

Report of the first Global Meeting of focal points and Associations of Former WHO Staff Members, 2 March 2021

NB: Sentences in bold are decisions and proposals for action to be followed up

The meeting started at 14:00 CET

Present:

AFRO – Kalula Kalambay, Custodia Mandlate and Gitonga Kathurima

AMRO – Gloria Coe and Hernán Rosenberg

EMRO – Hanna Ghoneim

EURO (Scandinavia) – Jill Conway-Fell

SEARO – Kanaga Rajan, S.S. Easwar and Sudhansh Malhotra

WPRO – Linda Milan, Romy Murillo and Henry Cardenas

HQ – Jean-Paul Menu and Sue Block Tyrrell

Opening

Jean-Paul opened the meeting and welcomed everyone, and thanked the HQ videoconferencing service for their assistance. **The proposed ground rules were agreed**, attached as Annex 1.

Draft agenda

The draft agenda was agreed, with the addition of an item on assistance to survivors, attached as Annex 2

Chairperson and Rapporteur

Jean-Paul was elected Chairperson of this first meeting (proposed by Kalula and seconded by Jill) and Jill was elected Rapporteur (proposed by Rajan and seconded by Romy)

Introductions

Each participant introduced themselves briefly.

Presentations by each Association

Manila: – see attached slides

Delhi:

- The Association is 40 years old
- It reaches out to retirees to help mainly regarding pensions and health insurance issues
- It produces a quarterly newsletter
- It reaches out mainly by email but also by telephone and through personal contact
- There is a good relationship with the Regional Office – the Association has office space and limited communications facilities, without access to intranet or IT
- Rajan's first message as President to the RD concerned the Regional Office continuing to host the Association and help it to reach out to retirees
- The Regional Office does not mention the Association to upcoming retirees
- They would like to have limited access to the WHO Intranet
- Their Committee meets on zoom
- Main issues of concern are SHI and the Certificates of Entitlement and helping survivors

Alexandria:

- There are many retirees in Alexandria and an increasing number in Cairo
- There is no official Association but they will work on that
- Their two main concerns - SHI and fraud cases and the length of time it takes to find out that after years of experience they are facing accusations. Hanna would like to discuss this further in a future meeting.

Geneva: - see attached slides

- The DG has said that he will deal with retirees through the AFSM
- We can still communicate with the DG despite Covid

Copenhagen:

- Jill collaborates primarily with AFSM but also with AFICS
- She assists surviving spouses who have no idea about how to apply for their pension etc.
- She also helps with the Certificates of Entitlement tracking
- She also assists with local taxation
- The Pension Fund staff give briefings in EURO for retirees in Scandinavia and their briefings are very well attended and highly valued
- Jill also organizes social events
- Unfortunately, those nearing retirement do not know that Jill is a focal point – neither the HR team nor the Staff Association pass on such information

Jill values her collaboration with AFSM Geneva and makes contributions to the QNT**AFR – Gatineau (Canada), Maputo (Mozambique) and Nairobi (Kenya):**

- They are still in the process of setting up their Association – the idea started in 2014 – their slogan is retired but not tired
- Their first objective is to stay connected with colleagues
- Working through Zoom, in view of Covid, has increased their connections
- There are about 130 ‘target participants’ including active staff on their platform but they are not yet members. The issue of membership including the bylaws will be discussed during our first General Assembly to be organised sometime this year
- The inclusion of active staff on the platform is a strategic way of preparing them prior to retirement, and thinking about how to stay connected after retirement
- They have held technical meetings to discuss different issues in Africa, e.g on Covid, celebrating polio eradication, investments after retirement etc.
- They have also organized virtual social events, e.g celebrating birthdays
- For technical meetings, there are still problems in getting people to participate
- They look at pension issues and react to requests from AFSM Geneva and they help surviving family members
- They also contribute to the QNT
- It is very important to stay connected and with colleagues at HQ for moral support
- Their main problems are:
 - How to formalize the Association
 - Connectivity is an issue in Africa – there are retirees all over Africa but it is not easy to connect with them
 - Another problem is how to connect with the Regional Office – the Office asked about their legality
- Regarding expectations:
 - They appreciate their strong relationship with AFSM Geneva and thanked Jean-Paul
 - They had recommended these global meetings to Jean-Paul
 - There is no easy access to country offices as they do not have an official mandate

- Surviving G staff especially do not know how to get their pension after their spouse has passed away.

