

Former FAO and Other UN Staff Association



FFOA/GA/2016/03

PROVISIONAL REPORT

Forty-fifth Session of the General Assembly

Wednesday 27 May 2015 Green Room, FAO Headquarters

1. Opening of the Forty-fifth Session of the General Assembly

The President of FFOA, Mr Alan Prien, opened the session at 09:40 hours welcoming guests and participants and announcing that the interpretation would be in two languages: English and Italian. He also announced that the proceedings could be followed via Webcast for those not able to attend physically.

2. Establishment of a quorum and announcements

Mr Prien announced that more than a quorum was physically present and that 10 proxies had been received. The meeting was declared officially open and constituted in accordance with the Articles of the Association. He thanked the Executive Committee Members for their support throughout the year, and particularly in recent meetings with the Directors of Human Resources of the Rome-based agencies, intervening on pension matters, representing FFOA on the JAC/MC, and in meeting with staff representatives on common interests.

3. Nomination of Rapporteurs, announcement of the Interpreters and the Photographer

Mr Prien announced that Ms Maria Augusta Di Giacomo and Mr Steve Dembner would work together on the Provisional Report of the General Assembly; Ms Marta Bochicchio and Ms Maria Rosaria Buri would provide Italian and English interpretation; and Mr Alex Van Arkadie would be responsible for photography (all photos in this report courtesy of A. Van Arkadie).

4. Election of the Presiding Officer of the 45th Session of General Assembly

Mr Prien proposed that Mr Ali Mekouar, former Director of the FAO Conference, Council and Protocol Affairs Division, chair the Assembly. He was elected by acclamation.

5. Adoption of the Provisional Agenda (FFOA/GA/2015/02)

The Provisional Agenda was adopted as presented as no proposals for changes had been received before the deadline of 28 April 2015.

6. Address by the Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations or his Representative Mr Denis Aitken, Assistant Director General, a.i. CS

Mr Mekouar welcomed and thanked Mr Aitken for agreeing to address the meeting, and also for agreeing to participate in the discussion on Medical insurance issues in his capacity as Chairperson of the JAC/MC, together with Ms Kamila Guseynova and the Allianz Representatives.

Mr Aitken conveyed best wishes for a successful meeting from FAO Director-General, Mr Graziano da Silva. Mr Aitken informed members that the Insurance contract with Vanbreda International ended in December 2014 and the JAC/MC and Management, according to normal procedures, decided to go to tender. Following FAO procedures eight companies were invited to bid for the future medical contract. After many meetings two companies were found suitable and the decision of the JAC/MC and FAO management was to select Allianz Worldwide Care (AWC). The new contract has fixed premium rates for three years, with the premium rates slightly lower than under Vanbreda. The contract has the same entitlements and benefits as in the past. Mr Aitken acknowledged that after 40 years with the same insurance company the transition was more difficult than had been anticipated. He noted delays in claims reimbursement and difficulties in communications with the Insurers, but he expected that all issues would be resolved before the end of summer 2015. However, he invited all present to continue to raise issues as necessary, which would be taken up during JAC/MC meetings.

Mr Aitken highlighted important FAO activities over the forthcoming months, including the June Conference and the approval of a pre-endorsed budget and programme of work for the first time in many years. Mr Aitken highlighted the General Assembly on Development Goals in Addis Abeba in September; another world event would be the Conference on Climate Control in Paris in December.

Mr Mekouar thanked Mr Aitken for his participation and thanked FAO for hosting FFOA's offices, including support for the maintenance of the FFOA database and the FFOA Website. He confirmed that FFOA would continue to provide support to FAO.

7. Update by FAO Social Security regarding medical insurance plans, presentation by AWC Representative Ms Maaref Wilson, Client Relationship Manager and her team

Mr Mekouar asked Ms Kamila Guseynova from FAO Social Security and Ms Maaref Wilson from AWC to take the floor for a short presentation followed by Q&A. Ms Guseynova thanked all participants for their patience during the transition period and in particular thanked FFOA representatives to the JAC/MC for helping smooth the process. She gave the floor to Ms Wilson who thanked participants for their patience and consciousness in these five months of transition. She acknowledged that the current turnaround time for reimbursement of claims of six days (some participants had reported delays of more than two weeks) was significantly longer than the promised 48 hours, but hoped this would be resolved by early June. She indicated that AWC had more than 30 employees working exclusively on claims by participants from the Rome-based agencies. She provided information on how to reach AWC offices in Dublin (via toll-free number 800 1398 3812) and hoped that the settlement note form would be simplified in the future (many participants have found

it difficult to read and understand). She also indicated that the Participants Benefit Guide would be reviewed and sent to active and retired members, and that a guide to understanding the statement of account document was under preparation.

