AFICS PHILIPPINES

NEWSLETTER

Association of Former International Civil Servants - Philippines

June 28 2024

President's Message



Alcestis A. Mangahas
AFICS-PHL President 2024-2025

Dear Members and Friends,

And just like that, it is 2024.

This year started with a splash, with an immensely interesting General Assembly on January 17. AFICS-Philippines had a record attendance, face-to-face and online coupled with a strong voter turnout (89!). Our special guest speaker, Ms. Kissa O'Donnell, Chief of Operations, of the UN Joint Staff Pension Fund, offered new insights on the workings of the Pension Fund, including a little unknown detail: there are 800 or so UN retirees and beneficiaries residing in the Philippines! As we have now have 236 actual AFICS members, we can look forward to further expanding our membership base. AFICS-Philippines has its first ever Rules of Procedure that puts together and updates AFICS organizational rules and practices through the years. This operations manual provides guidance to current and future officers and members on our internal processes and practices, an important step for our long-term sustainability as an organization.

Our new 2024-2025 Board of Trustees and Executive Committee combines experienced "old hands" and energetic "young 'uns". Expectations are high for even more creative ideas and dynamic activities in the next two years. Right at the bat, the energy and passion of the new team is showing - a 1st ever strategic planning exercise, a solidarity members' excursion to *Likha Verde* in Lipa, Batangas, and the launch of an intensive membership campaign with the support of UNJSPF.

There is so much to look forward to – the July 2024 54th FAFICS Council Meeting in Bangkok, our 1st international Tour to Central Japan this October/November, and yes, we are looking forward to planning with our UN Resident Coordinator, this year's United Nations Day celebrations.

And is our website finally happening? *Abangan!*

Hold tight in friendship!

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AFICS-PHL Conducts Its Strategic Planning Workshop

by Jana Ricasio

The 2024-2025 Board of Trustees and the Executive Committee of AFICS-PHL held its first-ever strategic planning workshop on March 21, 2024 at IOM Conference Room in Makati.

The workshop tackled topics identified from a quick survey among the officers on what they saw were priorities to be addressed. These included concerns about recruitment and activation of members; finance management and fundraising to support activities; recognition and partnership as part of institutionalization; intensifying communications; knowledge and information management; and regularity of activities. Over and above organizational and operational concerns, the workshop came up with the vision and mission statements as overarching framework to guide the Association's plans. (See separate box.)



The 12 participants to the Strategic Planning Workshop enjoyed exchanging ideas on topics like recruitment of members and fundraising projects.

The participants identified requirements on what needed to be in place to achieve the AFICS vision and mission; the constraints or gaps to be addressed; and proposals for innovation and activities. The key actions from the planning workshop were translated into the committees' action work plans which were presented at the following joint Board of Trustees/Executive Committee April meeting.

The workshop, organized by a team of members including Jana Ricasio, Anna Senga, Florence Tayson, Antonio Fernandez, Imee Manal, and



Participants worked intensely to complete the VISION and MISSION Statements of AFICS-PHL.

Thelma Lampano, brought together 12 newly elected officers led by President-elect Thetis Mangahas. The workshop was facilitated by President Emeritus, Cecilio Adorna.

The participants to the "self-financed" strategic meeting not only enjoyed reliving UN-style workshop, but also enjoyed delicious snacks contributed by attendees – fresh Bacolod lumpia, cheese pimiento sandwiches, empanaditas, banana-walnut cake, cassava cake, and Colombian coffee!!

AFICS PHILIPPINES

VISION

"Inspired by the values and principles of the United Nations and enriched by members' experiences in the service of the UN, AFICS is an association committed to promoting the well-being of former UN civil servants and fostering their social engagement."

