

Former FAO and Other UN Staff Association



FFOA/GA/2021/03

PROVISIONAL REPORT

Fiftieth Session of the General Assembly

Wednesday, 28 October 2020 Virtual Meeting via Zoom

11 Opening of the Fiftieth Session of the General Assembly

The President of the FFOA, Mr Edward Seidler opened the Session at 9:30 hours, welcoming guests and participants. Mr Seidler noted that this Session of the Assembly coincided with the 50th Anniversary of FFOA. The Assembly was privileged to have the Director General of FAO Dr Qu Dongyu among the guest speakers.. To take the floor one had to raise one's hand virtually and announce one's name. He also announced that the session was being recorded and the proceedings would be available after the session for those who had to leave the session prematurely or those who could not log on. There would be no afternoon session. The intention was to conclude the meeting at 13.00 hours as interpretation was available only until that time.

21 Establishment of a Quorum and Announcement of the Number of Proxies declared Valid

Mr Seidler announced that a quorum was achieved and 3 proxies had been received; thus, all decisions would be binding, including on those members not present. He declared the meeting officially opened and constituted in accordance with the Articles of the Association.

31 Nomination of Rapporteur and Announcement of the Interpretation

Mr Seidler announced that Ms Mariam Ahmed, the FFOA Deputy General Secretary, would serve as Rapporteur for the Provisional Report of the General Assembly. He announced that the meeting would be conducted in two languages- English and Italian - and that interpretation would be from English to Italian only. He thanked FAO for providing the interpretation and audiovisuals services.



FAO Director General, Dr QU Dongyu

41 Greetings by the FAO Director General, Dr QU Dongyu¹

The Director General of FAO, Dr Qu Dongyu recalled that last year he had promised the President of FFOA of his commitment to engage with FFOA and the FFOA General Assembly was a most opportune moment to do so. The Assembly was an important and memorable occasion to demonstrate how much he valued the contribution of the retiree staff to the work of FAO, the RBAs and the entire UN system. Dr Qu congratulated FFOA on its 50th anniversary and assured of FAO's support and solidarity to the Association's activities. He recalled that FAO had just celebrated its 75th anniversary. It could be seen from the social media and the FAO web how FAO had created a new way to celebrate through video mapping on FAO's building, the Organization 's history in the UN system. While the presentation was only 3 minutes in duration it had a powerful global impact. Dr.Qu informed the Assembly that he had been designated Chief of Security for Italy by the UN Secretary General and therefore responsible for the security of all the UN staff in Italy. Dr Qu shared the progress made by his Administration to FAO's reform, including the solidarity and support shown by member countries to face a new purpose and challenge that reform measures will bring. These measures had started by the reform of the structure of FAO to make it more agile, more efficient and more responsive to meet the new challenges. This was evidenced during the pandemic in making a quick shift from physical meetings to virtual meetings and from in person working to teleworking and, in this way, FAO had been able to maintain delivery working closely with member countries on the ground through the FAO offices in 134 countries and also building better coherence between Headquarters and the decentralized offices, especially the Regional and Sub-regional offices.



The Director General also referred to the establishment of separate offices for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Innovation and the LDCs and Landlocked Countries and also an Office for Climate Change and Biodiversity and an Office for more cross sectoral coordination. He pointed to the need for further strengthening the potential of the FAO Investment Centre and its links with other international financial Institutions and Funds. He also referred to strengthening the collaboration with WHO on Codex and Food Safety issues and also on transboundary animal and pest diseases, adopting the One Health approach. Another area was the creation of a Centre of collaboration with the IAEA. Dr Qu noted that IAEA had no country or regional offices and thus could use FAO's country and regional offices to enhance their country outreach. IAEA had excellent and advanced technology for peaceful use but needed FAO's technical capacity for its use in agriculture.

Dr Qu also referred to 3 Streams of which one Stream was for Partnerships, a second Stream for strengthening the link between the environment and agricultural crops, fishery and forestry and crop production and protection -a core value for FAO. A third Stream was the broadening of social and economic policy to cover more areas on agro-food systems and nutrition. The broadened concept of the agro-food transformation system was more encompassing than the food system which was limited to just food. He noted that the "New" FAO should be transparent, accountable, inclusive innovative and dynamic. Since he had taken office in August 2019, he believed that he had "walked the talk". All international recruitment was undertaken through an open approach. All senior positions were advertised and attracting high quality and talented candidates. Dr Qu stated that his aim was to build a more dynamic organization that would attract higher caliber candidates.

