

# **ASSOCIATION OF FORMER UNESCO STAFF MEMBERS (AFUS)**

## **Annual General Assembly**

**Thirty-Second Session, 28 May 2024**

**(Room IX, in remote mode)**

### **Provisional Report**

Chair: Jacques Rao

Vice-Chair: Vèrène Séret-Mukamusoni

Rapporteur: Georges Poussin

#### **Item 1: Opening of the session by the President**

As the quorum has not been reached by 2.30 p.m., Josiane Taillefer, President of AFUS, calls the meeting to order at 2:35 p.m. She thanks the participants in attendance, as well as those attending remotely, sometimes from considerable distances.

She pays tribute to the many former colleagues who have passed away since the previous General Assembly in 2023, some two hundred of them since 2022. She extends her deepest sympathies to their families and friends, with a special thought to Josette Erfan, Secretary-General of the AFUS who, for many years, provided invaluable support to the Association, in addition to running its cultural activities.

#### **Item 2: Election of the Bureau of the General Assembly**

The President of AFUS presents the list of candidates proposed by the Executive Committee (COMEX):

- Chair: Jacques Rao
- Vice-Chair: Vèrène Séret-Mukamusoni
- Rapporteur: Georges Poussin.

The three candidates are elected unanimously by acclamation.

Josiane Taillefer passes the floor to the Chair of the Session, Jacques Rao.

The Chair thanks all the participants for their confidence and congratulates Vèrene Séret-Mukamusoni and Georges Poussin on their election. He also thanks Fadhel Douiri for the fine video of the New Year gathering presented prior to the opening the Session. He introduces the other officials on the rostrum and reminds the assembly that interventions can be made in either English or French, but that simultaneous interpretation is unavailable. Lastly, he greets the colleagues who are attending in remote mode, with special thanks to those in different time zones.

### **Item 3: Statement by the Director-General or her Representative**

The Director-General, Audrey Azoulay, is represented by Nicholas Jeffreys, Assistant Director-General for Administration and Management (ADG/ADM), who is welcomed and given the floor by the Chair.

Nicholas Jeffreys expresses his pleasure at addressing those whose daily efforts have helped to shape the UNESCO of today, and praises their commitment to the Organization's aim of fostering peace through culture and cooperation between peoples: "Your experience and advice guide us in the implementation of programmes that promote intercultural understanding and respect for human rights."

He quotes the philosopher Michel Foucault's assertion that "*human rights are above all a struggle to ensure that the dignity of each individual is respected in all circumstances*," an overarching mission of UNESCO under the specific circumstances of today's world.

Young international civil servants know they can count on the support of former staff in their efforts to meet the Organization's intellectual demands, in orienting their careers, and preparing for "well-deserved" retirements, he adds, asserting that "Former staff members are, and always will be, part of the 'UNESCO family.'"

He mentions the ADM Sector's close attention to pension and health insurance matters, which are also of interest to retirees, in the framework of deliberations of the Governing Bodies (EXB, GC), and other relevant instances (CCPPNU/UNJSPF, CAM/MBF, IOS/JIU).

The Chair thanks Nicholas Jeffreys on behalf of the assembly and asks him to convey his best wishes to the Director-General for the remainder of her term of office. He also thanks all the units of the Secretariat which contribute to the efforts of AFUS (HRM, BFM, CLD, MDS, SPI).

The President of AFUS echoes the comments of the Chair and adds her thanks to Mr Xing Qu, the Deputy Director-General, for his constant availability and attention to AFUS, particularly in relation to pension and health insurance matters, notifications of retirements, provision of meeting rooms, pre-retirement sessions planned jointly with HRM, and the support provided to the journal *Link*. She thanks Nicholas Jeffreys for his participation in the AFUS luncheon earlier this year, a gesture of friendship that was much appreciated.

#### **Item 4: Election of Tellers**

The Chair introduces the candidates for the positions of Tellers: Aimée Ravonison and Wolfgang Vollmann. They are elected unanimously by acclamation. Jacques Rao congratulates them and thanks them for their contribution.

#### **Item 5: Adoption of the Agenda (doc.32A/1)**

The agenda is unanimously adopted without change. All working documents had been sent online. They remain available on the AFUS website and in the meeting room.

#### **Item 6: Approval of the Minutes of the Thirty-First Regular Session of the AGM (doc.32A/2)**

The minutes were approved unanimously by acclamation.

#### **Item 7: Presentation of candidates for the Executive Committee (doc.32A/3)**

The Chair reminds the Assembly that the Executive Committee (COMEX) comprises twelve members, one-third of whom are replaced each year. Outgoing members are eligible for re-election. Two outgoing members are standing for re-election: Patrick Gallaud and Jens Boel, Neda Ferrier is not standing for re-election and Josette Erfan unfortunately passed away during her term of office. There is also a fifth seat to be filled, which has remained vacant since the previous session of the Annual Assembly.

The AFUS receives the following five applications: Frances Albernaz, Jens Boel, Geneviève Fougère, Patrick Gallaud and Pilar Morel Vasquez.