Washington DC:

- They have recently celebrated the 30th anniversary of their Association
- They have 650 members of whom about 550 have an email address and about half respond to their messages
- They help with finding people for administrative issues such as those who have not returned their Certificates of Entitlement
- They have produced a guide for survivors and can share it with the group. A more user-friendly edition will be prepared
- When the Association started, it was centred around Washington DC but there are now a lot of retirees in the countries of the Americas and the Association is making an effort to include them – they have chapters in countries and 20 focal points volunteered in 20 countries to support the Board
- They have a Facebook page and Members can post what they want
- They produce a Bulletin 4 times per year – it used to focus a lot on pension news but now it includes more stories and poems etc. It is now only produced electronically – the printed version was stopped about 2 years ago.
- They are concerned about those who do not have access to email – however, they only received 4 requests from members who wanted to continue to receive the Bulletin in printed form
- They used to have social events prior to Covid – there were a couple of events each year, including one on a cruise ship
- Their last Assembly was held online
- They have a good relationship with PAHO
- There was a change in the health service provider and their Association helped to train people to use the services of the new provider
- A move to the PAHO A1 platform will facilitate communications
- Current platforms for communications, the web and for the Bulletin are different and they are trying to unify them
- One main problem is the lack of participation – people come up with ideas and then become unhappy because they cannot be implemented and their expectations are not met
- They tried to set up technical discussions but this did not work
- There is an association of retiree associations in the area which includes those from the World Bank and the IMF etc. and this is a good forum for sharing experiences
- Recruiting officers on their committee is a problem
- WRs in the Region need to understand that dealing with retirees is part of their business: the chapters and focal points will be linked to the WR Offices
- Solidarity is an issue – some retirees live alone and need someone to call them
- There are more retirees than members and it is challenging to get them to join the Association – people get confused with AFICS: now a member of AFICS who joins the AFISM gets a reduced rate
- The main challenge is motivating people to join and then participate

Discussion

- Sue made a suggestion following the comments above. The DG is very supportive of the AFISM Geneva and before the Covid pandemic the ExCom had meetings with him. We could ask for a virtual meeting to solicit his help in conveying to the RDs, and through

them to the WRs, his views on supporting collaboration with retirees through the AFSM associations

- Rajan liked this idea and suggested that the RDs should be asked to have regular meetings with retirees – retirees have a wealth of experience which can be used – it is a two-way street
- Gloria agreed it would be good to ask the current DG to include in the rules and regulations of WRs a function to link with retirees in the country – this should be institutionalized to ensure continuity by future DGs
- Linda referred to the helpful relationship with AFICS in Manila – the President of the AFSM participates in the Committee of AFICS – AFICS invites them to attend its meetings. If a retiree is a member of the AFSM, their subscription to AFICS is reduced by 50%. They get information about the missing Certificates of Entitlement at the AFICS meetings. AFSM Manila collaborates well with the Regional Office and an AFSM representative and the BFO try to go together to find the retirees concerned. In the last exercise, they found two retirees in an ICU – they were able to get a thumb print and get the person’s pension reinstated. If there is a discussion with the DG, it will be important to mention that there is good collaboration with the RD in some Regions like in WPRO – some RDs might not be comfortable with the DG asking them to collaborate with the retiree associations, when this is already happening.
- Jill referred to the fact that retirees forget to inform her of their change of postal and/or email address
- Linda raised the issue of confidentiality. As the associations of former staff are set up to help retirees, they need information on where to find the former staff.
- Regarding collaboration with AFICS, Jean-Paul referred to the good collaboration in Geneva. AFICS Geneva is also global, with about 3000 members around the world. The AFSM President is a member of the AFICS Committee and gets invited to their meetings. AFICS is part of FAFICS which meets once a year. AFSM Geneva has attended FAFICS Council meetings in Rome, Vienna, Geneva and Paris so gets informed about what is discussed. FAFICS represents retirees on the Pension Board. AFSM Geneva has excellent contacts with the Pension Fund Office in Geneva but cannot say the same for contacts with the Fund’s Office in New York. The Geneva Office responds but not the New York Office. The full list of those who have not returned their Certificates of Entitlement is shared with the AFSM, directly now and no longer through AFICS, and in turn we share it with the sister associations so there is no need for AFSM Manila to ask AFICS Manila for the list. How the search is then organized is another matter. The Pension Office at WHO in Geneva is now under new leadership and the team is willing to help but the details need to be sorted out. As soon as the list is received, Jean-Paul will ask their team how they would like to handle the matter and he will share this information with sister associations. PAHO AFSM has good experience in collaborating with the WRs. It would be good if all WRs became interested in the retirees – in some offices it works well, e.g. the WR’s office in Thailand has held seminars for retirees.
- Rajan referred to Jill’s comment about local taxation – this is not a big issue in the SEAR. They are trying to get a rebate for contributions to SHI because health insurance costs in India are tax deductible. He would like to receive a copy of the PAHO guide for survivors. It is a good thing to get the help of WRs. The staff of today are the retirees of tomorrow.
- Linda referred to the new Digital Certificate of Entitlement (DCE). A colleague had explained to their Executive Committee how to set up the DCE, but retirees can continue to use the paper version. Some colleagues have mentioned how difficult it is to set up the DCE.

