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THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON VIET-NAM

DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS  
MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES EXTÉRIEURES

The Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Mitchell Sharp, made the following statement today prior to his departure for Paris to lead the Canadian Delegation to the International Conference on Viet-Nam:

This will be an important conference. If it goes well, its beneficial effects will long be felt in Viet-Nam, both North and South. If it goes badly, the hopes for peace of the war-weary people of those two countries will be dimmed, and all those throughout the world who desire peace in Viet-Nam and in Indochina will have to think deeply about the hopes that were raised by the Paris Agreements of last month.

The chief issue, as I see it, will be to lay a firm basis on which the people of South Viet-Nam, as the Paris Agreements envisage, will be able to determine their own future. That means that the way must be cleared for the people of South Viet-Nam to achieve a political and military situation such that their country can at last cease to be the object of a bid for power from beyond its borders, with all the international reaction and involvement which is attracted by such a bid for power. In a real sense, the issue is that the internationalization of South Viet-Nam's political situation must be brought to an end. And that does not mean only that all troops which have entered South Viet-Nam must withdraw. It means also that, as soon as possible, the presence of international observers, and the need for them, must be done away with. Political normalcy must be restored as soon as possible, and achieving political normalcy will have to mean achieving a situation in which international observers need not watch over the

internal processes of that country, be they the working out of political balances within the country, or the functioning of its ordinary affairs, or the conduct of its elections.

That is why Canada will be attending this Conference. Canada, I need hardly say, has no direct national interests to promote either in Viet-Nam or at this Conference. The only reason for our being there at all is that we are, for the initial period of sixty days, members of the International Commission in Viet-Nam. The course of the Conference, indeed, will help to decide whether or not we will be in Viet-Nam for more than sixty days. And when we end our presence in Viet-Nam, our association with this Conference and with its decisions and undertakings will end as well.

I go to Paris, then, with a clear and immediate purpose, and I would like all Canadians to understand it equally clearly. We are not going to Paris to sit in judgment on the political and military settlements in Viet-Nam; we are not going to Paris to weigh the merits of the Agreements which were signed there last month, or to guarantee them or their implementation. We are going to Paris to do our part in ensuring that those Agreements have reasonable prospects of working, insofar as we are involved in them and for as long as we will be involved in them. Our involvement in the Conference arises directly from our involvement in the Commission, and our concern in Paris will be to ensure that our involvement in the Commission can be effective.

As I have said repeatedly, out of concern for the effectiveness of our task in the Commission, we consider that there is a crucial missing element in the present arrangements. We lack, the Commission

lacks, a continuing political authority to which we and our Commission colleagues would report. I am going to Paris to do all I can to ensure that such a body is created or designated, and that will be my chief aim. Without such a body, I do not believe that our task in Viet-Nam can be carried out effectively; without it, I do not believe that we can effectively serve the cause of peace in Viet-Nam by maintaining our presence in the new Commission there. And without it, I do not believe that I could say to the people of Canada that the job we are asked to do, the burden which Canada is being asked to bear, is worth it.

The Canadians who are now in Viet-Nam are a distinguished and dedicated group of men and women; they are doing an absolutely remarkable job under very trying conditions. What the International Commission has been able to do so far has largely been thanks to them. They have taken a role of leadership, and they have carried it off brilliantly. All Canadians should be proud of them. They have demonstrated once again that Canada and individual Canadians are prepared to do their part, indeed more than their part, in the cause of peace. But we need the means to make our part effective. I am going to Paris to seek those means, and I believe that I owe it to all Canadians. I believe Canada owes it to the cause of a lasting settlement in Viet-Nam and in Indochina.