Candidates are invited to introduce themselves briefly in alphabetical order.

The five candidates were unanimously approved by acclamation, in accordance with the Regulations, which provide for this possibility when the number of candidates is equal to the number of positions to be filled.

Following the elections, Tania Vella indicates that she would have liked to stand as a candidate. The President of the AFUS indicates that she had not received a letter in due form to that effect, reminding the Assembly that there should be other positions to fill in the coming year. In the meantime, she adds, Tania Vella is welcome to help the AFUS team. In particular, she is invited to write an article for *Link* on an artistic field, which she knows well. Tania Vella vows to cooperate with AFUS as appropriate.

The Chair thanks Tania Vella for her availability and congratulates the newly elected members of the COMEX, wishing them every success. He reminds everyone that their terms of office would take effect (on) 1st July and expresses delight in the fact that two-thirds of the COMEX's members are now women.

On behalf of the COMEX and of the General Assembly Geneviève Fougère and Christine Bruyère pay tribute to Josette Erfan for her outstanding contribution to AFUS as Secretary-General, and through her tireless dedication to its cultural activities.

Patrick Gallaud expresses in turn, on behalf of the COMEX and of the General Assembly, his warm thanks to Neda Ferrier, who is leaving the COMEX, for her crucial role in many activities of AFUS, in particular the *Mémoire et Avenir Club*, which he hopes will continue to benefit from her valuable support, and *Link*, as well as other activities.

Neda Ferrier thanks him and vows to remain active within the AFUS.

The Chair takes the floor to greet the current members of the Executive Committee attending online, and the Emeritus Chair, Georges Kutukdjian, to whom AFUS wishes to express its sincere gratitude.

## **Item 8: Annual Report of the Executive Committee (doc.32A/4)**

### **1° General Observations**

The President of AFUS introduces the Report on the activities of the association over the past year, and makes the following observations:

Activity has been intense, despite a somewhat unhurried start; the meeting between the new team elected in 2023 and the Deputy Director-General was highly productive, resulting in reinforced cooperation, chiefly in relation to support for the production of *Link*.

Overall, the aim is to stay on course. The members of the Executive Committee have been very active, and volunteers have provided invaluable support, particularly by representing AFUS at the General Conference.

The major objective was to strengthen communication. The membership list was updated, and the number of members is now over a thousand. "New old timers" usually express little interest in joining upon retiring; it is only later that they start to arrive. HRM's support to the Association should be noted. A meeting is due to take place shortly with the Division's newly appointed Director, Jennifer Linkins.

Very productive sessions on the Digitalized Certificate of Entitlement (DCE), were held respectively in January, with Mr Aliamane Bacar Saïd, Chief of the Operations Support Section at the United Nations Pension Fund (UNJSPF), and in April, with Ms Rosemary McLean, Administrator of the UNJSPF. Further meetings are planned, in addition to the annual meetings.

Josiane Taillefer notifies the assembly that changes in financial control procedures are planned. In regard to taxation, she indicates that this is the year when the Pension Fund determines its actuarial result as at 31 December 2023, which is likely to be positive.

The President of AFUS also indicates that she has had the opportunity to address the Governing Bodies, the Executive Board and the General Conference, in the Administrative and Financial Commission (FA), in order to support the Draft Resolutions that deal chiefly with the Organization's long-term commitments to financing the Medical Benefits Fund (MBF), and other details on the Fund.

Returning to the subject of DCE, she understands that the use of this digital resource continues to pose challenges for some, and reminds the audience that guidance by Mr Abdul Walid, the Pension Fund Representative in Geneva, is available by telephone at +44(0)9288871.

For further details of activities, please refer to the corresponding document.

## **2° The periodical *Link***

Patrick Gallaud outlines the features of *Link*'s expanded Editorial Committee, new orientation, presentation, and new sections on "Women," "The Planet" and "Science," under the care of newly appointed editors. Relevant sectors of the Secretariat are being requested to produce, for each issue, a feature on a UNESCO

activity. The first of these features was on Angkor. The next one will be on the use of artificial intelligence at the service of UNESCO's archives.

Further innovations include a section on “Books;” another entitled “I'm Writing to You From...,” where current or former staff members in Field Offices or living away from HQ, can offer glances into where they live; and a “Wisdom” section consisting of one or two texts that provide “food for thought.” The title of the *In-memoriam* section has been changed to *Homage*, a warmer term. In the current issue, it was not possible to list all the colleagues who have passed away, but efforts will be made to do so in the future.

Odile Blondy adds that there will also be a section called “*Billet du Notaire*” (Notary's Note), which is meant to deal with such issues as the protection of spouses.

A new layout artist has been appointed. The journal is now published in full colour.

Its revisited format has already given rise to other ideas that will be further considered and developed.

Last but not least, active UNESCO staff members can now access *Link* through the Organization's Intranet.

### **3° General Discussion**

One speaker gives a personal account.

Another congratulates *Link* on its new format.

