/Social Meeting**

There are estimated >100 people in the AAFICS/Vic community – 60 ex-UN retirees and the remainder spouses/partners. Invitations were sent to everyone with an e-mail address. Of the order, 17 people attended – representing 12 retirees/partners (20%) - with ten people (15%) offering apologies for not being able attend. Two thirds of the AAFICS state community did not respond to the invitation.

The numbers of people attending and apologising for not being available were much the same as the previous two meetings held post-Covid during 2023 & 2024. Further information is contained in Annex 1.

For the third year in succession the meeting was held in the Kathleen Syme (KS) Centre in Carlton, Melbourne. The venue is located in the central north city and easily accessible by public and private transport. Full use was made of in-house Zoom facilities following the unavoidable last-minute cancellation of the visit proposed by the AAFICS President. Two consecutive 40 minutes sessions were held, with the original program/agenda re-configured to comply with these changes. The exchange across the table/distance worked surprisingly well.

Where we did miss out was with the one-on-one social dialogue away from the table. Constraints of time precluded us taking advantage of the comfortable (and mainly empty) Common Room next door as in previous years. People used the tea/coffee/fridge facilities but returned to the meeting room to continue talking/listening/participating. We had booked a four-hour period (an hour longer than previous times) and then spent the entire period seated or standing around the table.

There is always considerable pleasure when meeting AAFICS people in person - being able to put faces/voices to the images of both newcomers and people already known. During the tenure of the present AAFICS State Coordinators, probably <40 people have been met. The community is generally not in regular contact one-with-the-other.

### **Follow-on Issues from the AAFICS AGM/Social Meeting 24 February 2024**

Itemizing the points/discussion that arose from the minutes of the previous meeting 24 February 2024.

### **AAFICS Coordinating Volunteers**

The AAFICS network remains dependent upon the handful of people who volunteer to act as service nodes – creating, receiving and/or transmitting the flow of information that will help maintain the cohesion of the majority. The viability of the national AAFICS network depends, perhaps, upon <10 regular active volunteers – state representatives and core executive. Others may be requested to volunteer, for example, when the potential of a publication is recognised and/or when external representation is required.

Experience shows the general reluctance of AAFICS people to become involved. Shifting from the current system of depending on the 'few' to one in which there are 'many' volunteers available would bring younger people and those with more recent UN experience – of current networks/protocols/people – into the AAFICS techno-management group.

The recently retired AAFICS President was in place for seven years, and the previous Victoria Coordinator was 11 years in office. These people reflected upon their overstay in office because alternative volunteers were not readily available.

Peter & Ivy Steele gave notice at the meeting that they intend to step down from December 2025 – following three years in office as Victoria Coordinators.

The AAFICS President fulfils a key role when networking within the country and overseas, respectively, with the Commonwealth States and selected UN focus groups (such as FAFICS, UNJSPF and others). Period of tenure was changed from open-ended to term-related during 2024 to encourage more/new people to volunteer.



*Coni Hicks, Alastair Hicks, Anne Klaric, Pushpa Jayakody, Mike Patto, Ivy Steele, Peter Steele, Karima Hamit, Zaheer Hamit, Marie Scoullar, Gladys Mutangadura, Tony Marjoram.  
(Missing: Tomoko Marjoram – photographer; John Elfick, Juliette Elfick – departed meeting.)*

### **AAFICS Publications**

Earlier recommendations for action to re-consider/re-draft the contents of the two AAFICS publications prepared >5 years ago have not been followed through. Neither were copies re-distributed to AAFICS/Vic people. There remains an element of uncertainty whether AAFICS people are fully aware of these documents.

These publications are supposed to be listed on the FAFICS/Australia web pages. The 'Demise' document, however, has not been found. The meeting recommended that the 'Demise' document be updated.

The *modus operandi* for initiating new documents or updating existing documents remains uncertain – previously ad hoc 'committees' have been established - of people familiar with the

topic. How to make a start? How to prioritise sectors? Who are the people who may become involved? How to encourage them? What is happening elsewhere within the national AAFICS network? There is also scope for exploring new documents within the resources of the national AAFICS network.

### **AAFICS/Vic WhatsApp Network**

The AAFICS/Vic WhatsApp group recommended two years ago is now available/operational but remains little used. More than a dozen people are registered. The coordinator is Pushpa Jayabody. Everyone interested within the AAFICS/Vic network is invited to join. A key issue is one of personal privacy. Make direct contact with the Coordinator.

A presentation paper describing WhatsApp was shared during the meeting. This will be circulated to all AAFICS/Vic people together with a Power Point presentation that is in preparation. WhatsApp is there to be used ... reach out ... therein is the basis of neighbourhood/regional social groups – talk, coffee, lunch? During the meeting we connected with the AAFICS President in QLD courtesy of WhatsApp as our Zoom minutes ran out.

### **AAFICS & UN Association of Australia**

AAFICS people represent those who have *previously* worked within the UN Family of agencies, programs, etc. The UNAA is there to promote, inform and explore opportunities for those aspiring to know more – the younger generation who will follow AAFICS people - to encourage/help them to *become* part of the UN Family. There is a deal of overlap and compatibility one-to-the-other. For those unfamiliar with the UNAA there is a regular newsletter available.

### **Communications – AAFICS Newsletter & Others – Contributions & Representation**

Published twice annually in July & December, the newsletter is the ultimate network contact for the majority AAFICS/Vic community (and countrywide). Value is proportional to the extent of the publishable material supplied by the network ... people providing the Editor with the appropriate material.

AAFICS Newsletters are archived by the National Library of Australia thus providing an historical record for the future. The newsletters are also available on the FAFICS website thereby sharing our activities/etc. with ex-UN people worldwide.

Many AAFICS people continue to link into the original UN agency for which they once worked courtesy of the dedicated newsletters available. People also follow other UN agencies. The newsletters provide a measure of continuity with a professional life that once was – keeping people informed.

### **Communications within AAFICS/Vic**

Estimated eight people within AAFICS/Vic do not have email facilities. How to include them within the AAFICS network? There was limited practical follow-through with new/novel ideas of what to do. Mailing is an obvious choice, but it has not been followed in recent times. It is much the same with AAFICS publications. How do poorly connected people gain access to material that is mainly delivered in electronic form? Will they, for example, accept the costs of photocopying and postage?

The current registry of AAFICS/Vic people dates from Dec22. It contains the names of ex-UN people and spouses, agency and address, phone and email information. In Oct24 a request was made to the community to update their personal information. This included a request for next-of-kin/trusted friend who was *not* a partner. A response of 15% resulted. A second request will be circulated.

### **Challenges for AAFICS people into the next period**

The eight inter-related challenges concerning the viability of the national AAFICS network of UN retirees into the next period were briefly introduced into the meeting. They had been carried over from the previous two years.

1. Unfavourable/unfair taxation of UN pensions.
2. Boosting AAFICS membership.
3. Raising an AAFICS profile nationally.
4. How to identify Australians currently working with the UN Agencies?
5. How to determine Australians retiring and returning to Australia?
6. How to circulate AAFICS material/information to the UN Agencies?
7. Potential for e-networking/Zoom/linking key AAFICS people – as required?
8. How to keep/support non-tech/non-connected AAFICS people – as required?

Constraints of time restricted discussions such that only 'Taxation' (1) and 'Networking' (7) were covered – as described elsewhere in the report.



*AAFICS President Martin Hadlow via Zoom link from QLD sharing in the debate/discussions with State delegates at the meeting venue in Melbourne.*

*Photo courtesy of Tomoko & Tony Marjoram.*

### **Reporting/Issues/Opportunities arising during the period 2024/25**

Relating to the presentation, reporting, Q&A and round table discussion with the AAFICS President.

### **UNJSPF/'Fund'**

The AAFICS/Vic community continues to rely mainly upon the AAFICS President and contacts/feedback/experience with the Fund. The meeting considered this within four inter-related sectors: 1. Overview. 2. Financial performance. 3. Communications. 4. Certificate of Entitlement. 5. Experience AAFICS/Vic people.

1. Overview UNJSPF There is little information circulating ex-AAFICS to help keep people in contact with what may be happening – inevitably this impacts both the community and the individual. Where to find information of this kind? Who is responsible for keeping AAFICS people informed?

2. Financial Performance UNJSPF As a defined benefit pension plan, the Fund is designed for long-term stability with diversified asset classes. It is designed to withstand short-term market volatilities which do not impact the final pension amount received by beneficiaries. A message from the Fund 07April25 shows current market value of assets US\$92.9B exceeds the accrued benefit liabilities of US\$83.2B, a key stress test indicator of the solvency of the Fund.

3. Communications The Fund reported a boost in efficiency of disbursements, etc. following the introduction of '*UNJSPF Connect*'. Further, an additional 11 new pension information booklets are available. Increased use of the digital Certificate of Entitlement has resulted (see below). The meeting acknowledged the new initiative by the Fund that aims to provide regular sessions of virtual pension information that are open to global membership. There were 14 Pension Fund '*town hall*' sessions held in 2024. The purpose is to ensure that UN beneficiaries can learn about pension-related rights, processes and requirements and use of essential pension tools. People may stand to gain a better understanding of the Fund and their pension rights. The meeting requested that people who explore this exchange eventually share their findings with the AAFICS/Vic network.

4. Certificate of Entitlement (CoE) Several people expressed the ease with which the digital CoE can now be used – negating the sometimes-mixed experience of earlier times - 53% of beneficiaries worldwide now use the digital CoE. Time to explore this opportunity again? One attendee described it as a '*three minutes*' activity. Another pointed to the challenges of electronic services in rural areas, and yet another raised the issue of meeting the quality of the photograph required. Presumably, the paper/mail option will eventually disappear.

