

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

HELP TO WAR VICTIMS IN NIGERIA

Each month the International Review has been publishing news of ICRC relief work in Nigeria and Biafra which began in July 1967 with consignments of medical supplies and delegates to each side. This action has ceaselessly developed as the number of victims increased and famine took its toll. We give below a summary of the position as at the end of July 1968.

There is no doubt that the most alarming situation is to be found inside the enclave remaining in the hands of the Biafra forces. Populations withdrawn from territory conquered by troops of the Federal military Government have quadrupled the numbers in the towns and villages in which they have sought refuge. In the absence of official figures, it is estimated that there are 4,500,000 displaced persons, of whom 600,000 are being sheltered in improvised reception centres in which rations distributed by the authorities are insufficient to meet needs. Victims living in Biafran territory occupied by Nigerian forces are estimated to number between 700,000 and a million.

Most civilians are suffering from serious undernourishment; many have not survived. In addition, fighting is continuing in several areas and the wounded keep pouring in to the hospitals where medical supplies are becoming increasingly precarious.

The situation is no better in regions retaken by the Federal forces.

ICRC DELEGATIONS

In view of this situation, the International Committee of the Red Cross has sent further delegates to both sides. Delegations are stationed in Lagos, Umuahia, in the Biafra enclave, and on the Spanish island of Fernando Poo.

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On July 1 Mr. Robert Hitz, ICRC delegate and a specialist in transport problems went to Lagos to co-ordinate relief actions on the Federal side, in close co-operation with the Nigerian Red Cross. Mr. Hitz was introduced to the authorities by Mr. Georges Hoffmann, ICRC Delegate General for Africa and Mr. Jacques de Heller, delegate sent from Geneva.

Furthermore, Dr. Wolfgang G. Bulle, representing the Synod of Lutheran Churches of Missouri, ensures liaison between the Lagos delegation and the four medical teams working in Biafra territory retaken by Federal troops. Two of these teams are in the Enugu area, to the north of the enclave, both supplied by the Lutheran Synod, and the other two teams are based on Calabar in the coastal sector which is to the south of the enclave (one Swiss Red Cross team and another of the Oecumenical Council of Churches). The three delegations now comprise 33 persons.

Dr. Bulle is heading a ten-strong team of doctors and nurses in Nigeria, working under the supervision of the International Committee.¹ His account of experiences in Nigeria, from which we quote hereunder, shows how essential and urgent is the humanitarian assistance organized by the Red Cross in that country.²

“ Our team was split into four groups with two groups working in Ogoja and the others in Enugu,” the medical missionary said.

Ogoja, now under control of the Federalist troops after the Biafra moved out several months ago, “ suffered not so much from the fighting as from the fact that supplies and medical aid were cut off for most of the civilian population,” he said.

The medical teams travel in Landrovers, equipped with medical supplies. They leave their headquarters posts early in the morning, set up and operate from temporary clinics in the villages during the day, and return to the headquarters before dark.

“ If I were to work in a hospital I could perhaps perform 10 operations a day,” the medical executive said, “ but by travelling out where the people in need are I can minister to as many as 250 a day.” In some cases the teams camp out for 2 or 3 days at a

¹ *Plate*. — In Biafra: Under the ICRC's emblem, a member of the Lutheran medical mission gives treatment to the civilian population.

² *Lutheran Witness Reporter*, U.S.A. July 7, 1968.

time, caring for the people who come to the clinics, which have been set up through the co-operation of tribal leaders.

In addition to the five Landrovers which the Missouri Synod medical team owns and uses, the workers have two trailers to carry the food supplies which are distributed to the starving and two tank trailers for hauling fresh water for use in the village clinic operations.

The lack of food and medical service during the past 9 months has seriously affected the health of many of the civilians, the doctor noted. They are suffering from malnutrition, parasites, infectious diseases, and injuries suffered from beatings at the hands of the military.

“ We have never experienced this kind of suffering and hardship in our whole life ”, said Rev. A.T.U. Ekong, president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Nigeria. “ Food, clothing, and housing are some of the chief needs ”, he added.

“ This is the time to share with the Nigerians their hopes, aspirations, and troubles. We need to be soldiers of peace, ” Dr. Bulle advised.

