



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



**VOL. XXXIX, No. 2**

**NEWSLETTER**

**DECEMBER 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.*

As we approach the end of another year, we look forward to a period of reconciliation and a celebration of peace and renewal over the Christmas/New Year festive season. However, it is



harder this year, than most, to embrace these cherished goals given the global turbulence of the past 12 months. Each day brings such extraordinary and troubling global events, attitudes or political decisions that one major Australian newspaper recently wrote “Nothing shocks us any more”. The UN system and other similar multilateral bodies face serious challenges to their very existence and are dependent upon the whims and capricious nature of a cabal of

politicians and a coterie of wealthy magnates seeking to disrupt, defund and denigrate. Truth and accountability are cast aside as aid budgets are slashed, international development agencies are sidelined, and longstanding poverty, health and human support initiatives are wantonly abandoned. The war in Ukraine grinds on, with the latest peace proposals seemingly favouring the invading country, not the nation facing destruction by its larger neighbour. In the midst of this news, we recall that the festive season offers a chance for a new start and an opportunity for humanity to come together and to seek to implement some of the goals of the UN Charter: sustainable development, human rights, justice for all, education, health, poverty alleviation and, above all, global peace. We wish all AAFICS members a joyful Christmas/New Year break and a calmer and more peaceful 2026.

**- Editor**

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## AAFICS PRESIDENT'S REPORT

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### AND SO, THE YEAR ENDS...

To say that the year 2025 has been, in a political and social sense, a turbulent, confounding and confronting one would be an understatement. The term 'agitation and incoherence' is commonly heard and it certainly resonates with those of us who have worked in the international sphere under a more defined set of procedures and regulations, and now find it difficult to adjust to an evolving order where democratic rules are trashed or changed seemingly at the whim of politicians or non-elected Internet 'personalities'.

There is no doubt that the entire multilateral system is under stress, not the least being the United Nations. In this, its 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, the UN finds its very essence in question, its work mocked and trivialized, its officials denigrated and abused, and eight decades of global service discarded, often by those whom, we would think, should know better. There is no question that the UN needs to change, evolve and readjust to suit new circumstances and times. All of us who have worked for the organization know only too well the bureaucratic frustrations and anomalies inherent within the system. However, the UN still stands as a creation built from the ruins of global war with the paramount goal of maintaining international peace and, to this end, its *raison d'être* should, surely, be strengthened and reinforced.

### CHANGES AT THE TOP

Several changes in AAFICS governance have taken place over the last year.

After 12 months in the role of President, Queensland-based **Martin Hadlow** (formerly UNESCO), steps aside at the end of December. This move is in line with the new AAFICS trial system under which the role rotates through a different Branch each calendar year, thus opening opportunities for service to a more geographically comprehensive and diverse group of members. I will continue as Editor of the twice-yearly *AAFICS Newsletter* and am pleased to provide any assistance or support to the incoming national and State leaders. May I also take this opportunity to sincerely thank Jennifer Ashton who was President before I took up the task and who provided so much information and support.

Taking on the position of President for the year 2026 is **Maurice Critchley** (formerly UNO/UNPKO) from the AAFICS Branch in New South Wales. Maurice has, for many years, been NSW State Coordinator and will continue in that role concurrently with being AAFICS President. Most recently, Maurice represented AAFICS at the FAFICS@50 annual meeting held in Vienna. Very much appreciated, Maurice. The change of President was approved at the AAFICS AGM held in October. Thank you, Maurice, for taking on the task and for all your efforts to date as NSW State Coordinator.

In the ACT, long-time AAFICS Acting Coordinator, **Kate Gordon** (formerly UNHCR), has stepped aside after greatly appreciated service to the Association and has been replaced by **Ellen Hansen** (formerly UNHCR). Thank you again, Kate. Prior to retirement from the UN, Ellen was UNHCR Deputy Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific based in Bangkok. Sincere thanks, Ellen, for stepping up to take on the job. Welcome!

After 16 years' service as Queensland State Coordinator, **Mike Sackett** (formerly FAO/WFP/UNDP), has now relinquished the role. Mike was first appointed in March, 2009 and, since then, he and his wife, **Eileen**, have organised and implemented countless social

lunches and other events for Queensland members. Not only that, but, given his extensive UN career experience, Mike has become the 'go to' person for consultations on a number of administrative matters, from pensions to the UPP to the CoE. He has willingly shared his expertise and knowledge with many old and new members, not the least with me as President. Personal thanks from me, Mike and Eileen.

Coming into the Queensland State Coordinator role at the end of December is **Ian Douglas** (formerly FAO). Ian and his wife, **Cathy**, have been regular attendees at Queensland Branch lunches and have enthusiastically embraced the role and possibilities the Association offers its members. To this end, Ian has already made suggestions for documenting the service of AAFICS in written form in some sort of publication. His proposal is expressed in an article in this *AAFICS Newsletter*.

## **IN MEMORIAM**

This year, we have lost two AAFICS stalwarts, **Mary Johnson** (formerly ILO) and **Tom Joel** (formerly WMO). We have reflections on their lives elsewhere in this Newsletter. Mary was President from January, 2006 following the request by founding AAFICS President, Dr. John Hirshman, to step down from the position. She served until passing the baton to Jennifer Ashton. Like Mary Johnson, Tom was an active AAFICS executive member and was Treasurer for many years. We recognise their service to AAFICS. Rest in peace.

## **IN THIS NEWSLETTER...**

Our members have, as always, contributed a huge range of interesting stories, tales and reminiscences for this edition of the *AAFICS Newsletter*. Without this input, the publication would be much lighter in content and I do hope that I have harnessed all the material received into this end-of-year document. As members would appreciate, material arrives in my mailbox over a period of months and I live in fear that I might not have catalogued a piece in my files or that it slips through the cracks and I miss publishing it altogether. If I have done so with a contribution you might have sent me, my apologies.

In this edition of the *Newsletter*, I have decided to explore some aspects of the history of AAFICS. For example, I am sure that many members would not know that Dr. John Hirshman AM set up AAFICS back in 1980. He then wrote the constitution, established the *Newsletter* and served for 25 years as President and Treasurer! We know this because, fortunately, print copies of early *Newsletters*, along with a great deal of correspondence, were saved by previous Presidents and the collection is now in my possession. Thank you again Jennifer for holding this material for so many years. While there are gaps, *AAFICS News* Vol. I. No. 1 from July, 1981 is still in our possession. The two key stories? Taxation of UN pensions and the on-time payment of UN pensions to Australian-based retirees. What a surprise!

Given that we still hold this historical material, I have given thought to having the entire print collection of early documents scanned professionally so that we have it in digital form. Thus, we could share with all members.

Thank you for a great year to all State Coordinators, Maurice (NSW), Mike (Qld), Kate and Ellen (ACT), Peter, Ivy and Mike (Vic), Jane (Tas), Christine (SA) and Sharon (WA) along with Treasurer Gehl. To all members...your friendship, collegiality and support have been hugely welcomed. Thank you. Let's go into the New Year with confidence.

**Martin Hadlow,**  
**President, AAFICS**

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## AAFICS AGM

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### **AAFICS Annual General Meeting: 11.00am Friday 24 October, 2025 Minutes**

**Venue:** The Birches Restaurant, Mount Mee, Qld 4521

**Chair:** Mike Sackett AAFICS Qld State Coordinator (FAO/WFP/UNDP).

**In attendance:** Martin Hadlow, AAFICS President (UNESCO), Anne Hadlow, Anne Attard (UNICEF), Chander Badloe (UNICEF), Ian & Cathy Douglas (FAO), John Clements (WHO), Lene Mikkelsen (WHO) & Alan Lopez (WHO), Chris O'Brien (FAO), Tomi & Mary Petr (FAO), John & Anita Powell (IBRD, WFP), Eileen Sackett, Phil Young (ADB/IFAD/UNDP).

**Apologies for Absence:** Leik Boonwaat, Malcolm Duthie, Mardie Holton-Cleave, Vanessa de Vos, Katharine Ghidella, Valerie Hay, Tim Henry, Adil Khan, Janette Kollisch, David Mclachlan-Kerr, Raghwan Raghwan, Perin Saint Ange, Dirk Schulz, Rhonwen Searle, Naawa Sipilanyambe, June Smith, Tanya Smith, Darrell Stark, Barbara Stubbs, Michael Wieteska, Christine Withanage, Cheryl Williams, Ajit Yogasundram, Klaus & Kerrie Zillner.

**The Chair** opened the meeting at 11.05am. With 17 members present a quorum was confirmed. The Chair then:

- Welcomed all those attending;
- Explained that this was probably the first time in its 30 plus years of existence that the AGM had been held outside Sydney. Previously the AAFICS President had been based in Sydney or Canberra – hence the location of the AGM;
- AAFICS has now adopted an annual revolving presidency initiated by Martin;
- Noted that today marked the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of the UN;
- Sadly 2025 was proving to be probably the most difficult year in the UN's history due funding cuts and hostility towards the UN from the country hosting its HQ.

**President's Report:** Please see attached. In response members raised the following issues:

- The efficacy of a revolving annual Presidency was questioned. In response it was pointed out that this approach had been adopted to resolve a deadlock in which nobody had offered themselves as AAFICS President.
- The Australian Tax Office's unwillingness to accept UN health insurers as eligible partners for tax deductibility. AAFICS has pursued this matter in the past without success.
- The vexed matter of the Undeducted Purchase Price (UPP) applicable to our UN Pensions and which is a useful deductible when we come to submit our annual income tax returns. There is a helpful article on this subject on pp8-9 of the July 2025 AAFICS Newsletter.

**Financial Report:** Please see the attached report prepared by AAFICS Treasurer, Gehl Crowe. It was received with satisfaction by those present. The Chair moved that the Financial Report be approved. Seconded by Ian Douglas. The motion was carried.

**AAFICS President 2026:** The President moved that Maurice Critchley take on the responsibilities of AAFICS President from 1 January 2026. Maurice had earlier been informally approached on the matter, and had indicated a willingness to take on the role if requested.

Seconded by Mike Sackett. There being no other nominations, Maurice Critchley was unanimously approved to be the next AAFICS President.

### **Any Other Business**

- 1) The Chair proposed a Vote of Thanks to Martin Hadlow for his energetic work as AAFICS President in 2025, in addition to his duties as Newsletter Editor which he has undertaken so competently for a number of years.
- 2) Ian Douglas offered to lead an exercise in which AAFICS members would have the opportunity to “tell their story.” Given the rich diversity of experience which we have all had around the world, this proposal was warmly supported.

The meeting closed at 11.55am when members adjourned to a much-anticipated lunch.



## **REPORT OF THE AAFICS PRESIDENT.**

### **Introduction**

To say that the year 2025 has been a turbulent one globally would be an understatement. In January, we looked askance as the USA took a new direction unlike any avenue we had seen previously. Not only did America seek to make radical change within its own borders, it also created mayhem on the international scene. Now, in October, the continual ‘churn and change’ of US policy directions has almost become second-place and we just accept, albeit perhaps unwillingly, that each day will probably bring more chaos, confusion and disappointment.

For retirees of the UN system, the outpourings from the USA have brought about concerns for the future of the organisation we all served with diligence, honour and pride, often in extraordinarily difficult circumstances. To hear the idle trashing of this international body and its agencies has been both sad and worrying, especially as the leaders of the once great democracy responsible for the founding of the UN, and still home to its Headquarters, wilfully denigrate its achievements, its global service and its people.

### **Member Interactions**

Not surprisingly, the key queries received by the President from members this year have primarily related to the investment performance of the UNJSPF. In an effort to allay fears, we have sought advice from various quarters, not the least the President of FAFICS, our umbrella organisation. Essentially, the information from across the board indicates that the Pension Fund is solid and secure but, of course, like any other fund, is subject to the vagaries of the investment market. We published as much information as we held in the mid-year edition of the *AAFICS Newsletter*.

The other key question asked of the President relates to the Undeducted Purchase Price (UPP) pension rules of the Australian Taxation Office. Again, this is a relatively complex matter and we have provided all the public information available in the *AAFICS Newsletter*.

A major part of the year involves seeking UNJSPF members who have not returned their annual Certificate of Entitlement (COE) to the UNJSPF in New York. These colleagues are known as 'defaulters'. This year, we sought six people in Australia who had not returned their form to New York. These included three from NSW, two in Victoria, and one in South Australia. With the support of State Coordinators, we found four of the six. The other two appear to have left the country. None of the 'defaulters' are members of AAFICS. We just carry out the task for collegial reasons.

As in the past, our State Coordinators have been the mainstay of the organisation. This year, we have had a change in the ACT Coordinator role and expect Victoria and Tasmania also to provide new Coordinators for 2026. The current AAFICS President also stands down in December.



### **Relationships**

We have a strong link with the Federation of Associations of Former International Civil Servants (FAFICS), our umbrella global body. This year marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of FAFICS and we were delighted to have AAFCS NSW State Coordinator, Maurice Critchley, present for that event in Vienna. A full report will be published in the December 2025 *AAFICS Newsletter*.

AAFICS also has a relationship with the UN Association of Australia (UNAA). This link is on an *ad hoc* basis and we stand ready to remain committed as circumstances arise.

