Dear Fellow Members,

I hope my note finds you and your loved ones well during these unusual times of our lives.

I want to update you on the following:

1. **Pension Issues**

   I wish to draw your attention to the current position of the Pension Fund vis-à-vis COVID-19:
   
   - The Fund will continue to process pension benefits as normal and without any delays.
   - COVID-19 is not affecting the funding stability of the Pension Fund, and the current performance has no bearing on the payment of established or new pension benefits.
   - Retirees, beneficiaries, and staff retiring this year, or in coming years, have no reason to worry about regular payment of their benefits.

   The Fund continues to receive, process and dispatch mail: therefore, you can continue to submit your original forms through the UN pouch at the UN Commissary building.

2. **COVID-19 situation**

   As indicated in my update of 28 September 2020, the country is now experiencing a second wave of coronavirus disease. From the available information, the average case detection rate in October is now 6.52 percent, which is higher than that of September which was 4.63 percent, but below that of August (9.30%) and July (10.20%). Unfortunately, the trends since October 13 show that the average case detection rate is likely to continue to rise. This is because the government relaxed the containment measures at the end of September. As a result, most of the people have disregarded MOH guidelines and protocols. The second reason, which is also confirmed by Governor Kingi of Kilifi (23-25 October 2020, *The Star*), are politicians. The top politicians are holding huge rallies without observing the anti-COVID-19 protocols.

   Moreover, on 27 October 2020, the country reported 14 deaths over a 24-hour period, and reported numbers have ranged between 12 and 14 since then. This was one the highest daily total after some days in August recording over 16 deaths. Also, according to experts, there are many COVID-19-related deaths that have not been reported, either because of stigma or lack of testing at the time of death. Therefore, the total number of deaths (934) reported to date is likely to be an underestimate.

   Given the above, there is a need to emphasize that you should not leave your home without a mask, you should avoid large crowds and keep social distance.
3. COVID-19 isolation and hospitalization

According to the Kenya Medical Practitioners and Dentists Council, the country now has a total of 18,443 isolation beds. The beds are enough for now, but more might be needed if the number of cases continues to rise. The Council also reported that it lost 200,000 isolation beds which they had been using, following the phased reopening of schools and universities. Currently, the Council is negotiating with private hotels to charge the bare minimum for patients in isolation. This is to ensure that hospitals are not overwhelmed. This is important, because Europe is currently experiencing a serious second surge and if we are not careful this might spill over to us.

4. COVID-19 vaccine

There are several candidates for a vaccine under trial globally. Kenya has joined the Covax COVID-19 facility under WHO and the Global Alliance of Vaccines Initiative (GAVI) to ensure that we access any vaccines that may result from the current trials. From the available information, only a small quantity of COVID-19 vaccine will be allocated to Kenya – enough to vaccinate 3 per cent of the population. The initial allocation will be distributed equally to the 156 participating countries globally. The initial allocation will be given to health workers and adults who are at high risk due to underlying health conditions and age (above 65) which makes them vulnerable to COVID-19 infection. There are several concerns with the vaccines under trial, such as:

❖ Will the people trust the vaccines? For example, the President of Brazil has said that his government will not buy a Chinese-made COVID-19 vaccine (Sinovac) because China has not yet completed its trials.
❖ Will the vaccines work on all races of people? This concern arises because the testing may not have covered a sufficiently broad base, such as including Africans, Latinos, and Asians.
❖ The fact that the vaccine development protocols have not gone through standard large-scale trials of 30,000 people plus.
❖ The concern that vaccine development may not have included the standard waiting time of more than two months safety after Phase III trials.

5. Dissolution of Parliament

We are currently awaiting a directive from the High Court, expected on 29 October 2020. This will determine whether or not Parliament should be dissolved, and if not, what should be the next course of action.

6. Building Bridges Initiative (BBI)

The Building Bridges Initiative report was presented on 21 October 2020 at State Lodge in Kisii County and it was launched on 26 October 2020. The report is likely to dominate the political arena for a while. The recommendations included in the report are: the creation of the position of Prime Minister and two Deputy Prime Ministers; that cabinet ministers may be members of Parliament and not necessarily technocrats, and it also proposes the establishment of an office of the Leader of Opposition, being the person who was the runner-up in the Presidential elections. Moreover, the report wants political parties to be compelled, through the Political Parties Act, to be consistent with the constitutional measures of inclusion through their party lines. Other recommendations include: the need for the review of
campaign financing laws to regulate the amount and sources of funds to be used during elections, and the introduction of recall clauses to instil party discipline.

In any event, the BBI report offers options which should be soberly explored.

7. Pending Issues

❖ Commissary

Before the COVID-19 outbreak in March 2020, I was supposed to have a meeting with UNON DG to discuss, among other matters, the use of the UN commissary by AFICS members. The meeting was postponed until further notice. Given that the UN complex is closed, we have yet to have the postponed meeting. On the other hand, I had had a meeting with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs before the COVID-19 outbreak, and they confirmed that they had written to UNON on the basis of my letter to the PS, Foreign Affairs, requesting advice on the issue mid last year. I will get back to you on this once I have had a meeting with UNON DG.

❖ Contributions

According to our records, we still have some members who have not paid their annual contribution from 2017 to present. Given that running our association depends on the contributions of our members, for those who are in arrears, kindly regularize the situation. Please note that for those who retired at the professional level your contribution is only Ksh.6000 per year, and those who retired as general service it is Ksh.2500 per year. As always, your contributions and continued support of our association are highly appreciated.

The details for payment are as follows:

MPESA pay bill No.522522

Ks A/CNo.1113818182 and Us Dollar A/C 1113818727.

Please confirm your payment to the AFICS Office.

❖ Get-together

I want to confirm that we had received contributions from many of you for a lunch get-together after our 2020 proposed AGM at the end of March this year. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the AGM and the lunch were postponed. I want to confirm that the lunch money received is in our account, and we thank all those who contributed. It is our hope that once the situation is safe, we will organize a get-together.

I want to end with a word of caution and encouragement by Andre Hoffman: “there is no solution to this crisis without a properly functioning vaccine”. I also agree with views of many public health experts that: “No one is safe from COVID 19 unless all of us are safe.” I cannot agree with them more.

With best personal regards,

Amb. John O. Kakonge, President, AFICS-Kenya

28th October, 2020