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## Seventy-fifth session

Agenda item 141

### Programme budget for 2021

## Addressing the deteriorating conditions and limited capacity of the conference services facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

In its resolution [73/270](#), the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to provide during the main part of its seventy-fourth session detailed information regarding the possible renovation work aimed at addressing the deteriorating conditions and the limited capacity of the conference services facility at the United Nations Office at Nairobi. The Secretary-General presented this information in his report [A/74/471](#). In its resolution [74/263](#) (sect. XIV), the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to conduct a needs assessment and explore options that maximize efficiency and cost-effectiveness, taking into consideration the future needs of the conference facilities of the Office, and to submit a report to the Assembly at its seventy-fifth session. The Assembly also appropriated an amount of \$470,000 under section 29G, Administration, Nairobi, of the programme budget for 2020 for multidisciplinary consultancy services to conduct a detailed needs assessment and expanded options analysis.

The hiring of a consultancy firm and its work, which included an analysis of modern conferencing trends, such as remote access, hybrid conferencing modalities and sustainable events, were undertaken within the context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Based on the expert study, two scalable options for renovation and construction (options A and B) are proposed which would meet the immediate and projected additional capacity requirements of the conference facilities at the Office. The projections of additional capacity requirements have been benchmarked against historical data for utilization and peak events, and take into consideration the following:



(a) The additional capacity needed to service the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Habitat Assembly of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme and other associated meetings in Nairobi;

(b) The conferencing requirements of other United Nations entities and potential non-United Nations clients;

(c) The sustainability of projected participation and utilization levels;

(d) Alternative conferencing options available within the city of Nairobi;

(e) A provisional project schedule;

(f) Potential environmental, energy and operational efficiencies.

Option A would meet the immediate and short-term projected capacity requirements for events with up to 7,000 in-person participants. Option B would meet longer-term projected capacity requirements, as an expanded, scalable version of option A, for events with up to 9,000 in-person participants. The implementation period of the project would be over five to seven years, a provisional timeline that is contingent on the next steps being funded and commencing in 2021.

The General Assembly is requested to take note of the report of the Secretary-General, approve the establishment of a temporary post of Project Coordinator (P-4), appropriate an amount of \$494,000 for 2021, which would represent a charge against the contingency fund, and take note of the intention of the Secretary-General to propose next steps to the Assembly at the main part of its seventy-sixth session.

# I. Introduction

## A. Background

1. The last major investment in the conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi was in the mid-1980s, more than 35 years ago. Given that the useful life of buildings<sup>1</sup> is limited, a capital construction project should therefore be developed and implemented to meet the current and future conferencing needs and address foreseeable conferencing requirements over the next 25 to 30 years. In this regard, a life-cycle maintenance programme for the east and west wings of the conference facilities was already forecast by the Secretary-General in his report on the strategic capital review ([A/69/760](#)).

2. The United Nations Office at Nairobi is mandated to provide conference services to the two United Nations programmes headquartered in Nairobi: the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). In addition, the Office's conference centre provides a full range of conference facilities to the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes located in Nairobi. Both the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme and the recently instituted United Nations Habitat Assembly of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme have universal membership (193 Member States).

3. In 2018, the Secretary-General, in his report on the pattern of conferences, informed the General Assembly of the deteriorating conditions and limited capacity of the Office's conference centre, which is affecting the ability of the Secretariat to service the regular calendar meetings of the United Nations bodies headquartered in Nairobi and the other major international meetings and conferences held there.<sup>2</sup> The Assembly, in its resolution [73/270](#), on the pattern of conferences, requested the Secretary-General to provide detailed information regarding the possible renovation work aimed at addressing the deteriorating conditions and the limited capacity of the Office's conference services facility. A detailed report on that topic was submitted in 2019 ([A/74/471](#)). In its resolution [74/263](#) (sect. XIV), the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to conduct a needs assessment and explore options that maximize efficiency and cost-effectiveness, taking into consideration the future needs of the Office's conference facilities, and to submit a report to the Assembly at its seventy-fifth session. The Assembly also appropriated an amount of \$470,000 under section 29G, Administration, Nairobi, of the programme budget for 2020 for multidisciplinary consultancy services to conduct a detailed needs assessment and expanded options analysis.

4. The Office proceeded to hire a professional services firm (which included preparation of a multidisciplinary scope of works, conducting a tender exercise, evaluating bids and selecting the firm) specialized in the international conferencing and events industry to undertake the needs analysis and to further expand on the options analysis conducted in 2019. A firm was hired in September 2020 and contracted to conduct over 13 weeks all the required market research, which included an initial on-site physical assessment which could only be done in September after the reopening of Kenyan airspace following the lifting in August of the international air travel restrictions related to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The

<sup>1</sup> The standard "useful life" or "design life" of a United Nations type A building is approximately 40 years. Over that period, it is expected that a renovation project would be required sometime within the first 25 to 30 years in order to extend the building's useful life by an additional 25 years or more.

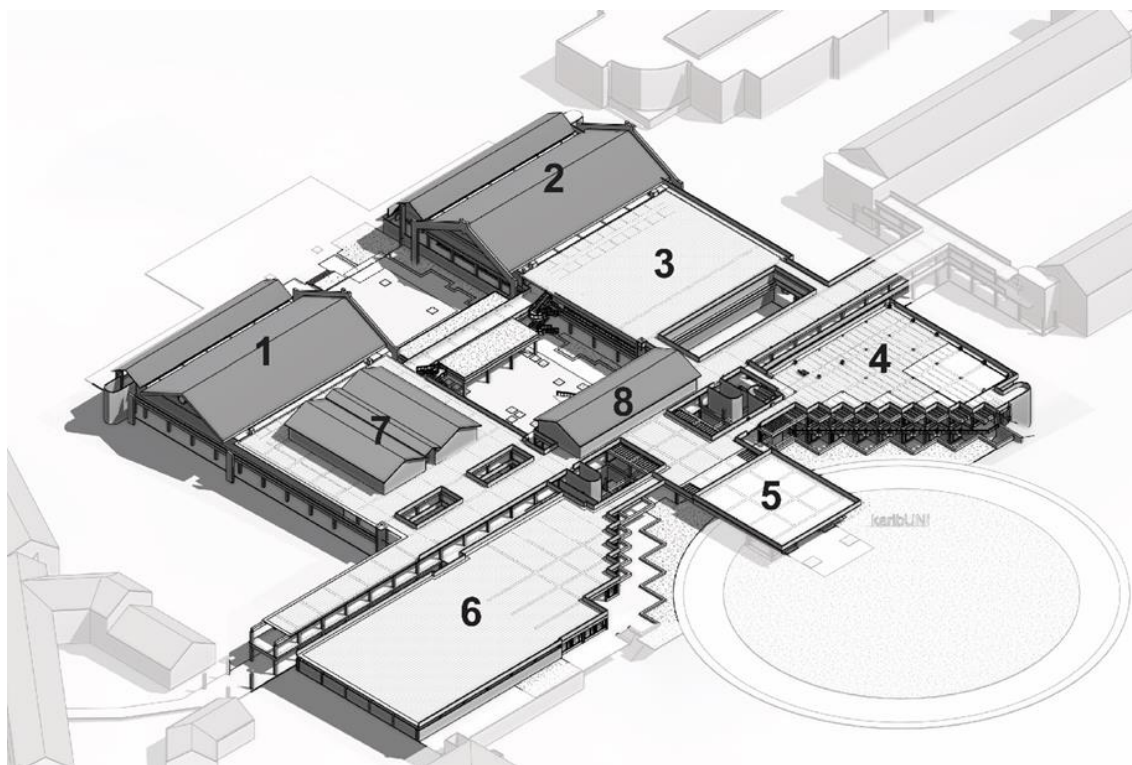
<sup>2</sup> [A/73/93](#), paras. 10–12 and 14.

