

tive has been exercised, but what of the prerogative of parliament, Mr. Speaker? It is the prerogative and the sovereignty of parliament that we seek to establish clearly and without any question of a doubt. We intend to give parliament a concrete opportunity to express its volition with regard to our future posture in Viet Nam.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, we are obviously confronted with a *fait accompli*. We are willing to grant the government the benefit of the doubt in this respect. They may well claim to have received valuable information from their good advisers. As a last resort, in the last few hectic days of official war in Viet Nam, the urgent need for some action may have motivated the government. But still we are confronted with a *fait accompli*. What respect has been shown for parliament? What respect has been shown for democracy? Barely a few moments ago, the Secretary of State for External Affairs told us: "In due course, when we have made a decision, we shall report. We shall have the condescension, the magnanimity and generosity of informing you, through a press release or otherwise".

Mr. Speaker, the questions we asked the government were precise. I refer in particular to the questions I asked on January 24 to echo the concern of Canadians, which we represent here. These questions should have been discussed in the House or in the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence when there was still time to do so. It could have been done before January 27, before a first Canadian contingent was sent to Viet Nam.

Mr. Speaker, I would say that our role of representatives of the people and the Canadian image through the world demanded that Parliament hold a debate earlier than today. We had to make sure of the reaction of all parties concerned in Viet Nam to the essential conditions imposed by the government and which we had endorsed.

[English]

Mr. Speaker, I referred a moment ago to the positive measures we can now take. I think it is important for this parliament to give several options a very clear examination. In his statement of January 5 the minister referred to the terms of our participation and said:

The extent to which they were met would also constitute elements in our assessment of the viability of the operation as a whole.

I believe that Canada, as a participant in the international conference, should go a step further. I believe we must view the inadequacy of the present conditions as elements of the cease-fire agreement that could work towards its final undoing. Indeed, there are two cease-fires in Viet Nam. One is a bilateral arrangement between the United States and North Viet Nam relative to the exchange of prisoners and the cessation of bombing and future hostilities. That needs neither policing nor supervision aside from that furnished by the Red Cross. The second agreement, and the more crucial one for the peace of Indo-China, is the four power arrangement implicating all the belligerents in Viet Nam. That is the arrangement which requires policing but which, under the present circumstances, simply cannot be policed. Our position at the international conference must be that of ensuring a viable machinery, both political and supervisory, to police and secure that four-power arrangement.

### Viet Nam

• (1610)

You know, Mr. Speaker, there are many who have referred to our presence in Viet Nam as international. They are, unfortunately, being imprecise in their use of the term. The international forces of which we have been part in the Congo, in Cyprus, in the mid-East, have had measures of success worthy of note. Our previous effort in Viet Nam did not. Clearly, it was because our effort in Viet Nam has not been, and is not now, international. We were cast, in 1954 as the representatives of the western interest on the commission. There is little to illustrate that anything less has transpired the second time around. The value of our contribution will always be minimal, as long as we are not part of an international force.

Canada must, therefore, move first and foremost to establish the readiness of the upcoming international conference to have a truly international force in Viet Nam under the aegis of the UN.

[Translation]

Fortunately, Mr. Speaker, it is still time for us to inquire in particular about the condition of political prisoners and also about that of other prisoners, among whom there may be a few Canadians. I was greatly moved at hearing, a few moments ago, in the news report of 3:45, that a 30-year-old Canadian named Lloyd Oppel appears on the list of prisoners held by North Viet Nam.

Mr. Speaker, at the same time, I therefore ask the hon. Secretary of State for External Affairs to bring a particular attention to the fate of many Christians in South Viet Nam who are only accused of publishing and commenting, before the cease-fire agreement, resolutions on justice in the world passed by the synod of bishops gathered in Rome in 1971.

Canada could have made many representations and had stronger guarantees had the present government condescended to better inform this House and really resort to Parliament.

Incidentally, Mr. Speaker, we find it difficult to understand why the government has waited so long before informing the House. We find it difficult to understand that the hon. Secretary of State for External Affairs was somewhat taken aback by all this matter. We find all this very difficult to understand as we know that Canada has in the Department of External Affairs a service of experts who are rightly known to be among the most loyal and the most competent in the world.

If the government does not mind gradually losing its credibility, it is free to do so, but we do not accept that it causes Parliament to lose one more inch of its credibility before Canadians, in particular before the members of the armed forces and their relatives. Nor will we let it lessen Canada's credibility across the world because of a lack of foresight and a lack of timely firmness.

That is why, Mr. Speaker, to accept the *fait accompli* referred to in the resolution we must have the assurance that the amendment I am about to move will be approved by hon. members of the House.

As the right hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) said in other circumstances, verbal guarantees are not enough, we need written guarantees.