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Geneva, August 11th, 1930.

LEAGUE OF NATIONS

SLAVERY

**REPORT BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL,
PRESENTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE ASSEMBLY
RESOLUTION OF SEPTEMBER 21st, 1929.**

On September 21st, 1929, the Assembly adopted the following resolution :

“ The Assembly,

“ Being extremely anxious to achieve the complete and final abolition of slavery and of the slave trade ;

“ Considering the importance, in order to attain these results, of the general ratification of the Convention on Slavery ;

“ Having considered the British Government’s proposal for the creation of a new Temporary Commission on Slavery ;

“ Being of opinion that an urgent appeal should first be addressed to the States which have not already done so to ratify or accede to the Convention on Slavery, and that it is necessary above all to collect information on the present position of the question ;

“ Postpones, therefore, further consideration of the British Government’s proposal ;

“ Urgently requests the States which have not already done so to ratify or accede to the Convention of September 25th, 1926, relative to slavery ;

“ Instructs the Secretary-General to collect from the States Members of the League, and from those non-Member States which are parties to the Convention, all possible information on the present position of slavery, and to report to the next Assembly.”

On November 1st, 1929, Circular Letter 292,1929.VI was despatched to all States Members of the League and to those non-Member States which are parties to the Slavery Convention of 1926. In this letter, the Secretary-General quoted the Assembly resolution, forwarded a copy of the Sixth Committee’s report to the Assembly on the question (document A.71.1929.VI) and called attention to the fact that the discussions in the Sixth Committee showed that the Assembly would welcome, not only official information, but also any information from private sources that the different Governments might think fit to forward.

The Secretary-General also expressed the hope that any information furnished by the various Governments might reach the Secretariat before the end of May 1930. A letter of reminder (C.L.132.1930.VI) was sent out on June 30th, 1930.

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Series of League of Nations Publications

VI. B. SLAVERY

1930. VI.B. 2.

SCOTLAND

The information received up to the present (August 11th, 1930) may be summarised as follows :

I.

RATIFICATIONS OF, AND ACCESSIONS TO, THE CONVENTION ON SLAVERY OF SEPTEMBER 25TH, 1926.

Since the end of the tenth session of the Assembly, the following ratifications or accessions have been deposited with the Secretariat :

Yugoslavia: September 28th, 1929 ;
Liberia: May 17th, 1930 ;
Greece: July 4th, 1930 ;
Irish Free State: July 18th, 1930.

The Polish Government has notified the Secretary-General (August 7th, 1930) that the instrument of ratification of the Convention will shortly be deposited with the Secretariat.

Moreover, *Cuba* (July 18th, 1930), *Czechoslovakia* (March 14th, 1930), *Japan* (January 4th, 1930), *Lithuania* (July 8th, 1930), *Switzerland* (May 20th, 1930) and *Uruguay* (December 12th, 1929) have intimated that they hope shortly to ratify or accede to the Convention. The Governments of Switzerland, Czechoslovakia and Uruguay, in their communications on this subject, state that the question of slavery is of no practical or direct interest to them, but that they are willing to consider ratification or accession in order to give a moral support to the efforts made under the auspices of the League. On the other hand, the Government of *Luxemburg*, in a letter dated November 21st, 1929, states that it has decided not to ratify the Convention on Slavery, as the Convention could not be applied by it.

The total number of ratifications or definitive accessions on August 11th, 1930, was 33 ; the number of signatures or accessions not yet perfected by ratification was 14 ; while the Convention is open to accession by 24 other States.

The accessions by *Hungary* (April 16th, 1927) and by the *United States of America* (March 21st, 1929) were given with certain reservations, which have been submitted for acceptance to the parties to the Convention. Fourteen States have not yet replied as regards the Hungarian reservations ; ten replies have still to be received regarding the United States reservations.

II.

COLLECTION OF INFORMATION CONCERNING THE PRESENT POSITION OF SLAVERY.

The communications received from the following countries are reproduced as appendices : *Australia, Belgium, Colombia, Hungary, India, Portugal and Salvador*.

The following countries in their replies indicate that they have no information to furnish ; that no slavery exists in the territories under their authority ; or that they are not directly interested in the question : *Austria, Czechoslovakia, Finland, Haiti, Irish Free State, Italy, Japan, Lithuania, Monaco, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, South Africa and Sweden*.

The Governments of *Estonia* and *Germany* state that they have no information either from official or from private sources. The Government of *Yugoslavia* states that it conforms strictly to the Slavery Convention; it has, for the moment, no information to furnish, but would be glad to communicate to the League any information that may come to its knowledge. The Governments of *Spain*,¹ the *United States of America* and *Uruguay*² state that they have nothing to add to previous communications on the subject.

