

Viet Nam

in parliament before that happens. We think parliament is the authority that should determine this matter.

There are one or two other matters I should like to mention, although I realize this is an occasion for a brief rather than a long statement. I agree with what the minister said, that no arrangement, no international machinery, can work without the good will of the people concerned, without the good will of the parties themselves in Viet Nam. As some hon. members know, I recently had the opportunity of talking to government officials in North Viet Nam and I must say I was impressed with the sincerity of their desire to maintain peace and to maintain their belief in the unity of Viet Nam as a country. Their aim remains the reunification of that country. They now say—and I hope and believe they mean what they say—that this will be achieved by a process of national reconciliation, not by force of arms. If that is the attitude of both parties, then let us hope that once foreign troops are removed from the area the Vietnamese themselves will settle their own problems. I believe I can say that the situation will be approached by one side at least with an attitude of good will and a determination to make that aim succeed.

• (1430)

There was some reference in the settlement, and rightly so, to the return of United States prisoners of war in North Viet Nam. We rejoice that they will be allowed to go home quickly. But this reminds us that in addition there are prisoners in South Viet Nam. I am informed that nearly 300,000 persons, mostly political prisoners, are in the jails of South Viet Nam. The solution to that problem must be part of the solution that is sought in this international reconciliation.

Many of us in this House have for many years had a feeling of agony and unhappiness about Viet Nam. We earnestly pray that a new chapter is opening, and we hope that Canada will be able to play a constructive part in that new chapter of history.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Laprise (Abitibi): Mr. Speaker, in his statement the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Sharp) has nearly promised us a much more important debate for next week after studying the whole text of the agreement just concluded and giving us copies of it. For these reasons, I do not intend to unduly prolong the time allotted to statements today.

However, my colleagues from the Social Credit Party, all other hon. members and myself were very pleased last night to hear the President of the United States proclaim the end of this war which has been lasting for nearly 30 years now.

The Secretary of State for External Affairs has inquired about our contribution when the interested parties will not only ask us to oversee the cease-fire but also and especially to establish peace. In brief, what the parties have requested and what American President Nixon refused was not only the end of the war but mainly the assurance of a durable peace and that this assurance be an example for peace throughout the world.

I have noted that in his statement last night Mr. Nixon used the words "peace with honour" at least six times.

[Mr. Brewin.]

Depending on how they are interpreted the problem is not only to save the American honour but rather to gain the honour of a true peace by ending this war. The Secretary of State for External Affairs does not know exactly what will be the Canadian participation following this war, but it seems however that some decisions have been taken for some time because almost 450 military personnel have already been vaccinated and prepared to be sent to Viet Nam following the signature of this agreement. Therefore, this means that certain conversations have already taken place between Canada and the American government. Since this war has lasted so long I think it should be possible for the present generation to love peace as it has not known anything else but a climate of war.

Of course, many things have to be rebuilt; surely there are many wounded to cure and readapt. In addition to the 450 troops which Canada can dispatch, it would be desirable to mobilize some doctors and nurses to assist the Vietnamese people in recovering from this war.

Mr. Speaker, when we will know more about the complete text of the agreement which will be signed by the parties concerned, then we will be in a better position to give our opinion, to support, to advise the hon. Secretary of State for External Affairs on Canada's participation. I think there should be participation even if it is only a humanitarian participation.

Perhaps indirectly, Canada benefited from that war but I think we should help bring back peace to that important part of the world that is Viet Nam.

As the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe (Mr. Wagner) mentioned a while ago, there still remains the question of Laos and Cambodia. Not too long ago Prince Sihanouk made a rather disturbing statement. I think that those two countries very close to Viet Nam are very important and suffered the backlash of that war. I think we must also be concerned with finding out what they desire in the establishment of that peace and what they are prepared to do.

Everything considered, Mr. Speaker, I think that the next hours or the days to come will allow us to see to what extent each party is anxious to see a true peace in that part of the world.

* * *

[English]

HOUSING

TABLING OF COMMUNIQUÉ ISSUED FOLLOWING FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL CONFERENCE

Hon. Ron Basford (Minister of State for Urban Affairs): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 41(2) I should like to table in both official languages the communiqué issued yesterday by the federal-provincial conference on housing that was held on January 22 and 23.