

This House welcomes the conclusion of the Agreements on ending the War and restoring peace in Viet Nam and notes the provision for an International Commission of Control and Supervision as part of the cease-fire arrangements, in which Canada has agreed to participate for the initial period of 60 days as provided for in the Note, dated January 27, 1973, from the Secretary of State for External Affairs to the four Parties to the Viet Nam cease-fire.

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I believe there was agreement among the House leaders, the announcement of which has probably been overlooked in all the excitement, respecting the length of speeches in this debate. Perhaps the government House leader could inform the House about this matter.

**Mr. MacEachen:** Mr. Speaker, I think it would be agreeable to this House if the initial speeches were 40 minutes each in the first round and if all subsequent speeches were limited to 20 minutes. That limitation would provide greater opportunity for participation in this debate.

**Mr. Speaker:** Is this agreed?

**Some hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Mr. Speaker:** It is so ordered.

**Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Secretary of State for External Affairs):** Mr. Speaker, this House had already had the opportunity for a preliminary exchange of views between party spokesmen before the departure from Canada of the first group of observers to the new Commission in Viet Nam. Despite the shortness of time, personnel from External Affairs and from our defence forces are already in the field. On behalf of the international community, they will observe and report on the implementation of the agreement on ending the war and restoring the peace in Viet Nam.

When the moment of decision came, the parties to the cease-fire had radically compressed the expected timetable. Consequently, the government was faced with the need to decide in time to have the Canadian delegation take off from Montreal on Saturday of last week if we were to comply with the terms of the agreements. Indeed, the parties asked us to do so on the basis of complex documents, some of which we saw for the first time on Wednesday of last week. Our participation, I think, was perceived by all sides in this House as necessary. Certainly, the speeches that were made by the party spokesmen when I made my first statement supports that position. I believe it was seen by the great majority of Canadians, as necessary. It was so because all Canadians, and indeed people the world over, so ardently desired that the fighting should stop in Viet Nam. As I explained to the House on January 24, the day of the government's decision, Canada had a choice to make that day.

On the face of it, it was a dilemma: we could, on one hand, accept membership in the new commission with whatever reservations we saw fit. This is what the parties to the agreement were asking us to do. But it would have meant committing Canada to an important step to which there are Canadian preconditions; and it would have meant doing so well before we could possibly know whether those preconditions were met or, in view of the

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complexity of the agreements involved, whether they were even likely to be met. The government would have regarded that as an abdication of responsibility. I am sure all hon. members would have so regarded it. On the other hand, we could have declined to participate in the new commission from the outset and turned it down flatly. By doing so, we could have stood in the way of ending the fighting in Viet Nam. No Canadian would have wished his country to do that.

We, therefore, decided to take part initially, and make available to the new commission the number of Canadian observers required by the agreements to meet the timetable set by the parties—in short, during that initial period, do all that we could to discharge the obligations of membership. But we were not prepared to commit Canada to open-ended membership before we were satisfied that Canada's preconditions for membership had been reasonably met. I should like to add parenthetically that these preconditions on membership had been enunciated by myself on behalf of the government and by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) on a number of occasions, not only in recent weeks but really over a long period of time when we had been asked to consider the possibility that somewhere in the world we might have to participate in some supervisory operations. Indeed, at the time we debated in this House the question of the bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong, I laid down very clearly the kinds of preconditions we had in mind. I believe it was useful for us to have done so, and I believe that that has had some salutary effect upon the forms of the agreements entered into by the parties and upon the form of the protocol relating to the supervisory commission.

Our participation which will be for the first 60 days, will enable us to evaluate the arrangements made for international observation and reporting and to learn what scope there is for mediation. I must make it clear that Canada's preconditions were not mere gestures of reluctance; they were the product of long and sometimes bitter experience, and they were an effort to point the way toward effective international observation and reporting. Indeed, I think the preconditions that were established will help whatever other supervisory activities may be authorized by anyone anywhere in the world in future. They are the sorts of conditions we have laid down before the United Nations when we have talked about peacekeeping activities and how they might be organized.

We shall see, in the first 60 days, whether the arrangements can be improved. In particular, we shall see whether a continuing political authority is provided. We shall see whether the contracting parties are determined to make the agreements work. We shall see how our associates in the new commission view the responsibilities of our collective role. If we conclude that Canada's conditions are adequately met and that Canada's continued participation would be effective, we may decide to accept full continued membership, with or without reservations. If we conclude that Canada's conditions are inadequately met or that we are likely to be drawn again into an exercise in futility and frustration, as the previous commission had become, we shall decide to withdraw. Which ever decision is made will be conveyed to this House.