

It seems to me that a conference lies at the end of the road, not at the beginning. If one could be held now, and if the Soviet Union, as Co-Chairman, acquiesced in the suggestion of the Prime Minister of India to join with Britain in calling such a conference, all of us would support this. But I should have to say, as I have already implied, that, knowing what I do, I should be greatly surprised if the representatives that must be at such a conference would be prepared to attend one at this time, whether it would be on Vietnam or indirectly on Laos or Cambodia....

I cannot foresee what intermediate steps may have to intervene before the time for such a conference is ripe. But, on the basis of all the discussion we have had, it is my assessment that it is likely there would have to be some preliminary undertakings (and I emphasize the word "undertakings") about the points of substance which are at issue in this conflict. What this means, in Canadian terms, is that we must do all we can to try to create the conditions in which the processes which will lead to an ultimate settlement can be started. This is precisely the task to which we have addressed ourselves.

I say again that we welcome the proposals made yesterday by the Prime Minister of India. The purposes and objectives behind her proposals are shared by the Canadian Government and they are shared by all of us in this House. If these proposals commend themselves to the parties concerned, and if the parties concerned would attend the conference -- I am sure the United States would be among those that would -- and if progress on that basis were possible, I can assure the House and the Government of India that Canada is prepared to do whatever may be required of us to see that these proposals are translated into action.

My right hon. friend spoke of Mr. Ronning's two visits to Hanoi. I should like to underline certain aspects of this initiative which may have been lost sight of in the great volume of publicity... which Mr. Ronning's visits have generated.

First, I have said that this was a Canadian initiative and that it was carried out by Mr. Ronning on the instructions of the Canadian Government, and not on the instructions in any way of any other government. I reiterate this today because the impression has been created in some quarters that Mr. Ronning's mandate may have been something other than it was.

Second, I should like the House to understand that the assignment we have taken on is essentially in the nature of a good offices assignment. It is inherent in such an assignment that we should be concerned to understand the positions and attitudes of all the parties, and that we should do our best to interpret and clarify the positions and attitudes of one side to the other. That, broadly speaking, has been the form which Mr. Ronning's assignment has taken.

Third, I would like to restate the ultimate object of this initiative. It has seemed to us that, if a beginning is to be made in the long and patient process which we hope will lead to ultimate peace in Vietnam, we must find a basis on which both sides would be prepared to see such a beginning made. The mere calling of a conference, desirable as that is, does not meet this essential objective, as we have learned in our discussions with both sides. This is