



Finance Committee

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Implementation of the budget for 2024

Standards of accommodation for air travel

Report of the Secretary-General

1. The present document is submitted to the Finance Committee in accordance with the decision of the Assembly ([ISBA/29/A/11](#)), in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to issue a report on the standards of accommodation on air travel, in line with the corresponding report published by the Secretary-General of the United Nations,¹ including in particular a breakdown of the cost of all air travel of all members of the secretariat during the 2023–2024 budget period and the class of travel used.

2. Expenditure on travel is one of the largest expenditures incurred by the Authority. The present report provides a summary of the travel policy of the Authority and a breakdown of the costs of air travel during the 2023–2024 financial period in the following categories:

- (a) Travel on mission by staff members;
- (b) Entitlement travel by staff members and their eligible family members;
- (c) Travel supported by the voluntary trust funds of the Authority;
- (d) Travel of consultants and individual contractors, interns or persons on secondment to the secretariat, members of advisory committees or delegates of member States to workshops, events and other activities of the Authority.

I. Travel policy of the Authority

3. It should be noted that there is considerable divergence in the travel policies between different organizations within the United Nations common system. While both the Joint Inspection Unit and the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) have urged greater uniformity in practices, this seems elusive.² The travel policies of

¹ The corresponding reports of the Secretary-General of the United Nations are issued every two years, the most recent being [A/75/654/Rev.1](#) and [A/77/629](#).

² See [JIU/REP/2017/3](#), in which the Unit noted wide discrepancies between the 26 organizations reviewed, in particular in the application of criteria and thresholds for different standards of accommodation. The Unit made various recommendations aimed at greater harmonization across the United Nations common system, only some of which have been implemented as of 2024.



the Authority are generally consistent with those applied by the United Nations at Headquarters.³ These are generally in line with the latest recommendations of ICSC. Travel entitlements are set out in chapter VII of the Staff Rules of the Authority (ISBA/ST/SGB/2020/1) and are further elaborated in administrative instruction ISBA/ST/AI/2020/6 and the related information circulars ISBA/ST/IC/2021/3 and ISBA/ST/IC/2021/3/Amend.1. These are reviewed and updated from time to time as necessary, in response to changes made by the United Nations or in line with ICSC recommendations.

4. Broadly speaking, the standard of accommodation for travel by staff members (below the D-2 level) is determined by the dual threshold applied by the United Nations, whereby business class is applied when the duration of a single-leg journey is 9 hours or longer or when the duration of a multi-leg journey exceeds 11 hours, including scheduled stops to change planes.⁴ This does not apply in the case of externally funded travel or travel for purposes of training, which are required to be in economy class regardless of the duration (unless the sponsor provides a higher class).

5. In line with the recommendations of ICSC, a 75 per cent lump sum option is available for staff members for travel on home leave, family visit, education grant travel or travel on assignment, repatriation or separation from service (referred to generally as entitlement travel).

6. The standard of accommodation for air travel by consultants and individual contractors, interns or persons on secondment to the secretariat, members of advisory committees or subsidiary organs of the Authority, or delegates of member States to participate in the workshops and meetings of the Authority is economy class, irrespective of the duration of the journey. Exceptions to this policy may be made on medical grounds or owing to the seniority of the traveller concerned, except in the case of travel supported by a trust fund, in which case no allowance is made for exceptions (see ISBA/ST/AI/2020/6, sect. 15).

II. Procurement of travel services

7. Since 2020, the Authority has engaged the services of an internationally recognized global travel agency, Travel Edge, based in New York, to procure air travel. Travel Edge offers a dedicated agent for the Authority with a two-hour turnaround time, two or three options for each trip, good tracking of unused tickets and refunds, customer service after hours at no cost if dealing with an emergency, and a 45-day credit facility.

8. The Authority also makes use of self-ticketing and online ticket purchases where it can be demonstrated that these are more cost-effective than purchase through the approved travel agent.

9. Solicitation of bids for air travel services is undertaken roughly every three years, but it is apparent that the volume of business is such that very few, if any, bids are received.

³ In the case of the Authority, one divergence from the United Nations practice is that in 2020 the Secretary-General introduced a policy on breastfeeding under which staff members who are nursing mothers with an infant under 1 year of age may elect to have the infant travel with them on official business travel.

⁴ The Secretary-General of the United Nations has pointed out that applying the dual threshold is inefficient and administratively complex, and has on several occasions proposed a single threshold for the use of business class of 9.5 hours calculated by total flight time (see A/77/629). This proposal has not yet been accepted by the General Assembly.

