



Statements and Speeches

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CANADA WITHDRAWS FROM THE ICCS

A Statement in the House of Commons by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Mitchell Sharp, May 31, 1973.

Speaking in the House on March 27, I said that the Government had decided to extend Canadian participation in the ICCS until May 31 and that before that date the Government would decide whether to remain or to withdraw.

At that time I said...that we would withdraw our contingent by June 30 unless there had been a substantial improvement in the situation or some signs of an imminent political agreement between the two South Vietnamese parties.

The decision is a serious one and the Government so regards it. Canada has a reputation, I believe, for responsibility in international affairs. We have served in more peacekeeping and peace-observer roles than any other country and we remain ready to serve wherever we can be effective. We have also, in the course of this varied and extensive experience, including 19 years in Indochina, learned something about the conditions that are necessary to success in peacekeeping and peace-observer activities.

The House will recall the efforts that the Government made to establish conditions which would help to improve the prospects for the successful functioning of the International Commission of Control and Supervision provided for in the Paris agreement on Vietnam. I shall not repeat them now. The record of Canada's approach to the question of participation in the ICCS up to the end of March 1973 is to be found in a White Paper that I shall table at the conclusion of this statement.

Stated briefly, what we sought to ensure was that the new International Commission would be an impartial, fact-finding body, supported by the parties to the peace agreement, with sufficient freedom of access to enable it to ascertain the facts about any alleged breach of the agreement and reporting quickly not only to the parties to the agreement but also to the international community as a whole. While we did not achieve all our purposes, I think it is fair to say that we helped to effect some improvements, at least in form.

What we could not ensure, and what the ICCS could not ensure, was peace in Vietnam. That depends on the parties to the peace agree-

ment and not on the ICCS. Nor can Canada alone ensure that the ICCS fulfils its function of peace observing and reporting as provided for in the peace agreement. That too depends on the parties to the agreement and on the other member delegations of the Commission.

Notwithstanding our hesitations and doubts, we accepted membership for a trial period of 60 days. At the end of that first 60 days our hesitations and doubts had been reinforced but we were urged by many countries to show patience. So we agreed to another two-month period which is now coming to an end.

By and large, there has been no significant change in the situation that would alter the view we formed at the end of the first 60 days notwithstanding the strenuous efforts of the Canadian contingent to support the functioning of the International Commission.

Let me repeat that our attitude results from Canadian experience in the old ICSC and the Canadian conception of the functioning of a peace-observer body. We are not criticizing the peace agreement. We welcomed that agreement; we regard it as a good agreement that provides as sound and honourable a basis for peace as was negotiable. If the parties will set themselves to applying it, as we hope they may yet do, it can bring lasting peace to Vietnam. We hope that the efforts of Dr. Kissinger and Mr. Le Duc Tho to achieve a stricter observance of the agreement will be crowned with success.

We have come to the conclusion, however, that the Canadian concept of the functioning of the International Commission has not been accepted and that it would be in the interest of all concerned if we were now to withdraw. Nor do we believe that Canadian withdrawal would have any significant effect upon the prospects for peace in Vietnam. That depends upon the parties to the peace agreement and not upon the ICCS. It is only if the parties are co-operating in a strict observance of the agreement and are willing to use the ICCS as a means of reinforcing the agreement that the Commission can perform its function with any hope of success.

Throughout our tenure on the ICCS, we have sought above all else to be objective. We have represented none of the contending parties. We have been as insistent in calling for and participating in investigations of alleged violations by the United States and the Republic of Vietnam as we have with regard to alleged violations by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the other South Vietnamese Parties. If the RVN or U.S.A. has been at fault, we have said so. If the other parties were to blame for cease-fire violations, we also have said so. I assure the House that we have no need to listen mutely

now or later to any charges that we have acted partially; we can be proud of our objectivity in the Commission and of our attempts to see this impartiality as an integral part of Commission activities.

I also said, in my statement to the House on March 27, that Canada would be prepared to return to Vietnam to participate in the international supervision of an election clearly held under the terms of the Paris agreement and therefore with the concurrence and participation of the two South Vietnamese parties. It went without saying that our participation would not be necessary if a replacement were found for Canada on the ICCS. I am not convinced that there is much chance that an election will take place as provided for in the agreement but, if it should (and we should want to examine it carefully to make sure it was this kind of election), and if no replacement had been found for Canada, we should consider sympathetically a request to return temporarily to the ICCS for this purpose, in the light of the circumstances then prevailing and our assessment of the chances for effective supervision.

The peace agreement itself anticipates the replacement of the named members of the ICCS -- Canada, Hungary, Indonesia and Poland -- or any of them. I have also said that we should be prepared to remain on the Commission until June 30 so that a replacement could be found. We have since learned that the discussions which took place recently between Dr. Kissinger and Mr. Le Duc Tho will be resumed in June. We want to give those discussions every chance of success and we would certainly wish to do nothing that would complicate them in introducing what might seem to be too short a deadline for agreeing on a replacement for Canada on the Commission.

In recognition of that possible difficulty, we are prepared, if the parties to the agreement so wish, to stay for a period beyond June 30 but not later than July 31. Canada's decision to withdraw is firm and definite, but the additional flexibility should give the parties adequate time to find a replacement for the Canadian delegation. Should a successor be named and be ready to take its place before July 31, we should, of course, be prepared to hand over our responsibilities at any mutually-convenient earlier time. We shall, of course, continue to function as we have been doing during the remaining period of our stay on the Commission.

In conclusion, I should like to pay tribute (and I know I speak for all members of the House of Commons) to Ambassador Gauvin, Major-General MacAlpine and all the members of the Canadian delegation now in Vietnam and to their predecessors going back to 1954. Notwithstanding great frustration and serious risks, they have carried high the flag of Canada; for some it has cost them their life. Those who

now will be returning to Canada can have the satisfaction of knowing that they did all in their power to help in bringing peace to the war-weary people of Vietnam. It was our delegation that carried the main burden of organizing the work of the Commission and whatever success the Commission has had can, in a large measure, be attributed to their professional competence, dedication and energy.