



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
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STATEMENT ON CANADIAN MEMBERSHIP IN THE
INTERNATIONAL COMMISSIONS FOR VIETNAM,
LAOS AND CAMBODIA

The Canadian Government has today (July 28) transmitted to Mr. Anthony Eden, co-chairman, with Mr. Molotov, of the Geneva Conference on Indochina, its acceptance of the invitation forwarded by him on July 21 to designate representatives to form, with India and Poland, the International Supervisory Commissions for Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Officials are being sent to New Delhi this week to take part in preliminary organizational discussions, prior to the actual establishment of the Commissions in Indochina. The Canadian representatives on the Commissions will be named shortly.

The Government has decided to accept this invitation only after detailed study of the cease-fire and armistice agreements which are to be supervised by the International Commissions, and with full knowledge and appreciation of the responsibilities and difficulties that will go with membership. There are no illusions about the magnitude and complexity of the task.

Canada is geographically remote from Indochina and her collective security responsibilities in Southeast Asia are limited to those that arise from membership in the United Nations. We know from experience, however, that just as local conflicts can become general war, so conditions of security and stability in any part of the world serve the cause of peace everywhere. If, therefore, by participating in the work of these Indochinese Commissions, Canada can assist in establishing such security and stability in Southeast Asia, we will be serving our own country, as well as the cause of peace.

While it is a matter of regret to us that the settlement in Indochina and the supervision of that settlement are not directly under the aegis of the United Nations, the Government is satisfied that Canadian participation will be fully in harmony with our responsibilities as a member of the world organization.

It should be emphasized that acceptance of membership on these Commissions does not mean that we have been called upon to guarantee or enforce the Indochina cease-fire. Nor does it involve any new military or collective security commitments for Canada.

The actual execution of the cease-fire agreements is the responsibility of the two sides directly concerned, functioning through Joint Commissions established by the Armistice Agreements. The International Commissions themselves have no enforcement obligation or responsibility.

Their function will be solely supervisory, judicial and mediatory. Under Indian chairmanship, the Commissions will be responsible for supervising the proper execution of the provisions of the agreements by the parties directly concerned; will assist these parties with the interpretation of those provisions; will be available to settle disputes; and, in cases where disputes cannot be settled, will report the matter to the members of the Geneva Conference. India, Poland and Canada are also expected to assume responsibility at a later stage for supervising elections.

In carrying out their tasks the International Supervisory Commissions should be able to function more effectively than the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission in Korea which, because of equal Communist and non-Communist representation, very often had effective action blocked, and which could report only to the two military commands.

The Indochina Commissions will each consist of three members - Indian, Polish and Canadian - and in most cases will be able to take decisions by majority vote. In those special and designated cases where unanimity is required by the cease-fire agreements but cannot be obtained, the commissions will submit majority and minority reports to the Geneva Conference powers. It will then be the responsibility of those powers to deal with the matter.

In addition to providing representatives for each of the three Supervisory Commissions, India, Poland and Canada will supply a number of military officers for the fixed and mobile inspection teams which will supervise the execution of the cease-fire agreements in the field, under the direction of the Supervisory Commissioners.

A study of the information available has led us to the conclusion that the Commissions have a reasonable chance of operating effectively and of making a constructive contribution to the successful implementation of the cease-fire agreements, and hence to peace in Southeast Asia. If our expectations unfortunately prove ill-founded, and the Commissions are frustrated by obstruction, then, of course, no useful purpose would be served by continuing their existence.

The exchange of views which we have had with those powers with whom we are especially closely associated in efforts to maintain peace and strengthen security, has confirmed our conviction that we ought to accept this onerous but honourable assignment.

Finally, we have been conscious of the serious consequences which might follow if we were to decline the invitation, since this could delay and complicate the implementation of the cease-fire agreements with unhappy, and possibly even serious results. We have no illusions that the task we are undertaking will be either easy or of short duration, but we take satisfaction from the fact that in performing it Canada will be playing a worthy and responsible part in an effort to strengthen peace.