#### 5. Experience AAFICS/Vic (shared by people at the meeting)

Death of an ex-UN fonctionnaire Sept24. Spouse proficient communicator. The Fund has taken seven months to re-establish the re-adjusted UN pension entitlement. It is due to be paid for April25. Need for personal resources to cover this period. Need to establish separate financial resources – including bank accounts/credit cards – whilst both partners are alive. A second AAFICS/Vic member at the meeting confirmed a period of two years following the death of a spouse. Non-payment for both prolonged periods is unreasonable/unfair/unacceptable.

The proportion of the pension paid following the death of the ex-UN fonctionnaire is typically 50% of the sum originally paid to the couple - fonctionnaire/spouse. Discussions suggested it may be slightly higher when all contingencies are taken into consideration.

### **FAFICS**

The AAFICS/Vic community continues to rely upon information contained in the report of the FAFICS annual meeting typically held mid-year. This is summarised in the report of the AAFICS President published in the AAFICS Newsletter in December each year. Attendance is usually distant/electronic but, occasionally, in person. AAFICS President requested a show of interest from any AAFICS/Vic people who may be in Europe mid-year who may like to attend. The meeting is scheduled for July25 in Vienna. Per diem expenses are available.

The national AAFICS community of 366 people was required to pay an annual subscription to FAFICS of US\$2/person for 2025. Thus, the value of keeping the national master/states lists up-to-date.

Checkout the regular news items/categories that are listed on the FAFICS website including 'FAFICS @50'. See what is planned into the next period. Further, explore the FAFICS Australia/Information page/publications page.

### **AAFICS People and Australian Tax Office (ATO)**

Meeting the annual requirements for paying tax on the basis of the UN pension remains central to the obligations/well-being of the AAFICS community – individually and as a group. A considerable history of definitions/representation exists between AAFICS and the ATO.

The meeting felt that we would benefit from further consultation with both UNJSPF and FAFICS regarding this. Further, the meeting queried what options there are for bringing the taxation status of AAFICS people in line with other ex-UN retiree groups worldwide wherein taxation is more equitable (e.g. in the 38 OECD countries and/or for retirees from international organizations such as development banks)?

There was a sense that AAFICS should approach this kind of exploratory investigation informally with the assistance, for example, of AAFICS people who are already familiar with earlier initiatives and/or others who may be familiar with the workings of the ATO.

### **AAFICS/Vic People coming and going**

The AAFICS/Vic community welcomed two new people – one ex-UNESCO transferred from QLD and the other due soon from WHO Geneva.

Celebrating the lives of those who have passed, however, can sometimes be challenging. We recognised the lives, contributions and achievements of two ex-UN colleagues, respectively, from WHO and UNESCO.



*Photo courtesy of Karima Hamit.*

### **Future of the United Nations/Agencies in an Ageing World.**

*Originally included in the program but constraints of time prevented introduction and debate.*

Cultural heritage, experience, resilience, cohesion, etc. of older people provides for the continuity of nations/tribes/families/etc. given their knowledge, values, traditions, resources, etc. Frequently not easily recognised/appreciated/accepted.

Older people are well-placed to address global challenges – climate action, disaster risks, technology/applications, inter-generational vision/solidarity. For Victoria, for example >100 AAFICS people have estimated >1,500 people-years of international experience worldwide.

**AAFICS/Vic Members Attending the Social/General Meeting 05April25**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Ex-UN Agency</b>
Mike Patto	UNDP/UNDDSMS
Anne Klaric	UNHCR
Pushpa Jayakody	UNICEF
John Elfick	UNESCO
Juliette Elfick	UNESCO
Alastair Hicks	FAO
Coni Hicks	FAO
Madhavi Ashok	UNICEF
Peter Steele	FAO
Ivy Steele	FAO
Marie Scoullar	FAO
Pushpa Jayakody	UNICEF
Gladys Mutangadura	DPPA
Tony Marjoram	UNESCO
Tomoko Marjoram	UNESCO
Kerima Hamit	UNICEF
Zaheer Hamit	UNICEF

**Apologies received**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Ex-UN Agency</b>
Jacinthe D’Souza	UNICEF
Lynne Fairservice	WFP
Rupert MacLean	UNESCO
Sylvia Murphy	WHO
Colin & Meko Nathan	WHO
Honorine Nachia	UNICEF
Susantha de Silva	WHO
Thangarajah & Shanta Kugathasan	UNHCR
Anoma Wijeyarante	WHO
John Langmore	ILO

**Peter and Ivy Steele, Victoria State Coordinators**

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**QUEENSLAND**  
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This note is being written in mid-May, long before our Editor’s deadline, due to an imminent departure on a Balkans “railway adventure” out of Budapest. It seems as if a significant proportion of the Queensland AAFICS membership is also travelling, or facing health issues.

So much so that we have decided to postpone our annual Brisbane lunch from May to Wednesday 9 July. I hope that proves more convenient for people.

It says much about the state of the rapidly-changing world that I feel it is important to include the time of writing above. Who knows how the world will look by the time this newsletter is published in July? The first 100 days administration of that returning narcissistic sociopath in Washington DC have been characterised by trade turmoil, threats to such benign countries as Canada and Denmark, and an initial cosying up to the autocratic tyrant running Russia. The US administration has already had its first casualty in Mike Waltz who lasted a little over 100 days as National Security Advisor. And what was his consolation prize? He is to be nominated as the next US Ambassador to the UN. It's hard to see that one ending well.

Several AAFICS friends have expressed concern for the UN Pension Fund as share markets took a dive in March/April in reaction to seemingly daily gyrations in US trade policy. Worst-case scenario we face economic downturn and a return of inflation globally. I would have thought that the Pension Fund will ride out such turbulence as it has done in the past through the dotcom boom, the GFC and the Covid hiatus. There are plenty of things to worry about in life, but I don't think a disturbance to our monthly pension payments is one of them. It is, however, good news that we will be represented in Vienna in July, by Maurice Critchley, at the annual FAFICS session, when we pensioners have the opportunity to meet face to face with those running the Pension Fund.

**Mike Sackett, Queensland State Coordinator**

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## NEW SOUTH WALES

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NSW members met for lunch in May at the usual spot, *Foys Kirribilli*, the restaurant at the Sydney Flying Squadron, the open-boat sailing club located on Sydney Harbour. There is something about blue water that just lifts the heart. How fortunate are those who have a daily view of Sydney Harbour.



It was a meeting with a difference for the 16 of us who met on a fine Sydney Tuesday. Three members who had recently had books published gave a talk about their books: *Colossal Love: My life's Journey* by Ram Prasad Koirala, *Back Burning Redux* by Sylvia Petter and *In Defence*

*of Our Humanity – Real Life as a United Nations Ambassador in a Troubled World* by Stephen Hill.

A great achievement by all three.



And we had a special guest, Maddie Lysaght, a New Colombo Plan Scholar, who is interested in working for the United Nations when she completes her post-graduate studies. She is soon to depart for Malaysia for a semester and field experience.

As many of us know, getting into the United Nations is not easy and Maddie was interested in learning how the attendees managed to get in the door.

The round-table discussion on that revealed that there had been many and varied ways of getting that first appointment. Probably the prize on that went to Elizabeth who told us that she went to a party in Rome, where she had no idea how she got there – I think she meant who invited her to the party - and was offered a job at IFAD.

With the automation of recruitment, those avenues are probably closed to Maddie and her ilk who are now looking to join the United Nations.

Ah for the good old days.

**Maurice Critchley, NSW State Coordinator**

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## TASMANIA

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### **Record of Meeting: AAFICS/ Tasmania**

**Author: Jane Wilson**

**Venue: Sea Grass, Long Point. Sandy Bay. Date: 5 May 2025**

**Present** - David James, Belai Ghebreegzabiher, Janet Cummins, Rupert Maclean, Jane Wilson

**Apologies** - Robert Mister, Tony Taubman

We thank Peter and Ivy Steele, AAFICS/ Vic State Coordinators for providing the report of their recent meeting in Melbourne which provided a useful structure for ours.

### **AAFIC/ Tasmania community**

We have a total of eleven members in Tasmania, including spouses. Attendees. Five out of eleven attended, with two apologies. Communication is easy as we all use email. We did not feel a WhatsApp group was needed given our size and because we already have a very high rate of participation.

We have settled on a quiet corner in a local coffee shop for our meetings these days as it's central and convenient. We shared news about what we were doing currently as well as past experiences. This included recent work setting up a circus academy in Hanoi, observations about the establishment of the salmon industry in Tasmania, participation in pétanque, canasta and bowls clubs, and working on governance in clubs and historical organizations. We are a diverse and active group. We're very much looking forward to meeting Tony Taubman, now based in Cygnet.

Information from our respective agencies, funds and programs is extremely worrying. The US has withdrawn its funds from UNAIDS, WFP will be laying off 30% of its staff soon. The ADB is being instructed to not use certain terms such as climate, leading to a shocking distortion of reality.

We passed a unanimous vote of confidence in our national Coordinator and Newsletter Editor, Martin Hadlow and appreciate the major roles he is playing in 2025.

The Victorian report commented on the fact that our roles in AAFICS are 100% voluntary. As members are reluctant to take on these roles, they are now time limited. The Victorian coordinators are stepping down after three years. Tasmania is overdue for change, so, after 13 years, I am also stepping down in December 2025.

### **Taxation of our UNJSPF superannuation**

There have been several approaches to this issue at Supreme Court level.

#### *Issues discussed:*

1. 50% of a married members' superannuation goes to their spouse on the death of the member, unless a lump sum is taken on retirement. This applies only to the spouse married to the member in service. Question - what is the definition of spouse?

2. The A/2 form for designated beneficiaries is available on the UNJSPF website (see below). Beneficiaries receive the residue of members' contributions.

