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BUDGET ESTIMATES FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 1970

United Nations accommodations in Bangkok and Addis Ababa

Twenty-fourth report of the Advisory Committee on
Administrative and Budgetary Questions to the
General Assembly at its twenty-fourth session

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered reports by the Secretary-General dealing with United Nations accommodations in Bangkok (A/C.5/1264) and Addis Ababa (A/C.5/1265). The reports analyse the existing accommodation problems in Bangkok and Addis Ababa and propose broadly similar measures with a view to their eventual solution.
2. In sections II and III below the Advisory Committee has summarized separately the Secretary-General's observations relevant to the two sites. Its own observations and recommendations are contained in section IV.

II. THE SITUATION IN BANGKOK

3. The Secretary-General recalls that since 1954 the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE) has been located in a building in Bangkok known as the Sala Santitham provided rent-free by the Government of Thailand. The occupants of the building also include several United Nations agencies. Various parts of the Sala Santitham have remained under the control of the Government.

4. In addition to office and commercial space the Sala Santitham contains a medium-size conference room under United Nations control. It formerly contained further conference facilities which, while under the control of the Government, were at the disposal of ECAFE for its meetings; however these were destroyed by fire in August 1969.

5. Under arrangements which have evolved since 1954 the United Nations and the Government of Thailand share some costs associated with the building, such as utilities. The United Nations is responsible for the cleaning and security of the area it occupies, and for minor repairs and maintenance, while the Government takes care of major maintenance, structural repairs and the grounds.

6. The Secretary-General advises that a short time after ECAFE occupied the Sala Santitham it became clear that more space would be needed. The following steps were taken to alleviate or remedy this situation:

(a) Expedients were employed to put the existing space to more intensive use;

(b) In 1961 the Secretary-General undertook a survey to determine the size and possible cost of a common building in Bangkok to meet the needs of ECAFE and other United Nations agencies for ten years; prospects for financing the project did not develop and it lapsed;

(c) In 1964 the Government of Thailand built an annex containing 1,052 sq.m. (11,324 sq. ft.) of net space, and in 1967 the Netherlands Government donated a building containing 1,236 sq.m. (13,304 sq. ft.); these additions provided some relief but did not solve the accommodation problem;

(d) On the initiative of the Executive Secretary of ECAFE and in co-operation with the Ministry of Public Works of the Government of Thailand, plans were subsequently developed (also in 1967) for a fifteen-storey building which would provide for the needs of ECAFE until 1987. The cost was estimated at about \$4 million and the Executive Secretary proposed that the building might be financed by voluntary contributions from ECAFE members. However, the pledges received were insufficient to warrant further negotiations;

(e) Early in 1969 the Executive Secretary developed a plan for a simple six-storey building estimated to cost about \$574,000 which would satisfy only

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the existing needs of ECAFE, with no margin for expansion. It was again suggested that the cost be provided by voluntary contributions, but the response has not been encouraging.

7. On the basis of a recent survey the present shortage of space at ECAFE is put at 3,457 sq.m. (37,211 sq.ft.), including 529 sq.m. (5,694 sq.ft.) currently rented and 537 sq.m. (5,780 sq.ft.) made available by building cubicles in corridors, one of the expedients resorted to in the past.

8. In this connexion the Secretary-General calls attention to a report of the Joint Inspection Unit on ECAFE,^{1/} which describes the working conditions of ECAFE personnel - with the exception of those with offices in the building provided by the Netherlands - as "most unsatisfactory". He adds that the destruction in August 1969 of the conference rooms under the control of the Government of Thailand will severely restrict the conference facilities available to ECAFE, at least until they can be replaced.

9. In the light of these facts the Secretary-General expresses the view that the situation in Bangkok has reached a critical stage and that action must be taken to provide the Commission with the facilities it needs to function properly. For the immediate future he sees no alternative to the rental of additional outside space. As to the long term, he recalls that United Nations policy has been to call on host Governments to help provide accommodation for offices established in their countries. The Government of Thailand has been approached and has reacted positively to the request for further assistance, but the Secretary-General understands that it does not feel that it could make a commitment for a project of the magnitude required to meet the full needs of ECAFE; it has, however, agreed to provide land for further construction. In view of this situation and the unsatisfactory response to past appeals for voluntary contributions, the Secretary-General considers that a solution to the shortage of accommodation lies with the United Nations membership as a whole.

