



AFICS BULLETIN

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ASSOCIATION OF FORMER INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVANTS

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VOLUNTEERISM — IT BEGINS WITH YOU



The mission of AFICS/NY is to support and promote the purposes, principles and programmes of the United Nations system; to advise and assist former international civil servants and those about to separate from service; to represent the interests of its members within the United Nations system; to foster social and personal relationships among members, to promote their well-being and to encourage mutual support of individual members.

AFICS/NY BULLETIN

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Note From President of AFICS/NY

Darshak Shah



As we move into the summer months, AFICS/NY continues its active engagement on issues affecting former international civil servants.

On the financial front, AFICS/NY remains on a stable footing, with regular reviews, thanks to the continued support of its members, the UN and the United Nations Federal Credit Union (UNFCU). Membership dues continue to be the Association's principal source of income, and the AFICS/NY's Governing Board continues to review opportunities to strengthen the Association's financial sustainability while maintaining the activities, advocacy and services that members have come to expect. We have created a Standing Committee on Funding in order to oversee AFICS/NY's financial stability under the leadership of Mac Chiulli, AFICS/NY's Treasurer.

Our Offices have temporarily relocated following a request of the UN Secretariat for the use of our office space. After consultations with the UN, we are now temporarily located in the UNICEF Building on the 4th floor, while our office staff are located on the 3rd floor of the UNITAR building. For queries, please visit the 3rd floor of the UNITAR building. We expect to move back to the UNITAR building early next year and will keep you updated. Our telephone number remains unchanged.

I am also pleased to share that AFICS/NY officially launched its [new website](#) at the Annual Assembly through the website group of its Communications Committee under the leadership of Andrew Nye. The site is designed to be a valuable resource for members, featuring announcements, an events calendar, a blog, payment guidance, and practical resources on tax, legal, and pension matters and an In Memoriam section. More than a source of information, the website is intended to serve as a central hub for keeping members informed, connected, and engaged. Members are warmly encouraged to explore the new site, test its features, and share their feedback as we continue to improve it.

I am especially pleased to highlight the creation of the new [Events Committee](#), whose mission is to strengthen our sense of community by bringing colleagues together in small groups and fostering meaningful connections. The Committee

has already organized two successful events this year: a lecture on the history of Harlem and a visit to a gallery. More events are being scheduled including a walk on Manhattan's East Side ending at the Rose Garden at the United Nations and the possibility of learning sessions on Mah Jong and portrait painting.

Regarding advocacy on pension benefits, AFICS/NY's Pension Committee is actively engaged on key issues before the new Plan Design Review Group established by the General Assembly under resolution 80/243, which called for a holistic review of the United Nations Pension Scheme over the next three years. The Committee will work to advocate that any proposed changes fully respect and preserve the acquired rights of participants and beneficiaries, including, to the greatest extent possible, the right to cost-of-living adjustments under the Fund's Pension Adjustment System.

With respect to After-Service Health Insurance, AFICS/NY continues to participate actively in the insurance plan renewals for 2026/2027, which were under review by the Health and Life Insurance Committee (HLIC) during March and April. To ensure that members are fully informed, arrangements were made to hold a webinar prior to AFICS/NY's Annual Assembly, providing time for a thorough briefing by the Health and Life Insurance Section (HLIS) and a fuller exchange of questions and answers than is usually possible during the Assembly itself.

An AFICS/NY delegation will attend the Council session of the Federation of Associations of Former International Civil Servants (FAFICS) in Vienna this July. The agenda will include discussions and inputs to the Pension Review requested by the General Assembly, After-Service Health Insurance matters and the need to strengthen succession planning within the Federation. The outcome of the session will be significant, and it is essential that former international civil servants remain well informed and continue to participate as members of committees and working groups that review and decide on the benefits accrued over the course of our careers.

The success of AFICS/NY depends on the engagement and support of its members. I encourage all members to participate in our events, volunteer to work on our programmes, and invite fellow former international civil servants to join our growing community.

I wish all members and their families a wonderful, healthy, and relaxing summer, while also assuring you that AFICS/NY's Governing Board will continue its work to safeguard the value of our service and ensure that the benefits earned over the course of our careers remain strong and secure.

Darshak Shah

President, AFICS/NY



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Farewell Note

President, Federation of Associations of Former International Civil Servants (FAFICS)

As I complete my maximum four-year tenure as FAFICS President, I reflect again on the value of FAFICS to retirees and to the 65 local Member Associations worldwide. It seems remarkable that a worldwide partnership of volunteers has become the respected voice of and support for the almost 100,000 retirees from the UN system of organizations.

I have chaired many pre-retirement seminars, and the vast majority of retirees in the United Nations system expect that retirement will be a time of freedom, reflection, and new opportunities—but it can also bring new challenges. Questions about pensions, health insurance, taxation, and evolving regulations in your country of residence do not disappear when one leaves active service. In fact, they often become more important. That is why local retiree associations, such as AFICS/NY, and the

Federation of Associations of Former International Civil Servants, better known as FAFICS, play such an essential role in the lives of former staff members. Both local associations and our Federation are led by elected volunteers, and other volunteers provide expert advice on a multitude of topics.

A local retiree association is often the first and most immediate source of support. It provides practical advice, timely information, and a sense of community. Retirees volunteer to arrange meetings, edit newsletters, and arrange social events so that retirees can stay informed and maintain contact with former colleagues. In many places, volunteers in these associations also provide direct assistance in navigating administrative procedures, understanding changes in health insurance schemes, or dealing with local tax and legal matters.

“
As the umbrella organization representing associations of former international civil servants worldwide, FAFICS gives retirees a collective voice at the global level.
”

Yet while local associations are indispensable, many of the most important issues affecting retirees are decided far beyond the local level. Pension adjustments, After-Service Health Insurance, and policies affecting the rights and well-being of former staff are often discussed and negotiated within the broader structures of the United Nations system. This is where FAFICS adds unique and significant value.

As the umbrella organization representing associations of former international civil servants worldwide, FAFICS gives retirees a collective voice at the global level. It represents the interests of former staff before bodies such as the United Nations, the UN Joint Staff Pension Fund, and other inter-agency mechanisms where decisions affecting pensions and benefits are made. Through sustained advocacy, informed analysis, and constructive dialogue, FAFICS works to protect the purchasing power of pensions, defend health insurance coverage, and ensure that retirees' concerns are heard and addressed. We need, and deserve, a strong voice. All of these activities are staffed by volunteers from the local Associations.

FAFICS also serves as a vital channel of information. It gathers developments from across the UN system, analyzes complex policy issues, and shares this information with member associations, which in turn inform individual retirees. In this way, a retiree in one country can benefit from expertise, advocacy, and experience drawn from colleagues around the world. In recent years, we in FAFICS have worked to

improve this information flow, and I believe we have been successful.

Together, FAFICS and its local Member Associations create a network of solidarity and protection that strengthens the well-being and security of all retirees. Like a local Association, the leadership of FAFICS and the many people representing FAFICS in various UN bodies are all volunteers. They are nominated by their local Association and are the visible face of our principles. FAFICS is truly blessed to have so many skilled and dedicated volunteers (from approximately 20 local Associations at last count).

The 56th FAFICS Council of all Associations will elect a new President and three of the five Vice-Presidents, as well as a new Treasurer, this July. The new leadership team will have some new challenges, I'm sure. The Call for Nominations has gone out to all Associations. If you have some advocacy expertise and a desire to make a difference, please speak to your local Association about being nominated.

For every UN retiree, joining and actively supporting a local retiree association is an investment in both personal well-being and collective strength. And by supporting that association's engagement with FAFICS, retirees help ensure that their voice is amplified where it matters most. In retirement, as during active service, we are stronger together.

Jerry Barton
FAFICS President

VOLUNTEERISM



— IT BEGINS WITH YOU —

In International Volunteer Year 2026, the United Nations wants to champion volunteerism and celebrate all those who volunteer their time, skills and resources to support projects and communities around the world. As many retirees have found so much richness in volunteerism, AFICS/NY decided it was a rich tableau where we should showcase some of those who do this for a living—such as the UN Volunteers—and so many others who do this work in their own time, or when they finish at the UN, and find meaning through their volunteer activities.

As UN Volunteers (UNV) points out:

Volunteerism is a cornerstone of sustainable development and humanitarian action. Volunteers strengthen societies in times of crisis and peace, and their contributions are vital to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Valuing and measuring volunteer contributions—formal and informal—is key to strengthening global understanding and shaping innovative models for the future.

In this connection, AFICS/NY spoke with the current head of UN Volunteers, Toily Kurbanov.

From UN Careers to UN Volunteer Service: A New Chapter for Retirees in the Year of the Volunteer 2026

by *Gail Bindley-Taylor*

The [United Nations Volunteers](#) (UNV) programme, now in its fifty-sixth year, may be less widely known than some other UN programmes and agencies, yet it has become an increasingly important part of the Organization's development, humanitarian and peacebuilding work. Established by the General Assembly on 7 December 1970 at the initiative of then Secretary-General U Thant, UNV officially began operations in January 1971. While originally inspired in part by the U.S. Peace Corps, the programme today operates on a far greater scale—and with a far broader vision.

Gail Bindley-Taylor is the departing head of the AFICS/NY Communications Committee. A former broadcast journalist, she interviewed Mr. Kurbanov. The interview has been edited for length, clarity and context.



Toily Kurbanov with Darshak Shah/Toily Kurbanov

In a recent interview, Toily Kurbanov, a Russian national who took over as UNV's Executive Coordinator in 2021, offered a candid account of how the programme has evolved, why retirees are increasingly central to its mission, and what the Year of the Volunteer 2026 means for the broader UN family.

THE PROGRAMME TODAY

Often described as the "best-kept secret of the UN system", UNV has grown substantially over the past decade. The programme now has approximately 15,000 volunteers serving in the field—three times the number deployed ten years ago—alongside a further 20,000 online volunteers contributing their expertise remotely from locations as diverse as New York, Beijing and Conakry. The number of UN partners has also expanded, from 51 when Kurbanov joined the organization in 2021 to approximately 70 in 2025.

The COVID-19 pandemic, Kurbanov noted, accelerated trends that were already emerging. “We were already sleepwalking into the digital era”, he said, “but it took the moment of COVID for us to recognize this challenging opportunity more explicitly.” The result has been a lasting shift: volunteers can now contribute meaningfully without leaving home, opening the door to a much wider pool of experienced professionals.

The direction of volunteer flows has also changed. Where once the model relied heavily on volunteers from the Global North serving in the Global South, today the majority of international UN Volunteers come from the Global South. The response to the Ukraine refugee crisis illustrated this vividly: UN Volunteers from Uganda and Jordan—experienced in working with displaced populations—relocated to Poland, Slovakia and Romania to support UNHCR, UNICEF and WHO operations there.

A PROGRAMME FOR RETIREES: TURNING A CAREER INTO A CALLING

Alongside its continued commitment to youth engagement, the programme increasingly recognizes the value of experienced professionals and retirees. Kurbanov was direct about the opportunity: “Back in the 70s and 80s, UNV assignments were seen as a stepping-stone to a UN career. Now your UN career is a stepping-stone towards a UNV assignment. Use it.”

