1. Introduction – impact of the pandemic

This biennium has obviously been dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic which started a few months after our last General Assembly. We had to adapt very rapidly. The intensive use of virtual meetings has fortunately allowed us to maintain meetings of the Executive Committee without interruption. Despite our inability to physically access our office in the headquarters’ building, we were able to stay in touch with you thanks to email messages. Only the “permanences”, your telephone calls and the reading of your letters and responses to them have been seriously impacted. We have managed to send to you as before our Quarterly News both electronically and by post.

We must emphasize the amazing cooperation of all the WHO services without which this would not have been possible, all the more remarkable as these services were having to respond to the health emergency situation in extremely difficult conditions.

Thus, the activities by the volunteers on the Executive Committee did not diminish but increased. In constant communication with the Staff Health Insurance (SHI) team and the Staff Health and Welfare (SHW) team, we have done our best to obtain official information (often difficult to interpret) from the French and Swiss authorities on the evolution of the health and vaccination regulations.

In addition to our usual tasks, which in themselves are time-consuming, in these difficult conditions, we had to respond to your requests concerning the pandemic and vaccination possibilities, prepare ourselves to move office into another building because of the renovation of the main building, find solutions to preserve the content of our website and access to it, and initiate new projects.

The good thing about virtual meetings has been that neither distance nor the inability to get to the office by some of our members have been obstacles to their participation.
2. Election of the Executive Committee

Elections for the renewal of the Executive Committee should have taken place in 2020. Their organization requires the despatch of postal correspondence to all our members and physical presence in the office to handle the voting. At our request, you have agreed to postpone the elections. Hopefully, we will be able to hold them next year. The present Committee will continue until October 2022.

We had the pleasure of co-opting Edmond Mobio.

The composition of the Bureau until October 2022 is therefore as follows:

- President: Jean-Paul Menu
- Vice-Presidents: Sue Block Tyrrell and Dev Ray
- Treasurer: Anne Yamada
- Assistant Treasurer: Keith Wynn
- Administrator: Michèle Bernard-Evans

The other members of the Executive Committee are: Laura Ciaffei, Maria Dweggah, Barbara Fontaine, Pascale Gilbert-Miguet, Pia Soto Cannata Mei and Ann Van Hulle-Colbert.

They are assisted by three Honorary Presidents - David Cohen, Roger Fontana and Alain Vessereau, as well as by two Honorary Members - Yves Beigbeder and Roberto Masironi.

The Committee members share the responsibilities for different activities, notably:

- Health insurance matters: Pascale Gilbert-Miguet, Jean-Paul Menu and Ann Van Hulle-Colbert
- WHO Staff Pension Committee: Barbara Fontaine and Edmond Mobio (observers)
- Quarterly News: Keith Wynn, Editor-in-chief, with Yves Beigbeder, Sue Block Tyrrell, Laura Ciaffei, David Cohen, Maria Dweggah, Lindsay Martinez, Jean-Paul Menu, Dev Ray and Rosemary Villars on the Editorial Board.

We take this opportunity to thank Dev Ray who has competently represented us on the WHO Staff Pension Committee for many years.

3. Relations with the Director-General

In line with the DG’s decision to have an information meeting with Executive Committee members three times a year, we met with Dr Tedros on 10 January 2020. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, we have not been able to meet with him since that date but we have remained in contact with the DG’s Office. Thanks to the DG’s support, a lunch-time seminar on the WHO transformation agenda was held on 28 November 2019 for former staff. It was well attended, and some former staff participated through Webex. The April 2020 Quarterly News issue (QNT 119) contains an article on the event and a photo of those attending by the WHO Values Charter. Former staff were also invited to attend the DG’s year-end party on 13 December 2019. The DG’s year-end party in December 2020 had to be virtual, but AFSM members were invited to participate and the Executive Committee was invited to convey a message.

Following discussions with the DG’s Office and the Department of Human Resources and Talent Management, we understand that WHO is interested in considering former WHO
staff members for short-term opportunities that may arise in the technical programmes and administration. As a first step, former staff have been invited to create their candidature profile in the Stellis database.

We have also had discussions with the team which handles the mentoring programme. We are pleased that several former staff are already on the list of mentors.

Details on our discussions with the DG’s Office about closer collaboration with associations of former staff across the whole Organization and support to retirees at the country level are included in item 9 below.

At the DG’s request, we had planned a meeting with the Director of Communications, but the pandemic has prevented this from taking place. In the meantime, we enjoy good relations with members of the communications team.

