



**THE PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION  
OF FOREIGN SERVICE OFFICERS  
L'ASSOCIATION PROFESSIONNELLE  
DES AGENTS DU SERVICE EXTÉRIEUR**

## **Executive Director Report 2020 Annual General Meeting**

Bonjour tout le monde,

2020 has been a year for the history books. At PAFSO, it has been a year full of challenges, growth, and introspection on our programs and services and on how we can better deliver them to our membership.

In February, at the EXCOM retreat, we started the work on developing PAFSO's Strategic Plan. This work continued throughout the winter and spring with consultations and input gathered by all stakeholders to bring us to the final product being presented along with the communications plan for your approval today.

That same month, the EXCOM made the difficult – but necessary – decision to put the publication of *bout de papier* on hiatus. This down time has allowed for a task force committee to undertake a complete review of the magazine and to develop a plan to reinvigorate it, extend its reach and to increase readership. During this process, subscribers and advertisers were notified of the hiatus and reimbursed for prepaid ads or any issues still outstanding. As a member of the task force, I can report that I am very pleased to see such a high level of engagement among my fellow committee members. Overall, I have a good feeling about the future of the magazine. The President will be providing a full report on the committee's work.

In early March, our finance officer unexpectedly went on extended leave. This, coupled with the extended absence of the Director of Administration, required that we hire both a term administrative assistant, Marty Johnston, and a contract finance officer, Jeff Beard to make up for these absences. And, in true 2020 style, no sooner had they joined our team than COVID-19 work-from-home orders came down, and all operations became virtual.

Thankfully, in late 2019 we spent a lot of time and effort to implement business continuity measures which included the upgrade of our IT systems – both software and hardware – as well as a VoIP phone system. This made the move to working remotely almost seamless. Staff were quick to adapt and to make the necessary adjustments required to be able to continue their work from home offices. I am pleased to report this was done without impacting the availability, delivery and quality of representation, communications, and other secretariat services to the membership.

With all the upheaval and uncertainty caused by the global pandemic, we have seen a significant increase in the number of members reaching out to us for guidance and advice on various labour relations and FSD issues related to the pandemic. In response, we have held two townhall meetings

with members to better understand the impacts COVID-19 has had on their work and to explore which systemic issues to bring to the attention of management. What we discovered through these sessions is that the biggest issue facing our members centers around vulnerable health status declarations. We undertook to push back on the Employer's proposed processes, and were successful in ensuring that those members who had been declared vulnerable would be assessed by a medical professional, and that their fitness to return to post would be determined by that assessment and not by a decision from management.

Over the course of this busy year, our Labour Relations unit has been able to achieve many positive outcomes for our members. Some notable cases include:

- the reimbursement of relocation fees and education expenses being authorized;
- assistance with obtaining authorization for the evacuation of pets from post;
- in addition to principal residence and family reunion expenses being paid and authorizations of per diems, temporary accommodation expenses, and alternate relocation routing;
- three return to work cases where members were put back on strength while awaiting suitable assignments;
- two successful grievances on PMAs;
- two cases resolved through mediation regarding a harassment complaint and code of conduct breach;
- 32 cases that were resolved informally regarding general labour relations issues; and
- the successful resolution of over 80 Phoenix related pay issues.

On the finance and administrative side of things, the current situation caused us to we move away from cheque payment and instead to the electronic transfer of funds for accounts payable. The transition did cause a few delays in getting out invoices to some of our affiliate members. We had to wait until some of the COVID-19 restrictions lifted in order for us to access the office to physically mail them out. I'd like to thank everyone for their patience and understanding through this challenging time.

Another consequence of the pandemic was the decision of the FS Awards committee to put off the gala until 2021. The committee is currently reviewing options for a virtual 2021 awards gala or whether to delay them until 2022.

This summer, we focused our energies on revamping and reconfiguring our entire membership database. These long overdue improvements will allow us greater efficiencies in updating our records, accessing vital information, preparing reports, etc. For our group life insurance policy holders, we have also undertaken a project to enable them to register and view their policy information through Groupnet, the CanadaLife web portal.

And finally, we are about to send out the latest issue of *bout de papier* along with the much coveted PAFSO calendars. Due to the many sudden repatriations and delays in the posting process, we may not have all of our members' current mailing addresses. In order to make sure that the magazine and calendar get to where they need to go, we are asking members to let us know of any changes in their contact information. So, if you have not already done so, please send your mailing address to [info@pafso.com](mailto:info@pafso.com).

As we move into the final months of 2020 and into the start of 2021, be assured that PAFSO remains committed to ensure that your rights are upheld and protected. We recognize and appreciate all the hard work and sacrifices you have all made this year. By working together as a collective, I am confident that we will come through this turbulent time stronger, and that we will have highlighted the crucial role that Foreign Service officers play in the service of Canada and all Canadians, at home and around the world.

Take care and be safe.

Kim Coles