One speaker calls for maintaining the paper version of *Link*. In second place, he brings up the issue of the relative difficulty of obtaining MBF reimbursements for hospital expenses in the Headquarters country. He encourages the holding of HRM information meetings for future retirees. Thirdly, he asks whether it is possible to obtain the personal contact details of former staff members.

On the second point, the President of the AFUS indicates that the issue is primarily due to the extra costs charged by the Parisian hospitals of the AP-HP. In response to the third question, she explains that certain members wish that their records are kept confidential.

### **4° Approval of the Report**

The Annual Report is unanimously approved by acclamation.

### **Item 9: Outlook for activities organized by AFUS.**

A number of projects are mentioned, to be described in greater detail at a later time. One such project is entitled “Dance for Peace,” and is expected to be take place in the framework of the International Dance Council. A sports day is foreseen on 8 June, on the eve of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, with the involvement of former UNESCO staff members. Also envisaged, depending on interest, are possible trips to Japan (Osaka), during the 2025 Universal Exhibition, and to Uzbekistan (Samarkand), before, during or after the upcoming 43<sup>rd</sup> Session of UNESCO’s General Conference to be convened at this venue.

### **Item 10: Report of the Treasurer's for 2023 and provisional budget for 2025**

#### **a) Treasurer’s Report for 2023 (doc.32A5a)**

Treasurer Terry Roberts Martinez begins by thanking her predecessor, Christine Bruyère, for leaving her files in perfect order and for her willingness to help.

She mentions the changes affecting the bank accounts which, by being separated from those of UNESCO from 2024 in accordance with IPSAS rules, will give greater responsibility to each association, presenting an advantage for AFUS.

She comments on the financial documents, which show a deficit so small that it does not pose a problem.

#### **b) Report of the Auditors for 2023 (doc.32A5b)**

Speaking on behalf of the two Statutory Auditors, Mohamed Bachiri congratulates the Treasurer on her excellent presentation of the accounts, following in the footsteps of Christine Bruyère. He insists on the importance of a constant renewal of membership subscriptions, suggesting that UNESCO include a reference to AFUS in its pre-retirement check-out formalities.

The President of AFUS agrees, stating that this request, which has already been formulated, should be reiterated. She adds that, in other Organizations of the UN system, active staff members are able to join retiree associations, and that a suggestion to that effect should be made to UNESCO.

One participant indicates that a document from AFUS was among those given to him when he left. Another said that this had not been the case for her. The Chair noted that UNESCO’s Secretariat should be reminded of the commitment made to this effect.

**c) Discharge**

The Treasurer's Report for 2023 was unanimously discharged by acclamation.

**d) Estimated budget for 2025 (doc.32A6)**

The Treasurer presents the document, insisting on the importance of increasing the number of paying members.

The provisional budget is unanimously approved.

**Item 11: Special Theme: Are Human Rights out of Fashion? Presentation by Mr Guy Aurenche, Esq.**

Patrick Gallaud presents the speaker, an attorney, whose credentials are posted online, and emphasizes the timeliness of the topic, which has also been discussed in *Link*.

Mr Aurenche begins by highlighting UNESCO's fundamental role in the promotion of human rights. He refers to Jeanne Hersch's project *Birthright of Man*, which demonstrates that universality has nothing to do with uniformity. Universality is never stationary. It is a movement, a process, a gradual construction, and requires forceful human rights dynamics in order to move forward. It must never lead to different blocks that claim to possess supposedly universal conceits.

The human rights dynamic is first and foremost a matter of survival. Mr Aurenche quotes Primo Levi and Albert Camus and stresses the role of civil society. It is a question of sharing convictions, one of UNESCO's primary roles.

The speaker outlines three contemporary crises: that of globalization, which has led to a phenomenon of identitarian closure, against the grain of the multicultural community; that of democracy; and that of *meaning*, and this is where UNESCO has an essential role to play.

Three orators followed, to which Mr Aurenche responded by insisting on UNESCO's role as a creator of bonds.

Time did not allow for further discussion.

**Item 12: Election of Statutory Auditors**

Mohamed Bachiri and Marie Malavielle are unanimously re-elected by acclamation.



### **Item 13: Results of the election of the members of the Executive Committee**

As the election has already been held by acclamation, this item no longer serves any purpose.

### **Item 14: Miscellaneous matters**

No questions are raised

### **Item 15: Closure of the session**

The President of AFUS thanks the participants and expresses her delight at the desire shown by all to keep going. She warmly thanks the Chair of the session for its smooth running.

The Chair thanks all the participants for attending, as well as the elected officials (Vice-Chair, Rapporteur, Tellers) and the room technicians for their assistance. For information, he reminds participants of certain important forthcoming dates (the UN Future Summit, the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversaries of IICI (2024) and IBE (2025), and the 80th Anniversary of UNESCO (2025). He reminds AFUS members who have yet to pay their yearly membership dues to do so as soon as possible, indicating that the necessary forms are available after the session.

He concludes by inviting all those present to the traditional "friendship drink" offered by AFUS in the adjoining Delegates' Lounge, and closed the session at 5.30p.m.