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PA/HO Department of State

E.O. 12958, as amended

April 21, 2005

REPRODUCED AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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Authority NWD969000

By *[Signature]* HAPA Date 3/19/88

NOVEMBER 12, 1988

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
FOR THE PRESS

NO. 339

STATEMENT BY SECRETARY OF STATE

WILLIAM P. ROGERS

ON BIAFRAN RELIEF

Over the past nine months this Administration has made a major effort to help relieve the anguish and suffering of civilian victims of the Nigerian civil war. A further report on our efforts is in order.

From the beginning of this tragic event the United States has sought to support and insure an effective means of delivering relief to the sufferers on both sides.

Some of the steps this Government has taken include the appointment of a high-level Coordinator of all United States activities relating to Nigerian/Biafran relief, Ambassador C. Clyde Ferguson; the donation of over \$65 million to the international relief effort; and sustained diplomatic efforts, both bilaterally and in concert with other concerned Governments, to obtain agreement on expanded international relief arrangements.

Nevertheless, relief into Biafran-held territory remains tragically inadequate.

Relief supplies now reach the Biafran enclave only at night, in insufficient amounts, by aircraft across Federally controlled territory lacking the approval of the Federal Government and originating outside Federal jurisdiction. Furthermore, following the shooting down of one of its aircraft on June 5, the International Committee of the Red Cross suspended its night flight operations which had provided roughly one half

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ICRC flights have remained suspended since that time in view of the Federal Government's reiteration on June 30 that it could no longer permit such night flights across its territory. One major consideration cited by the Federal authorities was the intermingling at night of arms flights and relief flights into the enclave. The present arrangements for getting relief into the enclave are considered by the agencies involved to be both dangerous and inefficient.

In recent weeks, the United States has vigorously supported efforts of the ICRC to obtain agreement by both sides on a program of daylight relief flights.

On September 13, the ICRC, after extensive diplomatic efforts, concluded an agreement with the Government of Nigeria allowing an internationally-inspected and militarily-inviolable relief airlift during daylight hours for an experimental period with good prospects for renewal. The Biafran authorities, however, have refused to accept such flights--principally on the grounds that they believed they could not rely on either the Red Cross or the Federal Government to assure that the daylight airlift would not be violated by a surprise attack on the Biafran airfield, the vital terminus for their arms supply. They asked instead that they be given third party assurances as to the good faith of the Federal Government of Nigeria.

To meet this concern, at President Nixon's direction, we took the following initiatives designed to facilitate agreement on a safe and effective method of getting relief into the enclave:

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- (1) We sought and received the solemn assurance of the Federal Government of Nigeria that it would ensure that no hostile military action would be taken against the ICRC relief aircraft.
- (2) After consultations with us, other governments agreed to offer impartial observers to accompany ICRC aircraft on their relief flights.
- (3) Ambassador Ferguson went to West Africa to give the Biafrans the specific pledge of the Federal Government of Nigeria as to the inviolability of the ICRC daylight relief flights.

On October 24, 1969, the Biafran authorities formally rejected this assurance.

On October 31, the Biafrans publicly announced their acceptance of an earlier U.S. plan for a surface route utilizing the Cross River in Eastern Nigeria. Under this proposal relief supplies would be delivered by ship to a mutually agreed neutralized distribution point. We have stated our willingness to resume discussions on this.

In our view however this Cross River route cannot substitute for the immediate resumption of ICRC daylight flights. Even if the plan could be promptly implemented the capacity of the river route will be greatly reduced by a low water level for several more months. The agreement of the two sides to this plan is so far in principle only and there has been no meeting of minds on the specifics of inspection and guarantees. Nevertheless, our Relief Coordinator is continuing his efforts to bring about agreement on the Cross River proposal.

Daylight flights under agreed procedures therefore remain the only practicable scheme for an immediate and substantial expansion of relief operations.

We believe that the ICRC proposal is such a realistic and reasonable scheme. We consider that the Federal Government, in agreeing to the ICRC

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proposal, has acted constructively and in accordance with its humanitarian responsibilities. We also believe that the proposed arrangements for daylight flights meet in a reasonable manner the legitimate security concerns of the Biafran authorities.

Innocent civilians are in desperate need of food and medical supplies. The United States stands ready to continue its aid to these helpless victims of the Nigerian war. We earnestly hope that the Biafran leadership will reconsider its position regarding daylight flights.

Beyond these immediate measures, however, we clearly recognize that the ultimate solution to the problem of relief is an end to the war. The suffering and the fighting have gone on too long. As President Nixon has said, the United States earnestly hopes for the earliest negotiated end to the conflict and a settlement that will assure the security and peaceful development of all the people involved.

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