

The Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence 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, but let me read how the Biafran Commissioner of Information described the observer team. He said: "We don't recognize the observer team. They are a bunch of crooks." It is difficult, under these circumstances, for there to be any particular welcome for that group of observers in Africa. We shall however continue to study the feasibility of this proposal.

To the extent that the Committee's second recommendation deals with continuing and future Canadian assistance to Nigeria, I can report that we are in regular contact with the World Bank and with interested governments. The World Bank currently has a team of experts in Nigeria studying economic projects and priorities, and we expect to have the benefit of the conclusions of this team when it returns. It is important to note that assessments of this kind in any country must be carried out with the concurrence of the government concerned, and I may add, Mr. Speaker, that in this respect the co-operation between Nigeria and the World Bank is proving to be very useful at this critical juncture.

In so far as the Committee was referring to emergency food aid, the Government has had constant advice from the International Committee of the Red Cross both on the amounts needed and on the particular categories of food to be emphasized.

The question of land and sea corridors has been discussed in the Committee and in this House. It is one of those items on which it has not been possible for the two sides to agree, despite the best efforts of the relief agencies. I am sure we all regret this because it is quite clear, as was pointed out by one of the speakers in the far corner, who said, "It would take planes moving in at about one a minute to supply the food that will probably be needed", and what we need will probably be land corridors.