

Chron Ref: CF/NYH/0SEB/HST/1996-042

File Sub: CF/HST/INT/HEY-002/M

1504K - 15 August 1983

Interview with Mr. E.J.R. Heyward by Dan Jacobs

at UNICEF Headquarters on 22 July, 1983

BIAFRA - UNICEF's Involvement 1967 - 1970

Jacobs: You are E.J.R. Heyward who has been the Deputy Executive Director for Operations of UNICEF?

Heyward: Right. And, it so happened that Dr. Egger, I think, was away. At any rate, he was not in New York Headquarters during much of this time - I don't remember exactly why that was.

Jacobs: Are you speaking of 1967, when the whole circumstances of Biafra first began, or are you speaking of July 1968 when we became more deeply involved in the real starvation - then Dr. Egger was in Geneva serving as liaison with the Red Cross, in July 1968?

Heyward: Right. So I have a bad memory for dates and I thank you very much for the notes you've given in the oral history in which, from your documentation, which cover many more points than I remember. I remember some things which made an emotional impact on me at the time and I remember working very closely



UNICEF Alternate Inventory Label



Rcf0006C3G

Item # CF/RAD/USAA/DB01/1996-0092

ExR/Code: CF/HST/INT/HEY-002/M

Interview E.J.R. Heyward by Dan Jacobs: BIAFRA: UNICEFs I:

43 pp + 3b

with Sasha Bacic on the programming in Headquarters. And there you refresh my memory: I remember that Dr. Egger was, therefore, in Geneva but the Headquarters programming was done with Sasha Bacic taking a prominent role in that. We had a group meeting - later on you refer to a group...

Jacobs: Don't assume that this is in the transcript (referring to a memo which will be found as Annex I).

Heyward: No, no. But you have it with you.

Jacobs: I have. I've given it to you. But we could append it I suppose.

Heyward: Yes, you append it.

Jacobs: Yes, but if we append it, this is off the top of my head and it might not be correct. It was given to you in order to refresh your recollection, but I'm not sure we want to make that part of the historical record.

Heyward: Well, but you are going to write the summary, aren't you?

Jacobs: I don't know what you're referring to. That won't be right there in the transcript.

Heyward: I am assuming that you're going to append to the record the notes dated July 21, that you gave me, called, "Oral History Interview on UNICEF in Nigeria/Biafra" because it contains much more information, and much more carefully dated, than I could recollect. I would like to give you, in the first place, some more or less emotional recollections of things that you refer to here. So, in the first paragraph you refer to Sasha Bacic being in Lagos. Later he came back to Headquarters and when Charles Egger, the Programme Director, was in Geneva, Sasha Bacic was working closely with me and other people from Programme Division, Supply and .....

Jacobs: So that would have been July 1968 when the starvation became grave and Bacic and you were working together.

Heyward: You're right. So that was a period of rather intense programming in Headquarters. I remember a considerable feeling of frustration about trying to get the various Headquarters substantive Divisions to work on the programme with a sense of urgency. I suppose that sounds an ungracious statement. I believe that it is generally experienced and it is a common thing that the people who are engaged in regular work and have their regular work, have some difficulty in switching the necessary time to deal expeditiously with emergency things. Anyway, we met every morning and looked into the situation, and there were continuous difficulties inherent in the problem. I remember a considerable feeling of

frustration at the time. I think that was probably exacerbated by the controversy that existed, in public opinion and, therefore, in our staff, some people felt that it wasn't right to be assisting Biafra, we were only prolonging the war against a legitimate authority. And, therefore, there might have been some feeling wondering whether they really thought it was right to be dealing expeditiously with it.

Jacobs: Could we go back for a moment to the earlier time at the beginning of this when you mention Bacic being in Lagos, that was in late 1967, and from that time until the time the starvation became grave in 1968, by July 1968, you made many attempts to get into Biafra and help the children there. I think you must have arrived at general conclusions of what your problems were. Do you recall anything of that period of 8 or 10 months during which you were trying to find a way of gaining access to Biafra?

Heyward: I can't recall anything beyond what you record here.

Jacobs: Okay. Go ahead with your next point.

Heyward: Well, my next point, around page 2, you refer to Mr. Labouisse - "difficulties of communicating with Mr. Labouisse candidly because he didn't take along an encoding machine....

Jacobs: When he was in Lagos. A period of four weeks or something.

Heyward: I think that that was a deliberate decision of his not to take an encoding machine because he felt that could give grounds for suspiscion in Lagos.

Jacobs: Do you recall in July 1968 when Charles Egger was in Geneva as liaison for the Red Cross and you here were waiting for the Red Cross to begin action in Nigeria/Biafra? There was a long delay. The International Committee of the Red Cross had been asked to be the Coordinator of relief. And this was also a frustrating period, I believe.

Heyward: That was also a frustrating period which changed when the attitude and the work of the Red Cross changed when Ambassador Lindt was made the Coordinator. He was much more active than the Committee had been beforehand, possibly an activity which finally led to his becoming persona non grata. That was a very frustrating period. When he became active also we still felt that the operational team was not very strong.

Jacobs: The International Committee of the Red Cross logistics ability?

Heyward: Yes. At least the ability that was given to him to work with, the staff that he had to work with, was not very strong, so that was a continuing concern.

Jacobs: When Mr. Labouisse returned to Geneva in early August 1968 and he asked you to come to Geneva, you met with him and the Red

Cross and August Lindt. Do you recall anything in those discussions or has it all faded?

