

“To Summon the Nations”: Russia and the Hague Peace Conferences

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Historical Factors Leading to the First Hague Peace Conference

In 1899 a historical event occurred in the transition to a global community with the holding of the first Hague Peace Conference. The roots of this Conference may, in one sense, be said to be almost as old as history itself. They lie in the ancient hope of belief that one day a comprehensive universal peace will be established on earth. This is a view derived both from ancient religious writings¹, and from the works of some of the great philosophers and essayists². This Conference and its achievements can be understood, not only against the background of such ancient hopes and beliefs, but also in the light of the rapidly changing international circumstances of the time.

In a more immediate sense, the first Hague Peace Conference was a lineal descendant, not so much of the innumerable peace conferences held before it at the end of particular wars to end those wars, but of the diplomatic assemblies called for the purpose of solving a then-present problem, and of furnishing guarantees, more or less permanent, for peace between the great powers. These began with the conferences of Munster and Osnabruck in 1648, otherwise known as the peace of Westphalia, and said to mark an important turning point in the progress of western civilization³. This was followed by those of Utrecht in 1713, Paris in 1763, and above all the Congress of Vienna in 1815 at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, and that of Berlin in 1878. The Hague Peace Conference was different from others, however, because it was the first diplomatic gathering called to discuss guarantees of peace without reference to a particular war – past, present or prospective⁴. It set a pattern for international relations which is still evident

¹ See, for example, Books of the Old Testament such as Isaiah, Chapter 2.

² For example, Kant's *Eternal Peace*.

³ J B Scott, *The Hague Peace Conferences of 1899 and 1907*, John Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1909 (republished by Garland Publishing Inc., New York, 1972), volume 1, pp 9-13.

⁴ F W Holls, *The Peace Conference at the Hague*, MacMillan, New York, 1900, p 352. The earlier pattern of major peace conferences following major conflicts continued after the second Hague Peace Conference, particularly in the Versailles Conference (1919) and the San Francisco Conference (1945). But there have been numerous other meetings of international significance this twentieth century which have sought to deal with peace and related issues and which have not followed a major conflict.

today, as the nations of the world cooperatively try to come to grips with the rapidly evolving nature of the contemporary global community and its interdependent needs, while at the same time clinging to their respective national priorities and sovereign interests.

The Conference must also be seen against a background of changing public perceptions and attitudes in the period leading up to it. The horrors of modern warfare exercised a profound effect on the thinking of many people in the nineteenth century, in a way never before experienced. Thus, for example, the first Universal Peace Congress was held in London in 1843, and the Red Cross was founded in 1863. Many proposals advocated refinement of the laws of war and humanitarian treatment of the victims of war. Ideas to prevent war, such as in the use of good offices, mediation and facultative arbitration, were circulated. Proposals for multilateral disarmament were made⁵. There was extensive public debate, at least among the western countries. The Russian decision to call the 1899 Conference has to be seen in this context.

Much of the initiative for the discussion of ways to reduce the risk of war came from Russia. Thus in 1874, Czar Alexander II called for a meeting of representatives of the great powers to discuss the laws of war. Little came of the proposal⁶, although later Russian proposals were to bear fruit, as discussed below. The important role that Russia played in this regard, extending into the twentieth century, has not yet been fully appreciated, coloured as it has been by the later excesses of the Soviet era and the associated build up of arms by the USSR. Proposals for considering and discussing the methods of preventing war in the Americas also emanated from the USA in the late nineteenth century⁷, leading in the twentieth century to the major role played by that country in international negotiations.

The Calling of the First Hague Peace Conference

It was apparently a Russian Minister, Sergei De Witte, who was engaged in promoting the economic development of Russia, and who believed that this was hampered by the heavy cost of armaments, who first encouraged Czar

⁵ Some of the documents relevant to these proposals can be found in the *Documents relating to the Program of the First Hague Peace Conference*, laid before that Conference by the Netherlands Government, and published by Clarendon Press, Oxford, in 1921.

⁶ J Huddleston, *The Search for a Just Society*, George Ronald, Oxford, 1989, p 278.

⁷ Scott, *The Hague Peace Conferences*, pp 24-5.

Nicholas II, grandson of Czar Alexander II, to promote the holding of an international peace conference. Russia was at that time in some financial difficulties. Also influential was the work of banker and Russian economic adviser Jean de Bloch, whose six-volume study of war reached the Czar⁸. De Bloch believed that modern war would become impossible because of the cost to both victor and vanquished. This gentle and humanitarian Czar, drawing inspiration from the traditions of the Imperial house, and influenced by his advisers and public opinion, decided in conjunction with his Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count Mouravieff, to issue an invitation to the leading nations with diplomatic representatives at the Russian court to attend such a conference⁹. The Rescript of the Russian Emperor of 24 August 1898 for this purpose is expressed in terms of the highest ideals. It recites in part:

*“...to put an end to these incessant armaments and to seek the means of warding off the calamities which are threatening the whole world – such is the supreme duty which is today imposed on all states.”*¹⁰.

The invitation was on the whole well received, and it was followed by a second circular from Count Mouravieff in which he furnished a program for discussion, emphasising the control of armaments, the revision of the rules of war, and the acceptance of the principle of good offices, mediation and facultative arbitration to prevent armed conflict. To emphasise Russian good intentions, the meeting was not to be held in that country. The Dutch Government responded by offering a venue, and the conference was born¹¹.

