

Fourthly, we have always thought it right to keep open the possibility that the Commission might be able in the right circumstances to make a positive contribution to a peaceful settlement of the Vietnam issue. I think I can say to the Committee, without exaggeration, that this possibility has played an increasing part in our thinking about the Vietnam conflict. I am satisfied that we would be ill-advised at this stage to discard an instrument which may yet have a part to play in bringing this issue from the battlefield to the conference table; I am strengthened in this view by the attitude taken by a number of parties concerned and by the strong position taken by the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

I now shall turn to some recent developments in the Vietnam situation. I would like to say something about the pause in the bombing of North Vietnam which began on Christmas Eve and continued for 37 days until the end of January. The position of the Canadian Government for some time previously had been that such a pause could represent a useful opening for a peaceful solution of the Vietnam issue. It was with this consideration in mind that the Prime Minister had suggested the possibility of a pause in April of last year. The pause which took place in the following months was short-lived and did not produce the results for which we had hoped. When a further pause was initiated by the United States in late December we welcomed this as a genuine contribution to peace and we did what we could, through diplomatic channels, to reinforce the many efforts that then were being made to turn it to good account.

I do not intend to recapitulate those efforts, except to say it was a matter of disappointment to us that the prospect of some break in the situation, which the pause might have offered, did not materialize. Nevertheless, we took the view throughout the pause that we hoped it might be extended until all reasonable possibilities of eliciting some response from the other side had been exhausted.

Toward the end of the bombing pause, the President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam addressed a series of letters to other governments, including the Government of Canada. We have studied President Ho Chi Minh's letter with the greatest care and consideration to see, in particular, if it offered any hope of a reversal of the present grave situation in Vietnam. While it did not appear to us that there were, in fact, new elements in that letter, we nevertheless felt it provided a basis on which time it might be possible to explore the position of the North Vietnamese Government in greater detail.

That is one reason we decided that the time might be opportune to send a special representative of the Canadian Government to Hanoi to present the Canadian reply and, at the same time, to probe the views of the North Vietnamese Government on the prospects for a settlement of the Vietnam issue through other than military means....

Perhaps I should say we did not think it profitable at this stage to enter into a controversy with President Ho Chi Minh over the interpretation of events in Vietnam which was contained in his letter. Rather, we availed ourselves of this opportunity to re-state the Canadian view that there could be no lasting solution of the present conflict other than through negotiations and to suggest, at the same time, that there might be a contribution which the members of the International Control Commission in Vietnam could make to that end.