

*Inquiries of the Ministry*

view of the tens of thousands of Biafrans dying weekly of starvation, and in view of the failure to date of the government of Canada to pursue with energy and concern any plan to bring assistance to those starving civilians, will the Prime Minister tell the house what measures the government of Canada proposes to take even at this late date to avert what threatens to be one of the great tragedies of modern times?

**Right Hon. P.-E. Trudeau (Prime Minister):** Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Secretary of State for External Affairs to answer this question.

**Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Secretary of State for External Affairs):** Mr. Speaker, no government has been more active in trying to bring to an end this horrible war in Nigeria, and no government has been more generous in providing relief supplies to deal with the great suffering and starvation existing in that country.

**An hon. Member:** Can they reach Biafra?

**Mr. Sharp:** Unfortunately it has been impossible for the International Red Cross, which is the association we have agreed upon as being the instrument best suited for the purpose, to reach agreement with the Nigerian and Biafran authorities as to an adequate route for the provision of supplies. I regret this very much. We have been working to bring about agreement, but this has not yet been possible.

**Mr. Stanfield:** A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. What pressures has Canada brought to bear on the governments of Lagos and Biafra to encourage a mutually acceptable arrangement for the shipment of relief supplies to Biafra?

**Mr. Sharp:** As much pressure as we could bring to bear, Mr. Speaker. We have been in constant contact with the government in Lagos. Nevertheless, I think the Leader of the Opposition will agree that the best instrument which can be of help in these circumstances is an international agency such as the International Red Cross, the motives of which are beyond reproach. That body could do this work most effectively. I take it that hon. gentlemen on this side of the house and on the other side will agree that we ought to continue to work through the International Red Cross.

[Mr. Stanfield.]

**Mr. Stanfield:** A further supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Does the Secretary of State for External Affairs not agree that this matter is of such concern to the conscience of mankind that steps ought to be taken through the United Nations to bring pressure to bear on Britain, the U.S.S.R. and all those who supply arms to the combatants in Nigeria, and to bring pressure to bear through the United Nations to permit international agencies of the United Nations to bring relief to the starving people of Biafra?

**Mr. Sharp:** I agree with the hon. gentleman who leads the opposition that it is incumbent on all the peoples of the world to try to bring to an end this conflict which is causing so much suffering. I can assure the hon. gentleman that the Canadian government is as active in this connection as any other government in the world, and it is our desire, as it is his, that this conflict be ended. At the moment, however, the situation is this. The question has been referred to the Organization for African Unity, and the people of Africa have an even greater interest than have the people in any other part of the world in bringing this conflict to an end. We believe that if efforts are to be made to bring this matter before the United Nations that action should be taken, at this time at least, by those who are seized with the problem immediately, that is to say the African states themselves.

**Mr. Stanfield:** Am I to understand that the position taken by the government is that the niceties of international arrangements are to stand in the way of the relief, or of effective pressure to bring relief, to tens of thousands who are in need?

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please.

**Mr. Andrew Brewin (Greenwood):** Has the Canadian government been requested to lend or supply Hercules planes to transport supplies to areas of Nigeria affected by the hostilities? Has it agreed to do so and, if not, why not?

**Mr. Sharp:** The government of Canada has been asked by the International Red Cross to provide Hercules planes for the airlift which that organization had hoped to arrange. Unfortunately for all of us, after agreement has been reached with the Nigerian government the Biafran authorities refused to agree to the airlift. In these circumstances the question whether we should supply Hercules planes is at the moment hypothetical.