

ACOA Nigeria-Biafra Relief Memo 7/4
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American Committee on Africa
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New York, New York 10016

FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION

People who want to know how the United States can do more to alleviate the tragic Nigeria/Biafra famine should press the government (this means your Senators and Representatives as well as the State Department and the President, candidates for office and anyone else who might have leverage) to make Hercules aircraft, preferably C-130s, available to the international relief agencies through Church World Service (CWS) and Catholic Relief Services (CRS). As early as August CRS requested planes and on September 5 the New York Times carried a story from Sao Tome pointing out the urgent need for a Hercules. On October 4 CWS, CRS and spokesmen for the American Jewish Committee asked for aircraft from the government. These requests have remained unanswered.

It is important that 3-4 planes be placed at the disposal of the church agencies, not the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), whose effectiveness is being increasingly criticized. The Swedish Red Cross has already provided the ICRC with a Hercules C-130, and more recently the Canadian Government has given it three more Hercules. It appears that only one of these latter planes is being used on Fernando Po. The others are presently located in Lagos and in Brazil. The reasons behind the ICRC's non-utilization of these planes, be they practical problems or political difficulties, still remain inexcusable in view of the great need. Church sources estimate they could use 3 or 4 such planes immediately.

The most consistent and effective aid reaching stricken areas in Biafra for several months has been coming from Sao Tome island from which both CWS and CRS operate. But at present the only planes in use by these agencies are either DC-7s or Constellations which can carry only about 10 tons per flight. The Hercules is a turbo-prop plane which can carry 25 tons. It also has the advantage of unloading quickly from the rear which would be most helpful in view of the simple unloading devices in Biafra. The C-130 is also the best plane for air-drops, and in addition to more food it can carry equipment necessary for expanding airstrips and fuel for local distribution, items which are too heavy for present flights. Despite contrary reports, ground facilities on both ends can handle the Hercules.

The costs for chartering such Hercules are almost prohibitive for the church agencies and amount to \$500,000 for the first month and \$375,000 each additional month, the bulk of the costs going toward insurance. The need for government aid is obvious, and inasmuch as the Canadian Government has already granted such help to the ICRC, the U.S. Government should be urged to give similar aid to the active church agencies.

Recent press reports have stated that the U.S. Government's refusal to give or lend planes stems from its recognition of Lagos as the only legitimate Nigerian Government and therefore of giving direct aid only to the ICRC which Lagos recognizes. It is difficult to see why, if the government can make food, other supplies, and funds available to the religious agencies, it draws the line at planes. A Times article (10/31/68) inferred that the government had

refused a plea for "one or two C-130 Hercules military cargo planes with military crews in civilian clothes." If the question is pilots, which the Times article indicates indirectly, volunteer pilots are available and there is no need for U.S. "military crews in civilian clothes," (a sly piece of journalistic innuendo, incidentally.) If the question is use of planes, the government could simply make available to the religious agencies a significant sum for unspecified transportation needs, as in August it allocated \$1,000,000 to the Red Cross. Or finally, if the government is really saying it will channel aid only through the Red Cross, it must be told in the strongest voice public opinion can raise that we hold the government responsible for thousands of unnecessary innocent deaths until that policy is changed.

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Military Situation

Although Nigeria has been predicting a quick end to the war since her "final push" announced in August, and Biafran-held territory on the map has shrunk, the end of the war is not in sight. This fact influences the total relief picture and therefore must be considered as part of the "politics of relief." The situation is in part because the Nigerian gains seem firmer than they are; they take cities and sometimes roads but the surrounding country remains in Biafran hands and the Biafrans are always in a position to cut communications lines and to repossess towns. A turning point came in late September-early October when French military supplies, particularly light arms reaching Biafra regularly from Gabon, enabled the Biafran forces to strengthen their defenses and mount limited offenses against Nigerian lines and strongholds. After the September meeting of the Organization of African Unity had decisively supported Nigeria, peace feelers within Biafra and through British mediators was widely reported in the press. But with new arms supplies, Lt. Col. Ojukwu was able to secure renewed support from Biafran diplomats who returned to Biafra and from the Biafran Consultative Assembly. What difference of opinion exists in Biafra appears to be over tactics: whether to prepare for and undertake guerrilla action immediately or to continue "conventional" warfare, holding Umuahia and taking other centers while pushing towards Port Harcourt. The answer will probably be dictated by the amount of military supplies available.

