

The UNJSPF Member Self-Service (MSS) and the Former Officials Section's new website

(Information meeting on 19 October 2016 at the ILO in Geneva)

Large numbers of retired staff members responded to the invitation from the Bureau of the Section to participate in the meeting on the Pension Fund's new online service and the presentation of the Section's new website. Room V on R3 at the ILO was practically full, with some 150 people present and many others wishing to be present but unable to make it. It was a sign of the interest in the changes under way in the management of the Pension Fund and also in the Section's new site, recently rolled out (www.anciens-bit-ilo.org).

The session kicked off with François Kientzler, Executive Secretary of the Bureau, and the two Assistant Executive Secretaries, Ivan Elsmark and Abdoullaye Diallo, on the podium. Introducing the meeting, the Executive Secretary referred to the work done by the Section over the past months, in particular its recommendation that members vote against the proposed SHIF contributions increase in the referendum. On one hand that proposal was based on an old actuarial valuation carried out when the ITU was still part of the SHIF, and on the other hand the financial situation was good, reserves being almost at the maximum level at the time of the referendum. A large majority of voters had followed this recommendation but it had to obtain two-thirds of the total. It fell short by just a few votes and was not adopted. A new actuarial valuation is under way and the Director General has requested an audit on SHIF governance. The Bureau will keep a very close eye on these issues as the vast majority of participants in the Fund wish to keep the management of benefits in-house. A "consultative" SHIF General Meeting was held on 29 September 2016 in which a large number of retired staff members also participated (constituting probably about 80% of the 180 participants). See the report in this issue of *Message*.

The floor was then given to Mr Aliamane Bacar Said, Chief, Client Servicing and Records Management Section of the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund in Geneva. During his presentation he addressed several crucial issues for retirees before presenting the UNJSPF Member Self-Service (MSS) in more detail. First, he referred to the Certificate of Entitlements (CE), which must be completed each year, on pain of suspension of benefit payment. While any suspension will occur only after reminders have been sent, this can cause difficulties and consequent delays. Then Mr Bacar Said made some necessary recommendations concerning the administrative elements to be compiled upon retirement in order that an eventual survivor's benefit can be obtained without too much delay. The Fund needs to have all the retired official's relevant details on file before such an event occurs. A booklet on survivor's benefits is available on the UNJSPF website. Ensuring your file is complete facilitates the calculation and rapid payment of a surviving spouse's benefit to the widow or widower and other possible beneficiaries. In this regard, he said that the concept of marriage covers new situations now that same-sex marriage is accepted providing the country of domicile recognizes it. In order for such an entitlement to be determined, this type of marriage must take place under the same conditions as a conventional marriage, and most particularly before retirement.

In the second part of his presentation, Mr Bacar Said briefed participants on the changes in the UNJSPF Integrated Pension Administrative System, which now covers all components of human resources management, contributions, benefits and payments. With particular regard to beneficiaries, he said, all payments have been made without any known incidents perturbing their successful completion during the implementation phase of the new system. Everyone has

received their pension as normal. One of the improvements to the system is that those entitled to two pensions, and who therefore received them in two payments, now get them in a single payment. But the big novelty is being able to access information within your own personal space (MSS). Armed with a Unique Identification Number (UID) and password, everyone can check the status of their past payments, ensure their CE is up to date and has been received, and gain online access to the various forms necessary in the event of a change of bank, address, etc. Mr Bacar Said provided a detailed presentation of all the components of the new system. To conclude, he encouraged all participants to access their personal space, use the MSS and have closer contact with their Pension Fund (<http://www.unjspf.org>).

During the discussion that followed his presentation, several people welcomed the communications work currently being done by the Pension Fund to inform pensioners of the procedures to be followed in the event of an altered family situation, death or change of address. A number of forms are now available on the UNJSPF website, and many wished this had been the case in the past. Questions covered survivor's benefit, the difficulties in some countries of obtaining the supporting documents required, and also acceptance of the fact that the concept of marriage now encompasses same-sex relationships. The Pension Fund has been obliged to take these changes into account, but marriage predating retirement remains the rule. Several people also spoke of the difficulty of obtaining documents such as birth or marriage certificates; however, if necessary, other supporting documents can be used in such situations. Mr Bacar Said recommended that everyone carefully collate the various elements of their file so that in the event of survivorship or bereavement, benefits can be paid as quickly as possible.

Then in the last part of the meeting, Bureau member Cherry Thompson-Senior and Azéddine Sefrioui, retired ILO staff member and webmaster, presented the new website of the Section. Up to now there had been a page hosted on the ILO Staff Union website that was little used. The new site – see the Editorial in issue 61 of *Message* – has been launched because more and more young retired people make use of the Internet. It will facilitate communication between the Bureau of the Section and its members, although *Message*, in its paper form, will continue to be published, bearing in mind the older ones among us who do not go online. The site is hosted by a private provider outside of the ILO, and one of its objectives is to facilitate access to information and other websites useful to retirees: a range of links are provided to the SHIF and the UNJSPF, for instance. Cherry Thompson-Senior presented the areas of the site that have already gone live, notably all the above-mentioned links, and also what still has to be rolled out, such as the elements necessary for direct communication between members and the Bureau of the Section. Similarly, all issues of *Message* published since 1986, archived in PDF format by the ILO Library, are available for consultation. Photos of events like retired staff receptions and information meetings have also been posted, along with reports and articles. By going to the unique address of the Former Officials website (<http://www.anciens-bit-ilo.org>), retired staff will be able to access a wide variety of information and services.

Speaking at the end of the session, Abdoulaye Diallo, Assistant Executive Secretary for relations with retired staff in the regions and liaison with the Workers' Representatives on the ILO Governing Body, recalled what the retired community in Geneva and worldwide stands for, and insisted that there is an obligation not to allow our faraway colleagues to be left isolated. He mentioned various colleagues from the regions who had just joined the Former Officials section and congratulated them on taking that step.

Summing up, the Executive Secretary thanked all the speakers and retired staff present for their active participation in the meeting and welcomed the ongoing good relations with the

management and staff of the Geneva Office of the Pension Fund. He then invited everyone to share a cup of good cheer and continue their informal and friendly exchanges.