## Membership

As of this week, we have 366 paid-up AAFICS members, an increase of eight on last year. One issue on membership continues to be the number of members who might be deceased, but still on our membership books. As we pay a one-off, lifetime membership fee, rather than an annual subscription, we do not know who may have passed during any particular year, unless we are specifically advised.

## Finances

The AAFICS bank balance is healthy, strong and fully in credit. Wonderful news. A full financial report, prepared by our dedicated and professional Treasurer, Gehl Crowe, will be provided to this AGM under the next subject heading.

## Newsletter

Along with social events, such as lunches, the biannual *AAFICS Newsletter* continues to be, in the President's view, the glue holding the organisation together. (As also being Editor of the *Newsletter* for some 8 years, he would say that, wouldn't he?) The *Newsletter* arriving in e-mail boxes across the country and, in fact, the world (our members are much-travelled people) provides a twice-yearly snapshot of members' activities, interests and their own travel stories, tales of life within the UN system, or adventures of general interest. The next *Newsletter* will be distributed in the first week of December.

## Conclusion

AAFICS is in a strong position, both financially and in membership numbers. We continue to advocate for more members and would ask current members to continue to provide information to those shortly to take retirement from the UN.



As outgoing AAFICS President, I thank you for your support during my year in the role. Under the new rotating system to ensure that all States are able to take on the task and to host the AGM, I will be stepping down in December. However, I will be continuing as Editor of the *AAFICS Newsletter* and look forward to your continuing assistance in this role.

It has been a most interesting and rewarding 12 months and I have learned a great deal about the organisation, FAFICS, and the UNJSPF. A most enjoyable assignment. Thank you to all State Coordinators, our Treasurer and all other supporters.

## Dr. Martin Hadlow

President

Australian Association of Former International Civil Servants (AAFICS)

24<sup>th</sup> October 2025

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## AAFICS Treasury Report as at 20 October 2025

### Income and Expenditure

From 1 January 2025 to 20 October 2025, AAFICS welcomed 8 new members and earned interest of \$1,247.55 on a term deposit with Commonwealth Bank.

In terms of expenditure, our annual dues to FAFICS (which is based on the number of AAFICS members 366 @ USD 2 per member) amounted to USD 732.00, or AUD 1,213.13. In addition, \$1,975.25 was paid for 4 days DSA for attendance at the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary meeting of FAFICS in Vienna, \$164 was paid for flowers for the funeral of Mary Johnson, \$420 was paid for wreaths laid at UN Day in Sydney for the years 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024 and 2025, and \$35.97 was paid for name tag holders.

### Income

Membership dues collected (8 @ \$140.00)	\$1,120.00	
Interest on Commonwealth Bank term deposit	<u>1,247.55</u>	
		\$2,367.55

### Expenditure

FAFICS annual dues	\$1,213.13	
Wreaths and funeral flowers	584.00	
Name tag holders	35.97	
DSA Vienna	<u>1,975.25</u>	
		<u>3,808.35</u>
Excess of expenditure over income		<u>(\$1,440.80)</u>

### Assets and Liabilities

At 1 January 2025, AAFICS had a balance of \$6,128.95 in a Commonwealth Bank chequing account and \$31,188.64 in a Commonwealth Bank term deposit. AAFICS does not have any liabilities.

Commonwealth Bank account @ 1.1.2025	\$ 6,128.95
Commonwealth Bank term deposit @ 1.1.2025	<u>31,188.64</u>
Total	37,317.59
Less excess expenditure over income	<u>(1,440.80)</u>
Total assets at 20 October 2025	<u>\$35,876.79</u>

### Represented by:

Commonwealth Bank account	\$ 3,440.60
Commonwealth Bank term deposit	<u>32,436.19</u>
Total assets	<u>\$35,876.79</u>

Gehl Crowe  
AAFICS Treasurer  
20 October 2025

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**COOEE!**

**REPORTS FROM BRANCHES**

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**QUEENSLAND**

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All good things come to an end! After more than 16 years in the role I shall be handing over as AAFICS Queensland State Coordinator to Ian Douglas at the end of December. I took over from Peter Myers (who had been 10 years in the role) in March 2009. I have a horror of people staying too long in any role and would be the first to admit that this refreshment may be a tad overdue.

On reflection, Eileen and I have really enjoyed the role, especially our twice-yearly lunch get-togethers. The most recent of these was held at Mt Mee on 24 October 2025, which coincided with the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the United Nations.

These lunches are a great opportunity to meet like-minded people and indulge in the occasional anecdote from some far-flung place. It was always surprising to find where our different paths had crossed or sometimes nearly intercepted.

More seriously, there were times when AAFICS intervention has helped to prevent elderly UN pensioners from being struck off the pension payment system. And there is a regular stream of prospective AAFICS members with questions about the treatment of lump sum payments, the Undeducted Purchase Price (UPP) component of our UN pensions and the general vicissitudes of the Australian Tax Office.



*Mike lighting up the latest AAFICS Queensland meeting. Eileen is to left of photo.*

I look forward to many more years of AAFICS fellowship and offer my congratulations and full support to Ian and his good lady, Cathy, in the future. Over and out ...

### **Mike Sackett, Queensland State Coordinator**

*[Editor's note: sincere thanks Mike and Eileen for sterling service. Appreciated.]*

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## **NEW SOUTH WALES**

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New South Wales members had their end of year function on Wednesday 3 December at their normal meeting place, the restaurant at the Sydney Flying Squadron in Kirribilli, the suburb on the north-east end of the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

It was our biggest gathering for a while – 34 attendees – which was boosted by the welcome presence of outgoing President Martin Hadlow and his wife, Anne, who travelled south from Brisbane and our two guest speakers, Sumaya Garcia and Glenda Gartrell.

Still, 30 members and partners was a very good turn-up and we enjoyed a most interesting presentation from Glenda and Sumaya on ageing - the “Right To Be Ourselves - Good News for Wellbeing from the New Aged Care Act”, which started on 1 November 2025 - something of direct relevance to us retired international civil servants.

Both Glenda and Sumaya have each recently published books on ageing/longevity - “Getting on with it – What is it? Ask an Older Woman” (Glenda) and a [“Certain Age, Time to Be Happy”](#) (Sumaya).

Glenda is a longtime member of the Women's Electoral Lobby. Sumaya, the daughter of a former WHO Officer and an honorary member of AFICS Brazil, is a tutor for the Keystones of Success program at the Queensland University of Technology. She, too, made the trip south for the gathering.



Martin gave an extensive talk on his year as President. He certainly was a busy man, as he also puts together the newsletter you are currently reading.

Coming to Kirribilli was a homecoming of sorts for Martin and Anne as they had lived in Sydney many years ago when both were working as flight crew for Qantas and Ansett Airlines. A few nostalgic smiles crossed their faces as they recalled those long ago days in Sydney, the city in which they met.



The 34 of us were blessed on the day of the meeting, as it was one of those wonderful days in Sydney with hardly a cloud in the sky and the water was blue and we could see yachts bobbing on their moorings – indeed, that seems to be the fate of so many yachts: to bob on moorings and only occasionally venture into the harbour.

The interestingly named Sydney Flying Squadron – it is a boat place and indeed bills itself as being the original home of the famous Sydney Harbour sailing skiff class, the 18-footers - is located just around the proverbial corner from Kirribilli House and Admiralty House, the Sydney residences of the Prime Minister and the Governor-General respectively.

We passed both when taking Martin and Anne to the ferry stop for their journey to Circular Quay to catch the train back to the Airport.

If the weather is good, a ferry trip, however brief, on Sydney Harbour is a proverbial ‘must’ when you come to Sydney.

As someone who lives outside the city, I must say that the Sydney Flying Squadron is in a good neighbourhood, marred only by the interminable roadworks in North Sydney that we outsiders must navigate through to find it.





**Maurice Critchley, NSW State Coordinator.**

*[Editor's note: sincere thanks Maurice and NSW members for your hospitality during our visit. A most enjoyable luncheon and a great chance to meet folks we only previously knew by name. Martin]*

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## IN MEMORIAM:

### TOM JOEL

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Tom Joel was a long-time AAFICS Treasurer and served our Association with integrity and vigour for many years. In September, he passed away peacefully in Inverell hospital, NSW at the age of 90 years. His entire UN career was spent with WMO in Geneva where he was based from the 1960s to the 1990s. He first took up a posting on a two-year contract, returned to Australia, but then decided to head back to Geneva for the remainder of his career. He was a senior WMO accountant for most of his posting. We send condolences to Joy, his widow, and family during this sad time.

*[Editor's note: Thank you to Peter Dexter (formerly WMO) and Robyn Archer for bringing Tom's demise to our attention and for the notes on his career. Our current AAFICS Treasurer, Gehl Crowe, took over from Tom last year and met him during the handover period.]*

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## CONFERENCE REPORT:

### FAFICS@50

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I was fortunate to be a delegate at the fiftieth anniversary of our parent organisation, FAFICS – the Federation of Associations of Former International Civil Servants – which was celebrated in Vienna in July as part of the annual Council meeting.

Delegates from all six continents gathered at the Vienna International Centre, that most impressive locale of the United Nations organizations based in the Austrian capital, to hear presentations on the Pension Fund, After Service Health Insurance and a range of topics of interest to retirees.



*The ever-dapper Maurice prepares to enter the lions' den, the Vienna International Centre.*

Being there at the conference in person spared me the 'joy' experienced by our previous President, Jennifer Ashton, who would be up at all hours of the night to watch the broadcast and participate 'virtually'.

In his opening address FAFICS President, Jerry Barton, paid tribute to Mary Johnson, Jennifer's predecessor, who died on 1 July.

Mary was a stalwart of both AAFICS and FAFICS and Jerry told the meeting about the invaluable assistance she had given him when he first became involved in FAFICS.

FAFICS has several non-voting members on the Pension Fund Board and the meeting heard from one, former Secretariat Treasurer Suzanne Bishporic, who explained that the Fund is in good financial shape and beneficiaries should not fear for their pension payments.



*Maurice meets FAFICS Secretary, Delia Barcelona, before taking his seat.*

In the main, this is because the UNJSPF is 'fully funded' through receiving the monthly contributions deducted from staff members salaries and the associated employer contribution, just as it did for us when we were working.

There is a 'bucket of money' in place to pay our monthly pension.

The meeting also heard from Rosemary McClean, the Pension Fund's Chief Executive of Pension Administration, who told us that 55 per cent of those receiving a pension were using the Digital Certificate of Entitlement. She also said that the Fund closely monitors survivor benefit claims to ensure that there are no delays in processing by the Fund.

And for those of us who are on the two-track system and are paid in Australian dollars, the DCE system picks up your location when you logon to do your annual update, so you can expect to receive a query from the Fund if you complete the DCE from outside Australia.

Pleasingly, Rosemary expressed gratitude for the work done by the various National Associations in following up with retirees who have not returned their Certificate of Entitlement, saying this has resulted in a big reduction in the number of pensions stopped for payment.

Chasing up Australian laggards is a task that falls to our State Coordinators. My experience has been that few of these laggards are members of AAFICS, so this truly is a public service.

Jay Karia, the former Director of Accounts at the Secretariat, gave the presentation on After Service Health Insurance and here the picture was not so rosy.

Generally, there is no Fund – or 'bucket of money' – in place to meet the ASHI payments and the cost of that scheme is a charge against the current budget – just like the Age Pension in Australia is paid from current revenue.

For those who have availed themselves of ASHI, it is part of the retirement package and should be safe but there was conjecture that the ASHI offered to future retirees may not be as generous as the existing schemes, given the current budgetary pressures facing the United Nations family.



*Maurice delivers the goods*

That hardy perennial, taxation on UN pensions, was raised by the Spanish delegate who said that the government had recently started taxing UN pensions, and he sought the meeting's support to have this changed.

This went nowhere after one of the US delegates who had worked in the Secretariat's Office of Legal Affairs advised the meeting of the 1979 decision of the General Assembly that allowed member states to tax the periodic payments of pensions as they were not considered to be emoluments of employment.

It was eye-opening for me to hear from delegates, particularly from poorer countries, about the role their local equivalent of AAFICS played for their retirees, many of whom had been national hires and were receiving minimal pensions and often had difficulties dealing with the UN bureaucracy.

For them, membership of their local AAFICS was far more than belonging to a social organisation.

Their participation in the Vienna proceedings was especially laudatory because it was done without financial assistance from FAFICS for travel or accommodation expenses – as was the case for all attendees.

I do acknowledge that I was paid four days DSA for my 'official' time in Vienna, and I thank President Martin Hadlow for arranging that, the view being that it was of benefit for Australia to be represented at FAFICS' fiftieth anniversary celebration. I paid my travel costs to and from Vienna.

The meeting was a bit of a work reunion for me as I had worked closely with both Suzanne Bishporic and Jay Karia when I was based in New York, so to catch up with them and other former New York staff members in Vienna brought back fond memories of those happy days.



And it was all by good chance that I went to the Council meeting and the golden anniversary celebration.

Months earlier I had organised a trip to England in July to see two England v India cricket Test matches but had not made any arrangements for the week between the two games.

It was a case of serendipity that the FAFICS event was scheduled for the week between the two Tests, which allowed me to go to Vienna and attend most of the five-day Council meeting and the fifty-year celebration held on the final day.

It also bought back happy memories of being in Vienna, a city I had last visited in 1975.