Heyward: Well (laughter), some of the emotion hasn't faded.

Jacobs: It was a very crucial point obviously. Nothing had started at that time. It was getting graver and graver.

Heyward: Right. Before the meeting I met one of the people from the Red Cross we were supposed to be talking to, whose name I've forgotten, and he had just come in about 10 o'clock in the morning to his office and he had been tending his roses in his garden and that was why he was late.

Jacobs: He was wearing white gloves.

Heyward: I don't remember that but I do remember the roses and, I felt a certain great difference of atmosphere and...

Jacobs: ....of priorities?..

Heyward: Yes, and of the feeling of what was the urgency of the commitment.

Jacobs: Was there ever given any moment of that time during the long period of waiting that you or Mr. Labouisse, or the two of you together, considered whether you should be working in tandem with the ICRC. Did you give any thought to separating or

attempting to go ahead on your own?

Heyward: I don't remember such a discussion, but ...

Jacobs: ...this was the way it was. You'd been trying to cooperate close to a year with the Red Cross.

Heyward: Yes, well, I think that as you say, they had been named coordinator of the relief and it would probably have...

Jacobs: Do you know who named them coordinator?

Heyward: No, do you?

Jacobs: Yes, the Federal Military Government of Nigeria invited them to be coordinator.

Heyward: Well, I think that Mr. Labouisse would have been extremely reluctant to indicate that the Red Cross was not doing a sufficient job, would have felt that that would have been discouraging to donors. So I don't think the question of trying to break out from that really... I have no memory of such a discussion.

Jacobs: Do you recall requesting food from the United States Government? Five-thousand tons of food and receiving the beginning of the food shipments from the United States?

Heyward: I don't recall that part of the history. I do recall what you refer to a little later - the help that came from the office of Vice President Humphrey and their willingness to take this question very seriously. Actually you yourself had helped in that introduction.

Jacobs: And the C-130s - they were prepared to try to get C-130s directly from the Air Force? Remember that?

Heyward: Right. I remember going to Washington to give them information about that.

Jacobs: And do you recall that that was the reason that I've written here, that the Red Cross was reluctant to go outside of its customary channels in making requests of governments?

Heyward: I hadn't remembered that point. I'm sure it's right.

Jacobs: I don't want to put words in your mouth. We're going to append this. You're making yourself responsible for what I've written.

Heyward: I have great confidence in what you've written. Then, you come -- I don't have any comments on paragraph 6. Well, 7, except you have mentioned that we were talking about the helicopter, engaging a helicopter - a service - which later we did. I remember at the time I was very keen on doing that.



Louis Gendron thought it was the wrong thing to do. I think that Louis Gendron was right and I was wrong.

Jacobs: In hindsight.

Heyward: Right.

Jacobs: At the time you engaged the helicopter you could not foresee what events would take place.

Heyward: No. It was very expensive, and the people who said that was an expensive method of delivering food were right.

Jacobs: It is something of an indication of the efforts you two were making to find any way to get a breakthrough to reach the children who were in need.

Heyward: Yes, but we never succeeded with the helicopters and then, later on, it was suggested that the helicopters were doing military spying for the Nigerian forces.

Jacobs: Who suggested that?

Heyward: I don't remember - some of our field people. And, I believe that if the helicopter service had good relations with...

Jacobs: Well, they had to maintain good relations...

Heyward: And the way they maintained them was to go up and look over and see what was happening on the other side -- that's what I was told.

Jacobs: That was a political action that UNICEF could not accept as part of its work?

Heyward: Well, it didn't know about it at the time. But...

Jacobs: And then it would have been (?)

Heyward: Right. Yes, well I mean, that was not what we wanted to do at all. So I'm afraid the whole thing was very badly misconceived because we probably should have known about that activity. Just the same as on the other side, people refused to supply these sideband radios for communication between various areas in Biafra or relief people in various parts of Biafra because they said it could be used for military purposes. So we wouldn't give the radios to Biafra but we gave the helicopters for the other side.

I also remember the visit of Count von Rosen very clearly. Partly because the Secretary-General's office refused to see him.

Jacobs: Count von Rosen had just been to Addis Ababa and Emperor Haile Selassie had given him a letter to take to the Secretary-General and the Secretary-General declined to

receive him on the grounds that he was not a diplomat representing any government.

Heyward: I believe so. I think he was a diplomat. I think he had been ...

Jacobs: But he wasn't a citizen of Ethiopia. He was a close friend of the Emperor's and the Emperor had given him a letter to take to the Secretary-General.

Heyward: Yes.

Jacobs: You also met with Count von Rosen about the airlift possibilities and so forth in late August, 1968?

Heyward: Right.

Jacobs: August 1968?

Heyward: Right. And he described how he flew in -- and he flew in in thunder storms which masked him from any radar activity from the other side. And that was one of his ways of avoiding being attacked. When General Tunner, whom you refer to later, whom I mentioned that to, thought that was a very risky thing to do - risky as well as being uncomfortable. Anyway, Count von Rosen had his blockade running, was started in that way.

Jacobs: When he broke the blockade in August '68 -- then that gave

rise to the Scandinavian airlift which was the progenitor of the whole Joint Church Aid airlift later.

Heyward: Right, and, I suppose that they didn't do all their flights in thunderstorms - I don't think.

