

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

HELP TO WAR VICTIMS IN NIGERIA

Each month these pages give an account of the ICRC's relief action in Nigeria and the secessionist province (Biafra). That operation has been ceaselessly developing, but cannot carry on unless the ICRC may in future count on help on a large scale. For this reason, Mr. Jacques Freymond, ICRC Vice-President, on May 30, made the following statement on world-wide television and radio.

For over a year, the International Committee of the Red Cross, with the support of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, UNICEF and many voluntary agencies, has been undertaking a large-scale relief action for the victims of the fighting between the Federal Government of Nigeria and those calling for an independent Biafra. For over a year, teams of volunteers from various parts of the world have been working alongside their comrades in Nigeria and Biafra to give food and care to women and children as well as aiding the wounded.

These efforts pursued in most difficult conditions have gradually shown results. Food supplies have arrived as well as medicine and also the necessary funds for the purchase of transport—lorries, boats and aircraft—and for the continuation of a vast relief operation over land and sea. Between teams from wherever they may come, co-operation has been established, the staffs responsible for orders, transport and the distribution of food have acquired experience and set up co-ordinating machinery which functions with the authorization and help of governments directly concerned. The situation of the population has improved and the number of persons assisted on both sides of a fluid front has increased. Two million in all in the first months of 1969, two million and a half in April, not counting those receiving aid direct from the Churches. The fight against epidemics has been engaged and is being pursued, against measles, smallpox and tuberculosis.

However, this operation which after having overcome numerous obstacles is in full development, must face a new and redoubtable danger: the weariness of public opinion.

Already now, when the warehouses are full, money is beginning to lack in order to ensure the distribution of relief and medicine. Financing for the six month plan (1 March - 31 August) is not yet assured. Whilst the United States have amply done their part by contributing 52 million Swiss francs out of a total of 84 million and the Swiss Government has, for its part, decided to make a payment of 6 million francs, for the whole of the period, and if other governments have promised useful contributions although still on too low a scale, Europe is still far from having supplied an amount corresponding to the emotion it feels and the sentiments which it expresses.

Now this population, over whose fate opinion has been moved and which we have helped to survive, has still been given respite. Should, however, the airlift slow down and lorries and vessels come to a halt, then famine which always threatens will return. Just because things seem to be going better and other sufferings require attention, will one allow the impetus of the action to be broken and abandon women and children who have again learnt to live?

The action on behalf of the victims of the Nigeria-Biafra conflict must be pursued. No one can ignore the fact that even if the concerted efforts of all the governments concerned in Africa or elsewhere were to lead to a cease-fire, many months will be necessary to help the population re-organize its existence. On the level of the present relief there will succeed another which the ICRC has the duty of preparing, which it is indeed preparing and for which it intends to obtain the support of governments and public opinion. It is a question of knowing now whether the aircraft which we have had to buy, the vessels we have chartered and the pilots we have engaged will be able to continue to bring relief to the population in danger. The ICRC cannot be content with fine words. Also, all surpluses generously offered are of no avail, if funds are lacking to cover transport costs to the place of distribution. The responsibility which it assumes towards the population, the engagements it has had to undertake and which amount to tens of millions of francs oblige it to speak out clearly and to ask governments which have not yet decided, to give definite answers. Of the 84 million francs necessary for the financing of the present plan, there are

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still twelve lacking. It must be known now at this moment, before the European holidays begin, whether we can count on their support in the autumn. Indeed on 31 August, our task will not be finished.

The ICRC relief programme referred to by Mr. Freymond may be illustrated by a few facts, figures and dates which show the diversity and operational problems of such a vast enterprise¹.

6 May 1969.—During the last few weeks, the work of the ICRC has been intense in Nigeria and Biafra.

In federal territory the rate of foodstuff distribution has been considerably stepped up following recent operations during which the north-eastern part of Biafra came under the control of the government in Lagos.

With a view to achieving a good harvest in July, an all-out campaign was undertaken by the ICRC. Throughout the sorely tried areas 650 tons of corn, yam and bean seeds were distributed to prevent an otherwise certain famine.

Relief supplies to Biafra in April were double those of the previous month. Flights from Cotonou (Dahomey) and Santa Isabel (Equatorial Guinea) to the Uli landing strip in Biafra during March reached the figure of 228, with a payload of 2,300 tons. In April the figures rose to 475 flights, with 5,000 tons relief goods.

From April 1968 to April 1969, in spite of operating difficulties, the ICRC airlifts carried out 1,636 flights, carrying 16,360 tons of relief supplies.

7 May 1969.—A freighter carrying relief supplies on the International Committee airlift into Biafra crashed last night at 10.30.

All the crew were killed, namely captain Karl Eric Baltze of Malmoe (Sweden), co-pilot Hellmut Scharck of Jügesheim (Germany), flight mechanic Carl Goesta Sternhag of Stockholm (Sweden) and loadmaster Bo Valentin Almgren of Stockholm.

The crash occurred in the forest near the village of Ihiala, some 7 miles from the Uli landing strip in Biafra.

The same night, the ICRC despatched from its base at Cotonou two specialists to enquire into the cause of the accident.

¹ *Plate.*—Red Cross relief goes to Uyo by helicopter, to Nwaniba by barge and reaches starving children and refugees who await its arrival patiently.

From the first results of the investigation, it would seem that the aircraft had not been shot down. During the night eleven other flights were carried out, without incident, by the ICRC aircraft from Cotonou, as well as others by those on the Santa Isabel/Biafra run.

The wreck and more than ten tons of foodstuffs and relief supplies were destroyed by fire. The bodies of the crew were found in the wreck. They were taken to the Uli landing strip, where they were placed in coffins with military honours by the Biafran army on the evening of 7 May. The four coffins were flown to Cotonou by another of the aircraft on the International Committee's airlift.

The Swiss Federal Commission of Enquiry into aircraft accidents will send two delegates to Biafra. In co-operation with the local authorities' special services they will endeavour to determine the exact circumstances of the crash. The ICRC will publish their findings.

13 May.—A further thirty seriously wounded Biafrans have been brought by the ICRC to Europe.¹

They will be treated in four European countries, thanks to the co-operation of National Red Cross Societies in Finland, Austria, Netherlands and the Federal Republic of Germany, and of the Netherlands Ministry of Defence. In addition each group was escorted to the various host countries by a Biafran nurse who acts as interpreter.

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The following figures show the resources involved in this action on 30 May:

Persons fed by the ICRC

In Federal territory	about 1,000,000
In Biafra	about 1,500,000

Personnel

Total	2,253
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¹ See *International Review*, March 1969.

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	<i>Africans</i>	<i>Non-Africans</i>
In Federal territory	1,073	239
In Biafra	650	96
At Cotonou and Santa Isabel . . .	132	63
Total	<u>1,855</u>	<u>398</u>

Airlift

Total medicines, food, vehicles and fuel delivered to Biafra in May 1969	3,501 tons
Aircraft based at Cotonou	6
Santa Isabel	4
Lagos	2

Distribution centres

In Federal territory	25
In Biafra	11

Vaccinations in Biafra:

By 24 May: 684,151 children had been inoculated against measles.
 1,720,333 people had been vaccinated against smallpox.