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Arrangements have been made by the ICRC, with a view to increasing the effectiveness of this medical aid on both sides. Two new teams have arrived in Lagos, one having been formed by the “ Save the Children Fund ”, a British organization, and the other by the Netherlands Red Cross. Four others are in the course of preparation: one team of Swiss doctors formed by the ICRC and intended to return to the interior of the Biafra enclave where it has already undertaken a first mission, two medical teams promised by the Yugoslav Red Cross (one will be attached to the Federal side, the other to Biafra), and one team organized by the British Adventist Church.

A fifth ICRC medical team left Geneva on July 20 for Biafra.¹ On July 23, seven delegates, one a doctor, another a nurse, took off for Lagos. Others will soon follow.

In Nigeria and Biafra the ICRC had 75 people in the field. This being insufficient to ensure full co-ordination and distribution of the relief supplies now reaching the ICRC from all quarters of the

¹ *Plate.* — At Geneva airport, two doctors (Drs Piderman and Spirgi), an anaesthetist and a male nurse preparing to leave for Biafra.

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globe, the Committee launched an appeal on July 20 for various staff, specialists in transport, drivers, mechanics, radio operators and technicians, doctors, surgeons, anaesthetists, pharmacists and nurses. This appeal was widely received, over a thousand offers reaching the ICRC in a few days.

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Faced with the expansion of the relief operations, the ICRC deemed it necessary to appoint a General Commissioner for assistance to Nigeria. At its request, the Federal Council provisionally assigned Mr. Auguste Lindt, Swiss Ambassador to Moscow, for this important humanitarian mission. Mr. Lindt used to be ICRC Delegate General for Berlin relief and U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees.

On July 20 the newly appointed General Commissioner had discussions with Mr. S. A. Gonard, ICRC President, and Mr. R. Gallopin, Director-General for External Affairs. He left the same night for Lagos where he was received two days later by the Head of State. He investigated on the spot the many relief problems arising in Nigeria.

He then went to Biafra for the same purpose, arriving by a Swiss aircraft on charter to the ICRC on 31 July. He was accompanied by ICRC delegate Karl Jaggi and ICRC doctors who will work in Biafra. The aircraft also had aboard about seven tons of medical supplies and foodstuffs.

DONATIONS

Cash contributions amounting so far to over 2,600,000 Swiss francs have been made by the National Red Cross Societies of 32 countries:

Australia, Belgium, Cameroun, Canada, Denmark, Ethiopia, Finland, German Federal Republic, Iceland, India, Ireland, Japan, Kenya, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Tanzania, United Kingdom, USA, USSR, Zambia,

as well as the Magen David Adom (*Israel*),

the governments of 7 countries:

Canada, Denmark, German Federal Republic, Liberia, Sweden, United Kingdom, USA,

and various organizations:

UNICEF, Oxford Famine Relief Committee (OXFAM), Save the Children International Union, Action Pro Biafra, World Council of Churches, Caritas Internationalis, Mani Tese (Italy),

the city of Geneva, Küssnacht town council (Zürich) and different private individuals.

Other cash donations have been promised.

The ICRC has also received donations in kind estimated at 4,500,000 Swiss francs. Further despatches of relief have in addition been announced for a value of 3,000,000 Swiss francs.

The movement of solidarity shown on behalf of the victims of the conflict has therefore assumed exceptional proportions.

On July 11, the President of the ICRC was visited by Mr. Henry Labouisse, Executive Director of UNICEF, who assured him of his desire to maintain and extend the co-operation between the two institutions to aid all those suffering as a result of the hostilities.

ROUTING OF RELIEF

Whilst relief consignments are able to reach Enugu from Lagos and Calabar from Santa Isabel in relatively normal conditions, this is not the case as regards transport to the Biafra enclave, which the ICRC is obliged to have carried out by night flights from Santa Isabel. This procedure takes place in extremely difficult conditions. They entail considerable risks, as was shown by the accident which occurred to a Superconstellation aircraft which crashed on landing during the night of June 30 to July 1. The aircraft moreover carry insufficient relief supplies (about 200 tons until now). They are in fact unable adequately to meet the situation.

The ICRC has therefore taken keen interest in the initiative of the Federal military Government which has proposed the opening of a land corridor through which consignments could be organized

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on a very large scale. However, the putting into effect of such a solution presupposes the agreement of both parties. The ICRC is therefore engaged in trying to persuade the Biafra authorities to accept this proposal.