Jacobs: No, they flew at night.  
Do you recall how UNICEF's relations with Ambassador Lindt were during that time - he was the Red Cross High Commissioner for Relief?

Heyward: Well, I remember...

Jacobs: You didn't deal with him directly, Mr. Labouisse saw him while in Lagos. In general, Ambassador Lindt had bad relations with a great many people, but he had been Chairman of the UNICEF Executive Board and you knew him. I just wondered if you recall whether your relations were good.

Heyward: My recollections is generally the relations were good. As I mentioned earlier, there was some lack of satisfaction about logistical arrangements, but I think that our relations with him were good throughout.

Jacobs: Now, how did you come to start supplying food? UNICEF started supplying US Government donated food to the airlifts. That was about the end of August, and you had a ship with 5,000 tons of US food on it about to arrive in Nigerian waters. You

had to make a decision as to what to do with it at that time. How did that come about? It was a very important decision -- it made a great difference in the future of the airlifts being able to supply food to children in Biafra? Can you recall that?

Heyward: Well, not particularly. It doesn't leave a great emotional scar with me because I think that we were probably all the time trying to deliver to both sides. And, therefore, to unload some to be taken into Biafra wouldn't have been a greatly difficult decision for us, I don't think.

Jacobs: That was your position but you had to be impartial. The earlier 105 tons flown in back in April had been matched by 105 food tons moved on the Nigerian side. So you're saying it wouldn't have been the consistent and correct thing to do?

Heyward: Yes.

Jacobs: But you delivered 1,800 tons of food to Sao Tomè, and as I recall, the International Committee of the Red Cross complained to Mr. Labouisse about this decision. Do you recall that?

Heyward: No, I don't remember that. At one point you refer to our making "guestimates" of needs.

Jacobs: Yes, you wrote a very valuable paper about the end of July '68 saying "guestimates" - because no one was taking an overall assessment of needs, so you worked that up as best you could. When Mr. Labouisse brought that to the attention of Ambassador Lindt in Lagos, Ambassador Lindt said: that's exactly the sort of thing that's needed, and he was glad for this.

Heyward: Yes, at one time, somehow, I got involved in making some explanations to the press about those estimates. You don't remember that?...Well, anyway, that was done in the UN briefing and...

Jacobs: You made an appearance before the United Nations press corps, I recall that.(?)

Heyward: Yes, and I found out later that the Secretary-General was listening in to that.

Jacobs: He had the room wired up to his office on the 38th floor, and he could listen in to your briefing of the press.

Heyward: Exactly. But he didn't object to that - he thought that was alright. Mr. Labouisse objected because he was reproached about that in Lagos.

Jacobs: By the Nigerian Government?

Heyward: Yes, and they said, here we are here and how can you be putting out these estimates in New York? So, Mr. Labouisse said: kindly refrain from doing that. Now, later on U Thant got offended with UNICEF because, I think, mischief makers reported to him alleged statements we had made about his lack of action or ineffective action in this field.

Jacobs: What kind of mischief-makers do you mean?

Heyward: Well, I don't know who they were but...

Jacobs: Were they from inside UNICEF?

Heyward: I suppose. Or inside the UN, and I was told that U Thant had been told that UNICEF and I had said things about him which I believe were completely untrue.

Jacobs: You had not said these things?

Heyward: No, I hadn't.

Jacobs: But it had been reported to him that you had said that he was not effective or you were negative in some way.

Heyward: Right... that he had made wrong decisions, that that was said also. Also phrased in a very discourteous way. So this...

Jacobs: This created a serious tensions or problems?

Heyward: Added to the problems...

Jacobs: What would you say was the Secretary-General's position about humanitarian relief in Nigeria and Biafra?

Heyward: Well, I think he was in favour of that, but he probably fell for the general United Nations line that - the line of the United Nations agencies - that you must have a written request from the sovereign government before you do anything. That was the reason advanced by the FAO and WHO for not doing anything - they didn't have such a written statement.

Jacobs: Did the Secretary-General ever caution UNICEF about what it was attempting to do?

Heyward: I don't remember that he cautioned UNICEF. At one time he asked, I think you record, that he asked Mr. Labouisse to represent the United Nations in discussions in Lagos...

Jacobs: I think I have written that he did not ask Mr. Labouisse or that Mr. Labouisse did not go to Lagos as his representative.

Heyward: Right. Mr. Labouisse declined, saying that he thought it was better for UNICEF to act in its traditional way rather than falling into this United Nations pattern. I guess that U



Thant, Chairman of the Administrative Committee on Coordination probably had several agency heads who could have been concerned. UNESCO also could have been concerned. All united to say that UNICEF was doing the wrong thing because it was out of line and not waiting for this written request.

Jacobs: You say that the other agency heads did take this position -- that UNICEF should not be doing what it was doing without a request from the Nigerian Government? I knew they did not do very much because they themselves had not gotten such a request. But did they have a position that they felt that UNICEF was going too far?

Heyward: I can't...

Jacobs: I can't recall this right now, but I know that the World Food Programme declined at first to provide food until finally UNICEF made considerable efforts, with the help of the Secretary-General, I believe through his Special Representative, to get the Nigerian government to make the request to the World Food Programme. Then they began supplying food, but there was a problem during the initial period. The WFP said, no, we can't do that.

Heyward: I don't have clear recollection that the other agencies felt that UNICEF was out of line. I have a feeling that they did, but I can't confirm that.

