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I. EXTERNAL AND PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES

1. AFRICA

Nigeria-Biafra

The ICRC has intervened in Nigeria-Biafra since the beginning of hostilities in July 1967.

During the second half of 1967, apart from its customary activity on behalf of prisoners of war, it mainly concentrated its efforts in giving medical assistance.

However, by the end of the year, the first signs of undernourishment began to be seen. To deal with this, the ICRC, whose action continued to extend throughout 1968, took several general measures, attempting, according to its traditions, to come to the aid of the civilian population on both sides of the front.

I. GENERAL MEASURES TAKEN BY THE ICRC

On 18 and 30 April, in view of the increase in the number of refugees and at the request of the Nigerian Red Cross, the ICRC addressed an appeal to the National Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun Societies on behalf of all the victims of the conflict. On 23 May, two days after the capture of Port Harcourt by Federal troops, it launched the operation " SOS Biafra ". The ICRC asked some thirty National Societies to intervene with their respective governments, as well as with the public, in order to obtain the necessary relief and means of transport for the rescue of some 600,000 refugees in Biafra.

On 17 July, seeing that its relief action on behalf of the victims of the conflict was extended daily, the ICRC entrusted its direction and co-ordination to a Commissioner General, Mr. August Lindt,

former United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and one-time delegate of the ICRC.

However, in order to be in a position to continue its action, the ICRC had to be able to count on an additional contribution by National Societies, governments and charitable organizations. It was, in fact, on financial resources that essentially depended the routing and distribution of relief for the victims of the conflict, on both sides of the firing line.

At the invitation of the Council of Europe, Mr. P. Gaillard, Assistant Director, went to Strasburg in order to describe the ICRC's activities in Nigeria-Biafra to that institution and to request increased support from the governments represented. The Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted a recommendation to that effect on 24 September, inviting all member governments to support the ICRC's action with large financial contributions.

Before proceeding further with its fund-raising campaign, the ICRC sent out Mr. R. Gallopin, Member of the ICRC and Director-General, to Lagos from 12 to 19 October. His mission was to decide, with the Federal Government, the ICRC's future action in Nigeria. At the same time, Mr. A. Lindt obtained the agreement of the Biafran authorities for a further appeal for funds.

As a result of these representations, the ICRC drew up a first programme of aid for a period of four months (from November 1968 to the end of February 1969), covering distributions of relief and medicine. It then successively convened to information meetings in Geneva, the National Red Cross Societies, representatives of governments and intergovernmental agencies, as well as those of other voluntary agencies concerned.

On 4 November, the representatives of National Societies undertook to support the action of the ICRC with their respective governments, as well as the steps taken by it to cover its logistic and operational expenses.

Four days later, delegates of 34 governments attended a meeting arranged for them. On its conclusion, the ICRC knew that it could count on an increase in contributions for its action in Nigeria-Biafra: not only did States already engaged confirm their financial support, but other countries promised their participation ¹.

¹ See list of donors p. 54.

II. AID TO THE CIVILIAN POPULATION

Territory under Federal control.—The situation of the civilian population in Nigeria rapidly deteriorated in 1968, chiefly on account of the constant increase in the number of refugees and the interruption of all economic activity in the regions devastated by the war. In addition, the absence of a local administration in territories recently reconquered by Federal forces made it more difficult to reach persons in need.

At the beginning of the year, the ICRC delegates in Federal territory distributed to the civilian population some 100 tons of powdered milk, as well as multivitamins donated by UNICEF.

Since June, the ICRC was in a position to organize, in close co-operation with the Nigerian Red Cross, the wide-scale action necessitated by the development of the situation. It was in fact the time when, as a result of the appeals made in April and May, relief supplies sent by the National Societies started to reach Nigeria. By the end of June, the ICRC held in Lagos an initial stock of about 100 tons of food and medicine.

In mid-July, during his first visit to Lagos, Mr. Lindt arranged for the local purchase of food. Furthermore, he made logistic arrangements for this to be placed in food stores situated near the firing line, in order to facilitate its immediate distribution and in the event of the two belligerents, agreeing on the setting up of a land corridor.

