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LEAGUE OF NATIONS.

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**WORK OF THE PREPARATORY COMMISSION
FOR THE DISARMAMENT CONFERENCE.**

REPORT OF THE THIRD COMMITTEE TO THE ASSEMBLY.

Rapporteur : His Excellency Dr. BENES (Czechoslovakia).

In order to give an absolutely clear idea of the present state of the preparatory work for the Conference for the limitation and reduction of armaments, I think it may be well to recall very briefly the substance of the discussions which took place during the eighth ordinary session of the Assembly in regard to the problem of the reduction and limitation of armaments and to link it up with the discussions of the present Assembly.

It will be remembered that at the last ordinary session of the Assembly all the delegations agreed that the Preparatory Commission's work should be continued, that nothing should be neglected to bring it to a successful conclusion as soon as possible, and that the Conference itself should be convened as soon as the conclusion of the preliminary technical work permitted. But at the same time it was unanimously recognised that the great work of disarmament can only be carried out gradually and by stages, and that it will mainly depend on the progress achieved simultaneously in the matter of security.

The resolutions adopted on September 26th, 1927, were based on these two main ideas. In the first place, they led to the creation of the Committee on Arbitration and Security, which has done valuable work, dealt with in the reports submitted to the present Assembly by M. Guerrero, M. Politis and M. Rolin Jaquemyns. In the second place, as regards the Preparatory Commission itself, the 1927 Assembly, in the same resolutions, had "requested the Council to urge the Preparatory Commission to hasten the completion of its technical work and to convene the Conference on the Limitation and Reduction of Armaments immediately this work had been completed".

Since the last ordinary session of the Assembly, the Preparatory Commission has met on two occasions. At its fourth session, which took place from November 30th to December 3rd, 1927, it set up the Committee on Arbitration and Security, which immediately set to work. At its fifth session, which was held from March 15th to 24th, 1928, it was forced to realise that the general situation necessitated a fresh adjournment. But it hoped to be able to hold a meeting soon, and therefore decided to leave its President free to fix, according to circumstances, the date at which it would be practically useful to convene a new session of the Commission, in order to proceed to the second reading of its preliminary draft Convention. It also expressed the hope that the next session would begin at the earliest suitable date and, if possible, before the present session of the Assembly.

It should be mentioned that, during these two sessions, the President of the Preparatory Commission addressed an urgent appeal to the Governments whose opinions differed most widely, asking them to endeavour to bring their views closer into line by means of diplomatic negotiations. Since then, the British and French Governments have announced that, in pursuance of this invitation of the President of the Preparatory Commission, they have entered into negotiations which have led to an agreement on the solution of certain technical problems raised by the Preparatory Commission's work. Nevertheless, considering that the situation had not yet developed sufficiently to allow of the desired result being attained, the President did not feel justified in convening the Preparatory Commission before the beginning of the Assembly.

Such was the position when the general discussion began in the plenary meetings of this year's Assembly and in the Third Committee.

This discussion showed that the delegations have remained true to their views as expressed at the last Assembly, and that there exists a unanimous desire for the work of disarmament to be carried through as rapidly as possible. Nevertheless, various delegations have drawn attention to the manifold difficulties which must inevitably attend a task of such wide scope. They pointed out, moreover, that, notwithstanding these difficulties, the general situation

is tending to develop on the lines laid down in Article 8 of the Covenant, certain States having already spontaneously reduced their armaments to a considerable extent. Other delegations expressed the view that the progress of the preparatory work and the results hitherto achieved could hardly be regarded as satisfactory.

Two draft resolutions, one submitted by the French delegation and the other by the German delegation, were laid before the Third Committee. Both drafts referred to the close connection existing between international security and the reduction and limitation of armaments, and both stated that the present conditions of security were such as to allow of a first step being taken towards disarmament. In the French delegation's proposal, however, it was considered essential that the efforts of the Governments concerned to remove the technical differences which have hitherto hampered the work of the Preparatory Commission should be pursued and completed before the Commission was summoned, so as to enable the latter to meet with the best prospects of final success. Accordingly, the Council was requested in this draft to make an earnest appeal to the Governments to seek agreed solutions which would enable the work of the Preparatory Commission to be speedily resumed and brought to a successful issue. The draft concluded by proposing that the Assembly should express the hope that these solutions might be arrived at in sufficient time to enable the Commission to meet at the end of the present year or, should this not be feasible, at the beginning of 1929.

On the other hand, the German delegation's proposal, while recognising the importance and desirability of direct negotiations between the Governments concerned, expressed the opinion that, in the event of the failure of such negotiations, the Conference for the Limitation and Reduction of Armaments should itself decide any questions which had still to be settled. According to this draft, the Assembly was therefore to request the Council to fix a date in 1929 for the meeting of the Conference, while leaving it to the President of the Preparatory Commission to convene the Commission at such time as would enable the programme of the Conference to be drawn up.