The *Danish* Government states that it has no special information in its possession. The *Canadian* Government says that it is not in a position to supply any details on the present situation as regards slavery. The Government of the *Sudan* refers to the information contained in its communication of March 27th, 1930, which has been reproduced in the annual report to the Council (document A.13.1930.VI). The Government of *Egypt* also refers to the aforesaid information furnished directly by the Government of the Sudan.

Appendix 1.

SLAVERY CONVENTION.

(Signed at Geneva on September 25th, 1926.)

STATE OF THE SIGNATURES, RATIFICATIONS OR ACCESSIONS (AUGUST 11TH, 1930.)

| Ratifications or definitive Accessions | Signatures or Accessions not yet perfected by Ratification | The Convention is open to Accession by |
|--|--|--|
| UNITED STATES OF AMERICA ³ | ABYSSINIA | AFGHANISTAN |
| AUSTRIA | ALBANIA | ARGENTINE REPUBLIC |
| BRITISH EMPIRE | CHINA | BOLIVIA |
| CANADA | COLOMBIA | BRAZIL |

¹ See document A.17.1929.VI.

² See document C.625.M.224.1924.VI.

³ Subject to a reservation which has been submitted to the signatory States for acceptance.

| Ratifications or definitive Accessions | Signatures or Accessions not yet perfected by Ratification | The Convention is open to Accession by |
|---|---|---|
| AUSTRALIA | CUBA | CHILE |
| UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA | CZECHOSLOVAKIA | COSTA RICA |
| NEW ZEALAND | DOMINICAN REPUBLIC | FREE CITY OF DANZIG |
| INDIA | FRANCE | GUATEMALA |
| IRISH FREE STATE | LITHUANIA | HEJAZ |
| BELGIUM | PANAMA | HONDURAS |
| BULGARIA | PERSIA | ICELAND |
| DENMARK | POLAND | JAPAN |
| ECUADOR | ROUMANIA | LIECHTENSTEIN |
| EGYPT | URUGUAY | LUXEMBURG |
| ESTONIA | | MEXICO |
| FINLAND | | PARAGUAY |
| GERMANY | | PERU |
| GREECE | | SALVADOR |
| HAITI | | SAN MARINO |
| HUNGARY ¹ | | SIAM |
| IRAQ | | UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS |
| ITALY | | SWITZERLAND |
| LATVIA | | TURKEY |
| LIBERIA | | VENEZUELA |
| MONACO | | |
| THE NETHERLANDS (including Netherlands Indies, Surinam and Curaçao) | | |
| NICARAGUA | | |
| NORWAY | | |
| PORTUGAL | | |
| SPAIN | | |
| SUDAN | | |
| SWEDEN | | |
| YUGOSLAVIA | | |

Appendix 2.

AUSTRALIA.

LETTER FROM THE PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS OF AUSTRALIA
TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE LEAGUE.

Canberra, May 29th, 1930.

With reference to your letter of November 1st (C.L.292.1929), communicating the resolution adopted by the Tenth Assembly of the League of Nations on the subject of slavery, I have the honour to inform you that slavery does not exist in the Commonwealth of Australia or its territories. In Papua, natives may be compelled to undertake portorage for Government purposes only, subject to adequate remuneration therefor and other protective conditions. In Norfolk Island, residents may be required to maintain roads, etc., or to make payment in lieu thereof.

Slavery and forced labour are prohibited in the mandated territories of New Guinea and Nauru.

It may be mentioned that certain regulations are in force in New Guinea and Papua under which natives may be compelled for their own benefit to cultivate food and other crops.

(Signed) J. A. SCULLIN,
*Prime Minister and
Minister for External Affairs.*

Appendix 3.

BELGIUM.

NOTE ON THE PRESENT POSITION OF SLAVERY IN THE CONGO AND IN THE TERRITORIES OF
RUANDA-URUNDI.

Communicated by the Belgian Government on June 23rd, 1930.

[Translation.]

In 1924, the Belgian Government submitted a Note of some length to the League of Nations (document A.25.1924.VI/August 4th, 1924) containing detailed information with regard to the slave trade and slavery generally in the territories of the Belgian Congo, as also on forced labour, the control of the traffic in arms and munitions, and of the traffic in alcoholic beverages.

¹ Subject to a reservation which has been submitted to the signatory States for acceptance.