- Jean-Paul mentioned the article on the DCE which will appear in the April QNT
- ***Hernán agreed to share the PAHO booklet for survivors as it stands at the moment.*** The IMF association is also working on a booklet and has developed a useful spreadsheet, e.g. to enter the name of the spouse's doctor. The PAHO/AFSM booklet will also refer to inheritance issues. Hernan had started the process to access the DCE – he was given a date for a telephone call and then his email was rejected and he received no explanation – such bugs in the DCE system need to be worked out.
- Rajan referred to colleagues who had tried to obtain the DCE and been given an appointment. Rajan has been through the process himself and has produced a document on tips and ***he will share it with the group***¹.
- Jill referred to articles published already in the QNT on three occasions about what retirees should do to prepare their surviving spouse for the action which needs to be taken in the event of their death. Jill has shared these articles with survivors.
- Linda supported the idea of asking for a meeting with the DG to discuss support to retirees by the RDs and WRs
- ***Sue agreed to draft a one-pager for submission to DGO to ask for such a meeting. She will share the draft with the group for input***
- Jean-Paul felt that the DG would want to talk to all the group. He may wish to address the group meeting or send a message of support which everyone could pass to the RDs.
- Rajan agreed that it would be best for a top-down approach
- Discussion then turned to the ***proposal for representation of all associations and focal points in the AFSM Geneva Executive Committee meetings.*** This topic had initially been proposed by Manila and then withdrawn by them, but Delhi had requested it be included in the agenda.
- Rajan summarized his reasons for requesting this re-insertion on the agenda: it would help to get information on what the AFSM is doing and increase a sense of belonging; in the Regions they feel cut off, e.g from SHI; and there should be an inclusive approach as people have a lot of expectations. If the suggestion is unmanageable, then each Region could participate by rotation.
- Linda mentioned a misunderstanding that the Geneva AFSM covers everywhere, but each association is independent. For example, it would not work in the Manila Executive Committee if a representative from each association participated in its meetings. Linda supported Jill's views (attached as Annex 3). Linda is not sure whether participation by all sister associations would be helpful to Geneva – for this reason Manila had withdrawn its proposal. Matters could be discussed in global meetings like today.
- Kalula agreed with Linda and stressed that too many structures should be avoided. Geneva could take the lead and organize further global virtual meetings.
- Gloria agreed that 2-3 global meetings per year would be useful. Perhaps at each meeting other members could be invited depending on the topic.
- Jill agreed with Linda that global meetings like today would be the best option – anything else will be very heavy. She suggested 3 global meetings per year.

Discussion then focused on the ***survey*** proposed by Washington DC.

