

Seventieth Session: Agenda item 134
Fifth Committee of the General Assembly
1 December, 2015

Report on the Progress in the construction of new office facilities at the Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa, and update on the renovation of conference facilities including Africa Hall

**Remarks by Stephen Cutts, Assistant Secretary-General,
Office of Central Support Services, Department of Management**

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates,

I am very pleased to introduce to you this morning the report of the Secretary-General (A/70/362) on the Progress in the construction of new office facilities at the Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa, and to provide an update on the renovation of Conference Facilities, including the Africa Hall.

As reported last year, the Zambezi Building was fully functional and occupied in 2014, and this year the related ancillary projects were ready for a major conference held at the Commission in July. This was a significant achievement.

The further detailed design and planning for the renovation of the Africa Hall will ensure that the building complies with prevailing health and safety regulations, and will preserve it as an iconic and historic building. Once restored, it is intended to continue to be used as a major conference centre, and to be used to host educational and cultural programmes for visitors to the Economic Commission for Africa.

Let me now highlight some salient parts of the report before you.

With regards to New Office Facility, which has been named the Zambezi Building , I am pleased to report that most of the ancillary works related to the building were completed in 2014 with the remaining projects, notably the east parking area, greenery and planting, comprehensive internal access and utility roads, and the walkways and site drainage being substantially completed by August 2015, all within the approved resources.

With regard to the Africa Hall Renovation Project, the main project objective remains to address the inadequacies related to building safety and functionality and make Africa Hall a rejuvenated facility that complies with the highest international standards for conference facilities. As part of preserving and restoring the historical and cultural values embodied in the architecture of the Africa Hall, a Visitors' Centre is to be included with the aim of making it one of the leading tourist destinations in Addis Ababa, highlighting the significant role of the Africa Hall in modern African history.

The Africa Hall Renovation Project is planned in 5 work stages. The first 2 stages, assessment and design, have been completed, and the third stage, construction documentation and tender for construction, are due to commence shortly. Once a contractor is selected, the fourth stage, construction, is planned to begin during the third quarter of 2017 and be completed by 2021. The fifth and final stage will be close-out, following construction.

The project scope as reported last year, continues to be grouped into 5 major components: (i) firstly structural upgrade, essential life and health safety improvements, and building works;

(ii) secondly Plenary Hall and associated work; (iii) thirdly external work and landscape; (iv) fourthly heritage conservation; and (v) finally Visitors' Centre.

Following the necessary structural and safety upgrades to ensure the ongoing safe use of the building by delegates, staff and visitors, the newly introduced Visitors' Centre of the Africa Hall is expected to be a desirable destination for those who wish to learn about the continent's history and the genesis of what is today the African Union. The purpose of the Visitors' Centre is to highlight Africa Hall's significance in modern African history. The conservation initiatives relating to the prominent stained glass and other artworks are central to this aspect of the project. It will also include a permanent exhibition and lecture gallery.

A Visitors' Center business case study has been developed by the Public Information and Knowledge Management Division of ECA, the details of which are in the report before you. Africa Hall would be promoted as a tourist destination through the Ethiopian Tourism Organization, as well as in schools, the media, and during conferences at ECA and the AU. The works associated with this proposed initiative would incorporate a visitors' screening building, as well as a reserved parking area adjacent to the ECA compound. The necessary consultations have been initiated and will continue to be undertaken with the host Government authorities. It is planned that the tours will take place in the Africa Hall itself, and an exhibition center and lecture hall will be part of the Visitors' experience.

As to the Governance of this construction and renovation at the Economic Commission for Africa, the project owner is the Executive Secretary of ECA. The Executive Secretary has designated the Chief of Staff at ECA to manage the oversight and governance of this project,

including liaison and interaction with internal and external stakeholders, as well as strategic issues requiring senior level decision making. A Stakeholders Committee soon to be established will draw its members internally from offices within ECA, will be led by the Executive Secretary or his designee, and will provide advice and guidance in the management of the overall project.

