

Statement of the Government of Australia in reply to  
the Government of the Soviet Union

On 15 May the Government of the Soviet Union, in a statement handed to the Australian Ambassador, commented on the Australian Government's decision to send an infantry battalion to assist in the defence of South Viet-Nam. The Soviet statement expressed support for the North Vietnamese protest against the Australian decision.

The Australian Government has noted the Soviet Government's statement and regrets that it is based on a distortion of the situation in Viet-Nam. The "direct and unprovoked aggression against the Vietnamese people" to which the Soviet statement refers in fact emanates from Hanoi, through its control and direction of the Viet Cong in South Viet-Nam.

In 1962, the International Control Commission in Viet-Nam found that North Viet-Nam had violated Articles 10, 19, 24 and 27 of the 1954 Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Viet-Nam. Further irrefutable evidence of continuing North Vietnamese violations on an increasing scale, including the presence in South Viet-Nam of units of the North Vietnamese regular army, has since been accumulated and must be known to the Soviet Government.

The 1954 Geneva Agreement provided that neither North nor South Viet-Nam should be used for the resumption of hostilities or to further an aggressive policy. These obligations, accepted by North Viet-Nam under solemn cover of international agreement, have been flagrantly violated by the introduction of troops, arms and supplies into South Viet-Nam from the North, with the purpose of undermining the Government in Saigon and imposing the will of the North Vietnamese regime on the people of South Viet-Nam. Faced with this threat to its territory and its independence, the Government of the Republic of Viet-Nam has found it necessary to seek assistance from other countries, including Australia.

The Australian Government, while not itself a party to the 1954 Geneva Agreements, took note of them and undertook to apply the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, including Article 2 (4), in regard to the settlement in Viet-Nam. The Australian Prime Minister said publicly, when the Agreements were concluded, that Australia would view aggression in violation of the Indo-China settlement as a threat to international peace and security. The action now taken

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by the Australian Government is in accordance with the attitude it has consistently adopted towards the Geneva Agreements. Moreover, the provision of Australian assistance to South Viet-Nam is in no way contrary to international law. The right of individual or collective self-defence is an acknowledged right in international law and is recognized in the Charter of the United Nations.

North Vietnamese efforts to overthrow the Government of the Republic of Viet-Nam by military means have been supported and reinforced through channels established by the authorities in Hanoi for infiltrating armed personnel and materials into South Viet-Nam. It is these channels in North Viet-Nam which have been under attack and not the people or the authorities there. It is the authorities in North Viet-Nam who have, to use the words of the Soviet statement, acted "in violation of the most elementary norms of international law", and it is they who must bear the heavy responsibility for the action which the United States and South Viet-Nam have been forced to take against military installations and communications in North Viet-Nam. If infiltration into, and aggression against, South Viet-Nam is stopped there would be no need for such action.

The Soviet Government expressed the view in its statement that the Australian Government assumed "a serious responsibility for the consequences of its actions" in giving military assistance to South Viet-Nam. The Australian Government's decision was taken after the most careful consideration and in the conviction that there was no other way, as long as North Viet-Nam and its supporters refuse to live in peace with neighbouring countries, to defend the freedom and independence of the people of South Viet-Nam, and indeed of other countries in South-East Asia whose independence would be threatened if aggression against South Viet-Nam were allowed to succeed.

The Australian Government recalls the statement by the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union, in his letter to the Australian Prime Minister of 31 December 1963, that the question of unification in Germany, Korea and Viet-Nam "must be decided by the people and Governments of these States themselves without interference and pressure from outside", and that "in the solution of these questions it is necessary to renounce the use of force". The use of force to impose a settlement in Viet-Nam was decided on, not by the Republic of Viet-Nam or the countries friendly to it, but by the authorities in Hanoi, encouraged and

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abetted by the authorities in Peking. It is they also who introduced interference and pressure across the internationally recognized demarcation line between North and South Viet-Nam.

The Australian Government considers that the influence of the Soviet Government should be directed, not towards Governments such as Australia which are assisting South Viet-Nam in its legitimate right of self-defence against aggression, but towards the authorities in Hanoi and Peking who have it in their power to remove the causes which have given rise to the existing situation in Viet-Nam and elsewhere in the area.

The Australian Government believes that in this way the Soviet Government could contribute significantly towards the strengthening of world peace, the reduction of international tensions and the development of peaceful relations between States with differing social systems.

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