The First Hague Peace Conference

Twenty-six nations were represented at the first Hague Peace Conference, the greater majority of which were from Europe. There were three from Asia (China, Japan and Siam, now Thailand), two from the Americas (USA and Mexico), and two from the Middle East (Persia and Turkey). Latin American countries were conspicuous by their absence, as were the then colonial territories. It was very much a meeting of the great powers of the

⁸ P van den Dungen, *The Making of Peace: Jean de Bloch and the First Hague Peace Conference*, Centre for the Study of Armament and Disarmament, California State University, Los Angeles, Occasional Paper no 12, 1983. Only the final volume of de Bloch's work, entitled *The Future of War*, has been translated into English.

⁹ Scott, *The Hague Peace Conferences*, volume 1, pp 39-47.

¹⁰ The text can be found in Scott, *The Hague Peace Conferences*, volume II, p 1 and in *Documents relating to the Program of the First Hague Peace Conference*, p 1.

¹¹ Scott, *The Hague Peace Conferences*, volume 1, pp 44-47.

time plus a few smaller and medium European countries. Interestingly, some concerned private organisations and individuals also attended¹².

The Conference resulted in the adoption of three conventions and three declarations¹³, as well as some recommendations and protocols. The laws of war received some attention.

A notable failure was the inability to reach agreement on any form of multilateral disarmament, mainly because of German resistance. Of much greater success was the establishment by Convention of an orderly system for the arbitration of international disputes through the new Permanent Court of Arbitration, with a permanent registry to be based at the Hague and served by a permanent international Bureau. The Court itself was to be comprised of named international experts who could be called upon to arbitrate between state-parties, subsequently extended by protocol to non-signatory states, with a view to the pacific settlement of their disputes. In the usual manner of arbitration, there was no compulsory jurisdiction, merely a facultative arrangement giving nations a ready option if they could agree, rather than resorting to the use of force in their international relations. Signatories to the Convention on the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes agreed that, with a view to obviating as far as possible recourse to force in the relations between states, they would use their best efforts to ensure the pacific settlement of international differences (Article 1). This was to be achieved by using the good offices or mediation of one of the more friendly powers, by international commissions of inquiry or by recourse to international arbitration, whether through the Permanent Court of Arbitration or otherwise. War was not outlawed, but the international community had now expressed in comprehensive terms a clear preference for alternative peaceful methods of conflict resolution in the international arena.

The Second Hague Peace Conference

It was intended that the first Hague Peace Conference should have a successor, but initially little was done to bring this about. It was President

¹² For a list of national participants see *The Proceedings of the Hague Peace Conferences*, prepared by the Division of International Law of the Carnegie Endowment for International Law under the supervision of J B Scott, Oxford University Press, New York, 1920, pp 1-7; Scott, *The Hague Peace Conferences*, volume II, pp 62-77.

¹³ The texts can be found in Scott, *The Hague Peace Conferences*, volume II, pp 80-159, and in the annexes to *The Proceedings of the Hague Peace Conferences*.

Roosevelt who took up the cause in 1904, reminding signatory governments of the important subjects bequeathed for discussion, and questioning the extent to which they were prepared to act in the matter. He proposed a second conference at the Hague. The responses were favourable, although Russia initially sought to defer participation pending the cessation of hostilities in the Far East with Japan. Active support also came from Great Britain, which was concerned about fishing rights as well as German rearmament. The USA and Russia found a means to cooperate in the plans for the Conference, and an invitation was extended by Russia to other governments, including Latin American governments, to meet at the Hague in 1907.

The second Conference was more representative than the first. A total of forty-four countries participated, of which twenty were from Europe, nine from North and Central America, ten from South America, three from Asia and two from the Middle East. Still noticeably absent were colonial territories. Thus the second Conference was essentially a meeting of the great powers, together with the small and medium countries from Europe and the Americas¹⁴.

The Conference prepared thirteen conventions and one declaration for signature and ratification¹⁵. Once again, the laws of war received prime attention and wide agreement was reached. But despite an expression of concern about rising military expenditures, there was a failure to agree on any form of disarmament. The Convention for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes was reformulated, giving the Permanent Court of Arbitration a code of procedure to follow. But a USA proposal to make the use of the Court compulsory in international disputes was not accepted. A draft Convention relative to the creation of a Judicial Arbitration Court plus a Report were adopted by the Conference and were drawn to the attention of potential signatory powers. The draft Convention was prepared with a view to bringing it into force as soon as agreement could be reached on the selection of judges and on the constitution of the proposed Court¹⁶.

The Conference called for a third such peace conference within the period up to 1915.

¹⁴ For a list of national participants, see Scott, *The Hague Peace Conferences*, volume II, pp 257-285.

¹⁵ Texts can be found in Scott, *ibid*, volume II, pp 288-527.

¹⁶ J B Scott, *The Project Relative to a Court of Arbitral Justice*, the Endowment, Washington, 1920.

Assessments of the First and Second Hague Peace Conferences

In the aftermath of the first two Conferences, it was not uncommon to understate their importance¹⁷. It is true that they did not, in practice, result in significant change in the conduct of nation-states in the years immediately after they were held. The Conferences were said to be the result of the work of the international law movement, which was criticized both for its naiveté about power and its lack of attention to the concrete workings of modern industrial societies¹⁸. The threat of, and the actual use of, force in international affairs continued and was even heightened, culminating in the devastation of the First World War.

The proposed third Hague Peace Conference did not occur, although a landmark conference of women was held at the Hague in 1915. After the Great War, attention was directed more towards the establishment of the League of Nations and the new Permanent Court of International Justice. President Woodrow Wilson, who was instrumental in the creation of the League of Nations¹⁹, paid little regard to the Hague traditions²⁰. The Hague Conferences had not been able to prevent a major global conflict, and had achieved very little towards mitigating the ferocity of modern war, so new solutions were sought. The international institution formed in 1899, the Permanent Court of Arbitration, although continuing to exist up to the present day, was and has continued to be under-utilized and has had limited beneficial effect²¹. In this scenario, it has been easy to minimize the achievements of these Hague Conferences and their promoters.