Thus in August, nearly 4,000 tons of relief were stocked in territory under Federal control, distributed between the capital and stores at Enugu, Agbor and Calabar. By the middle of October, it was also possible to start relief operations in the Port Harcourt area.

The Nigerian Red Cross was very closely associated with the direction of the operation through the Relief Centre which is the headquarters of the combined ICRC/Nigerian Red Cross relief operations for territory under the control of Federal forces. At its head is S. A. Ojo, Executive Chairman of the Nigerian Red Cross.

In order to ensure the transportation of relief between Lagos and the various distribution points in the interior of the country, the

ICRC had the following means of transport available in December: two vessels each with a capacity of 535 tons and one of 1,500 tons (the latter being placed at its disposal by the Netherlands Red Cross and Government), two aircraft, three helicopters (supplied by UNICEF) and nearly 300 vehicles, amongst which there were large numbers of lorries.

In the same period, relief stocks amounted to some 20,500 tons for the entire territory under Federal control, in which the ICRC contributed to ensuring the subsistence of about 800,000 persons.

Territory under Biafran control.—The rigours of the blockade, together with the influx of thousands of refugees led to real famine conditions in 1968 in Biafra. The first victims were the children, very soon stricken by “kwashiorkor” due to a lack of proteins.

Whilst access to needy persons in territory under Federal control above all raised logistic problems, it presupposed in Biafran-controlled land some easing of the blockade enabling the passing of relief supplies. At the end of 1967, the ICRC was engaged in obtaining the conclusion of an agreement between the two belligerents, either on the establishment of land or water corridors, or on that of an airlift, preferably for day flights. In spite of the efforts deployed to that effect by H.I.M. Hailé Selassié, Emperor of Ethiopia, and the Consultative Committee of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), as well as by the ICRC, only flights by night have remained practicable.

At the end of December 1967, the Federal Military Government and the ICRC had reached agreement on the principle of the provision of Red Cross food aid to children in need in Biafra and on the procedure for routing this relief. The plan envisaged, on the one hand, the establishment by the ICRC of an operational base at Santa Isabel on the island of Fernando Poo and also the control by Federal representatives of cargoes leaving for Biafra. The Federal Government could not, however, guarantee the safety of flights.

After having first of all refused to give their agreement to flights whose cargoes were to have been controlled by Federal representatives, the Biafran authorities finally accepted this procedure on 17 January 1968. However, in the meanwhile, the Federal

Government had, on 15 January, withdrawn its authorization for reasons of military security.

The ICRC then resumed negotiations with the two parties in conflict, but for three months was unable to obtain the essential guarantees enabling it to undertake flights to Biafra. During that time, the rigours of the blockade only increased the suffering of the civilian population.

On 9 April, after the visit to Geneva of Sir Adetokunbo Ademola, President of the Nigerian Red Cross, the Federal Military Government confirmed to the ICRC its sufferance of relief flights, at the ICRC's own risk. It is on this basis that flights have been carried out since that date.

The capture of Port Harcourt which took place on 21 May, however, made the task of the ICRC even more difficult: whilst a further wave of 100,000 refugees poured into the camps hurriedly set up by the Biafran authorities, it found itself deprived of its landing base. From then on, only occasional flights were made to Biafra, often in hazardous conditions, the ICRC's aircraft landing on the new landing strip at Uli. The first thirteen flights carried out from 9 April to 15 July enabled the transportation of 169 tons of relief which were at once distributed to the civilian population.

However, on 23 May, Nigerian and Biafran representatives met in Kampala to negotiate an eventual cessation of hostilities. The ICRC addressed a message to the two delegations, in which it suggested the immediate adoption of the following humanitarian measures:

1. to give very precise and strict instructions to the armed forces facing each other, whilst operations were in process, in order to spare the innocent civilian population from air attack or other attempts against their safety, whether in the form of reprisals or not;
2. to grant the ICRC facilities to lift the blockade enabling the passage of relief supplies;
3. to organize, under ICRC auspices, an exchange of prisoners of war which could take place on neutral territory.