Internally the Director General had created dialogue between the retired community and the new employees, also a Youth Committee and a Women Committee. The Youth Committee had played a critically important role during the lockdown in keeping the Organization dynamic and innovative. In regard to gender balance and recruitment of women, the Director General noted that there were currently two female Deputy Director Generals, the Chief Advisor, Director for Human Resources, and the Director of the Legal Office which were all female. The change had started from the senior level and he intended to pursue these reforms at the middle and junior level. He referred to the concept of Co-Leadership which was composed of six officers to share information and work as a team. The reforms and change were visible and the next year would be focused on delivery. He wanted staff to be more accountable as salaries were paid by member countries. Due to the pandemic FAO had a recovery program for building back better. In implementing the new strategic framework, Dr Qu expressed appreciation for the support of the staff. He also recognized the wisdom of the retired or senior staff who could provide a valuable contribution to FAO's work. He wished everyone well and reaffirmed FAO's support to FFOA which he viewed as an important part of FAO.

The President thanked the Director General of FAO for his inspirational words and expressed his appreciation to see the change in the FAO Administration and the support that is being provided by the FAO Social Security in the medical insurance, pension issues, etc. Mr Seidler noted that we were all part of the UN family and even though we had retired we were still associated with FAO and the other RBAs. Many of us had devoted 20 or even 30 years of our working life to the Agencies and we were all very proud to have been associated with the RBAs. The President expressed



his appreciation for the words of the Director General in regard to the retirees being included in the work of FAO and FAO supporting the retirees in their golden years.

51 Election of the Presiding Officer of the Fiftieth Session of the General Assembly

Mr Alan Prien, former, IFAD Director of Human Resources, was proposed to act as Presiding Officer to chair the Assembly. He was elected by acclamation and welcomed to the Chair by Mr Seidler.

Mr Prien said it was an honour and a pleasure to preside over the Fiftieth Session of the General Assembly and extended a warm welcome to all members.

61 Adoption of the Provisional Agenda (FFOA/GA/2020/02)

As no proposals for changes were received before the deadline of 28 September 2020, the Provisional Agenda was adopted as presented. He informed the Assembly that after the adoption of the agenda by the General Assembly no new items could be proposed.

71 Provisional Report of the 49th Session of the General Assembly (FFOA/GA/2020/03)

The Presiding Officer proposed the adoption of the Provisional Report of the 49th Session of the FFOA General Assembly. (which had been sent out last Fall to all members and no comments had been received). The Presiding Officer therefore proposed to adopt **Resolution A of Document FFOA /GA/2020/06**. The Report was adopted.

81 Report of the Executive Committees¹

The Presiding Officer requested Ms Georgia Shaver, Vice President FFOA to update the 2019 report and provide a brief account of the major developments between 1 January 2020 and the present time.

Ms. Shaver informed the Assembly of some of the highlights of the Association's activities during 2019. In this regard she referred to the FFOA Executive Committee's meeting with the Director General of FAO, providing a brief on the Association's activities and raising specific issues which were positively received and acted upon by him. The FFOA had worked tirelessly with the managements and staff representatives of the three RBAs for the tender of the medical insurance plans and although each agency had taken a different path, FFOA was able to ensure full participation in each of the respective Committees by prioritizing acceptable coverage of reasonable and sustainable premiums for participants, especially retirees. FFOA supported the RBAs organized Townhall meetings with CIGNA representatives to explain the new medical insurance plan to retirees. FFOA had consistently monitored implementation of the medical plans and raised medical insurance issues, monitoring performance and acting on problems brought to FFOA's attention by members. FFOA was able to stop retroactive payment of premium insurance increases which were announced in 2018 and foreseen for 2019. Moreover, the Association was able to stop FAO from applying an ad hoc premium increase for retirees in 2019. FFOA



continued to participate in Staff Pension Committees, act as a close collaborator of FAFICS and act as a contributor of content to the Pension Board meeting. Membership was a priority for the Association and various efforts had been made to attract new members through the Pre-Retirement Service Program, by decreasing suspended members and having more life membership, which enabled FFOA to keep a stable membership for 2019. FFOA worked continuously to update and clean up its databases and maintain the recreational and social activities which were many in 2019 and to keep members continuously informed through News briefs and other communications by e-mail as well as the website. As was well known in 2020 everything changed and FFOA had to also change and make adjustments in 2020 in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic which had forced FFOA to put many of its projects on hold. However, this did not stop the Association from adjusting its program of work and prioritizing the flow of issues of importance to members. FFOA issued regular bulletins about the closure of the RBAs to retirees highlighting its impact on the availability to retirees of in-house services and continued to issue the News briefs. FFOA also organized a successful virtual meeting with CIGNA representatives. FFOA had just issued a brochure on the 50 years of FFOA and the Association had been able to hold its General Assembly, albeit a few months latter virtually. The Executive Committee had never stopped working and had been continuously in touch with the RBA Managements, attended staff pension committees, joined and initiated conversations on health insurance issues and had been regularly briefed by the RBAs on the action and response to COVID-19 and the impact on staff and services. FFOA also participated in the Retirement Seminars organized by FAO. Ms Shaver expressed the hope that things return to normal as soon as possible but until such time the Association would not stop working for its membership.

