

ANNEX

Item 9.18 of the provisional agenda

UPKEEP AND RENOVATION OF HEADQUARTERS BUILDINGS: REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RENOVATION PLAN

ADDENDUM

OBSERVATIONS OF THE UNESCO STAFF UNION

OUTLINE

The UNESCO Staff Union (STU) considers that the amount of \$8.7 million agreed by the Executive Board at its 151st session (151 EX/Decision 8.4, para. 9) as the sum needed to be spent on repairs and renovation work is a **minimum**. It is far from adequate. We, the members of STU, are dismayed at the content of document 29 C/47, which proposes that this amount be reduced to \$3.7 million, and which explains, in paragraph 7, that ‘work of upkeep and maintenance has been removed from the initial list (cost: \$1,000,000)’.

We give below the reasons for our concern and our recommendations for action to remedy this grave situation.

The UNESCO Staff Union (STU), is disturbed by the advanced state of dilapidation of the buildings that house the Organization. Committed as we are to UNESCO's ideals, which include furthering the well-being of humanity as a whole, we, the staff, deplore the fact that we are now working in conditions of very real threat to health and safety. Nor are we alone. All visitors to the Organization are struck by its run-down appearance, both inside and out, but they may not realize that their personal safety is in some cases also at risk.

The most serious problem was perhaps that of **asbestos**, present in considerable quantities around the fire-stop valves in the Bonvin building. A costly operation has now been completed to remove it from all areas where pollution was most likely to occur. We welcome the fact that, after 15 years of dilatory manoeuvring, the Administration was in this case prepared to listen to the concerns of the staff and to take the necessary action. Indeed, by doing so it was able to keep one step ahead of anti-asbestos legislation subsequently introduced by the host country.

However, there is still some asbestos left in Bonvin - and even in Fontenoy - either sealed into permanent fixtures or located in relatively inaccessible places. There should be no risk of pollution as long as it is not disturbed. It could, of course, be disturbed in the event of unco-ordinated maintenance work and alterations, notably by drilling. It is therefore essential that all such work be overseen by the General Services Division.

The question of maintenance is crucial to our concerns about **safety**.

For many years, little or no maintenance has been carried out on our buildings, for the simple reason that funds have not been available. All available resources have been channelled into the programme, to the detriment of everything that takes place at Headquarters, including staffing and equipment. Yet Headquarters is surely the hub of UNESCO, and if the hub collapses, the rest of the structure will fall apart. The idea has become current that money spent on 'administration' is somehow money wasted. We consider this view to be short-sighted. Indeed, at the 151st session of the Executive Board, one speaker declared that a budget which did not contain provisions for such foreseeable expenditure (i.e. the cost of repairs to Headquarters buildings) was, in his country's view, incomplete and therefore not ready for adoption.

As a direct result of lack of maintenance, we now see the **façades** of the Fontenoy building crumbling. Lumps of masonry fall to the ground, and every now and again a glass sunscreen slices through the air like a guillotine.

Most of the **fire-extinguishers** in the Bonvin building - a high-rise building strictly regulated under French law - are well past their 'use by' date, and there is a risk that they may not work if there is a fire. Orders have been placed for some new extinguishers, but there is no guarantee of their systematic replacement, nor have we any assurance that money is being set aside for this purpose.

The **glass panes** of the windows in the Bonvin building have an alarming tendency to fall out and shatter on the ground far below. Indeed, this happened for the first time in 1979, immediately after the inauguration of the building, and for the second time in 1980. Such accidents are most likely to occur if the windows are opened. Colleagues naturally attempt to open windows, particularly during heat waves, because the air-conditioning is inadequate.

The **air-conditioning** system is faulty and needs a thorough overhaul. There are some offices where it does not work at all, and these are like ovens in summer.

The **electrical installations** in the Fontenoy building comply with the regulations in force in 1958. They are wholly outdated, the system suffers from overload, and there is a very real risk of fire.

The **loading bays** in the Fontenoy basement also constitute a fire hazard, as they have become a place to dump all kinds of unwanted publications and other discarded objects, which accumulate in large quantities as fast as they can be cleared away. Scraps from the cafeteria are dumped in the paper compactor, causing a stench which is compounded by exhaust fumes from delivery vehicles left with their engines running. Owing to budgetary restrictions, no guard is placed permanently on duty to prevent this pollution of the area.

