

1. INTRODUCTION

Since there has been recently some criticism by the media of the temporary withdrawal of the personnel of our Embassy in Saigon, a general account of the situation which led to this decision is appropriate. The Canadian public should be aware that, by the time the decision was taken, on April 24, the situation in South Viet-Nam had deteriorated very seriously. Our Embassy, like that of most countries accredited in Saigon, could no longer function effectively: indeed, most of its normal functions could not be fulfilled at all. The CIDA programme, for example, had ceased. Our Chargé d'Affaires and his staff were prepared to remain, but the Canadian Government judged that no useful purpose would any longer be served by their doing so.

2. FUNCTIONS OF THE MISSION

The mission had three main functions to perform in those tragic and confused final days. One was the evacuation of Canadians and of their dependents if they wished to leave; the second was the protection of Canadians remaining in Viet-Nam; the third was assisting the departure of Vietnamese citizens with Canadian connections. The first of those functions could in fact be discharged, and the Canadian Embassy did evacuate from Viet-Nam all the Canadians and their Vietnamese dependents who wished or could be persuaded to leave. Those who remained did so for personal reasons which we must respect; but they received several warnings about the closing of the mission and were given an opportunity to leave on any one of the five flights organized with the cooperation of the Department of National Defence using Canadian Hercules aircraft. The other two functions, however, had by the 24th of April become largely theoretical and could not be fulfilled. It was clear, for example, that the Embassy had exhausted all possibilities of effective assistance to Vietnamese citizens with Canadian connections who wished to leave.

We were dealing with Vietnamese authorities who were determined as a matter of policy to prevent the departure of their own citizens on any scale. Our Chargé d'Affaires pressed long and hard (ultimately with success) to have that policy waived in respect of the Vietnamese dependents of Canadian citizens. But it had become clear that there was no hope of