

Statement Respecting Nigeria

employed that opportunity to exchange views on a number of issues of interest to Canada and to the United Nations. This was the second occasion since assuming the office of Prime Minister that I have engaged in lengthy and useful talks with the Secretary General, the first being in Edmonton in May. We have agreed to continue this practice from time to time.

• (2:40 p.m.)

I draw these recent activities to the attention of the house, Mr. Speaker, as an indication of the continuing initiatives of the government to ensure that Canadian foreign policies are both effective and appropriate.

Mr. R. Gordon L. Fairweather (Fundy-Royal): Mr. Speaker, the announcement of the Prime Minister will be received with pleasure, I am sure, by all those who have felt that the government was somewhat slow in initiating an imaginative policy in so far as the humanitarian and political aspects of the Nigeria-Biafra war are concerned. As one who has been following some of the concepts of the Prime Minister's office about communications and the need to improve them, I am interested to see how this example of public attitude to foreign affairs has somewhat surprised the Prime Minister and his government in that they have found they cannot turn the public on and off like a tap. This they tried to do in the case of Nigeria and Biafra.

Certainly I welcome the initiative that the government has at least taken in sending one of its emissary, a senior person in the Prime Minister's office, to Lagos. I hope the gentleman concerned took the opportunity to make his appeal while he was in West Africa, not only to General Gowon but also to Colonel Ojukwu. Perhaps this would have avoided the necessity of the appeal of the Prime Minister. I think this very satisfactory, since the observer team, which has been under some rather restrictive prohibitions, about which it commented in its report; and has been guaranteed freedom of movement and access by the government of Nigeria. It will be a useful change if the observer team is enlarged and is also able to visit Biafra.

Mr. Andrew Brewin (Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, I am sure every member of this house who represents the Canadian people is happy to see that the deep concern of the Canadian public in relation to the situation in Biafra is reflected in the statement the Prime Minister has made. It was quite a long statement covering a number of complex matters.

[Mr. Trudeau.]

I would simply welcome the proposal that daylight flights are to be made, perhaps thereby enabling the delivery of needed food and medical supplies to be doubled.

However, Mr. Speaker, I note once again that the Prime Minister referred to Lagos and Fernando Po. May I remind the Prime Minister that there is another highly successful operation going on, one that has been going on for several months, from Sao Tomé. I appreciate there is difficulty here unless the operation is also carried out under the International Red Cross. If instead of ignoring that operation the government of Canada were to do its best to see that the Red Cross and the churches entered into an arrangement satisfactory to the Nigerian government for the inspection of flights from Sao Tomé, then I suggest supplies would not only be doubled but quadrupled, or perhaps even better.

I am glad the question of the observer team was taken up but I did not notice in the Prime Minister's statement any sort of undertaking by the Nigerian government that they would change the terms of reference. I remind the Prime Minister that it was made absolutely clear in the report of the observers that the future efficacy of the operation depended upon there being some change in the terms of reference.

I also suggest that their future efficacy depends on their having an opportunity to go into the Biafran occupied areas in order to hear complaints that may be made. This would make the observer team infinitely more useful than it is now.

I must say that I still regret in this statement, much though we welcome it, the complete absence of any reference to the overriding necessity of bringing about a cease fire and stopping the importation of arms by either side in the conflict. It seems to me this is something which in the interests of humanity and under the rules of international law cannot be disregarded by the international community. We shall continue to express our regrets until Canada takes the lead we think she could take in this respect.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Dumont (Frontenac): Mr. Speaker, allow me on behalf of the Ralliement Créditiste, to congratulate most sincerely the right hon. Prime Minister for his initiative in helping the people of Biafra, who seem to be threatened by inevitable suicide because the federal troops have tried to keep the province from obtaining its liberty.