¹ Done

- Gloria became President of AFSM in 2019. During the years we worked together at PAHO we saw each other in the cafeteria, hallways, social events and stayed in touch. However, upon retiring, many former staff members returned to their home countries or moved to other cities in the US. As officers of AFSM, we could strengthen our response to the needs of our members by obtaining information, for instance, on their financial and family situation, whether they are lonely, how is their health and wellbeing especially now, during the later years of our lives. In September 2020, AFSM had the opportunity to implement a short survey on the experience of members with COVID-19. Through [google.com/forms](https://www.google.com/forms) they carried out a free survey with @ 20 questions and received @ 225 responses. The results were presented at the virtual annual General Meeting in December that was attended by double the usual number of participants. It was a fascinating exercise and provided information for the Board. A topic of interest for a future study could be whether there is anything we can learn from retirees who moved during their careers from one country to another as WRs or technical officers? Some people have children and grandchildren in multiple countries across the globe. Would they have accepted various assignments in different countries if they had realized that in retirement their families would not be physically together? Do they have suggestions on how PAHO could have helped them or have provided advice to avoid distances within the family in retirement? The result of a future study could provide guidance to RDs and future members. This is just one idea. Concerning the questionnaire, for example, there could be 20 core questions and each region could add more questions. Based on the discussions of the AFSM PAHO Board, preliminary questionnaires will be sent to the group for discussion, suggestions, revisions, comments.
- PAHO will forward a message to the group with the questionnaire.

Topics for further discussion forwarded by Manila (see Agenda – Annex 2)

5.1 Pensions/Missing CEs – DCOE and process discussed, to continue electronically due to time constraints; Rajan (Delhi) will share tips. Jean-Paul informed that there will be WHO Pension Office in HQ, and will explore how the Regions may be assisted. AFSM, Geneva has more productive collaboration with UNJSPF at Palais des Nations, than in UN, New York.

5.2 Representation of Associations/Focal points in AFSM-Geneva Exe-Com – Manila initially proposed but withdrew, but Delhi wanted pursued all **ALL** AFSM/Focal points are co-equal. AFSM, Geneva has a lot of advocacies/responsibilities some of which also involve the Regions. The Global Meeting of AFSMs/Focal points having been initiated would be a good forum for concerns to be raised/discussed and ways forward as well.

5.3 Online information and briefing on Covid-19 – not discussed

5.4 Importance of Newsletters – HQ QNT Newsletter; Washington has some info material on preparation for retirement which they will share.

5.5 Access to AFSM/HQ website – already explained in Jean-Paul’s presentation.

5.6 Survey of Retirees. Washington shared their survey using free Google Apps form, re health effects of, e.g WRs assigned or transferred from one country to another, effects on their family, etc. Participants felt may be done individually by Region.

5.7 Staff Health Insurance (SHI) Delhi talked about SHI, and local taxation, both of which would be discussed further by mail due to lack of time.

6. Global meetings to be held on a regular basis: hosting and preparations on a voluntary basis, but Geneva stated they could not take it on each time due to its heavy workload. It could be on a rotation basis, hosting and preparations voluntary. Finally, Washington offered to host the next meeting in early September 2021.

Next meeting

- A volunteer is needed to organize the next meeting – in the discussions above, meetings every 3-4 months had been proposed
- Kalula regretted that AFRO could not help with the next meeting as they are still in the process of structuring their association – perhaps in the future the AFRO team could set up a meeting
- Gloria commented that if one person takes the leadership, it becomes a constant line of work, and if the responsibility is shared around, the thread could get shredded
- Jean-Paul emphasized that AFSM Geneva cannot take on the leadership – it has too much of its own work to handle
- Linda remarked that every 3 months is too often: the retirees in Manila are engaged in a lot of work, and she proposed less frequent meetings when there is substantive information to share
- Jean-Paul added that it should be up to the volunteer team to decide when it could organize the next meeting: perhaps AFSM Geneva would be prepared to organize another meeting in one year's time but not before
- Linda added that it would not be possible for WPRO to take charge at the moment – their Association would need to talk to the administration – they had only held one ExCom meeting on zoom and another is scheduled for next month. There are a lot of meetings going on in WPRO.
- ***Gloria and Hernán then offered to organize the next meeting in six months' time – in early September*** and their offer was gratefully accepted
- Rajan commented that issues could be dealt with by email in the meantime
- Jill will kindly write the report of today's meeting

The meeting ended at 16:00 CET

Agreed ground rules for the Global meeting (by zoom) of focal points and Associations of Former WHO Staff Members

2nd March 2021

1. For the meeting on 2nd March:

- 1.1. The use of first names is proposed.
- 1.2. To avoid extra noise, please mute your microphone until you want to speak.
- 1.3. Please ask for the floor by raising your hand in front of the camera or by using the icon at the bottom of the screen.
- 1.4. Please respect the time limits indicated to allow everybody to speak and to cover all items during the 2 hours available.
- 1.5. Whoever is proposing an activity should be prepared to take charge of it.