But support for the Hague Peace Conference concept continued before the Great War and, to a lesser extent, after it. Following the 1907 Conference, the organized peace movement flourished as never before. The Permanent Court of Arbitration made some ten awards to 1914, indicating some prospects for its successful operation²². President Roosevelt called for the

¹⁷ See, for example, C D Davis, *The United States and the First Hague Peace Conference*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1962, p 213. Davis argued that the first Hague Peace Conference had achieved little in the way of progress for humanity and that the agreements reached were paper agreements only.

¹⁸ Craig N Murphy, *International Organization and Industrial Change*, Oxford University Press, 1994, p 103.

¹⁹ A Walworth, *Wilson and his Peacemakers*, W W Norton and Co., New York, 1986.

²⁰ C D Davis, *The United States and the Second Hague Peace Conference*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1975, chapters 18 and 19.

²¹ Scott, *The Hague Peace Conferences*, volume I, pp 312-318; Davis, *The United States and the First Hague Peace Conference*, chapter 16; Huddleston, *The Search for a Just Society*, p 280; Leo Gross, *New Rules and Institutions for the Peaceful Settlement of International Disputes*, p 131.

²² Davis, *The United States and the Second Hague Peace Conference*, pp 314-318.

development of the Hague system. The USA began preparation for the third Hague Peace Conference. The Hague Peace Palace was constructed²³. But it is clear that the Great War undermined the Hague system and diverted attention by highlighting more pressing needs.

Proposals for a peace conference after the Great War received little government support. The peace movement, in contrast, continued its advocacy of the Hague concept. Among its leading supporters were an American group, the League to Enforce the Peace, and the American Peace Society. Peace movements based at the Hague and elsewhere, such as the Central Organisation for a Durable Peace, also pursued their work²⁴. Calls for a third Peace Conference involving all nations continued²⁵. These calls have never been totally abandoned.

Work on plans for a permanent international court in association with the League was commenced in 1920 by an expert committee of jurists meeting at the Hague. At the second session of its advisory committee, the acts and deliberations of the second Hague Peace Conference were advocated as the basis for deliberations, including the draft Convention for a Court of Arbitral Justice. It was agreed that the permanent Court of Arbitration at the Hague should act as the nominating body for judges of the new international court, with appointments by the League to follow. The draft statute for the new court was prepared, presented to the League, and adopted with slight changes²⁶. Thus there is a direct link between the Hague Conferences and the Permanent Court of International Justice²⁷. That Court is in turn the forerunner of the present International Court of Justice, which also meets at the Hague.

Assessments of the value of the first and second Hague peace Conferences have tended to be more favourable in recent times. Thus C A Davis, in his preface to his work on the second Hague Conference, stated that further research had led him to change some of his evaluations of the first

²³ This building itself attracted much interest. Its benefactor was Andrew Carnegie, who described it as a “*Temple of Peace*”. It became the seat of the International Bureau of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in 1913, and it is the seat for hearings of the International Court of Justice and housed the Hague Academy of International Law.

²⁴ See the Tablet of Abdu’l-Baha to the Central Committee of the Central Organisation for a Durable Peace at the Hague, discussed below.

²⁵ J B Scott, *Should there be a Third Hague Peace Conference?*, American Peace Society, Washington, 1925 (reprinted from *Advocate for Peace*, January 1925).

²⁶ Davis, *The United States and the Second Hague Peace Conference*, pp 360-362.

²⁷ M Hudson, *The Permanent Court of International Justice 1920 – 1942*, 1943, pp 83-84.

Conference, even though the Conferences had failed to avert war²⁸. The Conferences were better seen as part of the long evolution of international law and international judicial institutions and the occasional sporadic attempts of the international community to arrest races in armaments. Any assertion that the Conferences were essentially a failure seemed to him to be an overstatement.

A more generous assessment is that the first Hague peace Conference was the first general international conference concerned with building a world system based on law and order, helping to break the monopoly of the great powers of the Concert of Europe in matters of war and peace, and proclaiming a new era of cooperation. This indicated that a global organization to keep the peace and to promote interstate cooperation was now a possibility²⁹. It has been suggested that in the light of history, the Conference was of great importance³⁰. The two Conferences were said to be the first real attempts to ensure peace by law³¹, or at least the peaceful settlement of international disputes. Any assessment that they failed to achieve their objectives must be considered in the context of the international situation at the time, dominated as it was by rising militarism and the continuance of the belief in the legitimacy of war, at least on the part of some key governments and high commands. While the Conferences did not bring about peace themselves and did not break the assumed link between the alleged right of individual nations to use force on the one hand, and questions of their security and welfare on the other, it is suggested that they can, in hindsight, be seen as more a part of a much wider evolutionary process; that is, in the struggle to construct a new, more peaceful world order under the rule of law with the elimination of war between nations.

Some prominent writers, such as J B Scott, never lost faith in the Hague system. Another ardent supporter, Secretary of State for the USA Elihu Root, said:

“..the achievements of the two conferences justify the belief that the world has entered upon an orderly process through which, step by step, in successive conferences, each taking the work of its predecessor as its point of departure, there may be continued

²⁸ Davis, *The United States and the Second Hague Peace Conference*, pp vii-viii.

²⁹ R E Riggs and J C Plano, *The United Nations: International Organisation and World Politics*, Dorsey Press, Chicago, p 6.