Ms Wilson informed participants that Ms Ms Elsje Osselaer, previously with Vanbreda, had been hired by AWC, thus ensuring continuity of quality services. Ms Osselear confirmed that participants would continue to have freedom of choice in terms of medical service providers. She was working to increase the number of providers offering direct billing under AWC, and requested participants to contact her if they wished to propose adding a new provider. In addition, she notified participants that an agreement had been reached with the Istituto Europeo di Oncologia in Milan for direct billing for hospitalization and surgery. She also informed that the previous direct billing agreement had been maintained with the pharmacies near FAO and IFAD, and a new agreement had been reached with local dentists and with the eyeglass shop on Viale Aventino.

Mr Mekouar thanked Ms Guseynova and Ms Wilson and AWC for their participation, interesting presentation and for sharing and clarifying various BMIP issues with participants.

8. Address by the Chairperson of the UN Joint Staff Pension Fund Board, by the Director of the Geneva UNJSPF office, and the UNJSPF Representative

Mr Mekouar welcomed Ms Theresa Panuccio, Chairperson of the UN Joint Staff Pension Board as well as Mr Alan Blythe, Director of the Geneva office of the UNJSPF Secretariat, and his colleague Mr Alimane Bacar-Said.

Ms Panuccio reaffirmed the good financial health of the Fund. She also noted the strong governance structure. She acknowledged the expertise and dedicated work performed by FFOA members.

Mr Mekouar thanked Ms Panuccio for her participation and dedication and gave the floor to Mr Alan Blythe. Mr Blythe first reconfirmed the strong position of the Fund and then focused on the need to improve the Fund's servicing capacity,



and efforts in that direction. He noted that the Fund had posted steady gains and recorded a balance of US\$ 57.772 billion as of 31 December 2014. However, there are increasing numbers of enquiries, demands, e-mails, calls from both active staff and retirees, and these enquiries require speedy responses. Therefore, it has become necessary to improve the Fund's servicing capacity. Mr Blythe informed participants that the Fund was about to implement a new Integrated Pension Administration System (IPAS), which would improve and streamline. He introduced Mr Alimane Bacar-Said for a more detailed explanation.

Mr Bacar-Said informed participants that IPAS, expected to be fully operational during the summer of 2015, would provide a more integrated system environment, and increase capacity to accommodate future growth in the number of participants, retirees and other beneficiaries. In addition it would also strengthen the internal control, risk management and reporting environment. In a second phase, IPAS would also provide participants with enhanced "self-service" capabilities. He informed the Assembly that, during the transition from the current system to IPAS, participants could encounter delays in processing and response times, especially during the month of May. He assured participants that the Fund would continue to be mindful of the needs of the many clients who do not have or prefer not to use the Internet.

Ms Guseynova thanked the UNJSPF representatives for their ongoing support to the Rome-based agencies and notified participants that the Social Security office at FAO would be available to provide assistance in IPAS and other Fund matters as necessary.

9. Address by Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP) or her Representative

Mr Mekouar welcomed Mr Mageded Yahia Deputy Director HR, WFP, representing Ms. Cousin, Executive Director, WFP, and asked him to address the meeting.

Mr Yahia thanked FFOA for the invitation. He started by saying how he was pleased to hear the achievement of FFOA in terms of the number of members and their location.



He informed participants WFP is facing a changing world especially in countries with emergency situations as Iraq, Central African Republic, Sudan, Libya, Mali, Yemen, Syria and Nepal. Those countries represent a constant challenge for WFP in this transformation period. He noted that it is important to remain current, active and to change with the times. He informed participants that the voucher programmes have helped in facing challenges in Nepal related to the recent emergency and many porters have been recruited to reach the population with needed supplies.

