



CANADA

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION

DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 66/29

CANADA WORKS QUIETLY FOR PEACE IN VIETNAM

A Statement to the House of Commons on July 8, 1966, by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Paul Martin.

... Let there be no doubt; we are all concerned about Vietnam. On a number of occasions the Government has expressed its reservations with regard to the bombing of North Vietnam and about the whole sequence of events which led the United States to the conclusion that it had no option but to adopt this course. I made my views known before the recent bombings took place, and in a manner which I believe was the most effective way to engage in consultations with a country with which Canada has such close ties.

One could be dramatic. One could engage in particular public postures that might bring acclaim, but I want to say that as long as I am Secretary of State for External Affairs, and certainly with regard to this situation, I am going to carry on in the way which I believe will most likely yield favourable results, rather than seek acclaim by some public position that is not capable of yielding a satisfactory solution.

The Prime Minister made clear on June 29 that we should be glad to see the bombing stopped, that we should be glad to see the infiltration of North Vietnamese troops into South Vietnam stopped, and that we should be glad to see unconditional negotiations for peace started. This has always been our position. We urged a cease-fire before the President of the United States said he was prepared to enter into peace talks without any preconditions. When we now urge a cease-fire, we must take into account some of the implications which were mentioned yesterday by Mr. Wilson. We could have talks if the parties were so disposed, without waiting for a cease-fire, and these talks in turn might lead to a cease-fire.

I think it important that we understand fully the implications of the action which has now been taken to bomb the oil-storage facilities in North Vietnam. I do not think we can limit our analysis merely to the military aspects of this operation. I propose to go beyond these aspects, to go into other implications which seem to me essential to a full appreciation of the present situation.

So far as the strictly military aspects are concerned, it can be argued that the general pattern of activity has not been significantly altered by the bombing of the oil-storage facilities of North Vietnam. On the understanding that has been communicated to me, it is not the intention of the United States Government to extend the bombing to targets which are not directly related to the infiltration of men and supplies from North Vietnam to buttress the insurgency in the South.

The fact is that the oil-storage facilities which have been the target of recent attacks are located in close proximity to major concentrations of population in North Vietnam. I take it from the preliminary reports that have been made available to the Government

of Canada that every care has been taken to spare civilian life in those operations. Nevertheless, I should be less than frank if I did not say there is a risk inherent in these operations in terms of giving this conflict a character, a complexion, which I am sure all of us would be concerned to avoid....

There is a further aspect to these latest operations which is bound to cause concern. That is the possibility... of a greater engagement in this conflict by those who have supported and actively encouraged the policies and the efforts of the Government of North Vietnam. It is not possible, I think, beyond a certain point, to estimate what the threshold of that greater engagement may be, but it must be clear that everyone in every country, in all of the continents, is concerned about the dangers flowing from any change in the pattern of the present conflict.

It seems to me exceedingly difficult to guarantee against a miscalculation on the part of one or other of the powers concerned who may consider the course of developments in Vietnam as carrying a direct risk to their national security. All I can say at the moment is that, from all the information that has been made available to us, there appears to be a continuing recognition of the need for restraint on the part of all the governments directly concerned in the conflict.

I wish to deal with a matter which seems to me to be crucial from the point of view of the Canadian Government and of other governments which believe that a negotiated solution is the right way of resolving the Vietnam conflict. The question we must ask ourselves is whether these latest developments, or any future developments tending in the same direction, are likely to help or hinder the prospect of such a solution. This has been the cornerstone of Canada's policy and the guiding consideration in the efforts which we have been making in recent months.

I am bound to say, on balance, that, whatever the rights or wrongs of the situation may be, it is the judgment of the Canadian Government that there is a relation between this whole matter of bombing and the prospects of arriving at even a beginning of a process which might in due course yield an honourable accommodation of the interests of the major parties in the conflict in Vietnam.