Reply by the Presiding Officer¹

The Presiding Officer thanked Ms Shaver and noted that unless any member wished to comment he proposed the adopting the 2019 report under Resolution B of document FFOA/GA/2020/06. The Resolution was adopted.

91 Report of the Association's Financial Transactions¹

The Presiding Officer invited Mr Gianni Monciotti, Treasurer, FFOA, to present the financial reports for 2020 and the proposed budget for 2021.

At the outset Mr Monciotti apologized for not being able to present documentation on the financial transactions and the certification of the accounts by the Reviewers but he assured that this document was with him. He was happy to announce that the FFOA accounts closed with a positive balance between income and expenditure as compared with the closure of 2018 when the budget experienced a deficit of almost Euros 8,000. Moreover, there were no carry over of any liabilities which were all settled by December 2019. The surplus accrued was used for undertaking some new investments. Mr Monciotti proceeded to illustrate the data in the financial documents and the different accounts held by the Banca Intesa San Paolo, the United Nations Federal Credit Union, (UNFCU), the Banca di Sondrio, the latter account was not an operational account but a reserve for the “rainy day”. In

regard to the proposed budget for 2021, Mr Monciotti noted that this did not differ much from the one for 2020. He then referred to the appointment of the reviewers for 2020 and he requested the Assembly to accept the proposal of the FFOA Executive Committee to reconfirm as the Association's Reviewers Mr John McGhie and Mr David Baugh who had both agreed to accept this appointment if confirmed.

The Presiding Officer thanked Mr Monciotti and his team, in particular Mr Pino Pace and Mr Sino Tesfamariam for their contribution to the preparation of the financial documents and added that under the proposed budget there would be no increase in membership fees. There being no comments from the floor, the Presiding Officer proposed that the report on the financial transactions be adopted. He proposed that the General Assembly adopt Resolutions C, D, E and F of document FFOA/GA/2020/06. It was so decided.

101 Health Insurance¹

The Presiding Officer noted that under the item on Health Insurance several speakers had been invited, namely Pierre Moreau Peron of IFAD, David Fontana of WFP and Ms Shasha You from the Social Security Service of FAO and they would be requested to briefly present their experience in their first year of operations with CIGNA. These speakers would be followed by Ms Katja Habets and her team from CIGNA to make their presentation.

Mr Pierre Moreau Peron noted that in what was a transition period to the new medical insurance provider, CIGNA, they had experienced some teething issues both of a technical nature and related to the appropriateness of claims processing. IFAD had worked closely with CIGNA to address these issues engaging with the team on a weekly basis. Most of the issues were tackled and the solutions were in line with the goals of the Service Level Agreement. Further improvements of the KPIs have emerged in the statistics of the last quarter. From IFAD's perspective, CIGNA had proved to be a proactive partner responding to the problems highlighted by the Organization and its members taking necessary action to improve its service to satisfy its clients. At the last Progress meeting CIGNA reinforced its commitment to tackle outstanding issues and presented a detailed action plan to move from the transition period to the regular business, including the boosting of customer service



Ms Katja Habets,
Principle Client Manager
of CIGNA



Mr Pierre Moreau-Peron,
Director Human Resources,
IFAD

teams for claim processing and responding to queries through upscaling and training of staff, as well as a communication campaign to keep members informed on the requirements when submitting a claim. Mr Moreau Peron then proceeded to highlight some actions taken to date, notably, a specific information flyer on medication related to the reimbursement of pharmaceutical products. A virtual seminar was held in May 2020 to assist staff and retirees with major issues and collect feedback in order to address remaining bottlenecks. He noted however that there still remained some communication challenges, both internally and externally, which IFAD continued to monitor and discuss with CIGNA. CIGNA is currently working with the three RBAs to clarify the concept of “Prior Approval” and direct billing, which was very important, and would soon release a flyer on the specific procedure to follow on these issues. The flyer would be widely disseminated among members to ensure a smooth processing of claims and avoid bottlenecks and delay. In terms of the contractual relationship with IFAD, Mr Moreau Peron mentioned that there was a clause for the possibility to have a survey at the end of the year. IFAD was reflecting on this matter and he noted that the retirees’ views would be precious in this reflection. IFAD was to decide whether or not to conduct the survey this year or next year when the two other RBAs will also have their feedback. As a strong supporter of RBA collaboration, this latter option would be favoured. He suggested that even though the contracts were different, the three RBAs could have the same survey questions and it would be interesting to compare the separate experience of the three RBAs also in terms of benchmarking. If there were no objections, IFAD could be tempted to defer the survey to next year so as to include all RBAs as an example of good joint collaboration instead of IFAD doing the survey in 2020 alone. Mr Moreau Peron referred to the issue of premiums, especially important for the retirees. He noted that in the formula for their calculations, both for the BMIP and the MMBP, IFAD’s net loss ratio was beneath 75% (in other words, premiums paid exceeded claims processed). Accordingly, he did not foresee an increase in premiums in January 2021.

