



# STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION

DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

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## A REVIEW OF THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Statement to the House of Commons Standing Committee on External Affairs on April 4, 1966, by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Paul Martin.

When I came before the Committee on June 10, 1965, I gave a detailed account of the developments which had led up to the situation at that time in Vietnam. I said I thought it was difficult to form a judgment of that situation without examining in its proper historical perspective the problem in Vietnam. I believe the situation is no less true today than it was a little less than a year ago. I know there are interpretations other than that which the Canadian Government has placed on the course of events in Vietnam. Indeed, a great deal of the discussion and dissent which have developed in relation to Vietnam have focused on the history of the conflict itself. I think, however, that no useful purpose would be served by going again over the ground which we covered last year, but in that context I wish to make two comments.

First, I would like to remind the Committee that while there are differences over the antecedents of the present conflict in Vietnam, the assessment which the Government has formed on this subject is an independent assessment resting on a long record of firsthand Canadian experience in Indochina. Secondly, if our foreign policy is to have any impact on the present situation, I believe we must now cast our thinking forward rather than backward. I also believe we are unlikely to achieve anything useful by a policy of denunciation, which is sometimes being urged on the Government by those who take issue with our position.

What we must do is to map out a course which we regard as right and realistic, which takes account of the facts as we know them and which has some prospect of contributing to a peaceful settlement. And this is what we have been trying to do.

There is one matter with which I should like to deal before giving the Committee some indication of recent developments in the Vietnam situation. This is the matter of Canadian participation in the International Commission in Vietnam.

Members of the Committee will recall that this was the only issue on which the House divided when the estimates of the Department of External Affairs were considered on February 8. I do not pretend -- and I do not suppose anyone would pretend -- that the Commission is in a position, in present

circumstances, to do justice to the mandate with which it was charged by the Geneva powers in 1954. That is not in any way the fault of the Commission, which was set up to supervise a cease-fire and not to control an armed conflict. Nevertheless, there are -- and there will continue to be -- a number of good reasons for maintaining the Commission's presence in Vietnam. Some of these reasons I will be prepared to deal with in interrogation; some of them I will not be able to discuss.

First, none of the interested parties has at any time suggested that the International Commission be withdrawn or its mandate cancelled. Not even the Chinese People's Republic has made this suggestion. On the contrary, it has been confirmed to us within recent weeks both by the Secretary of State of the United States and by senior personalities of the Government of North Vietnam that they attach importance to a continued Commission presence in Vietnam. Indeed, the Committee might be interested to know that, when Victor Moore, our new Commissioner on the Control Commission, made his introductory calls in Hanoi about three and a half weeks ago, it was represented to him that the North Vietnamese Government would like to see the Commission hold more of its meetings in Hanoi than has been the case in recent years. I understand that this matter has since been discussed among the Commissioners and that there appears to be general agreement to act on the North Vietnamese suggestion.

I think this would be a good decision, and it would not be establishing a precedent. The Commission at another period has spent more time in Hanoi than it has during the past few years, so there would be no precedent involved in spending a longer period in Hanoi.

Secondly, both North and South Vietnam continue to look to the Commission to consider and adjudicate their charges of violations of the Cease-Fire Agreement. While there can be legitimate argument over the usefulness of such a procedure in circumstances where the prospects of remedial action are limited, the fact is that the parties do attach importance to this function of the Commission and to the public presentation which the Commission is able to make on the basis of its investigations of breaches of the Cease-Fire Agreement.

Thirdly, if members of the Committee examine the Cease-Fire Agreement which was concluded in Geneva in 1954, they will find that the Commission is, in fact, the only tangible instrument of the Geneva settlement as it affects Vietnam. Even if we were to consider, therefore, that the Commission's presence in Vietnam in present circumstances is of largely symbolic significance, we cannot, I think, discount the importance of the Commission as a reflection of the continuing interest of the Geneva powers in a situation which engages their international responsibilities....

