



CANADA

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION

DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 73/2

A TIME OF DECISION FOR CANADA -- THE FIRST SIXTY DAYS IN VIETNAM

A Statement in the House of Commons on February 1, 1973, by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Mitchell Sharp.

Mr. Speaker, this House had already had the opportunity for a preliminary exchange of views... before the departure from Canada of the first group of observers to the new commission in Vietnam.

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 Vietnam.

When the moment of decision came, the parties to the cease-fire had radically compressed the expected time-table. 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...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 Vietnam. 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 the 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 pre-conditions; and it would have meant doing so well before we could possibly know whether those pre-conditions were met or, in view of the complexity of the agreements involved, whether they were even likely to be met. The Government would have regarded that as an abdication of responsibility.... 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