The Government of the Czechoslovak Republic desires to express its thanks to the Secretariat of the League of Nations for forwarding to it the various documents regarding the discussion at the Fourth Assembly in September, 1923, on the question of the Treaty of Mutual Assistance and the limitation and reduction of armaments. The Czechoslovak Government has examined these documents with the closest attention and it desires to pay tribute to the devoted work of all those who have contributed to the collection of the valuable information, the highly important material and the ideas, which must be recognised by all, as springing from the highest and most generous motives.

The Czechoslovak Government, since the establishment of the republic, has followed with special attention and zeal, all matters tending to settle the great question of general disarmament and the question closely connected with it, namely that of security and the prevention of future wars. Czechoslovakia herself, after having, at the beginning of her independent existence, taken certain
Having lately become somewhat precarious as to the stability of the general situation and has consequently begun to effect progressive reductions in her expenditure, she proposes to continue to do so.

Having thus given practical proof of her conception of the principles and aims of the League of Nations, she attaches the greatest importance to all efforts to assure a more permanent and definite peace. The future of the smaller nations is, in her opinion, guaranteed only by an international system, in which, as a result of obligations freely entered into, all the nations, without thought of national egoism, undertake to offer determined resistance to evil with all the material means at their disposal, and in cases in which their own interests are only affected indirectly or from the moral point of view.

It is the aim of the League of Nations to arrive by progressive stages at such a state of affairs. This goal can probably be reached by various ways; and for the last five years the League of Nations has made every effort to find such ways and to decide which is the most likely to succeed. The Government of the Republic considers it immaterial which method is adopted; it considers it essential, however, that every effort should be made to find a method that such efforts should be unceasing, that the real object of them should never be lost sight of and that a positive result should be finally attained.

This positive result it desires for two reasons:

1) It is essential, after the Great War, that the Nations should at last enjoy the assurance of a quieter life and the certainty of a lasting peace;

2) It is essential that the League of Nations should not rest with any check in this matter. For this question is
the very essence of the League, its main object and, in the opinion of the Czechoslovak Government, its justification.

For some years past, the League of Nations has been endeavouring by means of the efforts of its important organisations, to find a way by which these objects may be attained. One such way was thought at last to have been found in the proposal for a treaty of mutual assistance drawn up by the 3rd Committee of the Fourth Assembly.

The Czechoslovak Republic to which this question has been submitted for opinion, adheres to its general policy and to its principle of examining, without prejudice or reservation, all proposals embodying the objects of the League and ventures to lay before you its candid and definite views on this matter.

I. The Czechoslovak Government considers the idea of the Treaty of Mutual Assistance capable of achieving what the League of Nations desired to achieve. The Czechoslovak Government is not aware, at the moment, of any other means by which this object can be attained and is doubtful if indeed other means exist. After full consideration, therefore, it accepts the idea of the Treaty of Mutual Assistance submitted to it for consideration as a basis for further efforts to bring about general disarmament and the security of nations. It accepts it as a basis, but is at the same time prepared to abandon it directly any plan is presented that is easier of realisation, more effective in result, and less open to objections than this draft Treaty. The Czechoslovak Government itself recognises these objections.
Until it sees a better method, the Czechoslovak Government considers it to be its duty, in view of the obligations entered into in regard to the League of Nations to make every effort to improve the present proposal, to remove these drawbacks and to endeavour to bring it to a successful issue.

It is in this spirit that the Czechoslovak Government now declares itself a firm supporter of the Treaty of Mutual Assistance, but it would, at the same time, submit certain reservations in regard to various articles of the Treaty.

There is in the first place, in the opinion of the Czechoslovak Government, a question of principle which should be further considered: in the case of aggression, the Council of the League would have to decide by unanimous vote which party is responsible for the aggression and what measures are to be taken against such party. Without considering the principle underlying this question, including the necessity of respecting the sovereignty of States in matters of such importance, the Czechoslovak Government is in favour, in such cases, of applying the principle of a majority vote pure and simple. It ventures, therefore, to submit reservations in regard to the article in question.
There are other reservations of less importance which it
would desire to submit. The question of demilitarised zones
appears to a small country in quite a different light from that
in which it appears to large States whose territory cannot,
therefore, fall easily and at a single blow into the hands of
the enemy.

Finally, we have reservations to make in regard to
Articles 13 and 13; the point in question is that of the revision
of armaments which is permitted to individual States if the
conditions of their security should change or deteriorate.
Furthermore, it is necessary from our point of view to reconsider
the question of the assistance which is to be given by other
States to a State which is the object of aggression solely in
cases where the Council has certified that the State in question
has reduced its armaments in accordance with its undertakings.
Again disputes might arise as to whether the State in question
had fulfilled its engagements or not; the Czechoslovak Government
reserves the right on this point as in the case of the other
Articles referred to, to submit during the coming discussion
amendments to the text which, in its opinion, might tend to its
general improvement. It intends, moreover, to propose certain
amendments to the Articles regarding partial defensive treaties.