I think it is fair to say that the elimination of the Commission from the Vietnam scene in present circumstances would only serve to complicate what is already a situation which is fraught with serious risks for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Fourthly, we have always thought it right to keep open the possibility that the Commission might be able in the right circumstances to make a positive contribution to a peaceful settlement of the Vietnam issue. I think I can say to the Committee, without exaggeration, that this possibility has played an increasing part in our thinking about the Vietnam conflict. I am satisfied that we would be ill-advised at this stage to discard an instrument which may yet have a part to play in bringing this issue from the battlefield to the conference table; I am strengthened in this view by the attitude taken by a number of parties concerned and by the strong position taken by the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

I now shall turn to some recent developments in the Vietnam situation. I would like to say something about the pause in the bombing of North Vietnam which began on Christmas Eve and continued for 37 days until the end of January. The position of the Canadian Government for some time previously had been that such a pause could represent a useful opening for a peaceful solution of the Vietnam issue. It was with this consideration in mind that the Prime Minister had suggested the possibility of a pause in April of last year. The pause which took place in the following months was short-lived and did not produce the results for which we had hoped. When a further pause was initiated by the United States in late December we welcomed this as a genuine contribution to peace and we did what we could, through diplomatic channels, to reinforce the many efforts that then were being made to turn it to good account.

I do not intend to recapitulate those efforts, except to say it was a matter of disappointment to us that the prospect of some break in the situation, which the pause might have offered, did not materialize. Nevertheless, we took the view throughout the pause that we hoped it might be extended until all reasonable possibilities of eliciting some response from the other side had been exhausted.

Toward the end of the bombing pause, the President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam addressed a series of letters to other governments, including the Government of Canada. We have studied President Ho Chi Minh's letter with the greatest care and consideration to see, in particular, if it offered any hope of a reversal of the present grave situation in Vietnam. While it did not appear to us that there were, in fact, new elements in that letter, we nevertheless felt it provided a basis on which time it might be possible to explore the position of the North Vietnamese Government in greater detail.

That is one reason we decided that the time might be opportune to send a special representative of the Canadian Government to Hanoi to present the Canadian reply and, at the same time, to probe the views of the North Vietnamese Government on the prospects for a settlement of the Vietnam issue through other than military means....

Perhaps I should say we did not think it profitable at this stage to enter into a controversy with President Ho Chi Minh over the interpretation of events in Vietnam which was contained in his letter. Rather, we availed ourselves of this opportunity to re-state the Canadian view that there could be no lasting solution of the present conflict other than through negotiations and to suggest, at the same time, that there might be a contribution which the members of the International Control Commission in Vietnam could make to that end.

The Vietnam question was placed before the Security Council at the beginning of February. There has been a good deal of discussion about the wisdom of this step, with particular reference to its timing after the bombing of North Vietnam had been resumed. As far as this Government is concerned, our position on this matter has remained unchanged. I said in the General Assembly last fall that the United Nations was the place, or one of the places, where the question of Vietnam should certainly be discussed. We have been aware, of course, that the prospects of the United Nations playing a direct part in relation to the Vietnam issue in present circumstances was very limited. This is not only because three of the principal parties to the Vietnam conflict are not members of the United Nations but also because there has been a reluctance on the part of some countries to have brought before the United Nations an issue such as this which directly engages the interests of the great powers.

Nevertheless, it would have been entirely inconsistent with Canadian attitudes and policies to deny, as I say, the right of the United Nations to pronounce itself on an issue which involves the maintenance of international peace and security perhaps more than any other issue at the present time. In our view, the provisions of the Charter in this matter are clear. It is regrettable that the Security Council should not have taken the opportunity of at least recommending to the parties that they seek a peaceful solution of the Vietnam conflict through the machinery for which they themselves have expressed a clear preference -- that is to say, the machinery created in Geneva in 1954.

The inability of the Security Council to deal with this issue has reinforced the judgment which we had formed some time ago, and which was in my mind when the debate in the House of Commons took place in February, that we should look to the International Commission in Vietnam to see whether, in the right circumstances, there was not a role which it could play toward bringing about a peaceful settlement of the issue there. This is the direction in which our thinking has been tending since last December, and it is to this aspect of the Vietnam problem that I want to turn.

The first question that arises is why it should be thought that the International Commission might be able to make a positive contribution to a solution of the Vietnam conflict. The Commission was brought into being by the Geneva Conference of 1954. We have served on that Commission since that time, along with India and Poland and, as well, we have served on the comparable commissions in Cambodia and Laos. In a sense, the Commission may be said to represent the continuing interest of the Geneva powers in the Vietnam situation. It is now clear that, when the time comes, any negotiation of the Vietnam conflict is likely to be conducted within the Geneva frame of reference. It is natural, therefore, to think of the Commission as an instrument which might be brought into play in preparing the ground for an eventual negotiation.