Jacobs: That's why I questioned you about that and I wasn't aware others intervened. I believe that when the Foreign Minister of Nigeria was here for the General Assembly, he complained to the Secretary-General about what UNICEF was trying to do in helping the Red Cross find planes and things like that. And that at that time Secretary-General Thant talked with UNICEF about what it was doing - early October of '68? You don't recall that period?

Heyward: No. But it could well be so and my general feeling is that the Secretary-General was subject to a lot of pressures -- you've just mentioned one, and I think that the other agencies also would have been on that same line because they had decided not to do anything and they were somewhat embarrassed that UNICEF was going ahead, I guess.

Jacobs: They did proceed to perceive that in this situation it was principally children who were starving, therefore, UNICEF had a special mission.

Heyward: Yes. Right, but WHO should not be turning its back on starving children or FAO either.

Jacobs: Are you suggesting it was an embarrassment or a sense of guilt that they were not acting as they should have?

Heyward: Well they would deny, I'm sure, it was guilt. They felt that

taking a proper decision , but I do have the feeling they thought that UNICEF was out of line and was not acting as a member of the United Nations family. And then, that U Thant also was not very happy about it, I think was exacerbated by this mischief-making probably. So I don't have more....

I wanted just to say the last thing on paragraph 20 where you say that UNICEF concentrated on rebuilding the roofs of schoolhouses, during reconstruction, and that was a means of getting some economic assistance to the people. In addition, I do think...

Jacobs: They also rebuilt the schoolhouses.

Heyward: Which was an extremely important point...

Jacobs: Yes, to get the children back into school before the rainy season or something like that,

Heyward: Well, to get the children back into school....yes. And then the schools were a key thing in the Biafran area. You know, that Ibo area was probably the most literate area in Nigeria.

Jacobs: Self educating people.

Heyward: Schools were a key thing to their recovery. But any sense of recovery of identity in beginning to do the things they wanted to do and wanted to do for their children. So, helping them

to rebuild the schools was, first of all, very important but it was also somewhat symbolic for some sort of reconstruction of the life that they wanted because they believed very much in education...

(Tape reversed)

Jacobs: I just want to go back and ask a couple of questions. I wasn't as familiar with what UNICEF did in 1969. A crucial crisis time came when the Red Cross airlift was shot down and the International Committee of the Red Cross could not start flying again. Can you recall how that affected UNICEF's involvements since UNICEF had been working so closely with the ICRC? Do you recall what you did or others did at that time or what you expected to happen, or what you tried to do?

Heyward: My memory, which I think that you have really covered here, but not maybe said it so explicitly, is that we had then to turn to working with the church airlift.

Jacobs: And you did. You continued to supply of food and medicine but it became increasingly stepped up from the other island of Sao Tomè.

Heyward: Right. And so, we were working rather closely with the church airlift. You mention Dr. Middelkoop, head of the Protestant Relief Operation in Biafra. Gertrude Lutz and I once attended a meeting in Rome which brought together the...

Jacobs: That was the Joint Church Aid, around November 1968, the first meeting of all the joint church relief agencies, for their airlift, together.

Heyward: Yes. And that had the Protestant Group which was particularly strong from Germany, there was a German Protestant group...

Jacobs: Das Diakonische Werk. The Lutheran Church relief agency in Germany.

Heyward: Right. And then there were very important Catholic agencies too. Miseraria. And then there was the head of the International Caritas operation in the Vatican and the Vatican was host to the meeting.

Jacobs: And the Scandinavian churches, and other churches were there. That was when they really began building up the church airlift.

Heyward: Yes.

Jacobs: Do you recall when the war ended and the collapse came? I mentioned here, the plan to get food moving through UNICEF, because it was expected there would be a delay before the now collapsed Biafra and the stricken population, who were in a very serious nutrition state, could be reached. Do you recall the conversations with the State Department about that, when Mr. Labouisse decided to go to Lagos and see what could be done and you were on the phone with Clyde Ferguson's staff?

Heyward: Clyde Ferguson also came to New York, probably he wanted to see the Secretary-General and to see us, I guess. I don't remember.

Jacobs: You don't remember the details of that -- you're going to have to wait to read my book.

Heyward: Right. I remember we were a little bit disappointed in Clyde Ferguson - what he was able to do - but I don't remember the details.

Jacobs: What actually prevented Mr. Labouisse from getting some kind of agreement there in the immediate post-war period? He was in Lagos. He went out to the area that had been stricken and, in fact, his press conference and so forth somewhat dramatized the situation. UNICEF didn't really get authorization to begin organizing relief as you had hoped.

Heyward: Well, I don't know whether actually...

Jacobs: It eventually got underway under various auspices, but it wasn't done through UNICEF, would you say?

Heyward: I think, first of all, there was a delay in any relief getting there and, partly, that was the reaction, I believe, of local commanders. We had hoped, I remember to send in materials

with Port Harcourt. I remember later on, meeting the commander of Port Harcourt...

Jacobs: Colonel Benjamin Adekunle? The Black Scorpion?

Heyward: No, I don't think it was the Black Scorpion... there was the Governor of a couple of the new,.....

Jacobs: Governor Diett-Spieff.

Heyward: Perhaps. The Governor of that area who, I would say, had a rather contemptuous attitude to the efforts to put things through Port Harcourt. He certainly wasn't going to allow that. I believe also, that there was a lot of embarrassment on the Nigerian side about the damage that had been inflicted on an armoured column that they had been trying to send into towards the Biafra heartland. They had left a lot of disabled military vehicles along the road that had been knocked out by the Biafrans, and I think that they didn't want foreigners going in and seeing that until some had been cleared away.