He admitted that although CIGNA’s claims processing was not perfect, with differences emerging with ALLIANZ, it had to be underlined that CIGNA was adhering more stringently to the rules and had a less lenient approach. While such an approach may appear stringent today, this would make the medical insurance plan more resilient over time. It was also positive to note that while the three RBAs had signed separate contracts with CIGNA, many commonalities remained, and the three RBAs technical teams continue to consult and engage in dialogue to find viable solutions with similar approaches for the Rome-based UN family.

Mr Moreau Peron provided the contacts of the Social Security team in IFAD to help retirees on emerging issues. He reminded that the ASHI premiums were still managed by FAO however any query could be addressed to their social security team. In regard to the flu vaccine for retirees, he recognized that this was indeed a challenge

for those non-Italians outside the Italian National Health scheme. He added that unfortunately IFAD had not received sufficient quantities even for its staff members, however if more supplies were received, he would make sure that the retirees could avail of them. IFAD had made available to all retirees certain services, including a box at the main entrance where retirees could deposit their annual Certificates of Existence to the UNJSPF and medical claims. All documents were sent by the IFAD mail room by a special courier to the UNJSPF in New York and CIGNA. In conclusion, he wished everyone and their families to stay safe and well.

The Presiding Officer thanked Mr Moreau Peron for the excellent overview. The best news for the retirees, especially those who were on relatively smaller pensions, was the hope that at the end of the year there would be no further fee increases in health insurance. He invited Ms Shasha You of FAO to take the floor.

Ms Shasha You, Social Security FAO noted that the FAO Social Security team had been closely collaborating with FFOA through the JAC/MAC to conduct effective consultations about various aspects of the medical insurance plans and that FFOA's contribution was highly appreciated and many representatives of the FFOA were valued as alumni and useful resources of expertise to the work of the Organization and FAO Social Security. Ms You expressed her appreciation for the continued support of the FFOA colleagues and assured that the transparent and excellent collaboration would continue to be enhanced in the future and in particular at this time of the disruption of the work due to the global health crisis. She recalled that CIGNA had been selected as the new medical insurance provider for the FAO staff and retirees starting from 1 January 2020. She also noted that FAO went through a very intensive transition period from November 2019 until March 2020 involving the transfer of a large volume of data from the previous insurer, ALLIANZ, to the new service provider, CIGNA, which proved to be quite challenging. In the first months several townhall meetings were organized, as well as weekly touchpoint operational meetings with the CIGNA team to discuss and resolve individual cases which were brought to their attention. The partnership between FAO and CIGNA had been moving smoothly. Frequent and timely reports were received from the CIGNA client manager and dedicated service teams. The After Service Medical Team in Budapest Shared Service Centre had been working remotely in the past months due to the COVID-19 lockdown and there was some disruption in responding to inquiries and providing payroll information. She informed of the recent FAO internal meeting on the medical insurance plan with the participation of FFOA representatives. The meeting reviewed a lot of operational issues, including the renewal formula and the projection of the future premiums. In regard to the first three quarters of the medical insurance plan, FAO's consumption ratio is 83% for the Europe plan and 84 % for the US dollar plan. If the same trend was maintained, then no premium increases were foreseen for 2021. However, the

Ms Shasha You,
Social Security Services,
FAO





final renewal formula and the final performance of the plan will be confirmed in January 2021.

Ms You noted that during the COVID-19 pandemic months the FAO Social Security had been extremely busy in finalizing the Certificates of Entitlement and participated in the UNJSPF Pension Board Meetings and reviewed various documents and processed all pension related documents electronically without any disruption. Various outreach programmes on telehealth were conducted on medical insurance for staff members and former colleagues. FAO Social Security also assisted families of the retirees in the current challenging situation.

Ms You also briefed on the continued collaboration with WFP and IFAD on the medical insurance plan with frequent communication between the technical teams ensuring an aligned approach for common issues, sharing experiences and brainstorming various initiatives. A joint JAC/MAC meeting was envisaged for November 2020 to review common issues related to BMIP.