4. Relations with the WHO Administration

We are lucky to enjoy good relations with the WHO Administration, notably all the teams involved in the printing and distribution of the Quarterly News and the Directory (see items 5.1 and 5.4); the Staff Health Insurance (item 7) and the Pension Office (item 6); the Staff Health and Welfare service, notably regarding vaccinations, especially against influenza (item 12.2) and also for the advice and help of their Staff Counsellor; the Global Service Centre and the IT team at HQ; the team dealing with conference rooms and videoconferencing; the communications team; the team at the main HQ reception desk and the security services; the archives team; the team dealing with the WHO website (item 5.3); and many other teams which willingly facilitate support to us when needed.

Our focal point at HQ changed after the departure of Isabelle Nuttall and we are fortunate that Jennifer Linkins, Director of Human Resources and Talent Management (HRT), has taken on this role. On request, we have been pleased to help the HRT team in finding former staff willing to accept short-term assignments.

Just before the start of the pandemic, discussions were held with HRT staff about setting up lunch-time seminars to enable former staff to share their experiences with interns. Several AFSM members had kindly volunteered their services. Hopefully, such seminars can be organized in the future.

In the past, we collaborated on occasion with the editorial team of the former UN Special. This joint WHO/UN magazine is no longer produced and since February 2020 WHO produces its own new Special magazine. The editorial team now kindly sends us the link to each edition which enables us to share it electronically with our members. We were invited to submit articles for the February 2021 edition which focused on issues relating to the workforce and particularly on retirement.

5. Information and communications

The Executive Committee continues its efforts to communicate with its members and this became more important upon the arrival of the pandemic. As referred to above, telephone messages left on the AFSM answering machine and correspondence sent by post suffered delays in our responses due to our inability to access the AFSM office, but electronic
messaging greatly increased. We repeat again our request to those of you who have an email address but have not yet communicated it to us, to do so as soon as possible.

5.1. Quarterly News

During these long months of pandemic, our Quarterly News has proved to be, more than ever, our best means of communicating with all our members.

We strive to make the magazine as varied and interesting as possible, at the same time using it as our main vehicle to keep you in touch – with each other and with WHO – and informed of the latest information important to you, especially concerning pensions and health insurance matters. These latter subjects are covered thanks to regular articles from highly motivated and dedicated voluntary members of the Executive Committee and Editorial Board. For general articles we count on you, our readers, to provide texts, ideas, suggestions and feedback – be it good or bad, we want to know.

The digital version of the current issue of Quarterly News is always posted on the AFSM website as soon as possible, and the electronic editions will often contain interesting, but non-essential, extra material that space limitations prevent us from publishing in the printed editions. Worth checking out, the added advantages of the PDF version show all photos in colour, and all web-links and email addresses are directly clickable. For the moment, all previous issues of the Quarterly News, from the first (pilot) issue published in 1989 through to the present day, are available on the AFSM website. This may have to change as WHO updates its website; however, your Committee will seek solutions to maintain this availability.

Thanks to an enthusiastic member of our Editorial Board, the Quarterly News has published several articles in recent years involving collaboration with WHO programmes, designed to keep our members informed about current priorities, progress and prospects in the Organization. The topics chosen, while of broad public health relevance, included aspects of particular concern for older people. We are grateful to the WHO technical programmes which have collaborated with us. During the period covered by this report, the Director of the Department of Nutrition for Health and Development kindly agreed to discuss the important issue of nutrition with us (Quarterly News no. 118, January 2020). Even though the subject matter at WHO is far from exhausted, further articles in this series are not possible for the foreseeable future.

5.2. Information notes and messages

We have continued our electronic Information Notes and other messages for disseminating various news and events such as the 2021 General Assembly. As referred to above, we have endeavoured to keep members informed about Covid-19 vaccination opportunities and other pandemic related matters, notably regarding restrictions affecting border crossings between France and Switzerland for those who live in the Geneva area.

5.3. Website

Early 2021, WHO started to change the presentation of its website. The AFSM is no longer listed but is still hosted under the WHO domain. At the time of writing this report, in order
to access the AFSM site, the entire URL has to be spelled out as follows: 
https://www.who.int/formerstaff/en/ for English and https://www.who.int/formerstaff/fr/ for French. Part of the current content will disappear and we are working to find alternative solutions. The maintenance and updating of our website will also be affected.