While much was familiar from years ago, Vienna has not escaped the internationalisation of big cities and the arrival of all those familiar shops.

As for the cricket, to paraphrase Dickens, it was a game of two cities.

In London, the weather was wonderfully warm, and it was a great match at Lord's that England won by 22 runs, with both sides having had their chance of victory.

Manchester was the antithesis. The weather was awful, the game one-sided and on the last day the England team put on a major display of petulance.

To reverse the old saying, England wanted to waive the rules (spirit) of the game by calling the match off at the start of the last hour of play as there was no chance of a result.

Not surprisingly, India declined the offer as their two batsmen were close to scoring a century, and the match continued until each had reached that milestone, although England continued their petulance by bringing on non-bowlers to bowl the final overs.

All up, it was a good voyage to the northern hemisphere, and it was pleasing to revisit Vienna and catch up with representatives of fellow retirees.

### **Maurice Critchley, NSW State Coordinator**

*[Editor's note: sincere thanks, Maurice, for undertaking this task on behalf of AAFICS. It was an important event, being the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of FAFICS and we value your taking time during a European holiday to participate. The current FAFICS President, Jerry Barton, has also prepared an after-conference report. This is available on-line at [FAFICS President's Letter Post-Council 2025 ENGLISH pdf Final 5 September 2025 \(4\).pdf](#)]*

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## UNITED NATIONS DAY 2025

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United Nations Day 2025 was celebrated at the Cenotaph in Martin Place, Sydney at a ceremony organised by the United Nations Association of Australia.



This was an impressive ceremony, well organised and attended by representatives of diplomatic missions, the Australian military, NSW and Federal Police Services, Border Force and the United Nations Information Centre, whose director read the Secretary-General's message.

The United Nations Association of Australia is certainly good at drawing a crowd.

The Army provided the Catafalque party, which provided a stirring display at the start and end of the ceremony, and NSW Police Band provided the music and the singer of the National Anthem.

The guest speaker was former Governor-General David Hurley, who in previous positions had been Chief of the Defence Force and Governor of New South Wales.

In recent years, the Governor of New South Wales, Margaret Beazley, laid a wreath, but she did not attend this year. She was represented by her (military) Aide-De-Camp.



Maurice lays a wreath on behalf of AAFICS.

Mr Hurley gave an interesting speech discussing Australia's involvement with various United Nations peacekeeping missions and touched on his own involvement with operations in Somalia, where the Australian military was part of a United States led, United Nations sanctioned, multinational force that operated from December 1992 to May 1993.


I have heard similar talks in previous years on these United Nations Day commemorations all lauding Australia's contribution to United Nations Peacekeeping. They are somewhat dated.



At the end of September 2025, Australia had 31 military personnel seconded to UN Peacekeeping, 18 Staff Officers and 13 Experts on Mission out of a total UN Peacekeeping non-civilian strength of 60,556. Australia's contribution has been at similar levels for many years as can be seen from the website of United Nations Peace Operations.

I laid a wreath on behalf of AAFICS as a tribute to our colleagues; for those who have passed and for the living.

**Maurice Critchley, NSW State Coordinator**



**United Nations Association of Australia**

**EVERY DAY THE UN WORKS TO TACKLE GLOBAL CHALLENGES**

<p>ASSISTS AND PROTECTS</p> <p><b>131</b></p> <p>MILLION PEOPLE FLEEING WAR, FAMINE AND PERSECUTION</p>	<p>PROVIDES <b>FOOD</b> AND ASSISTANCE TO MORE THAN</p> <p><b>150</b></p> <p>MILLION PEOPLE IN OVER 120 COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES</p>	<p>SUPPLIES <b>VACCINES</b></p> <p>TO 45 PER CENT OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN. HELPS SAVE</p> <p><b>3 MILLION</b> LIVES A YEAR</p>	<p>WORKS WITH</p> <p><b>196</b> NATIONS TO KEEP THE</p> <p><b>GLOBAL TEMPERATURE</b></p> <p>RISE WELL BELOW 2°C / 3.6°F</p>	<p>KEEPS PEACE WITH 71,000 PEACEKEEPERS</p> <p><b>UN</b> IN 11 OPERATIONS AROUND THE WORLD</p>	<p><b>TACKLES THE GLOBAL WATER CRISIS</b></p> <p>AFFECTING OVER</p> <p><b>4 BILLION</b> PEOPLE WORLDWIDE</p>	<p>PROTECTS AND PROMOTES <b>HUMAN RIGHTS</b> GLOBALLY AND THROUGH</p> <p><b>80</b> TREATIES/DECLARATIONS</p>	<p>COORDINATES</p> <p><b>\$46</b> BILLION APPEAL FOR THE <b>HUMANITARIAN</b> NEEDS OF 180 MILLION PEOPLE</p>	<p>USES DIPLOMACY TO PREVENT CONFLICT. ASSISTS SOME</p> <p><b>50</b> COUNTRIES A YEAR WITH THEIR ELECTIONS</p>	<p>SUPPORTS OVER <b>11</b> MILLION WOMEN A YEAR WITH <b>SEXUAL</b> AND <b>REPRODUCTIVE</b> HEALTH SERVICES</p>
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[www.unaa.org.au](http://www.unaa.org.au)

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## NEWS FROM/ABOUT AAFICS MEMBERS

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From Melbourne, Victoria, **Nancy Wong Ali**, writes of her late husband, S.M. Ali (formerly UNESCO):



S.M. and Nancy

(Photo: *S.M. Ali: A Commemorative Volume*, Dhaka. 1997)

My late husband, S.M. Ali, was UNESCO'S Regional Communication Adviser for Asia and the Pacific based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Upon retirement in 1991, he returned to his home country, Bangladesh, to start a new, national newspaper, *The Daily Star*. I followed him but returned to my home country, Singapore, after he passed away.

I worked for a newspaper (*The Singapore Herald*) after leaving the super conservative *Straits Times* and got into trouble. Some of my fellow journalists landed in jail for this and they warned me to get out of Singapore. Singapore had a super-efficient government, led by Lee Kuan Yew, who did not tolerate those journalists who criticized some of his policies - no one is perfect!

With one suitcase, I landed in Hong Kong, which was then a British colony with a free press, and worked there for a few years, then followed my husband to Bangladesh.

When he passed on, I returned to Singapore, but found the repressive atmosphere there intolerable, so I immigrated to Australia and have remained here ever since.

I found it quite easy to blend in as I've been everywhere as a journalist. Australia's *White Australia* policy had long since gone and I found life here quite pleasant as a retiree.

A friend introduced me to a Singapore club (mainly Singaporeans) who appointed me as its Secretary when they found out my background.

*[Editor's note: I had the pleasure of taking over the role of UNESCO Regional Communication Adviser for Asia following S.M.'s retirement. Nancy is being modest in her descriptions of both S.M. and herself. Nancy was a highly regarded scribe, while S.M. Ali was a doyen of journalism in Asia and one of the great print media professionals in his field. He was always known simply as S.M., not by his full name, Syed Mohammad. The newspaper he established with Nancy and others in Dhaka, The Daily Star, has 'Journalism without fear or favour' as its motto and is still the most influential news media outlet in Bangladesh. S.M. was truly a global press leader and it was an honour for me to have known him. His trademark expression was "Let's stay in touch". Thank you, Nancy, for the great memories.]*

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## OF WAR AND A STATE DINNER

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In September, the American President made his second State visit to the UK and was honoured with a banquet in St. George's Hall at Windsor Castle. Usually, a second-term visit only warrants tea or lunch with the monarch.

The former UK Poet Laureate, Carol Anne Duffy (2009-2019), decided to write a poem contrasting the 'rocks and rubble' of ongoing wars with the diamonds and grandeur of the 'great and good' at the banquet.

In her poem, she invites readers to think of the plight of those in peril while the ceremonial pomp of the dinner proceeds.

### STATE/BANQUET

*How it glitters and shines, The Grand Service,  
among the rocks and the rubble,  
laid out on a breezblock horseshoe table,  
six crystal glasses per setting.  
It took eight servants three weeks to polish -  
silver coated in a thin layer of gold -  
even the concrete dust in the air seems glamourised  
and the ruins are decked in the uplifting flags of  
democracy.*

*To start, fillet of Dover sole filled with salmon mousse,  
served on a bed of leeks with white wine sauce.  
Poached Sandringham venison with truffles to follow,  
then Key Lime Pie, and among the wines,  
Chateau Pichon-Longueville Comtesse de Lalande, 1990.  
Yum-yum. Let the trumpets sound on the bombsite  
as the great and the good pick their way through,  
and a famished child peers through a bullet-hole in a wall.*

(Report compiled from material in *The Guardian*, UK)

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## TELLING THE UNTOLD STORIES

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Queensland AAFICS members get together over lunch twice each year and, as Queensland State Coordinator, Mike Sackett, has insightfully observed, these luncheons are always great! In our day-to-day lives, we mix with people who have not had the international agency experiences that we have had. Yet in many cases, much of our lives - many of our stories - relate to these times. To talk too much of them can seem like we are just 'banging on' about our previous lives. However, in the surrounds of other AAFICS members, who have their own stories and understand, we can speak freely without anyone thinking we are big-noting ourselves.

I have certainly enjoyed the stories that come up at these lunches and in the *AAFICS Newsletter*. So, at the most recent Queensland lunch, I proposed that we could, for those who wished to participate, document some of these stories - to get them "on the record" and to share them more broadly. There seemed to be fairly strong support for the proposal.

The idea is that if stories are sent to me (aaficsbook@gmail.com), I will collate them and translate them into a multi-chapter book. This will be an e-book - in other words, in electronic form. I will edit the stories, but not to change their meaning, merely to prepare them for e-publication. I would hope that we can include a reasonable number of photos within the stories. If it is not possible to provide a written contribution, then I am prepared to receive a clear 'taped' contribution (perhaps as an MP3 file) and convert that to text.

From past experience, I have an idea that a short story is most likely read if it is 'short'. While no hard-and-fast rules apply, I think individual contributions might be best limited to perhaps 2500 words as a maximum.

**What to write?** Whatever you want to write but the following might form useful prompts:

- Where I was born and spent my formative years.
- What skills did I develop through my education and how did these prove useful in my international civil service (ICS) career.
- Did I benefit from any particular mentoring.
- How and where did I obtain my first ICC job.
- What was the nature of my work and in which countries did I work and live.
- What were my best experiences and is there any one experience that I am most satisfied with.
- How did I address language and cultural issues.
- What were my biggest challenges.
- Looking back, what elements 'saw me through' when times were difficult.
- Other .....

**For the spouses/partners of ICCs**, while many of the above apply, there is also a wealth of experience in moving countries, settling into life, making social contacts, managing families, surviving long absences and fears for my absent partner.

There is no deadline for this. I will merely add to the "book" as material is available. I will also have to work out how we can "post" the material to somewhere where AAFICS members can access it progressively. Any ideas are welcomed.

In terms of privacy, bear in mind that your stories will be shared. I imagine that, with your concurrence, we might also direct your stories to the newsletter from time to time, in part or as a whole.

Please do not feel pressured in this, but I am more than keen to read your unique histories and will do my best to include them for everyone's benefit.

Submissions should be made via email to: [aaficsbook@gmail.com](mailto:aaficsbook@gmail.com)

