

For several weeks, Mr. Speaker, the Canadian people have shown much concern and sympathy for the problem now being discussed. Opinions, comments and questions about it have increased. A standing committee (the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence) has considered that matter.

The civil war in Nigeria is a particularly complex matter. Its outbreak is linked to various factors and its roots go back quite far in the history of that great country and it is possible that only those who are engaged in that conflict can measure its intensity and understand its full meaning. In any case, Canadians as individuals have been deeply moved by the stories and pictures describing the suffering of the people of that country and they have felt involved. It is necessary however to grasp a fundamental point, namely that it is a civil war and that the solution of the conflict can be arrived at only by the belligerents themselves. Of course, those from outside can offer their services, but they cannot impose a settlement which would be contrary to the will of either side. In that connection, the good offices of the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, as well as those of the Organization for African Unity, have been and will always be available, and I hope that they will continue to be used.

The fact is that, during all the hostilities, there have been periodic discussions between Nigerian authorities and the rebels, some of them extending over several weeks. But it appears that it is not enough to have the belligerents talk things over, or even declare the urgency of a cease-fire. They must also be willing to make concessions leading to a peaceful settlement, and this is exactly this conciliatory spirit which cannot be imposed from the outside.

We have expressed on several occasions the earnest hope of this Government to see the opponents in this tragic war show at least the goodwill necessary to negotiate a lasting peace.

In testifying before the Committee, the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, Mr. Arnold Smith, helped us to understand some of the implications of the problem. He explained, for example, that on several occasions during the past 18 months, certain compromises which he, as an outsider, thought quite acceptable, might have been found. However, Mr. Smith then added that there was no hope of a settlement unless the two sides themselves made some compromises. I quote some of his words:

"The Biafrans will have to make concessions with regard to sovereignty, and Lagos will have to make concessions with regard to physical security and economic viability."

I bring up that statement again, Mr. Speaker, to make clear that those who were in a position to offer their good offices made a close study of the question and that it is up to the belligerents to find within themselves the true spirit of conciliation which is the prerequisite of any compromise. Above all, we must not think that we, in Canada, were the first to become aware of that war, and that we have all the answers. We do not have them.

If Canada attempted, in one way or another, to impose any solution whatever to the conflict, that effort would constitute an intervention in the internal affairs of another country.

The policy which my Government has followed in this situation has been motivated, as is proper, by humanitarian considerations. But what a government