Jacobs: That was up in the north near Onitsha.

Heyward: Yes. That was a land route.

Jacobs: You didn't have the feeling at the time that there were people in the Nigerian Government who were reluctant to allow the relief to begin ...

Heyward: Oh, I'm sure there were. In particular, even if some people at the centre wanted it to begin, I think some of the field commanders did not.

Jacobs: Did you feel that General Gowon was a person who was quite willing to have humanitarian relief, both during the war and in the post war period when he came out for reconciliation?

Heyward: Yes, but, I mean, that's not a direct personal feeling, that's mediated through Mr. Labouisse.

Jacobs: Also that's not entirely (?), it's relevant to UNICEF's efforts to get (?) underway. Could we go to a more general question - reflecting back now on how this evolved - it's not a controllable situation, how adequate do you think UNICEF's approach was to this enormous emergency, and how you did go about doing it and what this accomplished. UNICEF certainly did a great deal more than any other UN agency under extremely difficult circumstances. Can you look back and think of things you might have done differently?

Heyward: Well, I guess the scale of operation was certainly not sufficient to deal with the problem. There was a tremendous child death in that area. I don't know of ways in which the scale could have been greatly increased by UNICEF. First of all, there was the difficulty of getting supplies and secondly there was the difficulty of the airlift. I think that the



partnership between UNICEF and the churches was an effective one, and I don't remember now things that we could have done a lot better. I've mentioned the mistake about the helicopters.

Jacobs: You think that UNICEF could not have done anything differently in terms of, if it had to work through the Red Cross, which started one airlift and through the churches, which started another airlift. But it went as far, and perhaps went further than it could go, given the restrictions set by governments and the United Nations Secretary-General and so forth. There was no way that UNICEF could have, of itself, gone into Biafra, for example. It pushed the limits, as it was?

Heyward: Well, I don't think that UNICEF could have started its own airlift - I suppose we didn't have the money and, as suggested, there would have been tremendous diplomatic difficulties about it...

Jacobs: You would have encountered resistance or been told to stop doing it, if you tried such a thing?

Heyward: I believe so.

Jacobs: So by working through the backdoor, providing a channel for food from the U.S. and so forth, to the two airlifts, you were doing ...

Heyward: I think we were doing the best we could do.

Jacobs: You were doing a great deal. You found the interstices which you could work within - is that your present view of it? You did a great deal by working out even though there were pressures upon you not to do things you did ...

Heyward: Well, I don't think that the airlifts were actually short of supplies - do you have information about that from what you ...?

Jacobs: No, they were not short of food -- UNICEF did supply a large part of the food and medicines -- and there was never a logistics shortage. I meant the overall relief effort was inadequate for the situation. But I personally don't see how UNICEF could have itself done what the Red Cross or the Church relief agencies did. I was just asking you your opinion. Whether what it did was sort of pushing the limits of what UNICEF could have done - or whether you now see things that you might have done differently?

Heyward: I think we were pushing the limits. Furthermore, because of this the sovereignty doctrine and also the universal reprobation in Africa for anybody trying to break up the state boundaries, that the Executive Board also would not have allowed greater overt actions against the sovereignty of

Nigeria. I think the Ivory Coast was the only country which did not take the view that Biafra was wrong.

Jacobs:

I have a question. In retrospect, UNICEF in the Kampuchean situation went in to Phnom Penh and began negotiating, though Phnom Penh was neither recognized by most of the governments of the world nor was it a member of the United Nations, but rather the Pol Pot regime remained the government of the United Nations. Whereas in the Nigerian situation, UNICEF felt compelled to negotiate with the Government in Lagos and could not negotiate with the Biafran regime. Is there an inconsistency here or were they different situations? Why would UNICEF have gone to Phnom Penh when it was not recognized and it was not in the UN and yet it was really ham-strung in attempting to negotiate access to Biafra precisely because they felt they had to go to the Nigerian Government?

Heyward:

Well, in the case of Phnom Penh, also, we were working in partnership with the International Committee of the Red Cross which helped give some diplomatic cover. Secondly, what we were negotiating with Phnom Penh was not so different in substance from what was being negotiated with Biafra. There were operational matters. However, in the case of Biafra, it was other people who were there, it was the churches and the Red Cross...

Jacobs: They pre-empted the field so to speak? They were on the scene, so you let them do what they were doing?

Heyward: There were some UNICEF staff members who went into Biafra for operational reasons, I remember...

Jacobs: Three and a consultant.

Heyward: Right. So, in the case of Phnom Penh also the Pol Pot government was not an active government. I mean, that was diplomatic fiction.

Jacobs: But Biafra was more of a government than the Pol Pot government? There was an existing state there with considerable...

Heyward: Oh, yes, they were working there just as we were working with Phnom Penh. But you say we dealt with them more through our partners than with Phnom Penh.

Jacobs: So it was more happenstance. You proceeded to do what you could do at the time under the circumstances, but I shouldn't look for logical consistency in terms of international law or anything here?

Heyward: I don't think so.

Jacobs: At the end of the war after...

Heyward: But in the case of Phnom Penh there was more of a vacuum in negotiation. I think your phrase before maybe covered that, that the others, that the Red Cross and the churches were already in there...

