



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

# INSIDE FAO

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A T R U L Y  
G L O B A L  
F O R U M

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# INSIDE FAO

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# CONTENTS

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## THE HISTORY

From Roman settlements to the origins of the architectural complex

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The history of the site	8
The origins of the complex	20
FAO today	26



## INSIDE FAO

Discovering the Organization's most prestigious spaces

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34	The Entrance
42	The Atrium
46	The Sheikh Zayed Media and Knowledge Centre
50	The Flag Hall
52	The David Lubin Memorial Library
60	The China Lounge
64	The Plenary Hall
72	The Belgian Lounge
76	The Caribbean Lounge
82	The Thai Lounge
84	The Japan Lounge



# THE ROOMS

The meeting spaces of the global forum

- 88 A global and neutral forum
- 90 The Green Room
- 94 The Red Room
- 98 The Nordic Lounge
- 100 The Ethiopia Room
- 104 The Malaysia Room
- 108 The King Faisal Room
- 112 The Nigeria Room
- 114 The Philippines Room
- 116 The Mexico Room
- 118 The Iraq Room
- 122 The German Room
- 124 The Iran Room
- 126 The Lebanon Room
- 127 The Austria Room
- 128 The Pakistan Room
- 129 The Cuba Room
- 130 The Queen Juliana Room
- 131 The Canada Room
- 132 The India Room
- 134 The Azerbaijan Room
- 136 The Sudan Room
- 138 The Australia Room



## MORE TO SEE

Rooms, spaces and works of art not to be missed

- The Indonesia Room 142
- The Morocco Room 144
- Angola Radio and Television Centre 148
- Korean Conference Service Centre 152
- UEMOA Room 153
- Espace Gabon 154
- Turkish Registration Centre 155
- Slovak Delegates' Lounge 155
- Other artworks 156
- The terrace 168