MISSION

1. *AFICS shall be the platform of former UN staff to continue to be active contributors to the purposes and principles of the UN;*
2. *AFICS shall serve as the voice of former UN staff by providing members a venue to express and exchange matters of importance;*
3. *AFICS shall mobilize and expand active membership and sustainable funding resources;*
4. *AFICS shall be a center and hub of information, knowledge, and support on pension, health and other benefits and opportunities for members; and*
5. *AFICS shall provide channels to foster camaraderie and care for its members.*

AFICS Organizes Its Annual General Meeting

by Mi Ann Maglipon

The AFICS-PHL Annual General Assembly Meeting (AGM) was held on January 17, 2024/ Wednesday. The meeting was facilitated by Executive Vice President Regina Molera and Secretary Mary Ann Maglipon. The meeting was in hybrid mode, i.e., face-to-face presence at the Newgrange Condotel combined with participation via internet connection using Zoom as the platform.



Members listen intently to the discussion on Rules of Procedure, UNJSPF, and election results.

A total of 37 joined the Annual General Assembly Meeting and 85 members cast their votes during the Annual General Assembly Meeting.

President Thetis Mangahas showed a PowerPoint presentation filled with photographs that highlighted AFICS' activities and accomplishments through the two years under her leadership. She concluded her report by indicating that the two years were fully packed, which would not have been possible without the dynamic participation of members and officers.

One of the important decisions made by the body was the adoption of the Rules of Procedure which was put together by a working group headed by Ruth Batten. AFICS-PHL members were sent a copy of the Rules of Procedure immediately after its approval.



President Thetis recapped action points from the meeting, including the organizational meeting of the newly-elected officers.

AFICS-PHL Treasurer Antonio Fernandez reported that the AFICS had as its 2023 income the amount of P738,207. Following expenditure through the year, the balance of funds as of December 2023 was P406,792. This is almost twice the amount that AFICS had in December 2022 which was at P 247,433. He acknowledged that the increased 2023 funds were due to proceeds from special events, donations, increase in membership, and the sale of the retirement handbook.



UNJSPF was represented by Ms. Kissa O'Donnell (left) at the AFICS General Assembly Meeting.

The results of the election of 2024-2025 officers were announced by Ms. Medy Kapunan, Chair of AFICS Election Committee. She informed the members that the committee received TWENTY (20) names as NOMINEES. At the close of election count at 9:00 AM on January 17, 2024, the total number of 85 ballots received had been counted and the 13 candidates who garnered the highest votes secured their position as officers.

For the list of officers, please see last page of this newsletter.

UNJSPF Chief of Operations Provides Important Updates

Ms. Kissa O'Donnell of UNJSPF was the Guest of Honor during this year's AFICS-PHL Annual General Meeting. Currently, she is Chief of Operations, a position she has held since 2016.

Her presentation provided facts and figures on the Fund's scope of work and its immediate plans for further improving how the Fund is servicing its participants.

As of December 23, 2023, there are around 846 retirees with mailing addresses in the Philippines. Kissa opened the window of reaching out to these Filipinos through UNJSPF by AFICS-PHL issuing a one-time letter of invitation to join AFICS.

The said letter was drafted and sent to UNJSPF through Kissa. Since the time this AFICS-Philippines letter was sent by UNJSPF, a total of 41 retirees have signified their intention to join AFICS. Their application is being handled by the Membership Committee.

Kissa manages 90 staff, split between New York and Geneva. Prior to her current position, she was Chief of Pension Entitlement, Chief of Client Services, Benefits Officer, and Deputy Cashier. She is the expert in the Fund's Regulations and Rules and Penson Adjustment System. Prior to being part of UNJSPF, she was with UNHCR in Geneva, Moscow, and Africa for 10 years in admin and finance positions. Born in the province of Iloilo, she graduated from the University of Sto. Tomas and was with the Far East Bank and Trust Corporation.

