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STATEMENT DISCOURS

SECRETARY
OF STATE
FOR EXTERNAL
AFFAIRS.

SECRÉTAIRE
D'ÉTAT AUX
AFFAIRES
EXTÉRIEURES.

STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY OF
STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,
THE HONOURABLE MITCHELL SHARP,
IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,
JANUARY 5, 1973

The Canadian people, this House and the Government have for many years now been distressed by the continuation of hostilities in Indochina and by the suffering that events there have wrought upon all those concerned. As I said on December 17 last, when the negotiations between the United States and North Viet-Nam appeared to have broken down, the Canadian Government deeply regretted that the negotiations had not yet reached a successful conclusion. We welcome the fact that those negotiations have resumed this week.

In the interval, however, we were shaken by the large-scale bombing in the Hanoi-Haiphong area. We found it very difficult to understand the reasons for that bombing, or the purpose which it was intended to serve. We deplore that action, and we have communicated our view of it to the United States authorities. When, at the end of December, the United States Government decided to stop the bombing in the Hanoi-Haiphong area, we welcomed that. We said so to the Government of the United States, and we expressed our hope, as friends and neighbours, that the bombing would not resume.

That bombing, terrible as it is, is only part of a larger situation which deeply troubles the Canadian people, and which equally concerns the Government. There continues to be a high level of hostility and violence on both sides in Viet-Nam, and we deplore that as well. We have not lost sight of North Viet-Nam's continued military intervention in the affairs of Cambodia, Laos and South Viet-Nam and in particular the abhorrent disregard for innocent human life displayed in the almost routine attacks against the civilian populations of those countries.

It is, I think, more than a pious hope to say that the issues which have led to a generation of conflict in Viet-Nam, and indeed in all of Indochina, should not be resolved by violence; they should be resolved by negotiations. To all those who believe that, it is distressing to observe the violence which continues while negotiations take place, and to contemplate the possibility that the continuation of such violence could endanger the progress of negotiations. Since 1965 when the bombing of North Viet-Nam began, Canadian governments have consistently taken the view that resort to force in this form was counter-productive in the Viet-Nam context.

Canada has a special interest in this matter, and not only because we are close neighbours of the United States. We have been involved, during the past eighteen years, in the thankless task of supervising an earlier settlement, and of trying without success to make that supervision effective. Beyond that we have been given clear indications of the possibility of our being asked to accept a further role. It has been indicated to us that Canada would be acceptable to all the parties as one of the members of a new international body which it is expected that the present negotiations will create when and if they are successful. Canada has not yet been formally invited to participate in this new international presence; indeed I anticipate that no such invitation will be addressed to any of the potential members until an agreement is concluded. We have, however, been asked to consider the possibility, and we have done so most carefully.

Canada would of course wish to play a constructive role in assisting a peaceful political settlement if the parties wished it do do so, if that role were within Canada's capabilities and resources, and if it held the promise of success. The Government has long wished to see military violence end in Viet-Nam and to see its friend and neighbour, the United States, disengage itself from that military conflict. If the parties to that conflict invite Canada to play a role in which we could effectively contribute to a cessation of hostilities there and which would help the United States to end its military involvement in Viet-Nam, we would of course consider the invitation sympathetically and constructively.

There is no question, however, of Canada, as a part of a new commission, attempting to maintain peace through the use of arms. The implementation of the cease-fire would be the responsibility of the belligerents and the role being contemplated for a new international commission would be to observe and report on the implementation of those parts of the cease-fire agreement which the commission is asked to supervise.

In considering the invitation to participate in a new commission, however, we would have an obligation to the people of Canada, to this House and to those Canadians who would be asked to go to Viet-Nam to implement our role there, which I should emphasize once again would not be a military role but would involve only observation and reporting to ensure that Canada's contribution could be a real and effective one, and to ensure that Canada's attempt to contribute to peace not be reduced once again to impotence as it has been in the supervisory arrangements in Indo-China that emerged from the 1954 and 1962 Geneva Conferences.

Having our past experience very much in mind, in our discussions with the American authorities and in communications with the other parties to the Paris negotiations as well as in public statements, the Government has developed a number of conditions and criteria on which it would base its judgement on whether Canada should participate in a new international commission for Viet-Nam.

The first condition, and indeed the ultimate one, is that the provisions for the operation of the new organization, when taken as a whole, should be workable and offer real prospects of being effective. Moving from the general to the particular, we have also stipulated that all the present belligerent parties, the United States, the Republic of Viet-Nam, North Viet-Nam and the Viet Cong, should be bound by the Agreement, the implementation of which the new commission would observe and report upon. In this same category we have required that there should be a "continuing political authority" which would assume responsibility for the settlement as a whole and to which the commission or any of its members would have access through reports or consultations. We would prefer it if such an authority could be provided for in the original agreements, but failing that, we consider that it could be established by the international conference which, as we understand it, will be convened thirty days after the cease-fire.

