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CONDITIONS FOR CANADIAN PARTICIPATION IN VIETNAM TRUCE SUPERVISION

Statement by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Mitchell Sharp, to the Opening Session of the International Conference on Vietnam, Paris, February 26, 1973.

The first words of any representative of Canada to an international conference on the subject of Vietnam must be to congratulate the authors of the agreement signed in this same building a month ago. All the parties deserve the gratitude not only of their own peoples but of all those states which have come to regard the war in Vietnam as affecting their own national aspirations and interests. My Government is firmly of the opinion that the agreement signed here last month represents a magnificent and hard-earned opportunity, which must not be lost. This agreement, indeed, doesn't solve all the problems, neither does it meet all of our hopes; but it's very existence is far more desirable than the absurdity of the armed conflict itself.

Although Canada's agreement to participate in the International Commission of Control and Supervision was conditional, the Canadian delegation in Saigon has taken a leading part not only in getting the International Commission of Control and Supervision teams in place as required by the agreement but also in facilitating the other organizations established under it to begin to exercise their functions. The Canadian delegation has from the beginning been motivated by a desire to make the agreement work if this was at all possible. This will continue to be our attitude in Vietnam for as long as we are there. It will also be the attitude of the Canadian delegation here in Paris. I am sure that all other delegations at this conference are equally conscious of the importance of the part this conference has to play in transforming the present precarious cease-fire into a lasting peace in which the South Vietnamese people and only the South Vietnamese people will determine their future. Even though the Lao and Khmer peoples are not represented at this conference, their futures too are bound up in peace in Vietnam. They too are entitled to the right to determine their own futures for themselves without any foreign intervention.

The fact that there is yet another international conference being held on Vietnam is in some respects sad inasmuch as it reflects on the rights of the Indochinese peoples to determine their own futures for themselves. But the fact remains that the struggle in Indochina has become an

international struggle involving not only the nations of that peninsula but countries far removed from it. From the point of view of my Government, the object of the Paris agreement is not to perpetuate an international presence in Vietnam but to eliminate it, and on conditions that will ensure again a fresh internationalization. This conference should be able to provide for some of those conditions.

Canada has had the educational experience of having served 19 years on the international commissions in Indochina, and from that experience we have come to a number of conclusions. If these conclusions seem to imply criticism of the existing agreement on Vietnam, I hasten to assure you that this is not my intention. My primary purpose is to prevent my country from being once more involved in an intractable situation and an open-ended commitment. At the same time, we are deeply conscious that Canada has a history of concern for and participation in international peacekeeping and is very jealous of its reputation in this area.

Canada sees itself, in its membership in the International Commission of Control and Supervision, not as the spokesman of any one point of view, and certainly not as serving any direct national policy of its own, but as a representative of the international community and invited by all the parties concerned to act as such. We therefore feel that we have an obligation not only to the parties to the agreement, and, indeed, to this conference if it should decide to maintain an active interest in this agreement, but to the international community as a whole.

We would obviously prefer to see all peace-supervisory operations conducted under the auspices of the United Nations in accordance with the Charter. The fact that this has not been possible in the case of Indochina reinforces, in our view, the obligation of the International Commission of Control and Supervision to act as if it were representing the world community. If this were not so, it would be merely a quadripartite group with no claim to the description "international" in its title. Canada would have preferred greater Asian participation not only in the International Commission but also in this international conference, which is to discuss matters of vital concern to the future peace and stability of the Asian region. It is in the attempt to engage the international community to the greatest extent possible that we have adopted the policy of giving full information on our International Commission of Control and Supervision participation. Apart from details of negotiations while they are still under way, we feel that the international community has a right to know what is being done in its name in Vietnam. For our part, we propose to report regularly and publicly on this at least until other more satisfactory means are found for transmitting information and points of view to all concerned in the international community.

As I have already mentioned, our primary concern is to do what we can to make Canadian participation in the International Commission of Control and Supervision effective. We wish to continue to serve and we ask this conference to make it possible for us to do so. In this connection, we have come here to seek your support in establishing an independent mechanism more representative of the international community than the existing mechanism,

through which the International Commission of Control and Supervision, or any of its members, could report, and which would provide for some possibility of appropriate reaction to such reports.