**Ian Douglas, formerly FAO**

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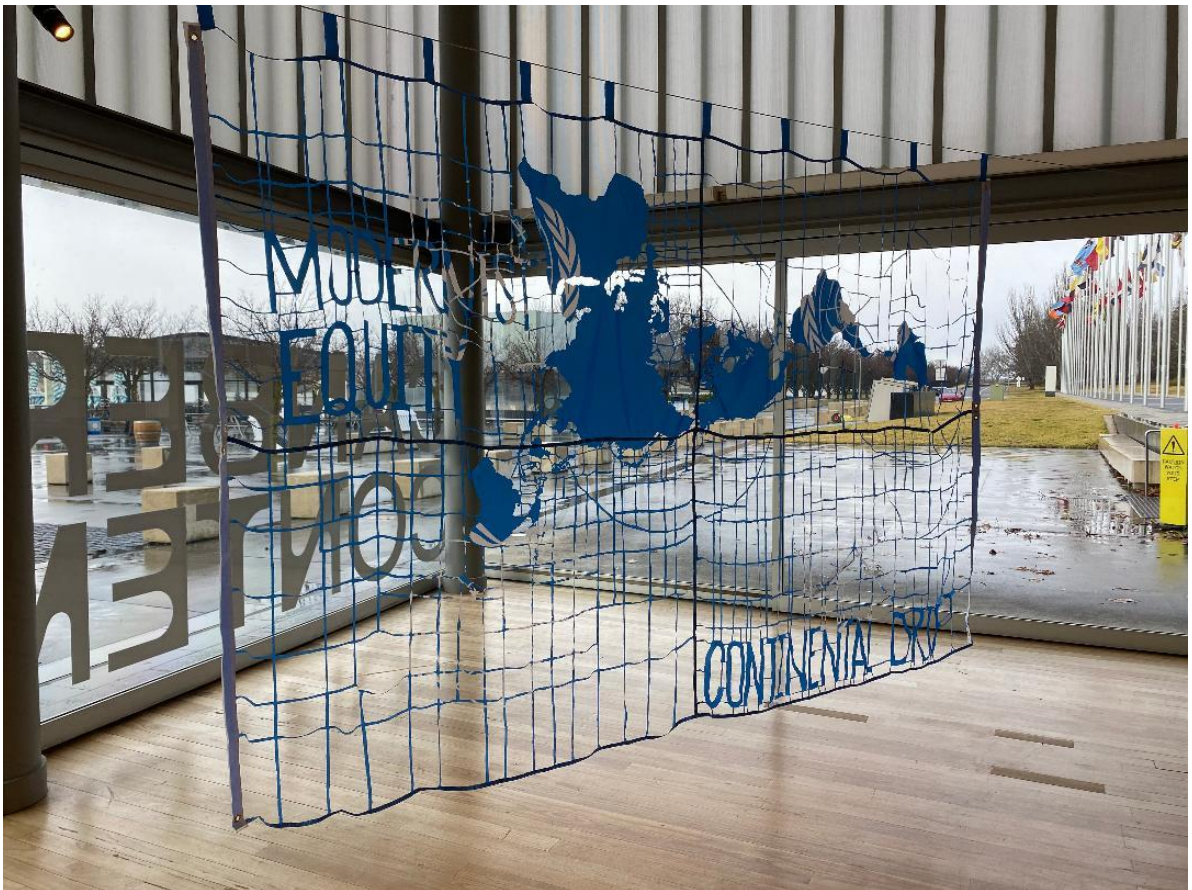
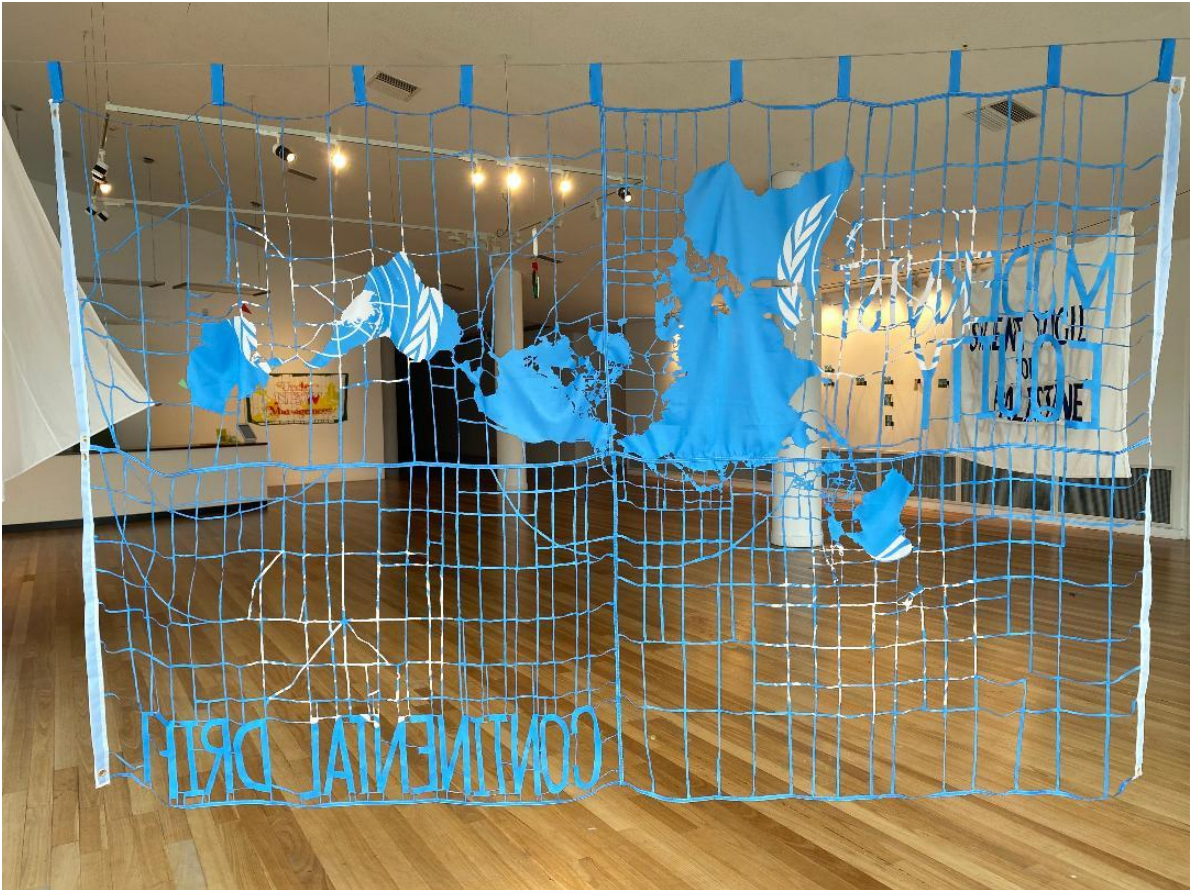
## AM I IN YOUR WAY?

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Thanks go to Kate Gordon, formerly Acting ACT AAFICS Coordinator, for alerting us to a recent exhibition, titled *Am I in Your Way?*, held at the Canberra Contemporary Art Space near Lake Burley-Griffin.

The installation was by the very talented artist Racquel Ormella and Kate's photographs really speak louder than words. Unfortunately, Kate was unable to meet Racquel but found the exhibits both sad and worrying.





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## IN MEMORIAM:

### MARY JOHNSON

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AAFICS members will be aware that our former President Emeritus, Mary Johnson, sadly passed away in Sydney on the 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2025. She was 80 years of age.

We reached out to Mary's son, Stefano, with our condolences and he advised that the family sought a private funeral and asked that we follow the proceedings through an on-line portal instead, rather than attendance in person. Of course, we recognised the wishes of the family and simply contributed an appropriate message and floral tribute to honour Mary's memory at the funeral.

Mary was an outstanding advocate for AAFICS and for the specific issues facing UN retirees in Australia. She was appointed President in 2006 (see her CV on the attached *Special Issue Newsletter, November-December 2005*). Her efforts to have taxation issues relating to our pensions recognized by the Federal Government are legendary. To this day, we hold a large file of copies of letters Mary sent to many Federal Ministers and Prime Ministers and we intend to digitally scan these documents for distribution to AAFICS members.



Mary at her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday party with friend and former senior ILO colleague, Bill Salter.

## Australian Association of Former International Civil Servants

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### SPECIAL ISSUE - NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2005

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#### *DR JOHN HIRSHMAN IS STEPPING DOWN AS AAFICS PRESIDENT*

I want to step down as president and now have a very suitable candidate I strongly recommend Mary Johnson (see CV).

She lives not far from me and I will be able to help a smooth handover as immediate past president.

My age and health need this change. Thank you all for your support.

**I hope to see as many as possible at the NSW lunch on 3 December at White City at 12.30pm for 1pm. Please call Ann or John.**

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Mary Johnson worked for the International Labour Organisation (ILO) for over 31 years, having joined the International Training Centre of the ILO in May 1972. The ILO's Training Centre in Turin, Italy, provides advanced training for developing country nationals. She worked on planning and coordination of the financial resources the Centre received from the UN donor community. In 1975 she was elected chairperson of the Staff Union, a position she held for a number of years.

In April 1987 she was assigned to the ILO's Office for the Pacific, in Suva, Fiji, as deputy director, a job she particularly enjoyed as her childhood had been spent in Fiji. On completion of this assignment she returned to the ILO Training Centre for a further four years and then went to work for the Bureau for Active Partnership and Technical Cooperation, at ILO headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. In 1997 she transferred to the ILO's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, in Bangkok, Thailand, as chief of the regional programming services, and in 1999 became Director of the ILO's office for India and Bhutan, in New Delhi, where she remained until early 2001, having helped build up donor contributions to the ILO's programmes in Asia to prevent child labour and bonded labour.

A further two years were again spent at the ILO in Geneva, this time as chief of relations with the donor community, before retiring in July 2003. She considers herself to have had a most fortunate career in a UN agency whose ideals of social justice have fulfilled her professional and personal aspirations.

Mary Johnson was born in New Zealand on 27 May 1945. She graduated with a BA (Hons I) from Sydney University, before taking up an Italian Government funded postgraduate scholarship at the Università degli studi, Turin, Italy.



Many of Mary's friends and colleagues were keen to pay homage through the AAFICS Newsletter.

*"Prior to arriving in Australia in November 1996, my letters to AAFICS on the UN pension and tax had remained unanswered. I learned later that Dr. John Hirshman, the AAFICS President at that time, had been ill. After more letters to AAFICS, Mary Johnson replied. With that simplest of introductions and perhaps because I happened to emerge from WA at that particular point in time, Mary asked me to take on the role of WA State Coordinator for AAFICS. There was no job description. I winged it from the start with Mary as pilot.*

*Mary was proactive and had us Coordinators commenting on position papers or writing letters to our State representatives to lobby for the interests of UN pensioners.*

*Sadly, I never met Mary in person despite 11 years of close collaboration in AAFICS. She inspired you to do your best and work as she did. She always had your back. On many occasions, I personally benefitted from her contacts and knowledge about UNJSPF rules and regulations and their application.*

*She will be greatly missed as a valuable and inspiring colleague, mentor and friend.*

***Monina S. Magallanes, formerly WA AAFICS State Coordinator."***

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*"Thinking of Mary, as I do frequently over these past 5 months, inspires so many superlatives, any of which would be greeted by her with an embarrassed giggle. For decades, Mary was, for me and many, a reliable source of calm wisdom, compassion, great humour and sound advice. Her unwavering commitment to the ideals of social justice and equality for the World's workers in her professional life won her admiration in all of her different roles in the ILO and effected improvements in the lives of countless beneficiaries. That same kindness and generosity of spirit was central to her private relationships.*

*Her love of reading, music, art (she herself was also a talented painter who rendered everyday objects in glorious colours), her fascination with fabrics, woven and embroidered, and appreciation of beautifully prepared and presented food gave her life and those lucky enough to share it with her, a lush richness and style. Her homes were dressed with flowers and objects chosen for their unique beauty. Her interiors could be quirky too, as was one of her cars that had the back shelf filled with bunches of plastic bananas to make it more visible in the parking lots of one busy regional post. Beyond her formal retirement, she put her enormous skills of organisation and care to making AAFICS a dynamic Association for which we're all grateful.*

*I miss acutely being able to have long, wide-ranging conversations with Mary which always felt unfinished because there was much, much more to share. Such times were punctuated with laughter, sometimes irreverent, and sighs about sadnesses beyond our control. But, always, she was joyful when talking of her friends and family, particularly her beloved Stefano.*

*Dearest Mary, you gave us more happiness than you ever could have imagined.*

***Christine Elstob, formerly ILO and current AAFICS SA State Coordinator"***

Mary and friends visited Fiji last year where she was totally at home amongst her old colleagues from the ILO Office in Suva where she had been based as Deputy Director for several years. These photos show Mary with friends and former colleagues enjoying the occasion. (We published Mary's story about Fiji in the *AAFICS Newsletter* in July 2025.)



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## TRAVELLERS BEWARE

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If anyone is thinking of travelling to the USA, it would be prudent to think of obtaining a State Department B1/B2 visa, rather than using the Homeland Security digital Authorization. The process is longer and more arduous, but, once the visa is issued, travel is more secure than it is under ESTA. Homeland Security can cancel an Authorization at any time, is not required to give a reason and does not allow any appeal against the decision. It, also, seems to be the practice that any cancellation is given at the last minute (usually, on the day of travel), although it is not possible to say whether this is deliberate, in order to create the maximum inconvenience for the traveller, or is merely a function of the computer programme involved.

Holding a B1/B2 visa still does not guarantee a traveller entry to the USA. An Immigration official can still turn anyone away on arrival, but a reason has to be given, and there is a right of appeal against the decision. Nevertheless, it is a good idea to insure airline tickets and any accommodation that might have been booked in the USA (making sure that exclusion from the country is a covered condition in the policy).

It has also been advised that travellers carry only a burner 'phone with them, as a regular 'phone can be subject to search at entry, and it's impossible to say what an Immigration official might find objectionable in a phone's history. It goes without saying that no book or article critical of Trump should be carried, as the Attorney-General has proposed that anybody critical of Trump should be sent to prison in El Salvador. An Australian would, probably, be unlucky to be treated so severely, but the possibility cannot be completely discounted.

It would, probably, also not be wise to reveal any previous association with the United Nations, as this would undoubtedly arouse suspicions of liberal tendencies which are anathema to the current administration. If it can be done on a full stomach and with a straight face, a word of praise for Charlie Kirk possibly wouldn't go amiss, if the Immigration official seems to be wavering over accepting credentials.

Perhaps, not travelling to the USA at all is another option to be considered.

