



General Assembly

Distr.: General
9 December 2019

Original: English

Seventy-fourth session

Agenda item 135

Proposed programme budget for 2020

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

Twenty-third report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the proposed programme budget for 2020

I. Introduction

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General on addressing the deteriorating conditions and limited capacity of the conference services facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi ([A/74/471](#)). During its consideration of the reports, the Advisory Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information and clarification, concluding with written responses received on 15 November 2019.

2. The report of the Secretary-General is submitted pursuant to paragraph 29 of General Assembly resolution [73/270](#) on the pattern of conferences, in which the Assembly 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 conference services facility at the United Nations Office at Nairobi and to present that information to the Assembly during the main part of its seventy-fourth session in the framework of the proposed programme budget.

II. Conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi

3. The report of the Secretary-General contains a business needs assessment that includes initial and long-term objectives, an assessment of the current conditions of the conference facilities, a needs assessment relating to conferencing capacity and two options for the renovation of the existing conference facilities. In his report, the Secretary-General indicates the next steps and resources required for 2020 for



multidisciplinary consultancy services to conduct a detailed needs assessment and expanded options analysis.

4. The Secretary-General indicates that the objectives of possible renovation work are to address immediate serious risks, given that the existing conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi are ageing and are limited by size, functionality and lack of multipurpose functions (*ibid.*, para. 13; see also paras. 6–16 below). The objectives also include bringing the conference services at the Nairobi duty station up to par with New York, Geneva and Vienna as a centre for multilateralism, to professionally service the organizations headquartered in Nairobi, the wider United Nations family with offices or regional headquarters in Nairobi and the other major international meetings and conferences, in a fully accessible conference centre (*ibid.*, para. 12).

5. The Secretary-General also indicates that the United Nations Office at Nairobi is mandated to provide conference services to the two United Nations programmes with universal membership headquartered in Nairobi, namely, the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the recently instituted United Nations Habitat Assembly of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) (*ibid.*, para. 3). He indicates the action taken by the General Assembly and the Committee on Conferences in relation to the utilization of conference facilities at the Office and to ensuring conformity with the headquarters rule, under which all meetings of Nairobi-based United Nations bodies are to be held in Nairobi (*ibid.*, paras. 10–11).

Conditions of the conference facilities

6. Details of the conditions of the conference facilities are described in the report of the Secretary-General (*ibid.*, paras. 15–24) and are summarized below.

Current utilization and capacity levels

7. In his report, the Secretary-General indicates that the utilization of conference rooms in Nairobi in recent years has remained relatively low, between 39 and 46 per cent, until 2018, when the demand for rooms increased to 54 per cent (*ibid.*, para. 13 and annex I, table 1). He also indicates that the increasing trend in utilization is expected to continue owing to the number of mandates emerging from the fourth session of the Environment Assembly, which indicate continued intergovernmental processes leading up to the fifth session of the Assembly (*ibid.*, para. 13). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was provided with the utilization rates of the 14 conference rooms in Nairobi from 2009 to 2018 and notes the historical low utilization of these conference rooms, ranging from 38 to 49 per cent, with the exception of the utilization rate in 2018 (54 per cent).

8. The Advisory Committee was also provided with information on the cyclical nature of the meetings held by the entities in both odd and even years that impact the utilization of the facilities and the monthly utilization pattern. The Committee was informed that, similar to other duty stations, the “peak periods” are the second half of the first quarter, the entire second and fourth quarters of all years, while the first half of the first quarter and most of the third quarters are the “valley periods” with low utilization. The Committee was also informed that the periods of low utilization would be the target for external events marketing by the Office. The Committee notes that although the cyclical utilization pattern throughout the year is an established pattern, there appear to have been limited efforts to date to increase the utilization rate, with the exception of the 2018 rate. Furthermore, while the Secretary-General indicates that the increasing trend in utilization will continue, the Committee notes from the information provided that the peak periods in Nairobi are in fact limited to

the months when the United Nations Environment Assembly and the United Nations Habitat Assembly meet, which is the second quarter of the year with a duration of one to two weeks for each entity.

9. The current capacity of the meeting rooms is indicated in tables 1 and 2 of the report. The Secretary-General indicates that seven of the eight original meeting rooms, have interpretation booths that can support two to six languages. Rooms 2, 3 and 4 can be combined into one large conference hall but only two rooms offer interpretation facilities in all six official languages. The six rooftop rooms built in 2006 lack the necessary capacity, equipment and infrastructure. Interpretation can be provided only on demand, in up to two languages, using portable booths. Room 12 has been converted into a courtroom and is currently being used exclusively by the United Nations Dispute Tribunal. Furthermore, the Secretary-General indicates that the rooftop rooms are considered inadequate as permanent rooms and lack sanitary facilities. Overall, the meeting rooms have insufficient capacity to accommodate Member State meetings and those of other major groupings (*ibid.*, paras. 51–54). In figure I of his report, the Secretary-General provides participation statistics from the sessions of the United Nations Environment Assembly for the period from 2014 to 2019 and a projection of 7,700 participants by the year 2023.

