

**Report of the Thirty First (31st) Annual General Meeting of The Association of
Former PAHO/WHO Staff Members (AFSM) Washington, DC, 9 December 2020
By Marilyn Rice, Enrique Fefer and Gloria Morales**

The AFSM thirty first Annual General Meeting was successfully conducted virtually for the first time, on PAHO platform, on 9 December 2020. There were 100 participants, many more than had participated in the face-to-face meetings in past years. The full recording and presentations can be found on the AFSM website at: <https://www.afsmpaho.com/copy-of-documents> AFSM is grateful for PAHO's technical support and facilities which contributed to the success of the event.

Our President, Gloria Coe, opened the meeting with a welcome to all participants. She reviewed the objectives of the meeting, provided an overview of the agenda, and designated Juan Manuel Sotelo as the Chair of the meeting.

Mary Lou Valdez, PAHO's Deputy Director, congratulated AFSM on its 30th anniversary. She provided a historical perspective of PAHO's accomplishments since 1990 when the focus was on communicable diseases, reminding us that in 1994 we were the first region in the world to be polio-free. The present focus is on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has highlighted the interdependence between health and the economy. The numbers of deaths and increased joblessness have amplified levels of poverty with the overall regional GDP going down by 8.1%. PAHO continues to emphasize the need for strong and well-funded health systems to recover from the disruptions due to COVID, which include the increased death rate due to untreated HIV, TB and diabetes. She discussed the Organization's challenge of continuing to support programs and staff, PAHO's greatest asset, in the face of unpaid country assessments. PAHO will continue with cost containment measures while working to increase voluntary contributions as a buffer against future shortfall in country contributions. She recognized AFSM as a strategic asset and, in closing, requested that AFSM continue to support PAHO's activities in the countries.

The official annual membership business meeting began with a moment of silence in memory of our colleagues who died during 2020 and Enrique Fefer read the names while we each reflected upon what those people meant to us, to PAHO and to the countries.

Juan Manuel Sotelo, as Chair of the meeting, proceeded to adopt the agenda and obtain approval of the minutes of the 2019 General Meeting.

Gloria Coe, as President, recalled the original purpose for the formation of AFSM and mentioned its ongoing efforts to increase members participation. She gave special thanks to members of the Board of Trustees, mentioning the work of each of the six committees. She welcomed the 16 new members who joined in 2020 and congratulated the recently designated Focal Points throughout the Region and in Europe. She especially thanked the outgoing and incoming web masters, Antonio Hernández and Stanislaw Orzeszyna and the win-win partnership with the PAHO Federal Credit Union. Finally, she invited all to the next International Reunion to take place in Costa Rica in October 2021, COVID permitting.

Sylvia Schultz, as Treasurer, gave us the treasurer's report with all accounts in order and in good standing, and even during the COVID pandemic we managed to acquire 16 new members. Rolando Chacón announced the results of the election process (see more about this in this newsletter). Hernán Rosenberg gave an overview of the proposed changes in the Bylaws, with the possibility of members nominating an associate member at any time, the changes in dues and the possibility of holding virtual meetings, or

physical ones outside of Washington. All members will receive an explanatory mail in about one month and have 45 days to review the changes and then vote on approval or not.

Nancy Berinstein, former President of AFSM, presented the 30-year history of AFSM from the time of its founding as a social club in Washington, DC to its transformation into an international association dedicated to protecting the welfare and benefits of former staff. She spoke of our involvement in the founding of ARAIO, an organization representing former staff and retirees from international organizations such as AFICS, IDB, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, the European Development Bank, the IMF and the OAS. The late Jean Surgi and Jaime Ayalde were remembered for their many years of dedication in nurturing and growing the Association. We also heard about Hortensia Saginor, who joined AFSM in 1996 and still serves on the Board as Membership Chair. Former PAHO Directors Macedo, Alleyne, and Roses were also acknowledged for their years of support and encouragement. In conclusion she encouraged us to stay well and look forward to the end of COVID when we will meet and enjoy our new freedom at an AFSM reunion in Costa Rica. Please see her more complete article in this newsletter.