### **Bruce Hyland, formerly UNCHS**

*[Editor's note: since Bruce submitted this article, the US authorities have indicated startling new rules for gaining a tourist visa to visit the country. We understand that these include disclosing five years of your social media history, phone numbers from the last five years, e-mail addresses from the past decade, personal details of family members, and biometric information. Good luck to those wanting to travel to the USA to see the World Cup football matches in 2026. For those of us who worked with the UN in countries where communist, military, dictatorial or similar regimes existed, the new US plans sound even more draconian than those we experienced. Perhaps someone in the US hierarchy might come to their senses before the law destroys the inbound tourist industry. But, maybe, given the events and the political realities of the past year, American citizens are beyond even seeking to influence the ruling powers.]*

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## NEWS FROM HERE AND THERE

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For every edition of the *AAFICS Newsletter*, we receive tips from members for interesting stories, usually seen on-line by the person making the suggestion. As Editor, it is simply not possible to reprint all of the stories in full as the content would probably overwhelm the publication and we would have to delete other locally-based material. With that in mind, we will, instead, simply list the links we receive and invite readers to access the content in which they are interested.

UNJSPF's Two-Track System: Challenges and Prospects. (In the ILO Former Staff Association magazine, pages 60-61.)

[Message](#)

US and UN salary cuts.

[US Wants UN Salaries Cut, but D.C. Is Singing to the Wrong Choir - PassBlue](#)

UN faces 'race to bankruptcy'

[UN faces 'race to bankruptcy' as Guterres unveils sharply reduced 2026 budget | UN News](#)

UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons

[BONILLA-GARCIA - Building a Society for All Generations. The Case for a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons - V 29 08 2025.pdf - Google Drive](#)

US aid tied to voting loyalty in UN

[Mike Waltz Wants US Aid Tied to Voting Loyalty in UN - PassBlue](#)

UN reform

[UN Reform Is Not a Floorplan. It's a Reckoning – IDN-InDepthNews](#)

Why the UN needs a conversation

[Why the UN Needs a Charter Conversation, Not More Power Struggles - PassBlue](#)

Minister Penny Wong on UN agencies becoming 'zombies'

[United Nations needs urgent reform, Penny Wong says | news.com.au — Australia's leading news site for latest headlines](#)

Pension and health advocacy information, reports of major meetings, news of fellow UN retiree Associations, documents (including AAFICS material).

<https://fafics.org/>

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## THE WAY WE WERE

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Australian Association of Former International Civil Servants (AAFICS)

### MEMORANDUM TO MEMBERS

This is the first edition of AAFICS News. Its aim is to keep members informed of the Australian Association's activities and to provide a forum by means of which items of particular interest can be explored. It is hoped that subsequent issues will follow in January and July of each year. Personal news items for inclusion in the News will be appreciated and should be submitted to:

AAFICS News, 212 Old South Head Road, Vaucluse, N.S.W. 2030

### PAYMENT OF PENSIONS

Pension payments in the past have arrived any day of the month, to the embarrassment of some of our members, sometimes as late as the 27th and, in some cases, not at all. In response to the request of AAFICS concerning improvement in the transmittal of pensions, AFICS (New York) has replied that the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund has decided to hold an overall review of the way pensions are being sent. It is not known yet whether the suggestion of AAFICS that pensions be transmitted by TELEX will be accepted.

In the meantime, some of our members have again missed a pension payment and find the channel for rectifying this slow and frustrating.

### LAST AAFICS MEETING

Our last meeting was held on 25 April 1981 at the lovely Wahroonga home of John (ex-UN/OTC) and Hope Copes who were gracious hosts for a social get together of members and their spouses. The formal meeting coincided with the social occasion. Members present included, besides John Copes, Jess Aland, Barbara Campbell and Arthur Travis (ex-UN, New York), Una Ellis (on home leave from CSDHA, Vienna), Harry Carroll, A. R. Delley, Ian Kelton and Norman Wake (ex-FAO) and John Hirshman and Cecil Showman (ex-WHO).

### CONSUMER PRICE INDEX

Paragraph 6 of annex V of the report of the United Nations Staff Pension Board to the General Assembly at its thirty-third session reads as follows:

"For measuring changes in the consumer price index for the United States and for the country of residence concerned, the index used will be the official Consumer Price Index for the country as a whole issued by the national Government and published in the United Nations Monthly Bulletin of Statistics. Once an index has been utilized, any subsequent amendment will not give rise to retroactive corrections."

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## NO COMMENT

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### **State Department forced to change fonts as Trump's DEI crackdown comes for typefaces**

Secretary of State Marco Rubio has issued an order for diplomats to stop using a word processing typeface he considers too woke, and go back to using Times New Roman, Reuters reported on Tuesday.

Rubio's order reverses a 2023 directive from Antony Blinken, then-President Joe Biden's Secretary of State, which "had switched to Calibri, a modern sans-serif font, saying this was a more accessible font for people with disabilities because it did not have the decorative angular features and was the default in Microsoft products."

A Dec. 9 cable proclaims, "To restore decorum and professionalism to the Department's written work products and abolish yet another wasteful DEIA program, the Department is returning to Times New Roman as its standard typeface," arguing that serif fonts are a better fit for official work.

It's yet another front in Trump's efforts to dismantle so-called diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs that seek to improve participation by discriminated groups in public and professional life.

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## A UN CONVENTION OF THE RIGHTS OF OLDER PERSONS AND AN AUSTRALIAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACT IN THE MAKING

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As UN retirees we are one by one joining the ranks of older persons in the world. They represent a growing proportion of the world's population. The number of people aged 60 or over has more than doubled from 541 million in 1995 to 1.2 billion in 2025 and is projected to reach 2.1 billion in 2025. Global life expectancy has also increased reaching 73.5 years in 2025, an increase of 8.6 years since 1995. The number of persons aged 80 and over is growing even faster and is projected to surpass the number of births by the mid-2030s.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, one in six Australians in 2020 were 65 and over (4.2 million) comprising 16% of the population. This is projected to increase to between 21% and 23% of the population by 2066. For those aged 85 and over, the proportion was 2.1% in 2020 (528,000) and is expected to be between 3.6% and 4.4% in 2066.

On 1 October 2025, the UN celebrated the International Day of Older Persons, first established in 1990. The theme this year was "*Older Persons Driving Local and Global Actions, Our Well-Being and Our Rights*".

“...older persons are powerful agents of change. Their voices must be heard in shaping policies, ending age discrimination, and building inclusive societies.”

UN Secretary-General António Guterres 2025

So, what are the UN policies and developments on the rights of older persons? There have been a series of UN and civil society initiatives since the 1980's to address the rights and concerns of older persons.

The most recent significant initiative was in April 2025 whereby the UN Human Rights Council's resolution ([Resolution 58/13](#)) established an intergovernmental working group to draft a legally binding convention on the rights of older persons. This is the latest significant step in a long-standing effort to create a comprehensive legal framework for these rights supported and promoted by NGOs and civil society organizations.

### Historic Resolution Advances Human Rights of Older Persons



The goals of the new convention and resolutions include:

- To provide clarity and guidance on promoting and protecting the rights of older people.
- To help eliminate ageism and age discrimination.
- To ensure older people can seek redress for rights violations.
- To address protection gaps that have become more apparent, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To promote active participation and integration of older people in society.

On 26 September 2025, during the UN General Assembly, an International Day of Older Persons event took place in New York on the topic of *From Resolution to Convention*. It highlighted the rationale for a legally binding instrument and the roles and responsibilities of each actor in supporting the process to a Convention that reflects the realities of older persons across the world today and generations to come.





The UN Human Rights Council also in a resolution on 8 October 2025 decided to extend the mandate of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons for a period of three years ([A/HRC/60/L.15](#)). It requests the Independent Expert to report regularly to the Council and the General Assembly in accordance with their respective programmes of work

Previous to 2025 initiatives included the following:

- **2021:** UN Human Rights Council reaffirms states' obligations Resolution 48/3), to respect, protect, and fulfill the human rights of older people, calling on them to eliminate ageism and combat discrimination and to take specific actions to protect the rights of older individuals in areas like employment, social protection, housing, health care, and education.
- **2021-2030:** The UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030) is a global collaboration, aligned with the last ten years of the Sustainable Development Goals, to improve the lives of older people, their families, and the communities in which they live. The World Health Organization was asked to lead the implementation of the Decade in collaboration with the other UN organizations and serves as the Decade Secretariat. Four areas are being addressed: age friendly environments, combatting ageism, integrated care and long term care.
- **2010:** The UN General Assembly Resolution adopted as a follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing a resolution “to establish an open-ended working group, open to all States Members of the United Nations, for the purpose of strengthening the protection of the human rights of older persons by considering the existing international framework of the human rights of older persons and identifying possible gaps and how best to address them, including by considering, as appropriate, the feasibility of further instruments and measures..” (Resolution 65/182).
- **2011:** World Elder Abuse Awareness Day designated as 15 June, was initiated by the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA) in 2006, and recognised as a UN Day by the General Assembly (Resolution [A/RES/66/127](#) adopted in 2011). In 2025 the focus of this day was on the abuse of older adults in long term care facilities.
- **2002:** The Second World Assembly on Ageing adopted the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) to respond to the opportunities and challenges of population ageing in the 21st century and to promote the development of a society for all ages. The primary action of the Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD) of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) programme on ageing is to facilitate and promote the MIPAA including: designing guidelines for policy development and implementation; advocating means to mainstream ageing issues into development agendas; engaging in dialogue with civil society and the private sector; and information exchange.

- **1991:** The General Assembly adopted the UN Principles for Older Persons (Resolution 46/91). These outline rights of older persons and provide a framework for national programmes concerning their **independence** (financial and otherwise), **participation** (in decision-making and policy development on aging), **care** (access to health, legal and social services), **self-fulfilment** (access to training, recreation, cultural and spiritual opportunities) and **dignity** (security, non-discrimination and freedom from exploitation and abuse).
- **1990:** The UN General Assembly designated October 1 as the International Day of Older Persons
- **1982:** The Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing, adopted by the World Assembly on Ageing and endorsed later in 1982 by the UN General Assembly. It was the first international instrument on ageing, guiding thinking and the formulation of policies and programmes on ageing. It aims to strengthen the capacities of governments and civil society to deal effectively with the ageing of populations and to address the developmental potential and dependency needs of older persons. It promotes regional and international cooperation. It includes 62 recommendations for action addressing research, data collection and analysis, training and education as well as the following sectoral areas: health and nutrition; protection of elderly consumers; housing and environment; family; social welfare; income security and employment; education.

In addition to the above UN efforts, civil society organizations and NGOs globally and nationally have played a key role in promoting the above initiatives and interacting with UN bodies culminating in the current progress towards a UN legally binding convention on the rights of older persons.

#### Human rights of older persons in Australia

In May 2024, Australia's Age Discrimination Commissioner, Robert Fitzgerald AM, called on the Federal Government to formally endorse the creation of a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons, in what he says "*remains a missing piece in the international human rights framework*". Back in 2020, the Law Council of Australia adopted an in-principal position in support of the development of an international Convention on the Rights of Older Persons. It considers the International Convention to have the potential to play an important role in improving the lives of older people globally, and in turn to inform Australia's own domestic legal and policy frameworks.

A new Australian network to promote the human rights of older persons within Australia and internationally was launched in June 2025, bringing together at least 20 key civil society organisations as well as individuals. The Network is co-chaired by Australia's Age Discrimination Commissioner Robert Fitzgerald AM and Sue Hendy, Director of the International Federation on Ageing. It will work collaboratively to advance human rights for older persons, including through supporting the development of an international legally binding instrument on the human rights of older persons and pursuit of a national Human Rights Act and Framework. A National Older Persons Reference Group (OPAN), aims to ensure older people are actively involved in discussions that affect them, including changes to the aged care system.

These initiatives for promoting human rights of older persons in Australia are taking place in the context of efforts to establish a national Human Rights Act. In 2023, the Australian Human Rights Commission launched a proposed model for such an Act to ensure legal protections for the basic rights of all Australians and provide avenues for redress where people's rights

are breached. The Commission notes that Australia is the only liberal democracy that does not have an act or charter of rights at the national level, and there are currently very few legal protections for the fundamental rights of Australians. However, ACT and Queensland have a *Human Rights Act* and Victoria has a *Chapter of Human Rights and Responsibilities*.

A national Human Rights Act would set out the basic rights of Australians and require proactive consideration of how these rights are being protected, and to provide avenues for redress if people's rights are infringed. The Commission's Human Rights Act proposal is detailed in a [comprehensive position paper](#). In this model, people with human rights complaints could endeavour to reach a solution through conciliation or administrative appeal, supported by the Commission, and then refer the matter to the Federal Court. This replicates the current process for discrimination complaints.

The Human Rights Commission considers that a *“Human Rights Act that includes human rights such as the right to adequate housing, health and an adequate standard of living (commonly known as economic, social and cultural rights) would make a difference to the lives of older people in Australia. It would improve the policies, procedures and services that impact on the daily lives of older people. It could help prevent human rights breaches and could provide remedies in cases where those breaches occur. It would require our government to examine how decisions impact on the human rights of older people.”*

#### *Status of progress towards an Australian Human Rights Act*

In March 2023, Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus launched an inquiry into Australia's human rights framework. In May 2024, the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights released its report, which recommended the enactment of a federal Human Rights Act based on the model proposed by the Australian Human Rights Commission.

#### **References and useful website links**

For an overview making the case for a United Nations Convention on the Rights of Older Persons, see the following document. It was presented at the 17<sup>th</sup> International Federation on Ageing Conference held in September 2025 in South Africa.

