

Fernando Po has been authorized to transport refugees to other neighbouring countries which are ready to welcome them. These people have been brought out from the rebel area by the Red Cross in order that they can be given better care. The Government has been happy to assist the International Red Cross in moving them to other countries. As to bringing children from the rebel area to Canada, the Government does not think it wise to press this idea in the face of the adverse views of those directly concerned.

The Government accepts the Committee's view that Canada should not sell arms to either side in this conflict. Indeed, as Hon. Members know, that has been the Government's policy throughout.

In its eighth recommendation the Committee urged the Government to intensify its efforts to persuade the parties to accept mediation. The caution attached by the Committee to this point is sound: that we should not operate in such a way as to jeopardize the effectiveness of our relief efforts. There are, as we have said, limitations on the Government's action on this essentially political question; but I can assure the House that within these limits we shall work strenuously for a peaceful settlement of this dispute.

On the proposal that Canada should contribute to an eventual peace-keeping force in Nigeria, I think it is premature to offer comment before a settlement or cease-fire has been achieved or before the terms of any peace-keeping operation are known. I may add this, however: As is well known, Canada has always taken a positive look at peacekeeping proposals, and I can assure the House that any proposals in respect of the Nigerian situation will be given prompt and careful consideration by the Government.

An amendment has been proposed to the Committee's report, Mr. Speaker, which would oblige the Government to take this question to the United Nations, to the General Assembly or to the Third Committee. As the Prime Minister explained this afternoon, and as has been made clear before, following intensive study of the matter we have come to the conclusion that this is neither a practical nor a useful initiative. Any proposal to have the matter discussed at the United Nations would not gain more than minimal support. For that reason alone an initiative would not be effective and would have no helpful influence on the situation. Moreover, if we were to press on regardless of the lack of support, Canada's position in the world body would be affected and the possibility of our taking useful steps on this or other matters would be seriously reduced.

In opening this debate this afternoon the Prime Minister spoke these words with which I concur entirely:

I remain convinced that an attempt to inscribe the Nigerian conflict on the agenda of the General Assembly would not only be bitterly resented by the Nigerian Government and the member states of the Organization of African Unity, but would also be totally unsuccessful

He also said:

Should we attempt to employ a General Assembly committee for such a discussion, conceding for the moment that we could do so, which is not entirely clear, our efforts would prove not only divisive but totally counter-productive.