The general lack of maintenance is attributable to serious **under-staffing** in the technical services. The following table shows at a glance how the situation has changed for the worse:

	1984	1997
Technicians qualified in heating, plumbing and air-conditioning	24	11
Carpenters	8	5
Painters	9	5
Metalworkers	9	4
Electricians	16	10
Labourers	16	6
Total	82	41

These few staff are expected to perform maintenance and repair work in **all** the Organization's buildings: Fontenoy, Miollis, Bonvin and the prefabricated buildings, where there has been no reduction in infrastructure or equipment between 1984 and 1997. They are seriously demoralized as a result of this impossible demand.

The trend is, instead, to call on outside firms to do ad hoc work. There are several disadvantages to this solution. Firstly, intervention is often delayed because of lack of funds. Many firms are unable to respond immediately, even if an urgent intervention is needed. An outside firm, unfamiliar with the buildings, could well disturb 'hidden' asbestos, particularly if there is no reliable system for centralized supervision of outside interventions; and no such system exists to date. Permanent Delegations are less than happy to see total strangers appearing in their offices when maintenance or repairs are needed, and much prefer to deal with permanent staff members whom they know. Lastly, our colleagues on the staff are committed to the Organization and would like nothing better than to be able to take long-term pride in the smooth functioning of its material infrastructure, whereas private firms are motivated primarily, if not solely, by profit, and have a rapid turnover of labour, when they do not themselves go out of business, leaving the Organization with no means of redress for work poorly done (as was the case for the windows in the Bonvin building).

We, the staff, consider that there are **two categories of renovation work that should take priority. Category A concerns work so urgent that death or serious injury** could result from its omission. **Category B concerns improvements that would make life easier and pleasanter** for all users of the buildings and would contribute generally to the smooth running of the Organization.

Category A

Façades of the Fontenoy building. Protective netting to be extended all around the building to complete that already in place, until proper renovation work on the masonry can be done. Barriers to be set up to prevent any person or vehicle from approaching the façades which are fitted with glass sunscreens.

Fire extinguishers. All outdated fire extinguishers, especially in the Bonvin building, to be immediately replaced and a system set up for their regular replacement.

Window panes in Bonvin. Urgent metalwork to be carried out on all windows.

Electricity. The whole system to be modernized and all sockets in the middle of the floor (Fontenoy) to be removed.

Loading bays. All ‘dumps’ to be removed forthwith and a staff member to be placed permanently on duty with authority to enforce regulations against dumping and pollution.

Category B

Air-conditioning. Modernization and maintenance.

Facilities for the disabled. Very little has so far been achieved. UNESCO does not set a good example.

Rest and recreation areas for staff. These have been increasingly requisitioned by the Administration, and very few remain. Particularly in the Bonvin building, colleagues have nowhere to go for a brief rest during the lunch hour, especially if it is raining.

General ban on smoking and creation of designated, partitioned-off smoking areas. Despite instructions from the Director-General, little or nothing has been done. Small fires regularly break out as a result of ash-trays being emptied into waste-paper bins. Many non-smoking colleagues are seriously incommoded by smoke.

Renovation of the kitchens. We note that the results of recent bacteriological tests, especially in Fontenoy, are far from reassuring.

Lifts and escalators. Many break down regularly.

We are fully aware that money is lacking, despite the praiseworthy efforts of the Headquarters Committee to raise funds. However, we are sure that Member States will appreciate that dilapidated and dangerous Headquarters buildings are detrimental to the Organization’s image and are scarcely conducive to its general efficiency. Moreover, short-term savings are bound to lead to the need for very much heavier outlay in the longer term. **We, the staff, call for work in category A to be carried out as a matter of urgency.** At the

same time, **we cannot stress too highly the importance of regular, long-term maintenance** performed by the most highly-qualified, competent and committed permanent staff members that UNESCO can recruit - and those criteria must naturally apply to their supervisors likewise.

We shall, of course, greatly welcome action in category B as soon as this also proves possible.

The staff and the buildings are the infrastructure of the programme. A programme without an infrastructure is a house built on sand.