

able, in the right circumstances, to make a positive contribution to a peaceful settlement of the Vietnam issue. I think I can say to the Committee that this possibility has played an increasing part in our thinking about the Vietnam conflict and that I am satisfied that we would be ill-advised at this stage to discard the instrument which may yet have a part to play in bringing this issue from the battlefield to the conference table.

#### RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

I shall now turn to some recent developments in the Vietnam situation. First, I should like to say something about the pause in the bombing of North Vietnam which began on Christmas Eve and continued for 37 days until the end of January. As members know, it had been the position of the Canadian Government for some time previously that such a pause could represent a useful opening for a peaceful solution of the Vietnam issue. It was with this consideration in mind that the Prime Minister had suggested the possibility of a pause in April of last year. In the event, the pause which took place in the following month was short-lived and did not produce the results for which we had hoped. When a further pause was initiated by the United States Government in late December, we welcomed this as a genuine contribution to peace and did what we could through diplomatic channels to reinforce the many efforts that were then being made to turn it to good account....

#### CONTACT WITH HO CHI MINH

Towards the end of the bombing pause, the President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam addressed a series of letters to other governments, including the Government of Canada. I can assure members of the Committee that we studied President Ho Chi Minh's letter with the greatest care and consideration to see, in particular, whether it offered any hope of a reversal of the present grave situation in Vietnam. And, while it did not appear to us that there were, in fact, new elements in that letter we nevertheless felt that it provided a basis on which it might be possible to explore the position of the North Vietnamese Government in greater detail.

That is one reason why we decided that the time might be opportune to send a special representative of the Canadian Government to Hanoi to present the Canadian reply and, at the same time, to probe the views of the North Vietnamese Government on the prospects for a settlement of the Vietnam issue through other than military means.

...I should perhaps say that we did not think it profitable at this stage to enter into a controversy with President Ho Chi Minh over the interpretation of events in Vietnam which was contained in his letter. Rather, we availed ourselves of this opportunity to re-state the Canadian view that there could be no lasting solution of the present conflict other than through negotiations and to suggest, at the same time, that there might be a contribution which the members of the International Commission in Vietnam could make to that end....

The question has been raised in our contacts with interested governments whether there is any-

thing in the Geneva cease-fire agreement which we would see as conferring on the Commission a mandate on the lines we have been considering. On a strictly legal interpretation of that agreement I am bound to say that the answer would have to be in the negative. But I do not think that anyone who is concerned about the course of developments in Vietnam would feel justified in looking at this issue only in legalistic terms. Nor, indeed, are we thinking of any fresh mandate being conferred on the Commission either by the Geneva powers acting collectively or by the Soviet Union and Britain acting jointly in their capacity as Co-Chairmen of the Geneva Conference.

What we have in mind is something a good deal more modest and informal. It is really in the nature of a good-offices assignment which would be undertaken, not necessarily by the Commission as such but by the three Commission powers acting as sovereign nations which have been associated with the Vietnam problem for the past 11 years or so and which have established a fair record of co-operation between them. It is our view that their knowledge and experience of the Vietnam problem and the ready access they command to all the interested parties would make the Commission powers a particularly suitable group to carry forward the search for peace in Vietnam, which is our common objective....

#### NARROWING THE GAP

What, then, are the next steps?...Certain propositions have now been put forward on both sides with respect to a settlement of the Vietnam conflict. In a sense this represents the beginning of a process of negotiation. But such a process can be carried only so far by way of public pronouncements. The gap between the positions of the two sides is still very wide and something will need to be done to narrow it. There is also a barrier of distrust and suspicion that will somehow have to be overcome.

It has seemed to us that this is something which could be pursued cautiously and discreetly by the Commission powers. We are not thinking at this stage of anything other than a good-offices exercise. The object of such an exercise would be to try to bring about conditions in which the parties themselves might find it possible to engage in direct discussions as a prelude to a formal negotiation. In essence, therefore, what we have in mind is an unblocking of channels which, in the absence of such action, are likely to continue to remain closed.

...We have had a series of exchanges about a possible Commission initiative along these lines with India and Poland who are our partners on the Commission. We have put our position to Britain and the Soviet Union as Co-Chairmen of the Geneva Conference. I have also had the opportunity personally to discuss our thinking with the Secretary-General of the United Nations and with Secretary Rusk.

While our exchanges with India and Poland must necessarily remain confidential, I think I can say that one common point in their initial reaction had to do with the timing and the circumstances in which any Commission initiative might stand a chance of