

Inquiries of the Ministry

Mr. Stanfield: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for his general statement of position. I should like to ask him what action, if any, the government of Canada proposes to take in addition to these conversations with other countries, which should have been held a long time ago. What proposals is the government of Canada making to other countries with regard to this very depressing situation?

Mr. Sharp: Well, Mr. Speaker, in the conversations that have been going on between the Canadian and Nigerian governments, we have been pressing upon the Nigerian government the importance of doing everything possible to facilitate relief. The house may recall that General Gowon had assured the Prime Minister's representative, who called on him some months ago, that he would authorize daylight flights. No response was received, from Biafra and it now appears that there are objections by both sides to daylight flights, except under very qualified conditions. In respect of what we can and would like to do in the future, the government again is looking at its policy.

Mr. Stanfield: Mr. Speaker, the minister did not answer my question. I asked the minister whether the government of Canada is making any proposals in the course of its conversations with other countries to meet the very depressing situation. Is the government of Canada making any proposals and what are those proposals?

Mr. Sharp: What we would like, and what I am sure the Leader of the Opposition would like, is to have relief shipments resumed. This is the purpose of all our representations to the Nigerian authorities, to the Red Cross and to the other agencies concerned as well as other governments who share with us the burden of providing relief.

Mr. Andrew Brewin (Greenwood): I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. I should like to ask the minister whether, in the course of his consultations with other governments, he has discussed action through the United Nations on a humanitarian basis to relieve this horrendous situation or whether he has discussed with the governments of the United States and the United Kingdom as well as other interested governments a united front to protest against the affront to humanity involved in the kicking out of the Red Cross from Nigeria.

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, the government has not as yet settled upon a course of action

because, as I said earlier, there are some uncertainties still to be cleared up. It is not clear yet whether the Red Cross will be able to operate.

Until these are cleared up I do not think we can decide exactly what we should do. But so far as the Canadian government is concerned we want to do what the hon. gentleman suggested and what all members of this house and all the people in this country would like to do. We would like to do everything possible to see that innocent lives are not sacrificed.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Heath Macquarrie (Hillsborough): Mr. Speaker, in view of the fact that many Canadians, as the minister says, are terribly interested in this vitally important matter, can he advise what if any channels are now available for aid from Canadians to this strife torn area.

Mr. Sharp: As I now understand the situation, at the present time neither the Biafrans nor the Nigerian authorities have been able to agree upon a procedure for sending relief by air. Discussions are still going on with regard to delivery by land and by sea but none of these has as yet resulted in an agreement between the two parties. So at the present time I cannot say whether or not the charity of the Canadian people can be made available to the people, of Biafra. There are facilities available to Nigeria.

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville): Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask the minister whether the Canadian government has as yet protested to the Nigerian government about the fact that the Red Cross has been expelled by the Nigerians from relief activities in the area.

Mr. Sharp: Yes, Mr. Speaker. As I said on Friday the Prime Minister sent a very special message to General Gowon following up previous contacts with that government.

Mr. R. Gordon L. Fairweather (Fundy-Royal): Mr. Speaker, in the meantime are the bold and brave countries of the world still supplying arms to Nigeria and Biafra while this inhumane tragedy unfolds?

Mr. Sharp: As the hon. gentleman knows, Canada is not supplying any arms, has protested publicly against this practice and has urged everyone to stop the supply of arms.