

After Can-Tho we flew to Saigon and were soon on our way to Vientiane, the capital of Laos. In Vientiane, after briefings with Canadian officials, I had a long conversation with the Prime Minister, Prince Souvanna Phouma. While recognizing a direct relationship between the war in Viet-Nam and the use of Laotian territory for military purposes, he was particularly anxious to ensure some measure of international involvement in the future of Laos through the reactivation of the old ICC. A cease-fire has been achieved. However, the two sides in Laos have not been able to find common ground for a military agreement on the modalities of disengagement and supervision. Until this takes place, it will not be possible for us to determine our response to the request for Canadian participation in a reactivated Laos Commission.

I also had discussions in Vientiane with representatives of the Pathet Lao. I raised with them the case of Lloyd Oppel, the Canadian missionary who was seized in Laos last October. I was quite frankly shocked to hear General Phoun Sipraseuth tell me that Mr. Oppel's release would be delayed until certain domestic political arrangements in Laos had been agreed. I replied in very plain language, making it clear to him that there could be no possible relationship between the continued imprisonment of a non-combatant Canadian citizen and political developments in that country. He promised to report my position to his superiors. I also raised this question with the political leaders in Hanoi. They too promised to look into it.

Sunday morning we had an early start for Hanoi. Shortly after our arrival in that city, I was able to have conversations with Prime Minister Pham Van Dong and Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh. After these discussions my hosts offered a tour of the city.

As you would expect all of my talks with political leaders in Hanoi and Saigon centred upon the question of continued Canadian participation in the Commission.

As I have already indicated, the views of all the leaders with whom I spoke were to the effect that Canada should continue to serve on the Commission. Most of these leaders emphasized that the consequences of an early Canadian withdrawal would be far-reaching. I have also received similar views from the governments of the United States, Britain, Indonesia and China. I made no commitment to any of them at that time and I make no commitment now as to what our response will be, since the question is still before the Government.

While the advice to us had a common theme, I think it is relevant to point out that each Party had its own distinctive reasons for wishing us to stay on.

For reasons which are very understandable governments of countries not directly involved in Viet-Nam tend to suggest that any international presence is better than no international presence. For Canadians our 19 years in Viet-Nam have long since disabused us of any such illusions.

I found the attitudes of the leaders in South Viet-Nam very direct. They have no illusion that the ICCS would be able to discharge effectively the responsibilities set out in the Paris Agreement. I explained very frankly to the Vietnamese both in the South and in the North that the composition of the Commission made it extremely unlikely that the Commission would ever reach a finding unfavourable to North Viet-Nam or to its allies in the South. At the same time I said that Canada would not hesitate to support a finding detrimental to the position of the Republic of Viet-Nam.