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Peace-keeping takes toll of UN copier bill

OFFICIALS at the cash-strapped United Nations in New York have made an embarrassing discovery. An audit has revealed that the cost of the 51m photocopies made on 209 machines last year is around three times the amount paid by comparable large organisations.

An internal document says the cost per copy is 3½ cents—2·3p—and recommends the UN reassess its working relationship with market leading equipment supplier Xerox when a five-year contract

expires in November. Independent consultants say Wall Street merchant banks and law firms with similar copying needs pay about 1½ cents a copy while large corporations, such as General Electric, Boeing and Ford, pay ½ of a cent.

It is understood that officials calculated the per copy cost for the first time recently after bringing in a consultant following a large increase in volumes. The document says that at the First Avenue and 42nd Street

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offices during the last four years 81 new machines have been installed, including seven donated by Xerox—one copier for every 23 staff.

The number of copies made, which forms the basis of maintenance costs, has soared 35pc, according to the UN, reflecting a greater number of peace-keeping missions and new members.

The document says: "Taking into consideration the

high volume of copying, any reduction in the per copy charge would result in significant savings."

A more commercial rate could save the equivalent of the \$1·2m annual membership fee of Peru, or 12 of the minimum \$102,000 subscriptions from the poorest member states.

Concern is also expressed in the document at the "significant profit" made by Xerox from charges from extra copies above those contractually agreed—so called

excess meter usage—and from paper and supplies.

Xerox, which owns half of Rank Xerox in Britain, admits that 3½ cents is above average but would not give the average. The company says this is partly because the UN pays for two Xerox staff full-time to maintain the machines. "The contract requires that the machines work 95pc of the time," said a spokesman. A UN spokeswoman said: "No decision on change will be made until the end of the year."