Jacobs: They'd been there and doing things before...

Heyward: Yes. Whereas in the case of Phnom Penh ...

Jacobs: Nobody was in there.

Heyward: Right. And so the UNICEF representative and, I think, the Red Cross person went together to open the discussion.

Jacobs: When this was all concluded, the International Committee of the Red Cross, which had - I will say in my own opinion - been dealt with very badly by governments, as compared with UNICEF which didn't have the same kind of problems that the Red Cross had had, went through a period of self-appraisal specifically because of the experience they had in Nigeria. They had outside consultants come in and study how they'd done things. They decided upon certain reforms that were recommended and they underwent quite a few changes since then in their operational approaches. I don't believe that UNICEF ever had that feeling that it needed to reappraise the way it went

about dealing with emergencies. Though, I think there may have been a time at the beginning of 1970 when you sought to earmark staff around the world who would be available for emergencies, or something like that? But was it a general sense of a conclusion of that Nigerian/Biafran situation that UNICEF had done rather well? Or had done the best it could and there was no need to reappraise UNICEF's way of operating in this kind of disaster or emergency?

Heyward: Well, there probably was an undue amount of self-satisfaction. However, I think that the question of how to deal with emergencies in an operational way has been a continuous problem for the reasons you just said, about how to liberate staff for that purpose. It doesn't seem to be possible - at least, the idea of having people set aside just to be ready to go in on an emergency has never been accepted.

Jacobs: You mean, by the representatives who they work for? Or what is the problem?

Heyward: No, I mean, to have a team who was not doing something else but is ready to go in on short notice.

Jacobs: I thought they were staff members who have had experience in emergencies who are doing their regular job and suddenly have to be pulled out on short notice?

Heyward: Right. That is the lame solution which we work for, and it's

lame because, first of all, it is hard to get them out quickly...

Jacobs: ...or they are involved in preparing recommendations to the Board and so on?

Heyward: Yes, and I don't know that we have so many of them anymore. But we never thought it was practical, either financially or even in human terms, to have a group of people sitting around waiting to be sent in to an emergency. And, as you know, I'm sure you remember the Executive Board has never been very keen on UNICEF's emergency action. The Executive Directors, well, certainly Mr. Labouisse, took a very strong interest in emergencies. The Board always thought it was necessary to try to tell him he shouldn't be dealing with emergencies. He should be dealing with long-term programmes.

Jacobs: Was it from 1965 on, there was a policy position that UNICEF must not involve itself too deeply in emergencies but should only get in for the minimal time that was needed to get emergency relief underway and then should turn its attention to the rehabilitation of children's services. Was that principally a Board decision in '65? Or were...

Heyward: Don't pin me down to which date it was...

Jacobs: Well, it seems that over at least a 15-year period or longer that this was UNICEF's policy, right?

Heyward: Right.

Jacobs: And it was during the time we're speaking of, Nigeria/Biafra.

Heyward: And the Board lay down that policy and has always been laying down such policies, I mean, right up to now. And, has further stated that UNICEF's general resources should not be used for emergency relief. The emergency should depend on special contributions coming from governments - that is a more recent elaboration of the doctrine which would mean that in the case of Biafra you would not get any special contributions because the governments wouldn't be willing to give for a rebellious area that was universally condemned.

Jacobs: I don't recall, was this a problem? Governments did contribute somewhat - didn't they to UNICEF's emergencies - or was it a limited number?

Heyward: Well, as you record, we got some food at some time and...

Jacobs: Food, yes, but there was a financial shortage, I take it at the time -- the National Committees were very much involved - they worked very hard in the Biafran situation.

Heyward: Yes, because the Biafra's public information in Europe was very well organized and public opinion was very strong. So, the National Committees were very strong. But had we at that



time depended - as the Board now thinks we should - solely on special government contributions to do emergency work, we wouldn't have got much for this.

Jacobs: So, to conclude - apart from questions I just asked, do you have any further final reflections on what UNICEF learned or might have learned from this Nigeria/Biafra experience?

Heyward: Well, I'd just like to continue with what I was saying that this it is also the developing countries which are against emergency work, since...

Jacobs: You mean in general or the one which is taking place at the time of this ...

Heyward: In general, in general!

Jacobs: In general, they oppose UNICEF when it starts doing any humanitarian ...

Heyward: Well, they think the resources should be used for long term work and they think that it is a -- I'm exaggerating perhaps - but my perception is, that they feel the concern of emergencies is a concern of industrialized countries with a much higher income level. They really can't afford to be concerned with emergencies. And industrialized countries are concerned with emergencies because they don't want to help the development of the developing countries but they're willing to

help with emergencies. So, there is a conflict there between the developing countries and the industrialized countries. And, therefore, since the developing countries representing more or less the receiving end in the Board, would not want - they don't want the emergency work to be played up.

Jacobs: They don't want it to interfere with development?

Heyward: Right. And they thought several times that too much attention from UNICEF was going to that and too much of UNICEF time.

Jacobs: Do you think that in the Biafran situation too much of your time, - Mr Labouisse, Mr. Heyward, Charles Egger - was devoted to that emergency. Was it an enormous drain on your own attention to your regular work? Has this new present-day, 1980s, arrangement for an emergency unit overcome that or will it always be necessary for UNICEF's top executives to attend to something which is both very urgent and also puts the future reputation of the organization in great danger?