*Building a Society for All Generations: The Case for a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons. A Global Overview of Thinking, Advocacy, and Strategic Momentum for a UN Convention*, Alejandro Bonilla Garcia, Chair of the NGO Committee on Ageing (Geneva)

<https://ngocongo.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/BONILLA-GARCIA-Building-a-Society-for-All-Generations.-The-Case-for-a-UN-Convention-on-the-Rights-of-Older-Persons-V-29-08-2025.pdf>

#### ***UN Older Persons Day***

<https://www.un.org/en/observances/older-persons-day>

#### ***UN Principles for Older persons 1991***

<https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/46/91>

#### ***Aging UN DESA***

<https://social.desa.un.org/issues/ageing>

## ***Human Rights Council Resolution on Human Rights of Older Persons 2021***

<https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/res/48/3>

## ***2021-2030 Decade of Healthy Ageing***

[https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/decade-of-healthy-ageing/decade-proposal-final-apr2020-en.pdf?sfvrsn=b4b75ebc\\_28](https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/decade-of-healthy-ageing/decade-proposal-final-apr2020-en.pdf?sfvrsn=b4b75ebc_28)

## ***International Federation on Ageing***

<https://ifa.ngo>

## ***NGO Committee on Aging Geneva***

<https://ageingcommitteegeneva.org/>

## ***Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People***

<http://www.rightsofolderpeople.org>

## ***HelpAge International***

<http://www.helpage.org/>

## ***Age International***

Age International works with, and for, older people in low and middle-income countries; championing their rights and supporting those who are most vulnerable.

<http://www.ageinternational.org.uk/>

## ***ASEM Global Aging Center (AGAC)***

**AGAC** is a specialized international institution dedicated to promoting the human rights of older persons by addressing challenges faced by older individuals that arise from population ageing. Moving beyond traditional assistance-driven approaches, AGAC adopts a human rights-based perspective in its work, which includes policy research, awareness-raising, education, and collaboration with stakeholders.

<https://www.asemgac.org/>

## ***AGE Platform Europe***

AGE Platform Europe is the largest network of older people in Europe. With more than 100 member organisations of/for older people, it works in the interest of the 200 million older adults of today... and those of tomorrow. AGE work focuses on a wide range of policy areas that impact older and retired people. These include issues of anti-discrimination, employment of older workers and active ageing, social protection, pension reforms, social inclusion, health, research, accessibility of public transport and of the build environment, and ICT. The Platform takes also active part in several EU projects. The purpose of AGE's work is to voice and promote the interests of the 150 million inhabitants aged 50+ in the European Union and to raise awareness of the issues that concern them most. AGE aims to give a voice to older and retired people in the EU policy debates through the active participation of their representative organisations at EU, national, regional and local levels so as to inform EU policy development.

<http://www.age-platform.eu>

## ***UN Human Rights Council***

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/hrc/home>

### **COTA Australia – Council on the Aging**

COTA Australia's role is to promote, improve and protect the wellbeing of older people in Australia. It is the leading peak body representing, and advocating for, older people to government, the general community and media. It fights ageism and age discrimination.

COTA Australia speaks to the federal government and all parliamentarians to ensure they are aware of the issues facing older people as well as their views and action that can be taken to address them. It also works with the public service on key issues. It makes submissions to government and parliamentary inquiries, undertaking research, engagement with older people and releasing policy statements.

COTA Australia is currently prioritising work on aged care reform, the development of better retirement income policy, addressing the housing crisis, calling for improved health services and tackling ageism in employment.

<https://cota.org.au/about-cota/>

### **Human Rights Commission of Australia**

<https://humanrights.gov.au/search?keys=older+persons>

**Summary: Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights Inquiry into Australia's Human Rights Framework**

<https://www.hrlc.org.au/explainers/pjchr-summary/>

### **ROPA Rights of Older Persons Australia**

[https://www.rightsofolderson.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/ROPA-Towards-a-United-Nations-Convention-on-the-Human-Rights-of-Older-Persons\\_v01.pdf](https://www.rightsofolderson.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/ROPA-Towards-a-United-Nations-Convention-on-the-Human-Rights-of-Older-Persons_v01.pdf)

### **Linda Wirth, formerly ILO**

*[Editor's note: Linda worked at the ILO in Geneva for many years with her last posting being in Manila as Director of the ILO Subregional Office for South East Asia and the Pacific. During her time at the ILO she mainly worked on employment and working conditions policies and trends, social dialogue and gender equality in the context of the adoption or revision of international labour standards. When based in Manila, much work was around projects to eliminate child labour and promote youth employment and the rights of workers to organise. Over the years, the ILO published a number of reports that Linda drafted, the most well-known being a book on "Breaking Through the Glass Ceiling: Women in Management".]*

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## **EINE KLEINE NACHTMUSIK**

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Ever thought about the entertainment on cruise ships? Perhaps you've experienced this question one or more times? Most likely it comprised endless games, trivia nights, karaoke evenings, stand-up comedians – and always schmaltzy muzak. A recent small boat cruise that I did with Robyn had this, of course. But that was not all.

There was a pianist, who played most late afternoons in the main lounge, then after dinner in a top deck bar, very cosy and quiet. And she did indeed play schmaltzy stuff, in both places on a grand piano. This seemed over the top for such music. We could also see that this bored her out of her brain and could sense that she was capable of much more, very likely classically trained. So, one evening we plucked up the courage to ask her if she could indulge us in some real music – some Chopin, Schubert, Liszt, Rachmaninov, Satie.... Her face lit up “of course, but maybe not Rachmaninov, a bit too energetic for late night.” She immediately launched into a Chopin Nocturne and never played schmaltz again on this cruise. Her name was Elena Koreneva, indeed a professional classical pianist.

On the second night, up in our cosy little late-night bar, she said: “OK, I will play you some Rachmaninov.” Wonderful, I said afterwards, full of Russian fire and energy. She said nothing but gave me a very quizzical look. Later that evening she revealed to us that, not only was she Ukrainian, but from Crimea. I shrivelled into my shoes at my faux pas. However, this did lead us into long conversations on the horrors of the Russian invasion, having a temporary home in Romania and having to make a living playing on tour boats. But the music continued every evening, often just for Robs, myself and two 80 something widowers we had become friends with on the cruise. Beautiful lyrical, soothing pieces by Chopin, Schubert, Clara Schumann, Liszt... It was always sad to finish up each evening.



And there was one big surprise to come. On the last day at sea, Elena gave a full recital to everyone in the main auditorium, on yet another grand piano - yes, three on board, it could only happen on a French ship. A truly wonderful event to finish the cruise.

Bye bye Elena, we really do hope that you get to live and play back home in Crimea again. You provided something special and unexpected for us, and we hope that your

appreciative fans lightened your onboard life a little as well.

Footnote: The cruise was in July 2025, up the Kimberley coast from Broome to Darwin on *Le Soleal*, one of the Ponant stable. They also had a team of marine scientists on board, who didn't play music but gave interesting talks each day and sometimes led zodiac excursions. Highly recommended.

**Peter Dexter, formerly WMO**

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## A MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

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In this *Newsletter*, we have posted a photograph of the first edition of the *AAFICS News*, Vol.



I, No.1 dated July, 1981. A quick calculation indicates that 1981 was 44 years ago! What a feat of volunteership by AAFICS members that we have been able to keep the Newsletter going for such a long time. Dr. John Hirshman, founder of AAFICS in 1980, was also AAFICS Treasurer and Editor of the Newsletter for most of his time in the role. He only handed over the job of President in 2005 and passed away a year later. We are holding many original copies of the *AAFICS News* from the 1980s and will start publishing parts of them in future *Newsletters*. Clearly, the early editions were typed and then, probably, cyclostyled. Remember that

technique? The early editors would never have believed that, one day, AAFICS members would receive the *Newsletter* through something called the Internet into their computer or mobile phone. And with colour photos and images too! 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 year, I have stepped aside as AAFICS President and will concentrate on the role of Editor. Looking forward to receiving your contributions for the *AAFICS Newsletter* edition in July, 2026. Please send to me 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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## FIXING MY BUCKET LIST – AUSTRALIA BY TRAIN

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I've seen the world and now, alone, I want to see Australia and feel that I've really come home. Seeking inspiration for a story on travel not yet experienced, I turned on the radio to hear Harry Belafonte sing: "there's a hole in the bucket", to which Odetta responded: "then fix it, dear Harry, fix it."

I needed to fix the holes in my bucket list for seeing Australia by train. South to North with The Ghan, East to West with The Indian Pacific. How far could I go with my golden Opal card and will it only cost me \$2.50 a day when using public transport services across the Opal network? Would I have to do several trips? For the longer ones on The Ghan and The Indian Pacific, could I afford the Golden Singles? Would I have to try to get on the TV game show *Tipping Point* to raise some, if not all, of the necessary funds?

Starting in Sydney I might do my Gold Opal for the **Blue Mountains** (Gundungurra/Dharug: Colomatta or Gulumada), a mountainous region and a mountain range located in New South Wales. The Blue Mountains Range comprises mountains extending off the Great Dividing

Range about 4.8 kilometres northwest of Wolgan Gap in a generally southeasterly direction for about 96 kilometres, terminating at Emu Plains. For about two-thirds of its length it is traversed by the Great Western Highway, the Main Western railway line and the proposed Blue Mountains tunnel. Several established towns are situated on its heights, including Katoomba, Springwood, Blackheath where I went riding as a child when we were living in Mount Victoria shortly after emigrating from Austria. The range forms the watershed between Coffs River to the south and the Grose and Wolgan rivers to the north. The range contains the Explorer Range and the Bell Range. I'd have to watch the weather and only pack my bathers if I get a spot in one of the spas.



My Gold Opal can also take me to the **Central Coast** known for its regional coastal towns like Terrigal, The Entrance, Ettalong Beach, Budgewoi and Bateau Bay with resorts and holiday parks, which feature many expansive beaches and lagoons with surfing and coastal tracks, as well as scenic views. The Central Coast includes major localities, villages and towns such as Gosford, Wyong and Woy Woy. Geographically, the Central Coast includes the region bounded by the Hawkesbury River in the south, the Watagan Mountains in the west and Lake Macquarie, on the Sydney basin.

My trusty Gold Opal can also take me to the **Hunter** wine-country and the **Illawarra**, a coastal region in the southeast of the state situated immediately south of Sydney and north of the South Coast region. You could call it the *Oyster Coast*. (I'd like to go to the annual oyster festival held in Narooma in May.) The Illawarra encompasses the two cities of Wollongong, Shellharbour and the coastal town of Kiama of blow-hole fame. The Illawarra region is characterised by three distinct districts: the north-central district, which is a contiguous urban sprawl centred on Lake Illawarra, the western district defined by the Illawarra escarpment, which leads up to the fringe of Greater Metropolitan Sydney including Macarthur in the northwest, and to the Southern Highlands region in the southwest, which is historically semi-rural, but now defined by increasing urbanisation.

My Gold Opal will take me to the Blue Mountains, the Central Coast and the Illawarra, but this isn't far enough to fill my bucket, when fixed, for 2026 and beyond.

I want to taste some adventure, so first up is **The Ghan** - 3 days, 2 nights from Adelaide to Darwin, including extended stops to do off-train tours. It's an experiential tourism-oriented passenger train service operating between the northern and southern coasts of Australia, through the cities of Adelaide, Alice Springs and Darwin on the Adelaide–Darwin rail corridor. Cost for a gold single around \$7,000.



Then there's ***The Indian Pacific*** which according to its website is a weekly experiential tourism-oriented passenger-train service that runs in Australia's East-West rail corridor between Sydney, on the shore of the Pacific Ocean, and Perth, on the shore of the Indian Ocean – thus, like its counterpart in the north–south corridor, *The Ghan*, it is one of the few truly transcontinental trains in the world. Named for the two oceans the train encounters on its journey, the Indian Pacific travels between Perth, Adelaide and Sydney on a spectacular

4352km crossing over 3 nights." Sydney to Adelaide (2 days, 1 night – cost of a gold single around \$1,590; Adelaide to Perth – 3 days 2 nights, cost of a gold single around \$3,500; Perth to Sydney – 5 days/4 nights – gold single about \$4,000.)

Similarly to the *The Ghan* and *The Indian Pacific*, *The Great Southern* is a slow journey across the country with a series of off-train guided tours along the route. The Adelaide to Brisbane service takes three days and features guided tours of the Grampians National Park in Victoria, Canberra and beaches along the northern coast of New South Wales. The Brisbane to Adelaide service takes four days with beachside dining in northern New South Wales, a guided tour of the Hunter Valley and Newcastle, and a stop at the Twelve Apostles.

I'm looking forward to all the final planning and finding out what I can enjoy both onboard and at the scenic stops along the way, and I haven't even explored the several vintage rail journeys yet.

As there's a bit of crossover with my Gold Opal network, it looks like I will need more professional advice than Harry and Odetta can give and may have to resort to a travel expert for timing and final package-deal costs for the "luxury" trips.

