



Seventeenth session
Agenda item 62

BUDGET ESTIMATES FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 1963

Major maintenance and capital improvement at United Nations Headquarters

Twelfth report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions to the General Assembly at its seventeenth session

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/928) concerning major maintenance and capital improvement at United Nations Headquarters. In his report, the Secretary-General recalls that the General Assembly at its sixteenth session decided,^{1/} as suggested by the Advisory Committee,^{2/} to defer for one more year the implementation of the permanent expansion programme of meeting room and visual facilities at Headquarters, which he had proposed to the General Assembly at its fifteenth session.^{3/} Paragraphs 2 to 7 of the Secretary-General's report summarize the background to the permanent expansion programme; paragraphs 8 to 11 describe the purely temporary arrangements carried out in 1962; the remainder of the report contains proposals for possible future action.

2. The Secretary-General's proposals cover three main categories of expenditure:

- I. Permanent expansion programme for meeting room facilities;
- II. Completion of the final phase of the architectural survey;
- III. Additions to visual facilities.

The Advisory Committee presents its comments and recommendations seriatim.

^{1/} Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixteenth Session, Annexes, agenda item 54, document A/5075, paragraph 38.

^{2/} Ibid., document A/4949.

^{3/} Ibid., Fifteenth Session, Annexes, agenda item 50, document A/C.5/848.

I. PERMANENT EXPANSION PROGRAMME FOR MEETING ROOM FACILITIES

3. The present accommodations for the General Assembly and its seven Main Committees comprise the Plenary Hall, four conference rooms and the Economic and Social Council Chamber, capable of seating 112 delegations in conditions which are not fully satisfactory. In the opinion of the Secretary-General, it now appears that a membership of some 126 can be expected in the not too distant future; the possibility of further expansion by temporary installations has been practically exhausted except in the Plenary Hall. Concurrently with the growth in membership, there has been an increase in the number of meetings held during regular sessions of the General Assembly, adding to the pressure on meeting-room facilities.
4. Accordingly, the Secretary-General has submitted revised proposals for the expansion of the seating capacity of the Plenary Hall and the main conference rooms and for the construction of two additional main conference rooms. These new proposals are based on an anticipated membership of some 126 as against 120 in the 1960 plans.
5. Before considering in detail the Secretary-General's proposals, the Advisory Committee has sought to determine the actual needs for meeting-room facilities. To that end, it has studied detailed charts showing day by day, for mornings, afternoons and evenings, how each of the available rooms, chambers and halls has been used in the last three years. This survey has shown that there have been but very few occasions on which six Main Committees have met simultaneously. Indeed, the normal maximum has been five Main Committees or, less frequently, five Main Committees and the Plenary meeting. In the circumstances, it would appear that five well-equipped committee rooms, with the possibility of using the Plenary Hall in case of necessity should be sufficient to meet all foreseeable requirements. This would require careful scheduling of meetings and strict adherence to the time-table by the Committees themselves. The Advisory Committee understands that, in any case, the Secretariat, even with temporary assistance during the General Assembly regular session, cannot service more than six meetings simultaneously and even that not on an everyday basis.
6. The Advisory Committee recognizes of course that the Secretary-General has felt obliged to put forward this proposal because of his responsibility for

assuring the proper servicing of United Nations meetings and in order to make it possible for Member Governments to choose the best method of providing necessary meeting facilities. For the reasons set out above and in view of the extremely critical financial position of the Organization, the Advisory Committee does not believe that it would be justifiable to incur the large expenditure involved in the construction of two new conference rooms (\$6,342,000). Consequently, the Advisory Committee recommends approval of a plan which would provide the necessary meeting-room facilities without requiring the construction of new committee rooms.

7. This plan would include the Secretary-General's proposal for an expansion of the Plenary Hall and the four existing conference rooms and, additionally, the conversion of the Trusteeship Council Chamber (or possibly the Economic and Social Council Chamber) into a regular 126-delegation conference room as indicated in paragraph 30 of the Secretary-General's report. This would provide five committee rooms plus a Plenary Hall. As explained in paragraph 11 below, the possibility also exists of making the Plenary Hall more suitable for committee use.

Expansion of the Plenary Hall

8. The Secretary-General has submitted three plans analysed in table 3 of his report. After careful scrutiny, the Committee would advise against the adoption of plan I for reasons of cost as well as for the serious disadvantages listed in the Secretary-General's report. As to the choice between plan II (three representatives plus three alternates per delegation) and plan III (five representatives and no alternate), the Advisory Committee has noted that plan III, while somewhat less expensive (\$187,000 as against \$255,000), would provide for one seat less per delegation on the floor of the Hall and result in a more crowded arrangement where consultations between members of a particular delegation would be more difficult; and that plan II, among other advantages, would make the circulation of delegates considerably easier and, in the opinion of the architects, would be more satisfactory from the aesthetic point of view. However, on this question of a choice between plan II and plan III which so closely concerns the convenience of delegations, the Advisory Committee would prefer to make no definite recommendation.

