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# STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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## A TIME OF DECISION FOR CANADA -- THE FIRST SIXTY DAYS IN VIETNAM

A Statement in the House of Commons on February 1, 1973, by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Mitchell Sharp.

Mr. Speaker, this House had already had the opportunity for a preliminary exchange of views... before the departure from Canada of the first group of observers to the new commission in Vietnam.

Despite the shortness of time, personnel from External Affairs and from our defence forces are already in the field. On behalf of the international community, they will observe and report on the implementation of the agreement on ending the war and restoring the peace in Vietnam.

When the moment of decision came, the parties to the cease-fire had radically compressed the expected time-table. Consequently, the Government was faced with the need to decide in time to have the Canadian delegation take off from Montreal on Saturday of last week if we were to comply with the terms of the agreements. Indeed, the parties asked us to do so on the basis of complex documents, some of which we saw for the first time on Wednesday of last week.

Our participation, I think, was perceived by all sides in this House as necessary...I believe it was seen by the great majority of Canadians as necessary. It was so because all Canadians, and indeed people the world over, so ardently desired that the fighting should stop in Vietnam. As I explained to the House on January 24, the day of the Government's decision, Canada had a choice to make that day.

On the face of it, it was a dilemma: we could, on the one hand, accept membership in the new commission with whatever reservations we saw fit. This is what the parties to the agreement were asking us to do. But it would have meant committing Canada to an important step to which there are Canadian pre-conditions; and it would have meant doing so well before we could possibly know whether those pre-conditions were met or, in view of the complexity of the agreements involved, whether they were even likely to be met. The Government would have regarded that as an abdication of responsibility.... On the other hand, we could have declined to participate in the new commission from the outset and turned it down flatly. By doing so, we could have stood

in the way of ending the fighting in Vietnam. No Canadian would have wished his country to do that.

We therefore decided to take part initially, and make available to the new commission the number of Canadian observers required by the agreements to meet the time-table set by the parties -- in short, during that initial period, do all that we could to discharge the obligations of membership. But we were not prepared to commit Canada to open-ended membership before we were satisfied that Canada's pre-conditions for membership had been reasonably met. I should like to add parenthetically that these pre-conditions on membership had been enunciated by myself on behalf of the Government and by the Prime Minister on a number of occasions, not only in recent weeks but really over a long period of time when we had been asked to consider the possibility that somewhere in the world we might have to participate in some supervisory operations. Indeed, at the time we debated in this House the question of the bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong, I laid down very clearly the kinds of pre-condition we had in mind. I believe it was useful for us to have done so, and I believe that that has had some salutary effect upon the forms of the agreements entered into by the parties and upon the form of the protocol relating to the supervisory commission.

Our participation, which will be for the first 60 days, will enable us to evaluate the arrangements made for international observation and reporting and to learn what scope there is for mediation. I must make it clear that Canada's pre-conditions were not mere gestures of reluctance; they were the product of long and sometimes bitter experience, and they were an effort to point the way toward effective international observation and reporting. Indeed, I think the pre-conditions that were established will help whatever other supervisory activities may be authorized by anyone anywhere in the world in future. They are the sorts of condition we have laid down before the United Nations when we have talked about peacekeeping activities and how they might be organized.

We shall see, in the first 60 days, whether the arrangements can be improved. In particular, we shall see whether a continuing political authority is provided. We shall see whether the contracting parties are determined to make the agreements work. We shall see how our associates in the new commission view the responsibilities of our collective role. If we conclude that Canada's conditions are adequately met and that Canada's continued participation would be effective, we may decide to accept full continued membership, with or without reservations. If we conclude that Canada's conditions are inadequately met or that we are likely to be drawn again into an exercise in futility and frustration, as the previous commission had become, we shall decide to withdraw. Whichever decision is made will be conveyed to this House.

To avoid misunderstanding, let me add this: we are not going to tackle those first 60 days of the commission's existence in a spirit of diffident and passive caution. We are going to make this commission work, if it can be made to work. Within its properly limited functions, we shall try to make it an active and inquisitive commission and an open, hard-working and

co-operative one. Frustration, inactivity and ineffectiveness have been forced upon us in Vietnam in the past. If they are forced upon us again, we are determined that it will be no fault of Canada's.

Members will be aware that the cease-fire machinery includes joint commissions on which the parties to the cease-fire are represented, as well as the international commission on which Canada is serving. Unless these joint commissions function effectively, the international commission cannot function.

