

[English]

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

VIET NAM ATROCITIES—SUGGESTED INQUIRY
BY ICC OR UN MISSION

Mr. David Lewis (York South): Mr. Speaker, on November 25, again on November 27 and again on December 5, in the absence of the Secretary of State for External Affairs, I asked the Prime Minister certain questions arising out of the alleged atrocities by United States troops in Viet Nam. I should now like to pose all the questions to the minister with your permission, Mr. Speaker. The first is whether the government or his department has instructed our representative on the International Control Commission to busy himself with investigating this matter. The second is whether the government has instructed our permanent representative at the United Nations to take the matter up with the Secretary General of that body. The third is whether the department has studied the suggestion made by certain law professors, of whom the Prime Minister expressed great approval, with regard to action that should be taken at the United Nations.

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to answer these questions. The statement I have to make, however, would be somewhat longer than you would permit. I am prepared now to make the statement if the House wishes to revert to motions.

Mr. Speaker: Is it agreed that we revert to motions for the purpose of hearing a statement by the Secretary of State for External Affairs?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

And the House having reverted to motions:

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

STATEMENT ON VIET NAM ATROCITIES

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member for York South has said, he asked several questions with respect to atrocities allegedly committed by the United States, South Vietnamese, Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces in Viet Nam. With the House's permission I should like to make a statement on the subject now.

Statement on Viet Nam Atrocities

It is, I trust, not necessary for me to stress how appalled all of us in Canada have been by the wave of reports coming out over the last two weeks concerning the alleged behaviour of combatants on both sides in this tragic conflict toward each other and toward innocent civilians. Every war is abhorrent, whatever its origins, whatever the explanation made for it by the belligerents or by the historians. It becomes particularly abhorrent when even the normal rules of military behaviour are discarded: when there is deliberate individual terrorism and assassination; when there is indiscriminate bombing and shelling; when there is rejection of internationally accepted treatment of prisoners of war; when thousands of civilians from a particular city are methodically executed and dumped into mass graves; when women and children in villages are shot in cold blood. There may be explanations, but there can be no justification for such action by either side. It seems to me that the agony the American people are going through at this time shows that they too believe deeply that there cannot be such justification.

Since the events at My Lai came to the attention of the United States government and public, that government has acted in a manner consistent with the normal practice of a democratic society. A committee of the United States Senate has reviewed the evidence. An inquiry at the highest level has been instituted by the Secretary of Defence. Criminal charges have been laid against those accused of complicity in the matter. Secretary of State Rogers told us in Brussels last week that his government is determined that the criminal proceedings will be carried out as vigorously as possible and that any United States personnel found responsible will receive the punishment that they so obviously deserve. At a televised press conference on Monday night President Nixon told the American people:

What appears is certainly a massacre and under no circumstances was this justifiable... We can never condone or use atrocities against civilians to accomplish our goal.

He also had this to say:

I'm going to do everything I possibly can to see that all the facts are brought to light and that those who are charged—if they are found guilty—are punished.

The normal course of the inquiries and criminal proceedings now under way in the United States will bring to light the facts of