



CANADA

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

71/21

OFFICIAL CANADIAN VISITS TO HANOI IN 1964 AND 1965

A Statement in the House of Commons on
June 17, 1971, by the Secretary of State
for External Affairs, the Honourable
Mitchell Sharp.

The attention of the House has been drawn to the publication this week by the *New York Times* of a series of documents describing the involvement of the United States in Indochina up to 1968. In these documents are several references dealing with the activities of an officer in the Department of External Affairs serving on the International Commission for Supervision and Control in Vietnam in 1964-65. I should like to give the House the facts about his activities, which he carried out on instructions from the Canadian Government.

On June 10, 1965, my predecessor, the Honourable Paul Martin, Secretary of State for External Affairs, in a statement before the Standing Committee on External Affairs, said:

"I informed the House on Monday that our role in Vietnam has not been supine and that we have attempted to use the channels available to us by virtue of our Commission membership to establish contact with North Vietnam. Our commissioner in Saigon, over the past eight months, prior to May 31 made several trips to the capital of North Vietnam, Hanoi.

"During these visits he has had discussion with the local leaders and officials in an attempt to assess the North Vietnam Government's position. I asked him to go to Hanoi on May 31 and to see someone senior in the Government of Vietnam, the Prime Minister or the Foreign Minister, and this he did.

"This is the most recent contact that he has made and, although his report is not an encouraging one, I want to say that we have not abandoned the probing process. Mr. Seaborn, who is our Commissioner, is an officer of considerable

experience and ability. He is well qualified for an important assignment of this delicate nature. He had an interview with the Foreign Minister on May 31, in which he expressed Canada's concern, and our willingness to play a helpful role if possible.

"He sought clarification of the North Vietnam Government's position including its reaction to the recent pause in the bombings. Naturally I cannot go into any greater detail about it at this time; but I should like to say that the Foreign Minister stated repeatedly that the four conditions which had previously been outlined by the Prime Minister of North Vietnam on April 8, taken as a whole, represented the Hanoi Government's approach to a settlement."

I should now like to give a full account of the nature of our Commissioner's mission to Hanoi during the time he was in Vietnam in 1964-65. In the spring of 1964, following a meeting between the U.S. Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, and the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson, and the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Paul Martin, the Canadian Government agreed that the new Canadian Commissioner on the ICC in Vietnam might be instructed to probe what was in the minds of the leaders in Hanoi and help to dispel any misunderstanding they might have as to the future course the United States intended to follow -- that is, that the Americans were not thinking of pulling out of Vietnam and were prepared to increase their commitment there if this were considered necessary.

Canada's motive in agreeing to this special mission for the Canadian Commissioner was to try to promote a peaceful settlement to the conflict in Vietnam. Thus the Canadian Government considered it entirely consistent with, and indeed reinforcing, our role in the ICC. I should like to emphasize that the Commissioner acted at no time as a direct representative of the United States Government or President but only as a part of a Canadian channel of communication. It was clearly understood, of course, that messages to be conveyed in this way would be passed *via* Ottawa, that Canada did not associate itself with the content of the messages and that Canada would be free to add its own comments to any message passed in either direction. Our only commitment was that there would be faithful transmission of messages in both directions. The Canadian Government's purpose in agreeing to participate in this channel of communication was to provide an opportunity to reduce misunderstandings between the United States and North Vietnam, and was founded on a strong desire to ensure the return of peace to Vietnam and to Southeast Asia. This position was understood by both the Americans and the North Vietnamese throughout.

In the course of his tour of duty in Vietnam, Mr. J. Blair Seaborn, who was the Canadian Commissioner at the time, made six visits to Hanoi. Not

all of these were occasioned solely by his special mission. Canadian members of the ICC maintain contact on a regular basis with the authorities of both South and North Vietnam. On his first two visits to Hanoi, the Commissioner was received by the North Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Van Dong on June 18 and August 13, 1964. During his first interview with the North Vietnamese leader, Mr. Seaborn explained his mission and the Canadian Government's purpose, which was to establish the Canadian Commissioner's credentials with the North Vietnamese as an authoritative channel of communication with the United States. At the same time, he conveyed the first of a series of messages from the United States Government. Mr. Seaborn reported to the North Vietnamese that United States policy was to see to it that North Vietnam contained itself and its ambitions within the territory allocated to its administration by the 1954 Geneva Agreements. He added that United States policy in South Vietnam was to preserve the integrity of that state's territory against guerilla subversion. He stated that the United States had indicated that it was not seeking military bases in the area and was not seeking to overthrow the Communist regime in Hanoi. The Commissioner informed the North Vietnamese Prime Minister that the United States considered itself fully aware of the degree to which Hanoi controlled and directed the guerilla action in South Vietnam and that the United States held Hanoi directly responsible for that action. He also made it clear that the United States considered the confrontation with North Vietnamese subversive guerilla action as part of a general confrontation with this type of violent subversion in other less-developed countries. Therefore the United States regarded its stake in resisting a North Vietnamese victory in South Vietnam as having a significance of worldwide proportions. The Commissioner mentioned examples of United States policy of peaceful coexistence having benefited Communist regimes, such as Yugoslavia and Poland. The Commissioner also reported that American public and official patience with North Vietnamese aggression was growing extremely thin and he feared that, if the conflict in the area should escalate, which he did not think was in anyone's interest, then the greatest devastation would result for the Democratic Republic of Vietnam itself. Mr. Seaborn reported that he was convinced that Pham Van Dong understood the importance and the context of the message he conveyed, and the seriousness with which the United States viewed the situation in Southeast Asia. To that extent it was judged that the initial purpose of this first contact had been successfully accomplished.

