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SHOOTING INCIDENT INVOLVING ICES HELICOPTERS

DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES EXTÉRIEURES

The following is the text of a statement issued by the Departmental spokesman on May 2nd:

"We have received a report from our Delegation in Saigon regarding the latest incident of shooting at an ICCS helicopter within minutes of its departure on a carefully pre-arranged and fully approved flight into what is regarded as Viet Cong controlled territory. This report broadly confirms news reports of this incident which were available this morning but also makes clear that the occupants of the helicopter were aware of being shot at. Most fortunately there was no injury or loss of life to Canadian or other Commission personnel involved.

We consider this a most serious and deplorable incident and it is a further indication of the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of the Commission being able to carry out its responsibilities as provided in the Protocol unless all Parties to the Agreement are prepared to adhere to its provisions.

The origin of the shooting is not yet clear, but Canadian representatives on the spot, who witnessed the whole incident, are of the view that the shooting originated from the Viet Cong controlled territory on the north side of the Thach Han River which forms a boundary. However, representatives of other delegations present are apparently of the view that the firing may have originated on the south side of the river from territory controlled by the Republic of Viet-Nam.

Our first concern is for the security and safety of Canadian and other Commission personnel and from this point of view it is immaterial from which side the firing came. Death or injury will not be mitigated by the origin of the bullet. If subsequent investigation confirms that firing did come from Republic of Viet-Nam controlled territory this would be the first time that ICCS helicopters had been fired upon from such territory and would represent a serious deterioration in the existing situation. If, however, the investigation confirms that the firing originated from the communist controlled side of the river, then the situation is even more serious because this would indicate that advance flight and security arrangements carefully prepared with the full approval and agreement of the Viet Cong authorities cannot be relied upon."

NOTE: References in the above text to "helicopter" in the singular should have stated "helicopters" in the plural.