

VIOLENCE AGAINST  
KOSOVAR ALBANIANS,  
NATO'S INTERVENTION  
1998-1999

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# FOREWORD

This publication is part of the “Médecins Sans Frontières Speaking Out” case studies series prepared in response to the MSF International Council’s wish to provide the movement with literature on MSF *témoignage* (advocacy).

The idea was to create a reference document that would be straightforward and accessible to all and help volunteers understand and adopt the organization’s culture of speaking out.

It was not to be an ideological manual or a set of guidelines. *Témoignage* cannot be reduced to a mechanical application of rules and procedures as it involves an understanding of the dilemmas inherent in every instance of humanitarian action.

The International Council assigned the project to a director of studies, who in turn works with an editorial committee composed of MSF representatives chosen by the International Board for their experience and expertise. They serve in their capacity as individuals and do not represent their national sections.

Faced with the difficulty of defining the term *témoignage*, the editorial committee decided to focus the series on case studies in which speaking out posed a dilemma for MSF and thus meant taking a risk.

Key information sources -MSF volunteers’ written and oral recollections — are reconstructed by highlighting documents from the period concerned and interviewing the main actors.

The individuals interviewed are chosen from lists prepared by the operational sections involved in each case. Speaking in the language they choose, these individuals offer both their account of events and their assessment of MSF’s response. The interviews are recorded and transcribed.

Document searches are conducted in the operational sections’ archives and, as far as possible, press archives.

The research is constrained by practical and financial issues, including locating interviewees and securing their agreement and determining the existence, quality and quantity of archived materials.

The methodology aims at establishing the facts and setting out a chronological presentation of the positions adopted at the time. It enables the reconstruction of debates and dilemmas without pre-judging the quality of the decisions made.

The main text describes events in chronological order. It includes excerpts from documents and interviews, linked by brief introductions and transitional passages. We rely on document extracts to establish the facts as MSF described and perceived them at the time. When documentation is missing, interviews sometimes fill the gaps. These accounts also provide a human perspective on the events and insight into the key players’ analyses.

Preceding the main texts collected, the reader will find a map, a list of abbreviations and an introduction that lays out the context of MSF’s public statements and the key dilemmas they sought to address.

In addition, a detailed chronology reconstructs MSF’s actions and public statements in regional and international news reports of the period.

Each case study was written in French and translated into English and is available in both languages.<sup>1</sup>

**These case studies were essentially designed as an educational tool for associative members of the organisation. With the hope of broadening their educational scope the studies are now being made available to the public for free, on the website [www.speakingout.msf.org](http://www.speakingout.msf.org), the various English and French-language websites of individual sections of Médecins Sans Frontières, and on Google Book.**

We hope you find them useful.

The Editorial Committee.

September 2013

# CONTENTS

<b>Abbreviations</b> .....	page 6
<b>Maps</b> .....	page 7
<b>People interviewed and their position at the time of the events</b> .....	page 9
<b>Introduction</b> .....	page 10
<b>Violence against Kosovar Albanians, NATO's intervention 1998-1999</b> .....	page 13
• MSF moves into emergency mode .....	page 18
• MSF decides it is time to speak out .....	page 28
• The first eyewitness accounts collected by MSF are published in the press .....	page 50
• The Racak massacre increases tension... ..	page 62
• Divergences within MSF over NATO's possible intervention .....	page 77
• MSF starts collecting eyewitness statements from refugees .....	page 93
• MSF insists there is no thing as a 'humanitarian' war.....	page 97
• Media visibility and the realities of our operations .....	page 104
• The question of funding from NATO countries.....	page 111
• MSF alert to the confusion between the military and humanitarian interventions and the protection of refugees .....	page 121
• How to use the eyewitness accounts? .....	page 146
• MSF insists on refugee protection .....	page 162
• Publication of the MSF report "Kosovo-accounts of a deportation" .....	page 178
• The Greeks go it alone .....	page 195
• Again, MSF insists on assistance and protection.....	page 214
• An awaited, media covered return to Kosovo .....	page 237
• The Nobel Peace Prize and the 'collateral damage' of the Kosovo crisis.....	page 263
• Epilogue	
<b>Chronology of events</b> .....	page 277

# ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ACF</b>	Action contre la faim (Action Against Hunger)	<b>MDM</b>	Médecins du Monde (Doctors of the World)
<b>AGCD</b>	Administration générale de la coopération au développement (Belgium)	<b>MT</b>	Mother Teresa (Albanian NGO)
<b>AFP</b>	Agence France-press	<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
<b>AI</b>	Amnesty international	<b>OFDA</b>	Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance
<b>AP</b>	Associated press	<b>OSCE</b>	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
<b>CIDA</b>	Canadian International Development Agency	<b>PHR</b>	Physicians for human rights
<b>CIMIC</b>	Civil Military Cooperation	<b>USAID</b>	United State Agency for International Development
<b>CPAS</b>	Centre public d'action sociale (Belgium)	<b>SHAPE</b>	Supreme Headquarters Allied Power in Europe
<b>CRS</b>	Catholic relief service	<b>START II</b>	Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty
<b>DRC</b>	Disaster Relief Committee	<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children Fund
<b>ECHO</b>	European Community Humanitarian Office	<b>WFP</b>	World Food Program
<b>EPI</b>	Expanded Program of Immunisation	<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organisation
<b>FEMA</b>	Federal Emergency Agency	<b>ET</b>	Emergency team (MSF)
<b>IFHR</b>	International Federation for Human Rights	<b>HAD</b>	Humanitarian Affairs Department (MSF Hollande)
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Committee for Refugees	<b>IDPs</b>	Displaced persons
<b>HRW</b>	Human Rights Watch	<b>IO</b>	International office (MSF)
<b>ICRC</b>	International Committee of Red Cross	<b>IC</b>	International Council (MSF)
<b>IFRC</b>	International Federation of Red Cross	<b>MOU</b>	Memorandum of understanding
<b>IMC</b>	International Medical Corps	<b>Sitrep</b>	Situation report
<b>IRC</b>	International Rescue Committee	<b>MSF B</b>	MSF Belgium
<b>IPTY</b>	International Penal Tribunal For former Yugoslavia	<b>MSF CH</b>	MSF Switzerland
<b>KFOR</b>	Kosovo Peace Force	<b>MSF F</b>	MSF France
<b>KDOM</b>	Kosovo Diplomatic Observation Mission	<b>MSF G</b>	MSF Greece
<b>KIC</b>	Kosovo Information Center	<b>MSF H</b>	MSF Holland
<b>KVM</b>	Kosovo Verification Mission	<b>MSF S</b>	MSF Spain
<b>KLA</b>	Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK in Albanian)	<b>MSF UK</b>	MSF United Kingdom
<b>LDK</b>	Ligue démocratique du Kosovo	<b>MSF USA</b>	MSF United States



Extract from MSF archives or press clippings.



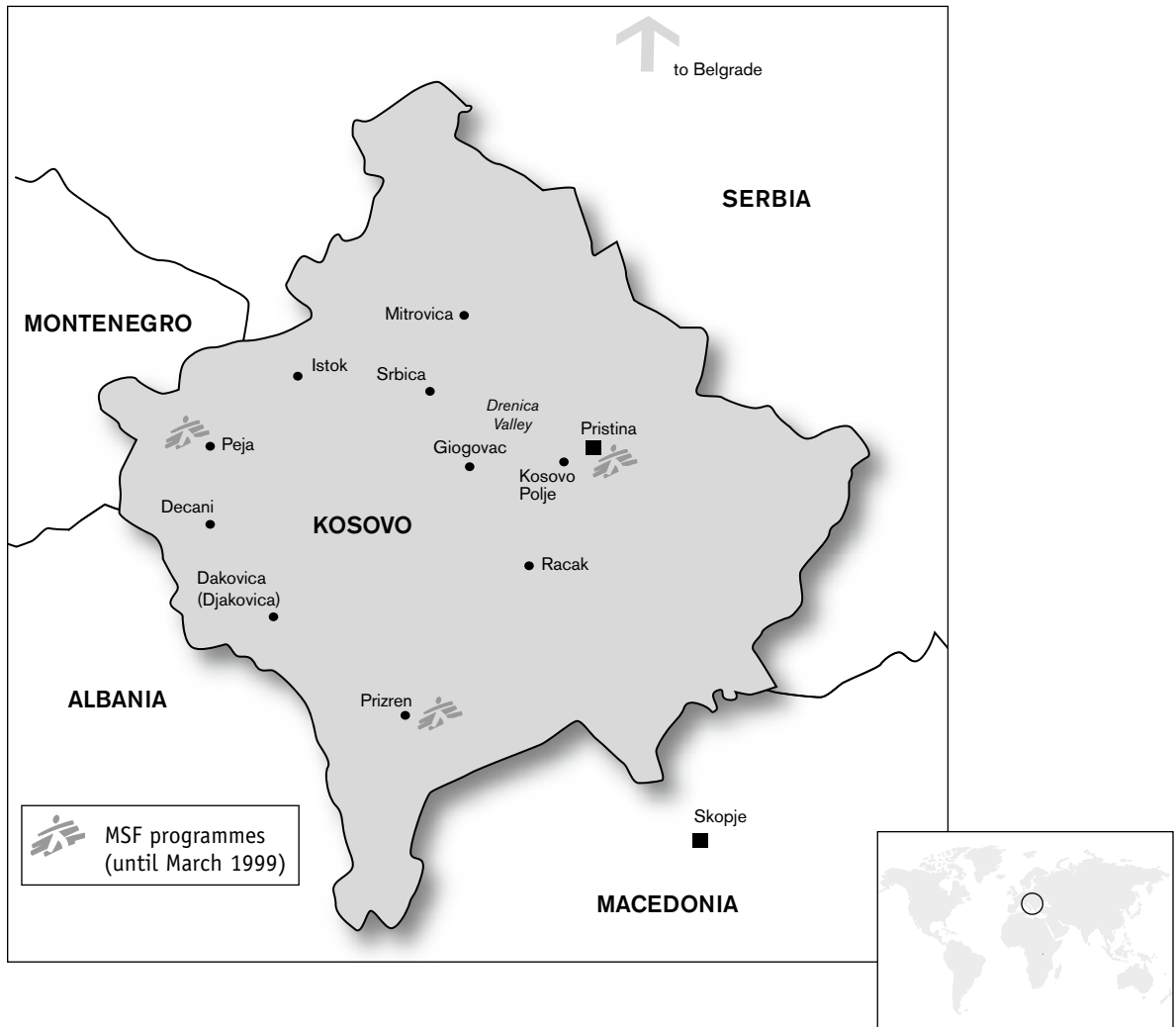
Extract from interviews conducted in 2000, 2001, 2002, and in 2003 with people who participated in and/or witnessed the events.



Click to access the reference material list.  
Then click on the referring number to access  
the full document.



Click to access the reference material list.  
Then click on the referring number to access  
the video.







# PEOPLE INTERVIEWED AND THEIR POSITION AT THE TIME OF THE EVENTS

<b>Dr. Philippe Biberson,</b>	President, MSF France
<b>Samantha Bolton,</b>	Communications Coordinator, MSF International
<b>Dr. Odysseas Boudouris,</b>	President, MSF Greece (denied that his interview is maintained in the public version of this study)
<b>Tim Boucher,</b>	Coordinator MSF Belgium/France in Kosovo from June 1998 to April 1999
<b>Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier,</b>	MSF Legal Advisor
<b>Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol,</b>	Director of Operations, MSF France
<b>Dr. Rony Brauman,</b>	Director of Studies, MSF France Foundation
<b>Dr. Vincent Brown,</b>	Epidemiologist, Epicentre
<b>Katrien Coppens,</b>	Humanitarian Affairs Department MSF Holland
<b>Dr. Eric Dachy,</b>	Programme Manager MSF Belgium
<b>Dr. Olivier Dechevrens,</b>	President MSF Suisse
<b>Anouk Delafortrie,</b>	Communication Officer, MSF Belgium
<b>[...],</b>	MSF Deputy Legal Advisor
<b>Thierry Durand,</b>	Director of Operations, MSF Switzerland/MSF Greece Operational Centre
<b>Antoine Gérard,</b>	Director of Programmes, MSF USA
<b>Graziella Godain,</b>	Deputy Programme Manager, MSF France
<b>Michiel Hofman,</b>	Coordinator MSF Holland in Macedonia, mid April - May 1999
<b>Anne-Marie Huby,</b>	Executive Director, MSF United Kingdom
<b>Dr. Vincent Janssens,</b>	Director of Operations, MSF Belgium
<b>Bénédicte Jeannerod,</b>	Communications Officer MSF France
<b>Hereklea Kalzetioki,</b>	Human Resources officer, MSF Greece
<b>Jean-Marie Kindermans,</b>	Secretary General, MSF International
<b>Michaël Neuman,</b>	MSF Officer-in-Charge of collecting accounts from refugees in Montenegro
<b>Stephan Oberreit,</b>	Exploratory mission officer in Albania, MSF France (April 1999), MSF International Council Representative by MSF Switzerland and MSF Greece (May - June 1999)
<b>Dr. James Orbinsky,</b>	President MSF International Council
<b>Dr. Sotiris Pappaspyropoulos,</b>	Honorary President MSF Greece
<b>Alex Parisel,</b>	Executive Director, MSF Belgium (interviewed but does not want to be quoted)
<b>Virginie Raison,</b>	Deputy Coordinator in Montenegro, MSF France, April - May 1999
<b>Antonis Rigas,</b>	Logistician, MSF Greece
<b>Isabelle Seguy-Bitz,</b>	Member of the Board of Directors, MSF Switzerland
<b>Eric Stobbaerts,</b>	Executive Director, MSF Spain
<b>Christopher Stokes,</b>	Coordinator MSF Belgium in Albania and Kosovo, April 1999 to June 1999
<b>[...],</b>	Executive Director, MSF USA
<b>Bas Tielens,</b>	Information Officer for Kosovo, MSF International, October 1998 to March 1999.
<b>Laurence Thavaux,</b>	MSF Field Manager in Pristina in 1996, in Pec, April 1998 to February 1999, and a nurse in Montenegro in April 1999
<b>Erwin Vantland,</b>	Communications officer in Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo, MSF International, May - June 1999
<b>Bastien Vigneau,</b>	Deputy Programme Manager MSF Belgium
<b>Rafa Vila San Juan,</b>	Director of Communication, MSF Spain

# INTRODUCTION

In the early 1980s the ethnic Albanian population who formed the majority in the Serb province of Kosovo revolted against the discriminatory system imposed on them by Serbia. That system was further strengthened after 1989 by the new President of the Yugoslav Federation, Slobodan Milosevic.

MSF teams, which had been working in Kosovo since 1993 in the wake of the intervention in Bosnia, specifically supported the parallel health network established by the Albanian independence movement. From March 1998, attacks on Albanian villages by the Federal Yugoslav army and the Serb police increased, and were exacerbated by the guerrilla action of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA/UCK). Several thousand people were killed and tens of thousands more fled into the interior and over the border.

Conscious of the deteriorating situation, MSF decided to inform European public opinion and to increase awareness by publishing communiqués and refugee eyewitness accounts which were reported in the press. The United States and Europe - who were behind the Bosnia peace accords - simultaneously increased pressure on Belgrade, calling on the Milosevic government to put an end to violence against Albanian Kosovars or risk an armed intervention by NATO.

On 24 March 1999, after several months of fruitless negotiations during which violence and population movements increased, NATO began aerial bombardment of Serbia and Kosovo. The Serb forces responded with increasing terror, forcing hundreds of thousands of Albanian Kosovars to flee to neighbouring Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro. MSF then organised a number of relief operations for these refugees at the borders of Kosovo. At the same time, NATO mobilised military assets as a means of organising and controlling aid.

In April and May 1999, MSF on several occasions publicly denounced both the control being exercised over the refugee camps by NATO - which was a party to the conflict - and the marginalisation of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). In particular, MSF stressed the need to provide refugee protection and signaled what was happening to the Albanian Kosovars who were still in the province, under the control of Serb forces.

On 30 April, MSF published a report entitled, 'Kosovo: Accounts of a Deportation.' Compiled on the basis of refugee accounts and an epidemiological study, this report showed that the Kosovar Albanians were the victims of a systematic process of terror and expulsion, described by MSF as "deportation." It again alerted public opinion to the lack of refugee protection in the camps run by NATO.

At the beginning of May, MSF's Greek section undertook an exploratory mission to Kosovo and Serbia, despite opposition from the other sections who considered that this mission was not in accordance with MSF's principles of operational independence. The Greek section was excluded from the movement until 2005 as a result of this action.

Throughout the period of military operations, MSF managers actively refuted the notion of 'humanitarian war' promoted by NATO.

These different stances were taken in the context of an armed conflict in which western countries were participating directly and which they justified by invoking human rights and humanitarian requirements.

This particular political environment considerably reinforced the dilemmas and difficulties for MSF:

- Should it speak out to denounce violence being committed against the Kosovars, at the risk of being itself excluded by the Serb authorities from access to these people?
- By denouncing and describing the violence against Kosovars, was MSF encouraging/supporting the NATO intervention?
- Should MSF take a position on the NATO intervention, or not?
- What sort of relationships (finance, cooperation, etc) should be established with countries that were committed either militarily (such as NATO members) or politically (Greece) in the conflict?
- By raising the alert about UNHCR's absence/withdrawal/lack of effectiveness in managing the refugee camps, was not MSF taking the risk of reinforcing this marginalisation?
- Is it justifiable, by invoking an interpretation of the impartiality principle that implies a responsibility to assist victims on both sides of a conflict, to carry out an exploratory mission that sacrifices the principles of operational independence?
- Does MSF hold double standards for developing countries armed forces and western armed forces?



## VIOLENCE AGAINST KOSOVAR ALBANIANS, NATO'S INTERVENTION 1998 - 1999

Kosovo is surrounded by Serbia, Montenegro, Albania and Macedonia. Its population is 82 percent Albanian (the Kosovars), and 17 percent Serb.

At the end of World War I, after 500 years of Ottoman domination<sup>1</sup>, Kosovo was incorporated into the first Kingdom of Yugoslavia. From 1941 to 1943, it fell under the control of fascist Italy as part of 'Greater Albania,' combined with the current Albania. In 1945, Kosovo entered Marshal Tito's Yugoslav Federation. As part of Serbia, Kosovo enjoyed considerable autonomy. In 1981, one year after the Yugoslav leader's death, the Kosovar Albanians gave voice to their desire for independence. The Yugoslav army responded with bloody force to demonstrations calling for an independent republic.

Kosovo's Serbs also organised demonstrations against what they considered the 'Albanisation' of the province, receiving encouragement from Slobodan Milosevic, head of the Yugoslav Communist Party. Elected president of the Yugoslav Federation in March 1989, the nationalist leader ended Kosovo's autonomous status and placed the province under the direct trusteeship of Serbia. Initially, the ethnic Albanian resistance was non-violent.

In March 1990, at the request of the Albanian Human Rights Committee and a group of ethnic Albanian doctors, a MSF Belgium team conducted an investigation into the possible criminal poisoning of 2,000 Albanian adolescents.



'Kosovo: A Poisoning Epidemic?' Report by MSF Belgium, March 1990 (in French). [D1](#)

### Extract:

Between 19-23 March 1990 some 2,000 ethnic Albanian adolescents in Kosovo, Yugoslavia presented with symptoms suggesting poisoning (a psycho-toxin?). Members of the Albanian Committee for Human Rights, as well as doctors from Kosovo, sought immediate assistance from

Médecins Sans Frontières Belgium. Specifically, to:

- Send medicines required to treat the victims: atropine sulfate, chlorpromazine, [...]

- Act as observers in a possible criminal action (?) against the Kosovar Albanian community, so that they could serve as witnesses, if necessary.

[...] During the period 19-23 March 1990, approximately 2,000 Kosovar Albanian adolescents were reported to have been poisoned by a psycho-toxin sprayed at school facilities. The students were reported to have signs of neurovegetative imbalance that improved spontaneously (collective panic?) Given the unknown etiology, they were treated only for symptoms. No sample of the sprayed substance could be obtained.

Given the current status of our investigation, we cannot determine the definitive origin of this epidemic. Even if there is a 'collective panic' element at work, we should not exclude - at least not at the outset and in dealing with the early cases - the possibility of poisoning through the dissemination of some product for criminal or other purposes. A more in-depth investigation might allow us to confirm any suspicions.

### Additional comment

Twenty ethnic Albanian doctors who treated the victims of this unexplained epidemic were arrested by Yugoslav police authorities in the days following our mission.

In 1991, the ethnic Albanian held a referendum proclaiming the founding of the "Republic of Kosovo." The new entity was recognised officially only by neighboring Albania. Belgrade immediately declared the referendum illegal. With Serb nationalism strengthened following the secession of several republics from the Yugoslav Federation, one after another, conflicts erupted between Serbia and Croatia and later with Bosnia.

In 1992, Ibrahim Rugova, head of the Democratic League of Kosovo (DLK), the political party of the Albanian opposition, was elected president of the self-proclaimed Republic of Kosovo. A parliament was also elected. The Belgrade regime declared the body illegiti-

1. This followed the Serbs 1389 defeat at the site known as the "field of blackbirds" in Kosovo Polje, a date and place that remain powerful symbols for Serb nationalists.

mate and transferred its powers to the Serb parliament. The Serb trusteeship continued to harden. Instruction in Albanian in schools was abolished; Albanian managers were expelled from businesses, government, hospitals, and the police force where they were replaced by Serbs. Albanian-language newspapers were closed and repression mounted.

In February 1993, an MSF team on an evaluation mission in Kosovo observed the policy's destructive effects on Albanians' daily lives and, specifically, on their access to medical care. The team emphasized the likelihood of an 'explosion' and the certainty of a massacre (without being able to specify a date) and recommended that MSF in Kosovo and neighboring countries (Albania and Macedonia) prepare to take in the refugees.



'MSF Evaluation Mission in Kosovo-Albania.' 6-18 February 1993, **Report** by Maurice Nègre and Virginie Raison (in French). [D2](#)

#### Extract:

In general, the circumstances facing the health care sector reflect Kosovo's political situation and what appears to be the Serb strategy to push the Albanians to the breaking point. However, even if international attention is only now focusing on the problem, we are in fact, in the advanced stage of a process that dates back to the early 1980s and that accelerated in 1989 with the 'poisoning affair.' [...]

1989: 7,000 Albanian children had a skin reaction following a vaccination campaign. To the Albanians, the only possible explanation was that the Serbs were poisoning them. The poisoning was acknowledged by a joint commission, but the cause was never investigated (Benedetti report, MSF?). Nonetheless, positions crystallized as a result. Albanians did not trust Serbian medical workers and refused to be vaccinated. In 1990, Albanian medical students and some professors participated in a demonstration. In retaliation, the army surrounded the hospital. Many professors and Albanian doctors were assaulted and forcibly dispersed. The medical school was subsequently closed. Since that time, the situation appears to have rapidly declined.

- Many Albanian doctors have been dismissed and replaced by Serb doctors from Belgrade. All government agencies have been placed under Serb control.

- Albanian doctors have organised to set up private Albanian clinics, an Albanian medical school, etc. Weak points: immunisation, transfusion and supplies. Clinics are poorly equipped, so patients with complex illnesses, requiring surgery and problem pregnancies are sent to public hospitals.

- The dismissal of a large segment of the population raises the problem of social security coverage and access to treatment and medicine. As a result, several free clinics have opened, but they have few resources. The embargo

is a compounding factor, which according to the Serbs, makes it difficult to maintain equipment and obtain drug supplies. The Albanian clinics (which receive donated supplies) consider the Serbs the source of the problem, as the latter systematically confiscate medicines on arrival in Kosovo.

- Finally, we have heard many accounts of Albanian patients who were victims of Serb repression (surgery recommendations by Albanian doctors systematically subject to review, delayed treatment or transfusions, falsified medical files and autopsy reports, etc.) [...]

Potential developments:

Based on the uncertainties and political parameters related to the health situation on both sides of the border, several scenarios are possible:

#### 1) Internal conflict

The current situation could harden further, without open warfare, or could move to open conflict, which might be confined for several days or weeks inside Kosovo (whether surrounded or not), thus without leading to population displacement outside the borders. 'Massacre' hypothesis would occur in the absence of buffer forces and if cities with Albanian populations are bombed.

The Albanian Kosovars will very soon face the problem of access to medicine and, more generally, of access to health care facilities.

For MSF:

- If we prepare in Kosovo (for vaccination, for example - see medical report) and in Albania based on the Albania aid project (MSF Belgium zone?), it should be possible to cross the border (our contacts have not denied that such crossings exist). NOTE: DLK contacts on both sides).

- If we prepare only on the Albanian side (ad hoc project in the Kukes hospital, for example), border crossings are possible but not risk-free.

In both cases, primarily medicines and logistics will be involved; few treatment staff. Regardless, and in both cases, preparation addresses current real needs.

#### 2) Open conflict with refugees heading to Macedonia

In a later phase, Albanian Kosovars could well be displaced into Macedonia (primary destinations for reasons related to roads, displacement to other destinations, family ties, poverty in Albania, etc.) This also assumes that the Serbs or Macedonians do not block the road to Macedonia and that it is not mined or is protected by the UN.

For MSF:

- See Macedonia evaluation mission report. Does not exclude preparation on the Albanian side.

#### 3) Open conflict with refugees heading to Albania (scenario compatible with the two others)

Heightened risks if bombing occurs because border villages populated almost exclusively by Albanians, except Prizren and Pristina. Area of influx: Between Tropoja and Shishtavec. Impassable high mountains on both sides.

Currently three frontier stations and three key roads: Qaf Morina (to Bajram Curri), Qaf Prush (to Kruma, border station closes today), and Bruka Morina (to Kukes). Also note possible influx from Diber (Kosovo) to Peshkopi.

For MSF:

- Prevention and preparation via vaccination campaign in the border region, Kosovo side.
- Preparation in Albania with ad hoc project in the Kukes region (or probably the refugees' main convergence point): establish local contacts and identify likely crossing points.
- Evaluation mission (survival kit) necessary along both sides of the border to conduct topographical and roadway reconnaissance, etc. (many mule paths). Also evaluate the Peshkopje region, where it may be possible to cross the border clandestinely.

In conclusion: the high probability of an 'explosion' in Kosovo should not halt MSF's mobilization in the region. The needs of the Albanian population - on both sides - will justify any action that we take.

**A joint Belgium-France MSF team started working in Kosovo in April 1993. It supplied official health facilities in three Kosovo districts with medicine and supplies. Through the Albanian NGO, Mother Teresa, MSF also supplied a parallel network serving Albanians denied care by the official health system. In addition, working from Belgrade, MSF aided individuals in the Serbian part of Bosnia, while other MSF teams were active in the Muslim enclaves of Srebrenica and Gorazde.**



**Mission report** by MSF Belgium, Kosovo 24 August 1994 - 30 April 1995 (in French). **D3**

#### **Extract:**

This mission was coordinated by MSF Belgrade, which, together with Split (Croatia), coordinated all programmes in the former Yugoslavia. Split and Belgrade are jointly coordinated by MSF France and Belgium.

#### VI-1. Background of MSF activity in Kosovo

At the request of Albanian groups and during various evaluation missions conducted in the region, our teams observed major shortages of essential medicines, anesthesia, partially-reusable supplies (syringes, suture threads, dressings, etc.), basic medical and surgical equipment, as well as significant weaknesses in the sterilization system throughout the health care system - both in-patient and out-patient care. MSF has become involved periodically following various violent episodes attacks (riots, toxic gas, etc.).

During those visits, we observed that the region's medical and health system was seriously lacking. As a result, MSF decided to open a mission in Pristina, Kosovo on 1 April 1993.

#### VI-2. MSF Belgium Mission in Kosovo

##### 1 - Goal

The general goal was to improve the low medical standards at medical facilities: hospitals, outpatient facilities, official as well as parallel systems.

##### 2 - Coverage

MSF in Kosovo is based in Pristina and covers all of Kosovo, which is composed of five districts for parallel facilities and hospitals. In terms of the official structures - hospitals and health centers - we cover only Mitrovica and Gnjilane districts.

#### VI-3. MSF Activities

The three categories of activities include:

- Establishing and maintaining good relationships with various contacts - official, unofficial, Serb and Albanian. Given the tension between the Serb and Albanian communities, Kosovo is an extremely sensitive region politically and everything is very delicate. Many international organisations have tried, unsuccessfully, to work here and others have been expelled after working here for some time.

- Handling all aspects of distributions and renovation. There are two categories of distributions: medical and non-medical supplies. Medical supplies are the most important distribution items and include basic medical-surgical supplies and equipment, supplies for dressings, injections and minor medical materials, as well as anti-scabies medication. Non-medical supplies are personal hygiene items, including soap, shampoo, detergent, washcloths, towels, etc. Renovation refers to improvements to medical facilities, so that care can be provided under acceptable conditions. We have several renovation projects underway.

- Monitoring contributions. This is to ensure that contributions are actually used on behalf of the individuals for whom they are intended (patients who cannot pay for medicine) because it is clearly specified that all medicines must be redistributed to patients at no cost and to confirm that the contributed equipment is being used and maintained properly. Monitoring also allows us to maintain ongoing contact with the various medical facilities we work with. This contact also allows us to keep track of changing needs. Last, we should always be attentive to the possibility that donations could be misappropriated.



**Board Meeting Minutes**, MSF France, 25 February 1994 (in French) **D4**


#### **Extract:**

4) The Kosovo context is particularly interesting by virtue of the population distribution - Albanians (90%) and Serbs (10%). Since 1990, the Serbs have dominated the public sector. There is no armed conflict in this region, but tensions run very high. Several activities are underway:


- An anti-TB programme with WHO - there are serious cases of severe tubercular meningitis.
- Support for health agencies and clinics that have run out of medicine, working through the public system.
- Support for the Albanian parallel medical system. A small

hospital has been set up in a house, open daily, where 600 medical consultations are performed daily with a volunteer staff of 25 doctors (on rotation). There are four other clinics operating on the same model and a distribution network that reaches 300,000 people. MSF will help them by providing supplementary equipment. According to T. Renaud, this is a very significant programme (half-French, half-Belgian).

It seems clear that we should give priority to action, while remaining discrete in the area of public statements. We have very limited room to manoeuvre.

 MSF Belgium had worked in Kosovo since 1992-1993. We thought that the region would become problematic at some point. We focused our projects on medium-term development efforts. This was appropriate in Kosovo, where they face recurring problems with measles and access to water. The plan was to spend several years on public health programmes because that would allow us to position ourselves politically, but MSF France had a different approach. Their attitude was: "There's an emergency, let's get in there; it's over, let's get out." It's a different rhythm. A mission with projects that struggle along, based on multi-year plans, are very different from an emergency mission.

Bastien Vigneau, Deputy Programme Manager MSF Belgium, (in French).

 We set up our Kosovo programme in 1993. The province had lost its autonomy in 1989 and there were significant renewed tensions between the two communities - Serb and Albanian. At the time, we thought it would be interesting to position ourselves in Kosovo so that we could understand what was going on there. We had a joint French-Belgian mission and began to develop contacts with the Albanian group, Mother Teresa, to work in the Albanian parallel structures. In 1993, these structures were not as well-organised as they were by 1998, but the network was already starting to form. In addition, after the 1992 'illegal' elections, Ibrahim Rugova was 'President of Kosovo' and parallel ministries had been established. So there really was an outline of an Albanian administrative and political structure. [...] We decided to reposition because access to care was clearly a problem, particularly in the official health facilities. That was when the Serb administration began to fire Albanians from the public sector, schools and hospitals. Albanians no longer had access to education or health care. [...] This created problems, but they left us alone. On the one hand, we were providing minimal aid in Kosovo at the time. We had only two or three international staff there. On the other, we were supporting two or three infectious disease departments in the Serb public hospitals. What's more, to balance things out, MSF Belgium was providing considerable aid to the Republica Srpska, the Serb region of Bosnia.

[...] I don't think our activities in Kosovo bothered Belgrade. They had other fish to fry. And, we weren't very visible - MSF's programmes were concentrated on the enclaves, Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Republica Srpska.

Graziella Godain, Deputy Programme Manager MSF France (in French).

**Throughout the war years in the former Yugoslavia, the international community did not focus its attention on events in Kosovo. The Bosnian Peace accord, signed in Dayton on 14 December 1995, ignored the fate of Kosovo's population. However, the Serb-Yugoslav army<sup>2</sup>, strengthened by the Serb self-defense militias and ultranationalist paramilitary groups<sup>3</sup> that operated ruthlessly in Bosnia and Croatia, boosted its terror operations in the province in an effort to promote the gradual exodus of the Albanian population. In 1997, the cycle of demonstrations followed by repression accelerated in Kosovo. In the face of Serb oppression, Albanian resistance became more radical. The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA - UCK) made its official appearance, while Ibrahim Rugova, the head of the non-violent Albanian political opposition demanded that the province become independent and even join neighboring Albania. France and Germany called for special status for Kosovo but Belgrade refused.**



'Let's Put Kosovo Back on the Map,' Laurence Thavaux, Managing Field Nurse in Pristina. Messages (MSF France's internal publication). February-March 1996 (in French). [DS](#)

#### Extract:

On this December day, 1995, on the eve of the signing of the Yugoslav Peace accords, the Kosovo Albanians still hope that the benevolent international community will not again avert its eyes from this tiny province of the former Yugoslav federation. Over the last several months we have watched a continuous parade of European diplomats and foreign celebrities stream through the capital, Pristina. The great leader, Rugova, President of the Kosovo Albanians, is linked to Gandhi through their shared pacifism.

These very important persons are deeply concerned with the Kosovo Albanian fate and Rugova welcomes them into his inner sanctum. After a quick review of the situation, they return home, satisfied with events.

How do you save your skin when ideology is your only weapon? Does freedom have a price?

Encouraged by the diplomats' promises, Rugova perseveres

2. At the end of the war, the Yugoslav Federal Republic was composed of Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo.

3. This refers to the - regrettably - famous Arkan Tigers, or Seselj Chetniks.



on his pacifist path, patiently awaiting the birth of the Republic of Kosovo. His position comforts the international community, which is happy to postpone discussions on the subject. After all, there's no conflict looming in Kosovo. All is well. And besides, who's really worried about Kosovo? You need dead bodies - lots of bodies - to awaken the international community's interest, along with bloody pictures. But over the last six years, an entire people have been murdered here. And the methodology is raised to an art: destroy the Albanian will to survive by denying them the right to speak, work, and attend school, not to mention obtain access to health care, which is quite expensive. The list is long. Maybe that's why the Kosovo Albanians long ago organised themselves into a parallel society.

Our impression is that the Albanian population has reached the end of its rope. So many hopes were dashed during the Dayton Peace negotiations. Despite widespread mobilisation throughout the Albanian diaspora, not a single word was spoken about Kosovo. Rugova's credibility declines a little more every day. Young people's anger is starting to mount, while their elders are losing hope. Daily life offers not a single positive change that could sustain a glimmer of hope. In a climate of perpetual terror, the Albanians experience arbitrary arrests, torture, extortion and repression on a daily basis.

What are we waiting for in France? A blood-bath? We are more worried about the fate of two French pilots than of the two million Albanians who are being held hostage. Some day soon the Albanians may no longer be afraid because they will have nothing left to lose and will no longer even be able to imagine a future. On that day, they may choose to die on a battlefield in the name of freedom. They would end up slaughtered because ideology can't save lives, but does freedom have a price? We've got to pay serious attention to the Kosovo Albanians before it's too late.



'Kosovo Albanian Freedom Fighters Move out of the Shadows,' Ibrahim Osmani, **AFP** (France), 30 November 1997 (in French).

#### Extract:

Armed men proclaiming membership in an organisation accused of terrorism by Serb authorities made their first public appearance in Kosovo. Their appearance heightened tensions in this majority-ethnic Albanian province. By ending their clandestine status, these 'freedom fighters,' battling on behalf of 1.8 million Kosovo Albanians, have become grist for the Serb regime's mill. The Serbs have vowed to "exterminate Albanian terrorism" and reject all Western initiatives to open dialogue with the separatists. On Friday, at funeral services for Haljit Geci, a Kosovo Albanian killed in a clash with the police early this week, three armed men in uniform, including one wearing a hood, announced that they were members of 'the Kosovo Liberation Army' (KLA), a clandestine organisation. Nineteen men believed to be KLA members have been tried in Pristina, the province's county seat.

Witnesses including Evlijana Berani, a reporter for *Bujku*, the leading Kosovo Albanian daily newspaper, confirmed the information, which was broadcast on Tirana television. Speaking before 20,000 people gathered in the Lausa (west) village cemetery, the three men announced "the continuation of the struggle to liberate Kosovo." No police were present. "The KLA draws its strength from the Albanian people and represents the only fighting force that can free Kosovo," the masked man declared. To loud applause, he accused the Serbs of conducting a regime of "terror" in Kosovo and stated that only the KLA could help the province's Albanians unite with Albania. The KLA has issued some 40 communiqués since last year claiming responsibility for several deadly attacks. The authenticity of the messages has never been confirmed.

Ibrahim Rugova, head of the Democratic League of Kosovo (DLK), the major opposition movement to the regime of President Slobodan Milosevic, has questioned the KLA's existence on several occasions. In its statements, faxed to the local press, the KLA always emphasizes its commitment to "use all means available to struggle for Kosovo's liberation and avenge victims of Serb police terror." Since the beginning of the year, 35 ethnic Albanians found guilty of terrorist acts on behalf of the KLA have been sentenced to terms of two to twenty years in prison, but all have denied membership in the organisation.

Albanians make up 90% of the province's 2 million inhabitants, which was stripped of its autonomy by Belgrade in 1989. Today, Kosovo Albanian leaders are demanding independence and even incorporation into Albania. The Albanian government supports the demand. Serb police forces, estimated at several tens of thousands, have responded with a violent crack-down.



*In 1996, I ended up in Pristina as a field officer. At that time, it was run by MSF France and MSF Belgium, and I was there for six months. In fact, I ended up all alone with Kosovar staff. I stayed for about three or four months, supplying the Mother Teresa ambulantas (mobile clinics) and living with Albanians. I went out a lot with Albanians and I saw what was going on in bars, schools and the health care system. At that time, the media wasn't talking about Kosovo and it had been completely ignored in the Dayton accords. Even so, serious human rights violations were occurring. Albanian doctors were being fired from hospitals. Medical care was much more expensive for the Albanians than for Serbs. Albanians could no longer go to medical facilities or to schools.*

*MSF was supplying the ambulantas throughout Kosovo and organising campaigns to eradicate fleas and scabies, working primarily with the parallel Mother Teresa network. When I left, I had lots of Albanian friends. Everyone said things were going to explode soon and that it would be awful. Back then, people weren't talking about the KLA yet. I promised to come back if it blew up. I did go back the next year for a month's vacation and the situation had become much clearer. People were starting to talk about the KLA. Not*

really the KLA, I guess, but about 'liberators.' People were saying that something was going to happen. And then there was this sort of 'Basta ya' movement among the youth. I remember student street demonstrations in Pristina, which were put down violently by the Serb police. The students didn't dare demonstrate anymore. They no longer had any rights. The parents of young Albanians couldn't stand this happening to their children any longer. They would say: "It's one thing for us, but we want the next generation to be able to study freely."

Laurence Thavaux, MSF Field Coordinator in Pristina in 1996, in Pec, April 1998 to February 1999, and nurse in Montenegro in April 1999 (in French).

## MSF MOVES INTO EMERGENCY MODE

**In early March 1998, Serb police and the Yugoslav army attacked, looted and set fire to villages in Drenica valley, resulting in the death of 2,000 ethnic Albanian and the flight of 250,000 more, who took refuge in Albania. The Serb police cracked down on demonstrations by Albanians in the capital, Pristina in support of their fellow citizens in Drenica. In response to warnings from the international community, the Belgrade regime said that tensions in Kosovo were internal matters of concern only to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and denounced Albanian 'terrorism.' MSF formed a mobile emergency team to care for displaced persons in Drenica Valley.**



'Kosovo Powder Keg Ready to Explode - Mass Demonstrations After Weekend Violence,' Victoria Stegic, *Libération* (France), 3 March 1998 (in French).

### Extract:

The official death count of 20, including 16 Albanians and 4 Serb police, confirms the violence of this weekend's clashes between Serb police and armed Albanians, who Belgrade refers to as 'terrorists'. Yesterday, tens of thousands of Albanians took to the streets of Pristina, Kosovo's county seat, to express solidarity with the population of the Drenica region, where clashes occurred, and to protest Slobodan Milosevic's regime, which they accuse of carrying out "terror, violence and ethnic cleansing." The police were brutal in their efforts to break up the demonstrations. Several dozen demonstrators and several journalists were injured. [...] Since the early 1980s, entire generations have grown up with the belief that Kosovo

would be independent one day, with the support of the international community, which would ensure its status as a protectorate during a transition period.



**Sitrep 4**, François Fille, MSF Yugoslavia Coordinator, to Eric Dachy, Bastien Vigneau, MSF Belgium Programme Managers, 9 March 1998 (in French). [D6](#)

### Extract:

You see things more clearly once you start moving around (few agencies go out to the field). 1,200 internally-displaced persons primarily from Lower Prekas, partially destroyed. The most important information we obtained was thanks to Dr. Barhi, from Handicap International, who took part in the trip (number of displaced persons with the names of locations, nature of the population, etc.) and we managed to assess needs, particularly in terms of food and NFI [non-food items]. We made notes and then spoke with people who had information to offer [...]. Visited the Drenica with Stéphanie and access to Srbica. We confirmed everything that the ICRC told us yesterday. People are terrorized. In the clinic, a group of doctors, accompanied by a Mother Teresa doctor, told us that they were unable to work. I didn't recognise the director because he had changed so much in one month. Every time they want to care for a patient on the outskirts of the city, or refer him or her somewhere else, they have to ASK THE POLICE FOR PERMISSION. Ex: A young girl was wounded; her family died yesterday during a police attack, as snipers lay in wait as they fled. Everyone is afraid to go out and information on the IDP numbers and needs is not available. They aren't asking for medicine because between our distribution last week and the ICRC's yesterday (bandages, food and NFIs), they have supplies; however, they would like to be able to treat people in the hills. In the meantime, almost no patients in the clinic and the Mother Teresa centre is still closed. The water delivery system has been cut off since yesterday. Apparently, that happens regularly [...].

You can feel the tension in the way people behave. Leaving the clinic, someone pointed out a morgue guarded by an army of cops, where 45 bodies were lying exposed, including 12 children and 14 women. We were hesitant to go there because we couldn't find a good reason. We continued on to a village west of Srbica (Rudnik). Extremely tense checkpoint but in the end, we did manage to speak with MT/DLK (Democratic League of Kosovo) activists next to a field. Not 100% sure of the relationship with Bahri from Handicap International, not completely comfortable, but enough about that. They are cut off from Srbica and from Mitrovica and do not have medicine, food, clothing, etc. According to these people, there are 8,000 displaced persons - that's a lot but it's possible (they were coming from Laushan, where there were reports of fighting). Thanks to the Paraplegic Association and the Mother Teresa group, we obtained information on the IDPs in Mitrovica (3,200 at 11:00, and 3,400 when we

returned at 16:00). The police left supplies and seemed to want to make the Albanians leave the area now that everything is over. This was confirmed by the new arrivals in many locations. From one of the windows, two buses filled with police. The surrounding area is full of them. The operation continues.



Several Questions **Email** from Graziella Godain, MSF France Deputy Programme Manager to MSF B Belgrade, 18 March 1998 (in French). [D7](#)

### Extract:

Given your various contacts and visits throughout the region, do you have a clearer sense of the possible number and location of displaced persons? Could we get some kind of map showing the victims/displaced persons in the region?

- According to the Mother Teresa group, there are 24,000 IDPs. MT are the only ones with a network of sources/activists in the field gathering data, village by village. Regarding the map - I'll try to put one together.

You are still working on medical supplies, primarily through the Mother Teresa group. Do they have the same general sense of the number of injured who have come to the sponsored facilities? If not, why can't they obtain fairly precise data? I understand that injured people aren't going to the official Serb facilities, but if they have access to parallel Albanian facilities, why don't we at least have data from that source? It's an obvious question, of course, from your perspective but from this distance, it seems odd to me.

- The parallel facilities (let's say, the Albanian doctors as a group) have a fairly clear idea of where the injured are located, but they won't say. One thing is certain - if they were in the parallel facilities, we would visit them, which is not the case. No one among the expats knows where they are.

What I gather from your sitreps is that the facilities in place can't really perform surgery if necessary. So the only facilities that can are the official Serb ones? Can a treatment facility, even a makeshift one, be set up on the Albanian side? I suppose that's a really difficult issue since it would be hard to be discreet about it. What do the authorities say? That everyone has access and can come for treatment? What do the Albanians do when they need treatment, even if it's just non-emergency surgery?

- When Theresa was still there (she left last week), you couldn't even think about working outside the surgical facilities. Now that we are between emergency "purists" (Eric pushed hard on that) and an emergency coordinator is working with us, it's a priority.

But:

- The authorities will not let us work in an MSF facility

(do not have the right). It has to be in an existing, legal facility (MT or a private clinic; have to give up on the MoH option for the time being).

- If we want to work on in a more 'irregular' setting, it would have to be under cover in a place that meets minimum medical standards and offers easy access to the wounded. Once again, the problem is that they do not want to come forward because of Serb reprisals. To a KLA clinic? On the resistance side?



*I was very familiar with the strategy because it had already been implemented in Bosnia. They were always the same - the same guys, the same faces, the same names, the same uniforms. There were variations, but they were always 'the Chetniks' who killed the people opposing the Serbs. It was horrible. It was strange that we didn't talk about it much even though we were familiar with how it worked and it was carried out so widely in Kosovo. Heavy weaponry and tanks fired on civilian populations and it didn't even make the papers here.*

Eric Dachy, Programme Manager MSF Belgium  
(in French).



*The problems had already begun by late 1997 and in February 1998, the first attacks against Drenica took place. At that point, the joint French-Belgian mission set up an emergency team, while continuing its 'long-term projects,' like the EPI<sup>4</sup>. It involved a mobile team of two or three expatriates and many Albanian medical staff who were providing mobile consultations in the Drenica region, close to the villages that had been targeted by the attacks and whose populations had begun to move out.*

Graziella Godain, Deputy Programme Manager  
MSF France (in French).



*I was on a mission in Liberia when I heard the word 'Kosovo' on the BBC and I said to myself: "Here we go." That was in early 1998. I called MSF right away about leaving for Kosovo. I was there two weeks later and stayed until the end. We saw quite a few displaced persons. These weren't displaced people like the ones you see in Africa. These people had time to flee. They took their tractors and TVs with them. Later, you'd find them camping in the forests, often in very harsh conditions because it was pretty cold. People might stay for one or two weeks. Sometimes they'd go back to their village during the day to*

4. EPI: Expanded Programme of Immunisation.

see what was going on. In general, when the villages were attacked, the houses were looted and the livestock were killed. Some houses were also booby-trapped. We organised medical consultations using mobile clinics. We would bring people a little food, clothing and soap. We would talk to them to find out what was going on and where the other displaced persons were. It was hard to follow because villages were being attacked continuously so there were needs almost everywhere. There weren't a lot of people with gunshot wounds. Rather, they'd been beaten and tortured. There was also psychological suffering. The torture didn't leave physical marks, but when people told their story, it was awful. Sometimes we would take the wounded to the Pec hospital and couldn't get in because Serbs were being treated there. The hospital was closed to Albanians.

Laurence Thavaux, MSF Field Coordinator in Pristina in 1996, in Pec from April 1998 to February 1999, Nurse in Montenegro in April 1999 (in French).

**On 31 March 1998, the UN imposed an embargo on weapons deliveries to Belgrade. Subsequently, the European Union and the US prohibited investments in Serbia. On 23 April 1998, the Serbs approved Slobodan Milosević's rejection of international mediation by a vote of 94.73%.**



'Embargo Is a Political Setback and Limited Military Problem for Belgrade.' **AFP** (France), 1 April 1998 (in French).

#### Extract:

The UN Security Council yesterday approved an embargo against Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro), to be implemented immediately. It seeks to pressure Belgrade authorities into agreeing to enter into useful dialogue with Albanians in Kosovo, the southern Serb province with a 90% Albanian population. The embargo was based on a proposal from the contact group on the former Yugoslavia (the US, Russia, Great Britain, Germany, France and Italy). The group was formed following a series of Serb police operations in Kosovo that began on 28 February and have left at least 80 Albanians dead. The special police units that intervened during the operations in the Drenica region of central Kosovo were quasi-military forces armed with heavy machine guns, mortars, armored tanks and helicopters.

According to a Western diplomatic source in Belgrade, the embargo should not constitute a serious military problem - at least in the short term - for the well-equipped Yugoslavia, which is also an arms producer. In particular, the source noted, it will not affect Belgrade's ability to conduct law-and-order operations in the coming weeks and months. On the other hand, the source emphasized, Yugoslavia will "certainly face a longer-term problem as it

becomes impossible to guarantee the availability of supplies - particularly replacement parts." While the military value of resolution 1160 may be largely symbolic, its adoption does represent a serious political setback for Belgrade and Yugoslavia's strong man, federal president Slobodan Milosevic.



'Serbs Reject Mediation, 23 "Terrorists" Killed in Kosovo,' **AFP** (France), Belgrade, 24 April 1998 (in French).

#### Extract:

On Thursday, Serb voters overwhelmingly supported Slobodan Milosević's rejection of international mediation in the Kosovo (south) conflict, where the Yugoslav army has killed at least 23 'terrorists.' According to the election commission projections, 97% of voters opposed Thursday's referendum in Serbia. Voter turnout was estimated at 75%.

[...] In Kosovo, where Albanians boycotted the referendum, the situation continued to worsen, with a series of clashes occurring between the Yugoslav army and supporters of an independent Kosovo. According to a source close to the army, at least 23 supporters were killed on Wednesday and Thursday. [...] The Albanians, who comprise 90% of the province's population and are demanding independence, have refused to talk to Serb authorities without an international mediator.

**In April and May, the violence expanded into other regions of Kosovo. MSF teams tried to help victims and displaced persons via clandestine Albanian health networks, while continuing their efforts to support official health facilities.**



**Sitrep**, François Fille, MSF Coordinator in Yugoslavia to Eric Dachy and Bastien Vigneau, MSF Belgium Programme Managers, 5 April 1998 (in French). **D8**

#### Extract:

Tuesday, 7 April 1998 [...] Izbica.

Returned to this village, where we saw a number of patients last week. Nothing special to note. 75 consultations. Same illnesses. People from the community helped us to screen individuals in front of the private house where we are working.

Information: When we returned, we noticed a significant increase in the police presence along the road. Many individual trenches were dug recently. They re-consolidated. Everyone was wearing a helmet. On the other hand, we were not subjected to heightened intimidation at the

checkpoints as compared to last week. The police are worried - that's obvious. Not surprising when you know that the Albanians are patrolling between Izbica and Rudnik, only a few kilometers from a major police force.

A large police presence has been organised along the road between Srbica and Glogovac to Morina; things are really heating up there. Forty police at the checkpoint, you wouldn't think you were in the 'bush' [...] Meeting with the ICRC, which, like the rest of us, is having a hard time determining the number of wounded. If they don't receive Interior Ministry authorisation, they're unlikely to continue making systematic referrals to the hospitals. Two days ago, after referring a patient with a gunshot wound to Mitrovica and running into lots of problems at police checkpoints, they had to spend a whole night with him even after confirming the medical staff's intentions and cooperation. If there were a conflict, no one would be able to follow up like that. It's clear to us that we have to identify (quantify, evaluate, prepare) all private facilities that are able to treat the wounded. The ICRC is building up its medical capacities with the arrival of a nurse who will be here for six months.



**Sitrep**, François Fille, MSF Coordinator in Yugoslavia to Eric Dachy and Bastien Vigneau, MSF Belgium Programme Managers, 4 May 1998 (in French). [D9](#)

#### Extract:

MSF Activities

- 1) We have managed to resume our normal activities so as not to compromise our prior efforts and undeniable successes. We'll rally around vaccinations, watsan and distribution of medicines; we'll continue and then we'll see.
- 2) We are maintaining an exceptional level of activity on behalf of populations that have been victimized by police violence in the Drenica region and are trying to set up an operational plan in case of extended conflict (positioning of medical supplies and watsan).

Our mobile team doesn't resist traveling within reach of gunfire from fighting in Likoshan and Izbica, where we conduct 100 consultations/day on average. We have good credibility with the local population and are considered a reliable partner, so we are able to treat the 'war wounded' (a term that the ICRC has not yet adopted and that prevents it from taking a clear position). No developments regarding the effective treatment of these wounded patients, but the Albanian surgeons, who are operational in the hot spots (please - no puns) trust us to provide them with all kinds of surgical supplies and injury kits. We just have to hurry up and make sure they are competent and confirm their means of access and reliability.

We will soon be focusing our efforts on Decani, where we managed to obtain access after the police in the field had been. For once, the local Serb populations - victims like everyone else - are being targeted (without any sense of opportunism on our part). No one in Serbia is optimistic.



**Sitrep**, François Fille, MSF Coordinator in Yugoslavia to Eric Dachy and Bastien Vigneau, MSF Belgium Programme Managers, 7 May 1998 (in French). [D10](#)

#### Extract:

The emergency team finally managed to make sure that a team of surgeons exists and is capable of 1) gaining access to and trust of the wounded and 2) taking responsibility for providing a minimum of care. After establishing contact with the surgeons' organisation and MT (Mother Teresa), we are contributing significantly to improving these doctors' working conditions. They are taking considerable risk by going out to the sites. The plan is as follows: MSF gives the supplies to Mother Teresa, which distributes them to the doctors/surgeons. We only know the people in charge. After making a limited distribution of supplies, we'll soon know whether the system is reliable. If we are satisfied with the result, we can then increase our support. Of course, there is a paradox in wanting to be completely transparent in our work and supplying a clandestine and illegal network. So for now, to protect our own interest and that of the Albanian doctors, we need to keep reasonably quiet about it. That said, given police suspicion, the challenge these wounded patients pose and our lack of access, I think this is still the best solution. We are taking all precautions (verifying our contacts, removing identifying marks from all supplies distributed) but at some point we'll have to expect that the police will start worrying about us. [...] As elsewhere in the world, our involvement with the authorities is essential, and we are working on that, too.



**Sitrep**, François Fille, MSF Coordinator in Yugoslavia to Eric Dachy and Bastien Vigneau, MSF Belgium Programme Managers, 15 May 1998 (in French). [D11](#)

#### Extract:

There are three reasons why we are planning to continue and expand our emergency programme in Kosovo. Security is still acceptable, of course, but all the information and data/statements we are gathering from a variety of sources are hardly cause for optimism. They support the notion that the conflict is spreading.

First, we are increasingly being denied access to certain areas (yesterday south of Drenica, when the emergency team was going out to conduct an evaluation in a place where many displaced people were gathered). Also, fighting continues and is worse than ever (around Klina, Orahovac and especially around Decani, in places held by the KLA). And last, we're turning up new information that carries bad historical associations. According to the Albanian press, anti-personnel mines have claimed victims along the Yugoslav-Albanian border (poisoning of some,

intimidation of others - it's clear that the information comes to us each time from one or another of the camps). In particular, we're hearing about the presence of Serb units -- easily distinguished from the others -- smeared with camouflage. People are telling us about the worst escapades and actions (all observed in Bosnia, racist operations against the opposing side, ready to mount cleansing assaults as soon as they get the order), [...] When we saw the gear, it was on a tank, with two loudspeakers on each side, blasting "Chetniks, kill them all" music, like in "Apocalypse Now."

The second reason is that despite our work, the population (at least in the Drenica) continues to have extremely limited access to health care. Every week, the number of consultations we hold rises. We are documenting a growing number of illnesses related to precarious living conditions and forced displacement.

Last, the 'humanitarian space' is shrinking in western Kosovo. The current emergency team is handling the mobile clinic, working with an operational network of Albanian doctors in the heart of the conflict zone and setting up an autonomous surgical facility. The team can't pursue that latter initiative, spread out and expect to perform regular missions in new conflict areas without weakening or creating problems for the mission's other departments.



**Sitrep**, Stephanie Van Peteghem, Medical Programme Managers, MSF Yugoslavia, to Eric Dachy and Bastien Vigneau, MSF Belgium Programme managers, 29 May 1998 (in English). **D12** [↗](#)

#### Extract:

The situation is aggravating, to say the least. There is continued shelling of several villages in the Drenica area and the south-west of Kosovo. There have been Serb attacks in Klina, Djakova, Decani, Srbica, Pec [...]. A huge build-up of Serb forces has been reported in Glogovac, along the Suhareka-Orahovac-road and other places, this also increasing the number of IDPs in the region. It has to be said that the Kosovo Liberation Army is moving too. New roads are hastily constructed by the local population, thus facilitating the access/way-out both for the UCK and the IDPs. Many fear that this is just the beginning of it all.

**Indirect access to the populations worsened the operational coordination problems between the Belgian and French sections' Programme Manager. It also had an impact on decisions about communications issues, which conflicted with those about maintaining operations and security.**



**'MSF FRY [Former Republic of Yugoslavia] Position on Kosovo' Email** from the MSF B Coordinator in Belgrade, to the Programme Manager and general directors of MSF B, MSF F and MSF H, 12 June 1998 (in French). **D13** [↗](#)

#### Extract:

Since the crisis began and faced with a variety of obstacles, MSF has tried to maintain ongoing contact with the Kosovo populations (the displaced or those affected by the civil war).

Access - or, rather, lack of access - is the norm and we are working continuously to ease it. Over the last month, we have noted that Belgrade and the Serb authorities are working, more or less openly, to prevent us from carrying out our work based on legal or administrative pretexts. Today, even as police authorities maintain tight controls over the work humanitarian groups are doing, they are also showing signs of more conciliatory behavior. We are thus hopeful about several attempts to reach victims and provide them necessary aid. While we are not blind to what's going on, their behavior does lead us to be more optimistic. **WE MUST CONTINUE OUR WORK. A TEAM IS NOW WORKING NON-STOP.**

When we set a deadline, if it passes, then we'll change our strategy. Right now, we are holding between 200-400 consultations/day, and even if there is no medical emergency, strictly speaking, we are one of the only real ways that the victims' stories can get out and be told. At the same time, there's a ratcheting-up on all sides. The Serbs are holding to their positions, which we know well. The Albanians are taking advantage of the situation to move their political pawns forward, based on the notion that more victims = greater legitimacy. For once, the international community is taking a position and not holding back. The situation is now in confrontation mode.

What do we make of it? For the reasons stated earlier, MSF must maintain its access, which has been seriously threatened by our repeated visits to the 'hot spots' and by the risk that Belgrade could find out about our work with the wounded. What about military intervention? 1/ By appearing to align ourselves, yet again, with political schemers in the West who share responsibility for political mismanagement and strengthening Milosevic's (and Tudjman's) power, MSF risks losing its identity. Our only concern is the victims. We don't have to take a position and embark on a seven-year diplomatic disaster.



*Shared coordination in Kosovo didn't match the reality in the field. Two stations were assigned to the French section but neither of them belonged to the coordination team. MSF Belgium chose the team members.*

Brussels maintained the operational link with the field and the coordination, not us. Officially, for Belgrade's purposes, MSF Belgium was the entity present in Kosovo, not the French section, which never registered officially. Furthermore, the Serbs had never forgotten MSF France's position on Srebrenica<sup>5</sup>. So being identified directly as MSF France was certainly no guarantee that we'd be able to work. And, Kosovo is not a very big place. So to have two sections and two coordination teams seemed somewhat ridiculous. At the time, MSF was practically the only humanitarian actor with a significant presence in Kosovo. Our presence was even greater than the ICRC's. They conducted distributions and provided first aid while we had medical activities underway and were supporting the Mother Teresa ambulancias. We were really right there in the heart of the situation and could assess what was really going on. We had statements from people about how they were driven from their homes and how the villages were bombed. But very little information made its way up to headquarters. Starting in April, we began to push the coordination team to speak out publicly. But we ran into objections from our Belgian colleagues and the 'security' syndrome: "We can't risk being thrown out of Kosovo, so we can't say anything." It dragged on and on. In May, I went back to the field and noticed that the teams had access to information. With help from Françoise [Françoise Saulnier, Legal Adviser], we supported them from Paris, encouraging them to undertake systematic information gathering. We sent them all the tools. But nothing came back.

Graziella Godain, Deputy Programme Manager,  
MSF France (in French).

Once the violence began to escalate, you didn't need central authorisation from Belgrade for anything in Kosovo anymore. You just needed an arrangement with the Pristina authorities. And even then, it was increasingly a matter of going to the pro-Albanian authorities. But they couldn't manage security and the Serbs gained entry into their area anyway. After that, administrative authorisations became less important. It was, above all, a question of security and responsibility for people. The two sections had always maintained active communications. Once the decision had been made that each section would be positioned somewhere, we still maintained a commitment to a shared discourse. The initiatives were particularly inspired by our activities. The mobile teams were conducting a lot of

5. An MSF team was present in the enclave of Srebrenica, in Bosnia, when the Bosnian-Serb forces took control of this 'security zone' on July 11th 1995. Despite the presence of a Dutch Peacekeeping contingent, the Bosnian-Serb forces deported 40,000 people and executed 7000 others. MSF publicly denounced the massacre and the absence of UN action. In January 1996 MSF published a report containing witness statements of the survivors and denouncing the disappearance of several members of its local staff. In July 2000 MSF publicly demanded that a parliamentary commission examine France's political and military responsibilities in the massacre. In May 2001 several MSF volunteers and management staff were heard by the French Parliament's 'mission d'information' on the events in Srebrenica.

exclusively medical activities, specifically with ethnic Albanian doctors. To the extent possible, we visited the villages to try to hold consultations and to take advantage of our presence to find out how things were going and gather information. And, what we heard was that there was a big problem.

Vincent Janssens, Director of Operations,  
MSF Belgium (in French).

I tried several times - I asked people to send their stories. When I got them, I noticed that the expatriates didn't have time. They would send two pages in which they would mention an uncle who wasn't there. You couldn't understand what they were saying. It had to be put in context. We started with a questionnaire and noticed that half the responses referred to things that made no sense. Someone really needed to make sure that what was reported and written was consistent. It was a lot of work!

Eric Dachy, Programme Manager, MSF Belgium  
(in French).

**In June 1998, in the face of Serb offensives, the ethnic Albanian fled en masse to the interior of the province, but also to neighboring countries. The Emergency Team (ET) that assembled teams, ad hoc, from all MSF operational sections for emergency operations was mobilised to explore the border regions of Albania and Montenegro and prepare an operational positioning in case of a massive influx of ethnic Albanian refugees.**



'Explos to Albania and Montenegro' Email from Wouter Kok, Emergency Programme Manager MSF Holland to Graziella Godain MSF France Deputy Programme Manager Kosovo, 4 June 1998 (in English). [D14](#)

Dear All,  
After consultation between Marie-Christine [Ferir, MSF Belgium Operations Director] and me, [the] following is decided in regard to the Kosovo situation:

- An explo team will move from Tirana to north of country to see what could/should be done with the influx of Kosovar people (3.700 reported). Responsibility: MSF Belgium.
- A second explo will (try to) move from Sarajevo to Montenegro. Objective: same as above (reported 6,000 people arrived). Responsibility: MSF Holland.

A close coordination will be maintained. Should the situation even worsen in coming days, the ET could come in to effect. Decision: Thursday/Friday by Marie-Christine and

me. We will keep everybody informed on the developments via the ET structures.



*'Kosovo: Shift from ET to IT?'* **Email** from Vincent Janssens, MSF Belgium Operations Director, to the MSF B/F/H Programme Managers and operational directors, 10 August 1998 (in French). [D15](#)

Hello everyone,

Following several meetings and telephone conversations, and given the timing (7 weeks for the ET), the question has been raised on ET follow-up in this context. Ellen's feeling [ET team], which we share, is that the influx to Montenegro and northern Albania remains small, emergency preparation is still difficult and security problems exist in these locations (arms trafficking).

We could resume the debate over whether the ET should have covered Kosovo at the same time, but this question is essentially one to be raised in the future. MSF-B suggests that the ET's presence in Montenegro and Albania is not indispensable. As a result, they suggest pulling the ET out and turning Montenegro into a rear base for the Pec team. Northern Albania would then be monitored by the southern Albania team? Of course, we absolutely do not want this to be seen as the section pulling back and, as part of the same process, would like to propose a certain level of internationalisation (IT) still to be jointly coordinated by France and Belgium:

- In the field, by inviting MSF-H HR [human resources] for the 3rd mobile team (or other position),
- Headquarters should provide an effective, cross-section communication and programme management systems

Given that this is an issue that involves multiple decision makers and multiple consequences, please speak up ASAP.



*'Assistance to Refugees and IDPs from Kosovo (Northern Albania, Albania, Montenegro)'*, 6 June - 6 September 1998, **Final Report**, Amsterdam September 1998 (in English). [D16](#)

#### **Extract:**

##### 1.1 Context at the start of the programme

During the first days of June 1998 an influx of Kosovar people into Montenegro and Albania was reported as a consequence of increased fighting with Kosovo. When the MSF-Belgium team running a 'regular' programme in south Albania requested support, it was decided to do this as MSF Emergency Team, with MSF-Holland as the Back-Up Section. Two teams were sent, one to Montenegro and the other to northern Albania, where the MSF staff in place continued to be involved. A third team was on stand-by to travel to Macedonia should the situation warrant it. [...]

##### 1.6 Conclusions about achieving general objectives

- In fact there was no medical emergency. Many of the

problems, both in Albania and Montenegro, are chronic problems which require a more structural intervention.

- On the whole there was good acceptance of Kosovar population by the host populations, as well as enough local coping capacity given the relatively low number of IDPs and refugees.

However, it is clear that it is a burden and if a big influx would occur, external aid is certainly warranted. In Montenegro a degree of compassion fatigue is evident both in the ministries and the local population. This is understandable considering that after 1994 the country was host to some 60,000 refugees, part of which remain. In addition, officials witness large amounts of aid directed towards Albania. Montenegro's open door policy of welcoming those from Kosovo has not been rewarded with significant donations from abroad. It was mentioned repeatedly that aid agencies come, assess, make promises and are not seen or heard of again.

#### Recommendations:

- Both UN and NGOs should take a regional approach to the crisis, with Kosovo as the focal point.
- Assistance should be provided to both refugees/IDPs and the local population. In Montenegro, assistance should also be provided to the Bosnian refugees and the Romany population.
- Any assistance given should be within the existing structures; no parallel systems should be created.
- Refugees should be allowed to move freely within Albania; they should not be restricted to the northern region.
- Before any large intervention can occur in the Tropoja district, there will have to be a serious attempt made by the government of Albania to [address] increase security threats in the form of banditry.

**While clashes continued between Serb forces and the KLA, the possibility of armed NATO intervention in Kosovo, with or without UN authorisation, was under consideration. Albania asked NATO for assistance along its border with Kosovo.**



*'Crisis in Kosovo: NATO Prepares for the Worst - Takes Measures and Could Threaten Additional Action.'* **AFP** (France), 28 May 1998 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

On Thursday, NATO adopted a plan to help Albania and Macedonia, including summer manoeuvres in those countries, and decided to continue reviewing possible preventive military deployment in the Kosovo region should 'the worst' occur in the Serb province. "The situation in Kosovo is explosive" and "all possibilities should be considered," Hubert Védrine, French Foreign Affairs Minister told the press. He noted that a decision by the UN Security Council



would be the only “relevant legal basis” for the use of force.

During a weekly session at the Luxembourg Palace, ministers from the sixteen NATO countries took several measures intended to strengthen the military cooperation program of the Partnership for Peace on behalf of Albania and Macedonia [...] and to establish to help Albania and Macedonia ‘secure their borders.’ It also anticipates establishing training centers in both countries under the Partnership for Peace framework and expects to prepare emergency civilian plans should a humanitarian emergency arise in the Kosovo region.

[...] In their final declaration, the ministers noted that in the future, the Alliance might also “consider other deterrent measures if the situation so demands,” alluding to possible military intervention in Kosovo. [...] However, several allies, including Great Britain, Italy, Spain and Greece, oppose any mention of specific military actions that NATO might opt for in the future. The US, France, and Germany responded more favorably to initiating a study now on possible action in Kosovo.



*‘Serb Operations Continue Despite American Threats,’ AFP (France), 6 June 1998 (in French)*

**Extract:**

According to Albanian sources, Serb forces continued their operations against Albanian separatists in Western Kosovo on Saturday, despite the threat of new US sanctions against Belgrade [...] According to the UN High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR), 50,000 people have fled their homes since Serb forces have launched violent attacks against the separatists. [...] On Friday, the Security Council president, Portuguese Ambassador Antonio Monteiro, announced the Council’s call for “an immediate end” to all violence in Kosovo.



*‘International Community Mobilises to Prevent Unrest,’ AFP (France), 10 June 1998 (in French).*

**Extract:**

On Tuesday, the international community announced its determination to take all necessary action to avoid an outbreak of violence in Kosovo, the Yugoslav province currently the subject of a tug-of-war between Serbs and Albanians. Those present did not rule out military intervention at this point, although Russia remains firmly opposed to that option. During a meeting of the six countries comprising the Contact Group, Russia stated that such a meeting would be perceived as supporting the Albanian separatists struggling against Belgrade. The draft resolution, introduced by Great Britain under Chapter VII of the Charter, authorises the Council “to take all

necessary measures to restore peace and stability in the region.” The resolution would thus provide a legal basis for UN intervention.



*‘Albania Demands NATO Presence at Its Northeast Frontier,’ AFP (France), 11 June 1998 (in French).*

**Extract:**

According to a press release, Perikli Teta, Albania’s Interior Minister, asked NATO to deploy along the Yugoslav-Albanian border at a meeting on Thursday in Tirana with experts from the Atlantic Alliance. [...] Continuing hostilities in Kosovo and an influx of Kosovar refugees into Albania “threatens to transform the north-east of the country into a crisis area,” Mr Bizhga said.




*‘Kofi Annan Warns Against Action in Kosovo without UN Mandate,’ AFP (France), 28 June 1998 (in French).*

**Extract:**

Any NATO military action in Kosovo without a UN mandate would create “a dangerous precedent,” said UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on Saturday, during an interview with ITV. [...]


According to Annan, NATO intervention without a UN mandate could also open the door to anarchic excesses on the part of organisation itself. “Who would NATO try to discipline tomorrow?” he asked. “Any use of force by regional groups should have U.N. sanction,” he stated, noting that action without such sanction “would create a dangerous precedent. While Russia (an ally of the Serbs and China oppose any military intervention in Kosovo (southern Serbia) and holds veto power on the Security Council, Annan expressed his “hope that no country would be so unreasonable as to refuse to intervene if the situation explodes.”

**In late June 1998, a team made up primarily of MSF France volunteers opened a programme in Pec, Western Kosovo. It was organised under the auspices of the joint Belgian and French sections’ mission and was overseen by the Pristina coordination team. However, coordination problems and disagreements over operational direction persisted. In particular, the managers of the French section wanted to take more a proactive stance on behalf of the victims of violence.**


 We thought it was paradoxical to have mobile clinics based only in Pristina that would travel across Kosovo to Pec and Prizren, given the problems with checkpoints there. So we pushed to decentralize the emergency teams, with one based in Prizren, one in Pec and one in Pristina. The Pec area seemed to me to be the most important area because the city had a large Serbian population. It was the symbol of the Serb control, with its Orthodox monastery. And it also bordered Montenegro, where problems already existed. I suggested to MSF Belgium that we set up a modular system. They refused. In June 1998, we opened the Pec mission, but it remained a joint French-Belgian project because MSF Belgium didn't want a French module. With a modular system, the team could've reported back to the coordinators but we would've had stronger, and perhaps more independent, ties with Pec. That would've been an interesting transition for us in taking on a project without having to duplicate the coordination. The problem was that the coordination team blocked our communication with the field team, so we continued to be in the dark about what was going on. The volunteers had information and went out to sites that the coordination team never even mentioned to me. So then I began communicating directly with my team in Pec and getting information directly from them. Two months after she arrived, a nurse sent me an email saying that her work wasn't at all what I'd said it would be and that she hadn't realised she would be sent to an expanded vaccination programme. She was tired of it and wanted to work in mobile clinics like everyone else, because she thought that was where she could be most useful. She didn't understand the purpose of the mission.

We asked the coordination team: "Given the bombings, we assume there would be lots of wounded people. Where are they going? Where are they being treated? What's going on?" We continued with our small mobile clinics. We saw people with superficial wounds but never any seriously wounded patients. Laurence Thavaux, the MSF France nurse based in Pec, knew that the KLA had set up field hospitals. She had had several contacts with Albanian surgeons who were working in these KLA hospitals and were also treating wounded civilians. Here in Paris, we tried to set up a network and establish a sense of trust with these doctors so that we could develop a better understanding. In fact, the KLA was very sceptical. They knew that if they attracted humanitarian aid, they risked discovery by the Serbs. The coordination team and Brussels really blocked us on that issue, saying that if we started to treat the wounded or do other things, we'd be putting ourselves at great risk. The Serbs could easily find a reason to expel us. The coordinator at the time prohibited the teams from continuing that support. But Laurence continued to maintain some contacts and provide certain surgical supplies clandestinely - without her Coordinator knowing!


Graziella Godain, Deputy Programme Manager  
MSF France (in French).

 The Albanians went to the clandestine hospitals, which were extremely well-organised. There was a network of Albanian anesthesiologists and surgeons who worked officially in Pristina and would also come to these clandestine hospitals. They had an entire information and escort system to get from Pristina to the secret hospitals, which had been set up in private houses. They had large hospitalisation wards. We found badly wounded people there, not just fighters, but civilians who'd been hit by exploding bombs and had other wounds. They managed to get around pretty easily. I think it would've been much harder for MSF to get there, with the Serbs watching us. We supplied them, but not directly. We worked through doctors in certain hospitals or ambulances. I was able to visit one of those hospitals. It was very well-organised. They had a bunker underneath, just in case. We knew that they were pretty close to the KLA. I did things that I didn't tell the MSF team in the field about. The drivers and the Albanian staff were aware of my commitment. So when we'd head out in the mobile clinic into the Drenica, we would always leave in two cars that would split up so that we could see what was going on. We'd leave the mobile team on site with the first car and then later, we'd head out not far from the front lines. The ICRC was supporting the Albanian hospitals. They had Albanian surgeons, who took them out to these areas. They were furious because we always got there before they did. We were always the first. Officially, MSF hadn't agreed to do that kind of thing. We would have needed passes, which would have taken too much time. And in terms of security, it might have been a bit close.

Laurence Thavaux, MSF Field Coordinator in Pristina in 1996, in Pec from April 1998 to February 1999, nurse in Montenegro in April 1999 (in French).

 MSF France agreed to a joint mission because there were administrative advantages. It wasn't a traditional arrangement and at that time, they weren't doing it much anymore. It was just to facilitate things. We tried to set up a sort of joint plan. In the beginning, I had the impression that things were going fairly well.

Vincent Janssens, Director of Operations, MSF  
Belgium (in French).

 The main activities were to support the Albanian health system. Under Rugova, they had started this parallel government system. So we helped them with support to their clinics [and] with referrals. They could not go so far so we had to try to get [refer] Albanian people when they had problems that could not be dealt with the primary level. We had to help to try to get [them] back into the Serbian health system [for treatment] in hospitals.

We had mobile clinics. There were tens of thousands of people being internally displaced during the conflict. The biggest area of activities was mainly in the Drenica regions, down to Glogovac and across to Klina which is towards Pec. But we had this office based in Pec and they were also running mobile clinics and supporting the Albanian health system in a sort of corridor that ran down from Pec. Of course the government was accusing us being one sided, helping the terrorists etc. So we did try to find gaps we could fill by providing materials to the Serb health system in Pristina and in Belgrade so that we were able to have a more even-handed approach. The [MSF] people in Pec were mainly French. I think we were able to keep those tensions more or less out of the field. We had some sort of monthly meetings and we said what was going on. I think at the field level we all agreed with what was going on. We agreed what we were doing. We developed these weekly SITREP[s] which were sent to everybody. Anybody could call or flag up issues all the time. But from my view we couldn't really be managed by Paris and Brussels and Belgians. There had to be some kind of ascent and that was in Brussels and certainly led to tensions.

Tim Boucher, Coordinator MSF Belgium/France in Kosovo, June 1998 to March 1999 (in English).

**The MSF mobile clinics' work was continuously limited by the constraints and, sometimes, the threat posed by armed Serb forces who controlled access to the valleys where the villages and sites that housed displaced Albanians were located. Relationships with the Albanian guerrillas were complicated, too.**

On the ground when there was an offensive, normally we would have no access. The police and the military were effective in sealing off the area where they were carrying out their operations, and then we would get access after two days. It sort of depended on the political climate as well as if KLA would just been in town. When the international focus was on the place then they would make gestures and give them the impression of being more open. And, it is also worth mentioning that dealing with the Albanian side of KLA guys was not easy. Their structures were somewhat disparate. You would speak to one commander he would say that's ok, I am the chief of this area. And then drive another kilometre down the road and meet another guy who would say he never heard of him and he needed different authorisation, etc. And then of course, we had to negotiate in Belgrade to maintain the official side of our position, and that was related to our activities and as well to this sort of climate that was going on at that time in terms of international focus and pressure.

Tim Boucher, Coordinator MSF Belgium/France in Kosovo, June 1998 to March 1999 (in English).

Sometimes it was hard for us to obtain access to certain areas because the Serb police wouldn't let us through their checkpoints. Or they would say: "OK, go ahead, but it's mined. There's fighting, so you travel at your own risk." Then they would fire from the tanks just to dissuade us from going there. Or they would search the cars from top to bottom and say: "You don't have a pass." To the Serbs, we were, obviously, pro-Albanian. One night, returning from Peja - we usually didn't travel at night but we had a flat tire - we ended up behind a convoy of tanks as night fell. It was foggy. Every time we tried to pass, they would keep us from getting ahead. In the end, we did manage to pass and as we went by, the tanks pushed us with [the side of their tank] their rearview mirror, sending us into the ditch. They did it on purpose. Another time, we wanted to go to a village where an attack had taken place a day or two earlier and where there were displaced persons. When I got to the road leading to the village, it was blocked. There was a tank across the road and the Serbs were just in front of it. I stopped the car around 50 metres away and we looked at the scene from a distance. Then I started walking towards the tank. The Serb soldier came towards me and as soon as I got close to him - I hadn't even had a chance to say anything - the tank's tower turned and they pounded the village just ahead. Right in front of my eyes! Sometimes, there were villages we visited regularly that hadn't been touched but that might be hit after we came through. We wondered if that could have been related to our being there. The paramilitary also used white cars, like ours, to go into villages and draw people out.

Laurence Thavaux, MSF Field Coordinator in Pristina in 1996, in Pec from April 1998 to February 1999, Nurse in Montenegro in April 1999 (in French).

**On 24 June 1998, the medical human rights organisation, Physicians for Human Rights, distributed a report noting the destruction, violence, and ethnic cleansing operations carried out by Serb forces in ethnic Albanian villages and called on the international community to intervene and prevent further escalation.**



'Medical Group Recounts Individual Testimonies of Human Rights Abuses in Kosovo' **Press release**, Physicians for Human Rights, 24 June 1998 (in English). [D17](#)

**Extract:**

A preliminary report released by Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), documents serious human rights violations, including detentions, arbitrary arrests, violent beatings and rape, throughout Kosovo during the past six months. The Boston-based medical group calls for urgent inter-

vention by the International Community (IC) to prevent further escalation of these atrocities.

PHR reports that intensive, systematic destruction and ethnic cleansing of villages in the Decane and Dakovica districts of Kosovo by Serb police and military has resulted in the widespread killing of civilians. This information was gleaned during the week of 15 -22 June, 1998 when PHR representatives conducted interviews with refugee families in the northern Albanian towns of Bajram Curri, Tropoje, Dojan, and Margegaj.

"People are fleeing Kosovo in the face of deliberate and concerted armed attack on civilians and their homes, an assault entirely in contravention of international law," said Dr. Jennifer Leaning, Senior Research Fellow at the Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies and coordinator of the PHR investigation to northern Albania. "Given the failure of the West to intervene in the past, we urgently call upon the IC to take bold and effective steps to respond immediately to this crisis, before it escalates into dimensions no international organization or government can contain."

The PHR team conducted in-depth interviews with a random sample of 38 heads of households of refugee families, comprising approximately 330 people. The respondents limited their accounts to incidents of which they had first-hand knowledge. Refugees told the PHR team that they witnessed a total of 60 killings of relatives, friends, and neighbours during Serbian armed forces attacks on their villages in the last several weeks and months. Eyewitness accounts of such killings include:

- The selection of a man from a group of mourners at a funeral by Serb special forces who was then killed in front of the funeral cortege.
- The fatal shooting of a young mother by snipers as she left her home.
- The description of how one refugee's two aunts were burned to death in their home when Serb police military forces advanced on their village.
- The killing of three men by a grenade explosion and the pinning down by sniper fire of their two companions for three hours until they escaped under darkness.
- The killing of three uncles of one informant by sniper fire as they tried to flee an artillery barrage.

## MSF DECIDES IT IS TIME TO SPEAK OUT

**During the summer, Serb forces launched several offensives. European Union members continued their support for Ibrahim Rugova, but kept their distance from the KLA, which was intensifying its actions**

**against Serb civilians and security forces. In a 5 August 1988 press release, MSF Belgium expressed its concern about the medical situation in Kosovo. MSF USA also distributed the release. MSF's USA section was actively relaying information on Kosovo to the media and to its donors. The Belgian and French sections' programme managers decided to ask the teams to gather statements from the population.**



*'MSF Mobile Teams Report Alarming Medical Situation in Kosovo,'* **Press release**, MSF Belgium, 5 August 1998 (in French). *'Doctors Without Borders Mobile Teams Alarmed by Health Situation in Central Kosovo,'* **Press release** MSF USA, 6 August 1999 (in English). [D18](#)

### Extract:

On Tuesday, August 4, a Doctors Without Borders/ Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) mobile team went to meet populations who fled to the hills surrounding Nekovce, central Kosovo. Several thousand people are living in extremely difficult conditions. During the day temperatures rise up to 100°F, and without shelter and very little food or drinking water, Doctors Without Borders fears that this situation could become fatal to the most vulnerable group—the children.

Keith Ursel, Doctors Without Borders Coordinator of the mobile clinic program in Kosovo, explains: "generally, these people are 'double displaced.' It is the second or third time they've had to flee the fighting in their region. Over the last couple of days, most of them have walked 9 to 13 miles to reach safety. We were able to leave behind baby food, plastic sheeting for the construction of shelters, chlorine to disinfect the water, cans to hold water, and soap. Still more is needed, especially food. We also fear that the exposure to the sun, combined with dehydration and diarrhoea, could become fatal to some of these people, especially the children."

Every day two mobile teams criss-cross Kosovo, with local medics, in search of accessible locations to set up mobile clinics. Patients are mainly being treated for diarrhoea, respiratory and skin infections, and also for problems caused by stress (such as headaches and gastro-intestinal problems). Up to 350 consultations can be carried out per day. Frequently, however, the mobile teams have difficult or no access due to the fighting or because they are stopped at roadblocks.



*'Ethnic Albanians Continue to Live in Fear,'* **CNN Worldview** (transcription) 5 August 1998, 18:18 (in English).

### Extract:

SADLER: They press on, knowing that Kosovo's fires have

scattered people far and wide. There are tears of relief at their first stop, an abandoned schoolhouse. Food and medicine is quickly unloaded. Doctors set up a temporary clinic, and with it, a glimmer of hope for the sick and the elderly. Deeper in the countryside, they find even greater hardship; a group of men come out of hiding and climb wearily up the hill. They are living rough and have virtually nothing left, no drinking water and no shelter. Survival in the open has taken its toll. Down below, there are women and children huddled below the branches of trees. What makes them hide? Its fear, fear from grenades she says, from rockets and sniper fire. We're afraid to turn back home. Western powers are attempting to encourage refugees to go back, but these faces explain why most are not. Even if there is nothing left to go back to, they still believe it's too unsafe.

[...], DOCTORS WITHOUT BORDERS: We've been here for 11 days, a lot of fear, and I think you are seeing here the first delivery of help that they're getting and probably the whole region covered with groups like that who have left their home and are now living in, as you've seen, the forest.

SADLER: The Serbs say their actions are to liberate terrorist controlled areas, although the ethnic Albanian guerrillas may be on the run, so too are countless thousands of innocent civilians, homes abandoned and ablaze.

(On Camera): A Yugoslav army unit rolls into yet another town, once held by the Kosovo Liberation Army, but recently overrun, a network of KLA bunkers is exposed. The balance of territorial control has clearly shifted in Belgrade's favour but battlefield gains have been made at the expense of what may grow into another humanitarian disaster. Western efforts to stop it may already be too late.



'Letter from Kosovo' from MSF USA Executive Director, 12 August 1998 (in English). [D19](#)

#### Extract:

The latest offensive of Serb forces in Kosovo has targeted mostly villages and small towns, forcing populations to flee into the hills. Previous attacks, in recent months, had forced families to take refuge in other villages, in the houses of relatives. But the latest offensive, so widespread, seems to have displaced too many to be accommodated in private homes. According to some sources, between 50,000 and 70,000 have been displaced by this latest phase of the conflict, declared two weeks ago. And according to UNHCR, the total number of IDPs in Kosovo is reaching 200,000, a tenth of the population!

MSF teams, despite tremendous difficulty at checkpoints, have been able, by insistence and obstinance, to gain access to groups of displaced people hiding in the hills, and to be a firsthand witness to their tragedy. For a large

part of the Drenica region, the formula is the same: villagers escape into the hills as the villages were attacked, mostly by shelling; Serbian police forces take control of the shelled villages. In many of these villages, fields and houses are set ablaze not only by the shelling but apparently days after the shelling too, possibly intentionally by arson, reportedly to prevent the displaced population's return, a sad reminder of the practices adopted in the Bosnia ethnic cleansing.

Some families in hiding are even scared to cook as they fear that smoke could cause them to be located and shelled by Serb police. So they cook at night, under tree cover. They have very little food, but some have brought a minimum supply to the hills. Often families we find have been twice displaced: their original village was attacked in recent months, and then the relatives' homes, in which they sought shelter, came under attack in the last offensive. Our work is essential as we are the only organization able to send medical teams into the affected and controlled areas. We also assist the populations with basic supplies such as collapsible water containers and purification tablets, plastic sheeting and mattresses: we carry out consultations on the spot and/or to give supplies to the displaced medical doctors and health professionals (also in hiding with their displaced community). Many pathologies are related to the quality of water found in the hills (diarrhoea) and to mental health (high blood pressure, mental trauma etc.). More worrying are the pregnant mothers and the serious cases needing evacuations to hospitals. MSF has started to carry out these evacuations, with a major limitation: no fighting-age man can be transported in our vehicles. In the weeks to come, the threat of rains is a concern, with the related need for shelter and the risks of respiratory infections. And of course, we all dread the continuation, and likely escalation of the fighting. MSF plans to immediately expand the program of mobile teams to expand its reach throughout the hills and valleys of the affected region.



Email from Bastien Vigneau, MSF Belgium Deputy Programme Manager, to Tim Boucher, MSF Coordinator in Belgrade, 7 August 1998 (in French). [D20](#)

#### Extract:

Things went fine with Guillaume and Graziella in Paris. Basically we keep the coordination as it is, we formalised a monthly (or more if necessary) meeting. Also, we are both convinced that now is the right time to build a communication strategy with you. It means more than relating daily events to journalists. This also means having IDPs (doctors???) telling us their stories. We can build a dossier and use some of these testimonies (*témoignage*) as material. Anyway, it is still essential that you quickly send us some stories as Eric D. mentioned in his proposal to you and Keith. And I know Joelle will also be of great help on this matter.

[...] We all feel that we should STOP/ENOUGH the [internal MSF] politics and shouting! Do something about Kosovo because people are dying there and it is going to get worse, enough time has been given to diplomats, and still no solution has been brought by the international community! The conflict dramatically changed last week, and definitely no improvement is expected. We already said in our communications that the Belgrade administration was beginning to block access to Yugoslavia for foreigners; refusing access to zones has been filmed by CNN, etc.

Kosovars are fleeing their country, and Western Europe has no clear policy concerning those refugees. We'll have a brainstorming session on Monday concerning these issues, and choose the means to use to reach these objectives. If you already have material (testimonies), ideas, messages you think are appropriate, please send me an email before next Monday 10:00.

**On 20 August 1998, with negotiations blocked, international leaders called for a ceasefire and increased aid for the fleeing Albanian Kosovars, predicting that the situation would become a 'humanitarian disaster.' On August 22 1998, the Serb army launched a new offensive in central and northern Kosovo. On 24 August, the UN demanded that Belgrade agree to a ceasefire, withdrawal its forces, dialogue with the ethnic Albanians, and facilitate the refugees' return.**



*'Humanitarian Catastrophe Threatens Kosovo, According to International Organisations'* Alexandra Niksic, **AFP** (France), Pristina, 20 August 1998 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

"If there is no progress, a humanitarian crisis could turn into a humanitarian catastrophe," warned Emma Bonino, the European Community's Humanitarian Affairs Commissioner, on a visit to Kosovo Wednesday. Thousands of people have taken refuge in the forests, fleeing fighting between Serb forces and Kosovo Liberation Army rebels.

Diplomatic sources say mediation efforts by US Emissary Christopher Hill, expected to begin Thursday in Kosovo, have not yet produced results. The Albanians refused to negotiate until Belgrade halts operations against the KLA. [...] Bonino and Soren Jessen-Petersen, UN Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees, who was also in the province on Wednesday, have called for an immediate ceasefire. They also demanded easier access to the region for humanitarian organisations.

More than 230,000 people have fled their homes in the face of fighting. Around 170,000 of them have been displaced within the province and have sought refuge in the

mountains and forests, where it is difficult for aid organisations to reach them. [...] Jessen-Petersen criticised the failure to respond to the organisations' needs. "We have received only one-third of what we requested and that will not be enough," he noted.

[...] On Wednesday, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) requested NATO assistance to build shelters in northern Albania for the Kosovo refugees. Daan Everts, OSCE Ambassador in Albania, said that NATO soldiers could help build winter shelters to house Kosovo refugees, who currently total around 14,000.

**On 28 August 1998, MSF Belgium organised a public awareness campaign in Brussels and launched an appeal directed at European political leaders and the Belgian government to ensure a halt to the violence and guarantee the safety of Kosovo's population. On 31 August 1998, faced with an influx of Kosovar refugees in Belgium, MSF opened a shelter where they could spend the night in Brussels. In the interim, refugees were housed at MSF headquarters.**



*'An Appeal to European Political Leaders from Médecins Sans Frontières,'* MSF Belgium **Press release**, 26 August 1998 (in French). **D21**

#### **Extract:**

MSF teams are sending mobile clinics out on a daily basis to assist the populations in the forests and countryside. In addition to this sudden and distressing change of circumstances, these men, women and children are unable to maintain proper hygiene, provide for their own survival or receive medical care.

The situation will worsen in winter if they are forced to live without shelter, drinking water, and health care.

This violence was not inevitable. Western governments could have prevented it. Experience has shown that the recent bloody conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia ended only when the international community decided to end the killing and provided the means required to do so.

Today, statements without action only encourage the warmongers to continue their policy of escalation.

Over the last two months, the massive influx of refugees from Kosovo into Belgium has created an acute crisis for organisations that accept asylum seekers.

Despite the contributions and participation of a range of actors in the field, refugees of every nationality go without shelter nearly every night. They are a powerful illustration of the weakness of Belgium's current asylum policy.

This situation was not inevitable, either. Solutions do exist. In the name of the values that Europe claims to

respect, in the name of the security of civilian populations and under the Geneva Convention, Médecins Sans Frontières today issues an urgent call to Europe's political leaders:

- To take all appropriate steps to halt the violence perpetrated against civilian populations, whether Serb or Albanian.
- To ensure that security is restored in the province so that people may return to their homes.

In the name of the same values, we call on the Belgian government:

- To release, on an emergency basis, the resources needed to provide a roof to anyone requesting asylum in Belgium.
- To choose a more open, more consistent and better coordinated asylum policy as the only way to ensure a dignified and humane welcome for all refugees.



*'Kosovo Burns at Europe's Door,' Press conference, MSF Belgium, 28 August 1998 (in French).* **D22**

#### Extract:

Over the last six months, Kosovo province has been the theatre of violence against civilian populations. Villages have come under artillery attack, houses are set ablaze, and residents are driven from their homes. Tens of thousands of civilians are hiding in the mountains and forests to escape the attacks. They have nothing.

In addition, those who flee confront glaring deficiencies in refugee reception facilities. In the face of this unacceptable situation, we are appealing to European and Belgian political decision makers and also wish to inform the public at large. We will thus place a replica of a burned house near the Schuman traffic circle. This house will symbolise the reality of Kosovo. We will also place a tent there, representing the displaced populations and refugees. We invite you to visit the site to interview individuals working with our projects in Kosovo and Belgium on Friday, the 28th, between 10:00 and 16:00, across from 175 Rue de la Loi (Schuman traffic circle).

The following individuals will be there:

- Pierre Ryckmans, Belgian, Manager of the 'night-time shelter programme in Belgium.
- Laurence Thavaux, a French nurse working with the mobile teams in Kosovo.
- Marie-Claire Durand, a French sanitation expert, who recently returned from evaluating living conditions among the displaced populations.



*'The Reception Facilities are Full: Médecins Sans Frontières Takes Action to Provide Nighttime Shelter for Kosovar Refugees,' Le Soir (Belgium) 29/30 August 1998 (in French).* **D23**

#### Extrait:

July was a record-breaking month, with 500 asylum seekers. The explanation may be found in a notice published in November 1997 in the *'Moniteur,'* providing "that refugees facing events that may put their lives at risk may not be expelled." "We haven't been sending the Kosovars home for the last several months," explains Dir Van den Bulck, Deputy Cabinet Director for the Ministry of Interior. "In any event, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia refuses to accept them, even if they return voluntarily, because there is no bilateral agreement with Belgium."

The precarious nature of their situation has prompted Médecins Sans Frontières Belgium to take the initiative. Beginning on Monday, the humanitarian organisation will open a nighttime shelter in the capital city, next to its own office. "We felt that Belgium was delaying," said Program Manager Pierre Ryckmans. "As it became clear that there were no tangible improvements underway in Kosovo and that the politicians were not sending a clear message on the situation, we decided, along with the Petit Château [a non-profit refugee assistance organisation] and the Office of Foreigners [the government immigrant services agency], to get involved in refugee reception for the first time, with the resources at hand."

We can house some 30 people at the MSF office, with priority to women and children. However, according to Interior Ministry statistics, "80% of the Kosovar refugee seekers are single men." Initially, the operation will continue until the end of September. "It's very important that we open on Monday because we know from experience that that's the day of the week when the influx of Kosovars is greatest. By the following days, some people have already managed to find shelter. We are working with a non-profit organisation that expects to open a shelter for undocumented women and children." MSF will provide its guests breakfast and a light evening meal. Asylum seekers will then be directed to the Public Centre for Social Action (CPAS, a social services network agency), where they must present themselves after two months. "It's hard to understand how a country like ours could lack the resources to house people in such need," says Ryckmans.



*Beginning in August 1998, Belgium also faced the problem of the Kosovars arriving in the country. You actually saw Kosovar families in the streets of Brussels. For Eastern Europeans in general, Belgium was very attractive because it was on the way to London. There was a whole route worked out - Brussels, then the coast, and then London. Later we even opened a small project on the coast,*

near the spot where the boats leave. People were in very risky situations. They were cold and they had nothing. It was tragic. We found ourselves amongst men who tried to push the refugee women into prostitution. We had to deal with that, sometimes by separating the girls from these parasites, who were everywhere. We had to deal with security problems ourselves. At that point, things had moved beyond us but we didn't have any obvious solutions so we decided to set up the burned villages across from the European Union.

Anouk Delafortrie, Communications Officer, MSF Belgium (in French).



We were with Eric Dachy and a couple of others, and we said to ourselves: "What can we do?" So we organised a whole series of events. We drove up in front of the European Parliament and set up a stand. We built a replica of a Kosovar village and set it on fire. We interviewed passers-by and handed out fliers. It worked well with the public and members of parliament. We also housed Kosovars at the MSF Belgium headquarters because there was no more room at the Petit Château, where illegal refugees are housed in Belgium while waiting for papers or deportation. We said to ourselves: "We have projects in Kosovo. We know the situation there and we're at the other end of the chain of events." So we organised night shifts. It was an amazing mobilisation.

Bastien Vigneau, Deputy Programme Manager, MSF Belgium, (in French).

**In September 1998, the French and Belgian sections' Kosovo programme managers made a joint visit to their shared project. Shocked by the population's tragic situation, they decided to speak out in public together. On 15 September 1987, MSF Belgium, MSF France and MSF USA alerted the press to the worsening situation observed by MSF's mobile teams in Kosovo.**



**Minutes** of the 25 September 1998 Board Meeting, MSF France (in French). [D24](#)

#### Extract:

Kosovo (Guillaume Le Gallais): The Serbs are conducting a war against civilians in Kosovo. The scenario is as follows: Serb forces surround a village, allow the residents to flee, shell the village, destroy everything (including livestock) and loot the valuables. The conflict moves from village to village. No one knows where it will travel to next or how it will all end. And, winter is coming. In reality, the Serbs' reaction, intended to punish rebel supporters, is completely disproportionate to the rebellion.

People driven from their homes try not to move too far from their original residences. They go to other villages, camp out in the valleys and build shelters with whatever materials they can find. The situation differs considerably from one locale to the next. Some people go home, others farm and some places haven't been touched yet.

MSF has no access to the villages when the destruction is occurring. We arrive later, along with everyone else. One team is based in Pristina, another is in Peja, and the third is working in the Prizren region. We've developed several programme components:

- Medical component: the mobile teams move from village to village. It's not very satisfying, but there's no major medical crisis. The problems we face have to do with hospital referrals; people are afraid to travel, are not always welcome at these facilities and we don't know how they are being treated. There are no hospitals in the rebel areas.
- Material aid component: we handle the distribution of any items that could help people survive, wherever they end up, and we have direct access to those sites that are the most isolated and least served by aid.
- Communications/testimonies/lobbying component: the government denies that there are homeless people. We were slow to speak publicly because we didn't have anyone who could take people's statements. It takes time to write.

What is the role of the Kosovo Liberation Army vis-à-vis the population? All Albanians support the opposition and are required to support the rebellion. The rebels are quite irresponsible with regard to the population. They wanted to hold positions militarily but were unable to do so. That might have been the only way to draw international public attention to Kosovo, but that decision had significant consequences.



*'Mobile Teams Based in Pec Report Serious Deterioration in the Situation in Western Regions Over the Last Few Weeks,'* MSF France, **Press release**, 15 September 1998 (in French). *'New Abuses in Kosovo - Populations in a Deadlock,'* MSF Belgium, **Press release**, 15 September 1998 (in French). *'Doctors Without Borders Teams Alarmed by Escalating Humanitarian Crisis in Kosovo - Wounded Have No Access to Medical Care,'* MSF US, **Press release**, 15 September 1998 (in English). [D25](#)

#### Extract:

Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) teams based in Pec, Kosovo, report a serious deterioration in the situation in Western regions of the province over the past several weeks. Villages have been subjected to fierce military attacks and systematically bombed, burned and looted and residents chased from their homes. Many displaced persons are suffering from bullet or grenade



wounds and do not have access to medical care. "These increasingly violent attacks are being carried out openly, in front of us and other international observers," says Tim Boucher, Coordinator for MSF in Pristina.

The MSF team recently visited villages that had been partially or entirely destroyed and whose inhabitants had fled to take refuge in the nearby mountains. When village residents try to return to their homes, they find their possessions looted and their houses destroyed. Some are forced to lodge with relatives in already overcrowded homes, and others have been displaced for months, moving from village to village, or hiding in the forest. On September 6, 1998, a MSF team succeeded in reaching the area surrounding Pornorsk, near Pec, where two days previously, multiple bombing raids had destroyed up to 90 percent of the housing. According to eyewitness accounts, Serbian military forces pursued village residents into the surrounding forest where men were arrested. There are also reports of ill treatment at the hands of Serbian forces. In Isniq, over 10,000 people who fled the September 9 attack on the town of Brolic, had taken temporary refuge in a field. A few days later, Serbian tanks uprooted these displaced persons, forcing them to move once again.

In the regions of Kosovo severely affected by war, health structures have been destroyed and medical staff are no longer able to work. Moreover, health problems (for example, diarrhea and respiratory infections) are worsened by the precarious living conditions. The health of these tens of thousands of displaced people is further threatened by the coming winter months. MSF has been working in Kosovo since 1992 providing medical support to health structures. For the last 6 months, relief actions have been brought to the regions most affected by the conflict. Three mobile teams are working around Pec, in the Drenica and Prizren regions. Three to four hundred consultations are given every day, mainly to the displaced population.

*In September, Guillaume [Le Gallais, MSF France Kosovo Programme Manager] left for Kosovo with Bastien Vigneau [MSF Belgium Kosovo Deputy Programme Manager] and Vincent Janssens, then - Operations Director in the cell structure that MSF Belgium had set up at that time. The visit was a complete shock to Guillaume. We realized that with 200,000 refugees, give or take, living in the forest, what we can provide is peanuts compared to what they need. Suddenly, remaining silent meant endorsing what was going on. We knew that speaking out could jeopardize our operations, but given how little we could really offer people, we had absolutely nothing to lose by doing so and the people had everything to gain. [...] So Guillaume and Vincent decided to set up a communications campaign.*

Graziella Godain, Deputy Programme Manager  
MSF France (in French).

*What I particularly remember is that for a long time, our programmes in Kosovo were focused on the medium term, like vaccination campaigns. We took a cautious approach to communications. It was hard for us to move out of that medium-term perspective and into 'emergency' mode. In the beginning, we didn't realize how extensive it would become. And then in autumn, everything changed. There was a lot of discussion around the question: "Do our programmes still address the needs?" Increasing numbers of people were being driven out. We had to spend more time with people in the mountains and the situations the mobile teams were seeing were getting worse.*

Anouk Delafortrie, Communications Officer,  
MSF Belgium (in French).

**On 22 September 1998, Serb forces launched a new offensive in central and northern Kosovo. On 23 September, the UN Security Council issued Resolution 1199 demanding that Serb forces retreat and that negotiations begin under threat of 'new measures.' On 24 September 1998, NATO began to prepare an aerial force.**



'Resolution 1199, UN Security Council,' **UN Security Council**, 23 September 1998 (in English). [D26](#)

#### Extract:

The Security Council,  
Recalling its resolution 1160 (1998) of 31 March 1998,  
Acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations,

1. Demands that all parties, groups and individuals immediately cease hostilities and maintain a ceasefire in Kosovo, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which would enhance the prospects for a meaningful dialogue between the authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Kosovo Albanian leadership and reduce the risks of a humanitarian catastrophe;
2. Demands also that the authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Kosovo Albanian leadership take immediate steps to improve the humanitarian situation and to avert the impending humanitarian catastrophe;
3. Calls upon the authorities in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Kosovo Albanian leadership to enter immediately into a meaningful dialogue without preconditions and with international involvement, and to a clear timetable, leading to an end of the crisis and to a negotiated political solution to the issue of Kosovo, and welcomes the current efforts aimed at facilitating such a dialogue;
4. Demands further that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, in addition to the measures called for under resolution

1160 (1998), implement immediately the following concrete measures towards achieving a political solution to the situation in Kosovo as contained in the Contact Group statement of 12 June 1998:

- (a) cease all action by the security forces affecting the civilian population and order the withdrawal of security units used for civilian repression;
- (b) enable effective and continuous international monitoring in Kosovo by the European Community Monitoring Mission and diplomatic missions accredited to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, including access and complete freedom of movement of such monitors to, from and within Kosovo unimpeded by government authorities, and expeditious issuance of appropriate travel documents to international personnel contributing to the monitoring;
- (c) facilitate, in agreement with the UNHCR and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the safe return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes and allow free and unimpeded access for humanitarian organizations and supplies to Kosovo;
- (d) make rapid progress to a clear timetable, in the dialogue referred to in paragraph 3 with the Kosovo Albanian community called for in resolution 1160 (1998), with the aim of agreeing confidence-building measures and finding a political solution to the problems of Kosovo;



*'Serb Forces Launch Vast Offensive in Northern Kosovo,' AFP (France), Pristina, 22 September 1998 (in French).*

#### **Extract:**

On Tuesday morning, Serb security forces launched a vast offensive in northern Kosovo against Albanian "terrorist" groups that have taken refuge in the Cicavica mountain region, said Colonel Bozidar Filic, Serb Interior Ministry spokesman in Pristina, the county seat. "Police officers have blocked the region and are pursuing separatist Albanian groups suspected of having committed crimes and participating in kidnapping civilians," he told the press.

According to the officer, the 'terrorist groups' have retrenched in that sector, considered the last bastion of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), after taking serious losses in the province's Western and central regions. [...] The Albanian Information Center announced that police attacked some fifteen villages in the region last Friday and that at least sixteen people, including two children, had been wounded in Prekzaz and Mikusnica. [...] The police representative stated that, with the agreement of local Serb authorities, fifty Albanian villages had organised "interior security groups responsible for restoring conditions to normal," in response to KLA efforts to rally the communities to its cause.



*'Contact Group Agrees On a Kosovo Resolution Accord,' AFP (France), New York (United Nations), 23 September 1998 (in French).*

#### **Extract:**

On Monday, the six contact group countries reached an agreement on a draft resolution warning of "additional actions" if Belgrade did not halt repression in Kosovo. However, Sergei Lavrov, Russian Ambassador to the UN, stated that the text did not give NATO a 'green light' to launch a military intervention. The text was adopted under the terms of Chapter VII of the UN Charter. The contact group includes Germany, the US, France, Great Britain, Italy and Russia.

The text states that if Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic does not fulfill his commitments, the Security Council "will consider additional actions and measures to maintain or restore stability in the region." "Nothing in this text authorises 'the use of force'," Lavrov told the press after a Council meeting.



*'NATO Asks Its Soldiers to Organise an Aerial Force for Possible Armed Action in Kosovo,' AFP (France), Vilamoura (Portugal), 24 September 1998 (in French).*

#### **Extract:**

On Thursday, NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana announced that the Alliance had asked its army to organise an aerial force in anticipation of possible armed action against Serb targets in Kosovo. "This decision sends an important political signal that NATO can use force if necessary," Solana said. [...]

Under pressure from the US, it seeks to lend credibility to the international community's threat to use force, reaffirmed Wednesday by the UN in a resolution calling on Belgrade to halt its offensive against the Kosovar Albanians. A new NATO decision will be required to take action. The allies had been considering a range of options over the last three months and chose to focus on air raids. If they are ordered, they would initially involve strikes by American Tomahawk cruise missiles. The aerial force stand-by, voted on Thursday, signals the member countries' 'firm intention' to make those forces available to NATO.

**Between 23 September and 5 October 1998, the MSF mobile team provided aid to people in the Pristina-Pec-Prizren triangle, which was attacked by the Serb army and police forces, particularly in the displaced persons' camp in Vatchak and the village of Golubovac. A writer**

accompanied the team, assigned by MSF to gather survivors' testimonies.



**Fax** from Myriam Gaume to the Programme Managers and communications officers at MSF France and MSF Belgium, 29 September (in French). **D27**

#### Extract:

28 September 1998: Drenica, Kosovo

When we entered the village of Golubovac, on the road to the Vutchak valley that we had found last Thursday, we discovered a landscape of ruined houses with still-smoldering beams. Several cows, killed by gunshots, lay on the ground, their legs stiff. Weeping women came out of the houses, stopping us. "We told them not to hurt us. We'd never seen anything like it. They came with tanks, wearing three kinds of uniforms - blue and khaki - some, with hats with the brims turned back, others with scarves around their heads and their cheeks painted green and black. They captured the young men, put a bullet in their pocket and then took it out, yelling: "Look a terrorist!" Two men in Djemila's family were arrested on Friday and their bodies are buried with those of twelve other villagers captured with them. It was a massive attack that began at 09:00. Many soldiers and militiamen penetrated the village and pursued them into the nearby forests, where they had fled. First, they separated the men from the women. The women were screaming, the children were screaming. [...] You heard firing and screams everywhere. They chose the ones they wanted to kill and took 14 of them to the houses. When Djemila, her daughters, her sister-in-law, her sister-in-law's 10 year-old daughter, and her brothers returned to the village, the family's two men had had their heads cut off. With a quick gesture, she made a slicing motion across her throat and the little girl cried. Her uncle is dead. "He yelled at us not to leave the house, or they would kill us. They took my uncle."

The last militiamen remained in the village until Sunday night. This morning, there were twenty fresh graves in the two nearby cemeteries. Djemila said: "They were singing at the top of their lungs as they beat up and hacked [the people]. They burned the aid you gave us and our flour. Here we are again, with nothing, nothing. [...] The Serb Red Cross came and then they left again. All night long we carried the corpses."

Selman is the only one to have survived the massacre. He was wounded in the shoulder and hip, but managed to find his family. He tells his story. "They surrounded us, with our families, yelling at us to drop our weapons. We came out of the forest with our hands on our heads. Then they separated the men from the women. There were about thirty men. They put the oldest to one side and sixteen of us were left-the young and not-so-young men. When the militia took us into a courtyard in the village,


they made us lie down on our bellies, with our hands on our head. That lasted about an hour, maybe more. Then we heard one person walking towards us. The others were drinking. They started shooting. I was hit and it hurt. Then they started kicking us. A man next to me started screaming. He'd been hit with two more bullets. They kicked me, too. I didn't scream. When they finally left, I managed to stand up and drag myself here. There were fourteen of us and a single man shot us all." His brother, Osman, 25, was killed. His grandmother cried: "Why did they give him back to me with a KLA beret on his head? There was no KLA in our house."

The medical supplies in the building where MSF held its consultations were burned. Only a pile of ashes remained, with a few metal clips visible. We continued on, looking for the people who lived in the valley. Along the road, more than one man raised his wrist or opened his hands as if to signal that it was too late. The evil had been done. Three days ago, several thousand families lived there. Today, only a few destroyed beams and cars, crushed by the tank, remain. It's the same stream, swollen by rains, the same autumn green and gold landscape, but the valley is deserted. Along the sodden road, horses pull several wagons. The families are on foot, their hands nearly empty, like this woman holding an oil lamp, accompanied by her children. "The militiamen came in with oil cans and set fire to the mattresses. The plastic went up in smoke. It was four o'clock in the afternoon, on Friday. They separated the women from the men, they took them away, their hands on their head, and then some came back to demand 500 marks to return the men to us. People were terrified, slipping and falling in the mud. The armored vehicles drove around us. A woman took money from her pocket, but they took 1,000 marks and 1,500 from another," a second woman added. As others recounted, the women were also stripped of their earrings and gold jewelry. "There were two hundred of them. They came with a tank and twenty-five of them searched us. Then they said: "If you don't get out of your houses, we'll kill you." So the woman and children started to leave." Some families, in the village of Bajica, for example, have returned to their charred houses, but they have no food left.


[...] The refugees who've populated this valley for two months have built shelters of plastic sheeting, held up by branches, like the greenhouses they make for their kitchen gardens. But, the nighttime damp sends water running down along the walls and it infiltrates the thin foam mattresses on the ground. In a few days, they will be unusable. The ground is soaked by the strong rains that have pounded the valley for three days. "Winter is here and this won't be enough," one father says, sadly, as he puts his hand under the shelter and brings it out, dripping. "The Serbs have found their best officer - General Winter."

MSF has just found this meager camp where food supplies are running out. The men try to return to their houses, clandestinely, at night. The granges and stocks have been burned and the livestock killed. We've been here for two


months and not a single humanitarian convoy has made it here, a man tells us, distraught. He stares at us, as if not daring to believe that the nightmare is over. The arrival of the MSF trucks rouses people from their torpor, relieving the refugees' fatalism. Until now, they have been left to their own devices. The same request is made by all: plastic sheeting for shelter. They all have one concern: "and what about Pristina?" Caught in a storm of gunfire and suffocating smoke for the last 48 hours, they fear the tanks have moved into the capital, heralding Kosovo's end.

 *It would've been better if every expatriate had been able to describe his or her days over the course of a week. We would have put it all together and we'd have had the description of the tragedy. But it didn't happen - either because they didn't have the time or the distance or because they did it clumsily. I received a few fragmentary accounts. The Coordinator told me: "It's not working. People don't have the time or the perspective." We could've done the classic thing and sent someone who would have assembled the accounts and interviewed people, but I said to myself: "If we wanted to distribute that publicly, it would've been more useful to send someone who could also tell the rest of it."*

Eric Dachy, Programme Manager MSF Belgium  
(in French).

 *Eric Dachy, one of the members of MSF Belgium's Kosovo cell, the former Balkans programme manager during the war in Bosnia, was a good friend of Myriam Gaume, an independent journalist. She headed out there for MSF to help the team assemble the statements. Eric Dachy's idea was that she knew the Balkans and was a good writer, so she would be able to write an article and a book for us. She went out there for the two sections. When she came back, she debriefed in Brussels and Paris and gave everyone her materials. I know that to get information and immerse yourself in this process of gathering statements, you have to send someone to do it. And Myriam did it. When she saw the reality in the field and the extent of the damages, she knew that the information had to get out and something had to be done. She gathered a fair number of accounts herself, but she also briefed the teams and later she edited some of the writing.*

Graziella Godain, Deputy Programme Manager  
MSF France (in French).

 *The statements were gathered in a fairly systematic and interesting way. This was a time when the MSF*

*teams were working in the Drenica valley in mobile teams. They had access to very isolated locations and to populations that had been displaced once, displaced again and displaced yet again. They conducted a series of interviews. It was like the doctor who asks the patient a few questions and later realizes, after the accounts accumulate, that the stories she's hearing aren't just individual incidents but add up to the displacement of several hundred families.*

Bénédicte Jeannerod, Communications Officer,  
MSF France (in French).

**On 29 September 1998, one day after Belgrade announced the end of military operations, the human rights organisation Human Rights Watch published a report on the massacre of civilians in Kosovo. Their information on the Vatchac and Golubovac region was provided by MSF teams there.**



*'Eighteen Civilians Massacred in Kosovo Forest - Thirteen Others Believed Executed,'* **Press release**, Human Rights Watch, New York, 29 September 1998 (in English). [D28](#)

#### **Extract:**

Today Human Rights Watch reported that Serb forces massacred an extended family of eighteen ethnic Albanian civilians, including five children, in a forest in the Drenica region of Kosovo on September 26. Human Rights Watch researchers on the scene saw seven of the bodies, all of which had been shot at close range in the head. Several of the corpses had been mutilated. "The massacre was clearly an attack on defenseless civilians who were hiding in the woods," said Holly Cartner, Executive Director of the Europe and Central Asia division of Human Rights Watch. "The Yugoslav Army and Serbian Police are fighting a war against civilians, and this is another sad example of the unspeakable atrocities being committed against them." The Drenica region of Kosovo was considered a stronghold of the Kosovar Liberation Army (KLA), and was the sight of similar civilian massacres in February and March 1998. Human Rights Watch has seen credible evidence of similar atrocities, including the recent summary execution of thirteen men, in nearby villages.

[...] According to one eyewitness interviewed by Human Rights Watch, the Deliaj family had been living in the forest since September 25. On September 26, at 10:00 am, Serbian armed forces entered the forest on foot, according to the witness, who heard shooting and screaming coming from the area of the massacre. [...] In the village of Glogovc [Golubovac], located approximately five kilometers south of Donja Obrinja, Human Rights Watch visited what appeared to be the execution site of fourteen young men, whom villagers said Serbian police had beaten and executed. The site was strewn with approximately eighty

spent bullet casings, and Human Rights Watch observed fresh blood stains along the fence where villagers said the men had been executed. One man reportedly survived the execution, and was interviewed by Western diplomats touring the region today.

According to eyewitnesses, police forces approximately two hundred villagers, who had been hiding in the nearby woods to escape shelling in their villages, to return to Golubovac on September 26. The eyewitnesses claimed that the police detained the group of two hundred civilians at a large house, and then selected the fourteen men for execution. One credible eyewitness told Human Rights Watch that the men were severely beaten and abused prior to execution.



**Email** from Bastien Vigneau, MSF Belgium Deputy Programme Manager, to the programme managers, general directors and information officers at MSF Belgium and MSF France, 30 September 1998 (in French). [D29](#)

#### Extract:

In the last four days, the situation in Kosovo has hit a peak in terms of human rights violations. More than ever, Serbian forces have flouted basic humanitarian rules, fatally widening the gap between political discourse and the day-to-day reality of violence. Our teams, which comb the affected regions on a daily basis, come in constant contact with the victims. In the evening, when they debrief at UNHCR meetings, MSF volunteers give their reports and tell what they have seen, indicating exact locations and stating general needs. It was in this way that they conveyed, on Monday, 28 September, the news about Golubovac (the village where Vincent Guillaume and I had ourselves spent the previous week). Houses razed after huge offensives, described Myriam (see her collection of testimonies [*témoignage*]). In short, Human Rights Watch went out after hearing our information, and is now confirming in the press that 14 young men were beaten and executed there. [...] They are also reporting that a family of 18, including 5 children, was massacred in another location, etc.

In short, it's clear that MSF is THE SOURCE of information on the ground. Yesterday, members of KDOM-Kosovo Diplomatic Observer Mission-asked us where we observed Tuesday's atrocities. Then they went straight there in their armored Nissan. Moral of the story: the KDOM doctor was concerned about the psychological stress on these expatriates, because some broke down seeing the mutilated bodies. [...] In short, as you know, Dr. Lec-whom we knew-was tortured and executed.

Belgrade has announced that it is withdrawing its troops, but fighting continues and the atrocities are becoming more numerous and more severe. [...] And, our teams are on the front lines. The press releases seem pretty weak to me, given the circumstances, but I'm no expert in this area. I discussed this with Keith [Ursel, MSF doctor in

Kosovo] this morning, and he would be willing to come back to be interviewed by journalists, on camera. If you have the time and the desire, put us to work and tell us, quickly, in what way MSF can speak out on behalf of these victims.



*Basically, we were supporting Human Rights Watch people. We talked to them and they went and did an investigation and managed to get that on the front page of the main Albanian newspaper. We thought that probably the impact on us would be too great if we spoke out. We had the agreement of headquarters. HRW people didn't get that pragmatic approach of our message. After that of course it was picked up and kept out in the press pretty quickly.*

Tim Boucher, Coordinator MSF Belgium/France in Kosovo, June 1998 to March 1999 (in English).

**On 1 October, the programme managers and information officers from the Belgian and French sections drafted an information strategy. MSF France's legal director suggested to the programme managers and the field teams that they focus the search for information around atrocities that constitute war crimes.**



**Emails** between Bastien Vigneau, MSF Belgium Deputy Programme Manager, and Anne Guibert, MSF France Information Officer, 1<sup>st</sup> October 1998 (in French). [D30](#)

#### Extract:

- Reaction to communication quickly, after yesterday's conversation between Guillaume and Bastien, and today between Anouk and Vincent, here's where we're heading.

1- We want to give journalists more information: Myriam did quality work. We want her to continue, but also to provide a second type of document (condensed and factual), so we can send them out to news agencies, after review by OPS/COM [operations and communication heads] (Tim insists).

2- To speak out on behalf of the populations, and not give only political or structural information ("NATO said..." "Milosevic said..."). In order to do this, we've invited Keith to Brussels (Tim and World, etc.). Preliminary work will be needed to choose the framework for the testimonies [*témoignage*] and the messages to convey, and to prepare technically for this meeting. COM thinks it can be ready by next Tuesday or Wednesday. Focus on the fact that doctors are being targeted, that for months there has been a disconnection between political discourse and the

brutality on the ground, a political farce.

Keith knows the area well, has followed the course of the conflict, and will speak in English, which makes it easier for better broadcast.

3- Someone else—Vincent, for example—will go with Keith.

4- We're knowingly risking this kind of action, given that many things could happen over these 4-5 days. What we're risking is a round-trip ticket.

• Bastien: [...]

Hi Bastien

It's true that we're having a lot of trouble finding Kosovo angles different than what's in the newspapers every day. But, we have to move forward, and you are right to make these suggestions. Having Keith come is a good idea. I think that we should focus our work on three main areas in the upcoming days and weeks:

-the fate of medical staff, which could use a bit more documentation

-the facts (raw testimony, more detailed personal stories, anonymous medical certificates)

-using these elements, characterise what we're seeing: looting, atrocities; what is systematic, (what are mistakes...).

In short, it's really good to have Myriam's information, but we have to firm up the sources and the details. Soon there will be enough to construct a little dossier; it's up to us to see what angle to give it.

[Anne]



'Kosovo' Email from Françoise Saulnier, MSF Legal Advisor, to the Kosovo programme manager, 1<sup>st</sup> October 1998 (in French). [D31](#)

#### Extract:

Dear friends of Kosovo, Dear Myriam,

After reading your report and following our meeting, here are a few comments:

Bravo for what's already been done—it would be interesting to narrow down the information search to three subjects on which our voice has legitimacy and might be useful. All three of these subjects constitute war crimes according to international law.

1- Atrocities against ethnic Albanian medical personnel: failure to respect the inviolability of medical and health personnel during a conflict. The list you've already sent us is impressive. We need to bolster all this by putting it back in the historical context of our intervention in Kosovo.

There was a well-organised network of doctors with whom MSF was working. We would have to find the numbers. Do a tally of what's left of all that, and of who we still have in terms of a network and contacts with whom we can work (find the numbers with respect to drugs or something else...). Add that if the doctors have disappeared or

are in hiding, it's because the authorities do not respect their mission and they're in danger...war crime. It may also be because they're seen as leaders of Kosovar society. In either case, we prove the failure to respect the medical mission in a time of war (crime) or the intention to destroy a society (crime).

2- General obstruction of the MSF medical mission and destruction of relief supplies prohibiting access to places we went the previous day, where we identified needs, an amassed population being deprived of care... Arresting people being transported by ambulance for care. The destruction of health care facilities or medical relief supplies that we leave on the scene.

3- Persecution of the civilian population, that is:

- Acts of brutality, executions.

- The destruction of civilian property and goods essential to the population's survival, including relief supplies.

- Deliberate destruction unrelated to precise military objectives, indiscriminate attacks intended to spread terror.


- Forced displacement, including prohibitions against travel and people returning to their destroyed villages, no doubt, in hopes of preventing the amassed population from serving as proof of village destruction and attacks on civilians.

This all has to be done quickly, because the situation is going to move very fast. We've got to be methodical but extremely responsive, ready to let one or another of these three issues get out, if necessary, if the information is important enough. Let's not let the desire to be exhaustive, or for perfection, slow us down.

This war seems to follow a particular pattern: always remaining below the threshold of outside intervention. Brutality takes subtle forms (like sending people back to their destroyed villages) or hidden forms (we don't see much, of course, of what's going on, and that's deliberate). So we have to be vigilant, let the emptiness, silence, and absence do the talking, and listen as much as possible to the people. Beyond the always poignant personal stories, it's the overall objective of this war that we need to reveal. It is typical that people flee fighting. It is not typical that they be pursued by the fighting and forced to flee 8 times. It is not typical to confiscate and burn the mattresses of civilians in flight (goods essential to the population's survival). Through interviews we have to elicit the fact that the population of a village of XXX people fled on XXX to XXX, was attacked again on XXX, fled to XXX... And, see how many people remain after three months of war there, compared to the original population of the village.

It also seems important, on the medical level that the teams draw up individual medical certificates for those we treat for war wounds. Since this isn't the majority, it shouldn't be too much work. These certificates are important, because they are the only concrete proof that these

people are victims of war. Someday they will be able to request compensation or prove what happened to them. It's an opportunity for us to talk with them at greater length and see if they want a certificate or not. In any case, the certificate is a confidential document. It should be dated, signed and stamped by MSF, with the doctor's name—and not just his or her unreadable signature. The patient gets a copy. It's not necessary to mention the circumstances of the injury if the patient doesn't want that (for safety reasons, in case of transfer). It's up to you to decide whether you'll keep a copy with the circumstances. It might be useful, but should be stored with care to avoid any breach of confidentiality. I'll let you think about it, and we'll talk about it again. I'm attaching a medical certificate form, just in case.

 *We thought we should show to what extent civilians were being targeted, and the impact of joint operations by the Yugoslav military, the Serbian police, and paramilitaries on the humanitarian situation. Milosevic had this whole strategy of making sure that the level of military operations did not get too high, to avoid an internationalisation of the conflict. At the time, his line of argument consisted of maintaining that there was no internal armed conflict, just anti-terrorist operations - this was two years before 11 September 2001. We thought he was not only trying to avoid an internationalisation of the conflict, but especially—by denying the label of internal armed conflict - trying to evade any responsibility for potential war crimes. Indeed, once it became a question of internal armed conflict, the atrocities committed against civilians could be labeled war crimes. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia [ICTY] was already in place. Things were swinging back and forth. So Milosevic was determined to avoid talk of war, of conflict, in Kosovo. Besides, he made sure that the level of these military operations wasn't too high, to avoid crossing the conflict threshold.*

[...], MSF Deputy Legal Advisor (in French).

**Diplomatic pressure on Belgrade was growing. Russia threatened to use its veto against any NATO intervention.**



*'Kosovar Government Calls Upon NATO to Use Force,' AFP (France), Belgrade, 30 September 1998 (in French).*

**Extract:**

The 'government-in-exile' of Kosovar Albanians called upon NATO to use force to "protect an entire people, and save it from a massacre" by Serbian forces, in a communiqué received

Wednesday by the AFP. According to the 'government,' the situation in Kosovo has "assumed the proportions of a national and humanitarian catastrophe" due to the "barbaric war" carried out by Yugoslav forces.

"This situation calls for a national and international response [...]. The government of the Republic of Kosovo is once again calling upon the international community, NATO in particular, to act and to use force now," the communiqué read. Condemning "the policy of apartheid and genocide," the text maintains that "the criminals in Belgrade have neither defeated nor regained Kosovo [...], but have lost it forever." The 'government' is asking the international community to "understand that the Albanian people have the international and inalienable right to self-determination." It states that: "Any solution [...] that leaves Kosovo under (the authority of) Serbia is unacceptable."

In Brussels on Wednesday, the NATO's Permanent Council deemed that acts of violence by Serb forces against civilians in Kosovo were "continuing," contrary to assurances by Serbian authorities.



*'Moscow Will Use its UN Veto Against a NATO Intervention,' AFP (France), 6 October 1998 (in French).*

**Extract:**

Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Igor Ivanov, quoted by Interfax, indicated on Tuesday that Moscow will "undoubtedly" use its veto if the question of using force against the Serbs over the Kosovo issue comes up for consideration by the UN Security Council. [...] A NATO intervention against Serb positions would provoke a return "to the Cold War" and delay ratification of the START II Nuclear Disarmament Treaty, Russian Defense Minister Igor Sergeyev declared to the RIA Novosti news agency.

NATO strikes against Yugoslavia would cause public opinion to demand a buildup in Russian military capacity and a change in Moscow's relations with the Alliance, added the Defense Minister, in an interview given to RIA Novosti during a visit to Greece.

**On 7 October 1998, following rumors of possible Serbian government retaliation against NGOs and distribution of arms to the Serbian civilian population, the MSF team in Kosovo withdrew to Macedonia for several days. On 9 October 1998, MSF Belgium held a news conference in Brussels to condemn the assassination of Dr Lec, a Kosovar Albanian doctor working with the MSF team, and to issue a warning on the humanitarian situation in Kosovo. Disagreement between the programme managers arose over the drafting of the message, and**

**the distribution to the press of a document containing testimony gathered in late September by the MSF team in the Pec-Prizren-Pristina triangle. Some in the media interpreted the statements of MSF Belgium's Director of Operations director as a call for armed intervention.**



'Myriam's stories, etc...', **Email** from Vincent Janssens, MSF-Belgium Operations Director, to the programme managers, operations directors, and communications directors of MSF-F and MSF-H, 8 October 1998 (in English). [D32](#)

**Extract:**

2. I understand that in certain places you want to add to the release a copy of Myriam's stories as info to journalists, I oppose to that for the following reasons:

- This information is not new, not to say that it is as old as facts are.
- The objective of their writing was not to tell facts, it was to bring across an appreciation of the suffering, and as such, they are meant to be edited later when the whole thing is complete with an accompanying text; this is not the case at present
- They tell (through a journalistic style) what Keith has been living through so, rather plan additional meetings with Keith...
- Written as such it makes a strong statement that could seriously impede any return to operations (and we know how unmanageable a written statement can become), it could have been an option to take that risk but this was not what we decided when going to the press

3. According to the question of our team leaving when we call for a reinforced international presence:

- Let me put it clearly that it has nothing to do with a kind of US-hysteria some seem to be feeling which we are not experiencing here or in Kosovo
- It has nothing to do with the real risks of air strikes because we expect them (if they happen at all) to be precise enough not to hit civilians; they will of course prevent us from doing fieldwork
- It has to do with the risk of retaliations that are clearly felt as serious and focused on expats (and of course further on Albanians):
  - Arms have been distributed amongst civilian Serbs
  - Vojislav Seselj, Vice Prime Minister, has stated that he would target the NGOs source: VIP, synthetic newsletter produced by Serb journalist in Belgrade)
  - National staff confirms this serious risk and that they won't be able to help
  - Also confirmed by our contacts in the Mother Teresa organisation
  - Serb troops are a heteroclitite mixture of subgroups (extremists, ex-prisoners, normal people...) making it fairly uncontrollable
  - Experienced person of the emergency pool (Katia) and Tim being there for a long time are the best reference
- The international status will probably not make a differ-

ence in terms of protection, since it did not prevent them from committing crimes in front of international observers

- We have an insufficiently balanced programme (on Serb side) to be able to count on their (moderate) support

- We were operational until yesterday (Prizren and Mitrovica) and Pec the day before; most of our teams have multiple-entry visas so they could be brought back in [to the country] in one and half hours if necessary

- Tim and Katia are still waiting until the last moment (last info probably Saturday)

- We will communicate with UNHCR, KDON and the international observers

- The whole issue of 'should I stay or should I go' is a matter of feeling (which is best sensed in the field), timing (both too soon and too late make you a fool), and added value in staying; we feel we made a balanced assessment.

Just this PS:

I feel we made a fair analysis, we are aware that we take risks (if the strikes are tomorrow we will have no attention) and we can probably always do better. I'm willing to respond to the best to questions but, I am not ready to spend more time on the telephone listening to blind criticism and frustration.

All the best for tomorrow



'Kosovo' **Email** from Guillaume Le Gallais, MSF France Programme Manager, to Vincent Janssens, MSF Belgium Operations Director, 8 October 1998 (in French). [D33](#)

**Extract:**

In any case, I wanted to respond to several points raised by the document on tomorrow's conference. I think what comes out of all this isn't totally clear in the sense that our "message" seems to be too multiple and is thus not as strong.

I also think that we absolutely have to give anyone who asks for it a written document one that leaves a mark. Ideally, this document should be widely distributed by all sections (not all of them have a Keith or a you handy). You will find attached, an organised (sort of) document that might help with this. As for you specifically, I think it's impossible to "explain that military action has clear consequences on humanitarian activities" ==> this is clearly to enter into the unknowable and impossible question of air strikes. This is super-slippery terrain, and the broader issue of the victims and access to care seems much more important to me. There, I hope that these few comments are OK with you.



'The Humanitarian Situation in Kosovo,' **Press conference**, MSF Belgium, 9 October 1998 (in French). [D34](#)

**Extract:**

You are invited to a press conference, to be held this



Friday [...], on the situation in Kosovo. This press conference will be presented in English by:

- Keith Ursel, who has been working for 3 months as Coordinator of our Emergency Program. Keith belongs to one of three mobile MSF teams in Kosovo. He has been in nearly daily contact with the civilian populations that have fled the fighting in the forests and hills. Villages are systematically shelled, burned and looted. Residents are being chased off their land. People are being mistreated, or disappear. One doctor was shot, others are disappearing. Keith Ursel will talk about his experiences in the field.
- Vincent Janssens, Operations Director for MSF's Belgian section and Head of MSF's Kosovo projects, is back from a visit to the field. He will talk about the programmes in the region.



'Kosovo,' **Draft** text distributed to journalists on 11 October 1998 (in French). **D35**

#### Extract:

1- In recent weeks, Médecins Sans Frontières teams present in the Pec and Prizren regions and in the Drenica valley have witnessed atrocities against the civilian population [...].

2- MSF teams describe the systematic destruction and looting of villages. In the Western and central parts of the country, entire villages have been destroyed; houses, fields, barns, and harvests have been burned and looted. The livestock has been slaughtered. Everything upon which families depend for survival has been sacked [...].

3- The persecution of Albanian medical personnel, the deliberate destruction of health facilities and supplies, and impediments to the work of humanitarian organisations are proof of the intention to deprive the civilian population of any aid, including medical assistance. Albanian doctors and medical personnel working with displaced populations are persecuted by Serbian security forces. Surgeons seem to be particularly targeted. Several Albanian doctors known by MSF teams have been subject to threats, arbitrary arrest, torture, and even assassination by Serbian security forces. Dr H. was arrested, tortured, and killed in Gradica. His mutilated corpse was found in the vicinity. His wife and four children are in hiding. Dr C., from Zhilivoda, has disappeared. Dr A, working in Ponorc, was arrested then released. Pursued by the Serbian police, Dr A. from Malishevo had to seek refuge in six different locations over eight weeks before leaving the country. We've had no news of Dr. V from Sedlare. Members of his family have been beaten up. The four doctors from Cirezz have disappeared. Dr J. from Sverke was arrested. Several local doctors who worked in our teams have also had to flee for fear of reprisals.

- Health facilities are being targeted by attacks; many of them completely or partially destroyed, are no longer functional - like in Zhilivoda and Brolic. Thus, the wounded and sick can no longer be treated. Medical supplies are stolen or destroyed. A visit on September 28 to Golubovac revealed that all the medical supplies in the building

where the MSF team performed outpatient consultations had been burned.



'Medical Personnel Targeted in Kosovo – Medical Supplies Burned as Thousands Hide in Forests,' **Press release**, MSF USA, Brussels, 9 October 1998 (in English). **D36**

#### Extract:

At a press conference in Brussels today, the international medical relief agency Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) voiced concern for the thousands of people in Kosovo facing a cold winter with few supplies and too little access to medical care. Two persons of the medical team just out from Kosovo spoke out against the increasing difficulties humanitarian agencies and local doctors face when trying to help those in need. Medical personnel are targeted and medical supplies are deliberately burned or destroyed. «When we visited the building where we had been seeing patients in the village of Gllgovc [Golubovac], we found that all the medical supplies had been burned. "All that was left was a pile of ashes and some metal tweezers," said Keith Ursel, Canadian-American Emergency Coordinator, after visiting the village on the 28th of September.

The population of Kosovo had enjoyed a good standard of health care but they are afraid and now there are enormous medical needs. These needs range from war wounds requiring immediate surgery and regular dressings to chronic illnesses such as diabetes and asthma. Those who do reach medical treatment on a local level are afraid to be transferred away to the larger referral hospitals even if they need the treatment. "The war-wounded are not the only ones in danger and who fear for their lives. Women with complicated pregnancies, asthmatics, and diabetics are also afraid and at risk if they don't get medicine or care," said Dr Vincent Janssen, just back from Kosovo.

Civilians requiring medical treatment are not the only ones at risk. Medical personnel, who bring hope and assistance to the population, are specifically targeted in the fighting. On the 25th of September, a doctor who worked closely with Doctors Without Borders, Dr Lec, was arrested, tortured, and killed. "We are worried about the high number of medical personnel who are reported arrested, who have disappeared or who have been forced to flee," said Keith Ursel, Doctors Without Borders Emergency Coordinator. "These people are suffering so much, not only are there no medicines to help them, but now even those who care for them are being targeted" he concluded.