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*All UNJSPF members should complete the Designation of Recipient for a Residual Settlement (A/2 form) to assure a Residual Settlement is paid as a one-time lump-sum to the person or institution you chose if you should die in service or after service. The Fund will make such a payment if:*

1. *You have no prospective survivors (meaning a spouse, ex-spouse, a child under the age of 21, a disabled child, or a secondary dependant) at the time of your death in service or after service; and*
2. *In the case of death after service, you did not elect to be paid the maximum lump-sum commutation of the benefit allowed, and the total amount of the benefit paid to you or to your survivors is less than your own contributions to the Fund.*

*In these cases, the Fund pays a residual settlement to your designated beneficiary at the time of your death. The benefit is equivalent to your own contributions to the Fund with compound interest, minus any payments already made to you or your respective survivor(s). The residual settlement is payable to the person or institution designated on your A/2 form.*



Rupert Maclean (I), Jane Wilson and David James

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3. Peter Steele will provide a list of three tax accountants in Victoria who understand the UNJSPF and the ATO.
  4. We need a very clear understanding of the situation vis-a-vis taxation. See link below to the AAFICS paper. The ATO allows a deductible amount each year for our own contributions, called the Undeducted Purchase Price (UPP). The UN advises our UPP on our retirement. The paper explains how the UPP is defined and how the annual deductible amount of the UPP is ascertained (27 (H)2). The paper suggests that the tax agent contacts the ATO for further information about the UPP and the formula to work

out the member's annual deductible amount from your 'foreign pension'. The ATO link contains the form to apply for a ruling on the UPP.

5. Martin Hadow has been consulted. He is taking advice from others and will publish more detail about the UNJSPF and the ATO in the upcoming newsletter. It's a perennial question.
6. Question – would the UN notify a retired member of the death of their spouse. Martin thought it would be unlikely.

[https://fafics.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/AAFICS-Australia\\_TAXATION-OF-UNITED-NATIONS-PENSIONS-IN-AUSTRALIA.pdf](https://fafics.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/AAFICS-Australia_TAXATION-OF-UNITED-NATIONS-PENSIONS-IN-AUSTRALIA.pdf)

[https://www.ato.gov.au/about-ato/ato-advice-and-guidance/ato-advice-products-rulings/private-rulings/applying-for-a-private-ruling?=%redirec%ted\\_privateruling](https://www.ato.gov.au/about-ato/ato-advice-and-guidance/ato-advice-products-rulings/private-rulings/applying-for-a-private-ruling?=%redirec%ted_privateruling)

### **3 Annual Certificate of Entitlement (CoE)**

This is a fixed requirement annually and can be done by letter or via the app. The app is easy to use, but many prefer the simplicity of a letter. If the annual signed letter from an Australian retiree is not received, the UNJSPF contacts our President who activates the relevant State Coordinator to follow up and ensure that the pension payment is not disrupted. This is one of our main functions. Given these two options the CoE should not be problematic. There is much support available.



Belai Ghebreegzabiher and Jane Wilson (l). Janet Cummins

<https://www.unjspf.org/for-clients/digital-certificate-of-entitlement/>

### **4 USD and two-track**

General discussion about the USD and two-track of payment in local currency.

Question – how does the exchange rate work for two-track?

### **5. FAFICS in Vienna, Austria in July 2025**

Members can attend if they are in Europe at the time. Per diem is available.

## **6. Advocacy**

Great concern about the inevitable lack of recruitment ex UN JPO positions are paid by countries for four years and a valuable way to start in international work. Articles in the local newspaper now seen as useful. It seems better to advocate via active politicians, such as Andrew Wilkie – one member has an opportunity to do this over the election weekend. Major concern about the lack of opportunities for young people, including the Peace Corps and universities. One member recently visited ESCAP in Bangkok and remarked on how quiet it was with staff having been cut back.

Contributions to the Newsletter are useful as it is widely read.

## **7 AAFICS publications**

The two documents, prepared five years ago, are very valuable and are available on the FAFICS website.

- Essential checklist for ex-UN Retirees retiring to Australia
- Before your demise – personal information for families.

## **Jane Wilson PhD, Tasmania State Coordinator**

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### ***WORLD POPULATION DAY THE MINI T-SHIRT RIOT, PNG***

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In Port Moresby one year, a funny thing happened, at least it was funny in hindsight. I had what I thought was the bright idea of giving all the early morning newspaper boys a WPD T-shirt to wear as they sold their papers at major intersections. This would provide an opportunity to publicise the message about the importance of family planning to the passing motorists.

So, my temporary driver Jacob and I went down to a major intersection at 7am. Unfortunately, as we opened up the boot we were mobbed by the boys and passersby who suddenly realized that there were freebies to be had. It was a bit of a mini-riot for ten minutes or so which took a bit of quelling. Finally, the boys (and a few others) had donned their T-shirts and went back to selling papers to passing cars with the 'Plan Your Families' message clearly visible. My driver and I went off happily back to the office.

But then I had another bright idea - we should do the same thing at another intersection and I sent Jacob the driver off with more T-shirts. However, by this time it was around 8am, and peak-hour traffic. In his wisdom, Jacob didn't pull completely off the road and so blocked one lane. Then the next lane was held up by an electricity authority truck whose workers also thought that free T-shirts were a good thing. Of course, this all led to a great argument (Jacob being a stropky little Highlander) which then attracted the attention of a policeman who was appalled at the pile-up of traffic. So, there were more furious words, with the driver insisting that 'his boss' had told him to do this and he continued distributing T-shirts. Of course, the policeman was ropable by this stage and arrested my driver and the truck driver and hauled them both off to jail!



*When the idea was working peacefully. The newspaper boys ready to do their bit in advertising World Population Day.*

I was startled to receive a phone call about 10am asking me to come and bail him out, so off I went to Boroko Police station with our Security Officer in tow. I thought that perhaps I could swing the 'white missus' bit and have him excused. But when I got there, I was ushered into the boss's office and seated on a bench with the driver and a couple of other people. Before I could get in an appeal, the officer went into a tirade about how stupid the driver was and how come he worked for the UN and wasn't the UN the most wonderful organization here in PNG to help people.

I nearly fell off my perch. It was amazing that a local community policeman felt that the UN was valuable to his country. It was such an unexpected and beautiful moment and I didn't have to say a word. I then took our crest-fallen driver back to the office and when he came up in Court he did what our Security Officer advised - plead guilty and pay the fine (OK, I contributed a little to that).



*Driver Jacob was a bit of a character – here he is charming Zuzana Das, the wife of the outgoing UN Resident Coordinator (and the crowd) with the gift of a highland string bag at their farewell party.*

Later, this same driver wanted me to sign a Statutory Declaration for him to buy a firearm, apparently to shoot a bullock for a big community feast – mmm, maybe not. On another occasion, his daughter won a lot of money in a lottery and he didn't appear for work next day. His boss ignored the discrepancy and enjoyed his excitement.

Later, he was not selected at interview for the formal position as the Representative's driver and I had to stage-manage informing him of the decision – being a 'Highlander' there was a real risk of 'payback'. So, I told him the bad news last thing on the Friday afternoon and softened the blow by presenting him with a guitar (again paid for out of my own pocket) and, luckily, he went quietly. But some months later I bumped into him in the driveway of a local company, using as a carry-bag one of our large and named UN international mailbags (pouch). So maybe he had had the last laugh after all. Staff management isn't always as straight forward as one would wish.

**Margaret O'Callaghan, formerly with UNFPA**

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## MEMBER PROFILE TOMI PETR

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AAFICS Queensland Branch member and former FAO expert, Tomi Petr, reaches the grand age of 90 years next month. While congratulating this distinguished gentleman on such an important anniversary, we also wondered about his life journey from his birth in the town of Hronov in Czechoslovakia in 1935 to his current retirement in Toowoomba, Queensland.

In 1964 Tomi left Czechoslovakia for Ghana in order to take up the position of Senior Research



Fellow for the Volta Basin Research Project, which involved carrying out limnological studies on a large reservoir. Limnology is the study of inland waters. At that time the government of Ghana was socialist; therefore, citizens of communist Czechoslovakia were allowed to go there.

In 1970, one year before the Idi Amin coup, Tomi moved to the Zoology Department of Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda, eventually becoming Head

of Department. In addition to teaching, he did research on Ugandan lakes. During the academic breaks he worked as a consultant doing limnological and fisheries studies on Tanzanian rivers and reservoirs for a Swedish company, which was considering the construction of a dam. There were also shorter consultancies in Kenya and Rwanda.

In 1973 Tomi's Czech passport was about to expire, and the Czech government refused to renew it, insisting that he return to Czechoslovakia. Instead, he went to Austria, where he had

contacts with the Austrian Academy of Sciences and where he was able to obtain an Austrian stateless person's passport. While in Austria he received a phone call from an Australian man, whom he had met in 1968 at an International Society of Limnology conference in Israel, offering him a job at Monash University.

In 1968, when Tomi was travelling from Ghana to Israel for that conference, he met his future wife Mary in Cairo. After the conference, during which the Russians invaded Czechoslovakia and the Israeli hosts raised the Czech flag (upside down), he spent several months at the Max-Planck Institute for Tropical Limnology in Plön, Germany.

In 1974 he moved to Monash University in Melbourne, where he taught limnology and fisheries in the Zoology Department for three years.

Tomi then spent the next 3 years in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (1977-1980). He was coordinator of environmental studies for the Purari Dam Project. This was part of feasibility studies for a large hydroelectric dam. This went way beyond limnology and fisheries. He recruited over 30 different experts from various countries. Their studies covered the physico-chemical, biological and social environment of the Purari River and its catchment in southern Papua New Guinea. This resulted in a book ***The Purari: Tropical environment of a High Rainfall River Basin.***



Tomi had contacts with FAO as early as 1966. When on duty travel to Europe he would stop in at FAO in Rome. He also met FAO employees at various conferences. He kept in touch with them, exchanging his scientific papers with some of them (Tomi published close to 100 scientific papers during his career.) He enquired several times about the possibility of work in FAO, and on one of his visits his name was inserted into a list of fishery specialists working in inland fisheries of Africa. In 1979 he met one of the FAO Fishery Resources Officers at a conference, who told him that he was a candidate in the first place for a job. Then, in 1980, a few months before ending his project, he got a phone call from a woman in Australia, no name

given (from a Canberra Ministry?) “There is a request for you to work for FAO in Rome. Would you like it?” Tomi answered “Yes”. She replied “Then we shall arrange it” That was all.

