

In May, long before this unfortunate war was the subject of constant questions in the House, the International Committee of the Red Cross asked Canada for urgent financial help in their operations in Nigeria. We responded with a substantial cash grant. In July we allocated half a million dollars in food aid for Nigeria and sent an initial food shipment to Lagos by Hercules aircraft. At that time we decided in principle to provide Hercules aircraft for an airlift under Red Cross auspices if the agreement of the two sides could be obtained.

In August we lent the services of a Canadian expert to the International Red Cross to assist that organization in studying the feasibility of increased and improved airlift operations.

In September another allocation was made of half a million dollars in food aid. The large sea shipment of food sent under these allocations arrived in the area early this month and we have reports of it reaching the forward centres from which the Red Cross distributes it to needy civilians. These are significant contributions being made by the Government in the name of the Canadian people, and they have been acknowledged warmly by the Nigerian authorities. But the story does not end there. Further food aid in large amounts will continue to move forward from Canada.

Private Canadian organizations have also made significant contributions, and their work should be praised and encouraged. I would pay special tribute to the efforts of the Canadian Red Cross Society, which has been in this situation from the beginning, working patiently and hard to bring aid and comfort to the suffering in all parts of Nigeria affected by the fighting.

Mr. Speaker, the most acute problem was that of transportation. The House is well aware of the sincere and sustained efforts the Government made in this regard. Generally, attention was concentrated only on air transport into the rebel zone. But, in fact, it was a second choice, for using the ground corridors into the Eastern area would allow the transportation of far greater quantities of supplies. The situation could be met far better through their use instead of hazardous flights in an air corridor over the jungle, close to aircraft transporting arms. Still, the rebels have constantly opposed the proposals of the Red Cross and Nigeria with regard to the use of the ground corridors, and although one can understand their military concern, one can certainly question the merits of such priorities. As the food supplies decrease, it becomes obvious that even the most efficient and best organized airlift will not be sufficient. Ground transportation therefore remains the only adequate solution. And this requires the approval of Colonel Ojukwu.

With regard to air transport, let us look first at the fact that the Red Cross asked us for Hercules aircraft because of their exceptional capacity and other features which made them particularly suitable for that type of work. Now, that request involved the use of Canadian armed forces airplanes and, consequently, we had to get beforehand the authorization of the Nigerian authorities. Such authorization was required not only for the flights over rebel territory, since these territories were under Nigerian sovereignty. It was then that Nigeria made it clear that any flights over rebel territory not previously authorized by it would be considered as "acts of hostility". As a friendly and responsible government, we were not going to ignore that warning. Therefore, the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Sharp) attempted to get from the Nigerian Government permission to fly over the rebel territory. Through painstaking and persevering efforts, such permission was granted on October 8. The sole condition