As regards the slave trade and slavery, which are the only two questions dealt with in the resolution adopted by the Tenth Assembly, the Note of 1924 stated most explicitly :

1. That the slave trade had long since disappeared from the Belgian Congo, both in law and in fact ;

2. That the only slavery known to exist was domestic slavery, which was only practised among the natives, and that, though such slavery was not punishable by law, it had not been given legal recognition, so that slave-owners could not obtain any help from the authorities in asserting their rights over their slaves, while slaves were legally entitled to full personal liberty.

Since the Belgian Government submitted its Note in 1924, the position with regard to the slave trade has undergone no change in the Belgian Congo. No act has been observed which could come under this head, and the extreme vigilance of the Government in this matter makes it practically impossible for any such acts to be committed in the Belgian Congo.

Moreover, the industrial and agricultural development of the colony has encouraged a rapid evolution, both as regards the native communities and the natives themselves, which has for some time past contributed to the gradual elimination of slavery ; the number of domestic slaves is diminishing from day to day, although the Administration is not, it will be readily understood, in a position to give exact figures.

The Note sent to the League in 1924 described the position of domestic slaves in the Belgian Congo as follows :

“ Domestic slaves are, as a rule, well treated. All travellers agree in declaring that there is nothing in his external aspect to distinguish the slave from the free man. No restriction or sign marks his servile condition and nothing in the villages distinguishes his living-quarters from those of the other natives.

“ The docility of the slaves does not appear to be due to fear, but rather to constitute a free acceptance of a situation consecrated by traditional practice. All who have closely studied native life are unanimous in declaring that, in the great majority of cases, the slaves have nothing to complain of in their conditions of life and that their master treats them as members of his family.”

Was it necessary to proceed to the immediate and forcible abolition of a social practice so little open to abuse ?

The Belgian Government did not think so, and explained as follows, in its Note of 1924, the reasons which had determined its policy :

“ The radical and immediate suppression of domestic slavery would have given rise to vehement protest and would even have provoked the armed resistance of those whose rights of ownership had been infringed. Nor could it be hoped that, from one day to another, slaves would become wage-earners. The immediate emancipation of the domestic slaves would have exposed the country to great dangers. It would have imperilled the food supply of the population, which is mainly provided by servile labour. It would, for the moment at any rate, have been just as harmful to the slaves themselves, who would have been deprived of the means of subsistence with which their masters supplied them.

“ There is therefore no reason for astonishment in the fact that the signatory Powers of the Act of Berlin and the Act of Brussels preferred, in the light of experience, a policy based on the gradual transformation of servile labour into free labour as a result of the evolution of ideas and economic conditions, rather than action designed to effect the radical and immediate disappearance of domestic slavery.

“ The Congo Free State adopted the former policy. It has always been careful to refrain from intervening in cases in which the slaves voluntarily accepted their work and raised no objections to their state of servitude.

“ This system of toleration did not, however, cause it to relax the strict application of the law.

“ It has never given legal recognition to the status of slavery. It has never countenanced the claims of a master to keep a person against his will in a state of slavery. The public authorities have always refused to help natives who sought, on the strength of the customs in force, to regain possession of fugitive slaves. In short, the Free State regarded domestic slavery as contrary to principles which the Civil Law declares to be international in character and, consequently, it refused to regard it as having any legal force.”

This is the doctrine which has also been applied by the Government of the Belgian Congo. Faithful to the policy which it has hitherto followed and which has proved its value, the Belgian Government has not thought it necessary, or even expedient, to push its efforts to a premature conclusion by prohibiting domestic slavery under threats of punishment. Any advantages derived from such methods of constraint would not, in its opinion, counterbalance the grave disturbance which it would introduce into the native community without really benefiting those concerned.

Domestic slavery is in process of dying out, and its sources of supply have dried up. The natives are more and more tending to obtain employment in concerns managed by Europeans and being brought into contact with civilising agencies, and are thus becoming imbued with a sense of their rights as men.

* * *

Since the Note of 1924 was written, Belgium has, in virtue of a Law of October 20th, 1924, accepted the mandate offered to her for the administration of the African territories of Ruanda-Urundi, so that the position in regard to slavery in those territories also calls for report.

The slave trade is utterly unknown in these two mandated territories.

Domestic slavery has completely disappeared. Even before the acceptance of the mandate, the Royal Commissioner, representing the occupying authorities, had abolished this form of slavery by a Decree-law of March 28th, 1923. This decree-law, a copy of which is attached, visits infringements of its provisions with a penalty not exceeding five years' imprisonment.

