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EXCERPTS FROM AN ADDRESS BY
THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, THE
HONOURABLE MITCHELL SHARP,
TO A DINNER MEETING OF THE
OTTAWA CENTRAL LIONS CLUB,
CHÂTEAU LAURIER,
TUESDAY, JUNE 5, 1973

"VIET-NAM"

I think it should be clear ...that withdrawal does not represent in any way a shrinking away from international responsibilities. We do not withdraw from responsibilities because we may think a task is thankless, dangerous and difficult - but we do when it has become futile. There is certainly no question of giving in to the view that prevailed in the '30s - retreating into what we then mistakenly regarded as our fire-proof house.

It was originally decided that Canada would remain in the Commission until June 30 so that a replacement could be found. In conversations which I had recently with Dr. Kissinger, he emphasized the importance of the discussions which he is now having with Mr. Le Duc Tho in Paris. Naturally we are anxious to give these discussions every chance of success and we would certainly not wish to do anything which might complicate them by introducing what could be too short a deadline for agreeing on a replacement for Canada in the Commission.

It was in recognition of this situation that I indicated, that subject to the wishes to the parties to the agreement, Canada would stay on for a period beyond June 30 but not later than July 31.

...I am not confident but I can only hope that the Canadian decision may stimulate recalcitrant members into more constructive activity. It is our hope that our successor, whoever that may be, may be able to use our withdrawal to constructive advantage.

Many Canadians have expressed concern about reports of the treatment and continued incarceration of civilian prisoners in Viet-Nam. A number have suggested that the Commission and the Canadian Delegation in particular have been complacent or negligent with respect to this problem. These views are put forward on the assumption that Canada or the ICCS as a whole has either responsibility or authority to inquire into conditions of detention or press for the release of civilian detainees. In fact, the Commission's mandate for civilian detainees is very limited and very closely defined.

The sole authority which the Commission or any of its members has is to observe the return of Civilian detainees after the two South Vietnamese Parties have agreed to their return, and to examine the lists of persons being returned. The ICCS also has the obligation to visit the last detention places of such persons being returned. If the Parties choose not to release these people, or if they choose not to provide lists of civilians in detention, the Commission is powerless.

Notwithstanding our humanitarian instincts, we have to recognize that we are dealing with sovereign states in areas of their jurisdiction. If we intruded too far we could easily destroy whatever potential utility the Commission may still possess in this domain. Nevertheless, while I was in Saigon I took the opportunity to raise with President Nguyen Van Thieu and Foreign Minister Tran Van Lam the question of detained Vietnamese civilians

and to express to them the concern that many Canadians have conveyed to me.

More recently the picture has changed and I am pleased to be able to report that the release of a number of civilian prisoners has begun.

...Looking back I can confirm without hesitation that our initial decision to participate was the right decision. Our reasoning then, for joining the Commission as well as our reservations, have been largely indicated. In Paris the negotiators envisaged that the ICCS, with its four members, would form part of an integrated package designed to accomplish a series of objectives. While the central objective of peace has not been attained, the Paris machinery, including the ICCS, has provided a working framework for a number of solid achievements. Although the fighting is continuing, the level of violence has subsided when compared with the period preceding the Paris Agreement. The United States has been able to disengage and withdraw its ground forces from Viet-Nam. There has been the long awaited exchange of military prisoners. These are not inconsiderable achievements and there should be satisfaction that we were able to contribute, even modestly, to their achievement.