10. Taking into account the utilization rates of the conference services facilities, the current capacity of the meeting rooms and projected number of participants in the future, the Advisory Committee is of the view that further in-depth analysis is needed. The Committee makes further comments and recommendations regarding the proposal of the Secretary-General and the utilization of the conference services facilities in paragraphs 23 and 24 below.

Building conditions

11. The Secretary-General indicates that the original eight meeting rooms constructed between 1983 and 1985 are no longer fit for purpose and that there is an urgent need for investment to upgrade the building envelope, reconfigure the spaces, incorporate new technologies and bring the facility up to acceptable international standards and best practice in terms of conference facilities (*ibid.*, para. 17). In 2006, an additional six temporary conference rooms were built on the rooftop over the conference area to accommodate the requirements of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Although the rooftop rooms are still in use, they are considered inadequate as permanent rooms owing to various deficiencies (*ibid.*, para. 16).

Infrastructure and supporting facilities

12. The Secretary-General indicates that conference support spaces are increasingly in demand and that the Office facilities are unable to accommodate them. Details are provided in paragraphs 25 to 31 of the report and reflect the existing lack of temporary office space, audiovisual and other constraints and related security risks. In addition, the Secretary-General indicates that there are also issues relating to participant desks in the main conference rooms and to the availability of multifunctional spaces, including breakout areas, event spaces, exhibition spaces, press areas, informal meeting spaces and catering areas. He also indicates that as regards supporting facilities, UNEP and UN-Habitat spent nearly \$500,000 in 2019 (\$317,000 and \$155,000, respectively) on one-time commercial event management services to supply temporary facilities and that the Office faced significant challenges owing to the condition of the facilities and their limited capacity when hosting the United Nations Environment Assembly and the UN-Habitat Assembly in 2019 (*ibid.*, paras. 3, 8 and 9).

Technology

13. The Secretary-General indicates that the conference management and simultaneous interpretation system has been in place since 2009 and that failures are regularly experienced. The Advisory Committee notes that several technological issues are indicated in the report, including that: the technical team lacks a conference control centre to monitor critical equipment; technicians need to be flown in to provide on-site support for conference events; the audiovisual distribution systems need to be upgraded; cable ducts that run under the main meeting rooms have become congested; and requirements related to the use of “paper smart” meetings have increased (*ibid.*, paras. 33–42). The Secretary-General also indicates that the annual maintenance budget is not sufficient to completely overhaul the systems and bring them up to par with other duty stations (*ibid.*, para. 43).

Accessibility

14. The Secretary-General identifies various physical constraints that characterize the existing conference facilities, including limitations in terms of mobility, and the absence of services required to make meetings more accessible at Office premises (*ibid.*, paras. 46–50).

Sustainability

15. The Secretary-General indicates that the current conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi are over 30 years old and that any new construction, as well as renovation of the existing conference buildings, will create significant opportunities for improving the environmental performance of the facility and increase efficiency in resource use and operations, including lighting, cooling and heat systems (*ibid.*, paras. 55–58).

Business continuity

16. In his report, the Secretary-General indicates that the lack of the reliability of the facilities and services, and the lack of overall competitiveness, make it unlikely that other major events would be attracted to Nairobi and that other major conferences could be serviced in Nairobi (*ibid.*, para. 59).

Assessment of future conference facility requirements

17. The Secretary-General provides an initial assessment for the renovation of the conference facility in the context of three client groups. The first group relates to support for the calendar meetings of United Nations headquarters entities, given that the governance structure of UN-Habitat was modified by the General Assembly in its resolution [73/239](#). The first session of the UN-Habitat Assembly with universal membership was held from 27 to 31 May 2019. The Secretary-General indicates in his report that, as in the case of the United Nations Environment Assembly, the limited capacity of the conference centre in Nairobi required the use of the rooftop rooms. He also indicates that the leadership of UNEP has expressed concerns regarding the inadequate infrastructure and the need to temporarily expand the capacity of the conference centre using resources that could otherwise be used for environmental mandates (*ibid.*, paras. 60–61).

18. The second group is identified in terms of the conference events relating to multilateral environmental agreements and human settlements that could potentially be held in Nairobi. In paragraphs 62 and 63 of the report and in annex II thereto, the Secretary-General provides details on the number of conventions and bodies under the auspices of UNEP and UN-Habitat, as well as on the governing bodies of those

conventions that do not have a designated conference centre for their meetings. He indicates that, in these cases, the entities accept offers from parties to the conventions to host meetings or, alternatively, they hold them at an available United Nations conference centre. He also indicates that although the facilities in Nairobi have been available, the main bodies of the conventions have not met in Nairobi since 2011. The third group is identified in terms of the potential for servicing the approximately 60 United Nations agencies, funds and programmes with offices or regional hubs in Nairobi (*ibid.*, paras. 64–65).