10. The Secretary-General therefore proposes that the General Assembly might wish to authorize the development of appropriate plans for the expansion of the premises of ECAFE, and suggests five steps to provide the necessary information upon which the General Assembly could decide to take measures. In summary, these steps are:

^{1/} JIU/REP/69/6.

(a) Study by officials of ECAFE and services at United Nations Headquarters to establish the additional needs of the Commission at present and projected for about ten years, taking also into account the needs of other United Nations agencies;

(b) Inquiries into the financial arrangements under which other members of the United Nations family might participate in the construction costs, pay rent for space occupied, or otherwise share in the operating cost of a common building;

(c) Study of such legal questions as the conditions under which the land would be made available, title to the property and ownership of the building. The Secretary-General calls attention to the fact that Bangkok is not officially the permanent headquarters of ECAFE and that United Nations construction there could imply some regularization of the de facto situation;

(d) Preparation in 1970, by means of an architectural and engineering survey, of preliminary plans for new construction, and cost estimates, on the basis of the established space requirements. The Secretary-General would hope that the Government of Thailand would be prepared to provide help similar to that which it made available in connexion with the proposals developed in 1967;

(e) Finally, the Secretary-General would plan to report on the above steps to the General Assembly at its twenty-fifth session, submitting proposals for a construction project.

11. Should the General Assembly approve this course of action, the Secretary-General requests an appropriation of \$50,000 for 1970, under section 7 of the budget, for the architectural and engineering survey, on the understanding that to the extent that the Government of Thailand may participate on a cost-free basis, the full amount will not be spent.

III. THE SITUATION IN ADDIS ABABA

12. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) has its headquarters in Africa Hall in Addis Ababa, which was built by the Government of Ethiopia and opened in 1961. The Secretary-General notes, however, that there is no formal agreement governing its use by the Commission. In practice, ECA occupies five of the six floors of office space rent-free, together with some office space on the other floor which must, however, be vacated at times if required for a conference held under Government auspices. The conference facilities are under the control of the

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Government but are made available to ECA free of charge, at agreed times. ECA also has the use of some storage and warehouse space, and of a language laboratory equipped and operated by the Government of France, in separate buildings.

Maintenance of this complex of buildings is paid for by the Commission.

13. The net usable office space available to ECA in Africa Hall totals 3,627 sq.m. (39,039 sq.ft.). This space is occupied by 384 staff members, giving an average occupancy per capita of 9.5 sq.m. (102 sq.ft.), compared with the normal average of 11.5 to 12 sq.m. (124 to 129 sq.ft.) generally used to estimate United Nations office space requirements. Offices have been constructed in corridors and others divided and shared. In addition, 245 sq.m. (2,637 sq.ft.) of the space occupied must periodically be vacated.

14. The Secretary-General goes on to describe the shortage of space in the library, where cramped conditions restrict the service available to users, and the documents reproduction shop, where overcrowding is a source of inefficiency and even danger. Moreover, he indicates that there is a serious shortage of document storage space and a further shortage in other areas, such as the health clinic.

15. In the view of the Secretary-General there is thus an immediate need for additional space totalling 2,330 sq.m. (25,080 sq.ft.) as follows:

	<u>Sq. m.</u>	<u>Sq. ft.</u>
Office space	1,695	18,245
Library	170	1,830
Document reproduction	189	2,034
Storage	200	2,153
Clinic	26	280
Miscellaneous (cable office, map room, etc.)	50	538
Total	<u>2,330</u>	<u>25,080</u>

This total includes provision for posts in ECA which are at present vacant. However, it does not provide for any expansion of ECA's activities.

16. The Secretary-General goes on to indicate that taking into account the expected growth rate of ECA, on the basis of its present functions, an additional 3,053 sq.m. (32,863 sq.ft.) of office and related space would be needed in the

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next ten years.^{2/} Furthermore, the estimated area currently required by United Nations agencies with offices in Addis Ababa amounts to 1,390 sq.m. (14,963 sq.ft.); allowing for expected growth over ten years, 1,800 sq.m. (19,375 sq.ft.) of space would be required if these were all to be accommodated in common premises with ECA.

17. To the requirements already outlined above the Secretary-General has added further needs which would arise if the library were to expand its collection and undertake increased responsibilities. These needs would amount to a minimum of 673 sq.m. (7,244 sq.ft.).