The second visit, despite its timing, was not occasioned by the incidents of August 2 and 4 in the Gulf of Tonkin and the air-strikes against North Vietnamese territory on August 5. These occurred after Mr. Seaborn had arranged to travel to Hanoi on August 10 on Commission business. On August 8 the Canadian Government agreed to relay to Mr. Seaborn a further message from the United States Government repeating many of the points made in the previous message and making clear that, "if the DRVN persists in its present course, it can expect to suffer the consequences." This message was based on the talking points that were published in the *New York Times* on June 13, 1971. This message was transmitted to Pham Van Dong on August 13, 1964. Despite its severity, the Canadian Government believed that, because of its importance and in the interests of peace, it should be transmitted faithfully in accordance with our undertaking to the United States. According to our Commissioner's report, the North Vietnamese Premier was clearly angered by it and said that if war came

to North Vietnam it would come to the whole of Indochina. Nevertheless, he said he wanted the Canadian channel kept open. Neither the United States nor North Vietnam, however, took any initiative to make use of it in the following weeks.

The Commissioner's third trip to Hanoi on regular Commission business was planned for November 1964, but we were asked by the United States Government to delay it to permit the preparation of a further message to the North Vietnamese. This message, which was relayed to Saigon on December 3, had nothing to add to the earlier messages beyond the statement that "the time is ripe for any message Hanoi may wish to convey", and the Commissioner was instructed by the Canadian Government to deliver passively so passive a message. It was conveyed, therefore, to the head of the North Vietnamese liaison mission for the ICC. This was the only North Vietnamese official whom Mr. Seaborn saw during this third visit, from December 10 to 18, 1964. There was no response to the American invitation for communication from the North Vietnamese and in January 1965 the State Department told us that it was unlikely that the United States would have anything to communicate to Hanoi "in the near future".

American air-attacks on North Vietnam began in February 1965 following a major Communist assault on American facilities at Pleiku and on February 27 Mr. Seaborn was instructed by the Canadian Government to go to Hanoi to discuss a new message with the North Vietnamese Prime Minister. He went on March 1, but Pham Van Dong would not receive him and the Commissioner saw Colonel Ha Van Lau, the head of the liaison mission, on March 4. At that time the Commissioner conveyed to him the substance of a general statement of United States policy and objective, which was also being made available to the North Vietnamese Government through the United States Embassy in Warsaw. Mr. Seaborn concluded, following this meeting, that the North Vietnamese were unlikely to use the Canadian channel of communication with the United States.

On May 28, 1965, following the suspension of bombing from May 12 to 17, the United States asked if the Canadian Government would instruct Mr. Seaborn to pass a further message to North Vietnam saying that "the United States continues to consider the possibility of working toward a solution by reciprocal actions on each side", and seeking clarification of whether American recognition of North Vietnam's "Four Points" of April 8 was regarded by Hanoi as a pre-condition to any discussions. Mr. Seaborn went to Hanoi for the fifth time on May 31 and saw both Ha Van Lau and North Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh. He reported his impression that the North Vietnamese were not interested in talking to the United States at that time. The fact that Mr. Seaborn had seen the North Vietnamese Foreign Minister was reported to the House by my predecessor, the Honourable Paul Martin, on June 7, 1965.

Mr. Seaborn visited Hanoi for the last time from September 30 to October 4, 1965. We had told the United States Government in advance that we had serious doubts about the usefulness of giving him special instructions and on this occasion he carried no message. His only official contact this time was at a low level in the North Vietnamese liaison mission and he detected

no sign of interest in discussions or negotiations. Shortly thereafter Mr. Seaborn returned to Canada at the conclusion of his normal posting in Vietnam.

It has been suggested that the Canadian Government knew, or should have known, that some of the messages it conveyed amounted to statement of an American intention to bomb North Vietnam. The Canadian Government knew of no such intention on the part of the United States. The messages we carried were couched in general terms and related to the possible consequences for the North Vietnamese Government of continued activities in South Vietnam.

It has been implied that the Canadian Government should not have carried any such messages on behalf of the United States. It was the view of the Government of that time that this was entirely consistent with its role as a member of the ICC, and indeed that it was implicit in the role that Canada should endeavour to promote a dialogue between the main parties to the conflict. The North Vietnamese made it abundantly clear to Mr. Seaborn that they did not regard our activity as in any way improper or inconsistent with our ICC role.

It has also been implied that when the bombing of North Vietnam began the Canadian Government should have made some public protest on the basis of what it is now claimed that it knew about American intentions. The Canadian Government had no information that would have justified such a protest at that time. Canada, along with many others, accepted the United States Government's version of the Gulf of Tonkin incident.

We were not allied to the United States in its operations in Indochina and were not fully informed by the United States on its various plans and intentions. Throughout, the record is clear that the Government of that day acted in good faith and in a manner consistent with our responsibilities to the International Control Commission.

S/C