

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am delighted to be your guest today. Your President's timely invitation has given me the opportunity to speak to you on the subject which is most on my mind. With my tropical suits not yet back from the cleaners, I expect that you too would wish me to say something about Viet-Nam and my recent visit.

However, I do not think that it is really possible to appreciate the difficulties of Canada's role in the new Commission and the dilemmas about continued participation without some background on the long years of Canadian involvement in Indo-China. This involvement reaches back almost 19 years -- to the International Conference convened in Geneva in 1954 by Great Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union, France and China. You may recall that this Conference followed the defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. This was the culmination of eight years of hostilities against the French Colonial Power by Vietnamese Nationalists -- under the Communist leadership of Ho Chi Minh and the military leadership of General Giap. The task of that Geneva Conference of 1954 was to establish a peace settlement which might prepare the way for free elections and the eventual reunification of North and South Viet-Nam -- objectives which, I think you will agree, have a familiar ring.

The Conference set up an international supervisory group known as the International Commission for Supervision and Control. Poland, India and Canada were invited to be its members. This body was despatched to Indo-China with the responsibility to report -- and in this way it was hoped to deter violations of the cease-fire. It was also intended that the Commission would play a role in the supervision of free elections.

In its first year of operation, the old ICC established a good record with some notable achievements. Much of this useful work was facilitating the movement of refugees from North to South and the regroupment of opposing military forces.

By the end of 1954, there were 14 teams located at sites in both North and South Viet-Nam. At that time there were some 200 Canadians in the ICC -- about two-thirds of the number now serving with the new Commission. The task of the old ICC, at least at the beginning, was made easier by the fact that the cease-fire line was a more meaningful division. The Viet Minh, or Communist troops, in the South largely withdrew to the North. The leopard spots, which bedevil the present situation, were not a factor. But of more importance was the fact that at this stage, the principal parties wanted the agreement to work.

However, the early successes of the ICC were not repeated. Commitments to the agreement gradually eroded and the International Commission slid into irrelevance. This was not because Canada had failed its responsibilities as a member of the Commission but largely because the adversaries in Viet-Nam repeatedly and violently broke the terms of the International Agreement. From watching over a peace it found itself watching over a war.

You are familiar with the tragic escalation of this war -- the hundreds of thousands of soldiers and innocent persons killed and maimed, the damage wrought on people in every sense -- socially, morally, economically and psychologically.

As the Commission could do nothing to halt hostilities you may ask, "Why did we stay on with Canadians exposed to the hazards of war in both Hanoi and Saigon?" Some Canadians did lose their lives in Indo-China. What possible