

UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL
ASSEMBLY



Distr.
GENERAL

A/9854/Add.1
9 December 1974

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Twenty-ninth session
Agenda items 73 and 76

PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1974-1975

JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the utilization of
office accommodation at United Nations Headquarters

Comments by the Secretary-General

1. The detailed and thorough report prepared by the Joint Inspection Unit (see A/9854) has not only brought into focus current difficulties in office accommodations at Headquarters but has also identified problems which will require attention in future years.
2. The main body of the report is largely a factual description of conditions, past and present, on which no comment appears necessary. Accordingly, the Secretary-General is limiting his observations in this statement to the summary of principal conclusions, suggestions and recommendations contained in section V of the report.
3. The conclusions and recommendations of the Inspectors fall into three categories: (a) those on which the Secretary-General can act independently; (b) those whose implementation will require prior consultation with agencies, offices and groups outside of the Secretariat; and (c) those requiring action by the General Assembly.
4. As to the first of these categories, the Secretary-General thoroughly agrees with the Inspectors that the General Service staff, in a number of areas, has occupied crowded space and that this overcrowding should be relieved. It is accepted, therefore, that the occupancy of the Secretariat building should be reduced from 3,700 persons to a target figure of 3,500. It should be understood that the reallocation of space to meet this target can only be accomplished within the framework of major space reassignments and that these moves will entail certain costs for removal of staff and relocation of partitions.

5. The Secretary-General also agrees that "to the extent that functions permit and adequate offices are available, P-1-P-3s should be 'doubled up', particularly in 144 square foot (13.4 m²) exterior offices" (A/9854, sect. V, para. 4). Wherever feasible this policy will be applied.

6. The recommendation of the Inspectors that the offices adjacent to the Council chambers and large conference rooms should be used to the extent possible to accommodate casual visitors coming to Headquarters on official business is accepted. Informal arrangements to effect such results have previously existed. However, the question of assigning to the Office of General Services specific authority for the scheduling of these offices, when not required by the officers and secretariats of organs meeting in the conference rooms or Council chambers, will be studied. At the same time it must be noted that when the greatest need for space for casual visitors exists, that is, during the General Assembly, the rooms in question are needed for the officers and secretariats of the committees of the General Assembly. Thus the implementation of this recommendation will not materially contribute, during the General Assembly, to a resolution of the problem of where to find offices for the many high-ranking officials from overseas whose presence is required at Headquarters at that time. The dimension of this problem can be noted from the fact that during the twenty-ninth session of the General Assembly temporary space has had to be found for 70 to 80 officials, most of whom were at the rank (or its equivalent) of D-2 and above.

7. As regards the question of space management and planning at Headquarters, the Secretary-General agrees that in view of the many conflicting interests within the Secretariat concerning space requirements and utilization, the authority of the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management, and that of the Assistant Secretary-General for the Office of General Services, as the office immediately concerned, should be reinforced. He would point out, however, that the Office of General Services can do little more than at present to carry out a meaningful programme of co-ordination and advice in respect of the building construction, space use and maintenance programmes of the overseas offices until such time as its limited resources in staff and travel funds are increased beyond present levels.

8. Turning to the second category of recommendations offered by the Inspectors, the Secretary-General notes that they have suggested that it would be appropriate to move out of the Headquarters buildings the liaison offices of FAO, WHO, IAEA and IMF and have indicated, as regards the UNESCO liaison office, that "there is no real need for this office to be located in the Secretariat building rather than in another building in the immediate vicinity" (A/9854, para. 37). The Inspectors further suggest that "it would be appropriate to move the offices of certain Missions to the United Nations and perhaps other units from the Headquarters buildings" (A/9854, sect. V, para. 7). The Inspectors, furthermore, recommend an extensive review of the policy under which no rent is charged to news agencies and the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund at Headquarters and Lloyds Bank International Limited in Geneva, as well as the differing rental rates charged the specialized agencies, the travel agency, the bank and other building occupants both in New York and Geneva.