For members of AFICS/NY and other associations of former UN staff, one of the most significant developments has been UNV’s growing emphasis on attracting experienced professionals and retirees. Decades of institutional knowledge, sectoral expertise and familiarity with the UN system can be deployed immediately—a quality of increasing value to agencies seeking volunteers who can contribute from day one.

Currently, 500 volunteers aged 65 and above are serving within the UN system. Short-term assignments of three to six months are available, reducing

“Volunteers are ordinary citizens who choose to help; they move through mud-choked streets, navigate cyberspace and climb over rubble to reach those left behind... During the Year of the Volunteer 2026, I ask you to see them, support them and stand with them.”

—Toily Kurbanov
UNV Executive Coordinator

barriers for older professionals who are unable to commit to longer periods. There are also opportunities to volunteer in one’s home country—particularly through the online volunteering platform—making participation accessible to those with family commitments or health considerations.

The scope of assignments available to retirees is genuinely diverse. Kurbanov describes arrangements in which retired Wall Street bankers have contributed to digital literacy programmes in Africa under a UNDP partnership. Others have returned to UN service to “bookend” their careers: having begun as a UN Volunteer, they now return as a seasoned professional to complete the arc. As Kurbanov explained: “When somebody has started their work in the UN as a UN Volunteer, and now they’re ending as head of office or representative somewhere or the other—they say, we want to bookend our UN career with another UN assignment.”

For many retirees, volunteering also offers a way to remain connected to the ideals that drew them to public service in the first place. While retirement

marks the end of a formal UN career, it need not mean the end of contributing to development, humanitarian action, peacebuilding or international cooperation.

THE YEAR OF THE VOLUNTEER 2026: A LASTING LEGACY

The Year of the Volunteer 2026 carries significance well beyond commemorating the achievements of UN Volunteers. Kurbanov expressed the hope that it will leave a structural legacy—strengthening volunteerism at national and community levels around the world. Some 60 UN Member States have already established national committees or action plans. Notably, Kazakhstan has gone so far as to adopt a constitutional amendment recognizing volunteerism as a means of contributing to social cohesion.

“There must be something that will happen this year that will make the structural adjustment and create new realities”, Kurbanov said, “and leave a legacy for the generation of volunteers who will come after us.”

Importantly, Kurbanov stressed that the Year of the Volunteer is intended to recognize all forms of

volunteer service—not only those working within formal UN structures. Pointing to long-established organizations that have relied on volunteers forever such as the Red Cross and Red Crescent, he urged, “Recognize them all.” The vast majority of people are volunteering without any formal structures in their communities, through their churches, mosques and local organizations, he reminded. “The year is not about us. The year is about you and the volunteers in your countries.”

INCLUSION, PARITY AND THE ROAD AHEAD

UNV achieved gender parity among its volunteers in 2020, a milestone Kurbanov highlights with pride. He noted that achieving balance across a system as diverse as the UN requires addressing sharp disparities between sectors and regions. “If you want to uphold gender parity, you can’t have a UN system where 70% of volunteers with UNFPA and UN Women are women, and 80% of volunteers in peacekeeping operations are men. You have to close that gap”, he stressed. He was also candid about the ongoing work required: parity must be

UNV AROUND THE WORLD



JAPAN ∫ AUGUST 2025

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and UN Volunteers at the Ninth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD 9) in Yokohama.



MADAGASCAR ∫ MARCH 2026

Malagasy National UN Volunteers in Antananarivo.



MAURITANIA ∫ FEBRUARY 2025

UN Volunteers supporting humanitarian work in Nouadhibou.



THAILAND ∫ DECEMBER 2025

Mangrove planting at Bangpu Nature Park in Samut Prakan.

understood not only at the global level but within individual agencies, regions and duty stations, where disparities can still be pronounced.

Disability inclusion remains another of his priorities. In 2019, only six of roughly 5,000 field volunteers were persons with disabilities. That figure has since grown to approximately 350 in the past year—progress Kurbanov acknowledged, while noting it falls well short of the 15% of the global population estimated by WHO to have some form of disability. “We are all people with temporary abilities”, according to Kurbanov. “It should be in our own interest to create environments where others can thrive.”

THE INVITATION

When asked how a largely unpaid, system-wide service like UNV remains vibrant in the face

of dwindling resources, Kurbanov was unequivocal: volunteerism is the world’s “largest renewable resource.” The answer lies in integration—thinking of volunteerism as part of the solution from the outset, not as an afterthought. “Our logo and the blue flag still command a lot”, he said, reflecting on UNV’s enduring ability to attract people who want to make a difference.

With nearly 30 years of experience in public policy and sustainable development, Kurbanov is helping position UNV for both the 2030 Agenda and the UN80 reform process. Progress on sustainable development, he maintained, will depend on the collective will of Member States and sufficient support from the UN system.

For retired UN staff, Kurbanov’s message is both a practical invitation and a personal challenge. Their experience, institutional knowledge and commitment to international cooperation are precisely what the programme needs. And as the Year of the Volunteer 2026 progresses, his plea serves equally as a call to action:

“See them, support them, stand with them—and perhaps more importantly, become one of them.”



BHUTAN ∫ DECEMBER 2024

De-Suups: local community volunteers in Thimphu.



The Power of Volunteering

by Olivier Adam

Olivier Adam is a retired UNDP staff member and former Executive Coordinator of UN Volunteers.

Many of us who spent our careers in the United Nations system were drawn to it by a sense of purpose—a belief that our work could contribute to something larger than ourselves. We moved across duty stations, adapted to new countries and cultures, and gave decades to the pursuit of development, peace, and human dignity. When that chapter closes, the transition into retirement can leave a gap that is hard to define but impossible to ignore. For me, volunteering has been the thread that has run through my entire life—and it is what continues to give that life meaning.

As a teenager growing up in a small city outside Paris, where the inequalities around me were hard to miss, particularly among nearby migrant communities, where families struggled with things most of us took for granted, I spent two summers volunteering at local camps for children from those backgrounds. It was my first real experience of giving my time to others, and what surprised me

“*Volunteering, at its deepest, is about being present with people when they need it most.*”

was how much it gave back. Working with those kids, I learned that even small gestures—attention, patience, encouragement—could make a genuine difference.

Years later, posted to New York as a Junior Professional in the late 1980s, I found myself in the middle of the HIV/AIDS crisis. Many of you will remember what those years were like—the fear, the stigma, the sense that institutions were too slow to respond. For me, it was deeply personal: friends and people in my community were falling ill. I got involved with ACT UP, volunteered with God’s Love We Deliver packaging

meals for people too sick to care for themselves, and worked the hotline at Gay Men's Health Crisis, taking calls from people who were frightened and searching for someone who would listen and provide advice. It was heartbreaking work—it taught me that volunteering, at its deepest, is about being present with people when they need it most.

In the early 1990s, while posted in Haiti, volunteering remained part of my life outside the office. In underserved neighbourhoods, we organized community cleaning campaigns—efforts that went beyond sanitation and helped restore a sense of collective pride. I began mentoring young Haitians, encouraging them to see themselves as contributors rather than beneficiaries. Anyone who has worked in development knows how transformative that shift can be—when people move from receiving help to offering it.

These experiences shaped my career in ways I could not have anticipated. They led me to manage the partnership between UNDP and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, supporting countries with limited capacity to respond to those diseases. And they eventually brought me to what I consider the greatest privilege of my professional life: serving, in my last post, as Executive Coordinator of United Nations Volunteers. In that role, I saw up close what so many of us have witnessed throughout our careers—that individual acts of commitment, multiplied across countries and cultures, become a force far greater than any single institution.

Our careers gave us purpose, structure, and a sense of contribution. Retirement, for all its freedoms, can quietly take some of that away. The meetings stop, the emails slow down, and the identity we built over decades can start to feel less solid.

Volunteering has been my answer to that. Today, alongside coaching, I mentor younger professionals—sharing not just technical knowledge but the things you can only learn by living: how to navigate setbacks, how to lead with humility, how to keep perspective when the work feels overwhelming. It keeps me engaged, keeps me learning, and gives me a sense of purpose that retirement alone does not provide.

I believe we, as UN retirees, are uniquely positioned to volunteer in meaningful ways. We bring decades of experience working across cultures. We have skills in mediation, management, communication, and analysis that are in short supply in many organizations. And perhaps most importantly, we have time—something that was always scarce during our careers.

Volunteering does not have to be grand or global. It can be mentoring a young professional, supporting a local charity, coaching someone through a career transition, or simply showing up regularly for a cause that matters to you. What counts is the willingness to stay engaged—to keep giving, even when no one is asking you to.

The power of volunteering lies not in any single act of service but in what it does to us over time. It connects us to others. It reminds us that we still have something to offer. And it gives retirement not just comfort, but purpose. For those of us who spent our lives trying to make a difference, that is no small thing.



Fundraising on Red-Nose Day/
Mac Chiulli

Life After Work:

The Unexpected Joy of Volunteering

by Mac Chiulli

Mac Chiulli has been involved with AFICS since her retirement in 2014, as Executive Officer of DGACM, and now serves as Treasurer of AFICS/NY. She and her husband are transplants to New York City, but love (almost) every aspect of it.

For decades, my identity was defined by my career. From the age of 16 until my mandatory retirement from the UN, I was a dedicated "workaholic." I loved the hum of the international atmosphere and the challenges of the private and public sectors. Honestly, the prospect of retirement was frightening; had it not been mandatory, I might still be at my desk today.

However, I've discovered a beautiful secret: there is absolutely nothing to fear in retirement. In fact, life "after work" can be even more vibrant, varied, and rewarding—largely because it is finally on your own terms.

“*Life after work can be even more vibrant, varied and rewarding.*”



Lobbying in Albany for Medical Aid in Dying which became law in December/Mac Chiulli

Living in a city like New York, the opportunities to find purpose through service are endless. Whether you want to mentor youth, support the elderly, or sharpen a professional skill, the right match is waiting for you. Excellent starting points include NYC Service, New York Cares, NYC Parks, and Idealist.

My own journey started small—just a few hours on Monday evenings helping with an ESL (English as a Second Language) programme in Harlem. That one step opened a door to a world of fulfilment I hadn't imagined. Since then, I've shared finance skills with high schoolers, helped the Museum of Math with special projects and bookkeeping, and explored the city's soul through arts organizations like Creative Time and Open House NY. I've even directed traffic for Summer Streets, danced on the Highline and crawled through Washington Square Park!

Currently, my heart is in my work with Big Apple Greeter—where I get to show off the city I love to visitors—and my involvement with AFICS/NY.

Through these experiences, I've learned that the true value of volunteering isn't just about the work itself. It's the people you meet—kind, interesting, and like-minded souls. It's the genuine gratitude from organizations that truly need your help. Most



Being a 'sprite puppeteer' in the Greenwich Village Halloween Parade/Mac Chiulli

importantly, I've found that the old cliché is absolutely true: you receive far more than you give.

