

The Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Mitchell Sharp, announced today that he will be leaving Ottawa the morning of Tuesday, March 13, on an official visit to the Republic of Viet-Nam, the Kingdom of Laos, and the Democratic Republic of North Viet-Nam.

Mr. Sharp will be accompanied by Senator Donald Cameron, Mr. Doug Rowland, M.P., and Mr. E. Allard, M.P., as well as senior officials of the Department of External Affairs, the Department of National Defence and the Canadian International Development Agency.

Mr. Sharp and his party will travel in a Canadian Armed Forces Boeing 707 jet aircraft. He is to return to Ottawa on March 18 or 19.

The purpose of Mr. Sharp's visit is to have talks with the political leaders of North and South Viet-Nam and Laos on the subject of Canada's bilateral relations with these countries, including economic co-operation and to discuss the role to be played by international truce supervisory organizations in the cease-fire agreement recently concluded in Viet-Nam and Laos, and Canada's participation in such organizations.

Mr. Sharp also intends to have very full discussions with the Head of the Canadian Delegation to the International Commission of Control and Supervision (ICCS) in Viet-Nam, Ambassador Michel Gauvin, with his Senior Military Adviser, Major-General Duncan McAlpine and with other Canadians serving in Viet Nam, to obtain their first-hand views as to the effectiveness of the International Commission and the usefulness of Canadian participation in it.

Mr. Sharp will also have similar discussions with the Head of the Canadian Delegation to the International Commission for Supervision and Control (ICSC) in Laos, Mr. David Jackson, and his Senior Military Adviser, Brigadier-General C.L. Kirby, regarding the possible role of this Commission, which was first established in 1954 and re-established in 1962, in the recently concluded cease-fire agreement for Laos.

Mr. Sharp said that on his return to Ottawa from this visit he would report to the Cabinet his assessment of the situation and make his recommendations regarding continued Canadian participation in the ICCS beyond the end of March. He also said that as soon as the Government had taken its decision it would be referred to Parliament for a full debate. Mr. Sharp expressed his pleasure that members of both the Senate and the House of Commons were accompanying him on this trip because their own views and impressions would be a very helpful contribution to that debate.