Whilst waiting for the conclusion of the discussions, the International Committee of the Red Cross made the request on June 24 that Biafra place at its exclusive disposal night and day a neutralized landing ground for relief flights by day.

A DC 6 aircraft, chartered for three months, with option to extend, by the ICRC from a Swiss company, left Cointrin-Geneva airport on July 23.¹ The aircraft had one normal and one replacement crew and several tons of relief supplies and spares. It will be based on Santa Isabel and will enable the ICRC to increase its relief to Biafra. Like a second plane which will be available soon, it bears the red cross sign on its wings and fuselage.

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Steps have also been taken to ship large quantities of high protein foods in order to increase the stocks in occupied Biafra. By the end of July arrangements had been made for the emergency depot in Enugu soon to contain 1,700 tons, that at Calabar 1,000 and that at A Saba 700, ready to go to the starving populations as soon as the way is open for large-scale relief consignments. At the same time there were 2,000 tons stocked at Santa Isabel on Fernando Poo while the supplies bound for Nigeria were estimated at 4,500 tons, and for Biafra 7,500.

Relief in territory controlled by the Nigerian federal government has already started and a two million franc credit has been opened for the ICRC delegation in Nigeria for local purchases of foodstuffs and necessary equipment. It has been estimated that a daily supply of over 200 tons of food is essential to relieve the victims' plight which deteriorates every day.

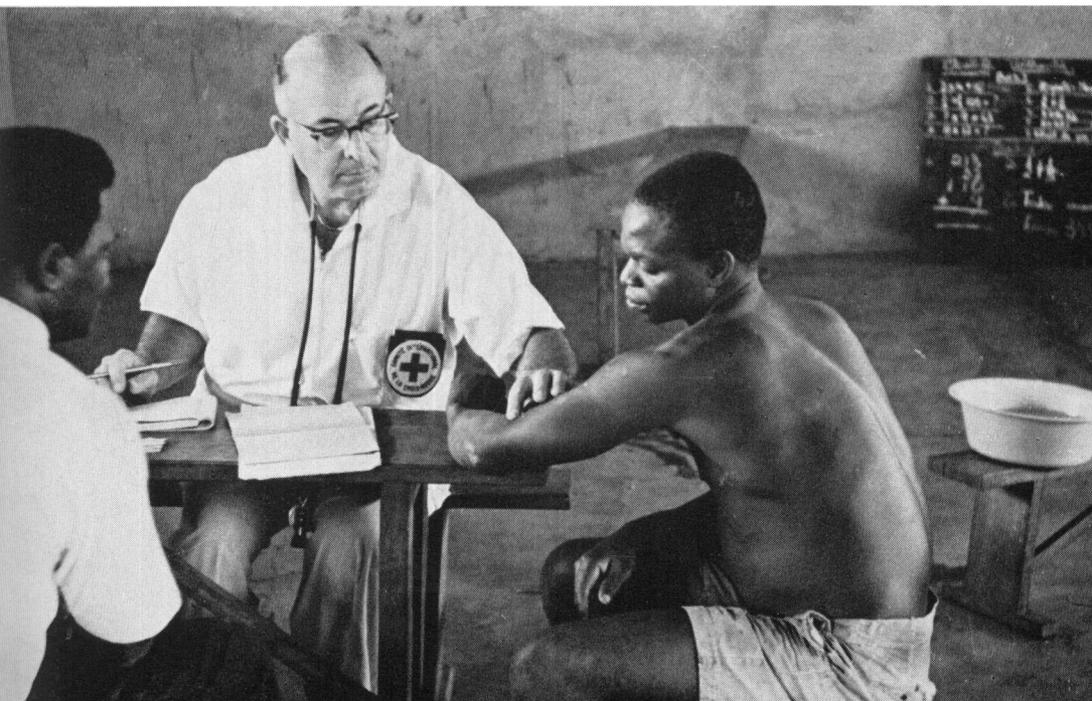
¹ *Plate.* — *In Geneva* : Loading a DC 6 chartered by the ICRC which will strengthen the air lift in aid of the victims of famine in Biafra.



Photo J. Zbinden, Genève.

At Geneva airport, two doctors (Drs. Piderman and Spirgi, centre), an anaesthetist and a male nurse preparing to leave for Biafra...

...where, under ICRC's emblem, a member of the Lutheran medical mission gives treatment to the civilian population.





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Photos J. Zbinden, Genève.

