

It is clearly not for Canada, any more than for others, to prescribe to the South Vietnamese people how to order their affairs. I have made it clear that we regard a continuance of the present division of Vietnam into two communities as probably unavoidable for the time being, if only to allow the scars which have been opened by the conflicts of the past quarter-century to heal and for new dispositions to be agreed for the eventual reunification of Vietnam. It will be for the people in the two parts of Vietnam to decide how soon and under what conditions the first steps towards reunification can reasonably be taken. I am convinced that there is a basic desire for reunification in Vietnam, as there is in other divided countries. At the same time, it seems to me, on the basis of recent statements, that there is also a realistic appreciation on both sides that reunification is not something which is likely to be accomplished overnight.

Whatever the prospects of early progress toward actual reunification, I would hope that, once the hostilities have ceased, a basis can be laid for a genuine reconciliation between the two communities. I appreciate that this may not come about either quickly or easily. But I am sure there is much to be said for the early opening of channels which respond to the interests of the people of Vietnam on both sides of the temporary dividing-line. I have in mind, in particular, such matters as the reunification of families, the establishment of at least minimum facilities of communication, and the institution of commercial exchanges on a basis of mutual advantage. It is around such a nucleus of common interest that I believe the foundations for the eventual reunification can most securely be laid. And, if any international presence in Vietnam could lend its good offices in that direction, I would hope that this is something which could be explored.

I have already had occasion, at the outset of my presentation, to comment on recent constitutional developments in South Vietnam. We welcome these developments, which are likely to culminate in the election of a genuinely representative government before the end of the current year. We would like to think that, once the hostilities have ceased and a settlement of the present conflict has been reached, the constitutional structure that is currently being evolved will be strong enough and flexible enough to accommodate all segments of the South Vietnamese people who are prepared to play their peaceful part in the political life of South Vietnam.

When I last spoke to the House, I said that we could see merit in proposals which are being made for the neutralization, in due course, not only of Vietnam but possibly of a wider area in Southeast Asia. I continue to think that such proposals may well offer a promising basis for political arrangements in that area. I think it important, however, that, whatever arrangements are ultimately arrived at, they cannot be imposed on the countries of the area against their will. They must be such as to reflect the genuinely held preferences of these countries based on an assessment, which each country can only make for itself, as to the course which is most likely to serve its own best interests and those of the area in which it is situated.