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STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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TOWARD A VIETNAM SETTLEMENT

Statement by the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson, in the House of Commons on January 20, 1966.

...I should like to say a few words now, and only a few words, about the situation in Vietnam. Just as the situation in Rhodesia is a threat to peace and orderly development in all of Africa and could bring about an African conflict, so the situation in Vietnam remains a threat to peace and to orderly development not only in Southeast Asia but also in all of Asia. It could ultimately lead to the worst of catastrophes. In recent weeks the United States Government has made offers for a negotiated settlement. I believe, on the information I have received and from the contacts we have been able to make—and these have been close and continuous—among our friends in Washington, in London and in other capitals on this subject, that these offers are genuine and sincere and that they should be supported by all who believe in the necessity of bringing the fighting to an end and beginning a process of negotiation.

In one sense I think it is right to say that these offers have already begun the process of negotiation by throwing out public proposals and by eliciting perhaps not counter-proposals from those to whom the original proposals were made but counter-proposals from one source or another. I hope this process will be continued. Obviously there is a limit beyond which this kind of dialogue cannot be carried but I hope what has been going on will lead to the constructive play of diplomatic negotiation and a chance to explore opportunities for peace, and that those who are more directly concerned than we are and who are bearing the burden of this issue will be able to maintain the patience and wisdom they have been showing in recent weeks since those offers were first made. There is a discouraging side to all this. It is that there has been no response that anyone can detect from Hanoi itself. I think it is wise for the critics of the United States to remember this fact.

At the Commonwealth prime ministers' meeting last June, we tried to take an initiative which would bring the Commonwealth into this issue by way of a Commonwealth mission which would include members who were certainly not unacceptable to the Communists, men who, in two cases, were certainly uncommitted. No success was