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**PROGRESS MADE IN FACILITATING THE MOVE OF ESCWA  
TO ITS PERMANENT HEADQUARTERS IN BEIRUT, LEBANON**Note by the Executive Secretary**A. Background**

1. In its resolution 197 (XVII) of 31 May 1994 on the permanent headquarters of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, the Commission decided "to recommend to the Economic and Social Council that the permanent headquarters of the Commission be relocated to Beirut."
2. The Economic and Social Council adopted resolution 1994/43 of 29 July 1994 on the permanent headquarters of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, in which the Council, *inter alia*, requested the Secretary-General:
  - "(a) To approach the Government of Lebanon, as soon as the appropriate legal action has been taken by the United Nations..., in order to arrive at a common understanding on all issues and commitments relating to the relocation of the permanent headquarters of the Commission, to conclude an agreement concerning the headquarters and to agree upon a suitable timetable and the necessary arrangements for the relocation of the permanent headquarters to Beirut in such a way as to ensure that the requirements for the proper functioning of the Commission are met;
  - "(b) To take all steps necessary to effect the transfer of the permanent headquarters of the Commission in accordance with the present resolution;
  - "(c) To ensure that the transfer is financed within existing resources and primarily from extrabudgetary contributions and without prejudice to planned cost savings."
3. The ESCWA secretariat submitted to the eighteenth session of the Commission, held in Beirut from 22 to 25 May 1995, a report on follow-up action on resolution 197 (XVII) (E/ESCWA/C.1/18/5/Add.1/Rev.1).

4. In a letter addressed to the United Nations Office of Legal Affairs, dated 9 April 1996, the ESCWA secretariat enquired about the "implications of a possible change in premises proposed by the Government of Lebanon to host the ESCWA permanent headquarters in Beirut." In its reply, dated 7 May 1996, the Office of Legal Affairs stated that neither ESCWA resolution 197 (XVII) nor Economic and Social Council resolution 1994/43 required that the headquarters of the Commission be relocated to a particular building in Beirut, although both resolutions clearly defined the criteria which should be met by the permanent headquarters, and that a decision concerning the suitability of the building for the headquarters could be taken by the Secretary-General without having to refer the matter again to ESCWA member States for endorsement.

#### B. The permanent headquarters building in Beirut

5. The ESCWA secretariat received a letter dated 2 August 1996, from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Lebanon, containing the sketches and plans of the headquarters building which were drawn up by the Lebanese Company for the Development and Reconstruction of Beirut Central District (SOLIDERE), owner of the building.

6. On 4 August 1996, the ESCWA secretariat established two committees (a steering committee headed by the Executive Secretary and made up of competent senior officials from the ESCWA secretariat, and a technical committee made up of competent officials responsible for technical matters such as the building, telecommunications facilities and equipment) and entrusted them with the technical and administrative responsibilities related to the permanent headquarters of the Commission in Beirut under the direct supervision of the Executive Secretary of ESCWA.

7. The architectural and technical features of the permanent headquarters building in Beirut can be summarized as follows:

(a) The building of the permanent headquarters of ESCWA is situated in the Beirut Central District and constitutes one of the main buildings in Riyad El Solh Square, a short distance from several major landmarks in the city including Banks Street, Martyrs' Square, Nijmeh Square, the Prime Minister's Office and Beirut International Airport;

(b) The building consists of eight above-the-ground office floors clustered around an inner courtyard and garden, and seven underground floors, of which three are allocated for conference rooms, the printshop and documents distribution, archives, stores and maintenance while the remaining four are to be used for parking. The Commission will occupy six office floors above ground while the two remaining floors will be occupied by specialized agencies of the United Nations in Beirut;

(c) The ground floor of the building houses the common facilities, including a cafeteria, a bank, a post office, and a travel agency. The above-mentioned three underground floors contain a conference hall seating 400 persons and two conference rooms seating 84 and 63 persons respectively, as well as lounges and offices for the servicing of meetings and other facilities. The above-ground second floor of the building contains the library, the central computer services room and telecommunications facilities;