firm completed the analysis within the agreed schedule and by early December delivered a detailed needs analysis, a conditions assessment and an expanded options analysis, which are summarized in the present report. In addition, the Office coordinated a multi-stakeholder group, which met regularly and included representation from the Facilities Management and Transportation Section, the Division of Conference Services and the Information and Communication Technology Service, as well as coordination with the two main clients of the conference facilities, namely UNEP and UN-Habitat. The actual cost incurred for the procurement process, coordination and professional services amounted to \$393,400, leaving an unused balance of \$76,600, which will be returned to Member States in the context of the performance report on the 2020 programme budget.

5. A schematic overview of the Office's conference facilities is presented in figure I.

Figure I

**United Nations Office at Nairobi conference buildings**



- 1: Conference west
- 2: Conference east
- 3: Committee rooms
- 4: Library building
- 5: Main entry
- 6: Catering building
- 7 and 8: Rooftop committee rooms

## **B. Objectives**

6. The objective of the project is to bring the United Nations Office at Nairobi up to par with New York Headquarters, the United Nations Office at Geneva and the United Nations Office at Vienna as an exemplary conference and committee centre at

which to forge key multilateral action, as well as address the risks posed by an ageing building nearing the end of its design life. The facility will need to service the governance and intergovernmental programmes of the two United Nations organizations headquartered in Kenya as a fully accessible conference centre. The centre would be built and operated to a standard of environmental excellence and would attract major international environmental and human settlement meetings and conferences to Nairobi. To achieve this, crucial renovations and construction work will be required to integrate the existing building fabric with new spaces and materials, and to connect the facility, campus and surrounding natural landscape to form a unified and seamless whole.

7. In addition to serving UNEP and UN-Habitat, a fully functional conference centre in the United Nations Office at Nairobi is intended to support the programmatic objectives, overall mandates and communications strategies of the many other humanitarian, development and peacebuilding entities operating in, and from, Nairobi. These include the regional offices of the World Food Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, the United Nations Support Office in Somalia and the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region. The new centre would help these entities improve outreach and communications with stakeholders and partners and strengthen their work with Member States. The facility will need to cater for the emerging market of remote conferencing, by providing a hybrid of integrated physical and virtual spaces that can respond to different event scales and to emergent health emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This approach towards modern remote and hybrid conferencing would enable Nairobi to explore options for remote interpretation, as well as other conference trends and innovations, advancing potential synergies and other cost-saving measures within the provision of conference services.

## **II. Needs assessment**

### **A. Condition**

8. The conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi now exceed their design life, or life expectancy, by over 20 years in some respects and are nearing the end of their design life in others. Non-compliance with international best practices for structural detailing, fire protection, access for persons with disabilities and mitigation for hazards posed by overcrowding at the facility need to be addressed to extend the design life and the continued safe use of the facility beyond the next 25 years. Service lines and infrastructure elements related to power, water and air supply already require complete replacement, as they are 16 years past their useful life; despite being well maintained, these systems are outdated, inefficient and not integrated with modern systems. Similarly, the current conference technology and audiovisual systems were installed between 2007 and 2009. Progressive urgent maintenance has been undertaken to keep these systems operational, and critical spare parts have been stocked, given the imminent discontinuation of these items by the manufacturer. Some components of the main system have been replaced over the past few years to maintain the functionality of installed equipment. However, although the system is still functional, there are ever more frequent technical issues, as it has outlived its useful life and requires complete replacement.

Table 1  
**Design life assessment of current conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, as at 31 December 2020**

<i>Component (1984)</i>	<i>Typical design life (industry average)</i>	<i>Remaining useful life</i>	<i>Assessment of condition (2020)</i>
<b>Building structure</b>	40 years	4 years	<p>Generally, the structure is in good condition with no obvious signs of visible deterioration; there are some visible broken edges to concrete beams and columns, with exposed reinforcement bar being compromised.</p> <p>Compliance with modern standards for seismic/earthquake and life safety may require some structural remediation work.</p>
<b>Building fit out</b>	15 years	-21 years	<p>Building fixtures, fittings and furniture are well past their replacement date and in need of complete refurbishment and replacement.</p> <p>Some toilet renovations were undertaken but there are no toilet facilities near the rooftop rooms, rendering them inaccessible for persons with disabilities.</p>
<b>Building fabric</b>	15 years	-21 years	<p>Building interiors and basic finishes are well past replacement dates but were well built originally and have been maintained past the usual design life.</p> <p>The building fabric presents as “dated” and requires complete replacement.</p>
<b>Building engineering services</b>	20 years	-16 years	<p>Well maintained past their useful life, the building engineering services are augmented by regular site infrastructure upgrades. However, the ability to integrate new technologies and energy-saving initiatives is severely limited.</p> <p>Conference engineering upgrades have had a positive impact on the functionality of the centre; however, these too are beyond their useful date, based on a 7- to 10-year cycle, with previous versions of systems no longer available.</p> <p>Building engineering services will require complete replacement to meet capacity and ensure functionality for the next 20 years.</p>
<b>Roads and pavements</b>	20 years	-16 years	<p>The pavements around the facility are in good condition; however, the site access paths and roads are in poor condition and require replacement.</p> <p>The existing paths and roadways, including ramps to rooftop rooms, are inaccessible for persons with disabilities.</p>
<b>Plant and equipment</b>	25 years	-11 years	<p>All original equipment is still operable, with power and data having been upgraded.</p> <p>Heating, ventilation and air conditioning, as well as air control systems, are outdated and will require complete</p>

<i>Component (1984)</i>	<i>Typical design life (industry average)</i>	<i>Remaining useful life</i>	<i>Assessment of condition (2020)</i>
			replacement to meet capacity and future use and energy-saving targets.
<b>Conference technology and audiovisual systems</b>	Maximum of 7 years	-4 years	Current conference technology and audiovisual systems were installed between 2007 and 2009. Progressive urgent maintenance has been undertaken to keep the systems operational.  The current technology is not adequate for the proposed activities for the site.

