

more complicated, as shown by reports of discussions already held by the Nigerian parties about a possible cease-fire. It is clear that this question has been surrounded by political conditions. For example, at one point the rebel proposals for a cease-fire stipulated a withdrawal of federal troops behind the pre-war boundaries, an action which the Nigerians claim would place some five and a half million non-Ibos under Ibo rule without their being able to make a choice. This one example illustrates that in this situation a cease-fire is not a simple proposition to be seen in isolation from the political factors. In present circumstances, any cease-fire inevitably involves a major concession of principle by one side or the other. I am not suggesting that a cease-fire is undesirable or that it is impossible; I am saying that it will be difficult to accomplish.

What I have been attempting to make clear, Mr. Speaker, is the legal, moral and political framework in which the Government has viewed this human crisis in a friendly country. It has been clear to me throughout that the concern of the Canadian people in this situation is that their Government should act to help relieve human suffering without interfering in the politics of the situation or being used to advance the political aspirations of one side over the other.

This challenge we have accepted; this concern of the Canadian people we have attempted to meet, I should like nothing more than to be able to stand here today and to announce that the Nigerian civil war has been concluded. It is of little consequence to me whether that conclusion is reached as a result of any special Canadian intervention. It is a solution that I seek, not necessarily a "made in Canada" solution. What is important is that the war cease, that the unnecessary deaths be avoided, and that the record of Canadians and their Government be an honourable one. I think that the record to date is honourable and I should like to recount briefly some of the actions the Government has taken.

The Government's concern with the Nigerian situation was engaged long before the Canadian people became aware of the problem and Hon. Gentlemen opposite began to ask questions. Our ties with Nigeria have been strong, affectionate and mutually advantageous, and because of this we watched with deepening anxiety as the situation deteriorated in 1966 and 1967. When the secession occurred and the fighting broke out we became increasingly concerned that this conflict would tear irreparably the fabric of this fellow Commonwealth country. We told the Lagos Government that we believed a peaceful rather than a military settlement should be found. We supported the Commonwealth Secretary-General in his efforts to bring about negotiations. Later we supported the initiative of the Organization of African Unity in the same direction. And we have repeatedly urged the Nigerian Government, which we continue to recognize as the government of all Nigeria, to seek a peaceful negotiated settlement.

In terms of action, the Canadian Government has concentrated on humanitarian assistance to those in need. We were involved in this well before the human problem reached its acute and well publicized stage. As early as February of this year, we made representations to the Federal Nigerian Government urging greater co-operation with the International Red Cross in its mercy flights into rebel-held territory. Since then we have spoken frequently with the Nigerian authorities on related subjects and have always been given a cordial hearing and explanation of their position. These explanations have made clear, for example, their long-standing willingness to open land and water corridors for the movement of relief supplies, a willingness which is not shared, I should emphasize, by the rebels.