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Authority NND 969000
By CLP NARA Date 2/21/98

Department of State

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SUBJECT: Secretary's statement on Nigeria, July 2
REF: State 109448

In addition to Q and A during scheduled news conference, Secretary Rogers issued today following press release:

QTE In view of the present seriousness of the relief problem arising from the Nigerian civil war, I wish to issue the following statement.

From the beginning of this conflict, the United States has shared the very deep humanitarian concerns of much of the rest of the world with respect to the civilian victims of this war. We have steadfastly refrained from any involvement in the conflict itself and sought to avoid interference in its politics. We have tried in every way possible to divorce these considerations from the human task of impartially succoring the innocent victims of the war on both sides. All of these considerations led to the very narrowly prescribed mandate we gave to Ambassador Clyde Ferguson as Special Coordinator for these relief efforts when he was appointed to that position on February 22.

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Clearances: P/ON - Mr. McCloskey (substance)

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There is no reason of a theoretical or practical nature why the humanitarian aspects of this problem cannot be separated from the political and military aspects. But this requires the cooperation of the two parties and of the international community in adhering to certain fundamental concepts: First, that the provision, by the international community, of assistance to both sides in a civil war should have international participation to assure that it is administered for the benefit of the civilian victims of the war. Secondly, that the relief be transported and distributed in ~~ways~~ ways that convey no military advantage or incur no military liability to either side. Thirdly and finally, that the parties to the conflict refrain from exploiting relief issues for partisan political and propaganda purposes.

The United States deplores the severe curtailment of the role of the International Committee of the Red Cross by the Federal Nigerian Government. It does so because it believes that Nigeria, Africa, and the entire world needs a strong and truly impartial organization to carry out the humanitarian mandate of the Geneva Conventions. For these same reasons, this government equally deplores the frequently expressed criticisms and unsubstantiated changes levelled by the Biafran authorities against the ICRC. Such attitudes by both sides to the conflict confirm, in the view of this government, not

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only the fact of ICRC impartiality in a difficult situation but also a regrettable lack of understanding by both parties to the conflict of the organization's non-political mandate. It is deplorable that this organization is condemned because it is in fact neutral.

The time is not too late to look at new arrangements which will repair the damage that has been done and make possible a new approach to assist effectively women, children, and the aged who are once again threatened with becoming the mass victims of a failure to meet common and decent obligations to assist them. But the essential rethinking to make this possible must come from the parties themselves. The planes stand ready, the vessels are at hand, the food is stockpiled, the medicines are available, all within hours of the victims themselves. All that is required is compassion, mutual forbearance and will.

As a specific illustration of this point, the U.S. recently provided financing to the ICRC for the chartering of two shallow draft vessels to operate on the Cross River. These vessels are now in Lagos harbor and are ready to move. But the necessary safe conduct assurances have not so far been forthcoming from either the Biafran authorities or the Federal Military Government.

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In connection with the above enumerated principles, the United States knows that the Federal Military Government is concerned that night relief flights provide cover for arms flights. We also understand the desire of the Federal Government for an inspection system ~~through its territory~~ to satisfy itself of the integrity of cargoes carried over or through its territories. We believe that controlled daylight flights would be both an effective and proper means of divorcing the air relief routes from any taint of military operations. FMG agreement to such procedures should assure the safety of the relief flights and the integrity of the air approaches used by such flights. Under such controls and agreement, there are no reasons which would justify the Biafrans in refusing relief merely because it passes through Federal territory. Satisfactory arrangements for a daytime air-lift can be quickly worked out, and such an air-lift, together with a water route, could meet the supplementary food needs of the civilian population. The United States sees no reason why an internationally operated water route with inspection procedures could not quickly be brought into being under simple conditions that immunize it from military taint. But to make any or all of this possible will, we repeat, require the compassion, the forbearance and the will of both parties.

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It is in this spirit that we appeal to both parties to the conflict to pause, to think again and cooperate with ~~xxxxx~~ their fellowmen in other countries in isolating the task of saving untold thousands of their brothers-- and our brothers.

Specifically, we seek to bring about a resumption of the flow of relief supplies through a four point approach:

a. We are urging the Biafran authorities to accept daylight relief flights with assurance of neutral air corridors and with reasonable inspection on Nigerian territory over which all relief flights must pass.

b. We are urging the Federal Military Government to facilitate arrangements for daylight flights under these conditions so that they can begin at the earliest possible time.

c. In order to feed the needy while the day-time airlift is being established on an effective basis we are appealing to the FMG to permit night relief flights to resume for a period of two weeks.

d. Lastly, we are appealing to both parties to give their final agreement to arrangements worked out by Ambassador Clyde Ferguson, our Special Relief Coordinator, that will permit the ~~XXXXXX~~ Cross River water route to get under way under the operating control of the ICRC. It is this

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route which may be the most workable for providing large amounts of relief to the enclave under mutually acceptable conditions.

The U.S.--as over the past months--will do all we can to help prevent a repetition of last summer's tragedy. But we should be absolutely clear that in the last account, only the parties themselves have the choice of life or death for their people. UNQTE

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