9. Consequently, due to the deteriorating conditions and the limited capacity of the conference facilities at the Office, the organizations holding events there are required to invest significantly in tent facilities that only temporarily increase capacity and utility to meet the peak demand of their events. However, these temporary facilities meet only minimal operational and safety standards; they are neither energy efficient nor fully accessible for persons with disabilities. Compared with recurring short-term financial commitments, the project would represent a long-term sustainable investment that would extend the building's design life for its safe, energy-efficient and accessible use by at least 25 years, increasing the utility and capacity of the conference facilities.

10. Similarly, increases in capacity will be required for water and power infrastructure servicing the conference centre and for the existing security gates at the arrival buildings, which struggle to meet the capacity required to process entrants into the compound during peak event times. The delays and congestion experienced when entering the compound during major events have been a major deterrent factor for outside organizations looking to host events at the Office. Furthermore, there is a noticeable lack of clear accessible paths of travel from the arrival gates through to the conference facilities, which, along with the replacement of deteriorating road surfaces, would need to be addressed. These additional supporting requirements, combined with the impact that the central location of the conference facilities has on the entire campus, require that renovations and construction work be implemented in accordance with an overall master plan that identifies short-, medium- and long-term planning objectives for the buildings and adjacent spaces, coordinating overall circulation and accessibility routes and supporting common back-office initiatives to unite common service lines for all connected facilities and infrastructure.

## B. Capacity

11. The existing facilities are now ageing beyond their useful design life, and their limited capacity is proving difficult for the Office when hosting the calendar bodies mandated to meet in Nairobi, such as the United Nations Environment Assembly and the UN-Habitat Assembly and their subsidiary bodies. The creation of expensive temporary facilities, and the overwhelming pressure on the Office's campus by crowds of circulating participants, are increasing the complexity and unattractiveness of hosting such events. The conditions are a definite deterrent for the parties of non-calendar governing bodies, such as those established under the more than 10 multilateral environmental agreements adopted under the auspices of UNEP in the past 35 years.

12. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Office was already struggling to meet the demands associated with the mandated calendar assemblies and the non-calendar

meetings of intergovernmental and multilateral forums on the environment that could be hosted at the Office. Observable and fundamental shortcomings are now evident in the existing facility, which will continue to deteriorate and to disrupt the Office's ability to host major international events, as well as continue to interfere with and disrupt the other important operations of the Office and tenanted United Nations agencies.

13. The assessment of the Office's conference facilities identified that the facilities are:

(a) **Undersized with regard to projected utilization.** The annual conferencing utilization is projected to exceed the physical available space in the next five years, based on conservative projections that factor in the 2020 decline in usage due to COVID-19;

(b) **Undersized with regard to meeting the demand of peak events.** The current interiors, service areas and adjacent spaces are unable to meet the existing and projected peak spatial demands placed on the facility during mandated United Nations Environment Assembly and the UN-Habitat Assembly events;

(c) **Using outdated conference services infrastructure.** The currently installed technology and conference engineering audiovisual and information technology infrastructure is out of date and is underserved by the available service spaces (control rooms and distribution lines), limiting the ability to effectively upgrade the services and to meet the changing and current demands of modern conference services, interpreters, information technology operators and end users;

(d) **Not accessible for persons with disabilities.** The facility is deemed non-compliant with respect to addressing the needs of persons with disabilities, and fails to meet current international building standards and United Nations standards for accessibility;

(e) **Undersized with regard to circulation.** The circulation areas and waiting halls adjacent to the conference rooms are undersized for peak events and pose a safety risk for participants. They are insufficient and overcrowded when participants need to move safely to adjacent areas or to escape in the event of an emergency. Participants have noted that they face considerable delays due to overcrowding when moving between programmed events;

(f) **Having a negative impact on other Office operations.** The demand for space placed on the existing facility during peak events requires expansion into the nearby circulation corridors, canteens and green areas adjacent to the facility. The main circulation and services corridor that links the east and west parts of the campus is severely blocked during events, disrupting movement around the campus and limiting access to core staff amenities of the Office;

(g) **Limited with regard to responding to emergent health concerns.** During a pandemic, appropriate social distancing measures would be hampered by the constrained entry and exit areas from conference rooms and circulation and work areas, and the lack of contactless or automatic doors, adding to the risk posed by the old furniture and building fabric, which may be difficult to sanitize when deep cleaning measures are required;

(h) **Undersized with regard to meeting security requirements.** The current pedestrian security gate access to the Office poses a safety risk for large crowds, who are forced to gather on an exposed public road with long wait times and congested processing for registration and security access;

(i) **Lacks necessary conference security infrastructure.** Security services are being hampered in their efforts to effectively control and support crowd movement, secure VIP areas and provide safe access and egress for delegates, VIPs



and civil society participants during events. This is partially due to the piecemeal installation of different security infrastructures over time, which limit the ability of security personnel stationed around the building to communicate and operate successfully.

## C. Projections and sustainability

### 1. Annual utilization

14. The sessions of the calendar bodies with headquarters in Nairobi (United Nations Environment Assembly and UN-Habitat Assembly) and their subsidiary bodies, which are included in the United Nations official calendar of meetings and conferences, are mandated to be held in Nairobi.<sup>3</sup> In several resolutions on the pattern of conferences, the General Assembly reaffirmed the headquarters rule. These mandates support the continued utilization of conference rooms in Nairobi, which experienced a surge in room demand of 54 per cent in 2018 and 59 per cent in 2019.

15. Current utilization has been significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with usage down to 10.66 per cent of capacity in 2020, an 80 per cent reduction from previous years. Conservative estimates, which reflect this anomalous market decline, expect utilization to recover to pre-pandemic rates of around 55 per cent by mid-2022 and 59.33 per cent by the end of 2022, assuming that there has been some gradual return to everyday operational normality in the second half of 2021. The target for utilization is generally about 70 per cent of capacity to allow general maintenance, set-up for the next event and cleaning. Current projections, based on historical figures and including the COVID-19 decline, indicate that the Office's conference facilities will reach peak utilization of around 70 per cent by 2025 and after that will be unable to meet the demands of calendar and non-calendar events while still providing for the servicing and maintenance schedules of the facility, which will become more demanding as the facility deteriorates.

### 2. Sustainability

16. The conference centre in Nairobi, which was built in the early 1980s, was constructed without enough consideration for environmental protection and sustainability. Any future project would have to follow the guidelines emerging from the environmental policy for the United Nations Secretariat ([ST/SGB/2019/7](#)). As Nairobi hosts the global headquarters of UNEP and UN-Habitat, the environment and human settlements programmes of the United Nations, any new building would have to be a sustainability showcase in the two thematic areas of both organizations.

