

Canadian Action on Nigeria-Biafra

have seen, but his words in the form in which I have them here:

The federal military government has warned foreign countries, organizations and individuals not to interfere in the internal affairs of the country in order not to prolong the sufferings of those trapped in the rebel held areas.

An hon. Member: When did he say that?

Mr. Sharp: Yesterday.

The government has also given the assurance that efforts as to rehabilitation and reconciliation among all Nigerians would continue. This is contained in the head of state's message of congratulations he sent to the federal troops for their capture of the rebel administrative headquarters, Owerri, and other successes in the war. The Commander in Chief renewed his call on the soldiers to adhere strictly to the code of conduct issued to them at the beginning of the military operations.

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): Would the minister indicate why newsmen have been excluded from the front during this period of engagement?

Mr. Sharp: I am sorry, I do not know the reason for that. I will go on to say something about the experience of our observers, who have not been excluded.

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Speaker, may I ask the minister a question about the statement concerning non-intervention from outside?

Mr. Sharp: Yes.

Mr. Lewis: Does the minister read that statement as referring to relief as well as to intervention in the political settlement that has to take place?

Mr. Sharp: No, I do not think so. I am very hopeful that the Nigerian government will be prepared to co-operate with all countries of the world in accepting relief and in facilitating its distribution. I do not think that that is the kind of intervention that General Gowon had in mind. I am quite confident that what he had in mind was the kind of intervention where countries sometimes acted without full agreement by both sides to the conflict, particularly without the agreement of the Nigerian government which is now apparently fully in control of affairs in that country.

Mr. Lewis: Has the minister had any assurance that General Gowon will agree to relief from outside?

Mr. Sharp: Not as yet. Reports have been coming from representatives of the Nigerian

government which seem to point to that conclusion. My own conclusion is that the Nigerian government will certainly be ready to accept co-operation. The war was over only this morning, but I should think that without undue delay arrangements can be made.

Joint Church Aid and Canair food flights appear to have come to an end, for the time being at least. There are stocks of food available in Nigeria and in neighbouring countries sufficient to meet the immediate needs of the Nigerian population for the next few weeks, if not for the next few months, and these stocks will be replenished as required.

The immediate problem is to distribute this food in the areas where it is needed, without delay. In the first instance—and I say this to all hon. members—we must rely on the Nigerian Red Cross and the Nigerian Rehabilitation Commission, both of which have already been in operation in this field. The reports we have received from our observers in Nigeria during recent months have referred to the way in which the Nigerian Red Cross has been following the troops and looking after the refugees as they have streamed across the lines. The Nigerian Rehabilitation Commission, on the other hand, has been concerned with the problem of rehabilitation rather than immediate relief. It is upon these agencies that essentially we must rely. This is one of the reasons that last week, before the war had come to an end and when we were expecting it might go on for some time, we had decided we should support those operations which were concerned with the welfare of those who were formerly in Biafra as well as those who had been in the federally-controlled areas of Nigeria all the time.

As I have said, Mr. Speaker, we have contributed \$1 million to those two organizations within the last few days. We have also made a contribution to the International Red Cross which, as the House knows, the government has been supporting throughout the whole of this unhappy war.

We have felt—and I am sure the House will agree with us—that since the Red Cross is the one internationally recognized agency available to meet disaster of various kinds around the world, it is most important that that institution should always have the support of the Canadian government. As it turned out, it became relatively ineffective because it was not able to operate at night, the Nigerian government failing to agree to night flights. It was unable to operate by day because Biafra