



## ASSOCIATION DES CORRESPONDANTS AUPRÈS DES NATIONS UNIES

Palais des Nations, 1211 Genève 10, Suisse

### **President's Report**

**20.06.2022**

ACANU has been active for more than 70 years ago. During all that time, the Association has always struggled to defend the rights and interests of its members in the exercise of their profession with as much integrity as possible.

I must admit that since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, we have had to be particularly inventive and gather all our forces to allow journalists to work and earn a living. More than ever, the priority has been to maintain freedom of expression, to defend equal access to information for all, and to respect our cultural and professional diversity. These constitute ACANU's real wealth.

Since the end of the first quarter of 2020, we are all facing new challenges. Since the beginning of the confinement period, the UN and the specialized agencies stopped all in-person activities in the Palais for a long period. During that time, we have noticed that all of them took advantage of the sanitary context and the virtual organization of press conferences to restrict access to information, prevent questions from being asked and avoid face-to-face meetings.

To compensate for this vacuum, the ACANU Committee created:

- Its own WhatsApp group to allow an exchange, in real time, of information. Thanks to the vice-president, Catherine Fiankan-Bokonga, for her initiative,



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- Its own ACANU platform for video conferencing. Thanks to the Secretary, Tamer Aboalenin, for his great availability.

These new facilities helped ACANU members to mitigate loss of income during the confinement. Since March 2020, the Committee has organized nearly 150 press conferences, with experts from the UN system, politicians, diplomats, NGOs...

We hoped that this would allow everyone to continue to practice their profession by covering the news of International Geneva and Switzerland.

To defend the professional rights of correspondents, we sent dozens of letters to agencies such as WHO complaining about delays in webinars, lack of briefings with experts etc. We explained that it was vital for the UNOG-accredited press corps to have access to "real" press conferences organized just for them. Most letters to Gabriella Stern, WHO's Director of Communications, went unanswered....

Once a month, we were meeting virtually with the United Nations Information Service's team (UNIS). Through these monthly meetings we have established a privileged relationship with the Director, Alessandra Vellucci, and we have tried to make her understand that all of us have the same interest: keep Geneva on the map. This message is, to this day, not understood. The UN considers that it provides enough reports, press releases, produces radio broadcasts or makes available images that should be sufficient to cover the news of its system.

During this exceptional period, several journalists left the Association, including members of the Committee, namely Lionel Fatton and Wolfgang Warner. They have been replaced by our colleagues Dina Abi-Saab and Paola Dupraz.



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We hope that the next Committee will have the opportunity to organize a big party to bring together old and new correspondents who are still in the region.

We have also encountered many problems with the Strategic Heritage Plan (UN renovation project). Unfortunately, all the suggestions and indications of needs expressed by ACANU during the last 5 years were not taken into consideration. Their attitude of "non-communication" was the same with UNIS. We are concerned that this is, in our opinion, a signal that correspondents no longer have a place in the Palais.

The ACANU Committee also fought hard to have the rent of offices used by some members reduced, at least for the period corresponding to the official confinement in Switzerland. This was made possible thanks to the personal intervention of the UNOG Director General, Tatiana Valovaya, with the UN administration. As a former journalist, the head of UNOG has always stood by us to defend our achievements and always accepts our requests to hold a press conference.

The Committee also did its best to help members move, at a preferential rate of payment, since the administration refused to pay for moving personal belongings. We followed up on moving mailboxes and allocating two Press Rooms for correspondents who need a desk.

The members of the ACANU Committee, elected for the period 2019/2020, have worked until June 2022 with the sole objective of serving efficiently the correspondents accredited to the United Nations in Geneva. We thank you for the trust you have placed in us.