

Minister's Statement on Biafran Relief

8. On July 10, in an attempt to meet Biafran contentions that daylight flights would prejudice its military position, the Secretary of State for External Affairs offered to send Canadians to the area to act as inspectors of relief cargos.

9. In the early summer the International Committee of the Red Cross began negotiations in Geneva in an attempt to solve the flight impasse which by then had reached a critical point as the Nigerian Air Force increased its efforts to prevent night flights of arms from reaching Uli. After one of its aircraft was shot down, the ICRC halted its night flights.

10. A Red Cross proposal for daylight flights—I repeat, Mr. Speaker, this whole business of daylight flights was begun as a result of Canadian initiative—the whole idea was brought up as result of Canadian initiative which followed upon our obtaining from General Gowon his consent to such flights.

Mr. Bell: Wonderful fellows!

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Trudeau: Apparently the opposition does not believe in daylight flights.

Mr. Stanfield: Yes.

Mr. Bell: We do not believe you.

Mr. Woolliams: You are reading it very well. A little on the quiet side.

Mr. Diefenbaker: We do not believe in alibis for inhumanity.

An hon. Member: Smile on.

Mr. Trudeau: Still thinking of those Christians over there, Mr. Diefenbaker?

An hon. Member: You do not even know anything about Parliament.

Mr. Speaker: May I take the liberty of reminding the right hon. Prime Minister that members are to be referred to by constituency and not by name.

An hon. Member: He doesn't know.

Mr. Trudeau: 10. A Red Cross proposal for daylight flights was given to both Nigerian and Biafran representatives in Geneva on August 1. Biafra accepted the proposal in principle on August 14 but made its acceptance subject to the condition that it would continue to use Uli airport for its own operations. The Biafrans offered no evidence that

[Mr. Trudeau.]

they were prepared to meet the single Nigerian request that arms not be flown in during daylight hours. The paper setting out "technical modalities" of daylight flights, drawn up by Professor Freymond of the ICRC and Dr. Cookey of Biafra, and circulated by the Biafran authorities, must be read in light of this Biafran condition.

11. In late summer the ICRC sent a team of representatives to Nigeria in an attempt to conclude a daylight relief agreement with both sides, no agreement having been reached with either side up to this point. On September 13 the federal Nigerian government and the ICRC reached an agreement for an internationally-inspected and militarily-inviolable daylight relief airlift. The agreement included, at Nigerian insistence and reply to the Biafran condition for what amounted to daylight military use of Uli airport, a clause that the agreement should be without prejudice to military operations by the Nigerian government.

12. The Biafran regime refused to conclude an agreement with the Red Cross. Biafra, instead, demanded in a press statement dated September 15 "a third party guarantee which will ensure that daylight flights are not used to military advantage by Nigeria." The statement continued to say that "the only guarantee acceptable to Biafra is that of a third government or international organization of a political character."

13. The governments of Canada and the United States immediately attempted to provide assurances to meet this understandable Biafran fear of military disadvantage. Discussions toward this end took place in Ottawa and in Washington and involved officials of the Prime Minister's office and the Department of External Affairs and officials of the White House and the Department of State. Included in these discussions as one element of these assurances was a proposal for Canadian observers to travel on board relief aircraft.

14. Canadian officials subsequently met with Biafran representatives in Geneva. Ambassador Ferguson, who had been agreed upon as the person who should convey formally these offers, travelled to Africa. As set forth in the Washington statement, dated November 12, 1969, the Biafran authorities on October 24 formally rejected the offers which were designed to protect Biafra from military disadvantage, which is exactly what they had asked for.