At the same time, Mr. Georg Hoffmann, delegate-general for Africa, went to Kampala to explain the ICRC's position.

The negotiations having fallen through, Mr. Hoffmann then left for Lagos to continue talks with a view to extending the lifting of the blockade.

On 22 July, Mr. Lindt was received in Lagos by General Gowon, Head of State of Nigeria. The latter confirmed that the toleration of air flights, at first considered null and void by the Federal government, remained valid. The ICRC then chartered a DC 6 which by regular night flights between Santa Isabel and Uli transported 231 tons of relief from 31 July to the beginning of September.

On 13 August, Mr. H. Jaggi, Chief Delegate of the ICRC in Biafra, concluded an agreement with the Biafran authorities bearing on the neutralization of the landing strip at Obilago, which would be placed under ICRC control and exclusively reserved for the routing of civilian relief.

However, on being requested to take cognizance of the neutralizing of this runway and authorize the aircraft of the ICRC to carry out regular day flights there, the Federal Military Government let it be known that it could not give its agreement to that operation.

During that period, meetings of the Consultative Committee of the OAU were held in Addis Ababa. Mr. A. Lindt was asked by H.I.M. Hailé Selassié, Emperor of Ethiopia, to act as adviser on logistic questions on either eventual day flights or on the setting up of land or water corridors. The Addis Ababa negotiations, however, ended in deadlock.

On the other hand, Federal troops continued advancing in Biafran territory where the number of refugees exceeded a million and infant mortality, due to the famine, increased day by day. In view of the extreme urgency of needs, the ICRC decided, on its responsibility and with all means available, to take measures enabling the large-scale despatch of relief to the starving in Biafra. It then mounted Operation INALWA (International Airlift West Africa).

On 20 August, representatives of the National Red Cross Societies, UNICEF, the World Council of Churches, Catholic Relief and the International Union for Child Welfare met at the ICRC's headquarters in Geneva. After examining the situation in territory under Biafran control, participants in the meeting decided to

co-ordinate the action of aid to Biafra. Five days later, the ICRC, which had made representations to the Spanish Government, obtained through the intermediary of Mr. Fürgler, special delegate, permission to use, to an increasing extent, the airfield at Santa Isabel.

In this way, at the beginning of September, thanks to the support of the Danish, Finnish, Netherlands, Norwegian, Swedish and Swiss National Societies, the ICRC had available at Santa Isabel six aircraft, namely 5 DC 6 and one C 130 Hercules. It was then a question of seeing how to use them. The best procedure would have been that of day flights. The ICRC was therefore very pleased to learn that on 3 September, the date of the mounting of the INALWA operation, an agreement had been achieved between Mr. Lindt and General Gowon. As a matter of urgency, the ICRC was allowed to transport relief from Fernando Poo to the airfield at Uli by means of day flights for a period of ten days inclusive from 5 September.

The following day, however, the Biafran authorities let it be known that it would not be possible for them to allow flights by day to Uli, for fear that the Federal forces might draw some military advantage from them. As against this they offered possibilities for another airfield, that of Obilago.

As an agreement between the two parties was shown to be impossible, the ICRC decided to continue, from then on, its night flights, to both the landing ground at Uli and at Obilago, at least until the latter, for military reasons, was handed over to the Biafran authorities. Shortly afterwards it fell into the hands of the Federal forces.

In December, a new problem was to be raised. In fact, the government of Equatorial Guinea, which became independent on 12 October 1968, ordered the ICRC to interrupt its airlift from Santa Isabel from the night 21-22 December. However, intervention on the part of Mr. Lindt enabled flights to be resumed from 23 December for a period of a fortnight.

