



Written by [Steven J. DuBord](#) on September 2, 2009

UN Computer Upgrade Slow & Costly

A planned computer hardware and software upgrade for the United Nations is more than three months behind schedule and appears headed to exceed its budget by over \$50 million, Fox News reported September 1.

The technology overhaul, dubbed Umoja (Swahili for “unity”), was approved less than a year and a half ago with a projected price tag of \$286.6 million, an amount that had already factored in \$37.2 million for “contingencies.” Fox News has obtained a 53-page [draft report](#) on Umoja that estimates the project will actually cost \$337 million by its expected conclusion in 2012, a budget overrun of \$50.4 million.



The draft report “was prepared on behalf of a steering committee of top U.N. bureaucrats overseeing the information technology overhaul,” Fox News stated. Heading the committee is Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s Under Secretary General for Management Angela Kane.

The report reveals that Umoja is beset by the same cost inflation that plagues other major UN projects, such as the renovation of its headquarters. Fox News noted that when the renovation began in 1999, its cost was projected to be \$800 million. Now, with the renovation still not finalized, the cost stands at \$1.88 billion.

Umoja itself is just the tip of the iceberg. Fox News refers to a 2005 report by a branch of the UN General Assembly known as the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU). According to the JIU, the UN had already spent more than \$1 billion on information technology between 1995 and 2005 — apparently without establishing the cost-efficient electronic data management that is supposed to be the goal of Umoja.

“The United Nations system’s investment in ICT [Information and Communications Technologies] is growing at a faster rate than the operating budgets of most United Nations organizations, or than worldwide inflation,” the JIU declared. The JIU pointed out that the UN had still not created a common payroll system for its tens of thousands of employees around the globe. One wonders what the \$1 billion was spent on, seeing that Umoja needs another third of a billion dollars to achieve “unity.”

Resistance to change, the hallmark of bureaucracy, has kept the UN behind the times. The report obtained by Fox News brings to light the UN bureaucrats’ distrust of technology. “Paper documents are usually the source of trusted information,” the report discloses, including the telling remark that at the UN “we often have several versions of ‘the truth.’ ”

Umoja appears to have the same fluid understanding of truth. The plan originally called for 44 full-time staff members to implement the upgrades. The draft report now claims that Umoja “could not possibly be executed” without a staff of 80, or almost double the first projection. This will cost over \$32 million, with about another \$18 million to UN employees who would be assisting the process at various times.

Truth also seems to change with the wind for Umoja’s travel budget, which began as a minimal estimate



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for total expenses. Now the report calls for 1,285 trips by staff members, experts, and consultants. With the typical flight ticket costing \$6,000, the addition of \$202 for “terminal expenses,” and an allowance of \$5,000 for per-diem expenses, each of the 1,285 trips is “estimated to cost \$11,202/person.” This brings travel expenses up to \$14.4 million.

Fox News said that “the draft report ends with a warning that the technical overhaul involved in Umoja must be accompanied by an overhaul of a wide variety of U.N. rules and regulations, amounting to an entire redefinition of how work is done at the U.N., and by a total restructuring, in effect, of the unwieldy organization.” Yet no estimate in cost or time is given for such fundamental and far-reaching change, making it seem unlikely that it will every take place, and highly probable that Umoja will just add its hundreds of millions of dollars to the \$1 billion that has already been spent in vain.

The UN’s goal is indeed unity, but it is a unity that will only be achieved by extending its rules and regulations around the globe, much as the European Union has brought all of Europe under its sway. Europeans watch daily with growing frustration as the EU establishes unity across the continent at the expense of each nation’s independence and every citizen’s individual freedom.

America should separate itself from this kind of unity. Americans ought to learn from the example of the EU and from the entrenched corruption, bureaucratic ineptitude, and monetary waste of the UN. The proper course of action for the United States, burdened as it is by trillions of dollars in debt and record-setting yearly deficits, is to waste no more money on the United Nations.

It takes no computer upgrade to calculate that it is high time to follow the [John Birch Society’s](#) advice: Get the U.S. out of the UN!



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