Heyward: I don't think the setting up a unit can avoid the involvement of the senior staff, where there is an emergency of any size there are political problems. So, the question of the amount of time taken is serious question.

Jacobs: It was at that time, a great drain on your time ...

Heyward: It was at that time.

Jacobs: And also on your emotions...

Heyward: And Mr. Labouisse's, and a number of other people in the organization who were working almost full-time on those arrangements which often had to be broken down and had to be re-thought out and re-arranged. So its true, it takes a lot of time. And, it is a question whether you can ignore that in the interests of long-term development. Personally, I don't think that UNICEF could or should ignore it - because those are things that are happening right now and have to be dealt with, I think. But that is an arguable position. Many of the developing countries, and many of our staff that come from developing countries, don't feel that way.

Jacobs: Did you think, during the time the Nigeria/Biafra crisis was on, or do you think now, that UNICEF's reputation as the agency for children in the world was at stake, either on two directions: either because it couldn't achieve enough to help the children, which would put it in bad repute with the public, or because it was trying to do too much, and therefore, would antagonize either the United Nations or other national governments. Was this a serious concern during the war and during the effort to do something?

Heyward: No, I don't think that we were so concerned with the image problem.



ATTACHMENT TO HEYWARD/JACOBS  
INTERVIEW.

## UNICEF

UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND  
FONDS DES NATIONS UNIES POUR L'ENFANCE

### INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: E.J.R. Heyward

DATE: ~~July 21, 1983~~

FROM: Dan Jacobs

FILE NO.: \_\_\_\_\_

SUBJECT: Oral History interview on UNICEF in Nigeria-Biafra.

As we discussed, here are some key points to help refresh your recollection.

1.) UNICEF and ICRC, together, sought to obtain authorization from the Nigerian Government, beginning in autumn 1967, to provide relief impartially on both sides of the conflict. One flight was authorized in November 1967. Sasha Bacic and an ICRC representative negotiated in December 1967 in Lagos and an agreement was achieved on December 28th. A series of problems arose over the ensuing months preventing the start of relief flights. Finally, April 10, 1968, the Federal Military Government sent a note to the ICRC stating that if it did proceed to fly at night it would be doing so at "its own risk". Eleven flights then carried in 105 tons of powdered milk and vitamin capsules, supplied by UNICEF, and a like amount was provided for distribution on the Federal side before the FMG declared the April 10th authorization "null and void".

2.) By late Spring 1968, reports from Biafra indicated a rapidly worsening condition in the nutritional status of children. UNICEF representatives in Lagos informed headquarters of the attitude of Nigerian Government officials. By early July, sudden news and media attention aroused public opinion. UNICEF was assured by the chargé of the Nigerian Mission to the UN that the agreement of the previous December was still valid; and UNICEF renewed its efforts. Food was requested from the U.S. Government. Mr. Labouisse went to Lagos and, at the same time, sent Willy Meyer into Biafra. You, in New York,

Jacobs: But I thought it went beyond image. I meant the future as an agency, how we were accepted or rejected? You don't think that entered into the discussion?

Heyward: Maybe it did. It does enter into discussion now. Emergencies that get mentioned in The New York Times in a big way get more attention than those that don't, which is very unfortunate, because there is pressure from public opinion of the type that you, you said from National Committees - which also existed in this case quite strongly.

Jacobs: Anything more to say?

End

of

interview.

began meetings with volags, such as CRS and CWS, while Charles Egger went to Geneva to maintain liaison with the ICRC. ICRC had been named Coordinator of all relief. Other relief agencies were being urged by governments to coordinate under the Red Cross and there was a hold-up on starting the relief operation while the ICRC awaited the outcome of the negotiations being carried on by Amb. August Lindt, who had been appointed High Commissioner for Relief. You were concerned about the ICRC's logistical capability. During the time Mr. Labouisse was in Lagos, it was difficult for you and Charles Egger to communicate with him candidly as he had not taken along an encoding machine as the UN Secretariat had suggested.

3.) During this waiting period, the U.S. Government having granted UNICEF's first request for 5,000 tons of P.L. 480 foods within four days, then held up before granting the second 5,000 tons for 45 days. You were concerned about the possibility of a longshoreman's strike in the East and Gulf Coast ports in September. You prepared "Guestimates" of needs in Nigeria and Biafra.

4.) UNICEF retained Robert Robards to mount a helicopter operation to provide relief in the Eastern Region of Nigeria. (It was not known whether Mr. Labouisse had made a request to the U.S. Government for helicopters through the U.S. Mission in Geneva before leaving for Lagos. He had, but in September it was turned down by the State Department as not being the most economical way of moving food.)

5.) You actively sought C-130s from a number of Governments, in the event that authorization for an airlift should be obtained. An initiative you took that opened up a possibility of obtaining aircraft from the U.S. Government, through the

Office of the Vice-President and the White House, foundered on the decision of Roger Gallopin of the ICRC to use the ICRC's customary diplomatic channels to governments.

6.) UNICEF faced serious problems in making appeals for funds, as the Nigerian Mission to the UN insisted that UNICEF not use the word "Biafra". UNICEF, having tied itself to the ICRC which was lagging in starting relief, faced problems of its future credibility as an agency assisting children.