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9. The Secretary-General considers these recommendations to be fundamental to the determination of long-range policies for space utilization. He notes that in some instances the adoption of the Inspectors' proposals would reverse practices which have been in effect for more than 20 years. Because of this he considers that on such matters as the occupancy of offices in the United Nations Headquarters by the specialized agency liaison offices, or the level of rent they should pay, it will be necessary to consult with the agencies and discuss the matter in the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination. In this connexion he notes that some specialized agencies provide accommodation and/or facilities to units of the United Nations Secretariat at various locations. He therefore believes it would be helpful, before deciding this question, to have available the second part of the Inspectors' report, relating to the question of the utilization of office accommodation within the United Nations system, that is, the report due in 1975 on these matters as they affect the premises of the specialized agencies at their headquarters.

10. Similarly, the Secretary-General considers that it will be necessary for him to review most carefully the Inspectors' recommendations regarding the occupancy of offices at Headquarters by certain missions and the arrangements under which the news agencies occupy space in the United Nations buildings in New York and Geneva. Until such a review has been carried out, the Secretary-General will postpone to a later date his conclusions regarding the proposals discussed in this and the preceding paragraph.

11. As for the question of rental rates, the Secretary-General concurs that it would be useful to carry out a comprehensive review of the policies and practices under which rates have been established at Headquarters and other United Nations offices for the rental of United Nations premises. In his study he will wish to take into account the Inspectors' findings as to how this matter is handled at the headquarters of the specialized agencies. It is planned that an appropriate review will be initiated early in 1975.

12. The Secretary-General concurs with the analysis of the Inspectors that, by the end of 1979, unless a significant movement of Secretariat units from New York takes place, approximately 150,000 square feet of space will be required in addition to that in the Headquarters buildings and the United Nations Development Corporation building. The need for long-range planning, as suggested by the Inspectors, thus is self-evident. The alternatives are described in section V, paragraph 17 of the Inspectors' report. Each of these alternatives has been the subject of long-range planning and has been reviewed in a number of reports in previous years. ^{1/} Under the circumstances, while the Secretary-General is

^{1/} Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-first Session, Annexes, agenda item 74, document A/C.5/1062; *ibid.*, Twenty-third session, Annexes, agenda item 74, documents A/C.5/1182 and A/C.5/1183; *ibid.*, Twenty-fourth Session, Annexes, agenda item 74, documents A/C.5/1246, A/C.5/1254/Rev.1 and A/C.5/1263; A/C.5/1458 and Add.1.

quite prepared to submit a further report on the matter, he would point out that the problem is as much a political one as it is financial and administrative. The matter of office space at Headquarters is in fact only one aspect of the entire problem of the adequacy of facilities at Headquarters, including the seating capacity of the meeting rooms; the dining facilities for representatives and staff; the lounge areas; the reproduction and printing space; garage capacity, and so forth. Most of these problems have been reported to the General Assembly in previous years, but implementation of related solutions thereto has been deferred. The Secretary-General would suggest that all of these questions should now be dealt with in a comprehensive report which he would propose to submit to the General Assembly at its thirty-first session.

13. Finally, as regards the question of extrabudgetary staff, the Secretary-General feels that the Joint Inspection Unit has drawn a fair and balanced picture of the situation, and concurs with the view expressed by the Unit (in paragraph 177 of the report and in paragraph 20 of the summary) that it would be desirable that he receive clear directives regarding the distribution, between regular budget and extrabudgetary funds, of the cost of facilities and services provided to staff paid from extrabudgetary funds. In establishing applicable policy in this regard, the General Assembly may wish to bear in mind the Secretary-General's view that the decisions on where to locate such staff - i.e. in "established" office space or in "outside" rented space - should not be predicated on the sources of funds from which the staff are paid, but should continue to be based on over-all management considerations.