In spite of all these difficulties, the ICRC continued and strengthened its dispositions, built up stocks which on the eve of the mounting of the operation reached a total of 3,300 tons of food and medicine. From 3 September to 31 December, 6,404 tons of relief were thus despatched to Biafra by means of 675 air flights.

By the end of the year, the number of Biafrans in need of food aid was estimated at about 3,500,000. The ICRC co-ordinated its action on the spot with that of other aid organizations (Joint Church Aid), thus contributing to ensuring the subsistence of some 850,000 women and children.

III. MEDICAL ACTIVITY

Territory under Federal control.—On the outbreak of hostilities, an ICRC medical team had worked in Federal territory, at Uromi then at Agbor.

In February 1968, thanks to personnel recruited by the Norwegian, Finnish and Swedish Red Cross Societies, as well as of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the ICRC was able to send two additional teams to Nigeria, one to Enugu and the other to Gboko.

Following on the appeals of April and May, the National Societies and voluntary agencies placed mobile medico-welfare teams at the disposal of the ICRC. These teams had as task not only to take care of the sick, but also to distribute food and medicine to the starving population. The Committee was thus in a position to extend its medical activity over the whole territory under the control of Federal troops.

In December, in addition to the two surgical missions, twenty-five medico-welfare teams were operating under the aegis of the ICRC in Nigeria. The number of persons receiving medical treatment was estimated at 50,000 per week.

Territory under Biafran control.—In July 1967, the ICRC had sent a surgical mission to Biafra, but in January 1968, access to Biafra being closed to it, the ICRC was unable to relieve its medical personnel.

In April 1968, the ICRC again despatched medicine and medical equipment for Biafra. By August, the first medical teams arrived. Amongst them were several “kwashiorkor” specialists, made available by the Swedish Red Cross and the International Union for Child Welfare (IUCW). By the end of the year, three medical

and eight medico-welfare teams were operating in Biafran territory under ICRC control.

The ICRC decided in December to organize a vaccination drive against measles and smallpox. These diseases, which are particularly harmful to under-nourished children, are in fact endemic in Biafra and it was feared that an epidemic might break out in 1969. By the end of the year, all measures had been taken for the operation to start in January 1969.

On the other hand, its delegates having drawn its attention to several cases of seriously wounded Biafrans, whose condition demanded special treatment (burns, plastic and orthopaedic surgery), the ICRC attempted to find through the National Societies countries in Europe which would receive them. In December, the ICRC had positive replies from the Swiss and Italian Red Cross Societies and also from the Norwegian branch of the World Veterans Federation.

IV. PERSONNEL

The surgical, medico-welfare and technical teams working under the ICRC's aegis in Nigeria-Biafra (personnel recruited by the ICRC direct and by other humanitarian organizations) were considerably strengthened in 1968, especially from mid-August onwards.

Territory under Federal control.—During the course of the year, personnel placed under the co-ordination of the ICRC evolved as follows: 65 on 7 August, 121 on 29 August, 140 at the end of September and 257 at the end of December.

ICRC teams formed nearly a quarter of this total personnel. The other teams were composed of persons recruited by the German Red Cross in the Federal Republic of Germany, the American, Austrian, Canadian, Danish, Irish, Italian, Nigerian and Swedish Red Cross Societies, as well as by the Salvation Army, World Council of Churches, Catholic Relief Service, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, OXFAM, Quakers, the Roman Catholic Mission,

Save the Children Fund (English and Swedish), Seventh Day Adventists, UNICEF and USAID.

Nigerian personnel engaged for the operation amounted, by the end of the year, to about 1,000, several of whom held key posts.

Territory under Biafran control.—Personnel working in Biafra under ICRC auspices increased in numbers between August and the end of September, then gradually decreased. From 3 persons on 7 August, it rose to 21 on 29 August and reached a total of about 140 by 30 September. On that date, more than half of the strength was formed by Swedish Red Cross teams. The French Red Cross and the ICRC had each sent some fifteen persons. The remaining personnel consisted of Danish, Finnish, Norwegian and Yugoslav Red Cross teams and those of OXFAM, Save the Children Fund, UICW and Adventists.