Winter is approaching and temperatures are lowering to dangerous levels in Kosovo. Around 200,000 people have been displaced, of which tens of thousands are living in the forests with little assistance. Doctors Without Borders has been running health programmes in Kosovo since 1992. These last few months, the organisation has concentrated its aid on the areas where there is fighting. Three mobile

teams are now working around Pec, Drenica, and Prizren, each seeing about 100-300 patients a day among the displaced populations. For security reasons, the Doctors Without Borders teams have been temporarily reduced.



'MSF Asks for a "Strong International Physical Presence in Kosovo,' *AFP* (France), Brussels, 9 October 1998 (in French).

#### Extrait :

Vincent Janssens, Director of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) operations in Kosovo, called Friday for "a strong international physical presence" in this region to restore the confidence of a population subject to acts of terror and forced displacement. Janssens did not want to go into detail on how this should be done, emphasising that this was the province of 'military experts.' "Between diplomatic actions and air strikes, there is a whole range of options," he emphasised.

His Canadian colleague, Keith Ursel, a member of the same humanitarian organisation, who has been in the former Yugoslavia for the past several years, has increasingly been speaking out on the deterioration in the humanitarian situation he has witnessed in Kosovo. He has personally observed tactics used repeatedly by Serbian forces against several Albanian villages. First there is shelling, then the able-bodied residents flee before security forces burst in, looting and questioning those who didn't manage to escape. "Some are beaten, tortured, and sometimes killed. A few days later, the villages are systematically burned," he maintained. Ursel declared that Serb forces specifically go after Albanian medical personnel, "probably because they provide physical and emotional comfort" to the population. He personally knew Dr Lec Ukaj, who he says died after being tortured on 25 September in Gradica. A quarter of the 200,000 displaced people are thought to be living in makeshift shelters in the forest. Keith Ursel saw old people, asthmatics, and pregnant women die for lack of adequate care. The disabled were sometimes left to fend for themselves.



'A "Strong International Presence" to Restore Confidence,' Sabine Verhest, *La Libre Belgique* (Belgium), 10 October 1998 (in French).

#### Extract:

The displaced in Kosovo need greater confidence in order to return to their villages. This is why - as winter approaches - Vincent Janssens, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Operations Director in the Serbian province, launched an appeal Friday in Brussels for a "strong international physical presence" to help reassure those in the region. "Between diplomatic actions and air strikes, there is a whole range of options," he added, without further explanation.



'Serb Forces "Are Torturing Doctors in Kosovo,"' Katherine Butler and Rupert Cornwell, *The Independent* (UK), 10 October 1998 (in English). [D37](#)

#### Extract:

Doctors and medical personnel helping refugees in Kosovo are being hunted and tortured by Serb forces, the Coordinator in the province for the medical aid agency Médecins sans Frontières said yesterday. Keith Ursel, a Canadian nurse who arrived back from the province yesterday, said a young ethnic Albanian doctor from the village of Gradica, 25 km from Pristina, was abducted, had his fingers hacked off and his eyes gouged out with a knife before being shot by Serb forces. Lec Ukaj headed a team dedicated mainly to helping pregnant women and delivering babies. Two weeks ago Serb forces moved in and "Dr Lec" as he was known, was dragged off. Witnesses interviewed by Médecins Sans Frontières said they heard him screaming. "They asked him what hand he used to treat the Albanian patients and then they asked him which eye he used. But it is not the only example. At least nine doctors have gone missing and medical personnel are being hunted because they are the direct link between the people and outside help. The Serb forces also stop us at the checkpoints, looking for surgical equipment", Mr Ursel said.

The medical charity, which says tens of thousands of refugees camping in the hills of Drenica could be wiped out by the winter and hunger and disease, appealed for an international protection force to be sent in to Kosovo. "Up to 50,000 ethnic Albanians are on the run, too scared to return to their villages," Mr Ursel said. Women giving birth in the open without proper medical care was a main cause of death.



**Email exchange** between Guillaume Le Gallais, MSF France Programme Manager, Vincent Janssens MSF Director of Operations and Wilna Van Aartsen, MSF Holland Emergency Programme Manager 9-12 October 1998 (in English). [D38](#)

#### Extract:

- Hi Tim and Guillaume,

With some more distance I see now why our appeal could be interpreted as calling for a military intervention; although it was [made] as clear as possible without saying [explicitly that MSF is] opposed to air strikes, [however] I should have suggested [in the press] 'political experts' to cover for the spectre in between rather than the military. Sorry for this lapse. In follow-up on this be aware of the even more explicit comments from Joelle on the military intervention. Still I must admit that I don't really see how the publication of your (Guillaume) document would neutralize this: it basically insists on details of the incidents

and interpretations of what the (military?) strategic must be behind it, but doesn't refer at all to the main question: what do we want?

So basically, I wouldn't be much in favour of bringing this out as a press release, I would keep it for the use if was originally made for (a booklet?) and go through this with Myriam who is supposed to come back today. I spoke with Tim over the week-end and I feel we have to take his feedback into account since it is basically them who are in the frontline; particularly if you might consider a press conference with Myriam (I'm not sure that rendering public the link between journalists and MSF will calm down the "espionite" paranoia).

Actually another thing I thought over in the week-end following some internal criticism on MSF leaving for the moment is the following I would like reaction upon:

- What we want is protection of civilians on the ground and the possibility of still further improve our assistance operations;
- This is for sure not met by mere air strikes
- Actually those strikes (we did not ask for) impede our operational capacity and bring along indirectly the threat to humanitarian organisations
- They put NGOs actually in a risk politicians and military are basically afraid to take (ground troops)
- We don't want to take this up for reason of a general principle not to mix with politico-military.
- And we would suggest internally staying basically to honour the slogan of 'staying when others go..'


I think this is the wrong angle of looking at the reality, and it makes me feel that we could have actually more stressed our opposition to air strikes; but then again this wouldn't do at the public level...

Guillaume, we did not receive any text in Amsterdam, can you forward it ?

In reaction to your feedback below quickly the following: In the Dutch press (did you receive the articles?) and in two wires military intervention, but almost the opposite.


Reuters opened: "A leading agency said on Friday... that the threat of Serb reprisals would force to pull out..." AP opening was alike.

[...] Many greetings, Wilna


 Doctor Lec was one of the people we supported in a clinic. We had heard from other partners who worked with him that the Serb forces had been asking for the people supporting the UCK [KLA] in terms of medical support. We heard these accounts that they were searching [for him and] mentioning his name. That happened maybe a few weeks before this, and eventually they found him and killed him. There were quite a lot of guys in our team who had worked with him. And, of course they felt very strongly. Of course, in the headquarters, they wanted to speak out. We wanted to speak out also but we were quite conscious

*we did want to stay there as well. We considered the risks. The classic arguments: If we went too far, we wouldn't be doing anything. I think it included the Albanian guys who were at most risk. They wanted to get things out as well. And we just did it. It was obvious where it came from, it was just; MSF in every section in Europe is saying this. When Vincent started to talk about a strong physical presence, we were saying it pretty clearly. And this was quite ironic as well because in fact, everybody who had experience in the Balkans was aware that this thing was only gonna go one way, because of all that Milosevic had done before. And it would come to probably the use of force by the Western states, one or another.*

Tim Boucher, Coordinator MSF Belgium /France in Kosovo, June 1998 to March 1999 (in English).

 *And then it was the doctors who were being targeted. Dr. Lec was tortured and killed. We had a big debate: "What do we do? Do we mention his name? Wouldn't that expose his medical colleagues even further by making it an issue?" In the end, we did it anyway. I think there was a feeling at MSF Belgium as well that we were a little late in coming out with the information. Emma Bonino, European Commissioner for Humanitarian Action, had declared: "Winter is approaching and MSF's report is a bit late in coming."*

Anouk Delafortrie, Communications Officer, MSF Belgium (in French).

 *I think there were a lot of questions about this. We came to the conclusion that the Kosovars weren't going to get out of this all by themselves. We believed that it might be possible to stop what was happening with a strong international presence, [with] observers. If there were enough observers, it could possibly dissuade them from committing such atrocities. Observers were, in fact, sent and they were driven out. Maybe it was a bit naïve, but I also hoped there was a middle path, something between negotiation and an international Peacekeeping force. This was clearly stated. But the journalists wanted to know more, and some of them said: "This is a call for military intervention." And yet we were always very clear: "We're not calling for military intervention." At the same time, we definitely realized that calling for a strong physical presence - this is why we insisted on adding 'physical' - was perhaps a little naïve. Sending unarmed observers into this context was a bit like sending them into a war zone. Dr Lec wasn't really part of our team. He was a doctor in one of the villages we visited on our rounds. And so on one of our visits, we learned that he had been eliminated. This showed that the Serbs really had it in for the medical system and not just for the UCK [KLA, or Kosovo Liberation Army].*

*Obviously we can't just let that go. This was a show of solidarity with them. We knew very well that by speaking out we were leaving ourselves open. We also knew that even doctors, like all active Kosovar Albanians, might belong to the UCK. There were UCK people hiding amongst the civilians in these regions.*

Vincent Janssens, Director of Operations,  
MSF Belgium (in French).

**On 12 October 1998, NATO was about to issue an activation order to its troops, without having obtained UN agreement - thanks to Russia's opposition - and without agreement among its members on a definition of a 'legal basis' for military intervention in Yugoslavia. On 13 October, US Special Envoy, Richard Holbrooke's negotiations with the Serb regime resulted in a draft agreement on the deployment of an OSCE<sup>6</sup> Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM), with aerial support. On 19 October, as the first verification mission was taking place in western Kosovo, several witnesses reported bombing by the Serb military, who nevertheless denied any offensive. NATO planes were deployed to the region.**



*'NATO Ready to Give its Troops an Activation Order,'*  
**AFP** (France), 12 October 1998 (in French).

**Extract:**

NATO was to give its troops an activation order in the Kosovo crisis Monday night, a decision that clears the way to unleashing air strikes at any time on Serbian military targets in Yugoslavia. NATO's Permanent Council (ambassadors from the 16 member countries) began meeting Monday at 3:00 P.M. GMT. A formal decision from the 16 members of the alliance was expected by late afternoon at NATO headquarters.

[...] The decision to issue an activation order allows NATO military leaders to strike at any moment in Yugoslavia. It involves a transfer of authority to the Supreme Allied Commander Europe over planes, ships, and troops provided by the allies for a given operation. In practice, the Supreme Commander, US General Wesley Clark, will conduct operations to position ships and aircraft armed with cruise missiles, and begin training and intimidation missions, with combat planes able to fly around Yugoslavian air space.

[...] "Slobodan Milosevic's got a gun to his head. It'll be loaded, with the safety off," summed up one diplomat.

6. Resulting from the 1975 Helsinki Accords between the USSR, the United States, and their respective European allies, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (55 States) is periodically asked to send observers to ensure fair elections in countries with fragile or re-emerging democracies.

"Averting military action will require a decision to stop the operation," he added, emphasizing that there will, *a priori*, be no new meeting of the NATO council to decide on military action. The activation order that will be given will cover both air intervention scenarios—limited strikes using cruise missiles, and a graduated air campaign—that NATO has had ready for several months. [...] NATO members, who have given up on the idea of a new UN resolution, owing to Russian opposition to any use of force, failed to reach an agreement on a joint definition of a 'legal basis' for military intervention in Yugoslavia. "Each country has its own interpretation" of this question, and "believes that it has its own legal basis," indicated one diplomat, regretting that a 16-member text could not be agreed upon.

During several meetings on this issue, Great Britain emphasised 'the humanitarian necessity,' Germany wanted 'a firm legal basis,' and other countries preferred to make reference to UN resolutions. According to the same sources, NATO Secretary General Javier Solana concluded that "each ally believed there to be a legal basis" for armed intervention. Several diplomats minimized the scope of the problem. "A consensus to act implicitly implies a consensus on the legal basis," assured one of them. The international community called upon Belgrade to cease hostilities, withdraw Serbian troops, ensure favorable conditions for the return of refugees, and begin negotiations with Kosovar Albanian separatists.



*'Holbrooke Confirms 2,000 OSCE People and Aerial Verification,'* **AFP** (France), Belgrade, 13 October 1998 (in French).

**Extract:**

US Special Envoy Richard Holbrooke confirmed Tuesday in Belgrade that the situation in Kosovo would be verified by 2,000 people from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and by an aerial system. "I hope that the Russian Federation will participate in this programme," said Holbrooke. Nevertheless, progress made toward resolving the Kosovo crisis will not lead to sanctions against Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) being lifted, said Holbrooke, because "we're not out of the emergency yet."

He told the press, "The OSCE will have 2,000 people on the ground in Kosovo who will be a verification mission, not monitors, not observers, and (the mission) will be there with the full permission of the Yugoslavian government." Members of the OSCE mission "will have their safety guaranteed, freedom of movement, and diplomatic status," he added. "They will supervise all elections and have many other tasks." Holbrooke added that the Chairman of the OSCE, Bronislaw Geremek of Poland, "will come to Belgrade soon to sign an agreement with Yugoslavia" to that effect. In addition, the American diplomat indicated that there will be "aerial verification, by non-combat aircraft, of the

situation on the ground" in Kosovo. "This arrangement will be clarified in a formal agreement between NATO Secretary-General Javier/Solana, Supreme Allied Commander of NATO in Europe General Wesley/Clark, and the Yugoslav authorities," said Mr. Holbrooke. He added that Mr Solana and General Clark would "soon" be going to Belgrade for that purpose. Holbrooke also indicated that the US Mediator for Kosovo, Christopher Hill, would "continue his efforts" to reach a political agreement between the Kosovar Albanians and the authorities in Belgrade.



*'The Belgrade Agreement: A "Surrender" According to the Kosovar "Prime Minister,"* AFP (France), Washington, 14 October 1998 (in French).

#### Extract:

"The displacement of a quarter of the population, the murder of thousands of citizens, and the destruction of 500 villages, only to accept an agreement that amounts to a surrender and a capitulation with respect to Serbian aggression," writes Mr Bukoshi. "We will only accept an agreement that provides full civil liberties and political rights," he added. [...]

According to Bukoshi, the Belgrade agreement is the result of 'major concessions' to Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic. He accuses the west of having backed down on the issue of withdrawal of Serbian troops from Kosovo, and of only demanding a reduction in police and troops to pre-crisis levels. In addition, Bukoshi bemoans the fact that the agreement contains no provision for investigating war crimes committed during the seven-month Serb campaign against Albanian separatists. Kosovar leaders will not negotiate peace with Milosevic "with a gun to their heads, even if the gun has been put temporarily back in its holster," asserted Bujar Bukoshi.



*'Military Accused of Conducting an Operation, Belgrade Denies Any Offensive,'* AFP (France), Pristina, 19 October 1998 (in French).

An OSCE team conducted its first mission on the ground Monday, in Pec, in the western part of the province, to prepare for the deployment of the verification mission, which will ultimately have some 2,000 members. According to Albanian villagers questioned by AFP and other sources, the military launched an operation on Sunday night in a sector west of Pristina, Kosovo's administrative seat. This operation came after the death, Saturday, of three policemen in an attack on their post, very likely by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA, or UCK).

However, in Belgrade, a military leader denied there had been any "offensive operation." Several dozen Albanians in the Kosna Reka IDP camp, some thirty kilometers west

of Pristina, confirmed to AFP having fled the village of Trpeza to seek refuge in the woods after the military starting firing on the village and surrounding areas. Trpeza is close to the village of Negrovce which, according to several sources, was also targeted by the military operation. Sunday night, a Western journalist was present when tanks and infantry began surrounding Negrovce. Late Sunday night, a European TV crew, stopped at a Serbian police roadblock 5 km from Negrovce, heard loud explosions and saw flashes. An international observer told the AFP on Monday of having received a phone call Sunday night from a Negrovce resident who claimed that the village was surrounded and shelled.

[...] In Belgrade on Monday, a source close to the Yugoslav military command, quoted by the independent news agency Beta, denied that the military had conducted any offensive operations the previous night. He claimed that the Yugoslav military had "not undertaken any offensive action" recently. [...] In Pristina, the UN High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) cancelled two aid convoys that were to have left for the center of the province "on account of the weekend violence" in the sector.

In Paris on Monday, NATO Secretary General Javier Solana condemned "all the provocations," and called upon Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic to "abide by the conditions of [UN Security Council] resolution 1199." [...] "We are ready to act. (NATO) Planes are over Kosovo to guarantee the verification process. It will be very important for Mr Milosevic to see that there are planes over Kosovo that are ready to act and to verify the situation," he said.

**The discussion between MSF sections on the organisation of joint missions in Kosovo resumes. The Dutch section suggests giving operational responsibility back to the ET (the international emergency team). In the end, the MSF Belgium Programme Manager decided to further internationalise the Kosovo mission, while maintaining control. The job description for an international information officer for Kosovo is currently under discussion.**



*'Communication on Kosovo,'* Email from Vincent Janssens, MSF Belgium Director of Operations to Programme Managers and communication directors MSF B, F and H, 12 October 1998 (in English). [D39](#)

We had the feeling and the pressure for a while and it has been but reinforced during last week's press conference preparations:

There is, under the present formula, a problem at Brussels' level to put sufficient investment in internal and external

communication (feedback to the field, include timely everybody -inclusive partner sections- in the discussions, link with external opportunities etc.) It was part of my objective to internationalise the operations in and around Kosovo (until we can/want to consider an ET formula) to make sure about a steady flux of info at international level (the other part being further internationalisation of the HR in the field). As such I am happy to be able to inform that Bas Thielens (previously come on Montenegro and Albania) from MSF-H com department is willing and available to take up this challenge in Brussels (for a month); very useful particularly given the enormous interest from the Netherlands for the issue. We didn't discuss practical issues but I would of course be happy if on financial terms we could consider this post also in an international way (all bits help since we are basically broke!); I think he'll prefer anyway a MSF-H contract. The same would go for the additional investment we should do within short in Montenegro and Albania: ASAP I would like to make an overview of the theoretical postings for the coming months and then see how we can make sure about a reasonable international presence.



'Kosovo,' Email from Wilna van Aartsen, MSF Holland Emergency Programme Manager to MSF Belgium and MSF France Programme Managers, 13 October 1998 (in English). [edited] [D40](#)

#### Extract:

Dear both, The political strategy in Kosovo, an international presence (OSCE monitors), with the NATO threat and diplomatic pressure on going at the same time, MAY lead to one of the following scenarios. There are other scenarios as well but I like to briefly highlight the one below, without discussing the effectiveness of this strategy and other possible scenarios but looking at this scenario and its humanitarian consequences and MSF responses (this does not mean that I neglect other likely scenarios).

One of the scenarios: diplomatic efforts and military threat result in monitors on the ground and a window of opportunity to have humanitarian access (temporary?) and respond to the increasing needs on the ground.

I like to urge that we prepare ourselves NOW in order to have HR available ready to go in (preferably with visa procedure finalised in advance). In other words, have a plan of action ready (I was briefed that London is the best place to get Yugo visa, by the way, is that so?). Please your reactions.



'RH Kosovo,' Email from Vincent Janssens, MSF Belgium Director of Operations to MSF Holland Desk, MSF Belgium HRM, 15 October 1998 (in English). [D41](#)

#### Extract:

The main principles to get clear amongst the collaborating sections:

A/ HR postings

I think this is basically going fine.

B/ Steady exchange of information in all directions

I feel like this is also going OK; particularly since adding Bas;

C/ Sharing the financial risk

I think (haven't seen the contract) that for the moment a lot is covered; but probably we will face soon more needs: Montenegro, relief, increased expats, watsan, rehabilitation, Serb hospitals, [...] (CIDA interested!); so we'll have to define how we'll deal with a possible financial risk (3x33%?)

D/ Agreeing on procedure for advocacy

At present we are taking into account "suggestions" from other sections; if we are asking for increased contributions we'll have to have a more formal procedure to work with this (majority of 3?)

A lot of questions, so send your remarks ASAP. I can see that this IT scheme is fragile and we have not much time to debate this over and over; if it would prove unrealistic, I fear that the only two alternatives would be:

- Return to the previous scheme and face the probable justified internal criticism of not responding to the needs
- Opt for the classic ET-scheme, with its present weak points.



'RH Kosovo,' Email from Wilna van Aartsen, MSF Holland Emergency Desk to MSF Belgium and MSF France desks, 19 October 1998 (in English). [D42](#)

#### Extract:

The idea was launched to 'make' Kosovo + surrounding area an ET mission at ET core group meeting, it did however, not receive support from Graziella and Bernard (Barcelona). Guillaume and Jean-Clement were against. I did not agree with the arguments not to 'make' it ET. Main arguments against were (short resume of a much longer discussion):

- No acute emergency
- Long-term MSF intervention therefore ET not applicable
- Sit, some months ago worse in Kosovo, ET should (maybe) have been applied at that time, not now. It should have been ET in an earlier phase, I agree with that one, but we should not cry too much and too long over the spilt milk, and we can rectify it now (Sudan revisited?).

The present formula of functioning, an IT mission (international team) which is counting on goodwill amongst the two sections concerned (B and F) cannot be maintained, now that MSF H involvement is desired, by both MSF H itself (strong desire as I know you realise) and desired by the mission itself due to the constraint of resources (optimising the MSF action, it was called in the ET document). Goodwill amongst sections needs to be maintained but a few fundamental issues need to be agreed upon formally, indeed in order to preserve that goodwill. It is not realistic, nor acceptable to any of us (as history shows) that a section provide resources without being engaged in the debate and decision making on the very few essential issues. The issues which need formalising are according to me: \$, financial responsibility [by] section and the potential risks, HRM involved [and] already in process, MSF's position in the Kosovo crisis, and subsequently advocacy/lobby activities and positioning towards PR.

I do realise that the ET process is 'in limbo' at the present, [but] still commitment to the ET was expressed by the ET core group last Thursday. So according to me [the] ET is applicable in Kosovo, ET gives guidelines how to formalise the cooperation amongst sections, in particular ET guarantees shared decision making on the few fundamental issues.



**Email** from Guillaume Le Gallais, MSF France Desk Kosovo to Vincent Janssens, MSF Belgium Director of Operations, 20 October 1999 (in French). [D43](#)

#### Extract:

Hi Vincent,  
A few quick comments on your last piece [...]

Point 4 - Re the position of information officer (which really is a bad name!). I don't agree with what you have said: this position is of critical importance and should be filled as soon as possible (Pascal Vignier is still waiting for his visa).

In my view the coordination team can be divided into three main areas of responsibility (overseen by a Coordinator - Tim). These three main tasks are:

- Medical activities
- Logistics activities (sanitation, relief)
- Communication activities, providing eyewitness accounts, lobbying

This last aspect is and remains extremely important: we owe it to ourselves to continue to work on this aspect of the programme and to do so over the long term (the war is not over). Someone must be responsible for that in the field, must be there for the team and must initiate this eyewitness work, develop it and propose lobbying or other activities... And we have worked out ways of tackling the problems of medical staff, of tracing the various village community histories and of providing access to medical care. [...]

Regarding the main principles:

The steady exchange of information seems to me important... As concerns Bas's role, be careful of two things: from what I read, he 'would like' to work with three ODs [Operations Directors]!!! Including Wilma (it seems to me that there is some confusion there!!!). Similarly, since he has been there he has been tight with field information (Tim no longer telephones me...). There again, if his role is really to work with the Pristina team on information flow, sitreps, etc. [then] his role is indeed to look after information ... and not operations, as his papers suggest. I assume that this day-to-day operational side is still being followed by Eric and Bastien???



*'Update on OPS [operational] organisation between Yugo and headquarters,'* **Email** from Bastien Vigneau, MSF Belgium programme manager to MSF France, MSF Holland, MSF Spain, MSF Switzerland/Greece programme managers, 22 October 1998 (in English). [D44](#)

#### Extract:

Dear all,  
[...] As the mission has to be daily followed, and with no other scheme decided up to now, we proceed the way the mission has been defined (without minimizing the improvements on certain matters (such as communication issues).

That means Brussels is the operational centre where is centralized the information from the field or the outside world (including MSF).

Paris is receiving as well as us operational information allowing them to be a critical partner helping decision making, defining better strategies, pointing out shadow areas, giving suggestions or other critics etc. As you all experienced within MSF (unless you have a tremendous great luck), these kind of relations between two sections on a hot context with international pressure are not always easy, generates tensions and sometimes can glide towards more structural problems. However, if the result is a better output for the operations and the field and the people, well it is a small price to pay. I can assure you that we try hard to find the best solutions for the people of Kosovo.

#### OPERATIONAL DECISION MAKING

I know the other sections are logically interested into participating more actively in the crisis. I know the Dutch section is very interested in the matter (we worked with Ellen this summer), the Swiss section too as wrote Thierry Durand (MSF Greece proposed to sent some logistical material in Kosovo, Jean Plettings OC6 logistician in Brussels is looking after this matter). Also the Spanish one as I received several phone calls along the last months concerning advocacy. Not to mention other sections, like MSF USA with Joëlle who came visit Kosovo this summer and made a debriefing in Paris, Brussels and New York. What does "participate actively" means? If it means been decision maker as well on this context, well I guess it

might be a good solution in order to better feel the crisis, give information to our respective donors, for public awareness, internal communication etc... But very inefficient in terms of operationality and management issues. It is already quite difficult to do it the way it is with two sections (but always fun...), that it would not be appropriate. However, there is no problem for receiving comments ("l'effet miroir") from the others. As already mentioned in few emails, we can open to other sections:

#### HR [Human Resources] PARTICIPATION

To emphasize international participation, we open the IT philosophy to other sections. That means although there is up to now a potential for 15 expats (right now only 9 because of VISA's authorization: major current problem), we have no problem to open these profiles.

#### COMMUNICATION EVENTS

Some press release, press conference, special events and lobbying have been organised in some sections and proposed to other sections concerning:

- The Western European Immigration issues in general and as a consequences of the war in Kosovo.
- The situation and exactions the population is facing in Kosovo.

There could be a much better coordination work among all sections to realise public events or lobby issues.



**Resolution 1203**, United Nations Security Council, 23 September 1998 (in English) [D45](#)

#### Extract:

3. Demands that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia comply fully and swiftly with resolutions 1160 (1998) and 1199 (1998) and cooperate fully with the OSCE Verification Mission in Kosovo and the NATO Air Verification Mission over Kosovo according to the terms of the agreements referred to in paragraph 1 above;

4. Demands also that the Kosovo Albanian leadership and all other elements of the Kosovo Albanian community comply fully and swiftly with resolutions 1160 (1998) and 1199 (1998) and cooperate fully with the OSCE Verification Mission in Kosovo;

5. Stresses the urgent need for the authorities in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Kosovo Albanian leadership to enter immediately into a meaningful dialogue without preconditions and with international involvement, and to a clear timetable, leading to an end of the crisis and to a negotiated political solution to the issue of Kosovo

6. Demands that the authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the Kosovo Albanian leadership and all others concerned respect the freedom of movement of the OSCE Verification Mission and other international persone.

*There was pressure from all sections, from the 19 presidents and general directors and I don't know how many operations directors, board members, the president of the International Council, etc. All these people were interested in what was going on in Yugoslavia and Kosovo and a fairly significant number of them wanted to come and see what was happening on the ground. And this does not even include the various media services, Agence France-Presse or journalists. It was there that I discovered what the mobile telephone was. You begin at eight o'clock in the morning with a briefing for Japan and Australia. And in the evening you are still there at 10 o'clock with the United States. The general director of MSF USA tells me: "Tomorrow I have an interview with CNN, so what can I say?" I understand of course that I need to reply to her, but everyone is asking me the same thing. So after a while I began to be a little tired. And then above all, I did not have any time left to concentrate and to analyse the situation with my team. I am asked: "Can I call your Coordinator?" At the beginning I say "yes," and then I say "no," but they went ahead and called him anyway. The worst thing is when people come back from the field. They are so shocked by what is happening! This is Europe, not Africa. In the field they have seen Europeans with the same infrastructure they have - video machines, television antennae... They have identified with them and the emotion is multiplied a hundredfold. So when they come back they say: "Something must be done," and in these circumstances we need to do some emotional debriefing. So under this pressure, we have opened up our human resources fully to MSF the planet over. Out of the 25, 30 or 50 expatriates - I don't recall exactly how many - there were only 10 Belgians. In fact, we felt we were under so much pressure that we made an international mission out of it. The best way of operating was that the American volunteer who went there should relate his experience when he came back.*

Bastien Vigneau, Desk, MSF Belgium, (in French).

**On 25 October, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1203 requiring immediate application of the agreements signed by the government of the Yugoslav Federation with NATO and the OSCE. The OSCE Permanent Council authorised the deployment of 2,000 of its observers to Kosovo in the context of its verification mission, provided for by an agreement signed with the Serb authorities on 16 October.**

**On 27 October 1998, after a substantial pullout of Serb forces, NATO abandoned the immediate use of force but maintained its military forces ready to intervene. Thousands of Kosovar Albanians returned home. The first OSCE 'verifiers' arrived in Kosovo.**





'The OSCE Permanent Council authorises the deployment of its mission,' **AFP** (France), 25 October 1998 (in French).

**Extract:**

The decision of the OSCE Permanent Council, which met on Sunday, envisages deployment of the mission in accordance with the agreement signed on 16 October in Belgrade by the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Bronislaw Geremek, and the Yugoslav Minister of Foreign Affairs, Zivadin Jovanovic, allowing the deployment by the OSCE of a mission of 2,000 personnel.

These 'verifiers' will have the task of carrying out on-the-ground checks for compliance with the requirements presented to Belgrade by the UN and by the Contact Group on the former Yugoslavia (Germany, United States, France, Great Britain, Italy, and Russia). [...] According to the OSCE decision, the mission "will be established for a period of one year" in Kosovo, "with the possibility of extension" of that time frame. A recent UN Security Council resolution demanded, in this context, that Belgrade impose an immediate ceasefire in Kosovo, withdraw its special forces from the province, allow the return of refugees and commence a political dialogue with the Albanian separatists.

The OSCE decision follows the adoption on Saturday by the UN Security Council of a new resolution requiring that Belgrade submit to the United Nations' demands, but without explicitly threatening a possible return to the use of force. The UN Security Council notably required Belgrade the rapid and complete application of UN resolutions relating to it, but without explicitly mentioning a possible reversion to the use of force.

This Security Council resolution 1203, adopted on Saturday, nevertheless opens the way to possible (military) action to ensure the safety of the members of the OSCE mission responsible for carrying out verification on the ground. [...] This resolution insists on the protection of the 2,000 OSCE verifiers, who must verify the application of the agreement on the ground. It asserts that, in an emergency, action may be necessary to ensure the safety and freedom of movement of these missions.



'Satisfaction but Caution in Washington regarding the Serb Attitude,' **AFP** (France), 28 October 1998 (in French).

**Extract:**

NATO has decided to keep its military force ready to intervene in Yugoslavia, while at the same time dismissing the possibility of immediate air strikes given Belgrade's adherence to the provisions of the agreement on Kosovo concluded with the American envoy Richard Holbrooke on 12 October.

[...] Refugees are returning home in large numbers, according to this same official. Some 20,000 people are still without shelter in the centre of Kosovo, he added, which is a substantial reduction on the 75,000 people in this situation several weeks ago. According to this official, fighting in the province since February has driven some 250,000 people overall from their homes.

The Serb military retreat from Kosovo "is insufficient" to avoid immediate use of force by NATO, said the American Secretary of State. But Madeleine Albright noted that NATO would very soon activate all of its aerial surveillance measures, with first reconnaissance operations already taking place. In addition, NATO intends to accelerate the formation of a rapid intervention force to be stationed in Macedonia to deal with any eventuality. No decision has yet been taken on the size of the force the United States is prepared to support, she indicated. However, Madeleine Albright stressed that Washington does not intend to commit any combat troops to this force.



Daily **Sitrep**, from Katia van Egmond, Medical Coordinator MSF Pristina to desks and information officer, Brussels, 28 October 1998 (in English). **D46**

**Extract:**

Preparations for OSCE verification mission going on. More and more observers arriving. They are not operational yet. Diplomatic observer missions (EU, KDOM...) are continuing and will be absorbed in OSCE mission.

[...] Since Monday 26/10, Serb troops are visibly withdrawing. Check points are abandoned and burnt. Yesterday, MSF field teams did not see any check point anymore. Police still present in bigger towns and doing passport controls. They are especially harassing IDPs coming from destroyed villages (all UCK suspects); but leaving original population in peace. In small towns, less or no policeman present anymore. Rumours though that not all troops left but some tanks are hiding in less accessible areas (Rugova valley in Pec area). UCK more visible than before. In Pristina hospital, still police present and blocking visits of surgical patients. But in general: positive evolution. Confidence not really restored yet. But more and more people going back to their villages to assess the situation, with the intention to return if everything seems OK. Quite soon (if situation remains stable of course) 'massive' return of IDPs to their villages is to be expected (to completely destroyed houses/villages). Also refugees from abroad (Montenegro /Albania...) might quite quickly return (?). Rumour that 5000 IDPs in Montenegro are preparing to return to Kosovo (not confirmed yet). Pec team will try to follow up situation.

3. Expectations for the future?

We think that [the] situation will remain stable over the following weeks. But definitely situation is not solved.

Only (temporary) cease fire for the moment. If no political negotiations are started, things might start all over again. Because: Milosevic ready for some steps towards a degree of autonomy of Kosovo, but still within [the] state of Serbia.

For UCK/LDK, this is completely unacceptable. The only acceptable outcome for them remains independence of Kosovo within acceptable period of time. They feel like the international community made concessions to Milosevic, giving up slowly and even ignoring their demands. Thus, if no political talks and changes, relative "Peace" might appear very fragile. Serb troops can be back in one day (just like they pulled out in one day). Some tanks left in strategic positions.

On [the] operational side: return of IDPs will mean [an] increase of relief and watsan operations! Thus the watsan expat and technical coordinator are urgently needed. MSF should focus on identification and relief supply of 30 smaller isolated villages. Big relief organisations targeting on bigger centres. Clear arrangements with other agencies needed + increase of MSF pipeline

## THE FIRST EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS COLLECTED BY MSF ARE PUBLISHED IN THE PRESS

**In its edition dated 28 October 1998, published on the afternoon of 27 October, the French daily Le Monde published eyewitness accounts collected by the MSF team and the writer who accompanied it, relating to atrocities committed by the Serb army and police in the Pristina-Pec-Prizen triangle between 23 September and 5 October 1998. This delayed publication, some weeks after the events, in a period of calm in the bombing, provoked criticism within MSF. The report was challenged in parts of the Serb press.**



**Daily Sitrep**, from Katia, Field Coordinator MSF Belgium/France in Pristina to programme managers and the information officer in Brussels, 28 October 1998 (in English). [D46](#)

### 4. *Le Monde* :

A lot of things have been said already, but done is done I guess. We do not want endless discussions or personal repercussions. But, following (I am speaking on behalf of the whole team and myself) would like to make clear to any MSF headquarters/communication department. We are not against speaking on behalf of the population, but for future communications, we would like:

- To be informed what is going to be released to the press and when (before and not afterwards)
- Better timing
- Better formulation of our messages, to avoid repercussions from the press/(paranoid) authorities, a humanitarian character and impartiality should be clearly reflected in our messages.

None of these 3 aspects were correctly managed in the concerned article:

- We were not informed. We were told information collected by Myriam would be used for reportage on Kosovo in some magazines later on (or eventually for tribunal of Den Haag?)
- Bad timing. Just before second NATO ultimatum expires... gives the impression nothing changed (and easily misinterpreted in the way we would prefer to see some kind of military intervention). But, Serb troops [are] recently complying more or less with [the] UN resolution. Positive evolution thus, from their side for now. Danger is coming for the moment more from UCK side (provocative actions, legitimising Serb revenge actions). Better to make aware public opinion when it's going [the] wrong way again.
- Bad introduction of the article. It looks like a confirmation of the general belief we are all spies. Nine expats involved in collecting testimonies against Serb police and militaries. No word on the humanitarian character of our work/organisation. No impartiality. Some atrocities occurred on UCK side as well, though we have no good information on this and thus [are] not mentioning this. Impartiality?

Two scenarios might happen:

- Or completely ignore; no attention given to it.
- Or they decide to use the article against us. We will know it by the national press. If over the coming days, all Serb newspapers publish "MSF = big spies" articles, we might expect some troubles. We could be called to Belgrade to explain our activities. Future VISA applications could be easily denied. More difficulties in getting authorisation for importation of goods could occur. We do not expect they will consider expelling the current team.

In case we are called to give justifications, I do not agree that this should be handled by the Kosovo team alone. We expect, if this kind of situation should occur, official back up from MSF headquarters (official statement to our defence). So could you please consider and think about arguments we can forward on behalf of MSF organisation directors, whenever it comes to this stage? Because, if headquarters take responsibilities on the "t moignage" [witnessing] character of MSF they should also take responsibilities in protection of the "operational" character of MSF, when it comes to it. But of course, we hope no particular attention will be given to it by the Serb authorities and everything remains "normal".

### 5. Info for Bas:

I was contacted by BRT news today, to give some comments on the article published in "Le Monde" and on the situation in general. They did not announce that it was

an interview or that our conversation was being taped. Only this night I figured out it was broadcasted live [live] on BRT news. Thus not a correct way of BRT to deal with us. I was contacted by a Norwegian newspaper, to give general information today. I did an interview for Radio 2 Holland yesterday. Keith did an interview with CBS television yesterday, as well as with US newspaper "Chronicle of philanthropy".

MSF Hong Kong wants to do an interview with Keith on behalf of a local Chinese newspaper, on the issue of persecution of the medial staff in Kosovo.

Washington Post came by today, and want to follow Keith next week (or end of this week) for three days on the field. They are aware of Life magazine intending to do the same, and having priority if they want to reportage on Keith at the same moment.

Do you have any news on when Life is expected to be in Pristina? (Keith leaving on 10 November at latest, and nobody else interested in having journalists following them for 3 days...).

On Friday 30 November, Alex (Magnum photographer) is arriving in Belgrade. We will pick him up and bring him to Pristina. We discussed within our team, and intend to send him to Pec team for one week.



'Kosovo: New Accounts of the Barbarity of the Serb Forces,' **Le Monde** (France), 28 October 1998 (in French). [D47](#)

#### Extract:

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has obtained evidence regarding atrocities committed in Kosovo by the Serb army and police in the period from 23 September to 5 October 1998. The accounts were gathered by a team of nine persons in the Pristina-Pec-Prizren triangle.

[...] The child's father, Osman, said: "On Saturday morning, after they had separated us, men from the women, the militia asked for our papers. They took 70 men into the woods or somewhere else - we don't know where. After a while they came back with some of them, only eight persons: young men between 16 and 25. [The next day] only the police came back. The torturing began. They started taking everyone's gold and silver, and people who did not have any were told: "Get over there; we're going to shoot you." The police kept saying, 'if you give money, we will set you free.' People brought a lot of money; an old man gave 2,000 marks to save five people. The women were crying out, people were slipping in the mud. Then they lowered their automatic weapons and said: "Get out of here." It was afterwards that they killed the three men in the ditch, the ones they had found in the mountains. They were 17, 20 and 40 years old. They made them get down on their knees and shot them in the head. In one case they broke the person's ribs with rifle butts beforehand; he was very young. In another case - the eldest - they cut off his two ears, put them into one of his hands and then put the badge with the UCK eagle into the other. And the man had to walk in front of us like that, quite

dazed, while they were saying: "This is what we do to the UCK! Tell people why you are in the war tell them what will happen to them if you continue to fight." The next day, after the police had said: "If anyone is still here at noon they will be killed," we set off towards Nekovc, and reached Obrije. There I buried 13 people in one day. One of them was headless - his brain had been crushed. I cannot imagine that a human being would do that to another human. I saw a young mentally disabled person, his body riddled with knife cuts, amongst them. That day we saw terrible things. The children were not allowed to approach the bodies; it was horrible. I saw an 80-year old woman whose ears had been cut off. A family of 17, all killed. There was a two-year-old child. Two years old - I saw it! On the first day we buried 13 people, then 17; wrapped in blankets, quickly. It is the worst thing I have seen in my life. With each offensive, first the soldiers would pass through with tanks and then the police would arrive. It's as if they were programmed to kill. Those they found in the house in Obrije were all killed. Then they spent the night in one of the village houses, where they ate. When they massacred the family they took three children and a woman and told her: "You must look after these children." All night, she heard the police drinking and talking, and they also smoked something. That night they killed three men with knives, ears cut off and a bullet to the head. Very slowly, one by one; they kept themselves amused all night with the bodies. A young 18-year old girl had tried to run away: she was shot and her eyes gouged out. I will ask myself all my life how it is possible to do such things - a human being to another human being. The policeman spoke to us with such hatred. He received no orders and kept on repeating: "We are going to kill you, you're going to die. If you take up arms to defend Kosovo we will destroy you - and it will not be with rifles any more, but with rockets." I believed that, since a tank had been destroyed just near the house [where the police were]; they had decided to take it out on the family.



'Kosovo Testimonies,' **Email** from Bénédicte Jeannerod, MSF France Communications Officer to the other MSF sections' communications officers, 27 October 1998, 20:00 (in French). [D48](#)

Hi there,

As we informed Brussels and the teams yesterday, this afternoon, the French daily, *Le Monde*, has published extracts of testimonies collected by MSF in Kosovo at the end of September. The article is very strong and is now quoted by other agencies, newspapers, etc. So, you probably will have some reactions from your national press. You can refer them to Peter, in Brussels and to me, in Paris. In the *Le Monde* article, it is said that these testimonies are part of a report issued by MSF: that is not true and our teams in the field are not doing inquiries about Serbian forces' exactions. The stories that Myriam (a MSF volunteer) has collected are the ones told by the civilians during the medical consultations.

You can find herewith the little dossier that we did two weeks ago and in which the MSF position is summarised. You all have already received it, but just in case you need it again. Sorry, it is still in French.

Salut à tous, Bises, Bénédicte.



'My Response to Wilna on the *Le Monde* Article,' **Email** from Bastien Vigneau, MSF Belgium Desk to Wilna van Aartsen, [MSF Holland Emergency Desk], 29 October 1998 (in English). **D49** [↗](#)

This Kosovo article keeps me busy since yesterday...and Bas is sick! Anyway, for you (but just you), I'll try to summarize what is going on.

Since July, MSF wants to have data on what people live. Unfortunately, the field was not able or didn't want to take some testimonies from some of our patients or people we met along our consultations. That's why we asked Myriam (journalist and writer who already worked for MSF) to go there and to be able to live with the mobile clinics and write some the stories of the people.

Now, two weeks ago some testimonies from Myriam have been chosen to [be] use[d] for [the] public (give the voice to the victims). Guillaume told me they sent this to *Monde* a week ago. *Monde* chose to release it yesterday, probably because of the ultimatum. The fact that MSF talks about what the population have to say is not the issue here. Although it is [they are] strong stories, it [this] is the [same] way Keith and Vincent testified 2 weeks ago concerning tortures and executions of people by the army, especially of a Dr we knew.

What [happened] yesterday and this morning [that] we were not happy about is the following:

- The timing (ultimatum day). Releasing it yesterday was a disaster. Does MSF clearly announce its approval of air strikes that much that it shows these testimonies that same day?
- In consequence of this *AFP* pushed it a bit further "a few hours from the ultimatum, MSF blah blah blah."
- The fact that there is no REPORT and systematic research on the massacre. MSF is not a human rights organisation, and the journalist of *Le Monde* presents it this way in its introduction.
- The fact that this journalist implies that the 9 expats currently in the field are there only to do this massacre scanning job...
- That within the title "Serbs Barbarian" we are spelling out that "the bad guys are the Serbs and the rest are the nice people."

Anyway, I also had to deal with a lot of sections who were harassed by journalist phone calls. Yesterday, after calling the field (security etc.), I talked with Guillaume where I told him that I was very much concerned by the introduction of the journalist. [...] I sent him an email asking--telling him what I'm telling you and asking him to:

- Send an explanation to all other 18 sections

- Send exactly the documents they sent to *Le Monde*

- Call me back today so we can explain ourselves

Yesterday, I also talked with Benedicte who had the contact with the *Le Monde* journalist. She told me she was not responsible for the timing or the introduction and amalgam of the journalist. Last night she also sent a rectification/explanation message. I also so told Guillaume they (we) have been screwed by that guy and that it is true once you release a paper you can't control it, but at least we were aware of this ultimatum and we could have predicted it.

This morning in Belgrade nothing was mentioned about this article. But, still there are possible consequences, the field is very cautious. Today we asked Graziella and Guillaume to send back all the info to other sections.



**Letter** from Myriam Gaume to Anne Guibert (MSF France Communications Officer), Guillaume Le Gallais (MSF France programme manager), Denis Pingaud (MSF France Communications Director), 4 November 1998 (in French). **D50** [↗](#)

I was very happy to see the results of my eyewitness accounts in Kosovo finally published. As you will recall, I had been very surprised to be met with a certain indifference back here, even though on the ground I kept battling to produce texts on a regular basis. My first objective has been attained now that Kosovar suffering has made it on to the front page of *Le Monde*, even if it is just for a few hours, which enabled wider distribution to a number of other media outlets and other countries. On the other hand, I have not understood why my name was not able to appear as co-signatory along with the MSF label. Yet my photos are covered by copyright. And when you use professionals such as Frédéric Laffont or Salgado in other areas the contract reflects an exchange of know-how, working through the blending of skills to serve a particular message.

It was because I was able to give structure to the eyewitness accounts, to convey their strength and to conduct the interview in such a way as to make the accounts authentic but readable, that they were able to feature as news items in *Le Monde* - which no communiqué would ever have been able to achieve. We're not talking here about a scoop or some stroke of luck, but the normal result of conjunction between an event of major significance and the appropriate means of reporting it. Just as MSF has not abandoned its identity in respect of these accounts, but on the contrary has used it quite legitimately, I did not wish to abandon my own signature.

The first consequence has been to create dangerous confusion in the case of a medical team of nine persons (what a tribute to my productivity) which is claimed to be spending its time gathering eyewitness accounts rather than taking care of the sick. I remind you that I had to struggle on a daily basis to obtain the minimum space necessary for my work, vis a vis

a group of people who were fabulous and to whom I remain deeply attached, but some of whom were defenceless and clumsy when faced with emotional outpourings.

In the same way as all of you, I make my living from my job. And more than for you, my job is based on the recognition of my professionalism. My rigour as an investigator earned me several publications in *Le Monde* as well as in *Le Monde Diplomatique*. It is because Eric Dachy had read my book on the conflict in Karabagh that he chose me and signed me up to describe the daily life of the Kosovars. It was an equal partnership in two complementary domains. My approach, as concerns MSF since 1993, has been based on an acknowledgement and on the need for me to get closer to an area where words take on the strength of action. I have gained a lot during this mission and - despite some opaqueness in the way positions are formulated - I wish to continue. But not if my work is not recognised. Are not all MSF internal and indeed external publications signed? The question is: why this last-minute modesty, masking my professional collaboration and rendering it 'shameful'? I am uneasy, and I await your response! Cordially.



'American Contradiction,' *Vecernje Novosti* (Serbia), 30 October 1998, (translated by MSF staff from Serbo-Croatian). [D51](#)

#### Extract:

After the Last Judgement pronounced by *Le Monde* against Serbia in its Wednesday's issue, using the worst fabrication, lies, and slander concerning the situation in Kosovo, enveloping its big editorial "Kosovo - Horror in Europe" in a so-called report of MSF, another widely read daily, "*Le Figaro*," immediately gave its opposite opinion.



Extracts from various accounts appeared in *Le Monde* at the initiative of Guillaume and Graziella, but Myriam was not quoted. They were presented as recent accounts although in fact they were not. It was not very correct on the part of *Le Monde* to present all of that as an account of events that had occurred just yesterday whereas they were six weeks old. That fact appeared in the body of the text, so that the reader could make appropriate adjustments, but the impact was in the headline: 'New atrocities in Kosovo.' Whereas, in fact there was nothing recent about it. It was a bit irresponsible! [...] It was just before the beginning of negotiations. There was a sort of vague ultimatum in the air; there really was a process underway. We said to ourselves: "Well look, *Le Monde* is cranking up the pressure ..." Everyone is likely to be manipulated or enrolled. I did not have any great problem with that, but it wasn't very sensitive.

Eric Dachy, Programme Manager MSF Belgium  
(in French).



With this publication, we were trying to show the deliberate decision to target civilians. In this conflict, civilians clearly represented one of the stakes, a passive force that worried the Serb authorities. Their policy of eradicating the rebellion involved systematic destruction of the passive support that the population could bring. We wanted to show that we are not talking about the army of a state fighting against resistance or rebellion, or of a rebellion attacking a legitimate army. The civilian populations were one of the stakes in this war, and indeed constituted the prime target. That's the message we were seeking to convey. But, it did not come across well in the article in *Le Monde*, which in some respects actually softened it [...]. The problem was that the issue was being dealt with late, during a period of calm related to the negotiations between Albright and Milosevic on the withdrawal of Serb forces. September/October was the ceasefire phase, not the period when fighting was at its most fierce. The question here is: should it have been published or not? Should we have held back because it was no longer news? And what does 'news' mean? It is true that at that time people were no longer having bombs dropped on them. But, they were still displaced; there were still 100,000 to 150,000 or even 200,000 displaced persons in Kosovo. We had had the same information since May or June, and I believe that that's when this report should have come out, when nobody was looking after these people, when nobody was paying attention. But, we had our decision-making processes, our internal discussions between sections, and these got in the way.

In October 1998, media interest began to focus on Kosovo and we brought out our accounts at the moment when many journalists were becoming interested. We benefited from increased interest in Kosovo and that is why *Le Monde* published it on the front page. Normally we give our stories to journalists and they take or don't take various extracts, they publish them on the front page or they don't: we are not the ones who decide. In this case *Le Monde* not only put it on page 1 but published more than just extracts. So, suddenly there was a snowball effect. We had interviews in other newspapers, on the radio, etc - it took off! In addition, since negotiations looked likely to take place, all of this was manna from heaven for journalists, enabling them to refocus on the political realities of Kosovo at the time. For us, the front page of *Le Monde* was not a problem. Of course, the Coordinator was called up to Belgrade and was scolded in the ministries. But, the Serbs have always insulted us. All of our coordinators who visited Bosnia and Herzegovina were treated to the great piece of cinema every time they went into a ministry. So what, that never changed anything!

Graziella Godain, Deputy programme manager  
MSF France (in French).



*We were dealing with a situation whose violence was a matter of public record - indeed it was the central issue in what was going on. Negotiations, news reports, criticism of Milosevic, calls for the mobilisation of the ICTY - all of that had a single objective, namely the unacceptable violence to which the Albanian population of Kosovo was being subjected. Moreover, MSF Belgium had been present in Pristina for years, albeit in a fairly small way. I recall that *Le Monde* put it on its front page and made a direct connection with what was happening. And, at that time something was still happening in Kosovo. So, by making public statements, MSF necessarily crossed paths with the diplomatic process and with military preparation.*

Rony Brauman, Director of research, MSF France Foundation (in French).

**Discussions concerning the profile of the international position for the information officer (sometimes also called 'Public Relations Officer') on Kosovo were rekindled by the publication of the MSF report in *Le Monde*.**



**'Job description Public Relations Officer,'** MSF Yugoslavia, 23 October 1998 (in English). [D52](#)

#### Main responsibilities

The promotion of MSF activities in Kosovo.

- To the press, proactively organising contacts
- Assist HOM in clarifying the MSF position and formulation of press statements
- Liaison with communication depts
- Assist field teams with press management
- Inform and update MSF sections
- Standardise and formalise the information that MSF forwards to other organisations e.g. UNHCR to present a coherent and professional image
- To assist HOM and medical coordinator with the setting up of a database/mapping system which the different teams will feed into.



**'To Bastien, Vincent, Graziella, Tim, Bas and all the MSF volunteers in Kosovo,'** Message from Françoise Saulnier, MSF Legal Advisor, 17 November 1998 (in English). [D53](#)

#### Extract:

After having briefed Bas here in Paris, I feel the necessity to share some feelings and comments with all of you. One of Bas' tasks would be to rebuild confidence with the team about its ability to control the process of advocacy and the use of our information by the media. It is easy to

read between the lines and understand that this is directly linked with the 'bad experience' of last October. I think we have to be careful with this 'never again approach' as it may not lead to a real improvement of our work if it is too much directed at building safeguards and guarantees. So I think it is important to agree on the diagnosis before deciding on the treatment and so defining the main priority of Bas' work.

1- When it comes to media management, the word 'control' is a false one. It gives wrong security feelings. Either you give information to the media, either you don't. But no one will ever be able to control from A to Z what happens with [it]. You can also establish [an] embargo on information until a specific date. But even with this, you have the question of morning or evening newspapers in Europe or the US that prove that information cannot be issued exactly at the same time everywhere around the world. When you look at what happened at the press conference, you understand that we were led to say more than what we wish (at the press conference) and that we were led to speak at a 'wrong' time we [which we would not] have chosen (the day of the deadline for air strikes in *Le Monde*) because we, as MSF, were:

- Too late anyway to say what we had to, on Kosovo.
- If we had maintained a flux of information to the media since February or July;
- If we had clarified our position on what concerns us and what does not concern us in this crisis (air strikes, NATO human rights observers, UCK, Serbian police and military activities, respect of the civilians, their vital properties, and the relief, respect of the medical duties ...); then we would not have found ourselves in such a difficult situation at the last minute. Golden rule: The less you give to the media, the more they put you under pressure, and the more they tend to fill [in] the blank by extrapolating or misunderstanding what you say.

2- We cannot be proud of this advocacy operation but at least it saved us from having been totally silent on war crimes. Now our real challenge is to make sure that we will not be in such a position in the future. I think that it is a waste of time to focus Bas' work on how to control media, to establish new communications procedures that will "protect us" more, to decide whether or not *Le Monde* is [no longer] not anymore a reliable newspaper, and to ban such a newspaper from our list (why not the Washington post?). Because at the headquarters level, communication people are usually not unprofessional.


If we want to avoid the repetition of what happened, we have to take a proactive profile in terms of information rather than a controlling attitude. We have to concentrate on the gathering of information relevant to our programs and relevant to the fate of the population. We have to identify the new problems that will arise in this phase of resettlement and distribution of international assistance (to who, through which channels, under what conditions, and decide if it suits or not our own humanitarian standards and ethical duties...). We have to keep journalists

informed regularly about all this and not only on the spot of crisis.

We are accountable on what we are doing to the public that gives us money and to the victims that we hope to protect. We are not a human rights organization, so we are not collecting any kind of information on what happens to the people. We are only accountable on:

- The way humanitarian law is or is not respected by each and,
- The way humanitarian activities are made possible or not by each.

This is a heavy work to do. If we want to give us the best chance to succeed in it, it will be better to make sure that Bas can concentrate on this only.

 *They were thinking of a jointed mission between Belgium and Holland. I was the bridal gift for Holland. I would report to the network, be a press backup, and by the time I arrived it was all very quiet again. UCK had retreated, and the Serbs too, so things were quiet. So I started to do some human rights work.*

Bas Tielens, Information Officer for Kosovo, MSF International, October 1998 to March 1999 (in English).

**The proposal for the future of Kosovo submitted by the United States envoy and endorsed by the Contact Group, which provided for substantial autonomy for the province, was rejected by most of the Albanian parties who were demanding independence. On 21 November, Belgrade proposed its own text, which argued for a strengthening of ties between Kosovo and Serbia. During November, MSF teams noted that regardless of the ceasefire, Serb police harassment and intimidation of Albanians, notably members of the medical corps with whom they were working, continued.**



*'With Kosovo's Health System a Casualty, Civilians Die,' Mike O'Connor, **International Herald Tribune (NYT)**, 4 November 1998 (in English). [D54](#)*

#### Extract:

The climate of fear in Kosovo during the Yugoslav government's offensive against ethnic Albanian rebels has caused the rural health system to collapse, aid workers and the few remaining health workers say, and hundreds of civilians may have died as a result. The workers also say that doctors who have been treating civilian victims of the war have been arrested, beaten and in at least two cases killed by government forces.

[...] Government troops have destroyed many villages, including health clinics, and hundreds of civilians have died during their offensive against ethnic Albanian guerrillas. [...] But they say that about 20 doctors have been arrested or have fled the country and that hundreds of civilians may have died because of the collapse of the rural health care system. "This is a systematic policy on the part of the government," said a senior official of an international health agency, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

[...] Yugoslav government officials said that there was no policy of intimidating health care workers and that the doctors who had been arrested were guilty of supporting armed insurgents. [...] The nearest medical clinic was destroyed by government forces. A district health center in Malisevo is empty of staff and medicine, its doors barricaded and possibly booby-trapped by the Serbian police like other places in this area.



**'Kosovo Communication update 015,'** MSF Press Departments' Internal document, 26 November 1998 (in English). [D55](#)

#### Extract:

The situation in health structures remains the same. Doctors are still returning but in some areas are afraid to work. The extent of destruction/damage to clinics seems to be less than previously estimated. According to our assessments in the Pec/Decan, where some of the heaviest fighting took place, out of the 28 official and Mother Theresa structures, 8 are damaged, of which 3 seriously.

[...] PRESS LINE

The main message remains the fate of the IDPs/returnees, and to draw attention to their needs. [...] Because of the humanitarian situation, MSF would like to see a lasting political solution that guarantees long-term stability in Kosovo.

[...] CONFIDENTIAL (see press line) Observations

The fragile "ceasefire" is still holding despite continued tit for tat actions (attacks and abductions) between the Serb forces and the UCK, with more involvement of civilians. Tensions have increased in the Pec and Decan areas. Last Wednesday night, a respected Albanian doctor who worked in Pec hospital was shot dead in his house by 3 masked men who spoke Serbian. One of his children was injured by a bullet. More reports of harassment/intimidation against Albanians by police, and attacks on Albanian restaurants and cafes in Pec. More police presence in Decan, civilians harassed and beaten. Similar reports from Mitrovica and Suva Reka.

For the people that had been forced out of their homes, there was a good host family system, but still some people were living out in the open in the middle of winter. So, we got some trucks and we would be doing more relief and shelter activities (blankets, plastic sheeting.) We did a bit of food, and hygiene kits. In terms of caring for wounded, it would have increased over the time up until April 1999. But sometimes ICRC or sometimes the Albanians themselves would deal with their own casualties. It would also depend on the feelings of the local commanders. They were so paranoid. They weren't always ready to give us access. There was a general trend that did increase but our access would change, it would go up and down according a variety of facts. They would ask for the driver or one of the senior medical staff to go into the barrack at the checkpoint. I think there was some verbal abuse.

Part of the problems was that we didn't have any communications as well. We had no radios. They wouldn't lend us any. We did get some sat phones but we were not supposed to have them and if they would find them you were thought as spies. It was always a worry when they came back late. And the other thing was the mines. That was a major problem. These guys, the Serb security people are pretty sophisticated, and had they wanted to put their mine in our car they could have done [so] quite easily. They actually put mines for these diplomatic observers, the OSCE. So there was an increase in pressure and on a daily basis we were discussing with the teams: "What could we do to mitigate the risks that you're facing. Do you think this is viable to continue this? Are we putting the local staff at too much risk?" All we could really do is encourage the people and the teams to have a good open discussion about it and see if everybody wants to continue. If they didn't, of course, we stopped that. And, then just to be extremely cautious, maintain a high level of awareness particularly for the mines. And, then we had this rule that if anybody in the car says "I don't feel good", then... [we wouldn't go on.] That was the best we could do.

Tim Boucher, Coordinator MSF Belgium/France in Kosovo, June 1998 to March 1999 (in English).

In November, December, and January, at a time when negotiations were being prepared and when the media was saying that Serb troops were pulling out, our teams in the field noted that the opposite was happening. They still saw bombings and attacks on villages. It was all less visible and on a smaller scale, but it was continuing. The presence of Serb troops, militia, and police remained enormous. But, at MSF no-one wanted to talk about it, for the sacrosanct reason that: "If we speak, we will be kicked out." It was not that we were not tempted, on several occasions, to leave the consortium! But let's say that we continued to try to make it work. We could have

done so but we were limited by the question of human resources. We were not even able to supply a medical coordinator!

Graziella Godain, Deputy Programme Manager MSF France (in French).

**Still dissatisfied with the operation of the common mission with the Belgian section, the French section's Kosovo desk decided to send an exploratory mission to Montenegro so as to position itself in case there was a stream of refugees from Kosovo. The mission only left at the beginning of January 1999.**


In November, given the situation we decided to send a team on an exploratory mission to Montenegro. Brussels did not agree, as they believed that this would give us problems and would be of no use. My view is that they were afraid we would become too independent from them. That worried them because they had not got over the article in *Le Monde* and were aware that if they cut us too much slack, they would lose control over us. So, at the beginning, they did not want this exploratory mission, although in the end they accepted it. But, it took time, visas took forever and they wanted the exploratory team to go via Pristina for briefing purposes, etc. I accepted all of that. I couldn't care less. The team set off but with all these delays they did not arrive in Montenegro until just after Christmas.

Graziella Godain, Deputy Programme Manager MSF France (in French).

The context was so volatile that we needed, on the international side, to avoid being spread too thin and thus, we needed to find a joint international formula that guaranteed consensus and good cooperation, and enabled us to avoid problems. It could also have the advantage of infusing greater depth into the debate. For us it was all about finding out how to manage communications in the name of MSF in an explosive and quickly changing context. With MSF Belgium in Belgrade and Pristina and MSF France in Pec, near Montenegro, if MSF were to be targeted in statements it was easy for the MSF France team to go quickly into Montenegro, whereas in Belgrade you ran the risk of finding out first from the Serb authorities, and that could have been too late.


Vincent Janssens, Director of Operations, MSF Belgium (in French).



 There was a lot of tension. We would often say to Graziella: "What actually do you want? What is it that we're not doing? What do you think we should be doing?" The *témoignage* [witnessing] thing came up. We did try putting our message down in terms of accounts of what had happened and flagging up human rights abuses. So, I am afraid my view is that really on the French side, they just wanted their piece and that had been decided at the board level. My impression is that the higher the media profile became the more pressure we would get from Paris to say: "This is MSF France and this is what we're doing." There was nothing happening in Montenegro, it seemed that things could go [get worse] there. So, eventually we agreed with Graziella going to Montenegro. There were clearly going to be issues on the administrative boundary between Kosovo and Montenegro and interethnic issues. I wasn't really happy with that because they wanted to start their own thing.

Tim Boucher, Coordinator MSF Belgium/France in Kosovo, June 1998 to March 1999 (in English).

**On 23 December 1998 the Physicians for Human Rights organisation issued a press statement containing extracts from a report planned for release in February 1999, denouncing the arrest, torture and murder of Albanian medical personnel and the destruction of medical infrastructure by Serb police. This information had been gathered with the support of the MSF information officer in Kosovo, who proposed that MSF make a public comment on this report. This 'task sharing' between human rights and humanitarian organisations was considered by some to be an evasion of responsibility by MSF.**

 *'Doctors Denounce the Intimidation of Albanian Doctors and Patients,' AFP (France), 24 December 1998 (in French).*

Albanian doctors and patients in Kosovo are being subject to "systematic atrocities" by Serbs, declared an American medical association, Physicians for Human Rights, on Wednesday. "The intimidation campaign" perpetrated against Albanian medical personnel in Kosovo is "characterised by cases of murder, torture, detention, imprisonment and forced disappearance of Albanian doctors in Kosovo," notes the organisation in a communiqué following two months of investigation, whose results are to be published in early 1999.

The group also cites cases of patients having been "beaten and chained to beds or radiators" by "Serb police or Serb health professionals." The group notes that these atrocities were committed mainly from the end of the summer


and during autumn 1998 and continued after the Kosovo agreement was reached between the Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic and the American envoy Richard Holbrooke.

"Attacks on health establishments, doctors and their patients are war crimes," declared Jennifer Leaning, a medical doctor and member of the Association. "Albanian doctors in Kosovo trying to assist people living in war zones, or zones currently or formerly controlled by the Kosovo Liberation Army, have been harassed and pursued in a campaign that disregards the rules of medical neutrality, which are protected by international humanitarian law and laws relating to human rights," she added.

 *'Extra Communication Update Kosovo,' Email from Bas Tielens, MSF International Information Officer to MSF network, 23 December 1998 (in English). [D56](#)*

Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) today published an excerpt of their upcoming report (to be issued in February) on violations of human rights in the medical sphere, regarding Kosovo. The report documents murder of health care professionals, detention and arrest for delivering medical care, torture and physical abuse, search and destruction of medical facilities, forced flight from medical practice, police harassment, and abuses against hospitalized Kosovar-Albanian patients. The full press release (8 pages), is available by fax from Kris in New York.

Should you get questions on this, the line is that MSF is very worried about these violations, and has come across a great number of violations itself, as was already reported in the press conference of October 9th. MSF fully supports PHR's recommendations to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the international community, except for point three, and in particular seven, in which is stated that international humanitarian organizations should "to the maximum extent possible" collaborate with Kosovo-Albanian doctors and employ them in mobile clinics etc. MSF in Kosovo takes an integral approach towards the healthcare in Kosovo, and works with health professionals from all backgrounds to be as effective as possible. In point three, PHR asks for extra presence of international monitors in areas under (previous) KLA-control. For reasons of neutrality, MSF cannot support this.

 *'Kosovo (extra, update),' Email from MSF France Assistant Legal Advisor to the programme manager and to the MSF France communications officer (in French). [D57](#)*

#### **Extract:**

1) I am very happy that PHR is doing the work that MSF should have been doing over the last several months and

has not done or done badly (cross out whichever does not apply) despite the successive presence of two persons responsible for this matter. Really, when one knows how long MSF has been in Kosovo, through this network of doctors. Frankly speaking, it's not something to be proud of...

2) I am very happy about this fine example of complementarity between humanitarian NGOs and human rights NGOs, so dear to our friends in MSF Holland. Each one has his own work - the humanitarians are on the ground to help and the human rights NGOs are there to look after human rights, because that is the work of specialists (you need to know how to gather information and how to speak to victims without traumatising them). Since the humanitarian NGOs are on the ground and the human rights NGOs are not, or arrive when people are dead, a superb solution has been found: the former will pass their information on to the latter. Long live sub-contracting. The circle is closed, everyone has his specialist job and in addition our operations won't be threatened. What a gift!


Except that all of that is a long way from reflecting MSF's identity and what makes us different; that it is an open door to operations of terrible quality (following along passively when violent phenomena occur); that it means abandoning the protection pillar of humanitarian action (we will henceforth only offer assistance - that reminds one of UNHCR, does it not?); that human rights NGOs know nothing about humanitarian law (yes, that is true, I am not just bragging). Sub-contracting is always a sign that responsibilities are being abandoned by the body doing the sub-contracting. And, in this case, it's MSF.

3) I am very happy that we have strong messages. A communications strategy - tell me if I'm wrong, Anne. Here we have MSF commenting on reports from human rights NGOs. We are going to have to be on the ball, given on the one hand the volume coming out each day and on the other hand the fact that MSF is present in eighty countries. Not to put too fine a point on it, I find it all stupid. And, the proposed message is ridiculous; it looks like textual analysis at about high school level. And, analysis on an elevated plane at that - almost metaphysical - given that nothing less than neutrality is invoked regarding the proposal to deploy more observers.


You will have gathered that I am not in favour of MSF's making itself ridiculous by commenting on PHR report. If journalists really (but really) insist, they could be told:

- We have been in Kosovo for a long time (can you remind me of how many years?).
- We have indeed noted that Kosovar medical personnel were particularly targeted at the height of the internal conflict and, we have publicised humanitarian law violations when we have become aware of them.
- All these crimes are war crimes (no one is saying so) and should be brought to trial.
- The International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia is competent to try these crimes, but the Yugoslav authorities are preventing investigators from going to the area (for information, the Security Council has adopted a very

weak resolution demanding that Milosevic allow the ICTY to work).

 *MSF could have gone further by itself with this. Probably we were more operational than most medical NGOs. Our operational activities were significant, and through the Albanian members of our staff we were dealing with some wounded etc. We had quite a widespread presence on the ground really [...] But we maintained our operationality.*

Tim Boucher, Coordinator MSF Belgium/France in Kosovo June 1998 to April 1999 (in French).

 *The most important part was trying to get the team look out for things they might encounter during their medical work. And, then liaise with Physicians for Human Rights who worked in Pristina. And, they advised me what we should look out for. During my break, I went to the office in MSF Holland to speak with HAD [Humanitarian Affairs Department] to see if they had a sort of ready-made tool. I went on some trips with mobile clinics to facilitate and filling out medical forms. I made one study of a massacre. It occurred in summer 1998. At first we had the impression we were the first to hear about this, but then speaking to the people on site, turned out that there had been diplomats [visiting] already. We heard about it through the mobile clinics and then I went to interview these people who were attacked by Serb soldiers. Some people had run into the bush and heard a lot of screams and shouting and found impacts on trees and stuff like that, and people had seen wounded. But still two or three people had died. It was relatively minor. But I could see if I find... I guess it would be evidence in a court case against a Serb officer. It was filed in Brussels. I have never had much feedback from Brussels at all. I don't know what they thought of that work. It was quite a minor sort of activity. This is something I had developed on the side when I had a lot of time in the first month. It was so quiet that I said: what can we develop in order to be prepared should there be the conflict and have a base to speak out.*

Bas Tielens, Information Officer Kosovo, MSF International October 1998 to March 1999 (in English).

**On 24 December 1998, without informing the OSCE verification mission (KVM), which remained powerless, Serb forces launched a substantial offensive against a UCK stronghold in the north of Kosovo. The UCK was henceforth a political interlocutor, intransigent on the question of Kosovo independence. It met regularly**

**with William Walker, the American Representative on the KVM. On 29 November, NATO reiterated that it was prepared to intervene in Kosovo.**



*'Explosive Situation in the North of Kosovo after Four Days of Fighting,' AFP (France), 28 December 1998 (in French).*

According to Western sources, the UCK today much better structured and organised than last summer, when it suffered a series of setbacks, losing most of its strongholds in the west of the province. Western experts put its numbers at 15,000 arms, while the UCK itself claims 30,000. Today, it once again controls about a third of the territory of Kosovo, according to experts.

Momcilo Trajkovic, one of the Serb leaders in Kosovo and an opponent of President Milosevic, claims for his part that it controls 70%. The UCK is increasingly aiming to set itself up as a political force, requiring not only that it be associated with negotiations on the future of the province, but aspiring to play a "predominant role," according to its political representative Adem Demaçi. Talks should no longer "depend only" on Ibrahim Rugova (the 'President' of the Kosovo Albanians, who has created his own team responsible for talks with Belgrade through the intermediary of the American Envoy Christopher Hill), Mr Demaçi said last week.

The Verification Mission (KVM) of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has understood this very well. Its leader, the American William Walker, has been on the ground over the last few days and has several times met not only Serb but also UCK commanders. The UCK will accept no outcome other than the independence of Kosovo, which is an unacceptable claim for the Belgrade authorities, who up until now have refused to negotiate with people they describe as "terrorists." But, the KVM, whose members are not armed, has very restricted means for making the warring parties see reason.



*'NATO Ready to Intervene "If Necessary" in Kosovo,' AFP (France), 29 December 1998 (in French).*

"NATO is ready to intervene at any time, if necessary" and "recalls that the act order is still in place," the Alliance declared in its communiqué. The Secretary-General of NATO, Javier Solana, "has made a new appeal to the authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), and to the armed Albanian groups of the UCK (Army for the Liberation of Kosovo) not to endanger the fragile security situation in Kosovo," adds the communiqué. The act order constitutes the last stage before the political decision to intervene. By brandishing this threat, NATO, in October, had obtained an agreement from Yugoslav

President Slobodan Milosevic on the cessation of military activity in Kosovo. Fighting has resumed since just before Christmas in the north of the Serb province, where the Yugoslav police and army have launched a major operation against an UCK stronghold in reprisal for the assassination of a Serb police officer. Four days of fighting resulted in 15 deaths on the Albanian side and one dead and six wounded on the Serb side according to unofficial estimates.



*The UCK were becoming impressive. They succeeded in winning territory and they were quite well-organised. Of course, they had the support of practically the entire population. Faced with that, the Serb police and paramilitary units (belonging to Arkan) were becoming tougher and more brutal in their ways of persecuting the population. Thus, there was a hardening. Some people were more specifically targeted. Some doctors were assassinated. The UCK's increasing strength was palpable, although we didn't know who was really behind them or how that was happening. They had support, even if it was just for procuring weapons. There was such a Diaspora! Many Kosovars who were in Germany returned to fight.*

Laurence Thavaux, MSF Field Coordinator in Pristina in 1996, in Pec from April 1998 to February 1999 and nurse in Montenegro in April 1999 (in French).

**On 4 January 1999, Dr Vukasin Andric, the Serb official responsible for health matters in Kosovo, stated to the Serb and international press that the MSF teams in Kosovo were taking advantage of the hospitality afforded by Belgrade and were engaging in arms traffic to the benefit of the 'Albanian terrorists.' He queried MSF's request for work permit extensions. These accusations were taken up by the Serb media, as was the MSF reply made in a press communiqué and through interviews with its coordinator in Kosovo. The MSF teams were subjected to new administrative red tape. MSF arranged a meeting to take this up with Dr Andric. The crisis ended in January.**



**Message** from Katia, MSF Belgrade, to MSF Belgium and MSF France Programme managers, MSF Pristina, MSF Pec, and MSF Prizren, 5 January 1999 (in English). **D58**

Hello,  
Hereby I forward you the public statement of Dr Vukasin Andric that was released yesterday, as well as the translation of consequent articles published in 4 main Serb newspapers. It seems similar messages have been spread

on the Serb governmental TV channel yesterday as well as on one radio channel. Up to now, no official reaction/accusation received from government side against MSF, thus the consequences this can have on MSF activities are not very clear yet.

We received some questions on the forwarded accusations from different sides (ECHO, Belgian Embassy, Reuters, AFP, Telegraph...) and these were all replied in the same sense as the attached press release prepared by Bas (see annex). Apparently, Dr Vukasin Andric seems to be quite a 'big fish' in Ministry of Health. He is Health Secretary of the Kosovo-Metohija Temporary Executive Council. We tried to get in touch with our main contact person in Ministry of Health in Belgrade, Dr Gajic for more information and eventual back up, but she refuses to give any comments/get involved into this (not very surprisingly, since she is already in a dangerous position by authorising MSF visa/drugs importations).

The press release prepared by Bas, will be distributed in the press centre in Pristina, as well as spread out in Belgrade to different journalist channels, different Embassies and ECHO. We will try to get an appointment with Dr Vukasin this week through sending him a fax. If we get a positive answer (???), probably Guy and Bas will try to see Dr Vukasin this week, since he is based in Pristina, and Tim (sick for the moment) and I are actually in Belgrade. Or, Tim and I will try to meet him next week. We do not believe these accusations will endanger our field missions for the moment, but we will closely follow up security situation/access in the field, of course; we fear we might get problems with authorisations for visa, importations of drugs... Not a lot of other options than to wait and see and hope for the best I guess.



**Declaration** of Vukasin Andric, Secretary for Health in the Temporary Executive Council, in *Politika* (regime's daily) from Yugoslavian press agency Tanjug, Pristina, 4 January 1999 (in English). [D59](#)

#### Extract:

"Médecins sans Frontières" misusing their mission. [...] The Secretary for Health in the TEC of Kosovo and Metohija, Vukasin Andric, declared today that representatives of the international humanitarian organisation "Médecins sans Frontières" were misusing their stay in Kosmet and that a question should be asked whether to continue to offer them hospitality. In Andric's declaration for [the] public, it is stressed that MSF and some other members of the international humanitarian teams "who are misusing and putting in the second plan the reason for their stay here" are not helping to resolve and improve the situation in Kosovo and Metohija as well as resolving the problem in [a] peaceful way and thus "they are excluding themselves from the list of those who are welcomed."  
[...]

- The regional Secretary for health and added that MSF's members "are misusing their mission because they were caught hiding and smuggling the weapons for Albanian terrorists." Andric also said that one MSF team was discovered to use the frequencies that are used for communication of the Ministry of Interior.

- All the tolerance of the state was not enough for warning MSF to undertake finally the job for which they received the permission. They continue, voluntary or not, to assist the Albanian side exclusively, distributing only some 'tiny bits' of attention and help to population in need of other ethnics, said Andric. Because of all this, Andric considers that their obstinate attempts to extend their work permit are to be discussed and that we should see if we should extend our hospitality to these "so called humanitarians" because they "use a human and noble idea for their or someone else's aims, helping, directly or indirectly the terrorists and the terrorism."

- "Is it morally correct to ask the extension of their stay permit of the state whose hospitality they are misusing for illegal activities?" wonders Andric.

- 'Vukasin Andric About the Representatives of the International Org MSF: Weapons Under the White Coats,' *Borba* (Serb regime's daily), 5 January 1999 (translated into English from Serbo-Croatian by MSF staff in Belgrade)
- 'Undesirable Doctors,' *Glas* (mild Serb opposition), 5 January 1999 (translated into English from Serbo-Croatian by MSF staff in Belgrade)
- 'Doubt of Humanitarians,' *Blic* (Serb opposition) 5 January 1999 (translated into English from Serbo-Croatian by MSF staff in Belgrade). [D60](#)



'Yugoslav Mission of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Surprised by Authorities Accusations,' **Press release** from MSF Pristina, 5 January 1999 (in English). [D61](#)

In a public announcement issued yesterday, Prof[essor] Dr Vukasin Andric, the Health Secretary of the Kosovo-Metohija Temporary Executive Council, stated that the mission of Médecins Sans Frontières in Yugoslavia is involved in several illegal activities. Mr Vukasin accused unspecified MSF members of misusing the medical neutrality for smuggling arms for the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK). Also, one team is accused of using a police radio frequency and the mission as a whole of giving assistance only to Kosovo-Albanian people.

For the mission of MSF in Yugoslavia, these allegations come as a complete surprise, as the organisation has always had a good cooperation with the Yugoslav authorities, especially the Ministry of Health, and has been cooperating with the Institute for Public Health since 1993. Because of its medical character, MSF is of course by no means involved in any kind of dealings with arms and also does not provide aid on the basis of ethnic backgrounds.

The mission in Yugoslavia works with Albanian as well as Serbian people, inside and outside of the organisation. Also, MSF (as well as many other NGO's) was never allowed to use any kind of radio; therefore, interference with police communication is out of the question.



*'Médecins Sans Frontières Denied Charges on Tuesday that it was Biased Towards Ethnic Albanians in the Flashpoint Yugoslav Province of Kosovo,' Reuters, 5 January 1999 (in English).*

#### Extract:

The head of the charity's mission in Yugoslavia, Tim Boucher, said the accusation by a Serb official was "very clearly untrue." He was responding to a statement made on Monday by Vukasin Andric, a top health official in the Serbian administration in Kosovo, and carried by the official Tanjug news agency. "Médecins Sans Frontières have abused their mission as they have been caught trying to smuggle in and conceal arms for ethnic Albanian terrorists," Andric was quoted as saying.

MSF and other international humanitarian organisations moved into Kosovo after Serbian security forces conducted a fierce offensive against ethnic Albanian separatists last year. Andric was also quoted as saying a MSF team had been using radio frequencies set aside for Serbian police. Boucher told Reuters none of those charges was true. "I hardly need to say we do not carry weapons and we have never been involved in any criminal procedures," he said. "We do not have radios. We are not allowed by the government to have radios." Boucher said he was scheduled to talk to Yugoslav officials in Belgrade later on Tuesday. "We will try to establish why these kinds of accusations have been made against us when they are very clearly untrue," he said.



*Sitrep, MSF Yugoslavia to MSF Brussels 29 January 1999 (in English). [D62](#)*

#### Extract:

Not much media 'publicity' over the past week. On Friday 22/1, Tim and I went to see Dr Andric (regional health secretary of the temporary executive council of Kosovo; the guy who accused us in the press). He repeated the accusations, but stated that the info came from other sources and it would be checked out and if correct we would receive an apology. He complained about our one side, but said that we are still welcome and that our collaboration should continue.

The teams (Prizren and Pec) were submitted to more complete and time consuming checking by police at some checkpoints, but police remained polite and correct towards the teams. Yesterday, Wednesday 28/1, the MSF office in Pristina was visited by two police officers demanding a detailed report on our medical and non-

medical distributions in 1998, stating they would ask the same to all agencies. They refused to be clear on who issued the order and did not have an official document. The incident was reported to UNHCR. For the moment, we will not respond to their demand, stating that we give all info to MOH authorities, who are our partner[s].




*We had one initiative that was highlighting the targeting of Albanian health staff. Our mobile team started to see that quite clearly and, so we collected some information. And, this came out in some newspapers. I remember there was an article in the Independent in the UK. And this had an impact. When I went to see the guys in Belgrade, of course they weren't happy. Initially, they responded by putting articles in the tabloids. These were the newspapers that the guys at the checkpoints were reading. So, it started to create problems for our mobile teams because by the time (at two or three o'clock in the afternoon) the guys at the checkpoints had a few beers, and there would be a double page colour spread saying MSF were spies. It mentioned the previous Coordinator, and then a photo of the top of the MSF building and, of course, there was the radio equipment. We were portrayed as spying and that created problems for us.*

*A dirty tricks campaign was their response to our indication of abuse by the Serbs forces. And, then we tried to address this to the government and complain that they were putting this in the papers. I went to Belgrade. And they didn't state specifically that they knew that we were talking about human rights abuses to the press in Europe. But, I sat in a meeting with some people from the ministry of health and a couple of security guys. And, I was saying: «Why are you doing this, you know that we're open, we're not helping terrorist. It is very easy for you to find out what we're doing exactly. In fact, we give you all our movements on a daily basis.» That was part of the deal to get access: we would call our movements to the police. On his desk, the guy in Belgrade had a photocopy of this Independent article that said "MSF accuses the Serbs of doing this." We didn't mention it. He had also some cuttings from Kouchner statements about Bosnia where Kouchner directly called for use of force, for NATO bombing. And they would say: «MSF you're the guys that were asking NATO to come and bomb us in Bosnia. So please don't tell us that you are impartial!» And that was quite a difficult argument to contend [address].*

*We were obviously on the edge of pushing for use of force by NATO or by the west. I remember saying to the desk: "You really need to recognise that I won't really have much to defend myself with in Belgrade if you come out with that because it is very clearly against the Serbs. Certainly, when I went to Belgrade, I realised how much the Serbs' intelligence and security knew exactly what we were doing. I didn't think when they started playing dirty tricks in the newspaper, that it was dangerous. Of course, there were drunk soldiers at checkpoints looking at the newspaper, saying that the car that just stopped at the checkpoint is full of spies or running guns. But on the other side, I could*

go to Belgrade and say: "Hey, you guys know exactly what's going on, what we're doing, so why are you saying we are running guns when you know we're not and if we were running guns, there is no way you would allow us to be here." And they accepted that point. You could speak to a degree quite frankly with them. So... maybe we should have pushed a bit further.


Tim Boucher, Coordinator MSF Belgium/France in Kosovo, June 1998 to March 1999 (in English).

 During a whole period we were treated as UCK spies. They claimed that we were trafficking in arms. This is fairly classic, something that we had already been through in Congo. It is true that we supplied medicine. From memory, I think that we never replied formally to direct requests from the UCK. I think that MSF France had this request also in Pec and that the team there was more active because UCK was more comfortable in Pec. When MSF had to leave Kosovo for Montenegro, they made supplies available to a network. That is clear. We had a network of Albanian doctors and medicine was provided solely for civilians. But, it is probable that MSF medicine was used for UCK sick or wounded. We always avoided taking a formal position in favour of one or the other. We always avoided formally taking sides with one or the other. We always worked with a medical network. And, the only Serb contact that we had was we were obliged.

Vincent Janssens, Director of Operations, MSF Belgium (in French).

During January 1999, the 'Petits Libres' publishing house, in association with MSF Belgium, published the book entitled 'The Hidden War in Kosovo,' which brought together all the eyewitness accounts collected by MSF in Kosovo.




'The Hidden War in Kosovo,' by Eric Dachy MSF Belgium Desk Kosovo for MSF Belgium, published in **Contact** (internal MSF Belgium publication), January 1999 (in French). [D63](#) 

#### Extract:

This small book (10cm x 15) represents something important for everyone in MSF who has contributed to and especially for the teams in the field. In October 1998 for some months, they were confronted with an alarming degree of distress the families of Kosovar peasants, whose villages were attacked by the army and militia, and who were hunted right into the woods with heavy weapons.

It was necessary to describe what we were seeing and

what we were the only ones to see. Videos, cameras, and recorders were forbidden. We contacted Myriam Gaume, whom we had known since Armenia, and she enthusiastically agreed to accompany a mobile team for three weeks. If you want to know what an MSF team does in an emergency situation, [...] read this book. You will change your mind.

 When it was published, we did not give a press conference because there was no pressing message, nothing urgent. This was not an intentional position as such, there was no analysis concerning such a conference. It was really a question of relating a little of what was happening: three weeks in the life of the Kosovars. It sold well: 15,000 copies and Poivre d'Arvor [prime-time news presenter for one of the main French television channels] showed it on the news. We had various reactions. It was sent to many people, along with a letter. But, in order to target all the European parliamentarians, we would have needed a lobbying list and a lot of time to put it together, and that was not done. Preference was given to public action. After all, Kosovo concerned everyone. Following that, we organised small debates on the question subject whenever possible. That gave rise to invitations and to other debates, and so on.

Eric Dachy, Desk MSF Belgium (in French).

## THE RACAK MASSACRE INCREASES TENSION...

On 15 January 1999, 45 people were killed in an operation by Serb forces in the Albanian village of Racak, in the south of Kosovo, on the road between Pristina and Prizren. On 16 January 1999, an MSF team went to Racak and discovered a decapitated corpse. It did not go to the place where the 45 bodies were located. MSF noted that most of the villagers had left, as well as the local doctor who had taken the medicine with him. On 17 January, a convoy of two trucks and two MSF cars bringing assistance to Racak and the surrounding villages was stopped by the UNHCR representative. The team saw a Serb police contingent arrive, heard the sound of firing and bombing, and saw the villagers flee along the road. MSF tried in vain to help the displaced persons, who fled into the surrounding mountains.



'Kosovo: Massacre Racak, MSF Actions,' Email from Bas Tielens, MSF Information Officer in Kosovo to MSF network, 16 January 1999 (in English). [D64](#)

Dear all,

As the news of the massacre in Racak came this morning, we sent out a team to see what we could do. The team entered Racak and saw one decapitated man. The team did not go to the ditch where the 40 shot people were found. Almost all the villagers (1500) had left Racak, also the doctor of the local ambulanta [fled], taking the drugs with him. The villagers reported 15 wounded who were taken into the mountains and are cared for by the doctor. Also, people from the villages around seem to have left for the mountains and other villages. Tomorrow, we will send out two 4-tonne trucks with relief-items (food, BP5, plastic sheeting, blankets and clothing) for the displaced. More information tomorrow evening.



MSF Kosovo, Human Rights Report,' Interview of MSF nurse by MSF press officer, 20 January 1999 (in English). [D65](#)

#### Extract:

8. Date of event: 16 January 1999, Time of event: 12.00, Location of event: Municipality Stimlje Village, Racak.

9. Description of event: When we were on our way between Stimlje and Petrovo (on Saturday 16 January), we were stopped by a group of women and children, who told us that the police had beaten them yesterday. We came to the entrance of Petrovo, where we were stopped by the UCK, who asked us to go to Racak. We went to Racak, and saw the house in front of which the decapitated man was laying. There was already a car in the yard, and some journalists. Soon after entering the yard, I saw the body. The head was cut off in one blow, and was missing. The body had no other injuries. He wore simple clothes: a shirt and green trousers. It [He] was a big man, about 50-60 years old. He was lying on his back, his right arm was folded over his breast, and in his right hand he was holding a bullet, pointing upwards. He was lying in front of this house, in a hole near the gate. They killed him there. I went up to the hole, until I was about 1.5 metres from the body. There were pictures of the body later on TV. Only a few people were left in the village. One woman was rolling on the ground, completely hysterical. A very nervous journalist of AFP said we had to go to a ditch further on, because there were bodies there. We tried to give the woman an injection, but she was moving around too much so we couldn't help her.

We did not want to go up to the ditch, because there was not much we could do, and the sight of the decapitated man was already enough for us. We went back to the cars to [look for] find wounded. In Petrovo, we found the rep-

resentative of Mother Theresa (Kosovo-Albanian charity, we had already met before when MSF worked in this area. He told us that there were 15 wounded in an UCK base further up the road. We had some dressing material, and went with the representative of Petrovo. In the car, he told us that the attack had started at 06.00 (on Friday) with shelling. After that, policemen, soldiers, and masked civilians came into the village. He thinks the masked civilians were from the surroundings of Racak. These people locked up the villagers in their houses, and took a group up the hill. OSCE took the most seriously wounded to hospital in Pristina.

On the way to the UCK-base, we met the doctor of that base. He said: "the wounded are ok; I'm going to identify the bodies in Racak." He asked us to leave some medical materials for the wounded in the base. The UCK base looked very well organised. It had two big buildings and a very new big tent. The site was very difficult to reach. The guard at the entrance called the second in command of the base. He said that the people first of all, needed protection. He also told us about 200 people in a village further up the hill, which had no food. He took our passports. Then he said: "the Serbs are barbarians. We never killed women and children". We started to load our material into one of their cars at the base, but then the commander of the base came up to us and started to shout at us that we should load the stuff back and take it to the civilians: "people will only say that we keep it for ourselves." He got angry with Skender (one of MSF Kosovo-Albanian doctors, BT). He accused the doctors of staying in the city to make money, and said that a UCK fighter who was wounded by shrapnel had to pay 500 DM for treatment by a doctor in Urosevac/Ferizaj. He also said that there was going to be a time when the doctors would have to face the consequences of their behaviour.

We decided to go the village where the 200 civilians were hiding. There was a lot of ice on the road and one of our cars got stuck. We managed to get to the village, and the representative of Mother Theresa, who was still with us, told the people there about what had happened in Racak. There was one woman there from Racak who started to cry. Soon, everyone was crying. We left blankets in the village, and went back with the woman and her family to Racak. 100 meters from the UCK base we got stuck again. Coming the other way, there were three cars of ICRC and two from IMC, on their way to the village. They did not have any info about the massacre, and did not seem to have a plan about what to do. They had already been to the base. I said we were going to Racak. The guy of IMC asked me what I was doing here, and asked me what I was going to do. I said I wanted to go to Bellince, which has also been hit, and that I wanted to leave supplies in Petrovo. That was OK with him. They were not carrying any supplies. Also, the ICRC team did not have a plan about what to do. The family we were taking in the car asked us about who was now in Racak. We said it was the UCK, but the people were afraid to go out of the car when we came to Racak. The women we met first in the small village eventually went out to take a look. After that we took the family to Stimlje, where they had family. We did not see any police

in Racak. There was one tank in Stimlje, and 5 to 6 empty civilian trucks with soldiers in the cabin. There were two policemen on the crossroads at Petrovo. We returned to Pristina. The most horrible thing was that we were not welcome: "You came too late, we don't need you."



'Kosovo: MSF Tries to Enter Racak and Surroundings' **Email** from Bas Tielens, MSF, 18 January 1999 (in English). [D66](#)

A small MSF convoy of two trucks and two Land Cruisers with relief, set out yesterday at 09:45 to assess the situation and distribute relief around Racak; the village in which 45 Albanians were massacred on Friday. The convoy was stopped by UNHCR at the outskirts of the town of Stimlje; where already a relief-convoy of the Danish Refugee Council was waiting. The security officer of UNHCR informed the MSF team that the situation was far too dangerous to continue, but that OSCE was negotiating to calm the situation.

From about 10.30 on, vehicles of the special police set out from the police base in Stimlje in the direction of Racak. Small groups of civilians started coming towards Stimlje along the road and through the fields from the houses just outside the town. At 11:00, the negotiations between the OSCE general and the Serb commander broke up, and after five minutes, shooting started in the hills. Policemen could be seen searching houses and buildings. The UNHCR-security-officer told the MSF team he was going to wait until 13:00 to see how the situation would be then, and make a decision about his own convoy, that was somewhere near in the area. The MSF-team also decided to wait, and got in touch with Pristina via the radio of a UNHCR car, to call for a medical team.

Meanwhile, the police brought in more reinforcements and occasional shelling could be heard. The medical team decided to invite a team of International Medical Corps to come along (IMC is the medical agency responsible for the Stimlje municipality), and arrived with three vehicles (two MSF, one IMC) at around 1400. The relief trucks were sent back to , as there was no possibility to do, but the MSF and IMC medical teams stayed in Stimlje. Via the local branch of the Kosovar aid organisation Mother Theresa, the teams got information about possible places where IDPs could have fled to, and at around 15:00, the teams went on assessment, together with a UNHCR car.

Near Dranmjak, villagers told the teams about several hundred people in the hills, but that the road leading to them was very bad. The teams decided that MSF would try to continue, while IMC would stay behind to distribute some relief. The UNHCR car radioed to Pristina and had to return. The road proved to be very bad indeed, and just outside Dranmjak, it became clear that it was useless to continue, also since it was already 1600.

Today, an MSF truck, together with a medical team in a

Land Cruiser, is doing an assessment in the same region. The truck is not carrying relief, but has to go to the biggest city there, Urosevac/Ferizaj, to get a new canopy. IMC is trying to reach the IDPs with a medical team, and ICRC is doing a relief distribution and is sending a surgical team.

**Presented by the Kosovars and the OSCE as a massacre of civilians, the events in Racak aroused the indignation of the international community. For their part, the Serb authorities claimed that the victims were UCK members killed in combat, and condemned the dramatisation of the events by the guerrilla forces. However they blocked any sort of international inquiry. This massacre increased tension between Serbia and the international community, which intensified diplomatic activity and preparations for a possible armed intervention. The Clinton administration prevailed on NATO to submit an ultimatum to Slobodan Milosevic.**



'Massacre in Racak: an OSCE report Accuses Serb Forces' **AFP** (France), (NY United Nations), 18 January 1999 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

In a report conveyed on Monday to the United Nations Security Council, the OSCE has accused Serb security forces of having massacred 45 civilians of Albanian descent in Racak, in the south of Kosovo. This report claims that the facts, verified by the OSCE Verification Mission (KVM) in Kosovo, "include proof of arbitrary detention, extrajudicial murder and mutilation of unarmed civilians by the security forces of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia." This report, dated Sunday, was conveyed on Monday to the 15 members of the Security Council, meeting in an emergency session after the massacre.

Belgrade has decided to declare the OSCE head in Kosovo, William Walker, *persona non grata*. Walker had accused Serb forces of having committed a "crime against humanity" in Racak. The report of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) states that survivors reported that "Serb security forces entered Racak at approximately 07:00," on Friday. "Some of them were dressed in police uniforms, some in black uniforms with balaclavas." Witnesses have said that they recognised some of these police as coming from Stimlje, and that they recognised others who were "civilian Serbs from Stimlje who were wearing police uniforms."

The report also gives a precise description of the manner in which the 45 Albanians, including a woman and child of 12 years, were killed outside and in the village. Most were killed by a bullet to the head and at "extremely close range," according to the report. Two men had been



decapitated and the third had been scalped. The OSCE underlines that this massacre “constitutes a clear violation of international humanitarian law and human rights.” The organisation believes that Belgrade “must forthwith allow the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia to travel immediately to Kosovo to investigate the facts.”



“The International Community and the New Yugoslav Challenges,” *Le Monde* (France) 20 January 1999 (in French). [D67](#)

#### Extract:

The international community, which had reacted with a wait-and-see attitude to the massacre in Racak, has again been challenged, on Monday 18 January, by the Yugoslav President, Slobodan Milosevic. Belgrade has, in quick succession, refused entry into Kosovo by Louise Arbour, the Chief prosecutor for the Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, and decided to expel the Head of the OSCE Observers, William Walker. Serb security forces on Monday transferred the bodies in the Racak mosque to the morgue in the hospital in Pristina; their autopsy is to help assist in the inquiry, carried out by the Serbs into Friday's events, aspects of which are unclear.

[...] After Slobodan Milosevic had, on Monday, refused to receive the two most senior NATO officers, Generals Klaus Naumann and Wesley Clark, the Chief Prosecutor for the International Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY), Louise Arbour, was turned back by lowly border guards at the entry to Kosovo. Belgrade then declared *persona non grata*, giving him forty-eight hours to leave. In short, the Yugoslav President is raising the stakes and has decided to challenge the international community on all fronts.

For weeks now, Paris has been seeking a meeting of the Contact Group on former Yugoslavia (United States, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, and Russia), but without receiving a response from the Americans who prefer to manage the crisis alone. The Elysée's intervention is a means of making them understand that, given the results obtained, such exclusivity is not warranted. The same situation is being experienced in New York where the Americans are clearly trying to keep the Kosovo question out of the UN Security Council, where the presence of Russia and France complicates things. Moscow does not envisage any policy other than the search for a negotiated settlement in Kosovo. On Monday, Russia nevertheless joined with its Security Council partners to condemn Belgrade's decision to expel the chief observer, William Walker.

Meeting in emergency session on Monday, the Council also “vigorously condemned” the Racak massacre and sought the immediate opening of an inquiry. However the Yugoslav refusal to cooperate with the ICTY was not mentioned in the declaration. Asked about Ms Arbour's inability to enter Kosovo, the Russian Ambassador to the United Nations, Sergueï Lavrov, replied that: “all she

needed to do was to ask for the Security Council's help before undertaking such a mission.” Divided as it is on the Kosovo conflict, the Council was hardly able to do any more on the issue. However, it was to examine a more detailed text on Tuesday.

In addition, in a report transmitted on Monday to the Security Council, the OSCE repeats the accusations made on Saturday by William Walker, who had accused Serb security forces of the massacre in Racak of 45 civilians of Albanian origin. This report confirms that the facts verified by the observers “include proof of arbitrary detention, extrajudicial murders and mutilation of unarmed civilians by the security forces of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.”



‘US to Push NATO to Issue ultimatum to Serb Leader,’ by Jane Perlez, *The New York Times* (USA) 21 January 1999 (in English). [D68](#)

#### Extracts:

The Clinton Administration is planning to push NATO allies for an ultimatum telling President Slobodan Milosevic of Yugoslavia that he must back down in Kosovo or face air strikes within days, officials said today. The Administration was feeling an urgency to “do something” several officials said, to save NATO from appearing irresolute over Kosovo as the alliance's 50th anniversary approaches. Mr. Milosevic, who rebuffed two top NATO military officials during a tendentious encounter in Belgrade on Tuesday, was cornering the Alliance into proving its worth, the officials said. Of uppermost concern, the officials said, was the ability of Mr. Milosevic to belittle the celebration marking the West's triumph over communism planned for April in Washington and turn it into a “Kosovo summit,” one Pentagon official said.

NATO's supreme commander, Gen. Wesley K. Clark, an American, said in a telephone interview from Brussels today that he had come away from his seven hours spent with Mr. Milosevic on Tuesday convinced that the Yugoslav leader was totally non cooperative because he did not yet feel any realistic military threat. “The international community has learned through long years of dealing with Mr. Milosevic that he is the most compliant when threatened directly with heavy military pressure,” General Clark said. [...] If Mr. Milosevic ignored the ultimatum and did not comply with the cease-fire terms that he agreed to with NATO last fall, the 16 alliance members would then vote to reauthorize air strikes.



“‘The West is Preparing for Both Peace and War in Kosovo - Military Pressure is Increasing,’ *Le Monde* (with **AFP, Reuters**) (France) - 24 January 1999 (in French). **D69** [↗](#)

#### Extract:

WESTERN COUNTRIES discussed, on Friday 22 January, a draft political settlement to the conflict in Kosovo, while at the same time increasing their military pressure to force Belgrade to withdraw its forces from the separatist province. The Contact Group on the former Yugoslavia (United States, Great Britain, Russia, France, Italy, and Germany) met in London to examine a peace plan drawn up by the American diplomat Christopher Hill. Following the meeting, the diplomats set, as an objective, that “negotiations should occur at the earliest opportunity on a political settlement involving direct international commitment.” They also reiterated that a military intervention remained on the agenda if the two parties refused discussions.

[...] *The Washington Post* underlined on Saturday that the European allies were hesitating to give their support to air raids against Yugoslavia unless the United States agreed to participate in a multinational peacekeeping force in Kosovo. The Secretary for Defence, William Cohen, is firmly opposed to sending American troops to Kosovo. But according to an American national security official quoted by the newspaper, “any serious discussion on the means for a long-term settlement of the Kosovo question must explore all options, including American participation on the ground.” “It is true that our allies are reticent about supporting air strikes against the Serbs in the absence of a clear strategy concerning what is going to happen on the ground,” he said.

In addition, diplomats from the Contact Group underlined their ‘disgust’ at the massacre of 45 Albanians from Kosovo in Racak on 15 January.

**Investigations and analyses by different international press outlets regarding the Racak massacre raised the question of possible manipulation of the facts in ways favourable to one or other of the parties involved in the Kosovo conflict.**



‘Nine Questions on the Deaths at Racak,’ H el ene Despic-Popovic, Pierre Hazan, Jean-Dominique Merchet, *Lib eration* (France), 21 January 1998 (in French).

#### Extract:

Nine questions probe the grey areas in the conflicting versions of a massacre.

#### 1. What do we know for certain?

At 07:00 last Friday morning, Serbian police launched an operation against the village of Racak. They claimed to be hunting a group of ‘terrorists’ from the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) who had killed a policeman several days before. The fighting took place in the vicinity of three villages, Racak, Belince and Malopljce, and lasted all day. At 11:30 the KLA’s political wing announced that both sides had suffered fatalities. These exchanges of fire were reported in numerous dispatches from international press agencies including AFP, Reuters, and AP. Journalists were confined to the periphery of the action. They all noted the presence of international observers (some specified that these were American) who were also confined to the sidelines. They observed the introduction of heavy weaponry: the Serbian police, supported by the army, used tanks and anti-aircraft guns. The Albanian separatists replied with mortar and small-arms fire.

The Serbian forces had authorised a single television crew, from the American APTV agency, to film the operation in the village. The Serbian information centre, quoting the police, announced that fifteen ‘terrorists’ had been killed and a large quantity of weapons seized. At 15:20, the deputy head of the OSCE, whose inspectors had been monitoring the fighting since 08:45, contacted a Serbian general and asked him to stop the fighting. At 16:45, the OSCE announced that fighting had ceased. The Serbian forces withdrew at 17:00. During the night the Albanian information centre, which had initially announced one fatality, reported a total of seven deaths. The following morning, OSCE inspectors discovered corpses, twenty of which lay in a gully above the KLA-occupied village. The OSCE Coordinator, the American William Walker, spoke of a ‘crime against humanity’ in which civilians had been executed at point-blank range. That same morning, the Serbian police boasted of victory and claimed to have killed dozens of ‘terrorists.’

#### 2. Who were the victims?

[...] According to an Albanian source, they were civilians plus about eighteen soldiers belonging to the Kosovo Liberation Army. [...] The body count differs according to the source. The OSCE gives 37, the Americans 45 and the Albanians 51. According to the OSCE, two thirds of the victims in the gully were over fifty years of age. Cartridge cases were found nearby, and the same sources claim they could only have come from weapons used by Serbian forces. On Monday, Racak was the scene of confrontations between separatists and Serbian forces, which were forcibly removing the bodies that had been laid out in the mosque. The bodies were taken to the morgue in Pristina. Two teams of foreign pathologists arrived in Yugoslavia to examine them. But apart from Serbian doctors, only OSCE inspectors and Byelorussian doctors were given access to them. The Finnish team was still in Belgrade yesterday night. An OSCE spokesperson said that it was “not authorised to enter Pristina.” The Finnish pathologists had already been denied access to

the victims' bodies of a massacre perpetrated earlier in the autumn.

### 3. How did the news break?

The OSCE explained yesterday that after the Serbian forces withdrew at 17:00 on Friday, villagers met inspectors at an unspecified location (not Racak) and told them that 24 men had been arrested in Racak. The inspectors were unable to verify this at the time and had to return to their base at nightfall. On Saturday, journalists and observers reached the scene of the previous day's fighting almost simultaneously. In the village, they encountered the KLA, who led them straight to a gully which contained about twenty bodies. Other bodies were found lying around the area. One decapitated victim had been carried back to his house. Journalists and observers talked to two or three witnesses, almost always the same people. William Walker joined the observation team and immediately adopted a hard-line stance, accusing Serbian forces of a "crime against humanity".

### 4. In what way do the various versions conflict?

At the village on Saturday, Albanians described the operation as a punitive expedition against a peaceful village guarded by no more than eight fighters, all of whom died. When they were encircled, villagers occupying houses on the higher ground were machine-gunned as they tried to flee. Towards noon, Serbian forces entered the village, locked the women and children in the cellars and took away about twenty men, young and old, who were later found dead on the hill; most of them had been shot in the head. A young woman had resisted and had been shot through the forehead. One man had been decapitated. The Serbian authorities denied that a massacre had taken place and claimed that the corpses had been rearranged after being stripped of their uniforms and dressed in civilian clothes. They accused the American William Walker of resorting to manipulation and declared him *persona non grata*.

### 5. What are the doubtful elements in the story?

On Saturday morning, an AFP journalist in Racak met a foreign observer who said he had entered the village at 17:00 the previous day. The fighting had stopped, the Serbs had withdrawn and the inhabitants were returning to the village. The observer said he had not seen or heard anything specific, but did not want to be identified. When *Libération* telephoned the mission on Monday, some of the French members claimed to be unaware that observers had entered the village that evening. All they knew was that teams had been in the area earlier on Friday, but were clear that rumours of civilian victims had begun circulating around the mission by Friday night. Another witness statement, quoted in *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde* on Wednesday, confirmed the existence of these phantom observers. It came from another French journalist who had entered Racak by chance after the fighting that Friday evening. Besides three orange OSCE vehicles, he noted observers calmly talking to Albanians and asking if there were any wounded. Shortly afterwards, he saw them

evacuate some of the lightly wounded but was "unable to assess the number of casualties."

The uncertainty is exacerbated by confusion over the number of deaths. An OSCE inspector claims to have seen 38 bodies, all dressed in civilian clothes. Walker mentioned 54 bodies. The KLA claims to have seen the bodies of the fighters. On Sunday, 40 bodies were laid out in the mosque.

These details give cause for concern. If the inhabitants were present in the village on Friday evening, why did they not alert the observers? Why did no one report that women were locked in the cellars? If the villagers did inform observers that 24 men had been taken away, why didn't the OSCE reveal the source of this information, or clarify who the observers were? And why does it insist that none of its teams were in the village on that tragic evening?

Yesterday, *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde* revealed that on Friday a crew from the American APTV agency had been invited to accompany the Serb police into the village. This has been confirmed by the OSCE. Journalists who have seen the footage say that it shows an uninhabited village and the police coming under fire.

### 6. Could the scene have been rearranged?

There is a gap of more than twelve hours between the return of some of the villagers after the fighting stopped and the discovery of the bodies the following day. Theoretically, this gap allows enough time to rearrange the scene. But the fact that it was possible to do so does not indicate that it actually happened. If a rearrangement did occur, it could have been total (people killed in the fighting and arranged in a macabre tableau by the separatists) or partial (the victims in the gully being combatants executed by the Serbian forces after the fighting). «It's quite possible that the Albanians were killed and their bodies rearranged," said a puzzled Western diplomat in Pristina. The massacre of civilians is more likely to influence public opinion than the massacre of combatants, even though both acts are crimes.

### 9. Will we ever know the truth?

Only an independent international enquiry would be able to shed any light on the case. Even then, it would be difficult because the bodies had already been moved at least twice (when they were taken to the mosque and when they were transferred to Pristina). In any case, the autopsies should determine whether or not the bodies bear traces of mutilation or blows inflicted after death. The results of the autopsies performed by Serbian doctors in the presence of pathologists from Belorussia (a country with a poor international image), concluding there was no massacre, are not very convincing. Moreover, only independent experts could establish whether or not there had been further tampering. The APTV film depicting Serbian police cautiously entering an empty village while under fire from KLA trenches in the hills should be treated with

caution: it was shot by Serbian cameramen who were covering the operation at the invitation of the Serbian police. The journalists may have chosen their angles so as to exclude anything that seemed too controversial. Any such film should also be examined by experts and authenticated to see if it was cut. This is another good reason for submitting the case to international justice.



'Serbs Tried to Cover Up Massacre,' R. Jeffrey Smith, *The Washington Post* (USA), 28 January 1999 (in English). [D70](#)

### Extract:

The attack on this Kosovo village that led to the killing of 45 ethnic Albanian civilians 12 days ago came at the orders of senior officials of the Serb-led Belgrade government who then orchestrated a cover up following an international outcry, according to telephone intercepts by Western governments. Angered by the slaying of three soldiers in Kosovo, the officials ordered government forces to "go in heavy" in a Jan. 15 assault on Racak to search out ethnic Albanian guerrillas believed responsible for the slayings, according to Western sources familiar with the intercepts.

As the civilian death toll from the assault mounted and in the face of international condemnation, Yugoslavia's deputy prime minister and the general in command of Serbian security forces in Kosovo systematically sought to cover up what had taken place, according to telephone conversations between the two. Details of the conversations, which were made available by Western sources, shed new light on the attack and its aftermath, which have again brought NATO to the brink of confrontation with Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic over his government's repression of separatist ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. The calls show that the assault on Racak was monitored closely at the highest levels of the Yugoslav government and controlled by the senior Serbian military commander in Kosovo - a province of Serbia, Yugoslavia's dominant republic.

The bodies of 45 ethnic Albanian civilians were discovered on a hillside outside the village by residents and international observers shortly after the government forces withdrew. "We have to have a full, independent investigation of this to get to the bottom of it," a senior Clinton administration official told staff writer Dana Priest in Washington. "Those responsible have to be brought to justice." In a series of telephone conversations, Deputy Prime Minister Nikola Sainovic and Serbian Interior Ministry Gen. Sreten Lukic, expressed concern about international reaction to the assault and discussed how to make the killings look as if they had resulted from a battle between government troops and members of the separatist Kosovo Liberation Army. The objective was to challenge claims by survivors - later supported by international monitors - that the victims had been killed in an execution-style massacre and to defuse pressures for a NATO military response.

Sainovic is the highest-ranking official in the Yugoslav

government responsible for Kosovo matters and has been present at most negotiations with top Western officials; several Western officials said they understand that he reports to Milosevic on Kosovo issues. "We often see him as the link between the government in Belgrade and the administration down here" in Kosovo, one official said. [...] One source familiar with the phone calls between military leaders in Kosovo and officials in Belgrade on Jan. 15 and succeeding days said they show that "the intent was to go in heavy" to find three guerrillas whom government security officials blamed for the ambush of an Interior Ministry convoy on Jan. 8 southwest of Racak in which three soldiers died. "It was a search and destroy mission" with explicit approval in Belgrade, the source said.

As tank and artillery fire and the chatter of machine-guns echoed off the hills surrounding Racak, Sainovic called Lukic from Belgrade, according to Western sources. Sainovic was aware that the assault was underway, and he wanted the general to tell him how many people had been killed. Lukic replied that as of that moment the tally stood at 22, the sources said. In calls over the following days, Sainovic and Lukic expressed concern about the international outcry and discussed how to make the killings look like the result of a pitched battle.

Their efforts to cover up what occurred continued, the Western sources said. One measure Sainovic advocated in his calls was to seal Kosovo's border with Macedonia to prevent Louise Arbour, a top U.N. war crimes investigator, from entering. Arbour was turned back. Another was to demand that Interior Ministry troops fight to regain control of the killing site and reclaim the bodies. Serbian forces launched a second assault on the village Jan. 17, and the following day they seized the bodies from a mosque and transferred them to a morgue in Pristina, the provincial capital. A third was to explore whether the killings could be blamed on an independent, armed group that supposedly came to the region and attacked the residents of Racak after government troops had left. Sainovic was told that making this claim was not feasible.

Shortly after the attack, a Yugoslav government spokesman said that the bodies found on the hillside were armed, uniformed members of the Kosovo Liberation Army. The account was challenged by international inspectors and journalists who arrived on the scene Jan. 16 and found dozens of corpses on the ground, all in civilian clothes. Government officials later alleged that some of the victims were accidentally caught in a cross-fire between security forces and the rebels or were deliberately slain by the guerrillas to provoke international outrage. But survivors, diplomatic observers and rebels who were in the area at the time of the killings say that little shooting occurred inside the town early in the assault and that no battle was underway at around 1 p.m., when most of the victims are said to have died. These sources say that Kosovo Liberation Army forces were not deployed near a gully where at least 23 of the bodies were found, and that none of the trees in the area bore bullet marks suggestive of a battle.

A team of forensic pathologists that arrived in Kosovo from Finland last Friday, a week after the killings, has

found nothing to contradict these accounts, according to a Western official. "A picture is beginning to emerge from the autopsies, and it is a tragic one," said another source, explaining that the types of wounds on the victims indicate that they were "humiliated" before being fired on from several directions. The last of 40 autopsies were to be completed today, and the Finnish pathologists say their final report will be ready by next week. But their preliminary conclusion is consistent with an account given on Jan. 16 by Imri Jakupi, 32, a resident of Racak who said he escaped death by running into the woods. He said that he and other men had been rounded up by security forces in house-to-house searches and ordered to walk along a ravine before troops "started shooting from the hills at us... firing came from all over."

According to Shukri Buja, 32, the commander of guerrilla forces in the area, Racak was home to many rebels, as government security officials suspected. But he said that most of them were driven into the hills early Jan. 15 by a wave of artillery and tank fire. "We were shot at from three sides... and they moved their forces during the day, so it was very hard for us to come down into the village," Buja said. Villagers told inspectors and reporters at the scene on Jan. 17 that many of the dead were last seen alive in the hands of Interior Ministry troops, who said they were under arrest. Many of the troops involved in the operation wore black ski masks, but survivors said they recognized some local policemen and Serbian civilians in uniforms. Jakupi and another Racak resident, Rem Shabani, told reporters that they overheard some of what the troops were saying on their walkie-talkies as two groups of men were being led away from the village. "How many of them are there?" one soldier asked. When the reply came back as 29, Shabani recalled, the order given was: "Okay, bring them up." Yakupi said he then overheard another order: "Now get ready to shoot." He fled before the shots rang out.

At the end of January, the MSF France Desk again expressed dissatisfaction with the MSF joint Kosovo mission's decision-making process and its reservations over the line of communication maintained by the coordination team. Following a field trip by the deputy head of the programme, the decision was taken to send a new exploratory mission to Montenegro. The mission would also explore Kosovo with a view to opening a separate MSF France programme in the province.



'Minutes of the Meeting of the Kosovo Programme managers in Brussels,' 25 February 1999, as taken by the MSF France programme manager (in French). [D71](#)

#### Extract:

##### 1) Montenegro

An exploratory mission comprising a doctor (Katrin Frolich) and a logistician (Nicolas Dedieu) began on 1/01/99. It had two objectives:

- To assess the situation of Kosovo Albanian IDPs (note

that a Dutch ET backup mission operated from June 98 to September 98, see report)

- To explore the necessity and possibility of running a medical programme, which addresses health issues in that republic.

The importance of achieving this mission was emphasised by several factors:

- The proximity of Montenegro to the conflict in Kosovo, and the possibility of another influx of displaced persons,
- The consequences of undertaking health care in a republic suffering from the economic collapse of Yugoslavia as well as the embargo imposed on the entire Federal Republic,
- The still sizeable presence of Serbian refugee populations (approximately 35,000 people) following the conflicts in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia,
- Political tensions between Montenegro and the Serb Republic.



'Kosovo Communication Update,' **Email** from Bas Tielens MSF International Information Officer in Kosovo, 28 January 1999 (in English). [D72](#)

#### Extract:

Dear all,

The information below is, in principal internal, but can be relayed to journalists depending on how good their relationship with MSF is.

Kosovo comm-update 020 (27 January 1999):

Internal document for MSF press departments, not to be handed out to journalists. [...] MSF in the Yu-media [Yugoslavian media]:

Although the 'campaign' against MSF (smuggling weapons etc.) is over, we were mentioned again in relation to the killing of an Albanian doctor working in the emergency room of the hospital in Pec.

Press line (replacing the press line of January 23rd):

MSF is horrified by the massacre in Racak and the killings last Sunday near Kramovik, and hopes the tribunal for war crimes in the former Yugoslavia will be able to do its own investigation (note: the Finnish forensic team currently investigating the bodies will only report to the district court in Pristina, and not make its findings public). MSF appeals to the parties in Kosovo to start negotiations as soon as possible, in order to stop people being killed or displaced because of the renewed fighting. The international community should put as much effort as possible into a negotiated solution that guarantees long-term stability in Kosovo. (note: all comments that could be interpreted as favouring NATO intervention will make our position with the government untenable).

The humanitarian situation in the municipalities where MSF is working is not deteriorating for the moment, but as

the situation is unstable, that could change rapidly. Until now, MSF still has unhindered access to the locations where it carries out mobile clinics.

[...] Regional division MSF/MDM/IMC

Something to be aware of: on the operational side, there is a geographical division between MSF, MDM and IMC for efficiency reasons. This means that we will not always be involved in a crisis here, and in that case will not have much to say. Racak for instance is in a municipality covered by IMC. As far as the response to emergencies is concerned, MSF will play an important role in the whole of the province.



'Press Line Again,' **Email** from Graziella Godain, MSF France Deputy programme manager to MSF Kosovo Information Officer, MSF Belgium programme manager, MSF France Press Officer, MSF Legal Advisor, 3 February 1999 (in English).

**D73**

Dear Tim and Bas,

Hopefully we will meet on Monday because I really need to discuss with you many things of course but I would like already react about your press line.

-Each time you select names in your address mail which don't have anything to do with either press communications or Kosovo.

-I don't understand why those press lines are not discussed with the desks in BXL (maybe it is?) but also in Paris before sending them to everyone through the MSF network?? According to media, over-coverage of this crisis, and the really sensitive context, all the press lines should be discussed together before publication.

-Press line/2nd of February: I really become more and more afraid by what you call MSF press line! Last time it was about "against or for" NATO intervention. Today it is about "MSF appeals to the parties in Kosovo to find a negotiated solution!!"

What is MSF? Security Council? US government? EU parliament? What is its role and specificity? If we don't have anything else to say about the population, the medical situation, the medical staff, etc. I am worrying a lot about why we are there???. So, next time thanks for sending us BEFORE your press line.



**Minutes** of the MSF France Board Meeting, 29 January 1999 (in French). **D74**

#### **Extract:**

MSF is running several kinds of operations in Kosovo: mobile clinics and hospital support (medicines, supplies). This is a joint mission with the Belgian section, which is acting as the 'backup section.' In practice, MSF-F does not

participate in decisions (operational, testimony) and is often notified of decisions or operational modifications two weeks after they are made.

Thus the MSF-F team in Pec was shifted to another location and required to do other types of work but was given no explanation. We no longer communicate directly with the teams as MSF Brussels criticised us for doing so. For two thirds of last year, there was little in the way of relevant testimony, or it arrived too late (the March offensives; the first messages in September). In the last press release, MSF announced its concern over a possible NATO intervention....!

During late 1998/early 1999, we communicated on everything, even when it did not concern the line MSF was taking. That's 'spin,' not testimony. MSF F feels dispossessed and wants to regain control of the mission by developing a separate project in Kosovo; working in Pec, for example (without the Pristina office).

- Anamaria Bulatovic: On what basis? Has there been a reassessment of needs?

- Graziella Godain: Needs vary a great deal from one zone to another. We've got to look at the way we're running our programmes (expanded vaccination and training programme during most of 1998 took place in the thick of the conflict). The network on which MSF relies seems very superficial and we should try to strengthen it – by ties with the Mother Theresa Society, for example. However, given what was said earlier, our grasp of the situation is extremely limited (a presence alongside populations does not necessarily imply closeness to them).

- Odysseas Boudouris: MSF G is very aware of what's happening in this zone for obvious reasons of proximity. Athens has offered MSF B its operational wing if refugees flood into northern Greece. As yet, there's been no response to this offer.

- Gundula Graack shared the feeling about the lack of information getting through to Germany. She recommended that, in general, information should be passed on to the partner sections of the operational sections.

- Bruno Corbé asked if it was possible, in the case of joint missions, for the other section to visit the field.

- Yes, someone from MSF Paris was there in April and September 1998.

- Bruno expressed surprise because he thought that the Mother Theresa contact was exclusive to MSF B.

- Graziella explained that what is contested is more the way of working with this network. In effect, distributions take place but there is no real medical activity or checking: three batches of surgical supplies were given to rural hospitals but we don't know how they were used. On the other hand, the projects during the conflict should have been pushed harder. For example, we didn't follow up the contacts with Albanian rural hospitals; whereas one or two had been set up (one of two hospitals was sent supplies). That has never been explained or clarified.

- Philippe Biberson focused on MSF action in the context of Kosovo where teams, notably from Brussels, have

been working for several years. But the recent dramatic developments, the deployment of OSCE observers, and the positioning of NATO in Macedonia, represent a radical evolution which places MSF in what is often called a 'military-humanitarian package.' MSF has to react to this changing context. Philippe has brought this to the attention of other sections but there has been no response. There are two solutions: either we cross Kosovo off the list or we embed ourselves there.

- Christian Losson: What is the reaction from MSF Brussels?
- Graziella: MSF Brussels sends us situation reports. That's our only link with the field and our perception is that MSF has changed; we feel that MSF is losing its way by getting mixed up with the structures of the OSCE or other organisations (when aid convoys are running, for example).
- Bruno asked if two sections on site would be better than one? This is not the first declaration of intent from MSF-F, but it seems to be a lone voice.
- Karim Laouabdia explained that in Sierra Leone, MSF F withdrew from joint coordination with MSF-H because the Dutch way of working was too different; the Coordinator decided everything without consultation and MSF Paris did not agree with the options chosen in the field. On the other hand, in Sudan MSF F went along with the project in Bahr-el-Ghazal. There is good joint coordination in Liberia at the moment. Joint coordination should not be an end in itself. MSF F will withdraw from international coordination if there are difficulties in getting across a point of view, lack of consultation, or disagreement over the operational choices made.
- Bruno agreed on the principle of separation if things are not working properly. In Kosovo, two television crews shot documentaries which were shown on Belgian channels last week ... MSF Paris was not consulted!
- Christian asked if MSF B's attitude corresponded to an approach that was diametrically opposed to humanitarianism or whether it could be explained by some kind of fear.
- Philippe Biberson shifted the discussion by warning that we should be wary of hearsay and generalities. That kind of thing distances us from MSF's goals and from our true vocation. It's a counter-productive system. MSF F justifies its attitude when it pulls out of joint coordination and avoids stirring things up.
- Graziella: MSF has had an exploratory mission in Montenegro for a month; it should last another two to three weeks. It was there for two and a half months this summer and withdrew because needs were covered. The situation is being reassessed because there is a real problem of access to care for these populations: some of the Montenegrins themselves and Serbian refugees from Bosnia and Croatia. MSF has access problems (visas, contact with the authorities).



'MSF-F Kosovo Plan,' **Email** from Vincent Janssens, MSF Belgium Director of Operations, to MSF France Programme manager, Director of Operations and General Director, 2 February 1999 (in French). **D75**

#### Extract:

I know that you have requested a meeting in Brussels tomorrow to discuss the frustration MSF-F is experiencing with the work in Kosovo and the way it is managed. I note that this has been suggested after a long period of non-communication on your side and lack of interest in our invitations to get together, but I won't go into that. On the other hand, I do have some serious questions arising from the fact that this meeting was suggested after the subject had been discussed and ratified at the MSF F Board Meeting! My questions currently concern:

1. Your apparent desire to launch an autonomous entity in Kosovo. The very idea is irresponsible and dangerous given the current situation in Kosovo and the threats to MSF. Consequently, we find this option unacceptable.
2. The arguments, motivations and operational alternatives which are supposed to provide the basis for this move. Apart from a vague indication of frustration and uneasiness with the mission, there have been no concrete suggestions or attempts to consider them within the context of the existing system. This gives us the impression that it is essentially a sentimental decision, unless it is part of a strategy (unknown to us), which extends beyond the Kosovo context.
3. The steps of taking up the matter with the Board (was the problem too much, or was there a hope that it would be too much, for the executive?) and of organising parallel meetings with messages are divisive, to say the least.

In international terms, none of this is very positive or constructive. In order to avoid further pointless discussion, I must insist that any new initiative aimed at setting up a dialogue is preceded by explicit, written clarification of the issues to be raised.



*I felt that things were turning very bad in Kosovo, that there was a kind of acceleration, that negotiations would yield nothing and that as a result we'd be shifting to a higher gear. In any case, I was almost certain that we were going to see a massive flood of refugees passing through Montenegro. And, I knew that in the Yugoslav context, if we didn't start work beforehand, if we didn't have a foot in the door, we wouldn't be able to return when it exploded. I had to go to Belgrade to see the Kosovo coordination people. So, I decided to go via Montenegro before the exploratory mission ended. I had the team on the*


telephone and I felt that it wasn't going well, that they didn't understand the importance of pre-positioning themselves in Montenegro. There was a bigger risk that the refugees would end up in Albania and even in Macedonia. But I thought it was important to have a foot in the Yugoslav Federation as well as in Kosovo. Now Montenegro is part of the Yugoslav Federation. In Paris, we had contacts with Montenegrins, with the Prince of Montenegro and with expatriates from other organisations based in Montenegro who were telling me: "There's work to be done, it's important to be there."

So I went, I spent 48 hours with the team, I travelled around. It was obvious that there was no emergency to respond to.

But you couldn't simply say that the need wasn't there. I found two possible projects: one at Ulcine, with an Albanian community, and the other on the Croatian border, with some Bosnian minorities who had been totally abandoned. We also went to Rozaje to see an Albanian community which was living in a danger zone because the federal army maintained a strong presence there. In Belgrade, I had intense discussions with Tim Boucher, the Coordinator of the Kosovo programmes. We had furious arguments over the lack of communication, the testimony, the whole way we were working in Kosovo. It was the straw that broke the camel's back. When I returned, Guillaume and I decided to send an exploratory team to Kosovo as well. We wanted them to look at the situation and give us an objective report, because we had lost all confidence in the coordination team.

Graziella Godain, Programme Manager MSF France  
(in French).

**At the end of January, the MSF field coordinator in Pec finished her mission and decided to make an unofficial and private visit to the Albanian populations encircled by the Serbs in the KLA-held Rugova Valley.**

 I had finished my mission with MSF but did not return to France immediately. I did not want to leave Kosovo. I had known these people since 1996.

I felt uneasy about leaving them because there had been no developments and I didn't see how I could leave it at that. So I arranged my trip to the Rugova Valley. When I worked in Pec, we used to hold consultations in that closed valley, a KLA stronghold with scattered villages. I set off but I couldn't go via Pec because the road was blocked by a Serbian checkpoint. So I took the bus to Montenegro, to Rozaje, and spent two weeks with a KLA-connected family which acted as a go-between. When the thaw set in, I could make my way on foot in the other direction, through the mountains. Graziella Godain [MSF France Deputy Programme Manager] knew of my plan. She had visited the MSF exploratory mission in Ulcine, Montenegro. She asked me to make

a detour before going into the valley so that we could talk. She tried to persuade me not to go, but she didn't succeed. I set off on foot with Selman, a teacher. We walked for twelve or thirteen hours, thigh-deep in the snow. From time to time, he'd start whistling. People responded but we couldn't see them.

When we arrived at the head of the valley, we stopped while he fired several rounds into the air with his Kalashnikov, signifying 'this is my territory.' It looked magnificent in the setting sun. The people of the Rugova Valley were peasants, they had a different mentality. It was their valley, a sanctuary they were prepared to defend. Selman was one of the chiefs in the valley. He had taken up arms in order to defend it. The whole population was behind him, women and children. They controlled the valley. And the Serbs had no access to it. They were at the bottom of the valley and the only access was a little track which climbed through the mountains. And the KLA had taken up positions in the mountains. There was no other way in. They transported masses of stuff from the Rugova Valley to the Drenica through a corridor. It took days, but there was a proper supply chain. There were also some former Croatian paramilitaries. They used to tell stories about the atrocities they had committed during the war in Croatia. They were war criminals. It was incredible because despite the stories, I never detected a sign of cruelty in their faces. I knew practically all the KLA fighters down there. I didn't have much to do with them. I concentrated on the people in the remoter villages. I travelled all over the valley on foot or on horseback with Mustapha, an Albanian doctor; our backpacks were full of medicines. We would travel for kilometres in the mountains. MSF still came to hold consultations from time to time. One day the mobile team saw me turn up in a car with about ten KLA fighters. The Coordinator was there, somewhat perturbed. But he did advise me to be careful. They gave me medicines. I stayed for three weeks. At first it was fine because we had the radio, we still had television, and then one day everything was cut off, that was just before the bombardments. That began to have an effect and I asked myself: "Should I stay, or should I leave?" I wasn't sure any longer.

Laurence Thavaux, MSF Field Officer in Pristina,  
1996 and Pec, April 1998 to February 1999.  
Nurse in Montenegro, April 1999 (in French).

**The member states of the International Contact Group for the Former Yugoslavia (France, Germany, Italy, Russia, UK, USA) which also sat on the UN Security Council worked to obtain the Council's support for their settlement plan. The plan envisaged negotiations between representatives of the Serb Republic and the Kosovar Albanians to begin on 6 February at Rambouillet (France). While preparing for a probable intervention, NATO acknowledged that it could do little to bring pressure to bear on the KLA resistance fighters. UNHCR announced that in the last month 45,000 people had fled their homes because of the fighting.**





'Contact Group Seeks Declaration of Support from Security Council,' **AFP** (France), London, 29 January 1999 (in French).

**Extract:**

The Contact Group countries which are also permanent members of the Security Council will ask the SC for a "declaration of support" for the Kosovo settlement plan adopted on Friday, said German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer. The United States, Russia, Great Britain and France are "still seeking to obtain a declaration of support" from the UN Security Council, to which they all belong, Mr Fischer announced at a press conference held after a meeting of the Contact Group for the Former Yugoslavia. The four countries, together with Germany and Italy, make up the Contact Group.

On Friday, the 'Six' called on Belgrade and the Kosovo Albanians to open negotiations at Rambouillet (near Paris) on 6 February and to arrive at a political agreement within three weeks. The talks, presided over by French Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine and his British counterpart Robin Cook, must arrive at an agreement on the basis of 'substantial autonomy for Kosovo, according to a joint communiqué issued after talks in London. Mr Fischer appealed for "an end to the violence, before we witness a real humanitarian disaster and expose ourselves to the real risk of a war" in Kosovo.



NATO Threats of Military Action Leave KLA Undeterred,' Michel Moutot, **AFP** (France), Pristina, 30 January 1999 (in French).

**Extract:**

NATO is also threatening coercive measures against the Kosovo Albanians, and particularly the KLA, in an attempt to make them renounce their claim to independence. In Pristina, a member of the general staff of the OSCE verification mission, an officer of an European army in civilian dress, who asked not to be identified, expressed doubts, "what are they threatening them with? Aerial bombardment? They live among the population, so air raids are out of the question, everybody knows that. It would be another Vietnam; they'd have to bomb every hole in the ground. I really can't see any serious military threat that we could use against them at the moment," he added.

Since the partial retreat of the Serbian troops in October, the KLA has occupied about one third of the province. Apart from major roads and towns and a few Serbian enclaves guarded by armed peasants, the rebels are masters of the terrain. They have no barracks, no fixed bases, no regrouping areas, no heavy military installations; they fight their war on a hit-and-run basis.

Some diplomats at NATO headquarters have recently suggested that international troops should blockade the ports and airports in neighbouring Albania, as these are used to channel weapons to the KLA. "Commander Remi", head of one of the seven military regions set up by the KLA, which comprises notably Pristina and the nearby town of Podujevo, finds the idea amusing. «Nobody can block our supply lines," he says confidently. «There are a large number of them in a variety of locations, NATO knows that. Albania is one of them, but there are others. We buy quite a few weapons from the Serbs, including some from their soldiers and police. We have all the money we need. The threats against us are not serious. They can't bomb us. I think NATO has to show that it's not simply targeting the Serbs, that's all it amounts to."

It has also been suggested that Western troops take control of the border between Kosovo and Albania. But the prospect of deploying troops in remote, mountainous regions dominated by heavily armed clans does not arouse much enthusiasm among military leaders.

Similarly, the threat of freezing bank accounts used to collect funds from the Albanian Diaspora, which is financing the KLA, causes the separatists little concern. According to Western news services, the Albanian mafias in Europe and the United States, are experienced professionals when it comes to the laundering and clandestine transfer of drug and prostitution money. They are actively participating in the supply of arms to the KLA. «The only solution would be to position ground troops in key areas of Kosovo itself, and thus restrict the KLA's movements," concluded the same KVM source. "But everybody knows that an intervention won't happen before a peace agreement has been signed."



'Kosovo: A Trial of Strength before the Negotiations – Milosevic Raises the Stakes and the KLA Won't Shift its Position,' Victoria Stegic, **Libération** (France), 1<sup>st</sup> February 1999 (in French).

**Extract:**

And Belgrade's strongman is showing signs of weakening. While announcing in his usual fashion his "commitment" to a Pejaceful solution in Kosovo, he has not rejected the idea of an international conference on Kosovo. Milosovic has given himself several days to respond to the summons issued by the six members of the Contact Group for Former Yugoslavia (Russia, the United States, France, Germany, Great Britain, and Italy), to begin negotiations with representatives of the Kosovo Albanians at Rambouillet on 6 February. The deadline for reaching an agreement on "substantial autonomy" for the province falls on 21 February. If the talks fail, the secretary general of the Atlantic Alliance may authorise air strikes against Serbian targets after final "consultations" between the allies.

[...] The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) is hostile to the negotiations. Its political representative, Adem Demaci, the Albanian Mandela who spent twenty-eight years in Serbian gaols, refused to commit himself at a meeting with Robin Cook on Saturday. In fact, the KLA is convinced that it can obtain independence through armed force, despite the material superiority of the considerably less motivated Serbian forces. [...] NATO's pressure and threats make very little impression. Air strikes cannot be launched against a guerrilla force that blends in with the population and conducts hit-and-run campaigns. And no one really believes that the west can block supply lines and stem the flow of arms and money to the combatants.

A protectorate. The failure of the west's plan is not guaranteed, however. The probable deployment of NATO ground troops would finally convince both the authorities in Belgrade and moderates in Kosovo. Belgrade could justify their presence as a guarantee of the international community's stated determination to avoid the secession of Kosovo. The moderates could boast that they have finally obtained the solution that Ibrahim Rugova has been advocating for the last nine years: an international protectorate as an interim solution before independence.

**On 7 February, the MSF Information Officer in Kosovo sent MSF France legal advisers the testimony the team had collected on the massacre at Racak and the murder of an ethnic Albanian doctor on 21 January. The Serb police claimed that the doctor had been killed by the KLA after refusing to work with MSF. Other sources reported that he had been executed because he had witnessed the murder of six Serbs.**



**Letter** from Bas Tielens, MSF Kosovo Information Officer to Françoise Saulnier, MSF Legal Advisor, 7 February 1999 (in English). [D76](#)

#### Extract:

Enclosed are copies of notes that I want out of the country. The notes are by our doctor in Pec, Ingrid Geerinck, about a doctor that was killed near Pec on 21st of January. Katia and Tim handed Graziella in Belgrade the draft of a policy document for our human rights actions. It has been discussed with Tim, and the field teams. The themes listed under '3' are what we see as most feasible and sensible to concentrate on, given our context here. Please, let me know if you have any suggestions for improvement.

