



Australian Association of Former International Civil Servants (AAFICS)

VOL XXIII, No. 1

NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2012

AAFICS represents retired officials from the United Nations and its agencies and funds. Former staff of other international organizations are also welcome to become members. We offer a link to other UN retirees through occasional social events, as well as contacts for information and advice about retirement in Australia. We are affiliated to FAFICS in Geneva, the Federation of all such associations as ours and an essential source of advice on pensions related issues and on after-service-health insurance schemes. This newsletter has been printed and posted with funds from the AAFICS membership.

Dear AAFICS members,

By now the 555 beneficiaries of a United Nations pension in Australia will have received, signed and returned their 2011 annual Certificates of Entitlement to the UN Pension Fund in New York. The saga of the Certificates began in October last year when the UN Pension Fund consigned them to the US Postal Service. The first bag of certificates went missing, in all likelihood because Mr Murphy tried to send the bag to Austria via the UK. AAFICS realized that in November 2011 and then Christmas had come and gone and no-one had received a Certificate. AAFICS alerted the Pension Fund. A second bag was posted and this time Mr Murphy put the wrong kind of label on it. Thanks to the kind intervention of the Chairman of the Board of Australia Post, David Mortimer, we have been given a detailed report of what went wrong – and the UN Pension Fund now knows, as all good bureaucrats should, which label is the right one. The 2012 annual Certificates will be posted out to us in October this year and we hope all goes smoothly.

Mary Johnson can now say at the UN Pension Fund's Board meeting, which she will attend in July that Australia Post was friendly and helpful throughout this saga. And she will also say that the UN Pension Fund responded very promptly, sending out a second mailing and extending the deadline for the return of the Certificates, so that no-one was in danger of having their monthly benefit suspended.

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Mary will attend the Council of the Federation of Associations of Former International Civil Servants, FAFICS, to which we are affiliated and which is a source of important information and assistance to us in Australia. There are now 50 member associations in the Federation. The FAFICS Council will take place a week before the Board of the UN Pension Fund and in the same place - UNESCO, Paris. There are several items that warrant attention such as the UN General Assembly's request for a report on After-service health insurance, to be tabled in September 2012. We know these reports can be the harbingers of some cost-cutting measures, at the least. FAFICS underlines that the provision of after-service health insurance was "a vital element in the package of benefits designed to attract and retain an effective expatriate workforce and hence to the maintenance of the integrity of the International Civil Service."

Although UN retirees in Australia in the majority do not keep their ASHI, which is not recognized by the ATO as an Australian health insurance scheme, nevertheless, for those of us who have kept paying ASHI premiums, perhaps because of pre-existing health conditions or because of frequent travel overseas, it is important to defend the existence of ASHI in the UN system.

We also want to defend the two-track system as this protects the value of our pensions calculated at

Representing Retirees of the United Nations in Australia

UN & its Agencies -EPPPO-FAO-IAEA-ICGEB-ICCROM-ICAO-ICC-IFAD-ILO-IMO-IOM-IPU-ISA-ITU-ITLOS-
UNDP-UNESCO-UNIDO-UNOPS-WFP-WHO-WIPO-WMO-WTO-WWF

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the time we retired. With the US dollar remaining low, many AAFICS members have shifted from a US dollar pension to a pension based on an Australian dollar calculation (the two-track). The Consulting Actuary of the UN Pension Fund has drawn attention to the increased long-term costs of the two-track system – and an item on the agenda of the UN Pension Board is likely to invite discussion on “the emerging higher costs of the two-track pension adjustment system”.

AAFICS has stressed the importance of increasing the normal age of retirement - we are all living longer. A higher retirement age would have a positive impact on the financial solidity of the Pension Fund.

The CEO of the UN Pension Fund, Bernard Cocheme, will retire in November this year. The search for his successor is well advanced, and candidatures will be discussed at the Pension Fund Board meeting in July. Mary will write a report on both meetings for you to read in the December AAFICS Newsletter.

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When UN retirees get together, a favourite topic is just how busy we all are since retirement, and how did we ever find time to actually work, when there is so much else to do! Mike Sackett, AAFICS Coordinator for Queensland, writes in this newsletter about his recent work in Afghanistan. Monina Magallanes, AAFICS Coordinator in WA is to be warmly congratulated for her recently published book *Sang Una*. AAFICS Treasurer Tom Joel has taken time off from looking after the cows and sheep in Bundarra and has prepared the accounts for you all to look at.