We have also insisted that the proposed new commission should have the freedom of movement and observation within the demilitarized zone and in South Viet-Nam necessary to achieve a proper exercise of its functions. Moreover, we have required that Canada should be invited to be a member of the new commission by all of the parties concerned.

In addition to these specific and essential considerations we have, from our broad experience in Viet-Nam, put forward a number of other suggestions and requests. The extent to which they were met would also constitute elements in our assessment of the viability of the operation as a whole. As an additional condition we have stated that if all the essential criteria I have already mentioned were satisfied except that which relates to the existence of a "continuing political authority", we would be prepared to consider serving on the commission for a minimum of sixty days during which we would assess the outcome of the international conference with particular reference to the establishment of a "continuing political authority". If no such authority was created or if, once created, it ceased to exist, Canada would have to reserve the right to withdraw at any time, even after the initial two month period. In any event, the Government would not accept a commitment beyond two years although some other formula for opting out on shorter notice might be acceptable.

We have also said that we assumed that the necessary logistic support for the new commission would be available from the outset to make its operation substantive and effective or even possible.

The Government has also urged that unrealistic demands should not be placed upon the new commission in the initial stages particularly, and that no unrealistic expectations should be vested in it. For example, the commission should not be expected to begin functioning in any part of Viet-Nam before a cease-fire has been established locally by the belligerents themselves.

In respect of the international conference, it has been our view that it should be free to establish its own relationship with the commission or indeed with other provisions of the Agreement or its Protocols. The Government has also taken the view that participants in the new commission should pay the salary and allowances for their own personnel but should not otherwise be expected to contribute to the general overhead and expenses of the organization. This was an idea originally put forward that the members of the Commission should also pay part of the infrastructure. We took the strongest exception to it. Should Canada decide to participate it would signify its acceptance by a formal unilateral communication to the parties. At the same time the Government would also communicate any reservations it may have in respect of the documents embodying the settlement or in respect of the commission or Canada's participation in it.

When all the texts are available, the Government will examine them in the light of these criteria, conditions and viewpoints and make its own determination on the viability of the operation and on the existence of a suitable role for Canada. The Government is conscious of the fact that there are several possible forms of response open to it between a simple refusal to take part at all to a full and unconditional involvement. The Government's assessment of the relevant texts will also take into account the importance of contributing to a scaling down of hostilities in Viet-Nam and to the disengagement of American forces and the return of their prisoners of war. It is conceivable that the result of this examination might suggest a participation limited to certain aspects of the Agreement or a participation for a limited period of time rather than an outright refusal or an unqualified undertaking to serve. If so the parties concerned will be so advised and if they found this acceptable, Canada could take part on a limited basis.

Also drawing on our experience, we are conscious of the dangers of allowing ourselves to be frustrated as a member of the new international organization through the possible application of a rule of unanimity. One way in which this risk could be minimized would be by regarding the new body, not as a diplomatic conference held under the normal rules of confidentiality but as an international forum where the proceedings are normally open to the public. Consequently, we would not regard the new commission's proceedings as confidential or privileged in any way unless there was in any particular instance a unanimous decision of all the members to the contrary. We would instead consider ourselves free to publicize the proceedings in any way we saw fit to ensure that our view of events and if necessary the difference between our view and that of others were publicly available.

In putting forward our conditions, it was of course not our desire or intention to raise unnecessary difficulties or to seek any special position for ourselves. The fact is that Canada is in an excellent position to judge from its own experience what is necessary to a successful operation in inter-

national supervision, whether or not we become members of the proposed commission. Some of Canada's experience has been positive. Some of it, notably in Viet-Nam, Laos, and Cambodia where for eighteen years we have tried to make international supervision work, has been profoundly disappointing. From that disappointment we have learned a good deal, and it is in the light of what we have learned there that we have arrived at the position I have just described which we believe essential to the success of the operation in which we may be invited to participate.

Because of the possibility that we will be invited to accept a new supervisory role in Viet-Nam, and because of our long involvement in the Viet-Nam problem, Canada, apart from the fact that it shares the interest of the whole world in the settlement of the Viet-Nam war, has a particular interest in current developments there and in the negotiations which we all hope will bring an end to the conflict. This House embodies that interest, and I think it would be fitting that the House make known its view of the situation. For that reason we have proposed the motion which appears on the Order Paper. It is in terms which I believe deserve the support of all sides of the House. I conclude by saying this, Mr. Speaker, that it is directed to all parties in the Viet-Nam conflict.