Also, Graziella has two completed human rights reports, one on Racak, a testimony by Laurence, and one about killing during the Drenica offensive last September. The last one is part of a bigger report on a massacre on the same day that I still have to finalise. Furthermore, I'm planning to compile reports on the trials I've visited

[attended]. Some good news there: Dr Bajraktari, the accused in the second trial I've visited, got released the week before last week.

A far as human rights violations against doctors are concerned, the information we are getting now does not indicate that there is an organised campaign going on, but doctors still feel targeted. My personal impression is that it seems moderate [but that] people are somehow targeted. The people that got killed near/in Pec recently, were well respected by both sides; and not involved in 'terrorist' activities.

Place of interview: Pec

Name of interviewer: XXX

Name of witness: local doctors Albanian/Dr XXXXOSCE Pec

Indirect witness

Name of victim: XXXX

Albanian, medical doctor

Address: Pec

Type of event: medical doctor killed.

Detailed description of the event: On 20-01-99 at 17:00, the doctor went to the emergency ambulanta in Pec (walking) because he was on duty. At 17:20 he met somebody at the road and talked with him. Afterwards nobody saw him. The next day in the morning he was found with a bullet in the head and the brain exploded, in Prekale (which is not his [home] living place).

By whom:

1. Police reported to OSCE that this doctor was asked by MSF to work with MSF and that he refused. So that UCK killed this doctor. This doctor has never made any application to MSF. Another doctor from the emergency ambulanta of Pec XXXX (same surname) came a few days ago in MSF Pec office – as translator for somebody who wanted to apply as driver. At the same time he asked MSF if we were also looking for a medical doctor because he was interested.

2. Some sources (who reported to DR XXXXX) said that this doctor has been a witness in the killing of 6 Serbs in Panda Café on 14-11-98 and therefore was killed by the same gang of young Serbs - 'Black Tigers.'

**NATO stated its readiness to launch air strikes against Serbian targets if the Rambouillet talks failed. In the event of an agreement, it declared its willingness to deploy a peacekeeping force. On 23 February 1999, the negotiations ended in a framework proposal for the establishment of an autonomous province of Kosovo. Another conference was planned in France for 15 March to study the methods of implementation. The Serbian government continued to mass troops on the border with Kosovo. Fighting between Serbian forces and Albanian rebels intensified while divisions within the latter sharpened.**



'Battles Between Serbian Army and KLA. Rebels Rocked by Internal Divisions,' **AFP** (France), Pristina, 25 February 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

The divisions between the leaders of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) became abundantly clear as the rebels once more engaged with Serbian forces in the north of the province on Thursday afternoon. [...] Serbian police and the Yugoslav federal army yesterday fired on positions held by KLA rebels in the north of the province, said Béatrice Lacoste, a spokeswoman for the OSCE verification mission (KVM). «At 14:40 local time (13:40 GMT), police opened fire with automatic weapons on the village of Bukos (north). They were joined by army tanks which discharged five shells a minute,” she added. At about 16:00 local time (15:00 GMT), “the shooting stopped.” There is no information concerning casualties.

KLA rebels have now taken up new positions in the south of the province. «On Wednesday, a large group of KLA took up a position on the Orahovac-Suva Reka road, a southern route which is normally open to Serbian police patrols,” said KVM spokesman Walter Edenberger. «The OSCE view is that the police are perfectly justified in patrolling this road and that the KLA is perfectly unjustified in trying to prevent them from doing so,” said Ms Lacoste.

In Brussels, a NATO official stated that the Serbs are continuing to mass troops on the border with Kosovo and that anti-aircraft guns from the regular army had been transferred to the special police based in the province. A senior Serbian officer, who asked not to be identified, confirmed that troops had been deployed near Kosovo. «These troop movements are not in preparation for an offensive against the KLA but are meant to confront the threat posed by NATO. A large number of reservists, especially from anti-aircraft units, have been mobilised and deployed in various regions of Kosovo during the last few days,” the officer explained.

**On 25 February 1999, the Belgian and French desks acknowledged the persistence of disagreements over the management of the joint mission in Kosovo and decided to bring it to an end. Despite the opposition of the Belgian section, which expressed reservations over the form and content of the uncoordinated official policy that was likely to emerge, the French desk continued to organise an independent mission. However, difficulties arose when it tried to obtain visas for its teams.**



'Minutes of the Meeting of the Kosovo Programme managers in Brussels,' 25 February 1999, MSF Belgium Programme manager (in French). [D77](#)

#### Extract:

Conclusion: No final agreement on a future operation achieved. Need for further discussion and to define practical methods. MSF F decided to withdraw from the current mission in Kosovo by 01/03/99. MSF F's decision to obtain visas and send an exploratory mission in order to define a future project (in 2 or 3 municipalities in East Kosovo or any other zone if justified and relevant). This exploratory team will coordinate its operations with the MSF-B team in Pristina. The exploratory mission's terms of reference will be defined during discussions with MSF-B on the separation procedures.



'Minutes of the Meeting of the Kosovo programme managers in Brussels,' 25 February 1999, MSF France programme manager (in French).

#### Extract:

Conclusions

1. MSF F has unilaterally terminated the joint mission system as of today, on the grounds that the system inhibits adequate adaptation, assumption of responsibility, and opportunities to give matters due consideration. MSF F acknowledged that this sentiment is long-held and felt that the system could not be salvaged. MSF B acknowledged that the concept is not perfect, but noted that there is room for improvement if this is desired, and that MSF F has never been excluded.
2. MSF F suggested a separate, modular mission. This is not acceptable to MSF B because it implies (as confirmed by MSF F) reducing the responsibility of the coordination team to the level of administrative representation, with a subsequent loss of decision-making power (which would be shared between the project and the head office). Moreover, if disagreement arose, head offices that are in conflict would be unable to bring a solution to a single representative.
3. MSF F then proposed a completely separate mission with its own representation. MSF B rejected this option because:
  - (1). MSF B believes that the existence of two separate sections would, in the present circumstances, constitute an *ill-timed enhancement of the security risk*. Given the current generalised and specific threats, the possibility of taking rapid coherent measures is crucial.
  - (2). MSF B interprets this proposition as a prioritisation of a section's own wants rather than of the interests of endangered populations. The initiative does *not contribute to the improvement* of operational output.

(3). MSF B does not believe in the claimed 'richness of diversity.' In fact, the exploitation of such richness presupposes a fundamental desire to share everything. At present, this desire does not exist.



Feedback on Desk Meeting, 'Email' exchange between MSF Pristina and MSF Belgium and MSF France programme managers, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1999 (in English). [D78](#)

#### Extract:

So this looks like the usual administrative work we have to go through when missions split; the unusual aspect in this case is that we don't come with a parallel mission to exit afterwards; so this looks more like the process of one section pulling out of a joint formula and leaving the context. [...] In terms of the request for visa facilitation for the explo-mission, I must alas request the field to not respond positively. As a matter of fact, this explo-mission is not a separate issue:

1- There were not TOR drawn up with the present mission and we therefore fail to see the operational argumentation for this initiative (this is a fact, not an impression).

2- We understand (so this is so far only an impression) from our meeting, and from HR that were approached in the field for this, that the initiative basically responds to the MSF F desire to start up a separate mission in the area of Pec.

As a consequence we see the visa-request as a concrete step towards the creation of a second independent MSF mission in the region; as explained in the summary of our meetings, MSF B does not only disagree, but sees this initiative as a serious security risk with no operational added value and will therefore also oppose to it. If needed formal steps to use the veto right will be undertaken. I don't want to dramatize, but I want to be clear that we are not ready to play additional dangerous games in a context like Kosovo.

Dear Tim,

[...] We had a desk meeting last Thursday in Brussels. Despite the fact that it was an interesting and long discussion, the issue was the same as we discussed together on the phone last time:

- The actual joint mission (MSFB/F) is over since the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 99.

- MSF F is willing to send an explo mission in Kosovo ASAP in order to evaluate the actual situation and define a future project. We didn't discuss yet the split modalities between both sections but as the visa process is very long, I would like to start ASAP the request. So could you ask Rada in Belgrade to send us the invitation letters for the team? [...]

PS: you should receive the meeting report as soon as it is approved by both desks. Nevertheless, I will send you

the one I wrote. I will call Vincent today to finalise this report with him.

Hoping you can see the right priorities.

Greetings, Vincent



*I went to Brussels and said: "It's all over. We're terminating your joint mission and getting out. We're sending people in, we're sending in an exploratory mission." They wouldn't let us obtain the visas. As a result, I couldn't get volunteers back through Belgrade, so I couldn't plan on sending them to Kosovo because we didn't have the visas. I knew some of the local Serbian personnel who had been working with us in Belgrade for years. All we needed was a letter of invitation. But our only contact was MSF Belgium, and the Serbs I knew worked for MSF Belgium. We also tried through the hotels, but it didn't work. I said to myself that Kosovo was impossible for the time being, anyway. If we couldn't get a coordination team and an independent network to obtain visas, our team in Pec wasn't going to last long.*

Graziella Godain, Deputy Programme Manager,  
MSF France (in French).




*At one point in a particular meeting, they said that in their experience we didn't give out enough information, that they were not allowed to prepare things properly, that we concealed information, that it wasn't a genuine joint mission which allowed them to function as an equal partner. We were rather taken aback, because their arguments seemed to lack substance. We tended to regard this approach as a deliberate choice on their part: "Things might get a bit hot, a bit politicised, so we'd prefer to work independently and in isolation." Now a joint mission always demands compromises, and I could well imagine how that was not quite to their liking. What annoyed us was more the way they approached the matter than the fact that they wanted to withdraw. We would have preferred if they had said: "OK, we're not happy in this set-up, we'd much rather go it alone," instead of telling us that we were not serious about the joint mission. At the time, we took exception to their accusatory tone. It wasn't very helpful at that particular time. We were a bit upset. One day they were telling us that we were not sincere and the next day they were calling to see if we could arrange visas. We kept the agreements and the records.*

*Now, our approach was a bit different to that of MSF France and we feared, of course, that they had something else in mind and were getting a bit beyond themselves. It was clear that in a context such as Serbia, this could have put us in danger, because we were staying there. I said no. It got a bit dramatic; they were very, very angry. I don't think they were used to people saying no to them. We did try to get*

them the visas in the end, but I refused at first because I thought that was no way to behave.

Vincent Janssens, Director of Operations,  
MSF Belgium (in French).

 It would have been up to us to do all the visas. The visas were a nightmare. Months to get people there. And we tried to facilitate visits of all these guys, because everybody wanted to come; people from Greece, from the United States. And, it was difficult to establish. I think I said I wasn't going to get them visas. We facilitated missions for the desk and different people to come, but I said: "No. I'm not going to spend our time for you guys to come and do an explo." We already had our relationships with Belgrade, with the authorities, with Pristina. For me, we tried to be flexible so far but, it seemed they just wanted one thing and we could not see the value of it. Kosovo is a small place and we said: "Please come in under the current structure." They wanted something else. For me it just seemed like the board of MSF France had decided they wanted a French mission there.

Tim Boucher, Coordinator MSF Belgium/France in  
Kosovo June 1998 to April 1999 (in French).

**On 10 March 1999, Milo Djukanovic, the president of Montenegro, claimed that NATO air strikes would strengthen Slobodan Milosevic, whom he accused of concentrating troops on the border between Kosovo and Montenegro. On 11 March, Richard Holbrooke, the United States Envoy in Belgrade, acknowledged that he had failed to persuade the Serbian president to accept the peace plan tabled at Rambouillet.**



'Air Strikes Strengthen Milosevic, Says President of Montenegro,' **AFP** (France), Belgrade, 10 March 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

"If they started bombing, it would be a double disaster. First, innocent people would be killed; second, it would strengthen Slobodan Milosevic's position," said Mr Djukanovic, a reformer and fierce opponent of the Yugoslav head of state. The President accused Mr Milosevic of ordering the Yugoslav army to amass troops on the border between Kosovo and Macedonia without the approval of the Supreme Defence Council (SDC). "The SDC has not met once this year," said Mr Djukanovic, who sits on the Council with Mr Milosevic and the President of Serbia, Milan Milutinovic. "It is part Milosevic's vast war scenario. He's up to his old trick of trying to provoke a crisis with

the international community," said Mr Djukanovic at a press conference in Podgorica, the Montenegrin capital. The Montenegrin president believes that eventually "Milosevic will do what the international community is asking [...] his only objective is to stay in power." Mr Djukanovic believes the Rambouillet conference resulted in a "genuine possibility: a political framework that provides a large measure of autonomy for Kosovo within Serbia and Yugoslavia."



'Holbrooke Fails to Shift Milosevic's Position,' **AFP** (France), Belgrade, 11 March 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

According to a presidential communiqué, Mr Milosevic again rejected the idea of deploying an international force in Kosovo, declaring that foreign troops had "no business" in Yugoslavia. "That is exactly what he said," stated Mr Holbrooke, when asked about this subject. Mr. Holbrooke explained that he would leave Belgrade on Thursday in order to report on his mission to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Mrs Albright has "already contacted" Russian foreign minister Igor Ivanov and will "inform him of the meetings we have had here today."

Mr Ivanov, who is due to meet Mr. Milosevic in Belgrade on Thursday, "will be the bearer of a firm message" from Moscow calling for 'progress' in the peace process, said Mr Holbrooke. "There are differences between Russia and the NATO members who make up the Contact Group, but they will not prevent us from cooperating in the search for peace," he added. Discussions with Mr Milosevic had been "very committed, very intense" and had provided an opportunity to review the Rambouillet conference, which had verged on failure but had been saved thanks to the presence of Mrs Albright, according to the American envoy. [...] Mr Milosevic "understands that the (NATO military) activation order still stands and is viable. The Secretary-General (of the Alliance), Javier Solana, has the power to authorise the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Europe, US General Wesley Clark, to take action at the appropriate moment," Mr. Holbrooke reminded his audience.

## DIVERGENCES WITHIN MSF OVER NATO'S POSSIBLE INTERVENTION

**On 12 March, the French daily, *Libération*, published an appeal from a group of prominent French personalities advocating a firm stand against Milosevic's**

**policies in Kosovo and for self-determination for the Albanian people. Rony Brauman, former President of MSF's French section and a Research Director of the MSF France Foundation, signed the appeal.**



'Save Kosovo,' M.F. Allain, Ch. Berling, L. Boltanski, **R. et P. Brauman**, Peter Brook, P. Bruckner, P. Cabannes, H. Cixous, Y. Cochet, G. Coq, J. D'Ormesson, J.P. Elkabbach, A. Escudier, B. Faivre d'Arcier, F. Fetjö, A. Finkielkraut, J. Gaillot, A. Garapon, P. Garde, M. Gendreaux - Masalou, R. Goupil, A. Glucksman, M-D. Gremek, B-H. Lévy, G. Herzog, P. Hassner, F. Jeanson, A. Joxe, Ismaël Kadaré, Y. Labbé, CL. Lanzmann, A. Le Brun, CL. Lefort, JL. Le Corre, A. Lipietz, G. Mink, D. Mitterrand, A. Mnouchkine, Y. Moullier-Boutang, E. Morin, B. Njman, V. Nahum - Grappe, O. Mongin, B. Noël, Met R Ophüls, J. Rancière, M. Revault d'Allonnes, D. Rondeau, R. Rotmann, J. Semelin, P. A Taguieff, F. Tanguy, Y. Terson, J.P. Vernant, E. de Véricourt, H. Vincent, E. Wallon, *Libération* (France), 12 March 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

The bloody ethnic cleansing begun in 1991 in former areas of Yugoslavia has now resumed in Kosovo. The same political policy undertaken by Milosevic that led to the resumption of crimes against humanity in Europe (Vukovar, Srebrenica, etc.) is now being carried out in Drenica in Kosovo: 30 villages and 50,000 people are completely encircled by special police forces and Arkan's militias are ready to strike. Tanks and helicopters from Belgrade are bombing and burning down villages that are cut off from the world, resulting in dozens of victims. Once again, terrorized families are fleeing the massacres. Milosevic's policy has not changed: he 'cleanses' non-Serbian populations from the territories he covets. After laying waste to Slavonia and Bosnia, he is now going after the Kosovar Albanians, whose autonomy he suppressed in 1989. He thus risks inflaming the entire region, from Albania to Macedonia.

Albanian is the culture and language of 90% of the region's population, which is subject to a policy of oppression and apartheid. One out of two Albanians has been imprisoned and tortured. In the past seven years, the Kosovars have led a non-violent struggle under the leadership of Ibrahim Rugova. But, who in Europe has cared? Kosovo was forgotten in the Dayton peace agreements three years ago. Because the province of Kosovo 'is part of Serbia,' Milosevic has always had free reign to persecute the population. He is now using popular resistance as a pretext to cry terrorism and launch murderous operations against civilians. However, it's not a question of terrorism, but the exasperation of a certain number of desperate young people who no longer believe in non-violence.

cleansed, an act that has been announced by the assassins and long expected by the experts? The Albanian people of Kosovo have the right to demand self-determination. Given this intolerable situation, we call upon public opinion in Europe to pressure governments to insist on a firm stance from various international bodies, even if it means resorting to force, in order to begin a political process leading to a new status for Kosovo. That is the necessary condition for the establishment of peace in the region. Milosevic must be induced to make a commitment to stop his aggression against the population. Compliance with this commitment must be overseen by international observers.

We also urge the French government to support the efforts of the International Criminal Court, which must urgently summon Milosevic, himself the perpetrator of crimes against humanity. We call upon Jacques Chirac to demonstrate his determination by receiving Ibrahim Rugova as soon as possible.



*I was in favour of armed intervention in Kosovo, as I was at one time for Bosnia. And I defended the idea that Europe had more of a responsibility for maintaining order on its own continent than in the rest of the world. The calls for intervention in Kosovo were therefore part of an attitude I had already adopted several years before; even when I was president of MSF, I had already taken this stance. I had called for the bombing of Serb batteries surrounding Sarajevo in 1992 and 1993 in a way that I find completely regrettable and I'm not giving that as an example to justify it. On the contrary, with hindsight, I think that I was completely wrong. But I did it and in a very embarrassing way: I was the one who brought about this interview as president of MSF so that I could then more easily rid myself of my role as president of an aid organisation by saying, "but it's not the humanitarian doctor who's talking to you; it's the French and European citizen." That was a rather crude and clumsy sleight of hand! So at the time events were taking place in Kosovo, my attitude was psychologically very similar, but I didn't involve MSF. The idea to call for intervention seemed completely justified to me. Also with hindsight, the fact that I called for intervention in Kosovo for political reasons, which is in the text, and for other reasons which do not appear in the text, are fine with me.*

*I have no regret on that account. Insofar as it doesn't involve MSF, I accept responsibility. Nor were we firebrands eager to see jet fighters take off. But, this type of text and the positions that we could take in public debates were intended to show that there was support for the action undertaken. We wanted to show that there would be no surge of pacifism or support for last-minute negotiations on our part. That was the point of this text. And publishing the text close to the actual military intervention is a further indication of this somewhat superfluous desire to 'set the table after the food has already been served.' I believe that in this sense, we*

represented the somewhat organised expression of rather widespread fragments of French public opinion. We weren't trying to convince public opinion; instead we were part of a movement of opinion, and as people expressing themselves in the press, we did so with our usual tools.

Rony Brauman, Director of Research,  
MSF France Foundation (in French).

**Most of MSF's sections are located in countries that belong to NATO, which was preparing for a military intervention in Kosovo. Within these sections, the debate on the Kosovo dilemma reflects the debates that were taking place in the countries concerned.**



'NATO, Humanitarian Aid Workers and Death,' Jean-Christophe Rufin [former Vice-President, MSF France], *Le Monde* (France) 20 March 1999 (in French). [D79](#)

#### Extract:

The right to intervene, brandished rashly, suggested to many people in the Third World that humanitarian workers might be the Trojan horse of a new, armed imperialism. In the end, it was kept under reasonable control. Apart from the Somalian disaster and the Gulf War - which are cases unto themselves - UN forces have demonstrated caution and respect for a certain balance, in keeping with the tradition of interposition operations. They have established many peaceful connections with humanitarian organisations, particularly through 'civil affairs' departments. If humanitarian groups speak out and criticise, as is their habit, they should know that now, their words can kill.

Everything changed with NATO. This is a completely operational, military alliance, intended to respond to a threat - that is, an enemy. Even if its new operations (in Bosnia and Kosovo) do not fall under Article 5, which defined its mission as defender of the free world, this has been the organisation's culture for the last 50 years. NATO defines an enemy and threatens it. It may launch a strike and destroy it. Setting such a machine in motion requires a trigger. Today, that trigger is no longer military. The Soviets won't be attacking Central Europe again. It's not political, either. But, we now know: NATO's new trigger is...humanitarian. Blood and killings are required - something that will make public opinion sick enough to its stomach that it will accept violence in response. The humanitarian-military connection that was so feared during the UN days has thus been firmly established.

If humanitarian groups speak out and criticise, as is their habit, they should know that now, their words can kill. Criticise fifty deaths here and the next reprisal could result in 5.000 victims there, somewhere near Belgrade.


Whether that is desirable or not is another question entirely. Let's just acknowledge that, in terms of a mandate, the situation is new and unique. The defenders of life now prescribe death. That is a weighty responsibility in such a complex conflict. Perhaps it explains the deafening silence on the part of non-governmental organisations since this crisis began. The result is that civilian populations may never have faced such a serious threat as the Kosovars do today. Why? Because the potential victims are key to an international response. Let's be clear here: the west wants deaths. We waited for them in Bosnia before taking action. There, it was in the Markallé market. We waited for them in Rwanda, where it took 500.000 before the response came. We are waiting for them in Kosovo. We'll have them. Who will kill them? Unknown.

The sinister events in Raçak lead one to fear that the threat is all around. That is why today it is critical to think about the new living conditions that NATO has created on the ground. We know the qualities of this organisation. We need to look at the side effects it produces. That way, we can avoid prematurely tossing out the other cards in the international community's hand. First among them - the United Nations. One can criticise its failures. Nonetheless, as an interposition force, it is certainly more appealing than NATO. Next, are the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the European Union. Of course, should an offensive be necessary, they are not the organisations to take it on. Still, the presence of their observers is critical in high-risk situations. If someone is to serve as the NATO trigger, let it be them. Their role as objective witness, which can help guarantee against deadly manipulation, is essential.


Freed from that fearful task that threatens their very existence, humanitarian aid organisations can, perhaps then help the populations to survive, rather than send them to their death.

*In Spain, the general context explains many things. In Spain, anything concerning NATO has always been viewed with suspicion by the civilian population because of the presence of American bases, which are associated with it. There is also an entire movement which, under Francoism, confronted society's conservative vision - a pacifist perspective that was considered a sort of counterweight to the military state. NATO intervening as an international police force with a mandate usurped from the United Nations, without any green light from the Security Council, was really the most basic type of violation of international procedures and it scandalised us. At MSF Spain, we work closely with civil society and the organisation is somewhat pacifist in its views.*


Eric Stobbaerts, Executive Director,  
MSF Spain (in French)

 *In the United States, we had a community that was very pro-Kosovar, so it was anti-Serb. Today, there are many analyses about the triggering of the Kosovo crisis which denounce the role of the Albanian diaspora's funding of violent elements in the UCK. In fact, I met people belonging to this diaspora – not officially as an MSF staff member, but among people that I knew in a private capacity, some were raising money and sending it to Albania. At that time in MSF, we weren't at all aware of this aspect of the conflict. Our understanding was limited to 'the good guys and the bad guys.' For us, the Kosovars were the victims. So it was easy to denounce the Serbian aggressor and say an intervention was needed to protect them. Our way of thinking was somewhat knee-jerk; this is what's happening on the ground. The United States has a responsibility to resolve this crisis. The humanitarian stakes are enormous. The violence being carried out is state violence; it's not only a small rebellion but something well-organised. We're witnessing round-ups; we're witnessing particularly dreadful acts of violence.' We never called for military intervention. I don't think that we ever said: "There needs to be air strikes." But, we probably said that the American government had a responsibility and it wasn't accepting responsibility. In fact, we maintained this ambiguity.'*

[...] Executive Director, MSF United States  
(in French).


 *From the beginning, we took a clear position: "It's not MSF's role to take a position for or against bombings and military initiatives." There were, however, some questions and discussions: "What are we going to think if it goes ahead? Are we going to protest?" We didn't ask ourselves, 'are we for or against the bombing?' But, "When it happens, what are we going to say about it?" I don't recall that the specific question: "Should NATO strike or not" was really the subject of debate. I think that our questioning was much more operational in nature. We foresaw the difficulty. I believe that we closely followed the whole process, come what may, while trying to avoid any extreme position in favour of bombing. We always hoped to avoid that and we asked ourselves a lot of questions, such as: "»If there really is a total military campaign, what will become of the situation in Kosovo and in Serbia itself? How much room to manoeuvre will we have?"*

Vincent Janssens, Director of Operations,  
MSF Belgium (in French).

 *I have the impression that at MSF Belgium, we believed very quickly that the NATO air strikes were not the right way to stop Milosevic's policy of ethnic*


*cleansing. On the contrary, he benefited from it. And perhaps we were very ambiguous when we said: "Something has to be done; the European Union and the international community aren't acting responsibly." But, we didn't say what should be done and then NATO struck and we very quickly said: "That's crazy, look at the massive wave of people; Milosevic's benefiting from it." I had the feeling that we didn't really know [what to say]. What was the solution? Very quickly, among ourselves, we were very critical. "NATO did a disservice to people; in the final analysis, it was a disaster." In any case, I think that we were less pro-air strike than Paris.*

Anouk Delafortrie, Communication Officer, MSF  
Belgium (in French).


 *In French society, Milosevic is no longer very popular; nor are his armies and allies. We aren't going to call for an attack against Milosevic and for his military defeat, but we're also not going to complain about it [if it happens]. We see what's happening in Kosovo and in a way we're relieved that someone's intervening to put an end to it. At MSF, we're rather in tune with French society in this respect. For MSF's French section, this is an extension of the civil war associated with the breakup of Yugoslavia. So our ambivalence is related to our experiences during the civil war, during which Yugoslavia ceased to exist. We are well aware that all the parties to the conflict have committed crimes, but in practice Belgrade has committed many of them and at MSF we have been directly affected by atrocities committed against our patients and against our colleagues with whom we work. I'm especially thinking of Srebrenica; Vukovar is another example... We're not at all surprised that they're massively attacking the civilian population of Kosovo. We know that that's part of their methods. We're very worried because we know that that has already led to large massacres and we believe it could happen again in a similar context. On the other hand, we have seen that in the history of Yugoslavia, at certain times, our hostility to Belgrade's power challenges our neutrality. Our form of opposition to Belgrade's power has sometimes stepped outside the bounds of humanitarian work. For example, a number of MSF officials spoke out about the war in Bosnia. For my part, I felt a certain anxiety. I found that during the war in Bosnia, we drifted toward a loss of neutrality. On the other hand, as a humanitarian field worker who had suffered from Belgrade's policies and as a democratic European citizen, I found that we could only hope for the defeat of this type of ultranationalist and highly bellicose regime, which had committed terrible crimes.*

Jean-Hervé Bradol, Director of Operations,  
MSF France (in French).




 In the Netherlands people were shocked. They thought that what was happening in Kosovo was unacceptable. But there was not a very strong demonstration against the strikes. Not like hundreds of thousands of people.

Katrien Coppens, Humanitarian Affairs Department, MSF Holland (in English).

 There are many people originally from the former Yugoslavia who work in Switzerland and among them are many Kosovars. So, they had informed the population in their own way. I have the feeling that people believed that these air strikes were justified. There was an aggressor and maybe it wasn't so bad to teach him a lesson. Before the strikes, there were demonstrations by Serbs in Geneva; they wore badges with a target over their heart. That was their way of saying, 'they're going to shoot us.' But that was a minority opinion. The atmosphere was tense.

Isabelle Seguy-Bitz, member of the Board of Directors, MSF Switzerland (in French).

 At MSF France, in any case, among those who expressed their opinion and with whom I was in touch, there was a rather large proportion that advocated armed intervention, as was the case for Bosnia. By denouncing the 'humanitarian alibi,' that's what they were calling for. One of the favourite expressions or ideas was: "While humanitarian work goes on, so does the business of ethnic cleansing." This coexistence between the role of defender of human rights and the role of humanitarian worker, which I now call somewhat neoconservative, was profoundly imprinted in the minds of quite a few MSF officials at different levels

Rony Brauman, Director of Studies, MSF France Foundation (in French).

**On 19 March 1999, negotiations between Serbs and Albanians of Kosovo, under the auspices of the contact group, which had resumed on 15 March in Rambouillet, adjourned due to the Serbs' failure to come to an agreement. The process of evacuating the OSCE's Kosovo Verification Mission and Western embassy personnel in Belgrade began.**



'Adjournment of Negotiations, Apparent Preparations for Military Strikes,' **AFP** (France), Paris 19 March 1999 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

"We believe that there is no longer any reason to continue the current discussions. The discussions are adjourned. There shall be no resumption of these discussions unless the Serbian party expresses its adhesion to the agreements," announced Hubert Védrine and Robin Cook, French and British Foreign Ministers and Co-chairmen of the negotiations. The discussions, which got underway Monday under a cloud of pessimism at the International Conference Centre in Paris, ended with an accusatory finger pointed at Slobodan Milosevic, the Yugoslav president. As for the Albanian party, it had signed the peace agreement proposed by the international community on Thursday evening. Milosevic bears "complete responsibility" for the failure of the conference, said French President Jacques Chirac, while Védrine stated that there was a 'real' threat of NATO air strikes on Serb targets.

Several hours after the adjournment of the discussions, the Western powers gave every appearance of preparing for a bombing campaign. London, Washington and other capitals announced the evacuation of non-essential personnel from their embassies in Belgrade. The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) decided to withdraw 1.400 employees from its Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM), which had been on the ground for three-and-a-half months, to ensure compliance with the continually violated ceasefire.

**Given the risks of a NATO military intervention, the military pressure on the Kosovar Albanians population was increasing. On 21 March 1999, UNHCR reported that several thousand Kosovars had to flee their villages, which were attacked and burned by the police and Serb forces or damaged by fighting between the Serb army and the UCK. Five to six thousand people fleeing the Pec region arrived in Rozaje in Montenegro. UNHCR announced that 400,000 people had left their homes since the beginning of the conflict. NGOs were beginning to reduce their staffs and were considering evacuating them from Kosovo.**



'Crisis in Kosovo: Dramatic Deterioration on the Ground, According to the [UN]HCR,' **AFP** (France), (Geneva), 21 March 1999 (in French).

An UNHCR mission that was able to travel Sunday afternoon to Srbica reported that two-thirds of its population, estimated at some 20,000 residents, was forced to flee the

city after fighting, according to Judith Kumin, an UNHCR spokesperson interviewed by AFP. Even though the roads had been blocked and access was forbidden to journalists and aid workers, the team was able to enter the city through a secondary road, Kumin explained.

The UNHCR team witnessed a dramatic situation: most of the civilians had fled their burned houses. The warehouse of the Mother Teresa humanitarian organisation had been looted. Women hiding in the city said that the police had come at dawn and had led the men away by force. On their return, the UNHCR team came across hundreds of people, especially women, children and old men, fleeing to Kosovska Mitrovica (in northern Kosovo). The same scene played out in Barilevo and Progovac, two villages near Pristina, the provincial capital, according to the UNHCR spokesperson. The villages were attacked and the population fled into the forest. Masked soldiers entered the houses and set them on fire. Tanks were also deployed in the area.

In addition, some 200 people fled to Macedonia over the weekend. It is, however, growing increasingly difficult to flee: UNHCR saw Yugoslav soldiers laying land mines along the border. UNHCR was able to send in another three convoys on Sunday, but its movements are limited by the fighting. It has also cut its staff in half, from about 30 expatriates to 15 on Sunday following the order given Saturday by the UN to withdraw non-essential personnel. On Saturday, UNHCR had estimated that there were some 20,000 displaced persons as a result of the new Serb offensive in Drenica, the fiefdom of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK). The fighting on Sunday has created thousands more displaced Kosovars. The UNHCR spokesperson said she regretted the departure of 1,400 staff members of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM) because "this presence was a factor of trust and security for civilians."



Info Matin, MSF Belgium daily morning brief, 22 March 1999 (in French). [D20](#)

#### **Extract:** KOSOVO

Important offensives by the Serbian army in Drenica this weekend. Seven thousand additional IDPs in Vushtrín and a total of 15,000 in Glogovac. Four police officers were executed in Pristina on Saturday evening. Tension has been on a steep increase since Saturday morning, following the withdrawal of the OSCE observers.

MSF teams are still present in Pec, Prizren and Pristina. In Pec and Prizren, MSF is the only international NGO present. In Pristina, there are small teams from MDM [Médecins du Monde], IRC [International Rescue Committee], IMC [International Medical Corps] and UNHCR. On Sunday, only the Pristina team went out. Today, all three teams will get out and UNHCR is sending a convoy to Glogovac. UNHCR is in security phase 4 (out of 5, which equals evacuation).

Same for MSF. As the situation evolves, it is very probable the team will shrink to a minimum of four people (the HOM and three medical staff). As in December, the rest of the staff will be repatriated to Skopje. The weekly sitrep will be available today as well as a special sitrep for this time of crisis.



*I didn't know what to do. Selmann told me that if the air strikes started, he wasn't sure he could get me out. The Serbs knew that there was a foreigner in the valley and that I couldn't get back out. They thought they could take me through Drenica. But, in case fighting started, that would be risky. And, it would take five days... I was very unhappy about it. I decided to leave Rugova Valley. Then Selmann left to fight and I didn't see him again. Another fighter accompanied me the same way I had come, through Montenegro, where I took a bus to Pristina to pick up my plane ticket for France. It was a little risky to go through Belgrade so they had me go through Skopje in Macedonia. When I returned to France, the air strikes began.*

Laurence Thavaux, MSF Field Manager in Pristina in 1996, in Pec from April 1998 to February 1999, and a nurse in Montenegro in April 1999 (in French).

**On 22 March 1999, the Yugoslav government requested a meeting of the United Nations Security Council on Kosovo and the threat of NATO air strikes. But none of the 15 council members, not even Russia, made such a request, necessary for a meeting to take place. On 23 March 1999, MSF teams, which continued to work in the Pec and Prizren areas, withdrew to Pristina.**



*There had been a couple of threats. There were at least two times where a political decision had been taken in New York or by the G8 or whatever to get everybody to evacuate. I think once or twice we discussed and said, "it's not actually going to happen." Of course, eventually it did. It was clear. Everybody pulled out. The UN had gone. We pulled the teams back from Pec and Pristina. And I stayed in Pristina with a nurse and a doctor. It was very difficult. I think there was about two or three days when everybody evacuated before the bombing started. All the Albanian staff was too scared to leave their houses. So, all we could do really was talk to people. Telephones were still working. So we could talk to people in the Drenica region. And it was clear there was a big offensive going on and we tried to get authorisations to get out there. But, in Pristina everybody was very tense, and to move down into the town was dangerous. There were no Albanians on the streets, there were lots of Serbs. Civilians were all armed*

walking around the streets. There were sorts of barricades all over the place. So, we struggled, we thought we might be able to do something. Our objectives were to try to get to Drenica and give some assistance to the people. It was clear that the Serbs wouldn't allow us to do that. We didn't want to take our vehicles out, so we walked into town and we made a contact with the authorities to try to get permission to get out. We contacted the Yugoslav Red Cross to see if we could provide some assistance through them. Of course it was a gesture, but they probably wouldn't do anything to help the Albanians.

Tim Boucher, Coordinator MSF Belgium/France in Kosovo from June 1998 to April 1999 (in English).

**On 24 March 1999, after the failure of the Holbrooke mission, NATO Secretary General Javier Solana announced the decision to launch air strikes against Serb targets after the refusal of President Milosevic to accept the peace agreement. The Russian foreign minister stated his opposition to the strikes. The president of the United States obtained Congressional approval for military action. The government of Montenegro refused to acknowledge the state of emergency decreed by Belgrade in the territory of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.**



'NATO to Launch Air Strikes after Failure of Holbrooke Mission,' **AFP** (France), Brussels, 24 March 1999 (in French).

**Extract:**

NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana announced Tuesday evening that he had given the order to launch aerial bombing in agreement with the 19 members of the alliance. "I just gave instructions to the supreme commander of the allied forces in Europe, the American General Wesley Clark, to launch air operations in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia," said Solana. "This military action aims to support the international community's political objectives. Its goal is to stop the violent attacks perpetrated by the Serbian forces in Kosovo and to weaken their ability to prolong the humanitarian disaster," said Solana after meeting with NATO's Council (of ambassadors).

According to the diplomats, the massive air strikes, which will rely on cruise missiles, may begin on Tuesday or Wednesday night. The strikes will commence Wednesday unless President Milosevic agrees to the Kosovo peace plan, said British Defence Minister George Robertson in London. In Belgrade, the Yugoslav government declared a state of danger from imminent war. According to the constitution, this measure precedes the declaration of state of emergency or a state of war. "In view of the danger (of imminent war), army and police units have been deployed

on the ground in order to avoid and reduce losses and damage," Prime Minister Momir Bulatovic announced on television. "We believe [...] that citizens and civilian targets will not be targeted. It is important to continue your normal daily activities." The Yugoslav army "will respond to force with all the means at its disposal," declared General Nebojsa Pavkovic, Commander of the Third Army, which is responsible for southern Serbia, including the province of Kosovo.

[...] "We have plans for a rapid and severe air campaign that the secretary-general (of NATO) has the power to launch at an opportune time and we think that it's going to hurt the Serbs," said Kevin Bacon, the Pentagon spokesperson. Solana's announcement followed the failure of Holbrooke's mission. Holbrooke said Tuesday evening that his discussions with the Yugoslav president had failed. Milosevic refused to make any commitments regarding a ceasefire in Kosovo or the deployment of a NATO contingent in the province. The United States "obtained nothing" during Holbrooke's discussions, said President Bill Clinton during a (televised) speech to Americans to prepare them for the air strikes. "I don't like to use military force, but if we have to do it, I'll do it," said the president. If President Milosevic "doesn't want to make peace, we're ready to limit his ability to make war in Kosovo." Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov, on a flight to the United States, turned around mid-Atlantic to return immediately to Moscow due to the imminent air strikes.

On Tuesday evening, the Serbian Parliament voted nearly unanimously against the deployment of a foreign military force in Kosovo. "They're planning to send 28.000 armed soldiers. They will rule over Kosovo and there would be no more Serbia" in the province, said Serbian President Milan Milutinovic. "We could never accept that." In mid-morning, Clinton had received Congressional leaders at the White House to ask them to support possible military action. Senate Republicans announced that they were planning to submit a resolution authorising the president to take military action. At the last minute, they had decided against presenting an amendment opposing air strikes. Before flying back to Moscow, Primakov had reaffirmed Russia's "firm opposition" to any NATO air strike. He said that the threat of NATO military action against a country that had not committed any aggression outside its borders "changes the nature of international order inherited from the Second World War."



*Montenegro Distances Itself from Belgrade,'* **AFP** (France), Podgorica (Yugoslavia) 24 March 1999 (in French).

**Extract:**

Montenegro has decided to prohibit the use of its territory for any confrontation with international forces and the use of its civilian facilities by the Yugoslav army, the Montenegrin press announced Wednesday. According the

newspaper Vijesti, the government of Montenegro which, with Serbia, forms the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, also decided not to accept any decision by Belgrade to decree a state of emergency after Tuesday's declaration of a state of 'imminent war danger'. The President of Montenegro, Milo Djukanovic, and the Prime Minister, Filip Vujanovic, were scheduled to speak Wednesday to the Montenegrin parliament in Podgorica. Montenegro is led by a team of reformers who are political opponents of Yugoslov President Slobodan Milosevic.

**The Greek authorities were preparing for the possible arrival of refugees at their border and stated that they would not take part in any military action conducted by NATO. Because of the possibility of a massive influx of refugees into Greece, the Greek section was making every effort to ensure it was operationally prepared.**



'Greece Strengthens Border Surveillance, says Minister,' **AFP** (France), Athens, 24 March 1999 (in French).

**Extract:**

Greece has "strengthened surveillance" of its borders, fearing the arrival of a wave of refugees following the air strikes against Serbia planned by NATO, said Defence Secretary Dimitris Apostolakis on Wednesday. "We have taken law enforcement measures, and armed forces have been sent to the borders," said Apostolakis, during an interview at a private radio station in Athens. An authorised source said that the Greek authorities were planning to set up refugee camps in north-western Greece at Pella, Florina, Kozani, Ioannina, Kilkis, and Larisa in coordination with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). "Greece is carefully following the situation and is ready for any eventuality," noted Apostolakis, adding that "all necessary measures have been taken." Apostolakis reiterated that Athens "will not take part in NATO military operations" against Serbia. It will "only participate in a peacekeeping force in the event of a political agreement," he said. He specified, however, that Greece has provided "facilities" to the NATO forces "in the framework of international agreements." The defence secretary said he wanted "Greece [to] keep its distance from this whole affair" and he described the statements of US President Bill Clinton and German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer that Greece and Turkey might be encouraged to join the conflict, as "exaggerated."



'Kosovo Evolutions,' **Email** from Tzanetos Antypas, MSF Greece Programme Manager to Thierry Durand, MSF CH Directors of Operations, 26 March 1999 (in English). **D81**

**Extract:**

Dear Thierry [...],

Following the last developments, and since the situation in Kosovo continues to be 'explosive', without us knowing the next steps of the raids [NATO air strikes], the Greek section of MSF is prepared to address any crisis, as we are the closest to this situation.

As for PR for the programmes in Greece (programmes within our borders), I believe that it falls under my authority to prepare the Greek section to deal with the refugee influx that may occur in Greece. Such a preparation means that will have to carry out some activities in case of influx of refugees so that we will be able to defuse the crisis.



*On 24 March, I was on holiday. And, I was pretty worried like everyone else in Greece. What was going to happen, the bombings, etc? I called MSF Athens and they told me that they were preparing for something [an intervention in Greece].*

Antonis Rigas, Logistician, MSF Greece (in French).

**UNHCR had announced the evacuation of all personnel from United Nations humanitarian agencies. Some members of the MSF team were evacuating to Macedonia. In addition to the ICRC staff, the three remaining MSF volunteers were the only agencies representing a humanitarian presence in Kosovo.**



*All UN Personnel Evacuated from Kosovo,' **AFP**, (France), Geneva, 24 March 1999 (in French).*

**Extract:**

All personnel of UN humanitarian organisations have been evacuated from Kosovo due to the imminent NATO air strikes, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) announced Wednesday. Representatives of UNHCR, the World Food Programme (WFP), and UNICEF left the separatist province Tuesday evening at the request of the UN security coordinator, according to UNHCR spokespersons. UNHCR had eight expatriates in Kosovo. A small number of essential personnel stayed in Belgrade. "We're going to see what happens," said spokesperson Judith Kumin. UNHCR had no information Wednesday morning about a

possible influx of refugees to Albania and Macedonia, the two most accessible countries, Kumin said. Kosovars had tried to reach Macedonia at the beginning of the week but were denied entry by Macedonian authorities, who demanded visas.

Skopje promised UNHCR on Tuesday that Kosovars eligible for entry could take refuge in Macedonia in the future, said Kumin. The UN agency is waiting to see if Skopje keeps its commitment. She had no information Wednesday morning on movements of the population to the Macedonian border. The border with Albania is difficult to cross. The Yugoslav army created a control zone and it has reportedly laid land mines in the area. Adding to the difficulty, is the mountainous terrain, said UNHCR.



'Kosovo News,' **Email** from Bastien Vigneau, MSF Belgium Deputy Programme Manager, 25 March 1999 (in French). **D82**

#### Extract:

- Since Tuesday afternoon, the team in Pristina is still reduced to three persons (HOM and 2 doctors).
- Yesterday afternoon (Wednesday 24/3) Tim (HOM) was able to find a Serb translator and went to the police to confirm MSF is staying in Pristina.
- MSF and ICRC are the 2 only international organisations in Kosovo.
- The team heard the first missiles hitting the surroundings of Pristina yesterday at around 20:30 local time. Different places were targeted by NATO:  
Pancevo (near Belgrade)  
Kragujevac (central Serbia) Pristina (Kosovo)  
Novi Sad (Vojvodina -north of Belgrade)  
And Montenegro!
- The team's biggest concern was the outbreak of fighting in the city itself but there was no power in the city, the Yugoslav army was present with tanks in the streets, and everything remained quiet.
- This morning the team is trying to contact/reach the hospital to get an update on casualties. The surgery kits are ready to be used. No countryside movements forecast in the Drenica as yet. [...]
- MSF H informed us that MSFF is trying to return to Montenegro and that after discussion with MSF F, they [MSFH] will go to Macedonia and take over the explo mission. For us, and the team, there is no problem with that. As we already started the explo, we will give human/logistical support to MSFH for this explo.

[...] Tim receives a lot of journalists' calls (CNN, BBC World, etc.). He will turn off his phone because they call in the night. Last night at 3 AM, CNN called Tim and told him they had lost their correspondent. They wanted to know if we had heard of him. Some journalists were arrested, questioned and brought back to the border.



Kosovo **Update**, 26 March 1999 (in English). **D83**

#### Extract:

##### GENERAL


- Stronger bombing in Yugo last night and during the night
- There is strong determination From NATO, Serbs, and UCK to fight for their positions
- There is a serious increase of tensions among civilians and militaries, not mentioning the fears of Kosovar Albanians
- A very strong 'anti-foreigner' feeling growing among Serbs (especially towards expats from NATO countries)
- No freedom of expression allowed (opposition radio closed by force)
- International press systematically monitored and controlled. Some journalists have being brought back to the border after declarations.
- Interpretation of our discussion with NATO officer this morning confirms air strikes on Pristina with possible intensification in the coming days

##### IN KOSOVO


- Seems retaliation increased towards Kosovar Albanians in the field. This morning we heard Serb shelling Kosovar Albanian villages
- In Pec it was reported that our warehouse had been looted
- In Gjakovac it was reported that a surgeon was killed and some executions took place (??)

##### [...]MSF (non) actions

- ICRC & MSF completely isolated, no possibilities for using the cars in Pristina. Both teams work together in exchanging info, analysis, etc.
- Last night stronger shelling on Pristina. Tim reported the house was 'shaking.'
- Our staff is staying at home/office (same street), very little communication abilities as we have no Serb translators. Morale is good.
- Contact with the hospital yesterday-we've been arrested by police and we had to go the police post. We were well treated.
- Obviously no possibilities to go to the field. We have therefore very little information on the situation out Pristina.
- Tim is not answering to journalists' calls since last night. Too many, no more journalists in Pristina, too high risks to be expelled by authorities.
- Bas will take over, and will move from Barcelona to Brussels on Monday

 Somebody from NATO actually called me to let me know that the bombings were going to begin within a few days. He didn't actually use those exact words but that was what he was telling me. I was informed that it would be prudent for MSF to remove our expatriates. It was really to ensure the security of the MSF team. I obviously discussed that with the appropriate people—the OD's, Jean-Marie the International Secretary, and the President of each of the operational sections that were involved. "Should we leave, should we not leave? Should one stay, should another go? What is the right operational decision here?" And we were reacting accordingly; we decided what an appropriate response is.

James Orbinsky, President MSF International Council  
(in English).

 I think NATO was quite bizarre. We had a call before the big evacuation. The guy phoned my office and said with an American accent: "I'm calling from Brussels, I'm from NATO, you guys are going to evacuate with everybody else." He was fairly circumspect with his words. So he said "I just wanted to check where you are." And, I said: "You're not going to bomb Pristina, are you?" And, then there was just a silence. Then the bombing started and I think the first couple of nights it seemed to be bombing positions outside of Pristina. And then, they put a couple of missiles into the centre, into the police security building by the stadium. The three of us were barricaded in the centre of the house with the windows covered up and everything. We were in contact with the local staff, the Albanians. I think couple of them came just to check and exchange information about the situation. But, then everybody was just in their houses terrified. So we went into town try to speak to the authorities, try to get access. It didn't really go anywhere. We also went to say: "Hey, we're to provide assistance to you, we would like to get access to Drenica, but we recognise that the bombing is going on and you have casualties and medical needs." I had been asking them: "Can you guarantee our departure to Macedonia?" It was the quickest way out. I think two hours you could be down there. And, up to that point they said "yes, you'd be able to leave." After, they hit the centre of Pristina, particularly the security building. Our main contact, the security building guy was actually in the basement and injured his arm. And then they said we couldn't go anywhere. Things had been turned up a level. So, that was when ourselves and ICRC (who had some of their accommodation attacked), moved to the Grand Hotel in the centre of town.

Tim Boucher, Coordinator MSF Belgium/France in Kosovo June 1998 to April 1999 (in English).

## MSF BEGINS ITS OPERATIONAL DEPLOYMENT AROUND KOSOVO

**On 29 March, NATO, OSCE, Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro announced the arrival of tens of thousands of Kosovar refugees in countries bordering Kosovo. On 30 March 1999, UNHCR announced that more than 90,000 Albanians had left Kosovo since the beginning of the air strikes, driven out by a systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing. The refugees arriving in Albania and Montenegro confirm that they had been subjected to violent attacks.**



'Parties to Conflict Assess Air Strikes,' **AFP** (France), Paris, 29 March 1999 (in French).

### Extract: REFUGEES:

Around 10,000 Kosovar Albanians were headed to the Albanian border Monday afternoon, joining more than 60,000 refugees from the Serbian province who had already reached the border, according to Albanian Prime Minister Pandeli Majko. "The situation is catastrophic and more refugees keep coming," he told AFP. Most of the refugees are in the Kukes region (north-eastern Albania). According to the OSCE, 70,000 Kosovars have arrived in northeastern Albania since Saturday and 'waves' of refugees continue to flood in. According to UNHCR, an estimated 30,000 Kosovars have arrived in the Kukes region in northern Albania since Saturday afternoon, but the exodus continues. Some 4,000 an hour are arriving in Albania, according to NATO.

The government of Montenegro reports that 10,000 refugees had arrived by week's end in the Pec region (western Kosovo) in addition to the 25,000 already there. Montenegro which, with Serbia, forms Yugoslavia, was already sheltering 20,000 refugees from Kosovo before the start of the NATO air strikes. Between 15,000 and 20,000 Kosovar refugees are heading toward Macedonia, according to a statement by Macedonian Foreign Minister Aleksander Dimitrov in Berlin on Monday.

The Romanian government said it had taken measures to receive between 3,000 and 4,000 Kosovars. Italy and the Czech Republic have indicated that they are also willing to receive refugees. According to NATO, more than half a million Kosovar Albanians have been displaced within the province since the beginning of Serbian operations to repress the population. [...]

"The NATO bombings have caused about a thousand civilian deaths in Yugoslavia," said Russian Defence Minister Igor Sergeev on Monday, as quoted by the Itar-Tass news service. The number of civilian deaths is 10 times higher

than the number of soldiers killed in the NATO bombings, said the Russian minister. Yugoslav Information Minister Milan Komnenic declared in Belgrade that the bombings of the past few days had resulted in 'numerous civilian casualties' and major damage. NATO has not provided any report or estimate on this issue.



'Hundreds of thousands of people may flee, says [UN]HCR,' **AFP** (France), Geneva, 30 March 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

More than 90,000 ethnic Albanians have left the Yugoslav province since the beginning of the NATO strikes six days ago. This influx brings to 550,000, or more than one-quarter of the total population of Kosovo, the number of people driven from their homes, both refugees and displaced persons, since the beginning of the conflict between independence fighters and Serbian forces one year ago, said UNHCR spokesperson Kris Janowski. "We're witnessing a very, very serious crisis of refugees" fleeing toward Albania, Montenegro and Macedonia, he said. Albania has taken in more than 60,000 people over the past few days, Montenegro, 20,000, and Macedonia, 9,000.

"People continue to flee to these countries by the hour. The influx could reach tens to hundreds of thousands of new refugees, depending on how the situation develops in Kosovo", said Janowski. People are often arriving exhausted, traumatized and terrified, he added. "We think that a very well-organised campaign of ethnic cleansing is underway, with people chased from their homes while the borders are left open so that they can leave. A situation of *fait accompli* is being created", said Janowski.

UNHCR, which evacuated its personnel from Kosovo last week before NATO's military intervention, has no first-hand reports of the atrocities attributed to the Serbs, he said. "The scenario that is emerging (from refugee accounts) is a scenario of expulsions and fighting, but also of acts of violence unrelated to the fighting, committed by paramilitary groups that are basically chasing people from their homes throughout the region," said Janowski. Refugees arriving in Macedonia do not talk about having witnessed atrocities and have often been able to bring with them their personal belongings. However, those reaching Montenegro and Albania report scenes of expulsion and violence and have been able to bring very few personal effects, according to the UNHCR spokesperson. "We agree with NATO that we're facing the worst humanitarian disaster (in Europe) since the war in Bosnia (1992-1995)," he said.

**The last MSF volunteers were leaving Pristina for Belgrade. The Belgian and French sections were dis-**

**seminating a press release announcing MSF's departure from Kosovo.**

The Dutch section was undertaking an exploratory mission to Macedonia. The French section was sending a team without visas to Montenegro and sending volunteers to assess the situation in Albania and Macedonia. The Belgian section was sending a team from Brussels to the Kukes region in Albania, after attempting to reposition the one that was already present in the southern part of the country. The directors of operations of the different sections were trying to coordinate operations and integrate volunteers from the Greek section, which had been making repeated requests to be included in missions to the region.



'MSF Leaves Kosovo,' **Press release**, MSF Belgium, 30 March 1999 (in French). **D84**

#### Extract:

Brussels, 30 March 1999. Yesterday evening, three Médecins Sans Frontières volunteers arrived in Belgrade from Pristina. The team, made up of a doctor, nurse and head of mission, left Pristina because the high level of insecurity in and around the city and the growing hostility toward foreigners was making their work impossible. MSF warehouses in northern Pristina and Pec were reportedly looted. Eight MSF volunteers left Pristina last week. They are currently in Skopje, Macedonia. Over the past few months, the MSF team had set up mobile clinics and provided daily medical aid to the displaced populations. These services ended 10 days ago. For the time being, there are no foreign humanitarian personnel in Kosovo. MSF will do everything it can to return as quickly as possible. MSF has teams in Albania and Macedonia and is expanding its activities in those countries.



'**Press briefing** – Médecins Sans Frontières Evacuated its Personnel from Kosovo Yesterday Evening and is Focusing its Efforts on the Province's Border Regions.' MSF France, 30 March 1999 (in French). **D85**

#### Extract:

Late yesterday afternoon, Médecins Sans Frontières had to evacuate its personnel from Pristina, Kosovo. The growing insecurity forced the last team of Médecins Sans Frontières still operating in the province to withdraw to Belgrade. The increasing hostility to foreign nationals prevented any movement in the area and made any activity impossible. Moreover, Médecins Sans Frontières supplies stored in northern Pristina and Pec (western Kosovo) were reportedly looted. There is now no international humanitarian organisation remaining in Kosovo. MSF has been working in Kosovo since 1993 and had been providing support to official medical facilities as well as a health care network managed by local associations. Since

the beginning of the military offensive in February 1998, mobile teams have been providing medical services in isolated villages and at sites sheltering people displaced by the fighting, such as Pec, Prizren and Drenica valley. It is estimated that more than 300,000 people had been displaced due to the hostilities and were living in extremely precarious conditions. The exodus of the past few days further worsens the situation of populations that had already suffered greatly during the war.



Press Update: Doctors Without Borders Evacuates from Kosovo - Last Medical Team Withdraws to Belgrade,' **Press release**, MSF USA, 30 March 1999 (in English). **D86** [↗](#)

#### Extract:

Brussels/New York: Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) yesterday made the decision to leave Kosovo. The last team of three members has withdrawn to Belgrade due to the deteriorating security situation in Pristina, where they were based. Increasing hostility toward foreigners made any humanitarian work impossible. The Doctors Without Borders' stocks in warehouses north of Pristina and in the western city of Pec are reported to have been looted. No humanitarian organization is now left working in Kosovo.

Although the team in Pristina was not able to travel outside of Pristina to assess the situation, it was clear from reports that violence in the province had increased. Doctors Without Borders continues to be present in Yugoslavia; teams are currently conducting needs assessments in Montenegro, as well as in neighboring Macedonia. A team of eight international aid workers is preparing to begin aiding the refugees in Albania, and a full charter [cargo airplane] of supplies has been sent. Health care needs already identified include treatment for foot injuries incurred on the long journey from Kosovo, water and sanitation supplies, blankets, and nutritional supplements. Doctors Without Borders will seek to return to Kosovo as soon as possible.



Minutes of the Operations Directors' Teleconference on the Kosovo Crisis, 29 March 1999 (in English). **D87** [↗](#)

#### Extract:

**Kosovo:** MSF (3 staff) decided to evacuate Pristina this morning together with ICRC (19 staff), escorted by the Serbian police in a 7 to 9 car convoy. The convoy was heading towards Belgrade and during the teleconf has passed the Kosovo-Serbia border. The team was stranded in the office, could not get out and assess anything. The local staff does not come to the office, and the stores with drugs and equipment have been looted. No space at all for assessments or assistance, the only ones that had some

possibility were the Yugoslavian Red Cross - until Friday or Saturday (highly political with Mrs Milosevic involved) when they were looted over the weekend and had their cars commandeered.

Some brief telephone contacts between the MSF team in Pristina and the local staff in Pec reported a disastrous situation: houses burned, Arcan-like militia activities, separation of men and women, possible black list for certain wanted people. No direct confirmation. In Pristina, there are 'rumours' of militia-like Serbian activities, setting houses on fire. Situation highly dangerous, no cross border thinkable, no humanitarian space.

**Belgrade-Serbia:** Only 3 local staff for the moment in Belgrade, no expats. MSF B will try to send two expats tomorrow (non-NATO nationality, maybe Russians). Maybe Tim from Pristina will remain in Belgrade once they reach the city. We still have an important stock of drugs and material there, we are in discussion with the Serbian MoH to provide some materials according to needs assessed. For the time being, no possibility of independent direct assessment of bombed sites or whatsoever.

**Macedonia:** Approximately 22,000 refugees, as of now, that go through an IFRC reception center and are settled with families and friends. According to UNHCR-IFRC, if figures go beyond 50,000 external assistance may be needed, but not for the moment. UNHCR with Macedonian authorities seems to have identified potential camp sites if numbers rise. Last Friday, the MSF team went to the border but did not see any refugees. No positioning of material now for MSF, we wait for further developments and info. from the field teams. It seems that the Macedonian authorities could be ready to receive up to 100,000 refugees on their soil before thinking about transferring people to other neighboring countries.

**Montenegro:** Paris has sent two persons on Saturday without visas via Italy and Croatia; they have arrived in Croatia but no more news as of today. Two more persons with visas will join them today. No direct news from inside.

**Albania:** MSF B had a regular programme in Fier (south Albania) but no office in Tirana. The team came from the south today to Tirana and is heading this afternoon to Kukes. Persons will be sent asap via Italy to Tirana to reopen the Tirana office and begin proper monitoring. [...]

**NATO:** Brussels is having regular contacts with them; they more or less encourage MSF not to stay in Serbia-Kosovo. For the time being no positioning of MSF regarding the NATO operations or the situation in general as access, direct evaluation, monitoring, and witnessing is impossible.

**Athens:** Preparation is being made in Greece for a possible flow of refugees to arrive, especially through Macedonia. If it materializes, they will be directly involved. There is a strong wish for more implication and involvement from the Greek section in potential activities in the region.



Everybody understands the concern and has no objection, at the minimum, we should incorporate Greek volunteers into teams. If an operational activity is beginning in Northern Albania, Thierry requested a module to be proposed to Geneva-Athens for this region.

## 2. Decisions:

1. No operational 'share' of the region as of today. In case operational activities begin in a given region, ad hoc discussion and decision will take place. So, for the time being, Brussels for Serbia and Albania, Amsterdam for Macedonia, and Paris for Montenegro - have a monitoring and explo mission and reporting role only.
2. Acute info sharing until further and/or different decision by dirops there will be a daily teleconference among the dirops - next one being tomorrow Tuesday 30th of March at 13:30.
3. Dircoms must propose for tomorrow, an adequate information dispatch system for the MSF network having two functions: collecting daily information from the different regions (directly through field teams and Programme Managers) for reconciliation and preparation of a daily international sitrep to be dispatched to all 19 sections and, attend the dirops teleconf and to take minutes and report orientations from this level to the 19 sections as well. TD to inform the Swiss dircom to organise and propose a system for tomorrow with his colleagues.



**Minutes** of Dirops Teleconference – Kosovo Crisis – 30 March 1999 (in English). **D88**

### Extract:

MSF remains the only humanitarian agency in Serbia, a fact that seems to be appreciated by the Serbian Ministry of Health and there might be some access granted for visiting some structures and support in medicines and material. The climate for foreigners remains difficult in Belgrade. The team still managed to talk with local staff in Pec over the phone but no real freedom of speech.

**Montenegro:** Yesterday evening the team of two without visas got the confirmation from customs and UNHCR that they could cross from Croatia into Montenegro. Info from UNHCR report approximately 20,000 people in Rojave (Mont.) arriving from Pec (Kosovo) with a rate of arrival yesterday around 1,000/hour. Some journalists in Montenegro (BBC) are reporting tension in Podgoriza (Mont.). CRS, UNHCR are in Rojave and it seems ICRC is trying to bring in some trucks from Croatia with difficulties. A small MSF base is being set up in Dubrovnik (Cro.) and some equipment and drugs will be positioned there. It seems that the Montenegro Red Cross is 'controlling' all humanitarian aid in the province. It seems that refugees have no more room in collective reception centers. 3 persons or more [from MSF] will be sent in the coming two days. No direct info as of today's teleconf.

**Macedonia:** 'Only' 3,000 refugees arrived yesterday, [according to] the figures given by the media, TVs about

the refugees in Macedonia - referring to the past two months cumulative figure of 25.000 people. All of them are accommodated in families, friends' houses through a local NGO called 'el Hillal.' Potential collective reception centres have been identified by UNHCR but no significant positioning of materials. MSF expressed its wish to support when and if needed and will preposition material for an estimated 20,000 people. Out of the 6 MSF people in Skopje that were evacuated from Pristina, 2 will stay for potential return to Kosovo and 4 will return to Brussels. 2 persons from Amsterdam are there and will be reinforced by two others. The NGOs locally are on a low visibility path no stickers on vehicles, fragile social balance still exist. [...]

**Press comm:** A short and simple statement on the evacuation from Pristina will be issued from Brussels this afternoon and can be dispatched by all who wish to do it. No plan as of today for further press releases ( [like about] full charters) Tim made a few interviews yesterday evening in Belgrade on the evacuation from Pristina, but low profile, no political statements at all. For the time being no dissemination of field phone numbers to the media, that will be reviewed daily and communicated to the network from the info officers.

**Witnessing:** For all the teams in Albania, Montenegro, and Macedonia, preparation of conditions to collect stories, experiences, and debriefing of refugees have to be of concern, especially for refugees coming from Pec area, even if for the moment, we still have no plan for use of this. Collection and good collection conditions are a must.[...]

**Greece:** Prepares for potential arrival of people on the Macedonian-Greek border, pre-positioning of material will be done this week. It is necessary that proactive efforts be made by ops centers to integrate Greek volunteers in the operations sites in the three regions for 'appropriation' [in order that they feel fully involved] purposes.

**Paris:** In order to 'confirm' the global picture in the region (contingency plans, figures), Paris decided to send 1 person to Macedonia and two persons to Albania, but not for operational purposes.




*They said: "You can't go that way to Macedonia." Of course what we learned afterwards is that the road down to Macedonia was full of people forced out of their houses. And, there were paramilitary checkpoints where they were abusing people; taking their money, etc. They could have led us through but, of course, they didn't want us to witness the horror that was going on. We went out the other way through Mitrovica towards Belgrade... We stayed a couple of days in Belgrade. The other guys left for Hungary. But, then you had the bombs in central Belgrade as well. We went to the Hilton a couple of days and there was not much else that we could do. I went to one coordina-*


tion meeting. WHO and a couple of people were still there, but everybody was just packing up to leave. And, I caught a bus to Hungary and flew out to Budapest.

I think that MSF had already started deploying in Albania and Macedonia. The rest of the Kosovo team had already gone south. Once they were in Macedonia, then things started to sort of break up into [separate missions for] France, Belgium, Holland etc. There was so much to do. And, those guys, the former team from, Kosovo stayed there. I think that sort of mounting tension over several months had stolen [exhausted] everybody. I went back up to Brussels and then we started to see things very clearly. And, I saw these people who'd been put on the train from Pristina down to Brazda and there was one of our local nurses there. She was at the border and she'd come across into Macedonia, and she was doing an interview for the BBC. She just looked so different, so destroyed, describing how they'd been forced out of their houses. And, the whole scale of the thing, the systematic sort of Serb operation was becoming clear. We all got it wrong. We've missed it. On our side, we'd seen this happen within Kosovo. There was already this pattern of internal displacement. We should have foreseen. We should have been positioning people in Albania and Macedonia. IMC or IRC had been positioned; they got their accreditation in Macedonia. I guess we didn't imagine that there would be such violence, tens of thousands of people forced across borders. It's such a horrible image. These trains were like some Stalinist or WWII German kind of manifestation, and maybe we didn't believe people could be that nasty.

Tim Boucher, Coordinator MSF Belgium/France in Kosovo June 1998 to April 1999 (in English).


 We were slow off the mark because people didn't believe the strikes would occur, even though there had been many warnings. This is also UNHCR's argument - the lack of instant readiness. The strikes began right before a weekend, and we lost the weekend. But still, I wonder why we weren't ready and on the border right away. At that time we already had a long-term mission in southern Albania. I well remember saying: "Why didn't we send in a team right away? There would have been five people there; it would have made a difference." But they arrived too late. And UNHCR did the same thing.

Jean-Marie Kindermans, Secretary General, MSF International Council (in French).


 At the beginning, we were counting on the team that was already in Albania, but that didn't really work. They were people who didn't have experience in emergency situations. We knew there was a problem, but we underestimated how quickly things would develop, and also, in the specific case of Albania, we were too compliant with the authorities in general. So we sent a team on an exploratory mission. It wasn't easy. It created some tension, because the kind of intervention required was contrary to what the government wanted. It posed some risk to the

existing project, which was a project to support the hospital in Fier, and this meant maintaining very good relations with the authorities. And suddenly, another MSF team arrived needing to take immediate action, without taking the time to reach agreements or obtain permits.


Vincent Janssens, Director of Operations, MSF Belgium (in French).

 I think MSF made an operational error by not offering to send the team members leaving Kosovo [onwards] to Albania. We didn't have the logistical support or the volunteers. Six of us arrived with a small seaplane. It took time to set things up. Actually, if the team had left Kosovo with vehicles, and if we had sent it on to Albania, we might have got to a better operational position in fewer days. It's possible to go from Macedonia to Albania. You have to go through the south. I've done it before. But they told me: "We thought the team members had been strongly affected by what they'd been through and we didn't want to put them back into this context, we preferred to bring them out." But I talked to the expats themselves. They felt terribly uncomfortable about leaving the area. They just wanted to go back and help the people they were seeing on television every night, people they had been living with.

Christopher Stokes, Coordinator, MSF Belgium, in Albania (in French).

 The Belgian section took its whole team out of Kosovo, while IMC and MDM kept their teams in the area, and returned to Albania much more quickly. During a teleconference between sections, it was announced that Gabriel and Stephan were prepared to go and help out the team in Albania. In fact, we arrived in Albania a few hours before Christopher Stokes and the fresh Kosovo volunteers who had been back to Brussels. We met the team from the Belgian section, which was working on a long-term programme at a hospital in southern Albania. That team was totally focused on its long-term project and was unable to go into emergency mode. There was no transportation planned to get to the border where the refugees were. Most of the vehicles had already been taken by other NGOs or journalists. As a result, we arrived long after the other NGOs. We joined Christopher's team and gradually made our way toward the border, taking taxis. It was all rather complicated. We helped the teams do explorations and set up treatment centers.

Stephan Oberreit, MSF France exploratory mission officer to Albania (in French).

 We also decided to send an exploratory mission to Albania and Macedonia, to get our own overview of

the situation. I had a bit of a disagreement with my colleagues, the directors of operations. They asked me: "What are you going to do with two volunteers in Macedonia and Albania — especially in Albania?" I told them "I'm sending people to find out what's really going on." Stephan Oberreit and Gabriel Salazar were the ones who went to Albania. They were working with the team from MSF Belgium, helping them get their emergency operation under way, and we in Paris were able to have an overview of what was happening during the crisis, thanks to people who's capacities we knew — people we could trust.

Jean-Hervé Bradol, Director of Operations,  
MSF France (in French).



We took the political decision not to work in the camps, because we didn't want to work with the military. We chose to work in Montenegro, because we knew NATO was not operating there and that would avoid confusion and allow us to feel a little more at home. We weren't going into Albania either, because a team from MSF Belgium was already working there. Gabriel and Stéphan had started working with that team, so we were able to stay to reinforce their numbers, as the Spanish section would do after that. But we would be located next to the camp managed by the Saudi army or some other army. In Macedonia too, we made a firm decision not to work in the camps. I stayed in contact with Montenegro and decided to send an exploratory mission. At that time, Croatia and Montenegro were signing trade agreements. People I knew inside Montenegro told me: "Give it a try, you can get in without a visa via Croatia." We tried, and this time, instead of sending them via Belgrade like the first team, we sent them all through Croatia. The first exploratory team went to Croatia and then on to Montenegro at the end of March when the strikes had already begun. They hesitated. They called me from Croatia because Montenegro was experiencing a lot of disturbances; there were federal forces everywhere. Their exploration didn't go well. We very quickly sent more people. At that point, refugees from Kosovo arrived from the Pec region, and we started our intervention at Rozaje.

Graziella Godain, Deputy Programme Manager,  
MSF France (in French).

**Despite efforts to integrate Greek volunteers into MSF teams intervening in the crisis in Kosovo, the heads of the Greek section argued that they should be more involved in operations in the Balkans because of their geographic proximity and the pressure they were under from Greek society. However, the operational autonomy of the Greek section had never been accepted by the MSF movement. After a number of unsuccessful**

**attempts with other sections, for the previous year it had been expanding its activities through an operational centre that was run jointly with MSF Switzerland and headed up by that section's director of operations. According to the president of MSF Greece at the time - who was interviewed but denied that his comments are reproduced verbatim - the MSF movement feared that letting the Greek section become operational would set an example that would result in a multiplication of operational sections. He acknowledges having done 'the forcing' with those responsible for the different sections to send volunteers to Macedonia and Albania.**



**Email exchange** between, Konstantina Nikolopoulou, member of the Board of MSF Greece, James Orbinsky, President MSF International, Jean-Marie Kindermans, General Secretary MSF International, and Members of the IC, 1-2 April 1999 (in English). [D89](#)

#### Extract:

Dear friends,

The recent situation in Kossifopedio makes up a big and complex crisis which, unfortunately, does not seem to end soon. To respond with results in this humanitarian tragedy, MSF needs to act immediately and with coordination in international level. It would be unacceptable for our organisation as a whole and the populations that are suffering, to undergo once more, the consequences of internal malfunctioning.

Therefore, it is necessary to define without delay, a clear procedure for the coordination of the different sections of MSF in the area of Kosovo. It is also necessary for the Greek section, which is de facto implicated in this crisis, to have an active role. This concerns the circulation of the information, the funding and most of all the engagement of expats.

Konstantina Nikolopoulou, member of the Board of MSF Greece

Dear Board of MSF Greece:

Firstly, thank you for your letter of March 31, which I received this morning (see copy below). In your letter, you rightly identify that the crisis underway in the Balkans is of major humanitarian and political significance, and that an effective and coordinated response is required of MSF at an international level. You also say that it is necessary to define, without delay, a clear procedure for the co-ordination of the different sections of MSF in the area of Kosovo.

Finally, you say that it is necessary for the Greek Section, which is de facto implicated in this crisis, to have an active role. This concerns the circulation of information, funding and most of all the engagement of expats. A clear procedure for the co-ordination of the different sections of MSF is in place, and has been in place for over one week. At this time, MSF Belgium, Holland and


France are active in Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro with exploratory missions and operational activities. In Kosovo proper, there is an active effort to re-enter via either Belgrade or surrounding regions. MSF Switzerland is coordinating daily teleconferences among all operational centres (which have been taking place daily for over one week, and which will continue).

MSF Spain is today, preparing a draft analysis regarding a possible public position that MSF can or should take regarding the ongoing humanitarian issues and crisis. This will be reviewed by all operations directors and general directors when ready, and an appropriate decision made. Finally, there is a daily report of both the teleconference and joint situation report going to all offices in the MSF movement, including MSF Greece. Teams on the ground are also sharing information, resources and expatriates. Thus, there is at this time, a clear, transparent and effective system of coordination for the movement in dealing with the crisis.

Regarding MSF Greece, and its need to have an active role: I spoke with Odysseus Boudouris (President of MSF Greece) on Sunday March 28, on Monday March 29, and on Wednesday March 31, to review MSF Greece's perceptions. I discussed these with various section presidents, general directors and operational directors. At this time, MSF Greece has an active role with three expatriates working with MSF Belgium in Albania, and two expatriates who are today conducting an exploratory mission in Skopje under the auspices of MSF Holland.

All sections of MSF - as a humanitarian movement - are de facto implicated in this crisis. All sections in the movement are looking for ways to place both private and institutional funds that are available for them. As well, all sections are deeply aware of the need to remain focused on our humanitarian objectives and to avoid these being used by any party to the conflict for their own political purposes. This is, as always a difficult challenge; [...]


James Orbinski, President, MSF International Council

 I learned about MSF in 1979 when I was attending secondary school I was in France. I saw them on TV, and I wrote down the address and started writing to them. In 1981, I went back to Greece to go to university. I was living in Athens, and attended the MSF General Assembly every year in France. Then I started going to the Belgian and Dutch sections' General Assemblies. By 1988, I was a doctor, and I went to El Salvador on a very political mission. I knew all the leaders of MSF and I kept telling them we needed to create an MSF section in Greece. After the MSF France General Assembly in 1989, they said to me: "MSF Greece? All by yourself? What will we do in Greece?" And they gave me four or five pieces of advice: "The medical community needs to be informed about it; you need to find volunteers who will go into the field; you need to get media exposure so that people know about you. You're on your own - see what you can do." So I spent two years going to universities and speaking to medical associations. I found vol-

unteers and sent them out with MSF France. Gradually, we developed a group of four or five people with MSF training and experience. I talked to the media, as did the doctors who joined us. And in May 1990, the International Council of MSF gave us the go-ahead. There were five of us.

In 1994, after the Belgian and Dutch veto [at the International Council, the Belgian and Dutch sections voted against giving the Greek section operational autonomy, and the Spanish section was given responsibility for its operations], I thought: "Five years of stagnation! And we could end up going through another five. That's it, I want to leave." And I started getting ready to leave. In 1995, I found someone for the position of executive director and was looking for someone to be president. But, the situation was so bad at the time that no one was willing to take the position: "We can't work with people from outside the country. They set up roadblocks and veto our decisions.' Things weren't going very well with the Spanish; they weren't progressing very well because they were facing their own crisis. And we wanted our own operations too. So we were continually at loggerheads. We had had enough. Finally, I chose Odysseas as a candidate for president. I said: "Here's a guy who will give them what [they asked] for, he'll really let them have it."

Sotiris Papaspyropoulos, Honorary President,  
MSF Greece (in French).


 Unlike the US or Japanese sections, which were created to raise funds, MSF Greece wasn't founded as a result of an external impetus. It was created by former volunteers in Sotiris' kitchen. Historically, they had a certain legitimacy; they set up their office. Their desire to be operational was a problem for everyone. The French had tried to include them [in their section], as had the Spanish. At the time, they had set criteria for allowing them to become operational, thinking that they would never achieve them. But they had achieved them, so as far as they were concerned, it was legitimate for them to become an operational centre. They kept on fighting for that. It was highlighted when Philippe Biberson [President of MSF France from 1994 to 2000] declared that all sections were meant, eventually, to become operational. I remember that Odysseas had put a copy of that statement up in his office.

So at that time, they undertook operations under another name. They had created an artificial NGO that was independent of MSF. And, they were conducting operations that they funded under a different name, in Palestine and in Georgia, for example. When I proposed a common operational centre for MSF Switzerland and MSF Greece, I went to a meeting in Brussels with the general directors who were to approve the Swiss section's new supervisory role with the Greek section. Eric Gomaere, the Executive Director of MSF Belgium at the time, was a bit cautious. He said to me: "I'll go along with this set-up. But we've had quite a time with the Greeks. So if you get a sense that things are about to go off the rails, be sure to tell us."


I had some sympathy for those guys: they were fighters, and they'd set up their own association. For the first few

months, I believed in what they were doing because they were motivated. I went to Athens one week out of every month for eight months to try to get things going. I had tried to get some people from my network to go, but that didn't work. I couldn't find any volunteers to go and work in Athens. I became less and less sure about their cause. I wanted to put them in charge of managing the programmes in Bulgaria and Liberia. But that would mean creating a real desk with reliable people. I couldn't find a programme head. There were internal conflicts everywhere. Even within MSF Switzerland I was having problems, because they didn't want to transfer any programmes to Athens. The further along we got, the more I realized that it wasn't working. When the crisis erupted in Kosovo, Odysseas started putting a lot of pressure on me: "You know, it's right next to us, it really involves us ... No one is more guilty than anyone else... we have to be visible for Greek society," etc. I, in turn, put a lot of pressure on the Belgians to include Greek volunteers in their teams in Kosovo. Then we gave them the opportunity to finance MSF Belgium's operations in the Balkan region. After that, I had to divert a cargo plane to Thessalonica that was heading from Brussels to Pristina so that we could take photos of it to provide publicity for MSF in Greece. It was at the limit of what I could defend in terms of operational efficiency. But it was never enough for Odysseas. I was constantly getting this pressure, these demands, especially from him, regarding the visibility of the Greek section in the Kosovo crisis, to improve their position in Greece. He would argue, for example: "MDM Greece is there."

Thierry Durand, Director of Operations MSF Switzerland/MSF Greece Operational Centre (in French).

 We had known it was coming for a very long time. There had also been discussions around the intervention in Albania; they wanted to be in all parts of the Balkans. From our point of view, the Greek section always took a position that seemed to correspond to that of Greek society, prompting them to provide assistance to people with whom they had more immediate ties.

Jean-Marie Kindermans, Secretary General, MSF International (in French).

 I went to Skopje in an MSF vehicle with a volunteer midwife. I was going to get in touch with the other MSF sections. I found some Dutch people, logisticians I had already got to know in Burundi, and I participated in the first meetings to see what we could do. It was an absolute disaster. They had lost two or three babies during the night. I had a Greek interpreter who lived in Skopje. He was an old family friend. Then I went to Tetovo to assess the situation and needs. I gave all my information

to MSF Greece and MSF Holland. Then I went back to Athens. All Greece had been informed that I don't know how many Greek NGOs were in Kosovo, in Skopje, here and there. But the biggest Greek NGOs weren't there. MSF Greece was in Skopje and also in Albania, but through volunteers who were working with teams from other sections.

Antonis Rigas, Logistician, MSF Greece (in French).

## MSF STARTS COLLECTING EYEWITNESS STATEMENTS FROM REFUGEES

The French section's Kosovo crisis cell decided to begin collecting information from refugees in order to understand why they were fleeing and adapt our operations accordingly. On March 30 1999, the plan was adopted by all the operations directors. A legal advisor from MSF France was put in charge of coordinating the survey, and she was to work with a representative of Epicentre, MSF's epidemiology satellite, to develop the methodology. During their daily teleconferences, the operations directors and programme managers discussed the conditions for a possible intervention by MSF in Kosovo. A communications officer was sent to Macedonia.



**Minutes** from Thursday Teleconference, Ciara Shannon, MSF Brussels, April 1<sup>st</sup> 1999 (in English). [D90](#)

**Extract:**  
Greece

Antonis Rigas is touring sites in Northern Greece where it is believed that refugees will go. Need to confirm whether or not MSF should go back into Kosovo. Amongst "callers," there was a split feeling; some think that it is an important thing to establish relations with Serbian authorities as this would be a way of portraying impartiality. However, others felt that despite this positive intention at the moment there is no point taking such a security risk. The timing of MSF re-entry into Kosovo is fundamental for future actions.

Conclusion: An agreement must be reached by everyone. Overall consensus for MSF to clarify action and strategy. On Friday, a press officer will be dispatched to collect stories and next week stories will be collected from Macedonia. François Saulnier [Legal advisor MSF France] will be asked to decide methodology of story collection.



'Information Gathering on Refugees in the Balkans,' **Email** from Françoise Saulnier MSF France Legal Advisor, 2 April 1999 (in French). [D91](#)

### Extract:

Please pass this information collection form for Kosovo refugees to the field teams. The goal of this information gathering process is to provide MSF with a better understanding of the situation faced by this population. It is important to know what people have been through in order to understand what they need. Refugees have fled under conditions that vary depending on the region, group, and departure dates. It is important to get a better understanding of their stories in order to adapt our programmes to the precarious situation they face and the trauma they are suffering from [...].

This work is also essential to provide MSF with independent information that we can use when we make public statements, in a climate of disinformation and propaganda. Information gathering must therefore be conducted in a transparent way in the field, while protecting the confidentiality of the refugees' stories. All the individual pieces of information will go directly to MSF. They will be analysed (at headquarters) in order to obtain an overview of the various refugee groups with regard to:

- Sex ratios
- Conditions under which they left their homes (were they deported or did they flee?)
- The specific experiences of the population in the different regions of Kosovo.

The sheet will be used as an interview guide. Interviews will be recorded on blank paper, using the question numbers from the sheet. The family names and given names of those interviewed will be recorded on a separate document, along with the corresponding interview number (or initials).



*When the crisis began, we were very well aware that we were involved in a propaganda situation, in a war our countries were involved in. Graziella had worked in Bosnia, and I had begun in 1991 with Vukovar, so we knew the whole story. We remembered that in this region, atrocities aren't just the products of people's imagination. And we were very much aware of the possibility that people would try to feed us misinformation and manipulate us. We wanted to be sure to have as much of our own information as possible, information we ourselves had gathered so that we could be more or less certain about what was happening. From the time the strikes began, when the population movements started, MSF had already positioned resources in preparation for its operations. I proposed that we set up an information gathering programme with the people who were on the move so that we could understand why they were moving, and what kind of violence they had been subjected*

*to in the interior. We were well aware that the Serbs would claim that people were moving because of the strikes. But there is also such a thing as mass panic, which we are very familiar with. So we didn't want to go in with any preconceived ideas, or assume the worst, and then set about to convince ourselves that the worst had taken place. Nor did we want to underestimate things that might be happening on a large scale, knowing that we wouldn't have access to Kosovar territory for a while.*

*So, we decided to immediately set up an information gathering system so that we could be as responsive as possible in terms of assistance. We didn't know what people needed, but we knew that a humanitarian circus was shaping up. Right away, we started thinking about methodology: exactly what type of information should we gather? How? From whom? What was relevant? What kind of information were we not interested in? How could we make sure our information was reliable, cross-check it, and end up with something of sufficient quantity and quality? We had already done a little work with Epicentre, our epidemiology satellite, on Kibeho<sup>7</sup> in 1994, and on tracking Rwandan refugees in Congo in 1997<sup>8</sup> to cross-check retrospective mortality and testimony collection methods, with smaller samples.*

*Vincent Brown from Epicentre and I decided to do an epidemiological study, although the objectives of the study had very little to do with medicine. We made up an epidemiological questionnaire. We set up a mapping system. We would ask a standard set of questions to a certain number of people. Then, with every tenth person interviewed, we would go further into their family history. We had learned from experience not to accept stories of violations that were told to us spontaneously, but to choose the people we interviewed, and not to ask them to tell us about all the atrocities they had seen, but just to tell us the story of their own families. Otherwise, if 100,000 people see a dead body on the side of the road, you end up with 100,000 dead bodies! At the same time, this method allowed us to deal with people in a more human, less sensationalised way. It also gave more credibility to the facts than an individual story would. Because we could also find plenty of tragic stories just by going out into the streets of Paris at night — enough to fill a report — but those stories wouldn't be representative of what a given population had experienced. So we couldn't just take any stories we heard. We needed to have a sample that was representative, randomly selected, etc. We went into the transit center, divided it into 20 by 20 squares, and estimated how many people there were per 20 by 20 square. If there were 30, for example, we would decide to take 1 in 5. And from these people selected at random on the 20 by 20 squares, we would get something like*

7. In April 1995, at least 4000 displaced Rwandans were massacred in the camp of Kibeho by the troops of the Rwandan Patriotic Army (of the new Rwandan Regime), in the presence of UN peacekeepers and an MSF team. See 'The violence of the new Rwandan regime'. MSF Speaking Out. Laurence Binet. 2004.

8. From November 1996 to the summer of 1997 at least 200,000 Rwandan refugees were hunted and massacred in the forests of Zaire, then Congo, by the rebel forces of Laurent-Désiré Kabila, with the support of the Rwandan Patriotic Army. Throughout this exodus, MSF tried to provide assistance to these refugees and to speak out about their fate - facts that were denied by the international community. See: 'The hunting and killing of Rwandan refugees in Zaire-Congo: 1996-1997'. MSF Speaking Out. Laurence Binet. 2004.

a representative sample. If we just interviewed the people who were waiting in line at the health center, we would only have people who were injured, which would not be representative. Or if we only chose the obstetric emergency group, we would only have women who had had miscarriages, but that wouldn't mean that the whole population of Kosovo had had miscarriages!

I didn't approach this strictly as a legal expert, nor did Vincent approach it strictly as an epidemiologist. What brought us together wasn't our professions, but our work with MSF — the fact that we could see what MSF needed and we thought that with our professions, we could make a contribution by working together. Legal people are quite used to turning to medical experts when dealing with legal medicine and when medico-legal reports are required. Law requires evidence, and evidence is scientific. So the two approaches are really quite compatible. Epidemiologists want very short yes-or-no questions, which limits the risks associated with interpreting and reading the results. They want results that can be translated into tables and graphs. So they aren't too keen on questions that give more narrative answers. This is perfectly legitimate, but in the case of the refugees from Kosovo, these risks were negligible. Our objective was not to produce tables and graphs, so it worked quite well. It was a blend of techniques that was best suited to the type of results we were looking for.

We proposed the project to the other sections, explaining that if the survey was done everywhere using the same format; it would provide us with an overall view of the situation. Everyone agreed that there was a problem with regard to operational information, that it was a very large-scale phenomenon, and that since the people going to all three different places were coming from the same population, it would make sense to use the same tools to get an overall view. The Belgians said: "We've got Diane who's about to head out to Albania; can she do the questionnaire with Françoise?" Katrien Coppens from HAD in Amsterdam said to me, 'OK, I'll go ahead in Macedonia.'" Everyone went to the field with plans for collecting information.

Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF Legal Advisor,  
(in French).

When you arrive at an emergency operation, you have objectives to meet. Within the day, you have to accomplish a certain number of vaccinations and set up your dispensary. Also, the patients, the refugees, the members of the population you're working with, tell you bits of stories about what has happened to them, and you are trying to find out, too. In the course of a consultation, you happen to get part of a story, and often it involves extreme violence. You knew things like that were happening - that's why you came to help - but up till now, it was something fairly abstract in your mind. And all of a sudden, it isn't abstract any more, it's a person telling their story, and it makes a strong impact on your mind. It makes a huge emotional impact, and you build a lot on the foundation of that emotion. But how representative is that emotion? You can't be everywhere at once; you can't see all points of view at

the same time. The people on the other side have suffered a lot too, and if you just focus on your emotions, you're liable to become biased. So you have to try to keep in mind how representative your emotions are, and build up a picture that includes a range of points of view. When your view is based on a few anecdotes, it's not the same as when it's based on over 50% of the people involved. For some kinds of events, it's really crucial to know how widespread they are within a group. Otherwise, you build all your reasoning on the basis of information that's extremely fragmentary, and consequently biased.

This is where it's important to be a little methodical. There are survey methods that allow you to deduce proportions, using the rules of mathematics to ensure that the results are valid. You need to have the decency to follow the rules of internal consistency provided by mathematics, and not make the numbers say things that, according to the rules, they can't say. Then, using this information that has been built up, you can go on to the next step. For example, if 30% of the population group you are working with is not receiving assistance, you can go to the people who are distributing food and shelter and say: "These are our patients - we're trying to look after them." If they have to sleep out in the rain all night and they aren't getting anything to eat, that makes it even more difficult. If we want to give them proper assistance, they don't just need to be given pills, they also need food to eat, water they can drink, shelter over their heads, etc. Then the question immediately comes back: where are all these patients you're talking about? How many are there?' And if we don't produce information that has some kind of basis, with specific locations, dates and proportions, your request will be ignored... We try to work to improve the quality of assistance, so we use what we consider to be the best tools for improving it. In our culture, in our society, that's how we put together information. Otherwise, people don't accept it. They don't understand it and it makes no impact. It's a statistical survey approach applied to our field of work; there's nothing unusual about this in modern society.

I think it was essential to understand whether people were fleeing, and exactly what was happening to civilians. Were these people actually running from NATO's air strikes, or were they running from something else? On the one hand there was NATO's propaganda, and on the other hand there was the Serbian propaganda. NATO's was much more powerful and was discussed much more frequently in Western languages. And, we still had a certain instinctive wariness that had carried over from the way information had been organised during the Gulf War. So before making any statements one way or the other, we wanted to build up our own picture of the events, so that we wouldn't be taken in by the propaganda. That was the objective of this work. Brigitte (Vasset, MSF France Director of Operations from 1989 to 1997) really trained us to feel 100% responsible for what we do. It's hard to see how we could genuinely assume this responsibility, and account for the quality of what we do, if we delegate all the responsibility for gathering information to someone else, acting simply as providers of material assistance. So I encouraged my fellow operations directors to do the same thing. At our meeting, it became clear that

the majority were in favor of this. It would certainly lead to a survey report, but nothing was decided as to what would be done with the report after it was produced.

Jean-Hervé Bradol, Director of Operations,  
MSF France (in French).

Together with Françoise, the legal advisor who coordinated the survey at head office, we asked ourselves how epidemiology could help reinforce these witness statements and capture the prevalence of the phenomena reported amongst the population. We started with nine questions that typically provide a backdrop to "human rights" questionnaires and adapted them: what type of violence? where did they leave from? Then we came to the conclusion that three of these were quantifiable. Our surveys were carried out based on a convenience sample of two hundred families. We used fairly representative epidemiological techniques, but it remains a convenience sample. So we will never be able to say that it reflects the situation of a majority of the population. It was carried out with great urgency and was quite limited. It was a first. And I think it was a success, because we were able to extract one piece of information. It was important to know what state they were in on arrival, with or without papers, how long they had been there for, their reasons for fleeing. It's true that in our survey there were not many questions on needs. But operations also needed answers to a few questions and trusted me. I have experience and I chose three or four questions concerning blankets, access to food etc... When the survey was carried out there was still a great deal of solidarity on the part of the population who provided shelter to those displaced and it didn't look as if it was going to be a problem. However, we realised that there were break-downs in the distribution of bread, that in the places they were sheltered people had less than one square meter each. It couldn't go on like that. There was also no point in asking if they needed nappies for the babies: everywhere smelt of urine. Things like that became apparent informally, during the visits. There was no need for a survey to find it out.

Vincent Brown, epidemiologist, Epicentre (in French)

I think it was mainly due to the fact that there was no more room for us at all in Kosovo. I think the idea of assessing the refugees' situation came up spontaneously because people had started to flee. In Albania, we had already posted people at the border, and they had begun to see refugees arriving. So from there, something needed to be done, not just counting people and seeing where they were going, but also finding out what they had experienced. What should we be expecting? Were there many wounded? What had they been through? Where had damage occurred? We still hoped to go back to Kosovo

once the situation had stabilised a little, so we needed to know where we would need to explore. I think it happened fairly spontaneously, and we were able to get beyond the tension and agree: "OK, so we're all interested in collecting information on what is happening to people." I'm not sure now who took the initiative, but I think we were all in agreement.

When we did it, our main concern was to find out what we could do on the ground. If we could no longer help people where they were, where they were being deported to, the least we could do was to try to gather some information. At that time, I don't think we had really anticipated using the testimonial approach. It was important to collect information, but we hadn't given much thought to how it might be used.

Vincent Janssens, Director of Operations,  
MSF Belgium (in French).

We had to be careful, get away from the 'good Samaritan' attitude; understand where we were and what was happening. Even before the report was published, we knew what would come out of all of this. At the meetings of the operations directors, we had some pretty serious discussions about that. We decided, by a vote of five to three, to characterise what was happening as a deliberate policy of deportation, and thus as crimes against humanity. The Dutch and Spanish abstained. We weren't inside Kosovo any more; we had access to people outside. We weren't even in Belgrade any more. To find out what was happening in Kosovo when we no longer had anyone there to give us information, we had to rely on people who were coming from there. And listening to them, we became convinced that a crime was being committed.

Thierry Durand, Director of Operations,  
MSF Switzerland/MSF Greece Operational Centre  
(in French).

I wasn't exactly crazy about the idea of sending investigators. It's a method we have used successfully on certain occasions, but it seemed to me that we had been a little more systematic in those cases. I felt that we were getting too caught up in the popular sentiments of the time, which were focused on human rights, to the point that they were taking the place of our focus as a medical aid organisation. In this case, we were frustrated because there wasn't much we could do as aid workers. I think the debate should have taken place at that point.

Philippe Biberson, President, MSF France (in French).



## MSF INSISTS THERE IS NO THING AS A 'HUMANITARIAN' WAR

As an institution, MSF chose not to take a position on the legitimacy of NATO's air strikes; the majority of its directors considered this question to be outside the organisation's scope. However, during the following weeks, the various sections publicly expressed their disagreement with NATO's characterisation of its intervention as a 'humanitarian war'.



'Kosovo Update,' Ciara Shannon, MSF Brussels, 31/03/09 (in English). [D92](#)

### Extract:

Belgrade, Serbia

Context: MSF B teams evacuated from Belgrade, local presence only, i.e. no expats. Tim Boucher (Coordinator) now in Hungary on his way to Brussels.

Communication: MSF B considering making a public declaration to press outlining present situation when Tim arrives in Brussels, this decision has been agreed by local staff in Belgrade.

Action: A need to reconfirm what has been witnessed in Kosovo by local staff; MSF is in a strong position to make a public declaration.

[...] Question: Should MSF take an official position towards NATO? Javier will make a draft of a first proposal...discussion to be held later this week.



*We didn't have a meeting on the bombing, for or against. It was very much that there were phone calls with several people. Informally, there were a lot of discussions among the ODs. I spoke with few people and it was a discussion that was happening in an ongoing way. They were under pressure from either people in their own association or just understanding what was happening in their own societies' public opinion.*

*But in a way, the feeling was that this is not a decision for MSF. We don't have competence in determining military policy. But, we have to anticipate the consequences and we also have to anticipate our role in terms of insuring the protection of civilians in a situation of that kind. I think that's the sense of the discussion at that time. There was a general feeling that this was the right approach.*

*In terms of position on whether or not MSF should be for or against bombing, the general sense was: "This is not for us, it's not ours, we don't have that expertise and nor do we have a formal role in terms of taking a position, supporting one of the belligerents in the conflict at that time."*

James Orbinsky, President,  
MSF International Council (in English).



*There was some debate about this, because within the sections, some members wanted MSF to take a position in favor of the strikes. But we didn't debate the issue very long. People were able to differentiate between their personal positions and those of MSF.*

*There were some who were somewhat opposed to the strikes, like the Spanish, but they were following their traditional stance. In any case, among the operational sections at that time, the Belgians, Dutch, and French, there wasn't much debate about MSF taking a position. There was agreement on the fact that something had to be done to oppose Milosevic.*


Jean-Marie Kindermans, Secretary General,  
MSF International (in French).




*When the bombing started, we were much more concerned about where we would be able to set up our operations than about speaking out against the bombing, which we had anticipated, and which we didn't think left us much room to manoeuvre. The people on the ground realised that there was virtually no room for negotiating. We were having trouble seeing how we could cope with the situation. Every time it seemed as if an agreement or a cease-fire was possible, there would be more provocations. Fundamentally, there was a desire for confrontation, and not just on the Serbian side. We realised that in this conflict, we were perhaps the only ones who didn't want a military confrontation. Right from the beginning, for the Serbs, it was an obvious power play. Without Kosovo, the integrity of the country and the authority to lead it would disappear, so there was a strong fear about the country disintegrating. As a result, it was seen as essential to make a demonstration of force. As for the Albanians, they had clearly opted for the path of violence with the UÇK, not relying on their own forces but on those of NATO.*

*We were well aware that in regard to both Serbo-Albanian relations and the more subtle factors like the latent cold war between Russia and NATO, with American involvement, we didn't know the whole story... What had really been tried? What hadn't been tried? What had been salvaged later? I think that is why we didn't want to take a position. I think we were always very, very clear. We went to talk with the military people here in Brussels. We wanted to tell them that a war can never be humanitarian as such. Did we go far enough in raising this issue publicly? Maybe not. Maybe we didn't raise a loud enough alarm, or maybe we didn't take a strong enough interest in the issue to keep trying. NATO's arguments in favor of the war were always based on the idea that the cause was just, that it was a humanitarian cause. So, maybe we weren't surprised that that argument was used. We didn't find it shocking or surprising. It had been clear that it was coming for a long time...*


Vincent Janssens, Director of Operations,  
MSF Belgium (in French).

 We didn't agree that this war should be characterized as 'humanitarian.' I saw how reticent we were, trying to avoid getting sucked into NATO's propaganda. I didn't believe this war was humanitarian, so I tried not to contribute to their propaganda, to avoid taking their money. I chose to go to Montenegro where NATO wasn't present rather than Albania or Macedonia, where everyone was involved. But, we considered this war to be necessary. We know there are necessary wars. Someone had to oppose Milosevic. We didn't want him to be allowed to commit yet another massacre. As private citizens, we all felt very strongly about this. Overall, within the MSF movement, it was a feeling shared by the majority, including the then President of the International Council, James Orbinsky. In society, there were people who said this war wasn't humanitarian. In Italy, Germany, and Greece, there were pacifist movements that were demanding an end to the air strikes, and some sections of MSF, or parts of sections, joined with them. Our Spanish, Italian and Greek colleagues, and others, certainly, were sucked into a pacifist movement which, in our opinion, played into Milosevic's hands. That was my criticism of the Greek section. We didn't want our position based on the fact that there's no such thing as a humanitarian war only as that would put us into the pacifist camp. At times like that, things move very quickly. Positions are taken that are not particularly nuanced. You have to be on one side or the other. It's not very easy to be in the middle. That was the dilemma we were facing.


Jean-Hervé Bradol, Director of Operations,  
MSF France (in French).

 Internally, we weren't in favor of the use of violence and bombing. We were uncomfortable with the idea of MSF asking for military intervention... it didn't seem to be within MSF's mandate. We didn't think MSF should come out for or against the air strikes. What was extremely annoying was that at our international meetings, MSF directors and leaders were saying, 'that's what's needed, they need to start bombing, Milosevic needs to be taken out, they have to give the Serbs a good pounding.' That's how people were talking — it was not only violent, but also a very Western view, and, in my opinion, biased. We were at war in Europe, and somewhere, our soldiers were fighting. People were thinking both as citizens and as members of a humanitarian organisation. Personally, I was shocked to hear some of the things people were saying. But when NATO decided to intervene, we were extremely scandalised by this idea of a humanitarian war, just as scandalised as the rest of society. We made this clear to our own members and to our donors. Right from the first days, we were aware of the manipulation, and we reacted to it immediately, even before there was a consensus internationally.


Eric Stobbaerts, Executive Director,  
MSF Spain (in French).

 We had an international teleconference at the very beginning of the strikes in which we proposed to make a bigger statement. We said: 'this is not a humanitarian war. NATO is one of the parties in conflict. We should be independent. We should explain what the humanitarian concept is and we should explain specifically that NATO is lying when they say that there is a humanitarian agenda in this war. But, it was not that accepted. It was only the Spanish position. The reaction was very strong: "We have nothing to say about NATO—it's their business." So we did it only with our society. We know that we are not a pacifist organisation but, we were very hard in our position saying: 'this is not a humanitarian issue. And we should be stating that clearly to all of the people. NATO doesn't want to hear that they are not doing this for humanitarian reasons. They say that they do that only for humanitarian reasons. So we want to be very aggressive on that message. There is no war with humanitarian purposes because humanitarianism is a consequence of war. We are not saying anything against the strikes. What we say is that: "They are risking humanitarian space." We were very aggressive against this. The other sections were not against our position but they didn't commit to doing something about it. So we were rebels in that sense here.


Rafa Vila San Juan, Director of Communications,  
MSF Spain (in English).

 At the time, I believed that we shouldn't say anything individually, and that a coherent humanitarian organisation shouldn't give the slightest signal of sympathy or antipathy regarding any conflict. I remember speaking out to try to cool down the pro-intervention statements I was hearing within MSF. Some, perhaps those who had previously been involved in politics and who made a connection between their work with MSF and their political involvement, were more strongly tempted than the others to express them. But deep down, people knew they had to refrain from expressing their opinions about the war. Saying how strongly you disagree with an expression like 'humanitarian war' doesn't do any harm. Maybe in France, where this expression was also being used, it didn't receive so much criticism, or we were less active in criticising it because in the end, there was enough support for the intervention that the expression just went along with it. Yes, it could be seen as propaganda, but then when propaganda is on the right side, it's called communication! So it's all part of the game. Propaganda is always what the others are doing... when we don't like what they're saying!

Rony Brauman, Director of Studies,  
MSF France Foundation (in French).

 In retrospect, I wonder if some people were actually saying: "There's no use discussing it - it suits us, so we won't talk about it." Maybe it was a time when things were going the way we thought they should and frankly MSF was happy about the intervention. It wasn't done in the way we would have liked, but still, we weren't going to go out of our way to speak out against the bombing in Serbia. We might say a few things like: "Be careful not to harm civilians." But frankly, we had what we wanted. We were happy. We were coming out of Somalia where things had gone badly, and Rwanda where nothing had been done at all. We had been badly traumatised by what had happened in Rwanda. So for us, military intervention in Kosovo was a plus. The details of the type of intervention didn't matter, that was like the 'icing on the cake.'

[...], Executive Director, MSF USA (in French).

 In the UK we chose to say: "A war can't be humanitarian." For days and days, I kept giving radio and TV interviews. I participated in a program called 'NATO on Trial' that had a very wide audience. There was the defense, the objections, the witnesses. I was one of the witnesses, and I said: "It isn't a humanitarian war. Humanitarian work is such-and-such, and this is war. It's very important to distinguish between the two." As a result of that programme, we were asked to give a lot of interviews. For a long time, our line was: "We mustn't confuse war with humanitarian work." I think the message really got through. But we must not kid ourselves: we had our moment of glory during Kosovo because we were the only ones in the humanitarian community in England who were saying that.

Anne-Marie Huby, Executive Director,  
MSF UK (in French).

**On April 1st, MSF Belgium and MSF France issued two press releases announcing that they would be strengthening their activities with Kosovar refugees in Albania, Macedonia, and Montenegro. They were also issued by MSF in the United States.**



'MSF Prepares to Receive Tens of Thousands of Refugees. Two Cargo Planes Leave for Albania and Macedonia,' **Press release**, MSF Belgium, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1999 (in French). [D93](#)



'Doctors Without Borders Sends Relief Workers, Cargoes, to Albania, Macedonia – as Refugee Influx Mounts,' **Press update**, MSF USA/Brussels/New York, April 1<sup>st</sup> 1999 (in English). [D94](#)

This morning, a DC-8 left Ostend for Tirana, and a second plane left Amsterdam for Skopje, Macedonia. The two planes are carrying 50 metric tonnes of medical material, blankets, tents and plastic sheeting, water tanks, and pumps. Four volunteers were on board the Skopje plane and three were on the Tirana plane to reinforce the teams that are already on the ground.

Until recently, the refugees in northern Albania and Macedonia could still be cared for by families and local authorities. Now, however, local facilities have reached a saturation point in both countries while the number of refugees continues to grow by the hour. The teams on the ground are preparing initial reception points for refugees. The day before yesterday, another MSF team arrived in Montenegro. This team is currently assessing the situation in the area to plan MSF aid operations there. Later this week, two additional planes will leave for Macedonia and Albania.



'Press Briefing 2 – Médecins Sans Frontières Reinforces its Presence with Kosovar Refugees,' **Press release**, MSF France, April 1<sup>st</sup> 1999 (in French). [D95](#)

#### **Extract:**

In addition, 30 tonnes of supplies (shelter, drugs, etc.) are being trucked to Montenegro. A team is already on the ground assessing the situation of displaced persons in Ulcinj (southern region) and Rozaje (eastern central region).

The Director of Operations of MSF France told the French daily *Libération* that MSF was taking a wait-and-see approach, since it did not have enough information to give an opinion on the policies being carried out in the region. The heads of the US and UK sections, which were facing a particularly intense barrage of questions from the international press, were concerned about MSF's inability to anticipate events and take a public position on the Kosovo crisis. Proposals for a public position circulated within the movement.



*The Situation is Volatile; the Refugees are Not Limited to Fixed Areas,* Jean-Hervé Bradol, Director of Operations, Médecins Sans Frontières, **Libération** (France), April 1<sup>st</sup> 1999 (in French).

We do not have a specific opinion regarding the air strikes. Our information base is very limited. Everyone is operating on assumptions, and we don't want to base our reasoning on the first information that is broadcast by all the media. As in all conflicts, the manipulation of information plays a major role. We hope to be able to form an opinion when we have been in close contact with the population involved, which is our way of proceeding. When we hear alarming information, we always ask how representative it is: are the events isolated acts? Are they happening throughout the territory? We need to collect data over a number of days in order to understand what is happening. Given the highly manipulative nature of the players in this conflict, we are being cautious. Our medical activities give us the privilege of coming into contact with tens of thousands of people. As long as we are not in that situation [working inside Kosovo], we are very cautious. That has been our approach for twenty seven years. It is difficult and extremely premature to draw any conclusions. Our method has proven itself. Up until Monday, we had a team on the ground in Pristina, but they had to leave. Now, we have several teams all along the periphery of Kosovo: in Montenegro, Macedonia and Albania. They are assessing needs and gathering information. We have started sending standard supplies for assisting refugees to Albania - that is where the largest number of refugees are - and teams have started working. Our primary concern is to look after the victims, the refugees. But the situation is quite volatile. The refugees are not limited to fixed areas. According to the latest news, the Albanian government is considering pushing the refugees toward the south for obvious security reasons. So we don't know what kind of rescue operation we need to be preparing for.

It's clear that Western governments have taken a strong position by making a military commitment. How will this benefit the populations involved? It's much too early to know. Particularly since we don't know what their actual plans are. Making a judgment about a policy that has not yet been clearly revealed is difficult, and would be extremely hasty. So we are taking a wait-and-see approach.



*'Kosovo - Albania - Macedonia - Montenegro Statements,' Email* from MSF USA Executive Director and comments from Vincent Janssens, MSF Belgium Director of Operations, April 1<sup>st</sup> 1999 (in English). [D96](#)

Dear all,

100 We are receiving MSF press releases and press updates, but

in the mix of internal communications, we are, I believe, in need of firmer, more cohesive, conceptual statements on the developments. All of us are asked by our own media to comment beyond the facts, and while we might on some other crises choose to stick to charter loads, refugee pleas, and operational plans (!), there it more to it at this stage. When the announcement was made of massive aid from governments for the refugees, and the operation more and more labelled as 'humanitarian,' here and there, without a cohesive approach coached by MSF, we spoke up on the concern this raises for us to be part of a band-aid on the Kosovo problem.

While many agencies might rejoice in the windfall of dollars and ECUs this new phase seems to offer, I believe MSF voice ought to be different. We can continue to affirm our operational intent and cite the refugees' plea when we have first-hand accounts, but we must be careful not to fuel the 'allies' P.R. and raise expectations that we are the solution to the problem. At this stage....shouldn't we reaffirm that humanitarian intervention is about both protection and assistance, not only assistance? Shouldn't we refocus the attention on the Kosovo black-out and the failure to protect? Bring the attention away from the do good feeling of refugee assistance? Shouldn't we be careful to measure how we play into the hype? Shouldn't we point out that the refugees are only one part of the equation, and that the media focus on the international support to them acts as a fig-leaf for the shortcoming of protection in Kosovo?

Left to our own devices, this is more or less what a few of us have been saying, at least -- and accidentally without prior consultation - in London and New York (\*). At every stage...everyday will bring a new load of communication traps, and thus I would welcome more cohesiveness on this, and would like to recommend that the DG & DO discuss how the 'political coaching' of the MSF networks' public expression could be done, beyond sitreps and press releases.

Amities

(\* ) I called Anne-Marie [Huby, MSF UK Executive director] today in London, and we compared notes for the first time on the Kosovo crisis media issues, it appears that we had had the same concerns and reflexes. You may want to chat it over with her when I am still in bed, 7 hours behind!

Just a brief reply to Joelle's statement.

She rightfully mentions a few considerations that many in different places try to sort out individually; probably media hypes are different in different places and I don't have the impression that people in the operational sections are exclusively absorbed by the refugee - and aid- issue; but I must agree that we are so far not very anticipative towards the larger MSF-Family in terms of reflexion; I personally feel this has to do with fundamental problems of large-groups- reflexion mecanismes and the evident risk of mixing up hard facts and individual interpretations, operational plans and public statements;

the issue of developing a coherent assistance and advocacy plan (and secondary from that plan to distil pertinent elements and formats for the media) was on the agenda amongst operational directors over the last days and will result in paperwork by beginning next week; this may seem rather late proportional to media pressure, but I feel more crucial to be pertinent than to be quick to the press. So feel free to contribute with questions and suggestions and with feedback on the upcoming paper.  
Vincent



'Re: MSF's position on Kosovo crisis,' **Email** from James Orbinsky, President of MSF International council to MSF Network 2 April 1999 (in English) [D97](#)

Dear All:

I think Joelle is right. We need a coherent MSF perspective on the Kosovo crisis that avoids falling into the humanitarian 'hype' created around Western military objectives. Her arguments rightly recognise the need to ensure that a focus on humanitarian aid does not obscure the need to focus on humanitarian protection. This is true inside Kosovo where massive ethnic cleansing is taking place, and for IDPs and refugees seeking to cross borders, particularly at Macedonia.

We must also ensure that what we as MSF consider to be humanitarian objectives are not used by any party to the conflict for their own political objectives. This is particularly difficult as ethnic cleansing is increasingly itself the justification for NATO bombs and NATO bombing is a justification for accelerated ethnic cleansing.

We know that there is massive ethnic cleansing, and that humanitarian access to people in Kosovo, and protection of those people is lacking or non-existent. As well, it is clear that massacres are taking place inside Kosovo, but are these systematic and of a genocidal scale? If they are, then as MSF we must condemn it and demand appropriate action. At this time we lack evidence on the scale and scope of massacres, but efforts are being made to see if this evidence exists.

At this time, in the midst of both massive ethnic cleansing and NATO bombing, there is a very fine line that we must tread in terms of any position we take. This could change within hours as events unfold, as we analyse existing information, or as new information is gathered.

Our focus should be on ensuring humanitarian space, which includes both the ability to access and assist directly and independently, and the need to ensure protection of civilians both inside and outside Kosovo. At this time the OD/GD's have asked Javier Gabaldon (OD of MSF Spain) to prepare a draft analysis in terms of témoignage. He is working on this today and tomorrow, and it will then be reviewed by the OD/GDs. I know people are under enormous media pressure, but as in any crisis it takes a few days to establish a clear view of the issues at stake.

Once this is clear, then we can react on a more daily or immediate basis as the situation changes.

Best,  
James Orbinsky



'Re(2): Kosovo-Albania-Macedonia-Montenegro Statements,' **Email** from MSF USA Executive Director to MSF Network, 2 April 1999 (in English). [D98](#)

Dear all,

I don't mean to be a pest but, as I wrote in my previous request for a more dynamic, coordinated and 'political' perspective on this crisis, the situation changes EVERY DAY or every few day and MSF 's thinking must evolve at a proper pace otherwise our voice will be an unpecific, non-descript part of the relief community buzz. Given our experience in the region, and the strength of skills in field and HQ with regards to more than simple aid logistics, I strongly believe we must force ourselves to do better than that. My point is: great that you agree, but let's be prompt and reactive, and let's establish smart but not too lengthy procedures!

YESTERDAY, I brought up the issue of hype over refugees, and fig-leaf for a failed protection in Kosovo. The issue for TOMORROW is...your guess. Ours: protected zones!

Emma Bonino (Source AFP - Relief Web Site April 2), signalled to me by Antoine: "if we want this assistance to be effective, to restore a protected humanitarian zone in Kosovo, armed protection is needed," she told a press conference, adding that such a plan would be permitted under the Geneva Convention and the declaration of human rights. But, Bonino dodged a question on whether she was in favour of international ground forces being sent into Kosovo, saying: "Everybody has their duties, and I say that if there are problems, solutions have to be found." At any rate, we will need the collaboration of the military in distributing humanitarian aid,» she said. And also, what's the true story and next step in Macedonia?



'Draft Press Release re Kosovo,' **Email** from James Orbinsky, President of MSF International Council to MSF Network 3 April 1999 (in English). [D99](#)

**Extract:**

After discussion with many of you today, and given the major changes in the last 24 hours in the Kosovo crisis, I have prepared a draft press release for discussion at the teleconference. Please read the attached file. I recognise that things can change overnight, so don't hesitate to be critical. We can discuss during the teleconference.

Best, James Orbinsky

[Draft press release: April 4, 1999](#)

## 'MSF Calls for Immediate Humanitarian Protection and Space in Kosovo and Surrounding Region'

Given recent events in Kosovo and its surrounding region, Medecins Sans Frontiers calls for:

1) The immediate consideration of direct action to protect civilians and IDPs inside Kosovo, including the possible use of ground forces to ensure safety of civilians and prevention of ethnic cleansing;

2) An immediate separation of humanitarian space from military objectives, and an improvement in logistical support and coordination for humanitarian assistance in Macedonia, Montenegro, and Albania. Humanitarian action should be coordinated by internationally recognised independent and impartial agencies (like UNHCR and ICRC), not by NATO;

3) And the immediate and unconditional respect for international humanitarian law inside and around Kosovo. Serb forces have launched a campaign of ethnic cleansing inside Kosovo. Journalists were expelled, and humanitarian workers are virtually absent inside Kosovo. Ethnic cleansing has been accelerated in recent days by NATO bombing. At this time, ethnic cleansing on a massive and systematic scale is taking place. Over 260,000 people have fled Kosovo in the last week alone. Massacres are taking place inside Kosovo, but their scale and scope is as yet unclear. It is clear that ethnic cleansing will continue. There is no protection of civilian populations. This is contrary to any and all basic tenets of international humanitarian law. Outside Kosovo, in neighbouring Macedonia<sup>9</sup>, Montenegro, and Albania<sup>10</sup> humanitarian assistance is unacceptably late and failing to meet the basic survival needs of refugees and internally displaced persons. NATO military actions and objectives mixed with NATO declarations to provide humanitarian assistance are hampering effective humanitarian space. Humanitarian space includes the ability of impartial and independent actors to freely access, assess, monitor, and deliver humanitarian assistance. At this time civilians lack basic food, water, shelter and sanitation and are at increased risk of exposure and epidemic disease. Internationally recognised independent and impartial humanitarian agencies (like UNHCR and ICRC) should be designated as lead agencies to coordinate humanitarian actions. This is not the legitimate responsibility or role of NATO. Humanitarian action is failing in Kosovo and the surrounding region on two fronts: assistance is ineffective and protection is non-existent. There is a profound risk of even greater death and suffering for civilian populations in the coming days and weeks. With a view to possible future developments in the Kosovo region, MSF is prepared to engage and meet humanitarian needs where they arise.

9. In Macedonia global coordination among humanitarian actors is poor, and hampered by confusion between NATO and UNHCR dealing separately with government actors. This is made worse by the fact that authorities did not allow humanitarian actors to make adequate emergency preparations in the previous weeks.

10. In Albania, insecurity and faltering coordination in the face of a massive influx of refugees is creating a bottleneck in delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Protection of civilian populations from ethnic cleansing and independent and impartial humanitarian space are absolutely necessary at this time.



'Global Paper on Kosovo Crisis,' **Memo** from Vincent Janssens, MSF Belgium, Director of Operations, 3 April 1999 (in English).

### Extract:

- To be adapted progressively
- Operational reference
- Source for communications

#### 1. READING OF THE PRESENT SITUATION

1/ Humanitarian assistance to Kosovar population in Kosovo was possible before NATO-bombing; it was difficult and responded only to the basic needs of the civilians.

2/ International presence, both humanitarian and observers (in the later phase) provided with balanced info on incidents and on the consequences of the increased tension for the civilians. To a certain extent it contributed also to protection of civilians in being disturbing witnesses to the situation.

3/ Serb exactions and repression of Albanian population under the argument of confronting the KLA has been going on for many months disregarding NATO-threats or -actions.

4/ The bombing set the materialised starting point for a new phase in which military action overtook the humanitarian space: the initiative in itself and particularly the behavioural switch it provoked amongst warring factions in Kosovo (uncontrolled and uncontrollable gang-warfare) makes now humanitarian assistance or even international presence impossible.

5/ Without arguing over whether this overtake was right or avoidable, we should focus at the present reality that shows that humanitarians under the present circumstances cannot respond to the civil needs for assistance and protection in Kosovo. As such, responsibility and perspectives lay to a large degree with the military.

6/ There is a growing mix-up between military and humanitarian international initiatives and mandates (UNHCR):

- NATO initiatives were supposed to solve the humanitarian problem in Kosovo; through an unforeseen reaction-chain it resulted in exporting the humanitarian problem to the neighbouring countries.

- In Macedonia, humanitarian response procedures are "controlled" by exclusive bilateral talks between NATO and the Government, leaving UNHCR and the humanitarians as no party; NATO staff is involved in setting up camps

- In Albania, where basically only humanitarian objectives are at stake, NATO decides to send in troops with unclear objectives.

7/ There is important and converging evidence from refugees that systematically Albanian Kosovars are forced out of all villages and towns and have to leave Kosovo; there are cases of people beaten up and indirect evidence of killings but it is hard to make an absolute picture of this.

8/ Humanitarian response to the needs in neighbouring countries was somehow delayed and is facing difficulties

(see below).

9/ The NATO-action is not understood by Serbian population, also by the non-extremists amongst them. Casualties on the Serb side are probable but kept secret and will be difficult to respond to. As such showing our impartiality has become even more difficult than in the past, although we maintained still some relation till the end.

Once the strikes began, reporters started calling us to ask what we thought. I said that we would judge this military offensive as we would any other and would take the time we needed to develop a position on what was happening to the civilians - who was doing what and what the possibilities for humanitarian activities might be. In that interview, I mentioned the intensity of the NATO propaganda implying that the war was being conducted for good reasons. "We are of two minds about that. With a few exceptions, on an individual level, we are pleased that there has been an international reaction against Milosevic. But from a professional perspective, we have been careful not to feed NATO propaganda in our statements. Whether we've succeeded or not is another matter." That's how I answered because I saw that there was a problem.

Jean-Hervé Bradol, Director of Operations,  
MSF France (in French).

We took a more critical position than the other sections, which seemed to be stuck in operational concerns. There was no obstacle that would have prevented us from speaking out on Kosovo. But we always faced that constraint of having to align our public positions with the European sections - the French-Belgian-Dutch line. But when I say there was no disagreement, I don't mean that there was a clear vision and a position. Anne-Marie (Huby, MSF UK General Director) and I found ourselves taking a much more visible position than the others. We were the spokes-people. We realized that inside MSF, there was no real momentum on this issue. I often felt like I was all alone in this crisis, coming up with the messages, articulating them and afterwards, having people like James Orbinsky express them. In London and New York, we even felt like we knew the questions before MSF was asked them. One day, we had to go to the Washington Press Club. I already knew which questions would come up and we had raised them with the sections to prepare. Their response was: "Oh! Good question!"

That was it! There was no intellectual leadership on this crisis. We were in a frustrating situation, realising that there were no more leaders at MSF, let alone any more thinkers. I don't know where they were. [...] James was in great demand in the media and he sort of orchestrated the thinking in the network. He had to get back into the operational priorities in the section discussions... So we had to force him to get involved. From time to time, he would step up but at other times, he was somewhat absent... But at the time, I don't remember any sense of vitality at the international level. I just remember a meeting where

I rebelled slightly one day, saying: "We're lacking some leadership here."

[...], Executive Director, MSF USA (in French).

Joëlle and I would talk on the phone from time to time. She would say to me: "This is what I want to say. What do you think?" I would say: "Well, OK." It was like that. I don't know how happy they were in the US with all this because it couldn't have been easy to sell. I was surprised that no one else was doing it... I have to say that in France, in private, MSF people were very pro-NATO strikes... In general, the organisation was very pro-NATO.

Anne-Marie Huby, Executive Director,  
MSF UK (in French).

The problem with Kosovo it that this was the first time we were in a complex war situation, where we really needed an operational view from the different countries. This was the moment when international relationships among the sections were at their worst. People weren't talking to each other. No one knew who was doing what. There was a time when I was in the field. I was the only one who had gone to both countries. I couldn't do it all alone. I remember calling Jean-Hervé [Bradol, MSF France Operations Director] to find out what he thought and for once in his life, he had no opinion. He said: "I don't know. I haven't seen it. I didn't go to Albania. I can't speak to this. I can only talk about Montenegro." I called different people to find out what they thought, but they didn't know because no one had seen what the others were doing and had an opinion. The organisation was very fragmented and I don't think we understood what was going on. We didn't explain anything clearly. The communications directors, who didn't get along, were forced to talk to each other. But, there was really poor communications among operations, communications, and the network. The international office had nothing coherent to offer. They were out of it. At the time, I was in London and when it started, I'd offered to go to the field. They said no. For a certain period of time, we had no communications officer on site. It was a little difficult to get an idea of what was going on and get feedback on what we should be putting out regarding our analysis of the situation.

Samantha Bolton, Communications Coordinator,  
MSF International (in French).

**On 2 April 1999, Sadako Ogata, High Commissioner for Refugees, called on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to end the expulsions of ethnic Albanians from Kosovo.**



'UNHCR's Ogata Demands an End to Expulsions as Humanitarian Crisis Mounts,' **Press release**, UNHCR, 2 April 1999 (in English). [D101](#)

#### **Extract:**

UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata urged the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia Friday to bring an immediate halt to the wholesale expulsion of Kosovo Albanians. Thursday saw the largest daily influx when up to 40,000 people arrived by train, car or on foot in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Most of them came from the Kosovo capital of Pristina. They told UNHCR staff that they had been forced at gunpoint to leave their homes. Many were stripped of their identity documents and herded onto overcrowded trains.

Refugees arriving on foot at the Albanian border told similar stories of having been rounded up in Pristina and forced onto buses. They were then transported to a point a few kilometres away from the Albanian border post at the Morini pass near Kukes, and made to walk the rest of the way. "The widespread abuse of human rights by the Yugoslav security forces must cease, and cease now," Ogata said. "Mass expulsions and the destruction of identity documents are blatant violations of international law and are morally repugnant. The refugees are suffering dramatically and the scale of the expulsion is placing enormous strain on other countries in the region and risks to have a destabilising effect." Mrs Ogata called for massive international support to meet the growing needs of the refugees. "The relief operation is on the verge of being overwhelmed," she said. "Our capacity to respond simply cannot keep pace with the scale of the expulsions and forced population displacements."

## **MEDIA VISIBILITY AND THE REALITIES OF OUR OPERATIONS**

**On the night of 2 April 1999, NATO carried out its first bombing in the heart of Belgrade. At the Macedonian border, tens of thousands of Kosovar Albanians fleeing their country were held up in the no man's land of Blace, which was difficult for humanitarian organisations to reach. For several days, Macedonian authorities had been blocking the refugees' transfer to the camp built by NATO soldiers for the UNHCR in Stenkovec-Brazda. MSF teams faced the complexity and slow bureaucratic**

**procedures imposed by the Macedonian authorities. Médecins du Monde (MDM) had registered and gained entry in the country several months earlier and could therefore commence working. During the first days MSF volunteers would work under the "banner" of MDM which allowed them to take action more quickly. Some felt that MSF was not visible enough on worldwide television, which was broadcasting images of the Kosovars' distress on a continuous basis.**



'Kosovo Update 03 April 99... Dramatic Changes,' **Sitrep**, 3 April 1999 (in English). [D102](#)

#### **Extract:**

Major humanitarian emergency - Situation out of Control. General Situation

1. NATO missiles last night bombed the Ministry of Interior in central Belgrade. NATO has received instructions to begin HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE in four ways (source: press briefing NATO/Brussels).

- Transport and supplies to refugees
- Set up refugee camps
- Construction
- Assist at ports and airports

(NATO teams went to Geneva for coordination)

240,000 refugees in the last 24 hours have arrived in Albania. It is estimated by NATO that in the next 10 days (half of population of Kosovo) would have fled to neighbouring countries. It has been suggested by British Defence sources that President Milosevic is planning to eject more than 1.5 million ethnic Albanians out of Kosovo.

3. MSF H teams in Macedonia confirm that Macedonia refuses to shelter anymore refugees, unless a guarantee is made from other countries that they will relocate them; refugees stuck in no-mans-land.

4. Milosevic has stronger grip on Montenegro provoking refugee flow into Albania

Albania-In the last 24 hours 40,000 refugees have entered Albania. It is believed that that there are now over 130,000 refugees. Many share the same story: the Serbs kicked them out of their homes and burned their papers. Any form of shelter/accommodation is now saturated. Thousands are sleeping in the open.

MSF Activities: Two teams left today, one to the North (Skoder and Kukes) and one to the South in Fier.

The cargo from the planes has been blocked by MOH, the problem it seems is that the authorities want control of goods and are not used to NGO's demanding independence of their materials. The 2nd cargo is arriving today at 17:20; this plane carries watsan and relief items and MSF photographer Roger Job.

Camps at Tirana: MSF team visited an old military camp in Mullet 12km from Tirana, estimated capacity 2.000



people. Five hundred people present at the moment, mostly women, children & elderly arrived from Prizen by tractors and then buses from Kukes. Local authorities are in charge.

Needs: To put more tents up. Major problems with latrines (only 20) activities. Many NGO's visiting this site. Tirana Lake-Sportive complex – 2,200 people here, camp saturated.

Northern Albania-Kukes: Rumours of a new crisis. In a security meeting, a rumour reported that 100,000 people are on the move to Kukes

MSF Activities: An explo team is travelling north, but they have experienced delays. Constraints: Problems with getting drivers to drive to North, too dangerous and takes up to 10 hours.

Communication: Paola Cortese is travelling to North with the assessment team.

#### Albanian -Montenegro border

UNHCR reported that at 2 sites near Skoder a total of 57,000 refugees are waiting at the border; confirmed reporting of growing hostility to refugees. Fear that refugees will turn back into Albania.

Dures: Refugees collected in 3 places, one covered by CRS (300 people). The needs: food, mattresses and blankets. There is a medical post which lacks medicine and so the people are referred to the hospital. Many refugees are being housed by host families. Transport: There is a problem to rent cars; many journalists have hired most available cars. However 4 Toyotas will arrive from Skopje on Saturday. Custom clearance takes one day. Human resources: MSF is planning to recruit numbers of experienced field workers do other sections have staff available? Communications: Telephoning Albania might be difficult since NATO is jamming the Serbian radar, phones should work in coastal area

#### Macedonia

General Situation: It is said that there is an 8 mile queue at the border near Blace where a minimum of 40,000 people are waiting in a muddy field in 'no-mans-land'. Many more are waiting in neighbouring hills. 31/03/99 4 trains =16,000 people; 01/04/99 2 trains = 8,000 people; 02/04/99 4 trains = 16,000 people. MSF has no access to the people in 'no-mans-land' and it is thought the refugees are without shelter and have very little food. Humanitarian action is monopolised by Macedonian Red Cross. The registration is still very slow and it is not clear when the authorities will allow the people to cross more quickly. The team is working with a scenario of potential 250,000 to arrive. The registration procedure at the second border crossing seems better; many of the refugees here have crossed the mountain range between Blace and Jaznice. At the moment numbers are unconfirmed. 3 transit sites have been identified: Bojane 2-3,000 capacity; Cegrane 6-10,000 capacity; Neprestema 2-4,000 capacity; A fourth camp is developing in Radusa, however below acceptable standards (situated on old garbage site), just

2km from border. It is clear that the present planned capacity is below the need. 1 big transit camp/centre is foreseen in Brawda (between Blace and Skopje) and accommodation for 60,000 is under construction.

MSF H plan: To establish 3 OPD/health posts similar in construction to other levels of construction: border, reception and permanent camp. Constraints: MSF materials have not yet arrived due to being stuck in customs, and despite all pressure applied, not yet released. No access to 'no-mans-land' at the border. Local MSF B staff identified in the crowd may play roll in overcoming constraints. No decision has been taken by Macedonian authorities on 'speedy' border crossings. No clear role for NGO's - all planning is happening between authorities and NATO. A second and third cargo will arrive respectively on Saturday and Sunday in Skopje.

#### Montenegro

General Situation: NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana has warned Slobodan Milosevic against a coup with its critical & outspoken Serbian sister Montenegro (source BBC World Service news). Most of the people are coming from Pec and surrounding areas, they are arriving village by village, which highlights the fact that their displacement is being done in a very organised way by the Serbian forces. Approx. 5,000 settled in 4 centres (old factories). Sanitation big problem here. ICRC and UNHCR have been delivering food. Team assessing Ulcinje (south) where approx. 10,000 new comers arrived, already approx. 10,000 refugees here. Many housed in local families; ICRC and UNHCR distributing blankets. A transit site to accommodate 15,000 people is being organised by UNHCR.

MSF plan: MSF F Activities - 2 Explo missions: North to Rozaje and South to Ulcinje. Yesterday the team went to assess the situation in Rozaje in the North where it is estimated that there are 10,000 refugees (estimated that 30,000 already arrived). No figures as yet re: numbers of people around these surrounding villages. MSF will try to run the medical aspect of this camp, assessing the medical facilities, medical screening, and sanitation in the camp. General medical problems: respiratory problems, diarrhoeas, and shock; still to assess food problem.



*'Kosovo Refugee Assistance Set Up in Macedonia,'*  
**AFP** (France), Skopje, 5 April 1999 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

International assistance to tens of thousands of Kosovo Albanian refugees in Macedonia began to be organised on Monday, but misunderstanding mounted between the Skopje government and certain aid actors. Although a huge refugee assistance centre just opened near the border with Yugoslavia, set up by NATO forces in Macedonia for the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), UNHCR complained of a lack of cooperation on the part of Macedonian authorities in managing the humanitarian crisis. NATO and UNHCR announced that the new refugee assistance centre, created the day before on an emergency basis, was now

'fully operational'. Located near the villages of Stenkovec and Brazda, the centre is on the road leading to the Blace border station, in northern Macedonia. It is intended to assist the thousands of Kosovo Albanian refugees blocked for several days in Blace, under horrible conditions, most having been driven from Kosovo by Serb forces.

Widely-varying estimates are circulating regarding the number of Albanians in Blace. While UNHCR puts the total as high as 65,000, many journalists say the maximum number of refugees around Blace totals 20,000, which is already significant. The Stenkovec-Brazda centre includes three sections: one to feed and house refugees; another to register them; and a third to handle their transit to housing in Macedonia or third countries. According to UNHCR, more than 5,000 refugees had already arrived at the assistance center on Monday afternoon, on board a bus chartered by the Macedonian authorities.

But UNHCR expressed growing frustration in the face of the difficulties in establishing cooperation with the Macedonian government; it specifically criticised the local authorities' slow pace in registering and transporting refugees. [...] The Macedonian government stated that its agencies had already registered 70,000 refugees and criticized the media, which had reported the statistic provided by UNHCR. Faced with a humanitarian crisis not of its making, the government resented being challenged on its handling of the problem. Up to that point, Skopje had avoided the convulsions sparked by the break-up of the former Yugoslavia. The government was concerned about the impacts of a massive flow of Kosovo Albanians on Macedonia's own fragile ethnic balance and stability. Some 30% of the small country's several million residents are Albanian.



'The Op-Ed: Visibility and Understandability,' Denis Pingaud, MSF France Director of Communications, *Messages* editorial, MSF France Internal Publication, April-May 1999 (in French). [D103](#)

#### Extract:

##### Visibility and Understandability

Many within MSF were unhappy about our lack of 'visibility' on the Kosovo crisis, particularly with respect to television coverage. This calls for an explanation. In every such situation, media presence is the result, above all, of a certain amount of happenstance: being in the right place at the right time for TV news. Our timing delay has hurt us because in terms of public perception, the effect produced in the first week is key. However, we chose to speak out when our missions were actually in place and we could deliver a clear message.

In the medium term, what is important to our donors is MSF's 'understandability,' not its 'visibility.' By chasing the camera, we risk losing time but, more importantly, meaning.



Minutes of the MSF France 30 April 1999 Board Meeting (in French). [D104](#)

#### Extract:

E. Lucioli: How do we analyse UNHCR's inability to move forward?

J.-H. Bradol: UNHCR had a hard time responding and its job was probably not made any easier on the political front. Madame Ogata, the High Commissioner, even asked NATO to take responsibility for the entire supply issue. That said; UNHCR is a cumbersome machine that always takes time to get rolling. It's now starting to produce data and register people, thanks also to Mr. MacNamara's arrival (protection director), who is running the operations on site.

P. Biberson: On the issue of humanitarian aid groups' responsiveness - it's hard to be operational in the first two weeks of such a massive and rough displacement. I think that what we saw wasn't so much a 'humanitarian crisis' as an inadequate response on the human rights and legal fronts. These deported persons needed to be acknowledged and protected as individuals. We had a hard time drawing up a list of needs (which were not primarily medical and so outside our typical response). It's a war context, but also a political crisis involving the regional destabilisation of fragile ethnic balances in border countries. It's not a medical-sanitation crisis, so that was also a little disorienting for us. [...] MSF's lack of visibility during the early weeks is explained primarily by the fact that we were slower than others to set up activities that the cameras could record and that we held back on political issues. In the end, the fact that MSF wasn't very visible in the media early on doesn't bother me very much. I think we can accept that we wanted to understand what was going on so that we could respond more effectively. [...]


Alain: I'm bothered by the fact that we can accept that we weren't present and visible from the beginning [...] obviously, we are speaking out today but an operational presence is important, too. I think this could have a major impact on our fundraising in a competitive market [...] People might well prefer to give to MDM because they saw them on TV.

P. Biberson: I didn't say so much the better. [...] Let's move past our wounded pride. We can also legitimately accept the fact that we didn't want to get involved in the brouhaha so that we could take the time to develop our analysis. Let me remind you that MDM quickly called for an intervention on the ground. [...] We didn't agree and didn't want to get caught up in a game of one-upmanship. I'm aware of the risk of losing public support, especially given that—and this is not a small detail—we decided from the beginning (and all the MSF organisations followed suit) to work only with private funds.


J.-H. Bradol: Yes, I agree, but I want to restate what I said at the last board meeting: we also have a problem with operations. MSF is not in a position to be able to respond appropriately to emergencies. For example, MDM managed, on its own, to get its cargo out, whereas we

wanted to do things on the up-and-up. We're too tied to the whole institutional representation issue and we waited for the local authorities to give us the go-ahead. I'm exaggerating to make a point, but it seems like we don't manage to do anything any more without following an organisational chart. We're not street-wise operators anymore and this culture doesn't work well in an emergency setting even if, it might be appropriate in other settings. Françoise: To put it simply, I think we're trapped in a superiority complex. We want to be where no one else is, we don't want to get mixed up in NGO crowd that rushes in to offer aid and that 'compromises.' We want the populations entirely at our mercy. Of course, we could always say that what makes the difference is the quality of our analysis, but you also have to get into the field quickly and made a commitment!