10. In 2016, the Authority joined a long-term agreement between the United Nations Development Programme and Saga Commercial Group S.A. (Allegro Tours), based in Panama. The arrangement was used intermittently since, in the experience of the Authority, compared with the locally based travel agency used at the time, it resulted in higher fees and fares with a lower standard of customer service, largely owing to the remote location and language differences. The travel agency mostly served United Nations agencies based in Panama City.

11. In the past, the secretariat has also explored the possibility of sourcing travel through United Nations Headquarters but has been informed that this is not possible for technical and administrative reasons, including because the Authority maintains a separate accounting system as an autonomous organization.

12. While there are several travel agencies based in Jamaica, the secretariat's experience is that these are unable to offer the range of services required by a global organization, including, for example, essential out-of-hours services, holiday and weekend service, competitive international fares and credit facilities.

13. In August 2024, the secretariat was informed by Satguru Travel Group (Rwanda) that it had initiated operations in Kingston. This travel group has a strong presence in Africa, providing services to the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Children's Fund, and is now extending its services to other countries. It is possible that its global presence, experience with United Nations agencies and range of services provided may offer a good alternative for the secretariat. This will be evaluated in 2025.

14. Notwithstanding that travel forms a large component of the Authority's expenditure, the overall volume of travel remains very small by international corporate standards and the Authority is therefore unable to benefit from airline discount agreements or other savings.

15. An important factor in maintaining cost-effectiveness is the advance purchase of tickets. To promote greater cost-effectiveness, the Secretary-General issued an instruction in 2021 requiring that the purchase of tickets should be finalized not less than 16 calendar days in advance of the commencement of official travel. The relevant head of office will be required to provide justification for all official travel arrangements that could not be finalized 16 calendar days in advance of the commencement of travel. This is done by adding an explanatory note in the travel authorization form upon submission. Furthermore, any changes to an approved travel authorization require justification and certification by the relevant head of office or the Director of the Office for Administrative Services, which is done by email.

III. Breakdown of costs of air travel for the 2023–2024 financial period

16. The present section provides an analysis of the costs of air travel during the 2023–2024 financial period, by category.

A. Travel on mission by staff members

17. During the financial period, the Secretary-General and staff members made a total of 101 trips on official travel related to mandate implementation, including travel to workshops and meetings, at a total cost of \$500,159 (cost of tickets only, not including daily subsistence allowance). Of these trips, 35 were in economy class and 66 in business class. No exceptions to the policy were authorized. There were a few

voluntary downgrades to economy or premium economy class, mainly due to flight availability for a required date and destination.⁵ A breakdown per year and class of travel appears in annex I, table 1.

B. Entitlement travel by staff members and their eligible family members

18. Entitlement travel refers to travel by staff members and their eligible family members on home leave, family visit, education grant travel or travel on assignment, repatriation or separation from service. Some forms of entitlement travel (education grant travel) are exclusively in economy class, regardless of the duration.

19. During the financial period, the Secretary-General and staff members made a total of 63 trips on entitlement travel at a total cost of \$520,873 (cost of tickets only, not including daily subsistence allowance). Of these trips, 21 were in economy class and 42 in business class. No exceptions to the policy were authorized. In 29 cases (roughly 46 per cent), the lump sum option was chosen by the staff member. A breakdown per year and class of travel appears in annex I, table 2.

C. Travel of consultants and individual contractors, interns or persons on secondment to the secretariat, members of advisory committees or delegates of member States

20. This category mainly covers travel of experts and delegates to workshops, seminars and meetings organized by the Authority, including events organized with project or extrabudgetary funding administered by the Authority. As a general rule, all such travel is in economy class. During the financial period, a total of 109 experts were funded to participate in workshops and other events. Total expenditure related to tickets purchased for these trips was \$221,201. A breakdown per year appears in annex I, table 3.

21. In 2023, a travel exception was granted in the context of extrabudgetary activity. The Chief of the Small Island Developing States Unit in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat was invited to make a presentation at the fifth international workshop under the Abyssal Initiative for Blue Growth, held in Tonga. Considering his status as a staff member of the United Nations and that he would have been eligible for business class travel had his travel been supported by the United Nations, the Secretary-General authorized an exceptional upgrade of travel to maintain equivalence with the staff of the Authority. The total cost of the exception was \$7,236.95. In 2024, one exception was given on medical grounds for business class travel to participate in an event organized by the secretariat, as permitted by the relevant administrative instruction. The total cost of the exception was \$3,183.

22. During the financial period, a total of 13 consultants were funded to visit the secretariat or participate in workshops and other events elsewhere. Total expenditure related to the tickets purchased was \$32,719. A breakdown per year appears in annex I, table 4.

⁵ In paragraph 4.9 of administrative instruction [ISBA/ST/AI/2020/6](#), an incentive is provided to staff members to voluntarily downgrade from business class in return for more generous rest stopover allowances.

