

*External Aid*

moment's notice to assist in the negotiating process. All they are waiting for is word from both parties that they are prepared to make the concessions necessary to get meaningful negotiations under way. As has been said by many speakers, action by outsiders in a situation such as exists in Nigeria is of no value whatever unless it is effective. As the Prime Minister himself said at the opening of this debate, unless the action is responsive to the wishes of those directly involved it can produce hostile reactions.

• (9:10 p.m.)

Canada's whole policy toward African and other newly emerging countries in recent years has been built on a spirit of co-operation rather than intervention. African history is ripe with examples of domination and intervention by peoples from other continents, and Africans are rightly sensitive about their hard won sovereignty and their right to manage their own affairs.

Canada has earned a good name in Africa. Many speakers have mentioned this. They have said that Canada has a good reputation. Why do we have a good reputation?—because we observe these principles of co-operation and non-intervention. We have been able to make a positive contribution to developments on that continent. We have been welcome in the Commonwealth countries of Africa, and we have been welcome in the Francophone countries of Africa. We have been welcome because our policy has been to assist Africans and not to tell them how to run their affairs.

Canada's policy has therefore been recognized as sympathetic and disinterested. This government does not intend to change that policy regardless of emotional appeals, however well intentioned they may be, because I believe, and so I believe do all hon. members of this house, that if we were to abandon that policy we would become unacceptable and ineffective in the vast task that remains on that continent to overcome the problems of underdevelopment and to create viable political societies on that continent.

I am confident, Mr. Speaker, that the government will have the support not only of a majority of the members of this house—I hope of all hon. members—but of the overwhelming majority of the people of Canada in pursuing this course.

The government's responsibilities on the international scene are different from those of private organizations. In saying this I am not criticizing non-governmental groups operating

in Nigeria or in other areas. The churches and other groups have done commendable work in bringing aid to the needy, and I join with many of the members who have spoken in praising their work. I support it. I hope that everybody in this house and that all Canadians will support the work of the churches. What I am saying is that governments must act as governments. For example, the Canadian government has chosen to funnel its food and transport aid in the Nigerian situation through the international committee of the Red Cross, the traditional organization for the assembly and distribution of assistance in difficult situations of this sort.

The international committee of the Red Cross has maintained working relations with the federal Nigerian authorities and with those in charge on the rebel side. It has the necessary support staff and organization on both sides. It has proven worthy of our support and continued co-operation, and I am quite sure that hon. members who spoke would not wish to reflect in any way on the excellent work done over years and years by the International Red Cross, and which is working so effectively in Nigeria.

The standing committee has made a most commendable examination of the many complex factors involved in this difficult situation. Its report contains recommendations in nine areas, and it might be useful if I commented briefly on those recommendations. We shall of course, be giving further study to the points made, and shall be pursuing them if this is feasible or desirable as the situation develops further. An indication of our views on them, however, may be helpful at this stage.

On the observer team the committee noted that the initial invitation for the observers was for two months, and suggested the government request the Nigerians to extend the duration of this invitation. In the interval since the committee's report was presented the Nigerians have in fact extended the operation of the team for a further month. We have been able to extend our participation accordingly and would expect further discussion of this and related questions at an appropriate time with the federal military government, and with those other countries and bodies participating in the observer team.

The question of whether the observers or a similar team should make observations on the rebel side is complicated by conflicting reports from the rebel authorities. I do not know whether the house is aware of some of the criticisms that have been made by the Biafran authorities—