³⁰ Huddleston, *The Search for a Just Society*, p 278.

³¹ K Suter, “*Making Peace*”, *Legal Service Bulletin*, volume 15, no 2, 1990, p 70.

*progress toward making the practice of civilized nations conform to their peaceful professions.”*³²

Revival of Interest in the Hague Conference System and Proposals for a Third Hague Peace Conference

With the unfolding of the Second World War and the creation, in its aftermath, of the United Nations Organisation and the International Court of Justice, the Hague Conferences tended to slip from prominent view. But they continued to live through the work of the Permanent Court of Arbitration, by reference to them in publications³³, and by the holding of a few isolated events. Thus the 75th anniversary of the second Hague Peace Conference in 1982 was celebrated by a meeting in the USA of an expert group on the Law of War.

The idea of the third Hague Peace Conference has recently been given new life. It is worth considering the events surrounding this development, for reasons that will become more obvious later in this paper when the Baha’i position on the necessity for a universal assemblage of the nations of the world is considered.

On 29 June 1989, a meeting of foreign ministers of the 102-nation Non-Aligned Movement was held at the Hague to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the first Hague Peace Conference. From this meeting emerged the proposal to proclaim the United Nations Decade of International Law. The proposal was included in a Declaration entitled “*The Hague Declaration on Peace and the Rule of Law in International Affairs*”, and included a call to hold the third Hague Peace Conference at the end of the Decade in 1999, the centenary of the first Conference. This Conference would “*adopt appropriate international instruments for the enhancement of international law and the strengthening of methods for the peaceful settlement of international disputes.*”. The meeting assigned to the Working Group of the Movement’s Coordinating Committee on the Peaceful

³² Quoted in J Scott, *The Hague Conventions and Declarations of 1899 and 1907*, 1915, p xiii.

³³ See, for example, the essay by Leo Gross, “*The International Court of Justice: Consideration of Requirements for Enhancing its Role in the International Legal Order*”, where reference is made to the Hague Conferences as giving a sort of official *imprimatur* to arbitration or adjudication as a substitute for war. The essay is published in *Selected Essays on International Law and Organization*, Transnational Publishers Inc., New York, 1992, p 485. In addition, the then Secretary-General of the United Nations, Boutros-Ghali, made specific reference to the Hague Conferences in his preface to S Muller (ed in chief) and W Mijs (ed), *The Flame Rekindled*. Martinus Nijhoff, Dordrecht, 1994, pp xiii-xiv.

Settlement of Disputes the task of “*examination of existing international instruments on the peaceful settlement of disputes with the view of drawing up a draft universal convention on the peaceful settlement of disputes*”, to be submitted during the Decade of International Law to the proposed Commission on the Decade for its consideration³⁴.

In association with that meeting at the Hague, the World Federalist Movement organized a parallel NGO meeting at the Hague attended by some forty NGOs and endorsed by over 100 NGOs³⁵.

There was some initial resistance from some western nations to the p[proposal for the Decade when it came before the General Assembly of the United Nations. The Non-Aligned Movement sought consensus and made some concessions, and little more of the Hague Declaration was retained in the resulting United Nations resolution than the basic proposals for the Decade, beginning in 1990. The proposed Hague Conference at the end of the Decade was mentioned, but reduced to a “*possibility*”. On that basis, the USA became a co-sponsor. On 28 November 1990, the General Assembly adopted resolution 45/40, entitled “*United Nations Decade of International Law*”, to which was annexed an initial program of activities. In addition, resolution 44/23 of the General Assembly declared the period 1990-1999 as the United Nations Decade of International Law and requested the Secretary-General to seek the views of member-states on the possibility of holding a third international peace conference or other suitable international conference at the end of the Decade³⁶.

The idea was quickly endorsed by the Soviet Union. It proposed a new, comprehensive international instrument for the peaceful settlement of disputes extending to all nations, many of whom were not represented at the first and second Hague Peace Conferences³⁷.

³⁴ S Muller and M Brus, “The Decade of International Law: Idealist Dream or Realist Perspective”, and Louis B Sohn, “*Preparation of a New Treaty for the Settlement of International Disputes*”, both in M Brus, S Muller and S Wiemers (eds), *The United Nations Decade of International Law*, Martinus Nijhoff, Dordrecht, 1991. See also the Special Report of the World Association for World Federation, December 1989. That Association obtained widespread NGO support for the Non-Aligned Movement’s surprise initiative.

³⁵ *International Issue Action*, World Federalist Movement, May 1996, p 3.

³⁶ Report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, A/46/372, 19 September 1991.

³⁷ Sohn, “*Preparation of a New Treaty for the Settlement of International Disputes*”, (1990) *Leiden Journal of International Law*.

Drawing upon its long history in the promotion of multilateral steps towards the peaceful settlement of international disputes, and consistent with the proposals of the Non-Aligned Movement, the Russian Federation has since proposed itself that a third peace conference be held at the end of the Decade of International Law to address fundamental issues of peace and security. In a letter to the Secretary-General of May 1994, the Russian Federation observed:

“One hundred years is a tremendous historical span, especially in the dynamic twentieth century. Nevertheless, leafing today through old documents of the 1899 and 1907 Hague Conferences, one is constantly amazed that, even at that time, such lasting values were established.”

The Russian letter suggested several items for discussion at such a conference, such as improved means for the pacific settlement of disputes, new priorities in the development of international public law, new approaches in research and education in international law, and the new challenges of the approaching twenty-first century³⁸.