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<sup>3</sup> In 2001, the Committee on Conferences recommended to the General Assembly that it request UNEP and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlement (Habitat) to comply with the headquarters rule and to hold all their meetings at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, in order to increase further the utilization of the conference facilities in Nairobi ([A/56/32](#), para. 53). The Assembly, in its resolution [56/242](#), endorsed the recommendation of the Committee. The Assembly, in its resolution [57/283 B](#), reaffirmed that all meetings of the Nairobi-based bodies should take place in Nairobi, except as otherwise authorized by the Assembly or the Committee on Conferences acting on its behalf, strongly discouraged any invitation for hosting meetings which would violate the headquarters rule, in particular for United Nations centres with a low utilization level, and reiterated its encouragement to the Secretary-General to continue to intensify efforts being made by the Office to attract more meetings to its facility (see General Assembly resolution [57/283 B](#), sect. II.A, paras. 9–11). The Assembly, in its resolution [59/265](#), section II.A, paragraph 8, recalled several resolutions, including resolution [57/283 B](#), section II.A, paragraph 9, and reaffirmed that all meetings of Nairobi-based United Nations bodies should take place in Nairobi, except as otherwise authorized by the Assembly or the Committee on Conferences acting on its behalf.

17. Nairobi's moderate temperatures and humidity, relatively stable climate and equatorial solar incidence should drive the design of a low-impact, energy-efficient building. Some buildings at the Office already generate electricity from photovoltaic panels. The renovation and expansion of the conference facilities would provide an excellent opportunity to further expand electricity generation, with the aim of achieving the lowest possible dependence on the national grid. Significant rooftop space should be dedicated to traditional crystalline photovoltaic panels, while canopies should be dedicated to translucent photovoltaic glass.

18. Smart design would ensure better orientation of the buildings, provide glazed areas to prevent exposure to direct sunlight and offer improved cross-ventilation to lower the requirements for indoor cooling equipment, which should be limited to critical areas such as server rooms. Electronic displays will have to be installed so that the heat generated is dissipated outside the building rather than in the meeting rooms. Exclusive use of light-emitting diode (LED) lighting would also help to reduce the capacity requirements for air handling and cooling. Mixed-mode systems that can easily switch to directly supplied air only are recommended during an airborne pandemic and are well supported by the climate in Nairobi, which is mostly benign throughout the year. Air cooling can be provided through passive means, such as evaporative cooling or ground thermal-mass heat exchangers.

19. Potable water distribution should be limited to handwashing and drinking, while wastewater systems should be fed by rainwater harvested from the roof areas. Existing water treatment systems in the compound would have to be expanded to cater for peak utilization. Sustainability should be a driving factor when choosing the specification of the building construction materials.

## D. Additional capacity

### 1. Current capacity

20. The original conference centre at the United Nations Office at Nairobi consists of eight meeting rooms of different capacities, seven of them with interpretation booths that can support two to six languages. Rooms 2, 3 and 4 can be combined into one large hall. Only two rooms offer facilities for interpretation into six languages.

Table 2

**Capacities of existing meeting rooms in the United Nations Office at Nairobi**

<i>Room</i>	<i>Desks</i>	<i>Seats per desk</i>	<i>Microphones (floor)</i>	<i>Languages into which interpretation is supported</i>	<i>Delegations (1+1)<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Delegations (2+2)<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Total capacity</i>	<i>Area (m<sup>2</sup>)</i>
1	109	4	109	6	218	109	436	747
2	138	4	138	6	276	138	552	757
3	49	4	49	4	98	49	196	277
4	49	4	49	4	98	49	196	274
2-4 combined	260	4	260	6	520	260	1 040	1 455
5	Boardroom	N/A	—	—	N/A	N/A	20	51
6	Boardroom	N/A	14	2	N/A	N/A	28	74
7	Boardroom	N/A	14	2	N/A	N/A	28	74
8	Boardroom	N/A	14	2	N/A	N/A	28	74
9-14	Boardroom	N/A	45	2	N/A	N/A	420	752

<sup>a</sup> The terms "1+1" and "2+2" refer to seating configurations of one or two, respectively, delegate position(s) seated at a desk with a microphone and listening device, and one or two, respectively, supporting position(s) seated behind the desk, with a listening device only.

21. The main governing body of UNEP was expanded from a governing council of 58 members to universal membership. Similarly, the main governing body of UN-Habitat, the other calendar body with headquarters in Nairobi, was also recently expanded to universal membership. Each year the number of participants attending the United Nations Environment Assembly has steadily increased and the demand for suitable conference facilities from these two organizations is expected to grow, furthering the pressure on existing facilities to provide additional space and to provide facilities that meet current conference-servicing demands.

22. As a significant number of delegations are large, the only possible plenary hall that can be used is rooms 2, 3 and 4 combined. In addition, both the United Nations Environment Assembly and the UN-Habitat Assembly establish a committee of the whole or a large drafting committee and include in their agendas diverse high-level events, such as dialogues or round tables, that meet in parallel with the plenary meetings. Both committees and high-level events have had to be assigned to room 1 in a one + one seating arrangement per delegation, with two delegations sharing a microphone, leaving only 25 seats for observers and stakeholders. At any given time, only two meetings with full interpretation in parallel can be programmed. The remaining meeting rooms are insufficient to accommodate regional and other major groupings of Member States and informal meetings convened by the committee of the whole or the drafting committee. These constraints pose immediate risks to the provision of adequate services to the bodies headquartered in Nairobi and have become a definite deterrent to consideration by the governing bodies of multilateral environmental agreements of the conference centre in Nairobi as a potential venue for their sessions.

## **2. Peak events**

23. The Office successfully hosted both the United Nations Environment Assembly and the UN-Habitat Assembly in 2019 (in March and May, respectively) and, because of unprecedented participation levels, faced significant challenges regarding both the conditions of the facilities and the limited capacity. It is important to highlight the risk and potential reputational loss that the United Nations faces by continuing to try and support conferences of this size using these existing aging and inadequate conference facilities.

24. The participation in and complexity of hosting the Environment Assembly have increased at every session, with the number of accredited participants surpassing 5,000 at its fourth session, in March 2019, and are expected to continue to grow. During the Environment Assembly, over 150 meetings were held in a period of five days in the 12 available formal meeting rooms, while 109 were held in temporary structures or other spaces adapted as meeting rooms. The inaugural UN-Habitat Assembly held in May 2019 also surpassed 4,000 accredited participants. During that event, 116 meetings were held in the 12 available formal meeting rooms while 43 were held in temporary structures or other spaces adapted as meeting rooms.

25. The UN-Habitat Assembly has also grown in terms of the number of participants in recent years. The Executive Directors of UNEP and UN-Habitat have confirmed their assessment that this growth is essentially a sign of confidence and appreciation by Member States, as well as reflective of the growing importance of environmental and urban-related multilateralism, and that the growth trend is likely to continue, if not accelerate, in the foreseeable future after the COVID-19 pandemic is controlled.