[...] Graziella: While there was a certain gap in taking a public stance and while our visibility might have been poor, I want to say that there are more than 100 MSF people working in the area and that we got 25 people into Montenegro in a few weeks - without visas - and 180 tonnes of cargo! No one else managed to do that. I call that a strong will to provide aid. The hesitation people are talking about doesn't apply to the commitment to provide aid to the deportees.


 At that time, MDM had pretty much garnered the media's attention. They had set up at the main station between Albania and Kosovo. [...] It was a media war. The reporters were sick of showing NGO acronyms on T-shirts and baseball caps. They made tighter and tighter shots. MDM came up with the idea of cutting their bumper stickers up and putting them on the stethoscopes.

Christopher Stokes, Coordinator MSF Belgium in Albania, then in Kosovo (April to June 1999) (in French).


 In the Blace 'no-man's-land,' the refugees were living in the mud. No one was taking care of them. UNHCR was incapable of doing it. MDM was there to make a symbolic, as well as highly political, gesture. Their doctors tried to cross the border with suitcases full of medicines to be filmed and to make the statement that it was unacceptable they couldn't care for people. It was a bit over-the-top, but they were trying to put the pressure on. At that point, everyone said: "MDM is in the no-man's-land with the refugees." All the TV stations picked it up and it gave them tremendous credibility. We weren't anywhere. Our teams weren't at the borders to talk to journalists and people. I think that in Macedonia, the Dutch made somewhat the same mistake as in Goma in 1994. That was a

logistics operation. They deployed planes with tonnes of supplies that were blocked at the airport. They ended up with these huge planes, lots of supplies and not much flexibility. What we did in Goma in 1996 - that is, go to the border every day, be present and visible, put pressure on at the border - in Albania and in Macedonia it was MDM that was doing it. We weren't players in the Kosovo media game. We have to admit it - we were really kind of useless. In Macedonia, MSF practically didn't exist for the reporters. MDM was everywhere. Their policy was much more consistent. They had someone there on an on-going basis doing political work.

Samantha Bolton, Communications Coordinator, MSF International (in French).

 We put the pressure on ourselves: the environment, the press, the images... We felt that we were living through historic moment, with the war just right there. We couldn't remain silent. We felt a responsibility, but also that we were being pushed by the media environment. And we were afraid - what if we didn't say anything or if we missed something - later on, we would be criticized for it. It was a huge crisis and it was close by. For the first time, we were living through a war foretold and our troops were the ones leading it... It's true that we could've said some things differently. But, we were trying to resolve concrete problems that we were facing in the field, particularly in Albania, and in the end we didn't give ourselves much time to deal with the problem.

Jean-Marie Kindermans, General Secretary MSF International Council (in French).

 When the crisis began, when the first Kosovars started arriving in Albania and Macedonia, we didn't have much presence in the field, so we were completely missing from the media landscape. You saw Médecins du Monde a lot. They were the first ones in Blace and they took advantage of the void. They were already registered because they already had operations in Macedonia and Albania before the strikes, so they had their office, their staff, their cars - they knew what was going on. Friends called us, saying: "But what are you doing? You're not there? MSF needs a greater presence in the media." But, MSF wasn't in the camps. In fact, the issue of our presence on television also reflected the issue of our presence in the field. And that was another matter entirely. In the house, there were people asking why a week after the refugees had arrived in Macedonia and Albania, MSF's operations were still so limited. We heard that small teams had started working in Montenegro, but you didn't see any evidence of that. The operations department told us that in Albania and Macedonia, they weren't French, but Belgians and Dutch and

that the teams were trying to do everything they could. MSF France also took a lot of time before really being operational in Montenegro...

We said to ourselves: "Since the teams are there, we have to send out a press release. 'MSF has sent a first team. The first airplane has left.'" And then the communications director says: "We have a major operational weakness. I don't have a problem with the fact that we're not showing up on the screen. There's a whole media fuss around it, but MSF doesn't have a particular position to promote." For him, having an MSF nurse on the television news describe the situation was useless if we didn't have a particular position to put out. As for the Kosovars, according to him, the media was talking about them and the public was flooded with information on Kosovo so he didn't see where the problem was. But the dominant position in our communication department at that point was: "Hearing a doctor talk about what he does, that's not particularly compelling, and that's what MSF has always done. That's what maintains a reputation, it's what makes donors feel involved and continue to support us."

Bénédicte Jeannerod, Communications Officer, MSF France (in French).



*It was like a bidding war with the press releases. They'd put one out every three days. 'MSF has sent a full charter, MSF has sent three international volunteers.' But you need time to create a message and if there's no operation, we can still always try to create something, otherwise we won't get anywhere! I had a team in the field that was working and sending information back. You have to digest that information, think about the strategy and the message. And we had these continuing requests from the media. It was a vicious circle: the media was talking about Kosovo, so the donors were saying: "Where's MSF? What's MSF doing? We don't see you on TV!" The fundraising department was swamping us with requests because they were getting these calls from donors. What could we tell them? We're not in the camps in Albania or Macedonia, where the TV cameras are. It was a constant cacophony. I felt like every time MDM said something, I had to speak, too! ... I put the brakes on. I told them that I would send out a weekly press release to give an update but not one every other day.*

Graziella Godain, Deputy Programme Manager MSF France (in French).

**The executive directors of MSF UK and Germany raise questions about information coordination within the movement, the fate of the local staff of MSF's former missions in Kosovo, the legitimacy of the refugee evacuation operations in Macedonia and Albania to**

**other countries, and the responsibility of the host countries. During their 6 April 1999 meeting, the operations directors decided that only the Belgian section in Albania, the Dutch section in Macedonia, and the French in Montenegro would be operational in dealing with the Kosovo refugees. The other sections would integrate into these programmes. They also reconfirmed MSF's commitment to taking action, again, as quickly as possible in Kosovo. In the coming weeks, the movement's leaders agreed to seize every opportunity to discuss this issue.**



'Re(2) Afternoon Sitrep Tuesday 6 April 99,' **Email** from Anne-Marie Huby MSF UK Executive Director to MSF network, 6 April 1999 (in English). [D105](#)

#### **Extract:**

The news agenda is moving and changing faster than the MSF sitreps (understandably). Along with the usual questions about the relief efforts, we are also getting subsidiary questions about, for instance, the legitimacy and effectiveness of the planned 'airlift' of refugees. I have asked Françoise Saulnier in Paris to help me with this, but this is typically something that MSF B, as the section responsible for information, should circulate to the field - and generally try and anticipate the issues of the day.

#### **2. Feedback:**

Talking to Albania and Macedonia over the weekend, it was amazing to see that they were not aware of what the other was doing (for instance, Albania did not know about Macedonia's customs problems and vice versa). In addition, the teams are not really able to monitor how the international press is portraying the crisis (at least at this stage).

Someone in the field told me that: "I am hearing more from my family about the angle of the day than from MSF." This kind of feedback would be better done by phone than by email, to make sure that info officers and HOMs are aware of the issues first thing in the morning.

#### **3. Information officers:**

It would be really good if MSF B could tell the network (not for release - just for info) what the various information people in the field are planning to do. I have seen various names mentioned under the communications heading, so I wondered whether these people would be gathering refugee testimonies, or what. This kind of independent gathering of humanitarian/human rights issues would be very useful of course, but it would be good to know it is on its way.

#### **[...] 5. Keeping the momentum going:**

Yesterday I drafted the English version of the press release on Blace. Although Skopje had still not received it by the evening (I must ask Malou what happened) I assume that

many in the network used the statement, or at least said similar things in interviews. What do you guys now recommend to keep the momentum going, to push for further access etc? I think it would be great if the sitreps included some advice on such things in future. As you know, Samantha will be in Skopje from tonight, and will no doubt help with that, but I just wanted to highlight the need to keep advising people, not just give them raw facts. But, thank you for all the work so far and all the best.  
Anne-Marie

'Afternoon Sitrep Tuesday 6 April 99,' **Email** from Ulrike Von Pilar MSF Germany Executive Director to MSF network, 6 April 1999 (in English). [D105](#)

**Extract:**

We need information on the whereabouts of our local staff from Kosovo. I was very happy to hear that we had already found two or three who even seem to continue to work with us. I think this is most important news - as MSF we feel particularly concerned about these people, and in addition I find it a good angle to talk about Kosovo proper. Just one last remark: no idea how you did it (let me know) - but we had to give a name to the special donations coming in now. Disgustingly, two of the biggest German organisations are marking these donations [as coming from] by 'victims' - which I find the wrong focus and in addition, I wonder if they want to avoid proper earmarking (which would be understandable but incorrect). Most other organisations use 'refugees' while we opted for 'Balkan' trying to say that we want to work in Kosovo again and also if possible for Serb civilian population. This in turn prompted outraged calls about why we support these murderers.

That's all for now - bye and try to get some sleep  
Ulrike

'Re: Afternoon Sitrep Tuesday 6 April 99,' **Email** from Eric Dachy MSF Belgium Programme Manager Kosovo to Ulrike Von Pilar, MSF Germany Executive Director and to MSF network, 6 April 1999 (in English). [D105](#)

Ulrike,

Of course this is an issue. Please find here (in French) what has been sent to the field teams in Macedonia Montenegro and Albania. Thanks for your concern,  
Eric

Dear Friends,

Following the events, contact between the MSF Kosovo team and its local staff was suddenly cut off around 24 March 1999. Below, you will find a complete list of the names and positions because we are concerned about their security and anxious to know what has happened to them. We are also very concerned that MSF will be able to honor its commitments to them. Please forward this to the field. It's important that you know that these employees have, for the most part, demonstrated a personal com-

mitment and physical courage in their work with MSF's mobile teams. Unfortunately, circumstances prevent us from updating the outcome of these activities and how MSF might help them in the future, etc. They were paid through the end of March. I am sure that you will be sensitive to this situation. Here are the possibilities we anticipate when we find the staff members:

1. Continue their contracts, while first giving them time to organise their life in exile.
2. If this is not possible or desirable, provide them at least three months' salary and consider what might be done for them in the current situation (recommendation, plane ticket, etc.).

In any case, can you let Brussels know about any contact with staff members? We've already found Milazim, Kelmed, Rifat, Sebe, Liman, Shefshet, and Agime from Pristina. It appears that the majority of the Pec team is in Albania. Thank you for your cooperation.



'Refugee Questions,' **Email** from Anne-Marie Huby, MSF UK Executive Director to MSF network, 6 April 1999 (in English). [D106](#)

**Extract:**

Dear all,

Many of us are getting media calls regarding the planned evacuation of refugees out of Macedonia and Albania: is this legitimate?

Are governments right to say that refugees should return to Kosovo or at least the region as soon as the crisis is over? Is this right? Etc...This is clearly an issue that is beyond our direct area of competence, but it is difficult to be totally silent when asked a direct question on air - so I thought I'd copy you just for info.

Here are the main questions we are getting - with answers based on Françoise Saulnier's info:

1. Are refugees entitled to refugee status (asylum) in Europe?

According to the 1951 Convention on Refugees, asylum applies only to people who have suffered individual persecutions (though some law theorists argue that victims of deportations could be entitled to refugee rights - arguable but not recognised widely)! The Kosovo refugees have fled as a result of war, so the individual rights granted by the convention do not apply. They are not entitled to asylum rights, or to choose a third country of asylum, but under humanitarian law, the following (obvious stuff - sorry) applies:

- They have the right to live in safety in the host country
- they can't be turned back to Kosovo against their will
- They can't be relocated to another country against their will (in other words, an agreement between Macedonia and Turkey, against the wishes of the refugees concerned, may amount to a second deportation)

The host countries are responsible for:

- Making sure that the camps are not used as war sanctuaries and backup bases for military operations into

Kosovo, even during a period of “official” i.e. declared war - finding appropriate and safe locations for the refugees + adequate relief

## 2. Does relocating refugees amount to furthering the ethnic cleansing aims of the Yugoslav government?

The question is irrelevant. The immediate responsibilities of the UN are to REGISTER the refugees properly, reunite families, and provide effective relief. (My note: the UK government seems to use the ethnic cleansing excuse to avoid a flood of refugees at home).

## 3. The UK government (and I assume, other European governments too) is planning to grant Kosovo refugees a very temporary status, and will expect to send them home as soon as ‘the crisis is over.’ Refs will not receive money, just coupons for food etc - very precarious. Is this ‘legal’ (according to humanitarian and refugee law)?

Strictly speaking, unfortunately yes. As in the Bosnian crisis, European countries have developed a temporary status granted to all the members of the community affected by the war, which is then withdrawn when a peace agreement is signed. Individual refugees can then apply for refugee status if they have a strong case of individual persecution. Humanitarian organisations will have a role to play in ‘monitoring’ how safe Kosovo is for people to return.



‘Operations Directors Meeting on Kosovo,’  
**Minutes**, Brussels 6 April 1999 (in English).  
**D107**

### **Extract:**

#### Actions

MSF Geneva prefers not to get involved in the big circus of general distribution. The needs are more or less artificially created by politicians. International humanitarian aid is massively present. In this mass MSF has no real added value anymore. MSF should take a position. MSF Brussels believes there is enough space for MSF to work on the field and MSF has been speaking out yet, even more than being operational in the beginning. It is proposed to ask Epicentre to do an assessment in order to better understand the situation, what is really happening, etc. The objective is to collect info/data centralized by one person and to make a synthesis for internal use in the first place. Afterwards it can be discussed what to do with the information.

In Montenegro an epidemiological survey done by Epicentre is on its way. MSF Amsterdam will contact Epicentre in order to follow the same methodology in collecting epidemiological data in Macedonia. MSF Brussels will decide later whether either Epicentre or the medical department will do the survey.

It is agreed that operations will be limited to the three sections actually operational: MSF B in Albania, MSF H in Macedonia and MSF P in Montenegro. Other sections will

be integrated in these operational sections. All sections are happy with the present set-up.

### **Return to Kosovo**

First it has to be decided what kind of action MSF wants in Kosovo, because

- The villages are empty: what are the needs then?
- There is no authority other than the military to make arrangements with (insecurity)
- There is a realistic risk for recuperation of aid by Serbs as well as by UCK

The objective is access to victims. There are three conditions to work with authorities:

- Free control/monitoring
- Free assessment
- Free speaking with populations

If we go to Kosovo it has been announced publicly in order to ensure the security of the team. The majority of the Kosovars who are still in Kosovo are staying in territories controlled by the Serbs. Still there is a small group of Kosovars staying in UCK territory. If we go in UCK territory the link with UCK will be obvious and disable [inhibit] us to provide assistance to the people in need on Serb territory later on. But, there is a strong will amongst the majority of the operations directors to go into Kosovo and assess the needs there.

### **Conclusion:**

MSF will go in Kosovo as soon as it gets the opportunity. It has to be made public then in order to insure the security of the team. The options to stay in Belgrade will be checked with others NGO’s, ICRC, etc. and it will then be decided if a team will be sent to Belgrade or not.

### **Position**

A position has been taken on

1. Protection of people in Kosovo
2. Refugees in Macedonia being sent to Albania

Protection of people in Kosovo: Humanitarian space was gained in Kosovo. Now with the NATO intervention this humanitarian space has been lost. MSF’s position is that it is of the responsibility of the NATO to address and assure the humanitarian space.

Refugees in Macedonia: MSF does not agree with sending the Kosovar refugees to Albania. The Kosovar people should be able to stay in the different surrounding countries until their return to Kosovo. As Albania is somehow seen as “their” country, their stay in Albania can be seen as an acceptable situation and then the risk is real that at the end nothing will be done to enable them to return to their homeland. MSF priority is for refugees to be settled in their own country.



'Trip into Pristina,' **Email** exchange between Wilna van Aartsen MSF Holland Operations Director, Javier Gabaldon MSF Spain Operations Director, and Vincent Faber, MSF Switzerland Executive Director, 9 – 10 April 1999 (in English). **D108** [↗](#)

**Extract:**

Dear all,

The situation is as follows:

In Macedonia there are strong rumours and discussions about a group of journalists and humanitarians going into Pristina (tomorrow?) from the Macedonian side. The MSF team in Skopje would like to join this mission, however practicalities all round are still to be resolved. This is not in line with the debate and decision we took last Tuesday. I am of the opinion that if the situation has changed again since Tuesday (which it does all the time), we should maybe reconsider our position in regards to re-entering Kosovo, and in particular Pristina. For the time being I am not in favour of going in with a kind 'convoy' into Pristina, I am against it. Apparently, there is an attempt from ICRC to go in separately/independently. Are we willing to join this initiative if MSF is able to independently assess the situation in Pristina? Are there developments in Montenegro in relation to the trip into Kosovo from that side today, which may influence this discussion? I am awaiting your reactions.

Many greetings,

## THE QUESTION OF FUNDING FROM NATO COUNTRIES

During that same meeting, the operations directors also decided not to finance Kosovo-related emergency operations with institutional funds, specifically, funds from NATO member countries, which were parties to the conflict. The executive directors confirmed that decision and all subsequent MSF press releases referred to it. However, this decision was the subject of debate because the Belgian section could not finance its high level of emergency operations without institutional funding, because it lacked adequate private donations. The executive directors' group then decided to initiate a mutual support system to share resources, ensuring that operational sections could rely on private funding in emergency situations when the usual donor nations were parties to the conflict. Debate continued over the issue of financing for the Belgian section from the Norwegian government, which remained a MSF B institutional donor.



'Operations Directors Meeting on Kosovo,' **Minutes**, Brussels 6 April 1999 (in English). **D107** [↗](#)

**Extract:**

**Institutional Funding:** Considering the specificity of this crisis (the implication of NATO), MSF should avoid institutional funding from NATO member states and use, as much as possible, proper [private] funds to guarantee independence. Funding requests have been introduced to different institutional funding agencies to guarantee coverage. Till now mechanisms don't exist in MSF to guarantee backup from the other sections for the financial risks taken by one section in such crises. MSFB has chosen to become operational and not to be blocked because of reasons of dependency.

**Conclusion:** the group of DO's recommend that all options have to be explored to put [use] private funds in this operation in order to avoid risk to be involved in [the] political debate. Jean-Marie Kindermans will explore the possibility to go backwards with [cancel] the ECHO contract and to get commitments of [from] sections to put private funding in this operation.

'Avoiding Institutional Funding in Kosovo Funding,' **Email** from Ruud Keulen, MSF Holland Financial Director, to MSF financial directors and operations directors, 7 April 1999 (in English). **D109** [↗](#)

Dear all,

This morning I was informed that during the international OD - meeting (yesterday) a decision has been taken with regard to the use of institutional funds in Kosovo: institutional funds have to be avoided as much as possible (especially when they come from NATO countries). MSF Holland fully agrees with this decision. We will act in accordance with this decision. We hope that you will all join us. It would be a big step on our way to internationalisation. However, I can imagine that it is not easy for your sections to comply with it because of a lack of funds. MSF H is willing to consider to contribute to your operations (directly or via our partner sections), a substantial amount of money, if we can avoid the use of institutional funds. Please call (or mail) me if you want to know more about this.

Kind regards,

Ruud Keulen



'Funding of MSF B's Projects for Kosovo Albanian Refugees,' **Email** from Goran Svedin, MSF Belgium Financial Director to MSF financial directors and operation directors, 7 April 1999 (in English). **D110** [↗](#)

Dear friends,

There is a strong wish in the international movement to

finance, as much as possible, MSF's operations for the Kosovo Albanian refugees with private funds and, to avoid particularly, funds from governments who are part of NATO. In order for MSF Belgium to do, the MSF movement as a whole will have to make commitments. The budget for MSF Belgium's operations for the Kosovo Albanian refugees amounts to 7,000,000 USD to cover activities during 6 months starting 30 March 1999. The detailed budget, which is calculated on activities to be undertaken in two 3-month phases, will be sent to you shortly. It is, of course, very difficult to anticipate the exact needs for a period as long as six months in a situation such as the present in Kosovo/Albania. I'd like therefore, to stress that MSF-Belgium's planning focuses on the Kosovo Albanian population and that there will be a need for MSF assistance during the 6 months whether this population is seeking refuge in Albania or returns to Kosovo.

So far some 25% of the budget is secured, i.e. contributions and/or commitments from MSF-Germany (280,000 USD), MSF-Italy (170,000 USD), the Norwegian Gvt (380,000 USD), Belgian Gvt (500,000 USD) and Echo (570,000 USD). Another 150,000 USD are planned to come from fund-raising actions in MSF-Norway, Denmark, and Hong Kong. In order for MSF-Belgium to proceed now, while trying to maximise the use of private funds and minimise the institutional funds, we will need information from you ASAP and by the latest tomorrow morning (Thursday) on the amount your section can formally commit to this budget. So please, contact me ASAP and by the latest, Thursday noon 8 April. I'm sorry for the short notice but the financial risk ran by MSF Belgium will be greater every day that passes.

With best regards,  
Göran Svedin



'Funding of MSF B's Projects for Kosovo Albanian Refugees,' **Email** from Ulrike Von Pilar, MSF Germany Executive Director, to MSF financial directors and operations directors 8 April 1999 (in English).

Dear Alex and Goran,

As I have said yesterday to Jean-Marie, we will fund your activities with an additional 500,000 Euro which is roughly FB 20,000,000, under the condition that you cancel your contracts with the institutional donors. We will be happy to continue to support your programmes, incl private funds, if you need more. But, I would like to stress that we would have preferred to be contacted by you BEFORE asking NATO-Govts for funding. That includes ECHO of course. We are very disappointed that after all our discussions of the last months and our strong commitment to support anyone trying to reduce institutional funding it has not been possible to accept our offer. The tone of your message below [above] is very irritating. "In order for MSF B to do this the MSF movement as a whole will have to make commitments." This makes me really angry: as if we had not already made commitments! It was MSF Germany

which offered FB 10,000,000 to MSF B 10 days ago - it was our initiative, no one from Brussels ever called us in order to ask if we could help. Before saying "you have to" may be there is a possibility to say "could you please." One phone call would have been enough to receive one or two million Euro from us, and I am sure others would have reacted in a similar way - there are private and institutional funds, but here is the best kind: MSF funds. Please get your fundraising strategy in order; we are not prepared to sell our principles at dumping rates.

Good luck for your work and efforts

Ulrike



'Re: Funding of MSF B's Projects for Kosovo Albanian Refugees,' **Email** from Nikos Kemos, MSF Greece Executive Director to Goran Svedin, MSF Belgium Financial Director, to MSF financial directors and operations directors, 8 April 1999 (in English).

Dear Goran,

Regarding your message I would like to include MSF GR correspondence briefly in three major points.

- 1) We strongly believe that the Kosovo crisis should be financed only with private funds and by no means institutional funding from governments or organisations that are part of NATO.
- 2) MSF GR will fully fund a cargo - it's already in process - for Tirana.
- 3) MSF GR contribution with private funds for Kosovo crisis will be directly linked with our operational activities to the Balkans.

Best regards,

Nikos Kemos

'Re: Funding of MSFB's Projects for Kosovo Albanian Refugees,' **Email** from Anne-Marie Huby, MSF UK Executive Director, MSF financial directors and operations directors, 8 April 1999 (in English).

Dear Alex and Goran,

I very much support Ulrike's and Nikos's notes today, recommending that no funding from NATO-countries or ECHO should be accepted for this emergency. Last week, we in London decided to turn down an offer of a free joint public appeal with other agencies because all MSF sections expected to be fully funded (or, in the case of MSF F, there was too little operational info to project funding needs). Indeed, I was told by MSF B that you found the use of private funds more cumbersome and difficult to manage in the early stages of an emergency. (Bastien and I ended up agreeing that what was needed was better management and co-ordination of private funds, and an effective 'brake' system to ensure that we don't raise too much money, as in the Mitch case). On a positive note, I think it would be a fantastic step forward for MSF's independence (and for internationalisation) if MSF B was to decide to



reimburse all institutional donors for this emergency, and ask partner sections to mobilise to make up the difference. If you choose to do so, we in London will join in the itl [international] fundraising effort whenever feasible (by the way more information about what this staggering USD 7m budget is going to be spent on would be welcome!). It is crucial if we are to remain credible critics of the current NATO humanitarian circus.

All the best,  
AM



'Kosovo Crisis Funding,' **Email** from Frances Stevenson, MSF UK to MSF financial directors and operations directors, 9 April 1999 (in English). [D111](#)

Hello all

Could I share some thoughts with you about Kosovo funding? As you know, this week, the ODs covering the Kosovo crisis agreed to minimise use of govt funding from NATO countries. We were very pleased to hear this, as several of you obviously were too. However, we heard yesterday from MSF B that they have now decided they will seek donor funding from both non-NATO and NATO govts (including Canada, Norway, Belgium etc). This is very disappointing. Even if the private fundraising strength of MSF internationally is insufficient for MSF Belgium's enormous budgetary needs in Albania, there are quite a few non-NATO countries with MSF support sections that could be approached:

Australia, Austria, Hong Kong, Japan, Sweden, Switzerland  
According to figures I've seen, most of these govts are making huge funding commitments for the Kosovo crisis (e.g. Switzerland: USD 35 million, Japan USD 15 million, and Sweden USD 12 million so far). There are also other non-NATO countries which do not have MSF support sections which could also be approached, e.g. Ireland (I know MSF B is already looking into the possibility of Irish funding). Surely it should be possible for Brussels to mobilise and make full use of MSF's private fundraising resources internationally and confine their institutional fundraising to non-NATO countries? The movement could then avoid being compromised and could take a clearly independent and credible position on the "humanitarian" actions of NATO in the Balkans.

Best wishes  
Frances



'Re: Kosovo Crisis Funding,' **Email** from Frederic Tremblay, MSF France Finance Officer to Frances Stevenson, MSF UK, 9 April 1999 (in English)

Dear Frances,

Thank you for copying your message to me.

1/ We do not understand MSF Belgium's position for seeking institutional funds from NATO governments.

2/ We are ready to give them private funds if those funds are not mixed with NATO funds and if we agree on operation approach.

3/ I am also very concerned by the fact that all the sections raised large amounts of private funds and, for the partner sections, are trying (by all means ?) to place them. I asked Karim to share this concern with the other sections.

Amicalement,  
Frédéric



'Re: Kosovo Crisis Funding,' **Email** from Ulrike Von Pilar, MSF Germany Executive Director to Frederic Tremblay, MSF France Finance Officer, 9 April 1999 (in English).

Dear Frederic,

As said before, we share the concerns over NATO-kind of funds but, I do not quite understand Frederic's last remark. I thought we had all agreed to keep it at a low profile - so there is no active campaigning for funds in Germany, but there are donations coming in evidently. I assume the same is happening in MSF F. But I assure you - we are not trying to place them by all means - we just want to use them in an intelligent way and support operations. If we in Germany offered funding to MSF F today, it was for the same reasons - and at this moment it would have been from our non-earmarked funds. Apparently we can't do it right - we are not operational, but have been asked to build up efficient fundraising departments. Now that we receive more and more private funds, knowing the percentage of institutional funds in MSF, we see this as a chance - and immediately cause concern. It's time for a real financial policy.

Amities  
Ulrike



'Re: Kosovo Private Funding/MSF Spain,' **Email** from Javier Gabaldon, MSF Spain Director of Operations to MSF Belgium Executive Director, 9 April 1999 (in English).

Dear Alex,

Following our phone conversation this afternoon, confirming your intention to cancel ECHO funding request for the Kosovo Crisis and to draw up a funding strategy based upon MSF private funds (whatever the section) and avoiding NATO member states' funding, we are pleased to commit with: USD 500,000 from MSF E [Spain] private funds. Our financial department will get in touch with yours to define the terms of the agreement.

Thank you for your attention  
Javier



'MSF Switzerland Board of Directors Meeting,' **Minutes**, 9 April 1999 (in French). [D112](#)

**Extract:**

Support from MSF Switzerland: we are familiar with Brussels' problems regarding private funds and our Board of Directors proposes to actively support this section by allocating CHF 500,000 in private funds for operations in Albania. We understand that the larger MSF movement is also making contributions for this purpose. It would also be very interesting to set up mechanisms so that an operational center would not have to bear, on its own, a financial risk that could create a bankruptcy risk. The International Council has a central role to play in refining this kind of mutual support mechanism and we are very pleased that the four section presidents are present this evening.

Board of Directors Vote/Decision: The members of the Board of Directors unanimously agreed to allocate CHF 500,000 for operations in Albania.



'Financial Commitments,' **Email** from Alex Parisel, MSF Belgium Executive Director to MSF executive directors and financial directors, 12 April 1999 (in English and French). [D113](#)

**Extract:**

Dear All,

Please find herewith the financial commitment of MSF in Brussels in terms of financial policy. ECHO and AGCD were cancelled today as promised. Most of the sections have agreed with the 3 first points addressed in the attached document (sorry it's in French, I was too much in a hurry). Please think about points 4 and 5 (reporting and advance). You will also find the already committed amounts by each section for the moment. Please confirm if there is any doubt on the amount. A revised budget and action plan will be sent to you tomorrow, we just got an adapted plan of action from the field tonight. Do not hesitate to call for any 'political' question. Thanks in advance and many thanks for the support given.

Alex

**3. Future coverage policy**

ECHO budget rejected, all requests to non-NATO donors placed on stand-by, no request for new institutional funds. The only institutional budget committed: USD \$370.000 from Norway. All funding needs will be distributed first within the movement. If institutional funds needed: priority to the UNHCR channel and then non-NATO donors. The movement's private funds are providing vertical coverage of needs (all budget lines), on a *pro-rata* basis, based on their financial commitment. We propose slightly higher headquarters expenses (5%) but, by including three task force people in operations expenses for expats, as forecast in the initial request to donors.

**4. Reporting**

We propose to prepare a financial report for the entire MSF movement with all the standard details; each section contributing to financing on a *pro-rata* basis, based on their commitments. This will enable us to avoid writing 20 different reports, one per section, which would effectively be a system of institutional funds.



'Funding Debate,' **Email exchange** between, Alex Parisel, MSF Belgium Executive Director, Ulrike Van Pilar, MSF Germany Executive Director, Frances Stevenson MSF UK, Eric Stobbaert, MSF Spain Executive Director, Antoine Gérard, MSF USA Director of Programmes, 14-15 April 1999 (in English). [D114](#)

- For your info – [from] Alex,

I will here give you a brief translation of the document 'Financial Politics - Kosovo Emergency- MSF Brussels.' In order to guarantee some space of action, the financial policy is elaborated with perspective of 3 - 4 weeks. No requests to institutional donors will be sent as long as our needs for a 3 - 4 week period are covered. In the future, all financial needs will first be sent to all sections. Demands will be sent to institutional donors only if sections do not have the possibility to commit themselves to cover the needs with private funds. If demands have to be sent to institutional donors priority will be given to UNHCR and governments who are not members of NATO.

- Dear all,

I believe that purity is becoming a major issue here which has nothing to do with independence. MSF is fully independent from NATO states as the budget from Norway represents no more than 5% of MSF budget in Brussels and certainly less than 2% for the movement. There was a time where independence meant 50/50, I believe. So please, let us put our energy in other issues. We all have made strong commitments on the institutional issues which might mean a huge progress for the movement. If this is going to be transformed in a quest of purity, we might lose a lot of energy and time on it. And maybe a strong momentum.

Alex

- Dear all,

I'm finding it interesting (if very dispiriting) to discover how different the interpretations of the idea of an agreement can be. It reminds me of Clinton and Monica: it depends what you mean by 'is.' In English we call this 'splitting hairs.' A couple of messages from Alex Parisel (see below) now make it clear that:

- MSF B intends to keep the Norwegian government funds because they were agreed before the OC decision about NATO govt funds (I hear hairs splitting).
- MSF B intends to 'prioritise' non-NATO govts for insti-

tutional fundraising. So they still envisage the possibility of taking NATO govt funds. When the OCs agreed to fund the Kosovo crisis response primarily by private funds and no institutional funds from NATO member governments, it seems that for MSF B this meant 'we will start with private funds but will also take funds from one NATO member govt, and then will try to take non-NATO govts for institutional funds, but if we feel like taking NATO govt funds, we will.

Although Alex clearly disagrees, I think that the concept of purity is sometimes extremely important. When, for example, we see DFID using its funding for the Red Cross as a PR fig-leaf for its disgraceful role in this war, even though it is only 3,5% of the total Red Cross budget, it shows how easy it is for a funding govt to use an NGO as a political tool. The NATO govts need to appear to adopt humanitarian aid agencies as a PR cover for their role in this war. We MUST disassociate ourselves from this. Of course, 5% funding from the Norwegian Govt is not going to destroy our independence. It is, however, going to completely discredit our very strong message that we accept no funds from NATO member govts, which made a very strong and completely unique statement. Apparently, the small amount of Norwegian funding is more important to BXL (despite the fact that it would take about half an hour for our private fundraisers to provide this to them if they are so desperate). I agree with Alex that we shouldn't waste time and energy on this. Surely the best way forward is therefore to abide by the international OC decision. [...]

Best wishes to all

Frances

• Dear all,

Just a brief response after having spoken to Alex.

1. I am not happy about the Norwegian funds
2. I was told that Vincent, Karim, Eric and Jean-Marie were aware of the Norwegian contract and accepted that the Belgians had to honour this contract.
3. Knowing this, the directors decided to henceforth resist the charms of NATO government funding.
4. MSFB has cancelled Belgian and ECHO contracts (big first), didn't get the Dutch one anyway.
5. If this is correct, I still don't like it, but I have to live with it and would like to stop this debate for now, since it risks becoming pointless.
6. We can probably still say that we are financially and especially logistically and politically independent from NATO, but we cannot say that we did not take a penny from NATO governments.
7. Questions open for the future...

Good night to all of you - in Bonn it is snowing, and the office has no wine left, I have to go.

Ulrike

• Hello to everyone,

I am just back from Somalia and stunned with the last news. Let's put it clearly: it has never been mentioned to me that we would accept any funds from the Norwegian government. Our decision to finance 500.000 USD to the

operation was based on a courageous decision to refuse all institutional funding from member states of NATO. Therefore I request that the money, kindly given by the Norwegian government, is immediately refunded and transparently argued [discussed with] to them. Sorry to disturb the current international 'Eden', but we have to keep strongly committed to what had been decided.

Regards,

Eric Stobbaerts

• Hello to Everyone

MSF B will return the MSF Spain money. If needed we will replace it by UNHCR money as foreseen. It was clear to Javier and Eric as for everybody that the Norwegian money was accepted. So, no problem, everybody is taking its responsibilities. We will too.

Alex



'Meeting of the MSF Belgium Board of Directors,'  
**Minutes**, April 1999 (in French). **D115**

**Extract:**

With regard to financing, MSF has decided not to request institutional funds from countries involved in the Kosovo crisis (NATO). This decision was made at the international level. However, MSF Belgium, the only section to have already received a commitment from an institutional donor/NATO member country (the Norwegian government), decided to turn down this financing (USD \$6 million). The goal of this decision was to avoid creating the image of an NGO tied to NATO funding. However, Alex emphasizes that acting on this principle has yielded nothing in terms of concrete operations and recognition in the field. The Yugoslav authorities are criticising us for conducting surveys at the Serb border but, place absolutely no value on our independence. Furthermore, the donors understand our attitude, but that attitude is handicapping us in the sense that we are not UNHCR's priority partners for the same reasons of neutrality. They think that we have probably gone too far in observing certain principles, or at least that we haven't managed to enhance the value of that position.

However, James points out that MSF never accepts money from countries participating in a conflict. In addition, we can generate the private funds necessary within the movement. But, he agrees that we have not managed to capitalize on the fact that we have remained independent. Pascal explained MSF Belgium's reaction regarding this decision to James: access to institutional donors has never been a disability for us. And, turning down institutional funds seems to offer only disadvantages, since we no longer have access to support from our priority partners. By making this decision, we hoped that we could be operational in Serbia since we are independent in Kosovo. That didn't happen. According to James, it could still be used in negotiations with Serbia.



'Kosovo Emergency,' **Press offset**, MSF France, April 1999 (in French). [D116](#)

## EMERGENCY - KOSOVO

86 Médecins Sans Frontières volunteers are providing aid to the refugees. We provide medical care to every patient. You can show your support to every refugee. Since early April, Médecins Sans Frontières has been working in Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro. Our teams have distributed tents and blankets and set up medical facilities to aid the refugees on an emergency basis. Médecins Sans Frontières' activities in the region would not be possible without your financial support.



*The decision not to accept money from NATO countries was a kind of precondition the operations directions imposed on the sections' management for conducting the operation because there was a danger of being brought in as NATO auxiliary forces. Together, we voted to ask the executive directors not to use NATO money for this operation. This was a chronic problem for us in the war in the former Yugoslavia. It was all the more visible because it came up for all the humanitarian aid groups. We remembered MDM's ad campaigns: 'Milosevic = Hitler.' It was a problem for all of us. As operations director, we knew that given our strong hostility towards Milosevic, there had been other episodes during the war in which we had already been pulled into anti-Belgrade public statements and there was a risk involved. So in this context, it seemed logical to us that we should not accept NATO money for our work but keep our hands free. This was the first time we'd shared so much private money on an international basis. This breaking with tradition had impacts on the internal financial organisation. As operations directors, we thought it was really important in terms of political independence. And it allowed the movement to learn to share money a bit on the basis of politics.*

Jean-Hervé Bradol, Director of Operations,  
MSF France (in French).



*In practice, this wasn't discussed much in advance. As in every emergency, when we started seeing population movements, we quickly said that we had to send tents and aid supplies. So we started sending funding requests to ECHO<sup>11</sup> and other donors, who were still under pressure to fund us for other emergencies. We told them: "We are thinking of such-and-such an operation. What are your funding possibilities?" We didn't really anticipate the fact that Kosovo could well turn out to be something so different from any other context... I think our institutional funds were close to 50%. That was pretty high. At the time, the partner*

*section connected to us was really small and didn't bring in much. So our message was: "We won't accept any more institutional funds if the international movement will guarantee us enough to carry out our operations. It's not only an issue of pure principle, but a pragmatic one. Create the conditions under which we can turn down institutional funds - not the opposite. Don't start by restricting us on the basis of this principle, leaving us completely dependent on the MSF sections to have our own funding."*

*It's easy to refuse international funding if you've got enough private funds. So, it was easy for MSF France and MSF USA to call for complete autonomy. It was part of a much broader framework of discussion. MSF Belgium had always felt that MSF France wanted it to be more independent from institutional financing because eliminating institutional financing would reduce MSF Belgium's operationality. And then, little by little, it turned out that there were lots of other possibilities besides institutional funds. The crisis got a lot of media attention, so there was a lot of private money available. [...] And that strengthened the position that: "There really are resources within MSF so we don't need to ask anymore." It mooted the question a bit. Those who were accepting institutional funds weren't doing it out of need but because they didn't want to yield on that point. They were challenging neutrality.*

*In the end, we made an overall plan, asking all the sections: "How much do you want to put in?" The partner sections had a lot of money. And since there wasn't a clear international arrangement, they continued to put money in operations. In addition, they also wanted to fund certain specific projects. This went hand-in-hand with the communications goals. The US, in particular, was very involved. This was a time when there was no overall international framework in terms of communications, fundraising or distribution of funds. We had to take money from the Germans, from this section, that section... I did the math, the tables, and I realized that I wasn't managing to allocate it all. We had to give the sections the opportunity to tell their constituency how we had used the money that was raised, so the money really had to be used.*

*But, even when we turned down the institutional funds, there was still too much money. So that created a huge amount of pressure to set up operations, which created other tensions. In Albania, we had to launch a lot of activities to justify our fundraising. And, we weren't finding a place for them because it had been difficult to get the evaluation missions going. And there were already plenty of NGOs and soldiers that had filled up all the space. Christopher, the Coordinator, felt all that pressure. "Spend! Do something!" The discussion came back to us just when we no longer needed institutional funds because suddenly, there were other sections that had money to give us. We had to refuse the institutional funding. So we asked certain donors for money, and then we had to tell them that in the end, we didn't want it. There wasn't a lot of consistency. But it forced us to explain why and I think that in general, it was pretty well understood.*

Vincent Janssens, Director of Operations,  
MSF Belgium (in French).

In the US, the Clinton Administration set up a media campaign to raise and manage contributions to the NGOs helping the Kosovar refugees. This involved using private humanitarian aid organisations to fund-raise with the public. The organisations would have no control over the money they raised because it would be completely organised by the Administration and the army, which as a bonus, would improve its image as a humanitarian player. The MSF USA section tried to prevent InterAction, the NGO group it belonged to, from being pulled into this strategy. When it withdrew from InterAction's Disaster Reaction Committee, InterAction's president had to notify the Administration of its members' opposition to the system. However, many US NGOs remained convinced by the Administration's notion that the government, the army and the NGOs now needed to cooperate closely in responding to humanitarian emergencies and that this would not compromise aid organisations' independence.



*With Aid Effort Overwhelmed, NATO Will Take Over Coordination,* Elisabeth Becker, **The Washington Post** (USA), 6 April 1999 (in English). [D117](#)

**Extract:**

NATO announced today that it was coordinating all transportation of food, relief supplies and medical care to the Kosovo refugees, as well as airlifting them to temporary camps, after two days of relief efforts by individual member countries. Over the weekend, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mrs Sadako Ogata, sent a private letter to Javier Solana, the NATO Secretary General, saying her agency was overwhelmed by the crisis and asking for immediate military help to bring order to the deterioration situation on the Kosovo border. "We were overwhelmed; we needed to save lives," said Karen AbuZayd, the refugee agency's representative to the United States. "We ask the military for help only when we have no other choice and when we had 350,000 refugees we knew we had reached that point."

Already, NATO troops who were to serve as peacekeepers in Kosovo have transformed themselves into a relief operation, working round the clock to throw up tents at six camps in Macedonia and three camps in Albania. NATO pilots are flying helicopters between Tirana, Albania and the border town of Kukes, ferrying emergency supplies to the refugees and evacuating those who need medical care, said Jami Shea, spokesman for NATO. Now NATO will set up headquarters in Tirana to organize the ground transportation of trucks filled with supplies - food, medicine, blankets, sleeping bags, even thermal underwear - to the refugees and to establish an airlift operation center outside Brussels, said Lieut. Col. Wilhelm Bocklet, a NATO spokesman.

NATO earlier had announced it would take charge of airlifting refugees out of Macedonia and flying them to

temporary housing in NATO countries. But NATO had left it up to each individual country among its 19 members to make contributions to the relief effort - be it the United States, with its logistical support, or Italy, with its camp police. The United Nations refugee agency had been the sole organization coordinating the relief and rescue operations on the ground, working with at least 55 private voluntary groups. Now NATO will assume military coordination of the relief convoys overland, as well as transport of supplies by air for the refugees, whose numbers rose by another 55,000 today, bringing the total of 480,000 people who have left Kosovo since the bombing began on March 24, said Kris Janowski, a refugee agency spokesman in Geneva.

[...] Since the American government plays such a key role in both NATO and the refugee agency, President Clinton established a special council to coordinate all American civilian and military contributions to the Kosovo relief effort, said Brian Atwood, the chairman of the new council.



**Letter** from MSF USA Executive Director to Jim Moody, President InterAction, 9 April 1999 (in English). [D118](#)

**Extract:**

Antoine Gerard, our Program Director, attended a meeting yesterday at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) with director James Lee Witt, his staff, and representatives of InterAction member organizations providing aid to Kosovar refugees in the Balkans. The subject of the meeting was the effort underway by FEMA to coordinate donations from the U.S. public to the Kosovar relief effort.

While FEMA and USAID state that their intent is to keep the American public informed about humanitarian aid organizations working in the Balkans, I am concerned that this strategy is not in the best interest of non-governmental organizations. While it may be of interest to the US Administration to associate itself with the public image of the private, voluntary agencies carrying out work in the region, it is a dangerous path for our agencies. As non-governmental agencies, we must develop an independent voice and identity before the American public which is not dependent on US foreign policy imperatives. We must also reaffirm our independence to support both the appearance and reality of our impartiality. This will be essential in the coming months, as we strive to gain-and regain-access in the Kosovo region to provide assistance and protection to the victims of the conflict.

It is not in the interest of InterAction, or of its members, to have Mr Witt rather than you, speak about the work of relief organizations in the Balkans (MSNBC April 8). It is not in the interest of InterAction, nor of its members, to have FEMA create a Kosovo Refugee Fund as a federal repository of private and individual donations to volunteer organizations. This should remain the responsibility of the

private, independent sector and should be discussed by members of InterAction operating in the region.

We are very concerned by the potential confusion between USAID and InterAction, and would like to have you (1) consider how InterAction, with the financial support of its members, could explore private arrangements with inbound telemarketing firms, to handle the "800" number where the work of our organizations is being featured; and (2) request that the telemarketing staff be trained NOT to answer the calls by referring to USAID, nor make undue reference to USAID.

As a member of InterAction, and as one of the leading members of the group active in the Kosovo crisis, I urge you to consider the implications of the FEMA/USAID initiatives for our community in the short and the long term, and would like to express my support to any initiatives you and your staff may be able to take to restore an accurate picture of the independence of our private, voluntary organizations.



**Letter** from MSF USA Executive Director to Disaster Response Committee InterAction, 14 April 1999 (in English). [D119](#)

#### Extract:

It is commonly understood that the goals of a humanitarian agency are to save lives and alleviate suffering while respecting human dignity. These goals are to be achieved through the guiding principles of impartiality, independence, and neutrality. As a humanitarian agency that adheres strictly to these principles, Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders (MSF) believes that proactive solicitation of coordination with the US military with financial support of the US government has jeopardized the ability of the InterAction Disaster Response Committee (DRC) to represent impartial humanitarian organizations. As such, I am writing to inform you that after careful consideration, Médecins Sans Frontières has decided to withdraw from InterAction's Disaster Response Committee (DRC).

Our major concern is that one of the DRC's central activities - military coordination - is in contradiction with our humanitarian principles. We take issue with and are opposed to linking humanitarian organizations with the military. While we trust that the intention of the DRC's interaction with the military is to increase their understanding of the humanitarian organizations' principles, we believe that a body which seeks to represent independent humanitarian organizations compromises its neutrality and independence when one of its four core activities is active participation in military briefings, conferences, war games, and exercises that are funded and orchestrated by the US government.

[...] To demonstrate our alarm over civil-military collaboration and its implications for humanitarian organizations, we refer to the NATO draft doctrine for Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC), which was circulated to

DRC members following the attendance of a SHAPE civil-military conference by a DRC staff member. The doctrine clearly states the primacy of military and political goals in the CIMIC agenda: "Civil military liaison provides the basis from which other CIMIC functions develop and will always be conducted in support of the military mission." The document also states that these activities are to be "derived from a political strategic objective." We question how humanitarian organizations can maintain their impartiality and independence of action once they agree to act in coordination with, or effectively under the coordination of a military structure.

We believe that the unacceptable result of such coordination is that humanitarian activities are subordinated to agendas other than humanitarian. We disagree with conferring humanitarian credibility, as we believe the actions of the DRC are doing, on any body which exists primarily to fulfil a military objective. [...] Furthermore, in the spirit of political independence, which we trust all humanitarian actors adhere to, we would like to register our concern with the fact that the DRC is funded almost exclusively by the US government to implement, among its other activities, the liaison with the US military and others. We believe that such a clear government link through the DRC - a body which represents a framework for a common voice within the international humanitarian community - to a major military power, has the potential to endanger our collective independence and jeopardizes the fundamental impartial appearance and nature of InterAction members. [...] In conclusion, we believe that the DRC's extensive work with the US military and their major funding by the US government jeopardises the neutrality of NGOs members and is in contradiction with MSF's humanitarian principles as well as is in contradiction with other humanitarian charters. For these reasons, MSF is withdrawing from the DRC.



**Letter** from Jim Moody, President of InterAction to John Podesta, Chief of Staff to the President, The White house and Brian Atwood, Administrator, US Agency for International Development, 16 April 1999 (in English). [D120](#)

#### Extract:

I write urgently to express the grave concern of InterAction members assisting victims of the crisis in Kosovo that the Administration is again considering establishment of a U.S. government-run Kosovo Relief Fund. After expressing total opposition to this proposal when it came to the attention of the NGO community last week, InterAction members were assured by FEMA Director James Lee Witt at an April 9 meeting that the fund was dead. Our members are alarmed to now discover that this is not the case. Although there has been no further formal consultation with the NGO community, we are informed the Administration nevertheless may establish the fund.

Many of our members helping Kosovo refugees are receiving logistical and other support from the U.S. government

and this is certainly appreciated. In our April 2 meeting with the President, we welcomed his interest in and support for our activities in the Balkans. However, the financial relationship between American citizens and their non-governmental organizations is one in which the U.S. government should not interpose itself. The U.S. government should not be in the role of dividing up the money, for many obvious reasons. Further, there is no need for the government to serve as receiver and distributor of funds to support NGO activities. Only a tiny percentage of the persons calling the FEMA phone bank and our office have had difficulty selecting an agency to which they would contribute.



**Letter** from Jim Moody, President of InterAction to MSF USA Executive Director, 19 April 1999 (in English). [D121](#)

#### Extract:

I agree entirely with the substance of your letter. From the onset of the current crisis InterAction has been very assertive in calling the public's attention to the role its member NGOs are playing in responding to the needs of Kosovars. Completely independent of AID, we compiled both a list of our members accepting contributions for their work and that of their affiliates on the Kosovo crisis, and a summary of their activities. Both documents are posted on our website and are updated every day. [...] As our web site is in the public domain, we were not in position to object to the U.S. government using information from it in responding to calls from the public for information on agencies accepting contributions for helping Kosovars. Nor, obviously, could we object to government officials including President Clinton and FEMA Director James Lee Witt calling on private citizen to support the work of NGOs.

[...] We have established a separate phone service for members of the public who call InterAction to ask how they can contribute to NGO relief activities Kosovo. It is accessed by following the instructions given at our office number. The list to which callers are referred is the InterAction list, not the USAID list. We haven't set up a separate 800-number since it is extremely expensive. Regarding our opposition to a US government run Kosovo relief fund, see my enclosed letter to the White House and Brian Atwood.

As Antoine can attest, as he attended one of the meetings where InterAction members engaged senior U.S. officials in heated dialogue on the subject, our opposition to the proposed U.S. government Kosovo Relief Fund has been absolute. As indicated in email traffic you probably have seen, our campaign appears to have been successful, as we were told late Friday by the NSC that the proposal is dead.



**Letter** from Julia V. Taft, Assistant Secretary, United States Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration to MSF USA Executive Director, 16 June 1999 (in English). [D122](#)

#### Extract:


I am very sorry to hear of your decision to withdraw from InterAction's Disaster Response Committee. I believe that the DRC has made great strides in order to enhance coordination with all actors who become involved in humanitarian crises, including the U.S. military. During the April Forum, the DRC made it clear that they do not see their humanitarian work as having been compromised by coordinating with the military. They work on the premise that the military should support, not substitute for, the work of humanitarian organizations and see their coordination efforts as a means to this end. Good coordination is also the best way to ensure that militaries can effectively plan for the smooth hand-off of relief operations to civilian organizations during a humanitarian crisis.

Since I first became involved in U.S. response to forced migrations 25 years ago, we have made major gains in international coordination. The U.S. government has been out in front, with offices throughout the world shaping the response to humanitarian emergencies. We have trained staff, pre-positioned necessary supplies, and have established response protocols within the UN, NGOs and NATO, and we are increasing our efforts to incorporate the proper level of military planning in that preparation. I believe that this can only be useful.

Most humanitarian emergencies do not involve any military forces. The current humanitarian architecture is essentially international, neutral and civilian. No one wants to turn humanitarian action over to militaries - but we all recognize that there will continue to be times when military involvement will be appropriate, and we need to plan better for those contingencies. Only through working together with all will we be able to build a humanitarian architecture which will respond to the needs and ensure that humanitarian assistance does not become politicized and fractured due to a lack of coordination.

As complex emergencies have gripped the world in recent years - in Sierra Leone, Kosovo, Timor - the military has played an essential role to assist the international community's humanitarian efforts and to provide requisite security. Such emergencies require closer coordination and better communication among different parts of the government and with NGOs - these can make the response to crises more comprehensive and effective. Joelle, I remember at InterAction how useful it was to have real NGOs, real ICRC and UN people provide needed perspectives to military planning and training efforts. There has been a dramatic improvement over the past. Now the concepts of CIMICs are regular features of military deployments in humanitarian crises.

I hope you will reconsider your current stance and that you will rejoin the DRC in the future. If you choose not to, the community might question why you are even a member of InterAction. MSF has always been a constructive partner, and I hope you will continue to be one.

 USAID, the United States Agency for International Development, the White House and FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency<sup>12</sup>, whose task is to respond to crises such as hurricanes, floods and earthquakes in the United States, had decided to set up a major public fund-raising operation to help American organisations intervene in the Kosovo crisis. FEMA paid for television appeals for contributions, and it was its director, Paul Witt, who appeared on the screen, saying: "Give your money for Kosovo." He clearly had no idea of what a humanitarian intervention was. On 8 April, at a meeting of FEMA and InterAction (the umbrella organisation for American NGOs, of which MSF was a member) I said to him: "You are going to talk on television about Kosovo as director of FEMA. Even so, we could perhaps also try to include an NGO representative such as Jim Moody, President of InterAction." I also asked how calls from the public were to be handled: "What are you going to tell them?" Paul Witt replied: "I don't know." He turned to his colleagues and asked: "Can you answer that question?" The woman in charge of the switchboard operators replied very candidly: "It's very simple; we've taken the script from the fund-raising campaign for the victims of hurricane Mitch and substituted Kosovo for Mitch." I asked: "Are you calling what's happening in Kosovo today a natural disaster?"

And on 9 April, they put Clinton on television. They didn't have to pay for a clip. They simply said: "The White House needs to make a speech," and every TV channel was there. The substance of what Clinton said was: "Look, Milosevic is killing people. We have to help the refugees. It's important. We need the public's help. Open your wallets." And where were you to donate your money? That's where FEMA came in. They have the logistics to provide switchboards with enough operators to answer thousands of calls. So Clinton said: "You call this number (it was the USAID number – they didn't have a problem!) and you'll find some charming operators who'll tell you who you give your money to, for those poor Kosovars." We immediately called that number. We found people who had no idea what this humanitarian crisis was all about. What I did was to say to them: "Those poor Kosovars! I'd like to give money to money to help them. Should I make out my cheque to USAID?" Some operators said: "Yes" they were so badly briefed. Others said: "No, it's not USAID; it's the NGOs." Then we asked: "What does that mean, NGO?" They had a list of the all the American NGOs, and asked us: "Where do you live?" – "New York" – "I can give you a list of all the NGOs in New York" – and MSF was on that list! We called again, and said: "I'd

rather give to a Catholic or Muslim medical NGO." And they gave us a list of those NGOs: the telephone number or the web address, or the free phone number!

What greatly displeased us was that InterAction clearly was not involved up-front, but had certainly been approached in order to give its approval for this operation. On 9 April, the Executive Director of MSF USA wrote a letter to the director of InterAction: "I am sorry, but we strongly disapprove of this operation." We sent a copy of the letter to all the NGOs who belong to InterAction, explaining that there was no reason why NGOs should be dependent on American strategy for their fund-raising. In his letter dated [???] the director of InterAction refers to a letter that he sent to the White House and to the director of USAID. This letter was sent only on 16 April, in other words, he had not been proactive before our letter of resignation from the DRC. And he does not inform us about it in his reply until 19 April – and in the meantime, FEMA continued collecting money through its TV slots. He took his time to think about his reply because he wanted to be sure he could say: "I have written to the White House and USAID." He was woken up at the last moment by the announcement of our resignation. Otherwise, he would have done nothing. At the time, it was not at all like American NGOs, and especially not InterAction, to challenge the authorities like that.

We had another meeting with FEMA and InterAction. Right at the beginning, I went to see the other InterAction representatives, and I told them: "If you give your support to this kind of operation, we will make our position public. In fact, one of the things they have in mind is that USAID should be made responsible for redistributing the money to the American NGOs according to their operations!" We reached agreement ten minutes before the meeting started. During the meeting, we asked: "Why are we, InterAction, not ourselves paying for the TV slots and raising funds in an independent fashion, by saying 'Give to American NGOs.' Why did you not choose that formula?"

I have devoted my energies to this case because it gave me an understanding of their entire logic of intervention, and also of their marginalising UNHCR. Their objective was also to enhance the ability of the NGOs to work with funds obtained not from the US government but from the American public – but collected and used under US government control.

In the end, we were completely taken in. We were very proud of saying: "We don't take American money." But the US government's strategy was not to fund NGOs. They would have been ruined by the many millions of dollars they'd have had to pay out! On the contrary, their strategy was to get the American public to fund the operation. At that point, we began to say to ourselves: "We have to react. We have to be vigilant in future, because this mechanism is perfect, and works extremely smoothly: on the one hand, military operations, on the other, humanitarian operations that cost nothing and a guarantee that American NGOs will be forced to intervene, because they are inundated with funds from the campaign that has been organised."

12. FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) also intervenes in international contexts, for example, in the case of hurricane Mitch in Central America, because of the size of the Central American community in the United States.



## MSF ALERTS TO THE CONFUSION BETWEEN THE MILITARY AND HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTIONS AND THE PROTECTION OF REFUGEES

**In a press release on 5 April 1999, MSF asked that the administrative and financial obstacles impeding the implementation of humanitarian action be lifted, and reminded those concerned, that humanitarian operations in Macedonia must be coordinated by UNHCR. In fact, MSF teams observed that UNHCR was being marginalised, and that contingents from the various NATO member states were omnipresent.**



'Lines for External Communications Macedonia - Q&A,' **Email** from Ruud & Marieke, MSFH Press Officers to MSF Kosovo Programme Managers, 7 April 1999 (in English). [D123](#)

### Extract:

What happened with the refugees at the Blace-site? Monday afternoon the Macedonian authorities started massive transportation of the refugees from the strip of land at Blace.

Dozens of busses were driving up and down to move the people out. Wednesday morning early, the camp was empty. Besides the refugees in Blace, also the refugees who were stuck in 'No-Man's-Land' - between Kosovo and Macedonia - were let into Macedonia and transported with the buses as well.

We can confirm that the Blace site and the 'No-Man's-Land' are empty now. The Serbian site of the Kosovo border is closed.

The people who were waiting there to get into Macedonia are no longer on the road which leads from Kosovo to Macedonia AS FAR AS WE CAN SEE we have no confirmation for the rest of that road.

Rumors say the Serbs will not allow refugees over the border anymore and that the Kosovars have been sent back. We do not know what's going on there.

### How did the evacuation go?

We received reports of violence being used against the refugees during the evacuation (police/soldiers beating refugees). In general, the evacuation was not violent, but very chaotic. However, the refugees were not told where they would be taken to [and] registration was only being organised in the second day, especially the first day was rather chaotic. This whole operation was definitely not in line with the international standards. MSF is very concerned that families have lost each other in the crowd and that it will be extremely hard to find each other as there seems to be no adequate registration.

### Where were the refugees taken to?

We know that about 15,000 refugees were taken to Stencovic camp (see your map, if did not receive one, please give a call to Polly) and 23.000 to Brazda camp. Allegedly, 9 airplanes full of refugees left for Turkey. MSF Albania reports that 10,000 refugees were transported by bus to Albania. They are expecting another 10,000 to arrive.

### Is MSF having problems with the authorities?

NOTE: this issue is sensitive right now; NO PROACTIVE communication! Line: we are in process of being registered. (Some un-clarities [problems] are still being sorted out and we are just waiting for the official confirmation). Is MSF allowed to work in Macedonia?

We have already started up some medical assistance in two refugee camps (Blace and Stencovic), with local supplies. We are now assessing the needs in other refugee camps and preparing to set up more medical and possibly water- and sanitation facilities.

### What do we think of the situation in the camps?

The camps were set up by NATO and they are still present in the camps. MSF is happy that NATO organised these sites so quickly and that refugees could be taken out of the Blace site into these camps. We do, however, urge that UNHCR takes over the coordination of the camps, as it is their mandate to secure that refugees are being treated in line with the international standards.



'MSF Calls for Immediate and Unconditional Access to Kosovar Refugees in No-Man's-Land on Macedonian Border,' **Press release**, MSF UK, 4 April 1999 (in English). Press release MSF Holland, 5 April 1999 in [English] **Press release** MSF USA 5 April 1999 (in English). **Press release** MSF France 5 April 1999 (in French), [D124](#)

### Extract:

The international medical relief agency Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) appealed to the Macedonian authorities today to grant aid agencies unhindered access to the refugees stranded on the border with Kosovo. "The sanitary and medical conditions on the ground have deteriorated considerably over the last few days. The fact that aid agencies have been prevented from providing the necessary assistance is totally unacceptable," said Dr Lex Winkler a director of MSF, in Blace. "We have the capacity to intervene but the authorities continue to deny us the authorization to deploy our teams and equipment."

Aid agencies have been facing serious administrative delays in Macedonia and Albania since the beginning of the emergency. MSF has appealed to the authorities in both countries to speed up customs procedures, cut administrative delays, and grant free access to the population in need of humanitarian aid, as required by international law. The organization is also concerned

about the effectiveness of the humanitarian coordination mechanism in Macedonia. "It is essential that this operation be coordinated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; only UNHCR has the legitimacy to lead this major humanitarian emergency," said Dr Winkler. More than 40 MSF volunteers are at work in Albania, Montenegro, and Macedonia.



'Humanitarian Aid: Administrative and Financial Delays,' **AFP** (France), Brussels, 5 April 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

The Belgian section of Médecins Sans Frontières stated on Monday that "for several days" humanitarian action in Albania and Macedonia "is being hampered due to administrative and financial delays." MSF Belgium calls upon the authorities involved to facilitate the implementation of humanitarian action, and to authorise the movement of teams and material. MSF draws attention, in particular, to the situation in Blace, on the border between Kosovo and Macedonia, and demands "immediate and unconditional access" to this area, in which refugees are in urgent need of health care. "The humanitarian organisations on the ground have the capacity to intervene but they are prevented from reaching this location, because they are not authorised," said Lex Winkler, Director of the Dutch section of MSF.



'Information Update Kosovo 2,' Anne Guibert, MSF France Communications Officer, 6 April 1999 (in French). [D125](#)

#### Extract:

##### Montenegro

Team of 7 people, 3 still to come. It is estimated that today, there are in total between 50,000 and 60,000 refugees in Montenegro, if you include new arrivals and those already there. In the past few days, the team has made an assessment of the sites at Rozaje and Ulcinje. At Rozaje there are between 10,000 and 15,000 refugees in the town itself, and doubtless more in the surrounding area. They arrived from the Pec region, in waves, one village after another, one neighborhood after another, which clearly shows the organised nature of forced removals in Kosovo. They fled in the face of threats. Many refugees have left Rozaje for the south of the country. The majority of the refugees in Rozaje are being taken in by Albanian families. Around 5,000 people are being accommodated on 5 sites, consisting of former factories and a mosque. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), UNHCR and Mother Theresa are working on these sites. Sanitation is a problem in these five places. 35 Montenegrin doctors are working in the clinic in Rozaje. In the past few days, they have been seeing around 1,000 patients a day. The main problems are respiratory infections, diarrhoea and shock. MSF has offered to provide medical and sanitation

services at the five sites, and plans to organise medical screening for the incoming refugees.

At Ulcinje, in the south of the region, there are a total of around 12,500 new arrivals registered by UNHCR, and certainly 10,000 more waiting to come. Many are being taken in by families (Ulcinjé was where the people of Pec used to go for holidays). UNHCR has set up a camp in a former holiday centre, the Neptune Centre. 300 people are currently accommodated there. If facilities were provided, the camp could have a total capacity of between 8,000 and 10,000. MSF has offered to provide medical and sanitation services in this camp. The team needs also to go to assess the situation at PIave, south of Rozaje, where 20,000 refugees are thought to have arrived. Two MSF lorries carrying emergency supplies (blankets, plastic sheeting, etc.) are expected at the camp. A fully loaded charter flight arrived at Dubrovnik today, carrying sanitation equipment. Problems with the health ministry on where the equipment is to be sent. Problems over coordination with Médecins du Monde, who plan to carry out the same programmes as our teams.

##### Albania


Team of 22 people. UNHCR estimates the number of refugees in Albania at 170,000, and they are continuing to arrive. At present, Kukes is the refugees' main crossing-point. At Krume, five kilometres to the north, there are also large numbers of refugees who have been unable to cross the border at Kukes. MSF is setting up a health centre at the border, to carry out medical screening of refugees and to provide first aid. MSF plans to support the hospital in Krume, to which the Kosovar refugees have been referred, and to assist health centres in the surrounding area. Problem: all MSF's medical and non-medical supplies have been held up by Albanian Customs.

##### Macedonia


Team of 15 people: According to government figures, 55,000 refugees have entered Macedonia. Tens of thousands of Kosovars, living in no-man's-land on the border between Macedonia and Kosovo, have been waiting for permission to re-enter Macedonia. For several days, the police have not been allowing them to do so. Conditions for reception and care on the site are very bad: no sanitation, no latrines, for example. On the other side of the border, the people who have gathered there have been given neither plastic sheeting nor blankets, and bread and water are in very short supply. No NGO has permission to work among these people. MSF is not even authorised to work in no-man's-land (see press release, 5/5). Six volunteers are providing assistance, for the time being under the aegis of Médecins du Monde and IMC.

During the weekend, NATO built reception sites for these refugees inside Macedonia. Thousands of refugees from Blace were then taken to Brazda, to a camp set up and run by NATO, with a capacity for 15,000 refugees. Part of the camp is being administered by French troops, the other part by British troops. MSF emergency supplies were still


being held up at customs as late as yesterday, and MSF has not been able to begin distributing it. The first lorry left today. Once the equipment is available, MSF plans to open health posts near the transit camps. MSF repeats that it is UNHCR (not NATO) that should run the refugee camps.

 I think the big issue for us was the fact that the refugees were not allowed in. There was this Blace setting where they were stuck. We had huge difficulties getting permission from the government to provide assistance in the no-man's-land and then the discussion was about how far we were willing to push, given that although this was a humanitarian crisis, most refugees arriving were not suffering from major medical needs at that time. So it was how far we were able to provide assistance right now and jeopardise for the future involvement and access to refugees once they are allowed into Macedonia. Then, there was the whole issue that once people were allowed in; the Macedonian government had negotiated that people would be immediately transferred and transported to other countries. Families were split up etc. Macedonia was very fearful to become Albanian. A nicely organised little state, we don't want these Kosovars in. There was a Kosovar minority and they were afraid they would get these freedom fighters in Macedonia. That is why they were very reluctant. But, the setting of Albania with its freedom fighters did not happen at all. I think it was a completely different setting. The questions of the journalists were very much about cholera, really looking for a disaster. Blace was full of press standing there with their mouths covered, looking down. The biggest thing for them was that nobody could go into Kosovo, they wanted to have some kind of disaster happening. A bit cynical but, this was the biggest thing for us as a medical organisation. Of course, people died, but nothing major. There was no cholera; it was a really disgraceful situation. And people were traumatised.

Katrien Coppens, Humanitarian Affairs Department,  
MSF Holland (in English).


 In Blace, due to blocking by the Macedonian authorities, all the refugees stayed out in the open. And everyone acknowledged that as a humanitarian organisation we could never have built a camp as quickly as the NATO troops. It would have taken us much longer, and there would have been human losses. This episode is truly the one in which it was acknowledged that the troops did indeed provide added value.

[...], Deputy Legal Advisor, MSF France (in French).


 That came from the Macedonian authorities in particular. On the Blace episode, I think we did not

speak out sufficiently loudly to NATO and the Macedonian government, because they clearly prevented access to the refugees, which was not the case in Albania or even Montenegro. As for what was happening in the camps, I would say that I found that a secondary matter. What was important was what was happening inside Kosovo. Nobody cares who helps whom outside. Personally, I have never questioned the right of armies or governments to provide help, up to a certain point.


Thierry Durand, Director of Operations, MSF  
Switzerland/MSF Greece operational centre (in French).

 What I found on arrival in Skopje was a completely bizarre situation where UNHCR has been purposely sidelined. Normally, in a refugee crisis, UNHCR would be the natural coordinating body for humanitarian assistance. They were not. There were coordination meetings which were chaired by the two main donors which were USAID and ODA, (Overseas Development Agency, the British government agency). And bizarrely, by two people who had actually business cards that were saying 'British government Overseas Development Agency, Military Liaison Officer' and the same for USAID. That was bizarre. So I asked: "Why are you chairing this meeting?" They said: "Obviously we are the link between the military and the NGOs" right? Right: "Where is UNHCR?" "Oh, we also invited them to the meeting." Right. UNHCR showed up and said: "We cannot be coordinator because we have no founding to engage with implementing partners." They said they got their legitimacy for coordinating NGOs from the fact that they were the main financiers of these NGOs. So I said: "Why don't you have that money? I mean it's a major refugee crisis? Normally, you have your appeal. And then you get your budget from the donors and then indeed you start your implementing partners' contracts. That's fair enough. But I don't think your mandate comes from the donor relationships but more from the fact that you have a mandate to address refugee crisis on protection and relief level." And, they said: "Well, from all the normal donor countries that contribute, in this particular crisis, only one country gave a normal contribution." It was Japan, the only one of the main donor countries to UNHCR that was not a member of the NATO. So there was a collective decision from all the donor countries from NATO not to give the usual contribution to UNHCR. Thus, it was already designed from the start, that UNHCR would be just one of the agencies represented in a coordination mechanism which was chaired by the two main donors of the NGOs around the table. All NGOs, except MSF, were financed by the USAID or ODA. So, it was the liaison officers for ODA and USAID who were coordinating those meetings. Which, therefore, was a pretty interesting set-up for a coordination mechanism!


Michiel Hofman, Coordinator in Macedonia, MSF  
Holland, mid April – May 1999 (in English).

 I think that to begin with, UNHCR was completely overwhelmed. They told us: “We haven’t been given the resources to match our programme, nor to match what we would like to do.” Later, they rallied, and installed a good emergency team in Kukes, in particular, with people who had worked in Congo and had learned from their experiences in Goma and Kisangani<sup>13</sup> camps. But, NATO did not really give them space. We didn’t need NATO in order to mount our operations. We acted totally independently. And, we had the resources to do it. What was more problematic was that the joint effort to provide aid was beginning to be coordinated by NATO. A camp isn’t built just like that; it takes discussions with the other agencies. And, in meetings, we found ourselves increasingly talking to army people who said: “Look, we want to set up camps here; we’d like you to do it there,” and so on. We hated the coordination meetings, but we had to be with other actors so that we knew who was going to do what, who was going to take on this or that group of people. And we had the impression that NATO was beginning to have a complete stranglehold over coordination of assistance. If UNHCR didn’t have the logistical resources, it didn’t bother us at all if they came from NATO. But, at the same time, we thought UNHCR was in a position to take decisions about coordination concerning the camps, and to have discussions with the NGOs, without being overridden by NATO. At that time, we had the impression that NATO was taking over. And, NATO said: “We’re doing it because UNHCR is not capable.” Off the record, NATO people told us: “They’re a bunch of incompetents, and it we don’t do it, nothing will happen.”

Christopher Stokes, Coordinator, MSF Belgium in Albania and in Kosovo April to June 1999 (in French).

 The armies had a very visible presence, and were carrying out very different activities. There were Greek, American, German and Austrian contingents, all working pretty fast, and the Albanians, who clearly wanted to talk with them, but hardly knew what UNHCR was. Instead of saying: “Yes, the armies can come in, but under our coordination,” UNHCR kept much too low a profile.

Stephan Oberreit, exploratory mission officer in Albania, MSF France, April 1999 (in French)

 At the beginning the teams were hampered by the presence of troops in the camps for two reasons:

first because of targeting in Albania and later because access to the refugees was complicated, and they were forced to collaborate too closely with the military. Our teams collaborated with them extensively on questions of logistics, because we were very far behind. And so, the position that military personnel should not assist civilians when they are outside of their own countries [refugees] was neither a very cogent nor a very well-argued one, including within the international community. It was very controversial. Later, we found our feet again, when we were able to show that intervention by the military was costly and not as effective as all that, and that they weren’t very efficient in their work. The first press releases were released locally, and there was no discussion about them. We learned about them later. I recall that the one issued from Macedonia by the Dutch was not at all to our liking. Then, there was the one issued from Albania by Christopher Stokes [Head of the MSF mission in Albania] and James Orbinsky [President of the International Council]. They held press conferences that didn’t always go well, because there was something about us of ‘defending our own position.’ They didn’t speak in a very calculated way. With hindsight, I’m not sure it was the right way.

Jean-Marie Kindermans, Secretary General, MSF International (in French).

**On 6 April 1999, Russia and China accused NATO of targeting civilians and therefore of being, responsible for the exodus of Kosovars. Refugees in the Blace no-man’s-land were forcibly evacuated by the Macedonian authorities to the camp at Stenkovec–Brazda set up by NATO for UNHCR, as well as to Albania and Turkey. Representatives of the European Union, UNHCR, and ICRC expressed reservations about the way these evacuations were carried out. On the same day, an international conference attended by representatives of governments, specialist agencies of the UN, and NGOs, came out in favour of an urgent evacuation of the refugees who remained on the Macedonian border. The governments of some NATO member states agreed to accept the refugees, others refused. UNHCR was officially put in charge of coordinating humanitarian assistance to the Kosovars, in liaison with the military and, with local governments. NATO said it would coordinate transport assistance to Kosovar refugees and the airlift to reception centres.**



‘NATO Continues to Increase the Number of its Raids; the First Refugees Leave,’ **AFP** (France), Brussels/ Belgrade, 6 April 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

Taking advantage of an improvement in the weather, NATO continued to increase the number of its raids during

13. See “MSF Speaking Out” – Laurence Binet : “Rwandan refugee camps in Zaïre and Tanzania 1994 – 1996” (April 2004) and “Hunting and Killing of Rwandan refugees in Zaïre-Congo 1996-1997” (August 2004).

the night of Monday to Tuesday, when the first groups of Kosovar refugees began leaving Macedonia for Turkey and Norway. The bombing damaged many Serbian towns, killing five people and injuring twenty in Aleksinac (south of Belgrade), and aiming at various targets, notably a number of radio and television transmitters, said Serbian sources. As a result of these attacks, broadcasts by the Serbian television channel RTS cannot be received in many parts of Serbia. NATO was not able to confirm these deaths. "We had nobody on the ground to verify this information" and "we are doing all we can to limit the number of civilian casualties," stated an official of the Alliance, minimising the civilian damage caused since the war began on 24 March.

Serbian sources reported that two allied aircraft had been shot down, a claim that was categorically denied by NATO, who added that the bombing had been "highly intensive." "In Aleksinac, a town of approximately 25,000 inhabitants, known for its coalmines," the Serbian television service RTS reported, that about a dozen buildings, including the accident and emergency department and a dispensary, had been destroyed, and broadcast pictures showing commercial buildings and houses in ruins. Serbian sources also said that new bridge over the Danube was destroyed at Sombor, a town 200 km north-west of Belgrade. The official news agency, Tanjug, reported that in Kosovo, a fuel storage plant and part of the runway at Slatina airport, near Pristina, had been hit. In northern Serbia, a railway bridge over the Danube, linking the province of Voivodina with Croatia, was destroyed. The pro-government TV channel Politika reported that the airport at Nis, Serbia's second-largest city had been hit.

NATO is always very tight-lipped about its targets and about damage caused, and went no further than stating on Tuesday that "military radio relay transmitters" had been targeted, and that it was possible that civilian installations connected with these military transmitters had been affected by the raids. NATO had not extended its targets, affirmed a spokesperson for the Alliance, after China and Russia had sharply accused it of aiming at civilian targets and, of being the cause of the flood of refugees from Kosovo into neighbouring countries. On Tuesday, the Russian president, Boris Yeltsin, expressed particular anger about the NATO raids on Belgrade, describing them as "barbarous" acts [...].

In a Japanese newspaper interview, the High Commissioner for Refugees, Mrs Sadako Ogata, judged that the number of refugees from Kosovo "has grown more rapidly than expected," and that the total "could reach 900,000" in the future. On Tuesday, Albania declared it was ready to accept the thousands of ethnic Albanian refugees held up at the Kosovo-Macedonia border. Following the start of an airlift to bring humanitarian aid to the region, evacuation to foreign countries of the first Kosovar refugees began, in accordance with the commitment of certain NATO countries to temporarily accept some 100,000.[...] Refugees arriving in Macedonia and Albania continue to report atrocities. In particular, witnesses' statements agree that some 500 Kosovo Albanians were used as human shields

for the Serbian forces, to protect them when making sorties against the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) positions near Krajlane (west of Pristina).



*'Forced Evacuations of Ethnic Albanian Refugees Provoke Criticism,' Pierre Lhuillery, AFP (France), Petrovec (Macedonia), 6 April 1999 (in French).*

#### **Extract:**

The Macedonian government continued on Tuesday to evacuate, often against their will, and in an inhumane fashion, thousands of ethnic Albanian refugees from Kosovo to third countries, provoking reservations and criticism from representatives of humanitarian organisations. [...] The refugees are being taken to the airport in buses from the Macedonian border post of Blace, north of Skopje, where thousands of ethnic Albanians have been stuck for days in wretched conditions, after most of them were expelled from Kosovo by Serbian troops. An airport official acknowledged that a large proportion of the refugees were leaving against their will, or without knowing where they were going. Asked about the destination of the first flights of the day, she replied, "they are going to Turkey, but we are asking journalists not to reveal this information to the refugees, because we have problems with them. When we tell them where they're going, they refuse to get on the buses or to board the aircraft."

In fact, many refugees, walking from the buses to the planes under police guard, said they did not know their destination. Others thought they were going to Germany, where there is a substantial Kosovar Albanian community. The airlift began dramatically on Monday evening, with families being separated and children terrified. On Tuesday, conditions were scarcely any better. When they arrived at the airport, the refugees were always met by police officers wearing surgical masks and rubber gloves, apparently to protect them against possible contagious diseases. And yet, teams belonging to humanitarian organisations had not reported any epidemics in Blace, where they were working day and night without that kind of protection. Distraught, exhausted, and often frightened, the refugees – ethnic Albanians of all ages – sometimes carrying a plastic bag as luggage, but often with nothing, were quickly checked by the police, then unceremoniously put on airport buses to travel the few yards to the plane. The stewardesses were also wearing masks and gloves.

The EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs, Emma Bonino, said she had "strong reservations" about the principle of sending these refugees to countries other than those bordering Kosovo. "People do not want to go far away (from Kosovo). Adding forced exile to forced deportation is not going to solve the problem," she declared. In Geneva, UNHCR spokesman Kris Janowski also expressed reservations, but nevertheless justified the operation. "It's not UNHCR's preferred solution, but we have to do

it in order to calm the situation in Macedonia. That must be done in order to save lives," he said. UNHCR had no presence at the airport, nor had the other humanitarian organisations, and the NATO forces deployed in Macedonia stated that they had nothing to do with the operation. A delegate of the ICRC in Skopje, François Zen Ruffinen, said he was "totally against" the way in which the evacuations were being handled, "separation of families" in particular. A diplomatic source in Skopje considered that it amounted to a "very serious failure on the part of UNHCR," and that UNCHR and the Macedonian authorities had a «shared responsibility" for it.

On Tuesday, the Macedonian Prime Minister, Ljubco Georgievsky, accused Western media of spreading disinformation about the work of the authorities, and the west of waiting too long to intervene, leaving Macedonia to face the first influx of refugees alone.



*'UNHCR Put in Charge of Coordinating Humanitarian Aid to Kosovo,'* Bruno Franceschi, **AFP** (France), Geneva, 6 April 1999 (in French).

Coordination of humanitarian aid to the Kosovars will be the responsibility of UNHCR. This was the decision made in Geneva on Tuesday by the international conference on this issue, at which a plea was made concerning the urgent need for a temporary humanitarian evacuation of the refugees. Representatives of 56 countries, specialised United Nations agencies, and the ICRC, as well as several NGOs, agreed that UNHCR should have overall coordination of this aid, in liaison with local military forces and governments. The meeting accepted the principle of temporary evacuation to third countries for those refugees who wish it, and who are now amassing at the borders of Kosovo, including the border with Montenegro, one of the two republics making up the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY).

The conference hopes that these measures will make it easier to obtain the Macedonian government's agreement on the evacuation to a transit camp of the approximately 60,000 Kosovars currently held at the border. By Tuesday morning, UNHCR had counted 650,000 refugees on the borders of Kosovo, of whom 450,000 had fled the province since 24 March, the date on which NATO aerial bombardment of Yugoslavia began. This population movement was "forced, planned and orchestrated", the High Commissioner for Refugees, Mrs Sadako Ogata, told the conference. Since this migration began, UNHCR has collected many testimonies pointing towards the forced removal of the entire population, apart from the many men, of whom some have been executed.

The paramilitary forces of the Serbian 'warlord' Arkan are frequently identified by the refugees as responsible for these abuses, said UNHCR spokesman in Geneva Kris Janowski. "The men are missing, and the refugees all say

they were killed and tortured in front of their families," he informed a press conference. Faced with this tragedy (which UNHCR admits is being handled better in Albania than in Macedonia), the government in Skopje has decided to close the border where some 60,000 Kosovars are gathered, about two thousand of whom have already been airlifted to Norway or Turkey. These movements are being carried out in conditions that are unacceptable to UNHCR. Families were separated, did not know where they are going, and had not been registered by UNHCR. "We wish to avoid transfers of this kind, without the involvement of UNHCR," explained Judith Kumin, spokesperson for UNHCR as a whole.

Most members of the Atlantic Alliance have now agreed to accept refugees from Kosovo on a temporary basis. France, doubtful even about the principle of taking these refugees away from their home region, finally agreed, with prime minister Lionel Jospin acting as an intermediary.

**On 7 April 1999, in an interview with the Belgian newspaper *Le Soir*, the Executive Director of MSF Belgium, while acknowledging Milosevic's political responsibility, declared that NATO had exported the Kosovo problem outside the province. He criticised the fact that politicians and army officers were turning themselves into humanitarians, and pronounced his support for opening the borders of Western countries to refugees from Kosovo. The Spanish section of MSF issued a press statement in which it demanded that humanitarian space be created and the civilian population inside Kosovo be protected. The French daily paper *Libération* published an appeal for action by ground troops and for recognition of Kosovo's independence by the European Union. The appeal was launched by a group of French intellectuals, including Rony Brauman, described as 'honorary president'<sup>14</sup> of Médecins Sans Frontières. The text was reprinted, under the names of Rony Brauman and Alain Finkielkraut only, in the Spanish daily paper *El Mundo*, in its issue of 9 April.**



*'On Western Ambivalence Regarding Acceptance of Refugees from Kosovo.'* Alex Parisel, Executive Director of MSF Belgium, interviewed by Agnès Gorissen, **Le Soir**, 7 April 1999 (in French).  
**D126**

#### **Extract:**

In your opinion, what is NATO's responsibility for what is happening?

– I cannot give my opinion as to whether the air strikes

14. There is no position of honorary president in MSF France. In 1999, Rony Brauman had not been president of the section for five years. Since May 1994, he has been director of studies at the MSF Foundation in France.

were appropriate. I can only note that before the strikes, Kosovo had no political future, but humanitarian agencies had access to the population on the spot. Since then, not only is there a total black-out in the province, and no humanitarian work can be done there any more, but we do not have access to the refugees in neighbouring countries. Clearly, intervention by NATO has exported the Kosovo problem outside Kosovo – even if the underlying problem is the policy of the Yugoslav president, Milosevic.

Is involvement by soldiers in humanitarian operations a good way of 'making amends'?

– Certainly not! NATO is a military actor, with military and political objectives. When politicians and the military turn into humanitarian actors, we witness scenes like those we saw last Monday in Macedonia, when refugees were shoved onto planes without a word, without even knowing their destination – Turkey, as it happened. To me, that looks very much like arbitrary 'deportation.' It wouldn't have happened if UNHCR had been allowed to manage things. It has wide experience of this type of situation, even to the point, if it deems it necessary, of calling on military logistical support. But the politicians speak in the name of humanitarianism, creating more confusion than solutions – that's true even of Emma Bonino, the EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs. At this point, it is more than urgent to put an end to manipulation and the cacophony of voices, and to redefine roles: let the politicians and the soldiers return to their own issues – that means Kosovo and Yugoslavia – and leave the humanitarians to deal with the refugees. We're tired of being caught in a loop, of not being able to do our job. Above all, it's unacceptable for hundreds of thousands of people to remain hostage to political issues that are bigger than themselves.

Should the borders of Western countries be opened to these refugees or not?

– In a way, the west has some responsibility for what is happening on the ground, even if, I repeat, it is President Milosevic's policies that are at the root of the problem. The west must now take responsibility for the consequences of its actions. To say that to accept the refugees would amount to conceding victory to Milosevic in his policy of ethnic cleansing is hypocritical. Those people are there, uprooted; they have lost everything, and have no social structure to which to attach themselves. We cannot leave them in this state of distress. We have to offer them protection, even if it's temporary. That is the only possible humanitarian – or human – position.



'Médecins Sans Frontières Demands the Immediate Creation of Humanitarian Space and Protection for the Civilian Population inside Kosovo,' **Press release**, MSF Spain, 7 April 1999 (in Spanish). [D127](#)

**Extract:**

There is no access for humanitarian assistance in Kosovo,

and the population is completely unprotected. In these conditions, there is a clear risk that in the coming days and weeks there may be even greater suffering and death among the civilian population. In view of possible future developments in Kosovo, MSF is firmly committed to meeting humanitarian needs in this region. At the present time, there is an urgent need in the region of Kosovo for medical assistance, effective protection of the civilian population in the face of ethnic cleansing, and the creation of independent and impartial humanitarian space. In view of events in Kosovo and its neighbouring regions, MSF is making an appeal, and asking for immediate action on these specific points:

1. MSF asks the parties to the conflict to give independent humanitarian organisations access so that they can provide humanitarian assistance and protection to all the civilian population who are victims of the conflict, of ethnic cleansing, and displacement inside Kosovo.
2. Humanitarian needs and priorities should be coordinated by an impartial agency of the United Nations. NATO should restrict itself to providing logistical support only when it is requested.
3. In neighbouring regions, local authorities in the area should take all necessary measures to eliminate bureaucratic obstacles in the reception zones, obstacles that are impeding the delivery of aid.



'The European Union will Have to Recognise Kosovo's Independence – The Case for Military Action,' by Rony Brauman, Alain Finkelkraut, Jean-Claude Guillebaud, and Paul Thibaud, **Libération** (France), 7 April 1999 (in French).



'The Case for Military Action,' Rony Brauman and Alain Finkelkraut, **El Mundo** (Spain), 9 April 1999 (in Spanish).

*Libération – Debates*

In Kosovo, where we are facing an insane and odious project to eliminate a nation, intervention by European Union governments must meet the criteria of what is materially, morally, and politically indispensable. That now means military action, since it is either much too late for negotiations (they have failed), or else too soon. We first have – before the to-be-wished-for conference on the question of borders in the region of the Southern Slavs – to stop Milosevic, and prevent him from resolving things in his own way. This military action must not be a form of protest or assistance, but a policy, a way of resolving the question, of creating the basis for a just solution.

To achieve that, we have to escape from two straitjackets: first, the straitjacket of air strikes alone. NATO has so far limited its action to such strikes, and they have not made Milosevic give way. They are being justified now on the grounds that they are destroying the Serbian military


machine. But this aim, while rational in principle, is liable to lead to something that is morally odious: a scorched earth policy in Serbia. It is clear that we have to change our military approach, and that European governments must take the initiative in doing so. Secondly, the strait-jacket of international 'legalism'. In Bosnia, the only thing that was achieved was a result that was little more than precarious and artificial; projecting a multi-ethnic, post-nationalist solution that bore no relationship to the way people were thinking.

In Kosovo, it's the moral obsession with punishing Milosevic that's blinding us. Lawyers are looking for him; planes are targeting him for his past and present crimes. Politicians ought first to concern themselves with the future by supporting the tyrant's victims, opposing his plans, resolving the situation against his wishes, and persuading the Serbs to no longer to identify with their ruler. The bombings, of which Milosevic is the symbolic target, have a threefold disadvantage: they are not stopping ethnic cleansing; they are not preventing Milosevic from hoping he will be able to retain part of his 'prey;' and they are drawing the Serbs close around him. Another form of action is possible that would delegitimise the Serbian leader, back up the Kosovars, and settle the question of Kosovo; EU governments must take it.


The essential thing is to take action on the ground, which would break with the 'archangelic' and morally repugnant style of a war in which we suffer no deaths, in which the Americans are hemming themselves in and hemming us in. Now, as we await the formation of an expeditionary force capable of holding Kosovo, we can help and encourage the Kosovars, and create, defend and extend a zone of refuge in Albania and Macedonia, providing support for the troops on the ground. But, the clear aim of this intervention must be to establish independence for Kosovo, without the prospect of partition or integration into Yugoslavia. Recognition of its independence by the EU is vital if its commitment is to appear firm, and if it is clearly to be seen that the solution does not lie with Milosevic.

Milosevic has two means of covering up his brutality and turning it to his advantage: Yugoslav sovereignty and the need for his agreement in resolving border problems. The use he is making of the former is such that we can no longer stop there. We also have to deprive him of the latter advantage by no longer making him the key actor on whom 'pressure is put,' and by creating a *fait accompli* that thwarts his plans. In order to preserve the tool of their tutelary role over Europe, the Americans are restricting themselves to what they can take on (and what is manifestly inadequate): intervention by NATO in Kosovo. Here is an opportunity for European governments to emancipate themselves, not in a spirit of resentment or by cultivating ingratitude, but out of necessity, out of a duty towards themselves; not dragging their feet like rebellious client states but by taking the initiative. Are they capable of an act of radical autonomy like that?


We are among those who have criticised (and are still criticising) the way in which the European Union was constructed, through the by-passing and humiliation of nations, through the destruction and not the creation of political will. Current events are not proving us wrong. But if the EU seizes the opportunity it has of legitimising itself in action, we will support it without hesitation, even while continuing to debate its institutional style. Europe's determination to assert itself is the criterion by which to choose between the various forms of Europe.

 *Rony also demands independence for Kosovo. That's nice! Maybe...why not? But if they had launched a ground attack, would that have been in the Kosovars' interests? We may still wonder about that. Perhaps they would have taken the opportunity of massacring a few of them themselves. Did Rony demand a ground attack to protect the Kosovars?*

Eric Dachy, Programme Manager MSF Belgium  
(in French).

 *If Rony thought it necessary to use force, he thought so as a private citizen. But it wasn't for MSF to say: "We think it's good that there are strikes." I think you have to distinguish between the two positions.*

Eric Stobbaerts, Executive Director,  
MSF Spain (in French).

 *You have to look first at how this type of text comes about. Usually, it's on the initiative of an individual or a small group. Either out of a feeling of personal affinity – as in the case of this text – or from a 'political calculation.' In the positive sense, you look for artists, humanitarians, intellectuals, politicians, to give a kind of cross-section of opinions. You hunt around in many different directions. And I was, no doubt, contacted as the 'duty humanitarian.' I had no part in writing this text. But as soon as it was published, I thought it was useful to support a position like that. I signed it. What I think is good, is that the Kosovars are in the foreground.*

*First and foremost, it was an appeal to support the KLA. And you can be critical later. The Kosovars who were organised militarily were the KLA, and the KLA was a group that's certainly open to criticism, sometimes Islamist, sometimes tending towards fascism. So they're not the kind of people whose case can easily be made. But at the time, we didn't really know that. Furthermore, we weren't in a position to choose our allies. We supported Rugova while at the same time demanding that the Kosovars' appeal to be able to*



take part in the fighting, to do the fighting on the ground, be answered. It's an approach in which I recognise myself, anyway; responsibility owned by those concerned, rather than liberation from outside. It's an approach that seems useful to me. And the critique of the vision that was being called 'providential' – life and death falling from the skies, the planes we sent up there – that's a position I continue to defend. There isn't a word about humanitarian action in this text. That absurd signature as 'honorary president,' I don't know where it came from. I have to acknowledge it, but I take no responsibility for it. As for the publication of the article in *El Mundo*, I had heard about it, but I had never seen it. And I didn't know that Alain Finkielkraut and I were the only signatories. *Libération* is read in Belgium, and Switzerland. Publication in Spain brought the thing back into the whole international movement, and created an echo effect. And no doubt I spoke on RFI [Radio France Internationale], after that. I understand clearly that in a context in which the other sections are accustomed to seeing MSF France tending to go roaring off, swords drawn... my declarations, signed "Rony Brauman, Honorary President of MSF" raised a few eyebrows.

Rony Brauman, Director of studies,  
MSF France Foundation (in French).

Journalists were always trying to get us to call for the deployment of ground troops, because the opposition and even some Labour Party people were demanding it. We didn't really want to call for intervention on the ground, because we thought that wasn't exactly our role. We replied: "We're not experts in military affairs, but what's sure is that bombing from 50,000 feet ..." We said that to bomb from 15,000 feet was a kind of air protection against Milosevic's defences, but it brought no humanitarian protection for the people, as there were no ground troops. We said that if the NATO intervention had a humanitarian purpose, only Tony Blair could demonstrate it. Without ground troops, the notion of humanitarian protection is meaningless. We've said that from the beginning.

Anne-Marie Huby, MSF UK Executive  
Director (in French).

Later, of course, we joined in the critiques about the nature of the intervention, and the increased risk that the choice of not wishing to envisage a ground attack imposed on local populations. But, I don't recall sticking my neck out to the point of saying we should send in the GIs in person. It was more a matter of: "At this point we'd like to see some sort of leadership on this question, an intervention, if you like."

[...], Executive Director, MSF USA (in French).

So the question was: "If we speak in favour of bombardments or ground troops, which then begin to be the question, are we justifying what is inevitable, what is already happening and adding weight to the NATO propaganda around this particular action?" They had the ground troops there. They had the attack helicopters: "When should we? When do we? We don't know! We're not sure! Should we use the helicopters?" And, some [more] questions about all of these issues. They [NATO] were prepared and the only thing that was holding them back from ground troops and from using their attack helicopters which would have been very effective in the mountains they were in was the question of tolerance in their own home society for casualties. And if we had been sucked in by the argument by making a statement on what is right, what is wrong, the effectiveness of bombardments, ground troops or whatever, we would have become part of the strategy. It was really not obvious. Personally, in the heat of the moment, being on the border and looking across the border and seeing people walking across the border, seeing hundred of thousand of people leaving their homes, seeing the fighter jets dropping bombs and seeing, I could have gone either way, honestly you know. In retrospect I'm very glad that we did not take a position on those ground troops.

James Orbinsky, President,  
MSF International Council (in English).

**Slobodan Milosevic announced a unilateral cease-fire in Kosovo. On 7 April, NATO stated that this measure was not enough, and repeated the five conditions necessary for air strikes to stop.**



'NATO Reminds Belgrade of its Five Conditions,'  
**AFP** (France), Brussels, 7 April 1999 (in French).

**Extract:**

Wednesday, NATO reminded Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic of its five conditions for a halt to the bombardments, which, in the absence so far of a positive response, are continuing. Jamie Shea, the Spokesman for the Alliance, said these five conditions are:

- Cessation of hostilities and murders in Kosovo
- Withdrawal of armed forces and police from the province,
- Acceptance of the deployment in Kosovo of an international peace force
- That all refugees be allowed to return to the province,
- That [his government] contribute to the conclusion of a political agreement making Kosovo autonomous.

While the response to these demands is awaited, "NATO airborne operations in Yugoslavia are continuing", said Jamie Shea, at the daily NATO press conference, remind-

ing his audience that on Tuesday the allies had considered Slobodan Milosevic's announcement of a unilateral cease-fire Kosovo as "insufficient."

**In a press release on 8 April 1999, MSF USA reiterated MSF's activities in the region of Kosovo, and expressed its concern about the fate of the Albanian populations remaining in Kosovo. It requested that the international community ensure the application of humanitarian law on the registration, movement, and repatriation of the refugees. *The New York Times* refers to this position in an article on the questions raised by some humanitarian organisations about the confusion between military and humanitarian action.**



'Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in the Kosovo Region,' **Fact sheet**, MSF USA, 8 April 1999 (in English). **D128** [↗](#)

*"It's terrible. It's really hard to describe. You can see in the eyes of the refugees... they are extremely overstressed; they are tired, afraid... Some people were able to grab a few things when they left Pristina...most had not time to take anything. They had to pass checkpoints on the way to Macedonia, where they were stripped of their belongings, so they have no passports or papers."* - Martin Tekulve, Doctors Without Borders, Macedonia, April 1, 1999.

- There are 85 Doctors Without Borders international volunteers working on the refugee effort. Doctors Without Borders has now sent eight cargo flights to the region.

- Doctors Without Borders was able to begin work immediately in Albania, focusing on refugees gathered in the towns of Krume and Lataj in the north and Vier in the south. Many refugees are passing through the northern villages on the way to other locations; Doctors Without Borders is providing first aid and mental health care. In the southern region, where the number of refugees is increasing daily, Doctors Without Borders is setting up urgently needed water and sanitation structures, establishing health posts, and conducting epidemiological surveillance. Refugees are mainly suffering from exhaustion, respiratory infections, diarrhea, and traumatic stress.

- In Macedonia, Doctors Without Borders, along with a number of other aid agencies, faced difficulties receiving authorization to begin working and to retrieve our medical supplies. Doctors Without Borders issued a press release on April 5, 1999, demanding full access to the refugees and the ability to work. We are now providing assistance in some of the refugee encampments and have provided supplies to other agencies, including the Macedonian Red Cross. As of this writing, large numbers of refugees are being relocated both within Macedonia, and to other nations by the Macedonian government; the situation is changing by the minute.

- In Montenegro, Doctors Without Borders is preparing

to launch a medical program in Ulcinje and Rozaje. There are currently five American Doctors Without Borders volunteers in the region. They include a nurse, psychologist, logistician, doctor, and public health specialist.

- Doctors Without Borders is extremely concerned about the protection of those Kosovars still within Kosovo and those who appear to have been involuntarily relocated. We call on the international community to ensure the enforcement of international humanitarian law with regard to their registration, relocation, and eventual repatriation.



'*With NATO in Charge, Relief Looks Less Neutral,*' Elisabeth Becker, ***The New York Times*** (USA), 10 April 1999 (in English). **D129** [↗](#)

#### Extract:

The new partnership of NATO and the United Nations refugee agency is bringing supplies and shelter to hundreds of thousands who have fled Kosovo, but some fear it is straining the traditional neutrality of aid groups. NATO troops have set up camps in Albania and Macedonia, NATO airplanes are flying badly needed supplies there and NATO technicians are running all the logistics for the flights, even at the United Nations refugee headquarters in Geneva. By working so closely with one side's military during an ongoing assault, the refugee agency may have crossed the line that allows relief organizations to care for the victims of both sides of a conflict, some governments and aid groups say. "I'm afraid that in the minds of Americans and Europeans, the military and the relief organizations are working on one side of the war together," said Joelle Tanguy, the Executive Director of Doctors Without Borders. "We're all part of the same operation, but we can't be. Independence is our main asset - to be able to walk into a war zone and act as independent relief workers."

On Tuesday, Kofi Annan, the United Nations Secretary General, defended the relationship during a Security Council meeting, saying he personally approved and "gratefully accepted" NATO's involvement. At the request of the Russian delegate to the United Nations, Mr. Annan also made public the exchange of letters between Secretary General Javier Solana of NATO and Sadako Ogata, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which established their partnership. On Wednesday, NATO spokesmen in Brussels were dealing with the same subject, saying that "NATO will not seek to create an independent humanitarian role for itself" and that the military was under the lead of the high commissioner. "It's obviously an extremely uncomfortable position," said Kathleen Newland, a refugee expert at the Carnegie Endowment, speaking of the United Nations refugee agency. "They're trying to emphasize the civilian character of the operation, but that protest pretty much flies in the face of what is obvious - that UNHCR is lining up with one side of the conflict." Echoing the sentiments at other relief

organizations, she said: "As far as the NATO participation in relief operations goes, that's all for the good, they are life savers." Neutrality is a responsibility under international law for many refugee organizations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross, which said this week it could not become partners with NATO the way the United Nations refugee agency has.

When asked for alternatives, Ms. Tanguy and other aid organizers suggested keeping the military and relief operations entirely separate, with individual countries making contributions and the United Nations in charge. Referring to NATO refugee camps in Macedonia, she said, "They should be UNHCR camps from the very start." She and other officials said the Macedonian Government could have been forced to negotiate with the United Nations refugee agency, and that the agency's officials could then have supervised the camps' construction by soldiers. But other officials who have handled refugee crises in this decade say that there is no getting around the role the military inevitably takes after it is called into these operations, as it must be. "In Kosovo, in great part, the military has taken over the relief effort," said Morton Abramowitz, a Senior Fellow at the Council of Foreign Relations, the research organization. "The magnitude of suffering has to be relieved as quickly as you can," he said, "and you have to put aside all other questions." As the United States Ambassador to Turkey, Mr. Abramowitz helped conceive and oversee ground-breaking cooperation by relief groups and the American and British militaries to escort tens of thousands of Iraqi Kurds from Turkey to a safe haven area in northern Iraq after the Persian Gulf War. United States and allied combat jets continue to patrol the skies over their village homes.

**On 9 April, at the press conference given in Skopje by the High Commissioner for Refugees, MSF expressed its concern that minimal criteria for assistance and protection of Kosovar refugees be met. The press release supporting these declarations was relayed by the different sections. The president of the international movement stated that the Kosovar refugees arriving in Albania were in a state of shock. V1**



'Ogata in Skopje,' Email from Samantha Bolton, MSF International Communication Coordinator, to MSF press officers, 8 April 1999 (in English).

D130

**Extract:**

Dear aIL,

Just to let you know that Sagato Ogata head of UNHCR has just arrived in Skopje and will be here for a day and a half. She just had a live press conference at the airport at which she announced that she had had a meeting with Solana the Head of NATO, to insist that UNHCR should

be allowed to fully coordinate the camps - in Macedonia. Apparently, Solana agreed that NATO would like to hand over (even though they have had great PR out of using 'humanitarian' as the reason for intervening in Kosovo in the first place and then by having all the soldiers having a softer image helping out the refugees and doing NGO type quotes about how they didn't know how they could cope with all the refugees).

Anyway, the plan is for MSF to do a press briefing/press release tomorrow before the next Ogata one, setting the agenda with some serious issues which we are having with the refugees [...]. Tonight the comm team here in Skopje will be working with the humanitarian affairs officers and the teams to work on what we can say to support what UNHCR is saying but also to clarify exactly what they need to be doing. MSF F (Montenegro) and MSF B (Albania) have been alerted, and will be looking into what they might like to add from the point of view of the refugee problems in the respective countries.

Strategically this is an ideal opportunity to put all the difficult issues we are having with refugees and access on the table, especially the more sensitive govt related blocking issues - as they can all be put into one UNHCR/refugee rights/humanitarian NGO right to access message without talking about the govts (Ogata was already hinting at that, so let her do that part - we put the pressure on UNHCR). In Skopje there are some serious issues with the camps - not least that they really are like military camps with soldiers in fatigues everywhere - trying their best to coordinate - without much success (they are better on the logistics - digging and clearing).

From UNHCR point of view there is very weak registration; refugees don't know who of their family has been sent to another camp, to Turkey or Norway, or onto other sites. Refugees are not allowed to move freely in and out and there are difficulties with patients being transferred in hospitals outside the camps and then getting back in etc. We really have to do a big push on this issue - this is our chance to reestablish what humanitarian means. As humanitarian organisations we appear to have been co-opted into NATO operations as they are the only ones with visibility at this point in time. We should also think of editorials/in depth op-eds, etc., to follow up on this issue to keep our independence on the agenda and to make it clear that humanitarian does not mean NATO air strikes. If we do not do this now then that may be the only thing people remember of this whole political media circus 'humanitarian intervention is military strikes.' That's all for now more from the team later Samantha.



'Médecins Sans Frontières Asks that UNHCR Carry Out its Mandate with the Refugees,' **Press release**, MSF Belgium, MSF Holland, Brussels/Skopje, 9 April 1999 (in French). 'Médecins Sans Frontières Expressly Requests that UNHCR Carry Out its Mandate with the Refugees,' **Press release**, MSF France, Paris, 9 April 1999 (in French). 'UNHCR Must Take Full Responsibility for All of the Kosovo Refugees – Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Calls on Mrs Sadako Ogata to Take Action,' **Press release**, MSF Skopje, Macedonia /New York, USA, April 9 1999 (in English). [D131](#)

#### Extract:

*Skopje, Macedonia/New York, April 9, 1999* — The international medical relief organization Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) today called on Mrs. Sadako Ogata to ensure that UNHCR takes full responsibility for the Kosovo refugees, including those outside the NATO refugee camps. UNHCR must ensure that it fulfils its mandate to fully protect and assist the refugees in accordance with international refugee standards. MSF is extremely concerned that the minimum standards for the assistance and protection of refugees have been ignored for the Kosovo refugees. "Many innocent civilians are suffering from the conflict in Yugoslavia. The least we can do is to take proper care of the people who escape," said Dr. Lex Winkler, Executive Director of MSF. «This means that UNHCR must take on its full responsibilities to assist and protect these people.

During the past couple of weeks, refugees were left for days in difficult conditions at the border, with no assistance. Recently at the border in Blace, when refugees were put into buses and transported away, there was no permanent UNHCR presence to monitor the number and destination of buses or refugees. The systematic monitoring of new arriving refugees is still not taking place, and many refugees have not been registered. Without registration, refugees have no rights and families cannot be reunified. Without registered names, the numbers of refugees are easy to manipulate and assistance is difficult to monitor. Families were and still are being separated and transported to camps and to other countries (sometimes without their consent) and without information about each others' whereabouts.

Although heavy logistical assistance has been useful, NATO is first and foremost a military organization which is currently involved in the conflict. It is not a humanitarian actor and is neither responsible nor able to coordinate humanitarian relief activities for refugees. Protection and assistance for refugees is the responsibility of UNHCR. UNHCR must take responsibility for the refugees in the NATO refugee camps (Stencovic, Brazda and Neprostenjo), or other camps (Radusa) as well as for the thousands of

refugees who are temporarily housed with families, for those who are still crossing the borders, and for those who are trying to do so but are being returned. MSF calls on Mrs. Ogata to ensure that UNHCR fulfils its mandate and specifically that it:

- Ensure that the individual needs of refugees are met, particularly for vulnerable groups
- Ensure registration of refugees and reunification of families
- Ensure that the refugees and not forcefully repatriated or relocated
- Ensure that refugees are treated humanely



'The Kosovar Refugees: a Population in Shock,' Michael Thurston, **AFP** (France), Kukes (Albania), 8 April 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

According to Dr James Orbinsky, one of the many foreign doctors now in Kukes, in Albania, near the border with Kosovo, "the effects are profound. Only time will allow the wounds to heal, but sometimes they are there for life." The doctors meeting the Kosovar refugees at the Albanian border have to deal with an entire population – adults, and children, too – in a state of psychological shock. 300,000 refugees have arrived at Kukes within a few days. Their testimonies emerge without the need for questions from journalists or help from the humanitarians. They've come back from hell, and they need to talk about it. "They're in a state of profound shock (post-traumatic stress, in medical terms). We've seen similar situations in Rwanda and Afghanistan," said the doctor. "The need to tell their story is a classic symptom. They have been dehumanised, they're trying to re-establish some sort of human contact," added Orbinsky. [...] In the most difficult cases, you have to resort to medication. "If they really can't cope, the only solution is to prescribe sedatives." [...] "The children don't have the same ability to express themselves as the adults. They tend to somatise stress. Psychological trauma often shows itself in them in the form of stomach troubles," explained Dr Orbinsky.



'UNHCR Aid to Displaced Persons is Still Being Limited by the Skopje Authorities,' Henri de Bresson, **Le Monde** (France), 11 April 1999 (in French). [D132](#)

#### Extract:

Taking advantage of the arrival of Mrs Ogata, the humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), which has several teams in place, delivered a strong protest against this situation at Skopje on Friday 9 April. In its view, "minimal criteria of assistance and protection have been ignored in the case of the refugees from Kosovo." At a press conference, Mrs Ogata promised to remedy this situation, assuring journalists that she had obtained a guarantee that the border would no longer be closed to

refugees, as was still the case on Thursday at the Jahnice border-post, where several hundred people were being help up by the Macedonians. UNHCR intends, Mrs Ogata said, progressively to take over administration of the NATO camps. But at the moment, in Macedonia, there is nothing to suggest that she still has the resources she once had. She believed that in any case, the allied forces would be needed to continue to provide security in the camps.

The refusal by the Macedonians to allow the refugees freedom of movement could cause new tensions both inside and outside the camps. If the situation deteriorates, the Albanian-speaking community in Macedonia will not stand meekly by. Must NATO then provide the police? The only solution (and the government is sticking to it) might well be to send the refugees as far away as possible to host countries. At present, only Albania (which had to be persuaded to accept 10,000 additional refugees), Germany, Turkey and Norway have agreed to take a significant number. Between 1,000 and 1,500 are leaving Skopje every day by air, under the supervision of OSCE.



*'War in Europe – Medical Charity Accuses United Nations Official of Failing Refugees - Organisation says minimum standards ignored for 600,000,' Tracey Lawson (in Blace), **The Scotsman** (UK), 10 April 1999 (in English).*

#### Extract:

An international medical relief charity yesterday accused the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees of failing to protect and assist 600,000 ethnic Albanian refugees who have fled Kosovo. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), which has sent more than 30 doctors to Macedonia and Albania, also claimed Sadako Ogata had not ensured that refugees were registered, exacerbating the problem of reuniting families who have been separated and jeopardising medical treatment.

MSF made its stinging criticisms in a harshly-worked statement issued as the Japanese head of UNHCR visited refugee camps in Macedonia set up by NATO to shelter the 165,000 ethnic Albanians who have flooded into the republic. In one of the most embarrassing condemnations ever suffered by UNHCR, the world-respected relief agency said: "MSF is extremely concerned that the minimum standards for the assistance and protection of refugees have been ignored for the Kosovo refugees. UNHCR must ensure that it fulfils its mandate to fully protect and assist the refugees in accordance with international refugee standards." Dr Lex Winkler, the MSF Executive Director, added: "Too many innocent civilians are suffering from the conflict in Yugoslavia. The least we can do is to take proper care of the people who escape. This means that UNHCR must take on its full responsibilities to assist and protect these people."

MSF's condemnation follow high levels of privately-expressed concern by NATO officials and other relief organizations in Macedonia that UNHCR had failed to secure the welfare to refugees. The Macedonian government, which has admitted it was overwhelmed by the number of Kosovars seeking shelter, granted NATO complete control of the crisis earlier this week. Since Monday, troops from Britain, France, Italy and Germany have erected six refugee camps that now hold 44,000 Kosovars. The move followed world criticism of Macedonia after its officials corralled 5,000 refugees into a small transit camp at the border crossing at Blace, with inadequate food, water and sanitation. More than 30,000 refugees were forcibly cleared out of the camp on Tuesday night without being registered; NATO is desperate to hand over control of the camps to UNHCR and free its troops to concentrate on peacekeeping duties.

However, there are concerns that UNHCR remains ineffective and unprepared. The frustration of dozens of relief organisations and military commanders in the area was reflected in the catalogue of criticisms issued by MSF. The independent charity claimed UNHCR allowed refugees to remain in squalid conditions at Blace for several days. MSF also accused the commission of failing to monitor properly the number and destination of refugees evacuated from Blace by the Macedonians and the failing to register the Kosovars on arrival at Nato camps. MSF officials said that registration was vital to assess health needs and to isolate those who might be carrying contagious diseases, which would spread rapidly in the camps. Then MSF continued: "NATO is neither responsible nor able to coordinate humanitarian relief activities for refugees - nor should it be. Protection and assistance for refugees is the responsibility of UNHCR." The relief agency also demanded the UNHCR prevent forcible repatriation or evacuation of ethnic Albanians from Macedonia.

Mrs Ogata responded by claiming that the UNHCR had taken a leading role in setting up NATO camps and registration services, which are to begin in earnest today, and claimed UNHCR's work has been hampered by the Macedonian authorities' refusal to allow it access to refugees at Blace.

In the Macedonian capital of Skopje, she said: «we don't have hundreds of staff. We are very much in the planning and taking the lead in asking for these things and making arrangements. "I think criticisms are freely given by many people at many times. If MSF are referring to the setting up of transient camps, it was the blockage of the border and our not being able to have access (to the refugees) which aggravated the situation." Kris Janowski, a UNHCR spokesman, said the welfare of refugees' health had been a greater priority than immediate registration.

- You can have an epidemic on your hands within days  
It is people such as Christa Hook who are bearing the brunt of the United Nations High Commission For Refugees' alleged failure to protect and assist 600,000

ethnic Albanian refugees who have fled or been forced out of Kosovo, writes Tracey Lawson. In the hills north of Skopje, in the Brazda area of Macedonia, Christa Hook, who works for the relief agency Médecins Sans Frontières, is helping to piece together the shattered lives of the constant stream of pathetic refugees. But, like many relief workers from almost 40 non-government organisations who have put their lives on hold to combat the suffering, she knows the dedication of individuals and voluntary groups alone is not enough. "Effective relief on this level has to come from higher up the ladder. And refugees are the responsibility of UNHCR," she said. "There are some basic things which only UNHCR can do on such a huge scale, and they have not been done."

The Geneva-based UNHCR's failure to register refugees released from Blace is among a number of mistakes Dr Hook and her colleagues believe the commission had made. The 56-year-old Scot added: "with registration, health problems can be listed and this is a vital way of safeguarding the entire population of refugees. It only needs one person with a contagious disease in living conditions like this and you can have an epidemic on your hands within days. On an individual basis we need to know who had chronic conditions, such as diabetes, so we can plan what levels of medication these people need." MSF's mission to safeguard the health of populations in crisis-hit regions has perhaps made it angrier than other relief groups at UNHCR's alleged failures.

Dr Hook, who works as a locum GP in Scotland between relief stints with the agency, was attracted to MSF because of its approach to securing a safe environment by providing sanitation, clean water, and other logistic requirements vital to effective medical aid. Originally from Perth, she has since 1994 worked with MSF in Zaire, Rwanda, Georgia, in for the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia, waving goodbye to her Edinburgh home and three grown-up children to help to save the lives of others. "I don't know where my motivation comes from, but I love my work, and it is rewarding to feel that you can give something to people who have lost so much," she said. "MSF's broad approach to healthcare and logistic support means lives can be saved. But we cannot work alone. Our good intentions and hard work are not enough. We need the help of people who have official responsibility for people such as the Kosovar refugees and that means UNHCR."



'Follow Up from Ops/Comm on UNHCR,' Email from Samantha Bolton, Communications Coordinator MSF International to the Programme Managers and communication departments, 10 April 1999 (in English). [D133](#)

#### Extract:

Just a short note to follow up on Ruuds last note. There were around 15 TV stations at the Ogata press conference and around 100 journalists. Most had received

the MSF press statement in the morning when we all distributed it at breakfast in the main hotels. It seems as though most of them will hang around for another week or so - and then go down to basic rotations until something radical happens again. That means that this week they will be running around looking for stories and following up on any of the issues raised, including checking if UNHCR and NGOs are doing their job properly now that they have made such a fuss!

It is essential that we follow up on the issues that we have raised - both in terms of our operations (explos/working with non-NATO camps + coherent message follow up) plus following up with UNHCR to make sure they do register the refugees and deal with the refugees not in the NATO camps, etc.

PRESS CONFERENCE - Ogata came into the press conference after meeting with the Prime Minister and President. She said that "both UNHCR and the Macedonian Govt have learned some lessons." Many of the journalists raised questions about the UNHCR's capacity to actually deal effectively with the refugee crisis - not competent enough. Also, questions about missing refugees. UNHCR said they would start registration today and that they were concerned about those remaining in Kosovo. The main point that was picked up in the UNHCR press conference, from our statement, was asked by *Il Giornale* - Italian newspaper - to Ogata basically saying that MSF was concerned about the refugees who were not in the three official NATO camps, and what would be done for them. Ogata then said that they were trying their best, that they were negotiating with the Macedonian gov't to better assist these refugees and that UNHCR looked forward to working for these refugees with MSF. MSF was the only international NGO mentioned by name in the press' conference.

MSF's statement came out at the right time, as yesterday, the German gov't also expressed concern at the way UNHCR had been working (in diplomatic speak that is tantamount to slamming them). Most of the journalists had already seen for themselves what a mess the whole thing was from a humanitarian point of view, and are clear that without the military assistance the NGOs/UNHCR could have never got their act together (this means this is what the public is reading!)

OPERATIONAL FOLLOW UP - It is essential that now MSF operations follow up on these concerns that we have expressed. If we are saying that we have been blocked or have not had enough access and are concerned about the people outside the camps, then we have to make sure that we really are trying to reach them and to do something (also be visible working outside NATO camps). MSF teams in Macedonia are already planning / doing explos etc - so good news.

MILITARY HAND-OVER - Some of the handovers from military are now happening - the Israeli military hospital will hand over to the German Red Cross (Israelis coming over

to help the Muslims and then being taken over by the Germans in a camp...)! The NATO health post in Brazdra camp will be handed over to MSF on Sunday. The NATO health post in Stancovitch will be handed over the IMC. The NATO soldiers will still be in the camps but not doing health or sanitation - security presence (not sure of exact wording for what they are doing).

[...]PS - After press conference UNHCR Spokesperson, Kris Janowski, was being filmed and interviewed by ZDF and made a big show of coming up to give MSF a big kiss and a hug to show that UNHCR and MSF are friends! Even said jokingly that he was irritated that ZDF had turned off the camera for the event!!! - Maybe we should readapt our comm tactics...

*We stated that it was not possible that UNHCR should not be doing its work, and that people were not registered, and the camps were being run by the military. We made our decision very quickly, in the evening... The director of communications of MSF France had arrived with volunteers. We called them: "We're writing a press release, come this evening." We all sat down in the MSF Holland office. We wrote this communiqué, which we distributed the moment Ogata arrived, and we said UNHCR was not doing its work. I had just arrived. I didn't really have the time to get a sense of how things were on the ground... MSF had not yet issued any message. Heads of Missions came one after another. They hadn't thought about it. I used the threat of creating a scandal among the other sections if they didn't do something about it. They did do something, and they said it had been very helpful, but that it would have been much more helpful to have this discussion earlier. Speaking out like that had been little discussed with head offices. We wanted to say something. I had called the legal officer to find out what words one should use for repatriation, and if that was UNHCR's responsibility. Our message was coherent.*

Samantha Bolton, Communications Coordinator, MSF International (in French).

*We were very shocked by UNHCR's attitude. And there had also been a public argument. We attacked UNHCR over it. We told them we could not understand why they were giving up as humanitarians in the face of NATO. We did it in public. It even led to specific ground operations. The determination by the Brussels operational centre to open a refugee camp in Albania that was not militarised by one of the parties in the conflict arose from that. [...] There were serious tensions on that subject. We felt that the humanitarian issue was sucked up into NATO propaganda.*

Jean-Hervé Bradol, Director of Operations, MSF France (in French).

*We noticed all these military camps that were springing up all over the place. I telephoned two or three American NGOs and asked them: "Isn't that a problem for you? We would like to communicate about that. When all these logistics are allowed to be put in place, and the problem of registration is added to it, the humanitarian identity of the thing is in question. Clearly, we're dealing with people who have absolutely no idea what a refugee is. They're treating the refugees as if they were immigrants or victims of a natural disaster, and had to be given shelter." I telephoned the director of emergency operations of the IRC [International Rescue Committee], one of the American organisations with the largest presence in Albania and Macedonia. It was deeply involved in Kosovo at that time. I put this whole question to him. He replied: "I've no idea what you're talking about. It's a bit difficult for me to make an acknowledgement of this kind, because my father's an army officer, and my brother, and I've always seen a certain value in military intervention." I telephoned Jim Bishop, a former ambassador, and president of the aid committee of InterAction, the umbrella organisation of American NGOs, and I said to him: "in MSF we've begun to develop a certain way of thinking about this military intervention. Do you know if other NGOs in InterAction have expressed the same kind of feelings? It's beginning to become a problem and we'd like to communicate about that?" He replied: "This is another MSF thing. It's very European, your way of thinking."*

*The following day, I received a telephone call from the Pentagon correspondent of the New York Times, their specialist on military questions. She said: "Jim Bishop gave me your number. It seems you have some problems at MSF with the confusion between the military and the humanitarian. That's very interesting. May I do some interviews?" I put her on to our Executive Director, who had just returned from Macedonia. The next day, in the New York Times, in a quite substantial article, you could read, 'some NGOs are questioning the military intervention in its current definition and precisely the association of military and humanitarian aspects,' with a quotation from Joëlle. Later, this journalist said to me: "Once again, MSF, you've touched a sore point."*

Antoine Gérard, Director of Programmes, MSF USA (in French).

*When the bombing started, we were particularly aware of trying to carve out the humanitarian space and trying to force UNHCR to play its humanitarian role so the humanitarian space could be protected. So, we were aware of this militarisation of humanitarian aid and there were several statements I was involved in where we pointed out the failure of UNHCR, and the placement of NATO troops in refugee camps putting the refugees at risk. We tried to highlight the reality of what the people were actually experiencing.*

James Orbinsky, President, MSF International Council (in English).

**On 11 April 1999, the Permanent Council of NATO gave its agreement for the deployment of a force of 8,000 men to Albania, tasked with transporting and distributing humanitarian assistance to the refugees from Kosovo, and guaranteeing their security. Deployment started on 17 April, and the operation, called 'Joint Guard', was intended to improve coordination of humanitarian action, which until now has been carried out in a disorganised way by the military contingents of NATO member states. Also, in Macedonia, the MSF teams noted from daily experiences, that while its staff responsible for public relations in NATO are very efficient, those dealing with humanitarian assistance operations are much less so.**



'NATO Launches "Operation Joint Guard" and Carries Out Limited Raids,' **AFP** (France), Brussels/Belgrade/Washington, 12 April 1999 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

On Sunday, NATO took a major step towards sending a force to assist refugees from Kosovo to Albania, while continuing its raids on Yugoslavia. The Permanent Council (ambassadors) of NATO approved plans for 'Operation Joint Guard,' which will provide for the deployment of some 8,000 soldiers in Albania, whose mission will be to "ensure the safe arrival of humanitarian aid, its transportation and distribution" to the refugees. On the military front, NATO resumed its raids during the night of Sunday to Monday, in particular, on the areas around Belgrade and Pristina.

[...] For the first time, NATO aircraft also dropped 2.5 million leaflets over Yugoslavia explaining the reasons for the raids, confirmed Jamie Shea, who said that the airborne force would be increased from its present 500 aircraft to around 600, with 82 additional American planes and seven British ones. The leaflets explain that the Alliance will halt its bombardments if Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic ends hostilities and withdraws his forces. [...] On the humanitarian front, 'Operation Joint Guard', NATO's first mission of this kind since its creation in 1949, should allow for the regrouping in one structure, led by NATO, of the various efforts undertaken in Albania by contingents of allied troops already on the ground. NATO will act 'in support' of the local authorities and of the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), which has a 'pilot role' in bringing aid to refugees, the diplomats in Brussels emphasised. In order to facilitate this operation, Tirana has decided to "give NATO rights of control over all of Albania's airspace, ports and military infrastructures."

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has, however, expressed reservations about 'Operation Joint Guard', believing that NATO should not conflate its war operations with a humanitarian mission, since the latter could be seen as a "preparation for military action on the ground," with Kosovo as its target. [...] On the northern border of Albania, the influx of refugees from Kosovo continued,

with the arrival at the border post of Morina during the night of Saturday to Sunday of some 4,200 Kosovars, said the OSCE spokesman in Tirana, Andrea Angeli. In contrast, the border between Yugoslavia and Macedonia was closed again on the Yugoslav side, said UNHCR. The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) put at 400,000 the number of Kosovar refugees driven from their homes and now in hiding inside the Serbian province, reported Foreign Secretary Robin Cook.



*The camps were actually not managed by the NATO authorities. But, they surely wanted it to be portrayed this way. Their public relations machine was very good in the sense that they got the footage that they were looking for: "NATO was helping the poor Kosovo refugees by setting up those camps." The reality on the ground, as usual, was much messier than a strictly managed NATO camp. Officially, the camps were managed by the Macedonian government assisted by UNHCR. The job of UNHCR was really pushed aside by extremely aggressive NATO public relations officers to be actually seen in the forefront as organising those camps. But, at the same time the NATO was really incapable of managing a camp beyond having the heavy equipment to level the ground, which all they were doing, and placing NATO soldiers to literally unpack and put up tents. Operationally speaking, the only contribution from NATO were these two things. The heavy equipment in terms of bull dozers leveling the ground of those pieces of land, donated by the Macedonian government is very a visible action. And, the cameras were around whenever one of the blue helmets was doing this job. And, again they had these very visible acts of having smiling NATO soldiers unpacking tents.*

*Something wasn't evident from this footage: these tents were not actually NATO tents because they had forgotten to bring tents. They had been brought there by UNHCR or other relief agencies. And, anything else that goes into camp management, they were not doing it either. Like the way-station for distribution, the crowd control, managing the infrastructure of the camps. Some needs were completely not taken into account. 50,000 people were living in the biggest of those camps, north of Skopje. The fact that these 50,000 people actually needed somewhere to shit is something that they didn't foresee. What they didn't think at all is that for 50,000 you need 5,000 latrines. That kind of essential part of a camp infrastructure like water-sanitation was not in any of the NATO books at all. The actual situation was extremely messy on the ground. Everything around us was full of shit because people actually had nowhere to go and do what they had to do... So, you have a confused MSF who didn't know exactly what to do or why, in front of the cameras. Anyway, we were pushed aside by the very hard PR machine of NATO who had a very clear objective to get themselves on the television screen as a humanitarian actor.*

Michiel Hofman, Coordinator in Macedonia, MSF  
Holland, Mid-April - May 1999 (in English).



On 11 April 1999, MSF issued a press release from Tirana (the Albanian capital), requesting that the UN agencies be made responsible for coordinating aid. Other humanitarian organisations had mixed views on this. The Macedonian authorities are claiming control over the refugee camps in their territory, in particular, the one at Stenkovec - Brazda, where the MSF medical team had just taken over from its NATO counterpart. On 13 April 1999, a UNHCR spokesman reacted sharply to MSF's allegations of failure. He claimed that the registration of refugees was underway in Macedonia and that new sites had been found for the refugees in the camps run by UNHCR.



'UN Agencies Must Lead Humanitarian Aid Efforts – Military Support for Humanitarian Aid Risks Being Seen as Support for Military Action,' MSF, Tirana (Albania), **Press release**, 11 April 1999 (in English). **D134** [↗](#)

#### Extract:

The international medical relief organization Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) today called on NATO and the international community to respect the essential and long-term neutral and impartial character of humanitarian assistance. MSF also called on UN agencies and especially UNHCR to more actively fulfill their mandate to protect and assist refugees, and to coordinate with independent and neutral NGOs in Albania. At this point, NATO member states with support from their militaries, are establishing and seeking to manage refugee camps inside Albania. For example, France and Germany have announced their intention to set up transit camps within a few miles of the Kosovo border where UNHCR and NGOs are already operational. Globally, NATO is seeking to deploy 8,000 troops to the border area ostensibly to support humanitarian operations.

James Orbinsky, MD, President of the MSF International Council, said that "support for humanitarian operations must not be a rationale for future military deployment capacity. While immediate NATO logistical support has been vital in this crisis, NATO militaries and member states should not be running, or be seen to be running refugee camps. If this perception exists, camps cannot be seen as neutral humanitarian zones and may be at security risk in the future." Dr Orbinsky added that "immediate logistical support from non-humanitarian actors is certainly needed in this crisis, but it must be at the request and under the coordination of UN Agencies. Otherwise such support risks being seen as support or preparation for military actions which could put the refugees at security risk in the long-run. The simple fact is that NATO is a military actor that is at war. NATO is not a neutral and impartial humanitarian actor." Dr Orbinsky said further that "refugee needs exist today, but will also exist tomorrow. We are extremely concerned that immediate military efforts to provide humanitarian assistance will jeopardize the long term neutral

and impartial character of humanitarian assistance in the region." He said finally that "UN agencies absolutely must now be more active in setting humanitarian priorities, in carefully requesting support from non-humanitarian actors such as NATO, and in coordinating with neutral and impartial NGOs."

According to official figures, over 250,000 refugees are inside Albania. MSF is currently assisting refugees in the border region of Kukes. MSF is also assisting refugees in Fier and a transit-camp in Korce. MSF is also present in Macedonia and Montenegro. Before the forced migration of Kosovars, MSF provided medical assistance to internally displaced persons inside Kosovo at Pristina, Prizren, and Pec.



'UNHCR Accused of Mission Failure,' **Le Monde** (France), 13 April 1999 (in French). **D135** [↗](#)

#### Extract:

Moreover, according to a news item broadcast by BBC television (UK) on Sunday 11 April, the Macedonian authorities have asked the leaders of the NATO forces based in Macedonia to take charge of the refugee camps there, particularly the Brazda-Stenkovec site where 38,000 refugees are concentrated. The camp was built and is currently being managed by NATO soldiers and NGOs working in the area. The Macedonian police, who are of Slavic origin and notoriously pro-Serb, have been mistreating the Albanian deportees. According to the Spanish daily *El Pais*, UNHCR is insisting that NATO soldiers be allowed to patrol inside the refugee camps. The Macedonian authorities have agreed to allow lightly-armed NATO foot patrols into the camp during daylight hours only, but are insisting that they are supervised by Macedonian police.



'NGOs Wary of NATO'S Humanitarian Initiative,' Paul Benkimoun, **Le Monde** (France), 13 April 1999 (in French). **D136** [↗](#)

#### Extract:

In a communiqué issued in Tirana on Sunday 11 April, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) was the first to state its objections to the mixing of genres. "While NATO's immediate logistical aid has been vital in this crisis, NATO soldiers and member states should not take charge, or be perceived to be taking charge, of refugee camps. If such a perception exists, the camps cannot be regarded as neutral humanitarian zones and their future security could be jeopardised." [...] According to Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF's Director of Operations, "NATO communications have been manipulating the humanitarian angle since the strikes began; they use moral arguments instead of explaining their political aims to the general public. The same arguments should have justified intervention in Kurdistan, but that was not the case. As time goes on, we have to orga-

nise and coordinate the provision of aid to the refugees and the protection of their rights. But, NGOs should not be reduced to the role of service providers to one of the parties to the conflict. Furthermore, we have decided not to accept public funding from NATO member states for our work in Kosovo.”

Jean-Luc Bodin, Director-General of Action Against Hunger/(*Action Contre La Faim*), expressed a similar view: “The UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) should reassert its role as a leader and coordinate all humanitarian aid.” [...] Interviewed by *Le Monde*, Marc Gentilini, President of the French Red Cross, said that he was “baffled by the confusion between humanitarian and military roles. If a decision is taken without consulting humanitarian organisations, it could ruin attempts to muster public support in France. The abiding principle of the Red Cross is that of neutrality and of coming to the aid of all those who need it. If the conflict took the form of an extended ground offensive, the confusion of humanitarian organisations and NATO forces would no longer be compatible with our ethics.” [...] Jacky Mamou, President of Doctors of the World/(*Médecins Du Monde*), took a more balanced view: “If Operation Joint Guard can help to stabilise the camps and prevent the widespread dispersal of the refugees, we are not against it,” he said. “There is no need for hypocrisy; getting aid into northern Albania safely is essential; some of it has already been hijacked. It is quite possible that NATO will do the same as they did in Macedonia, where they rapidly handed responsibility to UNHCR and the humanitarian organisations working in the camps.”



‘Should NATO Participate in Humanitarian Action?’ Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF France Legal Adviser, interviewed by Jean-Christophe Ploquin, *La Croix* (France), 13 April 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

**Q:** For the last five days, Médecins Sans Frontières has been criticising the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for its slow response to the situation in Macedonia and Albania. Why?

**A:** Because in such a situation the aim of humanitarian action is to remove the refugees, particularly the weakest, from the logic of violence in which they have become enmeshed, as soon as possible. According to international conventions, only UNHCR is authorised to assure the protection of refugees. These conventions were signed by all the UN member states. UNHCR must negotiate with the governments concerned the conditions which will enable it to verify that procedures for registering refugees have been implemented, that families are being reunited, that camps are located in safe, protected areas, and that eventual departure from the camps is voluntary. These precautions are simply small ramparts that international law has erected in order to protect refugees. Otherwise, they would be completely trapped in a power struggle and

left to the mercy of opposing parties who can make them disappear whenever they choose, as we saw at Blace.

Now negotiations between UNHCR on the one hand and Albania and Macedonia on the other are progressing slowly. In Tirana, as in Skopje, we don’t know whether UNHCR is encountering obstacles in its discussions and we would like it to tell us what is going on. MSF does not want to be drawn into an argument with UNHCR but wants to help it to force the issue so that states acknowledge the full scope of its role, which they are not doing at present. It is clear that Albania would rather negotiate with NATO than with UNHCR. Macedonia has no desire to open proper refugee camps. NATO is also remaining vague about its intentions.

**Q:** NATO has launched Operation Joint Guard, which has a mandate to send up to 8,000 troops to Albania to support UNHCR and “guarantee the safe arrival of humanitarian aid, its transportation and its distribution to the refugees.” In addition, there are several thousand soldiers helping to run the camps in Macedonia. What is so reprehensible about such actions?

**A:** NATO’s activities in northern Albania are probably necessary to secure the delivery of humanitarian aid. On the other hand, it is clearly receiving little cooperation from the Macedonian authorities and its position there is ambiguous. And, NATO has not declared its readiness to protect the sites in Macedonia. Moreover, the presence of uniforms in the camps may be a deliberate attempt to mislead Western public opinion. The image of soldiers is reassuring. It creates an impression of order in a place where disorder is in fact the rule. The registration of refugees has hardly begun in the military-run camps. Elsewhere, the refugees are subject to a variety of pressures and are often forced into supporting various causes. Moreover, if the camps are not regarded as neutral humanitarian zones, their future security could be jeopardised. NATO is not a neutral humanitarian actor and it must understand that it is vitally important to distinguish between humanitarian action and political action; that humanitarian action is not a card to play in the conflict; that it should not be used as propaganda or as a public relations tool.



‘Macedonia Communication,’ **Email** from MSF H Skopje to MSF Amsterdam, 12 April 1999 (in English). **D137**

#### Extract:

Current activities of MSF:

- 1./ 2 OPDs (Out Patient Departments) in Brazda - population 15,000/capacity 62,000 - (British NATO) camp. Sunday morning medical team of NATO handed over their OPD to MSF (see for Q&A, and small report below). MSF is now leading medical agency in this camp.
- 2./ MSF handed over their medical activities in Stankovic (French NATO) camp to IMC (International Medical Corps). Now, MSF is not present anymore in Stankovic camp.
- 3./ MSF started Sunday one OPD in Radusa camp - pop. 1,300/cap 1,300 - (NON NATO, Macedonian Government

controlled). MSF is the one and only medical agency in this camp. (We took over from IMC)

4./ Daily assessments by mobile teams at the border, other refugee camps, and the villages around that also absorbed ten thousands of refugees (in order to support local structures in case of any influx of people across the mountains and other borders areas). [...]

#### BASIC COMMUNICATION LINES:

- Focus on our operations!
- Customs constraints are a 'passed station.' Since Thursday, all our cargo is through customs (apart from some boxes with medical material that are in the MoH warehouse)! DON'T mention this pro-actively anymore, not wanting to destroy carefully built-up relations with the authorities.

- UNHCR promised last Friday 'everything' we asked for during the press conference by Mrs Ogata. For now, don't criticize UNHCR. "At this moment we have no reason to doubt their competence" (see also Q&A below, about the responsibilities of UNHCR). Of course MSF will monitor closely the efforts and developments regarding this issue. [...]

