

Inquiries of the Ministry

the United Nations or to Washington. The main purpose of my visit to the Secretary General and to the Secretary of State of the United States was to exchange views on the present course of developments and to explore ways of bringing the Viet Nam conflict closer to a conference situation.

As the house knows, it is the objective of the government to see the Viet Nam conflict brought to an end through negotiation. All promising proposals which are designed to carry us closer to that objective will have Canada's support. Earlier this month, as my hon. friend knows, the Viet Nam question was inscribed on the agenda of the Security Council. We welcomed this because we believed that the United Nations could not remain indifferent to a conflict which has grave implications for international peace and security.

But there are practical difficulties in the way of effective United Nations involvement. I must tell the house frankly that I am not hopeful that much headway can be made on Viet Nam in the United Nations at this stage. I do believe, however, there is a very real possibility that members of the international commission will be able to play a useful role. The commission powers have had a long and close association with the Viet Nam problem, and they are the only group of nations with ready access to both sides. I think it is important, therefore—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I hesitate to interrupt the Secretary of State for External Affairs on such an important matter. If the house wants to hear the minister further, it is at the discretion of hon. members, of course. However, it does appear the minister is now making a statement rather than answering a question submitted to him by the hon. member for Burnaby-Coquitlam.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): May I just say, Mr. Speaker, I had assumed that, because of the importance—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Diefenbaker: In view of the importance of this matter, the house waits with bated breath for an answer. So far we have just had the prelude.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): I make no apology, Mr. Speaker, for making a careful—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): I make no apology for making a carefully considered and extended statement on a matter which the right

hon. gentleman properly said the other day in this capital city was one of the most important problems facing the world at the present time. I went to the Secretary General of the United Nations and to the Secretary of State for the United States, to discuss from a Canadian point of view a matter that has all the implications which the right hon. gentleman noted, and which we all recognize. I think it is important that there should be no misunderstanding about what the Canadian government is trying to do, and about what I was trying to do on behalf of that government when I was at the United Nations and in Washington the other day.

What we want to find out, first of all, is whether there is a general consensus in favour of some action by the commission powers. If there is, we shall want to give careful thought to the next stage. We do not think it would be realistic to expect an immediate call for resuming the Geneva Conference to produce results in the present circumstances. There are obstacles which should be removed before such a conference can be usefully called. At the present time the road to a conference may be long. We all hope it will not be. However, whether it is long or not, a beginning will have to be made, and we think the commission powers may be able to help the parties make such a beginning. It is on these lines that I spoke to the Secretary General and to Secretary Rusk last week.

I am happy to tell the house that their response was encouraging. We shall now be pursuing our discussions with the commission powers and with other interested parties to see what this country and the commission members can do to help bring an end to the war in Viet Nam.

Mr. Douglas: Would the minister now answer my question, as to whether he found any inclination on the part of the United States government to meet with the national liberation front in order to begin negotiations?

Mr. Martin (Essex East): Mr. Speaker, the position the government of the United States wishes to take on these matters must be announced by it. I clearly indicated what we thought were the measures that must be taken to enable a conference to take place.

Mr. Lewis: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have already had a number of questions on this matter and