But we also have another concern. I have no authority to speak for other member countries of the International Commission of Control and Supervision but my Government, as the government of a responsible country, could not accept the onus of passing to the former belligerents in Indochina reports that could conceivably result in a re-escalation of the war in Indochina. At the same time, we are not prepared to suppress information once we are satisfied that it is soundly based. For this reason, Canada has consistently stated a fundamental condition to its participation: that it would serve on the International Commission in Vietnam only if, among other things, this conference produced some more broadly-based international authority which would accept the responsibility for evaluating and, if necessary, acting upon reports from the International Commission, or its members, dealing with the manner in which the agreement was being carried out. Ideally, as I have said before, the Security Council of the United Nations should be the body responsible for receiving reports from the International Commission of Control and Supervision or its members and determining what, if any, action is required. Reluctantly, we are prepared to acknowledge that this solution is not practicable in the present situation, but we must have some acceptable substitute. In any event, Canada considers that the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who has been invited to this conference by the United States and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on behalf of the parties to the agreement, would provide the most appropriate and effective channel for receiving and transmitting the views of the International Commission. He is present here not only as the principal public servant of the world but as representative of the world's concern at the decades of warfare in Vietnam. His obviously disinterested position fits him uniquely for this task. I should make it clear that I do not propose that the Secretary-General assume any responsibility, either in this capacity or on behalf of the United Nations, for action consequent upon his transmission of information received from the International Commission during the interim period of its involvement in Vietnam. If, however, it is agreed that the membership of this conference constitutes the continuing political authority to which the International Commission of Control and Supervision should report, the Secretary-General should, in our view, also be vested with the task of reconvening the conference when requested to do so, on whatever basis we may here decide. I would like to circulate and table a resolution which could cover the kind of arrangement I have in mind.

My Government is well aware of the problems that a vacancy in the International Commission of Control and Supervision could create and would, in practice, do whatever it could to avoid that situation arising. But we should not be asked to watch in silence a resumption of hostilities or to accept direct responsibility for all the consequences that could ensue if we felt duty-bound to report to the world that the agreement has been seriously breached.

We will work to find a solution that would meet our reasonable requirements. We are willing to examine any proposal that offers any chance of meeting our point. This is one of the reasons why, at the very beginning of the conference, I am putting forward a resolution that would best meet our requirements, and we hope it will be given the most serious consideration. Although this is only one of a number of factors in our decision-making, we shall examine the results of this conference with the greatest care and in the light of the information we have received from our delegation in Vietnam. Should we decide, as a result of our study of the outcome of this conference and of our experience up to now, that we must terminate our membership on the International Commission of Control and Supervision, we would so inform all the interested parties that, at the end of the 60 days for which we undertook to serve -- that is, on March 30 --, Canada would cease to be a member of the International Commission of Control and Supervision. At the same time, however, we would declare our willingness, if all the parties signatory to the agreement so desired, to remain in place and act as a member until April 30, 1973, or such earlier date as a new member could be agreed upon by the signatories and take our place.

Such a decision would be a very sad one for my Government to have to make. All Canadians have taken justifiable pride in the manner in which the Armed Forces of Canada, in particular, have contributed to peacekeeping operations throughout the world. It would be a bitter disappointment to them and to us to have to terminate our participation unilaterally. But I am satisfied that no Canadian would wish to see our representatives placed in the position of having to choose between suppressing relevant information or accepting full and direct national responsibility for the possible consequences of transmitting it under the existing arrangements. Even less would the Canadian people wish to see our delegation stand idly by, as Canadian delegations in Indochina have had to do in the past, while agreements they are supposed to supervise are disregarded.

I am hopeful that the new agreement will succeed if there is a desire on the part of those present to help make it succeed and to involve themselves in the process. If I am wrong, we shall have to arrange for the orderly transfer of our International Commission of Control and Supervision responsibilities to some other government. In doing so we would not be suggesting that our partners in the International Commission or a potential successor would be less sensitive or less alert to the problems that could arise than we were. We reached our own conclusions on peacekeeping in Vietnam some years ago and we have no reason to doubt their validity. On the other hand, we can readily understand that other countries differently situated from Canada could come to quite different conclusions. We respect their points of view and hope that they will understand ours.