Expansion of existing conference rooms

9. After exhaustive consultations with the Secretariat and, in particular, with the Director of General Services and his technical staff, the Advisory Committee would recommend adoption of plan II - the horseshoe plan - as shown in table 4 of the Secretary-General's report. The Advisory Committee endorses the remarks of the Secretary-General concerning the merits of this plan, namely, that it retains the present more desirable seating arrangement for meetings; that the visual coverage remains unchanged and that future expansion beyond 126 may be made with minimum extra cost by utilizing aisle space between tables. In addition, it is the opinion of the Advisory Committee that, while the alternative plan is estimated at the same figure, the retention of the horseshoe arrangement might well permit the salvage of a part of the existing installations and, therefore, the cost of the operation might conceivably be held at a level lower than the estimate of \$869,000 submitted by the Secretary-General, which of necessity is a very tentative one.

Conversion of a Council Chamber

10. The Advisory Committee recommends conversion of the Trusteeship Council Chamber into a regular conference room seating 126 delegations. This operation is estimated by the Secretary-General to cost some \$297,000. It would provide the United Nations with the same facilities as the expenditure of \$4.5 million for the construction of one new conference room [A/C.5/928, para. 30 (3)]. Financial considerations alone would justify this proposal; and the General Assembly will recall that the Trusteeship Council Chamber has seldom been used during General Assembly sessions. An alternate course would be to convert the Economic and Social Council Chamber which, for many years, has been in regular use by Main Committees of the Assembly.

Installation of conference room facilities in the Plenary Hall

11. With the expansion of the four existing conference rooms and the conversion for committee use of a Council Chamber, there would be facilities for five Main Committees of up to 126 delegations to meet simultaneously. The remodelled

Plenary Hall would also sometimes be available, as at present. The Advisory Committee understands, however, that, in the past, Main Committees have been reluctant to meet in the Plenary Hall. The Advisory Committee has established that the Hall could be made more suitable for Committee use at a cost of about \$135,000, provided always that the work was done at the same time as the main remodelling projects. This work would include the installation of plug-in microphones on each delegation's desk and the provision of a removable bureau table for the officers of the Committee assigned to meet in the Plenary Hall. The estimate of \$135,000 has been made on the basis of plan II for the Plenary Hall, which would provide more room for advisers on the floor. If related to other plans for remodelling the Hall, the cost would be about 15-20 per cent higher. In this way, the Hall would provide a sixth, and more satisfactory, committee room when not in use by the Assembly. The General Assembly may wish to consider whether this installation should be approved as part of the general plan or whether it should be reconsidered at the eighteenth session before the time when construction would have to begin.

II. COMPLETION OF THE FINAL PHASE OF THE ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY

12. The growing membership of the Organization and the more extensive use of Headquarters premises have increased the need for additional facilities for delegates and staff, including lounges and catering areas. The Advisory Committee has been informed that such facilities and services are already overcrowded or inadequate and in certain cases highly unsatisfactory from the point of view of safety and security.

13. The Secretary-General now recommends that the architectural survey authorized in 1959 be completed in 1963 at an estimated cost of \$14,500, and submitted to the Assembly at its eighteenth session. The purpose of the survey would be to review the adequacy of existing facilities, other than those relating to conference rooms and office space, with a view to:

- (a) Expansion and improvement of delegates' dining facilities;
- (b) Increased lounge area for delegates;
- (c) Extension of cooling system to various working areas of the basement;
- (d) Additional or enlargement of facilities such as telephone, coat room, coffee and tea services, staff facilities; and

- (e) Review and readjustment of safety and security installations throughout the Headquarters Buildings.

14. The Advisory Committee wishes to stress that this would complement an internal survey to be undertaken in 1962 and 1963 by the Administrative Management Service of the Office of the Controller, looking to the most effective and economical use of office space in the Secretariat Building. On the basis of the evidence submitted, the Advisory Committee recommends approval of the Secretary-General's request.

III. ADDITIONS TO VISUAL FACILITIES

15. In paragraphs 36 to 38 of his report, the Secretary-General recalls that, in the original plans for the construction of the permanent Headquarters, space was reserved in the basement area of the General Assembly building to provide suitable facilities for television and other visual services. A comprehensive plan for the development of this area for television services was submitted in 1959, which would have involved an expenditure of \$880,000 over a two-year period. As a result of increases in construction costs, the current estimate for the same plan would be \$918,000.

16. On the recommendation of the Advisory Committee, the implementation of this plan was deferred by the General Assembly in view of its relatively low priority in the face of the other demands on the United Nations budget at a time of financial stringency.

17. The Secretary-General has now reviewed the original plan and proposes a two-stage project. This would reduce materially the initial outlay of funds and the first stage would meet the more pressing needs of the television operations while permitting temporary use of the rest of the basement area.