Food Situation and Prospects

More supplies are entering Nigeria and Biafra and being distributed on both sides of the lines, but the death toll continues to rise. This is, of course, because starvation is the cumulative result of malnutrition over a lengthy period. And though supplies have increased, they have never reached the quantity needed to reverse the upward spiral.

It was reported in Paris on October 19 that the head of the World Council of Churches relief program in Biafra had cabled a confidential report to the U.N. Secretary General which read:

Estimated death from starvation in month of July, 6,000 per day;
August 10,000 per day;
September 12,000 per day.

Present situation holds or decreasing slightly with present level of relief flights. However, unless immediate cease fire, month of December could see death rate of 25,000 per day.

Roman Catholic and UNICEF sources in Paris supported his findings, and the Red Cross had separately estimated a current death toll of 12,000 daily.

Until now the major problem has been a protein deficit and children have been the main victims. But after the fall harvest of yams and cassava is exhausted, and it will be slim due to war conditions, there will be no bulk food either and this carbohydrate deficiency will cause death among the adult population. The most important food-needs cited by experts are for powdered milk, stockfish, beans and gari (gari: cassava which has been peeled, grated, and fermented for several days, then fried).

On October 29 the New York Times carried a story from Geneva headlined "Nigerian Famine Reported Eased." This article, which reported that the President of the ICRC in Geneva stated that the "famine crisis has been more or less met" was contradicted by another article on the same day written from Lagos in which a coordinator for the ICRC said "we do not know yet how much food is available in Nigeria itself nor how many people will need it at any given time." He reported that costs for the next three months for Nigerian activities alone would run from \$10-15 million. The Geneva report was further refuted in an article on October 31, when the head of Catholic Relief Services called the ICRC's statement "highly misleading" and a World Council of Churches doctor declared that Biafra faces famine without more foreign aid. Estimates for the actual tonnage of supplies needed in Biafra alone run to 5,000 tons per day.

Epidemics:

People so weakened by lack of food are easy prey for disease, and one of the very grave dangers is of epidemics which will spread not only through famine areas but far wider. Measles is always expected in the area in the late fall, and inoculations are urgently needed. Smallpox is a serious possibility and malaria, prevalent on the coast, may also spread out of control. The United States A.I.D. Program and the ICRC are both involved in a smallpox/measles program.

Relief Operations: BIAFRA

Transportation of supplies is the greatest need. It appears that food stocks, together with those in transit or promised, are adequate through the end of the year, but only if transportation and distribution difficulties are solved. The second need then appears to be for drugs. At last report, 15-20 planes were landing in Biafra with supplies nightly, none by day despite previous reports. This breaks down to 10-12 from Sao Tome (through the coordination of the Committee of International Church Relief, involving the World Council of Churches (CWS), Caritas, (CRS) Nordchurchaid, German, Dutch, Swiss churches etc.); 6-8 from Fernando Po, mainly ICRC; and 3-4 from Libreville, Gabon, mainly French. Major arms and ammunition flights emanate from Gabon as well and are reported as amounting from 20-30 tons per day. The Ivory Coast also is involved in the shipment of supplies.

It is unquestionable that relief efforts have increased since mid-September, particularly with the resumption of ICRC night flights on September 16. Reports from the Geneva headquarters of the ICRC indicate that since September the ICRC has flown in approximately 200 flights at night carrying about 10 tons per flight. In addition the ICRC, with the cooperation of other agencies, has located about 170 relief personnel (medical teams and distribution) within Biafra primarily under the direction of the Swedish Red Cross. The Sao Tome originated church flights have numbered well over 300 since mid-August, and all groups, including UNICEF, have been involved in financing the purchase and transport of supplies to the major embarkation points on the islands.

Most planes go to the Uli airstrip, which has been reported captured several times and is only 10 or so miles from battlelines, but as of October 20 was still the major Biafran landing point. The field can handle 6 food and 2 armaments aircraft simultaneously, and it is at present being enlarged. A new airstrip, code-Agnes, near Umuahia is also in use. Two other strips used at various times in September, Obilago and Uturu, have both been reported captured, but since much territory appears to change hands frequently, either or both of them may be or become operative again.

Catholic Relief Services, with Protestant and other contributions, has been helping in the development of airstrips particularly on Sao Tome. On September 20, 45 tons of aluminum loading planks and gravity conveyers were sent from New York; with them ground crews were able to cut down turn-around time for loading and unloading aircraft used in the nightly shuttles. On September 27, CRS sent four self-propelled ground units, and on October 4, 100 tons of aluminum matting, enough for 30,240 square feet of additional airstrip ramps, and a forklift truck. This will make technically possible an increase in night flights from 10 to 50, meaning a possible 500 tons of food and medicine a night. Relief agencies are also involved in bringing in specialized medical supplies both through Sao Tome and Fernando Po.