#### NATO MEDICAL HAND OVER in Brazda camp:

During a modest, small ceremony Sunday morning at 8 am, the medical team of NATO handed over their activities to MSF. Imagine, about a hundred military men standing in a circle, some refugees and MSF at early morning Eastern Sunday here in Macedonia. Beautiful light, an almost serene atmosphere in this camp of thousands of refugees. Then suddenly this prayer followed by a Christian song. It now sounds a bit 'over the top', but being there, it was all very emotional, in particular for the NATO medical team that had worked with the refugees from the first day on (grown-up military men in tears, hugging each other).

#### Q&A NATO hand over:

\*NATO out - UNHCR in, what does MSF think of this? MSF supports this transition process of handing over to international agencies. NATO did a great job constructing the camp and fulfilling heavy logistical needs. Last week MSF urged strongly for UNHCR to take over coordination from NATO. UN has the mandate to assist and protect the refugees and we are happy that UNHCR takes the responsibility for this.

\*What about cooperation with UNHCR? UNHCR coordinates the relief efforts in cooperation with the NGOs. Since yesterday in Brazda camp, all the medical needs are covered by the NGOs. If any problems may arise we'll try to solve this together. MSF is at this moment the leading medical agency in Brazda camp.

\*What about the security in the camps, now [that] NATO is in the process of moving out? Security is a concern. The responsibility to protect and assist the refugees is in principle the task of the receiving country/host country (i.e. the Macedonian Government). UNHCR has the mandate (and task) to monitor that this is implemented correctly, in line with international treaties. MSF will keep an eye on this.

\*What about the registration and family tracing? The registration of the refugees is very important. There are

tragic stories about family members that lost each other in the crowds and were split up. Registration has started in the camps. On the request of UNHCR, registration is at this moment coordinated by OSCE. (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe).



*'Kosovo Refugee Agencies – Aid Agencies in Row over Handling of Kosovo Refugee Crisis,' AFP (France), Geneva 13 April (in English).*

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Tuesday hit back at attacks over its handling of the Kosovo refugee crisis, insisting it had done its best to cope with daunting challenges. International aid organisation Medecins sans Frontieres (Doctors without Borders - MSF) last Friday accused UNHCR of neglecting its tasks and failing to fulfil its mandate with the Kosovar refugees. "MSF knew perfectly well what the situation was in Macedonia," UNHCR spokesman Kris Janowski said, referring to criticism that the UNHCR had failed to oversee the evacuation by the Macedonian government of thousands of refugees from the primitive Blace site. UNHCR had no access to that site because of orders from the Macedonian government. But eventually UNHCR worked with the authorities, and all the refugees were brought to safety, he said. "We did our best under those extremely difficult circumstances," from a logistical and political point of view, said Janowski. He stressed that UNHCR had to make sure the border stayed open and that the Macedonian government cooperated with the agency to help the refugees while at the same time taking into account their concerns over the economic costs of the massive influx of ethnic Albanians. "It was a tough situation. Sniping at us under those circumstances was perhaps a little premature," he said.

Until around March 23, the day before NATO launched its air strike campaign against Yugoslav targets, UNHCR had a huge operation in Kosovo." Then all of a sudden we were faced with three Kosovos," said Janowski. If UNHCR had then asked its donors to fund similar operations in Albania and Macedonia, "it would not have worked on the strength of the assumption that something may or could happen," he said. Janowski described as "dire" the situation of perhaps hundreds of thousands of Kosovars who remained trapped in the war-torn province although it was not clear what the food situation was. Asked whether the UNHCR backed an airlift operation, he replied that any such decision would have to be made by NATO but that UNHCR had not requested a go-ahead.

Within Kosovo, Yugoslav authorities are pursuing "mopping up operations, especially around the Pristina area", in which people are being rounded up and taken to the border, he said. "The border is then opened for the purpose of pushing them out and closed again." In Macedonia, UNHCR was nearing the completion of registration of the population at the NATO-run Brazda camp and started the process at its sister Stankovic site. The UNHCR intends to

finish the registration of all refugees in Macedonian camps in two weeks, the latest update released in Geneva said. UNHCR and government authorities in the capital Skopje have agreed to identify new sites for refugee camps which may be needed. Meanwhile preparations for the handover to UNHCR and its partners of the NATO-run camps are proceeding well and should be completed shortly, the agency said.

*I think we were more concerned about preserving our own strict neutrality. But there were so many demands on us that we couldn't avoid being implicated. Sometimes, the very fact of being there overcommitted us. We were pseudo-soldiers and we put a spoke in the wheels just like all the other NGOs. We were working in a camp in Kukec. We had to hand it over, to abandon it because NATO had assigned responsibility for the place to a less effective Spanish NGO. In that sense, the issue of humanitarian space and relations with military forces was the focus of major discussions. We tried to do what we thought was best. The UN agencies arrived in the wake of NATO, so they didn't have much freedom of action. Medical care in several of these camps had been undertaken by the military and by the Spanish and Italians who had moved in and had started running things. UNHCR had very little room for manoeuvre. They could have denounced the situation. But then who would have done the work? At the time, we were thinking: "If soldiers are running the medical side, what role are we supposed to play?"*

*The military tried to coordinate the effort, to reallocate the spaces. In Tirana, all the air space had been taken over and organised by NATO, which also managed the supplies, the cargo-loading. We even travelled in NATO planes. That left us a bit exposed to our own critics. But road travel was risky. I think it's a good example which shows that despite all the worthy principles, there are some areas where the only existing humanitarian space is located within the military space. So either you accept the pernicious effects of being taken over, the risk of being lumped together, or you stick very firmly to the principle. The desire to preserve a humanitarian space in the midst of that military madness was all very well, but I don't think it was very realistic. As for us, we didn't succeed. We tried to remain loyal to the principle and we did what we thought was for the best. UNHCR was incapable of managing all that humanitarian madness properly. There were container loads of clothing, supplies that were totally irrational and couldn't be justified on any grounds. But nobody sorted it out. The Albanians took great advantage of that. They made big profits out of that international military-cum-humanitarian invasion – it radically changed their economy. It was a real circus.*

Vincent Janssens, Director of Operations, MSF Belgium (in French).

*That press release created a storm of controversy. We ran into James Orbinsky, the President of the International Council, who arrived in Tirana when it came out. We spent hours discussing every aspect of it with the head offices. It lashed out in several directions. It contained a critique of UNHCR's position. We said that UNHCR should shoulder its responsibilities over the refugees. We also said that it wasn't the task of armies to take charge of the refugees. It's clear that the Albanian government did not understand the role of UNHCR. We were trying to say that all that military-humanitarian discourse was a problem in itself. Perhaps we didn't express it in a very subtle way. But we were very much aware of a problem.*

Stephan Oberreit, Exploratory mission officer in Albania, MSF France (in French).

*Mainly on arrival I argued with Amsterdam and also with my counterparts in Macedonia and Tirana. I said: "We are sort of being stupid here if we start with criticising the United Nations, UNHCR; in this case we are being so predictable, that we are doing exactly what NATO wants." Further, there was this all body of evidence that the normal international humanitarian response mechanisms could not cope with a crisis of that magnitude. It was bullshit! Of course, there were dozens of thousands of refugees. But, since when is that a magnitude which a normal mechanism can not handle? That was nothing as compared with Goma with half a million of refugees. The skill in itself is not beyond the capacity of the humanitarian machinery. Especially not in a context where, at least in a place like Albania and Macedonia there is no particular political concern and a superior infrastructure. Which make it even easier to do it rather than more difficult.*

Michiel Hofman, Coordinator in Macedonia, MSF Holland, mid April – May 1999 (in English).

*We miscalculated... We had all arrived with a bit of the 'African' spirit. We thought: "There are refugee problems, so UNHCR counts for something." But UNHCR wasn't saying anything about it. It took us a while to realise that we had laid into [criticised] UNHCR, whereas in fact it was the wrong target. In reality, UNHCR was weakened by politics. We should have supported it, even if it was making stupid mistakes and not registering the refugees. Perhaps we should have said that the host countries had a responsibility to support UNHCR. We were a bit too quick to react. The statement attacking UNHCR made Ogata very angry. Her spokesman, Kris Janovsky, called me right away and said: "But what are you doing? Once again you have come here to stir things up with UNHCR. Every time you turn*

*up, you criticise UNHCR. You know nothing about the Balkans. We are completely trapped here. We've got nothing to do with all that." Given the way the situation unfolded, I think that if we had backed off a little and if someone had had a wider, more political vision, we might have conveyed the same message but with more emphasis on the responsibilities of the states. UNHCR was powerless in that game. NATO was too strong. I think we were a bit naive.*

Samantha Bolton, Communications Coordinator, MSF International (in French).

*To be frank, all the communications teams slipped up there. They did approximately the opposite of what we had decided; in other words they attacked UNHCR when, in fact, the aim of the manoeuvre had been to strengthen it. So that generated an unnecessary public row with UNHCR. Our intention was more to attack NATO and the host countries in order to strengthen UNHCR's position in the situation. After those MSF press releases about UNHCR, I was faced with journalists who kept saying: "You are telling us the opposite of what is in the press release, which on the whole is an attack on UNHCR!" It was mishandled, but it does demonstrate the reality of our intention: our overriding concern was to protest about UNHCR because it would not stand up to NATO and was leaving it a completely open humanitarian field.*

Jean-Hervé Bradol, Director of Operations, MSF France (in French).

*The press release was really an effort to push UNHCR to push back against NATO and to assume its responsibilities and not allow it to be pushed aside by this huge machine that NATO was. UNHCR was just not powerful enough in the field and Ogata had not quite understood the situation. Things were going very quick. At that time we thought that it might be possible that UNHCR clear the space then NATO would have to retract a little bit. It would have been better overall to empower in a way UNHCR which is what we were trying to do, we were trying to say: "Look, take your positions, take your responsibilities and we are behind you, we want you to do it." I certainly was talking with the UNHCR people and so was Christopher Stokes, the Coordinator for MSF B at that time in this area. It was part of our daily life in that moment and certainly we wouldn't have chosen to write a press release of that kind having not a good reason to do it. It was not just press releases; I was doing interviews with BBC, CNN, ABC, and all kinds of American channels.*

James Orbinsky, President, MSF International Council (in English).

*We were not happy with the press release from Macedonia that criticised UNHCR. We knew UNHCR did not have the money to do its job and we felt that putting down UNHCR was not the best solution at that time. We also did NATO a favour by publicly announcing that UNHCR was useless. Shortly afterwards, Juliette Taft, the State Department official in charge of population and refugee issues (she reported directly to Madeleine Albright) visited the region and MSF did her a favour as well by saying: "UNHCR is totally incompetent, it can't get anything done, etc..." When she returned, I heard the director of USAID, who had accompanied her on her trip, claiming that the NGOs said: "There is no point in giving our money to UNHCR because it can't get things done." I don't think we were very clear about that.*

*At MSF USA, our concerns were the status of UNHCR, the difficulties it had in setting up its programmes, and particularly the low level of funding from the American government. I regularly challenged Juliette Taft. I would often put a question to her at public meetings: "What steps is the US government taking to help UNHCR at a time when so many people are fleeing Kosovo?" I also contacted the UNHCR representative here at the United Nations and said: "I need a better understanding of your financial situation. We can't really grasp the current strategy." On 9 April, I asked him to tell us how much they had received. They had received a total of 46 million dollars, whereas they had asked for 138 million. As I kept on at them, they came up with another figure on 26 April. The United States had given them a paltry eight million dollars for Kosovo. When I contacted the State Department they said: "Of course we have given money, we have given 28 million dollars." But, according to the UNHCR representative over here: "They gave eight or nine million dollars but these funds are linked to Bosnia, they cover the entire Bosnian problem and are not for the current crisis in Kosovo." We got a bit heated over this story because the public were being lied to over the matter of government funding. And we kept saying: "If you really want to set up a humanitarian operation that is independent of the military operation, you have to give UNHCR the means to do its work."*

Antoine Gérard, Director of Programmes, MSF USA (in French).

*One of our aims was to restore the regional aid system to a civilian basis. For public relations reasons, the first military 'humanitarian actions' in Albania were conducted by national contingents from the various states. You could have filled a book with the blunders committed by the military. NATO started to get worried. That's when it launched Operation Joint Guard. In my view, it was a way for them to regain control of what everybody was describing as a circus or a state of chaos. There were probably military reasons as well. It was obvious that NATO had*

decided to keep a grip on humanitarian action for several reasons. In the first place, it was an illegal military operation because it wasn't backed by the Security Council. Therefore, NATO needed a humanitarian argument to counterbalance the illegality of the operation and restore the appearance of legitimacy. I also think that NATO needed to manage population movements in case there was a ground offensive, although there was some doubt about that happening at the time. There was a debate because some humanitarian organisations had called for a ground offensive. On several occasions, MSF called for the UN to coordinate relief operations in the region. It was very strange. After that, MSF seemed to lose the taste for publicly advocating for the coordination of relief operations by the UN!

[...], Deputy MSF Legal Advisor, MSF (in French).

**On 12 April 1999, MSF France, followed by MSF UK, issued a press release announcing that a new wave of refugees was flooding into Montenegro. Montenegrin villages were overwhelmed and the displaced populations were utterly destitute. The MSF team struggled to adapt its relief operations in a context characterised by fluctuating security and shifting populations.**



'New Influx of Kosovar Refugees Arrive in Montenegro - Thousands Left without Shelter,' **Press release**, MSF France, MSF UK, 12 April 1999 (in English). [D138](#)

#### Extract:

For the past three days a new wave of Kosovar refugees has arrived in Montenegro. "The continual flow of refugees has increased – for the past few days we have seen 2,000 arriving each day in an alarming state" explains François Calas, MSF's Head of Mission in Montenegro. In Rozaje, the capacity to receive the refugees is already saturated. Neither the Montenegrin authorities nor the local solidarity networks are able to cope with the situation. Of the 63,000 Kosovar displaced persons now in Montenegro, about 27,000 are living in particularly difficult conditions; 7,000 of these are today without any form of shelter; the temperature in Rozaje falls to freezing at night.

"The 20,000 people we currently are working with have less than one square metre of space each in the existing reception centres. They sleep sitting on the floor, or in tractors or lorries. In general several hundred people have to share one toilet", says François Calas. The new arrivals are in a noticeably poorer condition than MSF saw previously. Whilst the first group of refugees travelled by road in cars, tractors and lorries, this new wave of displaced have come by foot across the mountains in the snow. They arrive at Rozaje exhausted and in poor health after walking for 15 to 20 hours. These new displaced people

hail principally from the region of Istok, north-east of Pec, from which they have been expelled. Those MSF has spoken to describe threats of violence against the civilian population there.

"Worryingly, signs of tension in Montenegro have appeared over the last few days which make us concerned about the future safety of these people. We hope that an agreement between the Montenegrin authorities and the United Nations High Commissioner for refugees will ensure the security of the new refugees camps", added Mr Calas. MSF is setting up temporary medical clinics for the new arrivals and teams are working with to improve the medical and sanitary conditions within camps.



'Montenegro's Resources Trained to the Limits - Refugees Race Catastrophe, Relief Officials Say,' Ray Moseley, **The Chicago Tribune** (USA) 12 April 1999 (in English). [D139](#)

#### Extract:

New refugees are arriving in Rozaje at the rate of 1,500 a day. Dr. Jacques de Milliano, a Dutch physician who heads the Doctors Without Borders mission in Rozaje, said at least 15,000 more refugees from the Istog area of Kosovo are expected to arrive in the next few days because Istog fell to the Yugoslav army Friday and Saturday. "At the moment, I have no answer for where they can receive shelter," he said. "Rozaje is full. Every house in Rozaje has taken in 10 to 15 refugees, the four local factories are full of them, and so are the churches and mosques. Maybe some can be moved to the coast and some to Albania, but it is vital that European countries give shelter to number of them." De Milliano, a former International President of Doctors Without Borders, said that on Saturday night his organization brought in six tents, each capable of sheltering 50 people, the only tents to arrive so far. [...] "The aid is just starting but it is not sufficient", he said. Rozaje is one of four Montenegrin sites housing refugees, and de Milliano said it is vital that another site be found, preferably in a more hospitable region.




'New Wave of Kosovo Albanian Refugees Floods into Macedonia,' Deborah Pasmantier, **AFP** (France), Blace (Macedonia) 14 April 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:


On Wednesday, at least 2,000 refugees from Kosovo arrived at Blace, a border post between Kosovo and Macedonia, said Paula Ghedini, a spokeswoman for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). According to Ms Ghedini, there are "at least 2,000 people" on the Macedonian side of the no-man's-land between Kosovo and Macedonia. "It seems that an even larger number of refugees are ready to cross over. They are still waiting

in trains at stations in Urosevac and Kaganic," she said. According to UNHCR, most of these refugees "arrived by train from Urosevac, but some travelled from Prizren and Gjilan in civilian vehicles."

Ms Ghedini suggested that other groups from Prizren might try to get across. "Most of the people we spoke to said they had not been forced onto the trains but had been told to leave as soon as possible. Most of the refugees seem to have all their documents such as passports. They said they had not been beaten." "We have been warned of a possible exodus. [...] It looks as if the situation is getting worse." [...] Most of the refugees from Urosevac – about one thousand arrived on Monday and Tuesday – said they had been given ten minutes to leave their homes and had spent several days hiding in the forests as they waited for the right moment to leave Kosovo. [...] Some 125,000 Kosovo Albanians have so far crossed the border to seek refuge in Macedonia.

 I was there [in Montenegro] for three weeks and every night groups of dozens or hundreds of refugees would arrive on foot from the Rugova Valley. Some came by car. Most had walked through the mountains. They were in poor shape, tired and cold. But on the whole, they were in good health. They had spent a week being subjected to the most appalling violence, living in very difficult conditions and going hungry. But there was no malnutrition. It was more a case of a disastrous situation. There were not all that many of them, no more than four or five thousand. We set up relief activities very quickly. People were installed in terrible conditions in derelict pine factories. I have very fragmented memories of how the project was set up. At night, the team leaders would gather in the torchlight around a map and discuss how to return to Kosovo. But I wasn't involved in that. And it didn't happen.


Michaël Neuman, Officer-in-Charge of collecting accounts from refugees in Montenegro (in French).

 It was not a genuine emergency. We were in a permanent post-emergency situation. There were three days of frantic activity when everybody was putting up tents. In fact we were always being warned of floods of refugees which never arrived, or if they did arrive we were not quite ready for them. It was very difficult to respond in terms of a programme because the situation fluctuated so much, and because in terms of security, things kept changing all the time: one day there was a danger that the borders would be closed and the next day there was no problem. Half the people who had been displaced from Kosovo immediately headed for Albania, where they were taken in by families. There were no real camps. The relief we offered them was ill-suited to their needs and wants. There was BP5


*[high protein food items] all over the place but they didn't eat it. In Ultsine, the arrival of the refugees doubled or tripled the population. We set up tents that had been very difficult to procure in the market. We had found some desert tents that were totally unsuited to local weather conditions. We were very slow, very behind in our work. And, then there was no food. We were not used to helping these populations. The Albanian solidarity networks, which worked very well, came and asked for our help. They had organised free kitchens which functioned very well. The community was well-organised.*

Virginie Raison, Deputy Coordinator in Montenegro, MSF France, April/May 1999 (in French).

### A MSF volunteer collected statements from the refugees while the Epicentre representative began a retrospective mortality study.

 I was there as the mission was being set up so, while waiting for the proper logistician to arrive, I recruited two interpreters. I travelled around the countryside taking notes, talking to people and trying to find out what had happened. I had met the MSF France legal advisers and they had told me what type of questions to ask. It was pretty basic. There were five or six questions such as: "Where did you come from? How did you get here?" I was in telephone contact with the inquiry coordinators, so that we could modify the questionnaires according to the kinds of questions that cropped up. I sent them everything directly. Then Vincent Brown of Epicentre arrived to conduct his epidemiological study and we were able to work together. We did the enquiry during the day and the relief work at night. They were three very intensive weeks. I would sit down, we'd talk and smoke, and when we finished we'd move on to see another refugee a bit further away. I've lost count of all the people I met. Everyone was talking at once and crying, even my translators! They were the same age as me; between 20 and 25. They would listen to these stories even though their houses in Pec had been burned down the previous week. I kept in touch with them for a long time.

Michaël Neuman, Officer-in-Charge of collecting accounts from refugees in Montenegro (in French).

 I delayed the study by six weeks because the priority was helping people find shelter. The logisticians were overwhelmed – small groups were coming down from the hills in the middle of the night, because they felt safer then. They had covered eighteen kilometres but they were still very cold when they arrived. And, it was vital to get them into tents and provide them with blankets. For a week we ate our supper at ten o'clock, and then helped

people until two or three o' clock in the morning before going to bed. There were eight or nine collective centres, gymnasia or abandoned factories. And between 500 and 1,000 people were crammed into every site. So we took these figures into account in order to take a fairly representative proportional sample of the number of families at each site. We excluded twenty or so mosques after establishing that, on the whole, living conditions in a mosque corresponded to those in a centre. It took two and a half weeks. We used six investigators and pulled out all the stops. It was rich in detail because Michaël had already conducted about thirty interviews. As a result, I was able to sit down with him for an hour or two while he briefed me, so I had a better perception of the more quantitative work I had to do. In fact there had been four deaths from violence during the flight from Pec, as they had taken refuge in the hills and then during their walk along the high ridges. A male child had died from the cold and the effort had been too much for an elderly woman, who had suffered a cardiac arrest. Two more had been killed. Others had disappeared

Vincent Brown, Epidemiologist, Epicentre (in French).

**On 13 April 1999, the president of the MSF International Council held a press conference in Tirana and attempted to refocus attention on the plight of the populations still trapped inside Kosovo. When asked for suggestions, he said that NATO should publish satellite photographs to facilitate the tracking of populations and the delivery of aid. Some journalists took this to mean that MSF possessed information about the presence of NATO troops in Kosovo. That same day, *The New York Times* published a 'Letter to the Editor-in-Chief' from the Executive Director of MSF USA. The letter expressed concern that the coordination of the refugee camps had been conferred on NATO rather than to UNHCR, the UN agency mandated to ensure the protection of refugees.**



'Tirana Press Conference – 13 04 1999,' Email from MSF information officer in Albania to MSF press officer network, 13 April 1999 (in English). [D140](#)

#### Extract:

The press conference was this morning at 9:00 am, and some 25 journalists attended it, among them *USA Today*, *La Republica*, *Liberation*, *New Republic*, *Financial Times*, *Stars & Stripes*, ABC (Spanish newspaper) and Reuters press and TV. The presentation took around 20 minutes starting with Christopher (HoM) introducing MSF activities in Albania. Then, Diane Plessia (Mental Health Officer) explained the conclusions we could draw from the 30 testimonies we have collected from the refugees in Kukes. Finally, James Orbinsky (President of MSF International Council) made the statement regarding the humanitarian situation in Kosovo.

As expected, the very first question was made by USA Today and asking for our proposals to ensure the security of the people trapped inside Kosovo. James answered MSF is a humanitarian organization, and not a state. MSF does not have its own direct information on what is happening in Kosovo at this time. Our only direct information comes from refugees who have fled Kosovo. The international community and NATO must have information on the situation of people on the ground, from aerial photography or from other sources. The purpose of the diplomatic and military initiative launched over the past months was to prevent a humanitarian crisis inside Kosovo and to ensure their security. At this time, all attention is focused on refugees outside of Kosovo and on the NATO bombing campaign directed toward Serbia. The focus on the security of people still in Kosovo is gone, and our initiative is to re-focus attention here, and not simply on refugees and NATO bombing.

The international community and NATO have launched this diplomatic and military initiative ostensibly for humanitarian purposes; they must have information on the status/security of people and are therefore responsible for assessing that information and exploring all options to ensure the security of people in Kosovo. It is their responsibility. It is not for MSF to now pose specific solutions. Journalists were quite pushy demanding specific proposals. James was consistent with his answers and said that if NATO can obtain satellite images of military objectives, they can surely obtain pictures of population movements and the conditions they are living in. We are asking for info on the humanitarian situation of the people in Kosovo whose fate is at best unknown and, that the international community take their responsibility [but until now] have [remained] silent [on this issue]. At the end, we believe journalists got the message. Basically, NATO and the international community are putting all their attention on the refugees and on their military actions, and are leaving the security of people of Kosovo on a secondary level. We will have to follow up this issue in the coming days and we are waiting for your feedback regarding the impact of this press conference in your respective countries.



'*The Alarming Mystery of the Disappeared – MSF Voices Concern Over the "Million or More" Ethnic Albanians Trapped in Kosovo*,' Fabrice Rousselet, *Libération* (France), 14 April 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

How many of the Kosovo Albanians driven from their homes are still in the province? Are there 260,000 as NATO claimed yesterday? Or 400,000, as Foreign Minister Robin Cook quoted on 11 April? Or over one million, the figure advanced by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) yesterday? That leaves us with another, and more important, question: what has happened to them? [...] Nevertheless, MSF yesterday accused NATO of not doing enough to ensure the safety of the ethnic Albanians who remain in Kosovo. MSF believes the Atlantic Alliance is



concealing information concerning the “million or more Albanians” still in the province. According to James Orbinsky, president of MSF's International Council, “the Kosovo Albanians should be the first priority of the international community from now on. But, they have been reduced to silence; they are caught between the hammer of Milosevic and the nail of NATO and have been abandoned by the latter. NATO can pinpoint the whereabouts of these people with its satellites and aerial photographs. The Alliance should publish these photos. Towns like Pristina and Pec have been emptied and we don't know where their inhabitants have gone. They have disappeared. If we can find out where they are, it would be the first step in drawing up an assessment of the situation.” On the basis of refugee statements collected in northern Albania, MSF also claimed that “Serbian police and soldiers are still perpetrating massacres in Kosovo,” before going on to explain that many Albanians who had crossed the border had seen “mass graves.” Finally, the humanitarian organisation criticised NATO participation in the humanitarian effort: «The Alliance should not be involved in humanitarian work. It is not an impartial organisation. It is fighting a war and is thus endangering the refugees it is assisting,” Mr Orbinsky concluded.



*'In Kosovo, Time for All to Save Face; Aid Groups Do Best,'* Letter to the Editor, MSF USA Executive Director, *The New York Times*, 13 April 1999 (in English). [D141](#)

#### Extract:

Re: “With Aid Effort Overwhelmed, NATO Will Take Over Coordination” (news article, April 7): While the line between military and humanitarian assistance may seem insignificant in the face of such a crisis, the international community, by putting the Kosovo refugees under the coordination of NATO rather than the protection of a neutral agency, is endangering them. Although the military may have an edge in logistics during some disasters, it remains the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to provide and coordinate assistance and protection. The agency has been designated under international law to register, protect and respond to the needs of refugees. This includes the imperative to respect their individual desires, or lack of desire, to be relocated to another country.



*We wanted to ask: “What is going on inside Kosovo? Can't we have some information?” The number of refugee arrivals varied considerably and we were well aware that NATO must have had information about what was happening. We had the feeling that they were showing us pictures about the degree of precision of their weapons but that we were seeing nothing about what was happening for the people on the other side. And the people arriving*


*were saying things like: “My village has been burned down; many more refugees are going to come through; another village has been torched,” etc. So our feeling was that NATO actually had the information we needed for our operations. And in fact we asked for clarification. At one time, James said: “Moreover, we know that there are NATO troops inside Kosovo.” The American journalists jumped on this statement: “But that's military information! Do you have any confirmation?” James replied: “this is public knowledge.” And, that went down very badly. We were accused of giving out military information. I think that it really was public knowledge. He must have read it in newspapers that talked about NATO troops being present ‘on the other side.’ We knew very well that NATO had information about what was going on inside the country. Indeed very soon afterwards, NATO gave us a map containing estimates of the number of people, where they were, and whether or not they were making their way towards the border. At the time, they had all the imagery relating to the situation on the ground. They didn't show the satellite photos, but Europe was rediscovering its precision weapons of destruction. That was one of the main points of this press conference, the one I remember most because when it came out we became aware that it was a mistake. We did not have confirmation of this; it was speculation.*

Christopher Stokes, Coordinator MSF Belgium in Albania and Kosovo, April to June 1999 (in French).




*I don't think the whole press conference was on this issue. It wasn't somehow about myself and the intelligence issue. And then I clarified: “No, no this is not what I was saying, I was saying that ...” I think in a way it was to somehow draw the light away from this kind of triumphant military action, to put the light on the people inside Kosovo and what was actually happening to them, as a consequence of what Milosevic was doing and as a consequence of the bombs. And in a way, to take some of the wind out of the NATO propaganda machine that reduced the entire reality to the great American bombing campaign. I remember, for example, just looking at the newspaper from all over Europe and the international media, and one day it was all about military strategy, airplanes and how fast are they going, how many pounds are they carrying and how many targets are they hitting. But, the story and the reality of what people were experiencing and suffering was lost, it was not even on the agenda anymore. It was somehow quite secondary and the effort was really to say: “Look these people are trapped.” That was really what we were trying to do. Our line was between the rock of NATO and the hard place of Milosevic.*


James Orbinsky, President, MSF International Council (in English).

 James managed it by himself. Everything was done on the spot. 'Free electrons' - it was the technique we had first used with Jacques de Milliano in Zaire. It has its disadvantages because there is no backup, but its strength is spontaneity and truth, without ulterior motives. We talked about it again afterwards. It was exactly the same sort of situation as with de Milliano in 1996 when he was on the Zaire border and was saying that all sorts of things were happening inside the country. In that case, there were no international discussions. They prepared things locally. In any case, preparation for a press conference is always done at the last minute, with three or four people working it out on the run. We spoke about the general message. But we said to ourselves that, inside the country, things were happening. We thought that what we had access to was merely the tip of the iceberg. There was not much discussion about that. Everyone knew that this was a major common concern. Certainly, this period was one of substantial decentralisation so far as expressing a point of view was concerned. I am sure that we did not speak about these stances on the telephone. I don't think that James spoke about it to others, although perhaps with the general directors or with some of the presidents - but that would surprise me. We were under pressure to say something, even though everything had already been said. We would have been better off not saying anything. I felt that very strongly.

Jean-Marie Kindermans, Secretary General,  
MSF International (in French).

 I thought that it was very clumsy. The president of our British section was on the ground. He came back saying: "That press conference was not very smart, not professional or well-informed." It went down very badly. We lost a lot of credit. The press release was badly put together: mishmash. We shot ourselves in the foot.

Anne-Marie Huby, Executive Director,  
MSF United Kingdom (in French).

 There were a lot of hot shots in Tirana at that moment. Top figures were there, Orbinsky, Parisel, the General Director of Belgium at the time, the whole room was filled with big shots, Samantha was even there. She was trying to balance all the drive coming from these big men who desperately wanted to say something. That was my impression. You can't be silent as MSF, you have to say something. So we were among ourselves discussing about aerial pictures they must have. Do we need safe corridors? Do we need to say how we can give assistance to these people? And, why is it so weird that we don't actually


know what is going on? Of course there was the conspiracy theory: 'NATO doesn't want to show the reality, they have people on the ground. It is obvious; they always have special people on the ground.' It was a big struggle to get something. I don't even know the statement we did. David Rieff was there and he was very disappointed by MSF. He said that in the press conference.

Bas Tielens, Information Officer in Kosovo,  
then in Albania, MSF International,  
November 1998 to April 1999 (in English).

## HOW TO USE THE EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS?

During the 13 April press conference, the person responsible for collecting testimony from refugees in Albania drew on the initial accounts when she stated that a systematic policy was in place to expel the Kosovar population. This thesis was taken up again in the published release following the press conference, giving rise to some reservations within the MSF movement. Press officers on the ground began also to distribute a number of accounts, accompanied by photos of the people being interviewed. The MSF Belgium Coordinator in Albania, stated to the British daily *The Independent*, that MSF had obtained refugee accounts mentioning the existence of mass graves in Kosovo. Dutch journalists referred to accounts collected by MSF referring to the use of gas by Serb forces. The MSF Belgium programme manager, reacting to an OSCE declaration on the use of human shields by Serb forces, again drew on refugee accounts to confirm the information.



'Macedonia Data Collection,' **Email** from Katrien Coppens, MSF Holland Information Officer in Macedonia to Françoise Saulnier MSF Legal Advisor, 13 April 1999 (in French). **D142** 

### Extract:

I arrived in Macedonia on April 3rd. The situation was very chaotic as refugees from Kosovo were stopped at the border and only let in on a very limited scale. MSF and others were not allowed to provide assistance and the humanitarian situation was terrible. After two days, the refugees were suddenly transported to camps, transported

to Albania and Greece and airlifted to Turkey. The situation was again very chaotic, no registration took place, families were separated and people were involuntary relocated to other countries. UNHCR was not able to coordinate any assistance/protection activities and everybody was running behind the facts; no registration etc. Given the situation in the first days of my stay in Macedonia, I focused on the situation of the refugees in Macedonia, instead of interviewing refugees on the situation in Kosovo. Therefore, in the first days, little testimonies were taken. When the people were moved to Brazda camp I interviewed refugees, but focused on their current protection needs as refugees in Macedonia. This [was done] also because the human rights org[anisations] present; HRW and AI, the OSCE human rights monitors, and later the HCHR monitors all took testimonies as well as focusing on the situation in Kosovo.

The testimonies I took showed the following:

The testimonies reveal a pattern of forced expulsion from Pristina. The refugees said that police and masked military men with arms went from door to door and told them to leave. Once out on the street, the people were directed towards the central station in Pristina. Police and masked military men were standing on the side of the road. People were being harassed by the police and military and they told them: "We do not want you here, there is no place for you here - go to Albania. Go and look for NATO." Some of them were beaten. At the station, thousands of people were gathered. The people were then forced on a passenger train which left for the border. Some of the refugees spent more than twelve hours at the station. When standing at the station and, in the train, people were being harassed and police and military tried to steal money, jewellery, IDs, and passports. The passports and IDs were torn apart and thrown away. The train was fully packed.

In Kosovo, during their flight, the refugees did not witness, killing or rape or separation of young men [from the rest of the crowd]. Some witnessed that people were beaten and saw on the way that houses were on fire. When they arrived at the border, after waiting in no-man's-land, people arrived in BLACE, [but] they were not allowed any further into Macedonia. [...] Almost all refugees in Macedonia are from the area/town of Pristina. This was also confirmed by other organisations who took testimonies of the refugees. They also did not hear of people who witnessed separation, killings, rape, etc. This suggests that most people were victims of organised expulsion. This all happened the last two weeks. At that moment almost no refugees were arriving (borders closed Serbian side)? With the team and Sofi we discussed [the need] to focus on the training of MSF staff in collecting information, on protection concerns in Macedonia for the coming days. I will send you the TOR [terms of reference]. We also adapted the questionnaire to serve this purpose. Will send this to you as well.



'Human Rights/Collection of Testimonies in Northern Albania,' **Email** from Diane Plessia, MSF Human Rights Officer, MSF Belgium Albania to MSF Belgium and MSF Holland press officers, MSF Belgium Programme Managers, MSF France legal advisor, 13 April 1999 (in English). **D143** [↗](#)

Here is the short statement I made this morning at the press conference: «In the course of extensive and lengthy interviews with Kosovar refugees, MSF field staffs in Albania have received consistent reports of actions taken by the Serb forces which support the conclusion that a systematic policy of population expulsion has been and continues to be pursued. The majority of refugees who have arrived in Northern Albania, come from villages. Refugees report that police, military and/or paramilitary forces systematically approached houses, told occupants to: "Go to Albania/NATO/Clinton" and that they were never to come back or they would be killed: "Kosovo is not your country." Serb forces burned or otherwise destroyed houses left behind by fleeing families. People who were unable to move rapidly enough, due to age or infirmity, are still reported missing. After people were expelled from their homes, they were frequently asked for cash (DM) and valuables in return for 'safe' passage. All along the road they were surrounded by paramilitaries who directed them to the border. There, officials confiscated all forms of identification cards, passports and automobile license plates. Families were often separated during the chaos of this organised expulsion and there are numerous reports of elderly people and young children dying from exhaustion along the way. There are widespread cases of missing persons and irregular but frequent reports of beatings, abductions, of individuals run over by cars or tanks and massacres with mass graves (on the scale of several dozens of people or more). The new refugees who have crossed the border in the past two days confirm these reports and we fear the worst for the million people still retained in Kosovo.



'Silence Over One Million – MSF Demands an Immediate Solution to the Security of Civilians in Kosovo,' **MSF Press release**, 13 April 1999 (in English). **D144** [↗](#)

#### **Extract:**

In the last six days, borders for Kosovars seeking refuge have been effectively closed, and people turned back by force. At this time, there is no security for trapped civilian populations, and no independent and impartial humanitarian access, presence or assistance inside Kosovo. MSF demands that the international community not simply focus attention on the refugee crisis. MSF demands security for the people remaining in Kosovo. MSF has obtained reports from refugees of rape, massacres, murders, mass graves, a clear pattern of brutality, and a forced expulsion of civilians from Kosovo:

- "We were rounded up at the village square and told that if anyone dare to leave, they would be killed."
- "You have no place in Kosovo, go to Albania."
- "We were never allowed to stop and could only rest a bit when the line was stopped by the paramilitary soldiers. People were frequently abducted and taken away in military trucks."
- "We were taken to a neighbouring village, and then we heard shots from where the men had been left behind."
- "We were all set to go. One of the paramilitary soldiers told my husband to get off the truck and give him his money. My husband shrugged, indicating that they had no money. The paramilitary soldier shot him in the heart. We started crying. The soldier walked away and then returned. In order to make absolutely sure that my husband was dead, he slit his throat."
- "Almost all the houses we could see along the road had been burned down, and there were soldiers all over that place."
- Serb military: "This is Serbia."

These reports demonstrate a clear and convergent pattern of a state-planned and implemented campaign of expulsions, forced migration, and terror that approximates the gravest of crimes against humanity. People now inside Kosovo have not been reached, and their situation is critical. According to official figures, over 450,000 people have fled Kosovo since March 24, 1999. The refugee crisis is simply the tip of the iceberg. At this time, it is clear that a massive and systematic campaign of terror and forced migration has taken place inside Kosovo. Yet, two thirds of Ethnic Albanians remain in Kosovo and their fate is not known. Beyond the urgent refugee crisis is a widening and ongoing primary crisis of the absence of security for, and information on the status of hundreds of thousands of civilians inside Kosovo. MSF firmly poses the questions:

- Are the parties to the conflict and the international community assuming as a priority their full political responsibility for the security of people trapped in Kosovo?
- Are they now engaging all options in taking clear and effective action to ensure the security of civilians inside Kosovo, and to ensure respect for neutral and impartial humanitarian assistance inside Kosovo?



'[Witnessing]/Témoignage,' **Email exchange** between Marie-Christine Ferir, MSF Belgium Interim Programme Manager, MSF USA Executive Director and MSF Network, 14 April 1999 (in English). [D145](#)

### 1. Marie-Christine

Re: Refugees statements/témoignage: Please be informed that Françoise Saulnier at MSF France is centralising all of the témoignage statements from Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro. Diane Plessia is collecting all témoignage date from Albania and then passing it on to Stefan de

Woolf (MSFB) who then passes it to Françoise. At this time, témoignage is still being collected from Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro and therefore at this moment the final MSF témoignage message has not been concluded and anything that is a refugee quote must not be mistaken as being témoignage. Yesterday, MSF B in Tirana sent out a press release demanding an immediate solution to the security of civilians in Kosovo and used some quotes from the refugees in Albania to paint a clearer picture of their plight. These were not TÉMOIGNAGE statements. Françoise Saulnier after collecting all the data will make a conclusion on the results.

### 2. Joëlle

Dear all,

I would like to suggest that in the future, when confronted with such témoignage statements that we are more cautious in the ways they sneak into our press releases. While I believe we must not abandon our 'témoignage' commitments, I have a lot of concerns about the unprofessional or politically engaged image we are developing through this Albanian release, while the rest of the operation and communications (in Albania too) have been otherwise attempting to establish just that: professionalism and impartiality. It would have been best to have a press release separate from the témoignage, and provide background and human profiles for those statements in a set of better documented interviews, appended to the press release. The press release could have then focused on a more analytical angle. We should also continuously state our concern for the populations in Kosovo, but carefully craft our statements to avoid fuelling the ground troop debate. Or otherwise, let's have a discussion internally whether we want to ask for ground troops. Is there a coordination and coaching mechanism in place to help field teams with communication support? Where is the idea we had in the past, of an international coordinator such as Samantha, coaching a team of press officers? Wouldn't it also be useful to have regional coordination so that we all raise the same issue on the same day in Albania, Montenegro and Macedonia (whenever appropriate) and have therefore more impact through saturation?



**Minutes** of the Executive Committee meeting, Tuesday 13 April 1999, MSF France, and 22 April 1999 (in French). [D146](#)

### Extract:

Reaction to the MSF Belgium press release from Tirana:

- Low level of credibility of what we were saying;
- Ambiguity in the title: implied clear questions from American journalists regarding military intervention. Philippe: the methodology used in obtaining the eyewitness statements is problematic: where, when, how, who? Responses to these questions should be possible without entering into debates over whether or not there should be an intervention. Should we send a press officer to Montenegro? This needs to be discussed with Virginie

Raisson; the security problems in Montenegro do not argue in favour of an increase in the number of MSF personnel.



'Kukes Comm[unication] Report # 2 - Refugee Quotes,' **Email** from Kris Torgeson, MSF USA Press Officer to MSF communication departments, 14 April 1999 (in English). [D147](#)

#### Extract:

Here is the rough text of some interviews I did with refugees in Tirana (in downtown sports stadium camp) and here in Kukes Hospital (with psychologist Christina Moore). The first is especially messy but is interesting as it is with members of an extended family of 24 people that have suffered a lot. People are so traumatized (and the translators generally are not that great so it is sometimes hard to get all the details without spending hours - which I have not had yet - with each family -sorry for that). I'll try to get more if you think they're useful at all for donor or story material you might be working on. I have taken photos of all the people in the interviews and if they don't totally suck, they'll be available soon after I get back. Tomorrow, Roger Job will go with Christina Moore to the Kukes Hospital and elsewhere to take, what I know, will be infinitely better shots of the little boy quoted below and of some other refugees she is doing consultations with. Diane from MSF International is also back from the press conference in Tirana this morning (which I only learned about after the fact...) and Roger plans to go with her when she gathers more testimonies so we can have photos with story material. Roger has been quite disappointed by the lack of action by MSF here in Kukes (he used more colourful words to describe it, of course), but today we discussed doing a series of refugee testimonies with photos that could be used in a variety of ways (newsletters, exhibits)? I hope it comes together.

The other big news I learned today from Jonathan in Paris is that Sebastian Salgado is coming. He'll arrive in Tirana with someone from Stern [German magazine] and then come to Kukes on Thursday. With Roger, Tom, and now Salgado, we'll certainly have plenty of pictures. [...] Anyway, sorry for the lengthy message. Here's the stuff. For comm purposes only.

Kris

If you use any of these quotes, better just use the first name (that's all I've given in a few places).

XXX, 42 year old woman, from village of Reshtane Suvareka (near Prizren), interviewed in Kosovar refugee camp in sports stadium in downtown, Tirana, April 11, 1999.

"I came over the border with my 9 children. It took us 10 days: 8 days to the border and 2 days waiting there to get across to Albania. In Kukes, we stayed in a billiard hall. It was cold and we had no food or water. We paid 18 DM per day for 24 people - my family and my extended family - to stay there. Finally, this morning we paid

250 DM to a minibus driver to bring us here to Tirana. The families of my two brothers-in-law are here with me. My husband stayed in Kosovo. He was afraid he would be imprisoned or killed. The Serb police came to our house. They took all our money and papers. It began 4 days after the NATO bombing started. The Serbs began shelling the area around a few villages. They pushed everyone into one village and then surrounded it. They took all the cars and everything. They stole gold chains from around the women's necks. Everyone left in tractors. There were so many of us. We travelled for 40 hours without food or water. Now we will try to find a place to settle in Tirana. But I want to go back.»



'Investigators Told of 15 Mass Graves - War Crimes,' Steve Boggan/Tirana, **The Independent** (UK), 16 April 1999 (in English).

#### Extract:

The medical aid organisation Médecins sans Frontières says it has more than 50 testimonies relating to the existence of the graves from refugees who have crossed into northern Albania.

"We have assigned one of our aid workers full-time to take statements from witnesses who are talking time and time again of mass graves," said Christopher Stokes, MSF's Emergency Coordinator in Tirana. "We have interviewed only a fraction of the people who want to talk to us because we always insist on a counsellor being present. The trauma involved in retelling their stories can be considerable."

Governments, aid agencies and prosecutors have learnt much from mistakes made in Bosnia, when vital witnesses to events were lost in the confusion of the conflict. This time, the collection of evidence is running in tandem with the provision of aid.



'The Independent,' **Email** from Bas Tielens, MSF Belgium Press Officer, to MSF Press officers, 17 April 1999 (in English). [D148](#)

Regarding Christopher's interview on mass-graves: Christopher did not speak about all the testimonies relating to mass graves, but only some of them. All the info is unconfirmed yet, as analysis still has to be done. The line is that MSF is collecting the testimonies to be able to carry a mental health program that can specifically address the problems of the refugees.



MSF on Mass Graves - News Agenda,' **Email** from Samantha Bolton, Communications Coordinator MSF International to MSF sections press officers, 16 April 1999 (in English). [D149](#)

Here is the NEWS TODAY - This is what we will have to be responding to. There are two issues we really need to organise ourselves on mass graves + NATO funding. As you know with news, the story is moving fast so we are going to be answering to the agenda set by journalists plus trying to set our own priorities. [...]

3) INVESTIGATORS TOLD OF MASS GRAVES - this is the story that needs coordination of information - input from all sections. Very sensitive. This story is going to run and we need to organise our info collection and line.

There will be a lot of follow up of this on SKY TV, etc. FYI - Today in the Independent -16 April - is reporting follow up from Sky and soon other news agencies no doubt. [...]

4) INDEPENDENCE OF AID AGENCIES IN CONFLICT - HUMANITARIAN VS MILITARY This touches on the fund-raising issue - MSF has said it will not take funding from NATO countries - there is currently a debate going on about giving back Norwegian funds.

From a strategic point of view and for our credibility, this must be done. The Scandinavian donors tend to be very understanding/respectful of ethical positions, and will probably respect us even more if we stand by our principles on this issue.

It is also an ideal opportunity to really galvanise Norwegian private donors {really lacking at the moment as they all rely on their govt to do the work} - to get private donors to fund MSF directly. Making a public statement in Norway and handing back the money in an ethical way will bring a lot of media coverage in Norway and will open up the debate about the need for private funding to organisations, etc. MSF B should not be afraid to give back the money - it will not endanger future money giving and apart from anything we have no choice given the position that we have taken.



'Bad Rumours Going on About What We Say,' **Email** from Diane Plessia, responsible for collecting refugee accounts in Macedonia, to MSF Belgium executive director, press officer, Programme Manager, communication director and MSF France legal advisor, 16 April 1999 (in English). [D150](#)

#### Extract:

Since James's press conference in Tirana last Tuesday there have been reactions from people who are angry (for example about the "scoop" on the presence of special forces in Kosovo) or believe that our press release was bad - and I'm sure many of us can understand why. But, more

annoying than that are the so-called statements made on mass graves or indeed the use of gas by the Serbs. [...] Ciara received my statement, so you can be reassured, but still these rumours now circulating seem out of control. Please call me if you have ANY doubt. AND, if possible, could we clarify things at the different levels concerned (cf the MSF "spokespeople") about violations of human rights that we are witnessing. For example, before having spoken to me James had already prepared his pre-press release (which was distributed in hotels, etc. the evening before) talking about rapes, mass graves, etc.! I have clearly said that I did not have statements and formal proof of rapes or of mass graves and that one cannot announce such things (which are mega-sensational and that journalists are going to lap up). I have not been able to follow up on what was said or misstated afterwards [by] very bad journalists (or even before: there were so many interviews). Are you able to get to the source of this information and deny it? (I am sure that you are just as annoyed as I am).

We are trying to put together this collection of accounts seriously, checking and rechecking the stories. There is nothing like this sort of easy rumour to blow away all our credibility... So there it is; apart from that I suggest of course that we should go a bit quiet on emergency press conferences along the lines: "we know what is going on in Kosovo." It seems to me [to be] important to stand back and take the time to gather more matching accounts before letting loose with our information to the media. Greetings from everyone in the Kukes and Krume team.



'Line Regarding MSF in Albania Reporting on Use of BZ-Gas,' **Email** from Bas Tielens, MSF Belgium Press Officer, to MSF Press officers, 17 April 1999 (in English). [D151](#)

Dear all,

Yesterday evening, a report came out via Dutch TV-journalists about MSF speaking about the use by the Serb forces of the hallucinating BZ-gas on the Kosovar-Albanian border near Kukes. This is the same gas Human Rights Watch reported was allegedly used near Srebrenica. According to the Dutch journalists the source is the Federation of American Scientists, reporting that a MSF-doctor would have made such a statement. The medium first reporting on the issue is unclear, nothing can be found on the issue on the internet. Clearly, this is an erroneous report that cannot be attributed to MSF. Please keep me posted if you see the story appearing somewhere else.



'Human Shields,' **Email** from Ciara Shannon, MSF Belgium Press Officer and Alex Parisel, MSF Belgium Executive Director to MSF Network, 20 April 1999 (in English). [D152](#)

Human shields: Please be aware that Eric Dachy (Director of Kosovo Task Force) in an interview with a Belgian TV station was asked about human shields in response to a press release from OSCE on 'human shield'. A decision was made between Alex Parisel and Eric to go ahead with what MSF knew and Eric spoke for less than 1 minute. Eric mentioned that MSF were collecting refugee witness accounts and some who were interviewed confirmed organised displacements of people with or without military convoys. Eric also mentioned that Albanian people were being obliged to wear Yugoslav military uniforms to work in the Yugoslavian military installations on the border. Eric also mentioned that people had been bombed by Yugoslavian planes while walking to the border and he then concluded that the use of human shields was obvious for MSF. Plan of action in case of media interest: if this is picked up by other wires/journalists Diane will be sending her witness accounts tomorrow morning to MSFB and we will distribute appropriate information to back 'MSF claims on human shields'.

Thanks  
Ciara

Dear all,  
Discussing with Tirana, we recommend a low-profile approach on this issue. In his very short interview (OSCE was the focus), Eric did not mention the existence of written reports, he spoke about "des réfugiés nous ont rapports [the refugees report to us]." This is of enormous importance since we do not want, at this stage, to give out the work done by Diane. This work needs to be analysed and used in a fully-coordinated way as it was discussed with Françoise Saulnier. When questioned you can refer all questions to Brussels. If pushed, you can say is that his statements are based on Eric's observations and conversations (even though some witnesses are saying similar things in Diane's work); which converge with observations made by the OSCE (as formulated in their press release today). The way things happened were unfortunate and should not at this stage, be empowered by other declarations, even if the declarations of Eric, based on his stay in Albania, are probably close to reality. Eric reacted on the OSCE report while we did not have all elements in hand. But, the issues he raised will have to be addressed very very soon. More tomorrow.  
Alex



*On the ground, the MSF Belgium investigator immediately began giving interviews, while continuing her investigation. I saw her on television at a time when*

*I did not yet have the results of her work. Of course it was probably not all that comfortable for her to have cameras filming her while she was working. It can't be said that she broke ranks, because there was nothing secret about all of this: the appearance of a newspaper article did not mean that a book could not be written. MSF Belgium was more in favour of getting a message across, probably because they were less well-off financially. It was a question of showing MSF in a position that 'did not raise any questions,' namely a young woman assisting women refugees.*

Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier,  
Legal Advisor, MSF France (in French).



*I don't remember at all. You need to understand that on the ground we did not participate in all these discussions about collecting eyewitness accounts. That took place completely separately from us. We were consulted very little. We were told: "Okay, people are going to come and collect accounts from refugees in three countries." That was decided at the international level. We had so many other, purely operational preoccupations! It was an extremely difficult operational environment. This [was a] humanitarian circus, with NATO arriving at the last minute and occupying all the space! It was really a bit all over the place.*

Christopher Stokes, Coordinator MSF Belgium in  
Albania and Kosovo, April to June 1999 (in French).

**In Brussels, the Belgian section announced publicly that MSF was not participating in the construction of 'NATO' camps. The information directors, keen to limit things drifting off course and to coordinate press activities throughout the network, asked the international office's information officer to help sections in the task of formulating a common position on the Kosovo crisis. For their part, investigation coordinators recalled that use of refugee eyewitness accounts for press purposes raised questions of confidentiality - and consequently of the safety of the persons interviewed. They again clarified the methodology to be used, underlining in particular the psychological impact of these interviews. This message was passed on to the movement's press departments. It was also discussed several weeks later in an article in the international medical journal *The Lancet* on MSF's experience in dealing with mental health care in Kosovo, which drew attention to possible confusion between the different purposes served by these refugee accounts.** [V2](#)



'Balkan (Kosovo) Crisis Sitrep,' **Email** from Ciara Shannon, MSF Belgium Press Officer, 13 April 1999 (in English). [D153](#)

MSF Statements: MSF B in Tirana issued a press statement today, demanding an immediate solution to the security of civilians inside Kosovo. MSF called for respect of neutral and impartial humanitarian assistance inside Kosovo. Also today, in Brussels, MSF called for urgent access to the civilians inside Kosovo in order to provide emergency humanitarian assistance. MSF pointed out that the 'humanitarian interest' of military troops is not the same as the interest of the population, and asked NATO to honour its 'humanitarian interest' by providing logistics under the neutral and impartial humanitarian umbrella of UNHCR. To remain [continue the] logic we announced we would not participate in the building of 'NATO' camps. All national TVs and radios [carried] took over the message.



'Communications Re: Kosovo,' **Email** from Ruud Hurman, MSF Holland Director of Communications to MSF network, 15 April 1999 (in English). [D154](#)

Dear all,  
Following the extensive discussions about public statements re: Kosovo (particularly the Tirana press release), the dircoms have asked Samantha Bolton to assist the sections in the process of positioning. Samantha will work on better feedback on, and analysis of media coverage and public debate, in order to identify issues for MSF's positioning. Samantha will advise the sections and will be stand-by for support in bigger advocacy activities. As the operations in Macedonia, Albania and Montenegro are not internationally coordinated from one operational centre, we should make sure that each section is involved in the debate on the bigger issues.

On behalf of the dircoms,

Ruud Hurman



'Media Feedback for Ops/Comm Strategy,' **Email** from Samantha Bolton, Communications Coordinator MSF International to MSF network, 15 April 1999 (in English). [D155](#)

#### Extract:

As you read from Ruud's note, there is an urgent operational need for feedback on what messages are going out and what is being said in all of our media. As the recent Tirana confused message illustrated, we need to be keeping track of which media is saying what and of what our governments/the real world are saying so that we don't come out with statements like 'silence on one million' in Kosovo when the whole world - CNN and his brother - is

saying a lot more about the fate of people in Kosovo than MSF - even though there may be little coverage on the issue in Swedish or other press for example. MSF ops need to identify the basic problem, what they want to achieve (get into Kosovo - push Belgrade for access, etc.), then we, as comms, work on the strategy and way of communicating. To do this, the reality of the international and local media in each of our countries needs to be taken into consideration. This is as much a war of propaganda as of guns and refugees, and we need to be strategic in ops and comms to maintain a minimum of humanitarian space/voice. This is your opportunity to input on strategy/to support ops and the field. Please could you all send me ASAP a summary today and on a daily basis of your headlines/main government lines - need not be long - so that I can put them together and forward them to ops. Also, please mention where and on what MSF is quoted and any other relevant info of other orgs or where you think there is a lack of information e.g. about what is going on in Kosovo.

E.g: In Britain last night/today the main news stories:

- Rape camps - Rape as weapon of war - strong reports by journalists
- MSF B Doc interviewed on ITN in Northern Albania saying he had examined raped women and daughters
- NATO bombing refugee convoy
- British govt development minister using rape as emotive counterbalance to NATO bombing of refugees.
- Reports of Pope condemning UN agencies for giving day after pill to refugees - victims of rape (is this true in the field? which agency?)
- Arkan and Mladic - indicted war criminals for Srebrenica etc. - are recruiting from prisons to build up Serb militia

Other interesting info:

- Physicians for Human Rights and Medical Foundation for Victims of Torture are looking into the rape issue to build up cases on war crimes/justice - but they do not have clinics/health posts to collect overall info / medical evidence
- Kaz De Jong - MSF H psychologist is going to Macedonia to see to what exactly can be done in the field on the rape issue from a public health point of view is the problem as bad as it seems or are there other pressing issues?)

Please send in your brief summaries / what your governments are saying - where you think there is a lack of info ASAP



'Message to the Press Officers,' **Email** from Françoise Saulnier, MSF Legal Advisor to MSF press officers in Albania and Macedonia, 14 April 1999 (in English). [D156](#)

TO ALL PRESS OFFICERS IN ALBANIA AND MACEDONIA

1) We would like to remind you that under no circumstances the identities of living or dead refugees must circulate internally or externally.



2) We also beg you to think first of the victims, after the MSF communication, and not use aggressive means in your job.

3) If you wish to take testimonies, please use the international data collection form sent to Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro.

Many thanks



'Clarification Regarding the Balkans' Eyewitness Accounts,' **Email** from Françoise Saulnier, MSF Legal Adviser to Programme Managers, general directors, and heads of missions of MSF sections working in Kosovo, 16 April 1999 (in French). **D157**

#### Extract:

Clarification regarding the press and eyewitness accounts. It was decided when the outflow of refugees from Kosovo began that we would put together a collection of refugee eyewitness accounts. The aim of this collection is to assemble eyewitness accounts of refugee deportation conditions in Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania. Over and above individual stories we want to build up a collective history - village by village, valley by valley, and town by town. Consequently, the aim is not to collect individual anecdotes on atrocities but to identify tendencies relating to the policy of ethnic cleansing, its different forms, and the different methods used in the various regions. The objective is one of advocacy and of operational adaptation to this specific context.

A questionnaire has been prepared in order to standardise information collection between the different MSF sections. We needed to ensure that the information collected by the various parties would enable replies to be given to our questions on the different forms of violence used against the civilian population: separation of men from women, assassination, deportation, etc. The questionnaire remains indicative: it is an interview guide that includes the information we see as useful and relevant. It is not a form to be filled in by ticking boxes.

This information-gathering system will enable MSF's advocacy role to be furthered in a number of ways:

- Through provision of an MSF synthesis document on the forms of violence to which the population is being subjected. This synthesis should be drafted next week depending on the return of information from the field. It is not a question of presenting a list of horrific anecdotes but of identifying tendencies as concerns regions, dates, etc, and of illustrating these tendencies by concrete examples. This document will enable us to reply accurately and relevantly to media questions about what is happening to the refugees, without having to react only to isolated acts (rapes, genocide, etc). This document can be transmitted to the Tribunal in The Hague as general information, allowing the Tribunal to connect it with information derived from its own sources.

- Individual eyewitness accounts can be used for advocacy and press purposes, but:

1. Without mentioning the actual identity of refugees or victims
2. Making clear each time whether we are dealing with an isolated account or one that is representative of a general tendency that we found in numerous other cases (as per synthesis document).

- Where some of the refugees interviewed have been victims or witnesses to specific crimes. In these cases the particular account could be sent to the International Tribunal. I have sent to teams in the field some special forms written by the Tribunal. A refugee who wishes to be a witness at the Tribunal could personally fill out and sign this form, which we will then forward. That's where the project is as at 16 April.

The people authorised to collect this information are:

- Michael in Montenegro;
- Sophi in Macedonia;
- Diane, Lisa and Johanna in Albania.

But so far I have only received accounts from Michael in Montenegro, and the accounts collected by Stéphane Oberreit during his mission to Albania. These accounts concern the fate of some 200 people in the regions of Pec, Istok, Klina and Dakovica. We have already studied these accounts and want to compare them and add those from refugees in Albania and Macedonia. I am still waiting the accounts collected by Katrien Coppens and Sofi in Macedonia and by three persons (Diane, Lisa ...) in Albania. Following a request from the teams, and together with a psychologist (Marie-Rose Moro), I have drafted a fact sheet on the psychological aspects of information gathering. Last week I also sent these teams a note on methodology.



'Psychological Aspects of Gathering Witness Statements,' **Email** from Françoise Saulnier, MSF Legal Advisor, 16 April 1999 (in French). **D158**

#### Extract:

Teams gathering witness accounts from Kosovo refugees have raised questions concerning the psychological consequences of the passive listening that they do with these refugees.

#### QUESTIONS:

- 1 - MSF members who collect witness statements fear that they may increase the trauma felt by these people by making them recount what they have lived through.
- 2 - They are worried that they are not themselves doctors capable of providing the specialised medical and psychological help that traumatised refugees may need.

I put these questions to Marie-Rose Moro, a psychiatrist, who is in charge of psychological programmes at MSF Paris.

**REPLIES:**

The care of psychological trauma always takes place in two stages:

- The first stage is one of objective and collective recognition of the trauma having been experienced. This is the time of speaking, of providing an account;
- The second stage is one of recognition of specific individual suffering. That is the time for the psychoanalyst.

Some suffering belongs to everyone. It should not be treated at the level of the psychoanalyst. The refugees have lived through something inhumane and they want it known and recognised so they can move onto other things. That should not be recognition by means of a professional, individual report but public recognition through words and statements. [...] Information collection for the purpose of eyewitness accounts is not passive listening because it has an aim: advocacy. On the contrary, collecting stories and comparing them with others in order to obtain representative information about a reality, done with the intention of public advocacy, is an essential approach in psychological terms. It provides the first phase of treating the trauma. This is the phase of objective recognition of a reality and collective recognition of the trauma that has been suffered. Those who are passive are those who are collecting the account. Those who are telling their story are active. They are speaking in order that we recognise what has happened to them. This is an initial means of defence and of continuing to exist. We are in a context of collective drama. This must be recognised and we must participate in this recognition. [...] It is important to present oneself clearly. To say who we are and what we are going to do with this story. To say what MSF is, what MSF does, and why. MSF is a medical association involved in advocacy regarding people's fate. So, we are gathering refugee stories and will put them together in a synthesis by village and by region in Kosovo [...] and we will make this public to assist in the recognition of what happened and in order to better understand the needs of the people that we are about to treat. Collective recognition of the trauma suffered by refugees is ensured by the advocacy that MSF will do.



'News Review – Kosovo,' **Email** from Samantha Bolton to MSF press officers, 16 April 1999 (in English). 'News Review,' ctd. **Email** from Anne-Marie Huby, MSF UK Executive Director to MSF press officers, executive directors, presidents, directors of operation, Programme Managers, 16 April 1999 (in English). **D159**

**Extract:**

C) MSF NEEDS TO COMMUNICATE /THINK ABOUT STRATEGY ON:

- Concrete issues - B
- Deteriorating situation in Montenegro - F
- More coherent message/ops analysis/to be more strategic/need MSF specific information - Italy, Germ

In my opinion, there are at the moment two issues were we (MSF Global) should focus on, and for which we need communication strategies to be developed:

- Epidemics - risk - real or imagined and of what?
- Inform journalists about basic humanitarian principles - they don't know how a refugee camp should be run

1. ACCESS TO KOSOVO: By all means, through every possible entry. Legal/illegal; allowed, prohibited. Why: the fate of x00,000 people roaming around in Kosovo will be subject of propaganda from all sides. Credible, independent witness accounts are crucial here. The Aid organisations will be questioned at one moment in time on their attempts to fulfil this gap in information.

2. HUMANITARIAN ROLE OF NATO versus UNHCR/NGOs: We have been completely caught in hardball politics between NATO and (the Macedonian) government. UN(HCR) and the NGOs have lost ground. Lots of ground. An impartial, independent role of humanitarian actors versus political/military actors is crucial for future credibility of the humanitarian world. Those two points should get high on the priority list for communication strategies.

As you know, Christopher Stokes was quoted in the Independent newspaper as saying that MSF has at least 50 testimonies relating to the existence of mass graves. I checked with Françoise Saulnier today whether we could draw any firm conclusions from the testimonies that MSF teams have gathered so far from Montenegro, Albania and Macedonia. AT THIS MOMENT IN TIME, WE CANNOT COMMENT ON THE GENERAL PICTURE. As Françoise is still to receive the full info from Macedonia and Albania, it would be irresponsible to draw general conclusions about both the circumstances of the expulsion or the systematic nature of rape incidents before we have collated the info and cross-referenced our sources. MSF will, of course, make these testimonies and our conclusions public (maybe as early as next week) but at this stage, the value of the testimonies you have seen in the media and in MSF reports should be considered as entirely ANECDOTAL - however dreadful the individual testimonies.

THE LINE WE ARE FOLLOWING HERE (for info): Today and over the weekend, we will say, though terrible things have obviously happened (that is the understatement of the day), it is very important to remember that ALL the information on rape, mass graves, etc. is entirely piecemeal/anecdotal. (The proverbial "is anybody here been raped and speaks English?" journalistic tradition is alive and well as confirmed by MSF psychologist Christina Moore in Albania). The UK and US govts are clearly using allegations of rape in camps, etc. (on which there is still no documented evidence) to reinforce the "butcher of Belgrade" image and deflect attention from collateral damage caused by NATO bombing (indeed it was Robin Cook who announced the rape story on the day of the first incident of civilian collateral damage). The only honest answer to the pressing questions is that a true picture

will emerge, but a lot more work needs to be done. At this stage, we have registered only one rape victim (though this of course could only be the tip of the iceberg).

On the question of the absence of most men of fighting age in the camps, it is worth reiterating that, in the absence of a proper registration system, it is very difficult to have a clear idea of which members of a family are where, let alone be able to say for sure at this stage that men have been systematically separated and shot. So in other words, what we are trying to do is separate facts from propaganda. It is more useful to try and deflect the media's attention from these issues to concentrate on the Montenegro question, where there is a much smaller media presence/interest and where the refugees/displaced are in an extremely vulnerable situation.



'Health and Human Rights – Mental Healthcare for Refugees from Kosovo: the Experience of Médecins Sans Frontières,' **Report**, Kaz de Jong, Nathan Ford, and Rolf Kleber of Médecins Sans Frontières with the Institute of Psycho Trauma, University of Utrecht, The Netherlands, *The Lancet*, 12:01 GMT, Friday, 7 May 1999 (in English). [D160](#)

#### Extract:

Concerns about advocacy: Many organisations are active in gathering testimonies of refugees from Kosovo. The aim of such activities at this stage is to advocate on basic needs and also the levels of assistance and protection given to refugees or deportees by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. At a later stage, the accurate reporting of human rights violations can serve to record the history of events and support international efforts to bring the perpetrators to justice. The immediate work allows for the objective recognition of a collective trauma and will also help the individual to come to terms with his or her trauma. However, advocacy must not be confused with counselling; the specific information obtained through counselling sessions is not used for advocacy. When pressure is put on a person for information, it can have a damaging effect. Such activities must, therefore, be sensitive to the psychological vulnerability of the individual.

#### Conclusions:

Among the main medical aid agencies working in the current refugee crisis in the Balkans, many, but not all, consider mental health to be important: UNICEF, Save the Children, and Oxfam all have current mental health programmes with a focus on crisis counselling and a long-term perspective. However, divisions remain among aid agencies as to whether mental health is a priority during the emergency phase or whether it should be developed at a later stage. MSF believes it is important to initiate mental health programmes during the emergency phase of refugee crisis: local staff must be identified and trained; time is required to understand the local cultural context, and people need to become aware that such help exists.

Other medical programmes become overburdened during the emergency phase and mental health programmes can help to alleviate this burden. Helping traumatised people is a matter of restoring the bond between the individual and the surrounding society. MSF programmes are implemented in cooperation and with the active input of trained national staff. National staffs are vital to overcome language and cultural barriers, and are ultimately the only way to ensure acceptance and sustainability of the programmes.



*In Albania the press teams began to want to make immediate use of the individual story material collected. We said clearly that it was out of the question to use individual stories in an isolated fashion, for press purposes. We wanted to do serious and rigorous work, that is to say go beyond what had already been reported either by NATO or by the media. At the time, we were very critical of the media because they only published individual stories, fairly deliberately squalid. So, we really insisted on the need to do rigorous work, building up the refugees' full story, so we could go beyond the eye-catching individual account.*


[...], MSF Deputy Legal Advisor (in French).



*At the beginning, I had my contacts at MSF Belgium on the phone at least three times. They were close to giving up: "We can't," they were saying. "This raises ethical problems, and is making people cry. Real psychologists should come and ask the questions." So, with the assistance of Marie-Rose [Moro, a psychiatrist, managing MSF France's psychological care activities], we drafted a small note on the psychological elements of the collection of eyewitness accounts and sent it to MSF Belgium. We also needed to make some adjustments to more operational aspects. For example, what should be done with the story of a direct victim or witness to a massacre? It was the investigator in Montenegro who alerted us to this question. There were three or four cases of refugees who had witnessed massacres of eight to ten people, whose names they knew. We could not simply ignore them. So, we called the Criminal Tribunal, which is competent in these matters, and we put together a system of passing on these stories and asking for protection to be given to these witnesses. There was a need to involve UNHCR and the Tribunal so these people were not 'branded' and especially so their protection could be organised. In any case, the interpreters were recruited with the same care normally taken by MSF. We did not ask for information that could have put people in danger. The instruction was that when we felt things were going too far, we were to take the foot off the pedal. We did not abandon such people, but at that moment they came under a different category, that of direct victims or witnesses and thus*

potentially in danger. And in the case of these people, we did not speak to them in front of everyone. The teams filled in the relevant boxes in the forms and sent them off by email, along with the stories. We used them again and compiled the statistics back at headquarters. Nothing was done in the field. Everything circulated by email because we did not want to have any documents on the spot.

Françoise Saulnier, MSF Legal Advisor,  
(in French).

 People had not systematically been subjected to physical violence, but their houses had been burned. They had been told to leave or else they would be killed. MSF's legal adviser had sent me a document on the psychological aspects of the interviews, which she had drafted in conjunction with the psychologist. I was thus, encouraged by MSF to proceed with initial work on debriefing the victims. It had not been presented to me like that: they spoke more of the benefits for the victim from discussing with someone. Occasionally refugees told me stories along the lines that their nine brothers and sisters had been lined up against a wall and had all been killed. In those cases, we had to put them in touch with the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

Michaël Neuman, Officer-in-Charge of collecting refugee stories in Montenegro, (in French).

**In mid-April 1999 an investigation by the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH), a 'confidential' American report in the Spanish newspaper *El País*, and accounts from refugees in Macedonia, Albania and Montenegro, spoke of massacres and rapes committed by the Serb army against Kosovo Albanians. The FIDH report concluded that crimes against humanity were being committed in Kosovo.**



'Large-Scale Crimes Against Humanity in Kosovo,' According to FIDH, **AFP** (France), 13 April 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

"Crimes against humanity have been committed on a large scale" in Kosovo and "continue to be committed, and may even qualify as genocide," according to a statement in Paris on Tuesday by the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH). FIDH, which has carried out an investigation among Kosovar refugees who have arrived in Montenegro, condemns the absence of major international humanitarian assistance organisations in this Yugoslav republic, whose government opposes the regime in

Belgrade. "Notwithstanding the very strong solidarity of Montenegrin institutions and the action of some humanitarian organisations, the absence of major institutions and international organisations is striking, and unless there is rapid mobilisation of international assistance the tragedy being suffered by the refugees could descend into absolute chaos," warned FIDH in a communiqué.

Officials from the organisation went to Ulcinj and Rozaje, near the border with Kosovo, between 8-11 April. The FIDH estimates that between 1,000 and 1,500 new refugees are arriving each day in Montenegro. Refugee accounts indicate that "hundreds of thousands of persons in the region (in Kosovo) are currently surrounded, without being able to leave." These stories confirm that the refugees have "mostly seen their houses pillaged and burned," or have even witnessed "the elimination of old people and invalids who had remained behind," according to FIDH. Persons responsible for crimes against humanity "must account for their crimes before the International Criminal Tribunal (ICTY)," adds FIDH.

FIDH is an international non-governmental organisation that has consultative status with the United Nations, UNESCO, and the Council of Europe.



'Accusations of Rape Multiplying in Kosovo,' Michel Moutot, **AFP**, Kukes (Albania), 13 April 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

There are increasingly numerous and consistent accounts from ethnic Albanian Kosovar refugees describing kidnappings, rapes, and the assassination of young women by Serb forces in Kosovo. Since the beginning of the exodus of Albanians from the province to Albania or Macedonia, fleeing Serb terror, many stories have emerged of the disappearance of young women and girls, kidnapped by armed Serbs in their villages or along the roads. On 9 April Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Beacon declared: "We are receiving very disturbing information in which young Kosovar women were gathered together in a Serb army training camp near the town of Djakovica, where they were raped by soldiers and up to 20 of them may have been killed."

In the night of Monday to Tuesday the Halime family, from Slatina (near the Pristina airport), entered Albania via the border post at Morina (in the north) and immediately told of the murder of a young 22 year-old woman. According to them Shpresa Halime, née Krasniqi, was killed because she tried to escape from Serb militia who wanted to make her get off a tractor trailer at the entrance to Djakovica (in the south west of Kosovo). Their story, which has been confirmed by witnesses outside the family, who were interviewed by **AFP** in different places and at different times, has been judged credible by the spokesman in Kukes for the United Nations High Commissioner for

Refugees (UNHCR), Jacques Franquin, who said that he had "every reason to believe it is true."



'More than 3,200 Civilians Assassinated since the End of March in Kosovo, According to a US Report,' **AFP** (France), 14 April 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

Since the end of March, more than 3,200 civilians may have been assassinated by Serb forces (soldiers, paramilitary units and police) in Kosovo, reported the Spanish daily *El País* on Wednesday, quoting an American "confidential report." This report, to which the Madrid daily's Brussels correspondent has had access, was compiled on the basis of accounts by Kosovar refugees in Albania and Macedonia, reports *El País*, without specifying which American organisation wrote it. According to the report, compiled on 10 April, at least 3,200 people have been assassinated in Kosovo since the end of March and some 200 villages have been torched either partially or totally. "Refugees continue to speak about summary executions in the province, as well as the existence of mass graves in Drenica, Malisevo and in the Pagarusa Valley," notes the report quoted by *El País*.

The report sets out in detail, village by village, the crimes committed by the Serb forces. 270 people appear to have been killed in Izbica, 200 in Oriate, 112 in Malkrussa, 100 in Ljubenica, 100 in Dakovica, 100 in Bruznic, etc. [...]

Many of the places attacked by the Serbs have never seen any activity by the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK), notes the report, which also provides figures, by village, of people who have been displaced or used as "human shields." The report also expresses concern over the fate of people who have disappeared inside Kosovo, whose number may vary between "tens of thousands" and "several hundreds of thousands." Some of them may be in special detention centres such as those run by General Jankovic and in Pec, it notes.

On 15 April 1999, a representative from MSF addressed the Council of Europe on the humanitarian situation in the Balkans. He focused his presentation on Montenegro and on MSF's relations with UNHCR and NATO.



'MSF Address to the Council of Europe,' **Speech**, by the MSF deputy legal advisor, on behalf of Philippe Biberson, President of MSF France, 15 April 1999 (in French). **D161**

#### Extract:

Up until 9 April, we considered that there had been no real humanitarian drama, and several factors can explain what some have called the "late humanitarian ignition."

- The refugees' medical situation was not catastrophic,

except for the psychological trauma whose extent we are currently evaluating so that we can be in a position to provide an appropriate response.

- The scale of the deportations, which may I remind you in themselves qualify as crimes against humanity, coming within the competence of the Hague International Criminal Tribunal, meant that they could not be handled solely by humanitarian organisations.
- The overwhelming majority of refugees and displaced persons were cared for in families, either in Albania, Macedonia or Montenegro. This capacity is now starting to be exhausted.
- Logistical and customs problems created by the states receiving humanitarian assistance slowed down the distribution of relief.

Since 9 April, the humanitarian situation has greatly deteriorated, in particular in Montenegro which those who spoke this morning have somewhat overlooked. MSF would like to underline the following points:


- The state of health of displaced persons now arriving in Montenegro is more worrying (respiratory infections, lack of food, an increasing number of people who have been wounded by weapons, etc). This situation is linked to deportation and travel conditions - 10 to 20 hours walking through mountains where the snow is 1.2 m deep.
- Reception capacity in Montenegro has now been exhausted. We now need to find shelter - provisionally erect tents because women, children and old people are sleeping in the street or in bus shelters.
- Humanitarian assistance is being delivered in a context of increasing insecurity: there are rumours of coups d'état and the arrival of Serb paramilitaries and special forces of whom refugees are afraid and who are giving signs of wanting to challenge humanitarian organisations. That is why MSF has chosen not to settle the displaced people - their physical security cannot be guaranteed.

I should like to end this presentation on the humanitarian situation by insisting on MSF's concern for the Kosovars who have been displaced within Kosovo itself. As you know, there is no longer any humanitarian organisation present in Kosovo, at a time when several hundreds of thousands of people have no water, food or shelter. I am very happy that the ICRC is currently seeking to negotiate with Belgrade on the question of its own return to Kosovo, and that of other impartial humanitarian NGOs.

2) Relations between MSF/UNHCR/NATO: You are aware that MSF seeks constantly to preserve its independence, and that of humanitarian action, vis-à-vis the United Nations system and the various military and political players. MSF should note however, that it appreciates the assistance that NATO provided following the episode in Blace for the construction of camps in Macedonia in 48 hours. It would have taken us about three weeks. However, our desire is that humanitarian operations rapidly revert to a civilian form and that they be led and coordinated by humanitarian organisations, neutral and impartial as

required by international humanitarian law. That is to say that over the coming days it will be necessary to avoid role confusion. We have been worried by the sidelining of UNHCR, because that means a lack of refugee assistance and protection dealing with matters such as family separation, forced displacement towards third countries, and lack of refugee registration - the result being an absence of identity and protection at the very time that people are concerned by the fact that all identity papers have been destroyed by Serb forces.

I should like to conclude by recalling in this institution - whose primary responsibility is the defence of human rights - that faced with war crimes and crimes against humanity, military logic and humanitarian logic are not enough. The Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia is too absent from this crisis and for the moment is not operational in the region. Member States of the Council of Europe should provide greater support to the ICTY because it is competent to investigate and to try the crimes committed in Kosovo.

 *I addressed the Council of Europe on behalf of Philippe Biberson. The Council's Parliamentary Assembly had run very late. Philippe had to leave because he had a media appointment and so I made the speech on his behalf. In substance, we explained that the humanitarian needs, in particularly on the medical level, were not actually enormous, contrary to the view that was widely held in public opinion and in the media. We also probably emphasised the fact that the refugees and displaced persons were in a state of profound shock - precisely because they had been deported, that is to say displaced by force, in a very organised manner, and despatched over an international border. But, we also, of course condemned military - humanitarian confusion and called on UNHCR to resume its place in organising assistance.*

[...], Deputy Legal Advisor, (in French).

**In Greece, certain journalists and publications spoke out against prevailing nationalistic and pro-Serbian positions. The Greek daily Eleftherotypia published an article by the honorary president of MSF Greece which denounced both Yugoslavian nationalism and NATO 'hypocrisy'.**



'On Humanitarian Space in Kosovo,' **Email** from Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of Operations, to Thierry Durand (Director of Operations MSF Switzerland), MSF Greece and President of MSF Greece 23 April 1999 (in French). [D162](#)

#### Extract:

[...] The testimony of a Greek journalist (dated 13 April). Subject: 'Kosovo: Letter from a Greek journalist' (*Greek Helsinki Monitor*), 13 April 1999. (French translation by Emmanuelle Rivière):

Letter from Christos Telidis to the Panhellenic Federation of Journalists' Unions, 13 April 1999

[...] I thought it would be useful to inform you about certain facts concerning the role of the journalists who are covering the crucial events of the war in Yugoslavia. My account will be of particular interest to those organisations which represent Greek journalists. The role of journalists, especially in the context of the current situation in the region, is extremely important - there are times when, in an attempt to assess a situation with the greatest possible vigilance, we are left with nothing but our conscience and our sense of responsibility. Because of the importance that each piece of information 'carries', it should be transmitted accurately, with no personal, political, social, racial, religious or cultural bias.

Journalists should also be aware of the consequences of the information they transmit. I have been reporting the major events that have shaken the Balkans for over ten years, and as a result I have acquired a good knowledge of the regional participants. On Wednesday 25 March, I returned to Pristina, in Kosovo. [...]

We were unable to move into the Albanian house a friend had reserved for us. Moreover, he let us know that he was terrified and did not want to meet us. We therefore had to submit to the 'confinement' of the Grand Hotel. Stories about the way the local authorities were treating the media, especially the major national television channels, had already created a 'heavy' atmosphere among the hundred or so foreign journalists staying there. Serbian officials had also declared that if NATO carried out its threat to bomb Yugoslavia, they would take their revenge and empty Kosovo of its Albanian population. It is obvious from what followed that Serbian officials were simply waiting for NATO to start the bombardment so that they could begin their own 'barrage' of attacks on the Kosovo Albanians. When we learned at 09:00 that NATO missiles had been launched at Yugoslav targets, explosions and shooting had already occurred in Pristina, although no NATO missile had struck the city. There were flames on the horizon, where the suburbs were enveloped in thick smoke. During the hours of darkness, we could well imagine the scale of the fighting; but anyone who attempted to leave the Grand Hotel at daylight and investigate what had actually taken place was in for a revelation.

The Greek media showed what was purported to be a Serbian base that had been struck by a missile and was covering the whole of Pristina in smoke. In reality, it was a large warehouse that had been converted for use as a garage and also housed a small printing works which had printed the Albanian newspaper *Kosovo Today* before the publication was banned. Not surprisingly, the whole building was Albanian-owned. It was not hard to see how the explosion could only have originated at ground-level. [...] Furthermore, a plan to frighten the foreign journalists, including the Greek contingent, in the Grand Hotel had already been drawn up and was set in motion during the night. Some of them tried to take photographs of the blazing warehouse (for that is certainly what it was) from their rooms. But, as they did so a shot was fired from the police station directly opposite the hotel. Fortunately, it hit the wall. Several thugs, cronies of the police, then arrived to terrorise the residents of the hotel. The journalists had to return to their rooms on the top floor, although these offered no real protection. Armed Serbs forced many of them to stand against a wall in the dark with their hands in the air while they were forcibly searched. Meanwhile, others forced their way into journalists' rooms when they were denied access. One Bulgarian working for the Associated Press was attacked in front of us; he was beaten up then thrown down the corridor. The cameraman from the Greek '5' television channel, who was alone in his room, was also violently assaulted. The Serbs beat him and smashed the tools of his trade, his cassettes and cameras.

These assaults on journalists were made public the following day. The representative from Belgrade, the so-called 'President of Kosovo', invited journalists to his headquarters for breakfast. More than 80 turned up. After a long wait, the representative appeared and simply told them that they were undesirables and should leave immediately. As they returned to the hotel to pack their bags, several staff from Greek television jostled around the 'President', trying to curry favour and extract an 'exclusive'. But, in their eagerness to control and persecute "undesirables," the Serbian authorities were very selective, even with the Greeks. [...] The decision to leave was confirmed when somebody threw a Molotov cocktail at a CNN car, endangering the lives of several people and causing a certain amount of damage. So they had to get out right away. [...]

A Serb who worked for the anti-government Serbian newspaper *Blits* [...] knew we were journalists, having seen us in the Grand Hotel, and warned us that we should leave because we were being followed – our lives were in danger. [...] Someone from a Greek television station, who was unaware of what had happened, approached me and also warned that we were being followed by the security forces, who knew what we were doing and what we had photographed. [...] The journalist mentioned earlier also advised us to get out of Pristina and stay away for two or three weeks. In addition, he advised us to hide our film and other materials because everything was likely to be confiscated during the journey. He also warned us to

be very careful as we travelled, because anything could happen. [...] During our journey, we had to get through several road blocks and were forced to prove to the soldiers that we were Orthodox. [...] We were scrupulously searched by ten policemen, and when they could not find what we had hidden earlier, they finally confiscated a few worthless rolls of film and some floppy disks, cassettes, etc. [...] We had to wait at least two hours before they let us go. The customs officials did not stamp our passports, as they are obliged to do by law, and thus avoided providing written confirmation that we had crossed the border at the General Yankovits' post.

While we were being subjected to this treatment, reporters from Greek TV stations were travelling back and forth between the two countries without hindrance – these were the only stations to broadcast 'exclusives', as there were no other foreign journalists left in Pristina. An Italian who had refused to leave received repeated threats and had to flee with the refugees. On the night of our escape, we were told that terrorist attacks had recommenced, although we had not seen any evidence of a NATO bombardment or KLA soldiers in Pristina. The following day, a Greek television channel reported that a missile aimed at a Radio-Television station had fallen 150-200 metres short of its target, and showed pictures of considerable damage. However, a rather more detailed analysis of the pictures would have revealed that the explosion had destroyed the ground floor of a house in the ethnic Albanian quarter. The reporter, doing a live broadcast in front of the building, attributed the damage to [...] a NATO missile. He attempted to question a passing Albanian, who contemptuously replied that a Greek TV channel was not to be trusted. Much remains to be said about these events. I have taken the opportunity to inform you of the situation, Mr President, because I believe that in these times of crisis, journalists must demonstrate a strong sense of responsibility and resist the influence of partisan motives, whatever form they may take.



'Nationalism and Scapegoats,' Sotiris Papispyropoulos, Vice-President of MSF Greece, **Eleftherotypia** (Greece) April 1999 (translation from Greek into French by Sotiris). **D163**

#### Extract:

The Crisis in Yugoslavia.

When examined through this prism, the crisis in our region leads us to the following considerations: the leaders of the former Yugoslavian Federation have repeatedly erected scapegoats at every stage of the crisis. During the initial stage, the leaders of what was then a united Yugoslavia cultivated a nationalistic hatred of other populations among the Serbs, and ensured that the Serbs became objects of fear for the other populations. They did so by exploiting the media (Milosević's 1989 declaration to the Kosovo Serbs: «They will never hit you again»); by manipulating the facts of history (recalling the 'Ustashi'

past of certain elements of Croatian society) and religion (emphasising an 'Islamic threat'); and also by deliberate measures such as quashing the autonomous status of Kosovo in the late 1980s.

The nationalist leaders of other populations were quick to adopt the same logic and apply it to their own causes. Together, they brutally destroyed the framework of coexistence and ensured the impossibility of its revival (if not artificial, how else can the fact that these populations coexisted for so many years be explained?) The results of this manufactured hatred are well known: carnage, massacres between neighbours and even between mixed families, populations uprooted.

The second stage of the crisis (Kosovo) was a natural prolongation of the first. The Yugoslav government's calculated abolition of Kosovo's autonomy and the repressive measures that followed (the restrictions on the use of the Albanian language, the closing of the university, employment discrimination, non-recognition of local election results and moderate local leaders, etc.) radicalised ethnic Albanians and led to the creation of a military organisation. Yet again, the terrain of this radicalisation has provided third forces with an opportunity to pursue their own goals. The opportunity was too good to miss.

The hypocrisy of the great powers lies in their use of the humanitarian pretext.

The use of the humanitarian pretext in order to justify political choices (which, to be specific, are simply served by military means) shows to what extent political debate has been discredited in the eyes of the public. If the real cause underlying political choices is at risk of public rejection, it then becomes necessary to invent another 'cause' to bolster support for the catastrophic choices made by governments. The method, which has proved infallible up till now, is to choose so-called humanitarian causes (from Kurdistan in 1991 to Somalia; from Zaire to the Gulf War; and of course Yugoslavia in recent years). When they cancel the political framework and reinvent it as humanitarianism, governments are seeking to regain the support of their peoples by pretending to abandon political ends in order to uphold noble humanitarian values. This is evident in the behaviour of NATO, a criminal enterprise that is practically transforming itself through its purported benevolence.

What can be done?

1) It is imperative that the Yugoslav army withdraws from Kosovo and accepts the existence of a provisional international force, which should include a Russian contingent. Those who accepted the creation of scapegoats must accept that there is a price to pay. The sooner it is paid, the cheaper it will be and the fewer the people who will have to pay it.

2) NATO should then stop the bombing. The humanitarian pretext will no longer exist; the public will no longer be deceived. All that remains on the stage will be the attack on a sovereign state, a flagrant violation of international law.

3) Negotiations intended to guarantee the autonomy of Kosovo should then begin.



'Media Coverage in Greece,' **Email** from Sophia Ioannou, MSF Greece Press Officer, 20 April 1999 (in English). **D164**

#### **Extract:**

As the past few days - and the recent ones - are more than hell for all press officers I didn't have the chance to inform you about media coverage and how Greek media have been presenting the situation. Have to say that we almost had - especially the first days - a 'media crisis' due to lack of presence in media. MDM pictures were all through the media and all our donors but also journalists were really worried and posing tough questions about what MSF is doing... Fortunately, we managed to overcome the difficulties. Copy some newspaper titles which indicate the picture:

\* 'Europe is Afraid of the Refugees' /No Common Political Strategy for E.U. Regarding the Refugees (*KATHIMERINI*)

\* 'The Greek Government Sends Aid and Builds up Camps for the Kosovar Refugees' (*KATHIMERINI*).

\* 'Green Light from USA supporting the Greek Intervention in Serbia and Kosovo'/The Greek Government Proceeds with its Willingness to Open a «Humanitarian Aid Corridor' and is the Only Country-Member of NATO which Continues the Open Dialogue with Yugoslavia. NATO sees it Positively (*EKSOUSIA*)

\* 'In Belgrade Special Mandate of the Greek Ministry of External Affairs for an Explo Mission before the Aid' (*EKSOUSIA*)

\* 'Victims of 'Humanitarian' Bombings'/Subtitle: 'The Humanitarian Aid Towards the Kosovars has Gained a Sponsor: USA!' At the same time the NATO forces are providing Serbia with Tomahawks. The Balkans has a new sponsor also: USA (*ELEFTHERTYPIA*).


\* 'New Chernobyl in the Balkans' /Ecological Approach of the Bombings (*APOGEVAMTINI*).

\* 'Humanitarian Aid and Medicines against Bombings'/ [...] As the Irrational NATO Bombings are Continuing, the Greek Population is giving a Helpful Hand to the Suffering Populations in Kosovo and Serbia' (*THESSALONIKI*).

\* 'UCK: Politicians or Rebels?'/Political Analysis on the UCK Military Movement (*TA NEA*).

I have to notice that although the public opinion is strongly with Serbia (not Milosevic), media are presenting the situation from both sides. The refugees' drama from Kosovo-caused by Serbian threats and atrocities-is also a big part of the broadcasts. [...] Mostly speaking about the MSF activities in Albania, Skopje and Montenegro, doing interviews and pushing hard our position regarding the need of UNHCR taking [a more] active role. We are having every week a press briefing in the MSF offices in Athens with journalists from newspapers and they seem that they really like all this flow of information from our side.



 Greece was in the grip of a pro-Milosevic frenzy: 'support our Orthodox Serb brothers' and all that kind of stuff. I wrote that article to show that Milosevic was one thing and the Serbs were another. We should not blame the Serbian people for something that was set up by Milosevic and his military machine. The Serbs lived alongside the Croats and the Kosovo Albanians for decades without problems. Milosevic is a nationalist; he does not come from the people; he manipulated the Communist Party to gain power and his game at the moment is to further entrench himself. I wrote the article because I felt I had to. Of course I discussed it with the members of the Board because I was going to sign it 'Honorary President of MSF.' We concluded that it would be a good thing to get the article into print. MSF cannot have a political position, but as honorary president I can voice my own opinion. That might make the Greeks think; are we right to have this mentality and what is the value of the views held by MSF Greece? We told the Greek population that at MSF Greece we did not adopt a political position but we did think about various things. But, unlike the Greek public, press and all the television stations at the time, our position was not unilateral. 'Eleftherotypia' was an exception, a neutral, centre-left paper. It took the risk of publishing opinions. But, the rest of the press did not want to know. There were negative reactions from donors. Anyone who had given it some thought and may have approved of us did not call us.

Sotiris Papaspyropoulos, Honorary President,  
MSF Greece (in French).

**From 15 April 1999 the Greek government negotiated an agreement with the government of the Yugoslav Federation and with NATO for Greek NGOs to enter the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to provide humanitarian assistance. According to the President of MSF Greece at the time, the Greek section immediately applied for visa's for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. It informed the other MSF sections and asked that an MSF mission was conducted under this initiative, involving the Greek section but not necessarily in a coordinating role.**



'Fact Finding Mission Regarding the MSF Greece Mission to FRY and the Breakdown of the MSF Greek-Swiss Common Operational Centre Agreement,' **Report** presented to the MSF International Council, 13 June 1999 (in English). [D89](#)

#### Extract:

15/4: MDM-G launches a mission to Kosovo. They get a lot of media attention in Greece. Between 15 & 19/4 (?): Official announcement of an agreement between the Greek

ministry of foreign affairs, NATO and the FRY government to allow Greek NGOs entry into FRY for humanitarian assistance. According to some Greek Board members, the Greek MSF office then 'applied again for visas'.



'Greece Working on Urgent Humanitarian Effort to Kosovo,' **CNN.com**, Washington, 15 April 1999 (in English).

#### Extract:

A Greek diplomat has gone to Belgrade to work out details of a humanitarian medical and food supply operation for displaced people in Kosovo, sources told CNN Thursday. Sources familiar with the mission told CNN that Yugoslav authorities have tentatively agreed to permit several Greek trucks with medical supplies to drive into Kosovo from the Macedonian capitol of Skopje, perhaps starting in the coming days. If that works well, the sources say, the truck convoy will be expanded.

The NATO allies are aware of the Greek mission and do not oppose it. But the mission is described as strictly an initiative of the Greek government. Greece is a member of NATO. On Wednesday, the State Department and the White House expressed hope that a third party, perhaps Greece might be able to get aid to the hundreds of thousands of displaced ethnic Albanians inside Kosovo. NATO officials have rejected air drops as too dangerous. They've also rejected introducing ground forces to fight their way into Kosovo with food and medical supplies. Sources familiar with the new mission say Alex Rondos, an adviser to Greek Foreign Minister George Papandreou, arrived in Belgrade on Wednesday and has been meeting with high-ranking Yugoslav officials. On the agenda: permitting the Greek branch of the organization 'Doctors of the World' [MDM] to expand its operations inside Kosovo.

The group has been able to keep three officials in Pristina since the start of the NATO air strikes - the only international aid organization that has operated inside Kosovo. It has been providing medical assistance to displaced ethnic Albanians and Serbs.



Throughout MSF this was seen as a Greek affair, negotiated with Milosevic to enable Greeks to enter Yugoslavia for propaganda purposes. But, if the press and population were sympathetic towards Milosevic, that was not at all the case so far as the Greek government was concerned. At the time, the head of government was Sinipis, who was pro-European. He consistently followed the European line; he initiated the first talks on the entry of Turkey into the EU; for the first time he accepted that Greece should adopt positions that were not very popular domestically but that made sense internationally. In addition, I believe that at the time Greece had the presidency of the European Union. Some days earlier, there had been a

great celebration to welcome new countries joining the union and all the European leaders had got together on the Acropolis in Athens. Sinipis had considerable weight as president of Europe. He was very open to the international scene. So the political judgment of the MSF movement was inaccurate. They did not even wish to give it any closer consideration.

Sotiris Papaspyropoulos, Honorary President,  
MSF Greece (in French).

**The departure of the last NATO troops from the camps in Macedonia worried the refugees who feared the brutal methods used by the Macedonian police; henceforth put in charge of security by UNHCR.**



'NATO Soldiers Leave the Camps, to the Refugees' Distress,' Deborah Pasmantier, **AFP** (France), Stenkovec-Brazda (Macedonia) 16 April 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

Most of the NATO troops who had built the largest refugee camp in Macedonia had pulled out by Friday, to the dismay of the Kosovo Albanians who fear being mistreated by the Macedonian police. The majority of NATO soldiers, who numbered more than 650 in the Stenkovec-Brazda complex (near Skopje) at the height of the crisis, have now left, according to the NATO spokesman in Skopje, Commander Eric Mongot. The NATO troops in Macedonia had set up this vast complex at the request of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), following the first massive influx of Kosovars at the beginning of April. On Friday, there remained only 30 French nationals in the Stenkovec camp (out of 220) and 30 British in Brazda (out of about 450).

The departures, which had been taking place progressively since 10 April, should be concluded on Sunday, after which only small liaison teams will remain, assisted by a hundred or so civilian security personnel that were expected to arrive on Saturday, added M. Mongot. The camp will henceforth be managed entirely by UNHCR and security will be entrusted solely to the Macedonian police, a fact which terrifies most of the refugees in Stenkovec-Brazda, who numbered more than 40,000 on Thursday. The Kosovo Albanians have a mental picture of Macedonian police beating and separating families during the evacuation of the informal camp at Blace (north of Skopje) 10 or so days ago. And they compare that with the image of NATO soldiers setting up tents and distributing food. [...] "With NATO I felt safe. Now, as usual, the Macedonian police will be trying to create incidents and panic to frighten us and make us leave the camp and leave Macedonia," said another refugee, aged about 40, who

preferred not to be named. [...] Aware of the problems that could arise, UNHCR has suggested to the Macedonian government a programme to sensitise the police (who are more used to supervising prisoner camps) towards vulnerable populations.

## MSF INSISTS ON REFUGEE PROTECTION

**In Montenegro the authorities were resisting the power of Belgrade and tensions were increasing between the Serb federal forces and the Montenegrin forces. The displaced Kosovars were living in a climate of fear and insecurity, not helped by UNHCR's thin presence on the ground. On 16 April 1999, MSF France issued a press release, taken up by MSF UK, requesting protection for the Kosovar refugees in Montenegro. MSF put pressure on UNHCR to organise the transfer of displaced persons into Albania and in order to remove them from violence committed by the Yugoslav federal forces and Serb paramilitaries. Subject to increasing insecurity, the team also began a local press programme to make its action known and thus limit tension with the pro-Serb community, which was accusing it of aiding the Kosovars at the expense of the local population.**



'MSF Calls for Protection for Kosovar Refugees in North-eastern Montenegro,' **Press release**, MSF France, MSF UK 16 April 1999 (in French, in English). **D165**

Having witnessed a serious deterioration of conditions facing Kosovar displaced people in Montenegro, the international medical aid agency Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) calls upon the Montenegrin authorities and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to protect these people. In particular, MSF asks that these refugees be looked (after in an area where their security can be guaranteed). For nearly a week, MSF teams working in Rozaje have witnessed an increase in the number of people fleeing the area of Istok in Kosovo (north-east of Pec). On Wednesday alone, 4,300 new arrivals were registered at the border. These people are arriving exhausted and traumatised following several days of arduous walking through the mountains. Once in Rozaje, however, their condition remains precarious - there are insufficient facilities for them and the presence of various armed forces and paramilitary groups is leading to instability in the area.

"Although UNHCR has just announced that the Kosovar refugee situation is under control, I can testify to the

deteriorating conditions facing displaced people arriving in this area," emphasised François Calas, MSF's Head of Mission in Montenegro. "We urgently need UNHCR to strengthen its presence on the ground here." It is vital that the displaced people are moved to an area which is safer and has adequate facilities. Due to rising tension in the region, a planned and voluntary evacuation should be organised under the joint auspices of both the Montenegrin authorities and UNHCR. Most importantly, UNHCR must urgently extend its protection mandate to this group, even if they currently hold the status of internally displaced persons because they have not crossed an international border, and thus, are not full-fledged refugees.



'Montenegro,' **Update**, MSF France, 19 April 1999 (in French). [D166](#)

#### Extract:

##### General:

Over the last two days, 200 displaced persons have crossed the border into Montenegro. In preceding days the number of daily arrivals was more than 3,000. Tension is increasing markedly in Rozaje, in northern Montenegro, between federal troops (Serbs) and the Montenegrin forces. Belgrade has publicly announced that the Montenegrin Deputy Prime Minister should be arrested. In Rozaje, the police have advised the population not to move about at night. The number of federal reservist soldiers and militia has been increased in the area and checkpoints have been set up around the town on the roads leading to Bac, Boltic and Berane. These checkpoints prevent displaced people from moving further to the south of the country. Displaced persons speak about violence committed by the military: buses have been stopped, men have been separated from women, and there have been arrests, disappearances and beatings.

##### Internal:

This weekend, for example, the military visited a village to the south of Rozaje and invaded houses. They violently prevailed upon displaced persons and even residents to leave this village, which is an entry point into Kosovo. The teams [report] a general climate of fear in Rozaje. Following this new deterioration in security, a significant number of displaced persons wish to leave the town and go further south or towards Albania. But, such trips are always expensive and dangerous. Moreover, the authorities in Ulcinje, in the south, seem unwilling to see more displaced persons settle in their town. Today, neither security nor protection can be guaranteed for refugees in Rozaje. The team is particularly concerned about the fate of displaced persons whose identity papers have been destroyed by Serb troops in Kosovo. It is urgent to allow those who wish to do so to return to safer zones. The UNHCR presence in Rozaje is still quite inadequate. There is only one person in charge of protection, and that person is not based on site. His work is currently restricted to

recording certain refugee eyewitness accounts and referring them to the Montenegrin police.



'Montenegro Fiercely Opposed to Control from Belgrade,' Bozo Milicic, **AFP** (France), 22 April 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

The leaders in Montenegro are fiercely opposed to control from Belgrade over their small Republic, which is run by the reformist President, Milo Djukanovic, who refuses to implement decisions taken by the federal Yugoslav government. The Montenegrin Interior Minister, Vukasin Maras, has refused to place his police under the command of the second Yugoslav army as required by Belgrade, according to the daily newspaper Vijesti, quoting sources close to the Montenegrin government.

[...] The Montenegrin police, supported by special units, had taken up positions at the beginning of the week at Debeli Brijeg, authorising foreigners to enter the country in accordance with the Montenegrin government decision taken in mid-March to dispense with visas up until October. On Tuesday, the army established a check point at Sutorna, 2 kms from Debeli Brijeg, sending back to Croatia foreigners who did not have visas and preventing humanitarian aid trucks from passing. On Thursday, foreign travellers were again authorised to enter Montenegro without opposition from the army, according to witnesses. [...] Belgrade is maintaining constant pressure on Montenegro. The Yugoslav Minister of Labour and Health, quoted by the Tanjug agency, announced on Thursday that because of the refusal of the Montenegrin leaders to apply federal law, the Montenegrin port of Bar could no longer be used to bring in humanitarian assistance. According to the ministry, the Montenegrin authorities are refusing to let it inspect the contents of cargo and it has therefore 'recommended' to the 'competent bodies' that they destroy humanitarian aid arriving through the port of Bar. This 'recommendation' will probably have no effect, however, given that the federal customs authorities are not present in Montenegro.



*When the strikes began I asked to go off again with MSF to Montenegro, to Rozaje. Those in charge of the programme were very dubious, because of my commitment. But, I was also a bonus to MSF because I knew the Kosovars very well. I was a field coordinator, but my only wish was to return to Kosovo. Very quickly I drew back from MSF activities. The team members did not know at all what I was doing. I was caught up in everything around me. I did not feel myself any longer to be part of MSF. I had become a Kosovar. When the Kosovars saw me in an MSF vehicle they signalled quietly to me; I got out of the vehicle, took the emergency kit and set off in civilian vehicles to go and care for the wounded all over the place around Rozaje. Fairly quickly, all of my friends in the Rugova Valley turned*

up. Among the displaced persons who came to register with the local Red Cross there were 10 or so persons at least that I knew, with whom I had worked. Gradually, I learned about the death of one or the other, including that of a whole family that had provided hospitality for me in Montenegro, before I had gone into the Rugova. They had been stoned to death by paramilitaries.

The Serbs had in the end entered the Rugova [Valley]. They had killed Selman, the school teacher. The people in the valley had fled towards Montenegro. Mustapha, the doctor, was unable to find his wife and two kids. He had no news and was afraid because he was wanted by the paramilitaries. He hid here and there. I tried to see what UNHCR could do. The answer was: nothing. Meanwhile, the Drenica UCK arrived on the scene. They were in a large hall on the outskirts of Rozaje. UNHCR was very embarrassed because it did not know what to do with these people. But, if they remained there they were in danger. I made a visit down there looking for Mustapha's wife. In fact, the Drenica UCK recognised me and asked me to help them. I hired a bus and they all went over into Albania. I had said to them: "When you go through the border, leave a message at the MSF Belgium refugee reception centre so I can know if you got through or not." In the Rugova we had taken a good many photos. The paramilitaries came across them and attempted to identify people. So, I was put into the files. At that time MSF said that it was best that I return to France. I went to Albania.

Laurence Thavaux, MSF Field Coordinator in Pristina in 1996, in Pec from April 1998 to February 1999, nurse in Montenegro in April 1999 (in French).

Some weeks after its arrival, the team in Montenegro told us that Serb paramilitaries were starting to enter the country. Thanks to the individual relationship one of our volunteers had with the displaced persons, we had confirmation that troops belonging to Arkan, the Serb paramilitary leader who had become known for his cruelty during the war in Bosnia, were present. Security problems were beginning to emerge both for the MSF team itself and for the displaced persons. I underline the term 'displaced,' because it's more complicated for UNHCR and the UN agencies to intervene in situations where people are displaced. So, we had fears concerning assistance or protection and security for those people. Additionally, the reception facilities for displaced persons in Montenegro were fairly chaotic. People were sleeping in the open. In the context of his work collecting information, Michaël had come across people who had been key witnesses to massacres. And, faced with the arrival of Serb paramilitaries in Montenegro, we had asked UNHCR to evacuate these people to Albania. We had an extremely complicated discussion with UNHCR head office in Geneva. Their argument was: "We, as UNHCR, cannot evacuate displaced persons to Albania because that amounts to transforming displaced persons into refugees. The UNHCR cannot create a refugee

situation." It was really a very complicated discussion. In the end, they accepted to evacuate these people.

[...], MSF Deputy Legal Advisor, (in French).

At that time we were in conflict with UNHCR, which had no mandate in Montenegro. The UNHCR protection officer rather saw me as a threat. We gave them information. Following that, the legal people got in touch with UNHCR to organise moving families who were in danger. From the moment my presence became visible; I became a sort of MSF protection officer, and was virtually identified as such by UNHCR. All of that took place in a context of extreme tension: the Serb militia - similar to the Russian militia in Chechnya - were behaving very violently and creating a reign of fear. Those in charge of the MSF team ended up saying to themselves: "Okay, we need to get him out of there."

Michaël Neuman, Officer-in-Charge of collecting accounts from refugees in Montenegro (in French).

I went to Montenegro to help the Coordinator on the foreign press relations side of the mission, because he did not have time to look after it and it was an important matter vis-à-vis the pro-Serb community in the country. At that time, in Montenegro, a minority of the population was very much in favour of Serb policy in Kosovo. But, the majority of Montenegrins, represented by the Prime Minister, were more neutral in relation to the Kosovar Albanians and in relation to the conflict. There was a very high degree of tension between the federal army, which was trying to regain control of the borders, and the national army which on the contrary wanted to open them up.

We never had a visa because they did not want to give us one. So, we entered illegally, through Croatia. If the federal authorities had decided to do so, they could have expelled us from one day to the next. We needed therefore, to be quite careful about the way we were being seen in the Serb community. The coordination team was set up in Bar, near the sea and near the border with Croatia so it could evacuate quickly. Our teams were sometimes subjected to insults and our cars were stoned. But, the busloads of refugees leaving from Rozaje, crossing Montenegro and entering Albania received much worse treatment. Buses were stopped and some passengers disappeared. These were fairly murky waters. We knew that the authorities were more or less favourable towards us because what they were after was clearly support from the European Union. They wanted the EU to recognise the efforts being made by Montenegro to set itself apart from Belgrade in this affair. The authorities were extremely proper so far as the Albanian population was concerned. But, nevertheless we were in the Yugoslav

Federation and as it turned out the Minister for Health was not as politically open as some of his colleagues. He felt that his authority and legitimacy were being undermined by humanitarian organisations which, in his view, did not consult him enough before intervening.

In addition, when several MSF exploratory missions had left they had made certain promises, but when the team returned to set up towards the end of March it came back empty-handed. And, when the medicine and equipment finally arrived, they were destined for the Albanian community. The authorities took this very badly. That explains the tension; the Minister for Health was annoyed because the MSF Coordinator and medical coordinator turned up for a meeting not wearing ties. He required that MSF telephone the Ministry every day to obtain permission to work. This Minister wanted someone to talk to. He needed to have it recognised that he was the boss. To try to improve things I said to him: "Yes, you are right." I made our excuses three times and I brought the operations director to see him ... with a tie on. Things got a little better after that. On the other hand, we refused to play the game of submitting a daily report.

After that the pro-Serbs began a counter-propaganda campaign. They claimed that the Albanians who were arriving were very dirty, that they reproduced like rabbits and that they had yellow fever. In fact, it was viral hepatitis; but with a bad translation it came across as yellow fever. Tension was rising in the Montenegrin population: "You're always helping the Albanians, but you never help us ..." To try to cut through that I arranged a meeting between all of the Montenegrin press, both federal and national, and MSF's Coordinator and medical coordinator. We also wanted to defuse the propaganda and misinformation being put out by the Serbs. We described and explained the objectives of our programmes. We underlined that we were politically independent; that we received no money from NATO countries and that we were completely separate from the European Union. The goal was to demonstrate our independence. But, that did not really interest the journalists. On the other hand, they asked us: "Is it true that the Kosovars are going to bring in a yellow fever epidemic?" In fact, they got a lot of things mixed up. It is true that there were some problems with scabies: but we had to explain to them that that was a problem linked to the displaced peoples' precarious living conditions. We had, ourselves decided to organise this press conference, on the advice of a Montenegrin journalist. We didn't ask headquarters in Paris for authorisation to proceed. We simply informed them. Our approach reflected good sense and transparency, not a desire to be in the press.

Virginie Raison, Deputy Coordinator in Montenegro,  
MSF France, April - May 1999 (in French).

**On 18 April 1999, the NATO Secretary-General made a statement about the possibility of a land intervention in Kosovo. A British newspaper reported preparations**

**being made to this end. Strikes continued and caused victims amongst the civilian population, according to Serb sources. For their part, Serb forces harassed the Kosovars who continued to flee in the thousands towards the neighbouring republics, which were being swamped.**



'NATO Does Not Rule Out a Land Operation in Kosovo,' **AFP** (France), Brussels/Belgrade, 18 April 1999 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

On Sunday the Secretary-General of NATO, Javier Solana, did not rule out that the Alliance may be led to envisage a land invasion of Kosovo if that turns out to be 'necessary'. Meanwhile, thousands of Kosovo refugees continued to amass on Saturday at the Albanian border. "At the present time, we believe that the air intervention is sufficient - the military authorities in charge of the intervention [also] believe that it is sufficient. That is why we are not about to change strategy now," declared Mr Solana on BBC television. "But, if we come to a point where (a land invasion) appears necessary, I am sure that countries belonging to NATO will be ready to undertake it," he added. The NATO Secretary-General also implicitly supported American President Bill Clinton's desire to see Slobodan Milosevic relinquish power in Belgrade. "I believe that it will be very difficult to have peace in the Balkans, and in particular in Yugoslavia, if we do not have a democratic Yugoslavia," he said.

[...] According to the British newspaper *The Sunday Observer*, NATO is preparing to launch a land operation in Kosovo and in the rest of Yugoslavia in six to eight weeks' time, during which 280,000 soldiers would be deployed. Again, according to *The Observer*, despite repeated denials in London and Washington, proposals are being studied so that the military campaign can be completed at the latest by 24 June. On Sunday, NATO refused to make any comment on this information. During the night of Saturday to Sunday, Allied aircraft continued the aerial bombing of targets in Serbia, resulting in one death, a 3 year-old girl in a north-west suburb of Belgrade, and five wounded, according to Serb sources.

[...] Meanwhile, five people were wounded on Saturday evening during NATO strikes in Batajnica, where there is a military airport, according to the same source. For their part, the Tanjug agency and Serb RTS television reported that strikes against Batajnica resulted in "several wounded amongst the civilian population, including a young 3 year-old girl." No further details were given. [...] At the same time, refugees were still fleeing Kosovo. Some 15,000 exhausted people were registered on Saturday at the border post of Morina, the main access point between Yugoslavia and Albania. According to the refugees, 'thousands' of people are still on their way towards the border zone. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), during the night from Saturday

to Sunday Serb forces fired a mortar shell into the line of refugees waiting to pass through the Albanian border post of Morina (in the north), resulting in one death and at least 22 wounded. Five Kosovars refugees were also killed when their vehicle ran over a mine in the night from Saturday and Sunday near Morina, announced the OSCE spokesperson in Tirana, Andrea Angeli. An official Greek source told *AFP* on Sunday that Greece had obtained 'official guarantees' from Belgrade to commence the distribution of international humanitarian assistance inside Kosovo, destined for both Serbs and Albanians.

On Saturday, Albania had some 340,000 Kosovo refugees - the equivalent of a tenth of Albania's population according to UNHCR which estimates that more than 545,000 refugees fled since the beginning of the Allied intervention, and a total of 775,000 refugees overall arrived in the last few months in Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro. The small Yugoslav Republic of Montenegro, with 640,000 inhabitants, is already sheltering 70,000 refugees from the Serb province, and is swamped by the inflow each day of 1,500 Kosovars, according to the authorities in Rozaje, a town close to the border with Kosovo.

**At a press conference in Brussels on 20 April 1999, MSF Belgium launched a food drive among the Belgian public on behalf of Albanian families.**



**Press conference invitation**, 20 April 1999 (in French). [D167](#)

**Extract:**

In Albania, MSF and Balkanactie are working side by side to help Kosovar refugees. The Albanian public is also demonstrating strong solidarity with the refugees, with a great many families taking them in, despite the poverty that abounds in Albania. As needs are great, Médecins Sans Frontières and Balkanactie are appealing to the Belgian public to collect food parcels. In limiting the collection to food, this drive is intended to supplement other programmes conducted by other organisations. The food drive will take place this Saturday, 24 April 1999 in various locations in Belgium. Médecins Sans Frontières and Balkanactie will use this opportunity to bring the public up to date on the situation and their activities in Albania.



**'More than 20,000 Food Parcels for Kosovar Families and their Albanian Host Families,'** Press release MSF Belgium, Brussels, 26 April 1999 (in French). [D168](#)

**Extract:**

Brussels, 26 April 1999. This past Saturday, MSF and Balkanactie organised a food drive for Albania in more than 20 cities in Belgium. The result surpassed expectations: the two organisations, whose original goal was 10,000 parcels, collected more than 20,000. [...] The parcels will leave Brussels for Albania this week. MSF and Balkanactie will then distribute them to 5,000 families in two districts, Lushnje and Lezhë.



*Right after the NATO strikes, and the mass exodus that followed, Alex Parisel, the General Director, told us: 'we have to carry out an action with the Belgian public.' Like everyone, he thought it very important to get the Belgian public involved. We worked like maniacs for three or four weeks. The local media were very involved. We arranged collections in Belgium's main cities all on the same day, specifying, 'we want you to bring a kilo of sugar, a kilo of flour, etc.' There was a pre-set list of products. It was a huge operation, and people actually came with parcels. We estimated that we needed 10,000, and in the end we got twice that. I went to Albania with the team that took the parcels. The Kosovar refugees there were hosted either by families or in communal centers. When they arrived, they had nothing left. Some Albanian families had taken other families completely into their homes. We didn't think they would stay long, but it has gone on. And the atmosphere became a bit tense, because there wasn't any aid. So the people were fairly happy with the aid we brought. I went there with an MSF TV crew to make a film that would show donors: "Here's what your solidarity was used for." Alex wanted to do something that would be symbolic of the solidarity between the Belgians and the Albanians, and this filled a need, as well. But looking back on it now, it seems an odd kind of action. Indeed, I don't think MSF would do it again today.*

Anouk Delafortrie, Communications Officer,  
MSF Belgium (in French).

**Some responsible for gathering accounts from Kosovar refugees were questioning the relevance to MSF in conducting this kind of survey in refugee host countries, as it was already being done by human rights organisations. According to them, it was more urgent to focus on the issue of protecting refugees. The interviewer in Montenegro pointed out the problems with getting the medical team to accept his work.**



**Email** from Sofi Elg, MSF Information Officer-in-Charge of collecting refugees' accounts in Macedonia to Françoise Saulnier, MSF Legal Advisor, 19 April 1999 (in English). **D169** [↗](#)

#### Extract:

In general, it can be said about the interviews that the most recently arrived do not tell of incidents as horrid as those who arrived two weeks to one month back. This is probably not due to a more lenient attitude from the Serbs but to the way the human mind and memory works. Interviews in camps therefore, give more general information on round-ups and deportations while interviews in the villages, among people who have had time to 'melt' a bit, tell of hand grenades thrown into wells where 20 people were forced to stand and similar types of incidents. The following has come out from interviews with refugees in Macedonia.

Gnjilane and Urosevac are two towns used as assembly points by the Serbs where people from the surrounding villages have been forced to go. When the Serbs enter a village, they shell it first to break any KLA resistance. Houses are burnt. Most often men and women are separated, men taken into detention and women displaced to the 'assembly points'. The men are interrogated on any KLA activities and released if found innocent. Urosevac area seems to have been emptied following the NATO bombings but in Gnjilane area, the cleansing started before that. Albanian quarters in Pristina are continuously being emptied. Police and paramilitary go street by street and give people up to 2 hours to leave their homes. Students at the university in Pristina were told to leave without having time to contact their families living outside the city, and so were separated from their families. The main hospital in Pristina was emptied of Albanian patients Tuesday -Wednesday last week (14 -15/4).

MSF has had to see to three dialysis patients who were kicked out of their beds. Two were separated from their families. The refugee population in Macedonia is, to a large extent, from urban centers and though family separation is a problem it does not seem to be a huge one, many have come together. We have no sure information as yet on the level of sexual violence. When MSF mobile clinics start working in the area, we will possibly be able to give more information on the occurrence of sexual violence, or at least gynaecological problems. From what we hear of Serb soldiers and paramilitaries' behaviour; there is no reason to believe rape has not taken place.

MSF in Macedonia are in close cooperation and coordination with other HR agencies in Skopje and meet regularly twice/week. Our own impressions can thus be verified. I have put together a medical statistics format as per the attached, by which we can give medical support to findings in the interviews. I do only very summary interviews on my own and follow up on incidents in Macedonia get

to know of via the doctors. If patients have a lot to tell about events in Kosovo we refer them to the OSCE interview team who takes testimonies for the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.



**Message** from Diane Plessia, charged with gathering refugee accounts in Albania, to Françoise Saulnier, MSF Legal Advisor, 20 April 1999 (in French). **D170** [↗](#)

#### Extract:

Here, finally, are the testimonies you've been clamouring for, from what I hear; it's not pretty to read...sorry. There are 52 of them, gathered in northern Albania (Kruma, Kukes, Morin) between April 7 and 16. There were 29 women and 23 men interviewed. Ages: from 15 to 90 years. Refugees [are] from the MITROVICA, DRENICA, PRISTINA, PRIZREN and DJAKOV regions. None of the stories were similar; nevertheless, it is clear that ethnic Albanian Kosovars have been systematically:

- Expelled from their homes by police, soldiers, or paramilitaries.
- Chased out of their homes just before the Serbs set their houses on fire or occupy them.
- Forced to leave immediately for Albania, regardless of their age, their health, or means (or lack thereof) of transport.
- Subjected to extortion before leaving (when the Serbs burst into their house to chase them out), when they're on the road, or at the border.
- Prohibited from taking their personal possessions with them (even clothing)
- Harassed en route
- Unable to eat or drink during their exodus.
- Dispossessed of their identity papers at the border, or before (ID cards, drivers licenses, passports, automobile license plates).

Not systematically, but frequently:

Beaten, killed, or terrorized by Serb forces; on rare occasions, taken to the border by Serbian police. It's hard to tease out the reason(s) behind expulsions, but it's clear that the emptying of certain towns and villages was definitely planned. Similarly, holding the refugees back one day and a massive flood at the border the next seems the result of some Machiavellian desire to sow disorder and keep everyone else on edge. So far, 355,000 refugees have entered Albania; together with those who have managed to find precarious asylum in Macedonia and Montenegro, that makes about 30% of Kosovars. And, the 70% still trapped in Kosovo? The feeling here is that they'll manage to get out, little by little, but how many? In what circumstances? In how many days, weeks...? Maybe you, having the objectivity that those of us here lack, can manage to decipher the answers from the following testimonies.



'Testimonies and Role HA [Humanitarian Affairs] Advisor in Macedonia,' **Email** from Katrien Coppens, MSF Holland HAD to MSF Macedonia team, MSF Holland Kosovo Programme Manager, MSF France legal advisor, 20 April 1999 (in English). [D171](#)

#### Extract:

I discussed this morning with Françoise Saulnier the following issues:

[...] Objectives of the testimonies;

The objective is to be able, on the basis of the testimonies, [to] establish a pattern on deportation and ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. Françoise will write a report on a pattern in Kosovo, (Names etc will not be used)

-Françoise will analyse the information she receives from both the Albania, Montenegro and Macedonian Humanitarian affairs officers.

-It is not the objective to use these testimonies in an anecdotal matter, as is being done by the Albanian office. Françoise is in contact with the Belgians about this. I explained that the focus of the humanitarian affairs officer in Macedonia is NOT to interview refugees on the situation in Kosovo. This due to the fact a lot of other organisations (AI, HRW, OSCE, HCHR, ICTY) are present on the ground to interview refugees about their experience in Kosovo, try[ing] to establish a pattern, collect testimonies and identify witnesses for the ICTY. No added value for MSF. There is however, a need to monitor and follow up on the situation and protection needs of the refugees in Macedonia or at the border. This is the main objective in the TOR of the HA officer in Macedonia. Our medical staff in the projects (camps and villages) will ask trauma, place of origin, family separation etc. of the refugees. For further testimonies people will be referred to other organisations, if available. Otherwise MSF should be willing to do it. If possible, by the humanitarian affairs officer. Data on the places of origin of the refugees, etc., will be sent to Françoise. If she has additional questions, she will get into contact with Sofi to see if this data is available.



'The Role of the Humanitarian Affairs Officer in an Emergency: Macedonia,' 6 April - 4 May 1999. **Memorandum** by Sofi Elg, MSF Holland HAD, 11 May 1999 (in English). [D172](#)

#### Extract:

Humanitarian Affairs Officer (HAO) Terms of Reference. Katrien Coppens from the Humanitarian Affairs Department in Amsterdam was already in Skopje when I arrived there and together we wrote the ToR. We discovered that the original objective of the témoignage [testimonies]; to draw the attention of the general opinion to human rights violations in Kosovo and to encourage relevant human rights agencies and organisations to act, was already achieved. Several human rights agencies were already

present, e.g. Organisation for Security in Central Europe (OSCE), Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch (HRW). The work of the Humanitarian Affairs Officer (HAO) would concentrate more on the situation of the refugees in Macedonia than on the events that had made them leave Kosovo. The HAO should also brief international staff on relevant international law and the role of MSF, identify areas of advocacy, and be a spokesperson locally with regard to humanitarian issues. A day at work could consist of brief interviews with newly arrived refugees at the border and in the camps, data collection from the MSF clinics on evidence of human rights violations, follow-up on doctor's reports of violence suffered by refugees in Macedonia, meetings with HR organisations on events in Kosovo and on protection concerns in Macedonia, writing of reports.

#### Constraints:

There were contradictory expectations from MSF International, from the team management and from the Amsterdam office on the work the HAO was supposed to do. MSF (1) requested testimonies; the Country Manager put the emphasis on the formal title of the post being Information Officer while the Amsterdam office supported the recently written ToR. Time forced me to set priorities that inevitably did not please everyone. The hierarchical structure in the team was unclear and consequently also the position of the post as HAO. Practical logistical concerns due to the emergency situation dominated the daily work and reduced the attention paid and importance given to HR issues by the team management. A duplication of work would sometimes occur in my search for information from sources outside MSF while it was in fact available from inside. I did not have access to meetings where relevant items of information could come up, such as the medical coordinators meetings and the UNHCR interagency meetings. Evidently, not all information in these meetings was relevant to my work as HAO but it was difficult for the person attending to know what was and to know what to share with me.

#### Positive effects:

The fact that we were on the location enabled me to provide training to the international staff directly related to the situation. Certain issues could be explained more in detail that may have facilitated their work or at least their understanding of the environment. The post of HAO also worked as an off-load to the rest of the staff in the field. In particular, the medical staff, which had to listen to many patients' stories, could pass them on to me for further action. The MSF presence at the meetings with the human rights organisations has hopefully left an impression with them of the importance MSF attaches to the link between humanitarian assistance and human rights.

#### Conclusion and recommendations:

The presence of an HAO in an emergency is necessary in order to have an assessment made of the humanitarian/human rights issues at stake to decide if and what advocacy work is necessary. I would suggest that if via the



assessment, it is found that in the emergency situation there is a need to take testimonies from a population for advocacy purposes a team of interviewers [could] be sent out to ensure a quantitatively and qualitatively reliable material to be provided in as short a time as possible .



'MSF France, Montenegro Mission, **Report** on Witnessing, Rozaje, April 1999,' Michaël Neuman, 25 April 1999 (in French). [D173](#)

#### Extract:

As far as the testimonies are concerned, the emphasis was, in fact, placed on the expulsions and attacks on Albanian villages after 24 March 1999. Approximately 25 testimonies were gathered, on an individual basis. A great deal of information came out of more informal discussions with numerous Kosovars (both civilian and KLA). Most of the witness names have been sent, though for security reasons I got rid of the ones in my possession. Getting people to give their names wasn't much of a problem, at least once they felt they were safe and could trust us. I don't think we should underestimate the witnesses' capacity for reflection. Though often tired and in shock, to me they seemed capable of consciously weighing their words. One ICT testimony was sent (to Paris and to UNHCR); another couldn't be for lack of time. A table and map describing (as well as possible, but without absolute certainty) the dates of expulsions and attacks, were drawn up using Vincent Brown's Epicentre survey and my own information.

#### Testimony method:

- I tried to limit the length of interviews as much as possible without, however, losing sight of the emotional dimension the testimony might have. Regrettably, on occasion, I had to spend a longer time with a witness or a family, and sometimes also see them again.
- I also limited, as much as possible, the presence of other people. But I have to say that taking testimony didn't attract a crowd, at least in general. This is also why I often went to the mountains to do the collection—there were fewer people, they had just arrived, and were under KLA supervision.
- I have to stress the crucial role played by the interpreter: it was he, more than I, who was able to get my message across, to stall if he felt it necessary, to refuse for one reason or another to ask a question, based on their common experience, to put himself in the witness' shoes, to gauge people's safety, to guide me to places where there was a lot of information. Thank you, Artan—23 years old, from Peja, and still in Rozaje.
- The testimonies were recorded in a notebook (the names kept separately) and thrown away once they were sent to Paris.
- I regret not being able to get in contact with the ICT (in spite of everything, indirectly well-established on the ground), the FIDH, or the other organisations that are gathering testimony (e.g., ACF).

[...] Aside from just the testimony, and thus my role on the team, the mission was seen as too political by a large part of the team. And indeed it was, as the hidden agenda of certain members of the mission quickly showed. [...] As a result, 'confrontation' between the 'political types' and the so-called 'field' doctors and logisticians. The doctors, led by Francis Huot-Marchand, deemed the medical programmes inadequate. In particular, they regretted the absence of medical evaluation in the camps and the lack of doctors in these same camps. I necessarily found myself in the spoilsport camp. Yet, the absence of medical teams in the field was also a big problem for me, since I was counting on these facilities in order work more discreetly. [...] I have to make note of an incomprehensible malaise: it seems that most members of the team (i.e. everyone except the heads and Laurence) were ignorant of 1) my presence in the field, 2) my duties (though some expected a log/admin). [...] In the end, when the general situation in Rozaje got a bit hot, I was treated to a whole collection of little remarks. "Témoignage, that's during" in other words, it's the accounts of people whose trust is gained through logistical and medical work, reported by the field. So some 'exclude me' from the field. Or a variation on that—that testimonies are basically emotional, to be used for medical, not legal, purposes. Otherwise, it's "MSF-Human rights." Moreover, the added value of 'my' testimonies is not always recognised. Since the 'political type' nearest at hand is me, people have started telling me that if the MSF mission at Rozaje is seen as primarily political, it's primarily my fault. [...]

#### 3) Conclusion and personal assessment

Témoignage was viewed by certain members of the team as a key component of the political aspect of the Montenegro mission, and thus bad. Beyond that, it is the basic motivation behind the mission that's in question: "We were used," "Montenegro was never more than the tip of the Kosovo iceberg." Regret, or even anger, expressed by some at not really having been informed of the 'true' objectives of the mission. And, while the entire mission didn't participate in the Kosovo meeting, everyone knew they existed. And, of course, all these things need to be put back into the MSF context of debate between the political types and the non-political types, between the diehard opponents of témoignage (Francis Huot-Marchand, Marie-Noëlle Rodrigue, and the logs in general), and others more favourably disposed to it (François Calas, Patrice Piolat, etc.). Whenever témoignage comes up, we'll always be reminded of the painful Grand Lac [Great Lakes] episodes. One of our logs, a Belgian, does not have good memories of the episode at Rozaje, which, it seems to me, has now taken on almost mythic proportions.

It did, however, shed a crucial light on the events in Kosovo these last several weeks; it also made it easier for new MSF teams to comprehend the situation. Certainly, the added value of témoignage is not always recognised. Yet, people at MSF have already, unconsciously, admitted its usefulness. We still have to persuade a few, consciously this time, of the vital work it represents. I think that while

I did have a few problems, they had more to do with the fact that everyone, or at least some, began to do only témoignage, than it had to do with my own work. The difficulties described above were only really noticeable in my final days in Rozaje, that is, when the presence of paramilitaries and soldiers in the surrounding villages had become apparent. Which means that, on the whole, I was able work under good conditions; that at no time, not even at the end, were my personal relationships with the other team members in question.



*My problem is how to write up the work. The information has to come in quickly, so I can get to work.*

*It's coming in quickly from Montenegro. We very quickly get a very precise view of the population. It's also coming in quickly from Albania, and it's very interesting. As for Macedonia, I've spent three weeks pleading for someone to send me testimonies. I got fewer than fifteen, totally incomplete, done using a different methodology and so unusable. Since I don't like it when reports arrive when the people are already dead [too late], I've badgered the interviewers to send back the accounts as they are gathered. The accounts must not hang around in the field. Since we don't know what's in them, the people are potentially in danger. And also, we need to use them as quickly as possible to get an operational idea. If we had had proof that there was a genocide in progress, we wouldn't have waited three weeks to hire an expert to go through the documents.*

*We were in a situation where professional responsibility meant working intensively, day and night, for three days. It was really difficult, but had to be done. We were in the office with the Deputy Legal Advisor and Anne Guibert [Information Officer] with piles of testimony, dates, and chronologies arranged region by region. In any case, it took time to write the report, that is, three days. We had big maps with the paths, roads, hills, valleys, names of towns. We highlighted the routes, the lengths of time, and then the dates, because that also allowed us to pin down the time of the attacks, how they had been attacked, surrounded. Their exit routes were often really bizarre, because they had been used to push other groups of refugees. When a testimony only recounted the horrors, but without any details, no date or anything, we couldn't use it. But there weren't that many of those. It's always useful for something. First off, for reconstructing the routes and timing. We see when the attacks took place. If they happened first in one region, and then the next day in another. If the forces were moving or if they attacked simultaneously in the same locations. Everything contains a lot of information; it just has to be processed. This was a special situation. It's rare to have a population, a territory completely emptied of its population in not even a week. But, naturally, the route people took, their condition when they arrived, how long they'd been en route—these are things that are always verified in this type of reconstruction.*

Françoise Bouchet - Saulnier, Legal Advisor,  
MSF France (in French).

**The same day, the general directors of the operational sections decided to begin documenting the lack of protection for refugees in host countries, and prepare a more articulated stand on military control of the camps. Planning for an exploratory mission that would be run by the Swiss section and include Greek volunteers was launched.**



'Executive Committee Meeting,' **Minutes**, Brussels, 20 April 1999 (in English). [D174](#)

#### **Extract:**

Documentation on the lack of protection of refugees in the regional host countries and especially in Albania is going to be undertaken from now on: lack of refugee status, of registration, risks of rapes, human trafficking, forced recruitment in KLA, etc. Meanwhile MSF will provide information on these concerns to the refugees locally. These concrete evidences of the lack of protection will be highlighted instead of systematically and simply denouncing UNHCR. A more articulated statement on the unacceptable military control and management of refugee camps should be developed (at least internally), expressing the differences between security and protection; it is also necessary to recall that the reasons for the conflict are not humanitarian.

**According to Thierry Durand, Operations Director for the Greek-Swiss common operational center (COC), it was on April 19 or 20, 1999 the President of MSF Greece - told him, during a telephone conversation, of his section's decision to launch an exploratory mission in Kosovo and Serbia. When Thierry refused to assume the operational responsibility, the president of MSF Greece offered to make it an 'observer mission' by members of the MSF Greece Board of Directors. The following day, Thierry informed him of his decision to give up his responsibilities as Operations Director for MSF Greece**

**On 21 April 1999, Vincent Faber, Executive Director of the Swiss section, proposed launching an international exploratory mission in Serbia and Kosovo to his counterparts in the other sections. He suggested that it be carried out by a team from the Swiss section, and include Greek volunteers. The president of MSF Greece claims that he didn't learn of the COC operations director's resignation until 22 April 1999. He, with his section, then created an emergency committee that named a new operations director, and began requesting visas for an exploratory mission in Kosovo and Serbia.**

**On 22 April 1999, the executive directors of the operational sections decided to launch an international exploratory mission in Kosovo and Serbia. Since MSF Belgium had received an invitation for five people**

to go to Belgrade, the operations directors from the Belgian and Swiss sections decided to get visas using this route. That same day, the general director of MSF Switzerland informed the president of MSF Greece, by telephone, of the decision to launch the international exploratory mission; the latter claims that he did not learn of it until early May.



'CH-GR Explo in Yugo?,' **Email** from Vincent Faber, Executive Director of MSF Switzerland, to the executive directors of MSF Belgium, MSF Spain, MSF France, and MSF Holland, 21 April 1999 (in French). [D175](#)

#### Extract:

Yet an entire region, at the very heart of the crisis, is still in total blackout - Serbia and, especially, Kosovo itself. Of course, there are many reasons for this, and we know them well:

\* Inaccessibility, first of all, and the quite prosaic impossibility of sending expats, the vast majority of whom come from countries that are NATO members—or sympathisers.

\* Second, the opinion, fairly universal within the movement, that the humanitarian space is non-existent - particularly in Kosovo - and that the risk of becoming an instrument of the Milosevic regime is still such that we cannot tolerate.

Personally, I am of the opinion that we can't just ignore our essential humanitarian duty to 'go see'. I am obviously aware of the above-mentioned risks, but I am still convinced that we cannot prejudge the lack of a humanitarian space, no matter how limited. Our position must be based on a reality analysed on concrete bases, seen with our own eyes, experienced personally, and not just according to perceived viewpoints, or even commonly held notions. We have a thousand times more impact and credibility when we choose to withdraw from a humanitarian field because we have actually run up against the absence of a real humanitarian space, rather than deliberately declaring that we won't go because we think, in theory, that it's impossible to operate there in accordance with our principles, as long as a few simple criteria are guaranteed: unlimited access to populations, independence of action and oversight, and ability to speak out (even minimally).

