

Wherever armed conflict breaks out, it involves commitments of power and prestige and the longer it continues the more difficult it becomes to reverse the course of events, the more difficult it becomes to bring into play the machinery of peaceful negotiation and settlement. In the face of such a conflict, can the international community really stand by and allow matters to develop to the point where all avenues of peaceful recourse are irrevocably closed?

I considered last year, and I consider now, that this organ, this particular institution in the United Nations, as opposed to the Security Council, has the obligation to contribute to peace in Vietnam. I think it is inconceivable that we should proceed with our meeting as if this threat to the safety of mankind did not exist. Even if in present circumstances the Security Council cannot deal effectively with this matter and some other framework may be appropriate, I continue to believe that it is the duty of this body to express its deepest concern over the war in Vietnam. We must urge the path of negotiation on all involved. We must persist in this effort until negotiations are begun.

I know that there are differences between us about the origins of this conflict and how it can be brought to an end. I know how difficult the issues involved in this conflict are. For 12 years Canada has served, with India and Poland, on the International Commission in Vietnam. In that time we have witnessed at first hand the erosion of the cease-fire agreement of 1954. We have known, and we still experience, the frustrations of the observer who is powerless to prevent what is happening before his eyes.

The Secretary-General has been untiring in his search for a settlement of the conflict. In doing so, he has acted in clear and conscientious recognition of the responsibilities which attach to the world community in this difficult and vital problem.

There are those who say that the time for a settlement of this conflict is not ripe. For my part, I cannot accept this judgement. The road to peace in Vietnam will not be easy and it may not be quick, but a start on that road must be made.

There are different ways in which a start might be made. For our part, we are guided by a number of basic considerations. The Canadian Government has repeatedly emphasized in its belief that an exclusively military solution is not possible. We believe that only a political settlement which takes into account the legitimate interests and aspirations of all concerned and all involved can restore peace and stability in that country. In the interests of promoting a peaceful settlement, we ourselves have used all the diplomatic channels available to us to see whether there is any contribution we could make towards resolving the problem.

I have mentioned the role of my country as a member of the International Commission for Supervision and Control in Vietnam. We have attempted to develop our responsibilities into opportunities for constructive action. It still seems to us that the Commission, on which India, Poland and Canada serve, can provide a means of facilitating contacts between the two sides. We have also not excluded the possibility that the Commission might help the parties to scale down hostilities as a means of eventual disengagement.