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BUDGET ESTIMATES FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 1964

Major maintenance and capital improvement at
United Nations Headquarters

Expansion of meeting-room facilities

Seventeenth 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 on major maintenance and capital improvement at United Nations Headquarters (A/C.5/991) which the Secretary-General submitted in response to the decision taken by the Fifth Committee^{1/} and approved by the General Assembly at its 1191st plenary meeting authorizing him:

(a) To proceed with the development of plans for the expansion of meeting-room facilities at Headquarters;

(b) To prepare a comprehensive plan for the development of the basement area of the General Assembly Building so as to provide for the optimum use of this area not only for additions to television and other visual facilities but also for office space, and to provide detailed estimates for this work; and

(c) To complete in 1963 an architectural survey of the Headquarters buildings.^{2/}

2. In the present report, the Advisory Committee deals only with item (a) above, relating to expansion of meeting-room facilities. Items (b) and (c) will be the subject of separate reports.

^{1/} Official Records of the General Assembly, Seventeenth Session, Annexes, agenda item 62, document A/5334.

^{2/} Item (c) is not dealt with in document A/C.5/991 and will be the subject of a separate report by the Secretary-General.

3. It may be recalled that, at its seventeenth session, the General Assembly approved, in principle, a tentative estimate of \$1,556,000 for the expansion of meeting-room facilities. This amount has been included in chapter IV of section 7 of the initial budget estimates for 1964. In response to the instructions of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General engaged an architectural firm to prepare detailed construction drawings and plans. On the basis of these plans, firm estimates have been obtained and the services of a general contractor have been negotiated. It now appears that the amount of \$1,556,000 is insufficient to provide for the completion of all the work authorized in principle by the General Assembly. The cost of such work has now been fixed at \$1,673,300. The difference of \$117,300 between the tentative estimate of last year and the cost as now established is ascribed by the Secretary-General to the following factors:

- (a) More accurate estimates based on actual detailed plans and specifications as confirmed by contractual bids received;
- (b) Necessary changes in construction details which became apparent in the course of the development of the plans;
- (c) Price increases for certain labour and materials since October 1962.

4. The Advisory Committee was informed that the figure of \$1,673,300 was the lowest of a number of bids submitted for the work approved by the Assembly and that this was a "contractor's guaranteed price", that is to say, the maximum cost to the Organization provided the United Nations fulfilled its obligations to the contractor and, inter alia, did not cause the work to be delayed for any reason. It was also informed that, whereas this estimate would be a maximum, it was possible that actual expenditure would not reach that level. Accordingly, while the Committee recommends approval of the figure of \$1,673,300, it expects the Secretary-General to make every effort to keep actual costs below this level.

5. In paragraph 5 of his report, the Secretary-General indicates that an additional amount of \$117,700 is required to replace sound amplification and interpretation equipment. The Advisory Committee inquired at some length into the reasons why the existing installations could not be kept in use with suitable additions to meet the requirements of the expanded seating. It was informed that the basic equipment of the control booths - including consoles,

power supplies, pre-amplifiers and amplifiers - which had been repeatedly modified to handle previous temporary expansions of seating facilities, offered no further margin for serving additional seats and had therefore to be replaced. As for the balance of the equipment, such as microphones, speakers and switches, many units were defective, and all were of an obsolete type and no longer manufactured. Accordingly, any addition would be uneconomical. The engineers therefore strongly recommended complete replacement. On the basis of the evidence thus provided, the Advisory Committee would recommend approval of the Secretary-General's estimate of \$117,700 for the replacement of this equipment.

6. In the light of the foregoing considerations, and subject to the observations made in paragraph 4 above, the Advisory Committee recommends approval of a total estimate of \$1,791,000 for the expansion of the meeting-room facilities as originally envisaged by the General Assembly.

7. In paragraph 7 of his report (A/C.5/991), the Secretary-General, without formally requesting corresponding appropriations, calls the attention of the General Assembly to five items which were not included in the estimates submitted to it in 1962. These items have arisen subsequently either through recommendations of the architects or the Ad Hoc Committee on the Improvement of the Methods of Work of the General Assembly (A/5423) or have been suggested by members of delegations and the Secretariat. The Secretary-General seeks the guidance of the Assembly as to whether any of these items should be included as part of the construction programme.

8. The first of these items (A/C.5/991, para. 7 (a)) concerns the installation of glass partitions and doors at the sides of the Plenary Hall, at an estimated cost of \$65,000. At a time when Member States are called upon to provide considerable funds for major reconstruction work deemed essential to the proper functioning of the Organization, the Advisory Committee believes that no other capital project should be contemplated unless it is evident that it would meet some well-established requirement and that any postponement would adversely affect the Organization. It would appear to the Advisory Committee that the installation envisaged does not fall into this category. Nor is it convinced that the proposed installation of partitions is the only solution to the problem of noise in the

corridor areas on the sides of the Plenary Hall. In the Committee's opinion, certain administrative measures, together with a solemn request by the President of the General Assembly to all concerned for their co-operation and understanding, would go a long way towards solving the problem. Consequently, the Advisory Committee would recommend that consideration of this proposal be deferred.