I would like, therefore, to clearly propose sending an explo mission to the region, under the aegis of the Geneva common operational centre, to analyse the existence and acceptability of a humanitarian space, in which we could evolve. It may turn out that there is no such space. In which case, duly noted; I have no problem with not operationalising in such a case, and we could easily justify it. But if there is one, we can't not try to occupy it. I won't hide from you the fact that I've also mentioned the common operational centre because—as you know—the pressure from Greece for an MSF operation in Serbia and

Kosovo is extremely strong now. There's a real risk that the Greeks will decide to intervene despite everyone else's opinion, even at the cost of destroying the partnership we're trying to build between Athens and Geneva (at best), or an international crisis within the movement (at worst). As for me, I don't want MSF Greece to 'go it alone' on this mission; their political reading of the situation is too biased (and I personally disagree completely with Odysseas's analysis of the crisis), and the risk of MSF as a whole being dragged into questionable and undesirable situations is not negligible. So if there is an explo, I would like it to be run by Geneva - with Athens' participation, of course - in order to protect ourselves from such risks.

Moreover, on a purely tactical level, the only nationalities that can go to Serbia right now are the Greeks and the Swiss—the first for the reasons we all know, the second owing to Switzerland's special status, and because a Swiss foreign aid mission has just returned from Belgrade with, apparently, some 'guarantees' of access to Kosovo. It seems that MSF CH is now in a position to quickly launch an assessment mission on its own initiative. I think it preferable, however—given the political stakes—to discuss it with you first and, if possible, to get your prior consent. Not so much to get some kind of 'authorisation' from you, but more to affirm the integration of such a project in a coherent MSF whole.



'Kosovo Explo,' **Email** from Vincent Faber, Executive Director of MSF Switzerland, to the members of MSF Switzerland's Board of Directors, 23 April 1999 (in French). [D176](#)

Dear all,

Today MSF Belgium received a formal invitation from Belgrade from the Serbian Ministry of Health. This invitation names 5 people: 1 Russian, 1 Ukrainian, 2 Swedes (one is the president of MSF-Sweden) and - surprisingly enough - Alex Parisel himself. This invitation follows upon a request introduced by Brussels several weeks ago. MSF B is therefore going to try to obtain - thanks to this invitation - the visas needed for these people to go to Belgrade, which in principle (you never know...) shouldn't pose too many problems. It's clear, then, that the facts of the situation as I presented them to you this morning are now completely changed. So we're going to put any Swiss initiative for an explo in Serbia and Kosovo on hold for the immediate future. Should Brussels' visa requests come to nothing, we would take up the torch again. Given the passion that became evident in this morning's discussion, I thought it important to tell you about all this. More info, probably, at the beginning of next week. Have a good weekend, everyone

Warmly,  
Vincent



'Fact Finding Mission Regarding the MSF Greece Mission to FRY and the Breakdown of the MSF Greek-Swiss Common Operational Centre Agreement,' **Report** presented to the MSF International Council 11-13 June 1999 (in English). [D89](#)

**Extract:**

18-19/4 (?): After O. Boudouris return of [from] Albania: T. Durand recalls talking on the phone with O. Boudouris who told him of the Greek Board decision to go to Kosovo. As T. Durand refuses this option, O. Boudouris proposes 'an observatory mission' done by members of the Greek Board.

20-21/4: T. Durand recalls announcing to O. Boudouris his decision of resigning as O.D. of Athens. [...]

21/4: T. Durand announces at the Geneva Directors committee that he no longer is O.D. of MSF G.

22/4: Executive Committee (Ex-Com) meeting (GD of the 5 operational centres and not 20 as written in the minutes). Extract of the minutes:

An exploratory mission will try to go inside Kosovo under the Geneva operational centre. This mission will include Swiss and Greek volunteers, and will not be the beginning of a mission or distribution (no equipment for the exploratory mission). MSF will be ready to explain that there is no humanitarian space in case of this likely outcome of the mission. The Brussels operational centre will try to return to Belgrade with the objective of: renewing contacts with the Serb society, in order not to isolate the Serb population which could lead to more nationalism and radicalisation; getting a better understanding of the situation; possibly have operation for Serb population (not of great magnitude) in Serbia; monitor events in Kosovo. [...] The Geneva/Greek partnership is in a bad way, as T. Durand has resigned from his position as Operations Director of Athens. This will be discussed apart and will be transmitted to the I.C.

22/4 18h30: V. Faber (from Brussels airport) calls O. Boudouris to inform him of the Ex-Com decision concerning an explo mission to Kosovo.

22/4 Evening: O. Boudouris recalls calling T. Durand about the Programme Manager position in Athens. It's during this discussion that he recalls being told by T. Durand of his resignation.



'Resignation as Operations Director for Athens,' **Letter** from Thierry Durand, MSF Switzerland Operations Director, to the presidents of the Swiss and Greek sections, 23 April 1999 (in French). [D177](#)

**Extract:**

After a long and difficult deliberation - informed by a year's work—on the feasibility of locating part of the operations

for which I'm assuming responsibility - in Athens, I owe it to both myself and Médecins Sans Frontières to admit that the mission is impossible, and immediately relinquish the responsibilities entrusted to me. The various reasons that have led me to this conclusion are as follows:

-The role and responsibilities of an operations director in the orientation and management of MSF missions require working, on a daily basis, within a team of managers who implement the programmes. I am now convinced that trust, tacit agreement, sharing, and decision-making—which are crucial to the conduct of operations—can only develop with the anchoring that daily contact provides. I cannot provide this anchoring, long-distance, with Athens.

-The role of programme manager is, to me, absolutely essential to the conduct of operations. It is a difficult position to hold, and there are few likely to take on the attendant responsibilities. It turned out to be extremely difficult to 'graft' non-Greek speakers potentially able to assume the programme manager's functions to the Athens organisation. It seems to me, after many searches and consultations, that there is no one from within MSF Greece that meets the requirements for this key position, and to whom I could delegate my responsibilities - such delegation being necessarily greater owing to the location of the position. I cannot and don't want to be forced to choose someone for this position by default; it would not be responsible of me.

- More generally, I've become convinced over the course of this past year that the maintenance, or even structural development, of foreign operations by Athens does not in itself represent a plus or an added value for Médecins Sans Frontières operations as a whole. At best, it might fit some internal institutional need or strategy for the organisation; nevertheless, the additional constraints and problems encountered in making this a successful exercise seem clearly out of proportion to the real benefit we can expect to MSF operations.



**Letter** from MSF Greece President, to Thierry Durand, MSF Switzerland Operations Director, 26 April 1999 (in French). [D178](#)

**Extract:**

Hello Thierry,

I received your letter resigning your functions with regard to the Greek section, and I'm taking official note of it. I carefully read the three reasons you give for your resignation. I don't, however, find in your letter reasons that explain:

- 1) The timing (the reasons you give are chronic),
- 2) The immediate nature of your resignation, particularly in a context of humanitarian crisis (Kosovo) and internal transition (Panos's resignation following your letter, with no response from you).

Please clarify whether the three reasons you give justify, in your eyes, the timing and the immediate nature of your resignation, or whether there are, in fact, other reasons.



'General Directors' Teleconference,' **Email** from Vincent Faber MSF Switzerland Executive Director to MSF executive directors, 26 April 1999 (in English). **D179**

Dear all,

I would like to suggest a teleconference ASAP (this evening, or tomorrow morning, pending on your availability) to discuss 2 issues:

- 1) as agreed during our meeting of last Thursday, to discuss the communication strategy over the témoignage that has now been compiled and formalised
- 2) MSF-Greece: you all know now that Thierry has formally resigned, with immediate effect, from his duties as Operations Director for Athens. This move puts, indeed, the common operational centre under heavy constraints (I personally believe the end of our partnership is near), and the fact is that there is no more 'legal' (in the internal sense of the word) frame to Athen's operationality, unless some transitional alternative is defined. Due to the sensitive period of the Kosovo crisis, needless to say there are currently undeniable risks of a unwished initiative from the Greeks. I believe therefore there is a real need to discuss together urgently this topic. Waiting for your reply, Amicalement  
Vincent



*The president of MSF Greece called me one evening and said: 'the Board of Directors had a discussion and we decided to go to Pristina. So that you won't have any problems, to circumvent the criteria, we're going to organise this operation as a Board of Directors mission and not an operations department mission under the supervision of the operations director.' He told me that they had contacts via the Greek Orthodox Church and with the Serbian Red Cross – at the time Milosevic's wife was the president of the Serbian Red Cross – via the Greek government. I asked him if they had contacts with the Yugoslav embassy and he told me that they had met with them. That evening, he told me about a number of steps that they had secretly taken over the past eight or ten days. That was completely crazy. They had lied to me and now they were asking for my support! I told him that it wasn't possible, that I had to think about it. I talked to Doris former President of MSF Switzerland and a member of the Board of Directors. The next day, I reluctantly resigned; giving reasons other than these [as described above] because I couldn't prove what he had told me. The president of MSF Greece is a very shrewd guy! In fact, with this resignation, I was trying to slow down and reveal this independent process that they had started. At least if they were setting it in motion, no one should have covered for them. My resignation did slow them down a bit but they still went ahead.*

*The president of MSF Greece chose strategies based on the people around him. By resigning, I took away his*

*opportunity to use me to calculate, to fabricate a position based on my arguments. He was forced to make his intentions clear, to show his true face. For months, we had been trying to get visas from Federation of Serbia and Montenegro embassies in Paris, Brussels, Geneva and other cities. We were all watching each other. There was probably the Belgian-French dispute, but there was also a lot of mutual distrust: "Careful, you're going to collaborate with the bastards! Did you really pay attention to this or that? What guarantees do you have?" When you constantly question people like that, you end up not accomplishing anything at all. In any case, we weren't real crazy about going there. If we had had visas, maybe we would have tried. Then, undoubtedly in Pristina, assuming we could even get there, we would have realized that we were being manipulated. We weren't fools. We were experiencing life in Montenegro. It wasn't easy. The team was lucky that the Montenegrin police and customs officials let it operate.*

Thierry Durand, Director of Operations, MSF Switzerland/MSF Greece Operational Centre (in French).



*I didn't follow in detail what happened with Thierry Durand but he was already completely depressed and shortly afterward, he handed in his resignation. He threw in the towel. He gave up without deciding what role the Greeks would play. For the Greeks, it was a message of refusal. So from that point on, they decided to go their own way and they developed their own mission.*

Vincent Janssens, Director of Operations, MSF Belgium (in French).



*Thierry's decision to resign came at a very bad time. He completely missed the larger picture. He only took into consideration the fact that he was fed up. He didn't need to resign to avoid supporting The President of MSF Greece. Instead, he cleared a path for him.*

Jean-Marie Kindermans, Secretary General, MSF International (in French).

**On 22 April 1999, the executive director of MSF Norway announced to his colleagues that his section had returned the funding granted for operations related to the Kosovo crisis to the Norwegian government. On 26 April, he made this decision public. MSF began to coordinate all information on the various sections' funding for the crisis. This was a new stage in a process that would result several years later in the consolidated presentation of MSF accounts. The sections continue**

**to announce publicly that they are no longer using government funds to finance their operations in the Balkans.**



'Norwegian Money,' **Email** from Kurt Peleman, MSF Norway Executive Director to MSF executive directors 22 April 1999 (in English). [D180](#)

Dear all,

MSF Norway yesterday, had a meeting with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs where we informed them - well officially we had to ask them - that we would return the Kosovo funding. They were completely surprised, as the 'unique Norwegian model' is one of close co-operation between government and NGO's, where the government gives the money, the NGO's executes, and the objectives are the result of joint discussions. Nobody ever gave money back; they only want more all the time. We then went into a discussion on why MSF returns the money, and how we will fund our operations. What they had difficulties with is to see how our position does not imply that we consider NATO as an aggressor, and the Serbs as victims (they consider the return of the money as a non-neutral act - interesting perspective)! They also thought accepting money from UNHCR, which is almost fully funded by NATO governments, is a proof of a double morality.

All this made for some interesting discussions which were held in a very open atmosphere. In the end, I think we made ourselves pretty well understood, they respected our position, but they regretted it because they consider MSF as a privileged and very well-respected partner. The meeting took another turn - and an unexpected one - when we informed them that we wanted to go public with our position: as a move for transparency toward potential donors, as an opening of an interesting debate - this completely lacks within the 'unique Norwegian model' - and because we need more private funds, now (in Norway we have been swept aside by the big Norwegian organisation). Here, the Ministry did clearly not appreciate such an initiative, as they think the resulting debate would be too complicated for the public. They were especially sensitive about us mentioning that we are returning the Norwegian funding. This would be seen as a clear criticism of the Norwegian government policy. They said that such a move could lead to the situation that MSF would be considered as a less reliable partner for the government and this could then - maybe, who knows - lead to a re-assessment of the attitude of the Ministry towards MSF. With 9 million USD in [19]98, this could be an expensive reassessment. By saying this, they extended the whole issue into a discussion on to which degree MSF is going to adapt its communication policy to the sensitivities of a donor. As you see: even a small PS [partner section] can get involved in interesting MSF policy decisions!!! We continued the discussions after that, and we came to the conclusion that we will communicate our position, while trying to find a wording which will not provoke the Ministry more than we

need to make our point. You will get a copy of this press statement later this week.

Regards.  
Kurt



'MSF Independent of NATO Funds on the Balkans - Do Not Want Support from the Warring Parties,' **Press release**, MSF Norway, Oslo, 26 April 1999 (in English). [D181](#)

#### **Extract:**

MSF had decided to work without support from the NATO countries as long as the war goes on in the Balkans. The reason is that the organisation does not wish to be financially dependent on one of the warring parties. The decision means that proposals will be withdrawn and that funds already received will be returned. For MSF impartiality is the basis of humanitarian action, says President of MSF Norway, Doctor Morten Rostrup. As the situation is right now in the Balkans, we consider it of utmost importance to operate totally independent of NATO. This does not mean that we take a stand for or against the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, simply that we do not wish to receive funds we have received from one of the warring parties, he explains. As a humanitarian organisation, MSF has a mandate to assist all sides of the conflict, regardless of political affiliation, religion or ethnicity. Practically this means assisting on the basis of needs alone, regardless of political, military and strategic considerations. In addition to the work that is taking place in Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro, MSF is trying to get back into Kosovo and Serbia to help people there. Because of this, it is especially important to be able to say that we are operating independent of NATO, says Rostrup. The work with the refugees will not be harmed by the decision to not source NATO funds. MSF will continue the work in Albania; Montenegro and Macedonia with private funds from all over the world, explains Rostrup. This again shows the importance of private donations for humanitarian work, he says.



'MSF Belgium Board of Directors Meeting Minutes,' April 1999 (in French). [D182](#)

#### **Extract:**

In terms of funding, MSF has decided not to request government funding from countries involved in the Kosovo crisis (NATO). This decision was taken at the international level. However, MSF B, which was the only section to have already received a commitment from a government donor which is a NATO member country (Norwegian government), decided to refuse the funds (\$6 million). The reason for this decision was to avoid giving the image of an NGO linked to NATO funds. However, Alex emphasized that we have not gained anything from this principle in terms of concrete operations or recognition in the field. The

Yugoslav authorities reproach us for conducting surveys on the Serbian border but they absolutely do not highlight the fact that we are independent. In addition, donors understand our position, but this position handicaps us in the sense that we're not UNHCR's preferred partners for the same reasons of neutrality. Alex therefore believes that we probably went too far in complying with certain principles or that at least we haven't managed to use this position to the best effect.

James recalled, however, that MSF has never accepted money from countries taking part in a conflict. Furthermore, we can generate the necessary funds within the movement. But, he agrees that we haven't succeeded in capitalising on the fact that we've remained independent. Pascal described MSF B's reaction to this decision to James: access to government donors has never been a handicap for us. And, this decision to refuse government funds only seems to have disadvantages because we no longer have access to the support of our preferred partners. With this decision, we probably hoped to be operational in Serbia, because we're independent from Kosovo, but that didn't work out. According to James, this can still be used in the negotiations with Serbia.



'Kosovo Finances,' **Email** from Bruce Mahin, MSF France Financial Director, 27 April 1999 (in English). **D183**

**Extract:**

Dear all,  
As discussed during last week's executive committee, we all agree that there is still much uncertainty as to how long the war in Kosovo will last and as to what MSF will be doing in the field. Despite these unknowns, we would like to suggest trying to put together a financial movement-wide overview of this crisis. In agreement with the international office, we in Paris, volunteer to seek out, collate, and communicate the required information. The purpose is to give us all some guidance as to what we should be doing in private and institutional fundraising (to avoid a repeat of Mitch). We will try to keep things simple. For each of the 19 sections we would like to know, in millions of Euros:

- A. As of end of April
- B. As of end of June
- C. As of end of December
- D. Everything after 1/1/2000
- 1. Operational expenses for Kosovo crisis (OCs [operational centres] only)
- 2..Private donor Kosovo earmarked monies
- 3. Private non-earmarked donor monies voluntarily allocated to Kosovo
- 4. Government funds,

These will only be ballpark figures but should be useful nevertheless.



'Médecins Sans Frontières Rejects Government Funds for the Balkan Crisis,' **Press release**, MSF Spain, Barcelona, 14 May 1999 (in Spanish). **D184**

The international medical assistance organisation, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), has decided to forego any institutional assistance destined for the Balkan crisis if this comes from governments involved in the conflict. This renunciation will apply as long as there is no effective ceasefire. MSF will finance all its programmes in Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro using private funds from members and co-workers as well as donations from institutions which are not involved in the Balkan conflict.

'It is a decision which claims to defend the principles of impartiality and neutrality in humanitarian aid, especially now that there is so much ambiguity between humanitarian activity and military action,' explains Eric Stobbaerts, Director General of MSF. 'Our objective is to provide humanitarian assistance free of any military banner and with the coordination of legitimate bodies such as UNHCR.'

The cost of MSF's operations providing assistance to refugees in Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro until the end of April was 750 million pesetas. From then until the end of the year this figure could multiply four- or fivefold, depending on access to the interior of Kosovo. Until now, MSF in Spain has received 150 million pesetas in private donations, as well as regular contributions from the 100,000 plus members of the organisation.

Over 100 overseas volunteers and 200 local professionals are working with MSF in the Balkans area to assist Albanian Kosovars in refugee camps and group centres. Medical activity focuses on preventive activities such as vaccination campaigns, curative activities and mental health by way of psychological support. The organisation has sent more than 342 tons of medicines, medical material, nutritious BP5 biscuits, tents, blankets and water and drainage material.

For example, in Fier, a city 140 kilometres south of Tirana, MSF is building a refugee camp with capacity for 3,200 people at a cost of 40 million pesetas. This figure contrasts with the cost of the refugee camp for 5,000 people, which the Spanish army is building in Hamallaj at a cost of 1,200 pesetas.



'Humanitarian-Military Organisations: A Dangerous Alliance?' Geneviève Delaunoy, **La Libre Belgique** (Belgium), June 1<sup>st</sup> 1999 (in French).

**Extract:**  
DIFFERENT PRIORITIES

Of special note among the humanitarian organisations is Médecins Sans Frontières's refusal to finance its operations out of the \$100 million paid by the federal government to the account of the NGO consortium working on behalf of Kosovo. Alex Parisel, General Director of MSF, explains: "Our humanitarian agenda differs from that of NATO members, which need to legitimise the presence of troops in this region on behalf of their political priorities. In addition, we will have complete freedom to use these funds insofar as the Belgian government takes care of the most media-friendly aspect of humanitarian work...*i.e. the refugee camps that shelter only 10% of the Kosovo refugees, whereas 65% are sheltered by Albanian families in their homes.*



*I'm convinced that this episode was a turning point, especially concerning our approach and the international management of an emergency. I draw a relatively positive conclusion from it to the extent that it apparently served a useful purpose in the aftermath. We ultimately learned that there's enough money during certain emergencies. It was at that point that we began to set up consolidated accounts and to develop an emergency fund management policy. That was fine, but it didn't always resolve our basic problems. In fact, in times of emergency, we're no longer forced to take government funds because from now on we have enough of our own funds. But outside of emergencies, even if there is enough money in the movement, we have no guarantee that this money will be available for us.*

Vincent Janssens, Director of Operations,  
MSF Belgium (in French).

**In Albania, while waiting for NATO-managed camps to be turned over to the UNHCR, the MSF team is making every effort to position itself amid the jumble of humanitarian organisations. On 24 April 1999, MSF issued a press release announcing that it was launching a vaccination campaign for 50,000 children in the northern part of the country.**



'Nine Things You Need to Know About the Albanian Humanitarian Crisis,' **Memo** from Christopher Stokes, MSF Belgium Coordinator in Albania, 24 April 1999 (in English). [D185](#)

#### **Extract:**

4) THE MEDICAL CONDITION OF THE REFUGEES IS NOT CATASTROPHIC

We have not seen any malnutrition and mortality is not preoccupying (always less than 0.5/10.000/day even in

worst sites). The most urgent medical need is for psychological assistance and MSF has started a psychological support programme in Kukes. MSF has already started distributing family hygiene kits both for refugees in the warehouses and those hosted by families, the target is 18,000 kits. [...]

#### **8) ALBANIA IS ENTERING INTO THE SECOND PHASE OF THE REFUGEE CRISIS**

Local capacity is reaching saturation (collective centres are becoming scarce, families overstretched). NATO troops are arriving, in theory to 'support/assist UNHCR' (window-dressing?). NATO will effectively build 50/60,000 new tent capacity across the south of the country in order to clear the north (ease military operations into Kosovo)? WE ARE NOW TRULY ENTERING INTO THE LARGE MILITARY CAMP PHASE. OSCE + bilaterals are very active although uncoordinated (most armies are not yet under NATO command). UNHCR remains disorganised, overtaken by events. There are over a hundred NGOs (latest estimate, and counting). This is a fantastic mess that has to be seen to be believed.

9) The MSF movement as a whole has to recognise that the future of non-governmental independent aid is at stake in this crisis. We will have to remain true to our values while not leaving the refugees in the hands of NATO which has served them so poorly up to now.



'50,000 Children to be Vaccinated in Northern Albania,' Tirana, MSF Belgium **Press release**, 24 April 1999 (in English). [D186](#)

#### **Extract:**

- Starting from Friday April 23rd a vaccination campaign has been launched to reach all children in the region of Kukes and Krume in Northern Albania. The objective is to vaccinate up to 50,000 children aged from 6 months to 12 years in a period of just 5 days. Yesterday, 1,740 children were vaccinated by the team of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in Kukes. MSF is one of the three organisations taking part in the campaign. The vaccination campaign, approved by Albanian health authorities, has been prepared in close collaboration with the Albanian Ministry of Health. The vaccinations will be carried out by local health staff supervised by medical staff from MSF and two other organisations.



'Albania: Humanitarian Crisis or a Crisis for Humanitarian Organisations,' **Memo** from Christopher Stokes, MSF Belgium Coordinator in Albania, 28 April 1999 (in French). [D187](#)

#### **Extract:**

OUTLOOK

Land invasion in preparation. Massive influx of refugees from Montenegro and Kosovo; possible case load > 1 mil-



lion. The camps/collective sites to receive this new wave do not yet exist, but are on the drawing board.

#### CURRENT SITUATION

The major players:

1. The government. Objective: in order to avoid the socioeconomic destabilisation of Albania, have the international community take responsibility for the refugees. Their ideal solution: camps created by NATO member governments, reassuring foreign presence, one-stop camps, according to the deputy prime minister (all services provided by the state in charge). The government therefore, views unfavourably the UNHCR/NGO handover of the Italian camp near Kukes, but cannot reverse the trend. Political objective: security at its northern border through military, and possibly political, integration in Europe.

2. NATO, the newcomer on the Albanian 'humanitarian scene'. Simultaneous implementation of a humanitarian and military structure, both with the same objectives.

Military objective: preparation for a land offensive?? (elite units and heavy offensive vehicles). NATO has a shallow, narrow front about 60 km wide, with two related humanitarian objectives: a) relieve congestion in the north in order to remove the refugees from a possible theatre of military operations and b) increase the shelter capacity in the southern part of the country.

3. Governments or bilaterals are gradually subordinating their humanitarian and media efforts to NATO's more vital objectives. In theory, they should pass under NATO's command.

4. The ghostly UNHCR is searching for a role. It's trying to put itself at the centre of humanitarian operations or at least give the impression of doing so. The bilaterals, including the largest donors to the UNHCR, are encouraging the Albanians to marginalise the UNHCR (off-the-record statement by McNamara on a visit to Tirana). UNHCR's stated objectives: registration, establish an effective presence on the ground, increase shelter capacity and transfer the refugees from Kukes to the south.

5. The ICRC is extremely low-profile in Albania. Have they decided to keep their distance from the humanitarian-military operation, to divide up tasks: IFRC in Albania – at peace – and the ICRC in Kosovo?

The operational objectives of the UNHCR and NATO converge for the time being, but the distribution of roles poses a problem. The UNHCR must develop an overall vision, a game plan, to have a real chance of reclaiming humanitarian leadership and demilitarising the management of the humanitarian operation. [...] The elements that prevent the construction of large camps are the lack of a real State in Albania, the property issue in this post-communist country, and the fact that ALL Albanians are armed, which doesn't help matters. The OSCE has asked Albania, off the record, to declare a state of emergency that would allow it to allocate land for the camps for the duration of the crisis. The prime minister told the OSCE that he didn't have the power to do so.

MSF: Corrosive operational environment; whiff of humanitarian breakdown. Symbolism will be important for the future. Profusion of NGOs that occupy the area without

necessarily providing appropriate services, the hovering threat of a takeover by NATO and/or eventually private contractors, if the muddle continues. We have to find our way in this very well-intentioned humanitarian crowd. We therefore, have to take an aggressive and opportunistic stance (with regard to form, not content). We don't focus on aesthetics. As a result, projects vary from site to site (medical station near the border town of Skodra, camps near Kukes, transit centre near Korçë, collective centres in the countryside) depending on the areas identified by our teams. We base our decisions, however, on two main guidelines:

- Strengthen our capacity to receive refugees at the three points of entry

- Improve living conditions (including psychological counselling) for refugees in the central and southern parts of the country.

**On 23 April 1999, the OSCE published a report revealing the scope of atrocities committed by the Serbian armed forces and paramilitary militias in Kosovo. On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of NATO, the bombings have not managed to sway the Milosevic regime. The member States are renewing their determination by intensifying air strikes, but remain divided over a land invasion.**



'OSCE Reports Unimaginable Scale of Atrocities in Kosovo,' Sean Smith, *AFP* (France), Skopje, 23 April 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

– The level of atrocities committed by the Serbs in Kosovo are beyond what "anyone could have imagined," with incidents of rape, torture, mutilations and summary executions, an OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe) official stated Friday in Skopje. "No one could have imagined anything on this scale," Joergen Grunnet, Spokesperson for the OSCE's Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM), told the *AFP*. "Everyone is very surprised by the scope of operations" carried out by the Serbs in Kosovo. In a report based on interviews conducted with 250 Albanian refugees from Kosovo, the OSCE notes "an increase in the number of claims of sexual assault, including rapes of groups of women." The refugees questioned by the OSCE reported cases of corpses being mutilated. "People would often be executed in front of family members or villagers," according to the document.

[...] Refugees wishing to testify come voluntarily to the Verification Mission's tents, which are set up in several refugee camps and in several cities in Macedonia, a country that is currently sheltering more than 140,000 Kosovar refugees. The Verification Mission is ready to send the information it has collected from refugees to the

International Criminal Court in The Hague, said Grunnet. "Their testimony conveys an image of a total absence of the rule of law and almost no form of protection for the Albanian population" in Kosovo, according to the report. [...] The refugees interviewed by the KVM mainly come from the regions of Mitrovica, Pristina, Gnjilane and Urosevac.



'NATO Seeks Milosevic's Surrender Without Knowing When and How,' Philippe Rater, *AFP* (France), 25 April 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

– Over the past three days, the heads of state and governments of 19 NATO member countries have been expressing their determination to bring about Slobodan Milosevic's surrender, without knowing when this objective might be achieved and whether they will be able to avoid an invasion of Kosovo. After more than one month of bombings, the Yugoslav president has not yielded to international demands, which include an end to violence in Kosovo, withdrawal of Serbian troops, the return of refugees, the deployment of a foreign peacekeeping force, and participation in a political settlement. Even though unity was officially the order of the day during the summit in Washington, the daily reality of the war, the influx of refugees into neighbouring countries, and the varying nature of the democracies comprising NATO have led to differences. For example, the idea of a sea blockade, urged by Washington, ran up against the reservations of France, which considers UN approval essential.

During its 50-year history, the military alliance, which on Saturday adopted a new strategic concept formally authorising it to 'manage crises', finds itself in a difficult position. It is playing its first war against a sovereign country by air and it underestimated the country's resistance. [...] The allies, that have begun to discuss the post-war period with a German-initiated plan for providing aid to the Balkan countries, have avoided speculating publicly about a land invasion. Such an invasion, however, is considered essential by many Western experts, even though it would be difficult to implement and very risky. According to NATO, up to 200,000 troops equipped with tanks and artillery would be necessary to defeat 40,000 Serbian soldiers and 300 tanks in Kosovo and surrounding areas. The idea of an invasion is on everyone's mind, but not all the allies are on the same wavelength. The Americans seem increasingly resigned to an invasion, while the Europeans have not yet reached that point. [...] For lack of anything better, the allies have decided once again to intensify their air campaign. While required to limit losses among the civilian population and the ranks of allied pilots, the soldiers have complete "flexibility" during air strikes, according to NATO.

## PUBLICATION OF THE MSF REPORT: "KOSOVO-ACCOUNTS OF A DEPORTATION"

On 27 April 1999, the first version of the document, "Kosovo Accounts of a Deportation," based on the Epicentre epidemiological study and the personal accounts collected from Kosovar refugees in Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro was circulated for approval within the MSF movement. The general directors decided to release it to the press in order to support the charge of crimes against humanity and to stress that the Kosovar refugees urgently require protection and recognition of their status. There were no plans to ask NATO to stop the bombings or send in ground troops.



'Balkans Témoignage,' Email from MSF Deputy Legal Advisor, to the executive director, operations director, Programme Manager and communications coordinators, MSF France, 27 April 1999 (in French). [D188](#)

#### Extract:

A brief review of the document for all of us within MSF, first of all, then for JHB before the teleconference.

- 1) For the first time since the beginning of the crisis, MSF has appropriate and independent information about the acts of violence committed in Kosovo. What we're saying in the document isn't new, but it's MSF, an independent humanitarian organisation that's saying it. You all know that during a period of conflict, the source of information is as important, if not more important, than the information itself.
- 2) For the moment, no NGO has publicly released a comprehensive and serious document on the acts of violence in Kosovo. We've only read gory anecdotes like the following, "we met a woman who was raped by 15 men and whose throat was then cut." These anecdotes did not cover the entire province of Kosovo and did not convey the patterns of crimes committed.
- 3) MSF has the responsibility, in one way or another (print press, radio, internet, etc.) to publicly report on the fate of deportees from Kosovo. It's MSF's identity; it's témoignage. It's also a way for us to say that humanitarian work has its limits. In light of these deportations, the humanitarian response is insufficient and absurd.
- 4) Concerning the time it took to produce the document. I recall that we waited more than 10 days for témoignage from Albania and Macedonia that had already been collected. We only received these documents last Thursday and with great difficulty. The quality of the six or seven refugee accounts from Macedonia was very poor. It took us only about a day and a half to put together a 640-piece puzzle. We finished as best we could Friday night around 23:00. We decided not to send it in its current state so that we could edit it with

a fresh eye over the weekend. We were certain that 'nothing was better than just anything' (the sin of pride perhaps).



'Kosovo Report,' **Email** from James Ross, MSF Holland HAD, 27 April 1999 (in English). [D189](#)

#### Extract:

Below are the comments sent by Katrien's and James to Françoise on the recommendations in the 27 April draft of the Kosovo report (latest version). Many greetings, until Thursday 12.00, Wilna

1. Our greatest concern is the relationship between the text and the recommendations. The text focuses on atrocities committed against Kosovars - that is, the situation inside Serbia - yet the recommendations deal with refugee protection issues. The only recommendation that seems to follow from the text concerns the confiscation of documents and the problems it causes those deported. We would like to see recommendations that follow from the text. While we agree with some of your protection-related recommendations, we are extremely reluctant to raise them without presenting a factual basis for our concern. For instance, we should not be making recommendations about registration without first describing the process and what has occurred, and the differences in Macedonia, Albania and Montenegro. The separation of the military from humanitarian assistance is of course an important concern, but again, without a full discussion of what is taking place on the ground, our recommendation is very weak. Also, it is unclear what you mean in the sentence beginning "limiter l'instrumentalisation des secours..." [limit the instrumentalisation of aid]

2. In the first paragraph of the recommendations, you seem to be saying that the Kosovars in the camps have been deported and are entitled to prima facie refugee status. We agree, but feel that the point should be made clearly and directly. In our reading of your French the point does not come off forcefully. (There also needs to be a discussion of those who have fled to Montenegro, who of course are IDPs and not refugees.) Perhaps this is only a translation matter, but we would say 'unlawful deportation' and not 'criminal deportation'.

3. It is not clear to us why you want to mention the international criminal court in this context. No one disputes that the qualification of rights violations has consequences for humanitarian assistance and protection. Mentioning the court just muddles things.



**Email** from Jean-Marie Kindermans, Secretary General of MSF International, to the executive directors and presidents of MSF Belgium, MSF Spain, MSF France, MSF Holland and MSF Switzerland. 28 April 1999 (in English). [D190](#)

#### Extract:

Here is a quick summary of today's General [Executive]

Directors teleconference. There is an agreement to go public quickly (by the end of this week) with the following core message: People in Kosovo have suffered of a systematic, planned and organised process of forced deportation, which can be qualified as a crime against humanity. This denegation of the very identity and dignity of these people implies that they need, as a priority, now and in the future, protection and recognition of their status, in order to recover their identity and dignity.

This is the outcome of a survey made independently by MSF, through interviews of people who were in Albania, Montenegro, and Macedonia. As the methodologies of the two already transmitted reports were mixed, a revised final version with the necessary corrections and the explained methodology will be forwarded tonight or tomorrow morning at the latest by Paris. It was also agreed during the potential interviews, not to ask for ground troops or for stopping NATO bombing. Communication Directors are asked to get contact quickly in order to define a coordinated strategy.

Best regards. Jean-Marie.




*It seemed obvious to me from that moment that the document was public, because it contained essential information on violence and deportation. Particularly regarding the need for refugees to be registered immediately by the UNHCR, in order to avoid what could potentially be a big mess: forced enlistment, the reinvasion of Kosovo by the Albanians. Since people no longer had identity papers, if they weren't registered they faced a potentially terrifying future. So we wanted to tell everyone about it as quickly as possible.*

Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, Legal Advisor,  
MSF France (in French).



*First the draft was submitted to Paris, to the programme managers and the operations director, then to the operations directors and general directors of the other MSF sections. Overall, getting the document approved was quite easy. To be quite honest, I didn't expect that at all, because my initial experiences at MSF had been international experiences with issues like these, and each time it had been a nightmare. What I remember is that the document was quite well-received. I don't remember any shouting matches or major disagreements. Even the qualification of deportation—which was questioned and criticised after the fact—I don't remember it causing problems at the time.*


[...], MSF Deputy Legal Advisor, (in French).

 I don't remember any big fights. There was some reticence from Belgium on doing the deportation document; on issuing it... We discussed it by telephone with Philippe Biberson [President of MSF France]. Alex Parisel [General Director of MSF Belgium] thought that we weren't critical enough of NATO. It was strange, because this isn't the division you'd expect in terms of positioning. MSF Belgium was wary that the témoignage would bring us too close to NATO. I do remember a discussion on that taking a bit of time.


Jean-Marie Kindermans, Secretary General,  
MSF International (in French).

There were some discussions or interpretations of the epidemiological survey. I felt some conclusions were not necessarily based by the outcome of the survey, more phrasing of mortality and stuff like that; a bit of technical discussion. But we were engaged in it, we collected all the information, it was not like revealing, not claiming anything shocking. Already during the process, we felt it was a good initiative at the time. Based on what I remember, the report as such was not widely debated as it was felt not to contain a lot of new, controversial information. It didn't feel as [if it was] pointing [out new] issues, [or] changing the humanitarian debate. It was more a statement of facts.

Katrien Coppens, Humanitarian Affairs Department,  
MSF Holland (in English).

On 29 April 1999, the MSF France communications department distributed the report to the entire MSF network. On 30 April, it was sent out to the press, accompanied by a press release, by all MSF sections. The document detailed the policy of terror created by the Serbian government to deport the Kosovars, and called on UNHCR to register the deportees right away. It made the front page of the French daily *Libération*, which presented it as 'the humanitarian report'. From there, it was picked up by other media outlets, and led to more interviews. **V3** 



'Urgent Urgent English Version [of the Report "Accounts of a Deportation"],' **Email** from Denis Pingaud, MSF France Director of Communications to MSF communication network, 29 April 1999, 18:31 (in English). **D191** 

#### Extract:

Dear all,  
Sorry for the delay, we had technical problems. Please find herewith FINALLY the English version of the report

entitled 'Accounts of a Deportation' that will be made public today, as the DGs and Dircoms have agreed. As was agreed during the Dircoms's teleconference, the document will be utilised in the following manner:

1°) The individual testimonies concerning exactions committed against Kosovar refugees are not fundamentally new, but they represent the first synthesis that properly documents the policy of deportation being followed in Kosovo. The report is based on both qualitative and quantitative approaches: the organisation and classification of testimonies collected in Montenegro, Macedonia and Albania (qualitative); and the epidemiological study undertaken by Epicentre in Montenegro (quantitative).

2°) The principle news is contained in the Epicentre Study, which concluded notably that: 46% of refugees in Montenegro no longer have their papers of identity; 91% fled under the constraint of direct threats or attacks; 13% of men between the ages of 15 and 55 years old are missing; 28% of families left at least one member behind in Kosovo.

3°) In distributing this report to the press, it is important that journalists be briefed on the following three points:


- The report represents the first systematic and synthesised work undertaken on the policy of deportation. The report qualifies this policy as a "crime against humanity;"
- MSF does not intend to take any position - as this is not the association's role - on NATO's strategy.
- Our humanitarian mission continues among the populations in danger, including those situated in the TFY.

4°) We are waiting for further results of scientific enquiries in Albania and Macedonia in order to eventually take public initiative next week (press release?).

5°) In France, we are meeting press demands by providing the report to *Libération* (publication Friday morning), *Le Monde* (Friday evening), and *Le Figaro*.

Regards



'Kosovo - Accounts of a Deportation, **Report** compiled by Médecins Sans Frontières Using Witness Accounts Collected in Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro among Deported Kosovars and an Epidemiological Survey Carried Out on the Kosovar Displaced Population in Rozaje,' Montenegro, April 1999 (in English). **D192** 

#### Extract:

In order to evaluate the situation and needs of the Kosovar population deported *en masse* to the neighbouring countries of Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro, MSF has taken two initiatives:

1 - An epidemiological survey was carried out mid April amongst the displaced population arriving in Rozaje (Montenegro).

2 - The collection of deportee witness accounts was undertaken in Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro to complete the epidemiological data with a qualitative approach.

#### Method

The epidemiological study was carried out on a population

of 1,537 people (201 families), considered as representative of the 25,000 refugees who had arrived in Rozaje (Montenegro). It covers the events that occurred in more than 50 villages, as well as in Pec and Istok, between March 24th and April 15th 1999. The aim of this study was to investigate the demographic characteristics of this population, the impact of the exactions committed on them and to evaluate their most urgent vital needs.

The witness accounts collected by MSF in Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro retrace the recent events of 639 people in 43 cities or villages in Kosovo between March 25th and April 16th 1999. These people answered a standardised MSF questionnaire regarding the conditions surrounding their personal departure and the fate of members of their family. By comparing the witness accounts and dates this method has been used to reconstitute the events in the villages and towns. By taking into account direct information, it also limits rumours which are rife in such situations. They concern 8 regions of Kosovo: Dakovica, Drenica, Mitrovica, Orahovac, Klina and north of Klina, Prizren and south of Prizren, Istok and Pec, Pristina. For ethical reasons, the questionnaire did not raise the question of rape. Sexual violence has been discussed in a medical context.

#### Main conclusions

The coherence and similarities of the witness accounts reveal the deportations from Kosovo were part of a systematic policy in which the modus operandi, participants and objectives can only have been pre-planned. The crimes committed qualify as war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The epidemiological survey and the individual witness accounts highlight the following:

#### 1. The main cause of population movements is deportation:

The population is not fleeing armed confrontations: they are forced to leave their city or village under the threat of death. The epidemiological survey shows that 91% of the displaced people in Rozaje, Montenegro, have been forced to leave their homes (direct threats, or attacks). In the vast majority of cases, the military objective is to deport the entire population of a given area. The villages are emptied by force and terror. On the other side of the border, groups of displaced representing entire families, neighbourhoods and villages are to be found.

#### 2. The deportation is accompanied by looting and destruction of all the populations' belongings:

The witness accounts report the burning of buildings and killing of cattle. The deported population are victims of extortion by the different groups of police and paramilitaries; amongst those who cannot pay, certain people are executed in front of the others.

#### 3. The methods applied to enforce the deportations is almost identical everywhere:

Violence and selective murder form an integral part of the method used to spread terror or to punish those who refuse to obey the evacuation orders. The more time passes, the more the violence on the population increased.

#### 4. Those groups reported to be responsible for enforcing

#### the deportation are always the same:

The police, paramilitary groups, and the federal army are omnipresent in all the witness accounts. These different forces act in collaboration with each other, there is no disagreement reported between these troops.

- Nearly every account mentions the presence and violence of the police and masked paramilitary groups. Some witnesses report having recognised, amongst these forces, Serb neighbours or local police. It seems that some of these police or paramilitary wear masks so as not to be identified if they are locals from the region.

- The presence of Arkan troops is described in certain witness reports from the region of Pec and Istok, particularly in the village of Vrela on the 27th of March.

#### 5. The police and army systematically confiscate and destroy identity papers:

#### 6. The injured, missing, and dead:

Although there are no reliable figures on the number of deaths, injured and missing within each family, the epidemiological survey carried out in Montenegro shows that the male/female ratio is unbalanced. There is 13% lack of males in the 15-55 age group. The study shows that 28% of families have left at least one member of the family in Kosovo. More than half the witness accounts describe murders that were committed under various conditions. Given the method adopted, this represents an extremely high level of violence. The accounts repeatedly describe the following:

- Men, women and children killed or injured during grenade attacks on their houses
- People killed and injured during the pillage and looting of the population. Those who do not hand over their money or car quickly enough, or those who do not have any more money to give, are executed in front of the others.
- Women, children and men killed or injured when police fire into the crowd if the population did not obey quickly enough, or if they resisted the expulsion order.
- All along the route, men were picked out of the convoy of deportees and executed.

#### 7. Separation of men and women:

The separation of men and women is frequently mentioned in the accounts. It often occurs at the beginning of the attacks. In most cases, the aim is to make the men talk, to rob them of their money and identity papers. There are some accounts of murders as part of the policy of spreading general terror.

#### Recommendations

The nature of the violence inflicted on the populations should influence the quality of relief aid provided. In the context of criminal deportation, looting and destruction of the legal identity of individuals, relief actions should aim at limiting the most perverse consequences of these crimes on individuals.

- The quick, systematic, individual registration of the deportees under the international authority of the UNHCR in all the neighbouring countries is still the main preliminary to all assistance for these deported individuals.
- This independent, international registration is also nec-

essary to protect the individuals in the neighbouring countries against risks related to tension and internal insecurity which the refugees may be the victims of.

- This registration will be the essential reference to ensure a balanced distribution of aid and to limit the risk of the misappropriation of humanitarian aid.
- All relocations should be voluntary.
- So as not to hinder the relief and protection activities, the clear separation of military and humanitarian actions should be sought. It is also necessary so as to:
  - Limit aid being used as an instrument in the military actions in and around Kosovo;
  - To limit the pressure on the deportees in terms of enrolment and financial support of military operations.

'Mass Expulsion from Kosovo – A Survey of the Kosovar Refugees at Rozaje, Montenegro,' Vincent Brown, MSF / Epicentre, Rozaje 27 April 1999 (in English).

#### INTRODUCTION

[...]At the request of Médecins Sans Frontières, a survey was carried out among Kosovar refugees in Rozaje, Montenegro. It is intended to describe the situation of the refugees and to evaluate their urgent needs. The refugee population living with residents in Rozaje has been estimated at over 15,000. This population and a further population of refugees housed in the mosques do not feature in the survey.

#### SURVEY OBJECTIVES

1. To establish demographic data on the refugee population (and the history of the exodus).
2. To evaluate the impact of exactions on the civilian population.
3. To evaluate the refugees' most urgent needs.
4. To envision immediate plans for the future.

#### METHOD

A sample was established by drawing at random in the three factories [sites of refuge for those who fled], Kristal, Liego-Biele, and Dekor. These sites are located in the most eastern part of Rozaje. They were chosen with the intention of evaluating the situation of the population which is considered to be "the most in need." From the outset, it was decided that the survey would focus on a random sample of 150 to 200 families. The proportional distribution of the refugees between the three factories was taken into account in establishing the sample. In order for the sample to be as representative as possible, each of the three factories was divided into ten sections (or rooms). The population of each of the 10 rooms was estimated before the draw was made. When randomly selecting families from each room, the four teams conducting the survey (each team was made up of one MSF member and one translator speaking Albanian) followed the same procedure. The team stood in the centre of the room and chose one family at random and then proceeded with every second family counting from this initial choice. A "family" was defined as "all of the members of a closely

knit group living under the same roof in Kosovo (in an apartment, or in a house)."

#### RESULTS

A total of 201 families, in all 1,537 people were chosen to participate in the survey. All of the families responded to the questions on the individual questionnaire. Number of people per family = 7.6

#### CONCLUSION

The survey has allowed to describe the drama suffered by Kosovar refugees since 24 March. It also sheds light on the particular difficulties the refugees face in Montenegro, particularly in the Rozaje municipal area. When the refugees are asked about their immediate plans (see survey), only a small percentage of families envision leaving Rozaje for another Montenegrin town (e.g. Ulcinj) or to move on to another country (Albania). One of the main reasons for this is that the refugee population living in the factories (and also in the mosques and under tents) has very limited finances or no finances whatsoever. The current situation is characterised by issues of security and sanitary priorities. The NGOs are unable to deal with these problems alone. In as much as this situation is likely to continue, the international community, in agreement with the local national government, ought to seek medium term solutions for the Kosovar refugees.



'Doctors Without Borders (MSF) Issues Report on Deportation of Albanian Population of Kosovo,' **Press release**, MSF USA, New York/Paris, 30 April 1999 (in English). [D193](#)

#### Extract:

The ongoing forced deportation of the Albanian population of Kosovo is planned, systematic, and constitutes a crime against humanity, according to a report issued today by the international medical relief agency Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). The report is based on witness' accounts collected from 639 Kosovar deportees in Albania, Macedonia, and Montenegro and an epidemiological study carried out on 1,537 Kosovars (201 families) who arrived in Rozaje, Montenegro, on or before April 15, 1999. Teams of MSF epidemiological and legal experts investigated the characteristics of refugee families, the conditions surrounding their departures, and the fate of their family members in order to evaluate the most urgent humanitarian needs of the Kosovar deportees.

The epidemiological survey shows that 91% of the displaced Kosovars in Rozaje, Montenegro, were forced to leave their homes after direct threats or attacks by Serb military, or paramilitary forces. In the majority of cases, threats and physical violence have been used to empty entire villages and towns, destroy or steal deportee homes and possessions, and confiscate identity papers. The epidemiological survey also found that the male/female ratio among refugees in Montenegro is unbalanced with a 13% lack of males in the 15-55 age-group, and that 28%

of families have left at least one member of the family in Kosovo. "The witness' accounts reflect a high degree of physical threats and violence against men, women, and children in Kosovo. Refugees we interviewed are clearly victims of a well-organised and carefully orchestrated forced deportation," said Joelle Tanguy, Executive Director of MSF.

Based on the findings in this report, MSF strongly recommends that relief efforts take into account the violence already inflicted upon the deported Kosovar population. In the context of the criminal deportation of the population of Kosovo, the international community must seek to mitigate the most harmful consequences of crimes already perpetrated on deportees by properly and systematically registering all deportees under the international authority of the UNHCR, and by carrying out only voluntary relocations of deportees.



'MSF Emphasises the "Systematic" Nature of Deportations in Kosovo,' **AFP** (France) (Paris), 30 April 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

The humanitarian organisation Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) emphasised, in a report Friday, the 'systematic' nature of the deportations in Kosovo, a claim supported by the accounts of numerous witnesses. These deportations are "part of a systematic policy in which the modus operandi, participants and objectives can only have been pre-planned," claims the sixty-odd page document. The report presents witness' accounts collected in Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro, which allow the retracing of particularly chaotic individual evacuation routes revealing the tactics of the Yugoslav armed forces.

MSF also provided an epidemiological study, carried out on the Kosovar refugee population in Rozaje (Montenegro), using a sample of 1,537 people (201 families). By combining individual accounts and systematic analysis in this way, the organisation was able to establish that the fundamental cause of population movements was civilians being forced to 'leave their city or village under the threat of death'. This deportation, the report continues, is accompanied by plundering and destruction of property and people. According to MSF, in the camps there is a 13% lack of men in the 15 and 55 age group, and more than a quarter of the families lost at least one person in Kosovo.

MSF details the terror methods, put in place by the police, paramilitary groups and the Yugoslav federal army, "omnipresent in all the witness accounts" and systematically "confiscate and destroy identity papers," which is part of the effort to destroy individuals' very identity and disrupt the possible reunification of separated families. Thus, 45.8% of refugees in Rozaje have lost their identity papers. The organisation considers systematic, individual registration of deportees under the authority of the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) a top pri-

ority. It also requests, in the interest of effectiveness, the "clear separation of military and humanitarian actions."



'Médecins Sans Frontières Issues a Report Friday on the Testimony of Hundreds of Refugees – Survey on the Deportation of Kosovar Albanians,' Marc Sémo, **Libération** (France), 30 April - 2 May 1999 (in French).



'Accounts of a Deportation – Médecins Sans Frontières Report Shows that Kosovar Exodus is the Result of a Premeditated Plan,' Marc Semo, **El Periodico** (Barcelona), 30 April 1999 (in Spanish).

#### Extract :

MSF has collected hundreds of witness accounts from refugees – Kosovo. The humanitarian survey: "it is a planned process to extinguish a people. Albanians from Kosovo are not only deported, but also systematically stripped of documents establishing their identity, civil status and title to property..." [said] Philippe Biberson, President of Médecins Sans Frontières. The mass expulsion of Albanians from Kosovo by terror, planned for weeks, if not months, by the Belgrade government and set in motion, with the first NATO air strikes, has already been illustrated by numerous witness accounts appearing in the pages of *Libération* and elsewhere. Beyond the tragic personal stories, 'Accounts of a Deportation', the report released Friday by Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) is important: it is the first survey to demonstrate that the Serbian government policy was coherent and systematic.

"It is a planned process to extinguish a people. Albanians from Kosovo are not only deported, but also systematically stripped of documents establishing their identity, civil status and title to property. By forcing them out of their homes, the Serbian forces are clearly telling them that they are no longer from Kosovo, never were and are never to come back," said Philippe Biberson, President of MSF, who emphasised that this unique situation means that the humanitarian organisations that receive the refugees need to make "a special effort to get them registered; this is tremendously behind schedule." And while MSF admittedly deals primarily with medical care, it is impossible to treat this population "without an understanding and recognition of the collective trauma suffered." Hence the study.

The scope of exactions; 'Accounts of a Deportation' is the result of a two-fold investigation. On one hand, it is an epidemiological study conducted on a sample of 1,537 individuals (201 families) arriving in Rozaje (Montenegro). They had been expelled between 24 March and 15 April from about 50 villages and towns in Pec and Istok. [...]

War crimes: MSF's report shows; based primarily on the "coherence and similarities of the witness accounts," the general and planned nature of an expulsion policy "in which the modus operandi, participants and objectives can only have been pre-planned. The crimes committed qualify as war crimes and crimes against humanity," adds MSF, which refuses to employ the legally fuzzy terms 'ethnic cleansing' or 'ethnic purification' or to speak, yet, of genocide. "The population is not fleeing armed confrontations: they are being forced to leave their city or village under the threat of death. The epidemiological survey shows that 91% of the displaced Kosovars in Rozaje, Montenegro, have been forced to leave their homes after direct threats or attacks," the document stresses, showing that, in the vast majority of cases, the sole military objective of Serb forces in a given area "is to deport the entire population."

The missing men: The conditions of the expulsion toward the borders demonstrate its enforced character. "Soldiers, police, and armed paramilitary control the convoy of deportees all along the route. These people are forced to take a particular route... they cannot stray from the route without risk." The length of the deportation journey is variable. It lasted less than five days for 53.2% of families surveyed in Rozaje, and between eleven and twenty-three days for another 34.3%. Conditions are often chaotic. Deported families, given contradictory orders, were told to "return to their homes, where they were attacked or chased out once again." The deportation methods were more or less the same everywhere. "Violence and selective murder form an integral part of the method used to spread terror and punish those who refuse to obey evacuation orders," emphasized the report. The village is attacked, or the Serb forces go house to house, "killing cattle, throwing grenades and burning the homes." At the moment of departure, the residents are assembled and the men often separated from the women. "They are interrogated and searched, and money and identity papers are taken from them. Some men can rejoin the group later." It is difficult to assess the proportion, in the absence of "reliable figures on the number of deaths, injured and missing within each family." The systematic study conducted amongst the refugees in Rozaje shows a "13% lack of males in the 15-55 age group" that is, men of fighting age. Some joined the resistance or fled into the mountains. Others are probably prisoners, or were killed.

"More than half the witness accounts describe murders that were committed under various conditions, indicating an extremely high level of violence," stressed the report. Some people were killed as the villages were being evacuated, others when the Serbs fired on convoys of refugees that didn't obey orders quickly enough. All along the departure route, men were pulled out of the stream of refugees and executed. Those who slowed the deportations, the elderly or disabled, were executed or left behind in the burning villages. Only one of the witness accounts "specifically reports two young women having been taken away by the paramilitary." In a traditional society,

such things are not easily talked about. The most recent accounts collected were from two weeks ago. Since then, the situation inside of Kosovo has gotten much worse.



'Charity Lists Reports of Atrocities,' Paul Webster, *The Guardian* (UK) 1 May 1999 (in English). **D194** [↗](#)

#### Extracts:

The French doctors' charity, Médecins Sans Frontières, yesterday published an independent report on atrocities in Kosovo which it said "amounted to war crimes and crimes against humanity." The charity questioned more than 2,200 refugees in camps in Montenegro, Albania and Macedonia. The organisation's chairman, Philippe Biberson, said aid workers were convinced that the refugees were victims of a "longstanding and well-prepared plan to wipe out an entire people."

Apart from journalists' accounts, the charity's report is the first published independent attempt to decide whether the mass departure from Kosovo was due to Serbian policy or allied bombing. "The people are not fleeing from armed confrontation but are being forced to leave their villages under pain of death," Mr Biberson said. "Our inquiry at the Rozaje camp in Montenegro showed that 91% of the 1,537 people questioned had left the country only because they were under attack or being threatened. They had been expelled from about 50 villages around Pec and Istok." The report said ethnic Albanians in Kosovo were subjected to body searches by Serb forces and systematically robbed of all their identity documents, including marriage certificates and property deeds - an indication that the Serbian forces intended they should never come back.

The organisation released several accounts to back up its claim that violence and murders were part of an integrated plan to spread terror or punish people who refused to obey deportation orders. Serb forces were described moving from house to house, killing cattle, throwing grenades and burning homes. Estimating that about 13% of all males between 15 and 55 were missing, Médecins sans Frontières said half of all accounts from refugees in camps referred to murders, including shooting at refugee columns and the execution of old and crippled deportees who held up marches. Among the many witness accounts was a report of a Serbian attack on the village of Kladernica on April 12 which started with troops lobbing grenades. A thousand people took refuge in a school where the men and women were separated.



'Minutes from the MSF France Board of Directors Meeting,' 30 April 1999 (in French). **D104** [↗](#)

#### Extract:

**KOSOVO** (Graziella Godain, Stephan Oberreit, Jean-Hervé Bradol)



P. Biberson introduces the presentation by recalling that, on the day of the last BD meeting, the first NATO air strikes had just begun. Everything that has happened in the past five weeks is significant, dramatic and hard to summarise. The deportation of hundreds of thousands of Kosovo residents is no doubt the most important, on the human level, and just today MSF released a report of personal accounts collected from Kosovar refugees and an epidemiological survey describing the deportation process.

Jeroen [Janssen], absent from tonight's meeting, sent a message insisting that the term "deportee" be used exclusively (document attached). [...]

P. Biberson: I'm sensitive to the criticism of a supposed superiority complex—I'm worried about that, too. But today we brought out a big story that made the front page of *Libération* and was widely picked up by the media; through collected witness accounts, it relates the story of a deportation that really shows the teams' involvement.

C. Voltaire: The work is impeccable; it is far from emotional, and there's more to do than get indignant. The emphasis is on what the loss of identity of individuals and a people represents; to me, that's the main message.



**Letter** from Jeroen Jansen, MSF France Board Member to MSF France board members, 20 April 1999 (in English). [D195](#)

#### Extract:

Deportees from Kosovo

Since weeks we witness the expulsion from Kosovo of the entire population of 1.8 million persons. Albanian Kosovars are systematically being deported. Serb soldiers and policemen knock on doors and order the people to leave their houses and farms. Identity papers and other documents are systematically taken from the people. Young men are separated from the women and children, who are ordered to leave instantly. Their houses are put on fire. The fate of the men remains unknown but it is feared they have been murdered. This policy repeats itself house after house, village after village, valley after valley, region after region. By thousands, the expelled cross the borders into Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro. Some have walked for weeks and are totally exhausted. They report outright atrocities such as (mass) killings, rape, physical mutilation and other war crimes and crimes against humanity.

This process is called ethnic cleansing. The 'fortunate' ones reach safety in neighbouring countries where the deportees are welcomed as refugees. In the Kosovo context, the words 'ethnic cleansing' and 'refugees' are misleading. It disguises the real nature and scope of the events. Ethnic cleansing is another word for mass murder and deportation. And a refugee does not equal a deportee. The term refugee implies a more or less individual choice

whereas deportees are bluntly ordered and sent away. It is precisely this notion of choice, presently absent in Kosovo, which touches a different emotional and rational nerve. We, and (our) politicians feel, think and act differently once confronted with the mass murder and/or deportation of 90% of the Kosovo populace rather than another refugee crisis. Deportation invokes a moral and legal obligation on the side of the international community to intervene. Refusing to speak of deportees to a certain degree justifies the present political inertia. Meanwhile, it covers up the most gruesome and despicable human rights abuses. Bernard Kouchner and Emma Bonino, amongst others, have already been more honest by proclaiming deportee status. Next to the humanitarian efforts, MSF should also pay attention to the context. MSF must stop fuelling the confusing political rhetoric and, as a 'témoin' [witness] stick to the facts. Those expelled from Kosovo are deportees. From a moral point of view, deportees need even more drastic and far-reaching assistance and protection than 'ordinary' refugees.




*We were following closely the news coming from the area, and we were beginning to call some journalists to tell them that a report was being written. In fact, links formed themselves more naturally with Libération, because Marc Semo, who was responsible for foreign politics, was very keen on using independent sources. He had already called Graziella and asked: "What news are you getting from the area? We can't get a clear picture of things." Graziella asked me to keep him informed. When I have the complete report, I'll call him again, to say: "Now we can talk about publishing this report." There isn't a great deal of choice among daily newspapers in France. We were working basically with Le Monde and Libération. Libération said they were very interested in publishing this report. We had quite strong links with them that go back to Bosnia, and we felt it was the same with Kosovo. So we worked with them. But it could just as well have been Le Monde. In fact, each time MSF took a significant public position, we decided whether to talk to Le Monde or Libération. It wasn't a matter of grand strategy. It was a bit like saying: "We did it with Le Monde in 1998, so we'll do it with Libération in 1999." It was also because Marc Semo said he would give this report prominence. And we didn't sense that sort of willingness on the part of Le Monde.*

*On Thursday morning, I met Marc Semo with the President and the Head of Operations, and on that occasion we discussed some very practical questions. He told us that for a while he had been looking for information from sources other than NATO headquarters, and that he didn't have the staff on the ground to do as thorough an investigation. He very quickly told us that he would give it a prominent space. He's one of Libération's genuine experts on the Balkans and Eastern Europe. He's the person on the paper who carries weight on the subject of Kosovo. And when he went back to the editorial office in the afternoon saying: "MSF has just brought out a really good report." His editors went along*

with him, and the next day the report was on the front page. It's always better to publish news during the week, when the media are all present, because people have gone away at the weekend. Semot was sure to be able to convince his editor on that day, but not at all sure what would happen at the week-end. So he couldn't guarantee that something would be given prominence the following week. It came out on the Friday, just before the long weekend of 1 May. The number of personal accounts are important to him. He's very interested in the quantitative side of the whole epidemiological study. Like most people, he thinks epidemiology is something you can't argue with. It's done by scientists, so it's serious. That can't always be said of humanitarian organisations, who publish testimonies here, there and everywhere. But once it has a bit of medical and scientific know-how behind it, that immediately gives it importance. Semo was practically able to reprint the three introductory pages of the report. I've worked on several other MSF reports. Each time, what has really been thought through is the analysis. It can usually be reprinted as an editorial. That particular report was extensively worked on by the team, who did a good job of being concise and writing well. Semot was interested in our conclusions and recommendations. In fact, he constructed his story on similar lines to the MSF report; in his opening section, he borrows many terms from MSF's analysis, and then illustrates them with a dozen testimonies selected from the report. Libération puts the emphasis on the source, in other words, on MSF, which they see as a source that in general is pretty reliable. It was neither a military nor a journalistic source, neither Kosovar nor Serb, but a humanitarian organisation that produced that report it was called 'the humanitarians' report.'

Bénédicte Jeannerod, Communications  
Officer MSF France (in French).


 At the time, I thought this was the first well-structured confirmation to date of a whole series hypotheses about this war, and its consequences for civilians. That was its only interest. Previously, I'd only picked up fragmentary pieces of stories, interviews conducted here and there by journalists. I don't in any way regret that this piece of work has been done, because it seems to me that this account is better structured, and more rigorous. So I'm convinced of the value of the information, its solidity and the way it's organised, in comparison with what's being produced elsewhere. I'm also convinced that these conclusions are so unoriginal that they're not going to interest many people. In fact, at that time, everyone was saying people had been deported. At last we're saying what journalists had been saying over and over for several weeks. But Bénédicte assures us: "Yes, yes! Libération was hugely interested in it, precisely because everyone had said a whole lot of things without anyone knowing if they had any foundation, and the journalist at Libération is very glad to see information that seems reliable. He's interested in publish-

ing it." At the time, it seemed to me a good opportunity, and I pushed for it to be published in Libération as soon as possible. Libération seized on it to fill its own gaps. They were looking for something to say. So the report came in handy.

Jean-Hervé Bradol, Director of Operations,  
MSF France (in French).

**The same day, at his daily press conference, the spokesman for NATO drew journalists' attention to the MSF report, which he said demonstrated the organised nature of the deportation of the Kosovars. Within MSF, criticism began to be expressed about the relevance of publishing the report: it would add no new information, in particular on the facts about 'deportation', which everyone probably knows about. In addition, it would help to justify NATO's intervention. The MSF team in Montenegro also referred to problems of security. The heads of communication at MSF USA and MSF UK expressed reservations about the ways reports are published.**



'NATO's Role in Kosovo,' **Press conference** by Dr Jamie Shea and Brigadier General Giuseppe Marani, 30 April 1999 (in English). **D196** 

#### Extract:

Now today there has been a very important report that has appeared in Paris of Médecins Sans Frontières, and I would like to draw your attention to this report because it is probably the most systematic analysis of what has been happening to the people displaced inside Kosovo. It is not only based on a number of accounts and testimonies of refugees, but represents the first systematic analysis of one single Kosovar community from the village of Rozaje that are now primarily in Montenegro, and Médecins Sans Frontières have been interviewing these people, 1,537 of them that represent 201 families. And from the report that is being published in Paris today it appears that 13% of the men aged between 15 - 55 are missing. All of the refugees, virtually without exception, report terror and intimidation at the hands of the Serb forces. 45.8% of these refugees from the same village have had their identity papers confiscated, which is not only something which destroys their identities as individuals, but also makes the task of the international relief organisations that much more complicated in trying to reunite families at a later stage.

And it also appears from this report, again a mixture of first-hand stories and systematic analysis, that a lot of this was part of a pre-arranged plan, that the pattern of intimidation, of looting of homes, of being forced to leave

at the point of a gun is the cause directly of why these people have moved in the first place.



'Release of Witness Account Report,' Email from Kris Torgesson, MSF USA Press Officer, 3 May 1999 (in English). [D197](#)

#### Extract:

While I really congratulate MSF F for putting together and releasing 'Accounts of a Deportation' and for getting the English version out so quickly, I have some suggestions for how such a valuable report might be released more effectively internationally next time:

1. Include a press embargo date (in GMT) that is at least one or two days after the report is actually available in French & English. For a report of this length, it would give time for all 19 MSF offices to translate the report (or at least parts of it) into local language/style and to alert and distribute to journalists. It also gives journalists and editorial writers time to read, do interviews, and carry out more extensive reporting on the report. I don't think a delay of one or two days more would have mattered much & the ability to use the document for advocacy much more widely would have been greater. As it was issued in Paris and given to French journalists on the same date it was first made available in English, there was no way for our office to have the time to issue it widely here on the release date. A 40-page document cannot be faxed to journalists. In the US, many of our key journalists are in different cities and require overnight express mail delivery. We were not able to clean it up, print, copy, and distribute to all journalists interested until Monday.

2. Include an international press release that can be used as a cover sheet for the report. This gives journalists (and us) the key points, statistics, conclusions, and recommendations in a quick format. Not all journalists have time to read the entire report and it is also a way to help guide the way they report the message we are seeking to advocate. Reports of this importance and potential impact aren't released by MSF everyday; therefore we should seek to have the maximum media and advocacy impact by formulating a careful release strategy. This all said, we certainly do appreciate all of the hard work that went into producing this report. I think that we will be able to use it for press and advocacy work for quite some time.



'Re: Release of Witness Account Report,' Email from Nathan Ford, Polly Markandia MSF UK Press officers, 3 May 1999 (in English).

#### Extract:

We agree with Kris on all points. It was a great document that could have had greater impact. Over here it was picked up by one journalist from the Guardian who

attended the Paris press conference on Friday. They gave it almost half a page which reflects the importance of the report, but in addition:

1) We were quoted as 'the French doctors' charity MSF

2) It became yesterday's news for all other journalists.

Of course, we also agree with Kris in appreciating the hard work that went into producing this useful report.

Polly and Nathan



*Vincent Brown [Epicentre] had carried out a piece of epidemiological research in Montenegro, and I thought that was interesting. I remember discussing it with him. I pointed out to him some gaps in this research. Then Graziella told us the report was to be published. François, the Coordinator, and me were against it, on the whole. We had no idea of the mood in France about this story, what they were saying in the papers. We didn't know about anything outside Montenegro. We knew nothing of what was happening in Albania with the other sections. So we had absolutely no overall view of the crisis. In Montenegro we were in touch with the issue of Montenegro. And above all, we were in enemy territory, but with the Allies, so we had major problems about safety and security. One spark and everything could blow up. The different communities could very easily rise up one against another. The pro-Serbs in the north of the country might easily decide to kill Albanians and those who were helping them, too. The atmosphere was electric. We were going through areas where it was extremely tense. We felt as though we were living under a blanket of lead. But we had no sense of what people really felt about MSF, since the Montenegrin authorities were supporting us. So we didn't really know what risks we were running. Our grasp of the context was rather poor. We read what was written in the pro-Serb press. I went to meet politicians, party leaders, intellectuals and academics, to try to get a sense of the climate of opinion. In fact, there was quite a lot of resentment on the part of the Montenegrins, who said that they were taking risks on behalf of the Kosovars and that nobody was helping them: "It's unfair. We have the courage to oppose the federal authorities while the army is in our territory, we're taking real risks, and all you're interested in is helping the Albanians! You don't want to supply medicine or equipment to our hospitals..."*

*What's more, as a member of the Yugoslav Federation, Montenegro was also subject to international sanctions. The Montenegrin authorities were willing to tolerate us, thus taking risks, in particular that the federal army might decide to take over power in Montenegro. And not only were we not assisting their population but on top of that, with this report we were using their territory to make propaganda against Milosevic, at a time when they themselves were already in a delicate position in this affair. There was a risk that they wouldn't take it very well. In addition to that, we had the impression that what was happening in Kosovo was known about in Europe and the United States, that the report gave the statistics, but added nothing, that all*

we were doing was 'following the crowd.' We had difficulty understanding MSF's logic in wishing to testify to what was happening in Kosovo, inasmuch as the international reaction had already started. So, for all these reasons, we tended to see only disadvantages in publishing the report. We sent e-mails saying that we didn't understand the added value of this report, and on the other hand, we saw the disadvantages very clearly... We weren't wrong about the added value, we were wrong about the disadvantages. In fact, very strangely, publication of this report strengthened our position vis-à-vis the authorities. The Montenegrin authorities did not take offence because we hadn't informed them of its publication in advance. The day it came out, the Albanians applauded us in the streets, and we didn't have any particular problem. And when he visited, the director of operations met the prime minister, and the minister of health, who said: "Congratulations! We would be very glad to make a report of that kind."

Virginie Raison, Deputy Coordinator in Montenegro,  
MSF France, April May 1999 (in French).

When the report came out, with its main argument 'these people are deportees.' I said: "I could have told you that from day one. I think people are starting to play games." I very much want to do a review of press coverage before the report came out. People were already talking about deportees; the word was being used... An Italian priest in southern Albania said to me: 'Those people aren't refugees, they're deportees.' In any case, not even this semantic correction was of any interest. Frankly, what did people believe? That the Kosovars were fleeing air strikes? [...] We had made propaganda for NATO rather than for Milosevic!

Eric Dachy, Programme Manager, MSF Belgium  
(in French).

We had been caught in a trap with our investigations, and everything we were saying, which proved to be grist to the mill for those who wanted to say there were abuses, and to multiply them by a hundred. After the report came out, I would hear on the radio or read in the French papers: "MSF is talking about hundreds of thousands of dead." And that wasn't what we were saying. But that's the impression that stuck. In the end, there wasn't a very high number of dead, contrary to what some people feared... The word deportation didn't create a huge amount of debate, given its connotations. We didn't speak of 'evacuation' or 'expulsion,' or 'purges,' but of 'deportation.' We didn't expect it to make the front page of the next day's papers, and to reinforce what the politicians were saying about humanitarian war. We can say with hindsight that we didn't distance ourselves sufficiently from NATO. Did we go about it the wrong way? Did we handle it badly? In any case, there was

no room for manoeuvring. With our famous wish for independence, which was later given even more emphasis, how did it come about that we didn't manage to distance ourselves sufficiently? We asked ourselves that in real time, when we published the document on deportations, and in the end we didn't answer it in the way we wished: by showing that we were neutral as between the parties in the conflict.

Jean-Marie Kindermans, Secretary General,  
MSF International (in French).

What game are we playing, and whose case are we supporting when we speak? For good reasons, the search for evidence to prove Yugoslav aggression was so intense that such evidence was not in short supply. That does not diminish the value of the report, but it poses questions: Where should we concentrate our efforts? Was it really useful to write this report? What did it add to the general picture? I don't agree with the assertion that deportations were not described as such. There was inevitably huge press coverage. During that period, one of my friends was working for a British television channel on all the films about Kosovo and he was at the borders all the time. They made two films that won awards. What they proved was precisely that: the systematic nature of the deportations. They put the crimes and killings in the foreground, showing that a policy of terror was being used to drive people into exile. What I'm saying is extremely subjective, because my friends never stopped talking about it. It took almost a month for those two films to appear. They had a big impact in Britain. The question of the nature of the repression wasn't even raised. The gung-ho brigade said a lot of people were being killed, but in the House of Commons many voices were raised to inject a little reason into the subject by saying: "We don't have evidence." Looking at it from the UK, it didn't appear to me that it was of crucial importance to take that position. I am sure we published that press release, but I don't believe it had a very great impact.

Anne-Marie Huby, Executive Director MSF United  
Kingdom (in French).

Maybe again we underestimated the possible political abuse of the word deportation. Still you can be aware of it; this is not a reason to call it deportation. I interviewed people; they wanted to talk to me, so that the world knows. At the moment you start this, you have an obligation to the refugees or the victims to use it. And not calling it deportation because it might be used by NATO... It can be used by the other side to say: "You see it is not deportation..."

Katrien Coppens, Humanitarian Affairs Department,  
MSF Holland (in English).

I was going away on holiday. On the plane they handed out copies of *Libération* and I saw MSF on the front page. I recall that my first feeling was one of incomprehension. What was that report doing in the public domain? But my incomprehension was mixed with satisfaction at seeing MSF under fire from the media. It was some sort of combination of satisfaction at seeing the publicity, and something else. But I didn't see any special immediate danger. I don't believe that I ever thought about problems of expression, or of MSF's position, from the point of view of risks, or security. I thought it could be used politically, yes, but without causing immediate danger (that MSF's position vis-à-vis NATO, or the United States might be 'labelled' in the future, that's different), so in a way that also helps to explain why I didn't see the slightest urgency. I was on holiday, a long way away. The thing was done. I didn't see a scandal in the making. I simply disagreed. When I got back it was over and done with. I recall that Jamie Shea used or is said to have used the MSF report. That's par for the course. If you publish something, you always run the risk that someone will pick up what you've said and use it. You just have to accept it. That's the risk in going public. The question this problem posed for me was: "Why did we talk about it in public?" My criticism was that you have to be sparing in what you say, in order to give it its full value, and if you say too much, you weaken the force of speaking out in public. That was the only problem. Apart from that, unlike some others, I attached no importance whatever to whether we were playing into NATO's hands, or Milosevic's. Publishing that report simply seemed to me a waste of breath, not a cause for scandal. The slinging-matches came long after. It became a hot issue because at a meeting I heard this report presented as a positive example, something we ought to be able to repeat. At that point, I suddenly became critical.

Rony Brauman, Director of studies,  
MSF France Foundation (in French).

At the time, there were no articles in the press talking about people being deported. They talked about ethnic cleansing. This wasn't ethnic cleansing. The number of bodies subsequently found by the Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia [ICTY] is proof; there were not very many dead, in comparison with some villages in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The retrospective death-rate was not huge: 1.2 is a pre-emergency mortality rate whereas an emergency mortality rate is 2. It was a deportation punctuated by massacres and other acts of violence. We succeeded very well in showing this in the document. There was violence when people refused to leave when the first order was given, or when they had left their homes because they had been ordered to go, and had hidden in the forests. When they came back, they were taken by surprise by the paramilitaries, and that was it. Or else, in order to force people

to leave, you come to the village, you assemble them all together, and you tell them: "You've got an hour to leave, otherwise we kill three of you." It was the same method as I saw in Bosnia and Chechnya. They had the same training. After the report came out, we gave a huge number of interviews. On most occasions, the journalists didn't pick up our analysis. They just wanted us to tell the story of the little old granny driven out of her home. But they could all easily obtain personal testimonies of that kind – they collected ten times as many as we did. It therefore seemed important to Françoise [Saulnier, MSF F's Legal Advisor] and to me, to include a word about the facts on what was happening, beyond the journalists' wild talk. And also, I think it was the next day or the day after, at his daily press conference, Jamie Shea said that NATO was pleased with MSF F's report, which showed the truth, at last. It was NATO's 50th anniversary, and they were making a tremendous amount of propaganda out of it. So obviously their army of press attachés seized on the report and turned it to their own ends.

Graziella Godain, Deputy Programme Manager,  
MSF France (in French).


In fact, it's not unusual for a publication that has received wide media attention to spark off an internal debate. The director of communications at the time said this report adds nothing, that it simply drives home what we see all day long on television: the hundreds of thousands of people arriving from Kosovo. To my mind, what the report adds is precisely the definition of the phenomenon. It is on the basis of a meticulous account of what is happening on the ground that we're able to make this analysis, and to show that people did not leave of their own accord, but because of the policy of forced removals. Up until the publication of the report, it was being said that massive removals of population were taking place. But no-one had yet mentioned the fact that people had been driven from their homes, and that there was an intention to empty Kosovo of its Albanian population by destroying identity documents, separating men and women, and destroying houses. And so journalists working on the region had a very strong intuition of what this process was, and our report strengthened the convictions they already had. But to date there are no sources of information based on a meticulous account of the facts. I think that's the added value of the report.

Bénédicte Jeannerod, Communications Officer,  
MSF France (in French)

With this report we fell into the very error we wished to guard ourselves against. We have another source of concern: the role of NATO in providing aid, and the concept of humanitarian war. And instead of making our

statement as we should have at UNHCR, and countering propaganda on humanitarian war, we're pushing through this report, which by and large falls in line with NATO's propaganda. Nevertheless, when you study all the post-war controversies about the number of deaths, you see that our report showed even then, an estimate that was very close to the figure that was later confirmed. We were very cautious about the number of rapes. We wrote that in the circumstances in which we carried out our investigation, we could not clarify that issue. And so with hindsight, I think its value as information is even clearer. But in relation to questions that we had to field in terms of taking a position, we gave priority to that one at the time, and I think it was a bad choice. It would have been better to deal correctly with the other two and to say to ourselves that in the case of that one, because it did not make very much difference to people's perception of the event, it was by no means vital for it to have as much public exposure. And on that point I am self-critical; I made a poor judgment about priorities in terms of our taking a position. I think we might not have succeeded, but we could have tried to say things differently, to have paid greater attention to the political dimension. But that's not easy; it's the difficult aspect of our work. On Kosovo, I experienced our public relations performance as a failure, overall. But I learned lessons from it. After 1999, it played a major part in my hostility to the 'human rights' approach in crisis of this kind. I certainly expressed it clumsily, I'm happy to admit that, but that hostility was based on an experience of that kind. It was one of the elements that made us slip. The year after the Kosovo crisis, we had a debate in the General Assembly during which I defended adherence to the principle of neutrality. But I also learned not to use neutrality as a benchmark from which to argue.

Jean-Hervé Bradol, Director of Operations,  
MSF France (in French).

 That was the first time that a rigorous report documenting acts of violence had been produced by an independent civilian organisation. At the time, we were all completely restricted to the information coming from NATO. By then no other organisation was present inside Kosovo, and the media were not at all rigorous. I have no memory of reading any really detailed information written by leading reporters or war correspondents that were in Kosovo at the time of the bombing. In fact, the media used to relay NATO's communiqués on the violence, albeit sometimes distancing themselves from it and taking a critical stance. At the time, we were working in an entirely military environment and an atmosphere of total propaganda, and that report was the first space, the first opening towards a fairer kind of information about what was going on. The impact of the document in the media also made us tend to forget that in spite of everything, what was described in it fell far short of what NATO had described up to that point. It was very serious, of course. We were talking about deportation; we explained that some people had been

executed. But all in all, what the MSF document described was much less than the acts of violence reported by NATO. The possibility that the document might be used for public purposes could be seen very clearly beforehand. Everyone had been kept informed, and nobody objected. We in no way imagined that the document we were going to make public would have that impact in the media. It was the first item on the 13:00 and 20:00 news bulletins on a national channel. I believe that the following day or the day after, at his daily briefing session, the NATO spokesman explicitly quoted MSF. For an organisation that is extremely protective of its independence, almost obsessive in its determination to limit as far as possible the way it is used by others, this event probably helped it to realise that every one of its public statements could be hijacked by one of the parties to the conflict. I don't remember exactly when the criticism began to come, but I remember that it focused on two things. First of all, it referred to the use of the word deportation, which had not been questioned or criticised or challenged when the draft report was presented to senior operations staff, directors of operations and directors general. And the second kind of criticism related to NATO's utilisation of the document. On the question of utilisation, my personal feeling is that, from the moment you speak publicly, you can be used. That's one of the inherent risks in MSF's public statements. The idea of 'zero utilisation' is quite impossible, because in that case, we'd have to stop speaking altogether. We'd be condemning ourselves to total silence.

The debate on definitions is a much more relevant one. Should MSF give legal definitions to situations of violence? In the case of Kosovo, if we had to do things over again, I would use the definition of deportation again. In fact, it seems to me that the legal definition made it possible to clarify and illuminate the political situation. And we said clearly that these movements of people were not the result of combat, but were in fact the real military objective of the Serbian armed forces, and thus of the Yugoslav army, the police and the paramilitary forces. It was truly an example in which a legal definition made it possible to throw light on the nature of a conflict and the acts of violence it involved. The word 'deportation' carries a symbolic charge connected with the genocide of Europe's Jews. But the international legal definition of deportation came after that genocide, since it was defined in 1949 in the Geneva Conventions and thus in humanitarian law, and later, in the Treaty of Rome on the International Convention. There is no reason why international law should be held hostage by the genocide of Europe's Jews. In my view, we should have agreed to overcome this symbolic charge. But I'm much less clear-cut or absolute about the relevance and the necessity of giving situations of violence a legal definition. In some cases it is necessary. It offers an opportunity to shake up political leaders at the national and international level. And in other cases it is probably much more appropriate to use simple words and everyday language that makes it possible to describe in detail the acts of violence, the burned villages, and the rapes.

[...], MSF Deputy Legal Advisor, (in French).

I don't recall any criticism at the time. Not at all. It came two years later. I'm very happy with the way we positioned ourselves, on the basis of a report like that. I'm actually quite proud of it. We were experiencing a period in MSF when we were trying to define a lot of things. There had been the genocide in Rwanda, and the activities of the research centres, and the Foundation. At the same time, MSF is a voluntary organisation, not a court, or an institution of the law. The interviews with Kosovars arriving on trains coming from Pristina to Skopje, describing the round-ups on the trains, the destruction of identity documents, as a way of denying people's identity, made a big impression on me. It influenced me deeply on the question of deportations, the use of the term. We were no longer talking about allegations by journalists, this was a report written in all seriousness, with the greatest possible scientific rigour, which combined an 'epidemiological' investigation from the epicentre, on the types of violence people experienced when they fled, with collections of testimonies, and many of those. The two categories confirmed each other, across three countries. People who had fled to different countries told the same stories, referring to the same day, the same place. You could not say we had been manipulated. It was all this, taken together, that led us to use the term deportation. I was very happy for it to be called deportation, and therefore a crime against humanity. That made a big difference for us, and our way of behaving in a place with a regime that was committing abuses at that very moment. Without putting things on the same level, it was as if we were going to negotiate and agree to work with a regime led by a man who was committing an act of genocide. When something like that is happening, you have to be careful about the way you decide to work or not to work, and how you're going to behave in that place, and with those people. It's not a trivial matter. This isn't a simple conflict.

Thierry Durand, Director of Operations, MSF Switzerland/MSF Greece Operational Centre (in French).

We did a very good job of bringing together the information we had gathered. At that time we knew that it would serve NATO's purpose, but we had the courage to publish it, we even overcame that reservation. We said: "Too bad, we have this information, we don't have ownership of it, but all the same, this is a historical fact, and it's a synthesis that hasn't been made so far." I fully agreed with all those arguments. At the end of the day, it was a publication of high quality, because it's true that previously there had only been anecdotes and we, on the other hand, had written a history, the history of the deportation of a people. These data were in our hands; they were comprehensive and described what was truly a deportation. We added something new, and in this case, it had to be done.

Philippe Biberson, President MSF France (in French).


It was entirely legitimate to put this debate on the table. But in my view, there was a debate after the publication of this report because at the time it was two years since MSF had taken a public stance on a number of situations. Since the crisis in the Great Lakes region of Africa, the organisation had really been 'flat lining.' So something happened at last! At that time, I defended the following idea: whether we're used of or not, what we have to say is what we're sure of, even if it serves NATO's purpose. We shouldn't prevent ourselves from speaking on the grounds that we're going to say something that to some extent falls in line with what NATO's saying. I have no qualms about those questions, or even about public opinion, because given the propaganda machine that NATO has put into action, the fact that we publish a report saying people really were deported isn't going to strengthen or weaken NATO. NATO doesn't need us, to be strong! Our rule, the only one we impose on ourselves, is that when we have got hold of a truth, we do not hide it.

Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF Legal Advisor MSF (in French).

**After the event, some people even wondered if MSF should have issued a statement setting out the difference between its position and that of NATO.**

Quite simply, our responsibility was to look at what it had contributed. As always when you speak out, it's used by this person and the other. The only question I always ask myself in such cases is: "Should we not issue a disclaimer?" But disclaimers are never followed up. We're not saying that we don't have control over the communication once it has been published, but before publishing it we always ask the question, how will the message be interpreted? So it's not true that we pay no attention to how the message is going to be interpreted once we've sent it. We talk about it at the time. And we are right to look at things afterwards. We can say that the people who were in favour of war, and what's more, for humanitarian reasons, certainly used part of what we said. Was that a critical factor, or not? Nobody is in a position to know. But we were participants in it.


Jean-Marie Kindermans, Secretary General MSF International (in French).

 *To have issued a disclaimer would have meant that the contents of the report were invalid. That would have made no sense. That's a totalitarian conception of taking a public stance: not only do we supply the words, but we would also have to supply the meaning that goes with those words. From the moment it was in the public domain, the most we could do was take part in the debates in which these reports and these positions were up for discussion. Then, perhaps, we could polish it up. That's desirable anyway, and that's also the way we express ourselves in public. But if NATO takes credit for our reports, or uses them for its own ends – just as anybody can use them, just as far-left anti-globalists can use our statements on medicines or the multinational chemical industry – that's of no importance. It may annoy us in some ways, but that should never be a consideration. The exactitude and rigour of what we say, the reason why we say it in public, are the only considerations. After that, either we decide definitively to speak in nothing but purely operational ten-line communiqués, in which case we will actually never be quoted, and therefore never made use of, or else we make the choice of expressing ourselves in public from time to time. And that's not only unavoidable but desirable.*

Rony Brauman, Director of studies  
MSF France Foundation (in French).

**The operations directors and Kosovo programme managers from the various MSF sections decided to continue gathering statements from refugees. They wanted to be able to use the statements to alert UNHCR and NATO regarding the lack of protection for refugees in Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro. This involved supplementing the data in the report, 'Kosovo: Histoires d'une Déportation' (Kosovo: Stories of a Deportation). The report's conclusions and recommendations had already emphasised the dangers refugees faced from NATO's taking control of humanitarian aid.**



**Minutes** of the 'Meeting of the Directors of Operations on Kosovo – Wednesday 5th May 1999,' (in English). [D198](#) 

#### **Extract:**

- **Montenegro**

#### Main Concerns

- The border has now been closed and there are only 20-25 refugees/day coming through.
- Protection: the refugees have not been registered and therefore do not have any status. The only protection for the refugees comes from the Montenegrin police who have posted staff outside each collective centre and the

MSF dispensary.

- There are no permanent UNHCR protection officers in the field. No registration by UNHCR. There is no focus on individual protection - only monitoring of the general situation.
- The ICRC does not ensure the protection of direct war affected patients either referred to the hospital or hosted in private place. Some patients who were referred to the hospital (men with bullet wounds) have been interrogated, others have disappeared. The ICRC say that they are not willing to take up the responsibility of protection as they are in the middle of delicate negotiations to meet Milosevic and that this could affect the outcome negatively. [...]

- **Albania**

#### Main concerns

- Protection: the protection of the refugees is cause of concern from the beginning (no registration = no rights) till now without improvement. The North (Kukes) with less security and the willingness of different parties (gvt, UN, NATO..) to move refugees from the place
- Assistance: the refugees living in hosting families (see William Perea's report)
- More and more assistance delivered directly by government: political agenda, limitation in skills (small NGO), under the cover of humanitarian aid. This to add to NATO involvement.

William Perea's report: William described briefly his impressions after having carried out a survey on the refugees in host families in Kukes. In general, the relief aid is extremely disorganised. The refugees in host families receive practically no aid and have no information on the assistance that could be available to them. They have still not been registered - everyone has a vague reason for why not having implemented it: William feels this is outrageous seeing as this is the preliminary to all assistance, and the conditions to carry it out are not difficult. Large volumes of aid are being poured into Kukes, why are these not receiving it? It is important to analyse why the aid is not getting to them, who is responsible; but in the meantime nothing is being done. It is time to act now, not wait until the analyses have been done or until the people have nothing left and are forced to move to the south in desperation. [...]

#### Decisions taken

1. MSF Barcelona will start up a mission in Albania to follow. The mission will have its own head of mission in Tirana.
2. MSF will ask to meet regularly [with] UNHCR concerning the delivery of protection and assistance to refugees in Montenegro, Macedonia and Albania. Each head of mission has to document the improvement of different recommendations, edited [noted] by MSF as well as new or continuous lack of assistance. This will be compiled and serve as base of discussion with HCR.
3. MSF has to contact NATO representatives to inform them about the delivery of assistance to refugees and the limits we give ourselves on collaboration with them.



Contacts have to be done either on field level or in headquarters level.

4. MSF will only intervene in Serbia if it can work according to its principles.

5. To continue recording interviews with refugees - but not necessarily with someone full time on it. Two main objectives: 1- continuing describing plight in Kosovo. 2 - Describing living conditions and rights in host country.

6. Through the different sections to document the situations of Kosovar refugees in other European countries. Note some recommendations issued from MSF past experiences (refugees from Kalovac, Srebrenica).

7. Vincent proposed a new framework to dispatch the information within MSF (see complain from Samantha). Seems all agree.

8. To discuss to the next OD meeting (May 14th): position and operational prevision in case of return of refugees to Kosovo.



**'Information paper** Compiled on the Humanitarian Activities of NATO and National Contingents (assistance and protection),' May 1999 (in French). [D199](#)

*The purpose of this compilation is to document the humanitarian activity undertaken by NATO and national military forces on behalf of the Kosovo refugees. What is its positive impact in terms of effectiveness, speed and security? What is its negative impact in terms of cost, marginalisation of the HCR and refugee protection?*

#### 1) General information

The following information would be important:

- Number of camps managed by NATO/national contingents: Listing of camps managed by NATO or national contingents (number of refugees affected)

- Do NATO and national contingents provide assistance only in the camps or also for refugees housed with host families?

- Percentage of refugees:

\* In the camps

\* In families

\* In centers

- General volume of aid provided by the armed forces for humanitarian activity.

- Are there separate budgets for the NATO/national contingents' military and humanitarian activities or are they included in the overall budget?

- What is the nature of the funding for NGOs working in the refugee camps?

- Are there entities coordinating the humanitarian aid? Who is responsible for leadership?

#### 2) Do the NATO and national contingent camps observe traditional standards of protection?

For example:

- Are refugees registered in these camps? By whom?

- What are the criteria for moving refugees from the north

to southern Albania/evacuating refugees from Macedonia to third countries (consent, protection of family units, etc.)?

- Who supervises the moves and evacuations?

- Are there family reunification programmes?

- Has a KLA presence been noted in the camps?

- Is there pressure from the KLA to enlist young men (numbers, circumstances)?

- Is the KLA pressuring refugees to turn over money or goods?

- Are there refugee groups under specific pressure or excluded from humanitarian aid in the camps?

- Are young women being pressured to prostitute themselves?

#### 3) Are traditional standards of aid observed in these camps?

- What beneficiary list is used to distribute aid to the refugees?

- Who draws up this list and who controls it?

- If there is no list of beneficiaries, how is aid distributed to the refugees?

##### a) Living conditions

- Is there crowding (does each person have at least 3 m<sup>2</sup> of space)?

- Is there enough water (one tap/250 people)?

- Is there enough food (at least 2,300 kcal/person)?

- Are sanitary facilities adequate (one latrine/20 people, soap, etc.)?

- Are non-food needs being met (blankets, clothing, heating, etc.)?

##### b) Access to medical care

- Is basic care provided?

- Are chronically-ill patients receiving treatment (cardiac illnesses, diabetes, etc.)?

- Have children under 5 been vaccinated against the five major childhood illnesses?

- Have anti-epidemic measures been taken?

- Are specific medical activities underway to address gynaecological and maternal-child health care needs related to sexual violence in Kosovo?


- Have specific medical actions been taken to address psychological trauma?



*Just because we said in this report: "Yes, there were deportations," and what we said might help NATO, that didn't mean that two weeks later, we couldn't also say: "Here's what's going on in the NATO-managed camps." MSF still had something to say about the conditions under which the NATO soldiers were taking charge of the refugees. One of the goals of speaking out through this report - also among its conclusions - was to show how vulnerable the refugees were, how they had no documents and needed to be registered to ensure that they would be protected inside the camps. These camps were run by soldiers and there were obvious risks of forced enlistment and pressures to mount a fifth column. We knew that if there were*


a land offensive, it wouldn't be led by Western soldiers but by pushing the refugees. Given their state at the time of their arrival, no one could have been more vulnerable. And we were leaving them in that situation. However, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to know what would happen when you turn refugees over to a belligerent party, given that it didn't want to have any deaths when a land offensive gets underway! There were major problems with KLA forced enlistments, particularly in Albania, along with prostitution and all kinds of criminal activity. No one was managing the humanitarian activities or refugee protection efforts in these camps. That's not acceptable in these kinds of situations. In the weeks that followed; we decided to conduct an evaluation of what the soldiers were really doing inside the camps. The proposal to set up this information-gathering effort came from Samantha Bolton and Anne-Marie Huby, from the London office. We found people to do the survey. But in the end, the project was torpedoed by people in the field. The explanation was that they were too busy with operations and didn't have time to pull the information together. So, for the rest of the war, our public communications focused on the fact that we didn't want to work in camps run by soldiers. This came across as a position based on principle, not one backed by facts, because unfortunately, we couldn't manage to document it. Even if everything we said might have been manipulated, the important thing was to speak out on a regular basis, over time, and say what we had to say. The awful thing for me about this report is that we only spoke out once. If there had been a land offensive, we would have been involved in a very dangerous situation. It would've been very serious for a humanitarian organisation - for MSF - not to speak out to protect a population in grave danger. I think I would've resigned.

Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, Legal Advisor,  
MSF France (in French).

 We had put together a second questionnaire that would illustrate the concrete impacts of the militarisation of aid and, NATO's and national military contingents' control of the aid system. We wanted to provide the public with concrete examples - sort of a collection of NATO's major blunders in the camps. At that time, the public was coming to believe that NGOs were completely incapable of managing aid and so wasn't it lucky that the soldiers were there. But in reality, in the field, the situation was very different. Based on our information, the militarisation of aid had led to camps and assistance programmes that completely failed to meet minimum standards of refugee assistance and protection in terms of maintaining the civilian and humanitarian nature of the camps, refugee registration and family grouping. Many families had been separated with people moving around so much. Some men had even been executed. Our criticism of the military-humanitarian confusion was not at all an ideological position. At the time, the issue was the possibility of a NATO ground intervention. NATO had literally run some NGOs out

of the camps they were managing in northern Albania so that it could set up military and even intelligence structures. Information was circulating about KLA forces on the ground, which were using the camps as a rear base in Albania to support the NATO aerial operation. But providing security to the refugees and assistance to the population meant restoring the civilian nature of the camps and the aid. We insisted on the need to register the refugees, explaining that that would provide a count and a way to monitor if the aid was meeting the needs and if the principle of impartiality was being observed. Protection against possible violence or sexual abuses was also necessary. There were rumors about prostitution in the camps in Albania. Overall, the NATO member countries had short-circuited the entire UN system in favour of bilateral action, which allowed them to conduct a large-scale PR effort to influence public opinion. This approach basically wiped out the two fundamental principles of humanitarian action: the principle of impartiality (that aid must be organised based on refugees' needs, not based on the 10 o'clock news, the military's public relations or its psy-ops) and the principle of humanity (that the only goal of humanitarian activity is to relieve human suffering, not to address political or military objectives). The questionnaire we wrote had been discussed and sent to all the operations departments of the various sections. But we really didn't get any feedback except for some information from Samantha Bolton [Communications Coordinator for the international movement]. She was in the region and really shared the goal of a substantive and concrete communications programme, beyond just interviews and speeches—well put-together, of course, but somewhat theoretical and detached from MSF in terms of the importance of civilian and independent humanitarian aid. That line didn't work. There was such a high level of propaganda and mobilisation around the military that all the media could do was follow that line. The information that Samantha had sent was extremely concrete and showed, quite effectively, the extent to which the notion that military humanitarian activity was more effective than NGOs' was, completely false, at least with respect to this crisis. But we never managed to kill this idea that had taken hold in public opinion.

[...], MSF Deputy Legal Advisor, (in French).

 It seemed to me that in these statements, we were in a position of psychological catch-up, as if we were trying to straighten a bar that we had twisted a little bit in NATO's direction and that was pushing us to move in the other direction. And in practical terms, I thought it was both unimportant and unjustified. In any event, the entire region was under NATO-US-Allied domination, then UNHCR, not UNHCR - it was really a whole series of complicated, meaningless arguments. Basically, I thought MSF was being totally anti-pragmatic - focused entirely on theoretical issues. We were spending our time arguing about completely minor issues. But on a practical level, it was obvious that no matter who at MSF was calling for NATO's

removal from the camps and its replacement by the UNHCR, if that person had been a refugee himself, he would have preferred that NATO remain. NATO was conducting this war. These refugees were displaced and wanted to stay for a couple of weeks. You didn't need a professional strategy to understand - it was obvious that Milosevic's militias couldn't hold out for very long in the face of NATO. The 900,000 refugees weren't going to move into Albania for the duration. They were there for a couple of weeks - just enough time for the air strikes to stop, the war to be won and then - off they'd go, back home. During that period, it made no difference whether it was the UNHCR or NATO who protected them and helped them. What was important was that they be protected from the war - that's it. I thought that the argument was inappropriate. In general, if the various parties to the conflicts were protecting civilians, all we could do was congratulate them.

Some of the refugees had fled NATO bombing. So? They weren't protesting the bombings. How many thousands, or tens of thousands, died when the Americans bombed Normandy? That didn't stop people from being pro-American, even if the bombs blew up in their faces. You shouldn't have a completely 'technical' view of a bomb that blows up in your face. That violence also has a meaning. Even if you've been wounded by the bombs, freedom is different from oppression and conquest. Refugees were fleeing the bombs that were intended to free them. People become refugees because for a short period, their liberators use violence and that violence can't be completely discriminating. It necessarily reaches beyond the boundary where it's supposed to be carried out. During that time, people flee but they don't hold it against the bomber pilots. On the contrary - they're grateful. What's more, later, when NATO forces moved into Kosovo, the Kosovars were grateful. They supported NATO's moving in and they supported the process. Of course, they worked it to their advantage, they had the KLA and the different political forces, but what could be more natural? And there was no hostility - far from it. Quite the contrary. They were grateful towards those who had carried out the violence. What can MSF say about that? Nothing.

Rony Brauman, Director of studies,  
MSF France Foundation (in French).



Theoretically, the idea is not wrong. Of course countries have the right to conduct humanitarian aid activities and accept refugees. It's also a good idea and, besides, they are often asked to do so. But should they do it through their military, mixing soldiers in with the civilian populations at the same time they're conducting a military offensive? I don't think that notion worked in the Albanian and Macedonian contexts. The camps are right on the border. Roughly speaking, the military bases and the refugee camps are completely interconnected. It's the soldiers who provide aid to the refugees. In that case, I think you need to play the lawyer a bit and distinguish between the two somewhat in the name of refugee safety and the

potential security issues facing the humanitarian operations. It was definitely necessary to try to make that distinction because if the Serbs had ever bombed the refugee camps, they could have said - with plenty of evidence - that in truth, they were bombing soldiers. Because it was difficult to tell the difference between refugees and soldiers in the geographic regions where the problems arose.

Jean-Hervé Bradol, Director of Operations, MSF France  
(in French).

## MSF GREECE GOES IT ALONE

**On 25 April 1999, a humanitarian aid convoy organised under the auspices of the Greek government entered Serbia. The Greek prime minister even mentioned MSF - wrongly - as among the Greek NGOs working in the regions affected by the NATO air strikes. On 26 April, the president of MSF Greece began telephone discussions with the director of the Pristina hospital regarding medical aid that the section could provide.**



'Greek Aid Convoy Enters Serbia via Macedonia,'  
**Radio Montenegro via BBC Monitoring**, 25  
April 1999 (in English).

### Extract:

Greek aid convoy enters Serbia via Macedonia. A Greek humanitarian aid convoy carrying 74 tonnes of food and medicines for Kosovo entered Serbia from Macedonia on Sunday, Montenegrin radio reported. Six trucks arrived on the Macedonian-Yugoslav border on Saturday, but were not allowed to proceed until Sunday morning. Greek officials arrived from Belgrade to accompany the convoy.



'Simitis Says That Greece Will not Participate in  
Ground Operations,' **AFP (France)**, Athens, 25  
April 1999 (in French).

### Extract:

Greece has "clearly announced to the world at large" that it "will not participate" in military ground operations "in Kosovo and Yugoslavia," Prime Minister Costas Simitis said. His comments were published in special Sunday inserts in the Greek press. "Greece is not involved in the current problems and the crisis in the Balkans and must not become involved," he added in an open letter from PASOK, the ruling Socialist party he leads. "Rather, our country must serve as a positive force in every effort to

find a peaceful, political solution to the region's problems," the government leader stated.

The country has pursued initiatives in support of peace and humanitarian aid for refugees and people in the region and is helping to organise a summit meeting of the Balkan nations to be held in Athens. Simitis added that Greek aid includes economic and humanitarian assistance to Albania and Skopje, aid to Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia, the presence of Greek NGOs (church, Red Cross, Médecins du Monde and Médecins Sans Frontières) in the affected regions, and assistance from Greek armed forces in setting up refugee camps.



'MSF Greece Exploratory Mission in Kosovo and Serbia,' **Sitrep** 21/5/99 Kosovo, 21 May 1999 (in English). **D200** [↗](#)

#### Extract:

Pristina Central Hospital: The team arrived in Pristina Central Hospital and spoke with the director, who had accepted our aid 13 days ago. He was very satisfied with the content of our aid, since it included exactly what he had asked for in our telephone conversations (since 26/4/99 and on).



*In late April, they'd decided to carry out the exploratory mission. I'd been traveling between Skopje and Athens for a month. MSF Greece had a pharmacy warehouse in Athens. They decided to find a truck and fill it with all the medicine, or almost all. You needed to get visas to go to Kosovo. They'd tried in Athens but it was impossible. I went to the Yugoslav consulate in Salonika to obtain visas. I got them but then the Yugoslavs phoned to tell me that they'd expired and that I shouldn't try to go to the border because we wouldn't get through. The visas had been cancelled for Athens and Salonika and in the discussions with Odysseas and others, I said: "We need to raise a stink on Greek TV. What's this about some little NGO from some little village that can get visas, but MSF Greece can't? Why not?" They'd unloaded the truck twice because of these visas. It was ready, we were going to leave the next morning, and the phone call from Athens came: "No, you have no visa." I went to Salonika and we loaded up again. No! Again! I was ready to just give up. In the end, we went back to the embassy in Athens and they told us: "You can leave tomorrow."*

Antonis Rigas, Logistician, MSF Greece (in French).

**Writing in MSF Switzerland's internal publication, the president of MSF Greece criticised both what he called**

**the Serb regime's 'crimes' and NATO's 'crimes'. He called on MSF to publicly condemn the NATO bombing and the abuses of Serb forces. The section's executive director questioned that approach, as well as the MSF movement's lack of a clear position.**



'No To All the "Sorcerers" Apprentices,' Odysseas Boudouris, MSF Greece President, **Moustiques** (MSF Switzerland's internal publication), 26 April 1999 (in French). **D201** [↗](#)

#### Extract:

The goal of the bombings was not to protect the Kosovar population. Indeed, they didn't offer any such protection. If you really wanted to protect the Kosovar Albanians, there were more effective ways to do so than by blowing up bridges in Belgrade. And there are other ways to protect Pristina's residents than wiping the place off the map. These bombings seek to weaken a country by devastating it without regard for its inhabitants. This crime differs little from the one committed by Serb authorities when they displaced a population. In both cases, the goals of war are pursued at the expense of civilian populations. That is a crime and is not a response to the crime of ethnic cleansing. Rather, the former is the latter's most effective ally because it leaves the field free, reduces all future possibility of coexistence, strengthens the process of mutual hatred and compromises any chance of a lasting peace. The concrete result of this escalation is that, today, between 600,000 and one million Kosovars are fleeing under horrific conditions, as shown by the statements we have gathered.

The 'MSF question' we must ask now is whether we should take a position and if so, what it should be. Everyone understands that our approach is 'humanitarian', not 'political'. But we know that while these two approaches may differ, the distinction between the humanitarian and the political is increasingly unclear. MSF has not hesitated to take "political" positions, supported by its humanitarian approach. We thus condemn any action that strikes massively and harshly against any population and we all agree that the violent and massive displacements carried out by the Serb government in Kosovo should be condemned. Depriving a population of its country is a serious criminal act that no war imperative can justify, regardless of the fact that violent population displacements have always been a war tactic. Similarly, then, we must clearly condemn the massive bombing of an entire country. Devastating a country (which also deprives a population of its country), destroying its means of survival and terrorising its population are also serious criminal acts that no war imperative can justify, regardless of the fact that strikes against a population and an entire country's economy have always been a war tactic.

I've heard some people say that we must limit our condemnation to the Serb regime because it bears 'primary'

responsibility. Perhaps, although it's not clear to me how one party can bear 'primary' responsibility in an escalating, expanding conflict? Isn't this a typically political form of analysis and process? Are certain deaths of innocents 'legitimate' because one party bears 'primary responsibility', while others are to be condemned because of a 'secondary responsibility'? Let's leave the political analyses aside and take the side of the victims--all the victims. If a humanitarian organisation like MSF, coming from countries that are party to a conflict (and almost all MSF sections are from NATO belligerent countries), 'forgets' the victims from one party to the conflict because they are unlucky enough to be from the 'wrong' side, we will have sent the entire world a terrible message about the kind of humanitarian work that we want to perform.



'Somber Humanity in the Face of the Balkans Crisis,' Vincent Faber, MSF Switzerland, **Moustiques** (MSF Switzerland internal publications), 26 April 1999 (in French). [D201](#)

#### Extract:

Questioning the validity of NATO's military strategy is one thing, but condemning the intrinsic nature of its action is another, particularly some when see it as criminal. In the end, the question of the just war remains a dilemma without a universal answer; a matter for each person's conscience. But one cannot challenge the legitimacy of the international community's action - limited to its political and military dimension - simply because the bloody barbarism that today constitutes Belgrade's political programme cannot be denied. Don't forget that NATO's action follows years of unsuccessful diplomatic efforts at reaching a compromise. And don't forget, either, that we were the first to demand that the international community take clear and strong action during the Bosnian crisis and to denounce its passivity. What were we demanding then--even implicitly--other than an intervention to stop the Bosnian genocide? And last, no other alternative to force exists when dialogue and diplomacy lead nowhere. [...]

On a purely personal note, I think that no other alternative exists to direct intervention in Kosovo to stop the killing. I am also among those who think that, unfortunately, there is no more hope for a peaceful, multi-ethnic Kosovo within the Yugoslav Federation. But I place responsibility for this situation on the person who deliberately chose to escalate the situation and then take advantage of the resulting chaos to justify his fierce nationalism: Milosevic. And if I criticise NATO for anything, it is that it did not anticipate the humanitarian and political impacts of its action and that it insidiously continued to confuse the so-called humanitarian dimension of its intervention. But once again, this is an objection to the chosen strategy, not a condemnation of the principal, fundamental aspects of the NATO intervention. [...] Let us stand with the victims, all victims, certainly, but the awareness of our humanitarian responsibility should not blind us to the bloody barbarians in power in Serbia today. Beyond our

humanitarian ideals, it involves the simple humanity of each individual.

**In late April 1999, efforts by the international MSF movement to obtain visas to enter the Yugoslav Federal Republic were still unsuccessful. They would remain so until the end of the crisis.**



'Going to Belgrade,' **Email** from Vincent Janssens, MSF Belgium Director of Operations to MSF directors of operations, 28 April 1999 (in English). [D202](#)

#### Extract:

Internal discussion document; should result in an international reference for Belgrade operations. We discuss it or you give me your feedback?

Vincent

#### Introduction

While preparing the mission for Irena, I feel like the need for formalising a bit along which lines (TOR?) we (as MSF) are going to work in Belgrade. The main line of course being to work towards real and useful humanitarian space without important risks for political repercussions or simple security risks, both for the individual MSFer and for the organisation as a whole.

#### The reasons for going to Belgrade:

- We left Belgrade because the movement announced strong public statements against the Serbs and we felt like this would expose NATO-nationals in the team to big risks; in the end we did not go public, so going back is as such, correcting for a premature departure.
- We keep on stating that the most important humanitarian issue is in Kosovo; so all options to be able to regain real humanitarian space in Kosovo should be tried out; in Brussels we feel that the most concrete approach to this is going through Serbian authorities; not that we are sure of the output, but options (at present) that exclude Serbian authorities stand, to our feeling, little chance (cross-border even less feasible then before?).
- We imagine that the global war must have provoked also displacements and needs on the Serbian side; if we consider to respond to those then is it not on political lines (à la ICRC) to 'show' our impartiality by balancing our aid equally on both sides of the frontline, disregarding the needs? It is along humanitarian lines which we want to respond to real needs, disregarding politics; also working on the message that there are also moderate Serbs that think in a more nuanced (and interesting way) than Milosevic and his militia.
- There is some internal MSF pressure to rush to Kosovo out of frustration seeing the 'scoops' of MDM or some (Greek) journalists; lets be clear that we are all interested

to work in an adequate humanitarian space in Kosovo as soon as possible; having a quick and partial peep into Pristina is, as such, not going to help us a lot and might bring along certain risks (see below). At present ICRC is negotiating apparently an operational return to Kosovo with the authorities, so let's check already the results of the ICRC mission.

#### The options to go back:

- From the latest DirOps meeting there was a majority of directors looking for the feasibility of cross-border activities starting from the different neighbouring countries and regions. I understand that that feasibility so far has almost shrunk to zero?

- The latest GD-meeting gave green light to an autonomous explo-mission to Kosovo, via Belgrade, managed by MSF Switzerland (to be negotiated through the Serbian Embassy in Geneva - team including Swiss and Greek expatriates); this option may become less relevant in the light of the third one

- Brussels in close contact with the national team in Belgrade have been working on a transparent and official operational agreement for MSF (international) in Serbia; what we have at present is an official invitation of MSF-Belgrade, formally 'acted' by the Serbian MOH, to bring in officially, expats to discuss and plan MSF's operationality in Serbia. Johan Von Schreeb, Eric Strobbart, Sergei Korniyak and Alex Parisel have a personal invitation through which they should be able to get visas soon (which Serbian Embassies are still open in Europe?); Irena Johanson (former Kosovo team) has still a valid visa and is planning to go in by Wednesday; others can join as soon as visa available. We are preparing a new list of people to replace or complete team according to needs: we are looking for Greek candidates, and we have already Lex W. and possibly Geoff P.

#### Objectives:

##### 1. Be there:

- Assess the atmosphere (without spying!) in terms of expat security, feelings/opinions of population, media-trends, context evolution...

- Reinforce national MSF team: second opinion on certain issues, options, pressures

- Check about needs and operational options and agreements with other humanitarian interveners (UNHCR, ICRC, SDR...)

- Set a formal security plan and internal rules for new expats working in this context and see about further visa procedures (neutral nationalities?)

##### 2. Sit with the MOH:

- Assist to the official meetings going on

- Check what kind of relation can be built up, what kind of needs they present thus far

- See what margin there is (and negotiate a wider margin) to assess in an independent and correct way the needs; see what agreements and conditions can be negotiated; set criteria for an operational intervention

##### 3. Re-establish a transparent impartiality for MSF:

- MSF has been impartial thus far but under the present circumstances, by the nationalities of its expats and through the departure, it is probable that we are not seen as impartial; I feel like we gradually will have to have to address this image problem (not only at MOH level)

- MSF does not want to 'buy its impartiality'; re-establishing this image has to go through talking and consequent response to real needs.

#### 4. Prospect needs in:

- Serbia, starting Belgrade area

- Kosovo, on condition that we can make a serious evaluation and that we have sufficient operational margin to respond to what we find. [...] Personally I feel like that through this we are basically preparing a capacity of intervention in Kosovo for the potential 'peace-window' that could result from Russian talks: between the moment such an agreement would be signed and the moment that international troops could actually provide security, I think that there will be an opportunity to get in if we are ready; I seriously doubt that we'll gather significant humanitarian space if the war goes as presently; then again I don't think NATO can go on like this: the price of war will become high; unity will be lost; so NATO will have to change rapidly: either by sending ground troops, either by reaching an agreement

#### Risks:

- Individual expats are for the moment under a greater risk (emotional reactions population) if NATO-nationality; unclear if that risk is smaller for non-NATO-expats other than Greek; this risk is for the moment considered as reasonable to take;

- MSF wants to be accepted as an international humanitarian organisation by the authorities; as such, scenario's that use individual or national favouritism (or even governmental facilitation) are considered as 'tricky' and therefore as a risk (of political repercussions we've been trying to avoid by not taking any government funding).

- MSF as an organisation should clearly beware of Serbian repercussions (see media); so we carefully have to analyse and discuss different moves;

#### Expectations:

- We should also be able to resist the internal pressures to go for quick mediatised moves that we can't manage afterwards; don't go public on the first info you get.

- It is very difficult to project the operational output at the moment; as such we have not set a timeframe; maybe later.

PS 1: Irena was refused at the border: old multiple-entry visa are not valid anymore; she's working on a new one in Budapest and then we'll try again (if our public statements don't add other obstacles in the meantime...).

PS 2: Can I re-insist that people stop calling our local team in Belgrade, particularly now:

- Brussels does not request people to contact Belgrade for visa purposes, we are organising nominal invitations for you - it creates confusion (triangle)

- It actually can expose our local team

Thank you



'Re(2): Visa Tales from Belgrade,' **Email** from Alex Parisel, MSF Belgium Executive Director, 27 May 1999 (in French). **D203**

**Extract:**

Alex-FYI

Hi, Vincent,

Frankly, the news regarding visas for Yugo is bad. Knezevic claims that he hasn't received letters from the embassies but it's not at all clear why he would need them. He avoids us regularly. The local team thinks he's playing games with us and has no intention of providing the visas. I suggest that we release Irène from Budapest and send her to coordinate a camp in Albania. I am still going to receive an [...] from Belgrade this morning and Irène can get a plane tomorrow, Friday. Can we decide on this this morning?

Eric Dachy

**SUMMARY:**

Visa requests for:

- XXX Ukrainian nationality: Invitation letter Submitted to the Budapest embassy 13 April
- XXX Swedish nationality: Invitation letter Submitted in Stockholm 23 April
- XXX Swedish nationality: Visa for Belgrade in passport rejected at the Hungarian-Yugo border late April. Irène is on stand-by in Budapest. Invitation letter submitted to Budapest late April.
- XXX Belgian nationality: Invitation letter received 22 April, never submitted to embassy.
- XXX Lithuanian nationality: Invitation letter Received 22 April, apparently never submitted because Andreiia was no longer available.
- XXX Swiss nationality: Invitation letter received 22 April. Letter submitted in Madrid, negative response sent to MSF Spain 5 May without explanation. Invitation letter resubmitted in Madrid 11 May.
- XXX Dutch nationality: Invitation letter received 6 May, sent to Amsterdam 7 May. Letter submitted to embassy in Amsterdam???
- XXX Swiss nationality: Invitation letter received 6 May, sent to Barcelona 7 May, submitted to embassy 11 May.
- XXX Argentine nationality: Invitation letter received 6 May, sent to Barcelona 7 May, submitted to embassy 11 May.
- 4 May: MSF SPAIN VISIT TO YUGO EMBASSY IN MADRID TO NEGOTIATE VISAS. LIST FAXED TO XAVIER (individuals above except ANDREIIA SLAVUCK).
- 6 May: SAME LIST SENT TO CATHERINE HARPER MSF USA + Eric's fax explaining MSF's departure from Kosovo.
- 17 May: MESSAGE FROM THE BELGRADE TEAM: The Foreign Affairs Ministry + chargé d'affaires for humanitarian organisations are supposedly going to provide MSF a short-term visa to negotiate its presence, explain the nature of its activities. They're asking for a letter from MSF, from Eric, dated 18 May to explain what Belgrade is asking for. It's been decided that Johan [...] and Irene [...] Johansson

will go to Belgrade on this mission. The letter was signed by Alex, sent to MSF Stockholm (request for Johan) and to Budapest for Irène. NO MORE INFORMATION - POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE - SINCE.

**On 5 May 1999, the president of MSF Greece sent an email to the president of the international movement requesting the latter's support for the Greek exploratory mission in Kosovo. The international president referred to the international agreements and proposed that the Greek section work under the auspices of MSF Switzerland or that its operational opportunities within the movement be reconsidered. He warned the MSF Greece president that carrying out an exploratory mission in Kosovo would expose the Greek section to the harshest sanctions, including the possibility of expulsion from the movement.**



'MSF Greece Explo Mission,' **Email** between MSF Greece President and James Orbinsky MSF International President, 5 - 6 May 1999 (in English). **D204**

Dear James,

As a result of its unusual position and the agreements that the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs has reached with NATO and the Serbs, MSF Greece finds itself on the front lines of the Kosovo crisis. However, Thierry's sudden and incomprehensible departure and Vincent's intransigent attitude have placed us in a difficult situation. In agreement with the Executive Committee, we think that we need to evaluate the situation in Kosovo and the rest of Serbia. At this time, we are the only ones who can ensure that access. But as I told Thierry and Vincent several times, we would like to do so in coordination with the other sections. The 'window' of intervention is narrow and the situation is pressing. I asked our new operations director, Dimitris Richter, to get in touch with the other operational sections. Can you help us get past the procedural and partisan quarrels so that we can devote ourselves fully to our urgent humanitarian responsibilities? Thanks and we'll be in touch soon.

Regards, Odysseas

Dear Odysseas:

The comments you make in your letter are unacceptable to me. I spoke with you last week about my position, which is that MSF Greece must maintain its integration with MSF Switzerland. The resignation of Thierry Durand simply means that the general director of MSF Switzerland must assume responsibility of operations in MSF Greece until an alternate for Thierry is found. Your actions in launching an exploratory mission to Kosovo and in appointing an operations director in Greece are unacceptable, and beyond the scope of existing IC resolutions governing this

issue. I will not facilitate any procedural or communication channels for your unilateral actions. These are wrong, and unacceptable.

Please call me ASAP at 32477774328.

Very best wishes, James Orbinsky

The executive director of the Swiss section rejected the Greek section's unilateral appointment of a new operations director and that person's proposal for an exploratory mission in Kosovo. Various MSF executives tried to contact the MSF Greece president, who said that he was 'en route to the airport' without specifying his destination.



'MSF Greece Operationality,' **Email** from Nikos Kemos, MSF Greece Executive Director to MSF executive directors, 6 May 1999 (in English). 'MSF Greece,' **Email** from Vincent Faber, MSF Switzerland Executive Director to MSF executive directors, 5 May 1999 (in English). **D205**

Dear all,

I would like to inform you that after Thierry Durand resigned, Dr Dimitris Richter (member of our CA [Board]) will be our new Director of Operations. It's the second time that Dr Richter is taking the responsibility to lead the operations department of MSF GR (period 94-95), and has already been on the field several times. You can contact him at MSF GR, at his mobile 094 508089 or at his e-mail address <richter@otenet.gr> due to a problem at his ccmil address.

Best regards,  
Nikos Kemos

Dear all,

As a matter of clarification, the appointment of a self-proclaimed operational director in Athens is clearly and explicitly opposed by Geneva, as it is de facto a unilateral breach in the resolutions taken in 1998 by the International Council defining the common operational centre. It is no secret that the common operational centre is going through a severe crisis. Geneva has made a clear proposal to MSF Greece to try to solve the situation and to maintain the existence of the C.O.C. It will be up to MSF Greece to accept or refuse the proposal. In the latter case, MSF's international bodies will have to make a decision. In the meantime, we in MSF CH cannot and do not accept the unilateral decisions of MSF Greece, and we deny any legitimacy to the role given to Dimitris Richter. We hope that the whole movement will refrain from accepting the validity of this appointment until the situation is clarified. Needless to say that this has nothing to do with Dimitris's personality.

Best regards,  
Vincent



'Operationality: MSF Greece,' **Email** from Vincent Faber, Executive Director, MSF Switzerland, to MSF Greece President, 5 May 1999 (in English). 'MSF Greece,' **Email** from Vincent Faber, Executive Director, MSF Switzerland, to the Executive Directors of MSF Belgium, MSF Spain, MSF France, MSF Holland and the president of MSF Switzerland, 5 May 1999 (in French). **D206**

#### Extract:

Please find below a message that I just sent to Odysseas after Athens' unilateral decision to appoint an operations director. I proposed to take personal responsibility on a temporary basis for Greek operations (which assumes a clear responsibility for operational choices) but Athens objected. Thus, the message below. It is obvious to me that I can no longer be responsible for the operational decisions that Athens will likely make very soon, specifically with regard to Kosovo. The Swiss board will take a formal position within 48 hours and will probably call an emergency meeting or conference call of the International Council's Executive Committee on this issue. I will ask JMK to organise an executive directors' conference call on this issue.

Regards, Vincent

#### Copy of message to Odysseas

Dear Odysseas,

[...] I want to notify you that the issue of the legitimacy of the Greek section's operationality is not as settled - and certainly not unanimously - as you might like to think, (I'm speaking from experience given the various international meetings and proceedings I've participated in so far.) Simply denying the problem outright will certainly not help clarify matters. Rather, it can only lead to a painful awakening on the day when you have to accept reality as it is and not as you perceive it. The only legitimate operational authority you enjoy is that which falls under the framework of the joint center.


Now that the Greek board has rejected my (temporary) proposal, I think that day is very near. Clearly, I cannot agree with the very biased reasons you cite to reject this proposal. Let me summarise the immediate issue; if we want the joint operational centre to be something more than a purely theoretical notion, MSF Greece operations must fall under the framework defined at the international level and someone must be accountable to the International Council and the movement as a whole. Without being pretentious, at this point I think I am the only person with the ability and legitimacy (in the movement's eyes) to assume this role (working, of course, with an excellent team in Athens) of managing the existing programmes. That was the meaning of my proposal.

I take note of - in any event, that's all I can do - your decision to appoint Dimitris as operations director. But for me, this means (the Swiss board will have to take a position) that there is no further hope of an operational



partnership - even in revised form - and that Athens has explicitly and deliberately chosen to withdraw from the framework defined by the international council and accepted by Geneva. That represents a shot across the bow. Regarding Geneva, I cannot accept your choices and I will notify the Executive Committee that I cannot assume any responsibility whatsoever for your operational decisions. Neither can I respond positively to your proposal that I serve as MSF Greece's 'representative' on the Executive Committee. How would it make sense for me - other than to provide you with an alibi - to be the spokesperson for a choice and an operational position that I cannot agree with? I am surprised that you would even make such an inane proposal.


In any event, and because I find your decision to constitute a real provocation, I have asked that all operational support (HR, medical and logistical) to your programmes be frozen until the board can take formal action on the situation. In conclusion, I must warn you against making any unilateral operational decisions - I am referring, obviously, to Kosovo. I will strongly oppose any such decisions and I believe that the other operational sections will, too. I would also like to remind you that there are many Greek expatriates working with sections operating in the area and that MSF Greece thus has an important presence in the field. You can certainly capitalise on their presence in terms of communications, speaking out and rooting MSF Greece firmly within Greek society. Thus, an operational MSF Greece, strictly speaking, is not necessarily the solution to the problems you raise about your absence from the field or the movement's overall response to this crisis.

 *We knew that things were happening. I wanted to talk to Odysseas. I called his office in Athens but he wasn't available. I reacted like a doctor - I figured that he was in the operating room. I called back a little later and the secretary told me that he was on his way to the airport to enter Serbia. I hadn't asked the question that morning, but I think he'd said clearly to Vincent or Thierry that there was no problem, he was in Athens, but obviously, he was already on his way.*

Olivier Dechevrens, President,  
MSF Switzerland (in French).

**On 6 May 1999, the MSF Holland coordinator in Macedonia alerted his programme manager that a MSF Greece team was ready to leave from Skopje, with a convoy of surgical and medical supplies, for an exploratory mission to Pristina and Belgrade. The MSF Holland team expressed its opposition. All MSF movement communications officers were notified.**



MSF Greece Mission/Kosovo/Serbia – Update,' **Email** from Wouter Kok, MSF Holland programme manager to MSF Holland press officer, 6 May 1999 (in English). **Email** from MSF Holland press officer to MSF press officers, 6 May 1999 (in English). **D207** 

#### **Extract:**

**INTERNAL ONLY: UPDATE ON MSF-GREECE MISSION TO KOSOVO/SERBIA**

This information gathered by MSF-Holland HoM, Michel Hofman, on afternoon of 6.5.99 from team from MSF Greece.

**Purpose of Mission**

Explo humanitarian/medical to Pristina/Belgrade. Assess humanitarian space. Assess needs of health authorities.

**Convoy Composition**

1 truck containing 18 tonnes of surgical items for Pristina Hospital and dental items for Belgrade. 2 white Niva vehicles. All clearly marked

**Team**

Antonis Rigas (log/security)

Odysseas (medical/explo)

Antonis Moras (medical surgical)

Aristides (translator)

1 x Greek truck driver

**Itinerary**

0.800 Friday 7th May set off

2 nights Pristina

4 nights Belgrade

Exit through Sofia

**Team sat-phone numbers**

+871 761 913 324

+871 761 913 327

**Athens Desk responsible**

Tzanetos Antypas - mobile 99 3094 472704 Operations 99 301 5200520

Sofia Ioannou Press Officer 99 301 5200 500

Other information: Mission apparently organised through Greek Ministry of Foreign affairs


**Security**

MSF Holland has made it clear that no rescue attempts can be made, but has clarified that it would be prepared to carry out medivac from Macedonia. Furthermore, MSF Holland has made it clear that it disagrees completely with the approach chosen by MSF Greece. The consequences are solely theirs. In the mean time, the first priority for MSF Holland is the safety of the people participating in the explo. Therefore, any discussion on this action will be postponed till after the safe return of the mission.


**PR**

MSF Holland will clarify that this is MSF mission and that the purpose is a humanitarian/medical explo, with no immediate intention to set up an operation. The number of the Athens desk will be given to the media, but not the sat number. Please spread this message throughout the network to assure a similar line of communication when being approached by media.

Regards, MSF Holland Field team and Desk.

 I left with Odysseas, another man named Antonis, a surgeon and Vice-President of MSF Greece, a volunteer Greek doctor who got his degree in Pristina and a translator. We got to Skopje and Odysseas was still on the phone with the coordinators. We tried to contact the other MSFs. I wasn't the person in contact with the Greek defense minister, who had asked NATO's permission but I think the NATO agreement was only for Kosovo. We had a document saying what time we should be in a certain village, at what time in another, etc. We had a schedule so that we would avoid the bombings and so we could get to Pristina. Before leaving for Kosovo, Odysseas told me that the NATO soldiers had changed their plan. They had said that we needed to paint the Greek flag on the roofs of the two 4x4s and the truck, otherwise we wouldn't get through, and so we painted the Greek flag over the MSF logos. We stayed in Skopje for a night and at 6 a.m. the next morning, we left for the border. When we got to Skopje, we knew that the other sections weren't going to agree with what we were going to do. Odysseas told me that he was talking to Thierry Durand, and the president of MSF Switzerland, who I didn't know. This was my first mission with MSF Greece. I'd done all my previous ones with MSF France. I didn't know anyone at MSF Greece anymore except the real old-timers, Sotiris and Odysseas. But I'd always said, openly: "We can't just do nothing because the Swiss or someone else tells us we can't do this, can't do that. We are MSF Greece. We've got to get out from under; otherwise we'll always be the other sections 'little brother' and I can't go along with that." I was convinced that we absolutely had to carry out that exploratory mission. We knew that Kosovo was empty - empty of international NGOs.


Antonis Rigas, Logistician, MSF Greece (in French).

 We didn't receive funding, we didn't have any collaboration with the Greek government, and the only direct communication was with NATO forces, to reassure the security of our team. We did not paint the MSF logo, because we didn't have cars of MSF. We had two jeeps; the jeep did not have identification of MSF. Therefore, in the beginning we said: "Ok we have Red Cross identification on the top of the roof." But, the flag cannot be identified from the air. Then we received a fax from ICRC saying that we had to stop using the Red Cross, we have to start [use] other identification. And later on we received another instruction from NATO forces saying that we have to paint our national flag on the top of the roof in order to be identified because otherwise we cannot be secured. So, either we got with the identification of the Greek flag or we wouldn't get in because we didn't have the green light of NATO.

Hereklea Kaltezioti, Human Resources Officer, MSF Greece (in English).

During a late afternoon telephone call, the president of the MSF international council reminded the president of MSF Greece that an exploratory mission outside the operational framework established by MSF in the Balkans was unacceptable, from an operational as well as political perspective. He warned the MSF Greece president that any such step would lead to sanctions. He confirmed these statements by email that same day. The MSF Greece president agreed, orally, to suspend the mission, while waiting for the volunteers from the rest of the movement to obtain visas to join them. Telephone and email conversations continued into the evening of 6 May 1999. Ultimately, the president of MSF Greece stated that he was not the person who bore responsibility for halting the exploratory mission. The MSF Switzerland executive director then asked the new MSF Greece operations director to suspend the mission. The latter responded that he could no longer do so. He proposed that when the MSF Greece team returned, an international exploratory mission be organised, based on the information that the mission, currently underway, would collect. Early on the morning of 7 May 1999, the MSF Greece exploratory team entered Kosovo. The MSF International secretary general asked the communications managers to keep a 'low profile' on the issue.



'MSF Greece Explo,' **Letter** from James Orbinsky, MSF International President to Odysseas Boudouris and Nikos Kemos, MSF Greece President and Executive director, 6 May 1999 (in English). [D208](#) 

#### Extract:

By telephone this afternoon I discussed the issues outlined in this letter with Odysseas, who is in Skopje, Macedonia. I was informed yesterday that following the resignation of Thierry Durand, and despite the assumption of his duties by Vincent Faber, MSF Greece has appointed its own operations director. I have also been informed by email today, from Odysseas, that MSF Greece is making efforts to launch a unilateral exploratory mission (in Kosovo). This is without the approval of MSF Switzerland's General Director, Vincent Faber. Both actions are unacceptable on five points.

- 1) Globally, MSF Greece's actions contravene the spirit and character of the MSF Movement which is central to the cohesion and coherence of the Movement.
- 2) MSF Greece's actions contravene existing MSF International Council Resolutions that govern the operational activities of MSF Greece. Essentially, these conclude that all operational activities of MSF Greece must be under the responsibility of a Director of Operations of a common operational centre. In this case, given that Thierry Durand has resigned, this means that responsibility now falls under his immediate superior, the General Director of MSF Switzerland. Any operational actions not under his supervision are not acceptable.

3) MSF Greece's actions defacto create a sixth operational centre in the movement. This is not acceptable as the number of operational centres in the MSF Movement is strictly limited to five.

4) MSF Greece, in seeking to unilaterally launch an exploratory mission of any kind without the approval of the operations director, or in this case his superior, contravenes the existing framework for management of operationality for the Greek section.

5) MSF Greece's actions in seeking to launch unilaterally an exploratory mission in Kosovo or surrounding region has broken the transparent, collaborative and co-operative system of operational management between the five operational centres. This system has been established for Kosovo and surrounding region - a region where humanitarian issues are complex and require clear operational collaboration. Particularly, in Kosovo, the Executive Committee decided on April 20, 1999 that an exploratory mission will attempt access to Kosovo under the Geneva Operational Centre, and that this mission will include Greek and Swiss volunteers, and will not be the beginning of a mission for distribution of humanitarian assistance (therefore no equipment or supplies for the mission). The mission is to explore the viability of humanitarian space in Kosovo, and is to be prepared to make a public statement on this after consultation with the Executive Committee. A unilateral exploratory mission outside of this agreed framework for the MSF Movement is unacceptable. This framework guarantees coherence to the MSF Movements' approach to-operations and communications for the Balkan crisis.

In pursuing this course of action, MSF Greece's actions have not been transparent, are directly in opposition to the spirit of the MSF Movement, and are directly in opposition to the existing International Council resolutions to integrate MSF Greece's operations. May I remind you that the MSF Movement has made strong efforts to address the issue of MSF Greece's operationality, and these have until now been pursued openly and transparently. These current actions by MSF Greece break existing rules that MSF Greece agreed to, and amount to actions that are both structural-ly [...] and politically unacceptable to the MSF Movement. In pursuing these actions, MSF Greece is itself walking away from the MSF Movement. I strongly urge you to come back.

To come back to the MSF Movement, MSF Greece must cease immediately all unilateral exploratory missions. This means in Kosovo and in any other location that is not now expressly approved by the MSF Switzerland General Director.

In addition, MSF Greece has two options. It can accept the proposal for operational management that MSF Switzerland has prepared. Or it can ask that the IC to revisit the means by which MSF Greece's operational interests are incorporated into the MSF Movement.

If MSF Greece does not immediately cease unilateral exploratory missions, and does not choose one of the above two options, this will mean that it is walking further away from the MSF Movement, and that the most severest of sanctions by the MSF Movement will have to be considered.

I have discussed this issue with all members of the Restricted Committee, including Odysseus. All members of the Restricted Committee except Odysseas, are in agreement with the full position and conclusions I have outlined above.

Please inform me immediately of your decision. [...]

I do hope that MSF Greece will choose to remain in the MSF Movement, as there are valuable contributions that the MSF Greece section has made, and can make to the MSF Movement. Indeed, MSF Greece's insights and participation in operational issues is recognised as extremely valuable. This is particularly true for humanitarian issues arising in the current Balkans crisis. Any insights, on any operational or other issue are always welcome, and there are ample forra to express these (ie: at the IC, at the RC, at the boards of other sections where you have representation, through the joint operations of MSF Switzerland and MSF Greece). However, participation must be within the framework and transparent spirit of the MSF Movement. Sincerely,  
James Orbinski MD, President, MSF International Council

PS: Please circulate this letter to all office staff, field volunteers, association members and board members of MSF Greece.



'Explo in Kosovo,' **Email** from Vincent Faber, MSF Switzerland Executive Director to Dimitris Richter, MSF Greece Operations Director, 6 May 1999, 20:07 (in English). **D209**

#### Extract:

Dear Dimitris,

As agreed on the phone, I shall herewith confirm in writing the position unanimously agreed by the Executive Committee today. A more detailed and circumstantial mail from James Orbinsky will also arrive on your mail very shortly.

1) We ask that the current mission standing at the Kosovo border in Macedonia and supposed to enter Kosovo tomorrow morning be put immediately on stand-by.

2) An international explo mission, including Greek expats, shall take place as soon as possible. This mission shall be under the responsibility of the common operational centre, meaning under my personal responsibility as General Director of MSF-Switzerland.

3) The projected explo mission will comply with the terms of reference drawn by the executive committee 2 weeks ago, low profile:

- No distribution of materials or equipment
- No communication around the mission
- No media/journalists present

4) The purpose of the mission is to assess the existence and the acceptability of a humanitarian space inside Serbia and Kosovo. Expecting your clear agreement on these requirements, Best regards

Vincent

PS. in case there is any contradiction between this message and the one from James, the latter shall of course be considered as valid.