There have been great difficulties in setting up these joint commissions. Many of these difficulties seem to be psychological in nature. Given the history of the conflict, this is no surprise. The time of enforced waiting is, however, being put to good use by the International Commission on Control and Supervision. The logistics support and organizational arrangements for the teams and the headquarters are being improved. So far, co-operation between the members of the ICCS has left nothing to be desired. The moment the joint commissions are functioning effectively, the international commission can begin to deploy its teams and get down to work. I was informed today that the first movement of the commissions may begin very soon out to very limited areas. The situation in Vietnam is still serious. I do not want to minimize the real risks that exist. These can only increase if the cease-fire itself, and the supervisory parties, continue to be ineffective.

In trying to make the commission work, we shall bear in mind that there are things which neither we nor the commission as a whole are expected to do. In particular, it must be clearly understood that neither the Canadian delegation nor the commission as a whole is a force to keep the peace. I regret very much that the shorthand term "peacekeeping force" is used so frequently because it seems to cause misunderstanding on the part of the general public. We are not sending a regiment to keep the peace in Vietnam. We are sending a group of civilians and members of the armed forces to undertake a civilian task, which is to supervise a peace which we hope will come. It is the parties to the agreement who bear the responsibility for keeping the peace. We may be able to play a good-offices role from time to time if the parties wish to avail themselves of the services of the commission or of the Canadian delegation for that purpose.

To accomplish the tasks which do form part of the responsibilities of the commission, we have provided, and are continuing to assemble, a body of men and women of the first quality. The delegation is headed by a foreign service officer of distinction and experience, including experience in Indochina, Ambassador Michel Gauvin. It is composed of personnel of the Department of National Defence and of the Department of External Affairs, who have been specially selected for the task. Many of them have previous experience of Indochina and of international observation roles elsewhere. They can be counted upon to do all that anyone could, and the Government will give them maximum support in their task. The Government is mindful of the fact that Canada has been asked by all four parties to participate; Canada and the Canadian delegation are not the nominees, representatives or spokesmen of any one party or of one side in the Vietnam struggle. The delegation will conduct itself accordingly.

As I told the House on January 24, the texts embodying the international observer arrangements are complex. I am sure those members of the House who have had an opportunity of studying the documents will agree with me that they are not only complex but (I think I can add without casting any reflection on them) they are a bit ambiguous also, and perhaps deliberately so. We are continuing our careful study and analysis of them, but their full meaning and implication will only become clear in the light of our experience in seeking to apply them. Our publicly-stated conditions seem to have influenced those who wrote the agreements, but serious inadequacies remain.

It is important that the House be aware of what we consider to be the principal inadequacies of the international observer arrangements. One is that the agreements by themselves do not provide for a continuing political authority. It may be, of course, that the international conference envisaged in the agreements will repair that deficiency. I do not make this as a point of criticism particularly; I merely point out that it would have been perhaps impossible for the parties to the agreement to end the war in Vietnam to have established an adequate international authority to which the supervisory commission should report without having the sort of international conference that is contemplated a few weeks hence. The Government would have preferred the agreement and its supervision to come under the aegis of the United Nations. It is happy to note, however, that the Secretary-General of the United Nations will be invited to attend the international conference. This was one of the suggestions that we made very early, that it would help greatly if the Secretary-General could be there. If I may add a word, it would also suit us if he were the continuing political authority to which the supervisory commission might report.

Another deficiency is the obligation of unanimity in the commission's decisions and reports. It seems significant that the parties, wanting an effective commission, should nonetheless have provided that it must be subject to a rule of unanimity; in other words, to a veto. The effects of that rule are alleviated, as I pointed out before..., by a qualified provision for reporting by individual members of the commission if unanimity cannot be achieved; but such reports would have no status as commission reports.

A further deficiency is that the new commission and each of its teams must act as a single body comprising representatives of all four members. This makes action by one, two or three national delegations impossible. This could turn out to be virtually an invitation to paralysis. We shall also be testing by experience the qualified provisions for the commission's freedom of movement.

Another deficiency is that the parties have provided that each of the four commission countries should pay not only the salaries and allowances of their personnel but a fixed percentage of the general budget of the commission as well. This percentage turns out to be small, 2 per cent. The Government is not inclined to make an issue of paying it. But, however small, Canada has on several occasions expressed opposition in principle to paying any share of the general budget of the commission at all.

