

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

date July 22, 1968
to Morris B. Abram .
from Marc H. Tanenbaum
subject Biafran Issues and Background for July 25 Meeting

Summarizing the results of our conversations with Catholic, Protestant, and Israeli authorities who are involved in the Nigerian-Biafran situation, it would seem that the following are the issues to anticipate in the meeting with Jewish organizational leaders this coming Thursday:

- 1) the moral, humanitarian concern;
- 2) the political-human rights issue involving the possible question of genocide;
- 3) the Israel-Arab issue growing out of the Soviet-Egyptian actions in Nigeria. (See attached statement by Abba Eban made in the Knesset, July 12)

It will be essential to anticipate that participants will want to range over a discussion of these several issues. For a number of internal Jewish reasons, it would probably be wise to acknowledge a serious awareness of the importance of the political-human rights question and the Israel-Egyptian issue but to indicate that since there are other existing Jewish umbrella bodies established to deal with such matters that it would be appropriate to propose that such groups as the President's Conference and NCRAC be asked to concern themselves with these issues.

The primary focus of this meeting should be on the moral and humanitarian questions; namely, in the face of the obvious knowledge that tens of thousands of helpless people are dying daily of starvation and are suffering incredible human tragedies, what should be the appropriate response of the Jewish community.

From your conversations with Father Anthony Byrne, Director of Catholic Social Services in Biafra, who has represented Caritas Internationale in Nigeria for the past ten years; Father Raymond Kennedy, who represents the Catholic church in Western Nigeria; Msgr. Landi, Associate Director of Catholic Relief Services; Mr. James Norris of CRS, who

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also serves on the Vatican Secretariat for Justice and Peace; and on the Protestant side, Dr. Van Hoogstraten of Church World Service (the Protestant relief body), and the Rev. Dr. Eugene Smith, Director of the U.S. Committee for the World Council of Churches, it is clear beyond any doubt that a great human tragedy is taking place before our eyes. Father Byrne and Father Kennedy came to our offices this past week directly from Biafra, and submitted documented evidence to the effect that two to three thousand children are dying each day from hunger. Attached are some of the photographs that the priests brought to us. It is estimated that more than a million people will die from starvation and disease before the month of August ends.

In response to this tragedy, Catholic Relief Services has made available 34 air shipments of food and medicine to Biafra and to the victims on the Federal side during the past few months; the International Red Cross has sent in 16 shipments; and the World Council of Churches has sent in 8 shipments. At the WCC meeting which closed in Uppsala on July 19, the WCC committed itself to raise three million dollars in food, medicines and monies.

In the shadow of the Nazi holocaust, and recalling the profound Jewish anxiety over the Arab threat to massacre Jews in Israel last year, clearly the Jewish conscience ought not to permit us to remain silent in the face of such an incredible tragedy. While there appears to be some movement toward some political resolution of the problem which in the long run is the only decisive answer to the present upheaval, in the short run we have an obligation as Jews and as human beings to help alleviate the suffering of so many men, women and children.

As a result of our conversations with the Catholics, Protestants, and others who are in daily touch with the Biafran situation, we are persuaded that the following are the priority needs for us to consider:

- 1) helping to raise money to defray the cost of airlifts of food and medicine to Biafra. ~~THE~~ It costs \$6300 for each flight of food and medicine from Sao Tome, the Portuguese island off Nigeria, to Biafra. Each flight carries 13 tons of supplies. Money is needed for 24 air lifts during the next few weeks. The Red Cross has declared that there is only enough food and supplies to last until August 1st.

While Catholics and Protestants have been operating independently but cooperatively in sending in food and supplies, at our meeting with them on Friday morning they took the initiative in proposing that we undertake to send an airlift together of food and medicine from the United States to Biafra. Their feeling was that such a joint Christian and Jewish effort would help a great deal in sensitizing the conscience of America and other countries to respond more generously than they

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have thus far. Our Christian informants indicate that such a flight would cost about \$25,000. In addition, it was suggested that another alternative cooperative effort would be that of Christians and Jews joining to defray the shipping costs of a ship from the United States, carrying four or five tons of supplies to the coast of Biafra. Ideally, it was hoped that from all sources it would be possible to send shipments by boat at two week intervals and one plane per month. There is no obligation placed upon Jews who desire to participate in this effort for such a continuous long range program. The Catholics and Protestants made it clear that they would welcome even a single symbolic effort for its important publicity value.

(Here you may wish to announce the Field Foundation grant of \$10,000 toward an airlift.)

Since word has gotten around of our interest in the Biafran situation, this past Monday we received a telephone call from a Dr. Richard Hahn, Director of the Alliance for Health, San Rafael, California. Dr. Hahn wishes to announce a contribution of three tons of medical supplies and drugs to be contributed through a Jewish communal effort such as this which we are exploring. There is great need for anti-tetanus toxin, and blood transfusion drugs, as well as multivitamins and antibiotics.

The foods needed are primarily salt, such high protein foods as powdered eggs, fish meal and baby food.

We are assured by Catholic Relief Services and Church World Service that every parcel of food and medicine that is contributed will reach the people for whom it is intended. There are distribution centers in both Biafra and Nigeria and it is assured that none of these supplies will go to military forces on either side. (Incidentally, there is a very low priority for clothing.)

The issue before this group is whether: (a) it wishes to participate either as organizations or as individuals in such a humanitarian cause; (b) what is the most effective procedure for organizing this effort in a realistic and responsible way?

Clearly, any relief effort should involve us in active consultation with the Joint Distribution Committee, the UJA and the CJFWF.

Morris B. Abram

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2) The question of a statement and an advertisement in The New York Times.

Should this group issue a statement to the press expressing its concern? What should the statement say? Should it include a reference to a Jewish relief effort?

(A proposed text for a statement is attached.)

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