## **3. Temporary facilities**

26. As the permanent facilities can currently host around 2,400 participants in the plenary, committee and meeting rooms, organizations that hold events are required to

provide temporary tented structures that are assembled in and around the existing facility in order to accommodate the significant additional number of attendees and to provide suitable spaces to cater for exhibitions, banquets, panel discussions and public committee events. These temporary facilities need to include rented furniture, information technology infrastructure and audio and visual conferencing equipment, including cabling and generators, and require additional temporary service facilities such as washrooms. It is expected that as expansions of these multilateral programmes continue to increase the number of participants at future events, both the cost (funded from voluntary contributions) and the potential risk of relying on such temporary arrangements will grow significantly.

27. Table 3 provides statistics on the use of temporary meeting space as a percentage of the utilization of fixed/permanent space during major conferences. The amounts shown demonstrate that capacity issues are related not only to participant desks in the main plenary halls, but also to the availability of the multifunctional spaces required of all modern conferences, including break-out areas, event spaces, exhibition spaces, press areas, informal meeting spaces and catering areas. The table shows that the number of meetings held in temporary, multifunctional space rose from only 10 per cent of the number of meetings held in formal meeting rooms during the first session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, in 2014, to 72 per cent of the number of meetings held in formal meeting rooms during the fourth session of the Assembly, in 2019.

Table 3  
**Utilization of formal and temporary meeting rooms in the United Nations Office at Nairobi**

	<i>United Nations Environment Assembly (2014)</i>	<i>United Nations Environment Assembly (2016)</i>	<i>United Nations Environment Assembly (2017)</i>	<i>United Nations Environment Assembly (2019)</i>	<i>UN-Habitat Governing Council (2015)</i>	<i>UN-Habitat Governing Council (2017)</i>	<i>UN-Habitat Assembly (2019)</i>
Meetings in formal meeting rooms	198	218	78	152	133	161	116
Meetings in temporary space	19	28	41	109	–	–	43
Percentage temporary vs. formal	10	13	53	72	–	–	37

28. Building and servicing temporary structures to accommodate the growing demand for conferences of organizations having their headquarters or regional or Kenya country offices in Nairobi comes at a significant cost to these organizations and deters non-traditional clients from hosting events there. The provision of electricity, information technology and other basic services to these structures is unreliable and unsafe, posing unacceptable risks to the professional conduct of intergovernmental bodies. The lack of reliability of facilities and services and the lack of competitiveness make it unlikely that other major events will be attracted to the Office's conference facilities, which, in their current condition, are unlikely to be able to service other major conferences.

29. It is now apparent to attendees of events in Nairobi that the conference facilities of the Office, as one of the four United Nations Secretariat headquarters duty stations, have deteriorated over the years to a level that is no longer comparable in terms of quality facilities, capacity or global United Nations standards for the provision of conference events and services, and that the facilities are no longer fit for purpose and unable to support the other duty stations in the delivery of services of a similar quality.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> General Assembly resolution [73/270](#), section III, on enhancing integrated global management, leveraging technology and measuring the quality of conference services.

## E. Conferencing trends and market positioning

### 1. Conference servicing

30. Notwithstanding the above arguments for the need for modern and adequate conference facilities in Nairobi, the support of both UNEP and UN-Habitat will be crucial to draw attention to Nairobi as a global and regional centre for multilateralism, as well as for other technical, non-governmental and politically neutral events. Building international quality infrastructure on its own will not suffice to guarantee high occupancy. Efficient and client-oriented management will be paramount, as will be the engagement of the Office with other Nairobi-based international organizations to ensure adequate utilization. Innovative management of conferences and events, while adhering to the guidelines and procedures contained in the administrative instruction for the authorization of the use of United Nations premises for meetings, conferences, special events and exhibits, will be a paramount requirement for the Office.

31. Regional and local market research has been undertaken to identify the positioning of the Office's facilities within the meetings and conferences market and to identify changes that the Office needs to consider to become a more attractive option, in both qualitative and quantitative terms. Qualitative aspects cover the key aspects of how international event organizers make their decision when looking for a host for their event, as well as how current and future trends of the industry are driven by participants. Quantitative aspects refer to an analysis of the market factors at the global, African and Kenyan levels, together with an analysis of local competitors in Nairobi. Event organizers generally prioritize the location of a conference based on its attractiveness as a destination before considering the specific venue.

### 2. Current and future conferencing trends

32. The current trend in conference services is for the destination and the venue to work together to provide a holistic, or total, experience throughout an event. This trend is about providing a convergence of practical and experiential, business and leisure, traditional and contemporary, multigenerational, economic and socioenvironmental experiences. The result is a combination of current and emerging trends in conference facilities that can be outlined as follows:

(a) **Hyperpersonalization.** Organizers are seeking to tailor and adapt any event, conference or meeting to the client's needs and the organization's values;

(b) **Event destinations.** Travellers are combining official business travel with additional leisure time to create "leisure" trips;

(c) **Sustainable events.** There has been an increasing trend towards green venues in recent years, with many venues around the world implementing green practices in most of their operational processes, including with regard to waste management, controlling carbon emissions and efficiently minimizing water and energy costs;

(d) **In-between events.** Design now blurs the lines between traditional plenary spaces, meeting rooms and suites, banquet rooms and exhibition halls. Intersectional spaces between the formal session spaces are becoming more important for the ad hoc meetings that can contribute to the success of an event;

(e) **Personal interactivity.** Technology is being integrated into and used in events to tailor the experience of individual users;

(f) **Personal benefits of attendance.** There is an emerging trend of incorporating well-being elements into conference programmes;

(g) **“Smart campus” conferencing.** The philosophy and ideas of a smart campus venue are being embraced, with enabled technology that is connected to all devices, including through the leveraging of virtual and augmented reality for remote appreciation of destinations and venues, as well as the testing of the potential of hybrid events, using the Internet of things to support ease of registration and participant movements to extend exhibitor reach and artificial intelligence for personalized communications and automation of support.

### 3. Conferences market

33. The key findings of the events market research conducted into the global, continental and East African regional positioning of the Office’s conference facilities are as follows:

(a) The African conferencing and event market is relatively small in global terms, currently accounting for approximately 3 per cent of global events. Kenya currently makes up approximately 0.02 per cent of the events market globally and 7 per cent of the continental African market;

(b) For the most part, meetings within this continental group are of a small scale, with fewer than 250 delegates in attendance, although there may be as many as 500 attendees;

(c) Within this trend, more and more meetings are being held in small to mid-size non-dedicated conference facilities, such as those in hotels, which have the added ability to offer significantly discounted rates for conferencing in combination with accommodation packages;

(d) The African events market offers an abundance of opportunity. With increased air access, relaxed visa rules, increasing development of business event infrastructure and the formation of national convention bureaus, the African events market is expected to continue to grow;

(e) Improvements towards continental growth include implementation of attractive sector regulatory frameworks and associated upgrading of infrastructure. There is also strong market competition from other emerging/growth continents and regions like Asia and the Middle East, which drives better events competition;

(f) Kenya, as an emerging events market destination, must, in partnership with its neighbouring countries, improve the global industry perception of safe travel destinations with market readiness and contemporary facilities to host a variety of meetings;

(g) The National Tourism Blueprint 2030 of Kenya identifies conferences and events as one of the key drivers for the economic development and diversification of tourism in the country, complementing the safari and beach destinations driving regional leisure tourism;

(h) The Kenya National Convention Bureau was launched in October 2019 to design and implement the national conventions and events strategy and to nurture best practices to help drive this emerging sector;

(i) The Kenya National Convention Bureau is currently finalizing the country’s plan for the development of a national conferencing and events strategy. The Bureau recognizes, however, that investment in the national infrastructure and refurbishment of the ageing Kenyatta International Convention Centre are key to achieving its goals.

