

In response to those who have asked the Government to dissociate itself from the bombing of North Vietnam by the United States, we have made it clear that we would, indeed, like to see the bombing stopped, but that we would also like to see the infiltration stopped, and that we would like to see negotiations looking towards the peaceful solution of this conflict begun. As I indicated to the House on April 4, it is from this general perspective that we endorsed the Secretary-General's proposals of March 14 and that we shall continue to judge all proposals which are aimed at putting a halt to the fighting in Vietnam.

As far as the Canadian Government is concerned, Mr. Chairman, it will continue to be the object of our diplomatic efforts to try to establish a basis on which the two sides might be brought together. There is, of course, no dearth of formulas for trying to do that. But the fact remains that the test of any such formula is its acceptability to both sides. This has been the experience of the Secretary-General; it has been our own experience; and it has been the experience of other countries which have tried to play a helpful part in this matter.

This does not mean, however, that any of those who have tried to lend their good offices to the parties intend to abandon this effort. Certainly, as far as Canada is concerned, I can assure the Committee that we have no intention of doing that. The question that arises is whether there is any new direction which it might be worth exploring in the hope that it might avoid the impasse which has apparently now been reached and which has brought us to the point where, for the first time in some 16 months, no new initiatives, either public or private, appear to be within sight.

It seems to me that, in trying to bring this conflict to a halt, the same principle may be applicable which we have found, in practice, to be applicable to the process of general and complete disarmament. In essence, that principle is that there must be a condition of parity between the two sides at all stages of the process. That is to say, care would have to be taken to avoid a situation where either side is placed, or considers itself to be placed, in a position of relative disadvantage at any given stage.

Having that principle in mind, I wonder whether it might not be worth while to take another look at some of the terms of the 1954 Agreement. The core of that Agreement lies in the concept of a cease-fire and a disengagement of forces. Surely that is what we are seeking today as a matter of first priority. Would it be going too far to suggest that some thought might now be given to the possibility of discussing a stage-by-stage return to the Geneva cease-fire arrangements as a first step towards a more permanent settlement which would necessarily have to encompass many other factors? Of course, the cease-fire arrangements are only one aspect of the Geneva settlement and I recognize the difficulty of trying to persuade the parties to return to one aspect of the settlement in the absence of some preliminary understandings at least as regards the basis on which the other, and more intractable, aspects of the settlement might be tackled in a subsequent negotiation. Accordingly, it may well be necessary to envisage a progressive re-application of the 1954 cease-fire terms as an agreed preliminary to direct discussions between the two sides