

Delay in Use of Aircraft for Biafra

whether or not Dr. Arikpo made the statement which I have asserted he did make. If the minister does not believe the hon. member for Egmont and myself when we make this assertion, surely he can confirm this from his officials in New York, his parliamentary secretary and others who were there. I suggest there is no need to wait for consent, because it is there.

I know, Mr. Speaker, that I must bring these remarks to a conclusion shortly, and I shall. I appreciate that the consent of the Red Cross is required, but surely the minister, who can arrange to send 100 or so armed personnel, can arrange with the Red Cross to send the one or two men necessary to Sao Tomé to carry out the inspection there. That was the only condition.

I am sure that in a desperate emergency, when children are starving by the thousands, the Red Cross will not delay its co-operation, and I am quite sure I speak for the church organizations who are running the supplies in when I say they will do all they can to co-operate. This is a matter in which death and agony increase day by day, and each and every day wasted is a day in which more thousands will die.

While the minister hesitates about confirming something which happened nearly three weeks ago, of which I suggest there is firm and credible evidence, and while he hesitates to establish the necessary co-operation with the International Red Cross, the one most promising means of sending in supplies is not used. It has even been suggested that we are going to bring back the Hercules and provide smaller aircraft that can fly into Nigeria.

● (11:30 a.m.)

Canada's good intentions will be made a mockery unless there is immediate action. The government must not postpone until the committee has reported, or postpone from day to day, perhaps for weeks, the provision of the urgently needed Hercules in the Sao Tomé operation. I suggest the reason for this debate is not only that the matter may be clarified, but also that this house may express its views on a matter deeply affecting Canada's humanitarian purpose, deeply concerning public opinion and deeply affecting Canada's reputation for efficiency.

Mr. David MacDonald (Egmont): Mr. Speaker, I will not take very long in speaking on the urgency of this motion because I believe Your Honour has already heard a very full and excellent statement on this

point from the hon. member for Greenwood. But I would like to indicate to the house that what we are faced with is in fact a matter that is of great interest and one that will undoubtedly cause considerable suffering not only to the people of Biafra and Nigeria but also to the people of this country. We have become well aware in the weeks that have passed that a tremendous amount of public interest and concern has grown in this country.

I would refer Your Honour to citation 100 (2) of Beauchesne's fourth edition, which says in part:

The "definite matter of urgent public importance", for the discussion of which the adjournment of the house may be moved under standing order 26, must be so pressing that public interest will suffer if it is not given immediate attention.

May I emphasize in particular the last phrase which reads "must be so pressing that public interest will suffer if it is not given immediate attention". It is particularly in this area that we must think very seriously of the motion proposed by the hon. member for Greenwood. For the last two and a half weeks there has been an unusually keen public interest in the activities of our government with regard to the relief operations for Biafra and Nigeria. When the government was finally able to arrange with the government of Nigeria the use of our Hercules aircraft I think all Canadians breathed a great sigh of relief that we would now be able to take a forward step to relieve the starvation of many thousands of people both in Biafra and in Nigeria. Since that time two and a half weeks ago many thousands of lives have been lost. Perhaps it is a little too callous to suggest that part of the reason is that we have not been able as yet to put our Hercules aircraft into service. How many lives were lost can never be determined, and now we face future uncertainty.

Whether it is a matter of 6,000 or 10,000 lives lost a day, each day as it goes by spells untold suffering for the people in that area. We know from personal experience, and we are not alone in this, that there are facilities that could be used tonight if our Hercules aircraft were available. We believe there is some danger that if further delays occur in the possible use of the Fernando Po route, these aircraft may have to return to this country. It seems to be of the utmost importance that we take action not in two days' time or in two weeks' time but today, to make sure that our Canadian aircraft can serve the purpose for which they were sent,