D. Travel supported by the voluntary trust funds of the Authority

23. In accordance with the respective terms of reference of the voluntary trust funds administered by the Authority,⁶ eligible members of the Council, the Finance Committee and the Legal and Technical Commission may request financial support to participate in meetings of the Authority. During the 2023–2024 financial period, a total of 81 air tickets were funded from the voluntary trust funds with a total expenditure of \$161,062. Following the established policies, all travel was in economy class. A breakdown of the nationalities of the individuals funded, by session, and the total number of trips appears in annex II, tables 1 to 4.

IV. Observations and recommendations

24. The location of the Authority's headquarters in Jamaica means that international travel is an essential and unavoidable part of the mandate implementation. Except for United Nations Headquarters in New York, very few of the destinations to which staff are required to travel fall under the dual threshold established for business class travel. For example, any travel to Europe through either the United States of America or the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland automatically generates a business class fare entitlement.

25. Some of the key considerations emerging from the present report are as follows:

(a) For cost reasons, the secretariat does not participate in the United Nations Umoja enterprise resource planning tool, and the secretariat's enterprise resource planning tool does not include a module for travel (again, for cost reasons). Consequently, all travel has to be processed manually, which is time-consuming and time-intensive;

(b) Limited competition in the Jamaican travel market, the small size of the Authority's travel business and monopolies or near monopolies on key routes means that it is very difficult to secure volume discounts or special fares;

(c) There has been a very large increase in the cost of air tickets over the past three years in particular, and this shows little sign of slowing down;

(d) For the above reasons, there is little incentive for staff members to take advantage of lump sum options for entitlement travel as it would leave them effectively out of pocket;

(e) Adoption of the single threshold for business class as recommended by the Secretary-General of the United Nations may potentially simplify administration but would likely produce limited, if any, overall savings in travel costs.

⁶ The relevant funds are the voluntary trust fund to support the participation of members of the Council from developing States in the meetings of the Council (see [ISBA/23/A/13](#) and [ISBA/27/A/8-ISBA/27/C/36](#)) and the voluntary trust fund for the purpose of defraying the cost of participation of members of the Legal and Technical Commission from developing countries and members of the Finance Committee from developing countries in the meetings of the Commission and the Committee (see [ISBA/23/A/12](#)).

Annex I

Travel on mission, entitlement travel, and travel of experts and consultants

Table 1

Travel on mission

(United States dollars)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of trips</i>	<i>Economy class</i>	<i>Number of trips</i>	<i>Business class</i>
2023	15	10 048	26	145 541
2024	20	15 902	40	328 668
Total	35	25 950	66	474 209
		<i>Number of trips</i>	<i>Economy and business class</i>	
Grand total		101		500 159

Table 2

Entitlement travel

(United States dollars)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of trips</i>	<i>Economy class</i>	<i>Number of trips</i>	<i>Business class</i>
2023	1	1 422	10	57 515
2024	9	10 072	14	149 520
Total	10	11 494	24	207 035
<i>Lump sum option</i>				
<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of trips</i>	<i>Economy class</i>	<i>Number of trips</i>	<i>Business class</i>
2023	4	4 169	11	178 807
2024	7	4 409	7	114 959
Total	11	8 578	18	293 766
		<i>Number of trips</i>	<i>Economy and business class</i>	
Grand total		63		520 873

Table 3
Travel of experts

(United States dollars)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of trips</i>	<i>Economy class</i>
2023	10	24 096
2024	3	8 623
Total	13	32 719

Table 4
Travel of consultants

(United States dollars)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of trips</i>	<i>Economy class</i>	<i>Number of trips</i>	<i>Business class</i>
2023	45	82 638	1	10 815
2024	62	122 159	1	5 589
Total	107	204 797	2	16 404
		<i>Number of trips</i>	<i>Economy and business class</i>	
Grand total		109	221 201	

Annex II

Travel supported by the voluntary trust funds

Table 1

Meetings of the Legal and Technical Commission

(United States dollars)