2. If more meetings are decided:

- 2.1. The responsibility for setting up future meetings must be shared between associations, particularly those with facilities for booking Zoom meetings.
- 2.2. The chairperson and the rapporteur must be different for each meeting.
- 2.3. Point 1.5 applies.

Global meeting of focal points and Associations of Former WHO Staff

Members

(By Zoom)

Tuesday 2nd March 2021

Agenda

1. Opening – Clarifications of ground rules for today’s meeting
2. Election of today’s chairperson and rapporteur
3. Approval of agenda
4. Presentations of participants (by reverse order of time zone!)
 - 4.1. Manila (Linda Milan, Romulo Murillo, Henry Cardenas)
 - 4.2. Delhi (Kanaga Rajan, S.S. Easwar, Sudhansh Malhotra)
 - 4.3. Alexandria (Hanna Ghoneim)
 - 4.4. Copenhagen (Jill Conway-Fell)
 - 4.5. Geneva (Jean-Paul Menu, Sue Block Tyrrell)
 - 4.6. Montreal/Maputo, Nairobi (Kalula Kalambay, Mandlate Custodia, Kathurima Gitonga)
 - 4.7. Washington (Gloria Coe, Hernán Rosenberg)

Suggested content of the presentations: What are we, what do we do, our main problems, expectations from the meeting and future collaboration. (5 minutes maximum per association)

5. Topics for further discussions already suggested:
 - 5.1. Pensions and missing CEs (Geneva)
 - 5.2. Representation of all Associations and focal points on the AFSM/HQ Executive Committee (Delhi)
 - 5.3. Online information and briefing material on Covid19 (Delhi) – not discussed
 - 5.4. Importance of Newsletters (Copenhagen) – not discussed
 - 5.5. Access to AFSM/HQ Web site (Delhi) – not discussed
 - 5.6. Survey of retirees in relation to the Decade of Healthy Ageing (Washington)
 - 5.7. SHI (Delhi) – not discussed
 - 5.8. Help to surviving spouses (Copenhagen)
6. Other suggestions?
7. Next steps – Future meetings?

Annex 3

Jill Conway-Fell

Sat, Feb 27, 1:30 PM
(5 days ago)

to JP, Gloria, Dr, MURILLO, Sudhansh, Easwar, Hernan, me, Linda, Cardenas, Hanaa, Rajan, Mandlate

Thank you for all the background material.

First names fine by me.

A few brief comments in advance. Replies not required prior to 2 March:

5.2 The suggestion is sympathetic but I am afraid it would lead to total chaos. It would take weeks before any decision could be taken as there would be numerous disagreements and interpretations. AFSM-Geneva would be unable to function.

5.3 There is an enormous amount of information in WHO newsletters circulated to all of us. Covid-19 is covered minutely in every version.

5.4 AFSM Newsletters 'Quarterly News' are invaluable; the amount of information produced is highly relevant. We were informed of 'The Decade of Healthy Ageing, endorsed by WHO's 73rd World Health Assembly (WHA). Reading WHO's internet information is valuable and an ongoing learning process.

5.5 AFSM's website is available.

5.6 I am not quite clear about the question as a survey would create a lot of work, which might not be necessary. What would we be surveying, unless of course Washington is thinking about countries suffering from extreme poverty. Perhaps surveys could be local rather than global.

5.7 SHI is an area that has been surveyed in detail. All those who have retained SHI are asked to take part in electing members of the Global committees, so all of us have a voice. The two committees publish their findings and suggestions keeping us all informed. We are welcome to forward our own recommendations which I have done on a number of occasions, for example, requesting that retaining copies of prescriptions and invoices for five years was excessive, requesting the number of years be reduced to three, which was done. Another useful point explained recently was that printers are not a necessity when forwarding claims as a smartphone can be used. Local briefings about submitting claims to EURO-SHI are excellent, and now there are briefings being arranged by SHI-HQ.

Annex 4 – slides from Manila attached