During the COVID-19 lockdown and in response to FFOA's request, in order to facilitate the processing of the Pension Certificate of Entitlement and medical claims (as many preferred to send these in hard copy), FAO exceptionally allowed retirees to use the services on FAO premises following exceptional preventive measures.

Ms You noted that she was attending the General Assembly with a team of HR and Social Security Staff who were committed to serve all the staff, and especially the retirees as former colleagues and their dependents, as a matter of utmost importance, and ensuring quality.

The Presiding Officer thanked Ms You for her presentation and for re-echoing Mr Moreau Peron's hope that there would be no medical insurance premium increases.

The Presiding Officer invited Ms Katja Habets, Principle Client Manager of CIGNA to brief the Assembly and introduce her team. Ms Habets thanked the Presiding Officer for the invitation to the FFOA General Assembly and congratulated the Association on its 50th Anniversary. She stated that CIGNA was very proud to serve the former staff members of the Rome based agencies, both in terms of numbers (representing (about 35% of the total BMIP population), but also in terms of the utilization of the benefits, representing thus a major customer of CIGNA. Therefore, the former staff members' customer satisfaction was important to CIGNA.

Ms Habets introduced the CIGNA delegation attending the Assembly, Mr Paul Debrabandere, Director Client Management, Vanessa Vermeulen (On-boarding Manager), Lisbeth Van Reeth (Health Operations Manager), Dr Isabel Cuevas Casado, (Medical Consultant), Michael Roy (Client Liaison Manager) and the two Rome-based representatives, Valeria Cara (local representative) and Solange Fichet (Nurse Case Manager). Ms Habets proceeded to speak to a shared screen presentation on CIGNA 's experience over the past 9 months (which would be made available to all members after the meeting). The three major highlights of this experience could be summarized as follows:

- Transition Massive Project
- Trusted Partnership with Policyholders; and
- Implementing a Robust Action Plan.

The CIGNA team recognized that there had been teething problems in the initial transition period which CIGNA acknowledged and was committed to resolve

going forward. The CIGNA team appreciated the feedback received from the RBAs and FFOA and confirmed the need to achieve better balance, reduce bureaucratic bottlenecks and improve communication. The CIGNA team also elaborated the corrective measures being undertaken to improve services.

The Presiding Officer invited Mr David Fontana to brief the Assembly on WFP's experience to date with CIGNA.

Mr Fontana referred to the slide of the power point presentation relating to the challenges that CIGNA was working on and noted that he very much concurred that these indeed represented the feedback that WFP had received from its members, including the retirees and which had been escalated by WFP and on which they were working. The issues highlighted included cumbersome bureaucratic procedures in terms of communication not being clear when claims are rejected or when more information is requested. From WFP's perspective, he felt that the Prior Approval procedure was unclear as when prior approval is to be requested and what the procedure is.

Mr Fontana confirmed that CIGNA was demonstrating openness to WFP's feedback and requests and that they were not shying away from working together. He acknowledged the positive relationship with WFP, and he was very optimistic that the level of satisfaction in client servicing would be increased over time.

The Presiding Officer asked Mr Fontana whether WFP could also share the hope of IFAD and FAO that premiums would not be increased in 2021.

Mr Fontana responded that WFP had a two-year contract with CIGNA and therefore there would be no premium increase next year. In 2022 there could be a possible revision of premiums payable to CIGNA. As of now there was no premium increase foreseen for WFP members.

The Presiding Officer thanked Mr Fontana and opened the floor for questions. He referred to a question addressed to CIGNA communicated to him by a member who could not be present. i.e. How often and in what manner does CIGNA review the ceilings for "reasonable and customary rates?"

"Ms Habets responded by saying that the review of reasonable and customary ceilings was established by contract and there is a yearly review based on the 18 preceding months of claims. Therefore, a more thorough review was expected to be conducted during the second half of 2021.

A second question related to the limit of Euro 400 for any medical examination which if exceeded needed prior approval.

Ms Habets responded that the amount of Euro 400 comes up whenever resorting to in network services. If undergoing major interventions or medical examinations with significant expenses the Euro 400 represented a guarantee of payment. This ceiling had actually increased from Euro 200. CIGNA required that the service provider themselves approach CIGNA for the guarantee of payment. There was

Mr David Fontana,
Chief, Health Insurance,
WFP





some diversity of approach among some service providers- with some still using the Euro 200 ceiling but most were adhering to the Euro 400 ceiling. The information relating to the procedures followed by the in-network providers for in-patients and out-patients were available on the CIGNA website.