He noted that 3,400 WFP active General Service staff members in the field, together with their family dependents, were moved from the UNDP medical plan to a specially designed field plan operated by AWC, the same claims processor for the BMIP/MMBP medical plans, from 1 January 2015.

Mr Mekouar thanked Mr Yahia for his statement and noted that many people admire the work being carried out by WFP on the front line to save lives. He thanked WFP for assisting FFOA in printing its documents such as those for the General Assembly and the Newsbrief.

10. Address by the President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) or his Representative

Mr Mekouar welcomed and thanked Mr Peter Frobbel, IFAD Human Resource Management Adviser representing Mr Nwanze, the President of IFAD. Mr Frobbel started by saying how pleased he was to participate on behalf of the President and of all the staff at IFAD. He noted how fulfilling work is and the dedication, professionalism, time and energy required to do it well. He thanked all for the work done that has made IFAD, and all the Rome-based agencies, what they are today. He highlighted recent advances made in poverty reduction and rural development and the direction where IFAD is going in the years ahead. 2015 would mark the last year of the Millennium Development Goals, which did so much to unite the international community in making development a universal priority. To a large extent, the MDGs also shaped the work of IFAD and the other Rome-based agencies



for the past two decades: work in which many of the persons present at the Assembly had been involved.

He highlighted notable successes, particularly in the first MDG of halving the proportion of people living in poverty. This goal was actually achieved in 2010. Not only did the proportion of people living in extreme poverty fall from 43 per cent to 17 per cent between 1990 and 2011, but the overall number dropped from 1.91 billion to just over one billion. However, reducing poverty and hunger is not the same as eliminating it entirely. And though there have been considerable improvements in hunger rates, 25 per cent of all children under the age of five are stunted. This is clearly unacceptable. IFAD still has more work to do, and in the years ahead the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) that would be finalized later this year would shape that work. The scope is even greater because the SDGs aim to address the underlying issues that interfere with the development of peaceful and inclusive societies, such as income inequality, environmental degradation and the impact of climate change.

In view of the continued exceptional demand for its services, Member states agreed to a target of US\$ 1.44 billion to fund IFAD work for the biennium 2016-2018. Mr Frobbel said that a percentage of the new resources would be channeled to sub-Saharan Africa where extreme poverty remains most entrenched. An estimated three-quarters of the world's poorest people and most of the hungriest continue to live in the rural areas of developing countries, a proportion that has not shifted significantly in the years since the MDGs were introduced. Since most of the world's poorest women and men depend directly or indirectly on agriculture, it is clear that the only way to eradicate poverty, and to achieve food and nutrition security for all, is to transform rural economies. Rural areas must provide decent jobs, decent conditions and decent opportunities. There must be a more even distribution of employment, services, opportunities and wealth between rural and urban areas so that the three billion people who live in rural areas can fulfil their potential without having to migrate. Rural transformation is important not just for the eradication of poverty, hunger and malnutrition, but also for many other elements of the sustainable development agenda such as inclusive growth, gender equality, health, education, greater equality, better resilience and decent employment.

Cities also need rural areas to provide the environmental services that safeguard the quality of our water and air and contribute to healthy ecosystems. It is becoming increasingly clear that healthy cities depend on healthy rural areas. The 500 million smallholder farms across the developing world, many of which are headed by women, will need to play a significant role in achieving the SDGs. With almost four decades of experience of investing in rural people and smallholder agriculture as a viable business, and an approach that combines the use of financial products, policy engagement, knowledge and partnership to achieve impact at scale, IFAD stands out from other international development finance organizations.

He recognized the solid work of IFAD's staff, as well as that of the other Rome Based Agencies, past and present, in creating a world free from hunger and poverty.

Mr Mekouar expressed his thanks to IFAD for their very interesting synopsis, especially relating to the MDGs and SDGs, and further expressed FFOA's appreciation for the support provided to FFOA, particularly mailing out the documents for the annual General Assembly, as well as the Newsbrief that accompanies those documents.