The question has been raised in our contacts with interested governments whether there is anything in the Geneva Cease-Fire Agreement which confers on the Commission a mandate on the lines we have been considering. I must say that, on a strictly legal interpretation of that Agreement, the answer must be in the negative. But I do not think anyone who is concerned about the course of developments in Vietnam would feel justified in looking at this issue

only in legalistic terms. We have never looked at it that way. We have never thought of the Commission as possessing a role purely on the basis of powers extended to it under the Geneva Agreement of 1954; nor, on the other hand are we thinking of any fresh mandate being conferred on the Commission either by the Geneva powers acting collectively or by the Soviet Union and Britain acting jointly in their capacities as co-chairmen of the Geneva Conference.

We have informed the Soviet Union, we have informed the United Kingdom Government, we have informed other governments of our views as to the role that the Commission might assume, but we have not thought it was necessary to get their authority for making our suggestion. What we have had in mind is something modest and informal; we continue to believe, however, that our proposal has potential merit. Our proposal was really in the nature of a good-offices assignment, which would be undertaken not necessarily by the Commission as such but by the three Commission powers acting as sovereign nations, which have been associated with the Vietnam problem for the past 11 years, and which have established a fair record of co-operation between them. It is our view that the knowledge and experience of the Vietnam problem of the three Commission powers and the ready access they command to all the interested parties would make the Commission powers a particularly suitable group to carry forward the search for peace in Vietnam. This is the common objective of the three members of the Commission.

There have been notable attempts made to try and bring about peaceful negotiation in Vietnam. Attempts made by the British, by a good-offices body of the Commonwealth, by individual intermediaries, some publicly known and some not, by concerted action on the part of a group of countries, including Canada -- action by Canada itself, for instance, in the visit that Mr. Blair Seaborn made in June 1965. But for none of these, other than the visit of Mr. Blair Seaborn, did the mediators know in advance that it would have access both to the Government in Saigon and to the Government in Hanoi. It must not be forgotten, in appraising the role of the Commission, that it has direct access to both capitals in the two belligerent areas in the regrettably divided country of Vietnam. We have, of course, for some time been supporting in general terms the re-convening of the Geneva Conference. In fact, about a year ago we specifically urged that the Geneva Conference be recalled. Britain itself, as one of the co-chairmen, has urged the Geneva powers to meet.

Recently the British Prime Minister discussed this matter with Mr. Kosygin when he suggested that they both might agree to calling a Geneva Conference.

However, I should like to make clear that we are not now proposing the calling of a Geneva Conference. We hope the time will come when this will be practicable and possible. I want to make as clear as I can that the proposal we have made for a use of the Commission should not be regarded as an effort to call or persuade the two chairmen of the Geneva Conference to call an immediate Conference. We are not pressing such a move at this time, because we are certain that such a call in present circumstances would not produce results.

Also, we do not think that this is the right approach for the Commission powers at this stage. A reconvened Geneva Conference is and remains, of course, the end result of the development we hope to be able to set in train, but it is not the first step. Indeed, I would be afraid, if we tried to make it the first step, that we are more likely to exhaust than to establish such influence as we may be able to have with the parties principally concerned in the Vietnam conflict. I have made this clear in talks that I have had with particular parties concerned. Certain propositions have now been put forward on both sides with respect to a settlement of the Vietnam conflict. There are the four points of the Government of Hanoi, the 14 points of the Government of the United States, and the four points of the Government of South Vietnam. In a sense, this represents the beginning of a process of negotiation. But such a process can be carried only so far by way of public pronouncements. The gap between the positions, particularly of the United States and of the Government of North Vietnam, is still very wide and something will have to be done to narrow it. There is also a barrier of distrust and suspicion that will somehow have to be overcome.

It has seemed to us that this is something which could be pursued cautiously and discreetly by the Commission powers. We are not thinking at this stage of anything other than a good-office exercise. The object of such an exercise would be to try to bring about conditions in which the parties themselves might find it possible to engage in direct discussions as a prelude to formal negotiation. In essence, therefore, what we have in mind is an unblocking of channels which, in the absence of such action, are likely to continue to remain closed.

I have already indicated, in general terms, that we have had a series of exchanges about a possible Commission initiative along these lines with India and Poland, who are our partners on the Commission. We have put our position to Britain and the Soviet Union as co-chairmen of the Geneva Conference. I have also taken the opportunity personally to discuss the matter with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, with Secretary of State Rusk and, through others, with the Government of South Vietnam and the Government of North Vietnam.

