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POL 279 BIAFRA-NIGERIA

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By *[Signature]* HARA Date *2/25/98*

Department of State

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Classification

18 JUN 69 21 31Z

Origin

ACTION: AmEmbassy, LAGOS IMMEDIATE

U.S. Mission GENEVA IMMEDIATE

Info:

RPTD INFO: AmEmbassy, ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY

COTONOU

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STATE

GENEVA, LAGOS FOR EARLY A.M. DELIVERY

1. Following is text statement issued 4 P.M. June 18 in meeting with press by C. Clyde Ferguson, Special Coordinator on relief to victims of Nigerian civil war: QUOTE:

The USG is pleased to note that the Federal Military Government and the Biafran authorities have agreed to a surface relief route into Biafra. This corridor has been the subject of intensive multilateral negotiations over the past three months.

As a part of its relief effort in Nigeria, the ICRC has undertaken to manage this new relief arrangement. Although some technical details remain to be worked out, it is expected that operations will commence shortly.

At the time of my appointment, President Nixon stated with regard to the problem of supplying relief to the Biafran enclave:

Drafted by:

AF/P:RLPerkins:djw 6/18/69 2105

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Telegraphic transmission and

classification approved by:

AF/P - Raymond L. Perkins

Clearances:

P.ON - Mr. Bartch

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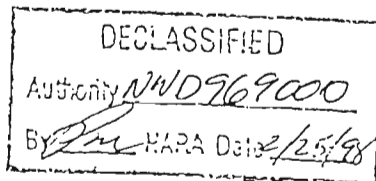
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E.O. 12958, as amended

April 21, 2005



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ACTION: Page 2 of telegram to LAGOS, US MISSION GENEVA

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— "The major obstacle to expanded relief is neither money, food, nor means of transport. The main problem is the absence of relief arrangements acceptable to the two sides which would overcome the limitations posed by the present hazardous and inadequate nighttime airlift."

This problem has been the focus of my efforts. I have made two trips to each side of the battle lines, have met with representatives of both parties, both here and in other countries, with the representatives of other governments, the ICRC, private groups and international organizations in an effort to resolve the problem of obtaining a more secure relief route into the presently land-locked Biafran enclave. New access routes were necessary because the intensification of the war had rendered a night airlift extremely dangerous. Moreover, due to inherent logistic limitations, the airlift was incapable of carrying the tonnages necessary to assure an adequate level of food and medical supplies for the civilian ~~ix~~ victims of this very destructive and tragic war.

The airlifts operated by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Joint Church Aid organization have saved countless numbers of people in Biafra from death through malnutrition or actual starvation.

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ACTION: Page 3 of ~~xxxx~~ telegram to LAGOS, US MISSION GENEVA

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This international effort has testified to a magnificent spirit of humanitarianism. These airlifts have delivered into Biafra tonnages of relief supplies which have run as high as 300 tons per day and are feeding well over two million persons. This has dramatically alleviated starvation and suffering. At the same time, the relief effort by the Federal Military Government and the ICRC has been feeding over a million people on the Federal side.

Throughout the period since the airlift came into being, a number of proposals were advanced, either to assure maximum use of available airlift capacity, or to obtain more secure and larger capacity means of transport. These proposals included a daylight airlift to Uli airstrip, the use of Obilago airfield with a connecting surface corridor into Biafra, a surface corridor from Enugu into the enclave and a water route to Oguta. None of these proposals were acceptable for a variety of military and political reasons.

A study of the available surface routes indicated that a corridor up the Cross River offered the greatest promise. This route has sufficient year-round depths to permit the utilization of shipping equipment carrying large tonnages and having shallow drafts. Moreover, the Cross River

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route has the major advantage of being out of the path of significant military activity and in its upper reaches provides a water barrier between the two sides.

Two Landing Ships Medium were located through the efforts of the United States Government and were chartered by the International Committee of the Red Cross. The first of these ships -- the Dona Mercedes -- will arrive at Lagos Tomorrow. The second is due there in a few days. Both of these ships can navigate the Cross River to Biafran territory and, on one voyage, each of them can carry approximately 900 tons of general cargo, the equivalent of some 90 aircraft landings.

The first ship, the Dona Mercedes, will be ready within a few days to proceed up the Cross River to the Biafran enclave. Its cargo will be limited for this voyage to urgently needed medical supplies.

It should be stressed that for the present these two Landing Ships alone will not be able to meet the full need for relief supplies. It is still necessary that some flights continue, and negotiations toward that end are underway. Furthermore, it is essential that agreement be reached on some of the technical details of the Cross River operation. Nevertheless, we are greatly encouraged by the actions of the two sides in

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agreeing to this new relief corridor and believe it represents a major breakthrough. It will assure the continuation of the great humanitarian effort of saving the lives of innocent victims of this conflict. UNQUOTE.

END

[ROGERS]

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