

The first and fundamental condition was that the provisions for the operation of the new commission appear workable and offer some prospects of being effective. More specifically we stipulated:

- That the belligerent parties, the United States, South Viet-Nam, North Viet-Nam and the Viet Cong should be bound by the same agreements which set out the role and procedures of the new commission. This was one of the short-comings of the previous agreement -- neither Washington nor Saigon were parties to the 1954 agreement. The signatures of all of the belligerents were obtained in Paris.
- We sought a "continuing political authority" to which the commission or any of its members could report and consult and which would assume responsibility for the peace settlement as a whole. This took the form of an arrangement whereby the four Parties to the Paris Agreement, the belligerents themselves, are responsible for conveying to the participants in the Paris International Conference reports from the International Commission and the views of its individual members. This is not a fully satisfactory arrangement by any means. We would have preferred to have the United Nations provide the political authority.
- We also made clear that Canada could not participate unless invited to take part by all of the parties concerned. This was obtained. All of the parties asked us to take part.

On the basis of our past experience in Viet-Nam we put forward a number of suggestions which we considered would help to produce a more workable framework for the commission's activities. Certainly we were unhappy with some of the short-comings of the Agreement -- but this should not be allowed to obscure our fullest appreciation for those who laboured so hard to secure the basic Agreement itself.

With the signing of the cease-fire agreement in Paris we had to decide immediately whether or not to take part in the new international commission. As we did not wish to obstruct in any way the path toward a peace settlement and as it was too soon to determine whether arrangements for the Commission's operations would be workable, we agreed to take part for an initial period of 60 days.

In this time, which expires shortly, we have to complete our own evaluation of the effectiveness of the Commission both in terms of its specific tasks and as a welcome stabilizing presence.

The decision is important and it was my view that a personal, on-the-spot visit to the Commission and direct conversations with political leaders in Saigon and Hanoi would greatly assist me in making informed and responsible recommendations to Cabinet. It was also my view that this visit would assist members of the Opposition Parties to make their own judgements about an important area of Canadian foreign policy. The visit also afforded us an opportunity to form impressions about the Canadian role in Laos where we have been asked to expand our participation in a reactivated Commission.

As you know my invitation was not accepted by the Conservative Party but I was very glad to have with me parliamentarians from the other parties in the House and from the Senate.