

## Library / Archives



### Before the League of Nations

- **Forerunner to the League of Nations: the Inter-parliamentary Union**

The peace activists of the nineteenth century were very aware of the fact that in the long run, the results of their efforts would depend on the active involvement and cooperation of governments worldwide. They envisaged an "International Forum" where governments could get

together and discuss international disputes rather than immediately resorting to the use of arms.

In 1889, the Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU) was co-founded by William Randall Cremer, the British pacifist and Member of the Parliament, and Frederic Passy, the founder of the French "Ligue de la Paix" and Member of Parliament. Thus, the first truly international political organization, whose aim was to promote international arbitration and world peace, was born. As a result, a new kind of pacifism, based on parliamentary support, was established. By 1914, one third of all members of the 24 State Parliaments had joined IPU, and their ultimate goal was to compel their Governments to resolve disputes by means of peaceful settlement and arbitration. IPU acclaimed with satisfaction the initiative of Tsar Nicholas II who had called the Peace Conferences held at The Hague in 1899 and 1907.

IPU was directed by a Council headed by a President who was to have been both a Member and the President ex officio of the Executive Committee. All the annual IPU conferences served as forums by which States could "perfect" the process of international arbitration. The IPU Bureau transferred its operations from Bern to Brussels in 1911. It is now based in Geneva.

- **The International Peace Bureau**

Even though the International Peace Bureau (IPB) was not an officially recognized organization of member States, it can be considered a forerunner of the League of Nations because of its visions, its goals and its prominent activists. IPB was an international body created to provide a "base of operations" for peace societies all over the world so that they could consolidate their efforts and organize annual Universal Peace Congresses. Its members consisted of the various peace societies that had been founded during the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1891, the Third Universal Peace Congress in Rome voted to formally install IPB at Kanonenweg 12 in Bern, Switzerland.

The first President was the Danish pacifist and Member of Parliament, Fredrik Bajer, followed by Henri La Fontaine in 1907. Bertha von Suttner, the well-known Austrian pacifist, became Vice-President until her death in 1914. The Swiss pacifist and publisher, Elie Ducommun, was the Secretary-General until his death in 1906, after which he was followed by Albert Gobat (1906-1914) and Henri Golay (1914-1951). In spite of their intense efforts, the First World War broke out, and during the war, most of the activities of the peace societies were severely restricted. Thus, the work of the International Peace Bureau was put on hold until 1918.

After the war, it became very active in the "No More War!" campaign of the International War Resisters movement. With the foundation of the League of Nations in January of 1920, IPB lost much of its relevance, though it had reached its goal of establishing an international organization for the peaceful settlement of conflicts. In 1924, IPB executive office moved to Geneva, where it is still active, at 41, rue de Zurich.

- **The First World War, the Women's International League of Peace and Freedom and President**

## Woodrow Wilson's «14 Points» speech

At the turn of the century, Europe was not only caught in an unstable web of precarious alliances; it also faced a variety of nationalist and ethnic disputes. Triggered by the assassination of Archduke of Austria Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914, the ensuing war that resulted was thought to be a justifiable method of settling those disputes once and for all. The First World War broke out that year at the end of August. It eventually embroiled most of Europe, Russia, the Middle East and the United States of America, among other regions, and it lasted four years.

Linda Gustava Heyman and Anita Augspurg, despite being accused of treason, met with like-minded women from Belgium and the United Kingdom at the house of Dr. Aletta Jacobs in the Netherlands to organize an International Women's Congress to be held in The Hague in the spring of 1915. Jane Addams, a member of the Women's International League of Peace and Freedom (WILPF), chaired the meeting of nearly 1,200 delegates from 12 countries and more than 700 guests.

The meeting furthered two causes: suffrage, and the use of arbitration as a means of solving international disputes. Several resolutions against the war were registered, and a list of "18 Final Recommendations to End the War and Foster Peace" were submitted to the President of the United States of America as well as to other Heads of State who were involved in the war. Among other things, these resolutions demanded the self-determination of all peoples, the use of arbitration for the settlement of all international disputes, the democratic control of foreign affairs, disarmament, equal civil and political rights for women, and freedom of trade on land and sea. The similarity of several of these recommendations with the "14 Points" of President Wilson's 1918 proposal for world peace are obvious.

[Join us](#)  
[Follow us](#)

### Related Information

#### LINKS

##### Archives Catalogue

[Archives Research Guides](#)

##### Finding Aid for the League of Nations Archives

[LONSEA \(League of Nations Search Engine\)](#)

[League of Nations Photos Online](#)

[League of Nations and United Nations Treaty Collection](#)

---

**Address:** Palais des Nations, 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland. | **P:** +41 (0) 22 917 1234 | **F:** +41 (0) 22 917 0123 | **E:** [webmaster@unog.ch](mailto:webmaster@unog.ch)

[Copyright](#) | [Terms and Conditions of Use](#) | [Privacy Notice](#) | [Fraud Alert](#)