

18. The International Commission has great pleasure in placing on record its appreciation of the help it has received from the French authorities in this matter. They have provided Dakota aircraft at Vientiane for despatch of mail and personnel to Savannakhet, Pakse, Lung Prabang and Plaine-des-Jarres. They have also been very helpful in providing light aircraft and helicopters within their availability.

19. No satisfactory start, however, could be made for reconnaissance or positioning of Teams in the northern provinces until almost the end of September owing to the fact that initially all available helicopters were being used for evacuation of casualties, and, later in September, due to very bad weather. During the month of October, the weather was clear and the Commission was able to extend its activities in the north.

20. During the month of November, however, availability of helicopters and light aircraft became very much restricted. These aircraft were stationed at outlying air-strips and airports where there was no special provision for the specialised maintenance of the helicopter. Most spare parts had to be flown from Saigon. Furthermore, the withdrawal of French forces from the North made the task still more difficult. The arrangements were ad-hoc, and the effect of constant use during October also began to tell. This was unfortunate, as it occurred at the moment when the Commission needed maximum air facilities, as a number of investigations and withdrawals were in hand. Unfortunately, the situation was made worse by a spell of bad weather and the crash of one helicopter in Phong Saly. Considerable air effort, particularly in helicopters and light aircraft, was used in search and rescue work in connection with this crash as well as that of a civilian Dakota in an adjacent province.

21. The bad weather has persisted in December also. This, happening during what should be considered as clear weather period, has made the International Commission give serious thought to the problem of maintaining its Teams in this part of Laos and of carrying out its functions under the Geneva Agreement during the long monsoon months.

22. The problem of ensuring continuous availability of a sufficient number of light aircraft and helicopters to the Inspection Teams is also engaging the attention of the Commission. The provision of helicopters particularly is vital, because without them large areas of the country will be inaccessible to the Teams.

23. Signal communication facilities for the International Commission are provided by a detachment of the Corps of Signals (INDIA). All equipment has been supplied by the French authorities.

Communications

24. Wireless telegraphic communication has been established between the International Commission Headquarters in Vientiane and all the Fixed Teams. In addition, each Mobile Team has a Signal detachment. These detachments accompany these Teams whenever they go out on specified investigations. One special station has also been set up at Boun Neua to provide communication to Phong Saly. This has facilitated quick call up of helicopters.