In Ruanda-Urundi, domestic slaves had become extremely rare. Moreover, the Commissioner found the native communities more highly developed, and could rely on the influence of the powerful chiefs to do away with the last vestiges of an institution which had already begun to fall into desuetude. He was thus able to proclaim a definite prohibition, which would be a premature measure in the case of the Congo.

Sub-Appendix.

DECREE-LAW NO. 28/128 ABOLISHING DOMESTIC SLAVERY.¹

Article 1. — Domestic slavery is hereby abolished throughout the territory of Ruanda-Urundi.

Article 2. — Any person who shall reduce a native to a state of slavery in any way whatsoever, or keep him in that state, shall be liable to a term of penal servitude of from one to five years.

Article 3. — The residents of Ruanda and Urundi are responsible for the execution of the present Decree, which shall come into force immediately.

Appendix 4.

COLOMBIA.

LETTER FROM THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF COLOMBIA TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE LEAGUE.

[*Translation.*]

Bogota, January 9th, 1930.

With reference to your communication C.L.292.1929.VI of November 1st, in which you brought to the attention of the Colombian Government the resolution on the abolition of slavery adopted by the Tenth Assembly of the League, and instructing the Secretary-General to collect information on the present position of slavery in the different countries and to report to the next Assembly, I have the honour to inform you that this problem does not arise in Colombia, as not only is slavery forbidden there, but all persons entering Colombian territory are regarded as free. This is expressly stated in Article 22 of the National Constitution voted in 1886 :

“ *Article 22.* — There shall be no slaves in Colombia.

“ Whosoever, being a slave, enters the territory of the Republic shall become free.”

Slavery has been entirely abolished in Colombia since January 1st, 1852, in virtue of the Law of May 21st, 1851.

The text of this law is reproduced in Volume XIV, page 415, of the “ *Codificación Nacional* ”. This work contains information on the steps taken in this connection, and a copy of it has been sent to the League library.

(Signed) Carlos URIBE.

¹ *Official Bulletin* of Ruanda-Urundi, 1st Year, No. 4, Supplement, page 29.

Appendix 5.

HUNGARY.

LETTER FROM THE HUNGARIAN DELEGATION ACCREDITED TO THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE LEAGUE.

[*Translation.*]

Geneva, June 10th, 1929

In reply to your Circular Letter 292.1929.VI of November 1st, I have the honour to inform you that :

(a) The Hungarian Government has no observations to offer in regard to the creation of a new Temporary Commission on Slavery, in accordance with the British Government's proposal ;

(b) The Hungarian Government has already made known its accession to the Convention on Slavery of September 25th, 1926. This accession will become effective as soon as the Governments of the following countries have declared their acceptance of the reservation made by Hungary at the time of her accession : New Zealand, Colombia, Spain, Abyssinia, Greece, Panama, Persia, Ecuador, Haiti, Monaco and Nicaragua.

(c) As regards the present position of slavery in Hungary, I have the honour to inform you that the institution of slavery is utterly unknown in the territory of Hungary, as is also every kind of compulsory labour which could give rise to anything resembling slavery. No compulsory labour within the meaning of Article 5, paragraph 2, subparagraph 1, of the Convention on Slavery is exacted in Hungarian territory, save for public purposes, or as part of a sentence of imprisonment, or in virtue of a judicial or administrative measure to ensure the execution of short-term contracts freely entered into, or to compel persons to observe the legal periods of notice.

(Signed) HEVESY.

Appendix 6.

INDIA.

LETTER FROM THE ECONOMIC AND OVERSEAS DEPARTMENT OF THE INDIA OFFICE TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE LEAGUE.

London, May 31st, 1930.

In reply to your letter of November 1st, 1929 (C.L.292.1929.VI), I am directed by the Secretary of State for India to forward a copy of a memorandum which has been prepared by the Government of Burma, and which is supplied in compliance with the resolution of the Assembly of the League at its tenth session on the subject of slavery.

For Secretary,
Economic and Overseas Department :
(Signed) CROFT.

Sub-Appendix.

MEMORANDUM ON MEASURES FOR THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY IN BURMA.

The memoranda communicated to the League of Nations in the years 1927, 1928 and 1929¹ explained the policy and the results achieved in those years, which were briefly that nearly 9,000 slaves had been released in the Hukawng Valley and the " Triangle " at a cost of over five lakhs of rupees, and that each year enquiries were being made by the officers in command of the expeditions to these areas as to the condition of the released slaves.

