

HELP TO WAR VICTIMS IN NIGERIA

The previous issue of *International Review* gave a table recapitulating to the end of December 1968 the relief activities undertaken by the ICRC in Nigeria and the secessionist province (Biafra), as well as the donations in cash and in kind which enabled it to continue and extend those activities. These cover various fields, and we now wish to explain some aspects. We would first mention that the appeal launched by the ICRC for financial support for its operation produced the sum of 40 million Swiss francs by the end of January 1969.

Help to war victims in Nigeria

The International Committee is pursuing, in Nigeria as well as in Biafra, its action for prisoners of war held in camps and prisons. Its representatives regularly visit these places of detention and attempt to bring material relief to those detained.

Vaccination campaign

Expected a month ahead, an epidemic of measles made its appearance in Biafra as well as in Nigeria in December 1968.

This is an endemic epidemic, often associated with smallpox, which periodically breaks out in West Africa every two years on an average. This year, because of the war and the general state of undernourishment, the worst can be expected.

Warned by one of its doctors in Biafra, the ICRC at once took the necessary measures by having a thorough study made of the problem, first in Geneva then in Biafra itself, by a highly qualified

female specialist, Dr. Nicole Grasset, of the Pasteur Institute in Paris.

Under the responsibility of the local authorities, the vaccination campaign started on 28 December 1968, thanks to the considerable material support of the following organizations, co-operating with the ICRC: local Red Cross branches, UNICEF, OXFAM, World Council of Churches, Caritas Internationalis, USAID.

The vaccine itself which is extremely costly and prone to deterioration has been supplied by UNICEF and USAID, whilst refrigerator vehicles and the necessary fuel have been provided by the ICRC, the Swedish Red Cross, the WCC and Caritas.

By 20 January the number of children vaccinated amounted to 120,000.

The first part of the programme will be completed as soon as about 350,000 have been vaccinated. It will then be possible to make an objective evaluation of the first results.

It is estimated that a million and a half children will have to be vaccinated against measles.

In Nigeria itself where the epidemic does not seem to be so widespread as in Biafra, the Ministry of Health alone has taken the necessary measures.

Hospital treatment for seriously wounded

In the autumn of 1968, doctors on both sides of the front observed a disquieting disparity between the number of seriously wounded civilians and military personnel and facilities for plastic surgery or orthopaedic treatment. The ICRC therefore felt it was its duty to seek ways and means of solving this humanitarian problem.

Consequently, the ICRC directed its Commissioner-General, Mr. A. Lindt, to offer its good offices to the Federal and Biafran authorities in order to seek hospitals abroad prepared to admit serious casualties for whom suitable treatment could not be provided locally. The Federal Military Government replied that Nigerian

medical personnel and facilities were adequate, but raised no objection to the evacuation of Biafran war wounded by air over Nigerian territory. The Biafran authorities on the other hand accepted the assistance offered. An ICRC doctor-delegate was then sent to examine and select the patients.

A preliminary study revealed extremely limited facilities for appropriate treatment in African hospitals. The ICRC therefore asked nine National Red Cross Societies and the World Veterans' Federation (WVF) whether they would be prepared to organize and finance, in their respective countries, the treatment of a limited number of casualties. Several favourable replies encouraged the ICRC to press on with the operation.

On its doctor-delegate's return at the beginning of January 1969, with 107 case histories, the ICRC called a meeting in Geneva of representatives of the organizations prepared to act as host to the wounded, in order to decide on the necessary guarantees and arrangements for the transport of the casualties and their stay in Europe. Hospital accommodation for 51 patients has already been arranged. At the end of January, 21 casualties requiring facial and dental surgery, 3 eye surgery, 17 nerve and orthopaedic surgery and 10 nerve surgery, still presented a problem.

The International Committee of the Red Cross then asked all National Societies to give favourable consideration to the possibility of taking in some of these wounded, or of contributing financially to a sister Society's efforts to do so. It will itself only co-ordinate the operation.

Bombing of a Hospital

A hospital of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Biafra, located at Awo-Omama, was bombed on January 5 by a Nigerian aircraft.

As a result, there were four deaths, a woman and three children, and two seriously wounded, a man and a new-born child.