A subsidiary question related to a procedural issue on whether it was the service provider who had to contact CIGNA for the guarantee of payment or for the insured member. In this regard, it was noted that in the experience of one member an in-network service provider had told the insured member that it was his responsibility to contact CIGNA and not for the service provider to do so. What would be the procedure to be followed in this case? CIGNA appreciated the feedback received and noted that CIGNA was the first to acknowledge that in Italy there was some confusion among certain service providers in the first months of the contract on the procedure for the direct billing.

A possible channel to raise these issues was to contact the local CIGNA contact person or write to the CIGNA e-mail address used for the prior approval and the guarantee of payment. CIGNA would then contact the service provider and clarify the procedure to be followed. The CIGNA representative welcomed this type of feedback to further improve their service.

Another question related to COVID-19. Since the opening up of international travel most governments in agreement with the airlines required all passengers to have a swab test at least 72 hours before boarding and the swab test expense had to be borne by the passenger. In some countries this test was very expensive, more than US\$ 200, and as the result was required in 72 hours CIGNA was asked to confirm that this expense was not reimbursed by CIGNA. CIGNA confirmed that COVID-19 tests related to personal travel were not reimbursed by CIGNA. In some cases, on arrival in the country of destination another test was required and if positive the passenger had to make his or her arrangements for quarantine. This exercise could prove very expensive and CIGNA was asked to review their procedure for this type of expenses. CIGNA responded that as this related to personal travel, unrelated to medical requirements, the contract with CIGNA did not envisage reimbursement of this type of expense. The Presiding Officer expressed his disappointment at CIGNA's position on this matter. He requested the CIGNA representatives to request their senior management to reconsider the reimbursement of COVID-19 expenses. Ms Habets promised to reconsider the matter internally and informed that the waiver of 20% of the cost of COVID-19 related tests to be borne by the member, originally effective until 31 October 2020, had been extended until 31 January 2021.

A question was asked in regard to when a fee charged by a surgeon is not considered "reasonable and customary" and therefore the guarantee of payment would not be issued. In these cases, it was questioned what criteria was used by CIGNA to determine "reasonable and customary" fees especially by surgeons and if CIGNA had a list of standard fees charged by surgeons for some common ailments especially affecting retirees e.g. cataract surgery, to determine what constituted reasonable and customary fees. Cigna responded that the term "reasonable and customary" was defined in the contract in terms of what was acceptable as fees for a particular treatment. CIGNA had a range of what was considered and for Italy this was being studied on the basis of 18 months of claims processing and the results would be made available in 2021. Another subsidiary question related to why CIGNA questioned or did not accept and requested justification for treatment which

had been ongoing for a number of years and which had been previously reimbursed by Van Breda and Allianz. CIGNA noted it did not have the medical records and case histories of patients and had to start from scratch and therefore had to ask for justification.

Another member noted that WFP had a two-year contract while IFAD had a one-year contract. He wondered whether the Assembly could resuscitate the issue and pass a resolution that all three Rome based agencies have a single contract.

The Presiding Officer noted that previously FFOA had tried to work towards a single contract for the three Rome based agencies but unfortunately that had not been the case; however, he assured that FFOA would continue to work towards this objective.

In conclusion, the CIGNA representatives noted that an important take away had been the perception that CIGNA asked for excessive information and justification in the claim processing exercise and had taken note of it. They assured that they requested additional information only where it was required. The intention was not to question and control to reduce costs but to partner better by getting the requisite information from the health care providers, doctors, hospitals to have a complete picture of the situation to ensure the best care. This was a different perception and experience which CIGNA hoped would be seen going forward and not one of distrust.

111 Pension Matters

The Presiding Officer informed that the Assembly had received a video message from Ms Rosemarie McClean the new Chief Executive for pension administration at the UNJSPF who due to the time difference was unable to join the Assembly.

Ms McClean stated that she had intended to visit Rome and meet the FFOA in person but was unfortunately unable to do so due to the COVID-19 pandemic. She expressed the hope that she would be able to do so in the near future.