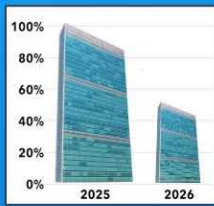
At FAO his work focused mainly on Asia and the Pacific, because there were already too many African experts in the department.

He retired to Toowoomba in 1995 – after making final use of his car to travel for 6 weeks through Turkey and Greece.



*[Editor’s note: we are most grateful to Tomi’s wife, Mary, for providing additional background information to help us to celebrate Tomi’s life story to date. Mary has her own interesting tale, having been a Peace Corps volunteer on Saipan, Mariana Islands. After her service in the Pacific, she was enjoying an extensive overseas tour on the way back to the USA when she happened to meet Tomi at the same hotel in Cairo, Egypt. The rest, as they say, is history. I have had the pleasure of often speaking at Brisbane AAFICS lunches with Tomi about his life under occupation in wartime Prague. To speak with a man who has outlived both the end of communism and a war so brutal and destructive in his homeland is an extraordinary honour. Best wishes to Tomi for a great birthday celebration and to both he and Mary for many more years of happiness and good health ahead.]*

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## The Results: Our Survey on Major UN-Reform Ideas

### The UN80 Reform Plan: What Survey-Takers ‘Strongly Agree’ On.

PassBlue’s informal readers’ survey on United Nations reforms offers insights into many of the choices being proposed in the official UN80 initiative. The reform effort, introduced in mid-March by Secretary-General António Guterres, aims to reshape the UN system to be more efficient and useful. Our survey, conducted from May 18 to May 24, 2025, gauged readers’ responses to seven key proposals from the UN80 management task force, using a sliding scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”

The survey results, collated from 1,377 respondents, indicate major support for certain proposed UN changes, reflecting a recognized need for the 80-year-old body to adapt to current budget constraints, primarily stemming from delayed member state dues (notably the United States and China) and recent/potential US cuts to a range of UN programs.

While the poll reflects strong support for some proposed changes, it remains uncertain whether these structural changes and budget cuts – as much as 20 percent — across the system, however strategic, will genuinely enhance operations or risk undermining the institution’s core roles, [as previously reported by PassBlue](#).

#### Most Popular Proposals:

- **Merging peace and security departments:** A significant **52 percent** of respondents “**strongly agree**” with merging the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) and the Department of Peace Operations (DPO). This proposal received the highest level of support in the survey, with only 2.4 percent strongly disagreeing and 9.6 percent undecided.
- **Creating a Unified Human Rights Department:** **Fifty percent** of survey-takers “**strongly agree**” with consolidating human rights efforts into a single UN Human Rights Department, led by the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Just 3 percent “strongly disagree” with this plan.

#### Other Notable Proposals:

- **Reducing high-level UN Posts:** **44.6 percent** of respondents “**strongly agree**” with reducing the number of high-level UN positions, while only 1.7 percent “strongly disagree.”
- **Merging UN Development Program (UNDP) and the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS):** In the development track, **48 percent** of respondents “**strongly agree**” with merging UNDP and UNOPS to “integrate strategic planning with project implementation.” Additionally, 31 percent agree, 11 percent are undecided, 7 percent disagree and 3 percent strongly disagree.
- **Merging UN Women and UN Population Fund (UNFPA):** Within the consolidation/reduction track focusing on UN development system entities, **50 percent** of respondents “**strongly agree**” with merging UN Women and

UNFPA to “create an agency focused on promoting gender equality and reproductive health and rights.” Seven percent each strongly disagree and disagree with this proposal.

**The least popular proposals appear to reflect reluctance by people to relocate or to integrate divergent roles, as shown in these findings:**

- **Relocating UN Jobs:** Only **38.6 percent** of respondents “**strongly agree**” with relocating some UN jobs from high-cost locations like New York City and Geneva to potentially cheaper hubs like Nairobi. Conversely, 5.5 percent strongly disagree with this idea.
- **Creating a UN Humanitarian Response and Protection Organization:** **42 percent** of respondents “**strongly agree**” with integrating the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) into a single entity. However, 27 percent agree, and a notable 7.5 percent strongly disagree, indicating concerns about combining agencies with somewhat different roles.

**Understanding the Comparison Scores (for accompanying charts/tables):**

A table comparing the average scores for each question is located at the bottom, after the seven column charts. This table can be sorted by question number and popularity. To provide a quantifiable “popularity value” for each question, a numerical value was assigned to each vote category:

- **Strongly Disagree = -2**
- **Disagree = -1**
- **Undecided = 0**
- **Agree = +1**
- **Strongly Agree = +2**

The “popularity value” for each question represents the **average** of all votes received. For example, a popularity rating of +1 indicates that the average sentiment for that question was “Agree.”

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## A VISIT TO THE EASTERN BORDER OF MYANMAR IN 1992

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The visit started in a place called Kyainge Tong - pronounced sort of Cheng Tong - which on one map was named as 'the centre of the Golden Triangle'. It could well be. Located in north-east Myanmar the region was, for about 40 years or more, an area of total unrest ruled by the Kuomintang who, as much as anyone, dealt in and, of course, supported the opium trade. This, with the help of Western governments, bought weapons and maintained their reasonable lifestyle. That much I think is fact, but I'm sure they were not in it alone and most of them (I'm told) have long since moved to Thailand or Taiwan and become respectable businessmen.



We left a place called Mang Khat at about 8.30 am on a cold, misty morning (to stand about was to freeze - this Golden Triangle is mountainous country and cold in winter) and headed a couple of miles out of town - our destination a village about 1 1/2 hours walk away. At the river's edge, someone called across to the other side for a boat. I didn't see it coming, being busy discussing a sand deposit with two geologists. When it came, I still didn't see it until I reached the bank. There it was, a long, flat-bottomed dug-out with its highest point about a finger's length above the water. When I stepped gingerly on board, it rocked alarmingly - as it did when the young boatman poled it strongly upstream. For all his hard work, we made little headway against the current - but this was the point, he was only trying to go across, not upstream. I pondered on how cold the water might be, the effect that it might have on my near-new video camera or on my half-cured ear infection, not to mention the effect of my well tied Mephisto walking shoes. Would they now help me sink or swim?

Of course, we reached the far side quite safely, waiting for 20 or 30 minutes until the boatman went back and fetched the rest of our party, a motor bike and some freight. When the bike arrived, U Win Myint said that I should get aboard. Dutifully I did...with the driver in front and an Army Captain behind. This threesome was sat upon a little 125cc Yamaha cross-country or scrambler type 2-stroke motorcycle and it was largely due to the fact that we had three all-male passengers that no-one actually became pregnant from the seating arrangement. With my 90 kilos plus the, say, 130 kilo aggregate of the rest of the crew, I was highly impressed, especially since we were at some altitude and Myanmar petroleum is not noted for its high octane rating. The Yamaha performed wonderfully well, although on one very steep hill the Captain and I got off and walked up.

If the scenery had been in Europe, or on some well-known track, it would be filled with millions of dollars worth of tourists. A long undulating valley, terraced paddy fields and mountains all around. After the morning start in the cold mist, the sun was now out with a welcoming warmth. To be rolling along with a beautiful breeze and warm sun is a pleasure I had long missed - memories of days when I owned several motor-cycles and on various occasions open tourer/sports cars. I was brought back to earth, literally, when we got stuck in the middle of a stream and had to wade to the far shore. The combined weight of bike plus three passengers pushed the narrow rear-wheel deep into the sandy bed. Shortly after that, we reached a bridge made of long poles connecting the two sides, and short cross-pieces which were just laid on top. The bike went back to pick up U Win Myint and U Tan Tun Chein, whilst the Captain and I walked the last mile or so to reach the village of Mai Nong. I judged we had come some five miles by bike on the narrow dirt road. The object of this safari was to see a

700-year-old Buddha in the monastery/pagoda at Mai Nong. Our original intention to walk the total of six miles in 1-1/2 hours would have been interesting, given the state of the road and, I'm sure, I would have weighed in at the end at more like 80 kilos.

As soon as we arrived, the Captain immediately bought me a small bottle of Lipovitan - a Thai concoction with vitamins and whatnots, guaranteed, they say, to turn octogenarians into ardent suitors. Fortunately, I'm not an octogenarian, but I must have looked as though I needed the pick-me-up although since the Captain had one too, and he was obviously quite fit, I didn't feel too bad.

The Buddha was quite beautiful, and we saw part of the bamboo-lime lath which formed the framework. Unfortunately, by this time, our previous nightly stops had been at places where the generators were out of order and my camera batteries were fully discharged. It seemed that I must come again, better prepared next time, which was a welcome enough thought. The ceiling above the Buddha is beautifully painted, a series of squares, within each one a different scene of peacocks and other birds, horses and cattle. There was a story recounted, of an Army officer who took a piece from the Buddha as a good-luck charm. He was blown up by a mine that same day or, of the lady who, thinking to do some good, stepped into a forbidden area and sprayed some gold paint. That day, the clouds gathered and the village was flooded. There are other stories too, but I'm no judge, nor do I wish to be one. That the villagers are sensitive and superstitious about 'their' Buddha seems to be real enough.

On the way back, I had a different driver, same Captain at the rear. The driver was more of my build and still the little Yamaha plodded on without stopping. I would have liked to have stood back and viewed the three of us as I have no idea where the Captain sat, but it had to be over the rear mudguard. At the river's edge once more, we waited for the boat, and I saw a man walk two horses across. After my earlier concern and the obviously swirling current, the water was only about 4 feet deep!