5.4. Directory of members

The Directory 2021 was completed, printed and distributed to our members thanks to the efficient help of Andrée Prodham. Since dispatching the Directory, we have been informed by some of our members of changes in their email addresses, etc. and, more sadly, of the death of a few of the persons listed. We therefore issued a corrigendum in Quarterly News no. 124, July 2021. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, postal services have been suspended in a number of countries and a considerable amount of mail has been returned to our office at WHO.

Following the decision of the 2019 General Assembly, former staff of UNAIDS, UNITAID and UNICC, whose staff contracts are administered by WHO and whose staff participate in the WHO Staff Health Insurance, may join the Association and the administrations of these entities have been informed.

As of end May 2021, we had 913 life members and 28 annual members in 75 countries.

5.5. Pre-retirement seminars

We continue to take part in the pre-retirement seminars held annually at WHO/HQ, emphasizing the benefits of joining the AFSM and encouraging upcoming retirees to subscribe. The November 2020 seminar was, needless to say, held virtually and with greater participation than during the normal physical presence seminars. However, this precluded our normal presence outside the room all day serving light refreshments which encourages participants to stop by and ask individual questions. At the time of writing, no date has been set for the seminar in 2021.

It seems that our interventions at the seminars are effective as more active staff write to us asking to join the Association at the time of their retirement.

6. Pensions

During the past two years, the Executive Committee has been actively involved in pension and related tax issues, participating in numerous meetings, and availing itself of various documentation to keep abreast of developments in order to inform AFSM members regularly via the Quarterly News and electronic communications, in addition to responding to members’ individual enquiries.

Articles in the Quarterly News have covered the major changes that have occurred at the Pension Fund during the last biennium, managerial as well as operational, in addition to keeping readers informed of the state of the Fund’s investments.

A major change has been the restructuring of the Geneva Office with the transfer of two high-level posts to New York. AFSM joined AFICS Geneva in writing to the Fund to stress the need for retaining these two posts in Geneva. The latest phase of the Geneva Office restructuring involves transferring the Geneva finance section to New York. In this regard, both AFSM and AFICS have addressed individual communications to the Chief Executive of
Pension Administration stressing the importance of a fully staffed Geneva Office and the need for a finance section in Geneva to provide, *inter-alia*, back-up to the New York finance office in the event that it, for whatever reason, is temporarily incapacitated. In addition to written communications on the subject, AFSM has had informal discussions with WHO Pension Board members on the importance of a fully staffed Geneva Office. The outcome of this issue remains to be seen, given that the 2020 Pension Board requested further investigation into the matter. So, even though AFSM does not sit on the Pension Board, it works diligently behind the scenes in addressing issues of concern for the retiree community.

On the operational side, a major change has been to replace paper by paperless transactions. This modernization process, greatly stimulated by the pandemic lockdown periods, has rapidly evolved to the extent that the Fund today accepts most, if not all, documents in electronic form. We have published several articles on the subject, particularly regarding the introduction of the Digital Certificate of Entitlement and the use of the Member Self-Service section on the Pension Fund website.

AFSM was active in two meetings of the WHO Staff Pension Committee on the issue of retiree representation at the Pension Board. Currently, all UN system-wide retirees are represented by the Federation of Associations of Former International Civil Servants (FAFICS) which designates observers (four with two alternates) to the Board. However, an external report (the Mosaic report), currently under consideration by the Board, recommends that retiree representation should be elected to the Board and have voting rights.

The AFSM Executive Committee continues to assist the Pension Fund, through a coordinated approach with the WHO Pension Office and counterparts in WHO regional and retiree associations, in the annual exercise of tracing retirees whose previous year Certificate of Entitlement has not been returned to the Fund. Much effort goes into this activity so that those concerned will be located and the missing Certificate can be dealt with in order to prevent the suspension of the retiree’s monthly benefit payments.

Finally, the AFSM Executive Committee expresses its gratitude to the staff of the Geneva Pension Fund Office who are always so helpful and prompt in responding to requests to solve problems presented to the Committee by our members. We also thank our colleagues at the WHO Pension Office for their excellent collaboration with the AFSM.

### 7. Staff Health Insurance (SHI)

Health Insurance and quality health-care services remain top priorities of our members. We receive queries but also suggestions based on personal experience. We discuss all of them with the appropriate authority - AFSM Executive Committee, SHI or with the retired staff elected representatives on the SHI Global Committees. We do our best to help our members when confronted with an SHI problem. However, we do not interfere in matters which should be dealt with by SHI directly. We enjoy excellent collaboration with the SHI Secretariat, and they take prompt action whenever their attention is drawn to a problem.