18. As for the conference facilities at Africa Hall, which are made available to ECA by the Government of Ethiopia at agreed times, the Secretary-General reports that the assembly hall contains fewer seats than are required for meetings of the Commission, and that considering the probability of a further increase in its membership expanded facilities will be required. In addition, the arrangement of the six existing committee rooms results in practical working difficulties. However, the Secretary-General notes that conference facilities for ECA have traditionally been provided by member Governments, and that he would expect that the host Government would take into account the current re-evaluation of requirements in Addis Ababa.

19. In summary, the total estimated space requirements in Addis Ababa amount to 7,856 sq.m. (84,562 sq.ft.), as follows:

<u>Item</u>	<u>Requirement</u>	
	<u>Sq.m.</u>	<u>Sq.ft.</u>
Immediate needs of ECA	2,330 ^{a/}	25,080
Expansion of ECA to 1979	3,053	32,862
Possible needs of other United Nations agencies through 1979	1,800	19,375
Library expansion ^{b/}	673	7,244
	<u>7,856</u>	<u>84,562</u>

a/ For breakdown, see the table in paragraph 15 above.

b/ The figures exclude an area of 170 sq.m. (1,830 sq.ft.) which was erroneously included twice in the Secretary-General's report.

^{2/} Assuming an annual staff increase of five per cent. See the Secretary-General's report on present and projected space requirements of the United Nations (A/C.5/1263), to which reference is made in paragraph 24 below.

20. It is the Secretary-General's view that rental of outside space would not provide a long-term solution to the problem in Addis Ababa and would be costly and inefficient. He has accordingly put forward other proposals. In this respect he advises that the Government of Ethiopia, while expressing its deep interest in the matter, has not indicated that it would be prepared to increase the space which it now provides to ECA; he understands, however, that it would be willing to make available suitable land adjacent to Africa Hall if the United Nations wished to undertake new construction. In these circumstances he considers that as in the case in Bangkok (see paragraph 9 above) solution of the accommodation problem of ECA rests with the United Nations membership as a whole.

21. Accordingly the Secretary-General proposes an initiative similar to that which he has put forward with respect to Bangkok, namely that the General Assembly might wish to authorize the development of appropriate plans for the expansion of the premises of ECA. He envisages the following six steps:

(a) Refinement of a recent study of space needs at ECA so as to provide a detailed programme that could serve as a basis for the development of architectural plans. As in the case of ECATE, the programme would provide for projected needs over ten years and for the needs of other United Nations agencies;

(b) Inquiries into possible financial arrangements for agencies which might benefit from expanded premises, along the same lines as proposed in the case of ECATE (see paragraph 10 (b) above);

(c) Study of legal questions, as envisaged also at Bangkok (see paragraph 10 (c) above); the Secretary-General recalls that no written agreement exists for the occupation by the United Nations of part of Africa Hall;

(d) Preparation of an architectural and engineering survey similar to that proposed at Bangkok (see paragraph 10 (d) above); it would be the Secretary-General's hope that the Government of Ethiopia would agree to participate in financing this survey;

(e) Communication by the Secretary-General to the Government of Ethiopia of additional needs for conference facilities at Addis Ababa, in the hope that they would be included in any over-all plans which may be developed for the Africa Hall site;

(f) Finally, the Secretary-General would plan to report on these steps to the General Assembly at its twenty-fifth session.

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22. On the basis of the above proposals, the Secretary-General requests the General Assembly to appropriate \$50,000 for 1970 under section 7 for the architectural and engineering survey, on the understanding that to the extent that the necessary services are provided cost-free by the Government of Ethiopia, the full amount would not be spent.

IV. OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

23. In deciding to deal jointly with the Secretary-General's separate reports on space requirements in Bangkok and Addis Ababa, the Advisory Committee has been motivated not only by the broad similarity between the problems faced at the two sites but also by the fact that the proposals placed before the Assembly are basically identical. It recognizes, however, that differences do exist and that the solutions which might eventually be found in Bangkok and Addis Ababa might not be the same.

24. The Committee accepts the Secretary-General's conclusion, based on the extensive information provided in his two reports, that the existing premises of ECAFE and ECA are insufficient for their needs. Indeed, the need for additional space has been evident for some time. It was partly for this reason that the Advisory Committee, in its twenty-first report to the General Assembly at its twenty-third session,^{3/} recommended that the Secretary-General prepare a report, which is presently before the Assembly (A/C.5/1263), covering current and projected accommodation requirements for Headquarters, Geneva and the regional economic commissions. The Committee has taken into account the indications provided by this general survey in its present report. In the Committee's view the needs of ECAFE and ECA must be faced realistically if the activities of the two commissions are not to be artificially circumscribed.