Our exchanges with India and Poland must necessarily remain confidential. I think I can say that one common point in their initial reaction had to do with the timing and the circumstances in which any Commission initiative might stand a chance of being acceptable to the parties on the ground. That was one of the considerations we had in mind when we decided to ask Mr. Chester Ronning, a distinguished former member of our foreign service, to pay special visits to Saigon and Hanoi early last month. I know that the members of the Committee will not expect me to go into details about his mission, or his future participation. It must be apparent that this is a significant assignment.

On these visits he had a full opportunity of discussing with senior personalities in both capitals their views of the present Vietnam situation and the possibility of the Commission powers playing some part in opening up avenues which might ultimately lead to a peaceful settlement of the conflict. You will appreciate that it would not be helpful for me at this stage to disclose the contents of the discussions which Mr. Ronning had on his visits to Saigon and Hanoi or even the possibilities which they may help to open up. All I would like

to say is that the results of these visits have in no way seemed to me to foreclose a Commission role in the right circumstances. In the meantime we are continuing our exchanges with India and Poland in response to their own indications that they would like to see these discussions carried forward.

Turning to another aspect of the Vietnam problem, the significance of the meeting in Honolulu between U.S. and South Vietnam leaders was that it laid the groundwork for a comprehensive programme of social and economic reform in South Vietnam. All of us recognize, I think, the very great problems which the implementation of a programme of this magnitude poses in any developing country. These problems are bound to be even greater in a context of continuing armed conflict and in circumstances where positive results can so easily be negated. Nevertheless, we believe that the renewed emphasis that is now being placed on the social and economic aspects of the problem in Vietnam is the right emphasis. It is calculated to contribute to a more stable and progressive society, in which the ordinary Vietnamese may be able to feel that his interests are actively engaged.

Recent developments in South Vietnam have underlined once again what I regard as the crucial problem in that country, which is that of achieving a stable political basis. This is not a problem that is confined to that country; it is a problem in many of the new countries which lack the resources to meet the mounting aspirations of their people for a better life. But it is aggravated in South Vietnam by the disruption which has been caused by subversion and armed conflict.

It is my understanding that the tenor of much of the current protest in South Vietnam is to the effect that only a broadly-based civilian government will provide a basis on which the South Vietnamese can be expected to take the decisions which are certain to face them in the months and years to come. We must be careful, however, not to draw false inferences from what is currently going on in South Vietnam. In particular, I think it would be wrong to conclude that these manifestations of political dissent are based on support for the concept of a government which was composed of representatives of the Viet Cong or which included their participation. There are many strands to the current dissent in South Vietnam, but that, according to the best information available to me, is not one of them.

There is a great deal of public concern in Canada, as in other countries, with the situation in Vietnam. As I interpret this concern, it is based on the risks that are inherent in the present situation and on the desire to see a fair and equitable peace established in an area which has been convulsed by conflict for the past 20 years. We share this concern. As a member of this Commission, with special responsibilities, we have felt that our position was not precisely that of other countries and of other governments. We feel very strongly that, if we are going to reach a settlement in this matter, every instrument that is capable of being used to encourage negotiation must be used.

We are strongly of the view -- and we are not without considerable encouragement and support for this view -- that the Commission has a role and that we, as a member of that Commission at the present time, have a role, and we are seeking to take advantage of this opportunity to the fullest extent possible.

I want to acknowledge that there have been other proposals made by a number of governments. One of them was a proposal made by His Holiness Pope Paul VI. I told his spokesman, on behalf of the Government of Canada, that his proposal for entrusting to the non-aligned powers the responsibility of arbitration was one that would receive Canadian support. Unhappily, for practical reasons (and I suppose these included the fact that the offer was not accepted by the other side), the proposal was not realized. But I wish now to acknowledge a note that we have had from the Secretary of the Vatican State, indicating their approval of the Canadian initiative.

I want to acknowledge, as well, the efforts being made by other bodies and other agencies, and I wish to say that Canada is prepared to support any effort that will help to bring about the beginning of negotiations.

That is all I have to say on Vietnam.

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s/c

APPENDIX I

President  
of the Democratic Republic  
of Vietnam

Hanoi, January 24, 1966

H.E. Mr. Lester Bowles Pearson  
Prime Minister of Canada,  
Ottawa

Your Excellency,

I have the honour to call Your attention to the war of aggression waged by the U.S. imperialists in our country, Vietnam.

