

Official No.: **C. L. 3.** 1931. VI.

Geneva, January 9th, 1931.

LEAGUE OF NATIONS

SLAVERY CONVENTION OF SEPTEMBER 25th, 1926.

COMMUNICATION
FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
REGARDING THE REPORT
OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF ENQUIRY INTO
THE EXISTENCE OF SLAVERY AND FORCED LABOUR
IN LIBERIA.

At the request of the Government of the United States of America, the Secretary-General of the League of Nations has the honour to transmit herewith to the Governments parties to the International Slavery Convention of September 25th, 1926, for information, the text of a communication, dated Washington, December 23rd, 1930, accompanied by a Note and a Memorandum on the Report of the International Commission of Enquiry into the Existence of Slavery and Forced Labour in Liberia.

Department of State,
Washington, December 23rd, 1930.

The Secretary of State of the United States of America presents his compliments to the Acting Secretary General of the League of Nations and has the honour to transmit herewith, for the information of the Governments parties to the International Slavery Convention of 1926, copies of a note and a memorandum which have recently been addressed to the Government of Liberia on the subject of the conditions disclosed by the report of the International Commission of Enquiry into the Existence of Slavery and Forced Labour in Liberia.

COPY OF A NOTE DELIVERED TO THE GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA ON
NOVEMBER 5th, 1930, BY THE AMERICAN CHARGÉ D'AFFAIRES *AD INTERIM*
AT MONROVIA.

Under telegraphic instructions from my Government, I have the honour to inform you that the Secretary of State has received from the American member of the International Commission of Enquiry into the Existence of Slavery and Forced Labour in Liberia a signed copy of the unanimous report which was recently submitted by that Commission to the Liberian Government.

The Government of the United States is profoundly shocked at this revelation of the existence in the Republic established in the name of human freedom of conditions not only in the tragic contrast to the ideals of its founders, but in denial of the engagements entered into by the Republic of Liberia through its adherence to the International Slavery Convention of 1926. My Government fears that the forthcoming publication of this report will cause a revulsion of feeling throughout the civilised world against the Republic of Liberia, which international public opinion will hold responsible for the conditions and practices reported by the International Commission.

In view of the recent assurance of the Liberian Government "that it accepts the recommendations and suggestions of the International Commission of Enquiry and agrees to adopt said recommendations", the Government of the United States is convinced that the Government of Liberia fully realises that its prestige before the world will now depend upon the sincerity and effectiveness with which it puts promptly into execution the reform measures to which it stands solemnly committed.

Series of League of Nations Publications
VI.B. SLAVERY
1931. VI.B.2.

COPY OF MEMORANDUM DELIVERED TO THE LIBERIAN CONSUL GENERAL
BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA ON
NOVEMBER 17th, 1930.

(The text of this message was also delivered to the Liberian Government by the American Chargé d'Affaires *ad interim* at Monrovia on December 1st, 1930).

The establishment of the International Commission of Enquiry into the Existence of Slavery and Forced Labour was agreed upon with extreme reluctance by the Liberian Government. The Liberian Government consistently denied, both before and during the investigation, that either slavery or forced labour existed in the Republic. The Commission, comprising one American member, one member nominated by the League of Nations, and one member appointed by Liberia, began its work in April of this year. It submitted its unanimous report to the Liberian Government on September 8th, 1930. The American member delivered a signed copy to the Department of State on October 21st, 1930.

This report is a shocking indictment of the Liberian Government's policy of suppression of the natives, permitted, if not actually indulged in, by nearly all the high officials of Liberia, including the Vice-President of the Republic. The conclusions are drawn from over two hundred and sixty depositions. Many suspicious criminal practices and even torture are cited.

While direct criminal participation in the shipment of forced labor to the Spanish colony of Fernando Po, under conditions characterised by the report as "scarcely distinguishable from slave raiding and slave trading" is established against Vice-President Yancy, several district commissioners, county superintendents and many other officials, the President of Liberia and members of his cabinet were aware of these and other abuses, having received recorded complaints from the natives. High officials of the Liberian Government made use on their private farms of forced labor, often brutally and ruthlessly impressed under the guise of Government work. The report establishes the existence of domestic and tribal slavery, as well as "pawning" of natives.

Since the submission of the report on September 8th, 1930, the Government of Liberia has made numerous promises of reform, but, in so far as the American Government is aware, the Government of Liberia has failed to submit definite plans for their execution. The Department of State is informed that a Cabinet committee was appointed to examine the report, but that its recommendations comprised a series of only partial reforms, without measures for carrying them out. Subsequently, two Executive Proclamations were issued—one forbidding the further exportation of Labourers, and the other declaring domestic servitude and "pawning" illegal. Neither carried adequate sanctions. With respect to the latter, the American Government points out that slavery has always been "illegal" in Liberia, having been expressly forbidden by the Constitution of 1847.

On September 30th, 1930, the President of Liberia informed the American Government that the Liberian Government "accepted the recommendations of the International Commission" and agreed to carry them out. In its reply of October 3rd, the American Government stated that when the details of the reform program were received, the American Government would study them with a view to rendering assistance. Although the American Chargé d'Affaires *ad interim* has made frequent enquiries, no such details have as yet been received from the Government of Liberia.

Ten weeks have now elapsed since the formal submission of the report to the Liberian Government. The American Government understands that not only has no action been taken against the officials whose guilt was established therein, but apparently all of these officials continue to hold public office.

It was brought to the attention of the American Government during the course of the investigation, that the Government of Liberia was endeavouring through threats and intimidation to prevent the submission of testimony. The natives of Liberia came forward, nevertheless, and made their depositions before the members of the International Commission. It has now been reported that, instead of correcting its abuses the Government of Liberia has encouraged measures of retaliation against these helpless people.

Should this be true, the American Government is convinced that it will irreparably damage the good name of Liberia, and that it will banish from the world its belief in the sincerity of Liberia's intentions to institute reforms. International public opinion will no longer tolerate those twin scourges of slavery and forced labor. Unless they are abolished, and unless there is instituted by the Liberian Government a comprehensive system of reforms, loyally and sincerely put into effect, it will result in the final alienation of the friendly feelings which the American Government and people have entertained for Liberia since its establishment nearly a century ago.