

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, November 25, 1969

The House met at 2 p.m.

[Translation]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

**STATEMENT ON DELIVERY OF RELIEF
SUPPLIES TO BIAFRA**

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, in the past few days several questions have been asked of me in the House of Commons with respect to steps taken by the government of Canada to assist in the shipment of relief supplies to the civilian populations of the secessionist areas of Nigeria. Because it is desirable to set forth in a single statement the several aspects of Canadian efforts in this regard, the following brief chronological record has been prepared:

1. In October 1968, Canadian Forces Hercules aircraft were despatched to the Nigerian area for use in carrying relief cargoes to Biafra. One of those aircraft joined the night airlift, the hazards and inefficiencies of which were then and have always been recognized.

2. In late October 1968, my personal representative, Professor Ivan Head, journeyed to Lagos for discussions with the Nigerian head of state, General Gowon, about the possibilities of additional relief shipments. It was as a result of that Canadian initiative that the Nigerians agreed to permit daylight relief flights subject to only a single condition, an undertaking by Colonel Ojukwu that he would not take advantage of the situation and fly in arms during daylight hours.

[English]

3. The proposal for daylight flights on these terms was transmitted through the International Committee of the Red Cross and other channels to Colonel Ojukwu. When in November no reply had been received from Colonel Ojukwu, and the Nigerian government announced that it could no longer guarantee the safety of aircraft flying into Biafra at night, the Canadian government withdrew its aircraft. Canada stated at that time that it

would consider replacing the aircraft once appropriate daylight delivery arrangements were concluded.

4. Not until June, 1969, some eight months following the announcement of the daylight relief flight proposal, did the Biafran authorities comment officially upon it. Not even then did Biafra accept the idea of daylight relief. It only said that, subject to five conditions, it would be "willing to consider" daylight flights.

5. Since early 1969, and with the knowledge of the Nigerian government, contacts have been made and discussions about relief and other measures subsequently held by Canada with representatives of the Biafran regime. The Secretary of State for External Affairs has spoken with Biafran authorities in New York; various Canadian officials have met with Biafran representatives in London, Ottawa, Geneva and New York, and are continuing to do so in one or more of these places whenever it appears appropriate to do so. It is in this light Mr. Speaker, that my statement of last week must be viewed when I said there had been contact at the ministerial level. This contact was made at New York; of course there have been other contacts at the official level in the various capitals, as I have just said.

6. In an effort to overcome the delivery difficulties the Canadian government has consulted continuously with a number of other donor governments which make up what is known as the Hague Group. It has consulted as well with the United States government. That government, early this year, took the recognized lead in Nigerian relief activities when President Nixon appointed Ambassador Clyde Ferguson as his official representative to co-ordinate humanitarian assistance to Nigeria.

• (2:10 p.m.)

7. In June of this year I sent my representative back to Nigeria to ensure that General Gowon's single condition for daylight flights remained unchanged. Professor Head then journeyed to Tanzania on my behalf to speak to President Nyerere, the leader of an African country which had recognized the independence of Biafra, about all aspects of the Nigerian situation.