At the outset Ms. McClean congratulated WFP on the award of the Nobel Peace Prize most richly deserved recognition of their hard work. She noted that one of her



Ms Rosemarie McClean,
Chief Executive of Pension Administration, UNJSPF



first priorities upon taking office in January 2020 was to define a new strategy for pension administration which had gained wide support, including by the Pension Board at its meeting in July 2020. The new strategy was conceived with a vision for transforming the Fund, increasing efficiency and establishing a more dextrous workplace. At the centre of the strategy is a vision of continued modernization of the Fund's operations and that of a service-oriented Pension Fund which provides outstanding, high quality services to member organizations, participants and beneficiaries. The Strategy consists of a 3-year plan supported by 3 strategic pillars, notably (i) to simplify client experience; (ii) to modernize pension services, and (iii) to develop a strong global partnership network. Ms. McClean noted that COVID-19 had quickly started the modernization process. Furthermore, she stated that the Fund remained in very good actuarial health and so the pensions were safe despite the turbulent markets. She added that the value of the Fund's assets was higher today than it was at the end of 2019 when it was already at an all-time high of US\$ 72 billion. The Fund continued to improve its operational performance. To date, 90% of the new separation benefits were processed within 15 working days upon receipt of complete separation documentation thereby exceeding the Fund's benchmark of 75%. Pension payrolls had been paid out without any delay and this was particularly noteworthy for April when there had been a 2020 cost of living adjustment that had added complexity. The Fund started accepting separation documents in digital format as COVID-19 led to postal disruption hence making the reception of paper documents uncertain.

The Fund had continued to provide outreach and client support through its call centre without disruption. Over the past months the Fund had demonstrated a new agility and learning culture in implementing the structural and operational changes to ensure business continuity. The challenges posed by COVID-19 had highlighted further the need for paperless processes without compromising the integrity of the Fund's controls. The Fund had also successfully tested a digital Certificate of Entitlement with WFP and FAO and retirees' participation. This digitalized version will be proposed as an option in 2021. COVID-19 had shown that contact in person and postal mail could suffer disruption, but modern technology offered alternatives to stay in touch and deliver fast and reliable communication. Several years ago, the Fund launched the Member Self Service (MSS) on its website, and this was a good way for retirees to access forms and certificates, including the Certificate of Entitlement. Ms McClean stressed the importance now more than ever, of registering with the MSS and encouraged peers to do so. It was a simple process and the Fund's call centre could assist step-by-step.

In conclusion, Ms McClean conveyed her best wishes for a successful Assembly and welcomed

suggestions and feedback for the improvement of the Fund.

A video was shown demonstrating the innovative digital Certificate of Entitlement as part of the Fund's modernization drive.

121 Other Business

The Presiding Officer requested the FFOA President to make a few announcements. Mr Seidler noted that FFOA is the link between the RBAs retirees and the organizations; it is also the link and represents retirees' interests as these relate to



medical insurance and pension matters. It was therefore very important to recognize that one of the Association's main duties was communicating information and changes to its members. Mr Seidler therefore strongly encouraged all members to ensure that FFOA had an up-to-date e-mail address and if there was a change of address to inform FFOA so as to enable FFOA to communicate in a timely way and better with its members.

Mr Seidler expressed appreciation for the intervention of CIGNA at the Assembly. FFOA was in contact on a regular basis with CIGNA and with the RBA Social Security units in order to raise issues which are communicated to the Association by its members. Occasionally individual cases could be taken up but when there is an overall general issue this is then taken up with the RBAs who then take it up with CIGNA as the RBA Social Security Units are the policy holders and CIGNA is the claims processor. By going through the RBAs, the Association was in a better position to influence change in CIGNA.

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

Mr Ed Seidler read the statement of Ms Lenyara Fundukova, General Secretary of the IFAD Staff Association -ECSA- presented on behalf of the AP-in-FAO, WFP-PSA, the IFAD Staff Association, IFAD- ECSA, and the UGSS, the 3 RBAs Staff Associations and Unions confirming the intention of the Staff Associations to continually maintain and strengthen relations with FFOA.

At the outset the Staff Representative Bodies (SRBs) congratulated FFOA on its 50th anniversary, a key milestone and achievement which symbolized the determination and lasting success of the Association. The SRBs also congratulated WFP staff for their awarding of the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize. The award reflected the excellent work of every member of the WFP team. Working closely with WFP in many countries had provided an opportunity to witness WFP's determination and passion, which held the noblest goal: to reach and aid the poor as well as those in great need. The Staff Association also congratulated FAO colleagues for their 75th anniversary. As many FFOA members had contributed to building these organizations into what they are today, their success belongs to FFOA as well, and should be celebrated appropriately.

Maintaining strong relations amongst our organizations was essential, but it was through staff representation that helped maintain unity. Representing staff was fundamental, especially during these difficult times. It is through staff excellence and determination that it was possible to overcome the difficulties, which had presented themselves since earlier this year.

FFOA members were a continuing part of the UN family and the Staff Association certainly shared its interests and concerns that have been recently put into the brighter light. First, the impact of COVID-19 has certainly complicated life in general, and particularly illuminated unprecedented areas of concern for staff and retirees. Thus, the health and safety issues managed to secure the forefront of every agenda, but also the fact that it should be supported by good quality and well-functioning medical insurance, as well as access to medical professionals. The start of the pandemic overlapped with the change of the insurance provider for the three RBAs because of last year's joint tender. The change itself had its own complexities, and both staff and retirees faced plentiful issues adjusting to the new provider,



process and requirements. COVID-19 has added to that complexity and revealed several issues that previously had not been taken into consideration.