II. There are certain general observations which
inevitably occur to all those who, responsible to their country
and to international public opinion, do not wish to treat
lightly questions of such importance and are eniævouring to
approach the very heart of the proposal submitted to us.
form of the Covenant and more especially of Articles 10 and 16. Finally, it appears to me that the idea of interdependence between security and the reduction of armaments is essentially inherent in the Covenant and entirely in keeping with its spirit. The Czechoslovak Government has never interpreted those Articles of the Covenant in any other manner.

If, therefore, the Council of the League and the Assembly are endeavouring to put into practice the principles of the Covenant, they can only follow the method indicated by the principles expressed in the Treaty of Mutual Assistance, that is to say, they can only put into force the idea of disarmament, by developing at the same time the principles contained in Articles 10 and 16.

The Czechoslovak Government cannot conceal the fact that a certain amount of anxiety has for some time past been apparent in public opinion in its country. Public opinion in Czechoslovakia has not failed to note that for the last two years repeated attempts have been made in the League of Nations to reduce the importance of Article 10, to lessen its significance to the point of rendering it ineffective in the event of any real threat of aggression against a smaller country. I rather fear that these tendencies led to more or less positive results during the fourth Assembly.

I venture to add that such tendencies appear to me contrary to the spirit of the Covenant and, in such a case, to the Covenant itself; the League of Nations would thereby lose much of its value and its real moral importance, and the very basis of the League would be jeopardised.
The Czechoslovak Government was therefore delighted to see the opposite tendency developing, the tendency to enhance the importance of the great principle of the Covenant contained in Article 10.

In conclusion, the Government of the Czechoslovak Republic is of opinion that to emphasise the interdependence of two essential principles — security and the reduction of armaments — is not to add a fresh condition to the execution of the Covenant, but on the contrary to act in the spirit of the Covenant and to give to it the true significance which it should always possess.

III. There is a whole series of other objections of principle which appear perhaps still more important. They may be summed up as follows:

The Treaty of Mutual Assistance cannot have the desired result and will be ineffective for the following reasons:

a) A unanimous decision of the Members of the Council is required to decide which party is the aggressor. In practice, however, it is impossible to believe that in a really serious case unanimity could be obtained.

b) In case of aggression it is necessary to act promptly; but the procedure laid down for the Council not only rules out, a priori, any such prompt action, but even precludes the possibility of a prompt agreement as to the military or other measures to be taken, the strategic plan or campaign, etc.

c) The authors of the Treaty were indeed alive to this
difficulty, and they finally adopted, as a complement to
the general guarantees of the Treaty, the further special
provisions incorporated in the partial defensive treaties, thus reverting
to the old system of alliances, which encourage the formation
of rival groups and are contrary to the spirit of the Covenant.

(a) In addition to this ineffectiveness as a practical
instruments, and to its reversal to the pre-war system of
alliances the scheme contains a final and serious disadvantage.
It weaves a whole web of grave international obligations,
without in any way advancing the general cause; and these
obligations are so complex that they seem likely to be a
source of fresh difficulties rather than a means of
avoiding disputes.

If those criticisms were justified they would amount
to a final condemnation of all schemes for a treaty of
mutual assistance. Their arguments may be summed up as
follows: You are seeking to create a system of obligations
which will not procure the advantages desired and promised,
but which will justify the formation of mischievous alliances
admittedly indefensible, from a moral point of view — and
will provoke fresh international difficulties.

IV. The acceptance of such criticisms would, however,
amount to a blank negation of the whole conception of the
League of Nations. And if they are justified it would
follow that the idea of the League of Nations, as now
constituted and as conceived by its authors, is impracticable.

What is the essential basis of any conception of the
League of Nations? Is it not the desire for universal
and lasting peace; is it not the demand that the community of nations should guarantee the independence and freedom of each of its members; is it not the endeavour to make the brotherhood of nations a reality, and at the same time to offer an effective bar to any violation of public right or justice by using measures of constraint against those who commit such a crime against the law of nations?

In spite of these criticisms - which in our view are only justified up to a certain point in regard to the present Treaty - the Czechoslovak Government remains firm in its loyalty to the League of Nations ideal. It believes that it would be only a half-way measure to seek the final abolition of war through efforts for the reduction and limitation of armaments - since, in practice, we can never contemplate complete disarmament. For the question at once arises: would it not be possible to begin a war with reduced armaments and reduced supplies of munitions? Would it not be possible to violate the conventions establishing the demilitarised zones, or the other less important conventions? Is it not a fact that in the last war some States entered into the struggle almost without armaments, and only took steps to supply their requirements during the course of hostilities? And how are we going to act, and how is the League of Nations going to act, if such cases arise in future? Should we not be failing in our duty as members of the League if we did not foresee such eventualities and prepare to guard against them?

The fact is that to endeavour to prevent wars by the reduction or limitation of armaments is to mistake the means for the end, thus committing a fundamental error. The employment of the means - even with a large measure of success - in no way implies that the goal has been attained.

