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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

reaffirmed its position in this respect. The Organization for African Unity, which is duly recognized as a regional organization of the United Nations, has been actively seeking to bring the two sides together for peace negotiations, and those endeavors are continuing.

It is unfortunate that the Secretary of State for External Affairs is unable to be here today to give us his views on the motion before the House. So many of his activities, especially in the past few months, have centered around the conflict in Nigeria. Elsewhere I will mention his discussions with Mr. Stewart and Mr. Gromyko about arms shipments to the area. He has also had many opportunities in Ottawa and in New York to have talks about Nigeria with the foreign ministers of other countries, including a number from the African continent. Hon. Members will also recall the visits to Ottawa of two distinguished African leaders, President Diiori of Niger and President Nyerere of Tanzania. These meetings confirmed the view of the Government that Canada should continue to concentrate on the humanitarian problems and that a dramatic peace initiative on the part of Canada would not help get peace talks started. Indeed, such an action might have an effect opposite to that intended. Rather, it has been the Minister's resolve that Canada should be ready and willing to grasp opportunities to be useful in ameliorating the situation, as in Canada's continuing participation on the observer team, or in helping to bring about peace negotiations. But until peace comes the humanitarian problem of relieving the suffering of war must be faced. In the absence thus far of any role Canada could play in resolving the complexities of Nigeria's internal struggle, the Government has concentrated on helping to mitigate its tragic consequences. Unfortunately, the effort made by the population of Canada cannot be compared favorably to that of other countries.

Like most other governments, we have made our relief contributions available through the organization which has always served with such distinction and efficiency in relief distribution throughout the world — the Red Cross. Through the Canadian Red Cross Society and the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Government has contributed almost \$3 million to relief for victims of the Nigerian conflict and, of this, almost one half in the Biafran area.

I need not dwell here on the complexities and frustrations which have beset all efforts to get relief supplies through to the suffering. The relief programs which the Red Cross has co-ordinated on both sides of the fighting lines have been persistently pursued in the face of acute physical risks, formidable political complications and monumental administrative difficulties. The most severe problems, naturally, have concerned efforts to deliver desperately-needed supplies of food and drugs to suffering civilians in the secessionist enclave, surrounded as it is by Nigerian Government forces. And as the conflict has been prolonged, the tragedy of its impact on those innocent people has assumed ever more desperately urgent proportions in our relief efforts. In his statement to the House on November 25, the Prime Minister outlined the persistent efforts which this Government and other donor governments have made, in co-ordination with and in support of the ICRC, to break the tragic impasse which obstructs the expansion of relief deliveries. I suggest that, when we examine this record of relief delivery efforts — efforts massively supported by many governments and organizations which share Canada's concern about the suffering in Nigeria —, we cannot escape a conclusion which can only be heartrending for all of us who earnestly seek to help relieve that suffering. It is not a conclusion which I derive any satisfaction from stating, but it is the single most relevant fact

which we must recognize in the present agonizing dilemma over relief delivery. This is the abundantly-tested and sadly-demonstrated fact that the Ojukwu regime so far is not disposed to accept more effective relief delivery arrangements unless it thereby achieves political advantage.

If we failed to face up to this distasteful conclusion, we should not only be doing less than justice to all those who have striven to overcome the obstacles to a freer flow of relief; we should also be deluding ourselves as to what are the real prospects for achieving our urgent objective of getting more relief to the suffering. Perhaps, most important, by ignoring the essence of this relief delivery problem we should only further prejudice the chances of yet breaking this impasse over expansion of aid to the hungry and undernourished.

This Government bears the Ojukwu regime no ill will, but we have much goodwill and compassion for the people who are suffering in the territory which that regime controls. And when it is clear that Colonel Ojukwu's policies are directly instrumental in denying them the relief we are trying to provide, we must be frank in declaring where our essential concern lies. Tireless efforts have been made over a long period to get a larger flow of relief into the Biafran area. The Prime Minister reminded the House earlier this week that these efforts date from last year. They have been stepped up steadily in recent months and weeks. After the successful airlift operation last spring had to be stopped, the Red Cross determined to negotiate a firm arrangement which would allow a large, steady flow of relief supplies. They decided to press for daylight flights which the Nigerian authorities had indicated they might accept. I should like to point out that all observers, including Joint Church Aid and Canairelief, agree that daylight flights would be better and more effective than the hazardous night flights.

On July 10, the Secretary of State for External Affairs informed the House of his offer to supply inspectors who would control the relief shipments. It was then obvious that the Ojukwu regime would not accept flights from Nigeria and therefore we had expressed the opinion that this kind of shipment inspection would make it possible for the Nigerian Government to accept flights from elsewhere. Our proposal was well received, and we think that it prompted the Government to agree to another mode of inspection so that it could recognize direct flights from outside Nigeria into the secessionist area.

Early in August, the International Committee of the Red Cross proposed to both sides to set up day flights in the secessionist territory. By the middle of August, both sides had agreed in principle to these proposals; however, the Biafran answer stipulated that the Ojukwu regime would keep on using the Uli airport for its own operations. It is important to remember this point because, obviously, it has sometimes been forgotten when appraising subsequent events. There is no indication that the Ojukwu regime was then or later prepared to meet the only condition laid down by the Nigerian Government to the effect that there should be no shipment of military supplies during the day as long as the proposed relief flights would last.

