

As the Committee is aware, the Foreign Minister of North Vietnam, in an interview with the Australian journalist Wilfred Burchett in January of this year, explained the position in the following terms:

"If (the United States) really wants talks, it must first halt unconditionally the bombing raids and all other acts of war against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. It is only after the unconditional cessation of United States bombing and all other acts of war against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam that there could be talks between the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the United States".

I do not want to suggest to the Committee that this is the whole position of the Government of North Vietnam as regards a solution of the Vietnam conflict. As far as that is concerned, the Government of North Vietnam continues to stand by its four-point programme, which it regards as reflecting the fundamental principles and provisions of the Geneva settlement of 1954 and as representing the most correct political solution of the Vietnam problem. It is only in respect of finding a basis for bilateral contact between the United States and North Vietnam that the matter of the cessation of the bombing has been put forward as a prior and unilateral condition.

The question has been raised in some quarters as to whether, if there was a cessation of the bombing of North Vietnam, this would have to be permanent as well as unconditional. The Committee will note that, in the passage which I have quoted from the interview given by the Foreign Minister of North Vietnam, only the word "unconditional" appears. The same is true of a similar passage which occurs in President Ho Chi Minh's reply of February 15 to President Johnson. I am bound to say, however, that, in other passages, both in the Foreign Minister's interview and in President Ho Chi Minh's message to President Johnson, the word "definitive" is used along with the word "unconditional" in setting out the requirements of the Government of North Vietnam on this subject. Furthermore, if there was any lingering doubt on this score, it was removed by the North Vietnamese representative in Paris in a conversation with reporters from the New York Times on February 22. In that conversation the North Vietnamese representative is quoted as saying that any cessation of the bombing which was not clearly labelled as permanent and unconditional would leave the threat of bombing intact and would thus constitute an unacceptable interference with whatever talks might then be in progress between the two sides. When he was asked how a distinction could in practice be drawn between a temporary and a permanent halt to the bombing, the North Vietnamese representative answered that the United States would have to declare at the outset that the halt was both permanent and unconditional. In any event, it seems to me that North Vietnam could logically say no less since anything less would amount to saying that the United States could resume the bombing if Hanoi did not meet Washington's conditions.

There has also been some question as to whether Hanoi would require the United States to accept its four-point programme before being willing to enter into any direct talks with them. On the basis of what Prime Minister Pham Van Dong told Mr. Harrison Salisbury at the beginning of January this year, I would judge that acceptance of the four points would not be regarded