

Geneva, June 22nd, 1932.

LEAGUE OF NATIONS

**Conference for the Reduction and Limitation
of Armaments**

GENERAL COMMISSION

**Declaration by Mr. Gibson (United States of America)
at the Meeting of June 22nd, 1932.**

I am desired by the President of the United States to communicate to the Conference the text of a statement which he is giving out at this moment. It is his hope that the public statement of such a programme will fire the imagination of the world and lead all nations to consider deeply and state openly how much they can contribute to a great general programme.

Statement of the Instructions issued by President Hoover to the American Delegation to the Conference for the Limitation and Reduction of Armaments, read by Ambassador Gibson before the General Commission, Wednesday, June 22nd, 1932, 4.30 p.m.

The delegations at the World Conference on Disarmament at Geneva are now engaged in discussions as to methods by which more comprehensive efforts can be made toward disarmament.

The following is the substance of instructions which have been given by the President to the American delegation for guidance in the discussions which are now occupying them. They are published in order that the American people may be fully and accurately informed.

“ The time has come when we should cut through the brush and adopt some broad and definite method of reducing the overwhelming burden of armament which now lies upon the toilers of the world. This would be the most important world step that could be taken to expedite economic recovery. We must make headway against the mutual fear and friction arising out of war armament which kill human confidence throughout the world. We can still remain practical in maintaining an adequate self-defence among all nations. We can add to the assurances of peace and yet save the people of the world from ten to fifteen billions of wasted dollars during the next ten years.

“ I propose that the following principles should be our guide.

“ First : The Briand-Kellogg Pact to which we are all signatories can only mean that the nations of the world have agreed that they will use their arms solely for defence.

“ Second : This reduction should be carried out not only by broad general cuts in armaments but by increasing the comparative power defence through decreases in the power of the attack.

Series of League of Nations Publications

**IX. DISARMAMENT
1932. IX. 49.**

“ Third : The armaments of the world have grown up in mutual relation to each other. And, speaking generally, such relativity should be preserved in making reductions.

“ Fourth : The reductions must be real and positive. They must effect economic relief.

“ Fifth : There are three problems to deal with—land forces, air forces and naval forces. They are all inter-connected. No part of the proposals which I make can be disassociated one from the other.

“ Based on these principles, I propose that the arms of the world should be reduced by nearly one-third.

Land Forces.

“ In order to reduce the offensive character of all land forces as distinguished from their defensive character, I propose the adoption of the presentation already made at the Geneva Conference for the abolition of all tanks, all chemical warfare and all large mobile guns. This would not prevent the establishment or increase of fixed fortifications of any character for the defence of frontiers and sea-coasts. It would give an increased relative strength to such defence as compared with attack.

“ I propose, furthermore, that there should be a reduction of one-third in strength of all land armies over and above the so-called police component.

“ The land armaments of many nations are considered to have two functions. One is the maintenance of internal order in connection with the regular peace forces of the country. The strength required for this purpose has been called the ‘ police component ’. The other function is defence against foreign attack. The additional strength required for this purpose has been called the ‘ defence component ’. While it is not suggested that these different components should be separated, it is necessary to consider this contention as to functions in proposing a practical plan of reduction in land forces. Under the Treaty of Versailles and the other peace treaties, the armies of Germany, Austria, Hungary and Bulgaria were reduced to a size deemed appropriate for the maintenance of internal order, Germany being assigned one hundred thousand troops for a population of approximately sixty-five million people. I propose that we should accept for all nations a basic police component of soldiers proportionate to the average which was thus allowed Germany and these other States. This formula with necessary corrections for Powers having colonial possessions should be sufficient to provide for the maintenance of internal order by the nations of the world. Having analysed these two components in this fashion, I propose, as stated above, that there should be a reduction of one-third in the strength of all land armies over and above the police component.

Air Forces.

“ All bombing-planes to be abolished. This will do away with the military possession of types of planes capable of attacks upon civil populations and should be coupled with the total prohibition of all bombardment from the air.

Naval Forces.

“ I propose that the treaty number and tonnage of battleships shall be reduced by one-third ; that the treaty tonnage of aircraft-carriers, cruisers and destroyers shall be reduced by one-fourth ; that the treaty tonnage of submarines shall be reduced by one-third and that no nation shall retain a submarine tonnage greater than 35,000 tons.

“ The relative strength of naval arms in battleships and aircraft-carriers as between the five leading naval Powers was fixed by the Treaty of Washington.

“ The relative strength in cruisers, destroyers and submarines was fixed as between the United States, Great Britain, and Japan by the Treaty of London. For the purpose of this proposal it is suggested that the French and Italian strength in cruisers and destroyers be calculated as though they had joined in the Treaty of London on a basis approximating the so-called accord of March 1st, 1931.

“ There are various technical considerations connected with these naval reductions which will be presented by the delegation at Geneva.

General.

“ The effect of this plan would be to effect an enormous saving in cost of new construction and replacements of naval vessels. It would also save large amounts in the operating expense in all nations of land, sea and air forces. It would greatly reduce offensive strength compared to defensive strength in all nations.

“ These proposals are simple and direct. They call upon all nations to contribute something. The contribution here proposed will be relative and mutual. I know of nothing that would give more hope for humanity to-day than the acceptance of such a programme with such minor changes as might be necessary. It is folly for the world to go on breaking its back over military expenditures, and the United States is willing to take its share of responsibility by making definite proposals that will relieve the world.”

* * *

The significance of the President's statement will be apparent to all. It is clear, self-contained, and comprehensive. I am well aware that everyone here will wish to study it in detail. There are, however, certain clarifications and explanations which I can make at once in order to clear up one or two points.

With reference to cruiser strength, it is proposed that the 25 per cent reduction of the total tonnage of the United States and Great Britain should be calculated on the present total London Treaty tonnage of Great Britain—namely, 339,000 tons. Furthermore, the total tonnage allowed under that Treaty for eight-inch-gun cruisers shall be limited to 150,000 tons each for the United States and Great Britain and the proportionate 90,000 tons for Japan.

I also feel that there should be a clarification on the subject of submarines. In order to make the acceptance of such a sweeping reduction possible, the President's communication is on the basis that no nation, whether or not a party to existing naval treaties, shall retain a tonnage in submarines greater than 35,000 tons or more than 40 submarine units of which no single vessel shall exceed 1,200 tons.

In view of the reductions suggested for the five leading naval Powers under the President's plans, it seems evident that the other Powers should here agree to corresponding sacrifices through the reduction or limitation of their naval armaments.

I have not laboured here all these months with my colleagues present to-day without becoming convinced of their earnestness of purpose and their desire to see the greatest possible accomplishment in disarmament. Therefore, I am sure that the principle of maximum accomplishment to which each nation makes substantial contributions, as my country is doing by the provisions of the text which I have just read, will appeal to them.

In our most powerful arm, the navy, we are prepared, as a part of this general programme, to scrap over 300,000 tons of existing ships and to forgo the right to build over 50,000 tons. In land material our proposal would affect over a thousand heavy mobile guns and approximately 900 tanks, and in aviation about 300 bombardment airplanes.

The American delegation is at your disposal for further explanations and clarifications as they may become necessary, and these points will, no doubt, be forthcoming as the conversations in which we are now engaged progress. These very real sacrifices of strength which the United States is willing to make in a predominant arm as part of a world scheme cannot fail, I am convinced, to find equally generous response.