Over the past 11 years and more, the United States has been seriously sabotaging the 1954 Geneva Agreements and preventing the peaceful reunification of Vietnam in an attempt to turn South Vietnam into a U.S. new-type colony and military base. It is now waging a war of aggression and barbarously repressing the patriotic struggle of our fellow-countrymen in the South. At the same time, it tries to draw experiences from this war to repress the national liberation movement in other countries.

In an endeavour to get out of the quagmire in South Vietnam, the U.S. imperialists have massively increased the strength of the U.S. expeditionary corps and sent in troops from a number of their satellites to wage direct aggression in South Vietnam. They have also launched air attacks on the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, an independent and sovereign country.

While intensifying and extending the war of aggression in Vietnam, the U.S. imperialists are clamouring about their "desire for peace" and their "readiness to engage in unconditional discussions", in the hope of fooling world public opinion and the American people. Recently, the Johnson Administration has initiated a so-called "search for peace", and put forward a 14-point proposal. As an excuse for its war of aggression in South Vietnam, it claims that it is "keeping its commitments" to the Saigon puppet administration; it slanders the patriotic struggle of the people of South Vietnam, calling it "an aggression by North Vietnam". This deceitful contention can in no way rub out the solemn declaration made by the United States in Geneva in 1954 that "it will refrain from the threat or the use of force to disturb them (i.e. the Geneva Agreements)". Still less can President Johnson's hypocritical allegations conceal the U.S. crimes in Vietnam.

The United States talks about respecting the Geneva Agreements. But one of the main provisions of the said Agreements bans the introduction of foreign troops into Vietnam. If the United States really respects the Agreements, it must withdraw all U.S. and satellite troops from South Vietnam.

It is crystal-clear that the United States is the aggressor who is trampling underfoot the Vietnamese soil. The people of South Vietnam are the victim of aggression and are fighting in self-defence. If the United States really wants peace, it must recognize the South Vietnam National Front for Liberation as the sole genuine representative of the people of South Vietnam, and engage in negotiations with it. In accordance with the aspirations of the people of South Vietnam and the spirit of the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Vietnam, the National Front for Liberation is fighting to achieve independence, democracy, peace and neutrality in South Vietnam, and to advance towards the peaceful reunification of the fatherland. If the United States really respects the right to self-determination of the people of South Vietnam, it cannot but approve this correct programme of the National Front for Liberation.

The 14 points of the United States boil down to this: the United States is trying hard to cling to South Vietnam, to maintain there the puppet administration rigged up by it, and to perpetuate the partition of Vietnam.

In his January 12, 1966, message read before the U.S. Congress, President Johnson affirmed that it was the policy of the United States not to pull out of South Vietnam, and he forced the Vietnamese people to choose between "peace and the ravages of a conflict". That is an impudent threat, an attempt to impose on the Vietnamese people the conditions of the so-called U.S. "unconditional discussions".

The Vietnamese people will never submit to the U.S. imperialists' threats.

At the very moment when the U.S. Government puts forward the so-called new "peace efforts", it is frantically increasing the U.S. strength in South Vietnam. It is stepping up the terrorist raids, resorting to the "scorched earth" policy, burning all, destroying all, killing all, using napalm-bombs, poison gases and toxic chemicals to burn down villages and massacre the civilian population in vast areas of South Vietnam.

I strongly protest against such extremely barbarous methods of warfare. I earnestly call on all peace-loving governments and peoples the world over to resolutely stay the hands of the U.S. war criminals.

The United States keeps sending its planes on espionage flights in preparation for new air attacks on the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

On the other hand, it is launching air attacks on many areas in the Kingdom of Laos, and multiplying armed provocations against the Kingdom of Cambodia, thus posing an even more serious menace to peace in Indochina.

Obviously, the U.S. "search for peace" is only designed to conceal its schemes for intensified war of aggression. The Johnson Administration's stand remains: aggression and expansion of the war.

To settle the Vietnam question, the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam has put forward the four-point stand which is an expression of the essential provisions of the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Vietnam. This is a stand of peace.

Having gone through over 20 years of war, the Vietnamese people desire peace more eagerly than anyone else to build their life. But real peace can by no means be dissociated from genuine independence. So long as the U.S. army of aggression still remains on our soil, our people will resolutely fight against it. If the U.S. Government really wants a peaceful settlement, it must accept the four-point stand of the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and prove this by actual deeds; it must end unconditionally and for good all bombing raids and other war acts against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Only in this way can a political solution to the Vietnam problem be envisaged.

Your Excellency,

Canada is a member of the International Commission for the Supervision and Control of the Implementation of the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Vietnam.