The ICRC has addressed a note of protest from Geneva to the Government of Nigeria in Lagos.

The hospital is very clearly marked with large Red Cross emblems. It is sited on open ground some considerable distance from any military installation. Two teams of French doctors placed at the ICRC's disposal by the French Red Cross are working there at the moment. They have taken charge of several hundred sick and wounded and are supplied in food and medicines by the ICRC.

End of an airlift

Equatorial Guinea has forbidden the International Committee of the Red Cross to transport fuel by air from Santa Isabel to Biafra. This fuel is essential for generators producing electricity in the ICRC hospitals and for the 70 ICRC lorries carrying food and medicines from the airport, the terminal of the airlift, to distribution points in the interior of Biafra. The vast network of humanitarian relief is now paralysed in consequence.

As a result of these increased technical difficulties, Mr. August Lindt, the Commissioner General, decided on 6 January 1969 to suspend flights for the moment.

In order to break this dead-lock the ICRC has made a considerable number of representations, determined that everything should be done for the continuation of its action on both sides. Its sole objective is to be able to act, in acceptable conditions, within the meaning of the Geneva Conventions, on behalf of all the victims of the conflict in accordance with its own strict traditions of neutrality.

To show how the situation has developed up to the end of January 1969, we quote below the ICRC's press releases:

January 3, 1969.—*The International Committee is continuing its airlift operations between Santa Isabel and Biafra. On the night of 31 December to 1 January, 95 tons of foodstuffs and medical supplies were conveyed; on the following night 97 tons; and the next night only 41 tons due to unfavourable weather.*

January 8, 1969.—*The ICRC airlift to Biafra was brought to a temporary stop on Monday, 6 January. Only intercommunication flights continued.*

This airlift from Santa Isabel is the means of forwarding to Biafra food and medical supplies for the victims of the war and also the equipment and vehicles required for distribution.

The effect of the stoppage is to cut off ICRC relief to 850,000 people—children, women and old men—with all the tragic consequences which that involves.

Difficulties with the authorities of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea are jeopardizing the airlift operation, and it has not yet been possible to smooth them out. The most serious difficulty is the authorities' decision of 29 December 1968 forbidding the ICRC to forward to Biafra the fuel necessary to keep its vehicles on the roads for the transportation and distribution of these essential supplies.

In order to guarantee the totally neutral character of its assistance, the ICRC must keep full control, at all stages of the whole of its action. That is the reason why it must itself assume full responsibility for the transportation of its own medical and food supplies, from the point of their arrival and reception in Biafra, through the various central stores up to the centers of actual distribution.

As a result of the blockade to which Biafra is being subjected, the ICRC is unable to procure the necessary fuel on the spot. It is thus obliged to bring fuel in by the same channels as supplies. The volume of fuel necessary is approximately equivalent to 2.5 per cent of the tonnage of relief supplies transported.

Ambassador August Lindt, the ICRC's Commissioner-General in West Africa, who is at present at Santa Isabel, is endeavouring to obtain the Government of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea's consent to lifting this prohibition. He has, furthermore, suggested to this Government the conclusion of an agreement which would allow for a solution to be found to the various problems in abeyance.

The ICRC's airlift can only start up again once the fuel, essential for distribution, can be flown in.

January 15, 1969.—*At a plenary session of the International Committee, Mr. August Lindt presented a report on the position of the ICRC relief operations in Nigeria|Biafra.*

As a result of its consultations, the ICRC has reaffirmed its decision to set everything in motion to continue its relief action for all the victims of the conflict on both sides.

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE

January 28, 1969.—*The Government of the Republic of Dahomey has just given the ICRC authorization for aircraft to carry relief from Cotonou to Biafra for the victims of the conflict in Nigeria. This agreement made between President Emile Derlin Zinzou and Mr. August Lindt will enable flights to be resumed very shortly.*

The decision to transfer a part of the airlift to Cotonou implements the ICRC declaration of 15 January 1969 reiterating its firm intention to continue its action on behalf of all victims of the conflict on both sides.

The ICRC warmly thanks the Government of the Republic of Dahomey for its hospitality which now enables it to resume its aid to children, women and aged persons helped before the interruption of flights.
