

Canadian Action on Nigeria-Biafra

decision, of course, that has to be made by the Nigerian government.

Our High Commissioner in Lagos has been instructed to offer the Nigerian government further observers, and a number of other countries have done likewise. I spoke to the French ambassador tonight. He told me that he hoped he would have the support of the Canadian government to a French initiative which is in favour of a greater number of observers, even though the French government is not represented on this team. I assure the House that we are in favour of that. We are prepared to offer them, but we cannot force them upon anyone. That responsibility must rest with the Nigerian government.

I think it is an indication of the essentially humanitarian approach of the Nigerian government in this field, at least until now, that they have permitted observers to observe the actions of their troops. I do not think there has ever been a civil war in history in which this has happened.

Mr. Stanfield: Would the minister permit a question? Has he or anyone on behalf of the government of Canada engaged in conversation with countries such as Britain and the United States about a common approach to Nigeria regarding enlarging the team of observers?

Mr. Sharp: Yes, we have informed our friends in Britain, the United States and France of our proposal to the Nigerian government. They are likewise making representations, and I hope that our joint efforts will be successful.

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): Mr. Speaker, can we be assured that the observers presently located in Nigeria are moving at the front lines and not, as was the case very often in the past, following at some later time the military engagements that take place?

Mr. Sharp: We expect a report within the next day or two on the situation in Nigeria today. The observers are due to make a report, I think on January 13, so we should be getting a report within the next day or two, which I hope I will be able to publish, which will give some indication of their observations of the recent past. The reports may not be up to date, of course, because there have been very dramatic developments within the last few days.

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): Were they instructed to be at the front during this extremely critical period?

Mr. Sharp: Yes, those are their general instructions. The International Observer Team has instructions to observe the conduct of the Nigerian troops and to report any evidences of genocide. So far they have found none. Indeed, they have reported, as I have said, that the Red Cross and the Nigerian Rehabilitation Commission have been following the troops and that refugees have on the whole been very well looked after, or as well as they can be.

Mr. Brewin: Mr. Speaker, before the minister concludes his remarks, will he deal specifically with the suggestion I made regarding the emergency in the next few days, namely, that the stocks of supplies in Sao Tomé, the aircraft, the crew and the distribution machinery which is in existence be handed over perhaps to the Nigerian Red Cross for use, before millions die in the country?

Mr. Sharp: That was the next point of my remarks. I have today had conversation with Dr. Ted Johnson of Canairelief on the future of that organization. Canairelief has, as hon. members know, for many months been engaged in carrying out night flights in Biafra without the consent of the Nigerian government. Therefore, there must be some doubt whether they will be allowed to continue this activity. At least, this is the information we received from Lagos. I am passing on the views that have been expressed to me. Dr. Johnson told me that if they cannot continue their flights, they are willing to put their foodstocks at the disposal of the Red Cross. It is unclear what role Canairelief may be able to play. I have advised them that the most likely way for them to help is by co-operating fully with the Red Cross.

Dr. Johnson and Dr. McKay jointly sent me a message in which they urged me to make representations in Lagos to the effect that Canairelief be allowed to carry on its operations. I think we have to consider what is the best way of getting these supplies used. This does not really involve a question as to whether Canairelief continues, but rather a question regarding the quickest way of getting these supplies from Sao Tomé into the area. I have told Dr. Johnson that on that point we are fully agreed. We will have to decide what is the most efficacious way. If the Nigerian government says it cannot trust