<i>Meetings of the Legal and Technical Commission</i>				<i>Twenty-eighth session, part I</i>	<i>Twenty-eighth session, part II</i>	<i>Twenty-ninth session, part I</i>	<i>Twenty-ninth session, part II</i>
<i>No.</i>	<i>Requesting country</i>	<i>Route of travel</i>	<i>Number of trips</i>	<i>Ticket cost in economy class</i>			
1	Argentina	EZE-PTY-KIN-PTY-EZE	4	1 773	1 469	2 514	2 736
2	Cameroon	NSI-IST-JFK-KIN-JFK-IST-NSI	4	2 069	3 502	1 869	2 469
3	Chile	SCL-MIA-KIN-MIA-SCL	1	1 376	—	—	—
4	Dominican Republic	SDQ-KIN-SDQ	4	783	361	922	637
5	Egypt	CAI-JFK-KIN-JFK-CAI	1	—	3 375	—	—
6	Ghana	ACC-JFK-KIN-JFK-ACC	2	—	2 320	3 899	—
7	Indonesia	CGK-DOH-JFK-KIN-JFK-DOH-CGK	3	2 360	3 083	2 730	—
8	Kenya	NBO-DOH-MIA-KIN-MIA-DOH-NBO	4	1 878	2 395	1 819	3 503
9	Mexico (from Berlin)	BER-AMS-ATL-KIN-ATL-AMS-BER	4	1 176	2 830	1 949	2 271
10	Namibia	WDH-FRA-MIA-KIN-MIA-FRA-WDH	2	—	3 069	—	788
11	Nigeria (from London)	LHR-MIA-KIN-MIA-LHR	4	1 005	1 115	1 821	1 277
12	Philippines	MNL-JFK-KIN-JFK-MNL	4	2 385	3 696	3 681	4 902
13	Sierra Leone (New York)	JFK-KIN-JFK	2	445	1 065	—	—
14	Tanzania	MBI-DAR-DOH-MIA-KIN-MIA-DOH-DAR-MBI	4	3 161	2 898	3 229	4 274
15	Togo	LFW-CDG-JFK-KIN-JFK-CDG-LFW	4	2 058	2 616	2 274	1 326

<i>Meetings of the Legal and Technical Commission</i>				<i>Twenty-eighth session, part I</i>	<i>Twenty-eighth session, part II</i>	<i>Twenty-ninth session, part I</i>	<i>Twenty-ninth session, part II</i>
<i>No.</i>	<i>Requesting country</i>	<i>Route of travel</i>	<i>Number of trips</i>	<i>Ticket cost in economy class</i>			
16	Trinidad and Tobago	POS-KIN-POS	4	1 047	765	708	803
17	Uganda	EBB-IST-JFK-KIN-JFK-IST-EBB	3	1 888	2 433	—	2 487
Total			54	23 404	36 992	27 415	27 473

Table 2
Meetings of the Council
 (United States dollars)

<i>Meetings of the Council</i>				<i>Twenty-eighth session, part I</i>	<i>Twenty-eighth session, part II</i>	<i>Twenty-eighth session, part III</i>	<i>Twenty-ninth session, part I</i>	<i>Twenty-ninth session, part II</i>
<i>No.</i>	<i>Requesting country</i>	<i>Route of travel</i>	<i>Number of trips</i>	<i>Ticket cost in economy class</i>				
1	Argentina	EZE-MIA-KIN-MIA-EZE	4	2 181	—	1 692	2 146	3 739
2	Bangladesh	JFK-JFK-KIN	1	535	—	—	—	—
3	Fiji	SUV-NAN-LAX-MIA-KIN-MIA-LAX-NAN-SUV	4	2 615	—	2 785	2 737	3 097
4	Ghana	JFK-KIN-JFK	5	515	720	800	515	720
5	Lesotho	MSU-JNB-DXB-MIA-KIN-MIA-DXB-JNB-MBU	2	—	—	—	2 739	4 073
6	Sierra Leone	JFK-KIN-JFK	1	—	—	731	—	—
7	South Africa	JNB-LHR-MIA-KIN-MIA-LHR-JNB	1	2 070	—	—	—	—
Total			18	7 916	720	6 008	8 137	11 629

Table 3
Meetings of the Finance Committee

(United States dollars)

<i>No.</i>	<i>Meetings of the Finance Committee</i>			<i>Twenty-eighth session, part II</i>	<i>Twenty-ninth session, part II</i>
	<i>Requesting country</i>	<i>Route of travel</i>	<i>Number of trips</i>	<i>Ticket cost in economy class</i>	
1	Bangladesh	DAC-DXB-MIA-KIN- MIA-DXB-DAC	2	2 540	2 787
2	Brazil	JFK-KIN-JFK	2	770	1 326
3	Ghana	JFK-KIN-JFK	2	710	721
4	Nauru	JFK-KIN-JFK	1	780	—
5	Uganda	JFK-KIN-JFK	2	820	914
Total			9	5 620	5 748

Table 4
Total travel supported by the voluntary trust funds

(United States dollars)

<i>Total travel supported by the fund</i>	<i>Number of trips</i>	<i>Total cost of tickets</i>
<i>Requesting country</i>		
Legal and Technical Commission	54	115 284
Council	18	34 410
Finance Committee	9	11 368
Total	80	161 062