I should like to take this point a little further by explaining to the House the positions of the Government of North Vietnam and the Government of the United States, as I understand them, on the basis of what has been said publicly and in private discussions. The Government of North Vietnam has called for a permanent and unconditional cessation of all bombing and other acts of war against their territory. This is one of the elements in a letter which President Ho Chi Minh addressed to the Prime Minister on January 24, and in the absence of which the Government of North Vietnam does not appear prepared to envisage a political solution. The argument behind the formulation is that, by bombing targets in North Vietnam, the United States is encroaching on the sovereignty of that country, and that this is a violation of accepted standards of international law and international relations. The Government of North Vietnam, accordingly, does not think that a willingness to cease this bombing should be qualified by any conditions whatsoever, or that it warrants any countervailing undertakings by the North Vietnamese Government in respect of its own policies.

I think the North Vietnamese point of view is well reflected in a statement issued by the Chinese authorities in Peking on July 3 last. The following extract is relevant to this matter:

"U.S. imperialism long ago completely violated the Geneva Agreements and broke the line of demarcation between South and North Vietnam. It has now further broken this line by its bombing of the capital of the heroic Vietnamese people. The United States must be held responsible for all the serious consequences arising therefrom. With the breaking of the line of demarcation by the United States, the Vietnamese people have ceased to be subject to any restrictions."

This is a significant statement. The House will note that it refers twice to the demarcation line which, however temporary it was designed to be, was laid down in the Geneva Cease-Fire Agreement of 1954. The statement appears to argue that, so long as this Agreement has not been superseded by a permanent settlement of the whole Vietnam question, that line must to all intents and purposes be regarded as a de facto political boundary between North and South Vietnam, and must be respected as such.

This interpretation of the provisions of the Geneva Agreement is, I think, one which Canada, as a member of the International Commission in Vietnam, is bound to take seriously. It is also, I think, an interpretation which lies at the root of the whole position of the Government of the United States as regards the matter of support and sustenance which the Government of North Vietnam has afforded to the insurgency in the South. I regret to say, however, that it is only partially accepted in the statement from which I have read to the House. For, having placed due emphasis on the inviolability of the line of demarcation between South and North Vietnam, the Chinese statement goes on to say that "all support and aid rendered by the North Vietnamese people to South Vietnam are within the sacred right of the Vietnamese people". It is this evident inconsistency which is the crux of the problem we are facing in Vietnam and to which we must address ourselves if there is to be any prospect of a peaceful and lasting settlement of the present conflict.

What is the position of the Government of the United States? It is in the following terms, as they have been given to us. The United States is prepared to stop the bombing of North Vietnam at any time as part of a mutual reduction of hostilities on both sides. They regard the military activities of North and South Vietnam as forming part of a single problem. If the North Vietnamese were prepared to respect the demarcation line in terms of the assistance they are providing to the insurgency in the South, the United States, for their part, would be prepared to match such a move by halting the bombing of targets in the North which are associated with that assistance.

This, then, is the impasse as I see it. There is a relation between this matter of bombing and whatever moves it may be possible to make towards an eventual settlement....

The North Vietnamese Government believes that the bombing of their territory should be stopped by a unilateral commitment on the part of the United States. The United States Government, on the other hand, argues that it is unrealistic to expect them to give a unilateral commitment of this kind which would leave North Vietnam without any commitment in respect of their infiltration of men and supplies into the South.

What is to be the position of the Canadian Government in this situation? I believe that there are two choices open to us. We can take strong public positions on any or all of the issues involved in the present conflict. That is the easiest thing we can do. Alternatively, we can continue to do what we have been trying to do. So long as I am in this office that is what I propose to continue to do, because I believe this is the only effective way available of achieving the objectives we have in mind. We shall continue to conduct quietly and through diplomatic channels our efforts to find the basis for an accommodation in Vietnam.

I should seriously suggest to the House that we can follow one or the other course I have mentioned. We cannot effectively follow both at one and the same time. I think we have to admit to ourselves that there are no simple solutions to this conflict. And, because there are no simple solutions, a settlement in Vietnam will not be achieved overnight; it can only emerge from a patient probing of positions.

It will have to go right to the roots and the origins of the conflict in Vietnam and it will have to be such as to hold out an assured prospect of peace and stability, not only in Vietnam but in Southeast Asia as a whole. This is what Lord Avon had in mind when he talked of neutralization -- not now, not as a means to bring this conflict to an end, but as the kind of solution that would follow a negotiated settlement. If this is what we are working toward, then I think it will be agreed we must take first steps first.