In this "Year of the Volunteer", I encourage you to look into your community and find a need that sparks your interest. I guarantee you won't regret it. Why not start your next great adventure right here with AFICS/NY?

Retirees Giving Back to Their Communities

by Delia Barcelona



Delia Barcelona is the Secretary of the Federation of Associations of Former International Civil Servants (FAFICS)

Many Member Associations of the Federation of the Association for Former International Civil Servants (FAFICS) engage in outreach initiatives usually aimed at helping marginalized and disadvantaged groups and often mobilizing not just their members but other volunteers from the community. Sometimes, these activities are also intended to assist Association members directly. Below are a few examples from FAFICS members around the world.

AFUNSOB-Bangladesh

Officers have undertaken activities to help members on issues related to pension and health insurance, including widow benefits and medical and humanitarian needs. An IT specialist also conducts DCE (Digital Certificate of Entitlement) training to help members shift to the digital certification app.

Montreal, especially during Christmas time, in collaboration with Church and community volunteers.

UNPAI-India

The UN Pensioners' Association, India (UNPAI), New Delhi, has been a steadfast support system, assisting members with a wide range of concerns, from pension processing delays and health insurance claims to caregiving challenges and overall wellness, offering emotional support and guiding retirees toward professional counselling when needed. Through these efforts, the Association has reaffirmed its role as more than just an administrative facilitator—it is a compassionate community that ensures UN retirees in India continue to lead dignified, secure, and fulfilling lives..

CAFICS-Canada

Annually, the Association holds a toy drive to bring joy to hundreds of disadvantaged kids in select communities in



AFICS Kenya

The Association has supported Mji Wa Huruma Home for the Aged, which hosts 42 elderly men and women with no family or means. While major operational expenses are covered by the County Council of Nairobi, the home relies on well-wishers for other needs. This is where the Association has helped through special meals, gifts, and assisting with the purchase of medications for diabetes and hypertension. In one of its anniversary events, AFICS Kenya provided cash and clothes donations, especially to elderly women in this home.



AFICS Myanmar

As part of its community outreach, AFICS Myanmar reaches out to needy families and communities. Here, AFICS Myanmar visited a monastic school and handed out gifts to the orphans.



AFICS Netherlands

Members have supported FAFICS and the UNJSPF in tracking down beneficiaries on the Pension Fund's pre-suspension list for non-submission of Certificates of Entitlement—often requiring considerable persistence and investigative skills. Some of these beneficiaries are aged over 80 and may need assistance in submitting the required certificates.

AFICS Philippines

Due to the most recent oil crisis resulting from the US-Israel-Iran war, many public transport drivers in the Philippines have been affected by gasoline price increases. As part of its outreach activities, AFICS Philippines officers and volunteers organized two community pantries in two strategic locations where jeepney drivers congregate between their trips. Cash and food donations (such as rice, canned goods, dried fish, and vegetables) enabled the Association to provide much-needed assistance, although temporary, to these drivers. AFICS Phils has also given assistance to Women Deprived of Liberty (women detainees)* to reach and communicate with their families and legal counsels through the provision of electronic tablets.



**Often from impoverished and marginalized backgrounds who are victims of gaps in the country's justice system.*

AFICS Sri Lanka

In December 2025, AFICS Sri Lanka contributed to the Cyclone Relief Fund efforts in that country to help in renovating and upgrading the educational facilities in one of the schools of a community badly affected by the Ditwah Cyclone. The project was successfully completed on 6 May 2026 and has benefitted the school population of over 360 students from Grades 1 to 12, particularly through the IT Learning Facility at Ganeshan Vidyalayam, in partnership with Foundation of Goodness (FOG). FOG is one of the most respected humanitarian organizations in Sri Lanka, providing valuable support to vulnerable communities since the tsunami in 2004.



IT Lab supported by AFICS Sri Lanka.

FROM OUR MEMBERS

—NEW— CHAPTERS

Retirement means so many things to so many people. It's time to do what you never had the chance to. It's an opportunity to travel and not worry about school holidays and precious annual leave. It's the window opening into learning and building skills—or just indulging yourself in what you always wanted to do but were afraid to let on! But most of all, it's time to kick back, to decide how you want to give back and in what ways you want to make yourself useful to the many communities that you have interacted with or observed with admiration through your working life. Here are a few snapshots.

It's Quite Easy to Be Green

by *Aysel Toprakli*



Aysel Toprakli served in the Information Communication Technology Division of UNICEF as Senior Production Associate.

For me a sustainable life starts with the environment I inhabit. This is my home, my city, and my country. We can extend this to our planet Earth which is home for all humanity, nature, and other creatures.

How can we sustain our environment? It starts with being mindful of using our resources such as water, electricity, transportation, and recycling so that some material can be reutilized and reduces the need to consume natural resources.

In my daily life, I have always been mindful of using resources such as electricity and water. I turn off the

lights when they are not required. I filter tap water to reduce the need of buying water in plastic bottles. Sometimes we cannot avoid buying bottled water and other refreshments in bottles or cans. I pay attention to recycle every bit of recyclable material like glass, cans, paper and put them into their respective bins wherever available. Thankfully, I have been living in environments where recycling is widely practised and bins to recycle are available almost everywhere such as in buildings, on the streets, train stations, etc.

I also volunteer for activities to help promote the greening of our



environment. Before retirement, I was a volunteer in the UNICEF Green Team. I took part in promoting recycling in the office, promoting replacement of plastic utensils and cups with the paper cups and wooden utensils in the cafeteria and in the meeting rooms. Besides the UNICEF Green Team, I was a volunteer at the UN Food Gardens where growing vegetables, fruits and other pollinator plants was promoted to show how to practice sustainability, especially among the younger generations. As part of this greening activity, composting the stuff pruned from the garden was also utilized. As an outcome of composting, oil is produced which is rich in nutrients and reused in the garden, thus avoiding the use of non-organic nutrients. This method promotes sustaining our biodiversity, which includes plants, trees, insects, bees, birds, and other animals on larger scales.

In my personal life, over the years, I started using my own re-usable coffee cup and water bottle and carried them with me wherever possible. At home I never use single use plastics (utensils or plates). When I was taking my lunch to the office, I stopped using plastic utensils when I received my own reusable utensil set at a Green Fair. Unless I am obliged to, I don't use plastic kitchen utensils. I also started carrying my own reusable shopping bag to avoid using excessive shopping bags thus minimizing the waste.

I also try to use environmentally friendly detergents and soaps for cleaning and laundry as much as possible. Compared to the past, they are now available more widely.

In addition to environmental sustainability, being part of a greening team gave me the happiness of being part of a solution. Planting and growing our own produce was a great learning experience

for me. It yields happiness to eat the fruit of a plant grown from a seed that you planted. I now feel more respectful and thankful to the farmers who take care of all those details from planting, to the care of the produce while they are growing, harvesting and then bringing them to the markets so that we can buy and consume for our nutrition.

As the habit of recycling and being mindful in our daily life grows in our community and on a wider scale globally, we can all feel proud that we are contributing to a sustainable environment for generations.



Using my Voice as a Volunteer

by Joan T. Seymour



Doing the Camino de Santiago trail/Joan Seymour.

Joan Seymour is a former Guyanese diplomat who retired as Deputy Director of the Americas and Europe Division in the UN Department of Political affairs and is now an active singer and volunteer for hospice care.

I retired from the UN on the last day of 1999 when the furthest thing on my mind was volunteering. As many may recall, the world was speculating about a major cyber security situation with worldwide effects because of the "Y2K situation". I had made no plans for anything except that I would remain in the United States if approved by the US mission to apply for green card status. The next concern was how long would the process take? There were reports that processing of pension documents could take up to six months—some former staff members I met had waited up to two years. However, I was one of the lucky ones who was able to obtain my green card status and my pension payments in the next three months.

I do admit that I found the fact of not going to the office very daunting—after all that is what I had done for 25 years, so what now? I took a number of courses including one as a "voice-over artist". After a few jobs doing that, I found myself competing with seasoned actors as members of SAG/AFTRA were on extended strike.

Among the options to maintain our voice training, recording books was one. I signed onto what was then called "Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic" now known as "Learning Ally". Thus began a very rewarding period for me as I went twice a week for my two-hour sessions to record books for all levels of learners,

from kids to graduate students. When you arrived for your shift, you never knew what book would be assigned to you. We had to learn conventions for reading the materials, as this was standardized and the readers were also using these conventions.

My difficulty was in reading geography books, as the maps had to be described in a particular manner, which could be very intricate. Whenever I had to read a book or section with maps, I would spend time figuring out how to read the section before turning on the recording machine. You didn't want to have to redo large sections, nor did you want the revisor to ask you to replace sections of text. My best reads were in literature and French textbooks or literary texts. At that time, there were only two readers of French, so that was a frequent assignment.

One of the books that I was proud of having read was the one by the Nigerian novelist Wole Soyinka called "Things Fall Apart". The director allowed me to read the entire book as she wanted only one voice and a similar pronunciation of the names. Every year at the party for users and readers, we were able to meet those who had graduated using the materials from the organization, ranging from PhDs to high school graduates.



My next stint was volunteering in 2012 at hospices run by the Visiting Nurse Service (VNS) at Bellevue Hospital and at Beth Israel Hospital. This led to my joining the "Threshold Choir", which sings at the bedsides of those in hospice and palliative care. I was introduced to this group by the Volunteer Manager at Bellevue, who heard me talking about enjoying singing and suggested that I join the Threshold Choir. After three months of attending rehearsals and trying to learn the songs without sheet music, I was ready to give up. One day, I found the words and music going around my head and realized that I could do it.

Since then, singing at the bedside has been the volunteer activity that I do most, and that brings me so much in return. The years of the pandemic brought challenges, but we adjusted to that situation and sang at homes of patients under the care of the VNS. One of the most rewarding experiences for me has been to see patients in memory care facilities who are not aware of their loved ones, suddenly bursting into song and singing the words to songs they knew from years ago. It brings that glimpse of the real person that comes out in such moments, and that brings me joy. With other patients, it is being able to provide soothing songs to calm them down or help in their transition; at times, we sing for their caregivers or even for doormen in those buildings. Three times a year, we sing at a facility where there are many retired nuns and other religious groups; their appreciation is something I truly treasure.

My volunteer life is not something I had envisaged, especially singing, but it has become very important to me. Being present for those who are alone is an important part of what we do and makes all the difference to most folks.

Singing at the bedside of hospice patients/Joan Seymour



In 2026, the United Nations began the year with an enormous amount of introspection about how the Organization could be made fit for purpose—and whether the UN embarking on reform, cast as UN80, might be too little, too late. The watershed moment was the adoption of a budget which set out ways to streamline, downsize and consolidate the work of the Organization, at all times looking for

cost savings, but also how we could do a better job of serving our global constituency, the peoples of the world. It is in this vein that we are sharing some opinion pieces looking at the intersectionality of how geopolitical events are weighing on the future of the rules-based order and the contours of the relationship between the UN and its host country, the United States, which this July marks its 250th anniversary.

