

the only potentially useful channel through which there has been contact with both sides in a long time. I will not say it is the only channel, but it is the only channel which has access to both sides. I regard this as a tribute to our country as well as to Mr. Ronning himself.

I do not wish to give the House a misleading impression of our results so far. We have not achieved any spectacular results and I think I can quite frankly say that we have had no illusions as to the pace at which progress was likely to be possible.

As I have explained previously to the House, we regard the two visits which have now been made to Hanoi -- there may be others -- as phases of a continuing effort. Over how long a period of time this effort may extend I cannot say. What is significant is that we have had a fair hearing and on both occasions with the top personalities of the North and the South and, of course, with the Government of the United States. I can say that if the channel we have established remains open, and if its potential usefulness is not called into question by any of those concerned, I do not think, in a situation where a failure of communication may be crucial, we can discount the significance of such a channel for the time when the circumstances for the solution of the Vietnam conflict are ripe.

The situation facing us in Vietnam is as serious as any which has faced us since the Korean war. Since that time there has been growing confidence on the part of the international community that it has the means of bringing its influence to bear on situations of this kind, and to put an end to armed conflict, and to lay the groundwork for political solutions. That is the essence of the conception of peace-keeping which Canada and others have tried to develop and strengthen through the United Nations.

We accepted the suggestion of the President of the United States that he would welcome any effort by any country to try to bring about at least preliminary talks that might lead to serious negotiations, which in turn might result in a negotiated settlement. It was in the light of this situation that we thought last December there was a role for the International Commission. Canada, India and Poland, as members of this Commission, have had experience in Indochina now for 11 years. Being the only body that has a continuing link with Hanoi and Saigon, we thought that, quite apart from any authority given to that Commission under the Geneva Agreement, it might undertake the effort to try and bring about a narrowing in the position taken by the various parties.

To that end we have had useful and fruitful exchanges with India and Poland. Our view was that the time had come to use the Commission for this purpose. We did not suggest they were not as sincerely interested in peace as we were. One of the countries took the position that perhaps this was not the particular moment in which to establish a role for the Commission as a mediating instrument. But we continue, all of us, India, Poland and Canada -- and this was reaffirmed yesterday by the Prime Minister of India -- to look upon the Commission as having a role in this situation.