It is being put to me from time to time that Canada, either by itself or in co-operation with other countries, should issue a call to a new Geneva conference. Before we set out to determine the proposed new role for the Commission, we had already done that. Before we sent Mr. Ronning to Hanoi and Saigon and elsewhere, we had already done that. I now resist this course, not because it is unreasonable or because it does not represent a long-term objective of the Government of Canada. We have had discussions with the Government of India -- and I mention India because of the speech made yesterday by her distinguished Prime Minister to the effect that there should be a conference called.

This proposal was made over a year ago, and again last November, before we contemplated the proposed role for the Commission, and before we decided on the Ronning missions. I have now resisted this course, in the sense that I have resisted it before, because all the information available to me indicates that a call of this kind will not have the desired results in present circumstances, much as I should like to be able to say that the situation was otherwise. We have been told this without going to Moscow, on the highest authority. It is one thing to call for a conference; it is quite another thing to ensure its being attended by those who must be there.

It seems to me that a conference lies at the end of the road, not at the beginning. If one could be held now, and if the Soviet Union, as Co-Chairman, acquiesced in the suggestion of the Prime Minister of India to join with Britain in calling such a conference, all of us would support this. But I should have to say, as I have already implied, that, knowing what I do, I should be greatly surprised if the representatives that must be at such a conference would be prepared to attend one at this time, whether it would be on Vietnam or indirectly on Laos or Cambodia....

I cannot foresee what intermediate steps may have to intervene before the time for such a conference is ripe. But, on the basis of all the discussion we have had, it is my assessment that it is likely there would have to be some preliminary undertakings (and I emphasize the word "undertakings") about the points of substance which are at issue in this conflict. What this means, in Canadian terms, is that we must do all we can to try to create the conditions in which the processes which will lead to an ultimate settlement can be started. This is precisely the task to which we have addressed ourselves.

I say again that we welcome the proposals made yesterday by the Prime Minister of India. The purposes and objectives behind her proposals are shared by the Canadian Government and they are shared by all of us in this House. If these proposals commend themselves to the parties concerned, and if the parties concerned would attend the conference -- I am sure the United States would be among those that would -- and if progress on that basis were possible, I can assure the House and the Government of India that Canada is prepared to do whatever may be required of us to see that these proposals are translated into action.

My right hon. friend spoke of Mr. Ronning's two visits to Hanoi. I should like to underline certain aspects of this initiative which may have been lost sight of in the great volume of publicity... which Mr. Ronning's visits have generated.

First, I have said that this was a Canadian initiative and that it was carried out by Mr. Ronning on the instructions of the Canadian Government, and not on the instructions in any way of any other government. I reiterate this today because the impression has been created in some quarters that Mr. Ronning's mandate may have been something other than it was.

Second, I should like the House to understand that the assignment we have taken on is essentially in the nature of a good offices assignment. It is inherent in such an assignment that we should be concerned to understand the positions and attitudes of all the parties, and that we should do our best to interpret and clarify the positions and attitudes of one side to the other. That, broadly speaking, has been the form which Mr. Ronning's assignment has taken.

Third, I would like to restate the ultimate object of this initiative. It has seemed to us that, if a beginning is to be made in the long and patient process which we hope will lead to ultimate peace in Vietnam, we must find a basis on which both sides would be prepared to see such a beginning made. The mere calling of a conference, desirable as that is, does not meet this essential objective, as we have learned in our discussions with both sides. This is

the only potentially useful channel through which there has been contact with both sides in a long time. I will not say it is the only channel, but it is the only channel which has access to both sides. I regard this as a tribute to our country as well as to Mr. Ronning himself.

I do not wish to give the House a misleading impression of our results so far. We have not achieved any spectacular results and I think I can quite frankly say that we have had no illusions as to the pace at which progress was likely to be possible.

As I have explained previously to the House, we regard the two visits which have now been made to Hanoi -- there may be others -- as phases of a continuing effort. Over how long a period of time this effort may extend I cannot say. What is significant is that we have had a fair hearing and on both occasions with the top personalities of the North and the South and, of course, with the Government of the United States. I can say that if the channel we have established remains open, and if its potential usefulness is not called into question by any of those concerned, I do not think, in a situation where a failure of communication may be crucial, we can discount the significance of such a channel for the time when the circumstances for the solution of the Vietnam conflict are ripe.