7.) Mr. Labouisse, after conferring with General Gowon and other Nigerian Government officials, travelled in the SE of Nigeria and observed conditions there. Upon his return to Geneva, he held a press conference. You joined him there for discussions with the ICRC and other relief agencies. Amb. Lindt returned from Nigeria and Biafra and encountered great anger from some National Red Cross Societies, church relief agencies and the international press corps in Geneva. There were consultations on what to do if either Biafra or Nigeria did not agree to the plan to begin relief flights into the demilitarized, neutralized airstrip at Obilagu. When the Federal Military Government refused, the ICRC made the decision to begin flights anyway, without authorization.

8.) The church relief agencies began an airlift at the end of August, based on Count von Rosen's Transair blockade-breaking flight, and the Red Cross began flying at night September 4th. UNICEF off-loaded a portion (1,800 tons) of the first shipment of U.S. donated food at Sao Tome, before sending the rest on to Lagos, thus starting the supply of P.L. 480 food to the church airlift.

9.) Willy Meyer was stricken upon his return from Biafra and the draft of his report assessing needs there not found till

months later. You sent George Orick to Biafra to assess the situation and to see what could be done about improving the logistics of the relief operation.

10.) One helicopter was shot down when approaching Benin Airport, but the other began operating out of Calabar in the area around Ikot Ekpene. Robards set about to procure three more helicopters to build up the relief operation in that area.

11.) Concern that collapse of Biafra might result in resort to guerrilla warfare, leading to worse conditions for the stricken population, prompted you to start a search for various kinds of aircraft more suited for air-dropping (including the LAPSE system) in the eventuality that Uli airstrip would no longer be available. Also, Mr. Labouisse, upon his return to Geneva September 1st, agreed with ICRC to seek C-130s, so that search went on for a number of months. General Tunner was sent to assess the airlifts and was appalled at what he found.

12.) UNICEF over the subsequent months became a major supplier of both airlifts, as well as the relief operation on the Federal side, with medical kits from UNIPAC being a major item. UNICEF became a backdoor channel for U.S. provision of P.L. 480 foods to the two airlifts. Both UNICEF and ICRC faced serious shortages of funds if an operation on the scale needed were to be mounted and sustained over a long period of time. Governments had expected the war would end by mid-September, but the French began supplying arms and ammunition to Biafra and the war did not end on schedule.

13.) George Orick returned from Biafra with an assessment that,



while until now there had been protein starvation affecting mainly children, by the end of 1968 there could be an exhaustion of carbohydrates within the besieged enclave putting the entire population at risk. Dr. Herman Middelkoop, head of the Protestant relief operation in Biafra, cabled Secretary-General Thant that the starvation rate might soon rise to 25,000 a day.

14.) Orick obtained from the U.S. Government financing of P.L. 480 foods through to their final destination, which meant that the U.S. Government became the principal financier of both airlifts, thereby easing the financial crisis the Red Cross and the church relief agencies had been facing.

15.) In December, the U.S. Government provided C-97Gs to both airlifts, which made possible building up the tonnages by the following March and April to a level that began to bring about an easing of the malnutrition of children in Biafra. Before this happened, however, there had been interruptions in the Red Cross airlift by the new Government of Equatorial Guinea on Fernando Po.

16.) By early 1969, UNICEF's role in the relief operation became regularized with a Task Force, chaired by Fred Hamilton, meeting regularly to oversee the continuing supply of food and medicine to the airlifts. During this experience, other relief agencies came to rely upon the UNIPAC warehouse as a source of emergency supplies, which created a sense of goodwill and cooperation between them and UNICEF. George Marr was later in the year sent into Biafra to assess medical needs. On the Federal side, the operation during the early part of the year became more effective, but the ICRC was under constant pressure from the Nigerian Government to turn over the relief

operation to the Nigerian Red Cross. UNICEF was faced with the question whether to continue its helicopter operation in Southeast Nigeria.

17.) A Red Cross airplane was shot down on June 5, 1969. Amb. Lindt was declared persona non grata by the Nigerian Government. At the end of June, the Federal Military Government ousted ICRC as "co-ordinator" of all relief. ICRC became tied up in negotiations over "daylight flights into Uli" and never began its airlift again. Joint Church Aid cautiously began flying again and eventually built up its airlift till it was eventually -- toward the end of 1969 -- flying in almost as much tonnage as the two airlifts combined had during the peak in April-May. The proposal C. Clyde Ferguson (the U.S. President's Special Coordinator for Relief) had begun for a Cross River route got nowhere.

18.) Biafra began to collapse on January 10th, and it appeared that relief might not begin for some time. A plan was set in motion to build up the UNICEF relief operation in Nigeria by channeling U.S., Canadian and British relief through UNICEF. Mr. Labouisse met with the Nigerian Ambassador to the UN, then flew to Lagos to meet with General Gowon. However the U.S. State Department set about to block this plan and persuaded the Under-Secretary of State not to provide the planes, helicopters and other supplies UNICEF had requested.

19.) Mr. Labouisse met with General Gowon and visited the stricken former region of Biafra, reporting in press conferences and on television about the dire nutritional situation of the people in the area. However relief did not get underway in any quantity, until some weeks after the

end of the war, then only at a level considerably less than estimated as needed. Les Tepley, visiting the area in April, found considerable kwashiorkor amongst the children, and you, visiting later in December, found a situation that still was less than satisfactory.

20.) During the reconstruction phase, UNICEF concentrated on rebuilding the roofs of school houses. This provided a means of getting some economic assistance to the people who had not received the limited financial means they had been expecting.

1  
2  
3

