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## THE PROBLEM OF RELIEF FOR SECESSIONIST NIGERIA - I

Statement by Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau in  
the House of Commons, November 25, 1969.

In the past few days several questions have been asked of me in the House of Commons with respect to steps taken by the Government of Canada to assist in the shipment of relief supplies to the civilian populations of the secessionist areas of Nigeria. Because it is desirable to set forth in a single statement the several aspects of Canadian efforts in this regard, the following brief chronological record has been prepared:

In October 1968, Canadian Forces Hercules aircraft were despatched to the Nigerian area for use in carrying relief cargoes to Biafra. One of those aircraft joined the night airlift, the hazards and inefficiencies of which were then and have always been recognized.

In late October 1968, my personal representative, Professor Ivan Head, journeyed to Lagos for discussions with the Nigerian head of state, General Gowon, about the possibilities of additional relief shipments. It was as a result of that Canadian initiative that the Nigerians agreed to permit daylight relief flights subject to only a single condition, an undertaking by Colonel Ojukwu that he would not take advantage of the situation and fly in arms during daylight hours.

The proposal for daylight flights on these terms was transmitted through the International Committee of the Red Cross and other channels to Colonel Ojukwu. When in November no reply had been received from Colonel Ojukwu, and the Nigerian Government announced that it could no longer guarantee the safety of aircraft flying into Biafra at night, the Canadian Government withdrew its aircraft. Canada stated at that time that it would consider replacing the aircraft once appropriate daylight delivery arrangements were concluded.

Not until June 1969, some eight months following the announcement of the daylight relief flight proposal, did the Biafran authorities comment officially upon it. Not even then did Biafra accept the idea of daylight relief. It only said that, subject to five conditions, it would be "willing to consider" daylight flights.

Since early 1969, and with the knowledge of the Nigerian Government, contacts have been made and discussions about relief and other measures subsequently held by Canada with representatives of the Biafran regime. The Secretary of State for External Affairs has spoken with Biafran authorities in New York; various Canadian officials have met with Biafran representatives in London, Ottawa, Geneva and New York, and are continuing to do so in one or more of these places whenever it appears appropriate to do so. It is in this light that my statement of last week must be viewed when I said there had been contact at the ministerial level. This contact was made at New York; of course there have been other contacts at the official level in the various capitals, as I have just said.

In an effort to overcome the delivery difficulties, the Canadian Government has consulted continuously with a number of other donor governments which make up what is known as the Hague Group. It has consulted as well with the United States Government. That Government, early this year, took the recognized lead in Nigerian relief activities when President Nixon appointed Ambassador Clyde Ferguson as his official representative to co-ordinate humanitarian assistance to Nigeria.

In June of this year, I sent my representative back to Nigeria to ensure that General Gowon's single condition for daylight flights remained unchanged. Professor Head then journeyed to Tanzania on my behalf to speak to President Nyerere, the leader of an African country which had recognized the independence of Biafra, about all aspects of the Nigerian situation.

On July 10, in an attempt to meet Biafran contentions that daylight flights would prejudice its military position, the Secretary of State for External Affairs offered to send Canadians to the area to act as inspectors of relief cargos.

In the early summer, the International Committee of the Red Cross began negotiations in Geneva in an attempt to solve the flight impasse which by then had reached a critical point as the Nigerian Air Force increased its efforts to prevent night flights of arms from reaching Uli. After one of its aircraft was shot down, the ICRC halted its night flights.

A Red Cross proposal for daylight flights (I repeat ... this whole business of daylight flights was begun as a result of Canadian initiative, the whole idea was brought up as a result of Canadian initiative which followed upon our obtaining from General Gowon his consent to such flights) was given to both Nigerian and Biafran representatives in Geneva on August 1. Biafra accepted the proposal in principle on August 14 but made its acceptance subject to the condition that it would continue to use Uli Airport for its own operations. The Biafrans offered no evidence that they were prepared to meet the single Nigerian request that arms not be flown in during daylight hours. The paper setting out "technical modalities" of daylight flights, drawn up by Professor Freymond of the ICRC and Dr. Cookey of Biafra, and circulated by the Biafran authorities, must be read in light of this Biafran condition.

In late summer, the ICRC sent a team of representatives to Nigeria in an attempt to conclude a daylight relief agreement with both sides, no agreement having been reached with either side up to this point. On September 13, the Federal Nigerian Government and the ICRC reached an agreement for an internationally-inspected and militarily-inviolable daylight relief airlift. The

agreement included, at Nigerian insistence and in reply to the Biafran condition for what amounted to daylight military use of Uli Airport, a clause that the agreement should be without prejudice to military operations by the Nigerian Government.

The Biafran regime refused to conclude an agreement with the Red Cross. Biafra, instead, demanded, in a press statement dated September 15, "a third-party guarantee which will ensure that daylight flights are not used to military advantage by Nigeria". The statement went on to say that "the only guarantee acceptable to Biafra is that of a third government or international organization of a political character".

The Governments of Canada and the United States immediately attempted to provide assurances to meet this understandable Biafran fear of military disadvantage. Discussions toward this end took place in Ottawa and in Washington and involved officials of the Prime Minister's Office and the Department of External Affairs and officials of the White House and the Department of State. Included in these discussions as one element of these assurances was a proposal for Canadian observers to travel on board relief aircraft.

Canadian officials subsequently met with Biafran representatives in Geneva. Ambassador Ferguson, who had been agreed upon as the person who should convey formally these offers, travelled to Africa. As set forth in the Washington statement, dated November 12, 1969, the Biafran authorities, on October 24, formally rejected the offers which were designed to protect Biafra from military disadvantage, which is exactly what they had asked for.

Canadian officials in Geneva have been informed by Biafran representatives that Biafra demands more than military assurances; that, in addition, guarantees of a political nature are required in order to break the impasse. The Canadian Government is not willing to give the political guarantees demanded, as these would be tantamount to recognition of an independent state of Biafra, and an overt interference by Canada in the political affairs of another country, contrary to the resolutions of the Organization of African Unity.

During the past several weeks, the Secretary of State for External Affairs has continued his discussions about Nigeria with some 25 other foreign ministers, many of them from African nations, at the United Nations. I talked to Secretary-General U Thant about the problem in New York on November 11, as I had a year earlier. Canadian leaders have pursued the Nigerian issue with the leaders of two African countries who have visited Ottawa this fall. They were President Hamani Diori of Niger and President Nyerere of Tanzania. I can say that the unanimous view of these African leaders is that the Organization of African Unity resolutions must be respected.

The Government is now considering, as stated a few days ago, alternative means of delivering relief to Biafra in daylight. It does so while agreeing entirely with the recent statement of United States Secretary of State Rogers: "Daylight flights under agreed procedures... remain the only practicable scheme for an immediate and substantial expansion of relief operations".

The Government's concern remains, as it has throughout, and as does that of Honorable Members opposite and, indeed, all Canadians, with the innocent civilian victims of this tragic war. Delivering adequate food and relief supplies to these people must be our resolve, notwithstanding the disinclination of the Ojukwu regime to accept it except in return for political advantage.

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