In the present open season of 1929-30, expeditions have again gone out under the same officers as in 1928-29, namely, Captain V. G. Robert, M.B.E., M.C. ; Mr. P. M. R. Leonard, O.B.E., of the Burma Frontier Service in the Triangle ; and Mr. A. W. Porter, Burma Frontier Service in the Hukawng Valley, each expedition being accompanied by a British officer of the Burma Military Police and an escort of at least 100 men. At every village visited the officer-in-charge has made personal enquiries about all released slaves. The only detailed report

¹ See documents A.37.1927.VI, A.24(a).1928.VI, A.17(a).1929.VI.

received up to date is from Captain Robert of the North Triangle Expedition, who had, up to February 19th, checked 2,134 out of 2,670 slaves released in the area visited by him. Of these, he found the following :

| | |
|--|-------|
| 1. Residing in their own houses in the village of release | 1,018 |
| 2. Residing with relations in other villages in the Triangle | 560 |
| 3. Gone to relations in administered territory | 428 |
| 4. Gone to relations in the Hukawng Valley | 47 |
| 5. Untraced | 33 |
| 6. Dead | 48 |

Detailed figures for other areas are not yet available, but from notes in the diaries of the officers it appears that the figures are much the same elsewhere ; that is to say, about half the released slaves are still living in the same villages, where they have in most cases built their own houses, about 20 to 25 per cent have gone to other villages in unadministered territory and about the same proportion to administered territory.

No more slaves have been discovered by Captain Robert and, as far as is known, none by the other officers, and no reports have been received of oppression of ex-slaves by their former owners. A small amount of money has been distributed as free gifts to pauper ex-slaves and as loans to others.

Captain Robert is of opinion that the former owners have in many cases assisted ex-slaves to build houses in their own villages in order to keep them there and use them as labourers, often no doubt with a lingering hope that they will relapse into slavery if we do not shortly administer the country. On the other hand, there is no actual oppression and the ex-slaves realise more each year that they are free ; and, though large numbers cannot leave their former villages because they have lost all touch with their original homes and relations, they know that they can obtain redress for any ill-treatment on complaint to the officer in command of the expeditions. Economic conditions have naturally been upset to a certain extent, but apparently not very seriously.

In the previous memoranda, no mention was made of the Naga Hills on the Burma Assam border. A report has been received from Mr. H. J. Mitchell, O.B.E., of the Burma Frontier Service, who has been in command of expeditions there for the last three years. Slavery did not exist in this area for purposes of labour, but there were a small number of slaves who were mostly kept to supply victims for human sacrifice. Mr. Mitchell discovered and liberated 59 such slaves in 1929 and has heard of a few more this year, whom he is also liberating. No compensation has been paid, because the chiefs, when questioned in 1927 and 1928, denied the existence of any slaves. Those liberated in 1929 were checked this year and found to be contented, and no cases of oppression were reported.

Appendix 7.

PORTUGAL.

LETTER FROM THE HEAD OF THE PORTUGUESE DELEGATION ACCREDITED TO THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE LEAGUE.

[*Translation.*]

Geneva, June 18th, 1930.

In pursuance of instructions from my Government, I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your Circular Letter 292 of November 1st, 1929, in which you brought to the attention of the States signatories of the Slavery Convention a resolution adopted by the Assembly at its tenth session "instructing the Secretary-General to collect from the States Members of the League, which are parties to the Convention, all possible information on the present position of slavery, and to report to the next Assembly".

In order to give effect to this resolution of the Assembly, the Government of the Republic instructed the authorities of the territories under its sovereignty to collect and transmit to it all information on the present position of slavery in these territories.

I am happy to be able to inform you that the Portuguese Government is in a position to assure you that no case of slavery in the territories of the Republic has come to its knowledge, whether from official or from private sources.

It is hardly necessary to remind you that, for a long time prior to the Convention of September 25th, 1926, slavery had been entirely abolished by the Portuguese Government.

(Signed) A. M. FERRAZ DE ANDRADE,

*Head of the Portuguese Office
accredited to the League of Nations.*

Appendix 8.

SALVADOR.

LETTER FROM THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF SALVADOR TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
OF THE LEAGUE.

[*Translation.*]

San Salvador, January 21st, 1930.

In reply to your communication C.L.292.1929.VI dated November 1st, 1929, relating to the present position of slavery in this country, I have the honour to inform you that slavery was abolished in the Republic of Salvador by the Decree issued on April 17th, 1824, by the Constituent Assembly of the United Provinces of Central America.

We therefore cannot provide any of the particulars regarding this question which the Secretariat asks us to give.

(Signed) F. Martinez SUAREZ.