**Sylvia Petter, formerly ITU**

*[Editor's note: Sylvia, we wish you all the best in achieving your ambitions. A Lotto win could be just around the corner? There are many train enthusiasts amongst our readership and, no doubt, a number who have 'done' the big two trips...The Ghan and Indian Pacific. They must be wonderful journeys.]*

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## FEATURE STORY:

### POMPEII THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

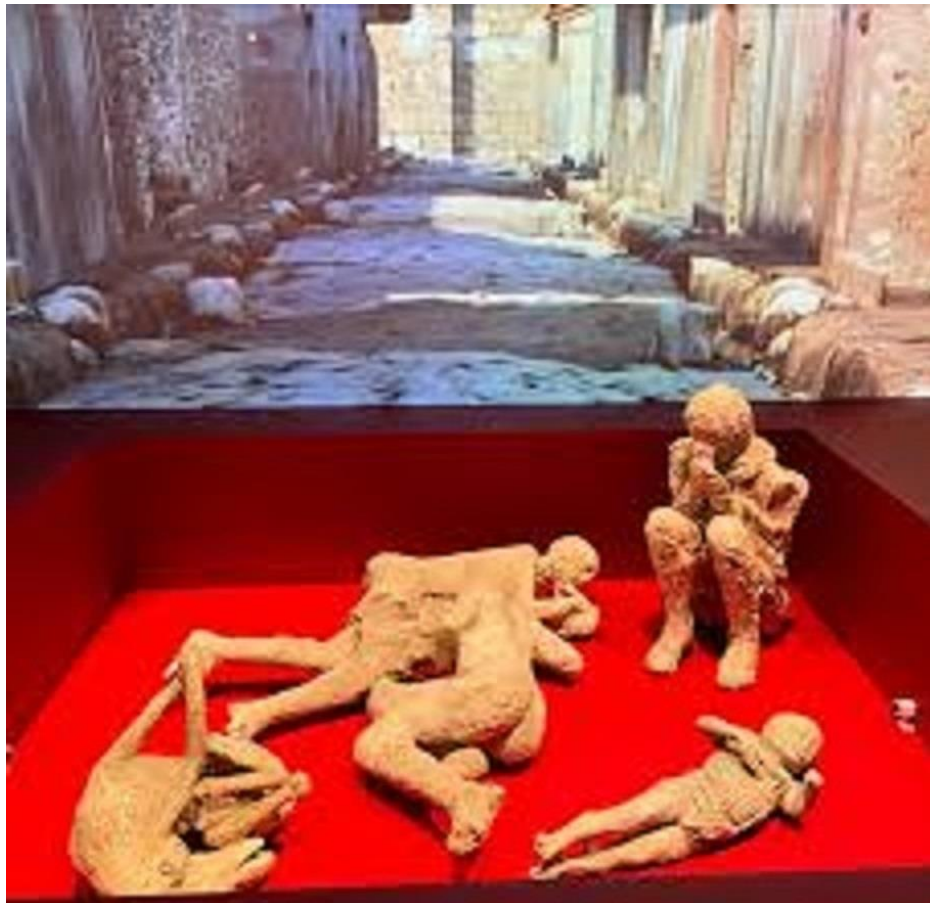
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*The fate of the ancient roman city of Pompeii 24 August 79 CE\* is a well-known story that continues to stimulate the imagination – it has reverberated down the years making the part-exposed/reconstructed Pompeii the second most visited historical site in modern Italy\*\*. The city is just 10 km in a direct line from the volcano Mount Vesuvius.*

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Escape? People did not stand a chance\*\*\*

When it erupted, Mount Vesuvius ejected a cloud of super-heated tephra and gases to a height of >30 km followed by a mix of molten rock, pulverized pumice and hot ash at a rate of 1.5 million-tonnes/second. Following the initial ash fall, the people trapped in the city were subjected to pyroclastic ground-hugging flow of gas clouds, rock fragments and fine volcanic dust >1,000 degC that surged down the sides of the volcano at speeds of many hundreds kilometres/hour\*\*\*\*.



The towns of Pompeii and Herculaneum remain the most well-publicized/famous of the settlements affected, but the event encompassed a wider area some of which has subsequently become today's Vesuvius National Park. There were an estimated 20,000 people living in the ancient towns of which the remains of 1,500 have been found thus far as a result of quazi-organized excavations that began >275 years ago. The de facto death toll remains unknown.

Capturing historical images of the past in 'real time'

Caught in an historical time warp that is close on 2,000 years, the value of the city/park is that of instantly capturing a unique '*Day in the Life of the People of Ancient Rome*'. By roman standards the region impacted by the eruption was affluent – this reflected in the high quality of the city buildings available for private, commercial and municipal use. There was architectural luxury in civic layout and design - decorations and furnishings were to high standards that reflected the range of the different, but mainly affluent, social groups.

Importantly, the cities became time capsules of life that were captured intact and, as-a-result, they provide the images of people going about their daily lives (and never expecting the disaster that hit them and essentially preserved some of them for posterity). Apart from the relatively light impact of hunters/looters seeking treasure trove, the cities remained 'as *destroyed*' for all but the past 150 years. This is when the de facto remains of that original Roman Empire became the subject of archaeological interest to scholars, tourists/visitors alike as part of the '*Tour in Europe*' movement from the mid-18<sup>th</sup>C on.



### Exploring history with modern technologies

Technical innovation within the historical industries in recent times has centred upon the exploration, interpretation and promotion/display (and, not least, the financial value/resources involved). It is the organic remains of the cities, in particular, that have enabled us to reflect upon the people themselves – living structures, habitation and way-of-life from those times. Decay has left numerous de facto spaces in the mix of solidified materials – original and volcanic - of the city that has enabled researchers to create moulds of the people themselves in their final stages of life. The modern visitor can see the results of what the people looked like in real time at the moment of death.

Language and the way people communicated can also be captured - different from the formal language of the classical literature that has been recorded and handed down through the centuries. The public signs for commercial businesses/shops, information boards and graffiti, scribblings and messages etched into walls by citizens and casual visitors alike provide a glimpse of what has been termed '*vulgar (or vernacular) Latin*'. Language cognoscenti tend to compare the written (classical) language with the spoken language over time noting the rapid

changes of the latter when compared to the former. With Latin, for example, this has enabled them to track the development of the Romance languages that evolved, and which are spoken today.



### Personal ventures – Pompeii & Naples/Vesuvius

Looking back, we've been to the '*Antica Citta di Pompeii*' several times over the years although our first visit to the area – before we actually visited the ancient city – was to the rim of Mount Vesuvius. We visited the area as Troop 236 Rome/American Scouts – a dozen boys and couple of leaders – having taken advantage of an offer from the captain of a US destroyer with the US Naval Support Activity part of the NATO Allied Joint Force Command located on the coast north of Naples. His lad was a member of the troop. The NATO base was a delightful surprise to us all – not only did we benefit from comfortable accommodation – but the reality of 'little America' in Italy provided the novelty of a 10-pin bowling alley, McDonald's hamburgers, PX trading store and much more.

Our visit to the ship completed, the next day we figured that we could also manage the rim of Mount Vesuvius before returning to Rome. It turned out to be an easy run, and we had the car park and the rim largely to ourselves. Leave the car and head uphill for about a kilometre along a path with comfortable gradient. At the top there was a shallow fence line between you and the crater. Sure, you could easily climb over it, but the crater was intimidating – smoke venting, vertical sides, etc. You count the lads in .... and we all returned safely.

And the cities – Pompeii and Herculaneum? In a word: '*Crowded*'. That's mid-year of course and out-of-season when the scavi is far more accessible, interesting and in demand. Hundreds of thousands of your fellow-tourists, however, bring challenges that are less attractive.

### Personal ventures – Ostia Antica/Rome

By comparison, we also had the advantage of living/working for many years close to Ostia Antica – 25 km from Rome - once the ancient port of the city – and also available intact as the result of sand blow and the movement of dunes and foreshore.

With the shift of the new port north to Portus (where Rome's Fiumicino Airport is now located) and to Civitavecchia in the first century CE, the original port declined and was eventually abandoned. The exposed scavi at Ostia Antica extends over 34 ha - the remainder is still underground. Entrance currently costs E18/ticket/day and is accessible by Metro from Central Rome for E1.50/ticket/one-way. Here you can capture another complete Roman city and one, moreover that provided industrial services to the capital city (compared to the admin/agric/rural/second-home raison d'être of Pompeii).

Choices ... choices then. Should time be a constraint, the advantages of Ostia Antica provide an easy option to wander back-in-time. For us it was the familiarity/knowledge/accessibility that took priority. The youngest member of our family once worked on site one time as part of his end-of-school IB studies/examination requirements, which has subsequently led to a career in civil engineering. Thus, the impact of municipal water services in ancient Roman cities on this particular family.



### Technologies in the service of the entertainment industries – Pompeii in Canberra

There are technologies that can reposition you – you the interested time traveller – into the Vesuvius eruption of 79 CE. The result is a realistic impression of the historical impact upon the 20,000 people affected (and largely killed) at the time. For us the experience came courtesy of the National Museum of Australia in Canberra >16,000 km from the scavi that is Pompeii today.

The modern 360 deg. techno-multi-sensory electronic interpretation highlighted the reality of 2,000 years ago with the overwhelming impact of the volcano blowing, lava/smoke/gases

racing down the slopes and inundating the city. The noise, lights, shaking and more felt realistic. The deluge of igneous/pumice/stones that filled the city were simulated by massed shadows flickering/streaking across the streets in which we were exploring the exhibition. Clever interpretation. Check out the brief introduction to the exhibition at YouTube.\*\*\*\*\*

The 'Pompeii' presentation extended from Dec24 – May25. We caught it on 01Jan25 having enjoyed the New Year's Eve fireworks display seated to one side of Lake Burley Griffin the evening before. In reality, and in retrospect, the pyrotechnics enabled us to capture our own Vesuvius dominating the dark sky in Canberra with colourful mass trajectories of 20 minutes or more. Time travel at its best.

\*Date of eruption of Mount Vesuvius. There remains a measure of dispute over the exact day.

\*\*Numero uno? The Colosseum in Rome.

\*\*\*Pompeii. Author Robert Harris. Novel. Published 2003 by Random House. Follow the charismatic/pragmatic Marcus Atilius the Hydraulic Engineer responsible for the aqueduct that supplies potable water to nine regional towns centred upon Mt Vesuvius. Immerse yourself in the exciting/imaginative story that includes escape from Pompeii during the eruption – it captures you. Don't start the book/story if you can't finish it in one read.

\*\*\*\*Source material. Description based upon: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount-Vesuvius](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount-Vesuvius)

\*\*\*\*\* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TFP5gZzSBx4>.... and

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mpKFwJN-kjQ>

## Photos 'Pompeii'

### 1. Body moulds Pompeii

Replica casts easily recognisable as four people and a dog – linking the reality of ancient deaths with human life of the modern day. (Source: National Museum of Australia)

### 2. Rim of Mt. Vesuvius

More than 1,280 m high and the only active volcano in continental Europe. From the car park there is an easy 1 km walk to the rim. Take in the views across the surrounding country and coast – with islands in the distance. (Source: Nomad Epicureans)

### 3. Pompeii exhibition Canberra

Image of the volcano erupting 10 km away from a street in Pompeii with a plume >30 km high as shown on the screen. Imagine the noise, vibrations, hundreds of people in shadow rushing past and the impact of the fallout – the lethal gases that represented instant death. (Source: National Museum of Australia)

### 4. Contrast with Ostia Antica Rome

Instant destruction of the one city with the 4-5 centuries rise, stability, decline and abandonment of the other. The main cross-town east-west highway Decumanus Maximus with commercial buildings, warehouses and the river/port to one side. (Source: Author)

## Peter Steele, formerly FAO

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### DEALING WITH ONE'S OWN MORTALITY

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At the extreme of life's experience, I **was** dead four years ago.

I did not feel even mildly ill. But, the United Nations *declared* that I was DEAD! So, it was Official.

I initially came across a clue that there was something seriously wrong because I checked my Bank Account, as I do on occasion, to find that suddenly my life-supporting United Nations Pension had stopped being paid.

I sure needed to find out why the United Nations had stopped providing my financial life support.

Thus, through somewhat frantic telephone research, I discovered that I was without Pension as the UN has a practice of not paying a Pension to Dead People. And, the United Nations had indeed declared me DEAD. True! Being told I am dead was something of an amusing surprise. But, not having income any more was much more serious. I still felt reasonably alive by normal standards of perception. Changing this official declaration thus became something of a priority.

After some difficulty, I finally managed to get through by phone to a United Nations Payroll Official in New York who shuffled around for a while and, with a sense of interested discovery, told me the clues that sufficed for the Declaration.

The problem started as in July 2021, when they mistakenly sent my 2021 "Certificate of Entitlement" to the apartment I previously rented just up the road from where I now live in Wollongong, Australia - even though I had already informed them twice that I had moved. This Certificate is the form I needed to sign every year, and return by post, to somehow 'prove' I was still alive.

The man who took over my previous apartment *after* me, *had* died - in the apartment - so the helpful next tenant who received my Certificate, confusing him with me, sent the Certificate back to the UN in New York informing them authoritatively – with detail - that I had passed on from this mortal United Nations administered world, and even where my body had been buried.

They believed it. And did not check even with my own previous UN Agency, UNESCO.

So, they stopped paying me my Pension. To rub it in, I then received a letter to my actual *current address* (note: they had it) shortly later from the Deputy Chief of Payroll in New York:

Addressed to *The Estate of Stephen Hill*, then in sorrowful terms, to my family, the letter requested my remaining relatives to send my *Death Certificate* to the UN in New York in order to complete administrative arrangements. I will be framing this epistle.