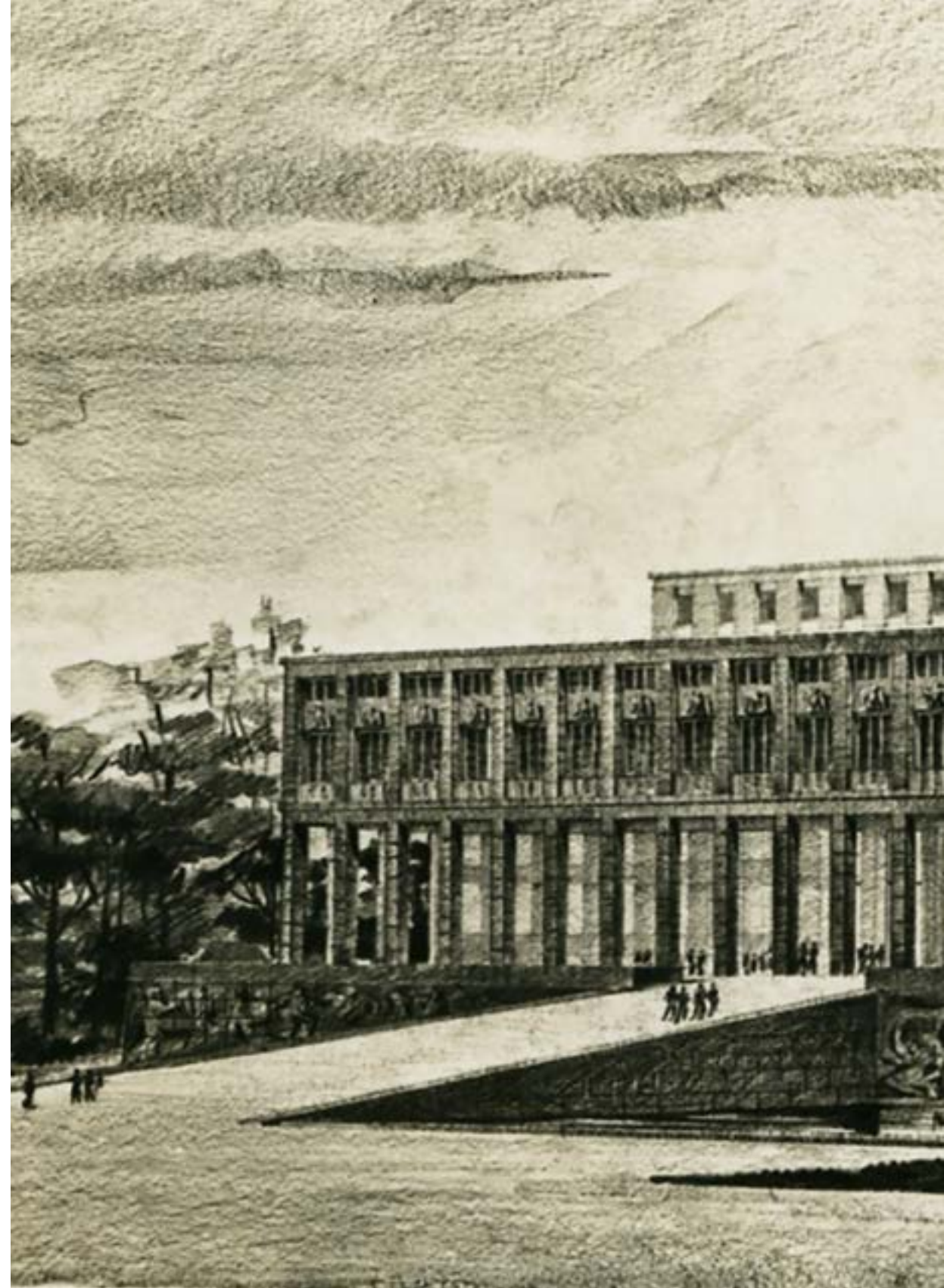
# THE ORIGINS OF THE COMPLEX

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In 1937 the Ministry of Public Works launched a tender for the “Project to build the new headquarters of the Ministry of Italian Africa to be erected in Rome between the Via d’Africa (what is now the Viale Aventino) and the Archaeological Walk”. The commission for the definitive project was granted in 1938 to a team formed by the architects Vittorio Cafiero, Alberto Legnani, Mario Ridolfi, Wolfgang Frankl, Ettore Rossi, Armando Sabbatini and Giulio Rinaldi. The building, which corresponds to today’s building B in the current complex occupied by FAO, was never actually used as the Ministry’s headquarters owing to military developments and the consistent loss of colonial possessions. In 1938, work also began on the construction of line B of the Rome subway in view of the opening of the EUR development in 1940, later cancelled due to World War II. It was not until 1955 that the subway line, with its Circus Maximus station located right in front of the FAO complex, was completed all the way to the EUR district and fully inaugurated.

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A view of the Ministry of Italian Africa, now the FAO headquarters in Rome, from the final plan by architect Vittorio Cafiero in 1950. Archive of the Accademia Nazionale di San Luca, Ridolfi-Frankl-Malagrizzi fund, 1947–1951.









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**On the opposite page:**  
The site from above during construction of building A.  
**Top left:** The FAO complex during construction of building A.



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A view of Piazza di Porta Capena with the Obelisk of Axum (fourth century) erected in 1937 to mark the fifteenth anniversary of the March on Rome and returned to Ethiopia in 2005 as a gesture of friendship and reparation.