Within Biafra agencies have central distribution points, while CRS has begun to decentralize its operations to keep small stocks in the bush in order to further its outreach. Recently teams from the American Friends Service Committee visiting Biafra were involved in the distribution of currency in order to enable people to purchase local food still available. They found that distribution of supplies was controlled by a meticulous bookkeeping system and were confident that all had reached their appointed destination.

Relief Operations: NIGERIAN-HELD TERRITORIES

The situation in Nigerian-held territories varies widely. The estimate of the number in danger of death by starvation is still an uncertain 500,000 to 1 million. Distribution of supplies, as they are shuttled from large centers, seems somewhat better in the Mid-Western State and in the northern parts of Biafra, (Enugu, Awgu), and still quite poor in the Calabar and southern coast areas where about 200 to 300 thousand people are in need.

"Better" means that there is a local population doing fairly well, with most severe suffering confined to refugee camps and hospitals; that there is a fairly regular source of food, though it may be inadequate; and that either in-

ternational relief teams, the Nigerian Red Cross, or the FMG Army have assumed responsibility for distribution. But it also includes areas of overcrowding, disease and other medical needs far beyond available relief; malnutrition, and perhaps a significant number of people outside of the villages whose physical condition is unknown.

Transportation remains a severe problem even within the Nigerian-held areas. This is in part due to inefficiency; in part to the heaviest rains since 1892, with bridges and roads washed out or destroyed by war; in part to the prior claim of military necessity for trucks, planes or other equipment at unforeseen times and places. Thus conditions exist where food is rotting or unsold only 50 miles away from refugee camps where people go hungry.

"Poor" means areas in which the death rate is extremely high. Since September 18 UNICEF and ICRC have begun, with the help of helicopter pilots from the United States, carrying food from stocks in Calabar to Uyo for further distribution. Now three to four helicopters are in use carrying 1 ton of supplies each, amounting to about 12 tons being transported per day. Still it is inadequate. Why all the difficulties are compounded in the South Eastern State is hard to say, for it is not the only refugee area which has been a battle area nor does it have unusual difficulties in reaching stocks. Coordination of efforts may be worse due to administrative weakness, and perhaps the interference of the military greater (it is here that three days a week planes fly under Red Cross markings, but on the other days the planes are requisitioned, repainted and used by the Federal Military Government).

At present the ICRC, with other groups, have located over 200 volunteer relief teams in the federal areas. A plan for the establishment of "food banks" has been worked out by AFSC personnel.

Volunteers

The Committee for Nigeria/Biafra Relief, previously reported as listing and training volunteers, is now able to report specific placements. It has a pool of 75 experienced people ready to leave on short notice. In conjunction with UNICEF the first two volunteers left for Calabar on September 3 to work with the helicopter airlift; one has gone into Biafra to survey and report relief needs; six to supervise unloading of relief planes and movement of supplies to distribution points. Another six will leave soon for the same work and four more for the helicopter operation. People have been referred to various relief agencies such as the AFSC, CWS, and Lutheran World Relief. The New York based Committee is anxious to develop an international relief volunteer group, and among the volunteers already sent are three Canadians. There is also discussion among those in the field of the utilization of African personnel, either local or national, and it appears that some Nigerian university students during their vacations are already involved in relief activities.

Other Relief Activities

Child evacuation: The relief planes often do not come out of Biafra empty. 400 starving Biafran children have been flown to Sao Tome under a local relief and medical program, with expectations that the island can accommodate 1,000

children. The French group, Terre des Hommes and the Knights of Malta have brought 1,000 children to Libreville with the aid of the Gabon Red Cross and Caritas, and reportedly even more are being transported to Libreville hospitals. The most publicized effort has been that of Miss Susan Garth, a wealthy real estate developer in Britain, who founded the Biafran Babies Appeal in July. She has flown to Biafra three times with medical supplies for children and has started an adoption program.

In the Ivory Coast a rehabilitation center for war victims is being established, and a Westport, Connecticut group is helping to raise funds. 40 children are already in the Ivory Coast. Other groups, notably one in St. Louis, are investigating further possibilities of other African nations accepting Biafran children.