**William (Bill) Buchanan, CTA, UNCHS project Yangon City and Regional Development**

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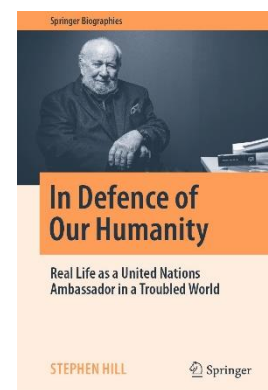
## NEWS FROM/ABOUT AAFICS MEMBERS

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Prolific author and academic, AAFICS NSW member, **Prof Stephen Hill (formerly UNESCO)**, brings news of his latest publication.

"I draw to your attention my latest published book which may be of particular interest to our community of UN related colleagues - as it covers direct, very dramatic experience of what life in the UN can be. My UN book is, Stephen Hill, *In Defence of Our Humanity - Real Life as a United Nations Ambassador in a Troubled World* (Springer Biographies, 2024). It already has very good reviews, including from best-selling Australian author, Hugh Mackay.

I have been able to purchase a number of copies of the book from Springer at 'Author Discount' price - 40% less than Amazon - with permission to sell. I can personally send the book to anyone interested within our UN community for the cost commitment of A\$45."



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In the *AAFICS Newsletter* of December, 2024 we carried a story about the recognition of **Dr Bill Pigott**, a NSW-based member of AAFICS and a former staff member of the **World Health Organisation**, by the award of a Membership of the Order of Australia. This was officially announced in The King's Birthday 2024 Honours List on 10 June 2024. The Award notification read: *“Appointed as a Member of the Order of Australia (AM), Dr William James PIGOTT Berry NSW 2535, For significant service to conservation and the environment, to medical education, and to international community health.”*



Unfortunately, in the Editorial note accompanying the article we incorrectly gave the spelling of Dr. William Pigott's name. Our apologies.

Congratulations again, Dr. William Pigott AM.

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Former **UNESCO** staff member, **Dr. John Elfick** (AAFICS Victoria) brings news of his ongoing activities in the education sphere.

“After science and agriculture teaching in Australia, Hong Kong and Papua New Guinea, I worked in big agriculture and science projects in the Pacific Islands, Pakistan and Bangladesh, then joined UNESCO Paris headquarters. After 5 years, I was transferred to UNESCO Beijing.

Wherever I worked, I always wrote little books on science and agriculture topics and in Beijing I published them through Capital Normal University Press (in Chinese) as ‘Basic Science Series - Physics, - Chemistry’ etc. When I returned to the University of Queensland, I started a website called “School Science Lessons”, and dumped into it all the contents of the little books I had written over the years, and put in more and more. It is a database of junior high school science and agriculture lessons, which is free to download for educational purposes.”

<https://johnelfick.github.io/school-science-lessons/>

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It's a pleasure to hear again from **Sylvia Petter (formerly ITU)** who is now marking her second year back living in Australia and, clearly, is as busy as ever with her creative endeavours. She writes:

“Prior to the recent AAFICS Sydney lunch, we met a young guest who wanted to know how to get to work for the UN. Participants introduced themselves and told stories of how, when and where they first started working for the United Nations. Interestingly, many of the stories attested to a certain serendipity, as did my own, coming to ITU in Geneva via conferences in Helsinki where I had been sent by UNIDO because German was not a UN language and following my studies in translation at the University of Vienna, I had little else to offer.



My Australian 'seniors' package' allows me to take advantage of the local community transport arrangements which organise outings and provide transport for medical and other appointments. I was fortunate that I could also be driven from Lane Cove to the AAFICS lunch. But the driver got the place wrong and deposited me at the Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron, instead of the Sydney Flying Yacht Squadron, 500 metres down the road. So, I got a peek into an exclusive club before clocking up some steps for my exercise app and arriving where I was meant to be.

So what have I been up to? In December, there was a 5-day literature cruise Sydney to Hobart return with my Childhood Bestie (CB) and a meeting with Australian writer Anita Heiss whom I'd met in Vienna a few years earlier.

This year, outings with my local transport group have taken me to garden centres in Mosman and Kirrawee, RSL clubs in Balgowlah and Canada Bay and to Bunnings for a DIY bookshelf.

On 7 April I gave a reading and a talk on my fictional memoir, *All the Beautiful Liars* at the Lane Cove Library, and on 12 April I attended the launch in Brisbane of my story collection, *Back Burning Redux*. A former ITU colleague, Cheryl Williams, who introduced me to AAFICS, was there, as was a former UNSW mate, Bronwyn Grannall now based in Mackay, who did the audio for my novel and that of my collection.



Last weekend, I was in Mittagong with my CB, Sue. Gee, it was cold there. We've planned a trip to Canberra when it gets warm again.

I'm currently working on my second novel, *Ambergris*, an eco-thriller with a romance sub-plot. Wish me luck.

Before I forget, I must thank Maurice Critchley for his tax advice and general support. That's all for my second year back.



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## Pacific Memories: Celebrating the past, discovering the present

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*The ILO Office for the South Pacific is based in Suva, Fiji. It covers 22 Pacific Island countries among which 11 are ILO Member States. The region is marked by vast expanses of ocean; a mix of cultures, history, languages, economic and political challenges; and features many critical issues at the core of the ILO's mandate.*

### Introduction

As retirees, we often wondered whether former colleagues return to far away postings to renew ties, reconnect with past work and to meet with current colleagues who carry on the programmes. We did; the four of us returned to Fiji in November 2024. It was a major step and, unfortunately, many could not join us. Here is our story.

Thirty-five years ago, we worked together in the ILO's office for the South Pacific, in Suva, and a bond of friendship and care for each other grew out of our being there through two coups d'état, curfews, sadnesses for the local population and adventures for us. Our different assignments marked us in many ways. Mary and Christine were in mid-career; Alette was just starting her ILO journey.



An ILO field assignment to the South Pacific is about the farthest away you can get from Geneva or the Regional Office in Bangkok. It was faraway then, and it remains so today. Making this journey together after so many years was a daunting prospect. We talked about it often whenever we were able to meet. Finding a time frame and locating former colleagues who could join and for how long were challenges.

In the end a group of four UN Joint Staff Pension Fund beneficiaries embarked on the journey. An international Zoom committee settled the questions around dates, flights and hotels and appropriate protocol was followed to inform the Regional Office and the Suva Office that these 'anciens fonctionnaires' would love to visit the Suva Office and meet colleagues currently working there. We were looking to find traces of our work of thirty-five years ago, in fact looking for validation of our memories of then, and our conviction that the posting to the Pacific had been truly special and probably the best of all.

### **A tour around Viti Levu, Fiji's largest Island**

And of course we wanted to explore Viti Levu, Fiji's main island and its spectacular nature. We started our tour around the Island from the Western part, gradually making our way to Suva via the recently upgraded Kings Road along the northern coast. Nadi had changed somewhat; more cars and roads but not as much as we had anticipated. Denarau, on the other hand, had grown considerably. It had become a major tourist resort, almost like any ocean-front resort around the world.



Next stop: Lautoka; a business center with lots of industry and trade and a multitude of clothes and jewellery shops and taxis! Several stops for photo ops on the beautiful Kings Road via Ba on our way to RakiRaki, where we would spend the night. We were fascinated by the beautiful countryside; the sugar-cane fields, the papaya and banana trees, the pineapple plants, the brown hills, the dalo and the colourful houses with laundry hanging outside. And the schools, which all looked alike, with large fields in front. As we made our way slowly towards Suva along the magnificent east coast of the island, we crossed many Fijian villages and saw many smaller islands off the coast in the distance including a clear view of Vanua Levu, the second biggest island of Fiji.

Just before Suva, the weather changed and we had our first serious – typical Suva - downpour and as expected Suva had changed! New buildings and commercial centres, good restaurants and coffee shops. But we did not see much change in downtown city centre Suva. In fact, throughout our tour in and around places that we had been before, we tried to detect how much Fiji had developed socially and economically. Our stay in Suva was too short to reach conclusions, but we still noticed some of the socio-economic disparities of the past. This said, staying at the beautiful Grand Pacific Hotel, walking along Victoria Parade, passing Ratu Sukuna House, brought up some special warm feelings, despite the non-stop rain.

We were just happy to be there. We drove around to find the houses where we had lived. We visited the highly successful Pure Fiji Soap Factory established by Mary’s friend Gaetan; went to the Fiji museum via Thurston Gardens, explored Colo-I-Suva and the waterfront, all the while the stories and memories of Fiji and our time there kept flowing. One of the highlights of our trip was the visit to the ILO office (see more later).



Two memorable visits to former colleagues marked our stop in Suva in a special way. With the help of Margaret Rounds Reade (a recently retired ILO official from Fiji), we were able to visit two of our former Suva Office colleagues; 91-year old Moira McDonald and Laisa Levula.



It was really a special and emotional moment to see Moira and Laisa again. We did recognize each other and reminded ourselves of the pleasant and happy atmosphere that reigned in the Suva Office 35 years ago.



We continued our tour around Viti Levu in non-stop rain via the beautiful Queens Road to Sigatoka. Nonetheless, the trip through the rainforest with traditional Fijian villages was great. Our drive along the impressive Sigatoka River towards the interior, up till a river cruise landing place and a visit to the Sand Dunes National Park where Mary had worked on archeological sites during her studies, were spectacular.

We stayed at a Fijian-owned hotel but, for old times' sake, we wanted to see the luxury hotels we had stayed in 35 years earlier. Our attempts to enter these places failed as all hotels along the Coral Coast were fully booked. Tourism is booming in Fiji! We just hope, but have our doubts, that the local population is benefitting enough from it.

The final stretch of our tour around Viti Levu brought us to the Gateway Hotel in Nadi just opposite the airport, where we had all stayed before. We left Fiji grateful, but also somewhat heavy-hearted.