#### 4. Alternative Nairobi venues

34. There are currently three other conferencing and events facilities of note in Nairobi: the historic Kenyatta International Convention Centre, which is a landmark of the city; Bomas of Kenya, which is more of a cultural and recreational facility but contains large adequate conferencing spaces and entertainment centres; and the more recently opened Sarit Expo Centre.

35. The list of key smaller meeting venue competitors is composed of the largest and most prominent hotels of the capital city, whether they are part of global hotel chains or independent, all of which have conferencing facilities ranging from ballrooms to boardrooms. For the 2019–2021 period, it is forecast that 13 new 5-star hotels will enter the market, adding a total of 2,600 rooms and representing a 14 per cent increase in available conference and event facilities.

#### 5. Potential market

36. The governing bodies of multilateral environmental agreements adopted under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme – such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna, the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade, the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer and its Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, and the Minamata Convention on Mercury – are natural candidates for holding sessions in Nairobi when no Government is prepared to host them. Should the deteriorating conditions and limited capacity of the Office's conference facilities be addressed, Member States may consider encouraging the parties to multilateral environmental agreements to hold their meetings in Nairobi.

37. The governing bodies of other environmental conventions, such as the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, or the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, are also candidates. These bodies do not have a designated location for holding their meetings, which the Office could be well positioned to host.

38. In the case of the human settlements agenda, Kenya hosted the first session of the World Urban Forum in 2002, at the Office. Since then, the Forum has grown exponentially in size and complexity, making it perhaps the largest human settlements conference held in the world, and could be a key event to attract back to the Office, should the Government of Kenya offer to host it or should there be no offer to host a particular session. In 2016, Kenya hosted the fourteenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, which was held at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre, rather than at the Office, due to the size of the event.

39. These historical trends show that there is an existing market of other major events whose organizers are interested in Kenya as a destination. These events are set to be held more frequently, with regional and national investment in infrastructure that aligns with the strategic plans of the Kenya National Convention Bureau. With a suitably scaled venue, the Office would be well positioned to participate more actively in this sector.

## **F. Projected investment**

40. The total operational cost to the Organization over the next 30 years, including the projected overhead and investment expenses for temporary facilities and ongoing maintenance, is estimated to be approximately \$160 million, without any of the now essential accessibility targets, sustainability improvements or life safety upgrades required for a building at the end of its design life.

41. A capital investment would provide for a complete renovation and construction project, after which the maintenance costs would be expected to be minimal. Such an investment would further increase the rentable floor area and increase flexible use of the rooms to increase utilization. Combined service lines and an updated infrastructure would also reduce the operational overhead costs to run the facility, and there would be no temporary facilities required for peak events in the future.

42. It has not been possible to provide detailed costs at the present stage of the analysis. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a factor; as outlined in the introduction, it was not possible to start the on-site assessments until the restrictions on international air travel were lifted in August 2020. Also, given the significant global implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on travel and conferencing in general, it will be necessary to fully understand the medium- to long-term effects of the pandemic before detailed costings can be calculated. Finally, in order to calculate detailed costings for a multi-year project of this scale, the implementation and construction schedules, as well as the need for temporary conferencing facilities, must be clearly understood. In order to provide detailed costs, the next priority would be to confirm the actual implementation schedule.

43. Further analysis is required to determine if alternative funding modalities could be considered. There is currently no evidence to suggest that such modalities, including extrabudgetary options, would be available for a Secretariat facility representing the United Nations headquarters in Africa, which is mandated by the General Assembly to host the main calendar meetings of UNEP and UN-Habitat. There is, however, approximately 3,200 m<sup>2</sup> of rentable space in the existing facility, which could host up to 2,400 event participants in active sessions. Although the proposed renovation and construction would increase the rentable space by between 11,000 m<sup>2</sup> and 15,000 m<sup>2</sup>, offering a substantial increase in space and the potential for increased rental returns, the urgent need to upgrade the existing facilities relates mainly to ensuring that the headquartered entities of UNEP and UN-Habitat can safely hold their mandated calendar meetings at the Office.

## **G. Efficiencies**

### **1. Operational**

44. A “hybrid” conferencing model at the highest level of international standards would further increase the capacity to hold events by enabling remote participation. Face-to-face in-person negotiations that provide the highest level of confidentiality remain essential for achieving critical outcomes, so virtual participation at major events would be aimed primarily at increasing civil society participation and engagement. However, as a direct benefit, the investment in state-of-the-art digital infrastructure would also increase the utilization rate of the conference facilities, increasing international committee participation and meeting attendance throughout the calendar year. Furthermore, should a crisis of the scale and with the consequences of the current COVID-19 pandemic occur in the future, the United Nations and the United Nations Office at Nairobi would have at hand the capacity to turn to “hybrid” or even fully “remote” conferencing for statutory meetings.



### III. Options

45. The two options presented in the previous report of the Secretary-General (A/74/471) have been expanded and provide scalable architectural solutions to concerns outlined by the needs assessment, as follows:

(a) Option A would meet the immediate and short-term projected capacity requirements for events with up to 7,000 in-person participants, with an estimated project area of around 59,100 m<sup>2</sup>, including roads, pathways, landscaping and a new dedicated security building for conference events;

(b) Option B would meet the long-term projected capacity requirements, as an expanded, scalable version of Option A, for events with up to 9,000 in-person participants, with an estimated project area of around 67,700 m<sup>2</sup>, including roads, pathways, landscaping and a new dedicated security building for conference events.

