

*Alleged Failure to Aid Biafrans*

cannot be successfully concluded on a battlefield. The complex human relationships which must somehow be repaired and restored, the confidence which must be created in the place of fear—these difficult and sensitive tasks cannot be performed in an atmosphere of war. They can only be the product of consultation and negotiation.

Canada has repeated these views again and again to the combatants in this war, Mr. Speaker, and it has expressed publicly its attitude with respect to the supply of arms from outside. We have stated as well that we are anxious to do whatever we can to assist in such consultations or negotiations. Just as we made available senior and experienced Canadian military personnel to serve on the international observer team in Nigeria, we are ready to make available talented Canadian diplomats to contribute to the process of peaceful settlement.

To intervene when not asked, however, would not be an act of courage; it would be an act of stupidity. There are some 30 countries in Africa south of the Sahara which have achieved independence since 1957. Every one of these emerged into nationhood following a lengthy and anguished colonial history. No single act would be regarded with more hostility by any of them than the unilateral intervention of a non-African state into their affairs.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Trudeau:** I say this, not from surmise, but because it was made very clear on at least two occasions by the Organization of African Unity. They have said that this is an African problem, and that outside interference in this conflict would not be welcome. Certainly, it is presumptuous on our part to think that we, white people who are far away in North America, know more about Africa than the 30-odd countries, the members of the Organization of African Unity which made the statement.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. MacDonald (Egmont):** That is not the question.

**Mr. Trudeau:** Because of that it would be wrong for the Canadian government to assist the Nigerian government militarily, but it would be equally wrong for the Canadian government to assist the rebel regime politically. Each is an act of intervention. Each would be a presumptuous step, an arrogant

step, I would say, for a country so distant as Canada.

What Canada can do, and what it must do, however, is to attempt to feed the children who will starve to death without help. A starving child prompts an emotional response, and properly so. But that emotion must serve to assist the children, and not the reverse. It has been said by some hon. members opposite that this is the greatest human tragedy of our time. It may be, but I doubt it. The nature of man is so perverse that in the past few years there have taken place tragedies of indescribable proportions in several developing countries: the mass slaughters during the partition of India, the atrocities in Algeria, the massacres in Indonesia. Even while the Nigerian war continues, there have been bloody conflicts in the southern Sudan and in Chad. The Canadian government did not intervene, and is not intervening in these sad situations. No Canadian government did so, and no Canadian opposition party criticized those decisions, because of the inescapable limitations upon the effective actions which Canada can take.

The Nigerian tragedy does not become different from these others simply because some persons employ superlatives, or repeat accusations of genocide when these allegations have been proved demonstrably incorrect,—

**Mr. Brewin:** By whom?

**Mr. Trudeau:** —or relate highly inflated death rate figures. Nigeria is only different because we know more about it and because it is children who are the principal sufferers.

[Translation]

I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that there are several points on which there is no dispute among hon. members. We share a common revulsion to the suffering which has been brought about by this war. We share a common desire to aid the victims. We all recognize the fragile and inadequate nature of a night relief airlift which must share a single runway and surrounding airspace with competitive arms flights.

Where we differ is in our judgment of the best means to increase the flow of relief. On the basis of careful evaluations of reports received from qualified observers from many sources, the government has concluded that the only truly effective way of delivering adequate supplies of relief to Biafra is by way of daylight flights. Not only is a daylight airlift