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The UN Pension Fund has sent out a letter on AAFICS behalf to ask those who have not yet joined our association to think about doing so. You will see from this letter that the one-off lifetime membership is now \$140, a slight increase from past years. Our current membership stands at 240 retirees or surviving spouses, so there is definite potential for a membership increase. As you are already a life time member of AAFICS, you don't need to take any action on this letter.

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For the first time, this newsletter is being sent to most of the membership by email. Those who don't have an email address will receive a copy in the post. We are also sending the membership list out by email and are reissuing the Members Handbook as well. If you haven't given AAFICS your email, or have changed it recently, please send us a note.

With best wishes to you all and please, stay in touch,
AAFICS president, treasurer and coordinators Mary, Tom, Christine, Lorraine, Margaret, Monina, Mike P., Mike S., and Stephen.



Letter from Australia Post's Geoff Williams

Dear Mrs Johnson,

Thank you for your letter and continued assistance with a matter involving the Return to Sender and delay of bulk mail lodgments from the UN to Australia. After exhaustive investigation, I am in a position to provide Australia Post's commentary on the most likely cause of both complaints.

I would note at the outset that the nature of the service used provides only for limited tracking. As such, I cannot conclusively make a statement that there were no other possibilities that could be considered in the delivery of these articles, however such possibilities would not fit the circumstances given.

Bag 1 (Returned to USA)

The UN has provided a copy of the Bulk Mail Lodgement tag that was used in the first mail-out that was ultimately Returned to Sender. I understand the UN has blamed Australia Post for the return. A photo of the tag is attached (Bulk mail tag.pdf).

The tag clearly shows that while the bag was destined for Australia, the article was handled by Royal Mail (in the United Kingdom), and was returned by them. The tag's return number, ending in **GB is further proof of this. The most likely scenario is that a sorter in the United States loaded the bag to be despatched to Europe (Austria) instead of to Australia. The Australia/Austria problem is a known one, however recovery steps usually prevent the experience you have had. Despite the advice you have been given to the contrary, Australia Post never received this article.

Bag 2 (Delayed delivery)

It is important to consider the actual type of service used to lodge the articles in question. It appears the UN has used Bulk Mail lodgement, pre-sorted by postcode, which would be one of the best services to use for such a mail-out. When using the service, each letter is sorted by general delivery area (which is sorted through Melbourne or Sydney) and lodged together as a bundle. This bundle is inserted into a bag, which then has a bulk mail tag affixed to its neck, and the bag is dispatched directly to Australia. The tag does not have an address, but rather instructs handlers to open the bag once it reaches the destination, where the contents have a rapid progression through customs before they are sorted and delivered as letters in the Australian mail system.

The tag shown in "Bag 1" is a clear indicator of the type of label that should be used. However, the bag label that was provided during my conversation with the UN representative suggests that either a UN mailer or a USPS staff member used the wrong bag label.

"M" Bags are bags of printed material that are low customs risk and destined for one address. A good example would be if you ordered 5 books from Amazon, they might all be delivered together in an M bag. Essentially, an M bag is a big parcel. It must have a sender's address, and it must have a delivery address.

The example provided of the tag used by the UN (attached – M Bag label.pdf) was an M bag, but it did not have a destination address (hence my repeated requests for the Australian handler). The bag arrived in Australia, but without a destination, was likely put together with other incorrectly addressed articles ready for return to the USA. It is likely that an Australian mail handler inspected the bag for the slightest evidence of a destination before its final return, and realised that the wrong tag had been applied. From there, the handler likely opened the bag and put the mail into the system as if it had been sent as bulk, which explains the delay you experienced.

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While we acknowledge that the second despatch was held in Australia, it is the position of Australia Post that incorrect labelling was responsible for the delay. Whether the label was affixed by USPS staff, or by staff at the UN we are unable to determine. The inconvenience caused is deeply regretted, however it remains the responsibility of the sender to ensure that they correctly address or label their mail-outs.

I hope I have been able to explain to your satisfaction the most likely cause of the problems with the two mail-outs. If I can clarify in any way, please do not hesitate to contact me either by return email, or on the number below.

Best regards, **Geoff Williams**
Board and Shareholder Liaison ,
Australia Post



Afghanistan Revisited

By Mike Sackett, AAFICS Coordinator, Queensland

I had always been a little doubtful about those former UN colleagues who on reaching the blessed state of retirement continued to “haunt the corridors of power” undertaking consultancy after consultancy for their former employers. For almost five years after our retirement, my wife Eileen and I concentrated on re-establishing ourselves in Australia, a country we had last lived in during the days of black and white television! And then it happened.