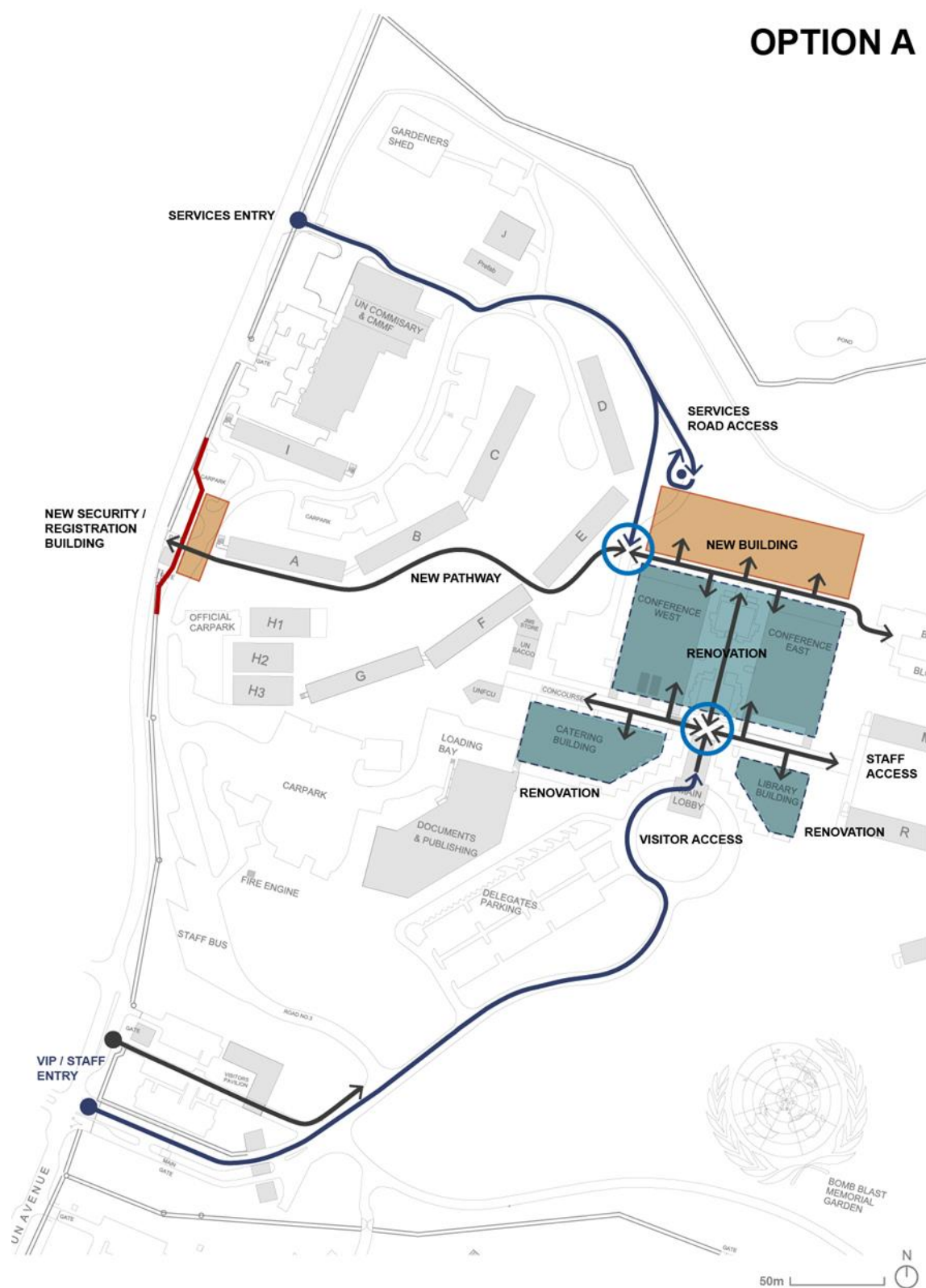
#### Site facilities and infrastructure

46. Common to both options are upgrades to security and site infrastructure, site paths, roadways and landscaping that support the buildings at either scale and comply with accessibility guidelines. Both options include a new dedicated security building on the western boundary, with a new garden pathway linking it to the conference centre for pedestrian access. The access of delegates and VIPs in vehicles would continue to be through gate 1, using the existing arrival roadways, supported by a newly renovated arrival hall for delegates at the existing entrance. This would provide added security infrastructure and improve processing capacity and times for pedestrian arrivals, while the new linking pathways to access the centre of the compound would relieve pressure on the normal circulation of staff and visitors, supporting a continued use of the existing “high street” as the main circulation link, with a new “second street” for conference connectivity.

#### *Option A: up to 7,000 in-person attendees*

47. Under option A, it is proposed that the existing conference facilities be completely renovated to expose the reusable building structure and fabric and reorganize the interior spatial zones for improved connectivity, flexibility and optimization, and to comply with current building codes and international best practices. New floor levels, room divisions and construction areas on the roof level would increase the rentable floor area in the existing building from 3,200 m<sup>2</sup> to approximately 5,800 m<sup>2</sup> through smaller spaces, dedicated media studios and flexible use of furniture and room space. Lounges, canteens and amenities for delegates would all be improved for better utility and for greater inclusion of all conference participants and staff of the Office. Investment in the conference facilities at the Office would be an investment in the campus heart, linking the offices and social spaces through the core functions of the United Nations and presenting a welcoming public face to members of civil society, inviting participation. A concept diagram of option A is presented in figure II.

Figure II  
Option A concept diagram



48. Construction work to the north of the existing buildings would provide two new plenary halls with 2+2 and 1+1 seating arrangements, and provide new lounges, halls and meeting rooms to support functions related to the UN Environment Assembly and the UN-Habitat Assembly. As a linking concept between old and new, the existing central atrium would be enclosed and remodelled as a new arrival hall that could be utilized for ceremonies and functions or as breakout space for active sessions. This central space would provide an open circulation and meeting area that is easy to understand and to navigate, providing clear visual circulation clues for travel between levels and incorporating green building concepts that connect the buildings with the exterior grounds and the renovated rooftop.

49. These new halls, atrium, rooftop and renovated spaces would be of a scale and standard comparable to the conference centres in the other duty stations, with state-of-the-art conference services and information technology and audiovisual support for interpreters, including infrastructure for centralized control and remote access interpretation. The facilities would include automation, allowing them to be run with minimal staff, with robust infrastructure that could be easily connected and upgraded within normal technology replacement cycles (typically seven years). A connected virtual building would provide dedicated media and live-streaming support to all spaces, linking meeting rooms and large forum gatherings with other sites around the world and further inviting participation by members of civil society in United Nations events. This infrastructure would also support the business continuity of the Office by providing a resilient event space that could remain operable with minimal staff during a civil unrest event or global pandemic, switching to virtual operations, or a hybrid of both, when in-person attendance is not safe.

50. The project schedule would tentatively cover a period of between four years, nine months, and six years, plus a one year close-out period. The schedule would be designed to minimize the overall project implementation period, thereby controlling project overhead and construction escalation costs while also ensuring that enough time is allowed to afford business continuity within the existing conference facilities that would continue to operate during construction. The anticipated project phases and their tentative time ranges are indicated in figure III.