'Re: Explo in Kosovo,' **Email** from Dimitris Richter, MSF Greece Director of Operations to Vincent Faber, MSF Switzerland Executive Director, 7 May 1999, 14:17 (in English). [D210](#)

**Extract:**

Dear Vincent,

As agreed by the phone I would try to discuss the decision of the executive committee with the Greek Board of MSF. Unfortunately, that has not been possible. The current mission is going to be in Kosovo tomorrow morning at 8:00 am. I cannot turn back this mission 12 hours prior arriving into Kosovo. This would not be correct versus the members of our association. The main target of this mission is to get more information concerning the humanitarian needs in Kosovo and Serbia for the benefit of the whole movement and it will last only a few days. I believe it would be wiser at the moment to let this mission be completed and upon the return of the team; we can plan a new international mission. As already mentioned, MSF Gr is willing to put all its efforts to assist an international mission of MSF to entry into Kosovo. I am sorry not to be able to follow your requirement. I believe and hope that quick decisions leading MSF to dead end situations would be better to be avoided at the moment.

Best regards

Dimitris Richter



**Letter** from Odysseas Boudouris, MSF Greece President, to Olivier Dechevrens, MSF Switzerland President, 7 May 1999 (in French). [D211](#)

Dear Olivier,

Due to urgent events, I cannot attend the board meeting. I am currently on stand-by at the Macedonia-Kosovo border. As you know, the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs has negotiated an agreement between NATO and the Serbs that provides access to Greek NGOs. But the access 'window' is narrow. In keeping with the Executive Committee's direction, we wanted to take advantage of this possibility and open this potential humanitarian corridor to the other sections. Furthermore, we hope to avoid any procedural disputes so that we can take action on our primary goals: assisting all those in danger inside Kosovo and the rest of Serbia. Please forward my message to the board and the MSF Switzerland office.

Regards, Odysseas



'Explo MSF Greece,' **Email** from Vincent Faber, MSF Switzerland Executive Director to MSF executive directors, 7 May 1999, 10:40 (in English). [D212](#)

Dear all,

After having called Dimitris Richter in Athens this morning (Friday) at 10:00, I received confirmation that the Greek explo to Kosovo is proceeding ahead as planned, although it was not yet confirmed they had effectively entered Kosovo yet. The decision to proceed was taken despite James's message sent yesterday, and after I had called myself Dimitris yesterday (Thursday) evening at 20:00, explicitly asking Athens to put the mission on stand-by in order to safeguard all possibilities to prepare an international mission regarding Kosovo and Serbia and to discuss further MSF Greece's status within the movement. I believe it is now up to the International Council to decide on the appropriate actions that ought to be taken. I also believe that the members of the Executive Committee had made their own position very clear during our teleconference yesterday evening. Best regards,

Vincent



'Observatory Mission in Kosovo,' **Email** from Dimitris Richter, MSF Greece Director of Operations to MSF directors of operations and programme managers, 7 May 1999, 14:16 (in English). [D213](#)

**Extract:**

Dear all,

Herewith I inform you that after all night negotiations with all relevant authorities and the final NATO clearance late in the morning, our team has entered Kosovo at 11:25 (local time), destination to Pristina, for an observatory mission. The team is composed by the following experienced volunteers:

Odysseas Boudouris, surgeon

Antonis Rigas- Log

Antonis Michas - surgeon

Aristedes Mavrikakis - interpreter

We shall be informing you with daily sitreps from now on [...] TPLS, contact me for any information needed.

Regards

Dimitris Richter [please check the proper spelling of Dimitris' name – I have used this version everywhere but if it is wrong, just correct all with 'find' and 'replace' option – thanks!]



**Email** from Jean-Marie Kindermans, MSF International Secretary General to MSF press officers, 7 May 1999, 16:09 (in English). [D214](#)

**Extract:**

Dear All,

You may already know that MSF Greece has decided to launch a unilateral exploratory mission in Kosovo, and they crossed this morning the Macedonian border to get into Kosovo. This was made without any approval of the MSF operational decision makers: the MSF Switzerland partnership, the Operations Directors or the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee decided on April 20, 1999 that: "An exploratory mission will try to enter Kosovo under the Geneva operational centre. This mission will include Swiss and Greek volunteers, and will not be the beginning of a mission or distribution (no equipment for the exploratory mission). MSF will be ready to explain that there is no humanitarian space in case of this likely outcome of the mission." This framework guaranteed coherence to the MSF Movement's approach to operations and communications for the Balkan crisis.

MSF Greece has been able, due to the particular position of Greece and in the frame negotiated by the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to get a VISA for Kosovo from the Serb authorities. The mission leaves with material (18 tonnes), and 5 Greek people which includes two surgeons. We do not know what contacts have been made, or the kind of positioning they are ready to take. Besides the rejection of our common rules for operations, you can understand the difference of the approach it reveals, and the potential dangers for the overall coherence of our operations and our positioning in the region it reveals. We have decided not to be public on these differences and keep them internal as far as possible: otherwise we would have to argue in a complex way to an external audience that this does not mean that we do not want to try to help the populations in Kosovo.

Despite our wish to keep a low profile and not to enter in a public dispute with MSF Greece, we might be compelled to react to possible strong statements made by the mission and which we would regard as taking a side in the conflict instead of being neutral or impartial. We will inform you if necessary of whatever positioning is taken but please be advised that there is no public comment on this issue at this time.

Best regards.

Jean-Marie



'MSF Greece to all IC Members,' **Email** from James Orbinsky, President of MSF International Council to MSF section presidents, 7 May 1999, 17:46 (in English). [D215](#)

**Extract:**

This letter is to inform you of developments over the last days involving MSF Greece. Yesterday MSF Greece announced and launched a unilateral mission to Pristina and Belgrade. They entered this morning via Macedonia with 2 trucks, 18 tonnes of supplies, and a team of five Greek expatriates which includes two surgeons and a doctor. This is without the approval of the Executive Committee of General Directors. It runs counter to the policy that MSF actions in Kosovo and Yugoslavia must be according to transparent humanitarian principles that are not open to manipulation by any party to the conflict.

MSF Greece organised the action through its links with the Greek Government that has an agreement with the Yugoslav Government to allow access of Greek NGOs to Yugoslavia. MDM Greece has acted on this agreement, and has operations in Pristina. For MSF, this is not an acceptable means of achieving humanitarian access in this situation, as independence and the freedom to assess, monitor, modify and deliver humanitarian assistance is not assured. MSF has and is making ongoing efforts to enter Yugoslavia through official channels in Belgrade. These efforts have been persistently stalled by the Belgrade authorities.


Additionally, Thierry Durand, the Operations Director for the Greek-Swiss OC resigned his responsibilities for management of Greek operations because he felt that he could no longer manage them. This occurred on despite lengthy discussions between MSF Swiss and MSF Greece at the boards levels – discussions I was kept informed about – MSF Greece on Wednesday May 6 announced that it has appointed its own apparent OD for operations. It then launched this unilateral exploratory mission. I have discussed the situation with members of the Restricted Committee. I have also discussed these issues with Odysseas Boudouris, the President of MSF Greece, last week and in two lengthy discussions yesterday afternoon, when he was in Skopje, Macedonia. The results of the discussions are in the attached letter, which I sent to Odysseas and the General Director of MSF Greece yesterday.

As well, yesterday Odysseas agreed in my discussion with him that the unilateral exploratory mission would be put on hold, until other MSF international expats could be added to the team. He also agreed that MSF Greece would apply for Visas for these expatriates to the Yugoslav embassy in Greece, and that the terms of reference for the mission would be according to those described by the Executive Committee on April 20, [19]99 (that is an exploratory mission to explore the viability of humanitarian space, that no humanitarian assistance is to be delivered, that no media attention would be sought, and that the results of the mission would be considered by the Executive Committee before deciding on how to

proceed with further actions in Kosovo). I spoke again with Odysseas who then said that while he agrees with this, the decision is not his, but that if the executive of MSF Greece, and that he has global responsibility for MSF Greece, not executive responsibility, and that he could not guarantee that our agreement would be respected. With the launching this morning of the unilateral mission, clearly the agreement was not respected.

At this time then there are two issues that emerge from these events. The first is one of governance and will be dealt with in the coming days and weeks, and at the IC in June 1999. The second is more immediate, and deals with potential political implications for MSF's humanitarian actions in Kosovo and surrounding region. We will not react publicly at this time to this action. However, we may be confronted with statements from the unilateral mission that are not in accordance with our principles and strategies for the region. If this happens, we will react publicly as required.



'Sitrep Kosovo,' Antypas Tzanetos, MSF Greece Programme Manager, 7 May 1999 (in English). **D216** 

#### Extract:

##### General Information

On the 6th of April 1999 until 13:00 Greek time we were negotiating with several authorities in order for our team that was present in Presevo to have the final permission to enter in Kosovo area, so the original planning not be changed - for security reasons. Finally and after collaboration with the Yugoslavian Ministry of Health and Yugoslavian Red Cross we got the permission. So, at 12:25 Greek time (11:25 local time) and after having finished all the procedures with the customs, we had the green light from NATO the mission to start.

##### Brief Report for the route Presevo-Pristina

- Total time of journey 2.5 hours
- They met 4-5 police check points on their route, which they passed easily
- There are not visible damages in the broader area and no feeling of deserted areas according to our volunteers' observation.
- They didn't see destroyed villages, but they noticed some burnt houses
- The road was passable.
- They didn't hear or see any plane during their route.

#### 1. GENERAL INFORMATION

- There were not bombardments notified [warned] in the city at present, even though late in the afternoon our team heard some airplanes
- There are rumors that free shooters [snipers] existing in the city
- There is a general feeling of war situation in the city. The two communities are deeply separated due to the war situation
- According to local people the situation of the last two days is not so dramatic.




*The Greeks decided to go ahead, though we tried to make this a joint international mission in order to get out of this mess and appear as unconnected to NATO as possible, and also do it in a way that would help them save face. We told the Greeks that if they went there, it was the point of no return. I called Odysseas and told him that I had heard they wanted to go to Kosovo. I told him no. We are trying, all the same, to find an international setup where they could possibly put a Greek. We are opening up a bit. He told me not to worry, no problem. He was actually already in the truck, at the border, when he said it. That's no way to work! You tell the truth, but you don't say: "I won't go" when you're in the process of leaving! It's been like this for months. We had the feeling that they were hiding everything. It didn't make us want to try very hard.*

Jean-Marie Kindermans, Secretary General, MSF International (in French).

**In Pristina, the MSF Greece Kosovo exploratory team found the situation 'complicated, with signs of both violence and coexistence' and reported that the hospital's needs were covered, despite the fact that all the Albanian doctors had left. In Belgrade, they met with Yugoslav health officials, and then split in two: the two surgeons, including the president of MSF Greece, left for Greece, via Bulgaria. The logistician and the translator returned to Pristina to continue the Kosovo exploratory mission until the end of May. In Greece, the mission received particular attention from the media.**



'Kosovo Sitrep 8/5/99,' From MSF Greece Exploratory Team to MSF Network, 8 May 1999 (in English). **D217** 

#### Extract:

##### 2. POLITICAL SITUATION-GENERAL INFORMATION

In the direction that the team followed from Presevo to Pristina (110Km) they saw a few burnt houses (approximately 20). The villages are not deserted. There is a slow but normal activity.

The team can not report with exact figures the number of the Albanians and Serbians in these areas, but it's certain that there is an important percentage of Albanians (it was noticed by the costumes [clothing] etc.). The picture of armed Serbian police moving around from one side and Albanian farm workers from the other side going to their fields was very characteristic. The situation is complicated. There are signs of violence but also signs of coexistence [relative calm]. Also, in these directions/axes there are not signs of massive bombardments. In Pristina, the ordinary life is normal and there are not basic defi-

ciencies. There is a complete partition between Albanians and Serbians (there are not mixed groups of people). Even though the feeling of coexistence of the two parts in the city exists. The team met Regis Debray [French writer], who had just returned from Prizren and Pec and Victor Loupan, who is journalist of the French journal *Figaro*. They mentioned that the situation for access to Pec and Prizren is completely different. The villages are burnt down, the refugees are moving but none of the refugees' convoys is being escorted by police or military. According to the above persons there are not indications of massive exterminations.

### 3. HEALTH SITUATION

Pristina hospital operates as peripheral hospital that practically covers the needs of entire Kosovo area to the borders of Albania. Odysseas mentioned that at the time they were in the hospital, admissions took place of heavily wounded persons coming from Kosovo-Albanian borders. In this hospital, urgent and war-surgical cases are treated. The surgical treatment (e.g. vascular and orthopaedics surgery) is at a high level. Almost all Albanian staff left the hospital, but according to Serbians they are still coming back to get their basic salary. The admissions had a periodical character. Since the beginning of the bombardments 800 surgical operations had taken place, that means 20 operations/per day. There is a preparation plan of the hospital for massive admission of wounded persons. It is reported that in the first days of bombardments they had until 80 surgical-operations (minor, intermediate and severe surgical cases)/per 24 [days] jours. The surgical unit of the hospital was organised in a way that 16 surgeries can occur in 16 operational theatres at the same time. In full function and preparation are surgery unit, gynaecological/obstetrician unit and paediatric unit.

The bed-occupancy is estimated between 30-40% in the above units. It is mentioned that the 40% of the patients are Albanians (this was confirmed also by our team). It is a matter basically of children and women, but men also. Many doctors are staying in the hospital 24 hours. In general, there is no lack of doctors and nursing staff. The hospital does not have basic deficiencies and despite the electricity black-out's and water cuts, the basic needs are covered (generators exist). The essential problem is drug and medical supplies provision. This problem exists due to the difficulties of transportation (demolished bridges, convoy attacks) and also due to the damages of the chemical and pharmaceutical industrial.

The only humanitarian aid that had reached in Pristina had been delivered from Greece (government and NGOs such as European Perspective and MDM-Greece that are financed by Greek Government). The Yugoslavian Red Cross is trying to monopolize the drug distribution, but this is under further investigation, because it seems it's not either strict or clear. [...]

Our press line is stable: assessment of medical needs in Pristina and Belgrade and our effort to stabilize a safe and free access to these areas for provision of humanitarian aid to the affected populations. As we have already

mentioned in previous sitreps, if you need further infos please contact MSF Athens office. Next sitrep will be sent tomorrow afternoon.



'Kosovo 2# Update,' **Email** from Sophia Ioannou, MSF Greece Press Officer to MSF press officers, 9 May 1999 (in English). **D218**

#### Extract:

Media interest

\*Local media have shown special interest right from the beginning of this explo mission. The press here have extensive articles regarding – mostly – the purposes of this mission. [...] \*12 radio interviews were given/ Tzanetos Antypas-Rp, interviewed on the issue

\*All Greek TV channels filmed the mission at the Pristina hospital. Not big coverage because of the Chinese Embassy bombing. We are waiting to see more when arriving in Belgrade. We are trying to be very careful with media, not being quoted incorrectly and not carried away. We are not being pro-active with this matter, only dealing with media response to it. Don't forget this is a very delicate issue when it comes to Greek media and a Greek team of volunteers visiting Belgrade. As you can imagine the interest is rather big. We are keeping a low profile.

\*CNN and BBC correspondents in Belgrade are showing interest on the issue of MSF being present in the city. Have spoken with them giving the basic frame of the explo. The media calls are filtered by me. Waiting to see what will come up. This is all for now. I would like to know if you had any calls from your media contacts asking about this. What did they want to know? What did you say to them?

Kind regards to you all



'Kosovo 3# Update,' **Email** from Sophia Ioannou, MSF Greece Press Officer to MSF press officers, 11 May 1999 (in English). **D219**

#### Extract:

Through the daily sitreps you are all aware that the team is already in Belgrade since Sunday afternoon. During these two days they have been having meetings with local health authorities in order to evaluate the health situation. Their meeting with the local MSF B staff in the office was important as the explo team had the chance to be briefed regarding the general situation in Belgrade since the last MSF team (one month ago) left the city. I've talked thoroughly with Anne-Marie from Skopje who sounded very preoccupied on what MSF Greece says to media and how this could be 'interpreted' or 'misunderstood' by journalists. I just reassured Anne-Marie that our press line has not changed; the sitreps that you receive are for MSF eyes only.

On the other hand, the team is very well briefed on what we say in order to avoid being out of context and incor-

rectly quoted. We have never said up to now, that we have obtained free access. We are pointing out our effort to stabilise safe and free access for provision of humanitarian aid to affected populations.

Media coverage - we are still dealing with local media requests which are following the story. The main titles in the Greek newspapers after the departure of the explo team are the following (9-10 May 1999):

- 'Life Mission from MSF in Pristina and Belgrade'/Medical Assessment in the Area (*ELEFTHEROTYPIA*).

- 'MSF in the Frontline'/Presentation of MSF Activities in Albania, Skopje, Montenegro and the Explo in FRY (*ETHNOS*)

- 'MSF: Appeal for Safe "Humanitarian Corridor" in Kosovo'/After the Deterioration of the Bombardments MSF is Making an Open Appeal for Free Access to ALL Victims of the War (*THESSALONIKI*)

- 'MSF Worried About Humanitarian Access in Kosovo' / Appeal for Free and Independent Evaluation (*TA NEA*)

\* AFP correspondent in Greece (Mr. Gounds) has picked up the story, contacted me asking for more details.

\* Today the team visited the Emergency Centre in Belgrade while meetings with the medical staff were scheduled to evaluate and collect medical data. There they were requested by all Greek correspondents (MEGA CHANNEL, SKY TV, ANTENNA TN, NET TV, STAR TN) to give interviews explaining the purpose of their visit in Belgrade. The statements made, were in the frame of the common press line.

\* CNN's correspondent in Belgrade (Tanya...) took statements from Odysseas outside the hospital. He emphasised on two basic points:

- Evaluation of medical needs

- Effort to explore the viability of humanitarian space in the country for independent humanitarian action in the future for all MSF

\* BBC correspondent in Belgrade (John Simpson) got in touch with Odysseas Boudouris (coordinator of the exploratory). They discussed MSF presence in Albania, Montenegro and Skopje. Particularly, he wanted to know more regarding what is the purpose of the explo. Nothing was filmed yet, but probably some statements will be made on camera.



'Sitrep 16-18/5/1999 – Kosovo/Belgrade MSF Greece Exploratory Mission,' 18 May 1999 (in English). [D220](#)

#### Extract:

MSF EYES ONLY: (16-17/5/99)

SECURITY: Midnight of 15/5 to 16/5 the military airport (which is located 15km away from Belgrade) was bombarded. On 17/5/99 there were no bombardments in Belgrade, but NATO -according to what CNN transmitted - redrew any guarantees for the humanitarian NGOs.

PLANNING: The team has planned meetings with Yugoslavian Ministry of Health, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

and Greek Embassy in Belgrade. The scheduled tour of the NGOs with the Yugoslavian Ministry of Health in several cities in Serbia, for the assessment of Health Facilities, was postponed. The team will follow its own schedule on Tuesday 18/5/99.

MEETINGS (18/5/99):

We meet the Representative of Minister of Foreign Affairs of Yugoslavian Federation, Mr. Dragomir Lavovic. The objective of this meeting was to inform the representative of 'who we are' (MSF charter, our action in Greece and abroad, our founding and donors). It was well mentioned [stressed] that MSF intends that the aid not be given unilaterally, but to the contrary, to be used in such a way so the affected civilians of Kosovo and Serbia be covered. We emphasised the bureaucratic difficulties we faced for issuing visas and at the customs control of the drugs. Also, we concentrated on the particularities and individuality of our organisation, that indiscreetly and independently require our volunteers themselves to distribute the humanitarian aid and to be present at throughout the process of its transportation, storage and distribution. Finally, the team suggested a plan of visits in hospitals of different areas (similar to the one of WHO in cooperation with Ministry of Health, but was postponed for security reasons. Our team was invited together with ICRC by WHO in this plan of exploration and of needs).



*On the road to Pristina, we passed where a NATO air strike had killed 52 people on a bridge the previous day. There were clothes scattered about and the bridge was, of course, destroyed. We found two or three survivors at the hospital, small kids whose whole faces were burned. In Pristina, we found groups of Greek journalists and a Canadian journalist, Paul Watson, who had hidden. He was with a Serb translator. We met Régis Debray [a French writer-philosopher]. We talked about many things during the night. After 6 o'clock we couldn't leave. We stayed in the Grand Hotel in Pristina - the only one that hadn't been bombed yet. We had a meeting with the hospital director, and we unloaded all the drugs in the hospital's central pharmacy. We talked with the doctors. Odysseas with the surgeons. We spent two or three days in Pristina. Afterwards, we headed for Belgrade via Nis. We saw bridges, houses, the whole infrastructure, tobacco factories destroyed, it was truly a catastrophe. We saw destroyed houses with the family nearby. But if memory serves me, it was NATO planes that dropped the bombs. We saw bombings in open country. We also picked up a small piece of iron from the bridge and had it analysed in Athens to see if the bombs contained uranium. They didn't. Outside of Nis we met a Brazilian who was on a mission for the UN. We arrived in Belgrade. The same story as in Kosovo; we met the vice minister of health. We unloaded in the warehouse of the Belgrade hospital's central pharmacy. We talked to the doctors and then left. There were only two of us left. The plan was to go back to see what was happening in Pristina, and to order other drugs from Athens, etc.*



*When we got to the Kosovar-Yugoslavian border, the Yugoslav soldiers stopped us and asked us where we wanted to go. They said that it was very dangerous, that there were a lot of snipers, etc. Along this route, there were many burned houses. I have a photo of an entire family, around a cart, people who were fleeing. I don't know if they were Serbs or Albanians. We got to Pristina, and stayed there a week. We were at the hospital. We had a satellite telephone. Each day, I got the news. Stéphan Oberreit called me. We were friends; we had worked together in Burundi. He asked me how things were going. I wasn't all that happy to be in Pristina with the bombings, and on top of it someone was asking me why we did what we did! (Laugh).*

*At the hotel I met Bernard Guetta, a European journalist who was working for la Repubblica and who had authorisation to move about in Kosovo. With him, we hoped to get to other towns in Kosovo, Prizren, Pec, etc. to see what was happening and contact the doctors. We had no contact with NATO. The entire region was under total Serbian occupation. Serb soldiers were hiding in trees to avoid being spotted by NATO satellites. When they would see the MSF flag, they would stop us. They were hostile toward us. Up until the point where we told them we were Greek. If they saw Greek passports, they would start saying: "Yes but you know those MSF people etc. We answered that we had permission and that we wanted to go to Pec, Dakovica, etc. The KLA were in between the towns. Like guerillas, with snipers. They never stopped us. We went to Dakovica with Bernard Guetta. At the hospital, we talked with the authorities. Afterward we went to Pec. The entire Albanian market had been completely burned and razed. Régis Debray had warned us that he had seen a lot of burnt houses. At the hospital we talked with the doctors, who were all against MSF, in general. They told us how things had gone before, with the Belgian or French MSF - they only gave drugs to the Albanians, to the KLA. Afterward we went back to Pristina. Then I returned to Skopje, all alone, without the translator. It was very dangerous. I saw a completely burnt-out village, not far from Blace. And I was scared of the snipers, the Yugoslavs, the Albanians, and the KLA.*

Antonis Rigas, Logistician, MSF Greece (in French).

**Most of the leadership within the international movement felt they could no longer trust the leadership of the Greek section. Some wondered about the personal responsibility of its president, and asked that he be suspended as vice president of the International Council.**



**Email** between Miguel Angel Perez, MSF Spain President, Tine Dusauchoit, MSF Belgium President and Olivier Dechevrens, MSF Switzerland President of MSF Switzerland, 6-7 May 1999 (in French). [D221](#)

**Extract:**

-In my opinion, we have to clarify Odysseas's personal responsibility in this whole matter. If we decide to expel the Greek section, we may be condemning the entire section for the actions of a single person, who will then continue on in the international movement as a member of another section and even as vice president of the IC. It leaves the door open, in a way. In any case, I agree with the letter as it is.

Regards. MIGUEL

- I completely agree with Miguel's comments, and thank him for having drawn our attention to this.

Tine

- I called Sotiris last night (6 May) to give him this information. I told him that as Honorary President of MSFGR, and given Odysseas's absence, he should clearly communicate the gravity of the current situation to the Greek BoD [Board of Directors]. I made it clear to him that expulsion from the MSF movement was a possibility in the coming days or hours, and that all the sections were opposed to their current actions. I told him that if the Greek BoD wanted to avoid expulsion, one possibility was to dissociate themselves from Odysseas, if he continued to lead MSFGR down a dead-end street, against the will of the organisation and the Greek BoD. I also told him that I thought that the BoD was responsible enough to know what it was doing, and to consider the possible negative consequences. Then Sotiris said that MSF GR should at least be heard before being expelled, or before the IC makes any important decision against them. He thinks that if there is a teleconference between the presidents, Odysseas should be allowed to participate. (I reminded him that James and Odysseas had spoken at length about the trip, but he didn't think that was enough). Personally, I agree with that comment. Then he told me that the 'observation and assessment, but not exploratory, mission for future MSF GR action in Kosovo' was too far along to be able to stop it (which Dimitris Richter confirmed this morning). He also said that there's enormous pressure in Greece, both from the organisation and public opinion, to see MSF-GR get involved in a concrete way. People don't understand why less well-known Greek NGOs like MDM GR are there, but not MSF. He thinks that to relieve the pressure and satisfy the Greek organisation, they have no choice but to go ahead with the Kosovo 'observatory' mission.

Olivier



'MSF Greece,' **Email** exchange between Pierre Salignon, MSF France programme manager and James Orbinsky, President of MSF International, 7-10 May 1999 (in English). [D222](#)

**Extract:**

I hope you are fine. I'm not in charge of Kosovo crisis in Paris. And I only want to react here as a member of MSF (I hope you will understand).

Hello James,

I learned few hours ago that a MSF G convoy is on its way to Pristina. I would like to know what is your position about this. I don't understand where the MSF international movement is going if MSF G, in this kind of context, is starting it's own operations in the field without a clear reaction of the International Council. The Odysseas position on the conflict is 'dangerous' (it's my point of view) and will put all the MSF movement in a difficult position. It could also have consequences on our operations in neighbouring countries in which MSF is providing assistance to all Albanian 'deportees' because of the policy of ethnic cleansing of S. Milosevic. I understand the will to assess the situation in Pristina and in Yugoslavia. But it must be under specific conditions (freedom of assessment first, access to the Albanian population displaced inside Kosovo) and under a common international 'umbrella'. You said yesterday that MSF G will be excluded from the MSF movement if their convoy crosses the border. Do you have the same position today? It's clear that if there is no clear reaction to the MSF G attitude, the International movement does not exist anymore for me. But it's a personal position of one MSF member. And [...] Odysseas is still vice president of the IC...

Pierre Salignon, MSF

Thanks for your note. I have forwarded a copy of the letter I sent to all MSF section presidents, as well as the letter I sent to MSF Greece. As you can imagine - and as is right -this is occupying all my time with telephone calls, teleconferences, and creating a coherent position in the movement. I think the letters speak for themselves. I also FULLY appreciate the political implications for our humanitarian actions in the Balkans (as you point out, and with which I agree ENTIRELY). Strategically, we need to try to minimize this potential impact. I and others, including the General Directors of the Executive Committee, are doing our best to do this.

James



'Confidential,' **Email** from Stephan Oberreit, MSF France, to James Orbinsky, President of MSF International, 9 May 1999 (in English). [D223](#)

**Extract:**

I think we have two major concrete issues to deal with:

- 1- The breach of MSF general framework and unilateral decision of MSF-G to become operational (but it is not in Zambia)!
- 2- The breach of the operational framework in the Balkans

These two need to be dealt with separately. As long as they are still in the movement, pt2 needs to be addressed vis a vis what the MSF Greece team will DO & SAY in FRY & when they come out. This will to some extent determine the attitude we need to take: very firm or ready to talk & negotiate. The problem is how we can be informed independently on what they have done, said to Greek media, To some extent, I regret no one has been to Athens yet to talk with the MSF and show how the movement takes this seriously and check how much support Odysseas has in this business. There is still time to do it. Then there is the legal aspect of expelling MSF G; we have little to stand on and I suspect they will have the right to open a MSF office in Greece (govt & judicial will support THEM & not us). In terms of press, no one will understand anything about our business, and therefore what's the point. We may have to limit ourselves to damage control. I guess we need to check the Greeks out, will probably end up expelling them essentially by cutting bridges, but they will remain MSF in Greece and there will be little we can do about it as long as Odysseas & Sotiris control the association: We'll have to support the dissidence and try to regain control of the board, but that may take time and never succeed.



'Vice-Presidency of the IC,' **Email** from Tine Dusauchoit, MSF Belgium President to MSF International Council members, 9 May 1999 (in English). [D224](#)

**Extract:**

Considering the events of the last few days. Considering especially the lack of openness, transparency of Odysseas and of the Greek section (although it is not clear at this moment in time to which extent this is a personal or sectional approach). Considering the obvious non-respect of the 'esprit' of the international movement (I use this word because esprit' goes far beyond agreements, procedures and structures and I consider that what happened is far more than not respecting agreements and structures). Considering the possible far reaching consequences for the international movement. After having discussed this at the board meeting of MSF B last Friday, and having received their full support for this proposal, I call for the immediate suspension of Odysseas as Vice-President of

the IC. The IC should consider at its June meeting what needs to be done further. I would request you to send your approval or rejection of this proposition to James, and if this proposal is acceptable I suggest James informs all presidents of the IC of this proposal, which by then has become a proposal of the RC [Restricted Council].



**'Open letter** to Tine Dusauchoit and all my Friends on the International Council,' from Odysseas Boudouris, President of MSF Greece, 17 May 1999 (in French). [D225](#)

#### Extract:

I have learned, from an email forwarded to me by Sotiris (to whom it had been forwarded by Olivier) of Tine's proposal to relieve me of my position as Vice President of the IC, effective immediately. I confess that I was hurt and offended by this letter. It hurt me for one reason - the date of the letter, May 9 - in other words, at a time when our team was between Pristina and Belgrade, in a dangerous area, on a difficult mission. Precisely the mission that Tine's section has been trying to embark on for weeks, without success. Has our great international organisation become so dehumanised? Couldn't it have waited until I got back, or at least until you had heard that our team was safe? Have we become adversaries to the point of forgetting the brotherhood that constitutes precisely the 'esprit' to which Tine refers? Thanks, in any case, to Eric Dachy [Brussels programme manager], who called us with only one question: "Is everything alright? Can I help you?" Eric, our analysis of the crisis in Kosovo disagrees in many respects. But with you, I feel as though we're part of the same organisation! The letter offended me, as well. We have a responsibility - particularly a moral one - to the movement. We are supposed to represent a large organisation that can only function according to democratic rules. Dear IC Friends, are you aware that we must respect the basic rules of democratic procedure?

Tine has appointed herself prosecutor, and accuses me of violating the MSF 'esprit'. But isn't the MSF esprit to act first and foremost, on behalf of populations in danger? That is what, in all conscience, we are doing. Wasn't it necessary to explore the humanitarian needs inside of Kosovo and Serbia? Wasn't it necessary to try to assess the humanitarian space we might find? If Tine thinks not, she is at odds with her own section and the Executive Committee. She's at odds with what any sincere humanitarian might think, and ultimately with the MSF esprit. If she thinks yes, then she should congratulate us for having embodied the "MSF esprit." Tine accuses the Greek section of a lack of transparency, and of having violated procedure. Based on what? Right from the beginning of the crisis, we clearly expressed our concerns to Thierry Durand, our DirOp - up until his resignation. After that, we went to James Orbinsky and Jean-Marie Kindermans to re-establish operational contact with the other sections. We have continued to inform the concerned parties as things

go along. Should we have stopped everything, in the midst of a crisis, because Thierry Durand abandoned his post without any warning? We didn't think so. At the risk of offending those who would prefer that the big sections have a monopoly on operationality, our main concern was the situation of populations in danger.



*There's a black spot on transparency. I'm not at all sure that Odysseas, then President, played the game openly. I've learned things that show that he wanted to obscure the situation. He didn't tell the other sections that we had requested visas, and that we were going to enter Kosovo, even though he had talked to them by phone a few hours earlier. We presented them with the fait accompli, once we had entered Kosovo. When we began sending Sitreps, we were already inside. As President, Odysseas took all the responsibility. In times of crisis, countries and organisations always rally around their leader. But on top of that, I think that Odysseas was speaking out of both sides of his mouth. Since he was the only point of reference, he wasn't saying the same thing internally and to the outside. We trusted him. We thought everything was fine. And we were convinced that the other MSF sections knew, but didn't want to. We were convinced of that.*

Sotiris Papaspyropoulos, Honorary President,  
MSF Greece (in French).

**The Kosovo operations directors and programme managers from the various MSF sections agreed to pursue efforts to obtain visas for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. They also reaffirmed that any MSF intervention in Serbia and Kosovo could happen only if the criteria of freedom of assessment of needs and freedom of action were met.**



**'Intervention in Serbia and Kosovo,' Appendix to the minutes** of the Meeting of the operations directors for Kosovo, 5 May 1999 (in French). [D198](#)

#### Extract:

##### Appendix – MSF Intervention in Serbia and Kosovo

There is nothing extraordinary about the criteria defining a sufficient humanitarian space for MSF to carry out its relief mission in Kosovo. They are the same for every mission. It is clear, however, that we should be especially wary, indeed suspicious, of whether these criteria will be met, given that we are going to work in a context of conflict, with the Yugoslav leaders and the Serb military, whose crimes against humanity with regard to the Kosovar population are well-known and documented.

1) Everyone should consult the 'Principals of the Médecins Sans Frontières Movement' [*Principes de référence du mouvement Médecins Sans Frontières*], put out by the IO [IC] in February 1997.

2) In April 1999, the general directors expressed their views on the minimum conditions needed for an expedition through Belgrade: freedom of movement (no armed escort), no donations beforehand (the team arrives empty-handed), commitment to disseminate information on what we saw inside upon our return (conversely, no media communication when we're inside).

3) The goal of the assistance is to deliver aid impartially to affected populations. This guarantee is only assured by aid actors (referring here to MSF).

The necessary means to achieve this objective are:

- The unhampered assessment of needs:

\*Access to the affected areas = unhampered movement free of administrative harassment, acceptable security conditions.

\*Access to populations, without discrimination; urban and rural areas, the right to meet, speak with, and examine anyone likely to be in need, to represent the needs of his or her community, or to direct MSF toward populations in need.

\*Assessment is done on a community-by-community basis, according to each one's particular history. In FRY there's no question of standardising the victims. Currently, inside the FRY the victims are primarily:

- The Albanian population remaining in the towns and villages, restricted in their movement and freedom, having seen part of its community expelled and/or mistreated;

- The Albanian population that has been displaced and "stuck" in various pockets (KLINA, for example);

- The so-called Serbian' component of the prior population of Kosovo, living under NATO air strikes.

The MSF assessment should take into account the various populations, histories, needs and suffering.

The Belgian and Swiss boards of directors wondered about the policies for welcoming Kosovar refugees in their countries.



'Minutes from the MSF Belgium Board of Directors Meeting,' April 1999 (in French). **D182**

#### Extract:

Pascal [Meus] then asks how Kosovar refugees are managed in Belgium. Vincent [Janssens] emphasised that this effort is run entirely by the Belgian projects and the cell concerned. The common factors are status and protection (registration, status, information). Our action is not intended to help them obtain documents, because this is the mission of other, better equipped NGOs. On the other hand, we direct people who don't have the necessary information. We also monitor the level of protection of

refugees at the Albanian border (Stef De Wolf). Use of this study will depend on how the situation evolves. The cell responsible for the host country monitors the Kosovars in that country. We should take a position on the situation of refugees in Albania, and whether we accept that Albania is acting as a waiting room for the refugees, and whether we also accept the EU's host policy. As for the rest, the situations in Kosovo and the host countries other than Albania are very different.



'Minutes from the MSF Switzerland Board of Directors Meeting,' 7 May 1999 (in French). **D226**

#### Extract:

IV. Swiss asylum policy – Kosovars.

The Swiss asylum policy toward Kosovars seems 'inhuman, parents are separated from children...' It seems like they're doing everything they can to make sure the refugees don't regain their dignity. In addition, by establishing strict quotas, the current Swiss policy pushes the refugees underground. So it is proposed that MSF not wait to be the 'fifth wheel' in order to take action. On the contrary, the BoD asks that the organisation be proactive on this issue. They would like MSF to get in contact and establish ties with the various organisations active in coordinating refugee aid in Switzerland. They also want MSF Switzerland to be able to position itself with other organisations regarding the Swiss asylum policy, if necessary.

**According to witness accounts gathered by the press and the UNHCR, the residents of Prizren, at first forced to leave town by Serbian forces, were then being forced to stay while it was bombed. The camp at Kukës, in Albania, was getting overcrowded, and the UNHCR was considering transferring the refugees. The Greek government was opposed to bringing Kosovar refugees to southern Albania, home to a significant Greek minority.**



\*'Serb Police Prevent Prizren Residents from Fleeing (Witness Accounts),' Selim Yassin, **AFP** (France), Morina, Albania, 2 May 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

On Sunday, Serb police were choosing which refugees were allowed to leave Kosovo, preventing those native to Prizren from fleeing, after having first facilitated their departure by making buses available to them, according to corroborating accounts collected by the **AFP** at the Albanian border post of Morina (north). UN High

Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) representatives on the scene confirmed having collected witness accounts to the same effect [...] According to the accounts of those arriving, the selection was initially being done at the bus station in Prizren, a city of 50,000 residents in southern Kosovo, where police were said to have attacked residents, rushing to get on buses to leave, using rifle butts. Later, at a roadblock in Zhur, located 6 km from the Albanian border, the police confiscated the refugees' identification papers. Those not allowed to pass the roadblock had to walk the 20 km back to Prizren; the others also had to continue on foot to the Albanian border. [...]

The residents of Prizren - the second largest city in Kosovo - had begun fleeing on Thursday, when Serbian soldiers spread out through the city after NATO bombed one of their barracks. The Kosovars that have arrived since Thursday - city-dwellers, for the most part - have made the situation even more difficult in the city and region of Kukes (population 25,000), already sagging under the load of more than 100,000 refugees. Only 25,000 of them were received in camps, according to UNHCR; the others camped under tarpaulins in carts, or were housed in public buildings or in people's homes, not always for free. [...] Because the infrastructure in this border region is inadequate, and for security reasons UNHCR wants to evacuate the refugees from this area.



'Athens Opposed to Sending Kosovar Albanians to Southern Albania,' **AFP** (France), Athens, 6 May 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

Greece claimed, on Thursday, that it had put an end to Albanian government plans to send refugees, from Kosovo to southern Albania, home to a significant ethnic Greek minority. Government spokesman Dimitris Reppas indicated Thursday in Athens that the OSCE representative in Tirana had been approached for that purpose nearly ten days ago. "Thanks to OSCE intervention, the Greek government has succeeded in blocking the Albanian plan," declared Mr Reppas. This clarification was made after Dennis McNamara, UN High Commissioner for Refugees' Special Envoy to the former Yugoslavia, had declared on Wednesday in Skopje, that several thousand Kosovar refugees that had been settled in Macedonia would be able to leave in the coming days for the Korça region (southeastern Albania), after the opening of a humanitarian corridor intended to relieve Macedonia of the large influx of refugees. Greek Prime Minister Costas Simitis had declared to Parliament on 31 March that the Albanian leaders had reassured him about the fate of the Greek minority in southern Albania, where Albanian refugees from Kosovo were pouring in. "They assured me that everything possible has been done to protect the rights of the Greek minority," he emphasised.

**On 6 May 1999, members of the G8 meeting in Bonn; adopted seven general principles for solution of the conflict, including withdrawal of Serb forces from Kosovo, deployment of an international force, and repatriation of the refugees. The Yugoslav government agreed to allow a United Nations humanitarian assessment mission on its soil. On 10 May 1999, it announced the start of withdrawal of its troops from Kosovo. NATO air strikes continued, however. UNHCR declared that since 25 March 1999, half of the population of Kosovo had been driven from the province, and launched an appeal for funding.**



'Outline for a Kosovo Peace Accord – Focus on UN Security Council Gives Legal Framework for Deal,' Joseph Fitchett, **International Herald Tribune** (Europe), Paris, 7 May 1999 (in English). **D227**

#### Extract:

"Think of the G8 accord as a rehearsal for a Security Council agreement," an official at NATO headquarters said Thursday, characterizing the agreement reached in Bonn as a stepping-stone that could smooth the way to settle the war over Kosovo. Implicitly, the accord, announced by foreign ministers of eight governments - six NATO countries plus Japan and Russia - supports the alliance's continuing air war until Belgrade complies with international demands. Significantly, the plan did not include any reference to agreement or consent by Slobodan Milosevic, the Yugoslav President. Instead, it called for a United Nations Security Council resolution demanding Serbian concessions in Kosovo that correspond to NATO's declared aims in the conflict. If the proposal is eventually adopted by the council, it would provide international legitimacy for a post-war Kosovo along the lines sought by the United States and its European allies. [...]

The diplomatic endgame foreshadowed in the communiqué, besides providing for peace plan that could be imposed against the wishes of a sovereign state, would also guarantee - as the Russians have sought - that no borders would change. Serbia would not lose official sovereignty over Kosovo, and interim autonomy - not independence - would be accorded to the rebel province. In that sense, the Bonn agreement contained no new concessions that seemed likely to tempt Mr. Milosevic into substantial political movement. [...] But in a potentially troubling concession apparently for negotiating expediency, was the explicit mention that NATO should provide the core of what was called an international security presence in post-war Kosovo.

In response to questions, Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer of Germany said that the force would have to be "military" - another word not used in the statement. And Foreign Secretary Robin Cook of Britain and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright approached the microphone uninvited to insist that, in practical terms, only a NATO force, including US troops, could provide enough reassurance for

Kosovar refugees to risk returning home.[...] On a major point, it hardened Western conditions about "an interim administration for Kosovo to be decided by the Security Council" - implying curtailment, perhaps only temporary but severe, of Serbian sovereignty.



*'Belgrade Agrees to UN Humanitarian Mission,' AFP (France), New York (United Nations), 7 May 1999 (in French).*

#### Extract:

The Yugoslav government agreed on Thursday to a United Nations humanitarian assessment mission on its soil, announced a UN spokesman in New York. At UN headquarters that day, the UN coordinator for humanitarian affairs, Brazilian Sergio Vieira de Mello, who expects to lead the mission consisting of representatives from a dozen specialized UN agencies, met with Yugoslav Chargé d'Affaires Vladislav Jovanovic, who informed him of his government's agreement. [...] According to officials in New York, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan wrote to inform NATO of Belgrade's decision on Thursday. The same officials added that Mr. Annan had not asked NATO to halt the bombing of Yugoslavia. [...] According to western diplomats, Belgrade's agreement to allow the mission did not necessarily indicate a new opening up on the part of Yugoslav authorities following Thursday's G8 agreement on the general principles of a political solution to the Kosovo conflict. The same sources believed that Belgrade would find it in their interest to have a UN mission that, in the course of its inspection, would see the destruction caused by NATO bombing since 24 March.



*'Kosovo Emptied of Half its Population,' Le Monde (France), 12 May 1999, (in French). D228*

#### Extract:

Wednesday, 12 May, the war in Kosovo is entering its eighth week; diplomatic negotiations are intensifying, and Belgrade announced, on Monday, a partial and unverified withdrawal of Serb forces from Kosovo. [...] According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 900,000 Kosovar Albanians - or half the population of Kosovo - has been deported to neighboring countries since 25 March. Westerners greeted with skepticism Belgrade's announcement that it was beginning to withdraw its troops from Kosovo. The commander-in-chief of the Yugoslav army indicated, in a communiqué, that he had begun to withdraw "some army and police units." He justified this measure by suggesting that "operations against the so-called KLA [Kosovo Liberation Army] are over." Without saying whether they were yet in a position to verify that the withdrawal was indeed a reality, the allies offered a reminder that such a gesture would not be enough. They demanded a complete withdrawal of Serb forces from the province.

## AGAIN, MSF INSISTS ON ASSISTANCE AND PROTECTION

**Like the other humanitarian organisations, MSF expressed to the press its concern over the disastrous health situation in refugee camps in northern Albania. UNHCR began to transfer people from these camps, and those in Macedonia, to southern Albania. The MSF coordinator in Macedonia insisted on a stronger warning regarding the dangers faced by Kosovar refugees in NATO-run camps. The MSF USA programme director questioned MSF's decision not to use UNHCR funds to finance operations for Kosovo refugees.**



*'With 910,000 Kosovo Refugees, Resources Still Inadequate,' Le Monde (France), 12 May 1999 (in French). D229*

#### Extract:

Rejecting China's demand, backed by Russia, for a halt to the bombing, and refusing to give Belgrade - which announced a partial withdrawal of its troops from Kosovo - the slightest benefit of the doubt, on Wednesday, 12 May the NATO alliance continued its air strikes against Yugoslavia. NATO indicated that at the moment it had no evidence of any withdrawal of Serb forces from Kosovo. According to NATO, there was no evidence, that the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) had been defeated, as claimed by Belgrade to explain its "partial withdrawal." The OSCE announced that thirty KLA fighters were wounded at the border between Albania and Kosovo during a Yugoslav fighter plane attack.

More than three thousand Kosovar refugees, including several with gunshot wounds, arrived Monday at the northern Albanian border post of Morina. The UN High Commissioner for refugees launched an appeal Tuesday in Geneva to remedy the lack of funding for its efforts to help the 750,000 Kosovar refugees in surrounding countries. On Tuesday, UNHCR estimated the total number of refugees from Kosovo since the start of the conflict in March 1998, at 910,000-740,000 of them since NATO air strikes began on March 24.



*'Growing Concern Over the Health Situation in Refugee Camps,' Stuart Wallace, AFP (France), Tirana, 11 May 1999 (in French).*

#### Extract:

According to officials from humanitarian agencies, numerous refugee camps in Albania, overwhelmed by new arrivals from Kosovo, are faced with serious sanitation problems that could turn disastrous this summer. "The

sanitation problem is one of our main concerns right now, we are overwhelmed," declared Melita Sunjic, spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Tirana. "We expect an increase in disease cases during the summer months, some camps are packed, and many of them have only basic sanitation facilities," she added. The situation is particularly difficult in refugee camps in northern Albania, where some 15,000 new refugees from Kosovo arrived last weekend. Although efforts are being made to relocate the refugees in the southern part of the country, where conditions for receiving them are better - UNHCR began a campaign for this purpose Tuesday in Kukes - progress to this point has been slow.

Pressure on the refugee camps in southern Albania will also increase if the transfer of nearly 60,000 refugees currently in neighboring Macedonia takes place as expected. There are currently 423,000 refugees in Albania, 241,000 in Macedonia, 63,000 in Montenegro, and 18,000 in Bosnia-Herzegovina. "Water is only available a few hours a day, and in some camps there's no water at all, or it's polluted. We are expecting an increase in skin and eye diseases, typhus, respiratory illnesses, and even cholera," declared Nadine de Lamotte, Medical Coordinator for Médecins Sans Frontières. Preventive measures have already been taken: antibiotics and drugs for cholera have been sent to the camps, where a vaccination campaign was launched by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organisation (WHO). These precautions cannot, however, completely stop diseases and their deadly consequences, according to humanitarian workers. [...] According to representatives of humanitarian organisations, the summer heat, which can reach 40°C [104°F], added to the already severe sanitation problems (lack of water, insufficient latrines), is going to make the situation considerably worse.



'Refugees Moving?' **Email** from Samantha Bolton MSF International Communication Coordinator in Albania, 11 May 1999 (in English). [D230](#)

**Extract:**

Dear all;  
 Just to let you know that UNHCR today started its information campaign to get the refugees to move south: it was not full on - probably because there isn't the capacity to really move them all even if they did decide to go - roads are terrible - not enough buses - no clarity where they are going etc. MSF position is that MSF supports [UN]HCR and Albanian govt decision to relocate refugees to Central and South Albania on a voluntary basis, but is concerned that there is not enough clear information (simply not available - not even to NGOs) about what is happening with the refugees - type of accommodation - availability - location - bus dept times - will there be a roof over their heads of comparable standard to the camps - will they be in camps; collective centres or families - etc - very simple questions.

The coordination issue is not as simple as it could be as there are bilateral agreements between govts armies and the local authorities as well as all the NGO efforts. The leadership in the camps is being taken more by the governments with the Albanian govt and NGOs with local authorities, etc. rather than by the UNHCR. [...]

Basically mostly Italians, French, US and UK around - have not seen any Germans - also seems there is a Belgian RTBF radio reporter though none of the journalists knew her name nor where she was saying - although team say she came round to the office already - so will keep an eye out. There are morning UNHCR briefings, but not all journos turn up. Journos trying to leave as many have been here for at least three weeks though BBC; Italians and French are still planning to be in here for a couple more weeks. [...] Will send you write up - quotes etc - from tobacco factory in Schrode - that is all for now.

Vincent Janssen, Alex Parisel and Christopher Head of Mission Albania are up here so team will be sitting down tomorrow to go clarify main issues of concern etc.  
 xx sb



'Proposed Strategy - Kosovo Refugee Crisis,' **Email** from Michiel Hofman, MSF Holland coordinator to all executive directors and all directors of operations, all sections, 14 May 1999 (in English). [D231](#)

Re: Kosovo lobbying/témoignage

Dear all,

Over the past few weeks, all of us have been too busy dealing with the immediate response to the Kosovo refugee crisis to spend time reflecting on what has been happening, and what may be in the pipeline for the refugees in the months to come. MSF Tirana and we in Skopje think that it is really important for MSF to clarify in our own minds, among other things:

- \* What it really means to work in NATO's shadow and what it may hold in stock for the future of independent humanitarian aid
- \* What the most immediate threats are to the refugees and what should be done
- \* What is acceptable and what is not with regard to the future 'pressured' repatriation programme into Kosovo

If we could agree that we share those major concerns, we could try and work together to shift the current terms of the humanitarian agenda (or at least not leave the field open to NATO alone). Though there are some differences in emphasis between Albania and Macedonia, our overall concerns are:

\*There are considerable differences in access to assistance and protection between different groups of refugees within each country, and across the region. Refugees in the community, most of whom are still unregistered, are extremely vulnerable. MSF has first-hand evidence that the aid is not reaching a sizeable proportion of the refu-

gees in Albania (see Epicentre report).

\*Political promises have been made to the refugees that NATO would soon ensure their safe return. Growing international acceptance of a 'pressured return' to Kosovo is extremely worrying and should be resisted. Even UNHCR seems to believe it will be inevitable.

\*In all the ongoing programmes of refugee relocation and transfer (from Macedonia to Albania, and within Albania itself) the refugees are not receiving full and accurate information about their future living conditions and their long-term status and rights. What no one has said yet is that the refugees who choose not to move are entitled to adequate standards of protection and care. There is evidence (at least in Macedonia) that the denial of such provisions (or simply really shitty conditions, coupled with misinformation on what is available in Albania) will be used as an incentive to relocate.

\*NATO forces have been widely portrayed as the driving force behind humanitarian efforts in the region. Not only does the humanitarian role played by one of the parties to the conflict a serious threat to the necessary impartiality and neutrality of humanitarian efforts here and elsewhere, but NATO has also proven to be less than effective in meeting its stated humanitarian aims when not effectively coordinated by a humanitarian agency with the appropriate mandate and expertise, such as UNHCR. (We have evidence in Macedonia of NATO contingents providing inappropriate aid - do you have similar stories in Albania?). It is crucial to the effectiveness and impartiality of the humanitarian effort that donor governments meet UNHCR's urgent financial needs and allow it to fulfil its independent protection role.

Note: For your information, a task force is being set up jointly by UNHCR, the EU and OFDA to plan for winterisation and the refugees' return to Kosovo (McNamara's initiative). NATO is being drawn into the plan as the main provider of security and logistical support. Operation Glorious Return? (on this, see Joelle Tanguy's note on her meeting with the US State Dpt)

\* The political emphasis on the imminent return of the refugees to Kosovo may hold back key preparedness programmes in host countries, such as winterisation.

#### Next steps

1. For MSF directors to discuss and endorse the concerns above and clearly brief the whole MSF network.
2. Document the practical evidence of the issues listed above to support témoignage activities (this evidence exists; it just needs to be written and edited in a suitable format).
3. Liaise with UNHCR at the highest level to assure them of MSF's support. Campaign for support for UNHCR's protection and coordination role.
4. Put pressure on other NGOs and major donors to discuss the real threats to humanitarian principles posed by the growing involvement of the military. We have to break the myth (widely held within NGOs) that NATO is best because it has the biggest trucks. We must explain why humanitarian aid is worthless if not independent. [...]
5. Conduct a press campaign on the same issue

6. Throughout, raise awareness in a systematic way of the fact that MSF is not NATO funded, and why (it is still not widely known - so we are just another NGO as far as many governments and media are concerned).

#### Issues for future consideration

1. As MSF Tirana rightly points out, all the refugees one speaks to say that the only thing they want to do is go back as soon as possible, so our concerns over 'pressured return' may sound unnecessarily paranoid. However, the country they want to return to will have changed beyond recognition, and there is no guarantee yet that all refugees will be able to return to their former homes, or even their region of origin, in safety. Refugee protection is there for a reason.

2. MSF Tirana also makes a good tactical point: when making a strong case for civilian leadership of humanitarian efforts, we must be aware of the less than perfect record of the 125 or so NGOs now swarming around Albania achieving very little of substance.

Looking forward to your comments.

All the best,  
Michiel Hofman



'UNHCR and Congress,' **Email exchange** between Alex Parisel, MSF Belgium Executive Director and Antoine Gérard, MSF USA Programme Director, 15 May 1999 (in English). [D232](#)

#### Extract:

I reconfirm there is no UNHCR money involved in operations involving the Kosovo refugees. There is indeed a camp handed over by UNHCR to MSF (there is a one page document signed between MSF and UNHCR to confirm this, nothing more). The next camp in Fier is for the moment, a MSF camp on private funding with no UNHCR involvement, direct deal between MSF and the local authorities. As from my meetings in Albania, it is not really recommended to take UNHCR money but on the other hand it makes it really difficult for our teams to fight for operational space since UNHCR is dealing major issues at top level with the Albanian Gvt and NATO. Therefore the only solution for MSF, without UNHCR money (and without a real memorandum of understanding) is to be largely operational and to occupy as much space as possible, based on our own strengths.

This need of operability is reinforced by the fact that Mushu, representing UNHCR in Albania will, if he finds the opportunity, stab us in the back, especially if he feels we are weak. This impression comes from a long meeting Christopher, Vincent and myself had with him in Albania. It seems the anger from the early declarations in Macedonia is still very much present, even at the level of McNamara. On a more local basis, as in Kukes, relations are good, and following a meeting with their representative, MSF could at that level, develop a rather coherent



partnership... but the global logic will come from Tirana.  
Alex

Antoine's reply:

- We have been vocal to reinforce the role of UNHCR in this crisis, (Coordination and Operations)
- We would like to see less leadership from Gov., especially by Humanitarian Gov Agencies (i.e. OFDA)
- By not taking UNHCR money we are weakening the UN agencies and develop the competitive spirit by gaining camps as the Gov. Humanitarian Agencies are doing.
- Nations like Japan have given the major contribution to UNHCR for the Kosovo Emergency, The Swiss Gov. (Do you associate Japan with the NATO strategy?). I don't see, so far, our logic to ignore UNHCR funds and the same time advocating for more coherence and leadership by UNHCR. We are sending signs here that UNHCR has been used by the funding countries (NATO and others) as a political tool in this crisis. Unfortunately, I have no field perspective regarding this crisis and I might miss some realities. It might be the reason I have problem to second your position. "Therefore the only solution for MSF, without UNHCR money (and without a real memorandum of understanding) is to be largely operational and to occupy as much space as possible, based on our own strengths."

Thanks to develop.

Antoine

**In the United States, MSF was involved in the debate over the respective roles of politics, the military, and humanitarianism in the Kosovo crisis. An article appeared in the weekly Newsweek, stated that NATO alone was in a position to respond to the needs of the refugees, and that humanitarian organisations, including MSF, were acting merely as subcontractors. Further, a call for ground troops was signed by a group of political and media personalities. Three international NGO groups including InterAction, a US network of which MSF USA is a member - issued a press release asking the United Nations to negotiate immediate access to Kosovo.**



'Few Issues of Debate: Balkan Crisis,' Email from Antoine Gérard, MSF USA Programme Director to MSF UK and MSF France executive directors, operations directors, programme managers and MSF team in Macedonia, 7 May 1999 (in English). [D233](#)

Few things which are worrying me here in the United States of America and specifically towards the behaviour of my US NGO colleagues. Brian Atwood, the USAID Administrator is on his way next week to Macedonia, at some point it is also said that the first Lady (Hillary) will come. For gleaning some ideas and to give the feel-

ing to the US NGOs that they are heard and important in this crisis, he decided to meet the CEO of some of them (Joelle will go to that meeting this Tuesday)..Few points are going to be debated by the US NGO; one in particular which is especially worrying me and, which is 'naively' carried by the NGO community with a lot of conviction and good will is the Repatriation of the Kosovars to Kosovo. My US Colleagues, well-brainwashed by reading the NY Times and the Washington Post on a daily basis, are convinced that tomorrow's negotiations are set and after tomorrow the Kosovars are back to their lovely, peaceful Kosovo. Thinking to be so powerful and not guided at all by the specific agenda of the US State Department and the US Department of Defence, my US Colleagues would like to share with Brian Atwood the criteria for a correct repatriation. The idea that the NGOs, which may receive US\$ for doing what ever they want (Ref: Bosnia and the reconstruction) is secondary. To that I have few comments and remarks:

1/ Contrarily, should we not send the message to the USAID Administrator that the situation in the camps is still terrible, and how much we are worried about the present future months of this refugee population? And we should not necessary think so much about repatriation today; we should not lie to the refugees (who were deported by force). We have enough experience and past experience to say that such a dramatic situation is not solved in few months.

2/ If any repatriation plan is on the table, can we be sure that TODAY everything is being done by UNHCR in order to give a chance and the legal tools for the refugee population to cross back the borders with the correct UNHCR papers? I am afraid that for sure the Serbian authorities will be involved in the process of repatriation and will control who is coming back to Kosovo. Therefore, it does reinforce what we have been saying before; that registration is essential. I believe that a NATO refugee identification card will not be so helpful in entering Kosovo for a refugee who has been deported and stripped of his (or her) ID papers.

3/ The LAST BUT NOT LEAST side effect

By disseminating the news of a possible future return of the refugees in Kosovo in the coming weeks (or months) and by setting resettlement plans within Kosovo, we will participate (again and again, this crisis has shown how much we have been used and reduced to a puppet role) in this insidious process of spreading wrong messages to the refugees. We can question ourselves in this process, launched by the US State Department (setting up meetings with this specific NGO agenda) and echoed by the US NGOs and media, about the side effects in the coming 'peace negotiations'.

The emotionally vulnerable population of refugees, under the influence of NATO and assisted by brainwashed US NGO staff, will be totally pleased to know that 'we' (US NGOs) have prepared their return and set a list of crite-

ria for their resettlement within Kosovo. It will create a massive pressure on the negotiation and will minimize the role and the re-vindication of any political parties representing the interests of the Kosovars. It facilitates the work of the Western negotiators to find a minimum platform of understanding with the Serbian leadership. We should be extremely vigilant concerning any request and any ideas of governments supporting NATO; the US is the first but not the only.



*'The Death of a Good Idea - Kosovo is Teaching Relief Workers a Bitter Lesson: There are No Humanitarian Solutions to Humanitarian Problems,'* David Rieff, **Newsweek** (USA), 10 May 1999 (in English).

#### Extract:

The Kosovo crisis demonstrates that we were kidding ourselves. It is one thing to insist that humanitarians want to do good. It is another to believe that they have either the resources or the power to do so. As one American aid worker in Albania told me recently, "you can't defeat ethnic fascism of Milosević's stripe with humanitarian aid. You have to do it with military force." And the problem goes beyond the truth that groups like Doctors Without Borders and the International Rescue Committee are not soldiers. Once the shooting started in Yugoslavia and the refugee exodus began, the aid agencies found that all their traditional norms of neutrality and impartiality, like their desire to be able to move across front lines, had been blown to pieces.

It was NATO that took care of the refugees in Albania and Macedonia. Only a military organisation had the money, the logistical capability and the political muscle to build camps for hundreds of thousands. If NATO were to withdraw from the camps in Macedonia, where the Kosovar refugees are hated by the ethnic Macedonian majority, a new catastrophe would be all but a certainty. The relief agencies, which seemed so essential only a decade ago, have functioned more like subcontractors in this crisis - a trend that is only likely to accelerate as private companies like Brown & Root and Bouygues bid for contracts to build and maintain camps the way they bid for other construction projects.

Only NATO, and certainly not the relief agencies, can resolve the worsening refugee crisis - one that will grow worse so long as Kosovo remains in the hands of Milosević's thugs. Relief agencies would have to negotiate access with the very murders that caused the disaster. The bitter lesson of Kosovo is that there are no humanitarian solutions to humanitarian problems. In future disasters the central role will be played by private companies that have the expertise and governments that have the power.



*'Letters to the Editor,'* **Newsweek**, MSF USA, 17 May 1999 (in English). [D234](#)

In "The Death of a Good Idea" (May 10, 1999) commentator David Rieff writes, "The bitter lesson of Kosovo is that there are no humanitarian solutions to humanitarian problems." But contrary to Rieff's assertion that Kosovo is teaching aid agencies about the limits of humanitarianism, Doctors Without Borders has always known that the presence of medical aid is not enough to stop the forces of oppression. Solutions to man-made humanitarian crises are always political, never humanitarian. Realizing this nearly 30 years ago, Doctors Without Borders helped usher in an era of witnessing and advocacy combined with the provision of aid. During the war in Bosnia, for example, our doctors provided what assistance they could to the victims of the conflict, all the while denouncing the lack of international protection for those who faced the massacres.

Rieff is wrong in concluding that only military powers like NATO can now provide effective humanitarian aid. The "humanitarian" goals of NATO's war on Yugoslavia and subsequent assistance to refugees should not be confused with the independent human-to-human aid provided by groups like Doctors Without Borders. NATO's eagerness to provide relief to Kosovar refugees, often to the point of muscling independent aid agencies to the wayside, must be seen as a part of an insidious trend toward the involvement of military bodies in humanitarian work. In embracing the cause of the refugees, NATO is overstepping its military mandate, and betraying its leaders' lack of political solutions to the original problems facing the Kosovar population.

Contrary to Rieff, aid is working successfully around the globe, but usually takes place away from television cameras. Even today, more than half of the Kosovar refugees have taken shelter in private homes, where only private agencies are reaching them. Most of the world's current war victims - from Sudan to Sri Lanka - depend on impartial humanitarian aid for their survival.




*'Only Ground Troops Will End Ethnic Cleansing in Kosovo,'* **Petition** from the Balkan Action Council, 13 May 1999 (in English). [D235](#)

#### Extract:

Dear President Clinton,  
Mr. President, bombing alone will not stop Slobodan Milosević's campaign of murder, rape, plunder and forced deportation. Milosević must not be allowed to negotiate a "compromise" that rewards his campaign of terror. NATO ground troops combined with air strikes are needed to end the killing of Kosovars, stop the systematic destruction of their homes and towns, prevent the deportation of

more refugees, and return peace to south-eastern Europe. Your leadership is crucial for achieving NATO victory. We believe the following goals are essential:

- Saving the lives of the nearly one million Kosovars now facing death from starvation and murder within Kosovo.
- Removal of all Serbian forces from Kosovo.
- Return of all refugees to their homes to begin the rebuilding process.
- Establishment of a NATO-safeguarded international protectorate for Kosovo.
- Indictment of Milosevic and all other Serbian officials responsible for war crimes in Kosovo.

 I remember quite well having argued with David Rieff [journalist] when he returned from the Macedonian border, where he had met with James Orbinsky. He had told him: "Your statements don't go far enough, you should say more what you think should be done, etc. The criticism that some, like us, were making was: "MSF speaks out on the violence against villages in Kosovo, but offers no recommendations." In Anglo-Saxon culture, this is hard to comprehend: "You come with your témoignage, so what? What do you think should be done? And, MSF always says: we don't say what should be done. That's your responsibility, not ours.'" And later, if they don't do anything, we say to them: "You're not doing anything. The ambiguity of this is that in speaking out, we are encouraging military intervention; somewhere in there we're talking about protection, intervention. Our discourse is ambiguous - you won't find a single press conference where MSF clearly says that. But the pressure we exert on governments is a pressure to intervene. Saying: "This is happening, and Clinton is doing nothing"" is the same as saying: "Clinton should send troops."

Since Somalia, and Kurdistan, we're still hesitant to talk about intervention, but in reality I think we're very ambiguous. Somewhere, even if we don't say it explicitly, it is heard as such. I say that we humanitarians - by demanding government intervention in the Kosovo crisis without saying clearly that the parameters of an intervention are as important as the fact that there be an intervention - have caused a more acute humanitarian crisis. The reality is that - as a result of an intervention designed to limit the risk to participants - —we ended up setting off an accelerated process of deportation from Kosovo. That's my current analysis of the intervention. But at first, we were not very conscious of having contributed to that. It's not so clear when it's happening.

[...], Executive Director, MSF USA (in French).

**In its 12 May 1999 edition, the French daily Le Monde published a long article on the mass exodus of Kosovars, based on witness accounts collected by**

**UNHCR, FIDH, Human Rights Watch and MSF. The following day, Le Monde published an open letter from the writer-philosopher Régis Debray, who had just returned from Kosovo, to the French president. In it, he questioned France's decision to support NATO bombing, and expressed doubts about the scope of atrocities attributed to Serb forces. He suggested verifying his statements with the doctors from MSF Greece.**

**In the 15 May 1999 edition of the French daily Libération, Rony Brauman, Research Director of the MSF France Foundation, responded that Debray was confusing the tormenter and the victim, and claimed that the MSF Greece doctors were pro-Serbian. The General Secretary of the International Office reminded movement leaders that, despite the doubts expressed by the Greek section's exploratory mission on the reality of ethnic cleansing, MSF still stood by the conclusions of its own report qualifying the violence against the Kosovars as a crime against humanity.**



'Ethnic Purification in Kosovo – Seven Weeks of Mass Exodus in Kosovo,' Marie Jégo, **Le Monde** (France) 12 May 1999 (in French). [D236](#)

#### **Extract:**

900,000 Albanians have fled Kosovo since the start of ethnic purification by the Serbs, and several hundred thousand are still roaming within the country's borders. Their accounts, validated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Federation for Human Rights [FIDH] and the humanitarian organisations, confirm the intention to deport the population and destroy civil registries, land registries, and property. They attest to executions, rapes and practices that qualify as 'crimes against humanity'. [...] The mass exodus of Albanians from Kosovo began on March 27 and 28, four days after the first NATO air raids on Serbia. Since March 25, cities have been emptied – Prizren and Dakovica in the southwest, Pec and Istok in the west – following a carefully executed campaign of forced expulsions by the police, paramilitaries, and the Yugoslav army. "On Saturday, March 27, the police showed up at my house and ordered us to leave: "You have to leave if you don't want to be shot. I went to the city center [this was in Istok, a city in western Kosovo]. The houses had been looted by the gypsies and then burned down by the police. The OSCE house [Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which had deployed 1,400 verifiers on the ground in the fall of 1998] had been burned," a 44-year-old woman who had fled from Istok with her father and five children to Rozaje, Montenegro, told Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). [...] In fact, the only information on the situation inside the province, and on the scale of exactions committed by Milosevic's soldiers, comes from refugees in Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro. Their accounts have been widely published by the world press. Several NGOs have recently set out to meticulously collect and compare the refugee accounts—which should silence those who deny,

in Belgrade and elsewhere, that ethnic cleansing ever took place. "We cannot speak of ethnic purification in Kosovo," Igor Ivanov, the Russian Foreign Affairs Minister had said, while in Madrid on April 15. It is "the entire population of Kosovo that is suffering. [...] It is not just the Albanians who are fleeing, but also the Serbs," he told a Spanish radio station. Médecins Sans Frontières and Human Rights Watch, as well as the OSCE and the FIDH – in partnership with Médecins du Monde – drafted reports. These reports – especially that of FIDH, which sets out to give a legal qualification to these crimes – will be sent, in part, to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. According to FIDH, these assassinations, deportations, and persecutions, "planned, considered, and conducted in a methodical and systematic fashion," qualify as crimes against humanity, "as provided in Article 5 of the ICT statutes."

[...] MSF teams operating in the three adjacent countries (Montenegro, Albania, and Kosovo) have collected and validated the accounts of 639 people forced out of forty-three towns in Kosovo (that is, eight regions: Dakovica, Drenica, Mitrovica, Oraovac, Klina, Prizren, Istok and Pec, Pristina) between March 25 and April 16. "The main cause of population movements is deportation," reads the report's first conclusion, which continues: "In the vast majority of cases, the military objective is to deport the entire population of a given area. The villages are emptied by force and terror. On the other side of the border groups of displaced representing entire families, neighbourhoods and villages are to be found." Proof of the enforced character of the deportations? "Soldiers, police, and armed paramilitary control the convoy of deportees all along the route. These people are forced to take a particular route... they cannot stray from the route without risk." According to MSF, deportee convoys were sometimes "forced to make long detours instead of taking the shortest route." Subject to "contradictory orders," after having been chased away once, they were told "to go back and to return to their homes where they were attacked once again." [...] At the moment of expulsion, "the men are often separated from the women." A 28-year-old man from the Klina region (emptied of its residents between March 25 and April 12), recounts: "Police entered our house the 28<sup>th</sup> of March and told us to go to Albania. Around 3,000 people were gathered in the streets. On the road, we were stopped by police and were told to keep our hands in the air for quite a long time. The police then separated men over 16 from the rest of the group. They took us somewhere and then told us to get undressed and to turn to face the manned machine-guns. We stayed there, in the rain, for two hours. Some snipers targeted several men in the group."

[...] An epidemiological survey conducted by MSF in mid-April among the Kosovar refugees in Rozaje, Montenegro to assess the impact of atrocities against the civilian population showed an overall distribution by person and by sex that was 'normal'. However, "the figure for males in the 15 to 55 age group is under-represented. This may indicate that a proportion [13%, according to the report] of men have stayed on to fight, or are dead," the survey concludes. [...] While the massacres don't appear to

qualify as systematic, men, women and children were killed or injured during grenade attacks on their houses, others were killed as their possessions were being stolen, and still others were victims of police shooting them for not obeying quickly enough, or if they resisted the expulsion order. Finally, anyone likely to "slow the deportations (the handicapped, elderly, or invalids) were executed or left behind in Kosovo." In almost all cases, the witness accounts mention that the violence was committed by police and masked paramilitaries, among whom many witnesses say they recognised "Serb neighbors or local police."



'Letter from a Traveler to the President of the Republic,' Régis Debray, *Le Monde* (France), 13 May 1999 (in French). [D237](#)

#### Extract:

Having just returned from Macedonia, Serbia, and Kosovo, I feel it's my duty to share my impressions with you: I'm afraid, Mr President, that we're on the wrong track. [...] Don't think I am biased. I have spent the past week in Macedonia, witnessed the arrival of the refugees, and listened to their stories. Like many others, I was deeply moved by them. I wanted, at all costs, to go see 'from the other side' to see how such a crime was possible. As I distrust Intourist-type trips, or traveling as a journalist by bus, I asked the Serbian authorities for my own translator, my own vehicle, and the freedom to go and talk to whomever I pleased. Agreement respected. Was the interpreter important? Yes. Because I realized, to my great displeasure – but what else can you do? – that in Macedonia and Albania one can, unwisely, put oneself in the hands of the locals who, KLA sympathizers or members for the most part, lend the newly arrived foreigner their viewpoint and their network. There are too many accounts of atrocities to doubt they have an unquestionable basis in reality.

However, certain accounts that I collected, and later checked in the places of origin, turned out to be grossly exaggerated, not to say inaccurate. This changes nothing, of course, in terms of the disgraceful scandal of this exodus. [...] "The ethnic cleansing continues..." I was outraged by the accumulation of license plates at the border post across from Albania, and of the identity papers of those leaving. It was out of fear, they told me, and that the 'terrorists' would sneak back in, by stealing them to disguise cars and falsify documents. Many were able to escape, from the modest amount I observed, but the German Minister of Defense lied, on May 6, when he declared that there were "between 600,000 and 900,000 displaced people inside Kosovo." This would not go unnoticed, in a 10,000-square kilometre region, by an observer traveling from east to west and north to south in one day. In Pristina, which is still home to tens of thousands of Kosovars, you can eat in Albanian pizzerias, in the company of Albanians. Might not our ministers question cool-headed witnesses over there – Greek doctors from Médecins Sans Frontières, clerics, or popes?



'Debray Sees What he Believes,' Rony Brauman, PH, Former president of MSF, *Libération* (France), 15-16 May 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

Régis Debray lays blame for the Kosovar exodus on the KLA, the violence, the generalised fear and - on the same level - NATO strikes and Serb militias. Yet we know that every time it has been difficult, or impossible, to go to where atrocities are being committed - like Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, or Ethiopia - it was the validated accounts of refugees that gave an accurate picture of the situation. Based on such accounts, reports by Médecins Sans Frontières, FIDH/IFHR (International Federation for Human Rights) and Médecins du Monde have clearly established the existence and systematic execution of a prepared plan, a programme of terror and expulsions in Kosovo. We are in a position to demonstrate that this exodus is the result of a deliberate strategy. Debray doesn't know of the programme by Serbian nationalists to take back Kosovo, and pretends not to know that a programme, by its very nature, will not be visible. He 'forgets' the weight of the frenzied memory of the Serbs, he forgets Vukovar, Srebrenica, and the bloody events of recent years - committed by Serb soldiers and paramilitaries now at work in Kosovo.

It is not surprising that Debray relies, for his proof, on the Greek MSF doctors who, like the majority of Greeks, are pro-Serbian; their first priority is to bring relief to the Serbs, by the same inversion that Debray now makes in transforming aggressor into victim. In this way, Régis Debray goes from a stimulating critique of 'droit-de-l'hommisme' [human rights-ism], as he says, to a sort of oblique apology for Milosevic's dictatorship. This transition is accomplished primarily by using NATO's propagandistic excesses, the impasses of this quasi-war, and the enormous failures of the allied intervention. Debray himself says, in one of his books, that we were the first civilisation to "believe (in) our eyes," he wrote that precisely to criticise a sort of ingenuousness when confronted with information. Well, during this trip in Yugoslavia, he succumbed to precisely the same thing. He didn't believe what he saw but saw what he believed - that NATO, and thus the United States, is the real threat to the world.

One gets the feeling that he elevates state politics to such a height that he denies all human realities, he radically rejects everything that comes from the US and reveres anything that resists the US.

Our only point of agreement is the inappropriateness of using the term 'genocide'. The comparison with Hitlerism is stupid - the suffering cannot be compared - because the political programmes are different. Milosevic is not Hitler. On the other hand, since Debray suggests that we should compare the situation with that of Algeria, he himself goes all the way and acknowledges that, like the Algerians in their time, the Kosovars are right to demand their independence.



*The Greek doctor in Pristina was Odysseas. Debray told me that he did a whole number that completely won him over. It wasn't the fact that he mentioned the Greek doctors in his article that motivated me to respond, it was the subject of humanitarian war. I refuted the idea that this was a humanitarian war, because there are no humanitarian wars. War is the epitome of politics - paradoxal politics. And I supported this policy. In reacting to Régis Debray's very questionable, sometimes even misleading, 'propagandistic' position, I saw an opportunity to reintroduce politics by saying: "It is precisely because this is a political conflict - and not a metaphysical conflict between good and evil into which the humanitarian pulls us -that it's open to debate." By definition, politics supposes plurality, and choice. So demonising Debray for his rejection of war is outrageous, inadmissible. On the other hand, criticising him for the stupid things he says, the mistakes he makes, is natural. I blame him for letting himself get brain-washed and sucked in by fleeting impressions that do not correspond with reality. So I disagree with him, but I agree with the fact that he should be able to express himself within the bounds of legitimacy. It's not as if it was all of a sudden Le Pen [leader of the French far-right] or Bin Laden talking! The Greeks and Serbs in Paris praised him to the heavens. But I think I was the only one of those who disagreed with him who gave him some measured support, because I criticised those who were demonising him.*

Rony Brauman, Director of studies, MSF France Foundation (in French).

**On 14 May 1999, at a press conference given on his return to Athens, the president of the Greek section claimed that the road which MSF Greece's car was traveling on was bombed by NATO, which he accused of failing to respect 'humanitarian corridors'. A week earlier, MDM had already claimed it had been bombed by NATO on a road in Serbia.**



'MSF Greece Questions NATO's Willingness to Respect "Humanitarian Corridors,' *AFP* (France), Athens, 14 May 1999 (in French). **D238**

#### Extract:

The President of Médecins Sans Frontières-Greece, Odysseas Boudouris, expressed doubts Friday "on NATO's willingness to respect humanitarian corridors" after an incident on Wednesday near Nis, in Yugoslavia. A section of the route, 5 km from Nis, along which a car transporting an MSF-Greece team back to Greece was to travel, was bombed by NATO forces, Mr Boudouris stated at a press conference. The surgeon added that NATO had been informed of their route by the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs,

the car was flying an MSF flag, and a Greek flag had been painted on the vehicle's roof as agreed. "We broke down 10-15 km from Nis, and had to stop at a garage around 14:00. An hour later we heard five or six waves of planes that bombed Nis heavily. When we continued on our way to Nis, we saw, 50 m from the road, signs of bombing in the fields along the roadway," added Mr Boudouris, who showed the press a shell fragment. On 5 May, Greek leaders from Médecins du Monde-Greece claimed that one of the organisation's convoys had been targeted by bombing on the road from the Macedonian border to Pristina. The Greek government demanded an explanation regarding this incident, which has still not been elucidated.



'MSF Greece Explo Mission,' **Message** from Jean-Marie Kindermans, MSF International Secretary General to MSF Directors, 14 May 1999 (in English).

#### Extract:

You might know that an outcome of the Greek mission in Yugoslavia, at least in France, is a questioning of the ethnic cleansing reality in Kosovo. As far as we know, there was not such a statement made by the mission openly, but interpretations in that sense are made by journalists. In case you are asked by journalists (and not in a proactive way), we propose to stick to the following position:

- MSF is maintaining the conclusions of its report 'story of a deportation,' qualifying what happened as a crime against humanity.
- If it is said by journalists that these conclusions are contradictory with the MSF Greece mission, we can answer that we do not endorse their conclusions; their mission was from their proper [own] initiative and we were not in agreement with the way it was implemented: Greek government involvement, distribution of goods, escort, etc. It is good for you to know also that *AFP* has released a statement where MSF Greece (Odysseas) says he doubts of NATO will to respect humanitarian corridors (?), in Yugoslavia. In his statement, he says that his mission might have been targeted by NATO planes in its trip back to Greece (meanwhile there is no evidence of it in the report but we do not have any comment). There might also be a continuation to their explo mission.

More on that next week.  
Best regards. Jean-Marie



*We went our separate ways in Belgrade. I headed for Pristina, Odysseas and Antonis, the surgeon, headed for Nis, then Sofia. They missed a very heavy bombing raid on Nis. Their car was broken, they had problems. They went to Sofia just to take the plane. I don't know why they didn't want to take the road from Skopje to Athens, and went via Bulgaria. A week earlier, Médecins du Monde-Greece had made a fuss because one of their cars had just*

*missed being bombed outside of Pristina, on its way to Blace. I have to say that they took that route without asking NATO's permission. And then they made a fuss! Everyone in Greece saw on TV that MDM had been bombed.*

Antonis Rigas, Logistician, MSF Greece (in French).



*Odysseas returned to Athens before the others. He took a public stand against NATO, accusing it of having bombed MSF Greece's car. First he claimed: "We were bombed," then he delivered a second - pretty neutral - message, to the effect that: "They don't need clothes; they need medicines and sanitation supplies." Of the two messages - "The bombs" and: "Don't give clothes, give drugs" - it was the bombs that made headlines. All the newspapers and television stations were talking about it. Odysseas was the man of the hour, the guy who made it through the bombs... He used a humanitarian pretext: "There is a need for medicines," to promote a political message: "ATO isn't playing its part, its bombing humanitarians," etc. Besides, I'm not at all sure that they were bombed. NATO denied it. In my opinion, if NATO had bombed them, their officials would have admitted it. They did bomb Serbian television and the Chinese embassy, and then they said: "Sorry we did that." MDM had said the same thing, and had also made the front page of the papers. If you say you got bombed in Yugoslavia, you get donors, the press, and the newspapers. So I think that the story was manipulated. From then on, it was clear to me that Odysseas was secretly pursuing his own personal goals within the framework of a political agenda. In my opinion, he had a hidden agenda, which explains all the different roles he played at the time.*

Sotiris Papaspyropoulos, Honorary President,  
MSF Greece (in French).

**On 18 May 1999, the Swiss section informed the Greek section that it was ending their collaboration for two reasons: its failure to respond to their proposal to recruit a joint programme manager, and its continuation of the exploratory mission in Kosovo and Serbia. They left it to the International Council to decide how to respond to MSF Greece's actions.**



'Partnership **Proposal** between MSF Switzerland and MSF Greece within the Framework of the Common Operational Centre,' addressed to the Greek Executive Board by the Swiss Executive Board, on 9 May 1999 (in English). **D239**

#### Extract:

The collaboration between our two sections with the

Common Operational Centre (COC) has deteriorated in the last few days, and it seems to me that a rupture is possible at very short notice. Like you, the Executive Board of MSF Switzerland wishes to go on with our collaboration. Please find below an ultimate and non negotiable proposal to try to find terms enabling the continuation of our joint work.

First, I think it is necessary to clarify some issues:

- The COC is part of a framework which has been defined by the IC during its meeting in 1998 in Amsterdam. The unilateral decision of MSF Greece to appoint an Operations Director for Athens and to undertake an exploratory mission in Kosovo is clearly a violation of this framework. Consequently, our proposal will be cancelled if you maintain Dimitris Richter as Operations Director, or if any MSF Greece's activities in Kosovo is carried on, without the formal clearance of the operational centres, following the end of your exploratory mission (this exploratory mission will be considered over with the return of any of the participants).
- MSF Switzerland absolutely does not consider withdrawing from the desk in Athens the missions in foreign countries as you seem to fear. [...]
- The current situation reflects a serious crisis in our collaboration and with the whole MSF movement in general. In such a situation, we think that the solutions we intend adopting will quickly solve the most urgent points.

In consequence we make you the following proposal:

1) To nominate a programme manager for the desk in Athens whose qualifications are higher than the average in order to guarantee not only the quality of work normally demanded by the MSF missions, but also to ensure an excellent taking over of the current operations. It is necessary, as there is no daily relationship with Geneva. The need of such a programme manager is also explained by the difficulties resulting from the geographical remoteness, and to a consequently less important involvement of the Geneva-based operations director. The structural conditions submitted to the office in Athens will have to be equivalent to the conditions proposed to other operational centres. In order to ensure the most effective recruiting proceedings, the recruitment will have to be performed simultaneously by MSF-Greece and MSF Switzerland; however, the final decision will be taken by Geneva.

NB: Till the new programme manager is identified, according to the normal procedure, Dimitris Richter could hold this position under Vincent Faber's supervision as the latter is replacing Thierry Durand regarding the desk in Athens. [...]

6) MSF Switzerland will immediately stop the collaboration within the COC and transmit the file to the IC for the following reasons.

- If the Executive Board of MSF Greece refuses this proposal
- If the unilateral decision to nominate an operations director in Athens is maintained
- If the activities of MSF Greece in Kosovo are carried on after the end of the exploratory mission, according to the details described above.

You will probably find this proposal is brutal, but we think that the emergency of the situation requires a radical solution if we want to preserve a certain substance within the COC.



**Letter** from Olivier Dechevrens, MSF Switzerland President to MSF Greece President, 18 May 1999 (in French). [D240](#)

#### Extract:

Dear Greek Friends,

Further to Odysseas's message received this morning, the Executive Board of MSF Switzerland considers that it is now a flat refusal of the ultimate proposal which had been addressed to you last 9 May to try to save our collaboration within the Greek-Swiss Common Operational Centre. We therefore consider that the collaboration is over, all the more that:

- We have not received any answer from you to this proposal, not even an acknowledgement of receipt despite my telephone calls to Odysseas and Sotiris.
- The Greek section has decided to carry on its action in Kosovo without MSF-Switzerland's consent and to go beyond the framework defined by the International Council.

In order to determine the repercussions of these decisions on the activities of MSF-Greece within MSF, we request the International Council to take a stand on this issue during its next meeting in Amsterdam on 11 June.

Until then, we support James Orbinsky's proposal of a neutral information delegation. We will meet the members of this delegation in Geneva today and we will ask MSF Greece to do the same quickly. Finally, I think that some terms used by Odysseas are false, and I am formally against the presentation accusing MSF Switzerland of a unilateral withdrawal. The resignation of Thierry Durand, Operations Director, is absolutely not the expression of our wish to abandon the common operational centre, but witnesses practical difficulties, which could have probably been overcome after correction of these difficulties. Moreover, the proposal which has been rapidly made by the general director of MSF Switzerland to get, temporarily, around this resignation has been rejected by the Greek section. In addition, the proposal of the Executive Board has obviously not been taken into account. I regret the turn of events and I am not opposed to a dialogue but we have now reached a deadlock and I have to note that there is no more trust between our two sections.

I look forward to meeting you in Athens.

Sincerely,

On behalf of MSF Switzerland  
Olivier Dechevrens President

**In Montenegro, the refugees reported offensives by Serb forces in north-western Kosovo that contradicted the official withdrawal announcement. Montenegro's president, an opponent of the Milosevic regime, supported the G8 decisions but asked for a halt to NATO strikes. The Montenegrin police, caught between the Serb armed forces and the KLA, which had infiltrated the groups of refugees, was finding it hard to ensure security. On 21 May 1999, Médecins du Monde denounced the hampering of humanitarian action in Montenegro. In southern Serbia, there was a severe crackdown on protests by the families of Serbian soldiers. In response, some local soldiers stationed in Kosovo deserted.**



*'In Rozaje, Montenegro, Serbian Soldiers and Irregulars Use the Same Methods as in Kosovo,'* Sophie Shihab, **Le Monde** (France), 16 May 1999 (in French). [D241](#)

#### **Extract:**

Recent Serb offensives in north-western Kosovo have pushed a new influx of families and Kosovar combatants into Rozaje. Not only are the Serbs not beginning to withdraw from Kosovo, they are once again launching operations intended to empty first the Rugova mountains, then the Mokra mountains and, at their foot, Drenica - the former KLA stronghold turned martyred zone in central Kosovo, claims a Kosovar journalist taking refuge in Rozaje. Announcement of the 'withdrawal' in Belgrade on May 10 also coincided with the movement, in Montenegro, of military supplies and convoys toward Kosovo. One of the objectives is to screen the columns of refugees. Muslims still living in border hamlets help refugees avoid patrols - especially, they say, 'paramilitaries' from Kosovo, whom the people here call the 'Frankic' (Serbian mercenaries from various countries). But this help is not always effective. One of the routines common in Kosovo is also used in Montenegro: the refugees are stripped of their belongings and their papers (those that still have them, that is). The men are separated from the women, beaten and led away. This happened Thursday to fifty-four men whose wives and children were still waiting, Friday, unsure whether they'd ever see them again. [...]

The Kosovars are trying, however, to take advantage of the confused situation to see who's in charge in Montenegro. The Belgrade army accuses the Montenegrin police of pro-Western 'treachery'. Clashes between them were just barely averted thanks to political compromise. And so the police, outnumbered, had little say when the army set up roadblocks to search for KLA members. Yet never, confirm the humanitarian organisations, has a bus been stopped along the road leading to the only open border between Montenegro and Albania. Could there be a tacit agreement between the police and soldiers to rid Montenegro of Albanian 'terrorists'? Very likely. As for the police, they've proven themselves powerless in another, minor, case: the

robbery of a Médecins Sans Frontières jeep by soldiers, who boarded four vehicles in front of the Kristal camp, at the exact place from which the bus left at dawn. [...]

The High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which has only a handful of representatives here, emphatically requested on Friday that the government transfer the refugees to southern Montenegro. But there are still many obstacles. The refugees themselves are not all convinced, and it is suspected that the KLA wants to establish a bridgehead in Rozaje, where access to Kosovo would be less heavily mined than on the Albanian side.



*'Yugoslav Army Steps Up Pressure in Montenegro,'* Sophie Shihab, **Le Monde** (France) 18 May, 1999 (in French). [D242](#)

#### **Extract:**

With dozens of refugees from Kosovo arrested, border crossings closed, and various troop movements, on Sunday, May 16 the Yugoslav army stepped up the pressure it has been exerting off and on since March 24 on Montenegro's pro-Western government. The protection it is giving to members of the opposition from Belgrade, and the visits made to Europe by Milo Djukanovic, the President of this tiny state, a recalcitrant member of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), have raised the ire of Belgrade and the Montenegrin opposition, which is demanding the impeachment of the head of state. Accused of treason for his meetings with 'the enemy' in Germany, Austria and France, according to close aides, Mr Djukanovic is nevertheless determined to go to Brussels Monday, where he has been invited to meet with European foreign ministers. [...]

But the most serious consequences of this harder line were felt on Saturday at the single border crossing to Albania. Not only did the army prevent buses transporting refugees from Kosovo, in transit to Montenegro, from passing through the border, but also at least twenty-five men were forced off the bus and subsequently arrested. Robert Breen, a representative of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), told *le Monde*: "There are rumors that some have been released, but if we are to believe the refugees we talked to, the number of arrests could be as high as one hundred." Crying women and children were picked up at Tuzi, an ethnic Albanian town near the border, where the Montenegrin police stopped the following buses to prevent them from falling into the hands of the army. Yet for the ten previous days, the army had stopped harassing buses coming from Rozaje, the entry point for deportees from Kosovo. It had allowed them to go on unhindered to Albania, even though some of the vehicles were transporting only men, who were probably KLA recruits. It was in the interest of the military to see 'terrorists' leaving the FRY so that they would not have to 'deal with' them. [...]



Moreover, a group of Serb 'paramilitary men' flexed its muscles by staging an incursion into the mountain town of Rozaje, whose population is made up of Muslim Slavs. Dozens of the town's inhabitants gathered in front of the police station and asked to be armed so they could protect themselves. At the same time, according to witnesses, truckloads of soldiers arrived in the region. On the same day, a thousand soldiers crossed the large mountain village of Cetinje, the old capital of Montenegro and stronghold of the independence movement. No sooner had they arrived than a thousand police, armed and wearing helmets, deployed right behind them... This confrontation between the police and the army, as well as rumors of a coup, has been a constant feature of life in Montenegro since Milo Djukanovic was elected in 1997, defeating Slobodan Milosevic's protégé. Is the army's threat more serious this time? "Nothing is more dangerous than a wounded tiger," say Montenegrins who, like their president, are waiting for the dictator in Belgrade to fall.



'MDM Condemns Restrictions on Humanitarian Work in Montenegro,' Paris, **AFP** (France), 21 May, 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

In a press release, MDM drew attention to the fact that on May 5, Belgrade authorities designated "six border crossings for receiving humanitarian aid, none of which is on the border with Montenegro. As a result, Médecins du Monde's humanitarian cargo is still tied up in Dubrovnik, Croatia. It is now impossible to enter or move around in Montenegro without a federal visa issued by Belgrade," and this week, an MDM volunteer "with a visa issued in Croatia" was turned back by the federal Yugoslav army near the border between Croatia and Montenegro, "which highlights the impossibility for MDM to replace its teams on the ground." MDM "is concerned about the immediate shortage of emergency products [...] but also about the protection gap that could be created by an absence of humanitarian workers in Montenegro" and asks "the Yugoslav and Montenegrin authorities to do everything within their power without delay to provide humanitarian organisations with access to the civilian populations, in accordance with basic humanitarian principles."



'Families of Serbian Soldiers Protest Against the War in Kosovo,' Jean-Baptiste Naudet, **Le Monde** (France), 21 May, 1999 (in French). **D243** [↗](#)

#### Extract:

"The dead don't need Kosovo! We want our sons to come back, but not in coffins!" Shouting these slogans, people from the Krusevac region in southern Serbia demonstrated against the war in Kosovo continuously for four days. For the first time, the Serbian population, which had been said to be firmly united behind its president, is defying

Slobodan Milosevic. And perhaps even more dangerously for the Yugoslav president, for the first time, Serbian soldiers deserted en masse on Wednesday, May 19 in Kosovo. After learning that their families' anti-war demonstrations in Krusevac had been repressed, nearly 1,000 soldiers from the region who had been sent to Kosovo returned in trucks Wednesday with their weapons, against the orders of their commanders, to their home town. Naturally, the press in Belgrade has been silent on the desertion. But in Montenegro, Serbia's tiny partner republic in the Yugoslav Federation - which has been increasingly distancing itself from Belgrade - the media have been closely following this peace movement.

**On May 18 1999, while the British Prime Minister was in Albania, the humanitarian organisation OXFAM criticised NATO and demanded that UNHCR be strengthened in its role as emergency aid coordinator. Its message was widely reported by media in the United Kingdom, where it is headquartered.**



'Re: Albania: Perea Press Release and Report,' **Email** from Anne-Marie Huby, MSF UK Executive Director 18 May 1999 (in English). **D244** [↗](#)

Dear Bas and Samantha (thanks for forwarding this to her in Kukes),

Thanks for the release. For your info, Oxfam has been all over the British media this morning and has done an excellent job. I quote extracts from a 'Today' programme interview this morning with Marcus Thompson, their Balkans emergency coordinator:

«A lot of players, including NATO, are engaged in all sorts of well-meaning activities, but most of them are totally uncoordinated, with different standards of quality. We need UNHCR to regain the leadership. UNHCR was indeed criticised earlier in the crisis for failing to take the lead. In fact, NATO countries were only too eager to bypass UNHCR to go and do their own deals with the Albanian and Macedonian govts. We would like Tony Blair (visiting today) to champion UNHCR and its independent role and take other nations with him. NATO should not lead this effort. UNHCR needs to be given money and the right high-calibre staff to fulfill its independent role. Govts must accept the discipline of humanitarian coordination" (good one this one - my remark).

On the record, it is very technically orientated, but nobody has missed the sub-text, and the coverage of their statement has been very political - raising doubts about NATO etc. Well done. Voila. Pity we could not come up with a more consistent message despite hours of discussions over the past 10 days. Plus ça change eh, all the best, AM

**On May 20, UNHCR made public its plan for returning refugees to Kosovo. MSF disseminated an epidemiological study conducted by Epicentre with Kosovar refugees hosted by families in Albania. A press release underlined the extent to which the refugees were being neglected.**



'UNHCR Makes Public its Plan for Returning Refugees to Kosovo,' *AFP* (France), Geneva, 20 May, 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

On Thursday, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) made public, its plan for returning to Kosovo approximately 1.5 million refugees and people who had been displaced as a result of the conflict. The 19-page plan is comprised of four stages, including a preparatory phase before the massive resettlement, rehabilitation, and the total reintegration of the majority Albanian and minority Serbian Kosovars. UNHCR estimates that there are around 600,000 people who have been displaced inside Kosovo and over 900,000 who have sought refuge in other countries — both neighboring countries and elsewhere in the world, mainly in Europe.

[...] The first phase of the plan will begin with evaluation visits to Kosovo. The second phase will be the reestablishment of activities in Kosovo by UNHCR and associated agencies to provide all basic necessities to people who have been displaced and civilians who have been traumatized by the war. At the same time, repairs to roads, bridges and airports will need to begin so that humanitarian aid can be brought into the area. UNHCR believes that an international military force will need to be deployed as soon as this second phase is launched. The third phase will see the first refugees begin to return in conditions of "dignity and security."



'Rapid Needs Assessment Among Kosovar Refugees Hosted by Albanian Families – An **Assessment** Of Human Rights Violations Committed in Kosovo - Kukes Town, Albania, 29/04/99,' William Peréa, Epicentre, 10 May 1999 (in English). [D245](#)

#### Extract:

##### *Recommendations*

1. The following elements should be addressed urgently to insure that the basic needs of refugees, old as well as new arrivals to Kukes, are appropriately covered. Implement as soon as possible a simple registration system in order to insure proper access to relief aid. This basically means to give a registration card to each family arrived or arriving in Kukes.

- Insure systematic weekly distributions of food parcels containing recommended energy and protein daily requirements in cold weather (2,300 kcal/person/day).

- Distribute a minimum of one blanket per person.
- Distribute when possible, to each family 2 mattresses as well as clothes for adults and children.
- Insure a regular distribution of hygiene commodities such as soap, tooth-paste and tooth brushes and women's hygienic items (tissues or pampers for babies would also be required.)
- Improve the refugee access of information through leaflets and continuous messages on radio and TV. The identification of a site or a bureau where people could be advised and oriented according to their needs may help substantially improve the access to key information and make the refugees to participate more actively in the search of solutions of their problems.
- Elaborate a well defined and 'transparent' strategy for the re-deployment further south of refugees currently settled in Kukes. Avoid the use of force, coercion or intimidation before or during the process of re-deployment.
- Document and immediately report any measure that violates refugees' basic human rights. Events like the forced displacement of tractor camps from Kukes should not be allowed and should not occur any more.
- Encourage the dialogue with the refugees, such as the one initiated by UNHCR through their 'Blue River Strategy'<sup>15</sup>. Those initiatives should be multiplied and continued until consensual solutions are agreed upon.
- Improve the visibility and strengthen the existing programme for the search of missing family members.

The above recommendations apply also to the other categories of refugees and particularly those that are still in the tractor camps.

2. A definite solution to the current crisis may still take several months. As time passes by, the needs of the refugees will evolve and the agencies in charge will have to adapt their activities to respond to new priorities. The following are some elements to be considered at short and medium term:

- Continue the implementation and strengthening of the epidemiological surveillance system proposed by the Ministry of Health/WHO/French National Public Health Centre. This should be a priority for all agencies implementing health activities, as the potential risk for the apparition and rapid extension of infectious disease outbreaks in Kukes is very high.
- Carefully consider the prevalence of chronic health disorders, and in particular diabetes, when planning essential drug supply.
- Implement a mortality surveillance system based on grave counts and hospital deaths. An initiative attempting to count graves was initiated by UNHCR a couple of weeks ago. This initiative needs to be maintained and a systematic data collection system promptly implemented.

15. This strategy consists of taking some Kosovar community leaders to visit camps in the South and then to transmit their impressions to the refugee community.

- Implement vaccination of measles and polio to all new arrivals, and continue the EPI strengthening at local health structures.
- Extend the mental health programme initiated in some of the tent camps to cover the population lodging in the town.



*'Refugees in Albania: Refugees Living with Albanian Families Neglected by International Aid Agencies According to a Survey by Médecins Sans Frontières,'* **Press release**, MSF France, 20 May, 1999 (in French). [D246](#)



*'MSF Survey Concludes that Refugees Housed with Albanian Families Remain Very Vulnerable: They Pay High Rents, Have Special Needs and Must be Registered and Protected,'* **Press release** MSF Kukes, 18 May 1999 (in English). [D247](#)



*'Humanitarian Aid Not Reaching all Albanian Kosovar Refugees in Kukës,'* **Press release**, MSF Spain, 20 May, 1999 (in Spanish). [D248](#)

#### Extract:

International aid is only reaching some of the refugees living with Albanian families. This is the main conclusion of an epidemiological survey conducted by Médecins Sans Frontières in Kukes, northern Albania. The survey, which was carried out in late April, shows that in spite of an unprecedented mobilisation of armies, bilateral assistance, humanitarian organisations and United Nations agencies, a significant number of the refugees living with locals are having to rely on their meager savings for survival (i.e. to pay for food, rent, etc.). It is estimated that in Albania, only 10 to 15% of refugees are living in tents in camps; the vast majority are staying either with families, in local centres, or in 'tractor camps'. "In Kukës, over 50% of the refugees are living with locals," explains William Perea, the epidemiologist with Médecins Sans Frontières who conducted the study. "These people are much more difficult to reach than those living in the camps. As a result, they are not benefiting from the protection or assistance that should be guaranteed to them as a result of their refugee status."

When the survey was carried out, not a single member of the families interviewed had a registration card or any document showing that they had refugee status. Without an efficient system for registering them, the refugees cannot be identified. Consequently, it is impossible to ensure that each family receives the minimum they need in order to survive: complete food rations, blankets, clothes, etc. Thus, 57% of the families interviewed had not received a single complete food ration since they arrived in the country, and 20% had no access to food rations at all. Since

that time there have been distributions of food, but these people's situation remains extremely precarious. Moreover, only 24% of the families had received at least one blanket. "While Albania is benefiting from an unprecedented surge of solidarity and attention from all the politicians and media, it is unacceptable that so many refugees are falling through the cracks when it comes to international aid," Perea said. These refugees' situation is made worse by the fact that they have to pay very high rent. The survey shows that 61% of the apartments or houses in Kukës have Kosovar refugees living in them. The average number of people per household is thirteen. Over 60% of the families have to pay rent to their hosts. The average amount paid is 137 dollars per month. Today, many refugees are short of money.


The survey also confirmed that serious human rights violations were committed inside the province of Kosovo. More than two-thirds (70%) of the Kosovar families interviewed were forced to leave because they were physically or verbally threatened by the armed militia or army, or because they had been subjected to acts of vandalism like the destruction of their property or their village. 43% of the deaths reported since the end of February 1998 took place after March 24, during the deportation phase. 56% of those deaths were due to acts of violence committed by the Serbian police or army. The survey shows that more than half (55%) of the refugees living in the region are women, but that the proportion of women is markedly higher in the 15-54 age range (62%). One out of three families (34%) reported that at least one of its members was absent (from Kukës). Over 60% of those absent were men between the ages of 15 and 54; 32% had joined the KLA; 22% had disappeared during the deportation.




*'MSF: Refugees Staying with Albanian Families Abandoned,'* **AFP** (France), Paris, May 20, 1999 (in French).

Refugees from Kosovo staying with Albanian families, "have been abandoned by international aid agencies," according to a report by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) based on a survey conducted in late April in Kukës, northern Albania. Among the more than 900,000 people who have left Kosovo since the beginning of the conflict in March 1998, nearly 400,000 are in Albania, according to UNHCR. The report, based on an epidemiological tractor survey [sic], states that in Kukës, only 10 to 15% of the refugees are living in camps. None of them have documents to show that they have refugee status, and only 57% had received a single food ration. 61% of the apartments or houses in the town have refugees living in them, with an average of 13 people per home, and in 60% of these homes, the refugees are required to pay rent, which averages 137 dollars (123 euros). According to this study, 55% of the refugees living in this region are women, of whom 64% are between the ages of 15 and 54. In 34% of families one person is absent, and 60% of those absent

are men between the ages of 15 and 54. According to MSF, 32% had joined the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and 22% had "disappeared."

 *The Albania study showed who was actually providing humanitarian assistance. The media were saying that the armies were providing all the emergency aid, and that was the impression the public was left with. However, we very quickly realised that in fact, 20 or 25% - not even that - as little as 15% of aid was channeled through the armies. All the rest came from Albanian solidarity through NGOs, collective centres, or private citizens.*

Eric Stobbaerts, Executive Director,  
MSF Spain (in French).

 *The Epicentre report clearly showed that the fact that there were a large number of players working in Albania did not mean that people's needs were being met effectively or that quality assistance was being provided in an impartial way. The report confirmed the analysis that we were never really able to get across to public opinion; contrary to the widely accepted view, the armies were no more effective than the humanitarian agencies, at least not in this particular crisis.*

[...], MSF Deputy Legal Advisor, (in French).

**On the same day, during the UN Secretary General's visit to Albania, MSF issued a press release from Kukës and Skopje demanding better aid coordination by the United Nations, and highlighting the need to strengthen efforts to protect and register the refugees. In the camps in Albania, the refugees were under pressure to join the KLA, the Kosovar organisation that was pursuing armed resistance against the Yugoslav Federation. Five members of MSF's local medical personnel left to enlist in the organisation. Also, at the border between Albania and Kosovo, as a result of fighting between the KLA and the Serbian forces, UNHCR was forced to evacuate 8,000 Kosovar refugees to the interior.**



'Press release' **Email** from Erwin van't Land, MSF Skopje Press Officer to MSF press officers 19 May 1999 (in English). [D249](#)

#### **Extract:**

Please find below the press statement, which we will hand out to journos [journalists] during Kofi Annan's briefing.

An army of journos are following the Secretary General, which doesn't necessarily mean we'll have a better chance to get our message through, but at least we have to give it a try. You may find not much new in the statement. Then again, we do hint at the conditions in case of a return of the refugees to Kosovo (without accusing anyone of having done anything wrong YET in that matter; please stick to the careful phrasing of that point).



'MSF Calls on Governments to Support Effective and Principled UN Leadership over Kosovo Refugee Relief Effort and Stresses the Need for Registration and Protection,' **Press release**, MSF Kukes, 20 May 1999 (in English). [D250](#)



'MSF Calls for Effective and Principled UN Leadership over Kosovo Refugee Relief Effort,' **Press release**, Skopje 19 May 1999 (in English). [D250](#)

#### **Extract:**

The international medical aid agency Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is deeply concerned about the lack of refugee protection and aid coordination in the international response to the Kosovo crisis to date. During a meeting in Skopje with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, aid agencies working in Macedonia delivered a message of support to the United Nations in general - and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in particular - in their efforts to set up a more effective, and more principled, leadership over the humanitarian effort. "This crisis is unique in that western governments, which usually support UNHCR financially and otherwise, have wanted to take a direct part in humanitarian efforts as part of their overall military activities," said Tim Pitt, the MSF Head of Mission in Macedonia. "In doing so, they have undermined UNHCR's ability to lead and to provide independent protection and assistance to refugees. Refugees need a well-funded and politically robust UNHCR that is able to protect their rights effectively, now and in the future."

NATO forces have been widely portrayed as the driving force behind humanitarian efforts in the region. That one of the parties to the conflict, i.e. NATO, is acting as a humanitarian agency poses a serious threat to the necessary impartiality and neutrality of humanitarian efforts in the region and beyond. It is crucial to the effectiveness and impartiality of the humanitarian effort that donor governments allow UNHCR to fulfill its independent humanitarian coordination role. Meanwhile, in all the ongoing programmes of refugee relocation and transfer (from Macedonia to Albania, and within Albania itself) the refugees are not receiving full and accurate information about their future living conditions and their long-term status and rights. The refugees who choose not to move are entitled to adequate standards of protection

and care, but there is growing evidence that the threat of denial of such provisions may be used as an incentive to relocate. Political promises have been made to the refugees that NATO would soon ensure their safe return. MSF stresses that also in the case of repatriation, UNHCR should be - and be perceived to be - the leading agency, and safeguard that international humanitarian law is being adhered to. This includes ensuring that repatriation is on a voluntary basis and that no measures are taken that would result in a pressured return of the refugees to Kosovo. For its aid mission in the Balkans, MSF is declining all funding from governments who have a military involvement in the conflict.



*'MSF Demands Improved Coordination of Aid under the Aegis of the UN,' AFP (France), Kukës, Albania, May 20, 1999 (in French).*

#### Extract:

«The fact that one of the parties actively involved in the conflict, NATO, is also acting as a humanitarian agency, is a serious threat to the neutrality that is essential for humanitarian operations,” according to a press release issued by MSF on Thursday, before UN Secretary General Kofi Annan’s arrival in Kukës. Some 7,000 NATO soldiers are deployed in Albania as part of the humanitarian support operation ‘Allied Shelter’, and MSF expressed its concern about the ‘confusion’ of the roles. “It is crucial that the international community support UNHCR (the United Nations High Commission for Refugees) and allows it to fulfill its role as an independent agency in the coordination of aid,” the press release said.

“In this crisis, Western governments chose to involve their militaries in humanitarian operations [...]. This policy results in differences in the treatment of refugees, and diminishes the role of UNHCR and its capacity to ensure that all refugees receive the same protection,” Christopher Stokes, MSF’s Head of Mission in Albania, was quoted as saying. MSF was also critical of the amount of time it was taking for the refugees to be registered and the lack of information provided to the refugees. “Nearly two months after the start of the war, there is still no system in place to register refugees, which means they have no status or rights,” MSF lamented, adding that this issue was a “priority.” “UNHCR must oversee the protection and registration of the refugees,” the organisation said. “While programmes have been organised to transfer refugees (from Macedonia to Albania, and from the Albanian border to the interior of the country), the refugees do not have complete information on their future living conditions and long-term status.”

Humanitarian organisations and Albanian authorities would like the refugees living in Kukës to be evacuated to safer camps in southern Albania. But to date, the various information campaigns have not succeeded in convincing the refugees, most of whom do not want to leave the

area. Some 100,000 Kosovo Albanians are living in Kukës, of whom more than half are in apartments with Albanian families.



**'Communications update Kukës,' 26 May 1999 (in English). D251**

#### Extract:

Press lines from Christopher Stokes (HoM). As a result of the non-conformist stance adopted by MSF over Kosovo (on funding and operational independence) there are signs that our views are being over-simplified, caricatured as an anti-NATO position. We have been criticised (21/05/99) by the Albanian government for making ‘political statements’ and questioning NATO’s role (after Kofi’s visit). On the more comical side, there is a rumour going around Tirana that MSF in Albania is not going to drive on any road rehabilitated by NATO. Brilliant. NGOs, whilst sometimes expressing concern at NATO’s involvement in humanitarian aid privately and complaining about donor pressure exerted on them to undertake programmes, are unwilling to do it publicly (for the big NGOs): furthermore they seem, for different reasons, keen to also over-simplify our position. MSF is very much a lone and singular voice. The few organisations that are vocal in Europe are in the field much more low-profile. The risk is that we will be painted into a corner, radicalised in a way that will damage the credibility of our message and prevent us from taking future stands. [...]

#### Operational lines:

- MSF will use NATO logistics if other options are not practical, MSF visibility will be minimal during such operations, to be discussed with coordination Tirana on a case by case basis.
- MSF in BXL has given the green light to work in camps built by NATO if they are handed over to UNHCR first. In effect, MSF deals with [UN]HCR rather than NATO. We have avoided this option to date as UNHCR often acts as a mere smoke screen + we have been otherwise working in camps set-up by MSF and collective centres.

#### Movement to MSF camp Fier from MSF camp Kukës

For the movement of the refugees from the MSF camp in Kukës to the one in Fier, NATO transportation will be used. This is not contrary to the policy described above, since the coordination of the operation will be done by UNHCR. MSF will determine who will be transported when, depending on the list of volunteers, and will determine who will be classified as vulnerable, to be transported by helicopter. There will be no direct dealings with NATO. UNHCR and MSF are the guarantors of the humanitarian standards to be applied by NATO. This can be realised since it is possible to provide alternative transport, to be organised totally by UNHCR and MSF.



'Press Lines KLA and Camps,' **Email** from Bas Tielens, MSF Belgium Press Officer to MSF press officers, 30 May 1999 (in English). [D252](#)

**Extract:**

Dear all,

Below some lines to use if questioned on the Kosovo Liberation Army and the camps in Kukes. As this issue was addressed in the NGO-morning meeting on Saturday here, it might come up.

1. Last week, 3 nurses and two doctors quit their job at the clinic in Kukes 2, to start working for the UCK (Kosovo Liberation Army, KLA). At first, it seemed that they did this voluntarily, but now we have reports that one nurse is hiding, and one doctor left with his family to the south. The issue of KLA-involvement in the camps is clearly something of great interest to the journalists, and often they try to compare it to the situation in the Zairian camps, where MSF left because of the impossibility to stay neutral because of military involvement in the camps.

LINE: So far, our line has been that the situation here is incomparable to what happened in Zaire, where people were taken from their tents to continue the genocide. What we know is that five medical staff left to start working for the KLA and we heard rumours that some of them might have been under pressure. If so, we find this a worrying development, because people should have freedom of choice and it endangers the healthcare for the refugees.

2. As far as KLA-involvement in the camps is concerned: officially, the KLA is not allowed to have any contact with the refugees. In practice, this means that they keep a low profile regarding the camps where we work (we cannot comment on other camps), and only occasionally show up in uniform, looking for 'relatives', which could be the truth. However, we have heard rumours of recruitment of men between 18 and 26. It is very likely that the KLA has widespread contacts in the camps. In Kosovo, the KLA was a popular movement in a very literal sense, with every-where village boys 'on patrol' with a Kalashnikov, pretending to be true fighters.

LINE: If questioned on this, we can say the KLA, like all armed groups, are not welcome in the camps, and that we make that clear to them whenever they do show up. We do not know and cannot control what all the individual refugees think, but there is no KLA-involvement in the management of the camps where we work. The cases of alleged pressure on the refugees have been addressed in the NGO-morning meeting on Saturday here, and one other NGO mentioned to have the same experience. UNHCR will relocate any medical person to the south in case this happens again, and take the issue up with the Albanian authorities.



'Kosovo's Concerns,' **Email** from Bernard Lapeyre, MSF Spain Kosovo programme manager to MSF operations directors and Kosovo programme managers, 8 June 1999 (in English). [D253](#)

**Extract:**

Hi everybody,

As promised, I send you here attached a document based on the Samantha proposal but reformulated with other elements coming from the field in Durres. We are working on an operational system to be back in Kosovo that we will receive later on. Good readings,  
Bernard

Concerns of MSF in AlbaniaLack of humanitarian assistance:

Medical discrimination

Lack of reception or transit center

Lack of water, toilet or showers in many facilities

Sites overcrowded

Absence of real organised information centers

Needs of refugees hosted within families running out of money

No registration

No protection

No security

Medical discrimination

The medical discrimination is often due to limited and disorganised system for health care delivery to people living with host families (representing about 70 % or more of overall refugee population according to the administration). Moreover, the low NGO support to the normal Albanian health system doesn't help the authorities to improve the situation. The collection of medical data for the actual situation is not set up in a proper way meaning that the mortality cases are recorded only through the governmental structures without giving an overall picture. The referral system for the refugees is not fitted to an emergency secondary level of care. Sometimes people try to go to the town hospital, sometimes an NGO brings them to a military hospital. On top of that, UHNCR does not pay the cost of referral. Refugees pay for surgery, are discriminated against, while bilateral/military hospitals remain empty. WHO has agreed to refer surgical cases to local hospital even though they don't have the capacity and there is no way to provide parallel assistance for refugees. In addition, refugees are being unofficially charged for treatment or are not accepted as they have no money. If no flights are possible to transfer the patients to Tirana, the NGOs accompany the patient to ensure he gets assistance. MSF ask for a real medical coordination to ensure the free access to health care without discrimination.

Registration

There are currently 450,000 Kosovo refugees in Albania. Approximately two thirds of all the refugees are hosted

within Albanian families while the rest are scattered throughout Albania in collective centers and refugee camps. Although refugees are being transferred from one camp to another and even from Macedonia to Albania, none of the refugees in Albania or Macedonia have been registered. Because they had their identity cards torn up at the border, this means that not only do refugees have no rights as official refugees, but they also have no identification, and do not exist in any records and, are therefore easy pray for criminal gangs. MSF must lobby for immediate registration of all the refugees. Nobody in the field or at the headquarters level is clear about when and how registration is going to take place.

### Protection

There are currently few UNHCR protection officers in Albania. This is clearly not enough to even keep track of the refugee protection issues. Although an increased number of protection officers may be of help to the refugees in families, it is clear that stronger protection is needed for the refugees in collective centers and tented camps, particularly the camps in the south and center. On a day-to-day basis, refugees are also being moved away from the border for 'security reasons', to areas with high levels of criminality and insecurity in south and central Albania with no protection. There are also potential security risks in the hand-over of the refugee camps from the military to NGO's/UNHCR. Whereas the Albanian government identified and made available collective centers to house refugees, there was no donor attempt to negotiate with the Albanian govt for a clear agreement on land for setting up camps. Because of high priority on 'quick fix', and no money constraints, no clear bilateral land rental agreements, the military went in with contracting companies and undisclosed large sums of money to obtain land. MSF and other NGO's are concerned for security, protection and separation of families of a population of 450,000 refugees scattered in camps, collective centers and families throughout Albania.

### Security

The refugees in camps in Kukes, north Albania, are only 15 km from the Kosovo border. MSF supports the voluntary relocation of refugees to at least 50km away from the border (internationally recommended distance), which in this case means relocating to camps in South and Central Albania. Although new arrivals in the north are being transferred directly to other areas, many of the refugees already living in the camps do not want to move. They feel relatively protected as the KLA is there and NATO soldiers. UNHCR and NGOs are facing problems dealing with the landowners and security. Not only are big bills, rents and payments unsustainable by NGOs but disagreements over how much has been promised can end up being a security risk. There are increasing fears among refugees and reports from monitoring groups about abductions and threats to refugees (OSCE/EU report increased sightings of 'black Mercedes with darkened windows pulling into refugee sites'). Because the refugees are not registered and there is little or no protection, there is no way to properly

record or deal with any disappearances or attacks reported or suspected. MSF should confront OSCE and EU monitors with the reality of the criminality reports they produce and ask them what they propose to do about this - apart from keeping it in a file.

### Military recruitment in the camps


UCK began to do forced recruitment among men 18 up to 50 years old in collective centres and camps in Durrës town and Spitalle area (MSF expat testimony). UNHCR Durrës has been informed. Before the recruitment, UCK is threatening refugees with the imposition of martial law in case of refusal. Moreover, a high risk exists to see the camps being militarised especially close to the borders with Kosovo...



'8,000 Albanians Displaced as a Result of Border Tension (UNHCR),' *AFP* (France), Kukës, Albania, 31 May, 1999 (in French).


### **Extract:**

Over 8,000 Albanians from villages near the border with Kosovo are currently living as displaced persons in the interior of the country because of tension at the border, according to a statement made Monday by UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) spokesperson Rupert Colville. [...] "There is now a real security problem at the border," he said, noting deterioration in the situation and increased militarisation of the area." A renewed outbreak of fighting between the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and Serb forces has been observed in the area in recent days. "There are no immediate plans for NATO reinforcements to be sent to the area," said NATO press officer Helge Eriksen, "but we will speed up the evacuation of the Kukës refugee camps" to central and southern Albania. These evacuations organized by UNHCR with logistical support from NATO began last Tuesday, with 300 to 500 people being evacuated per day. "The objective is to have evacuated all the camps in Kukës before winter arrives," said Colville. Some 28,000 Kosovo Albanians are living in refugee camps in Kukës.


 *The KLA made some use of the camps base camps for returning to Kosovo. I think they were recruiting there. But, there were also very basic things because of the fact that in Albania, land is owned by families. So we had to negotiate with families who saw an opportunity to rent out land for setting up camps. As a result, legally the owner of the land became responsible for security. So when people from the KLA came with their threats, he would say: "I'm not responsible, I'm renting it." And so he would say: "I'm going to set up a protection service." The mafia was behind it... It's an ideal country for the mafia to operate in. The officially recognised government was corrupted from the inside by all the benefits given to private clans that had*

very extensive power - especially in the north. We didn't have much of an idea how to negotiate with them and no one could help us. And the population, which wasn't very convinced that the government could do anything, was very dependent on the mafia.

Vincent Janssens, Director of Operations,  
MSF Belgium (in French).

 *The first concern was the refugees' security. They were extremely concerned about the risk of women being kidnapped and pressured from the local mafia. When we talked to the people in Skoder and Fier, they were very fearful: "The Albanians have not treated us very well; there are men who come near the women's showers and watch what goes on there." It was a major concern.*

Christopher Stokes, coordinator MSF Belgium in  
Albania and Kosovo, April to June 1999, (in French)

 *As soon as we arrived, Michiel [Hofman, MSF Holland coordinator] told me: "Kofi Annan is here tomorrow, we need to use the occasion to highlight the difficulties we have with the role of troops in refugees camps." So he said I start to write a press release. The strategy of communication was very much lead in the field. We decided: ok this is the best way of saying it. Kofi Annan was visiting Skopje and doing a press conference in a big hotel. We had problems with the fact that NATO was so present for two reasons. NATO troops set hospitals and do obviously very good work on individual patients but they had not concept of public health. The German military hospital in the middle of the camp [was] doing interesting surgery. But they did not keep any records and statistics. Also there were some principle issues; that belligerents as a warring party should not base themselves in the middle of a civilian population. And that was the issues. So I wrote the press release, checked with Michiel and Tim [who replaced Michiel] that were happy with it. Then, we went to the press conference. I had one of our national staff at the entrance of the hotel. And at the moment he called me, saying that Kofi had entered, I start handling the press release to the journalists so that it was the last thing they got. And the second question was: "NATO in the camps..." Almost all the media were there. And Kofi Annan clearly stated there should be no doubt about the fact that humanitarian assistance is always being seen to be the civilian activity. The statement of principle we wanted. I think that went quite well. We got on the records.*

Erwin Vantland, Communications officer in  
Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo MSF International May-  
June 1999 (in English).

**On May 24, 1999, UNHCR opposed the Macedonian authorities' decision to transfer Kosovar refugees from Macedonia to Albania in the middle of the night. On May 27, however, it told the press that the camps in Macedonia were overcrowded again.**



*'New Problem in the Refugee Crisis: Skopje Wants to Expel the Refugees - UNHCR Opposed,' AFP, Blace, Macedonia, 24 May 1999 (in French).*

#### Extract:

A new problem arose on Sunday night and early Monday morning between Macedonian authorities and the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), with the former attempting to forcibly transfer the refugees who arrived in their territory on Sunday to Albania. This incident reflects the noticeable rise in tension in Skopje, with the increasing number of refugees arriving each day at the Blace border crossing, the main transit point between Kosovo and Macedonia. Macedonian authorities decided to bus refugees from Kosovo to Albania. "The authorities want to transfer those who arrived today to Albania. UNHCR wants to stop this, and we are trying to intervene by negotiating with the police," UNHCR representative Astrid van Genderen Stort told AFP. A few hours later, Dennis McNamara, the UNHCR Emissary in the former Yugoslavia dispatched to the Blace border crossing, announced that the refugees would be allowed to remain in Macedonia, at least temporarily. "We were told that they would be put in camps (in Macedonia) tonight; we are sure that will happen. We hope this was just a misunderstanding and we will see over the next few days if these people want to go to Albania," he told the press. UNHCR opposed the transfer of these people 'in the middle of the night', without checking to see if they had relatives in Albania. [...] In mid-May, UNHCR had attempted to open a humanitarian corridor to encourage refugees from Kosovo to go to Albania, but this initiative had failed, and virtually all of them had refused to go to that very poor country, where they believe they have no future because of economic conditions. From the time the refugees began to arrive at the end of March, Macedonia, where the majority of the population are Slavs, has been worried that their presence would destabilise the country.



*'Camps in Macedonia Overcrowded Again, According to UNHCR,' AFP (France), Skopje, 27 May 1999 (in French).*

#### Extract:

SKOPJE, May 27 (AFP) – The camps in Macedonia are "overcrowded again" after 30,000 refugees arrived in the country within four days, UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) spokesperson Ron Redmond said Thursday. The massive influx, which was suddenly halted on Wednesday due to an apparent blockage on the Serbian side of the



border, has “resulted in the camps becoming overcrowded again,” as was the case at the beginning of May, Redmond said at a press conference. [...] According to testimony from the latest refugees to arrive in Macedonia, “there are still thousands of people in eastern Kosovo who want to leave,” Redmond said.

**On May 24, 1999, 1000 Kosovar men who had been released from the prison of Mitrovica described the abuse they had been subjected to while in detention. On May 25, a document issued by the United Nations reported numerous rapes committed by Serbian forces against Kosovar women. On May 27, Slobodan Milosevic was charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. On May 28, the Yugoslav presidency announced that it accepted the ‘principles’ laid out by the G8. NATO maintained its air strikes while the Russian and Finnish emissaries continued to negotiate with Milosevic. Three members of the humanitarian organisation Care, were found guilty of espionage and given severe sentences by a Yugoslav military tribunal. UNHCR announced a new fundraising campaign to finance assistance for the return of the refugees.**



*‘Horrible Accounts from Former Prisoners in Mitrovica,’ AFP (France), Kukës, Albania, 24 May 1999 (in French).*

#### Extract:

Exhausted, nervous wrecks, the men released Saturday and Sunday from prison in Kosovska Mitrovica (northern Kosovo), gave dramatic testimony on the conditions they had been subjected to during their detention, and the physical and emotional torture they had endured. Nearly a thousand men of all ages crossed the Albanian border during the weekend; they had been released with no explanation from Smrekovnica, the prison in the town of Kosovska Mitrovica, after several weeks in detention. Dirty, pale and emaciated, the men had just one question when they arrived: “What has happened to my family?” “We left Mitrovica in mid-April; there were over 10,000 of us,” said Shykri, a young man of 20. “When we arrived in Srbica (in central Kosovo), we were stopped by the police. They picked out the men: “You, you, you,” and we spent two weeks in an unused school before being transferred to the prison in Mitrovica. “I was beaten with the butt of a rifle. They interrogated me to find out whether I knew people in the KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army). I couldn’t speak Serbian, and they hit my hands with a stick ten times,” he said. They all told the same haunting story: beaten because they would not give any names, because they were accused of being terrorists, or because, like 20 year-old Elbasan, they were wearing a jacket with the logo ‘USA’. [...] The humanitarian organisations confirmed that

many of them had been victims of abuse and that they were “very badly traumatised.” According to Christina Moore, a psychologist with Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF): “Their stories are fragmented and sometimes confused, but they all show the same signs of stress. They often talk about their families and are especially concerned to find out where they are. When they arrived here, they were finally able to collapse. What they need most is rest and sleep.”



*‘Sexual Violence on a Massive Scale in Kosovo: UN Report,’ AFP, New York, 25 May 1999 (in French).*

#### Extract:

A UN report issued Tuesday states that women of Albanian origin have been victims of “sexual violence on a massive scale” by the Serbs in Kosovo. The women have been the victims of rape, kidnapping, detention and torture, according to an anonymous report, and some have been raped by several men “sometimes for several days.” Those who had been released had bruises on their arms and legs where they had been beaten. Ms Serrano-Fitamant reports that in the villages and small towns, the soldiers first round up the young women. “The soldiers take away groups of five to thirty women on trucks to unknown locations, or lock them in the houses where they live,” she said. She also states that at check-points, soldiers were forcing the women to undress to make sure they were not hiding any valuables. The soldiers then ‘rewarded’ themselves by raping the most attractive women, usually between the ages of 15 and 25.



*‘Milosevic Charged with “Crimes Against Humanity,”’ Le Monde (France), 28 May 1999 (in French). [D254](#)*

#### Extract:

Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic has been charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), for his responsibility for acts committed in Kosovo. The President of Serbia, Milan Milutinovic, and three other officials have also been charged. The indictment, which was signed Sunday by ICTY prosecutor Ms Louise Arbour, and confirmed Monday by a judge, was to be made public on Thursday May 27, at a press conference in The Hague. The prosecutor’s decision caught Western leaders by surprise; although they had encouraged the Tribunal’s investigations, they were not expecting them to result in a charge against the Supreme Commander of the Yugoslav army so quickly. Early Western reactions Thursday were positive; no one was prepared to speculate publicly about the consequences of the charges on the crisis in Kosovo. Russia’s Ambassador to the UN, Sergei Lavrov criticised the ICTY’s decision, which he said would compromise the ongoing diplomatic process. Russian Emissary Viktor

Chernomyrdin, however, decided to go ahead with his planned visit to Belgrade Thursday. The charges laid by the ICTY disqualify Slobodan Milosevic and Milan Milutinovic as negotiating partners. Western diplomats noted Thursday that they had no intention of negotiating with him in any case.

**At their annual general meetings, the French and Swiss sections reviewed the ways in which the Kosovo crisis was manipulated, the operational problems encountered by MSF, and its public statements about the crisis.**



'The President's **Annual Report**: 1999' General Assembly,' Philippe Biberson, MSF France President, 29 May 1999 (in French). [D255](#)

#### **Extract:**

##### A difficult and disturbing mission

In Macedonia, the state army block-ed tens of thousands of deportees at the border post of Blace. They were then 'evacuated' under deplorable conditions, to camps that had been set up by French and British forces. Some were sent to other countries without explanation and families were separated. At other borders, the refugees were able to get across very quickly and most of them were absorbed into the populations of the host countries. This was to their benefit, of course, for the comfort of a house, even when overcrowded, is better than living out in the open in a temporary camp. But when this happened, one of the essential stages in protection and provision of assistance to refugees was skipped. The registration, identification, and counting of refugees did not take place. Two months after the start of the exodus, registration is still largely incomplete; the bulk of the refugees are condemned to an anonymity that leaves them exposed to all kinds of ill treatment.

The mission was also disturbing because, despite the scale of the exodus and the terrible conditions in which it took place, the deportees (at least during the initial period) did not require that much medical attention. The standard practices of a large-scale relief operation are not designed to cope with elderly people suffering from chronic organ failure or psychological trauma. The rapid dispersal of the refugees to the south and into family homes further complicated the establishment of consistent activities. Finally, it was disturbing because the context was totally dominated by a war in which civilian and international humanitarian action was kept on a tight rein. The refugees were a circumstance of the war, their number and distribution a circumstance of strategy, and their image a fundamental circumstance for the influencing of public opinion.

In fact, the issue of refugee rights and the problem of their reception and exploitation were present from the very beginning. At first, the deportees were useful as victims of Milosevic, however, as asylum seekers who were owed protection and assistance, they were a great burden. Neighbouring countries and other states were more concerned with political risks and the destabilisation of the Balkans. In Albania, the mass of refugees served as a convenient pretext for armies; it enabled them to provide military support under the cloak of humanitarianism. In view of the circumstances, could we leave the running of the camps to the troops that had set them up? Could we stand by and do nothing when faced, in the midst of a refugee crisis, with the virtual absence of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees? It was not a matter of criticising colleagues who had allowed themselves to be overwhelmed by such a sudden and massive flood of refugees, but of trying to ensure that a totally abnormal and cynical situation was rectified as soon as possible. The lack of registration meant that individuals with no identity papers simply became a mass of people that could be shunted from one place to another, that had to be fed, that had no stories to tell, that could only be expressed and represented as victims on the one hand and as objects of concern on the other. What a nightmare!

##### The question of humanitarian needs

Without underestimating the psychological traumas, physical injuries and other morbid stresses that afflicted and continue to afflict the refugees, in terms of their social integrity, of their very existence as individuals, as families and as a people [...] it was not a case of wholesale murder. At least this is the finding that emerged from the study conducted in Montenegro by Vincent Brown. A classic medical and demographic study, its purpose was to clarify the needs of the refugees so that Médecins Sans Frontières could respond accordingly. Initially, the report (entitled 'Stories of a Deportation') was simply part of the usual information-gathering exercise, which is necessary if we are to be of use to a population affected by a crisis. It became our contribution to the revelation of what had happened to these people. Edited by Françoise Saulnier, it illustrates the necessity in humanitarian action, of establishing the facts: if these innumerable testimonies, all telling the same story, all tragic, had not been linked together, their impact would have been reduced considerably. When assembled in a methodical and scrupulously objective way, the accounts enabled us to name the crime to which the refugees had been subjected: systematic mass deportation. We now know from the refugees' stories that the deportation that plunged them into the unknown and exposed them to the most cynical exploitation was the culmination of a coordinated process, the ethnic cleansing of the province of Kosovo, a process that was announced and largely accomplished.

##### The 'other side'

Of course, it is easy to imagine the serious consequences of NATO's war for the populations of Kosovo and Serbia. Médecins Sans Frontières wanted to get involved at the

outset but permission to conduct an assessment of needs was never granted. The recent MSF Greece mission could have been an exploratory mission, but as it was conducted in conditions that were open to criticism in terms of independence, it brought back little useful information. We know little of what is really happening in the province of Kosovo or in Serbia but we do have a lot of recent experience - several years' worth - in Yugoslavia. We know that the means exist to care for the wounded and other victims (in the broad sense) of the war, and we have reason to believe that they have not been left to fend for themselves. The situation needed to be assessed, but not in that way. An exploratory mission to Serbia and Kosovo should have reflected our concerted desire to establish our 'truth' and to make it known. It failed; it was a total failure. Moreover, how could it be regarded as a Médecins Sans Frontières mission when it was prepared in secret and only granted entry on the condition that it kept its distance from the rest of the movement? It could have been a tactical move (an exploratory mission conducted under the cover of MSF Greece) had it been discussed and shared, but it ended up as a repudiation of the other MSF sections.

The very fact that Belgrade selected its MSF section illustrates this regime's contempt for our organisation and its mission. Leaving aside the Greek section, Médecins Sans Frontières now regards itself as banned from any possibility of action in Serbia. It is beyond doubt that if any member of MSF wants to assist the victims of the NATO bombardments, the only way to do so is by pretending to be Greek or by contriving to join the Serbian Red Cross. It is disastrous. Because of the way it was conducted, the mission's sole achievement was to exempt itself from the NATO propaganda machine by feeding the Belgrade version that portrayed the Serbs as victims. But Médecins Sans Frontières is not indebted to NATO. We disagree with the politics of this war and have demonstrated our position in a number of ways, including the refusal of institutional funding from NATO member states. We all have our own views on this war, on its reasons and its outcomes - some even venture their opinions on strategy! But as Médecins Sans Frontières, we cannot say or convey the impression - because of course there are victims on both sides - that needs are the same; we cannot there is no difference between victims and executioners.

Through crisis after crisis, Médecins Sans Frontières has constructed a 'doctrine' of action based on the rejection of 'neutralism'. Over the years, we have made difficult choices which have sometimes led us to abandon our work in a specific zone in order to avoid putting 'all the victims' on the same plane and to retain our sense of perspective. This Médecins Sans Frontières 'subjectivity' is, I admit, difficult to acquire and cannot function if there is no debate.



'The president's **Annual Report** 1998-1999,' Olivier Dechevrens, MSF Switzerland President, June 1999 (in French). [D256](#)

#### Extract:

The principal challenge of the past year has been our attempted collaboration with the Greek section, where we intended to create a common operational centre between Geneva and Athens. We tried to overcome the obstacles - the differences in structure, concepts and practical application between our organisations - but we were unable to achieve the conditions necessary for effective day-to-day collaboration. The expenditure of time and energy resulting from these differences, and especially from diverging interpretations of the explosive Balkan context, led us to conclude that collaboration had failed, certainly in the form initially envisaged. The International Council, therefore, has to try to find a solution that clarifies the operational status of the Greek section within our movement and, more broadly, to take immediate steps to define the ways in which all the sections participate in the movement. [...] Finally, although our section is not involved in the Balkans I cannot remain silent on the current situation in this area. To put it bluntly, when the government of Mr Milosevic expels the Kosovo Albanians from their land we are confronted with a crime against humanity. It is obvious that the expulsion process began before March; the present events are the crisis point and perhaps a point of no return.

NATO's political response - the bombing - might not be the best option. We all have our own views on that. I am not competent to judge and it is not for MSF to comment on the matter. What should be clear is that there are civilian victims, Serbs as well as Kosovo Albanians. When MSF is able to work independently in Serbia and Kosovo, it will assist all the victims. A population should not be confused with its government. Although it is tempting to compare them, we cannot regard a process of ethnic cleansing and the military response to this crime as being on the same level. A war is never 'humanitarian'; probably the only way it can be justified is as a defence of the principles expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is clear that a war is not 'surgical'. As a doctor, I stand against this abuse of language and I recall that surgery often 'stinks, bleeds and hurts'. In the present context, it is crucial that MSF and other humanitarian organisations avoid falling into the trap which is looming ever larger; the trap that will close on us if of our humanitarian action, which is supposed to be independent, is confused with parallel relief action conducted by the armies of the governments in conflict. There is a confusion of genres; this is very serious and we must react to it. In this particular crisis, the division of privately donated funds among different sections of MSF enabled the Belgian section to work in Albania without having to ask NATO governments for money. That is significant; it is a question of principle. Once again, our visibility in the field obliges us to distinguish ourselves clearly from the 'humanitarian

army' if we hope to retain our present independence and credibility. This may soon become even more important should we have to enter Kosovo in the wake of an armed intervention force.

