

The relief cargos could be inspected beforehand at Cotonou by representatives of the ICRC, the Government of Nigeria and the Government of Dahomey. The measures agreed to by the Nigerian Government would have allowed numerous direct daylight relief flights, while enabling them to make sure that the flights carried nothing but relief cargos and, in addition, they would have respected the condition made a long time ago by the secessionists — namely, that they would accept no help from Nigeria.

Two days after the Federal Military Government and the ICRC had signed an agreement for the implementation of this daylight relief flight program for an initial period of three weeks, a Biafran spokesman repudiated it. The Biafran press release invoked certain technicalities, stating that the agreement did not give enough guarantees against Nigerian military exploitation against those relief flights. The only acceptable guarantee in this regard, said the press release, would be that of a third government or of a politically-oriented international organization.

The Canadian Government, judging that the September 13 agreement offered a practical solution to the pressing necessity of transporting more relief cargos, immediately attempted, in agreement with other governments, to meet the new requirements of the Ojukwu regime. In the course of discussions with the American authorities, we now studied the possibility of putting Canadian observers on board the relief planes. Ambassador Ferguson formulated specific proposals concerning the guarantees that could be offered to alleviate Biafran concern with regard to the military advantages that might be derived from daylight relief flights, but the secessionist authorities rejected those proposals.

The Canadian Government, through the ICRC, has also reaffirmed its willingness to consider every practical means of promoting an agreement. It has asked the Ojukwu regime to reconsider its approach. All these efforts have remained fruitless.

It is obvious — and I can prove it — that, during the direct talks we had with them, the Ojukwu regime wanted to obtain political guarantees. In other words, the Ojukwu regime will not facilitate the relief flights its people so desperately need unless the Canadian Government and the other governments concerned accept the de facto recognition of Biafra as an independent state. Such are the facts.

I suggest that, under the circumstances, the Government cannot be blamed for a lack of interest in the welfare or even in the survival of the so sorely tried civilians of the secessionist area of Nigeria.

The fact that we openly refuse to interfere in the political matters of another country cannot simply be termed a technical reason or a matter of protocol. The fact that the Canadian Government is bent on acknowledging the resolutions of the OAU cannot be termed merely a scruple. The fact that we respect what we have helped to build — in this case, a friendly country, a member of the Commonwealth — cannot be termed stupid.

All these considerations are still significant if we want to play our part in the restoration work that will have to be undertaken as soon as the Nigerian conflict is over; if we want to retain the respect of the African continent as a whole; if we want to preserve abroad the image of Canada as a responsible country.