The views, thoughts, and opinions expressed in this publication are solely those of the individual author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Association of Former International Civil Servants, New York, Inc. (AFICS/NY), or of the United Nations, or any other individuals or entities associated with AFICS/NY and/or the United Nations.

THE FRAYING THREAD: MULTILATERALISM AT A CROSSROADS

by Shashi Tharoor



@Shashi Tharoor/Instagram

Formerly UN Under-Secretary-General for Communications, candidate for UN Secretary-General and currently an Indian Member of Parliament, author and diplomat.

When the United Nations marked its 80th anniversary last October, reports described the mood at the General Assembly in New York as anything but celebratory. The hall that once echoed with the optimism of post-war reconstruction, decolonisation and peacekeeping, instead reverberated with uncertainty, frustration, and quiet alarm. The institution that symbolized the triumph of diplomacy over destruction now finds itself confronting a world increasingly sceptical of its relevance—and a founding member, the United States, seemingly intent on retreat, with another founding member, Russia, conducting an all-out war on its neighbour, Ukraine.

The signs are stark. The U.S. has withdrawn from key global bodies, including the Human Rights Council and UNESCO, and has frozen or slashed funding to others, including an estimated 80% reduction in its contributions to UN programmes. It has vetoed Security Council resolutions on Gaza, revoked and refused visas of Palestinian officials, and embarked on a war on Iran without the Security Council's approval and sidestepping legal provisions or justification under the UN Charter. These challenges to the Charter follow on the heels of Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine, now in its fifth year. President Trump's address on the opening day of the UNGA

session questioned the very premises of multilateral engagement.

This erosion of multilateralism comes at a time when the world is in desperate need of coordinated action. Conflicts in Ukraine, Sudan, Iran and elsewhere rage with little hope of resolution. A kind of peace was reached in Gaza, with the Security Council's stamp, but to be implemented outside the UN framework. Climate change accelerates, inequality deepens, and technological disruption outpaces governance. UN Secretary-General António Guterres has called it a "global crisis", warning that "geopolitical divides do not allow us to effectively address them".

So, is multilateralism on the verge of collapse? And can the UN survive the growing diagnoses of its irrelevance?

To answer this, we must first understand what multilateralism has meant—and what it has become. At its core, multilateralism is the belief that global problems (what the late UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan called "problems without passports") require global solutions, negotiated through institutions that give voice to all nations, regardless of size or power. It is a system built on sovereign equality, mutual respect, and the rule of law. The UN General Assembly, where each of the 193 member states casts one vote, remains the most visible embodiment of this ideal.

Yet the ideal has always been tempered by reality. The UN's structure—particularly the Security Council's veto power—enshrines inequality. Its resolutions are often non-binding, its enforcement mechanisms weak. The General Assembly, for all its symbolism, is frequently dismissed as a forum for posturing rather than problem-solving. And the Council itself is seen as reflecting the geopolitical realities of 1945, not 2026.

Still, the UN has achieved much. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Climate Agreement—all emerged from multilateral processes. The UN has coordinated humanitarian relief, led successful peacekeeping missions, helped conclude dozens of international treaties, and promoted global health responses. It has provided a platform for smaller nations to speak, and for larger ones to listen—however perfunctorily.

But today, the system is fraying. The decline of US commitment, the rise of regional blocs, and the fragmentation of diplomatic norms have all weakened the multilateral fabric. The U.S.–China rivalry casts a long shadow, with both powers increasingly pursuing bilateral or "mini-lateral" arrangements with like-minded partners. Russia's defiance of international norms in Ukraine and Israel's intransigence in Gaza further undermine the credibility of global institutions. Even within Europe, once a bastion of

“The survival of multilateralism depends not on nostalgia, but on renewal. And that renewal begins with the recognition that in an interconnected world, no nation is truly sovereign unless all are.”

multilateralism, nationalist currents challenge the consensus.

In this context, the UN risks becoming a relic—an institution with noble intentions but limited influence. Yet collapse is not inevitable. Multilateralism may be wounded, but it is not dead. The very fact that world leaders continue to gather in New York, to speak, negotiate, and deliberate, suggests that the need for global dialogue remains. The UN80 initiative, launched last year, aims to streamline mandates, cut costs, and restore public trust. Institutional reform is on the agenda—not as a luxury, but as a necessity.

Moreover, the crisis of multilateralism is not just institutional—it is philosophical. It reflects a deeper tension between global interdependence and national sovereignty, between (in David Goodhart’s formulation) the “anywheres” who thrive in a borderless world and the “somewheres” who feel left behind. Goodhart’s thesis resonates here: the “somewheres”, rooted in place, religion and tradition, are increasingly sceptical of global elites and distant institutions. Their political ascendancy—from Brexit to Trumpism—has reshaped the landscape in which multilateralism must operate.

In this sense, the future of multilateralism depends not only on reforming institutions but on rebuilding legitimacy. It must speak to the concerns of ordinary citizens, not just diplomats. It must demonstrate that global cooperation can deliver tangible benefits—jobs, security, dignity—not just abstract norms. It must become less technocratic and more empathetic.

There is little doubt that today’s world is one of “polycrisis”, where the very basic assumptions of this structure have been challenged. Neither have conflicts been averted before they become critical, nor has cooperation been properly fostered, with global institutions unable to transcend the disagreements among key member states. And the system

itself has not evolved in step with the emergence of newer forces on the global scene.

The challenge, then, is to imagine a multilateralism that is principled yet pragmatic, inclusive yet effective. This requires leadership—not just from the United States and China, but from emerging powers, regional coalitions, and civil society. India, for instance, has an opportunity to champion a more equitable global order, rooted in the values of sovereignty, solidarity, and sustainable development. We can contribute our expertise and leadership to global discussions on issues ranging from cyberspace to outer space.

The stakes are clear. The world is not short of crises—but it is short of cooperation. The UN may be imperfect, but as the legendary Dag Hammarskjöld put it, the UN was “not created to take mankind to heaven, but to save humanity from hell.” It may have been unable to do so on occasion, but it remains the only forum where all nations can come together to address the world’s problems. To abandon it would be to abandon the very idea of our common humanity.

Multilateralism may be fraying, but it is also evolving. Redesigning the UN system may seem to be a lost cause, but redesigning priorities in a way that global interests can be championed within unilateral or plurilateral groupings is not a far-fetched possibility. We can’t wait for UN reform anymore, but in this process of transition, global governance itself is being redefined.

The survival of multilateralism depends not on nostalgia, but on renewal. And that renewal begins with the recognition that in an interconnected world, no nation is truly sovereign unless all are.

— AN — IMPERILED UNITED NATIONS

by Stephen Schlesinger



The American presidency has played a central role in the operations of the United Nations for all 80 years of the Organization's existence. There are obvious reasons for this: the United States was the original architect and mastermind behind the founding of the institution; it was the only country with the wherewithal to organize such a body after the Second World War; it is the largest financial contributor to the Organization, paying most recently 22% of the UN's regular budget; it is still the strongest nation on the planet with the world's most powerful economy; and, as a recognition of its stature, the UN headquarters is in New York City.

American presidents have stayed directly involved in the Organization for the past 80 years in myriad ways. President Eisenhower, for example, pushed for the establishment of the International Atomic Energy

Agency. Others, in turn, have been responsible for the creation of the UN agency UN Women, for funding the humanitarian work of the UN, for helping to set up the Millennium Development Goals, for backing the UN Relief and Works Agency, for upholding such singular entities as UNESCO and UNICEF, and for underwriting urgent peacekeeping missions.

Given its outsized standing, however, one wonders every time a fresh administration takes power in Washington, what the repercussions will be on the institution. This is very true now in our currently troubled times. In looking back through history, examining the various trade-offs, compromises, power struggles and conflicts that have long gone on between Washington, D.C. and the UN, one can gain some perspective on how the US has otherwise impacted the body. Not surprisingly, America's influence on the UN's war and peace decisions, on the selection of the UN Secretaries-General, on the financing of UN civil and military operations, and on the development of the body's commitments can be inconsistent as well as powerful—far more than is true for any other member state. At the same time, the UN's own unique role in providing, or not providing, legitimacy to US demands—as well as setting the norms that apply to

Author of *Act of Creation* about the UN's founding, American historian, political commentator, and international affairs specialist. In the mid-1990s, Mr. Schlesinger worked with UN Habitat.

“*The American presidency has played a central role in the operations of the United Nations for all 80 years of the Organization’s existence.*”

all 193 participating nations—still plays a vital role in managing the world body.

However, in the 80 years of the UN’s existence, we are at an inflection point. Our current leader, President Donald Trump, some would say, poses possibly the gravest threat to the survival of the Organization at any time in its history, despite his pronouncements supporting the UN as an important forum for diplomacy. Indeed, no other American president’s actions have so upended the place. Sadly, let us count the ways. First, his budget for the UN for 2026 represents the largest reduction in US funding that has ever happened—so drastic that Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has had to set up a so-called UN80 unit solely designed to handle the dramatic loss of monies from the USA. Trump’s 2026 UN budget announced last May cuts back by almost 83% the US’ legally-required dues to the body, its voluntary contributions to various important UN agencies (forcing some to leave New York for Kenya where rents are lower), and US repayment of its arrears, amounting to almost \$4 billion.

Furthermore, he has already withdrawn US membership in and funding for a large swath of UN agencies, including the World Health Organization (WHO), the Human Rights Council, UNICEF, UNESCO, UN

Women, and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), among others. In deference to Trump, though, these moves are not particularly special to him—all previous Republican Presidents have also withdrawn from these entities. Still, such rejections on the part of the US seriously weaken these entities in their efforts to assist and improve societies around our planet. In addition, most importantly, Trump has been openly dismissive of the UN Charter itself, especially its provisions barring illegal interference in the affairs of sovereign nations. How? Most significantly, he has called for the possible US takeover of Greenland, the Panama Canal, Canada, Gaza and Cuba—and has already directly attacked Venezuela and Iran with US forces without prior approval from the UN Security Council.

Now Trump, it is true, has not planned a total withdrawal from the UN. He has made clear that he still wants to keep the institution alive—albeit in a shrunken, less influential size. Apparently, the main reason for this is because he needs the UN’s worldwide platform, so, he can deliver speeches advising states on how they must conduct themselves and proclaim the magnificence of his “America First” policy. In addition, the UN also enables him to slap sanctions on countries he does not like, primarily North Korea and Iran. Lastly, he realizes that, without an American presence in the body, Russia or China will hold greater sway with delegates.

Where does that leave us today? This is a truly worrying moment. Trump has frankly put the skids under the Organization. In practically bankrupting the UN, Trump has tolled a proverbial bell. His rejection of the rules-based order from global trade policy to public health policy, to security policy, has shortened the UN’s writ, lessened its reach, diminished its moral authority, constricted its capacity to work for peace, and, in a perverse way, made the world confront a new reality—a return to the Darwinian universe of yester years, where might makes right—ironically the very hell-hole the UN was designed to deliver us from. As we mark the UN’s 80 years of existence and the 250th year of the existence of the United States, this is the challenge which the international community needs to reckon with today.

