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Text of the Reply by the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable L.B. Pearson, to Representations from a Group of University Professors, including the Faculty Committee on Vietnam at Victoria College, University of Toronto, March 10, 1967.

I need hardly tell you that the situation in Vietnam is one to which the Government attaches great importance in the formulation of Canadian foreign policy. That importance reflects not only the implications of the problem for world peace and the international processes of change by peaceful means but also the concern which the Government shares with responsible citizens at the toll the hostilities are taking in terms of human suffering as well as of wasted resources and lost opportunities for human betterment. On these points, I think there can be few differences of opinion.

The real problem, of course, for governments no less than for individuals, is in translating hopes and convictions into constructive action. Constructive action, in turn, depends on a realistic assessment of the nature of the situation which it is desired to change and of the likely consequences of any given action, whether public or private, in relation to the problem. Therefore, at every stage, we must ask whether any particular step is likely to advance the issue any distance towards a solution -- or even towards a more satisfactory state of affairs. Any answer to this question becomes doubly difficult in the context of problems where the direct involvement and the direct responsibility for action rest essentially with others.

Let me be more specific. I realize, as the public debate over Vietnam here and elsewhere over the past few years has shown, that it is possible to arrive at different assessments of the rights and wrongs of the various positions represented in the conflict. This is inevitable, and, in the long run, useful, in a free society, always provided, of course, that the differences of opinion are genuine and based on the fullest possible range of facts. But, whatever the view one might hold about the origins and development of a situation such as we face in Vietnam today, I believe that the right and proper course for the Canadian policy-maker is to seek to establish that element of common ground on which any approach to a solution must ultimately rest.

This is precisely the direction in which we have attempted to bring Canadian influence to bear - the search for common ground as a base for a solution to the Vietnam crisis by means other than the use of force. We have