

Geneva, September 23rd, 1931.

LEAGUE OF NATIONS

**MORAL DISARMAMENT**

**MEMORANDUM FROM THE POLISH GOVERNMENT**

At the request of the Polish Government, the Secretary-General has the honour to communicate to the Governments invited to the Disarmament Conference a letter from the Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs, and a memorandum annexed thereto on moral disarmament.

LETTER FROM THE POLISH MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS TO THE  
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS.

Geneva, September 17th, 1931.

[*Translation.*]

With reference to the statements made by the Polish delegate at the last session of the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference, the discussions in the Special Committee appointed to prepare a draft general Convention for strengthening the Means of preventing War, and my own statement at the Council meeting of May 21st last during the discussion of that Committee's report, I beg to forward to you herewith a memorandum from the Polish Government concerning the practical attainment of moral disarmament. I would request you to transmit this document to all the Governments invited to the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments and I should be grateful if you would be good enough to give it the widest possible publicity.

In the Polish Government's opinion the problem is one of great importance for the future work of the Disarmament Conference. In this connection, the statements made by the French Minister for Foreign Affairs at the tenth session of the League Assembly and by the British Foreign Minister at the annual meeting of the "Burge Memorial Trust" this year may be recalled.

Further, two great international associations, the International Federation of League of Nations Societies and the World Peace League, devoted special resolutions to this problem at their congresses this year. Their appeals to the Governments should not be in vain.

At the twelfth session of the Assembly, the problem of moral disarmament has also been raised by the Spanish delegation, which has submitted a proposal of great interest. This proposal, however, only deals with certain aspects of the problem.

The Polish Government believes that the question should be examined in its entirety and that the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments, where all the principal countries of the world will be represented, is alone capable of finding practical and adequate solutions of this important question, which is so closely bound up with the future Convention for the Limitation and Reduction of Armaments.

(Signed) Auguste ZALESKI,  
Minister for Foreign Affairs.

## MEMORANDUM FROM THE POLISH GOVERNMENT CONCERNING THE ATTAINMENT OF MORAL DISARMAMENT.

For some time past, the problem of moral disarmament has interested not only public opinion, but also responsible statesmen.

The international situation will, it is to be feared, become increasingly unstable owing to the dangerous agitation of certain elements which are endeavouring to poison relations between the peoples and to sow the seed of fresh conflicts in the minds of their supporters. The appeals to hatred in certain quarters are arousing universal uneasiness and creating an atmosphere of distrust which frustrates all efforts for the consolidation of peace. This problem calls for particular attention on the part of the Disarmament Conference, the results of which are bound to be influenced by the degree of mutual confidence prevailing between the participating Governments. This confidence in a large measure depends on securing an improvement in the moral and political situation in Europe.

Everyone who wishes the Conference to meet with the fullest possible success is therefore faced with an important question—namely, how to counteract the movement against peace and assure a moral *détente* by concerted action of the Governments.

In submitting the present memorandum to the Governments invited to the Conference, the Polish Government desires to draw attention to the value of achieving moral disarmament, and to suggest, at the same time, a few of the spheres where this is most urgently required.

National laws must always reconcile the freedom of the individual with the interests of the community ; certain restrictions must be placed on this freedom in order to safeguard the higher interests of society. With a few rare exceptions the interests of the community, to which the freedom of the individual was subordinated, have hitherto been thought to coincide with the interests of the various social classes existing within the nation. But a higher society exists outside the nation—namely, international society.

Why should not domestic legislations take this society's interests into account as well as those of the national society ?

The problem was raised in 1927 at the First International Conference for the Unification of Criminal Law. Certain legislative work along these lines was also undertaken in three countries : Brazil, Roumania and Poland. The draft penal codes of these three countries explicitly stipulate that any person guilty of incitement to war shall be punished with imprisonment. The Brazilian draft code goes even further, punishing also persons stirring up popular agitation with a view to exerting pressure on the Government in favour of war whilst diplomatic negotiations are in progress with a foreign country, and, more generally, any person attempting to disturb international relations. So far these three draft codes still remain alone amid penal legislation elsewhere, which is, in this respect, out of date. Would it not be worth while unifying every Government's efforts towards a general modification of the criminal codes ? The latter should be extended by the addition of one or more articles for the defence of peace and international solidarity against the criminal activities of certain individuals or groups of individuals. Expert jurists would find the proper formulæ and define what acts calculated to disturb international relations should be punished by penal legislation. The jurists' suggestions might serve as a basis for an international convention binding the Governments to introduce the proposed modifications in their respective penal codes. This would be an effectual way of co-ordinating and concerting Government activity in this sphere.