Canada was invited to this conference as a member of the International Commission of Control and Supervision and its participation now and in any final act or declaration is linked to our continued participation in the International Commission of Control and Supervision. It follows, therefore, that a cessation of Canadian participation in the International Commission of Control and Supervision would also mean a

termination of any other Canadian responsibilities that might arise out of either the agreement and protocols or any acts or declarations emanating from this conference.

I have asked the head of our delegation in Saigon -- who happens, like myself, to be chairman at the present time -- to give me an interim report on the work of the International Commission of Control and Supervision and the state of affairs in respect to the implementation of the agreement and protocols.

The report that I received late last week from the head of the Canadian delegation made two points very clearly: first, the cease-fire has not been effective throughout South Vietnam and, second, the four-party joint military commission has not operated effectively. Both these factors have seriously impaired the Commission's ability to meet its obligations.

With respect to the cease-fire, it is evident from this report that the Vietnamese parties are still engaged in hostile activities related to efforts by one side or the other to enlarge its areas of control. The Commission has received numerous complaints from the four parties alleging violations of the cease-fire. In a number of cases investigations have been ordered but, at this early stage, we have been obliged to settle for investigations of a more limited scope than that envisaged in the agreement, debate within the Commission over what the Commission is empowered to investigate and at whose request, delays on the part of the four-party joint military commission in establishing itself in the field, and the conditions of insecurity prevailing in the countryside as a result of continued hostilities -- all these have militated against the Commission's ability to take decisive action in investigating most cease-fire violations. After receiving a series of general complaints alleging cease-fire violations, the Commission issued a strong appeal to the parties to respect the cease-fire. This appeal on February 16 predated by one day an appeal by the four-party joint military commission to the same effect.

The delay of the four-party joint military commission in becoming fully effective has presented the International Commission with serious problems in meeting its obligations with respect to the deployment of teams in the field. The Commission's regional headquarters teams were deployed on February 5, several days after the deadline imposed upon us. On February 20, the Commission decided to deploy its teams at the sub-regional level. In addition, the Commission has decided to deploy its teams to points of entry into South Vietnam to control the import of armaments and other military material, as well as four teams to observe the withdrawal of United States forces and other forces allied with the Republic of Vietnam, from South Vietnam. Every effort is being made by the Canadian delegation to ensure that teams in the regions and at points of entry are deployed within the deadline established by the agreement -- that is to say, by February 27. Whether we succeed in meeting this deadline will depend -- as everything will depend -- on the ability of the four parties to afford the necessary co-operation. We have, however, taken the position that the

inability of the four-party joint military commission to function smoothly should not necessarily be permitted to bring a halt to the attempts of the International Commission to meet its obligations.

We have been pleased to note the progress of the exchange of prisoners-of-war and foreign civilian personnel. This has been an operation in which the four parties, despite some initial difficulties, have exhibited an ability to co-operate and co-ordinate their activities. We can only hope that the co-operative spirit that has characterized this operation will be extended to the implementation of all other provisions of the agreement.

Simultaneously with its attempts to deal with substantive issues and to deploy its field machinery, the Commission has been engaged in setting up its headquarters in Saigon, establishing its procedures, securing support facilities, and organizing a secretariat. This has been a complex and lengthy process, which has not yet been completed, despite concentrated effort. Among the difficulties the Commission has encountered in this area of its work is the fact that neither the agreement nor its protocols made provision for a secretariat, even though the necessity of establishing one was obvious. Personnel additional to the ceilings established in the protocol will be required if delegates are to be in a position to staff the secretariat adequately.

Fellow delegates, this, then, is the Canadian view of the status of the International Commission of Control and Supervision as of the last day or so. There are continuing problems of implementation and there remains the matter of a reporting authority for the Commission and its members. Implementation is the responsibility of the parties to the agreement assisted as best it can by the International Commission of Control and Supervision. However, the matter of providing an adequate international political authority as a basis for the operation and reporting of the International Commission of Control and Supervision and its members is clearly the main responsibility of this conference. My delegation will spare no effort in helping to achieve this objective on which we think so much depends. Thank you.

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