2022 Key Facts and Figures:

- 143,612 active participants in UNJSPF (an increase of 4.6% from 2021 due to inclusion of IOM and FAO)
- 83,988 benefits were paid to participants including survivors (an increase of 2% from 2021)
- US$ 3.13 billion paid to benefits (an increase of 5.1% from 2021)
- US$ 3.12 billion contributions from employers and participants (an increase of 5.1% from 2021)

(Note: 2023 figures will be finalized in May 2024)

AFICS Goes on A Very Healthy Outing!

by Delia Barcelona

On 25 May 2024, UN retirees visited the LIKHA VERDE "wellness and eco-friendly" house of Ed and Tina Valenzuela at Hacienda Benito, Lipa, Batangas.

UN-FAO retiree Ed not only hosted the sumptuous healthy lunch but also shared his experience in building an eco-friendly house and his and his wife's joy in growing and eating healthy foods.



The AFICS members who made it to Likha Verde lined up for their healthy vegetarian meal.

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Thanks to AFICS-PHL, particularly Pres. Thetis Mangahas, Secretary Mi Ann Maglipon, and President Emeritus Ces Adorna for spearheading this "educational field trip". It is an on-the-road version of our Telekwentuhan series. It was a fun day with co-UN retirees, and a joy to hear some funny stories and bloopers from our UN days.

Thanks again, Ed and Tina. Thanks for feeding us home-grown, healthy and yummy dishes from your farm and your super warm hospitality. Kudos for all your efforts protecting and saving our environment. We also loved your zero plastic initiative!



AFICS-PHL members enjoyed a well-spent day at Likha Verde where they were served healthy food and given take-home plants and fruits!



Ed Valenzuela's Tips for Smart and Healthy Ageing

by Tess Stuart

During AFICS-PHL's educational field trip to the *Likha Verde* wellness and eco-friendly estate of Ed and Tina Valenzuela, Ed shared some suggestions from their Food Revolution Webinars.

He mentioned foods and tips for brain, gut, and heart that will keep us staying alive healthy, and happy:

For the brain: turmeric, beans, green leafy, coffee, tea, blueberries, legumes, red grapes and omega 3 foods.

For the gut/stomach: taho/tofu/ tempe, fermented foods like kimchi, kefir, pickles, and foods rich in fibers.

For the heart: berries, leafy greens, avocados, nuts, seeds, beans, dark chocolate, tomatoes, apples, garlic, turmeric, ginger, black pepper, coriander, cinnamon.

For years now, he and Tina no longer eat red meat. The couple also try to practice being "common sense smart" - daily exercise such as walking and sleeping 7-8 hours and prioritizing other doable healthy actions.

Ed and Tina corroborate the seven imperatives of health ageing as featured in our December 2023 issue of the AFICS-PHL Newsletter.

All the *Likha Verde* visitors were truly inspired with the lifestyle adopted by the couple.

Prof. Edgardo T. Valenzuela, PhD, retired UN-FAO Officer, is currently Core Faculty Member, Ateneo School of Government.



Photo Source: https://www.flickr.com/photos/189590028@N07/50397377467/
Author: formulatehealth

AFICS Gears up for Autumn in Central Japan: An Off-the-beaten Track Fundraising Tour

by Lois Villanueva

AFICS is organizing its first international travel fundraising tour through Central Japan from October 27 to November 2, 2024. The tour will focus on off-the-beaten-track destinations at Kanazawa, Takayama, Toyama, and Tateyama, each offering a rich tapestry of Japan's history from the Edo Period.

Highlights include visits to well-preserved Edo castles, the intriguing Ninja temples, samurai houses and geisha tea houses in well-conserved districts that reflect the cultural sophistication of the era.

The tour will also feature UNESCO World Heritage villages, such as Shirakawa-go and Gokayama, known for their distinctive gassho-zukuri farmhouses, which serve as open-air museums showcasing traditional Japanese village architecture and lifestyle.

In addition to historical sites, the tour will offer breathtaking natural scenery, especially vibrant in the autumn season. Participants will experience the majestic beauty of Japan's northern Alps, accessed via a scenic cable car ride. The itinerary also includes visits to renowned gardens and



The Japan tour promises to show picture-perfect scenes of autumn.