NEWS
FROM THE
UN

Selection of the 10th Secretary-General



by Mita Hosali



As the process gets under way, the international media appears to be paying scant attention, despite the fact that several major events are unfolding against a backdrop of conflicts that are disrupting the global economy and threatening peace.

[UN News](#), the UN's multilingual digital news service, is covering the months-long journey which kicked off formally in November 2025. This article deconstructs the steps involved in the choice of the UN Chief who will take office in January 2027.



UN Photo/Loey Felipe



UN Photo/Manuel Elías

GENDER, GEOGRAPHY AND POWERBROKING IN PLAY IN RACE FOR NEXT UN CHIEF

President of the 80th General Assembly, Annalena Baerbock, has played a key role in advancing the selection process, the civil society dialogues and the broad lines of what will shape the selection process. Four candidates [took part](#) in the hearings organized by the General Assembly on 21 and 22 April 2026.

Michelle Bachelet (Chile)
Rebeca Grynspan (Costa Rica)
Rafael Grossi (Argentina)
Macky Sall (Senegal)

A fifth candidate, Maria Fernanda Espinosa of Ecuador has entered the [race](#) on 11 May 2026, followed by Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett, the permanent representative of Guyana to the UN, who also [declared](#) her candidacy on 12 June; her dialogue was held on 18 June. The process can be followed [here](#).



Michelle Bachelet Jeria
(nominated 2 February 2026)

[Joint letter regarding the nomination of Michelle Bachelet Jeria \(in English, French and Spanish\) by Chile, Brazil, and Mexico on 2 February 202 \[A/80/616-S/2026/56\]](#)

[Ms. Bachelet's vision statement](#)

[Ms. Bachelet's CV](#)

[Ms. Bachelet's campaign financing disclosures](#)

[Joint letter regarding the withdrawal of nomination of Michelle Bachelet Jeria by Chile on 25 March 2026 \(in English and Spanish\) \[A/80/694-S/2026/226\]](#)



Rebeca Grynspan Mayufis
(nominated 3 March 2026)

[Joint letter regarding the nomination of Rebeca Grynspan Mayufis \(in English and Spanish\) by Costa Rica on 3 March 2026 \[A/80/666-S/2026/124\]](#)

[Ms. Grynspan's vision statement](#)

[Ms. Grynspan's CV](#)

[Ms. Grynspan's campaign financing disclosures](#)



Rafael Mariano Grossi
(nominated 26 November 2025)

[Joint letter regarding the nomination of Rafael Mariano Grossi \(in English and Spanish\) by Argentina on 26 November 2025 \[A/80/549-S/2025/775\]](#)

[Mr. Grossi's vision statement](#)

[Mr. Grossi's CV](#)

[Mr. Grossi's campaign financing disclosures \(in Spanish\)](#)



Macky Sall
(nominated 2 March 2026)

[Joint letter regarding the nomination of Macky Sall \(in English and French\) by Burundi on 2 March 2026 \[A/80/662-S/2026/123\]](#)

[Mr. Sall's vision statement \(in French\)](#)

[Mr. Sall's CV \(in French\)](#)

[Mr. Sall's campaign financing disclosures](#)



María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés
(nominated 11 May 2026)

[Joint letter regarding the nomination of María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés by Antigua and Barbuda on 11 May 2026 \[A/80/736-S/2026/408\]](#)

[Ms. Espinosa's vision statement, also available in Portuguese](#)

[Ms. Espinosa's CV](#)

[Ms. Espinosa's campaign financing disclosures](#)



Carolyn Rodrigues Birkett
(nominated 15 June 2026)

[Joint letter regarding the nomination of Carolyn Rodrigues Birkett by Guyana on 15 June 2026 \[A/80/764-S/2026/498\]](#)

[Ms. Rodrigues Birkett's vision statement](#)

[Ms. Rodrigues Birkett's CV](#)

[Ms. Rodrigues Birkett's campaign financing disclosures](#)

Here is a quick word from the President of the General Assembly on this process:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GeQUINBRwxw>

You can follow the many phases of what is involved by checking some of these resources which are not UN sites and therefore not endorsed as such by AFICS/NY.

<https://1for8billion.org/>

<https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2026-05/in-hindsight-the-search-for-the-next-secretary-general.php>

<https://theelders.org/news/choice-next-secretary-general-could-decide-un-s-fate>

UN80 INITIATIVE

Real Progress Made on Tackling Complex Issues Facing the UN System

A new guide to the [UN80 Initiative](#), released on 29 April, provides an overview of the progress being made so far on this ambitious, wide-ranging reform effort.



UNITED NATIONS | UN General Assembly informal meeting of the plenary to hear a briefing on the **UN80 Initiative**.

The details of the [guide](#) were presented at a General Assembly briefing held in April on the UN80 proposals—the fourth such meeting so far this year—held at United Nations headquarters. Guy Ryder, the UN head of policy, explained that the new document serves as a navigational tool which clarifies when, and through which organs of the Organization, decisions are expected to be taken for each work package of the initiative.

Releasing another [progress update](#) at the end of May, the [Secretary-General briefed](#) the General Assembly noting that reform is required because “inaction in the face of geopolitical turmoil would compound human suffering.”

AFICS/NEW YORK IN ACTION





56th Annual Assembly, United Nations, New York



AFICS/NY 2026 Annual Assembly

RETIREES RALLY AROUND REFORM, PENSIONS AND THE FUTURE OF THE UN

From pension security to gender equality and a new digital home, the Association's annual gathering brought together senior UN officials, fund managers and retirees to confront the challenges and opportunities of a rapidly changing world. In the course of the meeting packed with information, members had the opportunity to raise questions and make suggestions. The 2026 Annual Assembly and reception was a resounding success and reflected the strong relationship that AFICS/NY enjoys with the United Nations and the broader former international civil service community.

On a Friday morning in late May, some 60—70 UN retirees (with many more online: 165 viewers live; 436 on demand) gathered in New York for the 56th Annual Assembly of the Association of Former International Civil Servants (AFICS/NY)—an occasion that has long served as both a reunion and a reckoning with the issues that most

affect those who spent careers in the service of the United Nations. This year, with a sweeping reform agenda reshaping the Organization, pension system reviews generating anxiety and healthcare costs continuing to climb, there was no shortage of ground to cover.

First Vice-President Nancy Hurtz-Soyka opened proceedings alongside Second Vice-President and Moderator Jay Pozenel, President Darshak Shah, Under-Secretary-General Catherine Pollard and Dr. Sudershan Narula, Chair of the Membership and Nominating Committees. (The Nominating Committee oversees the biannual elections process.) Thanks were widely expressed to all senior officials for their willingness to engage directly with our members, a testament to the respect accorded to our Association and the important role we continue to play in the life of the United Nations.

RESPONDING TO CHANGE: NEW INITIATIVES FROM THE PRESIDENT

President Darshak Shah set an energetic tone, announcing a cluster of new AFICS/NY initiatives reflecting the Association's determination to evolve and thanking the many volunteers who help AFICS/NY carry out its operations. Sounding an appeal for volunteers to share the wide-ranging activities of AFICS/NY, he welcomed the creation of a new Events Committee, which has already begun organizing activities for members and is planning future programmes, while a Fundraising Committee has been established to address the Association's growing financial needs. The Communications Committee, meanwhile, has been working to modernize how AFICS/NY reaches its membership among others, with the redesign of a new website.

Darshak Shah reminded attendees of the vital safety net provided by the Charities Foundation, which supports retirees facing hardship or disaster, and he issued a broader call to action: the Association's work depends on volunteers, and he urged members to step forward. Weaving in words from Secretary-General António Guterres —"We are a divided world. We can and must be United Nations"—he identified a thread that would run through the entire meeting: retirees have a responsibility to share their experiences of the UN and help others understand what the Association actually does and why it matters.

MODERNIZING WITHOUT LOSING THE MISSION: THE UN80 REFORM AGENDA

Catherine Pollard, Under-Secretary-General for Management, Strategy, Policy and Compliance, speaking on behalf of Secretary-General Guterres, offered the most authoritative account of what the UN80 initiative will mean in practice. The reform programme, she explained, seeks to modernize the organization, improve efficiency and ensure it remains fit for purpose—but she was careful to address the rumours and anxieties that such a far-reaching process inevitably generates.

Administrative functions will be consolidated and some 220 posts relocated closer to where operational needs are greatest. Ms. Pollard was clear: UN Headquarters will continue to provide leadership, policy direction and coordination. On pension matters, she confirmed that

the mandated review of the pension system would be conducted by the Pension Board, with retirees' interests represented through FAFICS. She emphasized that any review must respect accrued pension rights while safeguarding the Fund's long-term sustainability. Healthcare cost-containment measures are also under review—a subject that prompted considerable interest among attendees. Visa retrogression, affecting some retirees and their family members, with current backlogs amounting to a four-year lag, was mentioned as an issue to monitor, though she stressed meaningful progress would depend largely on action by the United States government.

Assistant Secretary-General Anne Marie Van Den Berg of the Department of Operational Support elaborated on how her department is adapting to financial constraints, citing the ongoing support for the UN mission in Haiti as an example of operational services continuing to be delivered

effectively in demanding environments—through logistics, medical support, recruitment and contingency planning. Like others on the platform, she ended with an appeal: retirees are among the most credible ambassadors the Organization has, and their voices are needed.

THE FEDERATION'S RECKONING: RELEVANCE, REACH AND RENEWAL

Jerry Barton making his farewell address as outgoing President of FAFICS, the Federation of Associations of Former International Civil Servants, used the occasion both to take stock and to challenge his successor. Over his eight years in the role, he said, FAFICS had grown more transparent, professional and accountable, and had strengthened its reputation as an effective advocate for retirees worldwide. He paid tribute to

AFICS/NY as a founding member and a model for other national associations.

But he did not shy away from the difficulties ahead. Membership is ageing. The needs of surviving spouses are growing. Volunteer participation is declining. Retirees in Eastern Europe and Africa remain underrepresented within the Federation's structures. Long-term care is becoming a critical



issue for members, given the widely varying availability and quality of care around the world. "This is a time to step forward and remain connected," he urged.

On pensions, Mr. Barton sought to provide reassurance. The assets of the Pension Fund, he explained, are legally separate from the UN's operating funds and can be used only to provide retirement, disability and survivor benefits. The ongoing review mandated by the General

Assembly is not unprecedented—previous reviews have produced a range of outcomes, not all of them involving changes to existing arrangements—and FAFICS is actively engaged in the process to protect retirees' acquired and accrued rights. In response to audience questions, he also encouraged members to ensure that spouses and family members know how to access pension information and how to contact the Fund if and when needed.