### **What the Pacific gave us**

By 1987, the aid agencies had smiled on us and we had a large programme of technical cooperation projects and programmes in 13 Pacific Island countries spread across vast expanses of ocean and uncertain air travel. Christine spent half her time travelling, not always knowing how she was going to return to base. Some of the programmes were multi-country and most of the experts were expatriate men. On the other hand, the Suva office was much remarked on for its female staffing, a rare thing in those times. We struggled with certain things, such as how to develop the relationship between the ILO's mandate of international labour standards and the technical cooperation projects which were often the result of compromise among donor countries, ILO values and the recipient country's desires and expectations.

Just to balance this, over the years when we have seen each other, we have regularly evoked the freedom to make decisions that our 12-hour time difference with ILO Headquarters gave us. No-one could telephone us in those pre-internet days, not to mention the ability we developed to cobble together solutions when faced with the refusal of headquarters to spend half their travel budget to send us a short-term expert.

There were only 3 ILO Member States in the South Pacific at the time, compared to 11 Member States now. Most of our experts came from overseas; we noticed that our few Pacific Island experts taught us some special things, such as the benefit of taking in local habits and sitting around and talking amicably and taking all the time needed with the project stakeholders.

Above all, we took in something that was fundamental to our subsequent careers: we learned that the ILO could be useful, practical and that social justice could be served in many ways. This sense of usefulness and the possibility of bringing about social and economic change remained with us in the many years and different postings that followed. That is what the Pacific gave us. This was particularly the case for Christine and Mary who at the time were in mid-career and had previously served mostly in Headquarters or Turin.

Suva was Alette's first post in the ILO. Alette and husband Sjoerd were curious to explore everything the Pacific had to offer; the idyllic island environment, its serene smiling people and of course a fascinating assignment in the ILO as a JPO. Imagine finding your feet in a complex organization like the ILO, far away from its headquarters, under difficult political circumstances and actual curfews. And with a baby on the way; there couldn't have been a better 'baptism by fire'. The support extended was overwhelming and the friendships that developed were lasting. The Pacific gave us a truly unforgettable and precious life experience.

### **Visit to the Suva Office**

Meeting with the Director and the current staff of ILO Suva was one of the highlights of the trip. ILO Suva greeted us with warm hospitality and set aside a morning to receive us, complete with the traditional morning coffee. We were impressed by the spacious and modern accommodations, the communications systems and the large number of staff. There were numerous programme officers from various Pacific Islands as well as international technical advisers in specific domains (International Labour Standards and employment) based in Suva. This situation was a far cry from our environment in the 1980s; our office was small and crowded in a rather old building; our only communications were by post, telex and midnight phone calls through the central phone company.



In the eighties when we were in Suva, the staff was small, with good secretarial and admin support, but only two professionals on a permanent basis; Christine and Mary. However, we were strongly reinforced by several associate experts/JPO's (it varied between 3-4), project staff who helped us and several invaluable, talented UNVs on different projects. As noted above, by 1987 we had a full programme in many of the countries we covered.



Against this background, we were curious to know how our programmes had fared, and what the new priorities were. We quickly cited our programmes, and the ILO Suva colleagues gave us a briefing on theirs.

In the years 1985 – 1990, the ILO was in its heyday of technical cooperation projects and programmes, funded by UNDP, UNFPA and multi-bilateral donors. At that time the focus was on operational teams in programme countries with on-site expertise. The largest projects in the Pacific were in the field of rural vocational training and skills development and certification, and in a large number of sectors, such as mechanics, outboard motor repair, repair of sewing machines, electricity, construction, including rural road construction and cyclone repair operations. The ILO's work in the hotel and tourism sector, as well as in logging, were also important at the time. Policy advice and consultancies occurred on a smaller scale and focused on employment promotion, including through small and medium sized enterprises and cooperatives, and rural employment, labour standards and labour administration and a large programme on population and employment aimed at policy advice on demographic shifts and their impact on the labour market. All these programmes had a strong gender component and they generally covered multiple Pacific Island countries.

One of the most sensitive programmes implemented by the Suva Office at the time was the Regional Workers Education programme, which focused on freedom of association and collective bargaining. This programme stirred considerable concern in Fiji during 1986 and 1987. The Government of the day viewed the project as a direct source of support for the opposition Labour Party. The Office was requested to change the programme and limit the activities. A dedicated visit by an ILO Deputy Director General eased the situation temporarily. When the Labour Party subsequently won the national elections, the question was laid to rest. However, the military coups in May and September 1987 overturned the government, and freedom of association became a critical issue once again. Little did we know in 1989/90 that this situation would persist for many years, with several changes of government. (Message aux Anciens Fonctionnaires du BIT No 64 2019).



In preparation for our trip in May we sought updates on the current state of labour relations in Fiji. The situation continued to be rocky over a span of many years. This continuing tension over freedom of association issues led to an ILO Supervisory Body-initiated Direct Contacts Mission (DCM) in 2012. The mission had begun its work when it was abruptly requested to stop by the highest authorities who questioned the validity of the terms of reference. The DCM was requested to leave the country immediately. The following years saw little improvement with the 2014 election of Frank Bainimarama and his re-election in 2018. (Mr. Bainimarama had led the 2006 coup d'état). Complaints against the government for suppression of trade union rights, specifically freedom of association and workers' rights were submitted to the ILO. While some progress was made in 2016 to initiate a reform process so that laws would be in compliance with ILO standards that had been ratified by Fiji, labour relations did not improve and accusations of suppression of rights continued.

Elections in 2022 brought in a new government, headed by Sitiveni Rabuka, who had led the first coup in 1987 while we were posted there. We learned, to our pleasant surprise as we were preparing our trip, that his coalition government had taken rapid steps to move the reform process forward so that the Employment Relations Act of 2007 would be reviewed to bring it in line with ILO standards. An ILO Direct Contacts Mission took place just before our journey to Fiji in May 2024. It was led by Karen Curtis, who had been on the 2012 DCM, and further comprised Anna Olsen and Matalasi Ragigia, staff of the ILO Suva Office. It concluded that the reform process was well in hand and that the tripartite Employment Relations Board had been reactivated with the most representative social partners. Moreover, a number of other reforms were being reviewed or had already been enacted to ensure freedom of assembly and speech as well as reviews of the status of civil servants and essential services. Although a number of important steps still needed to be accomplished, the outlook at the end of our trip in May was promising for Fiji to be in full compliance with those ILO standards it had ratified. We were particularly pleased to note how much progress had been made in the span of time between the 2012 DCM, which had been expelled, and the 2024 DCM, which has found concrete signs of improvement.

Over the years since she retired, Mary who lives in Sydney, had visited Fiji several times, trying to stimulate the setting up of an association for UN officials retiring to Fiji. With the recent improvements in the legislation on freedom of association and the help of ILO retirees in the Pacific, there is now hope for this.

## **ILO's programme of work in the Pacific; then and now**

During the course of 35 years, the focus of ILO programmes in the Pacific naturally changed. With the decline in UNDP funding for Regional Teams in the 1990s and an ILO-wide review of the most optimal means to ensure partnerships with Member States, the focus of programmes in the Pacific generally shifted from hands-on practical training and skills development to high level policy advice with social dialogue and International Labour Standards at its heart. This was further amplified with the adoption of the 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, which required all ILO Member States to fully implement the ILO's 8 Fundamental Labour Standards regardless of whether they had actually ratified the Conventions or not.

In our discussions with ILO Suva staff, it became clear that several focus areas from back in the days are currently still a priority. Formalizing the informal economy, promoting development in the rural economy, infrastructure development and vocational training in several sectors such as fishing and maritime continue to be important elements. And of course, projects aimed at disaster resilience and support to recovery efforts from damage caused by the many tropical cyclones have continued to be a priority. As per overall ILO policy, the promotion of gender equality and inclusion continue to be embedded in all projects. The workers education programme has transformed into projects focused on social dialogue and increasing capacities of employer' and workers' organizations to participate effectively in the development of social and labour policy.

And then there are new priorities reflecting the major changes in the world of work that have taken place over the last 40 years. Not surprisingly, the top priority in the Pacific currently is the impact of climate change on decent work in this socially and ecologically vulnerable part of the world. Several projects are operational on labour mobility and empowerment of migrant workers. And Green Jobs and Just Transition projects are reportedly underway.

Another new focus area is strengthening the capacity of Member States to ratify and implement International Labour Standards and to fulfil their reporting obligations on them. Notable examples of this work comprise the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC 2006) and the Work in Fishing Convention (C188) but also Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment and the continued promotion of the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work with its recent upgrade to include safety and health at the workplace.



This reinvigorated focus on the ratification and effective implementation of International Labour Standards is not only linked to overall ILO priority-setting and policy; it is also the result of the enormous increase in the number of ILO Member States over the past 40 years. Whereas only 3 Pacific Island countries were ILO Member in 1985 (Fiji, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands) ILO membership in the Pacific currently stands at 11.

### **Taking leave from the past**

And so, today, our old memories have been validated and now have some new memories added to them. It was a great pleasure to meet the current ILO officials in their well set out and welcoming office in Suva. We would have stayed for many hours more to learn of their work with sustainability, gender and climate change and it was wonderful to see there was an International Labour Standards expert there permanently, as well as many experts from the Pacific. They invited us to return for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the ILO Suva Office next year so we could continue our exchange. We will gladly give it some thought.

Our very best wishes to them all and to the newly arrived director. We hope that they too will be able to say after several decades that the posting in the Pacific was the best of all.