Towards the end of September, because of the advance of Federal troops in Biafran territory, the front line approached the relief teams' places of work. On 30 September, two members of the ICRC delegation, Dr. Dragan Herćog and Mr. Robert Carlsson, made available by the Yugoslav and Swedish Red Cross respectively, as well as two members of the World Council of Churches, were killed at Okigwi. After evaluating this situation, the ICRC decided to evacuate from Biafra members of teams who could be spared. Thus, by the end of December, the number of personnel in Biafra fell to 65.

The local Red Cross worked closely with the ICRC. By the end of the year, the number of its personnel amounted to about 600.

Santa Isabel.—In December, 53 persons, made available by the Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, Swedish and Swiss Red Cross Societies, were working at Santa Isabel for the ICRC, not counting flying personnel. African personnel numbered approximately a hundred.

V. PRISONERS OF WAR

In 1968, the ICRC continued its mission of assistance to prisoners of war, in Nigeria as well as in Biafra.

Territory under Federal control.—At the beginning of the year, the delegates of the ICRC visited Biafran prisoners of war held in various prisons in Lagos.

Since November, they regularly visit three internment centres, two of which are in Lagos and one at Makurdi where Biafran prisoners of war are assembled.

As usual, the ICRC handed to the Federal Military Government reports drawn up by its delegates as a result of these visits.

Territory under Biafran control.—The ICRC delegates have also visited Nigerian prisoners of war interned in Biafra to whom they gave blankets, clothing and cigarettes.

In addition, the ICRC has intervened with several African States in order to find a neutral country which would accept to receive Nigerian prisoners in Biafran hands. In the ICRC's view such transfer should foreshadow a general exchange of prisoners of war. The agreement of the Federal Military Government could not, however, be obtained.

VI. EVACUEES FROM BIAFRA

From 13 September to 10 November, by means of aircraft returning empty to their operational base, the ICRC evacuated to Santa Isabel 614 foreign nationals wishing to leave Biafra.

Before undertaking this operation, the ICRC had obtained the agreement of the Biafran authorities, of the Federal Military Government, as well as of the Spanish and subsequently of the Guinea authorities. Very ample facilities were granted it for the use of Fernando Poo as a place of transit.

For the refugees' reception, the ICRC set up three camps on the island of Fernando Poo, one of which was at Musola and the two others at Santa Isabel.

The ICRC also took charge, in co-operation with the governments concerned, of organizing the return of the refugees to their respective countries. On 19 September, 81 of these took the opportunity of a Red Cross flight between Santa Isabel and Basle to return to Europe.

Congo-Rwanda

In November 1967, as a result of the resumption of fighting in the Bukavu sector, the mercenaries and "Katanga gendarmes" withdrew to Rwanda. By the end of November, the Congolese authorities having repatriated the "Katanga gendarmes", under the responsibility of the OAU, there only remained ex-mercenaries of European stock and their families, about 130 persons in all, in camp at Shagasha.

In January 1968, the ICRC intervened on several occasions with Mr. Kayibanda, President of Rwanda, in order to prevent the ex-mercenaries from being extradited to the Congo. President Kayibanda declaring that he wished to see the rapid evacuation of the refugees, re-affirmed his Government's determination for them not to be extradited.

At the request of the Rwanda authorities, the ICRC accepted, in February, to organize the repatriation operation of the ex-mercenaries. However, before settling the technical ways of effecting the evacuation, the ICRC had first of all to obtain the agreement not only of the East African States whose air space had to be traversed, but also of the ten member countries of the OAU Special Commission, charged with the question of the mercenaries.

Mr. Hoffmann, Delegate-General of the ICRC, left for Africa in March for this purpose. After going to Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda, he met, in Khartoum on 23 March, Mr. El Azhari, President of the Sudanese Council and Chairman of the ad hoc Commission of the OAU. As a result of this meeting, President El Azhari made official representations to the ten African States concerned, which gave their agreement in principle at the beginning of April.

