OUTGOING TELEGRAM  Department of State

SECRET NO DIS Classification

ACTION: Amembassy KINSHASA IMMEDIATE
INFO: Amembassy LAGOS IMMEDIATE
STATE 024400

FOR SECRETARY FROM RICHARDSON

1. I understand that General Gowon may raise with you what he considers unfair Western criticism and unwarranted interference in Nigerian relief. In the event Gowon should do so contrary to your desire to avoid the relief question, I thought it might be useful for me to report to you on how the problem looks from here.

2. In both political and human terms, General Gowon's sense of personal grievance over recent developments is quite understandable. Having launched a magnanimous policy of national reconciliation, the wave of critical press reports on conditions in Eastern Nigeria (which seemed to receive confirmation by official pressure on the FMG to accept more relief) must have come, as Ambassador Trueheart reports, as a rude shock. And in considering our motives and those of...
others, Gowon and his colleagues must surely have recalled with mixed feelings our de facto neutrality and substantial support of international relief operations within the secessionist area during the civil war.

3. If Gowon chooses to raise this matter, I believe that we can and should affirm our admiration for the vigor and seriousness with which the FMG has begun to tackle the relief problem, emphasizing that our own sole purpose has been to be of assistance in a situation essentially caused by the secessionist leadership's determination to prolong a futile war. On the other hand, in light of the advice provided by our experts, I do not believe that we are as yet in a position to leave the impression, privately or publicly, of being fully reassured on conditions in the former rebel territory.

4. In this connection, I have just met with Dr. Jean Mayer and Dr. Lythcott to review the results of the new nutritional survey conducted for the Nigerian Red Cross. While there
are differences in emphasis between the experts, there was agreement that the new survey largely corroborates earlier findings of a very serious situation in the area of the former Biafran enclave (Deptel 23814). Similarly, as regards food, while shipments have been increasing, they remain far short of the targets set by the Nigerians themselves (4,500 tons a week or 20,000 tons a month). Our logistics experts here, familiar with the local situation, still question just how quickly we can hope the Nigerians will achieve their own targets -- although there is no doubt that the situation is progressively getting better.

5. I fully agree with Ambassador Trueheart's assessment that given the Nigerians' extreme defensiveness and sensitivity the only way of dealing with the FMG on this problem is in an entirely non-political manner, through technical channels, especially those between the AID Mission and the various Nigerian ministries and organizations concerned with relief.
and rehabilitation. Furthermore, without touching on this problem, your visit will be indirectly of considerable benefit to the U.S. Nigerian dialogue on relief by establishing a more cordial tone in U.S. Nigerian relations - following a period when even diplomatic amenities were held to a bare minimum.

6. Within the very real limitations noted above, I believe that in view of the seriousness of the situation in Eastern Nigeria our mission should continue, in a low key manner, to make available all possible assistance to the Nigerians in their efforts to achieve a more adequate relief program.

7. As regards the public treatment of the relief situation, your intention to avoid, if possible, public comment on this problem also seems to me the best course under the circumstances. Press coverage on Nigerian relief here has been declining—although editorial interest can still be sparked quickly as by a recent UPI article on US relief supplies accumulating —
Furthermore, in Lagos, strongly favorable official comment on the progress of the Nigerian program, implying that the problem has now been brought fully under control, would quite possibly still invite substantial adverse comment here from those concerned over the adequacy of the Nigerian effort.

8. You know that Marvin Kalb travelling with you has been the American newsman perhaps most concerned with the moral dilemmas of this situation. He will be extremely sensitive to the tone and posture of our mission in Lagos.

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