

As regards the question of the suppression of exploitation of prostitution, a draft convention has been submitted to the Governments of States Members of the League as a basis of study and with the request that their observations be sent to the Secretary-General by the 1st November, 1936. Meanwhile the Fifth Committee, in a general discussion of the problems involved, drew attention to the fact that the Traffic in Women and Children Committee had shown that the existence of the system of licensed houses or brothels was one of the chief contributing factors to this traffic, and that an immediate aim of the future Advisory Committee on Social Questions should be the abolition of these houses.

I may here add that, as a matter of convenient reorganization, the amalgamation of the Child Welfare Committee and the Traffic in Women and Children Committee into one body to be known as the Advisory Committee on Social Questions has now been effected.

The study of measures for the rehabilitation of adult prostitutes has for some time been in process, including an examination of the difficulties experienced in inducing women to give up a life of prostitution, the type of training most suitable, &c. The importance of the use of social services in connection with the treatment of venereal disease was another matter stressed by several delegates. The study is being continued, and it is hoped will go far towards enlightening the authorities and social workers on all the ramifications of the problem of rehabilitation. It would have to be extended to preventive action and the cognate problem of minors who were prostitutes or in danger of becoming prostitutes, on the ground that preventive efforts would be incomparably more effective if made in the early stages.

It has for some time past been felt that rescue work amongst women of Russian origin in the Far East who have taken to prostitution should be carried out but, so far, little progress in this direction has been possible. Last year the Secretary-General was authorized by the Assembly to endeavour to secure the services of a competent person, preferably a woman, to act as an agent of the League of Nations, under the condition, however, that the appointment should not "involve in the present circumstances any financial charge upon the League." Efforts have been made in different countries during the present year to raise the necessary funds for this work, but the sums collected so far have been insufficient to allow the appointment of such an agent. The Fifth Committee in its discussions expressed the hope that a new impulse might be given to this question by the Managing Committee of the Nansen International Office of Refugees, which in July, 1936, decided to ask the League for a mission consisting of two persons to be sent to the Far East to examine the whole problem and suggest possible reforms.

The preparation of the Conference of Central Authorities in the East on the subject of Traffic in Women and Children in the Far East, which the Committee considered to be the most important feature on the programme, has proceeded satisfactorily. The Secretary-General has been in communication with the Governments interested in the Conference with regard to the participation of international organizations and missions, and of national, regional, or local organizations, it being understood that the participation would be of an advisory or consultative character. With one exception, all the Governments which have already replied have approved in principle the participation in the conference of voluntary organizations and also of the list submitted by the Secretary-General of such international bodies. Of the twelve Governments originally approached nine have decided to take part in the Conference. Eight of these—viz., the United Kingdom (Governments of Hong Kong and Malaya), China, France, India, Japan, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Siam—would be represented by full delegates, and one, the United States of America, by an observer. Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan had stated that they were unable to take part.

This Conference will open in February, 1937, and on the invitation of the Netherlands Government will take place at Bandoeng, Java.

In a desire to demonstrate its special interest in the work of this important Conference the Fifth Committee submitted to the Assembly for approval the following resolution :—

“ The Assembly—

“ Having taken cognizance of the present position regarding the Conference of Central Authorities in the East to be convoked in conformity with previous decisions of the Council and the Assembly of the League of Nations ;

“ Noting that the Conference will be held in February, 1937, and that, on the invitation of the Netherlands Government, which the Assembly records with appreciation, it will take place at Bandoeng, Java ;

“ Noting further that the following Governments have agreed to participate in the Conference : the United Kingdom (Governments of Hong Kong and Malaya), China, France, India, Japan, the Netherlands, Portugal, Siam, and the United States of America (the last named being represented by an observer) ;

“ Considering the importance to be attached to the following questions, forming the agenda of the Conference : Closer collaboration between the central authorities in the East ; migration so far as it affects traffic in women and children ; closer collaboration between the authorities and private organizations ; the employment of women officials by authorities responsible for the welfare of women and children in the East ; the abolition of licensed or tolerated brothels in the East ; and the position of women refugees of Russian origin in that part of the world who have become, or are in danger of becoming, prostitutes :

“ Approves the proposed agenda, which it considers practical and in conformity with the matters raised in the report of the Commission of Inquiry into Traffic in Women and Children in the East ;

“ Expresses the hope that the important task of the Conference will be brought to a successful issue, and that practical measures for combating traffic in women and children may result from its discussions ;

“ And sends to the Conference a message of greeting and of good wishes for a successful conclusion to its work.”