

LEAGUE OF NATIONS.

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Geneva,

September 23rd, 1930.

EUROPEAN CONFERENCE ON RURAL HYGIENE.

REPORT BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF IRELAND.

As the representative of a State in which agricultural interests are of the first importance, I am glad to have the honour of presenting to the Council the proposal of the Spanish Government that the League of Nations should convene at Geneva a conference of European States for the purpose of a general study, on a technical basis, of the problem of rural hygiene.

General sanitation and hygiene must play an important rôle in any campaign intended to raise the standard of living in rural areas. So considered, the problem of rural hygiene is one of the most important problems in Europe to-day. Unhappily, however, there are very few countries in Europe in which the measures for preserving the health and promoting the welfare of the rural population are up to the standard obtaining in urban areas. It is not generally realised that the mortality statistics of many countries in Europe show that the risk of disease and death is greater in the country than in the towns.

The Health Organisation of the League has for some time been engaged in work connected with rural hygiene and its activity in this field has met with cordial appreciation by the Health Administrations of the different countries concerned. It has sought to assist Governments, faced with problems of rural hygiene, by means of individual and collective studies, resulting in a valuable collection of information and an interchange of experience, so that the methods adopted and the results achieved by the countries most advanced in this respect have been placed at the disposal of all. Its enquiries into the causes of infant mortality in seven European and four Latin-American countries included studies of this subject in rural areas of each country. The plan for the sanitary reorganisation of Greece, in which the Health Organisation has collaborated with the Greek

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Government at the request of the latter, is based on the most modern methods of organisation in rural districts.

I do not wish to burden the Council by referring here to questions of detail, and it is only necessary to state that the proposal of the Spanish Government is for a technical conference, composed of technical delegates from the various European Governments, who would discuss the subject in the light of information prepared by the Health Committee. A considerable amount of information has already been collected, relating to the very constructive work undertaken in rural areas during the last decade by the various European Governments and the analysis and arrangement of this material we can safely leave to the Health Committee.

During the Conference, each delegate would be requested to describe the problem in his own country, the measures adopted by his Government to deal with it and the technical difficulties which had been encountered in the practical application of those measures. The Spanish Government believe that, as the result of such a well prepared discussion, there should emerge recommendations and practical conclusions which should prove of the greatest value to the technical services of the countries concerned.

The Council will doubtless wish to deal with two questions arising out of the proposal of the Spanish Government. In the first place, that Government wisely suggest that the Health Organisation should obtain the cooperation of the International Institute of Agriculture at Rome in view of its special information and experience in agriculture. Accordingly, we might suggest to the Health Committee that representatives of the International Institute should be invited to sit on any small committee that may be set up to prepare for the proposed conference.

In the second place, the method of convening the Conference has to be considered. The Spanish Government in its letter cites the precedent of the Health Conference of 1922, convened by the Council of the League on the proposal of the Polish Government. That conference was composed of representatives of European States, convened for the purpose of considering problems of special importance to European countries.

I would therefore suggest that the Council should accept the proposal of the Spanish Government and agree to convene the Conference, inviting all European States to send technical delegates. The consideration of rural health problems in other countries might unduly complicate the discussions by introducing other factors such as tropical diseases and special conditions. Nevertheless, the Council may wish to invite the Governments of extra-European States, which have a special interest in rural problems, to send observers to attend the conference and hear the discussions.

We may therefore refer the proposal to the Health Committee for detailed study and report on all its technical aspects.

I have the honour to ask the Council's approval for the following resolution:-

"The Council accepts the proposal of the Spanish Government and refers it to the Health Committee for technical study and report; decides to convene the Conference at a date to be fixed after consultation with the Health Committee and approves the observations made in the present report".