11. Statement by the Representative of the Staff Representative Bodies of FAO, WFP and IFAD

Mr Mekouar welcomed Mr Mauro Pace of FAO-UGSS, speaking on behalf of the RBAs Staff Associations. Mr Pace noted the longstanding tradition of dialogue and cooperation between the Rome-based agencies and the staff representative bodies. He underlined that dialogue and cooperation, are prerequisites for effective representation; it is through a continuous process of information exchange and cross-fertilization of ideas that we can monitor the functioning of our social security scheme. He said that many staff still in service view pensions and social security benefits as abstract projections towards the future, while for retirees these are an integral and tangible part of their daily life. He characterized retirees as a precious source of information to strategize and recommend policy improvements. Fortunately, he noted that fruitful cross-fertilization of ideas is already a reality in the Pension Board meetings and in the Staff Pensions Committee. In this regard he noted that the Board's discussions had benefitted greatly from the input from FAFICS on small pensions, on the impact of devaluation and dollarization in many developing countries, access to the emergency fund, and the monitoring of the two-track system. He emphasized that representatives of serving staff should know, and communicate to members, that a "continuum" exists and that FFOA would be their "voice" after retirement. In focusing on the transition in medical insurance providers, he noted that UGSS members were encountering frustrations due to delays, or complicated negotiations before receiving reimbursement. He again stressed the need to join forces, and proposed the establishment of a monitoring unit, or observatory, on compliance with our medical insurance policy. The Rome-based staff representative bodies are confident that by pursuing this action we will eventually obtain concrete improvements in the service.

In conclusion, Mr Pace indicated that there were many areas of common interest among the representative bodies for serving staff and for retirees, and he stressed the need to continue and expand dialogue, including outside of formal, institutional venue. He wished FFOA a successful conclusion of the Assembly.

12. Provisional Report of the 44th Session of the General Assembly (FFOA/GA/2015/03)

The Provisional Report of the 44th Session of the General Assembly was approved without comment by the General Assembly by the adoption of resolution A of document FFOA/GA/2015/06.

13. Report of the Executive Committee on the work achieved during 2014 (FFOA/GA/2015/04))

The General Assembly congratulated the Executive Committee and approved with the adoption of resolution B of document FFOA/GA/2015/06, the report on the activities carried out by the Executive Committee during 2014 in accordance with 2013-15 Programme of Work, approved at the beginning of its three-year mandate in 2013.

14. Reports of the Association's Financial Transactions (FFOA/GA/2015/05)

Mr Mekouar asked FFOA treasurer Mr Gianni Monciotti to present the Financial Reports for 2014 and the proposed Budget for 2016. Mr Monciotti indicated that FFOA's financial situation had been satisfactory overall. There had been a slight

increase in new enrolments and yearly renewals. The annual Members' payments went up to Euro 14,430.00 while contributions received from life members decreased a little compared to 2013. Expenditures have also been kept under control. In this regard, he urged members to opt for email communication, which would both ensure timely contact, and reduce costs related to printing and mailing. He affirmed that the accounts had been examined and certified by the FFOA Reviewers, and he asked the Assembly to reconfirm Msrs John McGhie and Bernd Käss as reviewers for the 2015 accounts. The budget was approved and the Reviewers were reconfirmed by the adoption of Resolutions "C", "D", "E" and "F" of document FFOA/GA/2015/06.

15. Other Business

As no proposals were received from the members, Mr Mekouar handed the meeting over to the President of FFOA to deal with any other business and the closure of the meeting.

Mr Prien thanked everyone who contributed to the success of the meeting. He urged members to consider joining the Executive Committee, encouraged members to update their e-mail address, and invited everyone to observe a moment of silence to commemorate all retired staff that had passed away during the past year. In addition, he informed members that the updated document "Before and After" with useful information for UN pensioners and their survivors had been posted on the FFOA Website and it is also available in hard copy. He also announced that Mr McGhie and Ms Prien were making a collection for the old folks home adjacent to FAO at the end of the meeting and encouraged participants to be generous. He encouraged all participants to attend the afternoon session from 14:30 to 15:30 on issues and conclusions reached at the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) presented by Mr Mekouar.

16. Closure of the Forty-fifth Session of the General Assembly

Mr Prien, President of FFOA, officially closed the Assembly at 13.20 hours.

The Forty-sixth Session of the General Assembly

will take place on

Wednesday 25 May 2016 at 9:45 hours

at WFP Headquarters

So plan ahead, mark it in your calendars, and
please come along and bring this report with you.