The subject of the proposed third Hague Peace Conference was again raised at the first conference of the members of the Permanent Court of Arbitration, held at the Hague on 10-11 September 1993, and organized in the context of the Decade of International Law. A paper was delivered by Louis B Sohn on the proposed third Hague Peace Conference, calling for a special preparatory commission to be formed to prepare for the Conference. However the resolutions emanating from that meeting did not include support for a 1999 conference, it being observed that the adoption of a comprehensive convention on a peaceful settlement of international disputes was not presently on an agreed agenda for the Decade, and that states may actually prefer, and benefit from, the diversity of dispute settlement treaties currently available. The meeting did not call for an enhanced role for the Permanent Court³⁹.

The subject of the proposed third Hague Peace Conference was further considered at the Qatar International Law Conference in 1994. Alfred H A Soons reported on the Hague Peace Initiative, a non-governmental project started in February 1993 which supported the goals of the UN Decade of

³⁸ *World Federalist News*, no 26, November 1994, p5.

³⁹ The Onal Bureau of the Permanent Court of Arbitration, Peace Palace, the Hague.

International Law, as well as the holding of a meaningful inter-governmental conference at the end of the Decade. This initiative arose from a meeting of a “*Group of Ten*” on 26-28 June 1993 in Lisse, the Netherlands, and the preparation of a Project Outline of 30 July 1993. This Project envisaged a high level conference in 1994, with a final report in 1995-6. Discussion of this Report would follow, designed to generate the preparatory processes of an intergovernmental conference, an NGO forum, and possibly a peace festival, all in 1999. Seven areas were identified for further analysis: peaceful settlement of disputes, the law of armed conflict, arms reduction and disarmament, natural resources, environment and development, international economic relations, and human rights⁴⁰.

At the mid-way point of the UN Decade, and in conjunction with the 50th anniversary of the United Nations, a Congress on Public International Law was held in New York on 13-17 March 1995. There was considerable discussion on matters concerning the peaceful settlement of disputes and related topics, including on some problems not foreseen at the Hague Peace Conferences of 1899 and 1907⁴¹. However no relevant resolutions emanated from that Congress. One participant raised in discussion the likelihood of another congress being held before the end of the Decade⁴², but apparently no worthwhile debate on the issue ensued.

The Non-Aligned Movement, at its 11th Summit in Columbia in 1995, reiterated its support for a third international peace conference⁴³.

President Boris Yeltsin of Russia, speaking on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations in 1995, repeated the call for a third peace conference. The Russian Federation Ambassador, addressing the United Nations Sixth (Legal) Committee, also raised additional items that could be discussed at such a conference, including emphasis on the prevention of military phases of conflict, legal norms of peace-keeping including the regulation of peace enforcement, and the development of legal foundations of international sanctions⁴⁴.

⁴⁰ See “*The Hague Peace Initiative*” in N Al-Nauimi and R Meese (eds), *International Legal Issues arising under the United Nations Decade of International Law*, Martinus Nijhoff, the Hague, 1995, p49.”

⁴¹ United Nations paper A/CONF. 176/1.

⁴² United Nations Congress Press Release L/2709, 16 March 1995, p 5.

⁴³ *International Issue Action*, World Federalist Movement, May 1996, pop 3-4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p 5.

As far as can be ascertained, no official action has yet been taken within the United Nations Organisation preparatory to the holding of the proposed centenary conference at the Hague⁴⁵. However as a result of an international seminar, “*Unfinished Disarmament Agenda*”, held at Geneva on 8-9 November 1993 by the Special NGO Committee for Disarmament, the Review that was published after that seminar stated:

*“Working back from the end of the decade, we come to 1999. This marks the 100th anniversary of the 1st Peace Conference at the Hague, convened by the Tsar of Russia; and also the end of the UN Decade of International Law. The Non-Aligned Movement, who inspired the establishment of the Decade, have proposed that a 3rd Peace Conference be held at the Hague in that year, possibly a summit of world leaders to sign a new convention or other important instrument. In May 1994 this suggestion was supported in a letter to the UN Secretary-General from the Russian Federation, proposing a number of agenda items.”*⁴⁶

That Review stated that more intense global cooperation and coordination of effort was needed to deal with the imperatives of disarmament.

A number of private organisations, apart from those already mentioned, have indicated support for a conference along these lines. Both the World Federalist Movement and the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation support the concept⁴⁷. The World Federalist Movement, in association with the Danish United Nations Association, has mounted an international NGO campaign for the third Hague Peace Conference in 1999⁴⁸. In 1995, the Lawyers’ Committee on Nuclear Policy, the International NGO Task Group on Legal and Institutional Matters and the World Federalist Movement prepared a draft resolution on the proposed third Peace Conference for consideration of the United Nations Sixth (Legal) Committee and the Non-Aligned Movement⁴⁹. The World Parliamentarians in support of the United Nations, at their Conference II held in Japan in 1995, under the “GIFU Declaration”, resolved that:

⁴⁵ This comment was made at the time this article was written in 1996. For an up-dated comment, see the note at the end of this paper.

⁴⁶ “*Disarmament: The Unfinished Disarmament Agenda*”, United Nations, February 1995.

⁴⁷ *World Federalist News*, November 1994, no 26, p 3.

⁴⁸ *International Issue Action*, May 1996, issued by these two NGOs.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p 6. A copy of the draft Resolution is on pp 7-8. See also the Petition on p 9.

*“We, in quest for a world without war, call for a world conference on the peaceful settlement of disputes and the prevention of war (the No War Summit) to be held before the end of the century.”*⁵⁰

The Stockholm Initiative on Global Security and Governance⁵¹, and subsequently the Commission on Global Governance in its Report entitled *Our Global Neighbourhood*⁵², both recommended that a world conference/summit on global governance be held, the Commission recommending that this be called by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1998, with the decisions at that conference to be ratified and put into effect by 2000.

