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BUDGET ESTIMATES FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 1964

Alteration, improvement and major maintenance of the
Palais des Nations, Geneva

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

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions considered the report of the Secretary-General on the alteration, improvement and major maintenance of the Palais des Nations (A/C.5/982).
2. The Secretary-General's report, which comprises three sections: (1) alteration and improvement of premises; (2) major maintenance of premises; and (3) methods of financing, is essentially an interim one. While the Secretary-General calls attention to the magnitude of the programme, he limits himself to requesting at this time the General Assembly's approval - and the relevant appropriations - for the implementation of two specific projects in 1964:
 - (a) Installation of a delegates' lounge, requiring an additional provision of \$50,000 under section 7;
 - (b) Reconditioning of those parts of the roofing which are in the most serious condition, requiring an additional appropriation of \$115,000, also under section 7. The balance of the total cost of reconditioning the roofing would be included in the budget estimates for 1965 (\$70,000) and 1966 (\$35,000).
3. Apart from these two concrete proposals, the Secretary-General's report contains, in section I, a brief historical summary of the modernization plan and other related projects carried out at a cost of some \$2,201,000 at the Palais des Nations, which was built between 1929 and 1937 and conceived in the light of the

special requirements of the League of Nations. Furthermore, at its seventeenth session, the General Assembly authorized the replacement of the telephone exchange system of the Palais, at an estimated cost of some \$500,000.

4. In paragraph 4 of his report, the Secretary-General indicates what is the present capacity of the Assembly Hall, the Council Chamber, and the conference rooms. In the subsequent paragraphs, he recalls the growing difficulties faced at the Palais as a result of the trend towards holding an increasing number of international conferences in Geneva, adding that there would inevitably be a need for a further expansion of existing facilities if that trend were to continue. The Secretary-General believes that the time has come to consider what further action is called for. This is a policy matter in which the factors to be weighed are the potentialities of the Palais des Nations and the extent to which Governments desire to use its facilities in the coming years. To this end, the Secretary-General recommends that a comprehensive examination of all relevant factors should be made by the Advisory Committee during the early part of 1964, thus enabling the General Assembly at its nineteenth session, to undertake a more detailed assessment of future needs and the most appropriate manner in which they might be met.

5. As regards maintenance, the Secretary-General recalls in section II of his report that, in his foreword to the budget estimates for 1964,^{1/} he drew special attention to the present state of repair of the premises in Geneva and indicated that it would be necessary to undertake a substantial programme of major rehabilitation at an early stage. Indeed, since the United Nations took over the Palais in 1946, expenditures for maintenance have been confined to normal cleaning, painting and minor preventive repairs and replacements; apart from the work done in connexion with the expansion and improvement of the conference area, no major projects of maintenance and repair of the premises as a whole have been undertaken. As a consequence, there are, according to the Secretary-General, a number of matters requiring urgent attention, inter alia, complete inspection and repair of all roofing, replacement of obsolete elevators, repair and recovering

^{1/} Official Records of the General Assembly, Eighteenth Session, Supplement No. 5 (A/5505), foreword, paras. 43-45.

of flooring, heating and air-conditioning, replacement of boilers and fuel storage tanks, of worn and defective simultaneous interpretation equipment, resurfacing and improvement of lighting of roadways, etc., repair and maintenance of the villas belonging to the United Nations.

6. With the exception of the roofing repairs which should, as indicated in paragraph 2 above, be started in 1964, all other maintenance projects listed in the preceding paragraph might, in the opinion of the Secretary-General, be examined by the Advisory Committee in conjunction with its review of conference facilities, as recommended in paragraph 4 above.

7. Lastly, in section III of his report, the Secretary-General, after recalling the two specific provisions required for 1964 (see paragraph 2 above) states that it is conceivable that, at its nineteenth session, the General Assembly may have to take decisions involving substantial expenditures in Geneva over a period of time. He suggests that the Assembly may see some merit in considering a long-term approach to the financing problem and, in particular, envisage the possibility of appropriating an annual lump-sum amount for such purposes and establishing a buildings fund in which unspent amounts will accumulate to form a reserve against unusually heavy costs in the future, as suggested in the foreword to the 1964 budget estimates.^{2/} The Secretary-General trusts that the Assembly will wish to revert to this proposal at its next session when it considers the financing of any programme it might approve with respect to the Palais des Nations.

Comments by the Advisory Committee

8. Aside from the two requests for budgetary appropriations for 1964, on which it comments in paragraphs 11 and 12 below, the Advisory Committee took the opportunity of the presence in New York of the Deputy Director of the European Office, to discuss also the long-term aspects of the question. The Committee was informed that, should the General Assembly approve the Secretary-General's suggestion that the Committee go to Geneva, the Secretary-General would prepare detailed documentation, including, where appropriate, alternative solutions to the

^{2/} Ibid., paras. 46-48.

existing problems. It would be the Secretary-General's intention to make his submission as comprehensive as possible so as to anticipate needs for a good number of years and thus put an end to the piecemeal approach followed up to now, and about which the Committee expressed concern in its fifth report of 1963.^{3/}

9. The programme of alterations and possible expansion of the Palais des Nations will depend on the use which is to be made of the Palais in the future, and specifically on whether the trend towards holding an increasing number of conferences in Geneva continues.

10. Although the problems which have arisen with the agencies, as far as 1963 and 1964 are concerned, are mainly conflicts of dates regarding the scheduling of conferences, the fact remains that some of these agencies have stated that existing facilities in the Palais des Nations are not completely adequate. It would, therefore, appear that the question of the adequacy of these facilities for the major conferences of the specialized agencies is also a point which must be taken into consideration in arriving at a decision on future plans with respect to meeting rooms and ancillary installations at the Palais des Nations. The Committee was given to understand that the availability of suitable conference facilities was a prerequisite for the continuation of the use of the Palais as a common conference centre by the various agencies in the United Nations family, as was the assurance that henceforth they would be able to hold their major conferences each year at their accustomed dates.

11. The Advisory Committee would not contest the need for the installation of a delegates' lounge in the Palais des Nations. However, since it appears that, in any case, the work could only be completed in the latter part of 1964, it would seem to the Committee that the matter should be considered along with the comprehensive examination of the total requirements in the Palais, which the Secretary-General has recommended that the Advisory Committee be invited to undertake in early 1964.

12. The second specific request of the Secretary-General concerns the reconditioning of the roofing of the Palais. As explained in paragraph 5 above, this is now becoming most urgent owing to the fact that major maintenance has been deferred for a number of years. When it met in Geneva in 1962, the Committee

^{3/} Ibid., Supplement No. 7 (A/5507, para. 209.

was able to appreciate the need for these repairs and it would therefore recommend that the General Assembly approve the Secretary-General's proposal. It is estimated that the implementation of this project, which would be spread over the next three years, starting with the areas in the most serious condition, would cost some \$220,000, \$115,000 of which would be required in 1964. Accordingly, the Committee recommends that the General Assembly should approve an additional appropriation of \$115,000 under section 7 of the 1964 budget.