The touch of irony attached to the request for my Death Certificate was that the Payroll Deputy Chief asking for it was named "Mr Afable". Clearly, a 'kindly' man.

It's not often that, whilst still breathing, one is declared officially DEAD. Adds a bit of authority to it when it comes from the United Nations and is in writing.

Assuring them I was alive took some time, but finally the UN accepted that I actually was *not* dead and sent me an email a couple of weeks later, saying, and I quote,

"Dear Mr Hill, we now recognize that you are *alive* ... and apologize for the inconvenience".

Tempted by the precedent of 'Goons' comedian, Spike Milligan, who had projected forward to have "I told them I was sick" inscribed on his tombstone, I am seriously considering having the above epithet inscribed on mine ... signed, "The United Nations".

I could not help myself but observe in my response to the UN email that it was indeed distinctly inconvenient being *dead*. Payroll in New York must have felt a little embarrassed as they reinstated my Pension within two months ... not bad given the timing of common UN bureaucracy practice.

### **Stephen Hill, formerly UNESCO**

*[Editor's note: delighted to know that you are still alive, Stephen, and that we could meet again at the AAFICS NSW lunch in Sydney the other day! I'm sure many readers enjoyed the 'tombstone humour' in your article.]*

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## **FOX IN THE HENHOUSE – IT MUST NOT HAPPEN HERE**

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We have witnessed extraordinary events in the United States during the first months of the new Trump administration. Staggering cuts across the health sector, including research centres, have left many aghast.

While the need for fiscal reform may be urgent in that country, wholesale cuts have been implemented without apparent understanding of their impact on both domestic and global health. This is tragic as, until now, the US has been at the forefront of support for domestic and global public health initiatives.

Since starting 50 years ago with continuous USAID (US Agency for International Development) support, the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) - spearheaded by WHO and UNICEF - helped countries raise global vaccination coverage among infants from 5% to 86% and helped countries prevent an estimated 154 million child deaths, according to a recent study in *The Lancet* [1].

Since 1990, the US has helped reduce annual child mortality by half, largely by supporting immunization [2]. The current US cuts have derailed progress in reducing most of the remaining 8.5 million maternal, newborn, child and adolescent deaths and stillbirths which occur globally each year and are preventable through low-cost, life-saving interventions [3].

The Trump administration's abrupt defunding of programmes at USAID, WHO, UNICEF and Gavi (the Vaccine Alliance) has led to chaos, resulting in millions of young children missing vaccinations now and in coming years. This callous decision means many hundreds of thousands of young children will die needlessly and prematurely in the near term from vaccine-preventable diseases. Fewer female adolescents will be vaccinated now with a cancer-preventing vaccine that protects against the virus which causes cervical cancer later in adulthood. Fewer children will be protected now against chronic hepatitis infection, which frequently surfaces in adulthood as liver cancer. And the global fight to eradicate polio will be further delayed.

Diseases allowed to proliferate overseas will certainly reach the shores of Western nations. Investment in immunization saves lives both domestically and overseas, and prevents needless epidemics. Every \$1 of global investment was estimated to save \$16 to \$44 [4]. In 2000, Gavi was created with major support from the US to purchase new vaccines against life-threatening diseases for 75 resource poor countries on an annual declining and sustainable cost-share basis. Funding to Gavi from the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has been completely cut.

As if the defunding of vital public health programmes globally was not enough, the U.S. Secretary of HHS has now sacked the entire membership of the ACIP (the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices), replacing them quickly by individuals with questionable qualifications, conflicts of interest and anti-vaccination viewpoints. The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) advises the Minister for Health and Aged Care on the National Immunisation Program (NIP) and other immunisation issues. This is an independent group of professionals who represent the cream of Australian know-how in immunization.

Let us observe what has happened in the United States and vow never to let our public health service suffer from such political madness. While acknowledging imperfections, we should be proud of what has been achieved in immunization and other public health initiatives here and abroad, while still striving for better.

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**John Clements AM, former Medical Officer of EPI/WHO Geneva. (Now AAFICS Queensland, Australia.)**

**Robert Steinglass, former (founding) Director, Immunization Center, John Snow Inc. Marshall, North Carolina, USA.**

*[Editor's note: Thank you John. Very worrying news. Readers wishing to read the original article on the InSight page on-line, please go to [Fox in the henhouse: it must not happen here | InSight+](#) ]*



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## FROM GLOBAL SERVICE TO FAMILY STEWARDSHIP: A PERSONAL REFLECTION

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After two decades of international civil service, I returned to Australia slightly earlier than planned—not to take up a new job or retirement leisure, but to care for my father. It was a quiet decision, made without fanfare, but one that has reshaped my life in ways I’m still discovering. Earlier this year, ABC News Australia contacted me about sharing this journey, and the resulting news article sparked conversations I had not anticipated. In this piece, I reflect on that experience—not only the media moment, but the deeper transition from global engagement to intimate stewardship.

### **The Return**

Coming home after twenty years abroad was not a simple act of relocation. It was a re-entry into a country—and a city—that felt strangely unfamiliar. I had spent the last chapters of my professional life in some truly wonderful duty stations, including Madrid, Spain, and my favourite in Vienna, Austria. In my final posting I was in Montreal, Canada, working with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) as Secretary to its governing bodies. My days were spent in the company of Ambassadors from Member States, helping to coordinate the convening of the sessions and to facilitate draft texts for decisions and resolutions in the often highly charged atmosphere of multilateral diplomacy. The work was intense, structured, rewarding at times, frustrating at other times, but always global in scope.



*Andrew at a farewell event at ICAO. Left to right is: the Representative of Australia, the Representative of Mexico, the President of the Council, the Secretary General of ICAO, Andrew, and the Ambassador of Greece delivering some farewell remarks.*

To move from that world into the quiet, personal realm of caregiving was a profound shift. And Sydney itself, once well known to me, now felt alien. I remember walking up Castlereagh Street and then down George Street shortly after my return—streets I had once known well—and feeling completely disoriented. The skyline had changed, the rhythm of the city had shifted, and I struggled to find anything familiar. “Discombobulated” may be an inelegant word, but it

captures the sensation precisely: a kind of cognitive vertigo, as if the city had moved on without me. I do remember however being relieved to find at least that the Dymocks bookstore on George Street was still there with the delightful cafeteria on the mezzanine level.

### **Caregiving as a Second Calling**

My father, now well into his nineties, came to Australia in the late 1940s from a modest village in Cyprus, carrying little more than determination and a quiet resilience. At his professional height, he owned and managed a restaurant in Kings Cross—a bustling, once bohemian vibrant corner of a Sydney, which no longer exists, but where he earned a reputation not just for his hospitality, but for his culinary flair. He knows a thing or two about cooking—far better than I do, I'll admit—and even at one point landed a job in the kitchens of David Jones in his youth, where his grand flourishes and Mediterranean instincts found appreciative audiences, including the Boardroom lunches. He was always proud to have been asked to prepare meals for the board—though, as he often said with a wry smile, that some of the board members drove him crazy.



*Andrew enjoying a rare relaxed lunch with his father.*

Now, decades later, I find myself living in his house, navigating a new kind of partnership. Over the past few months, as his mobility has gradually declined, I've taken on more and more of the daily tasks: first the laundry, then the cleaning, then the grocery shopping. But one of the more delicate aspects of this transition has been learning how much to take over without taking away. I try to be respectful, leaving him as much independence as he rightfully deserves. Meal preparation remains however one of his great joys, and though the dishes are simpler now, the flair is still there—an instinctive touch with herbs, a knowing glance at the pan, a quiet pride in the whole process of meal preparation.

My mother passed away about twelve years ago. In one of our final conversations, she asked me—in her own gentle way—to try and look after my father if she were the first to go. For my parents, both post-WWII migrants from Cyprus, their 60-year union was one founded on love, first for one another, and then for their three boys. Growing up, my parents had done so much for me and my two older brothers over the years and they had sacrificed so much for us, that it was a promise I made without hesitation, and one I've tried to honour every day since.



*A memorial plaque that Sydney City Council embedded into the footpath at 76 Darlinghurst Road, Kings Cross, Sydney, to mark the spot where Andrew's father's restaurant once stood.*

### **The ABC Article**

Earlier this year, ABC News Australia reached out to me about participating in a feature article on Australians caring for elderly parents. I hesitated. Not only because caregiving is an intimate act, difficult to distil into soundbites, but also because I tend to crave anonymity. My life with my father is quiet, deliberate, and largely unseen—and I wasn't sure I wanted to step into the public eye, even briefly.

Ultimately, I agreed, hoping that sharing our story might resonate with others navigating similar paths. When the article was published in August 2025, I was surprised to find that our story led the piece. To this day, I'm not entirely sure why. Perhaps it was the dynamic—a son caring for his father—which remains less commonly portrayed in media narratives, where daughters are often depicted as the primary caregivers. Whatever the reason, I felt a quiet responsibility to represent our experience with honesty and dignity.

The article touched on the essence of our daily life: the routines, the emotional terrain, and the quiet strength required to sustain it. One line in particular from the article seemed to distil the heart of it:

*“Andrew says he's doing ‘the best he can’ to care for his 98-year-old father. ‘At times it isn't easy, and I desperately hope that I will never have to face the dilemma of trying to place my father into residential care’.”*

In one respect, it was humbling to see our private world reflected in a national conversation, and even more so to receive messages from strangers who saw something of their own journey in ours.

### **Reflections and Resonance**

Since the article's publication, I've received messages from old friends and former colleagues, some of whom I had not been in contact with for many years, and strangers who saw something of their own journey in mine. It reminded me that caregiving, while often invisible, is a shared experience across cultures and professions. It made me realise too that for many of us who have served abroad, returning home brings unexpected responsibilities—and unexpected grace.

## Closing Thoughts

I share this reflection with fellow AAFICS members in the hope that it offers a glimpse into one version of post-service life, which is perhaps not so usual. For those contemplating retirement, or already navigating its complexities, I hope this story affirms that meaning can be found in places we least expect. And for those interested, the original ABC News article is available by following this link online [here](#).

**Andrew Larcos, formerly ICAO**

*[Editor's note: thank you, Andrew, for this most touching and beautifully evocative article. I'm sure all our readers will fully understand the emotions of the whole journey you have had to take since leaving the UN. The health of elderly parents becomes a critical issue as we all age and we appreciate your concern and support for your father in his latter years.]*

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## THE LAST WORD:

### ABANDONED IN DAMASCUS

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For most of the years from 1976 until my retirement in 2007, I was a national, regional or global adviser in labour statistics with the International Labour Office (exceptions being 1979-1983 back in Canberra and 1983-85 with Australian Aid to Botswana). There are so many stories that could be told about those years but I have chosen only one: my final mission which was also the most problematic.

The trip was to Damascus from ILO headquarters office in Geneva where I was senior statistician, and the objective was to give a training course starting on a Monday morning. (I should add that this tale is probably very familiar to frequent flyers, and I had my share, but this was the worst for me and it was a stressful end to a most enjoyable career.)

For almost all of my many missions before this one, I had full knowledge of who was meeting me at the airport, how to contact them, where I would be staying, etc. On this occasion, I was not given this information and I was so preoccupied with retirement and repatriation matters that I did not follow up. The only information that I had was that ILO training courses in Damascus were usually held at the trade union headquarters.

The first inkling of trouble arose at Geneva airport where my Sunday afternoon flight was delayed due to winter snow storms and I missed the connecting flight from Vienna to Damascus. Vienna airport was in chaos because so many flights were delayed, but I was finally put onto a flight to Athens with a connection to Damascus. The trouble was that I would arrive at 4am Monday morning and I had no way to contact anyone about this. An added problem was that I do not read or speak Arabic and the training course was due to start at 9am!

So, I arrived at 4am with no one to meet me, no transport, no hotel awaiting me after a long and stressful journey. At the baggage carousel, I saw various hotels advertised on the walls

and chose one, got a taxi there and asked the front desk to wake me after 2 hours. After such a short sleep, I then had to get to the trade union building (if indeed that was where I was supposed to be) but no one knew where it was. Finally, someone said that they thought it was on the road to a regional town which was some distance from Damascus. After asking several taxi drivers, the concierge finally found one who said he knew where to go and I jumped in. Off we went and, since this was my first visit to Damascus, I eagerly looked everywhere as we went along. I saw a large white building flash by and thought I saw a hammer and sickle symbol, but who was I to tell a local driver to stop?

After about 30 minutes, the last traces of Damascus city were left behind and we were out in the countryside. Using hand signals, I asked the driver to stop and turn around because it seemed that he was actually taking me to the regional town. He was very helpful and stopped at two places where he thought there might be an English speaker to help me. Finally, I just urged him to go back the way that we had come and, when I saw the large white building again, we stopped there and YES it was the right place. I walked into the training room just as they had finished the opening remarks and were apparently telling everyone that all they could do was wait and hope that I would turn up. Like a magician, there I was. The ILO succeeded once again.

The training course went very well with interpretation and my return home was nowhere near as stressful. So ended my last mission as a permanent employee and I made sure that I was better informed when taking subsequent trips as a consultant.

**Bob Pember, formerly ILO**

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## ABOUT US

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The *AAFICS Newsletter* is an informal communications tool designed to keep former UN staff



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