The Governments of almost every country have accepted the principle of the condemnation of war as an instrument of national policy, and have since endeavoured to base their international actions on this principle. Their domestic policy should also be based on this principle, and severe measures taken to deal with any person attempting to undermine the moral bases of world peace by a propaganda of hatred. A suitable modification of national legislation would only be the logical complement of international agreements now in force.

Several penal codes explicitly state that any person guilty of founding or directing, or of only belonging to, an organisation with illegal aims is liable to appropriate penalties. After a modification of the criminal law in the sense indicated above, this provision would be applicable to any person guilty of belonging to an association with aims dangerous to peace. The activities of certain associations might be even more effectually counteracted by making this provision embrace organisations whose aims appear to be legal, but whose activity had been proved to be dangerous to peace.

Propaganda aimed at disturbing friendly international relations is usually carried on by associations or in the Press. The problem of the Press was raised by the Swedish Government at the meeting of the Special Committee appointed to consider measures for preventing war. That Government drew the Committee's attention to the disastrous influence a certain section of the Press might exercise during an international crisis. The Polish Government fully shares this view. Not only when an international dispute has arisen, but also in daily life, the Press may exert, if it so desires, a salutary influence by calming people's minds and supporting the Council of the League in its difficult task as mediator, or it may play a fatal part by stirring

up feeling and misrepresenting the facts of the case. Here, too, the intervention of the community would be of the utmost importance, for it alone would be capable of averting mischievous Press campaigns. Where must remedies be sought? An article punishing any person guilty of publishing in the Press false and tendentious reports on the international situation might possibly be usefully inserted in penal codes. But to punish the author of false news is only a repressive measure which, though of undoubted value, does nothing to correct the wrong information. This last result might be secured by extending the application of the right of reply so as to include foreign Governments. The latter would be entitled to ask a newspaper to correct false information it had published concerning the position of their countries. To prevent abuses, provision might be made for any rectification from a foreign legation to be sent through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the country where the newspaper is published.

Other means of combating newspaper excesses, as, for instance, the setting up of an international disciplinary tribunal for journalists, might also be considered. This tribunal, the composition of which would be determined by an international Press conference, would be competent to try, on the application of a professional Press organisation, any journalist charged with pursuing activities dangerous to peace. The court would be entitled to expel the accused from the journalistic profession, and its decision would be upheld in every country. Another effective means of preventing the false presentation of the international situation would be to set up at Geneva an international information bureau, whose reports would be accepted by the whole world because of its international prestige.

International Press conferences might be held every year. The whole problem of moral disarmament, in so far as it affects the Press, should be examined by the conference of journalists whose report would serve as a basis for Government decisions. Journalists themselves would be the most competent people to draw up a system capable of safeguarding international interests without compromising the freedom of the Press. It may be noted that the question of moral disarmament was fully discussed at the Press Conference held at Geneva in 1927.

In order to secure lasting moral disarmament, a great effort must be made to protect young people from everything capable of breeding in them hatred of a foreign nation. School-teachers should therefore be forbidden to abuse their position by arousing in their pupils' minds distrust and ill-will towards foreigners. School-books, particularly those dealing with history, geography, etc., would also have to be examined. On the other hand, instruction should be given to all young people so as to render them familiar with the aims and organisation of the League of Nations. The Sub-Committee of Experts of the International Committee of Intellectual Co-operation framed certain recommendations on this subject. This Committee recommended, *inter alia*: (1) compulsory instruction in all schools in regard to the work and aims of the League of Nations and, more generally, the development of international co-operation; (2) the formation of special League of Nations chairs in faculties of law; (3) the elimination from school-books of everything capable of arousing hatred of foreigners, etc. These recommendations have not, however, been carried out everywhere. Time is passing, and the position remains very much the same as it was before the foundation of the League. It would therefore be advisable to consider the possibility of giving practical effect to the suggestions of the Committee of Experts. An international convention binding Governments to take certain measures for eliminating from school instruction the elements of hatred and inculcating in young people's minds the dominating ideas of the League of Nations would be the most effectual way of making real progress towards educating young people in the spirit of international solidarity.

