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PA/HO Department of State

E.O. 12958, as amended

April 21, 2005

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ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 EUR-20 IO-13 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 CCO-00  
CIAE-00 PM-05 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 P-03  
RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-20 E-15 AID-28 UCF-05 UPW-01 SCS-04  
SCA-01 SR-01 ORM-03 RSR-01 /163 W

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FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC FLASH 1068  
INFO AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA  
AMEMBASSY LONDON  
AMEMBASSY LUSAKA  
AMEMBASSY PARIS  
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USMISSION GENEVA  
CINCSTRIKE  
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E.O. 12958, Sect. 3.6

By TDM/KW NARA, Date 11/29/77

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SUBJECT: GOWON PRESS CONFERENCE

1. FOLLOWING RETURN OF LARGE INTERNATIONAL PRESS PARTY FROM VISIT TO FORMER BATTLE AREA, GOWON MET WITH THE PRESS FOR AN HOUR AND TEN MINUTES.
2. HE FIRST READ PREPARED STATEMENT (SUMMARY TO FOLLOW), THEN ANSWERED QUESTIONS FOR APPROXIMATELY ONE HOUR.
3. MAJOR THEMES RUNNING RHOUGH BOTH STATEMENT AND RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS WERE: FMG REGARDS RELIEF AS NIGERIAN PROBLEM TO BE SOLVED BY NIGERIANS; NIGERIAN PROBLEMS COMPLICATED BY FOREIGNERS THINKING THEY UNDERSTAND NIGERIANS OR AFRICANS QTE BETTER THAN WE DO OURSELVES UNQTE; RECOGNIZED FMG QTE NOT RPT NOT INFALLIBLE UNQTE, THERE HAD BEEN SHORTCOMINGS BUT

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NIGERIANS HONESTLY DOING THEIR BEST MEET RELIEF NEEDS; QTE THOSE WHO GENUINELY WANT TO HELP WILL RECIEVE A READY WELCOME UNQTE.. HE MADE IT CLEAR PRESS FREE TO FILE WHAT THEY WANTED BUT RATHER BITTERLY NOTED HE EXPECTED THAT IN NEXT FEW WEEKS SOME WOULD QTE BELITTLE OUR EFFORTS UNQTE.

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By TDM/LW NARA, Date 11/29/99

4. FOLLOWING ARE GOWON'S RESPONSES TO MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS: ON REOPENING ULI AIRSTRIP, HE NOTED PORT HARCOURT, ENUGU AND CALABAR HAD BEEN DESIGNATED FOR RELIEF FLIGHTS AND RULED OUT USE OF ULI BY SAYING IT HAD BEEN TOO MUCH QTE IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS UNQTE.

5. REGARDING U. S. AIRCRAFT, HE CONFINED HIMSELF TO SAYING QTE IT BEING CONSIDERED UNQTE.

6. ON STARVATION, HE RECOGNIZED IT WAS QTE GIGANTIC PROBLEM, BUT WE HAVE NOT RPT NOT UNDERESTIMATED IT UNQTE. SAID HE TOLD FIELD COMMANDERS THEY RESPONSIBLE FOR RELIEF AS SOON AS AREAS THEY HAD TAKEN WERE SECURE.

7. IN RESPONSE TO EMOTIONAL STATEMENT THAT VIRTUALLY NO NIGERIAN AID GETTING INTO EX-ENCLAVE (QUESTIONER DESCRIBED INEFFICIENT NIGERIAN ARMY RELIEF EFFORTS AT OWERRI AND CALLED CONDITION OF 500 RIVERS CHILDREN IN PORT HARCOURT QTE WORST THAN BELSEN UNQTE), GOWON FLARED. GOWON REITERATED FMG DOING ITS BEST; SAID HE HAD DESPATCHED STATE GOVERNORS JOHNSON AND GOMWALK TO AFFECTED AREA AND THEY HAD SEEN NOTHING TO JUSTIFY SUCH A CONCLUSION. FINALLY, HE CHARGED QUESTIONER WITH SUGGESTING THAT EUROPEANS WANT TO COME IN TO DO RELIEF JOB NIGERIANS THEMSELVES DETERMINED TO DO. GOWON MADE IT ABUNDANTLY CLEAR ANY SUCH SUGGESTION MOST UNACCEPTABLE. ON QTE FUTURE OF NIGERIAN PEOPLE UNQTE, GOWON SIMPLY REPLIED THAT POLICY WAS TO INSURE THAT QTE ALL INHABITANTS, IRRESPECTIVE OF ETHNIC ORIGIN, COULD FEEL SECURE AND HAPPY UNQTE.

