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THE PROBLEM OF RELIEF FOR SECESSIONIST NIGERIA - III

Statement in the House of Commons on November 27, 1969, by Mr. Jean-Pierre Goyer, Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretary of State for External Affairs.

While civil war has been raging for over two years in Nigeria, the people of Canada have become aware of the situation and are increasingly concerned with the nature and the importance of this tragedy. They are concerned with the sufferings which this conflict has brought to the civilian population. It is, of course, this aspect of the situation which has preoccupied the Canadian Government first and foremost. We have wondered what was the best way to bring relief to people in distress while the war goes on. And we have always kept in touch with those who try, by different means, to promote a peaceful settlement. We have kept ourselves ready to do our best to help, should an opportunity arise.

I should perhaps say more on this subject, before examining the problem of relief supplies as such.... There are compelling limitations on what outside governments can do about furthering the settlement of this civil war. We can urge, as we have persistently, the critical importance of finding a peaceful solution, and the crying urgency of achieving this in order to shorten the agony of the conflict. We can, as the Government has also done, make clear our readiness to help in any way the parties might agree upon in the elaboration and implementation of arrangements for peace. What Canada emphatically cannot do is prescribe for the parties to the conflict the concessions each might make to bring about a settlement. Nor, unhappily, is there any formula whereby we could introduce from without the essential conciliatory spirit which alone could make peace talks meaningful and a peace settlement lasting. This essential ingredient can be provided only by the parties themselves.

It should also be borne in mind that in so far as mediatory assistance from outside may be of help, there has been no lack of well-placed and well-intentioned conciliators. From the early stages of the conflict, African countries have made clear their fully understandable concern that it should be recognized as essentially an African problem and that a solution should be sought in that context. This view was endorsed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in a letter to the SSEA, tabled in the House on September 30, 1968, and was again expressed when he had discussions with the Prime Minister about Nigeria early this month. The Organization for African Unity in September