Abie Nathan, the Israeli peace pilot, has flown in three loads of food and medicine to Biafra, the latest with a cargo worth \$25,000 financed by the B'Nai Brith Foundation, Israel Aid to Biafra, The Biafran Relief Services Foundation, and the American Committee to Keep Biafra Alive.

International Observers

The debate on the international level over the existence or non-existence of genocide in the Nigeria/Biafra war was brought into the open with reports by a team of international observers which Nigeria invited into the country. The team of thirteen, including nine military figures, represented Sweden, Britain, Poland, Canada, the United Nations Secretary-General and the Organization of African Unity. Various members of the group visited the southern front and the northern Nigerian-held regions near Enugu. In general, although condemning the Federal Nigerian troops for the killing of four relief workers in Okigwi on October 1, the international team affirmed in several reports that they had seen "no evidence of any intent by Federal troops to exterminate Ibo people." On the other hand, other observers, particularly several Canadian MP's who have gone to Biafra, have issued statements confirming Biafran claims of genocide. One MP stated that "anybody who says there is no evidence of genocide is either in the pay of Britain or being a deliberate fool." The international team recommended that because it had found that civilians on both sides had received "rough treatment," "white belts" 10 miles behind federal lines should be established for the resettlement of civilians, while "red belts" would be declared as war zones only. They also recommended that observer teams be enlarged.

Although Biafra has asked the U.N. and member governments to act in accord with the U.N. Charter to stop what it calls genocide, it appears that no single state with perhaps the exception of Canada, is taking the lead in introducing the Nigeria/Biafra problem into the General Assembly session at all.

United States Action

President Johnson sent a message to the Algiers meeting of the OAU informing the African delegates of America's readiness to cooperate in relief efforts, but thus far it is obvious that the OAU plans no coordinating relief role of

its own. On September 23, Senator Edward M. Kennedy, as Chairman of the Judiciary Sub-Committee on Refugees, spoke before the Senate and set forth an urgent appeal for the United States to urge the U.N. General Assembly to recognize its humanitarian obligations and to construct mercy agreements between the belligerents in order to provide relief. With the U.N. assuming this role, than member U.N. nations would support the U.N. coordinated effort. Three days later, 57 Congressmen, lead by James Scheuer, submitted a bipartisan resolution, concurrent with a Senate resolution by Senators Proxmire, Sparkman, and Dodd, which called for similar U.N. action and for the stationing of peace observers in the area.

Any possibility of U.N. action is unlikely, due to the conflicting pressures upon it, and channels that are freer to act must be used if relief is to be adequate in time.

U.S. emissaries have now gone to Lagos and Federal territory, including former Ambassador to Nigeria, and now Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Joseph Palmer and U.S. A.I.D. officials. Press reports have indicated little results of these trips, except to point out American solidarity with British relief efforts and U.S. concern for the status of the ICRC in Nigeria. On October 4, Senator Eugene McCarthy reconvened the Nigeria-Biafra hearings before the Senate Sub-Committee on African Affairs of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee. The only Senator present was Mr. McCarthy himself, although Senators Kennedy and Edward Brooke both testified. Other presentations were made by representatives of the government, the major relief agencies, citizens groups, and concerned individuals (actor, Cliff Robertson and James Meredith). With only a few deviations (i.e. Meredith and Senator Brooke), the testimonies called for more vigorous United States concern and concrete aid. Although these hearings have recently been published, specific follow-up is hazy. A press report dated October 6 reveals that the U.S. Government has granted \$11 million in supplies and funds for Nigeria/Biafra relief, while private U.S. agencies have raised more than \$4 million. The U.S. Government has also been involved in some more specific projects such as negotiating with groups about providing pilots for the Calabar helicopter operations.

Summary

It is hoped that over the next several weeks the number of flights into Biafra will increase with the use of improved airstrips. UNICEF and the ICRC have already begun investigation of parachute airdrops into Biafra, another development which would considerably expand the amount of food getting into the stricken areas. Naturally funds are still needed - for transport expenses, for continued stocks of food, for badly needed medicines. Continued pressure for a political solution or cease-fire is necessary as the only final way to provide vital relief to the 6 million people in need.

Clearing House

A Clearing House for Nigeria/Biafra Information has been established. It will collect, coordinate and distribute information on the activities of groups (both relief and citizens) and on actual political developments. It has a questionnaire seeking information that was sent out widely. The address is 380 Madison Avenue, Room 200, N.Y.C. 10017 (Telephone: (212) MU-2-2000). It should be put on all mailing lists.