Certain competent bodies (for instance, the International Committee on Intellectual Co-operation, the International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation and the International Educational Cinematographic Institute etc.) should be instructed to investigate the problem of moral disarmament in so far as it is affected by broadcasting, the theatre and the cinema. The practical suggestions resulting from these investigations might be used as a basis for concerted action on the part of the Governments. The Polish Government ventures to add as an annex the text of the agreement concluded on March 31st, 1931, between the Reichs-Rundfunk-Gesellschaft m.b.H. and the Polskie Radio Company concerning this very problem of moral disarmament. This agreement may go to show that practical results in this field are in no way impossible.

The Polish Government is convinced that there are still other spheres where moral disarmament might be achieved practically. It does not therefore claim that its memorandum exhausts the subject. In submitting it to the Governments that will take part in the Disarmament Conference, it has desired to draw their attention to the possibility and the value of taking some effective action. Moral disarmament will make no headway if we rest content with words. What is needed is action. The Polish Government is certain that the other Governments will not refuse to make a thorough investigation of the problem.

### Appendix 1.

EXTRACT FROM THE AGREEMENT OF MARCH 31ST, 1931, CONCLUDED BETWEEN THE GERMAN AND POLISH BROADCASTING COMPANIES (REICHS-RUNDFUNK-GESELLSCHAFT m.b.H.—POLSKIE RADIO).

The two Contracting Parties undertake in future to do everything in their power to ensure that matter—whether political, religious, economic, intellectual or artistic—broadcast from their stations shall not compromise in any way the spirit of co-operation and good understanding which is necessary if broadcasting is to fulfil its mission of drawing the nations together.

Each Contracting Party reserves the right to carry on a certain amount of positive propaganda in regard to its national activities in their various spheres, while undertaking to see that the matter broadcast does not in any way offend the national sentiment of listeners who are subjects of the other Contracting Party.

Each Contracting Party expressly undertakes to give its special attention to the matter broadcast by it in the language of the other Contracting Party, so that such matter may strictly conform to the principles set forth above.

The Contracting Parties undertake to apply the principles set forth above, not only to matter broadcast by themselves, but also to that relayed from outside stations.

As regards matter broadcast by the Governments, the Contracting Parties declare that, in accordance with the concessions granted to the companies, the supervision of such matter is entirely in the hands of the Government authorities of each country.

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### Appendix 2.

I. The fifteenth plenary congress of the International Federation of League of Nations Societies, held in Budapest from May 24th to 28th, 1931, adopted the following resolution :

“ Considering that the publication of false or tendentious news on the situation or activities of a State is likely to create currents of hostile opinion and may thus become a source of grave danger to peace between nations ;

“ Considering that the danger is graver still in the case of the publication of false documents ;

“ Considering that the laws of the various countries do not adequately prevent and punish such acts when they are likely to injure other States ;

“ The Plenary Congress,

“ (1) Notes with approval the decision of the International Federation of Journalists to set up an international professional jurisdiction empowered to judge journalists guilty of professional misdemeanours in international matters ;

“ (2) Considers that the practice should be generally adopted whereby certain States, when information is published which is denounced as inexact, tendentious or calculated to disturb international relations, apprise the national or foreign Press associations in the country so that disciplinary measures may be taken against the journalists responsible ; and further considers that such journalists should also be denounced to the Information Section of the League of Nations ;

“ (3) Considers that it would be expedient in such cases that the League of Nations Societies in the countries concerned should work together to devise the best means of enlightening and pacifying public opinion ;

“ (4) Recommends that the Assembly of the League of Nations entrust competent organs to seek internationally a solution of the following questions :

“ (a) *To establish* on behalf of any State about which a newspaper or a wireless broadcasting station shall have imputed a fact which is either inexact or calculated to disturb international relations *an international right of reply* ;

“ (b) *To institute a summary procedure of international enquiry* in cases of diffusion of information calculated to disturb international relations ;

“ (c) *Penal repression* in each State of the mischievous diffusion of inexact information or of false documents calculated to disturb international relations.”