PENSION FUND PERFORMANCE: STABLE, IMPROVING—WITH REVIEW AHEAD

Two speakers addressed matters concerning the UN Joint Staff Pension Fund, and both projected a message of financial confidence grounded in performance data. Dino Cataldo Dell'Accio, Deputy Chief Executive of Pension Administration, speaking on behalf of Chief Executive Rosemary McLean, reminded members that recent reductions in UN staffing levels have had only a limited impact on the Fund's solvency—pension payments are not dependent on current staff contributions, he stressed.

Historical performance data, he showed, demonstrated that the Fund has navigated major economic downturns—including the financial crises of 2000 and 2008 and the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic—and is projected to continue meeting its obligations for many decades to come. A recent 2.7 per cent cost-of-living adjustment has been applied, and the Fund's inflation protection mechanisms—tied to both the United States consumer price index and, for those on the two-track system, the index of their country of residence—remain in place.

Mr. Dell'Accio reported that 2025 had been a record year for service delivery, with more than

95 per cent of cases processed within the 15-day benchmark and client inquiries answered within an average of 2.5 business days. A new platform, UNJSPF Connect, now provides beneficiaries and active staff with a single point of access to their pension information and services. The Fund also conducted 33 global information sessions that attracted more than 42,000 views.

Robert van der Zee, the Secretary-General's Representative for the Investment of the Fund's assets, presented the investment portfolio's performance, stressing that a five-year strategic plan guides investment decisions and that prudent risk management is balanced with the pursuit of strong returns. He highlighted the Fund's responsible-investing credentials; its carbon footprint has been reduced by approximately 50 per cent over the past five years through divestment from fossil-fuel holdings, in order to achieve a net-zero portfolio by 2050. He also underlined the legal independence of the Fund's investment management: pension assets exist solely for the benefit of participants and beneficiaries.

HEALTH INSURANCE: RISING COSTS AND THE CASE FOR SMART CHOICES

The session on after-service health insurance carried the meeting's most directly practical implications for many attendees. Vera Radic, Officer-in-Charge of the UN Health and Life Insurance Section, introduced Julie Bohr, who delivered the news that all five health insurance plans—Aetna, Anthem, Cigna Dental PPO, UN Worldwide and UN Medical Insurance—had experienced losses as claims and administrative costs continued to rise. Premiums for all plans will increase effective July 2026.

The drivers behind rising costs are multiple and interlocking: inflation, the increasing use

of advanced medical technologies and specialty medications, workforce shortages in the healthcare sector, an ageing participant pool and a post-pandemic surge in healthcare utilization as people seek treatment that had been deferred during the public health emergency. Both encouraged retirees to make greater use of preventive services, telehealth consultations, in-network providers and urgent care facilities where appropriate, and reminded eligible retirees aged 65 and over of the significant potential savings from enrolling in Medicare Part B.

GENDER EQUALITY: THE CASE FOR FULL INCLUSION

Kirsi Madi, Assistant Secretary-General of UN Women, brought the meeting's attention to a dimension of the reform debate that can easily be lost in the focus on structures and finances: the question of who gets included in the decisions that shape the future. Gender equality, she argued, is not a side issue—it is foundational to any meaningful renewal of multilateralism.

The statistics she cited were sobering. Women continue to earn less than men while carrying greater responsibilities. One in three women experiences violence during her lifetime. Millions of women living in conflict-affected areas sustain their communities through crises yet remain underrepresented in peace negotiations and decision-making processes.

Progress has been made—the UN is on track to achieve gender parity at senior levels by 2028—but Madi was clear that progress cannot be assumed to be permanent. Established norms can be challenged, and retirees have both the experience and the moral authority to defend the values enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

She also flagged the Secretary-General's proposal under the UN80 initiative to merge UN Women and UNFPA—a move she said would bring together two key entities focused on women's empowerment and gender equality.

UNFCU:

SERVING 260,000 MEMBERS—AND AN AGEING DEMOGRAPHIC

Pamela Agnone, President and Chief Executive of the United Nations Federal Credit Union, brought news of an institution in robust health and focused on improving the member experience. Deposits are up 14 per cent. Membership has reached 260,000, including approximately 22,000 retirees. Response times to member inquiries are now 25 per cent faster than the previous year. The Member Loyalty Rewards programme is being enhanced, with dividend boosting beginning in July and \$1.8 million expected to be distributed this year; premium rates on checking accounts have also been increased for members maintaining an average balance of \$500.

Ms. Agnone pointed to a broader demographic trend that the Credit Union is actively preparing for: within the next decade, older generations are expected to outnumber younger ones. In response, UNFCU is placing increased emphasis on serving

its ageing membership, particularly those in their eighties and beyond, now among the fastest-growing demographic groups worldwide. Practical initiatives include faster and more favourable foreign exchange rates, enhanced fraud protection and workshops on savings strategies and digital banking.

She also highlighted the work of the UNFCU Foundation, which supports education, healthcare, livelihood training and humanitarian assistance around the world, including programmes benefiting entrepreneurs in Guatemala and savings groups in Kenya. She encouraged members to read the monthly UNFCU Connect newsletter and, on a practical note echoed by other speakers, reminded retirees to ensure that beneficiaries are properly designated on their accounts.

NEW BOARD, NEW WEBSITE, NEW CHAPTER

The closing portion of the Assembly brought its share of announcements. Dr. Sudershan Narula, Chair of the Nominating Committee, confirmed the results of the 2026 AFICS/NY Governing Board elections: eleven candidates were elected, including five returning members. The newly elected Board includes Nicholas Alipui, Renu Bhatia, Robin Della Rocca, Pilar Fuentes Conte, Ingrid Kasper, Maria Marita Legaspi, Regina Pawlik, Jay Pozenel, Christine Roth, Gülden Turkoz-Cosslett and Emma Witherspoon.

Communications Committee Chair Gail Bindley-Taylor and Co-Chair Andy Nye then unveiled

The screenshot shows the AFICS New York website. The header includes the AFICS logo and navigation links. The main content area features a large group photo and a section titled 'What you'll find on this site' which describes the community and resources. To the right, there are sections for 'Upcoming Events' and 'Latest Announcements'. The 'Latest Announcements' section lists several items, including 'Health Insurance Updates - Anthem ID cards, ASHI rates & ST/IC/2/2026', '2026-06-25 Stroll with Us Along the East River Greenway!', and '2026 AFICS/NY Governing Board Election Results'. At the bottom, there's a section for 'FAFICS News' with a link to 'What the 55th FAFICS Council Session Means for Members: A Message from President Jerry Barton'.

what had been quietly in the making for several years: a completely redesigned AFICS/NY website at aficsny.org. The project originated from a 2022 membership survey and focus groups that identified the need for a more user-friendly, responsive and regularly updated presence. Working through technical and resource challenges over an extended period, a dedicated team of volunteers—including Andy Nye, who led the design, along with Pilar Fuentes, Anne Matthews, Balasubramanian Murali, Alioune Faye and others—brought the project to completion. Nye guided members through the new site's main features, and both he and Bindley-Taylor encouraged members to explore the platform and offer feedback as it continues to evolve.

One participant invited members to join the newly established UN Advocacy Community, which seeks

to bring together professionals committed to promoting greater awareness of the United Nations' role in peacebuilding, humanitarian assistance and international development.

At its conclusion, President Shah paid tribute to the late George Floyd Saddler, the first President of both FAFICS and AFICS/NY, whose leadership helped shape both Organizations. Members observed a minute of silence in his memory—a quiet reminder that the Association's present rests on foundations laid by those who came before.

This article was jointly written by Alice Harrison, Gail Bindley-Taylor and Mita Hosali, with inputs from Nancy Hurtz-Soyka

Throughout the day, a recurring invitation ran through the agenda: to stay engaged, to share experiences of the United Nations and to help those beyond Turtle Bay understand the Organization's positive impact. In a divided world, as the Secretary-General has put it, that task has rarely felt more urgent—or more personal.

AFICS/New York Before I Step Down

by Gail Bindley-Taylor

Eleven years ago, after a career spent working at a fast pace and in constant contact with people, I was concerned that retirement might leave a void. I wanted something meaningful to do, a way to remain connected to friends and former colleagues, and an opportunity to continue serving the United Nations community in some small way.

There was another reason as well. My Personnel Officer and later a cherished friend, Netta Avedon, was widely expected to become the next President of AFICS/NY, and I looked forward to the possibility of working alongside her once again. Sadly, her untimely passing deprived the Association of an exceptional leader and many of us of a valued colleague and friend.

I joined the Governing Board at an interesting and somewhat turbulent time. The UN Joint Staff Pension Fund was experiencing internal difficulties, and concerns among staff and retirees had become highly visible. Various groups of staff were openly critical of aspects of pension governance. Social media provided a powerful platform through which concerns could spread rapidly. AFICS/NY found itself in the difficult position of trying to provide factual information while responding to criticism from vocal interest groups. For an organization accustomed to serving as a trusted source of information and advocacy, it was a challenging period.



Looking back, I realize that those early experiences offered several important lessons. The first is related to volunteer leadership. I discovered that it is often easier to criticize from the outside than to appreciate the complexity of representing thousands of members with differing views and expectations. Eventually, tensions subsided, confidence was restored, but the experience gave me an early appreciation of the responsibilities carried by those who serve the Association.

Those early years were a period of learning for me. I joined the Membership Committee, the IT Committee, under which communications then fell, and the Events Committee. These were also the years before COVID, which now seem like a different era. AFICS/NY functioned largely through in-person engagement. Members looked forward to the Annual Assembly, the spring luncheon, the annual boat ride, and a range of smaller committee activities. Much of the work focused on pensions, health insurance, membership services, and maintaining strong links with FAFICS and the wider retiree community.

But AFICS/NY also faced a significant challenge in reaching members quickly with accurate, up-to-date information and in countering misinformation in an environment increasingly shaped by social media. Effective communication was becoming more important than ever, yet it was an area where I believed the Association had room to grow. Given my professional background, it was also a field in which I felt I could make a meaningful contribution. Communications, therefore, quickly became my principal area of interest.

Like many newcomers, I arrived with ideas about change and innovation. I felt that too often longstanding practices were being preserved simply because "that was how things had always been done." At times, I found the pace of change frustrating and difficult to understand.

What I did not fully appreciate then was that institutional memory and change can walk hand in hand when approached with care. Over time, I came to understand that successful change requires not only new ideas but also patience, consultation, and respect for those who came before. The most lasting improvements are often those that build upon experience rather than seek to replace it.

By the time I was elected to a second term, I had a much clearer understanding of how the Association worked and where I might make a meaningful contribution. That understanding proved invaluable when the world changed dramatically in 2020.

AFICS/NY was preparing to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary when the COVID pandemic brought normal activities to a halt. Like many organizations, our first reaction was uncertainty. Events were cancelled, meetings suspended, and plans abandoned. Yet it soon became clear that simply waiting for normality to return was not a viable strategy.

With the support and confidence of then-President John Dietz and Vice-President Deborah Landey, I undertook the planning and organization of what eventually became not one but two fiftieth-anniversary celebrations. Both required creativity, flexibility, and a willingness to embrace unfamiliar approaches. Both succeeded beyond our expectations.

