

A PROTEST AGAINST GENOCIDE: BIAFRA RALLY
DAG HAMMARSKJOLD PLAZA, SEPT. 14, 1968, 3:30 P.M.
SPONSORED BY THE AMERICAN COMMITTEE TO KEEP BIAFRA ALIVE

STATEMENT BY RABBI MARC H. TANENBAUM, NATIONAL DIRECTOR OF INTER-RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS, AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE; CHAIRMAN OF THE INTER-RELIGIOUS LIASION COMMITTEE OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH EMERGENCY EFFORT FOR BIAFRAN RELIEF, AND PRESIDENT OF THE INTERRELIGIOUS FOUNDATION FOR COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

Today is the Jewish Sabbath. Traditionally the Sabbath is an oasis in time for retreat from the turmoil of the world, for calm reflection, meditation, and study. By superficial standards, a Jew, and certainly a rabbi, should not be taking part in a public meeting such as this on the Sabbath Day. However, from the deepest perspectives of the humanism of the Jewish faith and the historic experience of the Jewish people, I can do no other but lend my voice and my presence on this Sabbath in sorrowful and bitter protest against the bestiality that is taking place against innocent men, women and children, victims of the civil war in Nigeria.

Rabbinic tradition affirms (Ketubah 19a), "There is nothing - no religious law - that must not yield to the duty of saving life." And the Sabbath itself must be set aside to save a life (Ketubah 5a) ... whether the person in need is a Jew or a Gentile (Ibid. 15b).

We are here to try to save the lives not of a single person, but of tens of thousands of persons, before it is too late. The world - nations, governments, whole peoples -- have created an

artificial Sabbath about themselves, retreating to an indecent calm, an obscene indifference to the plight of millions who are being massacred and dying from hunger. We are here to cry out to the world to set aside this Sabbath calm and end the morbid immoral silence under whose cloak wholesale destruction of lives is taking place.

On June 9, 1942, the village of Lidice was wiped off the face of the earth, the entire male population of the village was massacred. The women and children were carried off to be shot, gassed, or to die from ill-treatment. Four of the Lidice women who were about to give birth were taken to a maternity hospital in Prague where their newly born infants were murdered. The Nazi security police then burned down the village, dynamited the ruins, and leveled it off.

Lidice is the most widely known example of Nazi savagery and one of the longest remembered acts of barbarism in the civilized world.

In the second half of the 20th century, Biafra is on its way to becoming the Lidice of mankind.

Yesterday morning, I received a letter from a priest in Port Harcourt, Rev. Fintan Kilbride, who described an hour-long bombing of the town of Ihiala. "The first stick of bombs was dropped

immediately behind the Holy Ghost Seminary where Rev. J. McNulty was feeding 300 starving children in the clinic. The first bomb dropped only a short distance away and decapitated one of the mission workers. The second which fell a little further away, killed 12 people and injured 115 in front of their eyes. The Russian Mig, piloted presumably by an Egyptian pilot, then circled for a while before coming in for the kill again, this time on the village market place which was crowded with shoppers. Twelve were killed and 35 injured. The next target was the Holy Rosary Hospital. It was struck three times before it was completely destroyed. It was absolute carnage." --The letter concludes, "In the name of humanity something must be done to stop this savage slaughter.."

Less than 25 years ago the Jewish People suffered a catastrophe in the ruthless murder of six million men, women and children, the import of which has permanently impaired our image of God, man and the moral order. The most traumatic effect of all was the feeling of abandonment, the agony of being surrounded by an ocean of silence.

Out of that holocaust we, the Jewish People, have salvaged one permanent lesson. There must never again be silence in the face of atrocities and human suffering.

"Thou shalt not stand by idly the blood of thy brother," is the eleventh commandment of the Jewish People.

If we remain silent now in the face of what amounts to in fact another attempted genocide, we will have given Hitler and Nazi Germany their final victory.

What are we to do? There are two things we can and must do:

First, we must help stop the slaughter.

Second, we must help put an end to the cruel starvation.

Unless a cease-fire or truce is brought about, and the massacre of innocents ends, all the humanitarian aid we send will in a short time be poured into a cemetery called Biafra. I urge therefore that our next rally take place not again before the United Nations, which is apparently and tragically paralyzed from doing anything effective to end the killing, but that we march on Washington, and in particular on the State Department.

Our government has been engaged in a diplomatic bird dance, feigning an impotence which is a lie. The culprits in the Nigerian war effort are Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and Egypt, without whose heavy military support and pilots this war could not rage on for long. We need to march on the State Department and insist on public answers to these questions:

Why is our government not protesting against Great Britain's imperialist role in Nigeria? Is Britain, our great ally, going to be allowed to continue to play the role of perfidious Albion in bartering human lives for Biafran Oil?

Why does not our government make it clear to the Soviet Union that we will not tolerate her continued feeding into Nigeria the Migs and Ilyushin bombers, flown by Egyptian pilots, to exterminate innocent peoples? Our president put the Soviet Union on public notice when the Red armies marched into Czechoslovakia? Is the Biafran tragedy any less demanding of our public outrage?

And finally we must ask what is the role of Ambassador Joseph Palmer, the head of the African desk in the State Department, in our strange neutrality in the face of genocide? Why is he dragging his feet in response to pleas for American airlifts of food and medicine to Biafra? Is the State Department repeating the same cynical pattern of the 1940's of turning a deaf ear to cries to help save human lives when it has the clear capacity to do infinitely more than it is doing?

While we must march on Washington and turn the light of world public opinion on the State Department and those responsible for its ignominious policy of neutrality, we must not relax for a moment our drives to raise monies to provide food, drugs and medicines.

I wish to use this occasion to announce that the entire Jewish community in the United States has organized an unprecedented American Jewish Emergency Effort for Biafran Relief, following the great leadership given by the Catholic Relief Services and Church World Service, who have done more than any government or inter-

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national relief bodies to bring succor and relief to the suffering people of Nigeria. We have just raised \$32,000 for Biafran relief, and two days ago have committed checks to Catholic Relief Services and to Church World Service and UNICEF which will make possible the shipment of twenty flights of food amounting to 200 tons and one flight of medicines from Portugal to Biafra.

In the days and weeks ahead we will continue to work with you, for the sake of the Biafran People, but also for the sake of our own sanity and our belief in the worth of man.