

The Canadian people, this House and the Government have for many years now been distressed by the continuation of hostilities in Indochina and by the suffering that events there have wrought upon all those concerned. As I said on December 17 last, when the negotiations between the United States and North Viet-Nam appeared to have broken down, the Canadian Government deeply regretted that the negotiations had not yet reached a successful conclusion. We welcome the fact that those negotiations have resumed this week.

In the interval, however, we were shaken by the large-scale bombing in the Hanoi-Haiphong area. We found it very difficult to understand the reasons for that bombing, or the purpose which it was intended to serve. We deplore that action, and we have communicated our view of it to the United States authorities. When, at the end of December, the United States Government decided to stop the bombing in the Hanoi-Haiphong area, we welcomed that. We said so to the Government of the United States, and we expressed our hope, as friends and neighbours, that the bombing would not resume.

That bombing, terrible as it is, is only part of a larger situation which deeply troubles the Canadian people, and which equally concerns the Government. There continues to be a high level of hostility and violence on both sides in Viet-Nam, and we deplore that as well. We have not lost sight of North Viet-Nam's continued military intervention in the affairs of Cambodia, Laos and South Viet-Nam and in particular the abhorrent disregard for innocent human life displayed in the almost routine attacks against the civilian populations of those countries.

It is, I think, more than a pious hope to say that the issues which have led to a generation of conflict in Viet-Nam, and indeed in all of Indochina, should not be resolved by violence; they should be resolved by negotiations. To all those who believe that, it is distressing to observe the violence which continues while negotiations take place, and to contemplate the possibility that the continuation of such violence could endanger the progress of negotiations. Since 1965 when the bombing of North Viet-Nam began, Canadian governments have consistently taken the view that resort to force in this form was counter-productive in the Viet-Nam context.

Canada has a special interest in this matter, and not only because we are close neighbours of the United States. We have been involved, during the past eighteen years, in the thankless task of supervising an earlier settlement, and of trying without success to make that supervision effective. Beyond that we have been given clear indications of the possibility of our being asked to accept a further role. It has been indicated to us that Canada would be acceptable to all the parties as one of the members of a new international body which it is expected that the present negotiations will create when and if they are successful. Canada has not yet been formally invited to participate in this new international presence; indeed I anticipate that no such invitation will be addressed to any of the potential members until an agreement is concluded. We have, however, been asked to consider the possibility, and we have done so most carefully.

Canada would of course wish to play a constructive role in assisting a peaceful political settlement if the parties wished it do do so, if that role were within Canada's capabilities and resources, and if it held the promise of success. The Government has long wished to see military violence end in Viet-Nam and to see its friend and neighbour, the United States, disengage itself from that military conflict. If the parties to that conflict invite Canada to play a role in which we could effectively contribute to a cessation of hostilities there and which would help the United States to end its military involvement in Viet-Nam, we would of course consider the invitation sympathetically and constructively.