

STATEMENT BEFORE THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE  
CONCERNING RELIEF ASSISTANCE IN NIGERIA AND THE FORMER EASTERN REGIONS  
KNOWN AS BIAFRA

Washington, D.C.

October 4, 1968

Mr. Chairman,

My name is James MacCracken and I am the Executive Director of Church World Service, Division of Overseas Ministries, National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America, 475 Riverside Drive, New York City 10027.

I am accompanied by Mr. Jan S.F. van Hoogstraten, CWS Director for Africa.

Church World Service is the overseas cooperative arm of twenty-nine denominations representing the concerns of constituents for programs of relief, assistance to refugees, rehabilitation, root causes of hunger and creative self-help development projects which touch the lives of more than six million people in forty countries of Asia, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East & Europe. Through CWS the concern of American Protestants can be expressed without regard to race, creed or geographic location to alleviate acute human need. A close fraternal relationship is maintained with and in support of the Division of Interchurch Aid, Refugee and World Service of the World Council of Churches.

We in Church World Service have been deeply concerned for the victims of the conflict raging in Nigeria for the past many months. Reports of aggravated starvation have been reaching us even before the massive public news coverage which has appeared in American and European newspapers.

Through the World Council of Churches we have been privileged to have sustained regular contact with our Protestant colleagues in Nigeria on both sides of the conflict line. In fact, as the WCC has launched its worldwide appeal for materials and funds to alleviate the starvation that has pertained, it resolved to assist people in need on both sides of the conflict. To this end WCC, with the support of CWS has facilitated shipments to Lagos and the Spanish Island of Fernando Po of medicines, foods and related relief materials and staff to both sides, exceeding \$1,000,000 in value.

Our relief policy is manifested in the concern expressed in the following policy statement that was passed on July 15, 1968 by the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Uppsala, Sweden:

"This Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Uppsala, has amongst the many problems of human misery with which we are confronted, given major consideration to the conflict between Nigeria and the former Eastern region and its consequences. The dimensions of the problem has already reached proportions beyond the capacity of Voluntary Agencies.

We are seeking every possible channel of bringing peace and urgently needed relief to all areas of need. Our relief activities are our most pressing concern and are planned not only to alleviate dire famine and starvation but to ensure that the suffering of ordinary people is not used for political advantage to either side.

Therefore we, the Assembly of the World Council of Churches, resolve as follows:

1. that in order to expand and intensify existing WCC relief operations beyond the goal of \$3,800,000 in cash and goods already almost achieved, a new additional appeal for \$3 million be launched forthwith;
2. that as an immediate step the World Council of Churches, through its Division of Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service, in cooperation with Caritas Internationalis and the International

Committee of the Red Cross, make a new and vigorous attempt to mount a continuous and effective airlift which can move supplies from suitably equipped points to distribution centers in needy areas;

3. that the appropriate agencies of the WCC pursue with governments concerned and international organisations the various alternative methods of securing the delivery of relief including the possibility of establishing 'mercy corridors' and increased air deliveries."

The National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America, by action of the General Board on September 13, 1968, meeting in Houston, Texas stated:

"The mass starvation in Nigeria - Biafra that is now occurring, and which will increase in the next few weeks, reaching overwhelming proportions probably in October, is a major human tragedy. Our church people, in company with many others in the U.S.A. and other countries are spontaneously giving money, and publicly urging that action be taken to prevent further starvation.

Voluntary agencies of different nations, including our own, and churches especially, have alone under severe difficulty been able to get some relief supplies in. The political issues in the conflict are serious. But we speak concerning vast starvation, and are convinced that large scale relief of this human suffering must not be subordinated to the tragic conflicts of battle.

We appreciate the leadership of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), especially the efforts of its President Emperor Haile Selassie, to secure the agreements whereby relief supplies may be distributed. We support continued efforts by the OAU, confident that African leadership is essential, and hopeful that it will be successful in the immediate future. Under that leadership, many peoples and nations will be willing to help in the massive relief effort now required.

