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PA/HO Department of State
E.O. 12958, as amended
April 21, 2005



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

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December 9, 1969

SUBJECT: Relief Survey Mission to Biafra, October 17-28,
INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

The recent U/CF Biafra Relief Survey Mission had two major results: (1) the U/CF team was able to document trends by comparing current data with that obtained on the earlier visits last spring; and (2) to obtain, for the first time, firm data on the size and condition of the civilian population in Biafra. We conclude that the overall nutritional condition of the people has deteriorated seriously since June. The population of Biafra is approximately 3.2 million, considerably lower than the figures commonly quoted by the relief agencies, Biafran authorities, or the world press. Public release of either of these conclusions will undoubtedly have serious political repercussions.

Disparity in Conditions

The survey team was struck by the enormous difference between the welfare of people living near main arteries and those in the remote areas. Prolonged rains have made some villages virtually inaccessible to relief teams, while duplication in relief distribution has given some people more than they need. Unevenness was also found between different age groups. Although severe malnutrition is prevalent in all parts of the population,

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it is far more widespread among persons over 45 (52% incidence of edema) and under four (42%) than it is among young adults (17%).

Attitudes

While no attempt was made to measure popular morale on a scientific basis, the U/CF team gained a distinct impression of war weariness and tedium among "the little people." Relative stabilization of the lines and more discriminating Nigerian air strikes have tempered immediate fears, while nutritional deterioration in the bush areas has caused listlessness and despair. Protestations of strong grass roots support for the Biafran leaders are still heard, but sound less enthusiastic and more defensive than in the past.

The leaders, for their part, appear, in effect, to have amortized their own people. Having paradoxically written off the population as the price for "Biafran security", they appear to harden their position on relief proposals proportionately as the health conditions deteriorate.

The weakening of the popular will is reflected in the lessening of discipline, especially within the army. The survey team observed an increased rate of food pilferage and commandeering of relief vehicles by soldiers, as well as black market transactions for personal gain.

The distinction between soldiers and civilians in determining eligibility for relief assistance has become increasingly hazy. Suffering soldiers are given food and medical attention by the relief agencies, and the general population is viewed as a potential army as the circle around the enclave draws tighter.

Population

The 3.2 million population figure is based on a sampling technique which utilized our record of the total number of vaccinations given during last spring's comprehensive smallpox vaccination campaign in Biafra. Allowing some room for such variables

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as population movement into or out of the enclave and inaccessibility of some areas for either vaccination or sampling, this figure is believed to be quite reliable. We can certainly say with some confidence that the total is less than four million, the lowest previous figure on which relief needs were based. Of this number, some 60 percent are children under 15 years old, while 23 percent are under four.

Medical Conditions

Widespread malnutrition has increased the susceptibility of the population to all diseases ordinarily endemic in the area. There is an added threat of epidemics of measles, whooping cough, and hepatitis. On the other hand, smallpox, tuberculosis, and yellow fever were not seen by the survey team, despite the fact that a yellow fever epidemic has occurred in the surrounding areas of West Africa in recent months.

Death Rate

It is impossible to determine how many people have died in Biafra as a result of the war. Hospital death rates obtained for this survey are valuable as indices, but they cannot be applied to the general population. The Biafran Ministry of Health death reporting system has broken down, and what reports are received from villages or refugee camps are unreliable for a number of reasons.

Relief Priorities

The findings of the survey mission clearly suggest that on the basis of the revised total population figure, it would be possible to meet the bare minimum nutritional needs of the Biafran people with as little as 160 tons of relief supplies per night. To do so, however, airlift shipments would have to be limited to high protein food items and current duplication in internal distribution by the different relief agencies would have to be eliminated. Given present conditions, it is more likely that the minimum tonnage necessary remains at approximately 300

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tons per night. During the month of November, relief deliveries to Biafra from all sources averaged about 200 tons per night.

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