Support has come from a variety of other sources. For example, the United Nations Association of Australia has a policy that reads:

*“the UNAA strongly supports the holding of an international conference of all nations in 1999 at the Hague, to commemorate the centenary of the 1899 Hague conference, to consider matters arising out of the Decade for International Law, ways to promote the compulsory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice, and to review the progress made in the past 100 years towards world peace. The priority for discussion should be the measures needed for achieving a just and lasting global peace in the 21st century.”*⁵³

No doubt further NGOs will come forward to support the holding of such a conference as the Decade progresses, if they have not already done so.

That such a conference might be held at least derives some support from the series of reasonably regular summit meetings of world leaders held in recent years under the auspices of the United Nations, mostly for the purpose of discussing one particular field or subject of concern. Conferences that come to mind include the World Summit for Children of 1990, the Security Council Summit of January 1992, the Rio Conference on Environment and Development of June 1992, the Vienna Conference on Human Rights of June 1993, the Cairo Conference on Population and Development of 1994,

⁵⁰ Letter to the writer from Senator Margaret Reynolds, 15 September 1995, enclosing a copy of the GIFU Declaration entitled *“Strengthening the United Nations: Towards the 21st Century”*.

⁵¹ Report published by the Swedish Prime Minister’s office, Stockholm, 22 April 1991.

⁵² *Report of the Commission on Global Governance*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995, p 351. See also *Issues of Global Governance: Papers Written for the Commission on Global Governance*, Kluwer Law International, London, 1995.

⁵³ United Nations Association of Australia Inc., Policy Book, 1995, p 7.

the Copenhagen Conference on Social Development of March 1995, The Beijing Fourth Conference on Women of August-September 1995, plus the meeting of world leaders in New York on the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, with further similar conferences scheduled to follow. It is said that these conferences have established a new methodology for global deliberations on critical issues⁵⁴, facilitating regular meetings of world leaders on these issues and creating in them a growing awareness of the need for cooperative global solutions.

Proposals in the Baha'i Writings for a World Conference

A fundamental aspect of the Baha'i teachings relates to the establishment of global peace and world unity. This theme consistently received attention from the main figures of the Baha'i Faith in their respective writings. Associated with it has been a stated need for the holding of a universal convocation of all the nations to lay the foundations of that global peace and unity, that is, a new form of global political order, described in those writings as the "*Lesser Peace*". Baha'u'llah, the Founder of the Baha'i Faith (1817-1892), writing in very definite terms towards the end of the nineteenth century, but well before the first Hague Peace Conference, stated that:

*"The time must come when the imperative necessity for the holding of a vast, an all-embracing assemblage of men will be universally realized. The rulers and kings of the earth must needs attend it, and, participating in its deliberations, must consider such ways and means as will lay the foundations of the world's Great Peace amongst men. Such a peace demandeth that the Great Powers should resolve, for the sake of the tranquillity of the peoples of the earth, to be fully reconciled among themselves. Should any king take up arms against another, all should unitedly arise and prevent him. If this be done, the nations of the world will no longer require any armaments, except for the purpose of preserving the security of their realms and of maintaining internal order within their territories. This will ensure the peace and composure of every people, government and nation."*⁵⁵

⁵⁴ *Turning Point for All Nations*, Baha'i International Community, New York, 1995, p 5.

⁵⁵ From *Lawh-i-Maqsud*, a tablet written about 1877-1879 to Mirza Maqsud, who resided in Damascus at the time, and regarded as one of Baha'u'llah's most notable tablets. Published in *Tablets of Baha'u'llah*, Baha'i World Centre, Haifa, 1978, p 165. See also the *Proclamation of Baha'u'llah*, Baha'i World Centre, Haifa, 1972, p 115; *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, Baha'i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, 1974, p 192. Note also the statements on pp 12-13 of the latter publication. A similar call is to be found in *Epistle to the Son of Wolf*, Baha'i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, 1976, pp 30-31.

Baha'u'llah also wrote to Czar Alexander II of Russia in about 1870-1872, calling on him to arise among men and to summon the nations to God, in terms that announced the spiritual station claimed by Baha'u'llah⁵⁶. The same Tablet refers to the fact that while Baha'u'llah was earlier in prison in Tehran, one of the Russian Ministers extended aid to him. This was no doubt a reference to the attempts of Prince Dolgorouki, who as a Russian Minister tried to establish Baha'u'llah's innocence when the latter was imprisoned in Persia. The Prince later offered the Russian Government's protection to Baha'u'llah when it was decided by the Persian authorities to exile him⁵⁷. While this offer was not accepted, Baha'u'llah expressed in elevated terms His high regard for the Russian Czar and his government. Thus there was a direct early connection in very positive terms between the Baha'i Faith and Russia. It seems that Baha'u'llah saw in this early connection evidence of the important role that Russia would play in future global negotiations concerning world peace and the elimination of war, those issues being so integral to Baha'u'llah's teachings.