We note with appreciation the offer of President Johnson, expressed to Emperor Haile Selassie, to provide large scale relief supplies. We urge the President, using every effective influence, to continue his efforts toward the objective of immediate delivery of desperately needed relief supplies to the children and adults who are starving.

"Appeals for increased money for relief are already out to our churches; we pledge our efforts to secure generous support of church people and agencies in this effort."

Further, the Church World Service Governing Committee on September 19, 1968 stated:

"Noting the Resolution of the General Board of the National Council of Churches on relief of starvation in Nigeria/Biafra, and

Agonizing over the suffering of people there --

RECOGNIZES the political and military complexities in the conflict;

LAUDS the efforts already made by voluntary, governmental and inter-governmental agencies to bring relief to suffering people on both sides of the conflict;

IS keenly aware that more needs to be done through relief now and rehabilitation for years to come;

- I. URGES member churches and agencies, and individual church members, to support their efforts through established church channels; and individuals as citizens to hold before elected and other government officials the urgency of the plight in Nigeria/Biafra;
- II. and URGES the U.S. Government to search diligently for, and pursue energetically, ways and means to help increase now the flow of relief supplies to the very people in need, by whichever access routes are available and obtainable."

Mr. Chairman, the statistics of tragedy are on the record.

Atrocious starvation faces an estimated four million people within Biafra and perhaps as many as one million people on the Federal side of the conflict in areas inaccessible to relief teams of the Red Cross, the Nigerian Christian Council or any other organization.

Church World Service acting on behalf of its supporting denominations will continue to meet human need wherever it appears.

In the Nigeria-Biafra emergency Church World Service has met and continues to make every effort to reach victims of the civil war on both sides of the line. Church World Service has established a base of operation in Lagos on the federal side as well as Fernando Po and works through Catholic Relief Services as of the latter part of September, 1968, in Sao Tome. The unprecedented starvation in the Eastern region of Nigeria on both sides continues unabated. At least a million are starving, and a reported 6,000 die daily, mostly children and aged. The minimum requirement of 400 to 500 tons of high protein foods to sustain the millions who are starving within the Biafra area has not yet been achieved; however, the number of flights leaving Sao Tome and Fernando Po are substantially escalating. Over the weekend of September 20, 21 & 22, 70 plane loads of foods and medicines were delivered directly into the hands of Christian relief workers in Nigeria-Biafra. Our main concern is and will continue to be to meet human need.

We have been working closely with the Interchurch Aid Committee within Biafra and with the Christian Council of Nigeria. A medical team of CWS is completing orientation in Enugu even as I sit here and is destined for urgent service in the Calabar region. We have provided a trained pharmacist to read and translate the various medical uses of medicines supplied to warehouses in Lagos Port which were not moving because of the individual tradenames. CWS has provided additional staff to support the Christian Council of Nigeria, as well as forwarding blankets, foodstuffs, and medicines.



The World Council of Churches has been working in the closest liaison with the International Committee of the Red Cross and the supplies and medical personnel which I have referred to are all serving in Nigeria within the context of the ICRC Program outlines.

May I note also that the World Council of Churches response to need in Biafra has been within the context of the International Committee of the Red Cross to the extent possible. During the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches we met repeatedly with Christian colleagues from the Christian Council of Nigeria and the Interchurch Aid Committee of Biafra and with representatives of Caritas Internationalis to coordinate our efforts in support of the ICRC possibilities. In tense violent circumstance caution and objectivity are always challenged. Often one prefers inaction to any possibility of misunderstanding. Our ICRC colleagues have endeavored but the starvation to death of helpless children and elderly clearly demanded more forthright and sustained action. Only after it became apparent that additional air facilities were essential for the movement of medicine and relief supplies to Biafra did the Scandinavian Churches organize NORDCHURCHAID under the competent secretaryship of Pastor Viggo Mollerup of Denmark to establish an airbridge into Biafra. More than 225 flights have landed in Biafra and thus moved more than 2,000 tons of medicine, high protein food and stockfish since mid-August, 1968.