“

Successful change requires not only new ideas but also patience, consultation, and respect for those who came before.

”

What I remember most from that period is not the events themselves, but what they revealed about our Association. COVID was disruptive and often difficult, but it also demonstrated the resilience and adaptability of AFICS/NY. Faced with unprecedented circumstances, volunteers from our membership stepped forward, learned new skills and honed others, and discovered new ways of working together.

Even before the pandemic, we had begun exploring new ways of attracting members and raising the Association's profile. One particularly memorable initiative was a 2016 interview event featuring the late President Martti Ahtisaari, an honorary member of AFICS/NY, in conversation with journalist James Bone. The event attracted considerable interest and demonstrated the value of offering programmes that connected members to distinguished figures from the wider UN community.

The years following COVID for me have been among the most active and rewarding of my time on the Board. In 2022, an ad hoc Communications Group was established to

develop a comprehensive communications strategy for the Association. What began as a planning exercise evolved into a far-reaching effort to modernize the way AFICS/NY communicates with its members. One of the most satisfying aspects of this work was the opportunity to bring together a talented and diverse team of communications professionals. Working collaboratively, we developed policies, strengthened the way we managed and shared information communications processes, revived the Bulletin, and undertook a comprehensive redesign of the website.

Over the past six years, AFICS/NY has been led by three Presidents, each bringing a distinct leadership style and perspective. New initiatives in communications, targeted membership drives, fund-raising, and special events have sought to raise the Association's profile and ensure its continued relevance to both current and future retirees. In an association whose members are dispersed across the United States and around the world, effective communication is therefore essential to maintaining a sense of community and belonging.

The Association itself has also evolved significantly during this period, and during this time, I have worked with talented professionals from across the United Nations system and more recently, a younger generation of retirees. Their skills, perspectives and commitment have added new dimensions to the Association's work and helped ensure its continued relevance in a changing environment.

I am also grateful for the opportunity to serve on the FAFICS Communications Team. The experience has broadened my understanding of the wider retiree community and strengthened relationships that I hope will continue to benefit AFICS/NY in the years ahead.

My hope for AFICS/NY is that it will continue to invest strategically in membership growth, develop more innovative ways to listen to members, and create opportunities for greater engagement across generations of retirees. I hope that future Annual Assemblies will evolve and engage retirees, finding new ways to encourage dialogue and participation.

As I leave the Governing Board, I find myself reflecting less on specific accomplishments than on the broader journey and the lessons learned. I have been fortunate to contribute to initiatives that I hope will serve the Association well into the future, particularly the growth of the Open House programme. Engaging staff before they retire and introducing them to the value of AFICS/NY is critical to our future. No retiree association can thrive without a steady influx of new members, new ideas, and new energy.

I leave with gratitude - for the opportunity to serve, for the friendships formed along the way, and for the many lessons learned. When I joined the Board, I believed I was volunteering my time to AFICS/NY. Looking back, I realize that AFICS/NY gave just as much to me: a continued sense of purpose, an opportunity to remain connected to the ideals of international service, and the privilege of working alongside colleagues whose commitment to the United Nations did not end when they retired. For that, and for the years of service and companionship, I will always be grateful.

IN MEMORIAM

IN MEMORY OF GEORGE F. SADDLER

By *Aurora Lola Costa-Esnard*



Lola Costa with George Saddler/Lola Costa

It is with heartfelt sadness that I extend my sincere condolences to George Saddler's family. I join the many admirers who had the pleasure of working with George in AFICS/NY, FAFICS, UNESCO, and the UN.

Even before I worked with him on the AFICS/NY Governing Board, George and I had bonded. My husband and I travelled with him on a UN-organized trip to China in 2002. We were surprised to discover how many mutual friends we shared, both of us having worked for several years at UNESCO in Paris. Our friendship did not end after my 10 years on the AFICS/NY Board; it grew.

I cannot express how much it meant to me that George supported the work my husband and I did to promote the history of our small community. Accompanied by his daughter, Paula, he attended some of our local events in our New York upstate village of Piermont. In 2012, when Congresswoman Nita Lowey unveiled the two historic panels that celebrated our work in creating Piermont's Historic District, he was there. And again, years later, at Tappan's historic 1776 House, he was there when we were honoured for our commitment to history. As his mobility decreased, he would catch up on our progress over dinner. It must have intrigued George

that my husband never ate lunch on the China tour, because, with some amusement, he would remind me of it, and he always made sure we met for dinner, not lunch!

It was always such a joy to participate in George's birthday celebrations. And it was with great regret that we missed his biggest birthday of all—his 100th. Reacting jovially to my email about touching Paris soil with a 6-hour delay on the morning of his 100th, he replied: "To be in Paris after only a 6-hour delay is better than not being in Paris at all." Knowing we would miss his big day, we visited his apartment for a quick meal before our departure. It warmed my heart to see that, despite his frailty and vulnerability, George welcomed us with his usual warmth and humour.

I am honoured that George thought of me as a friend. Throughout his many years of leadership and mentoring, I believe he has enriched many lives. I feel blessed to have been a recipient of his warmth and kindness, and I hope to honour his legacy in some small way by sharing his compassion for others.

Lola Costa-Esnard worked for ITU in Geneva, UNESCO in Paris, as well as DESA and UNICEF in New York. She served as Vice-President of AFICS-NY for 20 years.

CONDOLENCES AND MESSAGES FROM FAFICS MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS ON THE PASSING AWAY OF GEORGE F. SADDLER



Responses received from Member Associations following FAFICS announcement on
6 March of Mr. Saddler's passing away.

AFICS Argentina

On behalf of the AFICS-Argentina executive committee, we send our deepest condolences to the FAFICS community on the passing of the first President of FAFICS, Mr. George F. Saddler. Rest in peace.

— *Graciela Castonjauregui*
PRESIDENT

AFUNSOB Bangladesh

We have received your message and are deeply shocked to learn about the passing of Mr. George F. Saddler, first President FAFICS.

Mr. Saddler's passing is a great loss to the UN body and to the entire FAFICS family. His legacy of service, leadership, and compassion will continue to inspire those who had the privilege to work with him.

On behalf of the AFUNSOB executive committee and all members I extend our heartfelt condolences to his family, friends, and all who mourn his loss.

May his soul be in eternal peace.

— *Joyanta Adhikari*
PRESIDENT, AFUNSOB, DHAKA

AFICS Bolivia

We join all Associations in expressing deepest sorrow for the passing of Mr. Saddler. His legacy will always be part of FAFICS.

— *Maria Machicado*
PRESIDENT

AAFIB Brazil

Our AAFIB associates itself with our colleagues and transmits its condolences to the family of George Sadler and all members of FAFICS community.

— *Cláudio Menezes*
PRESIDENT

CAFICS Montreal

It is with great sadness that we received your message.

Personally, I am very grateful and honoured to have had the opportunity to see and hear Mr. Saddler's message during the FAFICS@50 celebration.

Please be assured that all CAFICS members are with you during this difficult time.



Our thoughts and prayers are with his family, friends, and colleagues.

May he rest in peace.

— **Jacques Daoust**

CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF FORMER INTERNATIONAL
CIVIL SERVANT (CAFICS)

CAFICS Montreal

Esteemed FAFICS community, on the sad demise of George Saddler, I, Secrétaire de Canadian Association (CAFICS), present my sincere condolences to the FAFICS community and to George Saddler's family.

CAMARADE ABBÂS

ASOPENUC Colombia

On behalf of ASOPENUC COLOMBIA, we wish to express our deepest condolences on the passing of Mr. George F. Saddler, first President of FAFICS (1998–2004).

Mr. Saddler's life and service exemplified dedication, leadership, and integrity. His distinguished career with the United Nations and his visionary role in strengthening FAFICS and AFICS/New York left an enduring legacy that continues to inspire retired international civil servants worldwide. His commitment to the values of service and fellowship will be remembered with great respect.

Please convey our sincere sympathy to his family and to the entire FAFICS and AFICS/New York community. We stand in solidarity with you during this time of loss and honour Mr. Saddler's memory with gratitude and admiration.

With heartfelt condolences,

— **Jorge Rincon Mantilla**

PRESIDENT

AIAFI-SNU Cote d'Ivoire

On behalf of AIAFI-SNU, we extend our deepest and most sincere condolences on the passing of M. George F Saddler.

We are deeply saddened by this loss and share in the grief of his family, friends, and all who had the privilege of knowing him. May his memory remain a source of comfort and strength to those he leaves behind.

During this difficult time, please know that our thoughts and prayers are with you. We wish you peace, courage, and comfort in the days ahead.

With heartfelt sympathy,

— **Souleymane Diabaté**

PRESIDENT

AFICS Cyprus

Dear Ms. (Paula) Saddler and bereaved family members,

I was very saddened to learn of the passing of your father, and my very good friend for over 50 years with whom I had kept in contact until his last days.

On behalf of the members of AFICS-Cyprus, as well as myself, I should like to convey to you and the bereaved family members our most heartfelt condolences. May he rest in Peace; may God bless his Soul, comfort you and the bereaved family members. He was indeed an exceptional personality with unique human qualities.

With very warm regards,

— **Benon V. Sevan**

PRESIDENT



AFICS Ethiopia

On behalf of the AFICS Ethiopia Board and myself, I wish to convey our deepest condolences to the entire FAFICS community on the passing of the first President of FAFICS, Mr. George F. Saddler, at a remarkable age of 101.

His visionary leadership during the formative years of the Federation laid a strong foundation for FAFICS and helped shape the Association into the respected voice today. His dedication, wisdom, and commitment to the retirees will be remembered with great respect and gratitude. Reaching the age of 101 is itself a testament to a long life of purpose and service. The legacy he leaves behind, both through his work with FAFICS and through the many lives he influenced, will continue to inspire future generations.

Please accept our heartfelt sympathy during this time of loss. Our thoughts are with his family, colleagues, and all members of the FAFICS community.

With sincere condolences,

— **Molla Sharew**
PRESIDENT

AFUS France

On behalf of the AFUS Executive Committee, and in my own name, AFUS extends its deepest condolences to George Saddler's daughter and his entire family.

At a time when the UN is facing a serious crisis, George Saddler's memory is exemplary: He was a great servant of the United Nations and his life should inspire new generations. It is men like George that we need.

AFUS EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

AFUNPI Bangalore, India

Saddened to hear about the passing of Mr George Saddler, one of the great pillars of FAFICS and AFICS/New York and the former President of FAFICS (1996-2004). All of us, the members and families from the Association of Former UN Personnel In and of India (AFUNPI India) wish to express our sincere heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family especially to the daughter Ms Paula Saddler.

AFUNPI will remember Mr Saddler as a great legend who lived for over a century with legacy full of dedication, concern to the UN retirees and the well-being of their families. A few of our past presidents and secretaries had interacted with Mr Saddler who had a great admiration for AFUNPI. A profound foundation and platform of FAFICS laid by former FAFICS presidents, historically, including Mr Aamir Ali, Mr George Saddler and Dr Witold Zyzz has continued to enable FAFICS to grow from four AFICS associations to 65 associations. May the soul rest in peace and in our terminology 'Om Shanti'.