**Christine Cornwell, Mary Johnson and Alette van Leur, formerly ILO**

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## IN MEMORIAM

### ANOMA WIJEYARATNE

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*A regular attendee at the annual AAFICS/Vic meetings, Anoma Wijeyaratne had registered early for the 2025 meeting scheduled for the first week in April. She was not, however, to make it this year. She fell ill during the weeks before the meeting, sent an apology that she would not be able to attend and then, just days before the meeting, she passed away. It was a sad timeline to the meeting that we would no longer have this effervescent, reliable and attractive woman available to share the formal debates at our table. Neither would she be available for the social side to our meetings – taking advantage of the casual groups that stood or sat together talking while sharing tea/coffee and snacks in the common room next door.*

*People are the essence of our AAFICS community – everyone is important. This brief note is by way of appreciation for those of us who knew Anoma Wijeyaratne following the loss of a treasured member of our State community. It contains a brief resume of Anoma's life and times as prepared by her daughter Mayanti, (Peter Steele)*

#### Anoma Wijeyaratne – a daughter's perspective

My mother Anoma Wijeyaratne was born and educated in Sri Lanka, eventually graduating from university with a Bachelor of Science (Hons) Degree in Botany. Her professional career was short-lived – a few years as a high school teacher, before switching to more interesting work as a member of the Audience Research Team of the BBC in London.



My father, Dudley Wijeyaratne, also grew up in Sri Lanka but undertook his undergraduate engineering education at the University of London. He and my mother met in London and planned to marry after my mother's graduation. At around the same time, however, my mother's father was appointed Sri Lanka's first Ambassador to the Soviet Union. As a result of my mother's new location, my parents were eventually married in a Buddhist wedding ceremony in Moscow. The Soviet authorities brought in two Mongolian monks to bless the couple, and the ceremony was filmed for national distribution.

My father joined the World Health Organisation as a Public Health Engineer, which resulted in more than 30 years of global travel – living and working in various countries primarily in Asia. When my father retired in 1988, my parents chose to settle in Melbourne. Here it was that my mother embraced another chapter of her life.

My mother had an inquiring mind; she always enthusiastically pursued her search for knowledge. She

was an avid reader during her years as an expatriate, expanding her knowledge and exploring the different cultures, religions and histories of the places in which she lived and travelled. In retirement she enjoyed French language classes, playing bridge, her UN retiree meetings and life in her retirement village. She spent time developing and subsequently enjoying her network of school and university contacts throughout her life.

My mother is survived by me - her daughter Mayanti - and her grandson Patrick. Her other daughter Menaka – mother of Patrick – died in 1996. My father died in 2002.

*[Editor's note: our condolences, Mayanti, we share your loss. Thank you, Peter, for your additional comments.]*

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## A MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

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This *AAFICS Newsletter* has the heading XXXIX. Thus, the next edition (December 2025) will be our 40<sup>th</sup>, meaning we have been publishing for some 20 or more years. That's quite an



achievement and I must thank and recognize former editors, not to mention all AAFICS members who have kindly contributed stories and articles for publication over the years. This edition of the *Newsletter* includes a good deal of information about essential elements of our retirement, such as news about the UNJSPF, ASHI, CoE, UPP and other matters. If you still have questions on any of these subjects, please check relevant websites and come back to the AAFICS President or State Coordinators for additional advice. We will help out as best we can, or will direct you to one of our more experienced members who may be able to assist in solving any pressing issues. Looking forward to

receiving your contributions for the *AAFICS Newsletter* edition in November 2025. Please send in MS Word (not as a PDF, nor in some strange word processing programme unique to your computer!) Standard defamation and other legal journalism content rules apply. The address for submissions is [aaficsnewsletter@yahoo.com](mailto:aaficsnewsletter@yahoo.com) Of course, I will also continue to monitor my personal e-mail for contributions well into the future. Thank you.

**- Martin Hadlow**

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## WIFE, CHILDREN AND BAGGAGE TO FOLLOW

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In September 1983, my husband, Bob, accepted a two-year contract with AusAid to provide assistance in re-establishing a Labour Statistics Department at the Botswana Statistical Office after a major fire burnt all records there. (This was the only time in 26 years that he was not with the ILO while working abroad). Three months later in the same year, his wife (me) and 3 sons and baggage duly arrived. A house was rented in the oldest suburb of Gaborone, the Village.

By 1985, our household had expanded to include my mother, our house-keeper/cook, Agnes, dog called Shelley and a black cat. The 2 older boys were happy at their high school, Maru-a

Pula, the youngest at his primary school, Broadhurst Primary, while I had found employment at a British Engineering Consultancy Firm.



Botswana is a land-locked country having a border with South Africa, which was then in turmoil as ANC activists intensified their campaign against the government. Many of the more prominent activists escaped as refugees to Botswana.

In June 1985, Bob was asked to do a short mission in Harare, Zimbabwe and thus wasn't home on the 14 June. It was a day like any other and all was peaceful when we went to bed. I was woken from a deep sleep to gunfire and the rumble of what sounded like tanks and loud hailers blaring out instructions, which I couldn't understand because of the background noise. Initially, I thought I must be dreaming because Botswana was a peaceful, democratic country with regular elections, so as far as I was concerned this was not a coup.

These thoughts went through my head as I lay in bed thinking what to do; don't draw attention to our house - no lights, no noise; safest place the corridor, no windows just brick walls on both sides; alert and warn the others. I rolled out of bed onto the floor and commando-crawled to the next bedroom, where the two older boys were soundly sleeping despite the nightmarish cacophony of gunfire, explosions and heavy vehicle noise. Whispered instructions were soundlessly obeyed and then I crawled to the third bedroom, where mum and youngest son were also sound asleep. Mum told me not to be silly, it was only the Botswana Defence Force target practising, another explosion had mum (she was 70 years old) dropping to the floor quick smart with youngest son following her example.

Finally, we were all in our safe space and then I thought of Agnes, who I hoped and presumed was under the bed in her own quarters at the back of the garden. She was a sensible person and I was sure she wouldn't panic. Suddenly I thought of Shelley by herself in the garden, as she was ostensibly our fierce guard dog, but, in reality, she wouldn't hurt anyone. I knew exactly where she would be, cowering outside the front door, so I crawled to the door, unlocked it and there she was shivering in fright. Quickly she squeezed through the slightly open door. To this day, I don't know where the cat spent the night, but in the morning she appeared as usual for breakfast.

After a few hours, during which time we discussed different theories about the nightmare happening outside, we noticed that the noise had lessened. Tired and sore from sitting on a cement floor, we crawled back to bed. I had no sooner got into bed when there was a massive explosion nearby; the windows rattled, plaster fragments from the ceiling rained down and this time everyone, without instructions, crawled speedily to our safe space. Shortly after, blessed silence. Nevertheless, we decided to drag our mattresses to the corridor, where we spent the rest of the night.

In the morning, via the BBC news, we learned that the South African Defence Force had invaded Botswana to capture, or eliminate, members of the ANC who had sought refuge there. The huge explosion we heard was grenades used in taking out a maid's quarters a few houses down from us. The unfortunate maid did not survive.

I was so relieved when Agnes appeared and confirmed that she had hidden under the bed, but of course she wasn't a target because she was a Botswana national and not ANC.

However, the firm where I was working had employed a South African engineer and his friend, a computer consultant. There had been rumours that that they were members of the ANC, who had taken refuge in Gaborone. They were nice young men.

After taking the boys to school I arrived at work where everyone was discussing the events of the previous night. The SA engineer arrived extremely worried that his friend could not be reached and we found out later that he ran, was spotted and gunned down.

Bob was expected home later that day and I thought that he would phone to find out if we were safe (no mobile phones then and it wasn't easy to make international phone calls in Africa). Finally, Bob arrived to be met by a rather disgruntled wife. He explained that as he had an early flight he hadn't listened to the BBC in the morning and was not informed about the events of the previous night until he boarded. He was therefore excused!

In later years, I worked at the Economic Commission for Africa, the Economic Commission for Europe and the International Labour Office, but these provide other memories and stories.

**Zydre Pember, formerly ILO and other agencies**

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## FEATURE STORY

### HISTORY OF THE AVA (INWA) BRIDGE, MANDALAY

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Ava (also called Inwa) was the main metropolis of the Burmese kingdom between the 14th and 19th centuries. A horse-drawn carriage could take you around this unique area, dotted with distinguished ancient monasteries, namely the Bagaya Kyaung, a splendid teak monastery built in 1834 which operates as a monastic school. The Maha Aung Mye Bonzan Monastery and the Nanmyint Watch Tower both also exhibited unique designs and architecture.



*Paddle steamer on the Irrawaddy River*

On arrival in Myanmar, you'd be invited to cruise the Ayeyarwady River from Mandalay downstream to Bagan. As the paddle steamer set sail, you'd take a last look back at enchanting Mandalay and take in the picturesque river scenery as it changes from cityscape to wide open countryside fields and gently rolling hills. To while away the time on board, have a drink at the outdoor Kipling's Bar or on the sun deck, as the boat sets sail towards Sagaing, one of the ancient capitals of Myanmar.

You would then disembark to discover the highlights of Sagaing and the former Royal Capital of Ava, two cities which were connected by the famous 16-span cantilever 'Ava bridge', built in 1934 by British Engineers, headed by George Hicks, Chief Engineer Burma Railways, our family's great grandfather.



*Old Ava road and rail bridge across the Irrawaddy River*

George Hicks was born in Trinidad, British West Indies, on December 10<sup>th</sup> 1879. His father was the General Manager to what was then the Colonial Bank, which later was taken over by Barclays Bank. George moved to London in 1885 and had decided to be a Civil Engineer and to study at the City and Guilds Central College in South Kensington. He studied for three years and obtained his engineering Diploma of A.G.G.I. in 1899. This College became affiliated to London University, and then awarded a B.Sc. (Eng) degree in addition to the A.G.G.I.

He sailed by a Bibby Boat from Liverpool on the third of September 1903 to Burma. He was given drawings of the girders, but no one knew for any given bridge what the type of girders were in that particular bridge. This meant trolleying over one thousand miles of track, stopping at each bridge and measuring up the girders, and noting it in its class or type. It was an excellent introduction, as he got an insight into the main line of the railway, and met most of the officers. He was soon busy arranging contracts for the earthworks and the burning of bricks, the size and design of the bridge arches. The bridge uprights were built using a huge bell to enclose workers who would work under high pressure and temperature under water, constructing with bricks each of the 16 piers which would hold the steel arches across the river. The water could rise and fall up to 40 feet during high and low water flows. The bridge

when finished was tested by multiple steam engines parked along its length. It was capable of carrying an American Sherman Tank, of 32 tons weight, during wartime.

