

# STATEMENT DISCOURS

SECRETARY  
OF STATE  
FOR EXTERNAL  
AFFAIRS.

SECRÉTAIRE  
D'ÉTAT AUX  
AFFAIRES  
EXTÉRIEURES.



STATEMENT ON MOTIONS BY THE SECRETARY  
OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, THE  
HONOURABLE MITCHELL SHARP, IN THE  
HOUSE OF COMMONS, JANUARY 24, 1973

VIET-NAM

Mr. Speaker,

Last night, President Nixon said that a cease-fire in Viet-Nam has been agreed upon. The Government is profoundly relieved at this historic news and profoundly grateful for it, as I am sure are all members of the House and all the Canadian people. At long last it seems agreement has been reached to stop the fighting in Viet-Nam. The way to peace will then lie open. All Canadians will welcome this.

It is now necessary to decide what contribution Canada can make to ensure that peace does indeed come to Viet-Nam. What is now in our interests to do, and what can we do effectively? - these are the questions we face.

Canada, in our view, will also wish to help in the immense task of relief and reconstruction in Viet-Nam. The Government has already announced its willingness to do so. The destructuon in both North an South Viet-Nam is immense. Canada has some experience in providing aid to South Viet-Nam, but none of course in North Vietnam. The government does not yet know what may be asked of us, nor how a larger Canadian programme may relate to the efforts of other countries and international organizations. We will have to find the answers to these questions as quickly as Viet-Nam returns to conditions in which aid can be effective. As always, we will offer to do what we are best able to do. We will be willing to help in this task anywhere in Viet-Nam where we are welcome and where we can be useful.

On November 2 last year, when it seemed a cease-fire agreement was near, the Governemnt made a proposal. That proposal was intended to meet the apparent concern of the parties that there should be some form of international presence immediately on the ground from the time of the cease- fire. The proposal was that, for the initial period, Canada would be prepared to place at the disposal of the new international supervisory body the Canadian Delegation to the existing international commission, the ICC, as it is commonly called, augmented as necessary.

Our concern was to enable the initial cease-fire arrangements to proceed without delay if the parties so wished.

That is very much the problem now.

The Governemnt subsequently stated publicly the conditions and considerations on which it will require assurances before it could take a decision on more complete participation in a new commission. It told the parties what these conditions were.

We have only just received the documents which embody the agreement between the United States and North Viet Nam. There has been no time to study them carefully, as they will have to be studied. A first look suggests that the conditions and considerations which we communicated to the parties have to some degree contributed to the terms which have been agreed on for the establishment of a new commission.

These are complicated and important documents. It will not be possible to say how far they meet our conditions until they are carefully studied. We already know that an immediate answer to that question will not be possible, if only because we are dealing with documents which have so far been initialed by only two parties. They will not be signed by all four parties until Saturday of this week, only hours before the agreement envisages an international presence on the ground.

In short the situation is this: the government is faced with a choice. It can accept, with whatever reservations are necessary, the role the parties have defined. We are capable of doing so. But this would mean committing Canada to full participation before we knew with any certainty to what extent Canada's conditions are met.

At the other extreme, we could refuse to participate because we do not yet know to what degree those conditions are met but to do this would risk our standing in the way of an end to the fighting which all Canadians ardently desire to see ended.

The government has concluded that both these extremes are unacceptable. It has therefore decided that when the documents have been accepted by all four parties and when all four parties have clearly invited Canada to take part, the government will then confirm that Canada is ready to take part initially. This initial participation will be consistent with the position announced November 2 last.

Canada will be prepared to serve on this limited basis for an initial period of 60 days; Canada will be prepared, during that period, to do what it can to discharge the obligations which would flow from full membership in the new commission.

A full and formal reply to the invitation for full membership, however, will have to await a number of things. First, it will have to await a very thorough study and analysis of all the agreements and of the full nature of the parties' commitment to the agreement. It will also have to await the lessons of our experience of participation in the initial stages. It is no secret to anyone that we have serious doubts about what we are being asked to undertake. Our more formal decision will have to await our judgment of the degree to which our doubts turn out to be justified in practice. We will form that judgment in the initial period of participation, and our full reply to the invitation will be given, with whatever reservations we may find necessary, before the end of that 60 day period.

Meanwhile, let there be no misunderstanding about what Canada will be doing in Viet-Nam. We will not be there to keep the peace ourselves; that is for the parties to the ceasefire. What we can do is observe how the parties are fulfilling their obligations under the cease fire, and report upon this. From time to time, we may be able to help them through

mediation. But it is not up to us whether or not there will be peace in Viet-Nam. If the parties fulfil their obligations, there can be peace; if they do not, then nothing Canada or any other country on the Commission can do will prevent the cease-fire from being broken.

The Governemnt will want these interim conclusions to be discussed in Parliament. It will introduce a resolution to provide a basis for this debate. Meanwhile, it will provide the cease-fire documents to all parties in the House as quickly as it can. When everyone has had a reasonable opportunity to consider these texts, a time for debate will be fixed by agreement of the House leaders. For its part, the Government would be ready to have this debate take place sometime next week.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Viet-Nam have endured beyond measure a tragedy of indescribable proportions. Every Canadian prays that the cease-fire will lead to a lasting peace. We can do nothing less than seek some means of contributing effectively to such a peace, and to the reconstruction of that suffering region.