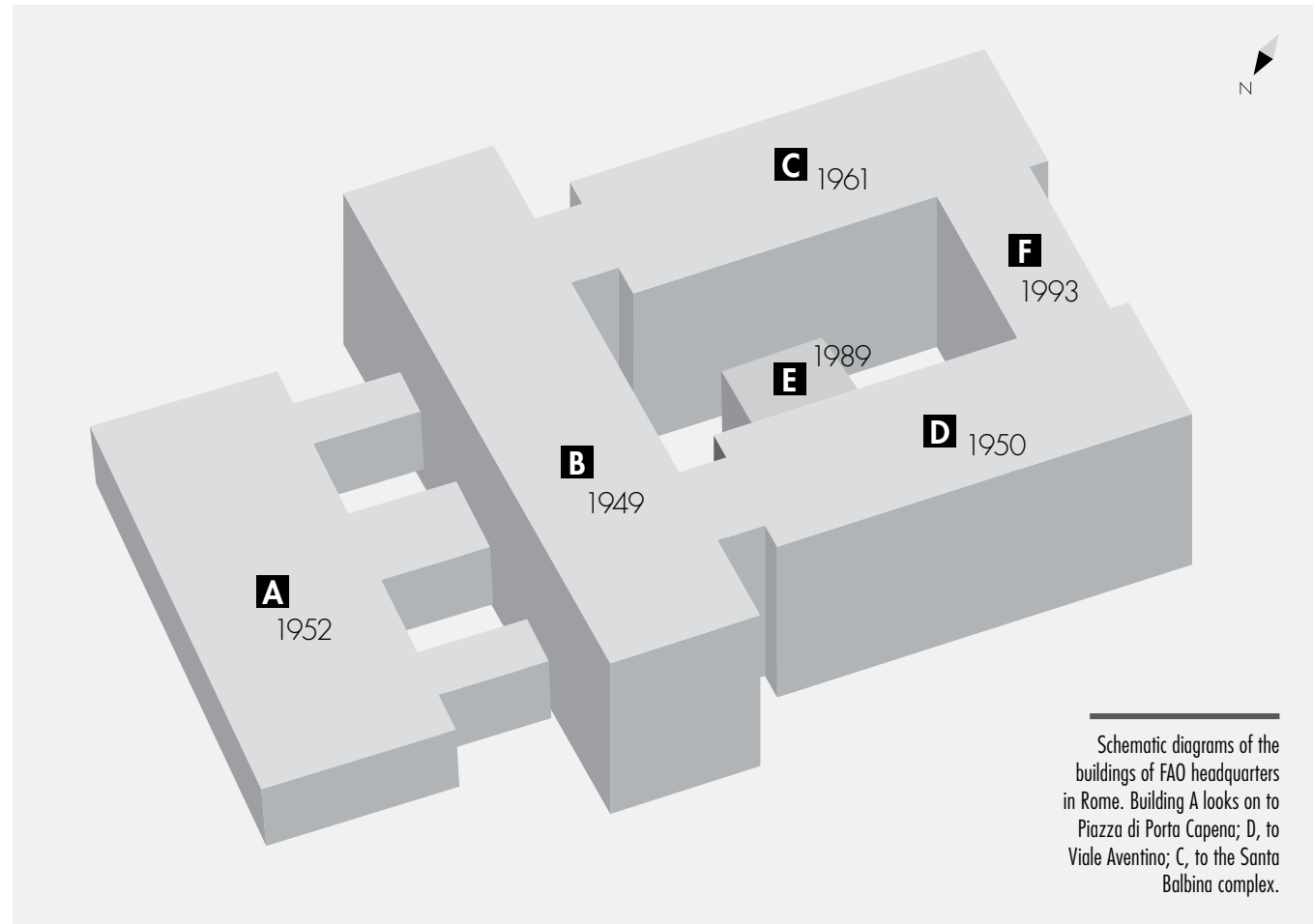
The excavations for the construction of building B revealed some of the materials currently preserved in the entrance of building A, which provides access to the rest of the complex.

During proceedings of the Fifth Session of the FAO General Assembly, which took place in Washington D.C, it was decided that the Organization's primary headquarters should be relocated. With 30 votes in favour of Italy and 28 for the United States of America, on 29 November 1949 the Conference decreed that FAO's new permanent seat would be in Rome. The Italian Government initially provided building B – which was already available in the capital and was located at the start of the Archaeological Walk – at a symbolic lease of one dollar a year. Following this decision, the Roman Office of Public and Construction Works joined forces with the architect Vittorio Cafiero, who had designed the project, to carry out the work to adapt the existing structure and to construct the new building A in front of it. In the original plans for the Ministry of Italian Africa, this area had been earmarked to house the reception hall and meeting rooms, but the construction of these had never gone beyond laying the piles for the foundations.

In 1950, the plans for completing the building – entrusted solely to Vittorio Cafiero – were presented and examined. Work began the following year on a structure built using reinforced concrete on piles also made of reinforced concrete, with the upper floors made of a combination of reinforced concrete and brick. At the end of the same year, the building was partially handed over to FAO's Director-General by the President of the Italian Republic so that it could be used for the Sixth Session of the Conference. Work recommenced at the beginning of 1952 immediately after the closure of the Sixth Session of the Conference and was completed during the course of the same year.