Moreover, the same congress has noted in its resolution on disarmament that it would be desirable to make “ an advance in moral disarmament through the abandonment of bellicose or aggressive propaganda and the consideration by the League of Nations of measures appropriate to that end.”

II. The Universal Peace Congress held in Brussels from July 5th to 10th, 1931, has recognised that “ moral disarmament is at the same time the condition and the guarantee of all reduction of military armaments ” and has decided to include the problem of moral disarmament in the programme of the next Peace Congress.

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### Appendix 3.

The Conference of Press Experts, held in Geneva in 1927, has adopted, amongst others, the following resolutions :

#### *Publication or Distribution of Tendentious News.*

“ Fully cognisant of the fact that the publication or distribution of obviously inaccurate, highly exaggerated, or deliberately distorted news or articles is calculated to cause undesirable misunderstandings among nations and suspicions detrimental to international peace ; and

“ Desiring to promote among peoples the growth of mutual understanding, necessary to world peace ;

“ This Conference expresses the desire that the newspapers and news agencies of the world should deem it their duty to take stringent measures to avoid the publication or distribution of such news or articles, and should also consider the possibility of active international co-operation for the attainment of this purpose, which is in conformity with the spirit of the League of Nations. ”<sup>1</sup>

#### *Courses for Journalists at Geneva.*

“ Whereas it is important, from the point of view of consolidating peace and of ensuring reasonable criticism of the activities of the League of Nations, that the greatest possible number of journalists should become familiar with the organisation of the League of Nations ;

“ This Conference recommends that preliminary consideration should be given to the question of organising at Geneva in connection with the League of Nations an international Press centre or institute which could be attended by journalists throughout the year in order to obtain such knowledge, and

“ Draws the attention of Governments to the advantage of affording every support to such an organisation.”

#### *Establishment in Newspapers of a Special Heading on the League of Nations.*

“ This Conference expresses its gratitude to the League of Nations, and especially the Information Section of the Secretariat, for the support and facilities granted to its members and for the organisation of its meeting, and notes that the League has in no way attempted in this connection to make League propaganda in its favour, but simply to assist in the material and spiritual development of the Press ; and

“ Recognising that the work of the League is worthy of the closest attention, constituting, as it does, one of the most interesting movements of the century, recommends the establishment in the great newspapers of a permanent section, such as already exists in some papers, devoted to objective information on the work of the League.”

#### *Moral Disarmament.*

“ The Conference makes a warm appeal to the Press of the world to contribute by every means at its disposal to the consolidation of peace, to combat hatred between nationalities and between classes, which is the greatest danger to peace, and to prepare the way for moral disarmament.”

#### *Regional Press Understandings.*

“ This Conference,

“ Considering that regional agreements with the object of promoting international harmony concluded by the Press of groups of neighbouring States constitute, not only one of the best means of facilitating the decisions of Governments on its improvements suggested by the Conference, but also, and above all, a permanent guarantee of pacification calculated to contribute in large measure to the prevention of misunderstandings between nations ;

“ Recommends to the delegates of all countries that might benefit by agreements of this sort—in particular the Balkan countries—to confer immediately with each other in order to reach as soon as possible an amicable understanding which may draw closer the bonds between the Press of their countries and thus favourably influence public opinion.”

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<sup>1</sup> This resolution was adopted by twenty-seven votes to two.

*Periodical Conferences of Press Experts.*

“ With a view to examining, in the near future, the extent to which the resolutions and recommendations of this Conference have been acted upon by the Governments and other organisations concerned, and also to considering various new problems arising from changed conditions due to the application of those resolutions and recommendations,

“ The Conference requests the Council of the League of Nations to consider the advisability of calling a subsequent Conference and also of making such Conferences periodical.”

*Right of Reply.*

“ The Conference decides to refer the consideration of the right of reply to a subsequent Press Conference ; and requests that it be studied meanwhile by the League of Nations, with a view to issuing a report.”

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