I was asked to go to Afghanistan to lead a strategic review of the UN’s food assistance to that country. A word of context is necessary here. Whenever I had been asked my favourite country in which I had lived while overseas, I always responded with “Afghanistan” on account of its beauty, its history and its extraordinary people. So I didn’t need a whole lot of persuasion to sign a consultancy contract with the World Food Programme and April Fools’ Day 2011 saw me jetting out of Brisbane to Kabul. I had got as far as Dubai when I read on the internet that the UN office in northern Afghanistan had been attacked shortly after my departure from Brisbane and seven international staff had been brutally murdered including four Gurkha armed guards. I continued on my merry way to Kabul to find UN operations in a four day lock-down and the UN community in a state of shock and disbelief.

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I couldn't help but compare the UN system's response to the latest attack with what I had experienced when I first arrived there in January 1999. At that time all international staff had been withdrawn from Afghanistan following the assassination of a UN Security Officer the previous August. It was not until March 1999 that UN international staff were permitted by the UN bureaucracy in New York to work in Afghanistan. By contrast, in 2011 the message was "stay and deliver". Staff deemed "essential" hunkered down in their duty stations around Afghanistan and kept on working. In fact in my first four weeks in Kabul, we were in lock-down and restricted to working in the guest house for six days.

The realities of living and working in Kabul in 2011 were pretty salutary, however. Accommodation was a heavily fortified UN guest-house surrounded by supposedly blast proof walls and protected round the clock by Gurkhas with recently issued shoot-to-kill instructions. On arrival at Kabul airport one was given heavy flak jackets, helmets and VHF radios – mandatory security gear under the circumstances. Every evening was punctuated by a radio role call and the last task of the day before sinking into blissful sleep was to ensure that one's quick-run kit was close by in the event of a surprise attack on the UN compound.

The commute to the office was in an armoured land cruiser with doors so heavy it took a super-human effort to close them. And guess what? Every UN office was surrounded by supposedly blast proof walls and protected by Gurkhas with shoot-to-kill instructions. Far worse, UN security regulations prevented any form of normal life outside work. No early morning constitutional walks in the city or visits to restaurants, carpet shops, markets, all of which had been perfectly routine in the Taliban days 12 years earlier – such is progress.

The highlights of my six weeks back in Afghanistan were two field visits. The first was to Jalalabad near the eastern border with Pakistan, where security was even tighter than in Kabul. We landed at Jalalabad airport which was adjacent to a sprawling US military compound. Sinister-looking drones were taking off what seemed like every few minutes for surveillance and no doubt other activities. The compound was seething with nervy and incredibly young-looking US combat troops, an astonishingly high number of whom were women. So restrictive was the security in Jalalabad that with one exception all our meetings with government officials and others were in the UN guest house. The exception was a working lunch with the Governor of the province in the winter palace of the former Afghan King – a magnificent building in surprisingly good condition.

The second trip was to Bamiyan province in the still snow-covered mountains to the west of Kabul where security conditions were reportedly the best in the country. We were able to stay in the commercial Silk Road Hotel and enjoy relatively normal conditions with even a little sight-seeing after work. The Governor of the Province proudly told us that she, yes SHE, was including a tourism component in her provincial development plan.

Another positive experience was the mission's debriefing attended by, not one, but two Ministers who were former UNDP colleagues in my earlier incarnation. Stubby cheek kisses and hugs were part of the warm and genuine welcome I received. I also met a number of Afghan UN drivers and other support staff who remembered not only me but also Eileen and one of my daughters who had worked in Afghanistan in days gone by. One of the drivers even recalled the raisin and peanut snack I had shared with him as we went on our field trip.

To conclude, my six week return to Afghanistan was a rich experience, mostly profoundly negative, but with some endearing human touches and delightful memory jolts. Not for second did I regret going back, but I won't be putting up my hand to return in a hurry.

Finally, a UN Retiree advocacy issue. WFP is one of several, but not all, UN agencies which impose a US\$22,000 cap on consultancy earnings by retirees. This means that would-be consultants are limited in either the number of days they can work, or the daily remuneration, or both. The cap was imposed by the UN General Assembly in 1996 and has not been increased since 2000. This cap is arbitrary, unfair and I would argue for consultancies such as the one described above, unjustified.

