

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, November 4, 1968

The house met at 2.30 p.m.

JUSTICE AND LEGAL AFFAIRS

CONCURRENCE IN FIRST REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE

Mr. D. R. Tolmie (Welland) moved that the first report of the standing committee on justice and legal affairs, presented to the house on Thursday, October 31, be concurred in.

Motion agreed to.

[Translation]

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

STATEMENT BY PRIME MINISTER RESPECTING NIGERIA AND DISCUSSIONS WITH U THANT

Right Hon. P.-E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I should like to report on certain initiatives taken within the last few days by the Canadian government in the international field.

[English]

Some two weeks ago discussions commenced in my office and in the Department of External Affairs about the desirability of sending to Lagos a personal representative of the Prime Minister of Canada for the purpose of furthering Canadian assistance efforts to that country. As a result of the decision reached in those discussions I instructed Mr. Ivan Head, my legislative assistant, to travel to Nigeria to speak on my behalf to Major General Yakubu Gowon, the head of the Nigerian federal military government.

Mr. Head left Canada on Saturday, October 26. He met with General Gowon in Lagos on Tuesday of last week. They talked at some length with respect to the unfortunate hostilities now raging in Nigeria. On my behalf Mr. Head expressed to General Gowon the deep sympathy of all Canadians for the people's suffering as a result of the civil war. These sentiments were understood and welcomed by General Gowon. Discussed as well was the means by which the desire of Canadians to assist in the alleviation of that suffering could be made more effective.

As an immediate result of the Lagos talks, I am happy to be able to report the following. First, General Gowon has agreed to assist in every way possible and to guarantee the safety of daylight Red Cross flights into Uli airstrip from either or both of Lagos and Fernando Po. This means that the daily volume of relief supplies which could be carried into the rebel area could be multiplied several fold. This statement by General Gowon is, I suggest, both significant and laudatory. It illustrates clearly the sincerity of the federal military government in its declarations of good faith toward the Ibo peoples.

General Gowon has placed a single condition on this guarantee, one which I regard and which I am sure all Canadians will regard as eminently reasonable. It is that Colonel Ojukwu will undertake not to employ the Uli airstrip during daylight hours for arms flights. In this regard it should be borne in mind that such an undertaking would in no respect reduce the present level of arms shipments to the rebels. Uli airstrip is not now being used for any purpose during daylight hours. Under the agreement now reached it would be used, but only for civilian relief purposes.

I therefore now address a public and urgent appeal to Colonel Ojukwu to seize this opportunity to open up his airport to daylight relief flights and so permit the Red Cross to increase substantially food shipments to those civilians in the rebel held areas needing help.

A second point emerging from the Lagos talks was the useful information exchanged with respect to the most effective form of assistance which Canada might offer to Nigeria respecting distribution of relief supplies in federal territory. These discussions are continuing at an official level and I hope to be able to make a further announcement in this respect at an early date.

Third, the talks proved useful as an occasion for discussing Canada's participation in the international observer team. General Gowon repeated his assurances that the team will continue to enjoy freedom of movement and access.

I should like to report as well, Mr. Speaker, that on Saturday afternoon I met in New York with His Excellency U Thant, the Secretary General of the United Nations. We