Figure III  
**Indicative project schedule**

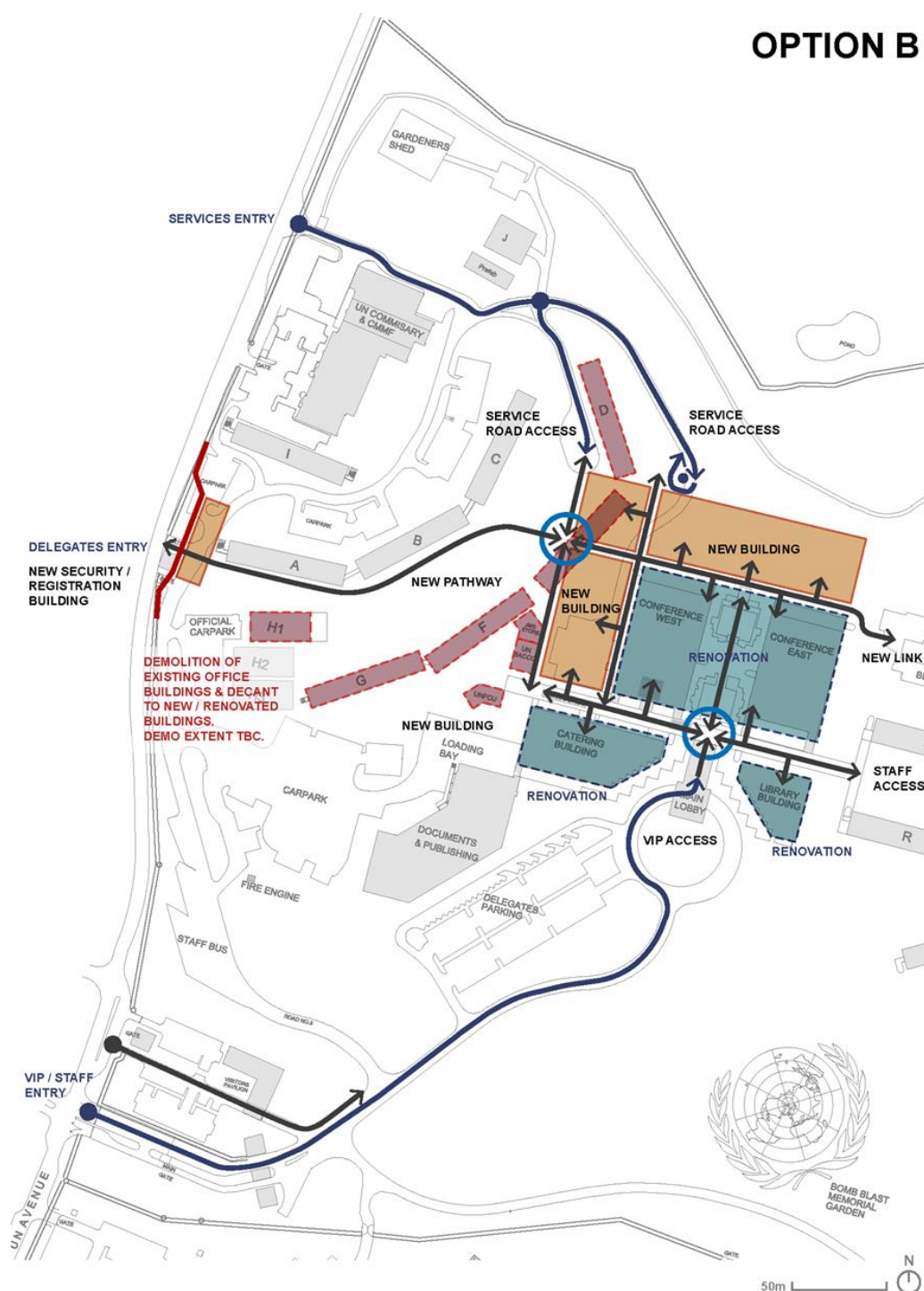
<i>Project Schedule</i>	<i>Months</i>	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	
Phase 1: planning (pre-design) phase	12 to 15							
Phase 2: design phase	12 to 15							
Phase 3: pre-construction and procurement phase	9 to 12							
Phase 4: construction phase	24 to 30							
Phase 5: close-out (post-construction) phase	12							
<i>Total</i>	69 to 84							

*Option B: up to 9,000 in-person attendees*

51. Option B is substantially similar to option A in that it provides a proposal for the renovation of the existing conference facilities and includes new construction work. The primary difference is the scale of this new construction work and the impact it would have on the site plan, claiming new ground to the west of the existing conference facilities. This would be enabled through careful master planning with the

project to replace office blocks A–J. The additional construction would include multipurpose halls and assembly areas that would extend the capacity of the site to meet the projected figures for attendance at the UNEA and UN-Habitat peak events in the future. A concept diagram of option B is presented in figure IV.

Figure IV  
Option B concept diagram



#### IV. Next steps and resource requirements for 2021

52. The future design and construction related to upgrading the conference facilities will follow standard procedures and practices established in the global guidelines for the management of construction projects. As an immediate next step, a planning and pre-design phase would be undertaken to provide detailed studies of the existing conditions and site data for use during the project design phase. Working at both the macroscale and microscale levels, this pre-design phase would provide confidence in the decision-making process, cost estimation and programming for future phases.

53. A summary of the planned activities during the remaining part of 2021 is as follows:

(a) Conduct additional detailed preparatory work necessary to begin the design phase, including a site feature survey and a topographical survey, and an audit of the existing services infrastructure;

(b) Develop an initial project implementation strategy, including an overall timeline, a phasing plan with temporary (“swing”) locations for existing functions, a business continuity plan during the construction phase and an estimated construction phasing plan;

(c) Develop comprehensive cost estimates for the two project options, including construction trade costs, design services, construction supervision services, a dedicated United Nations project management team, an escalation fund and a contingency fund;

(d) Conduct an independent risk analysis, through the Global Asset Management Policy Service, of the likely and possible project risks, including the estimated cost and schedule impact of such risks. The resultant cost would inform the amount of proposed project contingency funds to be included in the overall project cost estimate;

(e) Develop a proposed project governance framework, including an advisory board, a stakeholders committee and a dedicated project management team;

(f) Conduct a peer review of the project cost estimates, to ensure accuracy and efficiency;

(g) Conduct a feasibility assessment of possible income-generating activities of the renovated conference facilities, which could partially offset initial capital investment and future operating costs.

54. Resource requirements in the amount of \$494,000 are required for 2021 as follows:

(a) \$120,000 for a Project Coordinator at the P-4 level through the end of 2021. The incumbent would oversee the activities of the specialized multidisciplinary firm and coordinate with relevant stakeholders at the United Nations Office at Nairobi and at Headquarters in New York during the implementation of the activities described in paragraph 53 above;

(b) \$326,000 to continue with contracting services through a specialized multidisciplinary firm with expertise in conference servicing to undertake the activities described in paragraphs 53 (a) through (c) above;

(c) \$48,000 to conduct an independent risk assessment and cost estimate peer review, as described in paragraph 53 (d) and (f) above.

## **V. Recommended actions to be taken by the General Assembly**

55. The General Assembly is requested to:

- (a) Take note of the report of the Secretary-General;
- (b) Approve the establishment of a temporary post of Project Coordinator (P-4);
- (c) Appropriate an amount of \$494,000 under section 29G, Administration, Nairobi, of the programme budget for 2021, which would represent a charge against the contingency fund;
- (d) Take note of the intention of the Secretary-General to propose next steps to the General Assembly at the main part of its seventy-sixth session.

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