Now, there stood an old Pagoda on the line in fairly good repair. Its base was perhaps 3m square and the height some 10m. It had been kept in repair for it was newly whitewashed, and villagers came to it to worship. He found it impossible to avoid moving this Pagoda and, as it was considered a sacred object, the matter presented a problem which seemed insoluble. His first objective was to make friends with the local priests. To them, he explained the difficulty from the railway point of view, and together they examined the ground. His proposal to them was this: the railway would pay for a new site and all other costs. Masons would loosen each brick as carefully as possible, and these same bricks would be carried to the new site by the railway or by villagers if they wanted to. Any valuables found in the Pagoda would be built into the new Pagoda. The priests would provide a guard round the Pagoda whilst it was being dismantled to prevent thefts and to see that the terms of agreement were being observed.

When all had agreed, they made a start. Each brick was careful removed and cleaned, and villagers for miles around came to see the progress, and to help carry the bricks to the new site. Even small children joined in. As had been expected, they found in the centre a large cavity and in it were quite a number of silver tinsel images of the Buddha, and also a few brass ones. These were removed to a cash safe, but exhibited daily, and many people crowded round to see them. In great and solemn procession these were carried to the new Pagoda by the priests, and were built in, this time in good cement mortar. In due course, the new Pagoda was completed and the placing of the Tee on top was accompanied by music and festivities which lasted for three days and nights. When all was over, the priests came and presented him with a brass Buddha about 30cm high in recognition, as they said, of the care he had taken in the matter.



*The Ava bridge at Sagain*

Visitors to the bridge would be captivated by its elegant design and the stunning views it offered of the Irrawaddy River and the lush green hills that surround it. This old Ava (or Sagain) Bridge across the Irrawaddy River had a span of 3,948 feet (1,203 m). Built in 1934,

and until the 1990s, it was the only bridge which spanned this river, the first to join the south and north of the country, Myanmar.

As one strolled across the Ava Bridge, you would take a moment to appreciate the tranquil atmosphere that envelops you. The gentle sounds of the river flowing beneath and the distant chatter of local life create a serene environment, perfect for reflection and relaxation. The bridge location is especially beautiful at sunrise and sunset, when the sky is painted in hues of orange and pink, reflecting off the water below. This picturesque setting made it a favorite spot for photographers and nature lovers alike.

The bridge, referred to as the Ava Bridge, has been a striking example of Myanmar's architectural heritage, bridging the historical cities of Sagaing and Ava by road and rail. This impressive structure not only served as a vital connection between the two towns, but also stood as a testament to the engineering prowess of its time. The bridge was blessed by a famous hermit, U Khanti, who prayed a special blessing that no lives would be lost during this dangerous construction, and this was, in fact, the case.



In addition to its visual appeal, Ava/Sagaing Bridge has been steeped in history. The bridge has witnessed countless stories of the people who lived and travelled in this region, and it remains a vital part of the local culture. As you visited, you could consider exploring the nearby areas, to immerse yourself in the rich heritage of Sagaing and Ava, including ancient pagodas and bustling markets. Overall, a visit to Ava/Sagaing Bridge was not just a journey across a structure; it was an experience that connected you to the rich tapestry of Myanmar's past and present.



The 16-span Ava Bridge, as a 3,948-ft-long road, rail and pedestrian bridge, boosted the flow of trade in the country after it was officially opened in 1934 by Governor Sir Hugh Lansdown Stephenson. The Ava had since aged, and its carrying capacity became limited to under 15-ton capacity trucks in 1992. Heavily laden vehicles then crossed the river with Z-craft ferries, hence less efficient transport of goods.

Ironically, over eighty years ago, retreating British forces destroyed part of the Sagaing Bridge, also known as the Ava Bridge, to prevent invading Japanese troops from pursuing them. The

centre of the structure finally collapsed after being dynamited by British troops around 18 times in 1942. The spans linking Mandalay and Sagaing were then rebuilt by the original engineering group during 1954.



*The Sagaing/Ava Bridge after it was dynamited by British troops*

All this tranquility was again devastated on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2025 by the tremendous 7.7 earthquake, whose epicentre was in Sagain, a most peaceful and sacred place in Myanmar. Lying on the main fault line in the country this was not the first time such a huge quake has occurred –but this time the Ava bridge collapsed and several piers fell into the Irrawaddy River, blocking transit by shipping and traffic on the bridge. The shock to locals and visitors has been profound.



The 1839 Ava earthquake, was a disastrous seismic event that struck central Myanmar on March 23<sup>rd</sup> of that year. That earthquake estimated as high as 8.3, was one of the largest in the country since 1762. Damage was enormous in Ava, resulting in the death of hundreds. The Sagaing Fault is Burma's largest and most active source of seismic threat. In 1946, the 180 km (110 mi) long Sagain segment again produced two major earthquakes, but there are no records of their impact. Ten years later, in 1956, a magnitude 7.1 earthquake struck close

to the city of Mandalay, re-opening the 1839 rupture zone for about 60 km (37 mi). No record of damage to the bridge was recorded by the engineers during these more recent times.

### Epilogue

Since Friday, May 2, 2025, several media outlets in Myanmar have published images of the initial repair process for the Ava Bridge, or Sagaing Bridge. According to the images released, a crane is seen lifting the steel structure and beams of the bridge, which were shaken by the earthquake and sank into the Ayeyarwady River, back onto the bridge piers. Engineers and technicians from the Ministry of Construction are standing on top of the bridge.



The Ava Bridge is located north of Ava and about 12 kilometers southwest of Mandalay, near the mouth of the Midnaing River where it meets the Ayeyarwady River. On the opposite bank is Sagaing, the capital of Sagaing Region. About 600 meters north of the old Ava Bridge is the new Ayeyarwady Bridge, which was built for cars to cross in 2008.



Both the old and new Ava Bridges are important transportation hubs in central Myanmar, as they connect several other regions and states, with Mandalay, Naypyidaw, and Yangon. Earlier, on April 13, two weeks after the earthquake, a team of Indian military engineers, who specialize in disaster prevention and demolition, were sent to work with officials from the Myanmar Ministry of Construction to inspect, and assess the damage.



In addition, the old Ava Bridge is also an important connecting point of the 3-country expressway project, Thailand-Myanmar-India, which is a continuous route from the East-West Economic Corridor (EWEC), approximately 1,600 kilometers long, connecting from the Mae Sot border in Tak Province of Thailand, through Myanmar to the Tamu-Moreh border checkpoint to enter the state of Manipur in India.

There is no disclosure as to how long the repair of the old Ava Bridge will take.

**Alastair Hicks, formerly FAO Regional Office Asia and Pacific**

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## STOP PRESS

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### CHANGE OF CEO AT THE UNJSPF

Northern Trust Asset Management, a leading global investment management firm with US\$1.3 trillion in assets under management as of March 31, 2025, has appointed **Pedro Guazo** as head of international and responsible investing.

**Guazo most recently was chief executive officer for the \$100-billion United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund's Office of Investment Management.** During his five-year tenure, he transformed the fund, growing assets by nearly 60% with an extensive buildout of a private markets program and diversifying the portfolio across several new asset classes. The fund is recognized as a leader in responsible investing by the Responsible Asset Allocator Initiative and a founding signatory to the Principles for Responsible Investment. Guazo served on the Investor Advisory Group for the International Sustainability Standards Board.

*[Editor's note: Thank you to Sharon Vanbuerle, WA State Coordinator, for this news. We expect that a new CEO (or interim) will be appointed by the UNJSPF soon. No doubt the FAFICS conference in Vienna this month will discuss the matter. We will report back to AAFICS members accordingly.]*

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## THE LAST WORD: BABEL OR BABBLE?

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Creative art, like experimental theatre, provides opportunities to evoke strong emotions and to challenge conventional thinking. It also has the capacity to question, nourish the senses and, sometimes, to startle.

The wonderful gallery known as the Tate Modern, remodelled from the building that was once the Bankside Power Station, one of London's key energy generators along the River Thames, is home to a veritable cornucopia of fascinating and enthralling exhibits, creations and modern artistic structures. As a student of radio broadcasting, sound and audio in all its forms and genres, a visit I made to the Tate Modern earlier this year proved most rewarding, with the discovery of a unique art work addressing what the exhibit signage described as 'ideas of information overload and failed communication'.

The art work, named *Babel 2001*, and created by a Brazilian, Cildo Meireles, comprises an 8 metre tall tower of 800 radios, each tuned to a different radio station and all playing at once.



The base of the structure comprises large valve radios from the 1920s and 30s, while smaller, mass-produced modern models, form the summit. The artist explains that “radios are physically similar and, at the same time, each is unique.” He points out that the noise emanating from *Babel 2001* is constant, but that “the precise mix of broadcast voices and music is always changing, so that no two experiences of this work are ever the same.”



Cildo Meireles reminds us that the Biblical story of the Tower of Babel relates to a tower tall enough to reach the heavens. God was offended by the structure and caused the builders to speak in different languages. “No longer able to understand one another” Meireles says, “they became divided and scattered across the Earth, and so began all mankind’s conflicts.”

If any AAFICS members are travelling to London, a visit to the Tate Modern to see *Babel 2001* is very much recommended. The sound of 800 radios all blasting at the same time is incredible in itself. It’s also worth a visit just to look at the radios themselves as there are familiar and recognisable models in the structure to remind us of the pre-transistor radio set that once stood in our own home back when the wireless was such an influential and important medium.

**Martin Hadlow, formerly UNESCO**

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## ABOUT US

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The *AAFICS Newsletter* is an informal communications 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 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 December, 2025.



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