

interfering in the politics of the situation or being used to advance the political aspirations of one side over the other.

This challenge we have accepted; this concern of the Canadian people we have attempted to meet. I should like nothing more than to be able to stand here today and to announce that the Nigerian civil war has been concluded. It is of little consequence to me whether that conclusion is reached as a result of any special Canadian intervention. It is a solution that I seek, not necessarily a "made in Canada" solution. What is important is that the war cease, that the unnecessary deaths be avoided, and that the record of Canadians and their government be an honourable one. I think that the record to date is honourable and I should like to recount briefly some of the action the government has taken.

The government's concern with the Nigerian situation was engaged long before the Canadian people became aware of the problem and hon. gentlemen opposite began to ask questions. Our ties with Nigeria have been strong, affectionate and mutually advantageous, and because of this we watched with deepening anxiety as the situation deteriorated in 1966 and 1967. When the secession occurred and the fighting broke out we became increasingly concerned that this conflict would tear irreparably the fabric of this fellow Commonwealth country. We told the Lagos government that we believed a peaceful rather than a military settlement should be found. We supported the Commonwealth secretary-general in his efforts to bring about negotiations. Later we supported the initiative of the Organization of African Unity in the same direction. And we have repeatedly urged the Nigerian government, which we continue to recognize as the government of all Nigeria, to seek a peaceful negotiated settlement.

In terms of action the Canadian government has concentrated on humanitarian assistance to those in need. We were involved in this well before the human problem reached its acute and well publicized stage. As early as February of this year, we made representations to the federal Nigerian government urging greater co-operation with the International Red Cross in its mercy flights into rebel held territory. Since then we have spoken frequently with the Nigerian authorities on related subjects and have always been given a cordial hearing and explanation of their position. These explanations have made clear, for example, their longstanding willingness to

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open land and water corridors for the movement of relief supplies, a willingness which is not shared, I should emphasize, by the rebels.

In May, long before this unfortunate war was the subject of constant questions in the house, the International Committee of the Red Cross asked Canada for urgent financial help in their operations in Nigeria. We responded with a substantial cash grant. In July we allocated half a million dollars in food aid for Nigeria and sent an initial food shipment to Lagos by Hercules aircraft. At that time we decided in principle to provide Hercules aircraft for an airlift under Red Cross auspices if the agreement of the two sides could be obtained.

In August we lent the services of a Canadian expert to the International Red Cross to assist that organization in studying the feasibility of increased and improved airlift operations.

In September another allocation was made of half a million dollars in food aid. The large sea shipment of food sent under these allocations arrived in the area early this month and we have reports of it reaching the forward centres from which the Red Cross distributes it to needy civilians. These are significant contributions being made by the government in the name of the Canadian people, and they have been acknowledged warmly by the Nigerian authorities. But the story does not end there. Further food aid in large amounts will continue to move forward from Canada.

Private Canadian organizations have also made significant contributions, and their work should be praised and encouraged. I would pay special tribute to the efforts of the Canadian Red Cross Society which has been in this situation from the beginning, working patiently and hard to bring aid and comfort to the suffering in all parts of Nigeria affected by the fighting.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, the most acute problem was that of transportation. The house is well aware of the sincere and sustained efforts the government made in this regard. Generally, attention was concentrated only on air transport into the rebel zone. But in fact, it was a second choice, for using the ground corridors into the eastern area would allow the transportation of far greater quantities of supplies. The situation could be met far better through their use instead of hazardous flights in an air corridor over the jungle, close to aircraft transporting arms. Still, the rebels have constantly opposed the proposals of the Red