— **Marashetty Seenappa,**
AFUNPI PRESIDENT EMERITUS

AFICS Kenya

On behalf of AFICS-Kenya and on my own behalf, we were deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Mr. George F. Saddler, the first President of FAFICS (1998–2004).

We extend our heartfelt condolences to his family and friends. Mr. Saddler's remarkable life, distinguished service to the United Nations, and his pioneering leadership in the early years of FAFICS will long be remembered and appreciated by colleagues around the world.



Please convey our sincere sympathies to his daughter, Paula Saddler, and the Saddler family during this difficult time.

With our deepest condolences,

Amb. Dr. John.O. Kakonge,
PRESIDENT

AFICS Myanmar

On behalf of AFICS Myanmar, we extend our deepest condolences to the family of Mr. George F Saddler, the First President of FAFICS (1998–2004) who expired at a remarkable age of 101 on 6 March 2026.

Reading through the interview you had with Mr. George Saddler (2 years ago), I understand that he was really an inspiring man dedicated not only to his career but also to the leadership role of FAFICS.

Please accept our heartfelt sympathy during this time of loss. Our prayers are with his family members, colleagues and friends.

May his soul rest in eternal peace.

Ms Kyi Kyi Nyein
PRESIDENT

RUNSAN Nepal

On behalf of the RUNSAN, Nepal we would like to send our deepest condolences to the FAFICS community on the passing away of the first President of FAFICS, Mr. George F. Saddler.

With kind regards,

Leela Sthapit
PRESIDENT

AAFNU Niger

It is with deep sadness that we learned of the passing of Mr. George F. Saddler, an eminent International Civil Servant who dedicated his life to public service and to the ideals of the United Nations.

During his distinguished career and through his leadership as President of the Federation of Associations of Former International Civil Servants (FAFICS), Mr. Saddler made an enduring contribution to the international civil service and to the welfare of United Nations retirees worldwide.

He will be remembered for his integrity, wisdom, and unwavering commitment to the values of the United Nations.



REMEMBERING

Nicholas 'Fink' Haysom

A Top Bloke

By Ari Gaitanis



Nicholas “Fink” Haysom, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia at a press conference/Ari Gaitanis

I was honoured and humbled to be asked to write a few words about Nicholas “Fink” Haysom.

At first, I was unsure where to begin. Fink lived a full and remarkable life, and he was many things to many people: activist, scholar, international civil servant, diplomat, leader, husband, father, friend and mate. Others are better placed to speak to those roles and achievements. What stayed with me, and what I suspect stayed with many others, was something both simpler and rarer.

Fink was a top bloke.

“

*Fink was
a top bloke.*

”

Ari Gaitanis works for the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia as Chief, Strategic Communications and Public Affairs Group.

That may sound too modest a phrase for someone of his stature—but, in Australian terms it is, quite simply, one of the highest compliments one can pay.

It speaks not to titles nor accomplishments, but to character. It means someone warm, generous, grounded, funny, and genuinely interested in other people. Someone whose presence puts others at ease. Someone who wore distinction lightly and never sought to draw attention to it.

That was Fink.



Nicholas Haysom, then the head of UNAMA, the UN's mission in Afghanistan, greets audience members at a TV debate held in 2014. UN Photo/Fardin Waezi

Whether it was on the 38th floor at United Nations Headquarters, in a speakeasy in Manhattan, in a compound in Kabul, or a tukul in Mogadishu, he had the same essential quality of “top blokeness.” He was deeply intelligent and immensely experienced, but never remote. He had a seriousness of purpose without self-seriousness—the “take your work seriously, but not yourself” model. Away from the formal demands of his work, and often in the midst of complex political, humanitarian and security crises, he remained human and humane. He was interested in the person in front of him.

That mattered everywhere, of course, but especially in the “E” hardship duty stations where much of his working life was spent. In those places, living and working conditions were often cramped, exhausting and isolating. Health suffered. Families frayed. Friends and colleagues were hurt and killed. Food options were limited, diversions were few, and the days were often heavy.

Under those conditions, camaraderie was not a luxury. It was essential. Fink understood that instinctively. As a senior UN leader—but also simply as a person—he helped create the sense of community that made these difficult places more bearable. He brought warmth, humour, and a kind

of generosity of spirit that made people feel less alone.

I first met Fink in New York, when he was serving in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and I was in the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General. A delayed statement late one evening led to a surprising and engaging in-person exchange, and things evolved from there.

What struck me then, and continued to strike me over the years, was how down-to-earth and approachable he was. In an institution not always known for informality or accessibility, he stood out. We later worked together again in challenging settings in Afghanistan and Somalia, and there was almost a further chapter in South Sudan, which circumstances prevented.

Across those postings, what you saw was what you got with Fink. He was the same with colleagues as he was with local and international partners, and with representatives of the communities the United Nations was there to serve. There was no performance in it. He treated people seriously, when required, but never stiffly. His default setting tended towards a chuckle and a spark in his eye. He listened. He noticed. He engaged.

“
*What mattered
was curiosity,
wit, presence and
good company.
Fink relished
all of it.*
”

Some of my strongest memories are from after long trips in the field, north of the Hindu Kush or across the Horn of Africa, when the work of the day gave way to a meal and conversation.

Those after-hours conversations were often as memorable as the trip itself. They moved easily from the decline of the Eastern Roman Empire to the history of pan-African political movements, from the toll that field work can take on family life to the latest twists in Game of Thrones. There was always room for serious reflection, but just as much room for storytelling, laughter, irreverence, and the odd absurdity of life in the UN system. Neither rank nor responsibility mattered. What mattered was curiosity, wit, presence and good company. Fink relished all of it, whether it was a sharp analysis

or a punchy joke, or simply hearing another person's story.

That, to me, was one of his greatest gifts. He made space for people. He made others feel included. In environments so often defined by pressure, stress and fatigue, that was no small thing.

Fink will be remembered for many things, and rightly so. But for those of us who had the privilege of working with him closely, it is also the man himself we will remember: the warmth, the openness, the conversation, the perspective and the mateship. He brought not only skill and judgement to difficult places, but also humanity that helped brighten those places.

He was, in the fullest and best sense of the term, a top bloke.

Another day
on the job for
Nicholas Haysom
/Ari Gaitanis



JACQUES FOMERAND

An Inspiring Teacher Who Promoted UN Values

By John Renninger



Jacques Fomerand passed away suddenly on November 4, 2024. A native of France, Jacques completed his undergraduate studies at Sciences Po in Paris and Aix-en-Provence before moving to the United States in 1967 to study for his Ph.D. in political science at CUNY. He began his UN career in 1977, holding increasingly responsible positions in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). His last UN post was Director of the UN University's New York office. A defining feature of Jacques' work at the UN was his teaching as an adjunct faculty at various colleges and universities such as Columbia, CUNY, NYU and others.

His published academic research was well regarded. He was also a gifted teacher who inspired countless students to pursue careers in international fields. He made noted contributions to different Model UN exercises over many years. Following his retirement he had a particularly close relationship with City College which organized a Memorial to him in May of last year. I and another former colleague from the UN, Joan Seymour, were among the speakers.

Jacques is survived by a wide circle of friends, former students and his loving family, including his sons Thierry and Ross and his partner Marianthi Zikopoulos.

John Renninger is a former Director in the Department of Political Affairs

ÜNER KIRDAR

One of the Architects of Human Development Theory

Source: Wikipedia, edited for length



Uner Kirdar with then Secretary-General Kofi Annan/UN Photo

EDUCATION AND EARLY DIPLOMATIC CAREER

Kirdar's intellectual formation took him from the Faculty of Law at Istanbul University to postgraduate study at the London School of Economics, and ultimately to a doctorate in International Economics and Law from Jesus College, Cambridge, in 1962. He began his diplomatic career with the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1957, rising to serve as Director for International Economic

Organizations and Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Office at Geneva. During these years, he represented Turkey at the UN General Assembly, ECOSOC, UNCTAD, and UNDP, playing a key role in landmark resolutions—among them a 1963 measure that led to the Multilateral Investment Insurance scheme now operated by the World Bank, and resolutions that helped establish the World Tourism Organization and convene the first UN Conference on the Environment. He was twice honoured with the Outstanding Services Award and, in 1978, was promoted to the rank of ambassador in absentia.

A CAREER AT THE UNITED NATIONS

When Kirdar transitioned from the Turkish Foreign Service to the UN Secretariat, he moved into roles that placed him at the centre of the Organization's most consequential initiatives. He served as Secretary of the High-Level Group of Experts

on restructuring the UN system (1975), and as Secretary of the first UN Conference on Human Settlements (HABITAT) in Vancouver in 1976. He later served as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the second HABITAT conference, held in Istanbul in June 1996. As Director of External Relations and the Governing Council Secretariat of UNDP from 1980 to 1992, and Senior Advisor to the UNDP Administrator until 1998, he helped steer the Organization through a period of profound intellectual renewal. A lesser-known but significant achievement came in 1979, when Kirdar played a quiet but critical role in drafting the first UN programme of assistance to the Palestinian people—an economic framework that underpinned subsequent international efforts.

PIONEERING HUMAN DEVELOPMENT THEORY

Kirdar's most enduring intellectual contribution was his role in developing and

championing human development theory. Beginning in the late 1970s, he co-authored a series of volumes capturing debates from the Society for International Development's North–South Roundtables—expert meetings that drew together leading thinkers, policy makers, and practitioners from across the world. These publications became the conceptual foundation for what would eventually become the UNDP's Human Development Report, first published in 1990. In Kirdar's formulation, human development was not simply the satisfaction of basic needs, but the process by which people are empowered to realize their full potential—in education, health, creativity, and participation in society. This vision aligned closely with the capabilities approach advanced by economist Amartya Sen and stood in contrast to earlier frameworks that had dominated international thinking.

THE UNDP DEVELOPMENT STUDY PROGRAMME

In 1981, Kirdar founded the UNDP Development Study Programme, which he directed until 1996. Over fifteen years, the programme convened more than twenty international roundtables and high-level seminars, bringing together over 1,500 participants—Nobel laureates, heads of state, civil society leaders, and academics—to grapple with the pressing questions of sustainable development. The programme also organized the annual Paul G. Hoffman Lecture, which featured distinguished speakers including former Costa Rican President Óscar Arias Sánchez. The ideas generated through these gatherings fed directly into UNDP's strategic direction and the evolving architecture of the Human Development Reports. From 1993 to 1997, Kirdar also served as President of the New York Chapter of the Society for International Development.

Over four decades of writing, convening, and institution-building, Üner Kirdar helped transform international development from a discipline centred on economic growth into one anchored in human dignity and freedom. His legacy is woven into the fabric of UNDP and the global conversation on what it means for people—and nations—to truly flourish.

The full entry may be read on [Wikipedia](#).