Beyond good physical health, the SRBs also recognized that these challenging times had inevitably created an increased need for positive mental health. Changing of routines, isolation and uncertainty had unfortunately become the new norm, particularly among those who are forced to be alone, away from relatives and friends. The only way to combat this reality was by strengthening staff collaboration, mutual support and a great deal of empathy. In this process, the role of our associations was instrumental in providing a helping hand and supporting those in need. Besides, maintaining the social security aspect had been of particular importance. It may appear that pensions are of sole importance to retirees, but this was in fact essential to current staff members as well. As the UN Pension Fund continues to experience major reforms, it was necessary for our organizations to learn through the experience of FFOA members and come together on an agreed course of action. The SRBs expressed the hope that the FFOA will help them advocate for these issues.

Aside from discussing important issues, the SRBs emphasized the need to continually strengthen and maintain relations with FFOA which had the institutional knowledge, expertise and experience that our associations certainly could benefit from. Appreciation was also expressed for the consistent support provided by FFOA members to the IFAD Staff Association and IFAD Credit Union, as well as the collaboration with the FAO and WFP Staff Associations and Unions. Given this, the SRBs would appreciate FFOA's support and collaboration on a number of topics, particularly, in regard to strategic advice, HR and communication expertise that would indeed help them in performing their duties as staff representatives.

The need to stay together could not be sufficiently emphasized and to aid one another during this time of never-ending uncertainties, both in our environments and institutions. They looked forward to building better-coordinated actions and enhancing mutual exchange of information.

131 50th Anniversary Presentation

The 50th Anniversary presentation was made by Mr. Pino Pace from the FFOA Executive Committee. He regretted that the celebrations could not be held in person and had been constrained due to the situation prevailing since March. He noted that such an anniversary deserved to be supported by a series of initiatives to pay tribute to the enthusiasm, effort and dedication that our past and current colleagues had invested over such a long period in assisting and preserving the interests of our membership in various stages of their retirement. He referred to one of the main initiatives in the production of the brochure on the FFOA history. The brochure was prepared by the three RBAs and had been distributed electronically and by mail to all members. He noted that the brochure represented an excellent example of RBAs collaboration and thanked all involved in the preparation of the document, including the RBAs Management in ensuring availability of different services for the preparation, design, printing and despatching of the document. Mr Pace hoped that in going through the document the various achievements of the Association would be appreciated in its contribution to the resolution of various issues relating to health insurance, pensions, support to special events and its assistance to its membership through a comprehensive communication programme. The brochure contained



photos of members, some of whom were no longer among us, who had played a key role in the success and achievements of the Association. A special pin had also been prepared with the 50th anniversary logo to commemorate the event. Since under the current circumstances it would be costly to distribute the pin to all our members, it had been decided to store it until such time when it can be collected visiting the FFOA

offices. He further indicated that the celebration in person had envisaged other events such as a lunch, projection of historical pictures, exchanges of views and greetings among old friends and colleagues as well as a lot of other initiatives.

He invited members to provide their feedback, views, comments and recollections they may wish to share.

141 Closure of the 50th Session of the General Assembly

In conclusion, the Assembly observed a moment of silence for the members who had passed away during the course of the year and in particular those who had passed due to COVID-19, namely Charles Juge, Jim Ball and Wolf Klohn, all from FAO. A special mention was made of the loss of our friend and colleague Aurelio Marcucci who was well known to many, a stalwart supporter of staff relations, and FFOA, a Vice President of FFOA and who had been instrumental in promoting FFOA interests in bodies such as FICSA and FAFICS.

In closing, the President thanked the Presiding Officer, Mr Alan Prien for so ably conducting the General Assembly, the interpreters, the FFOA IT team, Alessandro Bertini and Maurizio Palmisano and the membership for their participation and feedback in the General Assembly.

Mr Seidler informed the Assembly of the intention to establish a link which permitted members to revisit and view the proceedings of the Assembly at one's own leisure. He also thanked the Staff Associations of the RBAs for their message of support and he looked forward to further cooperation with all the associations and unions and to have a meaningful and successful interlocuter arrangement with the RBAs Managements.

The President of the FFOA closed the 50th Session of the General Assembly at 13:00 hours.

The Fifty-one Session of the General Assembly

should take place on
Wednesday, 27 October 2021
Conditions permitting

So plan ahead, mark this date in your calendar

And bring this report with you