The Third Committee took these two drafts together as the basis of its discussion and considered in detail every aspect of the problem. The discussion was long and difficult, but, thanks to the spirit of conciliation and co-operation animating the delegations concerned, it was found possible to reconcile the different points of view to a considerable extent, so as to enable the Committee to submit the following findings and proposals to the Assembly.

In the first place, the Committee was unanimous in thinking that the present situation was such as to allow of definite results being obtained in connection with a first step towards the reduction and limitation of armaments.

In point of fact, the general political situation is continually improving. The Covenant of the League of Nations, the Treaties of Peace, particularly the reductions effected in the armaments of certain countries as the result of these treaties, and the Locarno Agreements, have created conditions of security which make it possible to contemplate the conclusion of a General Convention for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments. Moreover, the situation may further improve for those countries which regard their present degree of security as insufficient, when they have put the proposals of the Committee on Arbitration and Security into effect, as it is hoped they will do.

Furthermore, the various difficulties which have hitherto held up the Preparatory Commission's work are beginning to diminish. As an instance of this, we may mention the efforts recently made by certain Governments to prepare the ground for the future work of the Commission. It seems clear that, if other efforts of this kind were made to settle current difficulties, the chances of success of the Preparatory Commission's next meeting would be considerably increased. The Assembly will doubtless, therefore, express the hope that the Governments concerned will take steps in this direction as soon as possible, and suggest to the Council that it might ask the President of the Preparatory Commission to keep in touch with the Governments concerned with a view to acquainting himself with the progress of their negotiations and to convening the Commission as soon as possible.

The Third Committee did not consider that a definite date could be given for the next meeting of the Preparatory Commission. Moreover, the Assembly is not called upon to give explicit instructions to the Preparatory Commission, which includes non-Member States, seeing that the Commission has itself instructed its President to fix the date of its next meeting. All the members of the Assembly, however, will wish this meeting to be held at the end of the present year, or, at all events, at the beginning of 1929. The President of the Preparatory Commission, expressing the Commission's view, has interpreted this desire as, in any case, imposing on him the obligation to convene the Preparatory Commission, but at the same time as allowing him a certain discretion in fixing the actual date — which is essential if the danger of interrupting negotiations which might be in progress, with good prospects of success, is to be avoided.

With regard to the convening of the Conference for the limitation and reduction of armaments itself, the general impression in the Third Committee was that at the close of the session's work, which in these circumstances will be reached at the end of the present year or at the beginning of 1929, the Preparatory Commission will certainly think it desirable to make a general report to the Council of the possibilities of the First General Conference and the date at which it might be held.

The importance and utility of this first stage should not, however, obscure the fact that the work for the reduction and limitation of armaments calls for arduous, protracted and continuous efforts. It should therefore be clearly emphasised here and now that the work

of the Preparatory Commission and of the Committee on Arbitration and Security will have to be systematically pursued so as to render possible at later stages the gradual limitation and reduction of armaments in proportion to the growth of security.

The Third Committee therefore has the honour to propose to the Assembly the adoption of the following resolution :

“ Whereas a close connection exists between international security and the reduction and limitation of armaments ;

“ And whereas the present conditions of security set up by the Covenant of the League of Nations, by the Treaties of Peace, and in particular by the reductions in the armaments of certain countries under these Treaties, and also by the Locarno Agreements, would allow of the conclusion at the present time of a first General Convention for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments ;

“ And whereas those Governments which consider that their security is not sufficiently assured are now, thanks to the work of the Committee on Arbitration and Security, in possession of fresh means for strengthening their security, of which it is to be hoped that they will make use at need, by having recourse to the good offices of the Council ;

“ And whereas the Convention for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments will increase international security ;

“ And whereas it is desirable that the work of the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference and of the Committee on Arbitration and Security shall be pursued so that, by further steps, armaments may be progressively reduced as the increase of security allows ;

“ The Assembly :

“ Urges the necessity of accomplishing the first step towards the reduction and limitation of armaments with as little delay as possible ;

“ Notes with satisfaction the efforts of certain Governments to prepare the ground for the future work of the Preparatory Commission ;

“ Earnestly hopes that Governments among which differences of opinion still subsist as to the conditions for the reduction and limitation of armaments will seek, without delay, in the most liberal spirit of conciliation and international solidarity, agreed solutions which will enable the work of the Preparatory Commission to be brought to a successful issue ;

“ Proposes to the Council that the President of the Preparatory Commission be instructed to keep in contact with the Governments concerned so that he may be apprised of the progress of their negotiations and may be able to convene the Commission at the end of the present year, or, in any case, at the beginning of 1929. ”