The area surrounding the FAO site has changed greatly over time — it was home to the Circus Maximus from around the sixth century BCE until late antiquity, and the Baths of Caracalla in the Imperial Age. In the centre, on the 'Little Aventine', the only surviving evidence of settlement from the Imperial Age is the early-Christian Basilica of Santa Balbina. The archaeological finds and neighbouring structures are an ever-present reminder of the history that pervades the FAO buildings.

- C. SIXTH CENTURY BCE** Circus Maximus is built.
- FOURTH CENTURY BCE** First ring of Servian walls (visible in the FAO complex) is completed.
- FIRST–THIRD CENTURY CE** Lucius Fabius Cilo's domus, known as the Baths of Decius, is built.
- 212 CE** Construction begins on the Baths of Caracalla.
- FIFTH CENTURY CE** One of the earliest Christian parishes, the Basilica of Santa Balbina, is built on the Little Aventine.
- 1887–1930** The Archeological Walk is completed, which is now Via delle Terme di Caracalla
- 1937** Viale delle Terme di Caracalla is incorporated into the Via Imperiale project. The Obelisk of Axum is placed in Piazza di Porta Capena. Tender to develop Ministry of Italian Africa headquarters (now building B) is launched. Construction begins on Line B of Rome's metro.
- 1938** Construction of Ministry of Italian Africa headquarters is commissioned. Baths of Decius are uncovered.
- 1949** FAO's new permanent seat is assigned to Rome. Construction begins on building A.
- 1950** The Post and Telecommunications Ministry is built — this building will go on to become building D, assigned to FAO in 1976 and extended in 1987.
- 1951–1952** Building A is completed, and two connecting bridges to Building B are built.
- 1961** Building C is built: it will be completed in 1965.
- 1965** Building E is erected as a prefab structure — later demolished and rebuilt in 1989.
- 1993** Building F and the third connecting bridge between buildings A and B are built.
- 2005** The Obelisk of Axum is removed and returned.



Between 1951 and 1952 two connecting bridges were also constructed between buildings A and B (the third bridge now in place was built only in 1993), to link the two buildings on the second and third floors.

Another building — built by the Roman Office of Public and Construction Works on behalf of the Ministry of Public Works — was also built between 1945 and 1950. The building also faced onto the Viale Aventino

(which is now building D) and became the home of the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications. In 1963 the Twelfth Session of the Conference asked the Italian authorities to consider making this building available to FAO. In 1966, after approval of the proposed legislation allocating 20 billion lira to construct a new building for the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications close to the EUR lake (in the area bordered by Viale America and Viale Europa), the lengthy process of assigning

building D to FAO began. Substantial modifications were planned for the structure, including construction of an eighth floor, and after some years, the Italian Government approved the funding to restructure the building in 1976. Work began and the building was gradually occupied and put to use, although approval processes and amendments to the plans meant that the eighth floor was not built until 1987.

In the meantime, building C was constructed in 1961, with the structure facing the slopes of the Aventino Minore, looking out towards the Santa Balbina site. The works also brought to light new archaeological finds, of which some structures remain visible, and a number of items are displayed in the entrance to building A. After completion, it was handed over to FAO in 1965.

The same year saw the handover of building E, a prefabricated structure originally intended to be temporary and located in the courtyard between buildings C and D. In 1989 the building was demolished and reconstructed in the same position. Finally, in 1993, the eight-storey building F was constructed between buildings C and D.

In concluding this first part, it is worth noting that in 2005, after having stood in the Piazza di Porta Capena behind the FAO complex for 68 years, the Obelisk of Axum was removed so that it could be returned to Ethiopia as a symbol of reparation and friendship.

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Dismantling the Obelisk of Axum (fourth century) in Piazza di Porta Capena to return it to Ethiopia in 2005 (photo CC-BY4.0 Wikipedia).



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### PHOTOGRAPHIC PORTFOLIO

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