This theme of the need for a universal convocation of the nations was carried forward by Baha'u'llah's son and successor, Abdu'l-Baha (1844-1921). Writing as early as 1875, He said:

“True civilization will unfurl its banner in the midmost heart of the world whenever a certain number of its distinguished and high-minded sovereigns -- the shining exemplars of devotion and determination -- shall, for the good and happiness of all mankind, arise, with firm resolve and clear vision, to establish the Cause of Universal Peace. They must make the Cause of Peace the object of general consultation, and seek by every means in their power to establish a Union of the nations of the world. They must conclude a binding treaty and establish a covenant, the provisions of which shall be sound, inviolable and definite. They must proclaim it to all the world and obtain for it the sanction of all the human race. This supreme and noble undertaking -- the real source of the peace and well-being of all the world -- should be regarded as sacred by all that dwell on earth. All the forces of humanity must be mobilized to ensure the stability and permanence of this Most Great Covenant. In this all-embracing Pact the limits and frontiers of each and every nation should be clearly fixed, the principles underlying the relations of

⁵⁶ *The Proclamation of Baha'u'llah*, p 28.

⁵⁷ *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, Baha'i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, 1979, pp 64-67.

governments towards one another definitely laid down, and all international agreements and obligations ascertained. In like manner, the size of the armaments of every government should be strictly limited, for if the preparations for war and the military forces of any nation should be allowed to increase, they will arouse the suspicion of others. The fundamental principle underlying this solemn Pact should be so fixed that if any government later violate any one of its provisions, all the governments on earth should arise to reduce it to utter submission, nay the human race as a whole should resolve, with every power at its disposal, to destroy that government. Should this greatest of all remedies be applied to the sick body of the world, it will assuredly recover from its ills and will remain eternally safe and secure.”⁵⁸

Abdu’l-Baha went on to point out that this would alleviate the arms race and the burden of its cost, allowing humanity to get on with constructive work. Only a small force would be required for the internal security of the nations. He took the view that, by ceaseless endeavour and determination, this new state of world affairs would definitely come about.

Abdu’l-Baha continued this theme at various times, including during his travels in the USA and Canada in 1912. He called for the establishment of a Universal Tribunal or arbitral court to deal with all disputes between nations⁵⁹. In 1914 He called for the “*Parliament of Man*” under a covenant between the nations, for simultaneous multi-lateral global disarmament and an impartial international commission to delimit borders and to prevent the causes of friction and differences⁶⁰.

During the First World War, the Executive Committee of the Central Organization for a Durable Peace, a non-official body based at the Hague with members from various countries, wrote to Abdu’l-Baha, but due to wartime conditions in Palestine their letter did not reach him until after the

⁵⁸ *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, Baha’i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, 1979, pp 64-67.

⁵⁹ See, for example, His talk given on 16 June 1912 at New York, published in *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, Baha’i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, 1982, pp 202-203.

⁶⁰ Diary of Mirza Ahmad Sohrab, 13-14 May 1914, published in the *Star of the West*, volume 5, no 8, 1 August 1914, pp 115-117. As to the concept of a “*Parliament of Man*”, see Lord Tennyson’s “*Locksley Hall*”, a poem written around 1838 or 1842, in which he writes:

*“Till the war drum throb’d no longer,
and the battle flags were furl’d
In the Parliament of man
the federation of the world.”*

War. Abdu'l-Baha replied by letter in 1919 to the Committee at the Hague which was delivered by a special delegation. In his letter he discussed the means of establishing universal peace. He called for the establishment of a Supreme Tribunal, the members of which would be chosen from all nations, and exercising the utmost power, the decisions of which would be supported by a principle of collective security. He expressed the view that the League of Nations was incapable of establishing universal peace. A reply was received from the Committee shortly thereafter, to which Abdu'l-Baha replied by a second letter in 1920, again delivered by a special delegation. In his second letter, he pointed out that modern armaments could, in a short time, exterminate the whole of the human world. He called for universal peace, supported by an executive force. In a separate letter to one of the delegates taking the second letter to the Commission, he pointed out that the Hague Conference held before the War, with its president the Emperor of Russia and members of the greatest eminence, did not prevent the War. He forecast that without a doubt another war, fiercer than the last, would assuredly break out⁶¹.

Shoghi Effendi (1897-1957), the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith after the passing of Abdu'l-Baha in 1921, on several occasions reiterated this call for a universal convocation of the nations⁶². His call has recently been affirmed by the Universal House of Justice, the present ruling body of the Faith, which stated that the holding of this mighty convocation was now long overdue⁶³.

In a statement on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations in 1995, the Baha'i International Community urged world leaders to convoke a "*World Summit on Global Governance*", stating that we had reached a turning point in the progress of nations, and calling for a new international order to be based initially on suggested reforms to the United Nations Organisation and other matters⁶⁴.

⁶¹ H M Balyuzi, *Abdu'l-Baha: The Centre of the Covenant of Baha'u'llah*. George Ronald, Oxford, 1987, pp 438-440; *Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha*, Baha'i World Centre, Haifa, 1978, pp 296-309; *Star of the West*, volume 2, no 8, pp 123-127, 129-133 and 288-289.

⁶² See, for example, Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, pp 191-194.

⁶³ *The Promise of World Peace*, 1986. This document was addressed to the peoples of the world and distributed to nearly all heads of governments as well as other prominent citizens.

⁶⁴ *Turning Point for All Nations*, Baha'i International Community, New York, 1995.

Conclusion

It cannot yet be said with certainty that the nations of the world will agree to the holding of the third Hague Peace Conference, and if they do whether it will be held on the centenary of the first Hague Peace Conference in 1999. The idea that the centenary should be celebrated by a meaningful and comprehensive meeting of all nations at the Hague, to consider issues touching upon global peace and security and global governance, is an idea that now had considerable support, as has already been indicated, although there appears to be some resistance to it. That the world is faced with some increasingly critical and deep-seated problems that threaten its peace and security is now so obvious to most people that it is scarcely open to debate. The main concerns raised at the 1899 Conference, in particular the establishment of world peace, including the prevention and effective resolution of international conflict plus multilateral disarmament, remain largely unsolved a century later. This suggests that the present world order is seriously lacking in its capacity to adequately address these concerns. The end of the Cold War, far from bringing a new peace, has opened many old wounds and led to a new explosion of intolerance and conflict. The pressures of globalization are adding to the concerns, emphasising the inadequacies of our present national and international institutions.