Mike Sackett, AAFICS Coordinator, Queensland



“Sang Una...(Once upon a Time)”

In the June 2011 issue of the AAFICS Newsletter, we asked our members to write about what they are doing since retirement. For the past eight years, Monina S. Magallanes in WA has been doing research to provide the context to her family history. After retirement, she spent more time with her widowed mother in southern Philippines. According to Monina, her mother who will mark her 102nd birthday on 1 July and continues to be blessed with a sharp mind, has been a treasure trove of information. Born in 1910 when the population of the Philippines was around 9 million as compared to over 80 million today, she has lived through 14 out of the 15 past Presidents of the Philippine Republic. “During all my different postings with the UNDP, I carried with me a large envelope that my mother handed to me one day. To my amazement, it contained news clippings and articles with my mother’s photos as well as souvenir programs and invitations to piano recitals including her graduation concert as a soprano soloist at the Manila Grand Opera House on 8 August 1930. I did not realize that my mother had a different persona once upon a time.” Monina related that every now and then when there was a lull at work, whether it was in Khartoum, Yangon, Pyongyang or Male, she would go through this envelope and tell herself resolutely that ...one day. That day came in November 2011 when she published her 335-page book entitled “*Sang Una...(Once upon a Time)*”. The book is written in English with translations for Spanish and Philippine language quotes and references . The book was launched in three different cities connected to the story in the Philippines. On 14 April 2012, it was also presented at the Susannah Prichard Writers Centre in Greenmount, WA where the first seeds of her writing project were first sown.

The book review is available on Facebook. Since its release, the book is now in the reference libraries of several universities in the Philippines. The State Library of WA has purchased an additional copy to loan out. It has been catalogued by the National Library of Australia with a record now available via the National Library catalogue and Trove, the search service for Australian resources at www.trove.nla.gov.au.



**Australian Association of Former International Civil Servants
(AAFICS)**

AAFICS FINANCIAL ACCOUNTS For 2010, 2011 and to date 2012

<u>INCOME and EXPENDITURE</u>	<u>Year 2010</u>	<u>Year 2011</u>	<u>Year 2012 to date</u>
	Aud	Aud	Aud
<u>INFLOWS</u>			
<u>Interest</u>			
Interest Current Account	0.46	0.43	0.15
Interest on FTD	838.58	942.71	0.00
<u>TOTAL Interest</u>	839.04	943.14	0.15
<u>Subscriptions Members</u>			
Life Membership	1340.00	480.00	620.00
Membership Annual	25.00	0.00	0.00
<u>TOTAL Subscriptions Members</u>	1365.00	480.00	620.00
<u>TOTAL INFLOWS</u>	2204.04	1423.14	620.15
<u>OUTFLOWS</u>			
FAFICS	399.64	333.32	0.00
Postage	306.42	552.40	270.00
Printing Members Lists	168.15	0.00	0.00
Printing Newsletters	117.50	649.50	430.10
Stationery	0.00	112.03	0.00
Tax Fighting Fund Subvention	290.00	0.00	0.00
<u>TOTAL OUTFLOWS</u>	1281.71	1647.25	700.10
<u>SURPLUS/DEFECIT</u>	\$922.33	-\$224.11	-\$79.95

BALANCE SHEET

<u>ASSETS</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2012</u>
Commonwealth Bank Current Account	5005.31	3838.49	3758.54
Commonwealth Bank FTD	14254.19	15196.90	15196.9
<u>TOTAL Cash and Bank Accounts</u>	19259.50	19035.39	18955.44
	0.00	0.00	0.00
<u>LIABILITIES</u>			
	\$19,259.50	\$19,035.39	\$18,955.44
Accumulated Capital			

REMINDERS FOR AAFICS MEMBERS

Pension adjustment 2012

All beneficiaries in Australia on the Australian dollar track (two track system) should have received a 3.1 % increase, effective 1 April 2012, based on official CPI movement in Australia from December 2010 to December 2011. If you have any doubts about this, you can compare the quarterly notification received from the UN Pension Fund dated 24 April 2012 with the previous one dated 24 January 2012. You should see your 24 April notification shows an increase over your January notification.

For those on the US dollar track, the April 2012 quarterly notification will show a 4.5 % adjustment based on the official movement of the United States Consumer Price Index over the Dec 2010 to Dec 2011 period.

However if you started getting your pension in 2011 or in 2012, this adjustment will be the first one and will be reduced by 0.5 % and will in any case be on a pro rata basis.

If you think something is wrong with your monthly benefit, please let us know. In the past, the UN Pension Fund was not at all efficient about getting the CPI data for Australia ready on time for the April deadline. Therefore we used to get a backdated payment around August, which was more noticeable, but led to AAFICS raising a formal complaint with the Pension Fund.

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Distribution: To each AAFICS member. This newsletter is prepared by the AAFICS Committee of office bearers and is intended for AAFICS membership only.

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Life-long membership in AAFICS is \$140 payable to the Treasurer.