

Our approach to participation in the Commission was shaped at the very outset by our 19 years of largely frustrating experiences in the old International Commission for Supervision and Control in Viet-Nam. Many of you may not have heard of that previous Commission. If so, you are blameless because for roughly 17 years of that period, the old Commission was ineffective. From watching over a peace the Commission found itself watching over a war.

On the basis of this experience, we presented to the negotiators of the Paris Agreement on Viet-Nam a set of conditions which, if met, would have in our view made the peacekeeping arrangements practical and credible. Some of these points were accepted but when the final documents appeared, it was clear that supervisory arrangements left much to be desired.

We were particularly concerned about the establishment of a continuing political authority to which the Commission and its members could report. This had been a serious omission in the old Commission's arrangements. As leader of the Canadian delegation at the Paris Conference at the end of February, I pressed hard but with only very modest success.

I do not intend by these remarks to suggest in any way that the negotiators did not do their job. As I have said before on many occasions, this was undoubtedly the best agreement that could have been negotiated in the circumstances -- and I should hope that the results have, in spite of everything, turned the course of world events in a new and more peaceful direction.

I returned from Paris with the dilemma of whether or not to stay on still very much unresolved. I concluded that it would not be possible to reach an informed decision without having seen for myself the conditions in which the ICCS was operating or without having spoken directly to leaders of the governments most directly concerned. I had previously had several useful conversations with Secretary of State Rogers and was well aware of the views of your government. I wanted to have the views of others as well.

Accordingly three weeks ago today I set off with a group of Canadian parliamentarians, officials and journalists on a trip which put me in touch with both Vietnamese governments, the Government of Laos, as well as some leading personalities of the so-called Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Viet-Nam and of the Pathet Lao movement.

I found the attitudes of the leaders of the Republic of Viet-Nam very straightforward. They have no illusion that the Commission would be able to discharge effectively the responsibilities set out in the Paris Agreement. I explained frankly to the Vietnamese both in the South and in the North that the composition of the Commission made it extremely unlikely that the Commission would ever reach a finding unfavourable to the North or to its allies in the South. At the same time I said that Canada would not hesitate to support a finding detrimental to the position of the Republic of Viet-Nam where such a finding corresponded with the facts. South Vietnamese leaders acknowledged this. But for them the important thing was to bring all points of view into the open.

In the North the political leaders replied to all of our questions by referring us to the terms of the Paris Agreement. They regarded this as sacrosanct and like their counterparts in the South declared they intended to abide by it.