There may be a perception by some nation-states that even their participation in discussions at an international forum on possible comprehensive international solutions may threaten their sovereign rights, even though objective analysis might suggest that some such solutions are required to effectively respond to these problems. This resistance is not altogether surprising, given the nature of our present world order. As long as sovereign nation-states continue to play such a prime role in international affairs, then it is unrealistic to expect that they will make significant concessions to work towards creating some radically different global order – that is, unless they are convinced that it is in their national interests to do so. A peaceful world order, to be truly effective and lasting, must be built upon a whole-hearted consensus of the nations through their leaders.

If forecasts as to the growing seriousness of the predicament facing the international community over the next few years prove to be correct, and if the problems facing individual nations become much worse in that time, to the point where the inadequacies of existing institutional structures become intolerable and the pressures for urgent cooperative global solutions over a

range of issues become imperative and irresistible, then obviously the prospects of a Hague-type conference will increase correspondingly. Such a conference format provides just the mechanism needed to facilitate the devising of comprehensive international solutions. It may no longer be sufficient for national leaders to hold irregular international meetings on particular topics of concern, in the manner that has now become common. A more comprehensive and holistic approach will be called for, one that goes to the heart of the many deficiencies of the present global order and which devises integrated international solutions. The critical point in deciding whether the nations should participate in such an approach will be reached when the leaders of a sufficient number of nation-states perceive that the national arguments favouring participation in comprehensive global negotiations begin to outweigh those favouring non-participation. This could occur by a process of gradual realisation by different nations at different times, or it could be the much quicker outcome of some particularly serious international crisis. The latter cannot be ruled out in the current volatile international situation.

It is not the purpose of this paper to argue that a third Hague Peace Conference should be held in 1999. Rather, it is the purpose to review the background to the Hague tradition, its history and purposes, including the particular involvement of Russia, and the calls for a third such conference. That there will be some form of centenary celebration in 1999 is certain. Whether that celebration will take the form of a landmark peace conference at the Hague of all the nations of the world, or some less significant event, is not yet possible to say, and perhaps this is not the most important issue in itself. If such a conference were to be held, it could be in 1999 or in some other year, and it might be held at the Hague or elsewhere.

The prospects of further Hague conferences are, of course, dependent upon a variety of factors, little connected with any consideration of sentimental attachment. What is of significance is that the first and second Hague Peace Conferences have left a significant and lasting legacy, which is still having an influence on the thinking of a number of people of prominence in world affairs. It is a legacy that has been, and still is being, drawn upon to emphasise the calls of many of those who see a need for global negotiations at the highest level to establish a just and lasting peace in the best interests of all nations and peoples.

This paper has sought to draw some parallels between the history and purposes of the Hague system and the history and relevant principles of the Baha'i Faith. The Founders of the Baha'i Faith and their followers throughout the world were not directly involved in the first and second Hague Peace Conferences, and have not specifically supported plans for a third conference in 1999. But what is remarkable is the way in which the calls made in the wider world, and in particular by Russia, for comprehensive international negotiations on peace and related issues have, consistently since the last century⁶⁵, been paralleled by Baha'i statements calling for a great convocation of all the nations to lay the foundations of a new world order and a permanent global peace. From the earliest days of the Baha'i Faith, it was stated in the Baha'i writings that the time would come when the holding of such a convocation would be seen by world leaders as an imperative necessity. The first and second Hague Peace Conferences, although important, were clearly seen as being inadequate for this task.

The present ruling body of the Faith⁶⁶ has now expressed the view that the time for holding such a convocation is long overdue and has made this view known to world leaders. Several leaders have already consulted that body on this view. It is clear that a number of nations do not yet share this view, otherwise such a convocation would have already been held. That pressures exist in the wider world to change that perception has been indicated in this paper. It remains to be seen whether these pressures become irresistible as we draw ever closer to the twenty-first century.

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Despite the support from Russia and the Netherlands, as well as many NGOs, for a third Hague Peace Conference of the nations of the world in 1999, it did not occur. The Decade of International Law ended without any real progress in this respect. Instead, a major citizens Peace Conference was held at the Hague in May 1999. Some 10,000 participants attended, including some world leaders and Nobel Peace Laureates. The Conference developed *The Hague Conference Agenda for Peace in the 21st Century*.

⁶⁵ That is, the nineteenth century.

⁶⁶ The Universal House of Justice.

The third Hague Peace Conference, and the great convocation of all the nations indicated in the Baha'i Writings to lay the foundations of a new, united and peaceful world order, are still to eventuate. But there seems to be little doubt that such a great meeting will be held. Attention has been temporarily diverted from this most important goal by a number of factors, including the war on terror, serious global economic difficulties and the trend towards re-armament in many countries. The present world seems to be drifting into an ever-worsening situation, with many serious global problems – conflicts and mass violence, human rights abuses, terrorism, financial breakdown, environmental disasters, etc, etc. We can now foresee a time when the global situation will become so serious that the nations of the world will have no choice but to gather together to reframe the global structure to cooperatively achieve the changes necessary for meaningful human survival. Viewed against the historical background, we can also anticipate a central role for Russia in these momentous developments. We may yet come to regard the Russian Federation as having conferred a great bounty on all humanity, perhaps in fulfillment of the words of Baha'u'llah over a hundred years ago.