(d) The building is equipped with central air-conditioning, fire detection and fire-fighting systems and advanced electronic monitoring systems. It is also equipped with seven elevators, two service lifts, a

telephone exchange, an electric generator, two transformers, a source of continued power in emergencies, and exit staircases;

(e) The total floor area of the building is 43,468 square metres (m<sup>2</sup>), 39,884 m<sup>2</sup> of which are to be occupied by ESCWA. Of this area, 10,720 m<sup>2</sup> will be allocated for offices, 12,553 m<sup>2</sup> for common facilities and conference rooms, and 16,620 m<sup>2</sup> for parking (500 cars). The area of the office floors ranges between 1,432 and 1,968 m<sup>2</sup> and the area of the underground floors is about 4,100 m<sup>2</sup>. Most offices are day-lit and have windows opening on the courtyard and the front garden, since the facade of the building is made of glass and granite. The structural integrity of the building has been tested to ascertain its safety. The building is also soundproof.

(f) In consultation with the ESCWA secretariat, the offices in the building have been allocated according to the organizational structure of the secretariat and the grades and levels of the staff, and in accordance with United Nations standards so that administrative units in each floor are complete and contiguous in line with the requirements of work, which is facilitated by the use of the movable partitions system. Each floor houses an adequate number of lavatories, in addition to a meeting room, a refreshment counter and photocopying facilities;

(g) The building is also equipped with a telephone system and a computer network. It is also provided with drinking water taps, curtains, carpeting, furniture for offices, meeting rooms and lounges, including earphones, microphones and interpretation facilities, in addition to the restaurant, the cafeteria and other facilities. The printshop, the library and the storage areas have been planned so as to be able to absorb additional expansion. Consultations are under way between ESCWA, the Lebanese authorities and United Nations Headquarters about the safety plan proposed for the building by SOLIDERE.

### C. The ESCWA plan for the move to its permanent headquarters in Beirut

8. The ESCWA secretariat indicated during its eighteenth session that the drawing up of a detailed plan for the move would depend on the availability of the elements needed for that purpose, including the availability of resources required for the move and the setting up of a timetable for the completion of the headquarters building, in accordance with the listed specifications and conditions submitted by ESCWA to the competent authorities in the Government of Lebanon.

9. In this respect, the ESCWA secretariat should like to note the great efforts being made by the Government of Lebanon to complete the building on 1 September 1997 in order to turn it over to ESCWA, complete with all fixtures, furnishings and equipment, according to a specified timetable and taking into account the beginning of the school year, the housing and living conditions of ESCWA staff and the need to accomplish this goal in a way that does not negatively affect the work of ESCWA.

10. On the basis of the above, the ESCWA secretariat has drawn up a preliminary plan for the move to its permanent headquarters in Beirut, taking into account the legal, programme-related, administrative, financial and logistical aspects of the move, as follows:

(a) Legal aspects. The transfer operation requires that the responsibilities of both the Government of Lebanon and the United Nations, with regard to the timely completion of the headquarters

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building, be determined in a comprehensive and definite manner. The consultations between the ESCWA secretariat and the Government of Lebanon on this subject have reached an advanced stage through the exchange of visits and the holding of successive meetings between officials from the two sides. Discussions are expected to be held soon between ESCWA and the Government of Lebanon, with the participation of the Office of Legal Affairs, in order to sign a headquarters agreement between the United Nations and the Government of Lebanon. The agreement deals mainly with the immunities and privileges enjoyed by the Commission and its staff while carrying out their work in Beirut. A supplementary agreement is expected to be signed dealing mainly with the headquarters building in terms of operation, maintenance and insurance, and defining the responsibilities of each party. Talks will also be held between ESCWA and the competent authorities in the Government of Lebanon about the practical measures to be taken for the implementation of the headquarters agreement and the supplementary agreement; the issues of identity cards, customs exemptions, visas, and preferential rates for utilities such as electricity, water, and telephones, will also be discussed.

