

*Alleged Failure to Aid Biafrans*

Cross determined to negotiate a firm arrangement which would allow a large, steady flow of relief supplies. They decided to press for daylight flights which the Nigerian authorities had indicated they might accept. I would like to point out that all observers, including Joint Church Aid and Canairelief, agree that daylight flights would be better and more effective than the hazardous night flights.

*[Translation]*

On July 10, the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Sharp) informed the House of his offer to supply inspectors who would control the relief shipments. It was then obvious that the Ojukwu regime would not accept flights from Nigeria and therefore we had expressed the opinion that this kind of shipment inspection would make it possible for the Nigerian government to accept flights from elsewhere. Our proposal was well received and we think that it prompted the government to agree to another mode of inspection so that it could recognize direct flights from outside Nigeria into the secessionist area.

Early in August, the International Committee of the Red Cross proposed to both sides to set up day flights in the secessionist territory. By the middle of August, both sides had agreed in principle to these proposals; however, the Biafran answer stipulated that the Ojukwu regime would keep on using the Uli airport for its own operations. It is important to remember this point because, obviously, it has sometimes been forgotten when appraising subsequent events. There is no indication that the Ojukwu regime was then or later prepared to meet the only condition laid down by the Nigerian government to the effect that there should be no shipment of military supplies during the day as long as the proposed relief flights would last.

Although no agreement was then signed, the Red Cross felt encouraged to have these arrangements confirmed, which was done on September 13 by the Nigerian government. In so doing, the Nigerian authorities were making major concessions, namely the following which is the most important: relief flights would not necessarily have to leave from Nigeria but could reach the secessionist region from Dahomey, the neighbouring state.

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 I.C.R.C. 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, Mr. Speaker, 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