8. ON OJUKWU: QTE WAIT UNTIL HE GIVES HIMSELF UP UNQTE; HOWEVER, IMPLICATION WAS PROBABLY NO AMNESTY.

9. ON ROLE OF MISSIONARIES, GOWON WAS FLEXIBLE,

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INDICATING THAT WHEREVER FIELD COMMANDERS BELIEVED INDIVIDUALS WERE DOING GOOD WORK, COMMANDER HAD DISCRETION TO LET THAT INDIVIDUAL CONTINUE WORKING. WITH RESPECT STATUS CATHOLIC PRIESTS NOW IN PORT HARCOURT, GOWON SAID EACH CASE WOULD BE CONSIDERED ON ITS MERITS, I E, HAD THE INDIVIDUAL ENTERED THE COUNTRY LEGALLY AND WHAT WHAT HIS ROLE DURING REBELLION?

10. WITH REGARD TO FUTURE RELATIONS TO FRANCE AND OTHER COUNTRIES WHO RECOGNIZED REBELS, GOWON SAID QTE BALL IN THEIR COURT UNQTE. IMPLIED FIRST MOVE UP TO ZAMBIA, AND TANZANIA TO RESTORE RELATIONS. ON FRANCE, SAID THEY HAD BEEN QTE VERY PROVOCATIVE UNQUOTE, SUPPORTED REBELLION AND HAD DONE THINGS QTE NO SOVEREIGN NATION COULD TOLERATE UNQTE. HE SAID THAT EXCHANGE OF BIAFRAN CURRENCY FOR FEDERAL QTE WOULD SOON TAKE PLACE UNQTE AND THAT GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS CONCERNED WERE WORKING OUT DETAILS. REALIZED IT MUST BE DONE QUICKLY.

11. IN ANSWER QUESTIONS REGARDING WHEREABOUTS OF EFFIONG AND OTHERS WHO CAME TO SURRENDER, GOWON DENIED THEY ARRESTED, AND SAID THEY CURRENTLY SHUTTLING BETWEEN PORT HARCOURT, OVERRI AND ENUGU IN ORDER REASSURE CIVILIAN POPULATION. QTE IF WE HAD WANTED TO BE BRUTAL TO THEM THERE COULD HAVE BEEN EXECUTIONS ALREADY UNQTE.

12. ON ALLEGED MOLESTATION OF CIVILIANS, GOWON REPLIED INDIRECTLY BY SAYING FMG WILLING TO ACCEPT HONEST CRITICISM. WHEN HE FIRST HEARD SUCH REPORTS THIS MORNING HE CALLED OBASANJO. HE SUGGESTED THAT QUESTIONER QTE DIDN'T SEE WHAT HE EXPECTED TO SEE UNQTE NAMELY GENOCIDE AND MASS ATROCITIES UNQTE. GOWON POINTED OUT THERE UNPLEASANT INCIDENTS IN ALL WARS AND IN THIS CONNECTION ALLUDED TO VIETNAM.

13. REGARDING CHARGES THAT ARMY COMMANDEERING ICRC VEHICLES, GOWON DENIED THIS, SAYING HE AWARE HOWEVER THAT SOME RIVERS CIVILIANS, WHO HAD BEEN DETAINED BY REBELS, ARE UNDERSTOOD TO HAVE TAKEN VEHICLES REBELS HID IN BUSH WHEN THEY RELEASED.

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14. ON FUTURE OR RELIEF AGENCIES, GOWON SAID THAT ANY ORGANIZATION WHICH QTE DELIBERATELY DEFIED US OR DARED US TO SHOOT THEM DOWN UNQTE WILL HAVE TO ANSWER FOR LOSS OF LIFE AS THEY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROLONGING THE WAR.

15. COMMENT: GOWON, WHO FLANKED BY ADMIRAL WEY, STATE GOVERNORS JOHNSON AND GOMWALK, INSPECTOR-GENERAL OF POLICE, AND INFO COMMISSIONER ENAHOR, FULLY IN CHARGE THROUGHTOUT CONFERENCE. AT TIMES JOCLAR, HE MOST SERIOUS AND SENSITIVE TO CHARGES OF NIGERIAN INDIFFERENCE AND OR INCOMPETENCE ON RELIEF ISSUES.  
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