

In a news release on 19 October 1979, the Department of External Affairs stated that:

An exclusively humanitarian response to the present situation in Kampuchea — compelling though the requirements for it may be — is not enough. There must be a political approach to dealing with the roots of the problem, that is the policies being pursued by the Government of Vietnam.

To restore the independence of Kampuchea, hostilities will have to be brought to an end and the foreign forces now occupying much of the country will have to be withdrawn. The Ministers stressed that Canada would support any effort to start the process of political settlement through negotiations among the interested parties.¹⁴¹

Later events showed, in fact, that Canada was content to support the efforts made by others, while maintaining at the United Nations that it was “imperative that some satisfactory proposal be developed and accepted to allow the interested parties to come to the negotiating table.”¹⁴² The Secretary of State for External Affairs was pleased to learn that the matter would soon be debated in the General Assembly and pointed out that: “Unless it succeeds I can foresee nothing but continuing conflict, suffering, instability and tragedy for that part of the world.”¹⁴³

This was a fair analysis of the situation. Since then, however, Canadian governments have been content to provide passive support and to hide behind their recognition of a coalition composed of several parties, all of which are anti-Vietnamese but each of which pursues quite different interests, almost none of which have any relevance for Canada. This raises several questions. Does Canada have anything to gain by changing the policies which it has followed consistently since 1979? What sorts of assets does Canada have for playing the helpful role which no one has really asked of it, but which one might have expected it to take on? Above all, in what way can Canada contribute to bringing about a settlement of the conflict in Indochina?

¹⁴¹ Department of External Affairs, *Communiqué*, Ottawa, no. 78, 19 October 1979, page 2.

¹⁴² Canadian Delegation to the United Nations, *Communiqué*, Ottawa, no. 12, 5 November 1979, page 3.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*