The situation facing us in Vietnam is as serious as any which has faced us since the Korean war. Since that time there has been growing confidence on the part of the international community that it has the means of bringing its influence to bear on situations of this kind, and to put an end to armed conflict, and to lay the groundwork for political solutions. That is the essence of the conception of peace-keeping which Canada and others have tried to develop and strengthen through the United Nations.

We accepted the suggestion of the President of the United States that he would welcome any effort by any country to try to bring about at least preliminary talks that might lead to serious negotiations, which in turn might result in a negotiated settlement. It was in the light of this situation that we thought last December there was a role for the International Commission. Canada, India and Poland, as members of this Commission, have had experience in Indochina now for 11 years. Being the only body that has a continuing link with Hanoi and Saigon, we thought that, quite apart from any authority given to that Commission under the Geneva Agreement, it might undertake the effort to try and bring about a narrowing in the position taken by the various parties.

To that end we have had useful and fruitful exchanges with India and Poland. Our view was that the time had come to use the Commission for this purpose. We did not suggest they were not as sincerely interested in peace as we were. One of the countries took the position that perhaps this was not the particular moment in which to establish a role for the Commission as a mediating instrument. But we continue, all of us, India, Poland and Canada -- and this was reaffirmed yesterday by the Prime Minister of India -- to look upon the Commission as having a role in this situation.

The Government of India reaffirmed yesterday that they would be happy to see the Commission used to try and bring the parties together. Because we felt there would be some delay in trying to use the Commission for the purpose I have mentioned, the Government asked Mr. Ronning, a man born in China, who speaks Chinese, who knows many of the personalities involved, to undertake, if this could be arranged with the support of the governments concerned -- the United States, North Vietnam and South Vietnam -- a series of discussions to find out if there was a basis for a preliminary discussion between the parties.

We have made a commitment, and we intend to respect it, to the parties concerned that what went on in Hanoi is a matter that must rest with the Government of Canada until such time as we are in a position to report, finally, success or failure, It cannot be any other way....

We have had discussions only this week with representatives of the Government of the United States, right here in Ottawa, I have had discussions, as the Prime Minister has, with the Deputy Premier of the Soviet Union, who is visiting Canada. We shall continue these discussions next week. Other countries are engaged in similar processes. I want this House and the country to know that there is no item on our agenda that is more important than trying to bring about some process of discussion between the parties concerned, in order that we can bring an end to the conflict in Vietnam. That is the objective of all of us.

I believe that a military solution of this problem, of course, is not possible by itself. We are all aware of the dangers that flow from the conflict that has raged in that area. We are dealing with the situation as it is now; we are not dealing with its genesis. We have sought not to emphasize the history of this situation but to try to see if we could not make our position as a mediator more effective by taking the most objective position possible. I think thus far we have succeeded in doing this.

I can tell the House that no opportunity will go by without our making every attempt that we can, by ourselves, as a member of the Commission or in concert with other countries, to try to bring about peace talks. When they do take place, whether by a Geneva conference or as a result of the kind of situation that developed in Greece and Malaysia, namely by gradual process, then we shall address ourselves as one country in the international community to those methods by which we hope to bring about an effective neutralization of the whole area.

The objective that Lord Avon spoke of the other day will not be achieved without, of course, the use and support of the international community, through the United Nations or otherwise. I resume my seat after saying that this undoubtedly is one of the most serious situations the world faces. It is not a conflict in which we are engaged. It is not a conflict in which we have any intention of dispatching Canadian armed forces. This, we continue to repeat, would be inconsistent with our role on the International Control Commission

just as Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom yesterday said that it would be improper for Britain to send forces to Vietnam because of her role as one of the Co-Chairmen of the Geneva Conference powers.....

We have done everything we know, with our friends, to put forward our point of view. We have done so as a result of the accommodation extended our representative, Mr. Ronning, in Hanoi. We intend to respect the nature of the conversations that have taken place there and elsewhere, in the hope that we might be able, as a result of this instrument, to bring about the beginnings of peace in Vietnam. If we do not succeed, it will not be because Canada has not tried. We are not wedded to this method alone. If there is some other way by which peace negotiations can be begun, we shall support it. But I want this House to know that we are not weakening in our effort to try to bring peace in Vietnam.

s/c