Although no agreement was then signed, the Red Cross felt encouraged to have these arrangements confirmed, which was done on September 13 by the Nigerian Government. In so doing, the Nigerian authorities were making major concessions — namely the following, which is the most important: relief flights would not necessarily have to leave from Nigeria but could reach the secessionist region from Dahomey, the neighboring state.

The relief cargos could be inspected beforehand at Cotonou by representatives of the ICRC, the Government of Nigeria and the Government of Dahomey. The measures agreed to by the Nigerian Government would have allowed numerous direct daylight relief flights, while enabling them to make sure that the flights carried nothing but relief cargos and, in addition, they would have respected the condition made a long time ago by the secessionists — namely, that they would accept no help from Nigeria.

Two days after the Federal Military Government and the ICRC had signed an agreement for the implementation of this daylight relief flight program for an initial period of three weeks, a Biafran spokesman repudiated it. The Biafran press release invoked certain technicalities, stating that the agreement did not give enough guarantees against Nigerian military exploitation against those relief flights. The only acceptable guarantee in this regard, said the press release, would be that of a third government or of a politically-oriented international organization.

The Canadian Government, judging that the September 13 agreement offered a practical solution to the pressing necessity of transporting more relief cargos, immediately attempted, in agreement with other governments, to meet the new requirements of the Ojukwu regime. In the course of discussions with the American authorities, we now studied the possibility of putting Canadian observers on board the relief planes. Ambassador Ferguson formulated specific proposals concerning the guarantees that could be offered to alleviate Biafran concern with regard to the military advantages that might be derived from daylight relief flights, but the secessionist authorities rejected those proposals.

The Canadian Government, through the ICRC, has also reaffirmed its willingness to consider every practical means of promoting an agreement. It has asked the Ojukwu regime to reconsider its approach. All these efforts have remained fruitless.

It is obvious — and I can prove it — that, during the direct talks we had with them, the Ojukwu regime wanted to obtain political guarantees. In other words, the Ojukwu regime will not facilitate the relief flights its people so desperately need unless the Canadian Government and the other governments concerned accept the de facto recognition of Biafra as an independent state. Such are the facts.

I suggest that, under the circumstances, the Government cannot be blamed for a lack of interest in the welfare or even in the survival of the so sorely tried civilians of the secessionist area of Nigeria.

The fact that we openly refuse to interfere in the political matters of another country cannot simply be termed a technical reason or a matter of protocol. The fact that the Canadian Government is bent on acknowledging the resolutions of the OAU cannot be termed merely a scruple. The fact that we respect what we have helped to build — in this case, a friendly country, a member of the Commonwealth — cannot be termed stupid.

All these considerations are still significant if we want to play our part in the restoration work that will have to be undertaken as soon as the Nigerian conflict is over; if we want to retain the respect of the African continent as a whole; if we want to preserve abroad the image of Canada as a responsible country.

The Canadian Government also believes that no one should send arms to the Nigerian war theater. This is a firm statement, which has been enunciated publicly many times. It has also been expressed to the leaders of other governments by both the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for External Affairs, and the statement is well known to Britain, the Soviet Union and the other countries involved.

Recently Mr. Stewart, the British Foreign Secretary, and Mr. Gromyko, the Foreign Secretary of the Soviet Union, were in Ottawa and, when the Nigerian conflict was discussed during their talks here, they were reminded of Canada's own policy of not supplying arms to this theater, as well as our own view that none should be supplied. Those are facts; I suggest nobody can accuse the Government of being passive.

Hon. Members will agree that the cessation of arms shipments to the Nigerian side only will not necessarily bring about an end to the war. Arms shipments to both sides must be stopped. But those countries that are reported to be supplying arms to the Biafran side deny such activity. As a result, it is extremely difficult to find a means of stopping all arms shipments. The Government of Canada again calls upon all who are supplying arms to the two sides in this tragic conflict to look again at their policies. A complete cessation of arms shipments would undoubtedly help bring the end of this tragic war closer and would save the lives of many. To conclude, I might recapitulate briefly the fundamental elements of the Government's position. First, we are prepared to make further substantial contributions to relief needs in Nigeria, through whatever feasible and appropriate means may be open to the Government.

Second, we, like many others, remain convinced that the early inauguration of daylight relief flights offers the most practicable and effective answer to immediate relief problems in the secessionist area.

Third, while keeping in close touch with the persistent efforts to bring about agreement on daylight flights, the Government is also exploring possible alternative means of improving the relief delivery situation. Fourth, we stand ready to assist, in any way that both parties wish us to do so, in promoting a negotiated peace settlement. Fifth and finally, we look toward an effective role for Canada in the work of rehabilitation and reconstruction which must follow conclusion of this tragic conflict. I know the whole House, with all Canadians, shares the Government's earnest hope that the day when this reconstruction process can begin will not be much longer deferred. Nigeria has always been an important area for Canadian economic aid, as shown by the nearly \$20 million that we have provided since independence, in addition to the \$3 million in relief. Peace will allow these important programs to go forward with new vigor.