Toyama is a mountainous region with scenic attractions and cultural sites.

bustling markets, providing a well-rounded experience of both Japan's cultural heritage and natural splendor.

This tour not only promises to be an enriching journey through Japan's past and present but also supports a noble cause, making it a meaningful travel opportunity for all involved. Twenty five AFICS members and friends have signed up for the tour.

Both Jana Ricasio and Lois Villanueva are the focal points in managing this Japan autumn tour. They aim to generate funds for AFICS-Phil of at least US$100 to 150 per participant .

Updates from FAFICS

by Delia Barcelona

The 54th Council of the Federation of Associations of Former International Civil Servants (FAFICS) is fast approaching. It is scheduled to be held at the United Nations Conference Centre, Bangkok (UNCC), in HYBRID mode (in person and virtual), on 22-25 July 2024. As the Council Session will be held in hybrid mode, Member Associations can send in-person participants as well as virtual participants, or only in-person, or only virtual.

The Philippine delegation will be headed by AFICS President, Thetis Mangahas, who will be joined by Marlene Arduo, Mary Ann Maglipon, and Tony Fernandez. Delia Barcelona, while also an officer of AFICS-PHL, will be wearing her

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hat as the Secretary of the Federation. Thetis accepted the invitation to chair the council meeting.

The agenda of the 54th Council is full of topics that include pension matters including small pensions, after service health insurance and long term care, the launch of the new FAFICS website, membership issues, plans for the 50th anniversary of FAFICS in 2025, several administrative and financial matters, and election of a few FAFICS officers whose terms are expiring. The Chief Executive for Pension Administration, Ms. Rosemarie McClean, and the SG's Representative for Investment, Pedro Guazo, will also address the body.

REAL LIFE STORIES: How AFICS Has Helped UN Retirees

Collated by Antonio L. Fernandez

Here is an excerpt from a testimony of **Emma Colayco**, who worked with the UN Secretariat in New York. Emma was in the Editorial Section of the UN Dept. for General Assembly and Conference Management from 1983 until she retired.

"In a nutshell: On May 2016, I underwent a second surgery on my left knee necessitated by the damage sustained by the knee implant which I underwent 12 years earlier.

"Despite my submission of all necessary medical information and documents, Cigna rejected my request for hospital insurance coverage because it 'did not meet Cigna criteria and guidelines.' I nonetheless informed Cigna of my scheduled operation and, thereafter, of the surgery results. Subsequently, Cigna informed me that I could appeal Cigna's decision through your organization.

"Marlene, who herself had undergone hip surgery, helped me draft the letter to Cigna. She advised me to incorporate additional information and documents to include post-operation Medical Certificate of my Orthopedic Surgeon and, most importantly, a CD containing several photographs of the damaged prothesis of my left knee – an undeniable proof of my need for surgery. On June 10, 2016, I sent Cigna all the materials Marlene had helped me prepare. On August 1, 2016, Cigna informed me of their decision to reimburse me for my surgery expenses.

"Looking back, AFICS played a most valued role in my "appeal case" with CIGNA. Through their genuine concern, constant support and invaluable assistance, Ludy and Marlene gave me the courage and the confidence to pursue my appeal and had a favorable outcome."

Fe Tupas. At the height of COVID-19 pandemic in 2022, long-time AFICS-PHL Ludivina Santos who worked with UNDP Manila during her UN days, shares another success story:

"In the case of Fe Tupas (who as you may know has been comatose for many years now), Marlene helped her niece recover her pension and UNFCU which had been inactive for over 2 years!"

* * *

AFICS-PH is ready to help UN retirees or those soon-to-retire. Each case is unique but through AFICS, resolutions are generally positively found.

AFICS is also successful in reaching retirees whose pension would have been suspended because of their failure to submit the annual certificate of entitlement.

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The AFICS Philippines Board of Trustees and Executive Committee 2024-2025