The ICRC was then able to charter two DC-6 long-distance aircraft which repatriated the ex-mercenaries to Europe on 24 April. They were escorted by two ICRC delegates and 14 members of the "Securitas" Surveillance Society. One of the aircraft flew to Brussels direct, the other touched down at Pisa and Zurich before landing in Paris.

Throughout the period of these negotiations, the ICRC delegates continued to care for the sick and ensure the former mercenaries' subsistence, whom they visited each week in the camp at Shagasha.

They acted on those occasions as intermediary for the refugees' family mail.

Before this and after having obtained the agreement of the authorities concerned, the ICRC had organized the return to France on 16 February of a wounded and paralysed former mercenary.

Former Katanga gendarmes.—In the course of the year, the Central Tracing Agency continued its efforts with a view to ensuring the transmission of messages between some Katanga ex-gendarmes of whom there had been no news, and their families.

Guinea-Bissau

In 1968, Mr. G. Hoffmann, Delegate-General of the ICRC for Africa, had discussions on several occasions with Mr. Amilcar Cabral, Secretary-General of the PAIGC (Movement for the Liberation of Guinea-Bissau and the Cape Verde Islands), Mr. Alcantara, President of the Senegalese Red Cross and the Portuguese authorities, with a view to obtaining permission to visit persons detained both by the Portuguese Government and the PAIGC, on account of the events of which Guinea-Bissau was the theatre.

During these meetings, the ICRC representatives also requested the eventual release of the detainees.

In February, after having decided to release three Portuguese prisoners interned in Conakry, Mr. Cabral asked the Senegalese Red Cross to take charge of their repatriation to Portugal. Handed over to the Senegalese Red Cross on 15 March, the released detainees were sent on to Lisbon the next day.

In November, Mr. Cabral announced that the PAIGC proposed releasing three other Portuguese prisoners. Mr. Hoffmann, representative of the ICRC, went to Dakar on 14 December to arrange with Mr. Cabral and Mr. Alcantara ways of transferring the detainees. The latter left Dakar on 19 December, in the presence of the ICRC representative; they were accompanied by a French female social worker and a Senegalese official, both selected by the Senegalese Red Cross. They were received in Lisbon by the Portuguese Red Cross on the following day.

Mozambique

As a result of representations made to the Portuguese Government by Mr. Hoffmann, the ICRC was given permission to visit political detainees interned in Mozambique. He then appointed Mr. Tschiffeli, delegate, to undertake a first series of visits.

The latter accompanied by Dr. Pais, President of the Portuguese Red Cross in Lourenço-Marques, in November visited seven detention centres, where he was able to talk without witnesses with detainees of his own choosing. The reports drawn up by the ICRC representative were then handed over to the Detaining authorities in accordance with usual practice.

During the same period, Mr. Hoffmann opened talks with Mr. Mondlane, head of the Liberation Front of Mozambique (FRELIMO), in order to obtain authorization to visit Portuguese prisoners in that movement's hands.

Sudan

Mr. Tschiffeli visited the Sudan from 28 August to 15 September. The ICRC had instructed him to examine, in co-operation with the Sudanese Red Crescent, the possibilities of a relief action in the southern provinces where the secessionists were operating.

When passing through Khartoum, Mr. Tschiffeli handed over to the Sudanese Red Crescent a donation of 5,000 Sudanese pounds (60,000 Swiss francs), out of the ICRC's special fund for relief actions. This sum was to make it possible to come to the aid of the victims of the troubles raging in the southern part of the country, and, in particular, to distribute relief to refugees having fled the fighting zones.

The delegate of the ICRC returned to Khartoum on 17 December, to discover developments in the relief action organized by the Sudanese Red Crescent. That Society had allocated a third of the ICRC's contribution to the purchase of clothing and the balance to the acquisition of food. These relief supplies were handed over to the civilian population of the three southern provinces of the Sudan, as well as to refugees regrouped on the outskirts of the capital, at a rate of one distribution each week for a month.