SUBJECT: GOWON PRESS CONFERENCE

1. FOLLOWING RETURN OF LARGE INTERNATIONAL PRESS PARTY FROM VISIT TO FORMER BATTLE AREA, GOWON MET WITH THE PRESS FOR AN HOUR AND TEN MINUTES.

2. HE FIRST READ PREPARED STATEMENT (SUMMARY TO FOLLOW), THEN ANSWERED QUESTIONS FOR APPROXIMATELY ONE HOUR.

3. MAJOR THEMES RUNNING THROUGH BOTH STATEMENT AND RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS WERE: FMG REGARDS RELIEF AS NIGERIAN PROBLEM TO BE SOLVED BY NIGERIANS; NIGERIAN PROBLEMS COMPLICATED BY FOREIGNERS THINKING THEY UNDERSTAND NIGERIANS OR AFRICANS BETTER THAN WE DO OURSELVES; FMG QTE NOT INFALLIBLE; FMG QTE NOT RPT NOT SHORTCOMINGS BUT
Nigerians honestly doing their best meet relief needs; qte those who genuinely want to help will receive a ready welcome qte. He made it clear press free to file what they wanted but rather bitterly noted he expected that in next few weeks some would qte belittle our efforts qte.

4. Following are Gowon's responses to most important questions: on reopening Uli airstrip, he noted Port Harcourt, Enugu and Calabar had been designated for relief flights and ruled out use of Uli by saying it had been too much qte in international politics qte.

5. Regarding U. S. Aircraft, he confined himself to saying qte it being considered qte.

6. On starvation, he recognized it was qte gigantic problem, but we have not rpt not underestimated it qte. Said he told field commanders they responsible for relief as soon as areas they had taken were secure.

7. In response to emotional statement that virtually no Nigerian aid getting into ex-enclave (questioner described inefficient Nigerian army relief efforts at Owerri and called condition of 500 Rivers children in Port Harcourt qte worst than Belsen qte), Gowon flared. Gowon reiterated FMG doing its best; said he had despatched state governors Johnson and Gomwalk to affected area and they had seen nothing to justify such a conclusion. Finally, he charged questioner with suggesting that Europeans want to come in to do relief job Nigerians themselves determined to do. Gowon made it abundantly clear any such suggestion most unacceptable. On qte future of Nigerian people qte, Gowon simply replied that policy was to insure that qte all inhabitants, irrespective of ethnic origin, could feel secure and happy qte.

8. On Ojukwu: qte wait until he gives himself up qte; however, implication was probably no amnesty.

9. On role of missionaries, Gowon was flexible.
INDICATING THAT WHEREVER FIELD COMMANDERS BELIEVED INDIVIDUALS
WERE DOING GOOD WORK, COMMANDER HAD DISCRETION TO LET
THAT INDIVIDUAL CONTINUE WORKING. WITH RESPECT STATUS
CATHOLIC PRIESTS NOW IN PORT HARCOURT, GOWON SAID
EACH CASE WOULD BE CONSIDERED ON ITS MERITS, I.E., HAD
THE INDIVIDUAL ENTERED THE COUNTRY LEGALLY AND WHAT
WHAT HIS ROLE DURING REBELLION?

10. WITH REGARD TO FUTURE RELATIONS TO FRANCE AND
OTHER COUNTRIES WHO RECOGNIZED REBELS, GOWON SAID QTE
BALL IN THEIR COURT UNQUOTE. IMPLIED FIRST MOVE UP TO ZAMBIA,
AND TANZANIA TO RESTORE RELATIONS. ON FRANCE,
SAID THEY HAD BEEN QTE VERY PROVOCATIVE UNQUOTE, SUPPORTED
REBELLION AND HAD DONE THINGS QTE NO SOVEREIGN NATION
COULD TOLERATE UNQUOTE. HE SAID THAT EXCHANGE OF BIAFRAN
CURRENCY FOR FEDERAL QTE WOULD SOON TAKE PLACE UNQUOTE
AND THAT GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS CONCERNED WERE
WORKING OUT DETAILS. REALIZED IT MUST BE DONE QUICKLY.

11. IN ANSWER QUESTIONS REGARDING WHEREABOUTS OF
EFFIONG AND OTHERS WHO CAME TO SURRENDER, GOWON
DENIED THEY ARRESTED, AND SAID THEY CURRENTLY SHUTTLING
BETWEEN PORT HARCOURT, OWERRI AND ENUGU IN ORDER REASSURE
CIVILIAN POPULATION. QTE IF WE HAD WANTED TO BE
BRUTAL TO THEM THERE COULD HAVE BEEN EXECUTIONS
ALREADY UNQUOTE.

12. ON ALLEGED MOLESTATION OF CIVILIANS, GOWON
REPLIED INDIRECTLY BY SAYING FMG WILLING TO ACCEPT
HONEST CRITICISM. WHEN HE FIRST HEARD SUCH REPORTS
THIS MORNING HE CALLED OBASANJO. HE SUGGESTED
THAT QUESTIONER QTE DIDN'T SEE WHAT HE EXPECTED TO
SEE UNQUOTE NAMELY GENOCIDE AND MASS ATROCITIES UNQUOTE.
GOWON POINTED OUT THERE UNPLEASANT INCIDENTS IN ALL
WARS AND IN THIS CONNECTION ALLUDED TO VIETNAM.

13. REGARDING CHARGES THAT ARMY COMMANDEERING ICRC VEHICLES, GOWON
DENIED THIS, SAYING HE AWARE HOWEVER THAT SOME
RIVERS CIVILIANS, WHO HAD BEEN DETAINED BY REBELS, ARE
UNDERSTOOD TO HAVE TAKEN VEHICLES REBELS HID IN BUSH
WHEN THEY RELEASED.
14. ON FUTURE OR RELIEF AGENCIES, GOWON SAID THAT ANY ORGANIZATION WHICH DELIBERATELY DEFIED US OR DARED US TO SHOOT THEM DOWN UNACCOUNTABLE WILL HAVE TO ANSWER FOR LOSS OF LIFE AS THEY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROLONGING THE WAR.

15. COMMENT: GOWON, WHO FLANKED BY ADMIRAL WEY, STATE GOVERNORS JOHNSON AND GOMWALK, INSPECTOR-GENERAL OF POLICE, AND INFO COMMISSIONER ENAHOR, FULLY IN CHARGE THROUGHTOUT CONFERENCE. AT TIMES JOCLAR, HE MOST SERIOUS AND SENSITIVE TO CHARGES OF NIGERIAN INDIFFERENCE AND OR INCOMPETENCE ON RELIEF ISSUES.