9. The second item (Ibid., para. 7 (b)) relates to seating modifications for press and delegates' alternates in the Plenary Hall, at an estimated cost of \$62,370. As regards the press seats, the Committee notes that the Secretary-General has been strongly urged to provide special seats with writing arms for the press, and it would concur in this particular project. The second part of the provision would make it possible to increase the number of seats for advisers in the Plenary Hall from 318 to 472. In view of the fact that the number of seats per delegation on the floor will be reduced from 10 to 6, the Advisory Committee sees merit in this proposal which would substantially compensate for this loss of seating. It would therefore recommend approval of the estimate of \$62,370 for the purposes stated in this paragraph.

10. The third item (Ibid., para. 7 (c)) concerns alterations to documents rooms and additional changes to advisers' seating in the former press area in conference rooms 1, 2, 3 and 4, at an estimated cost of \$27,625. It would not appear that the suggested alterations to documents rooms and re-location of the conference officers' tables in conference rooms 2 and 3 present any special urgency which would justify the expenditure of some \$7,000 in 1964. Consideration of this item should therefore be deferred. However, for reasons similar to those stated in the preceding paragraph, the Advisory Committee would see some advantage in the proposed readjustment of the seating arrangements in the balcony to provide better access to the floor for advisers utilizing the seats in the former press area. It should be recalled that the total number of seats per delegation on the floor of conference rooms 1 and 2 will be reduced from 3 to 2, and in conference rooms 3 and 4 from 4 to 3. The Advisory Committee would accordingly recommend approval of this project, at an estimated cost of \$20,000.

11. The fourth item (Ibid., para 7 (d)) relates to the replacement of wiring and listening devices in the public areas of the Plenary Hall, Trusteeship Council

Chamber, and conference rooms 1, 2, 3 and 4, at an estimated cost of \$134,250. While it is true that most of the equipment at present installed in the public areas consists of material transferred from Lake Success and Flushing Meadows, the Advisory Committee has been given to understand that, with reasonable maintenance, the major part of this equipment is still serviceable and can be kept in use for a few more years. Total replacement of the equipment does not therefore have to take place in 1964 and the Committee would recommend deferment of this project.

12. The fifth item in the Secretary-General's report (Ibid., para. 7 (e)) concerns the installation of electrical voting equipment in one conference room and preparatory work for its possible later installation in one other room and in the Plenary Hall, at an estimated cost of \$67,100. The work involved and the estimated cost are as reported by the Advisory Committee to the General Assembly at its eighteenth session (A/5442). It may be recalled that, after having reviewed the report of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Improvement of the Methods of Work of the General Assembly (A/5423), the Advisory Committee recommended that, should the General Assembly decide to approve the suggestions of the Ad Hoc Committee concerning the adoption of an electrical system of voting in the United Nations, such a system should be introduced on an experimental basis for one year in one committee room and that, for technical reasons, it would be desirable to undertake this work at the same time as the meeting-room modification programme in 1964. The Advisory Committee further suggested that, for the same technical reasons, the General Assembly may wish to consider whether, in addition to equipping completely one conference room, some essential work of a preparatory nature should be carried out in the Plenary Hall and one other conference room so as to permit, if the experiment were successful, an eventual expansion of the system without undue expense. As stated in its seventh report referred to above (A/5442), the Advisory Committee therefore recommends that, should the General Assembly decide to adopt the electrical system of voting on a trial basis, an additional appropriation of \$67,100 should be approved, under section 7 of the 1964 budget, comprising \$40,700 for the complete installation in one room and \$26,400 for the initial preparation of two other rooms.

Recapitulation

13. In the light of the considerations and comments set forth in the preceding paragraphs, the Advisory Committee would recommend approval of the following appropriations under section 7 of the 1964 budget:

(a) \$1,791,000 for carrying out the programme of expansion of meeting-room facilities, as originally approved in principle by the General Assembly at its seventeenth session, it being understood that the Secretary-General would spare no effort to keep actual costs below the maximum "contractor's guaranteed price" (see paras. 4 and 5 above);

(b) \$62,370 for seating modifications for press and delegations' alternates in the Plenary Hall (see para. 9 above);

(c) \$20,000 for additional changes to advisers' seating in the press area in conference rooms 1, 2, 3 and 4 (see para. 10 above);

(d) Should the General Assembly decide to adopt an electrical voting system on a trial basis, \$67,100 for the installation of equipment in one conference room and preparatory work for possible later installation in one other room and the Plenary Hall (see para. 12 above).

14. The total additional appropriation required for all these purposes would thus amount to \$1,940,470.