18. This first stage, estimated to cost some \$525,000, calls for the basic preparation essential for any use of the basement area, such as basic structural steelwork, air conditioning, plumbing, heating, electricity, dust control and fire protection. Also included in the first stage is the installation into slightly more than half the total area of a television studio and processing centre. The remainder of the basement area would be available to relieve temporarily other pressures on space in the Headquarters buildings.

19. As regards stage II which would provide for the utilization of the remainder of the basement area for the construction of additional studio space with a public gallery suitable for use as a briefing and screening room, the Secretary-General suggests that it be deferred until a later date for reasons of economy. It should be noted however that the estimate of \$525,000 for stage I is related to the utilization of the remainder of the basement area envisaged under stage II.

20. In the past, the Advisory Committee has questioned the need for additional television facilities. However, it is clear that television is rapidly becoming a more widespread information medium in many new and developing countries; and the Committee recognizes that, if the Office of Public Information is to meet the requests for television coverage of the United Nations which are already being received from broadcasting organizations outside the North American continent, it may need to be provided with more adequate facilities. In view of the information submitted by the representatives of the Secretary-General, the Advisory Committee would agree that grounds exist for undertaking the work envisaged in stage I at an appropriate time. The installation of basic steelwork, plumbing, lighting, air conditioning, etc. would in any case appear to be a sound investment in that it would make available to the Secretariat some sorely needed space.

21. For a number of years, the Advisory Committee has consistently advocated and the General Assembly has upheld the principle of stabilization of OPI expenditures. Against this background the Committee considers that the stage I facilities, i.e. the provision of a well-equipped technical area and of a modern studio, should be regarded as fully adequate to cover visual information needs at Headquarters in the years to come. Moreover, the balance of the basement area can certainly be put to more profitable use in view of the critical space shortage now obtaining in the Headquarters buildings. Therefore, the Advisory Committee recommends:

- (a) That the provision of additional visual facilities should be limited to stage I;
- (b) That the Secretary-General be invited to undertake, as a matter of urgency, as part of the internal survey by the Administrative Management Service mentioned in paragraph 14 above a study to

determine the optimum use to be made of the remainder of the basement area. This study would need to be completed before any work begins on stage I, since the details of that work may well partly depend on the specific use to be made of the rest of the area. The Advisory Committee would be ready to consider a report by the Secretary-General, including definite space utilization proposals as soon as such a report can be made available. It should then be possible for the Secretary-General to present an over-all plan and revised estimates for work on the basement area as a whole, which could be considered by the General Assembly, together with the timing of any approved capital expenditure.

The time element

22. In paragraphs 48 and 49 of his report, the Secretary-General indicates that the execution of the plan would require at least fifteen months after authorization by the General Assembly. A minimum of six months would be needed for the preparation of plans for architectural, structural and mechanical work, and three months for competitive bidding and contract assignment. Thus, actual construction work could only begin about September 1963, and would require an absolute minimum of six months for its completion. It would not be practicable however to start work at least with respect to the General Assembly Hall or main conference rooms until the eighteenth session of the General Assembly, due to open in September 1963, has been concluded.

23. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the Secretary-General's time-table is based on the assumption that there would be no resumed session of the General Assembly. He indicates that, if such is the case, the renovation of the Assembly Hall and the main conference rooms could commence early in 1964 and every effort would be made to schedule the work for completion by the opening of the nineteenth session of the General Assembly in the fall of 1964. He points out, however, that only a limited number of meetings requiring the use of the main conference rooms could take place during the construction period.

Recapitulation

24. The total costs of the projects recommended by the Advisory Committee can be summarized as follows:

		\$	
(a)	Expansion of Plenary Hall: Plan II	255,000	[or \$187,000 for plan III]
(b)	Expansion of existing conference rooms	869,000	
(c)	Conversion of a Council Chamber	297,000	
(d)	Completion of the architectural survey	14,500	
	TOTAL	\$1,435,500	[or \$1,367,500 if plan III is adopted for the Plenary Hall]

25. In addition, the General Assembly may wish to consider at this time the following project described in paragraph 11 above:

(e) Installation of microphones and of a removable bureau table in the Plenary Hall \$135,000

26. Finally, the General Assembly may wish to consider, after the receipt of an over-all plan and revised estimates, the following project described in paras. 15 to 21:

(f) Stage I of work in basement area
(including visual facilities) [presently estimated at \$525,000]

27. Should the General Assembly approve action in respect of the projects listed above, an appropriation of \$100,000 would be required in 1963 for completion of the architectural and engineering survey and the drawing of plans and preparatory work. The balance would need to be appropriated over 1964 and 1965, the exact year depending on the particular plans approved by the General Assembly and the construction schedule decided on. Accordingly, the Advisory Committee would recommend that the appropriation of \$4,107,000 it had itself recommended^{4/} under section 7 of the 1963 budget be increased by \$100,000 to \$4,207,000.
