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No. 84

December 3, 1972

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

INTERNATIONAL SUPERVISORY ARRANGEMENTS IN VIET-NAM

DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS  
MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES EXTÉRIEURES

The Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Hon. Mitchell Sharp, made the following statement today:

I have received a number of enquiries in recent days about the role Canada is being asked to undertake in Viet-Nam and about the Government's position on the matter. I would, therefore, like to summarize the position in both of these respects.

First of all, I want to emphasize that in the role being contemplated for a new international commission in Viet-Nam, there is no question of maintaining peace through the use of arms. If it is decided to provide Canadian military personnel for the commission they would not be a military formation but would be specially selected individuals who have the required expertise to observe and report on the implementation of the cease-fire agreement. They would be part of mixed observer groups drawn from each of the four participating countries. At the present time it is not clear how many would be involved.

The second point I wish to emphasize is that the Government has taken no decision on whether to join and cannot do so until the cease-fire negotiations have been completed and full information on the proposed arrangements is available.

Over the past four years the Government has indicated on many occasions in public statements of policy and in diplomatic exchanges its basic position that it would consider constructively any request for Canadian participation in truce supervisory arrangements when, in its opinion, based on the lessons of the past and the circumstances of the request, an operation held the promise of success and Canada could play a useful role.

On October 25, 1972, I was informed by U.S. Secretary of State Rogers that Canada had been mentioned in connection with the arrangements being discussed between the USA and North Viet-Nam. On October 26, following Radio Hanoi's revelation of the existence of a nine-point draft peace agreement between the United States and North Viet-Nam, the Government was informed, through its Ambassador in Washington, that both sides had agreed on an international commission composed of Canada, Hungary, Indonesia and Poland to supervise the cease-fire. The same day Dr. Kissinger outlined in a press conference the details of the agreement he had worked out in Paris with the North Vietnamese. Later that day the Prime Minister said that Canada would carefully consider any invitation in the light of the conditions which had been set forth clearly on many previous occasions.

Shortly thereafter it seemed an agreement for a cease-fire in Viet-Nam might be concluded very quickly and there would be a need for some form of international presence immediately on the ground when a cease-fire went into effect. In those circumstances, the Government announced, on November 2, that it would be prepared to place at the disposal of the proposed new international commission the services of the Canadian Delegation to the existing International Commission for Supervision and Control in Viet-Nam for an initial period. It was our hope that this would meet the need until the international conference, provided for in the proposed cease-fire agreement, enabled Canada, as well as the parties concerned, to determine what, if any, future role Canada could play.

What has been put to us and what we have been examining since, is a proposed arrangement to be embodied in a protocol signed by the Parties to the agreement which would become operative in advance of the conference and continue on after it. We have accordingly sought clarification from the governments involved regarding the structure of the proposed new observer commission, the role it would be expected to play in Viet-Nam, its size and its terms of reference. Our representative in Hanoi was instructed to explore

these questions with the North Vietnamese authorities and our Ambassador in Washington has been in close touch with the United States authorities. On November 20 I discussed these matters with Secretary of State Rogers in New York who explained that many of the questions on which I sought clarification could not be answered since the negotiations were still in progress. I am satisfied that the United States fully understands our position.

The cease-fire negotiations have not been concluded and therefore it still is not possible to know what terms of reference, operating conditions, size, responsibilities, financing and facilities, the new commission would have. These negotiations, which all the world hopes will result in a lasting peace in Viet-Nam, are being resumed in Paris and, depending on their progress, it may be possible to get a better understanding of what Canada is being asked to do.

When more details become known the Government will give the matter the most careful and understanding consideration to determine what further role Canada could usefully play. The Government has made clear both publicly and privately that it will wish to have assurances that the commission will be effective; that all four parties concerned will be bound by the agreement; that all four will invite Canada to participate; that there will be a continuing political authority to receive reports from the commission members; that the commission will have the necessary freedom of movement; and that there will be arrangements for a member's withdrawal from the commission.

Only when all the considerations involved in reaching a decision of this nature have been assessed in the light of the Government's policy and its long and varied experience in truce observing roles will the Government be able to decide.