The Director of Administration at ECA remains the Project Director and is responsible for managing the dedicated project management team. The Office of the Director of Administration continues to coordinate quarterly videoconferences and bilaterally with my Office, the Office of Central Support Services(OCSS) at Headquarters on all the significant project-related matters, including reporting and regular updates to Member States.

The day-to-day project execution is under the leadership of the dedicated Project Manager. ECA initiated the recruitment of the positions approved last year for the dedicated project management team. Accordingly, the Project Manager and Administrative Assistant are both expected to be on-board shortly. The remainder of the dedicated project management team and support functions, as noted in the report, will be brought on-board during the course of 2016-2017, subject to the approval of the resource requirements indicated in the report.

In order to implement a robust integrated approach to project risk management, in line with industry best practices, an independent risk-management firm is proposed to be included as part of this project, similar to those services incorporated into the governance of other substantial capital projects undertaken by the United Nations.

With regards to the overall budget and schedule for the project, they remain as previously reported. The estimated overall project cost for the proposed renovation is \$56.9 million at current rates and would be implemented over a period from 2015 until the completion date of 2021.

Let me assure you Mr. Chair, and Distinguished Delegates, that my Office will continue to be actively involved to ensure that the supervision and management of this project, is in line with other similar capital projects undertaken by the Organisation, and includes a risk-management strategy in line with the lessons learned and best practices identified from other UN capital projects. And we will help to ensure that the risk-management approach includes robust scope, cost and schedule containment measures.

As to the proposed next steps and project tasks to be undertaken during the biennium 2016-2017, these would comprise the following: (i) firstly, detailed assessments required prior to the finalization of design and tender documentation for construction, (ii) secondly, establishment of the Stakeholders Committee, (iii) thirdly, acceleration of the recruitment of the remaining members of the project management team, (iv) fourthly, procurement of the independent risk-management firm, (v) fifthly, finalisation of the design and tender documentation to procure for construction; and (vi) finally procurement for the construction contractor.

Moving onto to the Conference Centre and its upgrades, I am pleased to advise that capacity utilization has been increased by 15 per cent from an average of nearly 70 per cent over the previous three years to 85 per cent during the biennium 2014-2015.

Among factors contributing to the increase in utilization are: (i) firstly, proactive marketing initiatives on the part of the ECA Executive Secretary to other UN agencies in Addis Ababa, (ii) secondly, the final completion and occupancy of the Zambezi Building by five additional UN agencies, and (iii) thirdly, closer partnership with regional non-UN organizations.

The return to full use of conference rooms 3, 4, 5 and 6 in March 2014 has also expanded the availability of conference rooms a great deal and a competitive pricing structure has been introduced.

Phase 2 of the Conference Centre's roof renovation is planned for completion by the end of 2015, during the dry season.

Mr. Chair and Distinguished Delegates,

To conclude, this report summarizes the completion of the Zambezi building and ancillary projects, updates on the required next steps to continue the renovation Africa Hall project, and updates on the renovations concluded at the Conference Centre.

I hope that the Committee will note the progress made since the last report, and give favourable consideration to the resources requested and required for the renovation of the

Africa Hall, noting that the project relates both to the health and safety of delegates and staff, and also to the historical importance of the building.

The General Assembly is requested to approve the overall project scope, schedule and estimated cost of \$56.9 million for the renovation of Africa Hall, to approve the proposed related resource requirements for the biennium 2016-2017, and to establish a multi-year construction-in-progress account.

In accordance with section I of Assembly resolution 63/263, progress reports would be submitted annually to the Assembly.

Finally, I understand that this committee will commence consideration of this topic in an informal session tomorrow morning (Wednesday). I wish to inform delegates that colleagues from ECA will be available at that time via videoconference, along with representatives from OCSS and OPPBA, to answer any questions and provide clarifications as required.

Thank you.