25. In the case of Bangkok the Secretary-General has estimated the existing space deficiency at 3,457 sq.m. (37,211 sq.ft.) net. This does not take into account any future expansion of ECAFE, nor any increase that might be needed to accommodate future needs of other United Nations agencies with offices in Bangkok. With reference to the former point, the Advisory Committee observes that in his report on present and future space requirements for the United Nations the

^{3/} A/7366, para. 19.

Secretary-General considers that an estimated annual average growth of 5 per cent in the personnel of ECAFE would be justified; on this basis the additional needs in 1979, over and above those which already exist, would amount to 3,253 sq.m. (35,015 sq.ft.) (A/C.5/1263, paras. 11 and 22). The total additional requirement would thus amount to 6,710 sq.m. (72,226 sq.ft.).

26. As for the situation at ECA, the additional space requirement by 1979 - taking fully into account the possible needs of other United Nations agencies - would be 7,856 sq.m. (84,562 sq.ft.), as detailed in the table in paragraph 19 above.

27. The Secretary-General has stated in his reports the reasons which have led him to conclude that the solution of the space problems at both Bangkok and Addis Ababa lies with the membership as a whole. The Advisory Committee notes that the two host Governments have for many years made space available on a rent-free basis; further, the Government of Thailand has offered to make land available for new United Nations construction, and the Secretary-General understands that the Government of Ethiopia would be willing to do likewise. The Committee hopes that both Governments will see fit to continue and even extend their assistance, within the context of any action which might be decided upon by the General Assembly.

28. With respect to the situation in Bangkok, the Committee has noted the efforts exerted by the Secretary-General and by the Executive Secretary of ECAFE since 1961 to secure additional premises for the Commission. It regrets that the successive attempts to obtain sufficient voluntary contributions for a new building were not successful.

29. In the light of the facts reported by the Secretary-General, the Advisory Committee believes that the membership of the Organization as a whole might consider assuming some responsibility for providing accommodation for ECAFE and ECA. In taking this position it reaffirms the accepted United Nations policy of host government responsibility, but considers that the General Assembly could take into account the fact that such Governments may not always be in a position to satisfy the totality of the Organization's growing requirements. It would also point out that in 1958 the General Assembly assumed responsibility for the construction of the United Nations building in Santiago, Chile, to house primarily the Economic Commission for Latin America.

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30. Accordingly, the Committee concurs in the Secretary-General's proposals that the General Assembly might wish to authorize the development of exploratory plans for the expansion of the premises of ECAFE and ECA. It agrees in principle with the steps suggested by the Secretary-General in each case, as set out in sub-paragraphs 15 (a) to (c) of document A/C.5/1264, and sub-paragraphs 23 (a) to (f) of document A/C.5/1265, on the understanding that certain considerations will be borne in mind.

31. Firstly, the Committee is particularly concerned that the legal questions outstanding at both Bangkok and Addis Ababa be settled at an early stage. It considers that the Secretary-General should endeavour to enter into a formal agreement with each of the host Governments which would clearly define the conditions governing the presence of United Nations offices. In the case of Bangkok the special situation described in paragraph 10 (c) above should be taken into account.

32. Secondly, the Committee would hope with the Secretary-General that both host Governments will find it possible to assist in the preparation of the proposed architectural and engineering surveys, thereby reducing the cost to the United Nations.

33. Finally, the Committee recommends that the exploratory studies proposed by the Secretary-General be as comprehensive as possible and cover all possible solutions to the problems of accommodation in Bangkok and Addis Ababa. It considers that in approving appropriations at this stage in respect of proposed studies at both sites the General Assembly would in no way be prejudging the action it might take in the light of the reports which the Secretary-General intends to submit to the Assembly at its twenty-fifth session.

34. In the light of the above considerations, the General Assembly might wish to appropriate amounts of \$50,000 each to conduct architectural and engineering surveys for possible construction by the United Nations in Bangkok and Addis Ababa, on the understanding that to the extent the host Governments provide services cost-free, the full amount will not be spent.

35. If the Assembly agrees to this course of action, an additional \$100,000 will need to be appropriated under section 7 of the budget for 1970.
