

path toward a peace settlement, we agreed to take part for an initial period of 60 days.

In that 60-day period, we had to complete our evaluation of the effectiveness of the Commission both in terms of its specific tasks and as a stabilizing presence. To help me and my colleagues make the right decision, it was my view that a personal on-the-spot visit to the Commission and direct conversations with political leaders in Saigon and Hanoi would be a considerable advantage in making recommendations to Cabinet.

As you may recall, I set off toward the end of March with a group of Parliamentarians, officials and journalists on a journey which was to take us 22,000 miles in less than a week. This proved to be a very useful visit. This is not to say that the reports received from our delegation were not complete or sufficiently reliable. These reports were first class. No, it was simply that as the Cabinet Minister principally charged with making the recommendations to Cabinet, it was invaluable to have on-the-spot exposure -- to have the advantage of full conversations in the field with our Delegation and the political leaders of North and South Viet-Nam.

The visit also gave me a much more vivid appreciation of the extraordinary job our people had been performing, often 16 hours a day and often in appalling and immensely frustrating circumstances. It became abundantly clear to me that if it had not been for the Canadians, it is doubtful that the ICCS would have been in any position to have been even potentially effective.

The views of all the leaders with whom I spoke on this visit were to the effect that Canada should continue to serve on the Commission. While the advice I received from these leaders had a common theme, it is relevant to point out that each party had its own distinctive reasons for wishing us to stay on, and its own conflicting interpretations of how the Commission should operate. It became evident that North and South were (and still are) expecting quite different and in some ways contradictory results from the Paris Agreement.

Many other countries asked us to stay on, at least for another temporary period to give the ceasefire a better chance to set. It was argued, and quite reasonably, that Viet-Nam had been engulfed by war for a generation and that no one could expect peace at the stroke of a pen in Paris. When these impressions and recommendations were balanced and assessed, although we continued to have hesitations and doubts, the Government decided to remain in the Commission for a further period of 60 days.

When I made that announcement in March of last year, I also made it very clear that we would withdraw at the end of this period if there was no evidence of substantial improvement in the situation in Viet-Nam or in the absence of any signs of an imminent political settlement.

In June, I announced our decision to withdraw because neither of these conditions had been met. The Canadian concept of how an International Commission should function had not been accepted and it was our view that it would be in the best interest of all concerned for Canada to withdraw. I think there has been ample evidence that this decision responded to the judgment of most Canadians in this issue.