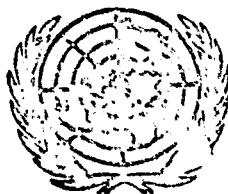


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## SLAVERY

CONSULTATIONS CONCERNING THE DESIRABILITY OF A SUPPLEMENTARY  
CONVENTION ON SLAVERY AND ITS POSSIBLE CONTENTS

The Secretary-General of the United Nations has the honour to communicate to the Economic and Social Council herewith, in connexion with his report on consultations concerning the desirability of a supplementary convention on slavery and its possible contents (E/2540), the following communication, dated 16 March 1954, from the Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations:

## BELGIUM

Letter dated 16 March 1954, to the Secretary-General of the United Nations from the Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations

"I have the honour to inform you that my Government's comments were outlined by the Minister of Foreign Affairs in his letter to you of 21 September 1953 in reply to your letter SOA 17/1/02 of 21 July 1953. They were elaborated by the Belgian representative to the Sixth Committee in his statement in the Committee on 15 October 1953, and by me in explaining my vote in the General Assembly at its plenary meeting on 23 October 1953, at which the question of slavery was discussed. The Belgian Government has thus clearly expressed itself in favour of the conclusion of a supplementary Convention. My Government considers that at the time of its conclusion the Convention of 1926 represented a step forward, but that today, in the light of present developments with regard to slavery and of the humanitarian ideas now prevailing,

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it is very inadequate. There exist in fact forms of servitude other than slavery as condemned by the Convention which affect more people and cause more suffering than crude slavery. In noting this serious fact in its report on the work of its second session (E/1988), the Ad Hoc Committee on Slavery adds that the forms of servitude in question appear to be growing in regions of the world where judicial or legislative action has not been taken to suppress them, and where public opinion has not been aroused. The need to supplement the Convention of 1926 - a need, moreover, repeatedly emphasized by the agencies concerned - is therefore urgent. It is inconceivable that the United Nations, having taken up the question, should not do everything in its power to prevent the evil from spreading.

The principal task of the United Nations would seem to be to counter any evil which is tending to grow rather than to remedy one evil which is disappearing. It is therefore essential that the United Nations should deal with the practices similar to slavery which are not covered by the Convention of 1926.

The essential reason why such practices must be suppressed by means of a convention is that they cause much more suffering than crude slavery. There is, however, an additional reason for protecting the victims of such customs by means of an international convention: owing to a restrictive interpretation of the Charter, many indigenous peoples - precisely those among whom forms of servitude similar to slavery are most prevalent - have been deprived of the international guarantees they enjoyed under the Covenant of the League of Nations.

Although at the time at which it was concluded, the Convention of 1926 did not cover the forms of servitude envisaged by the Ad Hoc Committee on Slavery, Members of the League of Nations were at least bound by Article 23 (b) of the Covenant, under which all Members had assumed the general undertaking "to secure just treatment of the native inhabitants of territories under their control." No Member State ever questioned the fact that that undertaking applied to indigenous peoples.

Chapter XI of the Charter contains a similar provision. But, through a restrictive interpretation which Belgium has unceasingly denounced, many indigenous peoples have been unjustly deprived of these international guarantees, although they are entitled to them under the terms of the Charter itself and need them now as much as they ever did.

These are the Belgian Government's comments on the desirability of a supplementary convention on the question. I should be glad if you would communicate them to the members of the Economic and Social Council.

My Government reserves the right to communicate its detailed comments on the contents of such a supplementary convention at a later date.

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