

EXTERNAL AID

NIGERIA—DELAY IN USE OF HERCULES
AIRCRAFT

On the orders of the day:

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): I should like to ask the Prime Minister if he would explain to the house why the Hercules planes do not appear to be actually engaged in flying food and medical supplies into Nigeria. According to the reports we were led to believe the government of Nigeria had, in fact, no objection and had approved of food and medical supplies being flown to Biafra.

Right Hon. P.-E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): As I understand it, Mr. Speaker, the problem is that the International Red Cross has not been able to obtain the necessary clearance from all the governments involved. We have expressed our concern to the International Red Cross in the strongest possible terms. Our planes are there; they are available, and we want them to fly supplies. We feel that the Red Cross are doing the best they can to obtain the necessary clearance.

Mr. Stanfield: May I ask a supplementary question. Is the government of Canada making any representations directly to the government of Nigeria in this regard?

Mr. Trudeau: The Leader of the Opposition will remember that the arrangement was that we would supply our aircraft to the Red Cross, and the Red Cross undertook to obtain the necessary clearances. The personnel are there. There are advance crews which have done as much advance work as they can, but they are now waiting for clearance. There are important matters involved other than merely clearing with the Nigerian authorities. Over-flight and landing permission has to be obtained from the Biafran authorities and also from the new state of Equatorial Guinea. These are the things which are bogging down the Red Cross.

Mr. David Lewis (York South): May I follow up these questions, Mr. Speaker, by asking the right hon. gentleman whether, in view of the hold-up at Lagos and other places, the government would not consider making the Hercules available to the church organizations at Sao Tome, from which planes have been flying into Biafra quite regularly.

Mr. Trudeau: We can, of course, always consider this. However, I do not think it is the time now to believe that the Red Cross

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will fail in its attempt to achieve these clearances. We have to select a channel and assume that it will succeed. We cannot tell the Red Cross we are going to supply them with planes and then tell them we are going to take them back and supply the planes to some other body. If the Red Cross are working for clearances for our planes we have to assume they are doing the best they can.

Mr. Stanfield: Has the Prime Minister any reason for confidence that the Red Cross will succeed without the assistance of governments, such as the government of Canada, in bringing pressure upon the authorities in Nigeria to make the necessary arrangements?

Mr. Trudeau: Of course we do not have any assurance of that, Mr. Speaker, but our whole position all along on this, which I still believe is the right one, is that since Nigeria is a friendly country we do not want to take initiatives of our own in this area. I think everyone agreed—this was the kind of pressure brought to bear by the opposition and by various sections of the informed public—that we should put planes at the disposition of the Red Cross authorities, and this we have done after receiving certain assurances from the government at Lagos. Now, Mr. Speaker, we can only be optimistic that the Red Cross will succeed.

Mr. Stanfield: A further supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, arising out of the answer of the Prime Minister and the telegram that was sent to U Thant by the head of the World Council of Churches in respect to their relief program for Biafra, which suggested that only a cease fire could now prevent acute mass starvation.

Would the Prime Minister not reconsider the position taken by his government and directly bring pressure to bear on Great Britain and other countries to stop shipping arms into Nigeria? Would he also not reconsider his position and take action to bring the matter before the United Nations with a view to preventing this mass starvation?

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, not only are we prepared to reconsider our position but we do reconsider it every day, and we keep coming to the conclusion that our position is the only realistic one.

I would ask the members of the house, and the members of the Canadian public to reflect on our position here. After all, very often the same people who blame us now blame the United States for involving itself in a civil