

Pilots expose Pat Robertson's 'charity' operations in Zaire

by Anton Chaitkin

Pilots who flew over 100 supposed "charity" missions in Zaire for Pat Robertson have told *EIR* that the televangelist used most of the flights to run a diamond-hunting scheme. In interviews on May 7 with this reporter, pilots Robert Hinkle and Tahir Brohi described their 1994-95 flights in Caribou cargo aircraft, a fleet purchased with funds donated to Robertson's "Operation Blessing." Contributors to that tax-exempt charity were told they were paying for the evangelization and medical relief of suffering Africans.

From approximately August 1994 through September 1995, the "Operation Blessing" cargo planes actually carried equipment and supplies for the river-dredging of diamonds, on behalf of the African Development Company. Pat Robertson, as the sole owner, had chartered that company in Bermuda in July 1992. It suspended operations in October 1995. Before then, chief pilot Hinkle had quit in disgust at Robertson's fraud and deception.

Hinkle told *EIR* that he flew about 40 missions for the Robertson organization, which was headquartered in Goma, Zaire. Hinkle set up the cargo-flying operation and hired others, including pilot Tahir Brohi, a British national. Hinkle told of his flights from N'jili airport near Kinshasa, and from N'dolo, around 15 miles away, to Tshikapa some 200 miles into the interior and 60-70 miles from the Angola border.

Hinkle observed Robertson's attempts to pick diamonds out of fast-flowing river currents; when he failed to get much more than industrial-grade diamonds, Robertson launched legal action against the U.S. company that had supplied the mechanical dredging equipment.

The diamond hunting was in the vicinity of the Zaire-Angola border. Hinkle said that he had heard Robertson's aides discussing the possibility of buying diamonds from smugglers operating between Angola and Zaire.

In one instance, Hinkle recalled, he flew Robertson into a landing in Angola. On that trip, he told *EIR*, Robertson discussed with Angolans the prospects for Robertson's project to rebuild a railroad from mineral-rich Shaba province, Zaire, through to the Atlantic Ocean port in Lobito, Angola. The *Wall Street Journal* reported on April 30 that Max Boule, boss of the Canadian-based American Mineral Fields mining

company—which is plundering Zaire on behalf of the British Empire's Anglo American Corporation—has asked Robertson to go back into action with the Shaba-Lobito rail link project. The *Journal* reported that Boule holds the position that "anyone able to win a concession to rehabilitate and run the railroad could make a fortune if Zaire's copper and cobalt industries are revived." The *Journal* quoted a spokesman for Robertson, with respect to this project: "Mr. Robertson's main concern is for the spiritual needs of the Zairean people."

Pilot Tahir Brohi, who flew for Robertson from November 1994 through September 1995, told *EIR* that he made "one or two flights a week." The majority of these, Brohi said, were related to the diamond dredging, including carrying food for the dredge operating crew. One of Brohi's flight bases was the Zaire port city of Matadi on the Congo River. In one of the few flights actually made for the legitimate purpose of medical relief, Brohi said, he piloted a plane into Kikwit during an epidemic of Ebola virus, at considerable apparent risk to the crew.

'I asked George Bush's advice'

Robertson reacted to criticism of his diamond ventures in a guest column in the Richmond, Virginia *Times-Dispatch* on Feb. 1, 1997. Robertson explained that his entire Zaire operation was undertaken on President George Bush's request. He wrote, "Before a visit to Zaire, I met with George Bush in the White House and asked his advice." Bush told him he should go into business in Zaire, allegedly, according to Robertson's story, in order to save Zaire's government.

"I brought with me," Robertson wrote, "a former under-secretary of state from the Bush administration for the purpose of advising [Zaire's President] Mobutu [Sese Seko] on fiscal and monetary issues. . . . I personally met with the Cabinet of Zaire and warned them that if they continued printing money there would be runaway inflation with rioting and looting in the streets."

Robertson "evangelized" with advice to lay off workers and to give away the national patrimony to foreign looters. "I . . . analyzed the . . . Gecamine copper mines, where I discovered 16,000 surplus workers . . . [and] the government-owned Kilomoto gold mines, where 3,300 workers produced a pitiful [quantity] . . . of gold . . . and the government-owned industrial diamond facility in Mbuji-Mayi, where I discovered production limping along at 50% of peak capacity."

Robertson wrote, "My own company, African Development Co. . . . secured the concessions from the government." Though the diamond operation allegedly failed because of "American dredging equipment that was poorly constructed . . . and . . . the internal chaos in the country," Robertson asserted, "one thing really worked." "Through our television, radio, and evangelistic meetings, more than 4 million people in Zaire have accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior."