

Canadian Action on Nigeria-Biafra

private sector in Canada in this regard through non-governmental organizations, but the government must take the lead to make sure that relief supplies are moved in by supplying aircraft where necessary and helping to fill the general needs of the people as they relate to the distribution of essential supplies and services.

Fourth, I hope that we can interpret the remarks of the minister as meaning that the observer team will be strengthened. I believe that the government could very well assure the Organization of African Unity, as well as the Nigerian government, that it is ready to do all that is necessary in so far as international supervision is concerned. The government should request additional members for the observer team to ensure that the possibility of reprisals is minimized.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member but his time has expired.

Some hon. Members: Carry on.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous agreement for the hon. member to continue?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Thompson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have only a few more comments to make. I am very pleased to say that from conversations today with church leaders and members of various organizations who have been able to carry on relief work on both sides of the issue that there is going to be a further response by the Canadian people. I would emphasize, though, that the rehabilitation and reconstruction task in Nigeria will be tremendous. This is not just a problem for the next month or two until law and order is established and relief distribution centres are set up; there will be a continuing need over the next few years.

The Canadian government must show leadership here as well. It is one thing to rationalize; it is another thing to use our position to make demands of the Nigerian government whilst at the same time giving assurances of co-operation to the OAU, the Nigerian government, the International Red Cross and any other organization that might be able to participate directly. Someone will have to be responsible for the over-all supervision of the international relief effort, and this should probably be the International Red Cross. I hope the Canadian government will take steps to ensure that a single body supervises

[Mr. Thompson.]

all international assistance and provides administrative co-ordination and leadership.

Mr. Speaker, I conclude by saying that the events of the last day or two have been some of the most momentous that have taken place in this House as we approach the decade of the 1970s. There is no question that this decade will probably be the most critical in the history of the world or even the history of civilization. We should be able to take some encouragement and hope from the fact that so early in this decade at least one international crisis seems to be subsiding, and I hope it will come to an end before too many more days have passed.

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville): Mr. Speaker, in rising to participate in this debate one cannot help but over-emphasize the importance of this issue which must be of the highest priority. All members of the House should take this matter very seriously because it is one of the greatest tragedies affecting the modern world.

Just today one of my friends in the press gallery pointed out a very ironic incident that occurred at the question time. He noted that we were discussing the tragedy of the Biafra-Nigeria situation and then started asking questions about hockey and the troubles in the international hockey world. Many members seemed to view this as a more important question and feel more pain about it than they do about the matter now before us. There were then questions about the RCMP musical ride, veterans affairs and the British Commonwealth gallantry awards.

The question before us now concerns a matter of life and death. However, I was very disappointed in the speech and the statement given by the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Sharp) in the House today because they demonstrated that the government did not feel any real sense of urgency in the issue. Also, when the Secretary of State for External Affairs was speaking just a few minutes ago he seemed to have a great deal of information from Lagos. I wonder why communications are so fast now, when a few weeks or a few days ago there seemed to be difficulty in communicating with Lagos when trying to arrange relief for people dying of starvation in Biafra. It used to take weeks and sometimes months to get an answer from the Lagos government, but that does not seem to be the case today.

Some members on this side of the House, and probably some on the other side as well,