

Also, we do not think that this is the right approach for the Commission powers at this stage. A reconvened Geneva Conference is and remains, of course, the end result of the development we hope to be able to set in train, but it is not the first step. Indeed, I would be afraid, if we tried to make it the first step, that we are more likely to exhaust than to establish such influence as we may be able to have with the parties principally concerned in the Vietnam conflict. I have made this clear in talks that I have had with particular parties concerned. Certain propositions have now been put forward on both sides with respect to a settlement of the Vietnam conflict. There are the four points of the Government of Hanoi, the 14 points of the Government of the United States, and the four points of the Government of South Vietnam. In a sense, this represents the beginning of a process of negotiation. But such a process can be carried only so far by way of public pronouncements. The gap between the positions, particularly of the United States and of the Government of North Vietnam, is still very wide and something will have to be done to narrow it. There is also a barrier of distrust and suspicion that will somehow have to be overcome.

It has seemed to us that this is something which could be pursued cautiously and discreetly by the Commission powers. We are not thinking at this stage of anything other than a good-office exercise. The object of such an exercise would be to try to bring about conditions in which the parties themselves might find it possible to engage in direct discussions as a prelude to formal negotiation. In essence, therefore, what we have in mind is an unblocking of channels which, in the absence of such action, are likely to continue to remain closed.

I have already indicated, in general terms, that we have had a series of exchanges about a possible Commission initiative along these lines with India and Poland, who are our partners on the Commission. We have put our position to Britain and the Soviet Union as co-chairmen of the Geneva Conference. I have also taken the opportunity personally to discuss the matter with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, with Secretary of State Rusk and, through others, with the Government of South Vietnam and the Government of North Vietnam.

Our exchanges with India and Poland must necessarily remain confidential. I think I can say that one common point in their initial reaction had to do with the timing and the circumstances in which any Commission initiative might stand a chance of being acceptable to the parties on the ground. That was one of the considerations we had in mind when we decided to ask Mr. Chester Ronning, a distinguished former member of our foreign service, to pay special visits to Saigon and Hanoi early last month. I know that the members of the Committee will not expect me to go into details about his mission, or his future participation. It must be apparent that this is a significant assignment.

On these visits he had a full opportunity of discussing with senior personalities in both capitals their views of the present Vietnam situation and the possibility of the Commission powers playing some part in opening up avenues which might ultimately lead to a peaceful settlement of the conflict. You will appreciate that it would not be helpful for me at this stage to disclose the contents of the discussions which Mr. Ronning had on his visits to Saigon and Hanoi or even the possibilities which they may help to open up. All I would like