Enrique Vega, PAHO Unit Chief of Healthy Life Course provided an overview of PAHO's plans for the UN Decade for Health Ageing 2020-2030. The Americas Region has a greater increase in aging populations than the rest of the world and a more rapid increase in the oldest of the old (80 years old and older). In our region, the impact of COVID has been greatest in North America followed closely by Central America, especially in people over 60. The epidemic has clearly revealed the deficiencies in the health care systems and long-term-care facilities, and the gap between life expectancy and healthy life expectancy continues to widen. The Global Strategy on Ageing and Health 2016-2030 is aimed at creating a world in which everyone can live a long and healthy life. Through a long and consultative process, a regional strategy has been developed focusing on 4 action areas: changing how we think, feel and act toward elderly and ageing (confront discrimination); ensure that communities foster the abilities of older people; develop person-centered integrated care and primary health care services responsive to older people; and provide access to long-term care for older people who need it. On 14 December a report was launched with baseline information for the Decade of Healthy Ageing, based upon a participatory process of partnerships with governments, civil society, universities, artists, producers, communicators and journalists. An online space has been created to collect relevant knowledge in the six official UN languages that can be accessed at <https://www.who.int/health-topics/ageing>. Enrique Vega made a call to PAHO's retirees to become active drivers of the Decade and join PAHO in promoting those plans and programs that build bridges in the gaps of inequality and create healthy environments for older persons in the Region.

Enrique Pérez Gutiérrez, Unit Chief of Health Emergency Information and Risk Assessment, presented the situation of COVID-19 in the region and PAHO's response. We have the greatest number of cases in the world (almost half) and are just behind Europe in the number of deaths. The disease is spreading into indigenous and remote communities and surgical procedures are being postponed to accommodate COVID patients. Although there may be more cases in younger people, the deaths are much greater in populations over the age of 60. There are five pillars to PAHO's program: logistics and information management; public health measures to control the spread; epidemiological intelligence for case management; strengthened lab capabilities (rapid antigen tests, supportive PPE and trained health staff); and communication and media relations.

The Board, concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on its membership sent a survey to all AFSM members to see how they were coping with the epidemic. The information was collected and analyzed by 3 outstanding members. Given the limited number and widespread geographic distribution of AFSM members in the English- and Dutch-speaking Caribbean, Yvette Holder surveyed all former staff she could locate and not just AFSM members. Marlo Libel conducted a survey of members residing in Canada and

the US, and Alberto Concha-Eastman did so for our members in Latin America. Responses across the countries were remarkably similar. Positive COVID impacts included increased healthy public health practices such as handwashing, improved communication with family and friends, better Internet and computer skills, and more free time for personal enrichment activities like reading, writing and exploring new activities. Negative impacts included inability to travel, shop and socially interact with family and friends, as well as frequent feelings of sadness, depression, isolation, and monotony, especially among women living alone. Most respondents said they would accept the vaccination. Retirees have been supported throughout this time by AFSM by providing access to critical information, and sharing and receiving support in resolving COVID-generated issues. Please note that a more complete article with all the survey results will be included in the March 2021 issue of PAHO AFSM's newsletter.

Miguel Boluda, CEO of the PAHO/WHO Federal Credit Union reported that the FCU is celebrating its 70th anniversary. Starting in March 2020, due to COVID, the staff completely transitioned to working remotely, even though consultations have been made available through online booking on the new FCU website. A financial overview as of 1 October 2019 showed a strong, well-capitalized FCU. There are several new products and services that are now offered, including: contactless debit and credit cards, student loans, 20 and 30-year fixed rate mortgages, Master credit cards with points that never expire He highlighted the seven Globies Winners with \$7,000 in donations to charities of their choice, and the success of the virtual financial educational sessions. He recognized the retirement of Patricia Vidal Ilijic, a strong supporter of AFSM- FCU relations.

The final session of the meeting was a presentation by PAHO staff of the changes in the management companies of the health insurance and prescription plans for those residing in the US, taking effect 1 January 2021. More details about this are in the article on Health Insurance and Pension Update in this newsletter as well as on our AFSM website.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:00 pm.