(b) Programme-related aspects. In an endeavour to carry out the tasks entrusted to it and to minimize any disruptions due to the move, ESCWA has rescheduled the activities of its programme of work for the biennium 1996-1997, so as to complete most of the activities by the end of August 1997, before the transfer operation begins. For that purpose, numerous steps were taken, including a rescheduling of the missions of ESCWA experts and Professionals to the member States and the postponement of annual leave for staff. In addition, efforts were made to solve logistical problems such as data compilation and the printing and publication of outputs.

(c) Financial and administrative aspects. The financial aspects include the preparation of a budget for the moving costs, the opening of an account for ESCWA in Beirut, the liquidation of ESCWA accounts in Amman, and the revision of the budget programme for the biennium 1998-1999 on the basis of prevailing prices in Beirut. Contacts are continuously being made with the competent authorities in the Government of Lebanon in order to ensure that the headquarters building is completed on time, including the building fixtures, furnishings and equipment, in preparation for the move. A practical plan for the gradual transfer of ESCWA office equipment, documents and archives, as well as the move of ESCWA staff with their families and personal effects and belongings, will then be implemented over a period of about two months, according to a fixed timetable and taking into consideration the exigencies of work. This transfer operation also requires entry visas and identification cards for ESCWA staff as well as customs exemptions for their personal effects and belongings. Afterwards, the temporary offices of ESCWA in Amman will be vacated prior to being shut down gradually. Meanwhile, the necessary transactions with the Jordanian authorities will be completed, the contracts of local staff will be terminated, and preparations will be made for the selection of new local staff in Beirut, in accordance with United Nations rules and regulations. Adequate schooling and housing are among the matters that will have to be facilitated for ESCWA staff, in addition to health services and recreational activities.

11. As regards the financing of the costs of the transfer of ESCWA in accordance with paragraph 5 (c) of Economic and Social Council resolution 1994/43, the Secretary-General was requested to ensure that the transfer be financed within existing resources and primarily from extrabudgetary contributions and without prejudice to planned cost savings. To that end, the ESCWA secretariat contacted both the United Nations Secretariat and the Government of Lebanon. The Secretary-General assigned to the Executive Secretary of ESCWA the task of following up the issue of providing additional financial resources to finance the transfer; accordingly, the Executive Secretary contacted the representatives of the ESCWA member States for that

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purpose. Consultations are under way between the Government of Lebanon and the Secretary-General to explore the best ways of providing the funds needed for the transfer of ESCWA to its permanent headquarters. In this respect, attention is drawn to ESCWA resolution 207 (XVIII) of 25 May 1995 on facilitating the relocation of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia to its permanent headquarters in Beirut, Lebanon. In that resolution, the Commission called on "the member States to take measures to support the Secretary-General in his efforts to secure the necessary resources for the implementation of resolution 197 (XVII)."

D. Hand-over of the previous headquarters building to the  
Government of the Republic of Iraq

12. The ESCWA secretariat informed the Commission at its eighteenth session that "in response to the request made by the competent Iraqi authorities to hand over the previous headquarters building in Baghdad following the selection of Beirut as the permanent headquarters of ESCWA, and with the consent of the competent department of the United Nations Secretariat,"<sup>1/</sup> an ESCWA team had travelled to Baghdad on 18 March 1995 and had undertaken, along with representatives of the Government of Iraq, a thorough inspection of the building, furnishings and fixtures. On that basis, ESCWA and the Government of Iraq agreed that ESCWA would leave behind certain electrical equipment and spare parts that could be used by the Government of Iraq in the maintenance of the building facilities and fixtures. Moreover, the remaining furniture and equipment provided by the Government of Iraq was returned to officials of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

13. On 16 June 1996, ESCWA and the Government of Iraq signed an agreement concerning the hand-over of the premises occupied by ESCWA in Baghdad. The agreement states that the premises have been returned and handed over to the Government of Iraq, retroactive to 20 May 1995, and that the Government of Iraq received the keys to the premises after inspecting the premises, and acknowledges the premises, its fixtures, furnishings and equipment, to be in good order and repair and therefore releases ESCWA from all liabilities, obligations and responsibilities with respect to the premises.

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<sup>1/</sup> E/ESCWA/C.1/18/5/Add.1, para. 8.