19. With regard to the potential benefits of renovating the conference facility, the Secretary-General provides an initial analysis in paragraphs 66 to 71, including mitigating the risk of failure of equipment, given the current conditions of the facilities; addressing the expanded requirements of United Nations headquarters entities; and addressing the ability of the conference centre to meet future demands.

III. Addressing the conditions of the existing facilities and next steps

20. In his report, the Secretary-General provides an initial analysis of two options to address both the deteriorating conditions and the capacity limitations of the existing facilities. As regards the facilities and infrastructure, he indicates that the two options would bring the existing conference facilities at the Office into full compliance with prevailing building and life safety codes and provide a modern, accessible, technologically integrated, flexible and multipurpose conferencing facility capable of accommodating up to 8,000 delegates (option one) or up to 12,000 delegates (option two). Both options entail the complete renovation of the existing facility and new construction, to varying degrees.

21. Option one (8,000 delegates), as detailed in paragraphs 75 to 79 of the report, provides for the full repurposing, upgrade and expansion of the existing conference and meeting rooms located in the central area of the Nairobi complex, as well as the construction of a new, state-of-the-art plenary hall facility adjacent to the existing conference rooms. This proposal also includes the construction of a new entrance and visitors pavilion. Option 2 (12,000 delegates), as detailed in paragraphs 80 to 83, builds upon the first option with the construction of an additional, stand-alone, state-of-the-art convention centre on the periphery of the United Nations complex. In his report, the Secretary-General indicates that both options would entail more technologically advanced facilities with a maximum of flexibility for the multifunctional use of space. Furthermore, the renovation or construction work would be staggered in order to avoid impacting the servicing of the official calendar of meetings and to avoid jeopardizing business continuity (*ibid.*, paras. 84–86).

22. The Secretary-General indicates that resources are required for multidisciplinary consultancy services to conduct a detailed needs assessment and expanded options analysis, which would build on the options set out in his report and would include a detailed study of current and future needs and requirements over the next 25 to 30 years, in the light of the mandates of the entities headquartered in Nairobi and future programme-specific requirements (*ibid.*, paras. 87–88; see also para. 25 below). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was provided with additional information including the terms of reference of the multidisciplinary conferencing consultants, the cost recovery mechanism for intergovernmental meetings, the environmental management system, energy consumption and other information relating to the status of the current facilities as well as the options presented in the report of the Secretary-General.

23. In terms of renovation and construction options, the Advisory Committee notes that different options can be considered based on a comprehensive needs

assessment, including an assessment of the essential renovation needs, in order to bring the conference facilities up to an acceptable standard of usage for events and conferences, followed by further renovation and construction options based on capacity considerations. The Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to present a comprehensive assessment with detailed costs, as well as tangible and intangible benefits, and the funding modalities of the various options, including extrabudgetary and other funding sources.

24. Furthermore, the Advisory Committee is of the view that due consideration should be given to a number of factors, including: the conferencing needs and demands of United Nations entities and those of other potential clients; the projections and sustainability of targeted occupancy levels; the additional capacity needed to service those United Nations bodies mandated to hold their conferences in Nairobi; the alternative options available within the city of Nairobi, including the rental of the Kenyatta International Convention Centre or other venues; the valorization possibilities; and the environmental, energy and operational efficiencies of the various options.

IV. Resource requirement for 2020

25. Resource requirements are estimated at \$470,000 under section 29G, Administration, Nairobi, of the proposed programme budget for 2020, which will represent a charge against the contingency fund for multidisciplinary consultancy services to conduct a detailed needs assessment and expanded options analysis, comprising:

(a) \$84,000 for the services of a specialist conferencing consultant with expertise in conferencing and events, to provide direction for the work of the contracted professional services (*ibid.*, para. 92);

(b) \$270,200 for professional services specialized in the international conferencing and events industry to undertake a business conferencing needs analysis (*ibid.*, para. 93);

(c) \$115,800 for professional services to support and further expand on outcomes of the business conferencing needs analysis and to expand on the options analysis conducted in 2019 (*ibid.*, para. 94).

V. Conclusions and recommendations

26. The recommendations of the Secretary-General on proposed actions to be taken by the General Assembly are set out in paragraph 95 of the report. **Subject to its recommendations and observations above, the Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly:**

(a) **Take note of the report of the Secretary-General;**

(b) **Appropriate an amount of \$470,000 under section 29G, Administration, Nairobi, of the proposed programme budget for 2020, which will represent a charge against the contingency fund;**

(c) **Request the Secretary-General to submit a report on the results of a detailed needs assessment and expanded options analysis to the General Assembly at its seventy-fifth session.**