Retired staff elected representatives participate very actively in the work of the two SHI Global Committees. The members elected for the four-year period 2019-2023 are as follows:
**Global Standing Committee:** Marjory Dam and Jean-Paul Menu (members)  
Carol Collado and Françoise Héry-Persin (alternate members)

**Global Oversight Committee:** Ann Van Hulle-Colbert and Thierry Lambrechts (members)

The Global Standing Committee takes decisions on individual cases referred to it under the SHI rules and proposes to the Global Oversight Committee amendments to the SHI rules in the light of experience. It also submits an annual report on its work to the Global Oversight Committee.

The Global Oversight Committee advises the Director-General on SHI management, operations and financial status of the SHI Fund. It organizes periodic actuarial studies, reviews investment strategy and performance and audit reports.

In spite of Covid-19, both Committees have continued to carry out their duties and have held frequent meetings (mainly virtual via Zoom, Webex, MS Teams etc.) to deal with both regular matters and also those related to Covid-19 itself.

SHI faces the challenges of an ageing insured population. As the number of retired staff has grown, so also has the projected actuarial deficit (excess of expenditure over income). Various measures have been taken to address this deficit. As a result, the Fund has accumulated assets which exceeded USD 1 billion at the end of 2020. Whilst this may seem a significant sum, it has to be compared with a net actuarial liability estimated by the actuaries of USD 2.7 billion. The assets of the Fund are prudently invested and performance is closely monitored by a team of independent expert advisors.

You will have noted the annual increase in your contributions in previous years. As from 2021, the Director-General has agreed to freeze this increase for participants whilst at the same time increasing the Organization’s share of contributions to cover the actuarial liability.

In view of the financial situation, various cost containment measures have been introduced and any increase in benefits is reviewed very carefully before implementation.

**8. Participation of AFSM in WHO organized activities**

We are pleased to have been invited to participate in some of the events organized by WHO and, when open to all AFSM members, we have shared the details as rapidly as possible.

AFSM members were invited to submit their artwork for an exhibition held in the WHO Library end October 2019 – too late to be included in our last report. An article on the opening of the event is contained in *Quarterly News* no. 118, January 2020, together with photos of some of the work submitted by former staff.

We were delighted to receive an invitation to be represented at the ceremony on 13 December 2019 to commemorate 40 years since the signing of the Certification of Smallpox Eradication. Two former staff had also been invited to speak at the ceremony. *Quarterly News* no. 119, April 2020, contains an article on this event.

*Walk the Talk* in May 2020, the third such event, had to be virtual, but it permitted participation of staff and former staff around the world, beginning in WPRO Manila and
ending with HQ in Geneva. *Quarterly News* no. 120, July 2020, contains a short report on the event. At the time of writing this report, there is no news about such an event in 2021.

The 2020 event to celebrate the International Day of Older Persons, on 1 October, focused on the Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021-2030 and we were pleased to share the flyer with members globally, inviting you to participate in the virtual event.

Other virtual events in which former staff were invited to participate include: the *One World: Together at Home* Concert in April 2020 (*Quarterly News* no. 120, July 2020, contains an article on the event); a webinar on how to deal with misinformation held end November 2020 (sadly the information was received late and could only be forwarded at very short notice), and a seminar on Covid vaccination in March 2021.

We welcome these opportunities to join with the staff and thank members of the communications team for keeping us in mind and sending us invitations.

9. **Relations with associations of former WHO staff in the Regions**

For a long time, we have had frequent contact with these associations but, until very recently, there have been very few exchanges among them.

In March 2021, we held a virtual meeting with their principal officers in the six Regions. It rapidly became evident that the moral and logistical support offered to the associations by the Regional Offices varies enormously from excellent to non-existent. We reminded them of the statement by Dr Tedros to our General Assembly in 2017: “Former staff are still part of the WHO family .... Retirement does not break this relationship.” We hope that this vision can be shared by the Regional Offices. It was therefore decided that our Association should bring this disparity to the attention of the Director-General. During a preliminary meeting that we had with the DG’s Office and the Director of Human Resources and Talent Management, it was agreed that we would prepare an outline of the situation for submission to the DG’s Office. A second meeting of the associations is planned for September 2021.

10. **Relations with the Staff Association**

We continue to maintain close ties with the HQ Staff Association which provides valuable assistance to us for various administrative issues, including the procurement of office equipment. The Secretariat of the Staff Association is a great support. We are invited to and attend their General Assemblies. When their office moves out of the main building, we have requested that our office remains close to theirs.