The coordinated relief distribution within Biafra in consultation with the ICRC continues, with Dr. Middelkoop, a Dutch missionary, acting as relief coordinator for WCC and CWS.

We have supported with CWS funds the NORDCHURCHAID airbridge, which has averaged eight flights per night since inception in mid-August.

Here in the United States I would pay tribute to our colleagues in the American Jewish Committee for their leadership in bringing together Roman Catholic, Protestant and Jewish humanitarian voluntary agencies to our real concern about the plight of millions of starving people. We have noted that the staggering need cannot realistically be met by private effort and have sought responsible governmental or intergovernmental relief initiatives. We have noted and commended without reservation the outstanding role His Imperial Majesty, Haile Selassie, has played as Chairman of a Special Committee of the Organization of African Unity in seeking a way to relieve the agonized human suffering. We have looked to the OAU Chiefs of State Meeting in Algiers for action. When the OAU declined to pursue the matter of relief further, tragically no other international governmental action has been initiated.

Senator Edward Kennedy has challenged our government to request immediate submission of this human problem to the United Nations General Assembly. We are not aware that any action to this effect has been initiated, although Senator Kennedy spoke the mind and heart of a considerable segment of our constituency. Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum has stated clearly that our American Judeo-Christian compassion for our brother cannot permit us to remain silent nor to ignore the plight of such horrendous starvation and we concur.

May I note particularly, Mr. Chairman, the ecumenical unity between Catholic Relief Services and Church World Service and of Caritas Internationalis with the World Council of Churches. We have coordinated with each other in new and distinctive ways, supplies of either have been made available to the other. Joint interpretation via radio and television have outlined our aspirations to relieve some part of this suffering. Policy meetings have included Roman Catholics and Protestants within and without the United States. Joint air flights, joint shipments, and joint statements to government have been placed on the record.

We have received tremendous support from the American people. As we have together tried to help starving people survive. The American Committee to Keep Biafra Alive has made equal financial contributions to the CRS and to the CWS emergency program responses. The American Jewish Committee has made very generous contributions to CRS and CWS program efforts; CWS provided its American Jewish Committee support direct to NORDCHURCHAID to pay for another two days of airbridge operating costs.

Acting within the guidelines of U.S. policy, Ambassador Robert Moore and Mr. Stephen Tripp, AID Disaster Officer, and their colleagues have done a fine job. But may I suggest that the well being of whole peoples requires governmental or intergovernmental response on an exceptional scale, beyond the efforts already made by voluntary agencies. What is now required is a stepping up of government aid to allay disastrous starvation.



Mr. Chairman, I may summarize our concerns:

1. The fact of atrocious starvation on both sides of the tragic conflict in Nigeria has been well recorded before you. We are solely concerned with starvation and suffering and believe that the humanitarian issue must be separated from the political.
2. Voluntary agencies, working closely together - and in support of the International Committee of the Red Cross - and beyond - have done all they can do to alleviate the need and can state that only governmental or intergovernmental massive assistance can make any real impact in the lives of the thousands who face starvation daily.
3. If the Organization of African Unity cannot pertain, and if African leadership which is so essential is not able to secure agreement, then Senator Kennedy's appeal through our government's official mission to the United Nations General Assembly must be acted upon.
4. The problems of mass starvation will not be easily reconciled in the future regardless of the conflict dimensions; already hundreds of thousands have passed the point where any amount of medicine or high protein food can save them. And a generation of human beings has already been crippled physically and intellectually through malnutrition in the critical and formative period of their life.
5. The International Committee of the Red Cross and NORD-CHURCHAID require massive support until governmental or inter-governmental programs can be launched and relief actually gotten to the people who are in this distressing travail.

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The Geneva Convention does not include a ban on the use of atrocious starvation to secure political end. We cannot pass on the political complexity of the tragedy in which Nigeria finds itself, but we can say that men of good will throughout our country and indeed the world look with horror upon the daily spectacle of atrocious starvation which Christian conscience cannot abide.

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