In face of the extremely serious situation brought about by the United States in Vietnam, I hope that Your Government will fulfil its obligations under the Geneva Agreements.

I take this opportunity to renew to Your Excellency the assurances of my high consideration.

HO CHI MINH  
President  
of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam

#### FOUR-POINT STAND OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM

The unswerving policy of the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam is to strictly respect the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Vietnam, and to correctly implement their basic provisions as embodied in the following points:

1. Reaffirmation of the basic national rights of the Vietnamese people: peace, independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. In accordance with the Geneva Agreements, the U.S. Government must withdraw from South Vietnam all U.S. troops, military personnel and weapons of all kinds, dismantle all U.S. military bases there, cancel its "military alliance" with South Vietnam. The U.S. Government must end its policy of intervention and aggression in South Vietnam. In accordance with the Geneva Agreements, the U.S. Government must stop its acts of war against North Vietnam, cease all encroachments on the territory and sovereignty of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

2. Pending the peaceful reunification of Vietnam, while Vietnam is still temporarily divided into two zones, the military provisions of the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Vietnam must be strictly respected: the two zones must refrain from joining any military alliance with foreign countries, and there must be no foreign military bases, troops and military personnel on their respective territory.

3. The internal affairs of South Vietnam must be settled by the people of South Vietnam themselves, in accordance with the programme of the South Vietnam National Front for Liberation without any foreign interference.

4. The peaceful reunification of Vietnam is to be settled by the Vietnamese people in both zones, without any foreign interference.

This stand unquestionably enjoys the approval and support of all peace-and justice-loving governments and peoples in the world.

The Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam holds that the above-mentioned stand is the basis for the soundest political settlement of the Vietnam problem. If this basis is accepted, favourable conditions will be created for the peaceful settlement of the Vietnam problem and it will be possible to consider the reconvening of an international conference of the type of the 1954 Geneva Conference on Vietnam.

The Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam declares that any approach contrary to the above stand is irrelevant; any approach leading to a UN intervention in the Vietnam situation is also irrelevant, because such approaches are basically at variance with the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Vietnam.

(Excerpts from Prime Minister PHAM VAN DONG's Report to the DRV National Assembly -- April 8, 1965)

APPENDIX II

Ottawa, February 28, 1966

His Excellency  
Ho Chi Minh,  
President of the Democratic  
Republic of Vietnam.

Dear Mr. President,

I have read with interest your letter of January 24 which was addressed to Canada as a member of the International Commission for Supervision and Control in Vietnam.

You will not expect me to share the interpretation of the nature of the problem in Vietnam and the origins of the present conflict which is set forth in your letter. I do not believe, however, that it would serve any useful purpose at this time to dwell on our differences, other than to note that they exist.

What concerns me, as it does the people of Canada, is the tragic toll in human suffering and the threat to international peace which the continuation of the conflict in Vietnam involves.

I am convinced that the use of force is not an acceptable means of attaining political objectives in the world as it is constituted today. That is why Canada has urged all parties to the conflict in Vietnam to pursue a course of negotiation. It is in this direction that we see the prospects of a fair and lasting settlement which will take account of the freely expressed aspirations of all the people of Vietnam.

For these reasons I have been deeply disappointed by the failure so far of all efforts to promote unconditional discussions on Vietnam. I have carefully studied the positions which have been put forward by the main parties to the conflict. While these positions are still very far apart, I believe that they show some common elements on which a foundation of peace can be built.

It is not for Canada to prescribe to the Vietnamese people how they shall order their political life and institutions. That is for the people of Vietnam themselves to decide freely when the time comes. But the present course of developments in Vietnam is a source of legitimate concern to the international community and it is my firm hope that it can be reversed before all avenues to a peaceful settlement are closed.

In your letter you refer to the obligations which the members of the International Commission for Supervision and Control have in the serious current situation in Vietnam. As a member of that Commission Canada has at all times endeavoured to carry out its obligations in a spirit of objectivity and impartiality towards the facts as we know them. I can assure you that we will continue to do so to the best of our capacity.

I also hope that the International Commission may be able to play some part in helping to restore peace in Vietnam. It seems to me that, by virtue of its long association with the problem and the advantage of access it has to all the parties to the present conflict, the Commission is in a unique position to play such a part. As far as my Government is concerned, it is prepared to explore all possibilities that may be open to the Commission in present circumstances to exert its efforts in the direction of peace.

Yours sincerely,

(signed) Lester B. Pearson