The question which I have just raised is one which will always have to be faced by the League of Nations, particularly
by the smaller nations who are so much exposed to aggression. If, in spite of the reduction of armaments and of all these conventions, a State attacks one of its neighbours, notwithstanding its reduced armaments and in violation of its pledged word, what policy are we going to adopt?

There are certain States whose social and economic structure enables them to increase so rapidly their supplies of the arms and munitions required for the scientific and technical warfare of today that their neighbours might be easily and rapidly overwhelmed if they possessed no other form of guarantee.

These are very disturbing questions; they all lead back to the fundamental question: do we desire, and is it in our power to prevent war? Is it in our power to guarantee the safety of nations who may be the victims of aggression, and are we prepared to adopt measures of constraint in case of a violation of public right?

If the answer is no let us say so frankly and not blind ourselves with illusions. Let us expose the naked truth, before the eyes of the whole world, and particularly of certain small nations who are especially concerned about their future. For these nations have both the right and the duty of acquainting themselves with the facts and of shaping their policy accordingly.

The world would draw the inevitable, though somewhat melancholy conclusion - which nevertheless would be much better than uncertainty or the kind of vague hopefulness which at present prevails - that the League of Nations in its full idealistic sense is an impracticable idea, and that it must continue to play - no doubt an important - but still a secondary role as an organisation which may often be usefully employed for subsidiary tasks, but which is incapable of solving the real
problems of international relationship, and in particular the
most burning problem which now confronts humanity - the problem
of permanent and durable peace.

If the answer is yes, let us set to work without hesitation,
let us redouble our efforts and strive to eradicate the defects
in the schemes to secure the safety, liberty and independence of
the peoples.

In the present case we might get rid of some of the
difficulties in the way of the Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance
by adopting the principle of a majority in place of a unanimous
vote for decisions in cases of aggression. This suggestion does
not entail any amendment to the Covenant. The Covenant is not
involved; we are simply concerned here with the stipulations of
a new treaty to be freely accepted by the High Contracting Parties.
The principle of decisions by a majority vote would thus only
apply within the ambit of the treaty, and would not necessarily
entail any amendments to the Covenant. The results would
quickly be evident.

We might also make a bold effort to hasten the procedure
by which the Council is to afford assistance. We could arrange
for the partial treaties to be operated under the supervision of
the League. I am fully alive to the defects of the partial
treaties. But these treaties exist, they will continue to
exist, and no one has hitherto ventured to maintain that they
would be contrary to the spirit of the Covenant, seeing that
they must contain a clause to the effect that they can only
if compatible
be made operative with the Covenant.

We are told, as a serious objection, that partial treaties
are imperfect and even dangerous instruments. To that I would
reply that every human institution has two aspects - its good
and its bad side, that it will always be diverted to wrong uses.
I do not stop using knives, because it is easy to cut our fingers with them!

In this case we are concerned with a great idea, the development of which is being watched with anxiety and hope by a large section of mankind. Let us have the courage to recognize that in order to realize so great an ideal and to attain so great a goal, it is necessary to take risks: we must choose the lesser evil. I prefer to accept the principle of the partial treaties, which certainly involve some difficulties — though it should be easy to surmount them if we grapple with them vigorously — rather than to abandon the idea of a Treaty of Mutual assistance and so virtually condemn the very ideal of the League of Nations. Even the strictest moralists do not scruple, in their daily lives, to practice the rule of choosing the lesser evil. If all nations had practised this rule in political affairs, we should long ago have entered the era of eternal peace between nations.

VI. The last argument which the Czechoslovak government would advance in favour of giving effect to the Treaty of Mutual assistance, is as follows: Why should we not adopt both courses simultaneously? Why not seek to improve, and carry out, by successive stages, the scheme for security through a treaty of mutual assistance, and at the same time proceed with the necessary steps and measures for the conclusion of special conventions concerning the demilitarised zones, the specially exposed frontiers, the extension of arbitration, etc? Neither of these courses excludes the other. On the contrary, they mutually assist and supplement one another, and by thus supplementing one another they will mutually eliminate the objections which are peculiar to each.
To conclude the Czechoslovak Government believes that the idea of the treaty of mutual assistance is one which cannot be abandoned without the danger of provoking - particularly among the smaller nations - the impression that they can never obtain even comparative safety, and that in the last resort it will always be the force in the hands of the most powerful nations which will decide their rights and destinies. My Government however holds that there are other paths by which we may approach the same objective and that the use of these paths does not exclude that of this particular scheme, so that our efforts to attain the desired end by these paths should be continued. The Government of the Republic draws particular attention to the principle of compulsory arbitration, which it endeavours to apply in its own policy, whenever there is an opportunity for doing so.

Confident in its belief in a genuine human idealism - a belief which has inspired the views expressed in this letter - the Government of the Republic is convinced that the combination of methods which it has indicated offers the right, and indeed, the only path, to the solution of the great problem of disarmament and of a universal and durable peace.

(Sgd.) Dr. Eduard Beneš.