We believe that the provision for the sort of infrastructure and the payment for the ordinary expenses of the commission could have been met elsewhere. I understand the argument that is used in order to justify a token contribution from each of the members of the supervisory commission is that each of us under the circumstances would support economy in the expenses of the commission. This was the argument that was put to me. I said it was not one I could defend very well to the taxpayers of Canada, who would, in any event, be paying the salaries and allowances of the personnel. I thought there were surely more effective ways of ensuring economy. However, as I say, the 2 per cent is very small and I would not for that reason consider that Canada should withdraw.

Then, too, we have been concerned that the task of the international observers be realistic and realizable. Yet the agreement provides that the commission shall supervise and control the entry into South Vietnam of military personnel and all military equipment. This seems to specify a task which is clearly beyond the means of an international commission of this size or, indeed, of any likely size.

Finally, although passing reference is made in the agreement to Cambodia and Laos, no precise arrangements are envisaged for broadening the cease-fire and settlement to these two countries. There seems to be no intention of having them participate in the international conference. We can only hope that, in the weeks ahead, the effects of a cessation of hostilities in Vietnam will be extended to these two countries, so that the fighting will stop throughout Indochina. Indeed, it is disappointing that Asian involvement in the arrangements as a whole is so slight. The omission of Japan and the ASEAN group of countries, except for Indonesia, is particularly conspicuous.

Some of these shortcomings in the arrangement are now built in. Others could be altered at the international conference. Still others could be corrected or alleviated in their effects if the parties and our associates in the commission show enough goodwill and enough determination to make the commission work and be effective. We shall be watching and working for that. As I said at the outset, we are not taking a passive or a reluctant attitude; we want to make the commission work.

The comments I have made are not intended as the sort of facile criticism that those who were not involved in hammering out the agreement can always level at those who were. Obviously, this was an extremely difficult negotiation. It is a wonder there was any agreement at all. I am not suggesting that the circumstances could have permitted a better arrangement. What I am trying to do is establish, from the point of view of a conscientious member of the International Commission of Control and Supervision, the magnitude of the task given to us and the apparent poverty of the arrangements available to carry it out. This is not an effort to establish some sort of fancied position of moral superiority. It is an attempt to explain why we cannot undertake an open-ended commitment at this time, to lay before the House and the Canadian people the sorts of problems that can be foreseen and that led us to warn we might have to withdraw.

We shall do what we can to alleviate the effect of these shortcomings by our own efforts, by the manner in which we approach the commission's operations and our participation in them. I have referred, for example, to the provision for unanimity. We are determined not to be frustrated by it. One way we shall do this is by making the commission and its activities and proceedings as open and public as possible. We shall consider ourselves free to communicate our views, and the difference between our views and those of other delegations, to whatever person or organization we think fit, or to the public and the press. This applies to the rule of unanimity or any other provision of the cease-fire that might reduce us to inactivity or ineffectiveness.

For 60 days we are going to put everything to the test: the viability and effectiveness of the international supervisory arrangements themselves, the will and determination of the parties and of our commission colleagues to make the agreements and the commission work -- indeed, ourselves and our own ability to make the commission work and work effectively. By the end of the 60 days, Canada will form its own judgment of that experience and of prospects for the future. On the basis of that judgment, Canada will reach its own decision on continued participation for a further period.

I want to say candidly now that, in some important respects, the international observer arrangements are unpromising. I will not prejudge the Government's decision either way, but no one should assume as a matter of course that continued Canadian participation will be forthcoming.

Before concluding these remarks, Mr. Speaker, I wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the hundreds of Canadian men and women, civilian and military, who have served in commissions in the past. I say this because, although I have said on a number of occasions that the International Control Commission was reduced to a farce, it was not because of lack of effort on the part of the Canadians who served on that commission. It was just in the nature of the arrangements that had been made, and that we are trying to correct on this occasion.

I should like to pay tribute to the men and women who are now in Vietnam to begin work in the new commission, and to those who are preparing to go there. They went there and they are now going, not because their country has national interests of its own to pursue there but because Canada recognizes it has a responsibility to contribute to peace in the world if it can do so effectively. I know of no better way of contributing to Canada's national interest than to end the war in Vietnam, or to help end the war in Vietnam.

The task is difficult: it can also be dangerous. Some Canadians have lost their lives trying to accomplish it. Others may yet do so. We bear a heavy responsibility to them; it is to ensure that their dedication and courage serve to contribute effectively to the maintenance of peace. We must do all we can to ensure their role is effective, and we must withdraw them if, despite their best efforts, their role seems doomed to ineffectiveness.

That is the purpose of the Government's policy and of its recent decision. I know it is also the purpose of all Canadians and of this House which represents them.