11. **Activities and relations with other associations**

11.1. **Association of Former International Civil Servants in Geneva (AAFI-AFICS)**

Our relations with AAFI-AFICS are always excellent with Odette Foudral as President. AFSM is an ex-officio member of the AAFI-AFICS Committee. We sent representatives to be part of the AAFI-AFICS delegation at the annual meetings of the FAFICS Council in July 2019 (Wien) and in December 2020 (held virtually by Zoom). We reported on those meetings in *Quarterly News* no. 117, October 2019 and no. 123, April 2021. Our participation in the
monthly meetings of AAFI-AFICS and in the annual meetings of the FAFICS Council is essential to keep us informed of the situation in the UN Joint Staff Pension Fund.

11.2. Other association of retirees
The “Plateforme des Associations d’aînés de Genève”, which is comprised of more than 50 different associations, including AFSM, was unable to hold its usual meetings or assemblies physically but it remained very active virtually, maintaining support through its numerous associations. “Cité Seniors”, normally very active, and which welcomes retirees from the United Nations family on the first Wednesday of the month, was obliged to close. We have been keeping you informed of key information shared with us by “Plateforme”.

In March 2021, CLIC – the “Centre local d’information et de coordination” in the Pays de Gex, in association with “Silver Fourchette Ain” invited us to join, from home, two days of workshops for the exchange of information on diet for the over 60s.

AFSM also maintains relations with the British Association of Former UN Civil Servants (BAFUNCS) which has many WHO former staff members.

12. Social activities

12.1. Annual receptions
In 2019, our reception was held on the same day as the General Assembly on 22 October. As indicated under item 3 above, AFSM members were later invited to attend the DG’s year-end party on 13 December. In 2020, it was planned to have our annual reception with the DG’s year-end party in December but, due to the pandemic, this could not take place. AFSM members were instead invited to join the virtual DG’s year-end party on 17 December.

12.2. Influenza vaccinations
In 2019, the vaccination sessions at WHO were held as planned in October and about 250 retirees were able to take advantage of them. In 2020, the usual sessions could not be held normally but the DG decided to offer vaccination to all staff and retirees under special conditions which took into account the risks of the pandemic. This vaccination campaign was successful.

12.3. Travel
The trip planned for 2020 (cruise on the Douro in Portugal) had to be postponed until 2021 but could not take place on the dates planned. The company “Croisieurope” proposed to again postpone the cruise or change it for another trip, but the participants preferred to be reimbursed. It seems that reimbursement will be difficult and will take a long time.

12.4. Solidarity Fair
As usual, our Association participated in the Solidarity Fair held at WHO headquarters on 27 November 2019 to help replenish the Solidarity Fund. The Fund was set up in 1995 to help staff members who, due to the Reduction in Force (RIF) of that year, found themselves in financial difficulty. Since then, thousands of francs have been distributed either as grants or interest-free loans to staff in need and to other charitable causes. The AFSM once again organized its traditional tombola and the proceeds were given to the Fund. Our participation in this event enables us to demonstrate our solidarity with the staff and the
Fund and allows us to actively promote our Association and recruit some new members.
Sadly, no Fair could be held end 2020.

13. Thanks

Our sincere thanks go to:

- The Director-General and his office
- The Administration, including the SHI and Pensions Offices as well as the Printing and Distribution services
- The Global Service Centre and the HQ/IT team
- The Medical Service (now Staff Health and Welfare service) for the influenza vaccinations and advice on Covid vaccinations, including the assistance of the Staff Counsellor when needed
- Ms Marie-Pierre Austin for her invaluable help in the use of our mailing lists and securing the printing and mailing of our communications
- The Staff Association and its Secretariat
- The Reception and Security services
- The team handling the conference room bookings and videoconferencing
- The archives team
- The communications team
- The WHO website team
- Other associations of seniors in the Geneva area and in the Regions

14. Conclusion

Even if the pandemic situation seems to be getting under control in the region of Geneva and neighbouring France, it is not the same scenario in all the countries where our members reside: we have tried to be at your side wherever you are.

We have done our best to respond to your requests which are more and more numerous and varied and to offer you our services. This is our role but we take this opportunity to emphasize that we are all volunteers, without any financial or other compensation. We are reaching our limits at the expense of our personal activities as active retirees.

Your Committee can only continue if new candidates present themselves for election next year and thus allow some long-standing Committee members to enjoy a new retirement. Even if you do not want to be a candidate for election to the Committee, you can always be co-opted for specific tasks at any time.

We hope that the health situation will allow us to see you again in October, either physically or at least virtually, and we look forward to that opportunity.