**On 30 May 1999, a NATO raid inadvertently caused the death of civilians for the thirteenth time. On 31 May, the Spanish daily *El Mundo* published details of a NATO report, which admitted that the Alliance was losing the information war in Kosovo and recommended using journalists and NGOs to improve its propaganda.**



'Thirteen NATO Raids Have Missed Their Targets or Caused Civilian Casualties,' **AFP** (France), Brussels, 30 May 1999 (in French).

**Extract:**

On Sunday, NATO admitted bombing a bridge at Varvarin, 160 km south of Belgrade, and regretted the deaths of civilians - 11, according to the Yugoslavian Tanjug agency. NATO has now conducted 13 raids which have missed their targets or caused civilian casualties. These deadly raids have caused at least 254 deaths since the war started on 24 March, according to Serbian sources that have not been confirmed by NATO. The Alliance regards these 'errors' and 'civilian losses' as inevitable and statistically insignificant given the overall number of aerial missions. [...]

- 5 April: During a raid on the Serbian mining town of Aleksinac, 200 km south of Belgrade, a laser-guided missile aimed at a barracks complex missed its target and caused 17 fatalities.

- 9 April: Houses were struck during a raid on a telephone exchange in Pristina, the capital of Kosovo. No list of casualties was provided by NATO or Serbian sources.

- 12 April: Missiles struck a bridge at Grdelicka Klisura in southern Serbia. A train was crossing the bridge at the time and 55 people were killed.

- 14 April: NATO bombarded convoys in the Djakovica region (south-west Kosovo) killing 75 people. The Alliance claimed it was trying to neutralise military vehicles and admitted targeting two convoys.

- 28 April: NATO targeted a Yugoslav army barracks at Surdulica, 250 kilometres south of Belgrade. It missed its target and bombed a residential area, killing at least twenty civilians.

- 1 May: the bombing of a bridge on which a bus was travelling at Luzane, 20 km north of Pristina in the province of Kosovo, resulted in 47 deaths.

- 7 May: A NATO daylight raid on the centre of Nis in south-east Serbia killed at least 15 people and injured 70 more when a fragmentation bomb deviated from its target. The planes had been aiming at the city airport and a radio relay station.

- 8 May: The bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade

killed three Chinese journalists and injured twenty people. The raid provoked a serious diplomatic crisis with Beijing. The United States and NATO blamed a faulty map for this fatal blunder.

- 13 May: Serbian sources said 87 Kosovo Albanian civilians were killed in a raid on the village of Korisa in southern Kosovo. NATO claimed it had bombed a 'legitimate target', a military camp, but could not explain the presence of civilians there.

- 20 May: A misdirected bomb from a NATO plane struck the Dragisa Misovic hospital in the Dedinje quarter of Belgrade. Four patients lost their lives.

- 21 May: The bombing of a prison in Istok in north-east Kosovo, regarded by NATO as an 'assembly zone' for the Yugoslavian police and military, killed at least 19 people, according to the Serbian information centre.

- 22 May: NATO admitted bombing a KLA position at Kosare in Kosovo, near the border with Albania, which it had mistaken for a Yugoslavian army position. The separatists suffered 7 dead and 15 wounded, according to informed sources.

- 30 May: The bombing of a bridge in Varvarin, 160 km south of Belgrade, killed at least 11 people and wounded 40 others, according to Tanjug, the official Yugoslavian agency. NATO insisted that it was an important communication route and said the civilian deaths had been unintentional.



'NATO Fears it is Losing the Information War,' (*El Mundo*), **AFP** (France), Madrid, 31 May 1999 (in French).

**Extract:**

The Atlantic Alliance is losing the 'information war' in Kosovo, claimed the Spanish daily *El Mundo*, quoting a NATO report that recommends involving NGOs and journalists to improve its propaganda. The report suggests that the campaign may 'last for some time' and advocates preparing public opinion for three scenarios: a long period of aerial bombing, an escalation of air strikes against non-military targets, and a ground attack.

According to the document, which was produced by the staff of NATO Secretary General Javier Solana, NATO does not possess the necessary mechanisms, means, or experience to conduct an information campaign in wartime. It recommends the use of all possible channels to improve its communication, especially NGOs, journalists and even the armed forces. «We should establish which non-governmental organisations (NGOs) it is possible to use, what roles they seek to develop and what audience they are able to reach." The report also suggests that NGOs could organise new activities, which could be used to convey NATO points of view.

At the beginning of June, Médecins du Monde and the Fédération Internationale des Droits de l'Homme (FIDH) published a report which concluded, as had MSF, that the Kosovo Albanians had been subjected to a systematic process of deportation. The report named those responsible and demanded that they be brought before an international court. Such close links between humanitarian aid and the defence of human rights aroused debate in the French press.



'Justice for the Kosovo Albanians: Report of a First Investigation of War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity Perpetrated in Kosovo,' FIDH, Médecins du Monde, June 1999 (in French).  
D257

#### Extract:

[...] All work was mandated to this end by the Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme (FIDH) and Médecins du Monde. These investigative missions were not simply a compilation of spontaneous stories but were undertaken from a rigorously judicial perspective. [...]

[...] Soldiers and representatives of special-forces are named as the authors or co-authors of assaults conducted with both heavy and light weapons (aerial and ground bombardment, mortar fire, grenade attacks, artillery shelling, etc.) on villages and houses inhabited by totally defenceless ethnic Albanians. [...] These acts may be described as crimes against humanity of the type defined and enumerated in Article 5 of the statute of the ICC, and therefore expose those who committed them as authors, co-authors or accomplices, and also those who ordered, encouraged, prepared, incited or aided their commission, to legal action and charges on the basis of Article 18 of the statute of the ICC. [...] The responsibility of the leaders of the Republic of Serbia and of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is clear in several respects. [...] Thus, besides the executants, Article 7 of the statute of the ICC applies to those who planned, ordered or incited the commission of war crimes and crimes against humanity by Serbian military, paramilitary and special-forces in Kosovo. These are named as:

- Slobodan Milosevic, President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
- Jovica Stanisic, Security Advisor to the president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and head of the security service.
- Vladimir Djordevic, Head of Public Security for the Republic of Serbia
- Nebojsa Pavkovic, Commander of the Serbian armed forces in Kosovo.
- Streten Lukic, Chief of Special Forces in Kosovo
- Franki Simatovic, Commander of the special units deployed in Kosovo
- Zeljko Raznatovic ('Arkan'), Chief of the paramilitary force known as the 'Tigers'

- Vojislav Seselj, Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia and leader of the White Eagles



'Justice: an Indispensable Aspect of Therapy,' *Le Quotidien du Médecin* (France), 2 June 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

In early May, Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) issued a report which drew on an epidemiological study and a collection of witness testimonies. It concluded that the crimes committed in Kosovo formed part of a systematic policy and qualified as war crimes and crimes against humanity (*Le Quotidien*, 4 May). Now it is the turn of Médecins du Monde and FIDH, which have joined forces to produce a report that reaches the same conclusions. The publication of these two documents may leave some people wondering why medical NGOs are plunging into what is largely a legal battle.

[...] MDM and FIDH believe that the strength and relevance of the 'alliance' between doctor and jurist derives from the scale of the violence inflicted on the Kosovo Albanians. «It endows the words of the patient and victim with a therapeutic and legal dimension. Above all, being able to speak is to contribute to one's own healing, to the re-establishment of one's dignity, and it also contributes to the constitution of an individual, familial and collective memory. And, more important, it is a way of participating in the identification of those responsible, to pave the way for legal action and judgement.» Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, legal officer of Médecins Sans Frontières, stressed the importance of determining the causes of the suffering endured by people in receipt of aid. "MSF is not a human rights organisation; its field is humanitarian action. But for us, such action is only possible if we can understand and describe exactly what it is that turns people into victims. That is one of the very foundations of humanitarian aid, which is more than a simple focus on the problem of needs. The victim of a natural disaster is not the same as the victim of a planned and organised deportation. The victims' rights and needs are not the same."

## AN AWAITED, MEDIA COVERED RETURN TO KOSOVO

Following a fact-finding mission in Serbia and Kosovo, the UN commissioner for humanitarian affairs warned that delivering aid to the displaced populations inside Kosovo was a matter of urgency. He claimed that his mission had found abundant evidence of the violence committed by Serbian forces in Kosovo. A NATO

spokesman announced the organisation of KFOR, an international peacekeeping force for Kosovo. On 3 June 1999, Slobodan Milosevic accepted a peace plan based on the cessation of NATO bombing following the withdrawal of Serbian forces from Kosovo.



'UN to Organise Aid Convoys for Displaced Populations in Kosovo,' **AFP** (France), New York, 2 June 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

Sergio Vieira de Mello said that he hoped to secure Belgrade's agreement so that "regular road convoys" would be able to deliver aid to the populations in Kosovo, and was also seeking the means to control its distribution. The Yugoslavian authorities "assured us that they were ready to let us do that," he told reporters after briefing the UN Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Kosovo. He added that the delivery of as much aid as possible should proceed without delay, but admitted that in terms of the security and control of aid distribution, conditions were "far from ideal."

Mr de Mello led a mission composed of a dozen UN humanitarian agencies. In late May, it spent ten days in Kosovo and entered other parts of Yugoslavia for the first time since NATO strikes began on 24 March. [...] He told the Security Council that the mission had collected "irrefutable evidence" of a planned and organised campaign of violence against civilians, aimed at their "displacement and permanent deportation," according to the text of his statement published by the UN. There should be an urgent independent enquiry, he added. He stressed that all the testimony collected by the mission pointed to an "explosion of murders, arson, looting, forcible expulsion, violence, vendetta and terror" between 24 March and 10 April. Mr de Mello rejected the arguments advanced by Belgrade on the grounds that they could not "account for, explain, or justify the extent and intensity of the brutality inflicted on civilian populations."

He stressed that emergency aid was necessary for the "over half a million people" displaced within Kosovo. Food, health care and drinking water were among the most urgent needs. It appears that the refugees and displaced populations are more in need of protection than humanitarian aid. The hundreds of thousands of Kosovo Albanians who had fled to other countries would only return under the protection of a "powerful" international force, he said. A force responsible for ensuring the return of approximately one million refugees is "priority number one," he told reporters.



'Thirty-one Countries Commit 50,000 troops to KFOR,' Philippe Rater, **AFP** (France), Brussels, 2 June 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

The 19 members of NATO and 12 of its neutral or Eastern European partners have offered approximately 50,000 troops for a future peacekeeping force in Kosovo (KFOR), NATO spokesman Jamie Shea announced on Wednesday. These countries have so far committed a total of "47,868 soldiers," he said at a press conference, where he assured journalists that the troops would soon be ready for deployment in the Serbian province. Mr Shea did not provide details of individual contributions and NATO declined to elaborate on Wednesday. Russia was not one of the 12 partners involved in the initial negotiations with NATO over the composition of KFOR. [...] The planned force is called KFOR for Kosovo Force. The operation was baptised 'Joint Guard'. "This force is designed to promote democratic values and human rights, not to destroy them as the repressive regime in Belgrade has done," stressed Mr Shea. "We want it to be unique, with a robust unified command and rules of engagement (the right to open fire) which will ensure its effectiveness." He also mentioned the possibility of assigning zones of responsibility to different nations, as in Bosnia.

**Officials from different MSF sections began planning programmes to deal with an early return of refugees to Kosovo. There were fears that the return process would exacerbate the insecurity and poor quality of life the refugees were already experiencing.**



'Scenarios - Return to Serbia and Kosovo,' **Email** from Vincent Janssens, MSF Belgium Directors of Operations to MSF operations directors and Kosovo programme managers, 3 June 1999 (in English). **D258** [↗](#)

Dear all,

Now maybe more than before (and if its not today, it'll be tomorrow) we have to prepare amongst ourselves for a return both to Belgrade and to Kosovo; at the same time, the moment this opportunity will be there we still have to secure our present activities, particularly the ones in Montenegro for evident reasons. There is a whole series of aspects to be tackled globally for any MSF going in:

- Criteria for humanitarian space
- Objective of coverage
- Collaboration with other interveners - defining priorities

Differentiate in strategies between IDPs left and refugees coming in - a series of risks to evaluate:

- Retaliations UCK
- Political agreement not kept
- Defining Kosovar citizenship
- Mines
- Uranium issue
- 'False safe-haven' syndrome
- How to go about mass-grave confrontation - logistics
- NATO coordination

What I would like to take up at first amongst these themes is the one of coordinating practically amongst us. The baseline is as from the beginning:

For Belgrade:

That we try from all sides to get expat people in and prospect operational potential; as soon as this is a fact, operational options are in principle open to all sections, but we'll have to make sure from the start about fundamental coherence by agreeing upon a coordination amongst us; MSF B proposes to assume this in line with the situation before, but there is room to see which kind of formula (see the set of 5 schemes in the ET-evaluation report). As such we'll see with our local team what preparations can already be set up in advance. If by that time there are still Greeks around, they could be included

For Kosovo:

We try to get in by crossing all borders and, if there is real humanitarian space that we try to set up operations; we feel like that once the opening is made (by agreement) that Kosovo will become a virtual independent Albanian state, militarised but with large needs (enough to keep all sections busy) and probably many interveners; here again, we think there is no need for geographical split-up between sections, although MSF B would be happy to recuperate the humanitarian space lost in Pristina; it could as such also serve as exchange for circulating information; the formula opted for to preserve at this level international coherence again can be looked at (even the modular one ?).



'More Specifications Going to Kosovo (to complement to my first message),' **Email** from Vincent Janssens, MSF Belgium Director of Operations to MSF operations directors and Kosovo programme manager, 7 June 1999 (in English). [D259](#)

**Extract:**

Based on some new elements from Skopje: (I guess Tim Pitt [MSF Holland HOM in Skopje] will send propositions himself, but as we agreed to start shooting ideas and suggestions to each other, here are some) apparently it seems useful to distinguish two steps in the return process for MSF:

1. assessment phase:

-Most likely only possible from Macedonia as smallest UCK-interference and less 'protected' border (mines); also the starting point for NATO;

-The assessment team could be 'international', but as it would leave from Skopje it would have a 'Dutch' backbone and management;

The composition and scale of feasible assessment could be different if we consider stepping in:

1/ Before NATO:

-Team should be small, non-NATO nationals (MSF B seems able to offer John Farqueson (Australia), Irena Johanson and Johan Von Schreeb (Swedish)

-Unclear how far it would be able to get (Pristina?) - solid security precautions are needed (blindée [amored])

2/ After NATO:

-Team could be larger, eventually more than one

-Nationalities would be less an issue; MSF B could offer Eric Goemaere, Christopher Stokes?

-It is evident that this mission can encounter problems at different levels and would therefore require staffs that have time flexibility

Seems useful to have international conversation about:

- Assessment schemes and what to check - security measures
- Communication on observations

2. operational phase:

-The heaviest caseload of refugees will come from Albania, probably all through Kukes;

-As mentioned, it seems logic and useful to have a different section coming in, both for the volume and the appropriation; the proposed coordination scheme would be 'Burundi-like', rather light, hoping that all can keep working in mutual confidence

-A regional repartition would be preferable, e.g. F in Pec, H in Prizren and B in Pristina; if S and E are also interested to go modular additional areas can be defined

-Particularly we have to discuss, also, with the old club of actors in Kosovo before the bombing to see what they plan

-We absolutely have to discuss internationally our ambition and our added-value in this context (that will be full of needs and actors) beforehand and try to set this in form of a few criteria to select operational actions

-We could do a small projection of what needs we'll find and have to address for the Kosovars who were still staying in Kosovo (based on OCHA report?) and for the refugees and preposition at the border, at least some available people and basic materials (? sheeting ...)

-We also have to see what we can bring in along with the refugees without abandoning capacity in the neighbouring countries (be prepared for the worst).



'Return to Kosovo, a Dutch Perspective,' **Email** from Wouter Kok, MSF Holland Emergency programme manager Director, 8 June 1999 (in English). [D260](#)

Dear All,

With some contributions from Vincent Janssens, and from the field (Christopher and Tim) dropping in, herewith

some more ideas on a possible way of cooperation between the sections in Kosovo. (This to contribute to the foreseen teleconf tomorrow at 13:00):

1. MSF wants to work in Kosovo, represented by one HoM.
2. MSF is willing to accept responsibility for provision of services in designated districts IF under overall coordination of UNHCR.
3. Different sections may give different interpretation to the sort of operationality. This will make it difficult/impossible for the one HoM to represent MSF on other aspects than témoignage and general representation.

Each section should define what sort of operationality is foreseen. Ranging from strictly medical emergency services to long term rehabilitation programmes for Kosovo. (MSF H will take a three months-emergency-perspective in first instance). Bearing above in mind, the organigram as proposed by Christopher/Tim is valid, with some adjustments towards the task of the single HoM, and the functions of logistics and finances to be considered. Some practical matters:

-An assessment team is on stand-by in Skopje, making practical preparations for a return. Security being the first issue of thinking. Consist of four non-NATO nationals, drawn from two sections.

-To be seen as an MSF Team, not an MSF H team

-Attempts being made to get in before NATO, reality will probably dictate an entry after NATO.

That is it for the moment. Thanks, Wouter Kok.



'Charter to Belgrade,' **Email** from Vincent Janssens, MSF Belgium Director of Operations to MSF operations directors and Kosovo programme managers, 9 June 1999 (in English). [D261](#)

#### Extract:

Just for info:

We are getting feedback from our people in Belgrade that flying in emergency medical material might be a realistic option in the coming days; this results from meetings they kept on attending since the beginning. At the same time, we believe this should not be seen in the context of visa-negotiations: we feel like this won't work, neither by conditioning expats on such a plan, neither by expecting changes by the plan. On top of this, we remain particularly concerned with the conditioning of any aid by an international needs assessment and guarantees to accompany it to the beneficiaries; this means that sending in standardised items now aims only at anticipating probable needs; also in trying to increase MSF's reactivity-capacity. We expect that basically all NGOs will receive visas at the same time and that within hours, transport and importation channels will be overwhelmed. As such, we have been giving feedback to Belgrade that we should try to get in this basic material but upon official condition that it can be stored and kept in an independent MSF-warehouse and kept there until decent international assessment can be made.

Vincent



'Return to Kosovo,' **Email** from Graziella Godain, MSF France Kosovo programme manager to her colleagues in Macedonia and the headquarters of MSF France, 10 June 1999 (in French). [D262](#)

#### Extract:

I'm hunched over my keyboard to give you a brief summary of MSF F positions on returning to Kosovo. There's a meeting of ODs in Amsterdam tomorrow (Friday) to finalise the return plan.

1) But there's also our own position:

-MSF F is interested in taking over the zone of PEC, Istok and Djakovica (where most of the people we are busy with, in Montenegro, came from). Politically, it's very unstable as it's the Serbian nationalist stronghold; the zone has seen a lot of confrontations recently and throughout the past year.

MSF F envisages the following priorities:

-Explo and rapid takeover of the IDPs in this zone: (medical, food/nutrition, water and shelter),

-Preparing to take charge of the returnees (food and shelter first, followed by sanitation then med soon afterwards)

-Activities are centralised more on the peripheries of the big towns (Pec and Djakovica) because we think the rural zone is the worst affected, the most fragile in terms of the security and protection of the population, the most accessible and easier for working closely with the population and the carers. That doesn't mean we ignore the towns in the first phase of the return, but we prioritise activity on the periphery in the second phase, when populations and NGOs return en masse.

2) I know that some of you (and I'm particularly referring to the Macedonia team) are fuming over the business of the intersectional coordination plan in Kosovo: put all that aside, we'll manage with our friends...

Concentrate on:

-Identification of possible entry points.

-Preliminary identification of local Albanian staff (north-west region) willing to work for MSF,

-Identification of transport (cars and lorries) to convey teams and materials

-Constitution of a team ready to return with reinforcements from Paris to Kosovo; pre-positioning of materials.

-Developing contacts with the KLA as well as with civilian authorities and local Albanian notables.

3) MSF F will coordinate with UN, UNHCR, NATO and ECHO when necessary but will not be coordinated by them!!! Intersectional organisation - it's planned (should be decided by ODs on Friday) as follows:

-Geographical division: MSF H PRIZREN zone, MSF B PRISTINA zone, MSF F PEC zone.

-Operational coordination is therefore independent but one person (a public relations officer, to use international jargon) will be responsible for coordination between HOM, representation and MSF contact with reps in Pristina after agreement with HOM. Also representation and establishing press contacts with the different teams. Has no decision



making powers concerning operations (who wants the job? Joke!).



'Decisions Made by the Group of ODs,' **Minutes** of MSF operational directors meeting, 11 June 1999 (in English). [D263](#)

#### Extract:

1. Participation convoy: the group of ODs agree to be part of the UNHCR convoy into Kosovo, ETD from Skopje Sunday morning. Although the UNHCR convoy will fall under NATO military control, there is no strong objection for MSF to be part of it; the re-entry into Kosovo falls under the auspicious of the UN while cease-fire is in place. MSF will use this opportunity and use the framework of the UN. MSF however is not tied to this UN coordination framework, meaning that MSF will decide for itself, when to use and not to use the coordination framework, following MSF principles and MSF's security policy in Kosovo. In case there are other opportunities to enter Kosovo from one of the surrounding 'republics' MSF will do so.

2. Functional Structure: the structure decided upon by the group of ODs is for the initial exploratory phase, starting Sunday (re-entry) lasting approximately one week. During this week (from Monday on) daily teleconferences will be held amongst the ODs in order to be informed on fact finding in Kosovo, decide on MSF strategy and the structure once MSF becomes operational. Input from Christopher Stokes in the teleconferences is desirable. The group of ODs are in favour of a geographical division of the MSF activities amongst the sections. Both MSF Spain and Swiss have a strong wish to be part of the explos in regards to human resources. MSF Spain will continue its attempt to enter Kosovo through other channels than the UNHCR convoy. MSF Swiss will examine the possibilities to enter Serbia (Nis) from Sofia.

The structure: the structure will be strongly decentralised with one common MSF representative. The responsibilities of the MSF representative:

- Focus point for MSF,
- Representation to third organisations, authorities etc.
- Global view of the situation, location of the various teams and their activities.
- The teams in the field will have a witnessing role, the teams can communicate externally what they witness, in case they wish to communicate on political and MSF strategic issues the group of ODs will be informed in advance and decide accordingly.
- Christopher Stokes will be the MSF representative in Pristina for the first 10 days; in the meantime a replacement will have to be identified.
- One log coordinator and a PR person will be in Pristina next to the MSF representative.

3. Internal MSF communication (sitreps): daily sitreps will be continued for the MSF network, synthesised in

Brussels. It will be done in a more communicative way in order to make it accessible and understandable for the MSF network as a whole. One of the partner sections will be consulted. [...]

Apart from the realisation that there is a large amount of earmarked funds available, MSF's position towards NATO-member states funding needs to be reviewed according to the group of ODs. The ODs ask the GDs to make a decision on this principle standpoint. Amongst the ODs, there is feeling that the situation has changed with a cease-fire and UN mandate in place, and that after the retreat of the Yugoslav army/police from Kosovo this standpoint may be open for revision, decision making on GD level.

**On 4 June 1999, despite the reservations of MSF Belgium's operations director, the MSF Holland team in Skopje issued a press release stating that the return of refugees to Kosovo should not be subjected to any political or military agenda. MSF Spain issued a similar press release from Tirana.**



'Urgent, Press Release,' **Email** from Erwin Van'tland, Press Officer MSF Skopje to MSF communication departments, 4 June 1999 (in English). [D264](#)

#### Extract:

Sorry for the late notice, but as you may know things are moving fast in the Balkans. We will issue a press release here in Skopje on Friday, 4 June, at 11:30. You will find the press release below [above], which has been prepared here in close collaboration with Amsterdam. The desks at other sections should know about it. We will personally deliver the release to a select-ed number of journalists and simultaneously make it avail-able in the hotels where journalists are staying. You can use it for your media, but please do not jump the gun: 11:30 our time (which is the same as Amsterdam time) is when you have the green light. Any difficult questions or requests for interviews you can refer to me.

We've got a lot of mileage out of our previous statements of principle regarding military and civilian tasks in refugee aid; it is reflected in the summary of the UNHCR press briefing which I sent you earlier. Now is the time to hammer the message home. Hence the haste.

Erwin

Press release: Skopje, 4 June 1999: The international medical aid agency Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is calling upon all actors in the Balkans conflict to ensure that humanitarian assistance and the resettlement of refugees be under civilian - and not under military - authority. This should be clearly stated in all agreements regarding

repatriation of Kosovar refugees. MSF sees four roles for an international military force in the event that Kosovar refugees return home. "They should take responsibility for general security and the clearing of mines and booby traps," says Timothy Pitt, the MSF Head of Mission in Macedonia. "They may also be asked to support humanitarian organisations with heavy logistics and airlifts of supplies and people, though coordination of these tasks remains the responsibility of the UN High Commissioner of Refugees," Mr Pitt adds. According to MSF, such clarity should be reflected in all written agreements and rigidly adhered to. Assistance to refugees and the resident population of the Former Yugoslav Republic should be based on the principles of providing aid to those most at risk, neutrality and impartiality. Interference from political or military agendas in humanitarian aid has to be avoided. Mr Pitt adds that MSF wants to go back into Kosovo and Serbia as soon as possible. "We know that the needs of internally displaced and the resident population are paramount," he says. Currently, MSF assists refugees and residents in Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro and Bosnia. The organisation has over 100 expatriate staff in the region and employs hundreds of locally recruited staff. For its work in the Balkans, MSF has thus far declined any funding from governments who have a military involvement in the conflict, to maintain its neutrality. [...]



'Re: Draft Statement,' **Email** from Vincent Janssens, MSF Belgium Director of Operations, 4 June 1999 (in English). [D265](#)

A small reaction that comes a bit late:

- Recalling that last time you made a call for support to the UN, the UN read it as stating that the UN was weak, I hope you have been cross-checking it with them this time,  
-All over I feel like this message is coming too soon and, as is such, somehow contributing to an (to my opinion) unrealistic expectation that a return is something that will start as from tomorrow  
-I feel a bit uncomfortable with the paragraph in which we tell what Nato's role could be: it sounds rather pretentious (although I know this is not the intention) and I feel that a press-release is not the good medium to tackle this, as it requires much more explanation to be well understood  
Regards,  
Vincent



'Kosovo: the Return of the Refugees Should Take Place Without Political or Military Interference – Médecins Sans Frontières Calls for a Clear Separation of Military and Humanitarian Action,' **Press release** MSF Spain, Tirana/Skopje/Barcelona, 4 June 1999 (in Spanish). [D266](#)

#### Extract:

The international humanitarian assistance organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) calls for a clear distinction between the roles and responsibilities of the military and those of humanitarian assistance organisations in the event that refugees decide to return to Kosovo. The UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, declared during his visit to Macedonia on May 19th that "humanitarian assistance is a civilian activity." MSF asks all the parties implicated to respect this principle in the countries sheltering refugees, and that it be reiterated in all international agreements regarding conditions for the return of refugees to Kosovo. "During the first weeks of the crisis there was a lot of confusion about the roles of humanitarian assistance," said Eric Stobbaerts, Executive Director of MSF [Spain]. "At the moment, the role of the international military force and the Yugoslav army is crucial to ensuring security and carrying out the de-mining process in the zone" continued Eric Stobbaerts. "Furthermore humanitarian agencies may need to ask them for logistical help to transport refugees and material goods. But it must remain clear that humanitarian assistance organisations, and particularly UNHCR, would be responsible for the coordination and definition of the conditions in which such collaboration would take place," added Stobbaerts. This clarity should be reflected in written agreements and guaranteed in the practice of humanitarian assistance. The protection of the IDP's and resident population's rights, as well as the cover of basic necessities, must not be influenced by any military or political agenda. E.g. the transport or return of refugees must be carried out on the basis of voluntary repatriation, independent of any political or military interests. MSF's objective is to return to Serbia and Kosovo as soon as possible. "There are clearly extensive medical needs among the population" explained Eric Stobbaerts. "Every day the situation deteriorates further and can result in the loss of human lives." MSF teams are currently assisting refugees and the local population in Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro and Bosnia.

**On 8 June 1999, the foreign ministers of the G8 countries adopted a peace plan that included UN led international peacekeeping force. On 9 June 1999, NATO suspended air strikes as Serbian forces began their withdrawal from Kosovo. On 10 June, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1244, which authorised the immediate deployment of KFOR in Kosovo.**



'UN Hails the End of a "Dark Chapter" in the History of the Balkans,' Afsané Bassir, *Le Monde* (France), 12 June 1999 (in French). [D267](#)

#### Extract:

There were fourteen votes in favour and one abstention – China: on Thursday 10 June, the UN Security Council adopted the peace plan for Kosovo. Voting took place shortly after the receipt of written confirmation from the secretary general of NATO that the allied bombing had ceased. The adoption of resolution 1244, which authorises the immediate deployment of an international force in Kosovo and the setting up of a civilian administration, aroused unprecedented rejoicing at the United Nations. Only 30 of the 185 UN member countries spoke at the formal council meeting, but most of them hailed a "happy day for the United Nations."

For the overwhelming majority of speakers, the adoption of the peace plan, even if it had been largely drawn up by the G8, marked the UN's "return to grace" in international affairs and was seen as an "acknowledgement of its powers." They believed the vote confirmed the Security Council's authority because it now had the "prerogative to authorise" the use of force. [...] Many other countries welcomed the adoption of the peace plan as a "victory for humanity." But some representatives, particularly from Africa, were under no illusions: "I know that this western goodwill will never extend to the African continent," said one. "But I am nonetheless delighted to have witnessed the UN finally agree to the first genuine humanitarian intervention." [...] The Russian Ambassador, Sergei Lavrov, emphasised that the resolution authorises an international presence "under UN control." However, he again harshly condemned the "NATO aggression that has transformed a humanitarian crisis into a humanitarian disaster through-out the entire Balkan region."

**During the night of Friday 11 June 1999, several hundred Russian troops began arriving in Pristina, the capital of Kosovo. They were the first to do so. On 12 June, MSF teams entered the city several hours before the arrival of NATO. That same day, the MSF International Council agreed on the principles, objectives, and strategy to be applied in forthcoming MSF operations in Kosovo.**



'British and French Troops Enter Kosovo – After the Russians,' *Le Monde* (France), 13 June 1999 (in French). [D268](#)

#### Extract:

NATO's Operation Joint Guard began at 05:25 local time on

Saturday 12 June, when British detachments from Blace and French units from Slupcane and Lipkovo, to the north of Kumanovo, crossed the border between Macedonia and Kosovo. But these initial movements by KFOR, the international peacekeeping force for Kosovo, were preceded by an unexpected manoeuvre involving 500 Russian soldiers, part of SFOR in Bosnia, who crossed Belgrade on Friday 11 June, reached the Nis region south of the capital and took up positions in the suburbs of Pristina. [...] The Russian attitude caused considerable confusion within NATO, which is responsible for troop deployments. The move was totally unexpected for the Bosnia-based troops entered Pristina via Yugoslavia before agreement had been reached on the nature of Russia's contribution to KFOR. The troops were warmly received by the populations of Belgrade and Pristina. "There is total confusion," said a NATO official in Brussels, where the permanent council was addressed by General Wesley Clark, Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Europe. The Russian Foreign Minister, Igor Ivanov, told CNN television news that the arrival of the [Russian] soldiers had been "inadvertent" and had not been authorised by Moscow. "The situation is under investigation," added Mr Ivanov, "and the troops have been ordered to leave Kosovo immediately and await further instructions." A White House spokesman said he was "satisfied" with the Russian minister's explanation and thought that "constructive discussions" should continue in Moscow in order to establish Russia's role in the peacekeeping force. The Russian detachment took up positions overnight near Pristina's airport, about four kilometres from the centre of the city in which KFOR will set up its headquarters. The troops were still in place towards midday on Saturday.



'MSF International Council Meeting Minutes,' 11, 12 June 1999: Amsterdam, Holland, 12 June 1999 (in English). [D269](#)

#### Extract:

MSF's planned activities in the Balkans region surrounding the Kosovo crisis were presented by Wilna van Artsen (OD for MSF Holland) and reviewed in light of the recent UN Security Council resolution and the international security and humanitarian response. MSF operations at this time in Kosovo were broadly presented. At this time, MSF should be present in Kosovo to:


1. Provide medical humanitarian assistance if required, witness the humanitarian situation of both Serbs and ethnic Albanians
2. To monitor the relationship between humanitarian UN and military activities, and to be prepared to speak out, if required
3. Given that there will be a large number of NGOs present, MSF will adjust its presence accordingly, always looking for our value-added.
4. The internal MSF co-ordination structure will be under constant review.

5. MSF will continue to try to gain entry into Serbia, though Belgrade continues to refuse MSF's presence.


The principles by which MSF will attempt to operate in the region were discussed. Key among these was MSF's independence relative to UN and other actors, and the importance of financial independence as enabling other forms of independence. The previous MSF decision to not accept institutional funding from NATO member states because they were party to the conflict, was endorsed by the IC, and is to be reviewed after a peace deal had been reached for Kosovo. The IC urged the Executive Committee to exercise caution in reversing this decision. The experience of Somalia in 1993 was noted, where when military and political issues became dominant, the US government pressur-ed humanitarian NGOs to leave Somalia, using the fact of strong institutional funding as leverage. The question of availability of private funds within the movement stands apart from these considerations. However, there is a general recognition that more than ample private funds exist within the movement, and these are being inventoried.

As with the potential in Somalia [19]92-93, we must guard against becoming a defacto sub-contractor for NATO and the UN. It was recognised that MSF would like to be present in Kosovo, but clarity around our independent role, the scale of our operations in proportion to need, and our responsibility to witness if required, were stressed. As well, we must be prepared to recognise that there may not be a role for MSF, and in this case we must be prepared to withdraw. Some issues to be considered are summarised below:

1. Independence of access and action in Kosovo and the FRY. MSF should ensure that it has the ability to independently assess the needs of the population; retain unhindered access to the population, especially the most vulnerable; conduct, monitor and evaluate the distribution of aid commodities; and obtain security guarantees for expatriate and local staff. MSF should co-ordinate with other international and local actors, but avoid being co-ordinated by them. Reliable local interlocutors should be identified as soon as possible.
2. All avenues should be explored for autonomous access to the FRY. Although appreciative of the importance of conducting an exploratory mission in Kosovo as soon as possible, there is some concern that this was only possible under the auspices and protection of the NATO forces.
3. MSF should avoid undertaking any action, which could be manipulated by a party to the conflict. This includes acts, which may bestow legitimacy on President Milosevic or any other indicted war criminal.
4. MSF should identify a bottom line, beyond which MSF will not be prepared to go in relations with NATO or other forces; in terms of conditions of access, and with regard to the unintended negative consequences of aid.

 UNHCR had been given or had taken the task of making a schedule of who would be able to go into Kosovo; NATO troops - nobody else - because of demining. There was a small representation of the humanitarian community, all UN, of course, were going to do a first draft assessment. I think we were scheduled for day 3 to be allowed with maybe two people. On that Saturday, when the NATO started moving in, we found two things. One was that the NATO troops would take any good TV friends on their tanks so that this all victory show would be live on television. And, the other thing was that we got a new schedule from UNHCR where we were moved from day 3 to day 4. We had the team ready in Skopje. Christopher [Stokes, MSF Belgium coordinator] had come over, another key staff came over, ready to go. So we said: "How about we take one armoured land cruiser and three expat staff, and one national staff, drive to the border?" We drove to the border. Much to our surprise, nobody stopped us. There was this one national staff UNHCR at the border completely bored. He saw a NATO truck passing by, a NATO car, jeeps, an MSF car... "Shit!!" They just kept overtaking this huge file of NATO cars. What I heard later from Christopher was that they arrived in Pristina before the NATO troops. One of the first vehicles at the end of the afternoon in Pristina. I was in the car following with Tim [Pitt, coordinator MSF Holland]. We felt like: "Ok we cannot go at this stage without an armoured car." So that evening, we heard back from Christopher, we decided to assemble a small convoy, about 12 staff, and went early the next morning. So on Sunday we drove to Pristina, and I was there before lunch.

Erwin Vantland, Communications officer in Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo, MSF International May - June 1999 (in English).

 In fact what really struck me when we returned to Pristina was that we were the first humanitarian workers most people had seen. They were peering at us from behind the curtains. People started coming out of their houses as we walked through the streets and up the hill to the hospital. They were talking to their neighbours and saying: "We saw MSF." The NATO tanks were not there yet; it would take them the best part of 24 hours to get there. It was quite late when we arrived; people were throwing flowers at us. The Serbs were still in Pristina, so it didn't do much for our image of neutrality! We were covered in flowers by the time we got to the hospital. Guards were still hanging around, great hulking brutes who handled their Kalashnikovs like toy pistols. They stared at us - it was really heavy! And they were still looting the city. They were still entering houses and coming out with televisions. And there we were in the middle of it all. It was a very, very weird time. We had this feeling of 'déjà vu' because it looked like those pictures of the liberation of Europe in 1944. [...] The population of Pristina was mostly Albanian. It was

*extraordinary how hospitable the locals were. They invited us to eat and drink with them. Those first few days were great. And then we had the tidal wave. The Serbian forces took almost a week to leave. There was this interim period between the arrival of NATO and the departure of the Serbs. The Serbs had decided to leave, but they took their time and it was very tense.*

Christopher Stokes, coordinator MSF Belgium in Albania and Kosovo, April to June 1999 (in French).

**When the International Council met on 12 June, representatives of MSF Greece refused to discuss their exploratory mission but offered a written statement. Following a discussion based on an assessment by two IC representatives, a resolution was adopted. This gave the Greek section until 28 June 1999 to provide a written commitment to terminate its operational activities or face expulsion from the movement. As this request was ignored, an expulsion procedure was set in motion during the months that followed. However, MSF Greece continued its operations in several areas, retained the MSF name and logo and took the case to the Greek courts.**



'Fact Finding Mission Regarding the MSF Greece Mission to the FRY and the Breakdown of the MSF Greek-Swiss Common Operational Centre Agreement,' **Report**, Stephan Oberreit and Morten Rostrup, 3 June 1999 (in English). [D89](#)

#### **Extract:**

REPORT Completed June 3, 1999. Presented to the MSF International Council 11th-13th of June 1999  
Team: Stephan Oberreit and Morten Rostrup

<b>Part III: Conclusions</b>	24
1. Resume of Findings	24
2. Outcome of the Crisis, Scenarios and Recommendation	24
Annexes	26
Annex 1: MSF Greece Board Letter to IC, April 1, 99, and reply of IC President	26
Annex 2: Letter of IC President to MSF Greece, May 6, 99	27

#### **PART III: CONCLUSIONS**

##### 1 - Resume of Findings

The Greek section wanted to carry out this mission to FRY whatever the conditions and the risks. The reasons are multi-factorial (political positioning, operational ambition, Greek society pressure, 'exclusive' opportunity through the Greek government mediation...). They knew they could only do it alone and that no visas would be issued for non-Greeks. So they prepared it in secret and

imposed it on the movement disregarding the consequences in terms of:

- Political impact on the movement
- Endangering other sections access
- Breakdown in trust & communication

##### Outcome of Crisis. Scenarios and Recommendation

The actions of MSF-G are in our opinion not acceptable due to:

- 1) Violation of humanitarian operational principles,
- 2) Violation of decisions made by the Executive Committee,
- 3) Lack of international co-operation and co-ordination
- 4) Lack of transparency.

We see five alternative scenarios as outcomes of this crisis. These are:

- 1) MSF G continues within the MSF movement as a 6th independent operational centre.
- 2) MSF G continues within the MSF movement as part of a new common operational centre.
- 3) MSF G continues within the movement, but is not allowed to run operations outside Greece. It can maintain its in-country programmes, but will function as a partner section of another operational centre.
- 4) MSF G is suspended from the movement (with clear conditions for re-entering the movement) which would lead to -1) cutting CC-mail and logistical & technical support with all sections and 2) informing partners (UN, ICRC, donors) of the situation.
- 5) MSF G is excluded from the international MSF movement.

In our opinion MSF G has proved itself incapable of running operations abroad within the MSF international framework. Thus, we will not recommend alternative 1 or 2. A question that has already been asked by the movement in recent years is "do the populations in danger need another MSF operational centre or is it the MSF structures that want to become operational?" This has been answered in that MSF needs to optimise its current network and organisation (5 O.C., more than 20 sections & offices, 80 capitals with MSF coordination teams, 100's of missions scattered around the world). Our goal is to stabilise and strengthen what already exists, and our priority must be to better utilise the existing competencies and the scarce human resources. At this stage, more growth, expansion and dilution would be more dangerous to the quality of the programmes and the identity and specificities of the MSF movement.

Under pressure from its own society, the MSF G political interpretation of the Kosovo crisis and also the interpretation of MSF humanitarian principles are very different from the rest of the movement. MSF G chose not to debate these inside the MSF movement despite ample forums for doing so. It also chose to ignore and over-ride the MSF operational framework for MSF operations in the Balkans region. While MSF sections are based in their civil societies, they are not to be a simple reflection of societal views, but are meant to be a 'lens of humanitarian principles' through which those views can be explored and expressed. That lens is continually "polished" by debate

within MSF, and should strengthen each section in taking risks in their own societies. In choosing to avoid debate within the movement around the application of humanitarian principles in a very complex situation - the Balkans - MSF Greece went its own way with its own interpretation and application of humanitarian principles. It also broke away from the framework that allows this essential debate to take place, and finally, it did this in a non-transparent way, damaging the trust that is essential to an international association.

Therefore, we recommend to the IC that:

- 1) The ongoing and unilateral MSF Greece exploratory mission inside FRY must be stopped immediately;
- 2) MSF G continues within the movement, but is not allowed to run operations outside Greece. It can maintain its in-country programmes, but will function as a partner section of another operational centre. All programmes run by MSF Greece outside of Greece must be handed over to an MSF Operational Centre within two weeks.
- 3) If either of these is not met within the prescribed time, MSF Greece will be taking its final step away from the MSF movement, and this departure will be accepted by the MSF movement.



'MSF International Council Meeting **Minutes**,' 11, 12 June 1999: Amsterdam, Holland,' 12 June 1999 (in English). [D269](#)

#### Extract:

Item 3: MSF Greece and the breakdown of the MSF Greek-Swiss common Operational Centre Agreement. Because he is implicated in these issues, James Orbinsky asked Michael Schull to chair this item. Odysseas Boudouris arrived for the opening part of this discussion with a guest, Kostas Papaioannou. Odysseas refused to participate in the debate around these issues, and instead wanted only Kostas to make a statement from the Board of MSF Greece to the IC. Before Kostas gave his prepared statement, Odysseas was reminded that he had a responsibility to participate in the debate at the IC.

According to the statement given by Kostas, the Board of MSF Greece considers the main issue to be the isolation of MSF Greece from the international MSF movement, which comes from discussions with James Orbinsky and the report of Morton Rostrup and Stephan Oberreit. The report outlines 5 options and favours that MSF Greece should not have operations outside of Greece. MSF Greece will not accept loss of operations. MSF Greece will not participate in the discussion as there is no clear accusation, and it is not clearly stated in the agenda. The Board of MSF Greece will leave a series of questions and remarks in the form of a written submission (see Annex 1), and then leave the IC meeting but will be available to discuss these. Odysseas was then asked to define the key issues of the statement, which he emphasised, was procedural in that he heard from James Orbinsky orally, what would be

debated and has not had time to prepare arguments. This was countered by James Orbinsky who reminded Odysseas that he has a responsibility and opportunity to explain the actions of his section and offer other options to the IC; that any option, including doing nothing is open to the IC; and that Odysseas and his Board had been informed by letter on May 6, 1999 of the gravity and consequences of the situation. This was in addition to numerous phone calls from James Orbinsky to Odysseas Boudouris since then and in the Extraordinary General Assembly in Greece on June 2, 99 by Jean Marie Kindermans, as well as in Board meetings with MSF Switzerland, and at the MSF France General Assembly. Odysseas and Kostas then left the meeting after Odysseas was again reminded that he has a responsibility and is welcome to participate in the debate now as it is occurring, and that contrary to his request, he will not be contacted by cellular phone.

Morton Rostrup then presented a 15 minutes overview of the Fact Finding Mission Report (see attached). He emphasised that the options and recommendation were those of the Fact Finding team (Morton Rostrup and Stephan Oberreit), and that the IC would have to make its own determination as to what possible options existed and what action, if any, to take. Morton emphasised his view that the Greek section wanted to carry out this mission to the FRY whatever the conditions or risks, and that this was imposed on the MSF Movement as a *fait accompli* without regard for the range of consequences that followed. (...)

The report, the options it outlines, and its main recommendations were discussed. (...)

The five and a half hours of discussion that followed, emphasised the issue of operational principles, and if and how MSF Greece's unilateral mission to Kosovo violated these. The main conclusion was that independence and impartiality were sacrificed, ignored or naively applied. The discussion also emphasised that:

- 1) The application of humanitarian principles in a particular situation is never easy, as the individual humanitarian principles can often contradict one another;
- 2) Therefore there is a need to always nuance these to a particular situation where choices as a movement have always to be made;
- 3) It is therefore essential that debate within and across the movement at all levels is central to determining a particular application of humanitarian principles.
- 4) That the TOR for an exploratory mission to Kosovo was explicitly stated by the Executive Committee on April 20, 1999 that implicitly recognised and prioritised humanitarian principles in this context [must be respected];
- 5) That transparency is central to the MSF movement;
- 5) That the minimal structure that exists to manage operations across the movement must also be respected;
- 7) That this was ignored by the MSF Greece section;
- 8) That MSF Switzerland considers the Common Operational Centre partnership as now over; and
- 9) The history of MSF Greece in the movement and particularly their operability and how this has been monitored

poorly by the IC, and how each successive partnership with the French, Spanish and Swiss operational sections/centres since 1990 have failed.

10) The procedure established and followed to deal with the unilateral mission of MSF Greece to Kosovo and the breakdown of the Greek-Swiss COC was seen as having been fair at all times, however the timing of Thierry Durand's resignation as the Operations Director for the joint COC was at best, inopportune. This procedure was also seen as having provided more than adequate space for discussion and arbitration. MSF Greece has been informed, at an early stage in writing and verbally, of the risks they incurred with this action, and strong efforts were made to discuss and arbitrate around this issue. MSF Greece itself has knowingly avoided responding to these normal and established means of communication.

After carefully considering the best interests of the Movement and the desire of the IC for the Greek section to remain in the movement, the following resolution was adopted with two abstentions (MSF Switzerland because it was not strong enough, and MSF Japan, because Dominique Leguillier argued that it was not a customary way of resolving an issue in Japan, and he wanted to reflect the spirit of the culture he represents):

#### Resolution

The IC was presented with and accepts the report of the fact finding mission of Morton Rostrup and Stephan Oberreit on "The MSF Greece Mission to the FRY and the Breakdown of the MSF Greek-Swiss Common Operational Centre Agreement." The IC deeply deplores the explicit decision of MSF Greece not to respond or participate in the debate at the IC meeting of June 12th, 1999, in Amsterdam.

The International Council of MSF resolves that:

Given:

1. The unilateral MSF Greece mission into Kosovo lacked the independence necessary to facilitate an objective evaluation of the needs of the population and that unacceptable conditions of access were agreed to by MSF Greece which compromised the mission and undermined future attempts by any MSF section to enter into the FRY;
2. That the actions of MSF Greece were carried out without respecting prior decisions of the IC as to how MSF Greece would carry out field operations;
3. That the actions of MSF Greece were carried out with a total lack of transparency, were deliberately misleading to members of the IC, and deliberately avoided international debate and co-ordination, and
4. That the actions of MSF Greece violated the specific decisions taken by the Executive Committee with regard with the objectives and conditions necessary for a MSF exploratory mission into Kosovo. [...]

The IC considers that the Common Operational Centre between Greece and Switzerland has ceased to exist and therefore MSF Greece can no longer carry out operations outside of Greece, effective immediately. The IC wishes

MSF Greece to remain within the MSF-movement, so long as they accept the responsibilities and privileges that go with membership as a partner section. Should MSF Greece refuse to comply in writing with this decision by June 28th, 1999, the IC considers MSF Greece to have forfeited their membership in the IC and to have excluded itself from the MSF-movement. In that case, the IC and all its sections will cease all formal collaboration with MSF Greece and demand that MSF-Greece ceases all use of the MSF logo and the name "Médecins sans Frontières" in any language. [...]

Item 4: Removal of Odysseus Boudouris as VP of MSF IC  
Odysseas' appointment as VP of the IC was for 12 months, ending 28 June 1999. Since he has declined to stand for reappointment for a second year, this issue need not be considered.



'Re: MSF Greece,' **Message** from James Orbinsky, President of MSF International Council to MSF presidents, 8 July 1999 (in English). **D270**

#### Extract:

The approach is a low profile one, where appropriate persons, donors and agencies are informed, but where we try to avoid a public statement on the issue. If a public statement is required, this will have to be preceded by an Executive Committee teleconference, and the statement will have to respond to the questions that are raised at that time. Therefore, it is not useful to prepare a press statement in advance. So that it is clear to everyone, I am sending my reply to all sections, including some examples of what some sections have already done. If any general director or section president has any comments, questions or points of clarification, please contact Jean Marie or myself. In Jean-Marie's letter, he noted that the following actions should be taken:

1. People within MSF have to be aware of the decision (...)
2. CC mail access and networking [for MSF G] are to be cut from all sections. (...)
3. Expatriates working for MSF Greece should be notified of the IC decision. Therefore the general directors of all sections with national expatriates working with MSF Greece should ensure that their expatriates are contacted and informed of the situation. Expatriates working with MSF Greece should have a choice as to whether they will continue working for an NGO that is no longer an MSF Section.
4. Major partners will be notified by the international office. Jean-Marie noted that we do not want to give a high profile to this information, and for this reason, do not envisage notifying partners in writing.
5. Multilateral donors will be informed by the international office.
6. Where relevant, national government donors should be informed by the appropriate MSF interlocutor at each section. Again, we do not want to give a high profile to this information, and for this reason do not envisage notifying donors in writing. The appropriate MSF interlocutor should

explain this situation as a part of their normal discussions with their national donor government agency. They should explain that MSF Greece has left the MSF movement because they do not want to observe our commonly agreed principles, and operational mechanisms. They should also explain that this Greek NGO will not receive any operational, logistical, security or financial backup or support from the MSF Movement.

7. In Kosovo, and other project countries, there is a need to dissociate from “the NGO formerly known as Prince<sup>16</sup>... I mean MSF Greece.” Morten Rostrup (Vice President of the IC) has been informing relevant partners in Kosovo of the situation. HOMs for each MSF section can do the same if the opportunity arises in their daily dealings with partners. The same is true for other project countries where they are currently operating. (...)

8. The international office has already started legal proceedings to retrieve the name “MSF / Médecins Sans Frontières” in Greece. The Greek section holds legal title to use of the name in Greece, however, not outside Greece. Therefore, in all sites where they are now, or are attempting to operate, it is important that MSF HOMs on the ground inform partners and governments that they are no longer apart of MSF, and that this Greek NGO will not receive any operational, logistical, security or financial backup or support from the MSF Movement.



**Letter** from James Orbinsky, President MSF International Council to Odysseas Boudouris, President of the MSF Greek Board and Nikos Kemos, Executive Director of MSF Greece, 5 August 1999 (in English). [D271](#)

#### Extract:

Dear Odysseas and Nikos:

Given that you have not replied in writing by June 28, 1999 to the MSF International Council resolution of June 12, 1999 (sent to you by email on June 14 and by registered mail on June 16, 1999 and attached), the MSF IC considers MSF Greece to have forfeited its membership in the MSF IC and to have excluded itself from the MSF-movement(...). The MSF IC and all its sections have ceased all formal collaboration with the former MSF Greece section. This means the following:

- That the former Greek section of MSF no longer is a member of, or can represent the MSF movement;
- That the former Greek section of MSF can no longer use the name or logo of MSF;
- That the MSF movement is not liable for any initiative or statement of the former Greek section of MSF;
- No MSF section can or will represent the former Greek section of MSF, as no collaboration will be possible;
- MSF will not be providing any logistical, operational, financial, human resource, or technical support to the

former Greek section of MSF; and that

-This resolution applies to the organisation of the former Greek section, and not to individual Greek volunteers who may now choose to work with a recognised MSF section.

The MSF IC demands that the former MSF Greece ceases all use of the MSF logo and the name “MSF / Médecins sans Frontières” in any language. If this demand is not met, we will begin appropriate legal action.



**Minutes** of the MSF France Board meeting, 27 August 1999 (in French). [D272](#)

#### Extract:

A NOTE ON GREECE AFTER THE EXPULSION (J. M. Kindermans, secretary general MSF International). The expulsion of MSF Greece was self-inflicted given the political stance it took on MSF’s role in the Kosovo conflict and the fact that its insistence on operational autonomy compromised the project for an exploratory mission.

Jean-Marie Kindermans: MSF Greece is continuing its operations in Armenia, Georgia, Palestine and Kosovo. It was also active in Turkey when the earthquake occurred. It has issued statements claiming that there is no factual basis whatsoever for the procedure initiated by the International Council. In Armenia, they are at the point of registering their own trademark, so we are taking firm measures to prevent that happening. We began legal action several weeks ago in an attempt to stop them using the name in Greece itself. Our lawyers are optimistic, but by definition, they are always confident. If we win the licence case, that will still allow them to work with other Greeks again, or to open another section. If we lose, we will be forced to proceed on a case-by-case basis. We have not said anything to the press because the matter is still confined to the Greek context. However, we have warned the United Nations and the European Union and they have ‘noted’ the matter, by which they mean that it has nothing to do with them.



**‘News from Guillaume,’ Email** from Pierre-Pascal Vandini, MSF France Deputy Director of Operations to MSF directors of operations and Kosovo programme managers, 14 June 1999 (in English). [D273](#)

#### Extract:

22:00 phone call from Guillaume. Monday Guillaume and Jean-Clement took the road to Pec. No NATO forces on the road. Check points with FRY military and paramilitary. They went through the check point without hostility. On the road, villages seem empty of civilians. Dejan and Djakovica same; only armed military and paramilitaries. Houses burning. Tense +++. They visited the local hospital in Djakovica and decide to turn back to Prizren. They met a journalist from AP who went to Pec. She described the same situation; houses burning, military troops and few

16. Referring to Ptice, an American rock star who changed his name to “The person formerly known as Prince”.



civilians. From place to place and especially in Prizren, UCK came into the light. In Prizren: MSF B team + MSF Spain Team + MSF F team. So too many people and no good reason for [their presence]. It seems that MSF B is here because they cannot go on the road to Drenica (tense, not clear). Guillaume urged us to clarify the situation between the different MSF teams. MSF B team has work to start in Pristina. So please could they stay there and be focus on Drenica. For MSF Spain, there is work to do. But please inform your team about the instability of the situation. If they want, they can coordinate with Jean-Clement and Guillaume to work on the axis Djakovica/Dejan. Plan for tomorrow: try the road to Pec again, with material (freight from Skopje was planed to arrive for a different MSF Team). Please check also a second message I sent you about situation in Montenegro (tense also).



'Some Information about MSF in Prizren,' **Email** from Bernard Lapeyre, MSF Spain Kosovo programme manager to MSF directors of operations and Kosovo desks, 15 June 1999 (in English). **D274**

#### Extract:

Hi everybody,  
Some information about MSF in Prizren. Three sections present F/B/Sp. The trip from Morina to Prizren: the road from Morina to Prizren is not totally controlled by the Germans. In the middle of the way, the team met a group of Serb militaries mixed with civilians at a check point. NATO forces don't seem to have any contact between the different groups (the Germans have only a map up until Djakovica) because after that, the zone is controlled by the Italians. There is still "zone grise" [gray zone] in terms of security. Prizren is in the hands of UCK. All the Serbs are going to move from Pec to Pristina via Prizren meaning that will be very tense. During a meeting this morning, the coordos decided to share the work meaning: The material brought by MSF Sp will be shared by the sections. MSFF and MSF Sp intend to go together to Djakovica. MSF Sp will evaluate Djakovica and MSFF will try to proceed to Pec today. MSF B??? MSF H should come today to Prizren.  
That's all folks  
Bernard



'Re: Some Information about MSF in Prizren,' Email from Eric Dachy, MSF Belgium Kosovo desk to MSF directors of operations and Kosovo desks, 15 June 1999 (in English). **D274**

#### Extract:

[...] and here are some infos from Pristina, Tuesday 15th at noon (fortunately consistent with the one sent by Bernard Lapeyre).  
News from Christopher 15/6/99:

#### 1. Context:

Pristina: Ambience a bit tense because today is last day of withdrawal of Serbian troops from sector.1. Between 2,000 and 20,000 persons in vehicles expected to cross Pristina in the coming 24 hours. Mine incident reported south of Pristina: a civilian woman walked on a mine.  
Prizren: Apparently UCK took control of the city. German troops present. The road to Djakova was not secured yet yesterday but MSF Sp and MSF-F try to reach Djakova today and Pec possibly later.

2. MSF activities: First mobile clinic set up by MSF B-H in Pristina. Some people in need of hospital care but too afraid to go to hospital.

International coordination: No real coordination at the moment. The international HoM post is an empty shell and Christopher refused it.

Eric



*We put the report together as quickly as possible and tried to highlight both the political stakes and the political errors committed by the Greek section. We also stressed its failure to respect the movement's rules and the matter of falsehoods, which is more serious than both the political error and the lack of respect for the rules. Of course, it is always possible to break the rules if there is a well-reasoned political argument. This particular argument had its points. And of course, the Greek section used it. They claimed that their actions were completely neutral. In our view, it was quite the opposite. We thought they were extremely biased. Our report also noted that the movement was responsible because it had allowed a Balkan section to become involved in a Balkan war. The movement, and especially the Swiss section, had not been sufficiently alert to the problem. The rest of the movement should have been far more attentive, far more alert so that it could help them to confront a political situation that was difficult for them. We should have realised that they were going off the rails. In Greece, Médecins du Monde had gone right off the rails, well before MSF. So we should have been much more alert and involved, we should have tried to convince them. I'm not saying that we could have prevented the slip and the adoption of unilateral action, but we are responsible because we didn't do enough.*

Stephan Oberreit, MSF International Council Representative by MSF Switzerland/MSF Greece, May - June 1999 (in French).



*We asked the Greek section what was happening with the registration of the MSF name in Greece. They told us they were looking into it but that there wasn't a problem. In fact they had already registered it. I was angry with myself for trusting them and for not sending a mission over there to check it out. At that time, we still*

had the seniority to recover it. Afterwards, it was too late. So, there was all that desultory guerrilla warfare going on, but it did show that Odysseas and some of the people around him had only one idea in their heads: to turn MSF Greece into an independent operational body that would conduct its own operations. I kept pressing the issue at movement level, but nobody was interested. They didn't see the problem. Furthermore, with Kosovo going on, it was not one of the most urgent problems at that time. But, as soon as the MSF Greece team set foot in Kosovo, all the sections were with us right away, whereas I thought that a lot of them would keep their distance or at least play the neutral card. But that wasn't the case at all, especially with the partner sections. It was probably because they had an idyllic vision of the international movement.

Jean-Marie Kindermans, Secretary General, MSF International (in French).

**MSF closed its camp in Kukes, because of security reasons. The refugees returned en masse when Serbian forces withdrew from the regions of Kosovo. UNHCR became heavily involved in the resettlement process. MSF operational sections launched exploratory missions in various regions of Kosovo and later began to set up programmes. Care was taken to ensure that no section operated in the presence of a KFOR contingent from its country of origin.**



'Returns Intensify as the Southern Kosovo Zone is Liberated,' **AFP** (France), Geneva, 16 June 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

On Wednesday the UNHCR, in an update on reports from its border-post representatives, indicated that Tuesday had seen an increase in the number of Kosovars returning from Macedonia and Albania, and that an even greater increase was expected on Wednesday when the Yugoslav military retreat from the 'UN' zone (south of Kosovo) has been completed on the Tuesday. In an interview with El Pais, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Mrs Sadako Ogata, warned against "a disorganised return" for the refugees on Wednesday, with "people returning by their own means, refugees coming back, finding themselves face to face with departing Serbs, and skirmishes."

[...] UNHCR registers refugees' identities from the moment they cross the border, and has also set up temporary first-aid posts (medical assistance, drinking water, biscuits) along the road from Morini to Prizren to help the refugees with their return. UNHCR warns those refugees who want to go to the northern Kosovo regions, not yet liberated by Serbian forces, of the danger of such a return. It advises refugees to get more precise information from the German KFOR contingent at Prizren.



'News from Albania: MSF Camp Closes' **Email** from MSF Belgium Press Officer in Kukes to MSF press officers, 18 June 1999 (in English). **D275**

#### Extract:

MSF will close its camp in Kukes this morning. The reason being that security is now a severe problem. Since the Morini border near Kukes opened three days ago, refugees have been leaving Kukes, including the MSF camp, in high numbers. Till now, approximately 6,000 refugees have left the MSF camp, leaving about 500 behind. The departure of the refugees from the MSF camp has been accompanied by repeated lootings by Albanian criminals who have entered the camp with Kalashnikovs threatening the refugees and looting tents. MSF expats have witnessed the lootings, and have tried to reach an agreement with the Special Albanian Police Force to protect the camp, but we have not succeeded in these negotiations. Consequently, the 500 refugees that will not leave for Kosovo today will be moved to Kukes II. Kukes II is an Italian camp protected by Italian soldiers where MSF provides all medical facilities. MSF continues all other activities in Kukes including its activities in the Kukes II camp, at the border, and at the central square.



**Minutes** of the MSF France Board of Directors Meeting, 25 June 1999 (in French). **D276**

#### Extract:

MISSIONS - Kosovo - Latest Developments:

The Kosovar borders have opened to KFOR and also to NGOs. A plan for the retreat of Serbian forces has been established, with three phases corresponding to three geographical lines. This retreat took place quickly, without many problems, but the Serbs left booby traps ("conventional" mines and booby-trapped houses) and during the week of the retreat, there was a final heavy wave of violence. MSF's positioning in relation to other organisations, from the UN to KFOR, was not as difficult as anticipated in that no checks were carried out (either by the UN or by the army, or even by the UNHCR). MSF was therefore, able to return to and travel within Kosovo without having to join convoys.

MSF Presence: For coordination reasons, MSF France works in Pec and its surroundings, MSF Holland in Prizren, MSF Spain in Djakovica, MSF Belgium in Pristina and its northern region. Guillaume Le Gallais and Jean-Clément Cabrol led an exploratory mission to establish contact in the Pec region starting from 12 or 13 June, that is to say immediately after the (Italian) KFOR first wave. From Pec, an exploration was led to all the surrounding villages and a team established on 16 or 17 June; finally another team arrived to complete the action around 20 June. [...]

Operational Objective: Basically, to support the Kosovars in re-establishing the healthcare system and in food

provision to see them through winter. Practically, this means reopening dispensaries, doing a little emergency distribution (plastic tarpaulins, water tanks, food etc.), so as to help people as soon as they arrive, and supporting the hospital's reopening, with one or two volunteer placements there, especially in emergency and triage. There is, therefore, no great medical problem, but a need for general support (as the potential number of returning refugees is estimated at around 200,000). Psychiatry will be a vital medical area, as the population has been severely traumatised (to varying degrees). The group work method, already established in Debar and other refugee camps, seems to create a high level of enthusiasm, and will probably be reused here and extended. The Serbian populations who sought refuge in Montenegro were rapidly dispersed into host families and there is not much chance of MSF offering care to them, as there is little need. In Serbia, still no access.



**Minutes** Operational Directors Meeting on Kosovo Crisis, Brussels, 21 June 1999 (in English). [D277](#)

#### Extract:

##### 1. Access to Serbia

All attempts to obtain access to Serbia have still not brought in much. MSF presence in Serbia is important/necessary and MSF should continue to try to get access, although an official authorisation is indispensable in order to ensure the security of the MSF staff (risk to be accused of "espionage"). Efforts to get into Serbia will be continued through the normal way. Besides that, MSF will present its intentions to Moscow and Romanian authorities and each section will try from its side through the Orthodox Church.



*In the immediate aftermath of the war, we did not have to compete with the armed forces in order to do our work. MSF had a key operational positioning.*

*We were very numerous on the ground. Everyone wanted to be there, and independently. It was unimaginable for an operational section not to be there. Everyone was convinced, as usual, that there was a catastrophe, hellish work to be done. So, the distribution of the various NATO troop commands determined the distribution of the MSF sections. No section was allowed to have its base in the same sector as a contingent of the army from its home country. For example, MSF Holland did not set up near to the Dutch army contingent. There were also questions around potential problems where Serb and Albanian-speaking populations were living together.*

Jean- Marie Kindermans, Secretary General,  
MSF International (in French).

**In Pristina, the MSF team discovered the presence of a press attaché who was speaking to journalists in the name of MSF Greece (the President of MSF Greece denies having used the services of a press officer). Despite the desire for coordination, the various sections communicated in quite a disorganised way. In the weeks that followed, they talked publicly about their activities, about the danger posed by antipersonnel mines to the civilian population of Kosovo, and about the difficult coexistence of Serb and Albanian medical staff in the hospital at Pristina.**



'Rotation Kosovo Com,' **Email** from Samantha Bolton, MSF International Communication Coordinator to MSF network, 15 June 1999 (in English). [D278](#)

#### Extract:

Dear all,

Quick update on who is where as there seems to be various rumours about who is doing what. The Dir Comms are coordinating regularly on this Kosovo crisis from here. Anouk is currently coordinating for all from Skopje and Dir Comms/Ops have asked me to go in/replace her in the next few days to carry on and to be available to go into Pristina. Currently helping field recruiting an information officer to go into Skopje to help do the info collection (Bas 2!<sup>17</sup>). Have also asked Petra if she could be on standby to come in over the next couple of weeks if need be (be useful to have an experienced comm German speaker). [...] At the moment/for next couple of days, the story is very much military/security but as soon as it opens up a bit will be IDPs and then refugees, and MSF must be prepared with a flexible reactive system within Kosovo. Possibly with a roaming info collector/comm plus more permanent person in Pristina and Skopje.

sb



'Comms Agreements for Kosovo,' **Email** from Denis Pingaud, MSF France Director of Communications to MSF directors of communications, 16 June 1999 (in English). [D279](#)

#### Extract:

In order to organise good press-work during the next weeks, Op Dircoms have decided the following device:

1) At least one press officer in each mission (Pristina, Prizren and Pec) working under the control of the HoM for the international network (gathering information, proactive communication, etc.). At present, it's Erwin in Pristina, Kris and Amaia in Prizren, Cecile in Pec. Dircoms ask for a second francophone press officer in Pristina. Anouk or Marc is ready to go from Skopje but, unfortu-

17. Referring to the fact that this type of work was, at first, done by Bas Tielens.

nately, Erwin slammed on the breaks.

2) One coordinator press officer in Skopje who will be in touch every day with the group of Dircoms and the Kosovo press officers.

3) A daily call conference of the Dircoms to analyse the situation and suggest to Ops talking with media on such and such issue according to our operations and the media agenda.

Best regards, Denis



'A CD for Médecins Sans Frontières – "No Boundaries:" the Elite of International Rock are Coming Together to Support the Work of MSF (Doctors Without Borders) in the Kosovo Region,' **Press release**, MSF 15 June 1999 (in French). [D280](#)

#### Extract:

On the initiative of 18 international rock artists and their record company (Sony/Epic) an album of rare and previously unavailable tracks is being released today to support the work of Médecins Sans Frontières among Kosovar refugees. Some of the artists named on this compilation entitled "No Boundaries" are: Oasis, Peter Gabriel, Jamiroquai, Neil Young, Alanis Morissette, Pearl Jam, Suede, Rage Against The Machine, etc. This CD, which benefits from an international release date, will be sold at the price of 99 francs. All profits will be distributed equally between Médecins Sans Frontières and the British-based humanitarian charities Care and Oxfam. There will be a promotional campaign for the album's release covering the whole of the media, but especially FM radio stations. Since the start of the conflict, Médecins Sans Frontières has been present in Montenegro, Albania and Macedonia, with the Kosovar deportees. Medical and sanitation work is carried out in the camps as well as in the homes of host families. In total, over 100 volunteers are working in the region. Furthermore, this weekend, aid teams have also been able to return to the interior of Kosovo in the regions of Pristina and Prizren. An additional team should also be going to Pec. Their priority is to assess the situation of populations who have been displaced within the interior of Kosovo, and who have been deprived of aid for many months. 40 tonnes of emergency equipment (food, medical and logistical equipment, etc.) are leaving today for Skopje (Macedonia). Tomorrow, a 100-tonne cargo plane will also fly to the region. This equipment will then be transported on the ground.



'Médecins Sans Frontières Sends 90 Tonnes of Aid to Kosovo,' **Press release**, MSF Belgium, Brussels, 15 June 1999 (in French). [D281](#)

#### Extract:

On Wednesday afternoon, at 14:00, an Antonov 124 will take off from Ostend carrying on board 90 tonnes of equipment destined for the populations of Kosovo. The

plane will be unloaded at Skopje, which is currently the supply centre for MSF activities in Kosovo. The 90 tonnes will be made up of 53 tonnes of medicines, medical kits, sanitation and water supply equipment, and blankets, as well as 37 tonnes of transport vehicles: a bus converted into a mobile clinic, two lorries to be used for transporting equipment on the ground, a tanker truck for water distribution and two 4X4 vehicles. The cost of this equipment is 30 million Belgian francs. The transport costs have risen to 4.2 million. MSF can count on the collaboration of the Ukrainian airline company Air-Foyle for this flight. The plane's transport capacity is usually 110 tonnes, but the load has had to be limited to 90 tonnes (which is still equal to three normal cargo loads) because Skopje airport runway is short.

On arrival at Skopje, the equipment will be used to supplement existing stocks in Skopje which is the supply base for MSF activities in Kosovo. An MSF team is currently present in Pristina, carrying out medical consultations. Other MSF teams will reinforce the local medical facilities in the region of Drenica, thanks to mobile clinics. As was the case before the crisis, MSF is collaborating with the 'Mother Teresa' network. This collaboration is all the more important as the official health infrastructures have now disappeared.



'Médecins Sans Frontières, Present in Two Regions of Kosovo: 140 Tonnes of Emergency Equipment Ready to Leave,' **Press release**, MSF France, Paris, 15 June 1999 (in French). [D282](#)

#### Extract:

Médecins Sans Frontières is once again present in two regions of Kosovo, and is today sending 40 tonnes of emergency equipment to help restart aid programmes. Already in Skopje, Dr Philippe Biberson, the organisation's President [MSF France], will be participating in this mission. Present in Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro with Kosovar deportees, the Médecins Sans Frontières teams have been able to return to the interior of Kosovo. From this week-end, volunteers have been ready to get down to work in Pristina and in Prizren. A team will also be going to Pec, where violent conflicts have taken place. In these three regions, the priority is to assess the situation of displaced people who have remained inside the province, and to meet their needs urgently. Deprived of any form of aid, these people have lived for many months in extremely precarious conditions.

At the same time, as the assessments get under way, emergency equipment is, as of today, being sent to Macedonia to be transported to Kosovo. 40 tonnes of medicines, and medical and logistical equipment are leaving today from Médecins Sans Frontières' logistical base in Bordeaux. Tomorrow a 100-tonne cargo plane will also leave Belgium for Skopje. On top of this, more than one hundred volunteers are still working in Montenegro,

Macedonia and Albania. Although no massive return has yet been noted, the teams are preparing to deal with significant population movements. In particular, in Albania, one of the MSF-run camps in Kukes could become a major transit camp for people coming back from the south of the country towards Kosovo. In Montenegro, where MSF is working, 13,000 people, mainly of Serb origin, have entered via the town of Rozaje.



'MSF Resumes Aid Operations in Kosovo,' **Press release** MSF Skopje, 18 June 1999 (in English). **D283** [↗](#)

#### Extract:

Teams of the international medical aid agency Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) have resumed relief operations in Pec, Djakovica, Prizren and Pristina. MSF teams report that Djakovica and Pec have suffered some of the worst damage, with up to half of the buildings and infrastructure destroyed. Teams have described Pec as: "A ghost town, with only a few hundreds of Serb families left. They are not sure whether to pack their belongings and leave or seek protection from KFOR troops. The situation is tense as the other residents are slowly reappearing." In Djakovica, people emerging from three months of forced confinement are reporting past incidents of physical abuse and threats. Residents have said that the local health facilities ran out of medicines and equipment and that they did not dare to leave their houses - so the wounded and sick were left untreated. In both Djakovica and Pec, MSF has begun supplying medicines and equipment to the local health facilities, helping with rehabilitation, and opening new clinics. On Wednesday, MSF teams launched their first assessment missions outside the towns to identify the medical needs of isolated communities.

At this stage, the teams did not find large numbers of displaced in need. They have given emergency treatment to wounded people and to five mine victims before referring them to a surgical facility in Pristina. Tense security conditions continue to hamper relief operations. However, MSF managed to bring medical supplies to several villages to date, including Srbica in Zone 3, the last zone to be cleared by KFOR troops. MSF also expects that mental health will soon become a major concern. "As most of the people have suffered a great deal of stress, we will be dealing with severe mental health consequences", said an MSF aid worker in Djakovica. MSF has 30 international staff in Kosovo at present. The organisation continues to provide assistance to Kosovar refugees in Albania, Montenegro and Macedonia. Over the last two days, 140 metric tonnes of relief goods (including medicines, emergency and surgical kits, food, blankets and sanitation equipment) have been flown into Macedonia for use in Kosovo.



'MSF Calls for Swift and Coordinated Action on Booby Traps and Mines in Kosovo,' **Press release** MSF Pristina, 19 June 1999 (in English). **D284** [↗](#)

#### Extract:

The international medical aid agency Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is deeply concerned about incidents involving booby traps and mines hidden in private homes in Kosovo. As the internally displaced and refugees start returning from their hiding places and from neighbouring countries, MSF fears that the number of such incidents will increase rapidly over the coming days and weeks. There are also grave dangers for those who stayed in their houses and who now, for the first time in months, dare go outdoors. Therefore, MSF calls upon United Nations agencies; non-governmental organisations involved in demining and mine awareness campaigns, and K-FOR in particular, to coordinate their efforts and immediately make clearance of booby traps and mines a high priority. Over the past four days, MSF teams have treated booby trap victims in villages and transported them to Pristina Hospital. Some of these devices were deliberately left behind in order to inflict injury upon returning refugees. With an increasing stream of returnees in the near future, there is sufficient reason to fear that many will lose limbs, or their lives, when they finally get home.

Christopher Stokes, MSF coordinator in Pristina: "We find ourselves on the receiving end every day. We treat people, transport them to the hospital and we hear their stories. They tell us how they had already been back home for days, cleaned the house, brought back their family and then stepped on a mine in their garden. Or, about how they opened their front door for the first time in months and ended up with shrapnel all over their body. As more and more refugees return, more and more people will become victims of booby traps. If we do not act now, the consequences could well be serious and massive." Stokes added, "NATO promised to make sure that refugees could return home safely. This goes beyond demilitarisation and clearance of the main roads. Providing safety should not end at the gates of people's private properties." MSF strongly urges that organisations involved in demining and mine awareness campaigns take this new reality into account and respond to it without delay. This means that they have to coordinate their work, set up comprehensive information campaigns, develop systems for identifying high risk areas and organise rapid demining there.



'Kosovo – Press Update - 30 Volunteers from Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) are Working in Kosovo,' **Press release**, MSF France, Paris, 23 June 1999 (in French). [D285](#)

#### Extract:

Thirty volunteers from Médecins Sans Frontières are working in Kosovo. The teams from Médecins Sans Frontières are based in Pristina, Pec, Prizren and Djakovica today. They are supporting the main health facilities with personnel and medicines. Mobile clinics have also been introduced into the surrounding areas. As refugees return in large numbers to the province, restoring medical activities is a priority for the teams. During visits to the villages, care is also provided to displaced persons who remained inside Kosovo and emergency equipment is distributed. The logisticians, for their part, are working to assess what is needed in terms of rehabilitation and access to drinking water. Through their missions, the Médecins Sans Frontières volunteers ensure that access to care is equally assured for both the Serb and Albanian populations. Furthermore, Médecins Sans Frontières have already provided care for around a dozen people injured by explosive devices (mines or booby-trapped objects).



'Antipersonnel Mines Represent a Grave Danger for the Civilian Population,' **Press release**, MSF Spain, Djakovica 24 June 1999 (in Spanish). [D286](#)

#### Extract:

The international medical aid organisation, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) notes with concern, the grave dangers posed to the civilian population by antipersonnel mines scattered throughout the region of Kosovo. At least two people have died as a result of exploding mines and several have suffered injuries and amputations. MSF has launched an awareness-raising radio campaign aimed at the population of the region of Djakovica. The campaign consists of an announcement, which is broadcast several times a day giving advice on avoiding accidents caused by exploding mines. We chose the radio because it is the principal means of communication," explains Carlos Ugarte, Head of Mission of the MSF project in Djakova. "Many roads and fields are mined and we have evidence that booby-traps have been put in houses which were abandoned. Our worry is that with the massive return of refugees, the number of accidents caused by antipersonnel mines will increase considerably."

The antipersonnel mines are designed to cause casualties amongst the civilian population. The injuries they cause range from shrapnel wounds in the thorax, limbs and face, to traumatic amputations of limbs. 30% of victims need to be given blood transfusions. An increase in accidents

caused by mines would create a situation for the region's healthcare facilities, given their precarious circumstances, which would be difficult to handle, as well as the negative psychosocial consequences to the victims. Furthermore, the road network's lack of security hinders transportation of victims to hospital facilities. MSF is making an appeal to the NGOs responsible for demining, and particularly to KFOR, to coordinate their efforts and speed up the process of demining in Kosovo.



'Difficult Cohabitation between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo – The Hospital; Testing Ground for Coexistence,' Thierry Oberlé, **Le Figaro**, 24 June 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

In the surgical emergency unit, the old guard and the handful of returnees glare at each other. The Serb management resisted the Albanians' intrusion for as long as they could before throwing in the towel. "They're coming back but, really, we don't need anyone," exclaims one surgeon. Just a few days ago, his manager was taking his orders by phone from Belgrade. Refugees hit by exploding antipersonnel mines as they returned home, entered the operating theatre with legs smashed to a pulp and fear in their stomachs. They felt as if they were going to the slaughterhouse. The chance discovery by a British military doctor of an amputated leg thrown into a dustbin had spread terror. The permanent presence of an anaesthetist from Médecins Sans Frontières on the premises should, in theory, reassure the families of victims of the pernicious delayed-action mini bombs, scattered by the Serbian police and special-forces throughout private houses and gardens.

[...] In gynaecology the atmosphere is tense. Flora, a nurse in a miniskirt and red coat, leaves her night shift aghast. She tells: "I'm putting on my white coat for the first time since I was fired for ethnic reasons, ten years ago. Ten years without working, with just small jobs as my only income. Last night, the nurse-in-charge ignored me, so I stayed in the corridors. I'll come back tomorrow. I'm holding out." Seeking revenge, she no longer wants to hear Serbo-Croatian: "I don't believe them any more. We've suffered too much. They have to go. Albanians need to take control." Yesterday, things took a turn for the worse. Members of the KLA prevented Serb medical staff from working. Christopher Stokes, MSF Head of Mission in Pristina, considers the hospital to be in a precarious equilibrium. He would like, despite everything, to believe in cohabitation. "Since our return to Kosovo, we are systematically and deliberately transporting victims wounded by mines to this hospital," he says. "The staff is competent, and the facility is unique within the province, even if, before the war, Albanian Kosovars' access to care was limited. The changeover can happen without a purge." The establishment remains the testing-ground for the first administrative attempt at intercommunity coexistence

in-vitro. A committee of four wise men - two Albanians and two Serbs – supervised by WHO and the international civilian administration of the protectorate, are overseeing the pilot scheme. Staff salaries will be paid by WHO in the hope that the chequebook argument will be able to reduce the predictable risks of rejection by the Serb population.



'Médecins Sans Frontières Provides Medical Aid to the First Official UNHCR Refugee Convoy to Kosovo,' **Press release**, MSF Skopje, Macedonia, June 28<sup>th</sup> (in English). [D287](#)

#### Extract:

Skopje, Macedonia June 28<sup>th</sup> - The international medical aid agency Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) today (June 28<sup>th</sup>) provided emergency medical support for the first official convoy for Kosovo-Albanians to returning to Pristina. UNHCR who organised the seven bus convoy, personally asked MSF for a medical escort. Timothy Pitt, MSF Head of Mission in Macedonia, who travelled with the convoy said, «MSF participated in this convoy to provide medical support to the refugees who are returning home. We are delighted to have taken part and to have been able to provide assistance. However, MSF still remains concerned about the overall security situation in Kosovo and the danger posed by land mines for the returnees.”

MSF selected a special medical team to provide emergency kits and water for the entire journey between Stenkovec I (Brazda) refugee camp and Pristina. Prior to departing MSF medical and mental health workers checked all the coaches to ensure those returning were fit to travel. A total of 250 refugees boarded the buses at 7.30 a.m. (0530 GMT) this morning. Upon arriving in Pristina, the MSF staff helped the refugees leave the coaches and [they] were given a final medical check. All the refugees reached Pristina safely. MSF, which has strongly advocated voluntary repatriation for all Kosovo refugees in Macedonia, Albania and Montenegro, welcomed the opportunity to provide medical assistance to this the first UNHCR sponsored convoy. Approximately 400,000 Albanian refugees have already returned home to Kosovo over the last two weeks. Many of those travelling today were returning to Kosovo to be reunited with their families.

MSF was the first international medical aid agency to re-enter Kosovo on 12 June. Since then, MSF has been operating four mobile medical clinics to outlying villages, distributing medicines and non-medical supplies including baby food, soap, washing powder, blankets to both Serbs and Albanian communities, and has provided crucial medical supplies to the main hospitals in Pristina and Prizren. Working in Pec, Prizren; Djakovica, Mitrovica, Leposavic and Pristina MSF medical teams have started a mine awareness programme providing information on the dangers posed by mines, booby traps and unexploded ammunition in Kosovo.



'Kosovo – Press Update – 50 Volunteers from Médecins Sans Frontières are Working in Kosovo,' **Press release**, MSF France, 16 July 1999 (in French). [D288](#)

#### Extract:

Since 14 June, teams from Médecins Sans Frontières have been based in Pristina, Pec, Prizren and Djakovica. They are participating in the restoration of healthcare facilities and are managing, together with the local population, medical and surgical emergency activities in the hospitals in Pec, Pristina and Mitrovica. Mobile teams have also been set up and are reopening dispensaries in neighbouring towns and villages by restoring premises and providing medical equipment and medicines. Thus, 18 health centres are now operational in the Pec region. These teams also provide healthcare and take emergency equipment to populations in need in the most affected zones: up to now the following have been distributed: 12 tonnes of food, 1,167 tents, 13,275 blankets, 3,680 mattresses, 273 plastic shelters, and 210 hygiene kits.

In parallel, Médecins Sans Frontières' logisticians are working on water supply point purification programmes. In the Pec region, our teams face problems caused by the discovery of victims' remains in wells and rivers. These contaminated water supply points must be cleaned, but our teams try not to disrupt the investigative processes and identification of the bodies by families. Faced with the substantial traumas people have undergone, Médecins Sans Frontières is offering psychological support, in particular to women who have been the victims of sexual violence and to eyewitnesses of violent acts. Three psychologists have set up individual or group consultations in the hospitals at Pec, Pristina and Mitrovica. In Pec, since 4th July, there has been a duty psychologist for the gynaecology/obstetrics, paediatric and psychiatry units as well as for home visits. Up to now, around thirty children who have been traumatised by events they witnessed have already received care in the form of group therapies.


To reduce the dangers associated with mines, the information campaign organised by Médecins Sans Frontières in Kosovo, has been extended to zones where reports of incidents have reached us: in total, 360 people have already been trained so that they, in turn, can raise awareness among populations exposed to this problem, especially children. Through their missions, the volunteers from Médecins Sans Frontières can ensure that treatment is dispensed fairly to the Serb, Albanian and Rom populations.



*When we came back to Pristina, we were sleeping in the corridor, because all the rooms had been overbooked by journalists. So we slept in the CNN corridor, on the carpet, in the middle of the cameras and we*

looked after their equipment. That's why they came and made a special programme with MSF live with Tom Clancy. They came with us into a village, since we were the first to go back into those zones. At the time, we had a very wide margin of manoeuvre with the programme manager. The press release about mines that we put out from Pristina, we decided to do it and then we did it. We had direct access to the media. We were having regular meetings, discussions with MAG [Mines Advisory Group - an NGO whose aim is to raise awareness about mines]. During this period, we moved around less but we still had quite a few wounded arriving at the hospital in Pristina. Roger the photographer, who was working for us, went out a bit more than us and told us what he saw. There were an enormous number of mines in the schools, around houses. So we gave NATO a bit of a rough ride over that.

Christopher Stokes, coordinator MSF Belgium in Albania and Kosovo (in French)

 I was dropped at a hotel, and I didn't know anyone or anywhere before I had a mobile phone. I started writing business cards, handing them out. At that moment, an estimated 400 journalists were staying in the hotel. Privately, I had some frustration because it was so open to political manipulation. But at least we were in and we started working. At that moment, there was not a big MSF messages. We just got there and we needed to find out what the needs were. The journalists had just arrived as well. They wanted to do the factual stories, the military stories. The reason why I started handing business cards around was not because I assumed they wanted the stories the same day, but by the time they were ready for it, to come to us. And, when we had specific concerns to raise, we would be able to do that. I was quite keen to attract journalists towards MSF, partly because there was pressure for visibility from Paris because MDM before that, had been very visible in the media and MSF not that much. So, I wanted to use the fact that we were in Pristina before anyone else. And, make sure that the MSF phone number was the number one phone into NGOs for journalists.

So, what I started doing from the day I got there, was to present the three factual updates of our interpretation. At the end of the day, I was ready with three facts and I would get Christopher to read it. Then, the first two days I would sit in the hotel with three or four national staff and just print 400 copies of that update and started handing it out. 90% of the journalists were staying in the same place, so it was easy in that sense. The other thing was for the first couple of days, we lived in the hotel, and we would have team debate on things until very late. In the middle of the hotel, journalists would just walk pass and take notes. A dream job for me, it couldn't be better.

I remember at some stage that CNN producer late at night, she was so tired and one of our logisticians brought a bottle of whisky. There was nothing in Pristina. So I gave her a bottle of whisky and ever since we were friends... This is not

ethical, but worth it... The first issue that we identified and we should speak about was the fact that our teams - every day - brought victims of mines. And, we were bringing the victims into the hospitals.

People started to return in the mountainous areas. They were not waiting for UNHCR to say: "You can come back home." And NATO troops had big problems about making Kosovo safe. They were hardly demining anything. So we had contact with NATO, and asking for their policy on demining. They said it was because they were too busy, they only demined roads for transportation. But people started to return home. So, we organised a press conference in the MSF office. There was a mistake; we should have done it in a hotel. We produced a press release, which was sent to the offices in Europe as well. And, originally we had the agreement from the director of the hospital that we take a patient to the press conference to tell the story. To make very visible what we were talking about. On the morning before the press conference, he changed his mind, and said we couldn't allow people in the middle of treatment to leave the hospital. I went to the hospital. At the end of the day, one thing I could get was one camera crew in ten minutes for one patient. So I came to a producer saying you have exclusivity of hospital but you have to promise that you make the rushes available for free to everybody who wants to use it. We went to BBC, and the deal was done. I think it had an impact although NATO didn't have the capacity to do all demining that it had to do. But at least, it functioned as a warning sign for people returning, that they have to stay on the road, be careful entering houses again etc...

The strategy of communication was very much led in the field. We needed to check things with the programme managers. But in the field we decided: "Ok this is the best way of saying it." Effectively I only reported to heads of missions in the field. Because the communication needs were crappy. In an extremely hectic situation like this, a lot happened. You never know when certain issues that we need to speak out about will arise. It is really key to have people in the field who have a lot of trust from headquarters, and autonomy and allowed them to take the lead also on advocacy issues, active advocacy... And, a key element when I was in Pristina, is that we didn't have heavy clearance procedures; we didn't need to go back to Paris, Amsterdam, and Brussels... The fact that we could go like that, especially because journalists were there, things happened. The down side of that is that a lot of stuff we did in Pristina is not documented. There were two or three Greek people in the hotel. And from the corner of my eye, I saw someone, a girl in an MSF T-shirt whom I didn't know. Strange, as I didn't hear anything about new people arriving. So, I went to see her, and introduced myself. She said she was the press officer in Greece. "OK. And who are you, where do you come from?" She said she was there with the doctor for many weeks already. She was part of the explo team. And she said she was in touch with media, it was going really well. I got Christopher to talk with her and her colleague, the Greek doctor. We discussed, and we managed to neutralise them. But she was doing interviews for Polish television, Bulgarian radio etc. It was quite emotional for some people because we had a couple of Greek people in our team and



*it was in this period that the things happened which kicked MSF Greece out of the movement.*

Erwin Vantland, MSF Communications officer  
in Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo May- June 1999  
(in English)

**The KFOR troops discovered signs of atrocities committed by the Serbian army and paramilitary forces. The latter gradually withdraw, while negotiations by NATO and the Soviets to obtain KLA demilitarisation continued. Serbian civilians leave Kosovo en masse. Those who remain are subject to reprisals.**



*NATO Uncovers New Evidence of Atrocities,' AFP (France), Pristina (Yugoslavia), 17 June 1999 (in French).*

#### **Extract:**

British troops deployed in Pristina, the capital of the Kosovo region, have discovered "a torture centre" in a Serbian police "headquarters," according to the Foreign Office. Specifically, "knives, batons, baseball bats carved with Serbian slogans, and a box filled with knuckledusters" were found in this five-storey building, by the First Battalion of the Parachute Regiment. "The most frightening thing is that this building does not seem to have been a special detention centre for the victims of the Serb forces; it seems to have been no more than an ordinary police HQ," according to the British Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, Geoff Hoon.

At least 10,000 "innocent" civilians were massacred in Kosovo, he declared, and these estimates "will almost certainly have to be revised upwards." "According to our information, some 10,000 people were killed in over a hundred massacres," which demonstrates the "savagery of the Serb forces," declared the politician. "Not just every day, but almost hour by hour" KFOR troops discover signs of the atrocities committed against the Kosovars of Albanian origin, he said. In Paris, the Army Joint Staff announced that French KFOR soldiers had themselves started making "significant discoveries" concerning the presence of presumed mass graves in several locations within the Mitrovica zone, in the north of Kosovo.

At least 33,000 Serb civilians have left the province since the deployment of the KFOR on Saturday. After the abuses carried out against the Albanians, the Serbs fear reprisals, as much from refugees, of whom 18,000 returned within 24 hours from Albania and Macedonia, as from the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA/UCK), with whom KFOR is negotiating a demilitarisation agreement which was by Thursday 'in the pipeline', according to NATO. [...] "We presented a clear timetable to the KLA political leaders,

which anticipates a 30-day period for the first stage of the demilitarisation," specified a NATO spokesperson.



*In fact it was on the way to Mitrovica that I really realised. I went onto the Serb side and crossed the bridge. Over there I met people who told me that life had become impossible for them, that they had been very afraid for their safety. And so, just before leaving, I talked with Loïc, who replaced me, about Mitrovica. But at that moment, we were quite overcome by the level of destruction we had found while driving around outside Pristina, and the feeling of liberation in so many villages. They had been through hours of terrible fear; there had been bombings, there were the Serbs. At that moment, the persecution of the Serb population was not so high on the agenda. For a week or two it was rather this atmosphere of liberation.*

Christopher Stokes, coordinator MSF Belgium in Albania and Kosovo, April to June 1999 (in French).



*On the day before I left, the CNN producer told me: "I'm leaving after you, if you have space for one more story, but what should it be?" I said: "The one thing that we are worried about is this tendency for frustrated Albanians to take revenge on any Serb. So, if there is any angle from which you can put it on the public agenda..." I went back to Skopje and a day later, she arrived in Skopje, she phoned, crying on the phone, saying she needed to see me now. I went to see her. She cried and cried. She was tired as well, of course. She said that on the day I left, in the morning they got news that two Serb boys had been really butchered in the university. So she convinced a crew to go. They filmed, did interviews with the mother of the two boys. And, they took the tape and went to the nearest NATO post. They asked a guy at the entrance what they were doing protecting the Serbs. And, the answer was nothing. So she said that she demanded to see his commander. The commander asked if she had a video player. She showed the tape. In the meantime, they filmed the response. And the report went on air on CNN. Three or four times a day. She was so emotional about it. So angry about the fact that NATO clearly denied it.*

Erwin Vantland, MSF Communications officer  
in Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo May -  
June 1999 (in English)

**On 20 June 1999, NATO announced the formal cessation of bombing over the territory of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. On 23 June 1999, the Directors of Operations studied a proposal from MSF Holland to launch an exploratory mission into Serbia.**



'NATO Announces the Formal Cessation of the Aerial Campaign in Yugoslavia,' **AFP** (France), Brussels, 20 June 1999 (in French).

**Extract:**

The Secretary General of NATO, Javier Solana, decided on Sunday to formally cease the Atlantic Alliance's aerial campaign in Yugoslavia, which had been "suspended" on 10th June, announced the Alliance in a communiqué. "Acting under the authority entrusted to me by the NATO Council (Ambassadors), I have decided, with immediate effect, to put an end to the aerial campaign, which I suspended on 10th June 1999," declared Mr Solana in this statement. "I have been informed by the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe, General Wesley Clark, that all Serbian military and police forces have left Kosovo, in accordance with the Military Technical Agreement signed by the Commander of the KFOR Peace Force and representatives of the Yugoslav government on 9th June", specified Mr Solana. Total withdrawal of Serbian forces from Kosovo was achieved a little more quickly than expected, the deadline having been set for this Sunday at 22:00 GMT by the military agreement signed between NATO and the Yugoslav authorities, after the "capitulation" of Belgrade. The International Peace Force in Kosovo (KFOR) had confirmed shortly beforehand, that the retreat of Yugoslav forces from Kosovo had been achieved.



'Possible Explo to Belgrade,' **Email** from Wouter Kok, MSF Holland Emergency programme manager Director to MSF directors of operations and Kosovo programme managers, 23 June 1999 (in English). **D289**

**Extract:**

By means of this message, I want to inform you about a POSSIBLE way to materialise an exploratory mission to Belgrade. This to inform you, as well as to ask your feedback on the points mentioned in this message.

1. An exploratory team visited North Kosovo yesterday (Leposevac).
2. They visited the border between Kosovo and Serbia, and took contact with the Serbian authorities.
3. These authorities informed them that there were no obstacles should they have the intention to visit Serbia/Belgrade. "You are in Yugoslavia already, so you can proceed." The team had discussions yesterday evening in Pristina to consider this option, and had consultations with the HQ's in Brussels and A'dam.

We have now formulated a number of conditions that we want to see fulfilled before continuing with this option. I want to share them with you all, asking to reflect on it, and provide relevant feed-back ASAP.

A. The biggest threat to an explo team is being arrested for illegal entry, and accused of espionage (The CARE scenario).

B. The objective of this explo would be to prepare a legal ground for MSF to be in Serbia, and access the 'humanitarian space'.

Pre-conditions:

1. The border officials have to stamp the passports, giving the team a legal basis (be it Blace or Leposevac).
2. Obtain an invitation letter from the Yugoslav Red Cross (possible at a small transit camp at the border).
3. The team agrees with the objective being a political rather than a direct humanitarian one: We do not want to sneak around for some hours in Nis, sneaking out again. We want to go to Belgrade, to make serious contacts to explore the Serbian side.
4. IF POSSIBLE, the MSF B local staff should be involved. Feasibility from a security perspective for the local staff to be estimated from Belgrade/Brussels.
5. Participants in the explo are initially from Non-NATO citizenship.
6. This is an MSF undertaking, not an MSF B/Fr/Sp/Sw/Dutch one.

The team is now in Pristina visiting some relevant partners in preparation for this mission: ICRC/KFOR-Serb liaison Officer/Journalists/ etc. etc. At the end of the day we want to come to a conclusion whether or not to pursue the option. If «yes" it could/should materialise tomorrow. Related issues: Who should be informed: Yugo embassy in Skopje? Embassies of the nationals involved in Belgrade, UNHCR, KFOR, etc. etc. Your urgent feedback is highly appreciated.

Regards, Wouter Kok

Re: Possible Explo to Belgrade,' Email from Thierry Durand, MSF Switzerland Director of Operations to MSF operations directors and Kosovo programme manager, 23 June 1999 (in English).

**Extract:**

Hi Wouter,

I have no problem with continuing exploring this option the way you mentioned it. On our side we continue to try the Bulgarian possibility in the same manner. And in Geneva it is now Bastien Vigneau following this subject for MSF CH (Kosovo with MSF B and Serbia options). Thanks to putting [add] him on the mails.

see you

Thierry

'Re [2]: Possible Explo to Belgrade,' **Email** from Vincent Janssens, MSF Belgium Director of Operations to MSF operations directors and Kosovo programme managers, 23 June 1999 (in English).

I basically agree. Maybe one suggestion is to profit from the official authority of Uniak to get from them the formal authorisation/visa to be in Kosovo (which is Serbia) and get this stamped at the border; our team in Belgrade seems to be panicking at the idea of having expats around without minimal paperwork on them.

Vincent

On 2nd July 1999, Bernard Kouchner, one of the founders of Médecins Sans Frontières, whose image remains associated with the organisation even though he has not been a member since 1979, is named 'High Representative of the United Nations for Kosovo', and put in charge of the province's provisional administration.



'Annan Appoints French Health Minister to Key UN Post in Kosovo,' Colum Lynch, United Nations, *The Washington Post* (USA) 2 July 1999 (in English). [D290](#)

#### Extract:

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan named French Health Minister Bernard Kouchner yesterday as his special representative in Kosovo, making him a virtual governor of the Yugoslav province during its occupation by a NATO-led peacekeeping force. The appointment ended an intense diplomatic competition among European NATO governments for one of the most important jobs in the post-war reconstruction of Kosovo. It also represented a diplomatic victory for French President Jacques Chirac, who lobbied aggressively on Kouchner's behalf.

A resolution passed by the UN Security Council last month, authorizing the peacekeeping intervention in Kosovo, placed the United Nations in charge of civilian administration of the province as well as a multibillion-dollar aid and reconstruction programme. Annan said that Kouchner's initial priorities would be to ensure the resettlement of Kosovo's refugees before the onset of winter, and to pursue the reconciliation of the province's Serbs and ethnic Albanians. "We are determined to try and create a multi-ethnic Kosovo", Annan said after making the announcement. "It's not going to be easy, but we are going to our best." Kouchner, a veteran humanitarian who co-founded the French relief organization Doctors Without Borders, will have more sweeping authority than many heads of state, including the power to levy taxes, write new laws and form a police force.

[...] US officials were privately chilly, but resigned, to the prospect of the appointment of Kouchner, who is viewed by critics as unpredictable and excessively independent. He was criticized for being a self-promoter in the early 1990s when he posed on a beach in Mogadishu with a sack of rice during the UN intervention in Somalia. The Clinton administration favoured the appointment of Martin Ahtisaari, the Finnish President who helped broker the deal ending the NATO air war against Serbia, according to senior diplomats. But Ahtisaari dropped out of the running after Chirac insisted that he must resign as Finland's President if he wanted the job.

During the summer, MSF teams were alerted to the presence of bodies of victims of crimes committed during the conflict, in Kosovar wells. They find themselves facing a dilemma, which weighs public health constraints against the need to preserve evidence so justice can be done. However, the organisations responsible for this investigative work are not yet operational. MSF decides not to speak out publicly about this, but to collect the information, and pass it on to the International Criminal Tribunal for ex-Yugoslavia (ICTY).



'Summary of the Kosovo General Coordinators' Meeting #2,' Prizren, 14 July 1999 (in English). [D291](#)

#### Extract:

2. Dead bodies are clearly the most pressing issue facing MSF. The public health issue for MSF is that, left unattended, dead bodies pose a health hazard. Further delays in burying dead bodies may also raise the possibilities of mental health issues for their relatives. The areas most affected by this issue are Djacova and Peja [Pec]. In both areas the people insisted on having an international authority make some sort of legal record of their dead and an acknowledgment of the circumstances of their deaths. It is widely anticipated by the surviving relatives that such information will be utilized by the ICTY for future criminal prosecution. Until a record is taken, the people refuse to bury their dead; therefore posing the health risks identified above.

In Djacova the people have taken matters into their own hands. They have made a record as best they could, and buried the dead carefully bearing in mind a possible need in the future to exhume the bodies for further investigation. In Peja the people continue to wait for official documentation of the dead and their circumstance of murder. The most pressing need for MSF action is here. There was, within our meeting, a respectful but vigorous debate about how MSF should respond to this situation. Should MSF make records ourselves about the dead, their circumstance of death, and preserve fingerprints with bagged hands before burial? Would such actions taken by MSF be admitted as evidence at the ICTY? Or would the information be thrown out on technical grounds? Is this current circumstance too pressing and should MSF act nonetheless? There was no clear answer on this subject.

However, there was clear agreement that agencies with the responsibility to collect information were not performing their tasks to an acceptable standard. MSF has heard unconfirmed information that the ICTY will only attend to murder sites, which involve 14 bodies or more; or that the ICTY has stopped collecting information/evidence; or that the agencies collecting information are grossly under-resourced for the task at hand. The impulse to speak out was very strong amongst the coordinators but,

it was thought better to collect more information and to push the issue with relevant agencies in Pristina. To that end, Graziella will provide to Tim with the names and numbers of the HoM and Deputy of the ICTY; who shall then push the issue and highlight the points of public health. Furthermore, Tim will push that the ICTY HoM and/or Deputy go to Pec and see Graziella directly to get the full picture up close and directly from her, in Pec. Tim will also chase OSCE and British military officials who have responsibility for evidence collection for the ICTY to highlight the above concerns. Also, if the ICTY is finished with evidence collection or will only visit sites with more than 14 dead, MSF shall implore them to make such points known to the people. If there is unsatisfactory results on this tact, MSF coordinators shall regroup to determine a public témoignage message in consultation with MSF responsible in Europe. It was also suggested that a protocol for dealing with the dead - both for evidence and burial - will be necessary.



'MSF Sitrep 18/07/99 – Pec Region,' 18 July 1999 (in French). [D292](#)

#### Extract:

2) Dead Bodies p4. At last it's clear (inch Allah)! We are now working on collecting bodies in coordination with the Council for Defence of Human Rights and Freedom (a local organisation), Barry Hogan from ICTY and CIMIC (Liaison Officer Captain Bobis). CDHR refers the presence of bodies to Barry and to us. Barry decides if it justifies an ICTY investigation or not. If it does, he joins with CDHR for the 'collection work', if not, they do it alone. In cases where the body is in a well, we get involved (our teams and an expat). CDHR sends us a weekly report on the bodies collected (ditto for ICTY). MSF provides all the logistical means for this work (1 team for the transport and the wells, a vehicle, protective equipment, body bags etc. etc.). We have official KFOR authorisation to transport the corpses of unidentified people, which are all then recorded and buried in a 'cemetery'. The gravediggers are CDHR teams. Likewise for MSF support if needed.

On the other hand, everyone is in agreement that recent bodies (non-war crimes) are to be referred to the carabinieri, who should take care of this, but do not really do so. It is their role, and everyone is pushing for this, even if it means complaining higher up if that doesn't work (cf. Alain Le Roy etc.). Precise numbers and data will be available as the activity progresses.



Minutes of the MSF France Board Meeting, 27 August 1999 (in French). [D292](#)

#### Extract:

Our work with populations and our comings and goings have exposed us to other types of demands, which are

still unmet, despite the fact that there is starting to be a proliferation of NGOs and international organisations. The population feels an enormous need to be able to tell foreigners what has happened, in the hope that in this way, it gets recorded somewhere. They also want to report disappearances and initiate investigations. Lastly, they do not know what to do with bodies, which are discovered. In response to this need for justice and for points of reference, standard forms have been drawn up for medical staff and logisticians. These forms allow information to be passed on to the ICRC or to ICTY, with whom collaboration is beginning to run smoothly. Thus, in agreement with ICTY and a very active Albanian organisation (properly accredited by ICTY), the team has agreed to become involved in collecting bodies from wells. This is in response to an extremely anxious request from village residents, and presents contamination problems (it is estimated that of the region's 12,000 known wells, 20% are contaminated by the presence of animal and/or human remains. The remaining 80% require cleaning (chlorination) due to the stagnation of water).



*Our logisticians were confronted with the problem of contaminated wells and rivers. Therefore, a protocol was established for the identification of bodies removed from the wells. Since, over there, identification was not performed using jawbones, because the parodontal system was not very advanced, it was absolutely vital that we manage to retain the fingerprints, and then carry out examinations. A Tribunal doctor was due to arrive, but the bodies had to be covered with chalk straight away, so as to prevent sanitation problems. They therefore had their hands wrapped in plastic gloves, since the fingerprints were of the greatest importance. The date and place were noted, and the neighbours were asked if they knew who the bodies belonged to. Then they were covered with chalk and put into body bags, and a form detailing the particulars was given to the Tribunal. An agreement had been made with the Tribunal. Before ICTY had effectively had a representative present in Kosovo, a large number of bodies had already been reported. The Tribunal told us that the work had been of enormous help, as we had identified places, and preserved the evidence while at the same time meeting our public health objectives. [...] We did not pass on information about this. It was of no interest because it was just part of our usual work. It was just a matter of making sure that our work did not obliterate the evidence.*

Francoise Saulnier, MSF Legal Advisor,  
(in French).

**All through the summer of 1999, MSF teams operated within a tense security situation, caused by the uneven control KFOR had over the whole of the territory, the**

**KLA's regaining administrative control, and the proliferation of acts of vengeance against the minority Serb and Tzigane populations. MSF France's Board of Directors considered making a statement about this but did not. On 9th and 10th September 1999, KFOR intervened between groups of Serbs and Albanians who clashed violently in Mitrovica. The Serbian nationalist press associated The UN Administrator in Kosovo with MSF and compared the organisation to the Ku Klux Klan.**



'MSF Sitrep 18/07/99 Peja/Pec Region,' Graziella Godain, Kosovo deputy programme manager, MSF France, 18 July 1999 (in French). [D293](#)

#### Extract:

##### 2/ Minorities

- Village of Zac (gypsy minority, around 250 people, Istog district): 12/07, a gypsy shot dead and another reported missing following an exchange of fire between gypsy and Albanian minorities. It seems that the missing man's brother was a paramilitary who committed atrocities against the Albanian population. No news of the missing man since then. This village is now under KFOR protection and we make regular visits there as do the mobile clinics.

- Villages of Dobruska, (Bosnian Muslim minority (Serbo-Croatian speaking), around 1,000 people, Istog district): 15/07, a gypsy family was thrown out of the village and left for Montenegro. The Bosnians do not feel too threatened and are receiving police protection organised by the Istog police chief. However, they only leave their village when they really must (for fear of their cars being stolen). MSF is still continuing the mobile clinics so as to follow the situation closely.

- Village of Cerkolez (Serb minority, around 300 people, north east of Istog): they are living under KFOR protection. They have an open border with Serbia which allows them access to provisions. People living in surrounding areas accuse them of being responsible for the massacre of the inhabitants of Padalista (cf. MSF Report on deportation). 19/07, (tomorrow) a doctor and a logistician from MSF will visit this village.

- Village of Gorazdevac (Pec district, Serb minority, 360 people): they are under KFOR protection. MSF makes regular visits to the village and gives some basic medicines to the ambulanta run by a Serbian nurse. The population is very worried and feels completely hemmed in and enclosed.

- Zahaq zone (north district of Pec, Bosnian minority, around 2,500 people spread over several localities): no problem for the moment, regular visits to support the ambulanta. In the village of Zahaq itself, existence of 12 gypsy houses (around 50 people): they have access to food, to equipment distributed by MSF and to medical care from the ambulanta. No security issues at the moment, they leave the village and drive around without difficulty.

This list of zones containing minorities is incomplete. It will be completed in a forthcoming Sitrep. These places are known to MSF and we are planning regular visits there to monitor the situation, to do mobile consultations if necessary and to give regular feedback to the authorities in charge of the matter (HCR, KFOR). However, some vital questions remain:

- For how long will KFOR continue providing close protection to these populations?
- What other alternative is there for these people than having to leave Kosovo in the near future?



Minutes of the MSF France Board Meeting, 27 August 1999 (in French). [D294](#)

#### Extract:

##### Development of the situation concerning ethnic segregation

Extra-judicial executions, that is to say settling scores, and murders have been carried out since the KLA took control of the zone around 15 June. Since then, it is also feared that, over and above score-settling (of a military or summary justice nature), the entire population has been drawn into taking revenge on what is left of the Serb community (people, symbols and possessions). It is now clear that the Albanian-speaking Kosovars have developed the same attitudes towards the Serbs and Tziganes, which they themselves were victims of during the preceding months and years. This is not necessarily spontaneous, but it seems to be strongly frowned upon to express anything other than anti-Serb sentiments. That is effectively what we can ascertain in the 4 districts of Pec. There are 2 villages left (300-700 people) which are sort of Serb enclaves, and whose populations are growing. In the rest of the districts, there remain only a few isolated elderly people.

All the other Serbs left just before KFOR's arrival, or in the following weeks. In the large village of Gorazdevac near Pec, there is a dispensary supported by MSF, but if the Serbs need hospitalisation, their safety would not be guaranteed in the hospitals. Their only remaining solution is, therefore, to be admitted to one of the two hospitals run by KFOR. The Kosovars categorically refuse to use the Serbo-Croatian language (and even the hospital's printed matter written in Serbo-Croatian). Their attitude seems to be to get rid of the Serbs (their possessions have been destroyed or distributed for services rendered) and make sure they never come back. They are effectively perpetuating the same crimes, which trigger the same responses as the Serbs did. Question: will MSF, which has played a major part in publicly revealing and demonstrating the nature of the crime of deportation committed against Albanian speakers, have the same willingness to denounce acts of ethnic cleansing against the Kosovar Serbs?



'Post-War Kosovo Remains an Area of Forced Population Displacement,' Isabelle Ligner, **AFP** (France), Pristina, 30 August 1999 (in French).

**Extract:**

Since June, the forced displacements in Kosovo have affected the non-Albanian minorities, in particular the Serbs. "The weeks following the Yugoslav forces' retreat and the arrival of KFOR saw an exodus of minorities, especially Serbs, from Kosovo," indicates a report by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and to the UNHCR. "The situation for those who stayed behind is extremely tense and unpredictable and many are the targets of arson attacks or criminal threats which can go as far as murder," continues the text. "It seems that these groups are targeted despite having no links with any supposed collusion" with the Serb forces, notes the document, citing in particular the case of attacks against elderly isolated Serbs.

According to the UNHCR, more than 200,000 Serbs were living in Kosovo before the NATO bombings and some 180,000 left the province (130,000 heading for Serbia itself and 30,000 towards Montenegro). 50,000 fled during the bombings and 130,000 in the first days after the arrival of KFOR. Only about a thousand remained in Pristina out of a total of 40,000. Those who wanted to stay in Kosovo often had to hide in Serb enclaves for which they are now asking the international community to provide protection. Most of the 6,000 Serbs from Bosnia and Croatia – who had been encouraged in 1995 by the regime of Slobodan Milosevic to settle in Kosovo in an attempt to curb the decline in the number of Serbs there – fled towards Serbia and Montenegro. Around a hundred volunteered for a programme of resettlement into Romania proposed by the UNHCR. Other minorities were caught in the cross-fire of Serbo-Albanian hatred, in particular, the Tziganes (around 45,000 in 1991), accused of collaboration by the Albanians and rejected by the Serbs.

The UNHCR admits to not knowing how many fled because they are often included in statistics relating to the Serbs. Fewer than 500 remained in Kosovska Mitrovica (north) out of a pre-war total of 20,000. The others have been regrouped in the camps, like that at Obilic (5,000 people), and a growing number are desperately trying to reach Italy on board fragile boats, risking drowning. The Gorans (Muslim Serbs) and the Bosnian Muslims (a nationality created under Tito) are the targets of persecution by Serbs as well as by Albanians because in addition to speaking Serbo-Croatian, they are also of the Muslim religion. UNHCR notes that a number of members of the Turkish Kosovar community – around 60,000 people before the war - left for Turkey. This community is under increasing pressure, notably from the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), who seek to 'Albanianise' them, and make them relinquish their language, stated the *AFP*. The 5,000 Croats who were in Kosovo before the war also had to leave, since they are

associated with the Serbs, with whom they share a language which is henceforth banned in Kosovo.



'Violence Continues Between Serbs and Albanians in the North of Kosovo,' Christophe Chatelot, **Le Monde** (France) 12 September 1999 (in French) **D294**

**Extract:**

Renewed tension in Kosovo, where the last few days have seen a dangerous escalation in interethnic violence. On Thursday 9th and Friday 10th September, the town of Kosovska Mitrovica, a cauldron of ethnic hatreds situated in the French-controlled northern zone, saw at least one hundred and fifty people injured, as KFOR had to intervene between several hundred Serbs and Albanians. [...] Security conditions are far from satisfactory throughout the province, where around a dozen people have been killed during the course of the week. Furthermore, on Friday, at the United Nations Headquarters, the UN Administrator for Kosovo, Bernard Kouchner, requested twice as many police than the UN had anticipated (three thousand elements). Before leaving for New York, Mr Kouchner had warned that a "wave of terrorism would not be surprising," the objective of extremists on all sides being to topple the agreement on total demilitarisation and the reorganisation of the KLA planned for 19th September. Mr Kouchner considered that "we must break the spirit of vengeance at the heart of the whole population," adding that the task could not be accomplished "in weeks or months," but would take years.




'About Kouchner – The Town Crier in Pristina,' **Vecernje Novosti** (Serbia) 16 September 1999 (in French).

**Extract:**

What the Ku-Klux-Klan racists are to the blacks in America, the "Médecins Sans Frontières" are to the Serbs in Europe: an ethnically exclusive, politically instrumentalised, sinister phalanx in the service of the global bluff of "democratic" imperialism and "humanitarian" hegemony. To be fair to the Ku-Klux-Klan, it has a considerable moral advantage over the Médecins: its policy is openly racist, i.e. devoid of prejudice and perfidy. Up to this moment, throughout the Yugoslav drama, Médecins Sans Frontières – those knights of hypocrisy – have been 'treating' people selectively. Being the army of the arrogant Atlantic ideology, they have carried the banners of humanity, freedom and democracy. We have been watching them carefully in the Balkans all these years. They 'cured' the Arnauts in Drenica (Arnauts is an abusive term which refers to Albanians as foreigners in the country), but none of the Serbian front-line soldiers were their 'patients'.

The founder of Médecins Sans Frontières is Bernard

Kouchner. It is our ill fate to have him as despot of the Anglo-Saxon occupiers of the Province. The giddy Kouchner (who was born that way) maintains that the KKK-like policy of Médecins Sans Frontières can be applied in Kosovo. In keeping with the Médecins' good tradition, he is now playing the part of the dejected murderer participating in the victims' cortège. He is the town crier for a multi-ethnic Kosovo which, if he goes on in this way, will end up ethnically cleansed. He screams like a town crier and spreads news about the disarmament of Albanian terrorists, but - in a classical Médecins manner - he is, on the other hand, preparing the KLA for its transformation into a Kosovo Guard of Albanians.

 *There is a problem which has been swept under the carpet a bit: in the wake of all this, the Serbs and the gypsies have left Kosovo. Some have taken refuge in Mitrovica, a town divided in two; to the north of Kosovo ... then many more people went into southern Serbia. These are the populations we worked with afterwards. We were able to go to Belgrade with MSF Belgium who had kept on some local staff. And, we worked in southern Serbia with Serbs and gypsies who had fled Kosovo. There were not hundreds of thousands ...*

Thierry Durand, Director of Operations,  
MSF Switzerland/MSF Greece Operational Centre  
(in French).

**On 9th September 1999, MSF issued a press release announcing the launch of a programme to provide supplies for the reconstruction of roofs before winter**



**Press release**, MSF France, 9 September 1999  
(in French). [D295](#) 

**Extract:**


Hundreds of thousands of people in Kosovo are currently taking refuge in simple tents, shelters made out of plastic tarpaulins, or even in badly damaged houses – a particularly unsuitable situation for facing the severity of the coming winter. In the Pec region, to the west of Kosovo, where the war took its heaviest toll, about 60% of dwellings have been destroyed. An assessment carried out by Médecins Sans Frontières has allowed those houses, which are still able to support a roof to be identified. On a scale of 1 to 5 for levels of destruction, these houses are classed as “category 4”. To tackle a precarious situation for those populations threatened by the winter, Médecins Sans Frontières has decided to commit itself to a programme for the distribution of roofing repair supplies. In the coming days, MSF will begin to distribute to these populations,

the supplies they will need for repairing the roofing on 1,000 “category 4” dwellings in 60 villages. These supplies, consisting of wood, corrugated iron sheets, construction tools, as well as stoves for heating, are currently being transported here by 142 articulated lorries. This operation “Objective: 1,000 Roofs for Winter” carried out in close collaboration with the village residents, will allow at least 3 families to be accommodated in each house, within a space of about 100 m<sup>2</sup>, or on average 18 people per house. The total number benefiting, identified as among the most vulnerable, is thus estimated at a minimum of 18,000. This aid programme for repairing roofing on houses is being set up chiefly so as to prevent the risk of respiratory infections and death, especially amongst the elderly and young children, as well as other diseases linked to poor hygiene and group living conditions. 21 Médecins Sans Frontières volunteers are currently working in the Pec region, and are providing support to the health facilities. The organisation is also present in Pristina, Prizren and Djakovica.

## THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE AND THE ‘COLLATERAL DAMAGE’ OF THE KOSOVO CRISIS

**On 15<sup>th</sup> October 1999, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to MSF. The Greek section, which had not publicised the news of its expulsion, now being extensively covered in the media, launched a press release declaring that MSF is a victim of collateral damage from the Kosovar war. The Greek press relayed the message. MSF International then released its own analysis of the situation to journalists. Several articles appeared in the European press.**



**‘Médecins Sans Frontières in Figures,’** *Le Monde*  
(France), 17 October 1999 (in French). [D296](#) 

**Extract:**

Médecins Sans Frontières is an international organisation made up of 18 independent sections. MSF Greece was expelled from the movement after taking its own positions during the conflict in Kosovo.



'MSF Victims of the Conflict in Kosovo,' **Press release**, MSF Greece, October 1999 (in English). **D297** [↗](#)

### Extract:

The victims of the conflict in Kosovo were not only Albanians and Serbs. 'Collateral damage' affected humanitarian organisations as well!

#### Summary of events

From the outset of hostilities, and before the massive influx of Kosovar Albanian refugees into Albania and the Yugoslav Federal Republic (YFR) of Macedonia, a large number of humanitarian organisations were mobilised. Médecins Sans Frontières put operational responsibility for the region in the hands of three sections: MSF Holland for YFR Macedonia; MSF Belgium for Albania and MSF France for Montenegro. Other sections, such as MSF Greece, linked their operational potential to this action plan. In parallel, MSF Greece organised preparations on Greek territory for the reception of Albanian refugees (which never happened in the end). Dozens of Greek volunteers were mobilised to come to the aid of the Albanians and dozens of tons of material were sent to the refugee camps.

As the weeks passed and the bombing intensified, our concern grew for the fate of the populations within Kosovo and Serbia. The contrast between the deployment of NGOs in Albania and Macedonia (a total of over 120 NGOs) and their absence from among the populations suffering the bombings became both obvious and unacceptable. However, access to Serbia was practically impossible. During this period MSF Greece made its position known publicly on several occasions. In each case the policy of ethnic cleansing by the Belgrade regime was condemned, but so too was the NATO bombing of non-military targets. For example, attached to this text is an article by the honorary president of our section denouncing Milosević's regime as being mainly responsible for this war (annex 1) as well as an interview with the acting president after his return from a mission to Kosovo (annex 2).

The situation changed towards mid-April when, through the intervention of the Greek government acting in agreement with the European Union, a 'humanitarian corridor' was established with the consent of both belligerents. According to this agreement, NATO agreed not to bomb humanitarian convoys which they received warning about and which followed a given itinerary and timetable, while the Serb authorities agreed that convoys would be allowed to enter and move towards destinations selected by the NGOs. The humanitarian organisations using the corridor would do so on their own responsibility and in total independence of the Greek government. This humanitarian corridor became operational as from 26 April.

MSF Greece immediately informed its Belgian, Dutch and French partners of this possibility. The Greek organisation

proposed to the other sections that a mixed team should be created with coordination ensured by one of these sections. This proposal was not followed up. Meanwhile the operations department of MSF Greece applied for visas from the Serb Consulate in Athens. The applications were accepted on 4 May and the Greek director of operations informed the other sections asking them to join with us. A great deal of pressure was then put on MSF Greece to cancel its project. The reason given was that "the Greeks lacked impartiality" and that only the Belgian section was authorised to enter Serbia on behalf of MSF. James Orbinsky, President of the International Office (IO), also assured us that visa requests had been made by the Belgian section and that we must wait until this section received authorisation to enter Serbia. Our response was that we could delay our mission by one or two days, but that, given the urgency of the situation, it was ethically unacceptable to wait longer. Our mission therefore entered Kosovo on 7 May 1999.

This mission was composed of three doctors (the president of MSF Greece, a second surgeon and a Greek Serb-speaking doctor so that we would not have to depend on a local translator) and a technician-logistician. Apart from the Serb-speaking Greek doctor, the members of this mission already had much experience, acquired mainly with the French section of MSF. The mission had been prepared by telephone calls, mainly with doctors in Pristina hospital and the emergency hospital in Belgrade. The objective of the mission was, on the one hand, to bring in first aid material on the basis of the information available (a total of 18 tonnes, i.e. a relatively small quantity) and, on the other hand, to evaluate the situation from the point of view of the medical needs and the space for humanitarian manoeuvre (i.e. free access to victims). Every movement by our mission was recorded in daily written reports and these reports were sent to the other sections. Our mission's activities were covered by independent Greek journalists as well as by Canadian, Italian, French and other journalists. From the outset the Serb authorities asked us to hand over our aid to the Yugoslav Red Cross. Our reply was categorically negative and our material was handed over to the doctors in the Pristina and Belgrade hospitals. Part of our team (a doctor and the technician) remained there until the end of the conflict in order to verify that this aid was effectively used for hospital patients and the wounded, and was not diverted.

After the end of the bombing, the other MSF sections entered Kosovo behind the NATO troops. The Greek volunteers welcomed the members of these sections to Pristina and MSF Greece asked to contribute towards their mission. But this request was not met. However, as an MSF presence was ensured by these sections, MSF Greece judged that it was no longer useful to remain as such in this region. It did, however, develop activities in Nis and Novi Sad, and continued to send written reports to the other sections.



### The expulsion procedure regarding MSF Greece

The Belgian, French and Dutch sections considered that MSF Greece had committed a serious misdemeanour. The President of the IO sent two people to Greece to 'inquire' into these misdemeanours and present a report to the International Office meeting planned for 12 June. MSF Greece received these people with open arms and called an Extraordinary General Assembly (EGA - for 2 June) in order to hold an in-depth debate on this issue. The two emissaries refused to participate in this EGA and their enquiry thus almost took on the air of a police investigation. Their main concern was to prove that MSF Greece requested visas without informing the other sections. All the documents in our possession were open to them and they were able to meet with everyone available. In return, we asked them to let us see their report before it was distributed so that we could contribute our own comments. They did not keep their promise and we were made aware of this report at the same time as the other IO sections, barely three days before the meeting. Of course, this report concluded that MSF-Greece was 'guilty' and proposed that the IO should call on our section to definitively end all our missions in order to have the 'privilege' of remaining with the 'MSF movement' as a 'partner section' (i.e. a section without the right to carry out missions, but aiming to raise funds to finance Belgian, French and Dutch missions). If we did not agree to this, we would not be expelled, but our own act would lead to 'self-expulsion!'

In fact, the expulsion of MSF Greece had not been put on the agenda. However, it was announced to us orally by the President of the IO the evening before the meeting and confirmed at the beginning of the meeting that this issue would certainly be discussed. In fact, what took place was the expulsion of MSF Greece, avoiding the normal procedure that would have led all the sections to deal with very basic questions. We denounced this procedure as contrary to the statutes and, above all, anti-democratic. We stated our refusal to participate in a discussion on our expulsion in which neither our statutory nor our real rights would be available to us in order to present our defence. On the other hand, we were willing to participate in any discussion on the basic issues. MSF Greece rejected this suicidal suggestion and again proposed a dialogue. This proposal was not taken up. At the beginning of October we received a letter dated 27 September stating that the IO, in a new decision of 16 September had voted by 17 voices to 13 in favour of our 'formal expulsion'. We, of course, had not been asked to take part in this meeting, nor had we been informed that it was taking place. According to some information received, this meeting did not physically take place, but was limited to an exchange of e-mails. However, the information was confirmed in an article in *Le Monde* on 17 October, which explicitly mentioned "the expulsion of the Greek section." Following this, we in turn made this information known in Greece (it should be noted that we had made public our divergence from the attitude of the western humanitarian organisations in the Kosovo conflict since the beginning of this internal crisis).

(...)

### Behind the facts, the reasons for the conflict

First of all, note that the expulsion decided on by the IO (ultimate sanction) appears disproportionate in regard to the facts for which we are reproached (exploratory mission with 18 tonnes of material). 'Misdemeanours' of this nature are a frequent grievance that various sections have blamed others for, but without the same consequences. If a section were to be expelled for an exploratory mission, practically all the sections would have had to be expelled several times! In order to understand, the context must be recalled. The war in Kosovo was the first international war in Europe since the Second World War. It exposed the deep splits between different societies on the continent. This split did not spare the humanitarian movement. Practically all the international organisations have suffered repercussions from this crisis. Most of them were able to handle their differences in a consensual manner. However, the International Office of MSF opted for authoritarian methods and expulsion instead of dialogue and reflection. Why?

There are two possible answers to this question. First of all, the management of some sections was probably more sensitive than that of others to the climate of polarisation, even fanaticism that surfaced during the war among public opinion and the media. Secondly, the management of these same sections has for years been cultivating a tendency to concentrate decisional power in a restricted number of large centres. This observation comes not from us alone, but is also that of a large number of MSF members, including Philippe Biberson, the current President of MSF France, who wrote in 1997, when he was president of the International Office: "at the international level, the participation of the different MSF (sections) has been taken away by the large sections in the name of a principle of coherence wrongly referred to as 'operationality' and which is nothing other than a concentration of power." In line with this tendency, a restricted number of large sections must decide about missions while the large number of other sections must limit themselves to fundraising in order to finance these missions. From this point of view, the Kosovo crisis appeared to be a good opportunity to "get rid of" MSF Greece.

### The future of MSF-Greece

MSF-Greece considers that its expulsion from the International Office is illegal and illegitimate. It has initiated procedures with the competent Belgian courts to have this decision annulled. But in any case, whether outside or inside the IO, MSF Greece considers itself to be a member of the MSF movement, which cannot be summed up by (membership of) some "office" or any other superstructure. The MSF movement has a common history to which we are definitively linked, real people who have experienced and built this history and, above all, the principles and ethics to which we all belong. MSF Greece will therefore continue to look for dialogue with all the actors in the movement.

MSF Greece is an association with several hundred vol-

unteers supported by over 100,000 donors in Greece. The spontaneous and massive support of the whole of Greek society, in reaction to what it considers to be a scandalous sanction, constitutes a commanding mandate, not only to carry on, but also to intensify our actions from now on in defending the ideal of impartial humanitarian action. We warmly thank all those who have offered us their support in such a moving manner and assure them that we have understood their message. We launch an appeal to all other sections and all their volunteers to end the anathema and ex-communication procedures and to discuss together, without delay, the difficult challenges that the humanitarian movement is meeting today in the face of the diverse attempts by all governments, civilian and military, to take over (our role).



'Greek Saga - Souvlaki and Mussaka,' **Email + Press advisory** from Samantha Bolton, MSF International Communication Coordinator to MSF press officers, 21 October 1999 (in English). [D298](#)

#### Extract:

I think I am off Greek food for a while after today and all the Greek MSF's anti-Serb propaganda. FYI - given what was said in the Greek press today - here is the final version which went out to couple of Greek journalists - not the press advisory you received this morning. Same rules apply - only in response to queries.

#### PRESS ADVISORY

Greek section expelled from MSF movement and Secretary General [of MSF] confirms that there are only 18 sections within MSF.

To re-clarify the status of the former Greek section of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), the international MSF office today publicly issued a statement reconfirming the expulsion of the former Greek section. The decision to expel the former Greek section was finalised September 24<sup>th</sup> by the International Council (IC) of MSF, which is made up of all the presidents of all the sections of the movement. "At MSF we greatly appreciate the support we have received from the Greek public and Greek volunteers in the past. We are sorry that there is no longer a Greek section within the MSF movement today and hope that in the future we will be able to re-establish MSF in Greece" said Dr Jean-Marie Kindermans, the Secretary General of MSF.

MSF is an international humanitarian organisation with a double mandate to bring independent assistance and to speak out about crimes against humanity and other injustices witnessed in the field. In conflict, MSF tries to work on all sides of the conflict in an impartial and independent way. These rules apply in Kosovo as they do in Sudan. In the Kosovo crisis, MSF refused to accept any funds from NATO governments. While MSF was working in Montenegro, Albania and Macedonia, MSF was also trying to gain

access to Serbia and Kosovo to freely assess the needs of the population, independently of all authorities and governments. "The situation with the former Greek section became unworkable at this time as they took the unilateral decision to enter Kosovo and Serbia without previous discussions or agreement with the MSF movement, thus compromising MSF operations and negotiations in the region" said Dr Jean-Marie Kindermans.

The former Greek section distributed tonnes of material in Kosovo without any means of proper monitoring and control (to ensure the goods were distributed to the most in need and in an impartial way). Given the complexity of the situation, MSF had previously decided to first assess whether it was in fact possible to act impartially and independently, before any supplies were to be brought into Kosovo. The Greek sections' actions directly contradicted this decision. In addition to compromising independent MSF assessments and missions in the field, on a public témoignage/speaking out level the former Greek section did not fully reflect the internationally agreed MSF positions on the lack of humanitarian space or on the crimes against humanity in Kosovo.

Although the IC then gave the former Greek section the option of remaining within the movement as long as they accepted the responsibilities and privileges that go along with membership as a partner section (there are 13 partner and 5 operational sections within the movement), the former Greek section refused. The former Greek section was informed of the IC decision to expel them from the movement at the beginning of July. MSF counterparts in the field have also been informed that the former MSF Greece section is no longer part of the MSF movement. "This has been a difficult decision for MSF, but the vote confirms the resolve of the movement to stand firm on issues of principle and humanitarian practice within MSF" said Dr James Orbinsky President of the International Council.



'Médecins Sans Frontières Expels its Greek Section, which was Seen as Too Pro-Serb,' Ram Etwareea, **Le Temps** (Switzerland), 13 November 1999 (in French). [D299](#)

#### Extract:

Early last May, Médecins sans Frontières Greece, with three doctors and 18 tonnes of supplies and medicines, arrived in Pristina, the main city of Kosovo. Operation Joint Guard was in full swing. In the wake of the atrocities committed by the Serb paramilitaries, the Atlantic Alliance bombed Yugoslavia. The people who remained in the suffering province were left to their own devices, with no food or medical supplies. The World Food Programme (WFP) announced that thousands of people who had taken refuge in the forests were facing famine.

In mid-April, the Greek government, which had gone its own way within NATO by supporting the Belgrade regime

in the name of the Orthodox Church, negotiated with the two warring parties, the opening of a humanitarian corridor. On 7 May, a mission from MSF Greece arrived in Pristina. It was precisely on account of that mission that the Greek section has been expelled from the MSF family, which comprises 19 national sections. Many reasons have been put forward for this step. During the conflict, the Greek section aligned itself with the Serb camp. In Pristina, it assisted the Serbs more than it did the Albanians, allowed it to be manipulated by the Belgrade regime, collaborated with the Greek government although it is a non-governmental organisation and, lastly, brought in humanitarian aid without carrying out a prior evaluation exercise. "It's clear that our disagreement is ideological," said Dr James Orbinsky, international director of MSF. He added: "The Greeks have tried to create an illusion of assistance to victims, whereas in fact they have assisted the Belgrade regime."

#### 'An excessive punishment'

In Athens, MSF-Greece was bitter following its expulsion. "Even if we were wrong in what we did, the punishment is excessive," protested Dr Odysseas Boudouris, President of the Greek section. And he counterattacked, accusing the central organisation of being dictatorial, and berating it for wanting only the French, Swiss, Belgian and Dutch sections to be allowed to operate on the ground, while the rest would be reduced to a fund-raising role. "In that case, why are sections being opened in Japan, the United States and Scandinavia," he wondered. Greece went even further: "did the Serbs manipulate us? The same could be said of NATO, which manipulated the French, Swiss, Belgian and Dutch sections," was Odysseas Boudouris' charge. "Wrong!" said Dr Orbinsky, "we openly criticised the allied military action for its violations of humanitarian law, and we refused to take funds from NATO member countries to pay for the operations we carried out in the Balkans after the end of the war."

Vincent Faber, Director of MSF Switzerland, who supports the Greek section's expulsion, believes there is no question but that it has put at risk the image of an organisation respected for its neutrality and independence. He drew attention to the fact that the Serbs generously issued visas to the Greeks, but refused them to people of other nationalities. Dr Orbinsky stated categorically, "MSF and the Greek section have definitively severed their connection." "Our expulsion is illegal and unjustified," retorted Odysseas Boudouris. "We would like to reopen dialogue. On the other hand, whatever the outcome of this crisis, we will continue our humanitarian activities under the MSF banner." This affair will probably end up in the courts, as MSF's international president makes clear: "we will have no hesitation in using all available means to protect the movement's honour."



'Explanatory note on MSF Greece, for the Attention of ECHO,' by Laure Delcros, MSF International to Ms Moreno, ECHO, 16 November 1999 (in French). **D300**

#### Extract:

Médecins Sans Frontières is a private not-for-profit organisation, currently represented by 18 sections across the world (Germany, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Spain, the United States, France, Holland, Hong Kong, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Norway, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Switzerland). MSF's operational sections, namely MSF France, MSF Belgium, MSF Holland, MSF Spain, MSF Switzerland and MSF Luxembourg have signed a framework partnership agreement with ECHO. As the other sections of MSF are not operational, they are not eligible for ECHO funding.

In 1997, a clear decision was made by the International Council of MSF (made up of representatives of all the sections of MSF) that there would be only six operational centres: those mentioned above. This decision arose from a concern for the consistency and effectiveness of our action on the ground. That decision was violated more than once by our Greek section, causing internal crises and losses of confidence. The latest violation of this common rule was the sending to Kosovo, last spring, a unilateral mission under the Greek flag, showing a total lack of transparency vis-à-vis the movement, and a total breach of the principle of independence regarding humanitarian action. That is why the International Council decided to exclude the Greek section of MSF, not without previously suggesting that it remain within our movement as a non-operational section. MSF Greece is no longer part of the international organisation Médecins Sans Frontières, and within a few weeks we will be able to provide you with a legal document attesting to its expulsion.



'Doctors Operating in a Divided House,' Sofka Zinovieff, *The Financial Times* (United Kingdom), 4 December 1999 (in English).

#### Extract:

They deliver emergency medical aid wherever and whenever it is needed and they have been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts. But while the doctors of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) know no geographical borders, internal divisions threaten to cast a cloud over next week's presentation ceremony in Oslo. MSF is a private international organisation that has worked for nearly three decades to provide medical help throughout the world, regardless of race, religion and politics. The Nobel Prize, worth \$960,000, is in recognition of this work.

The cause of its rift is the expulsion of the 200 doctors of the Greek section for having entered Kosovo during the

NATO bombing campaign, launched in March this year, without the go-ahead from MSF headquarters. The Greeks were deemed to have compromised the organisation's fundamental principle of independence and impartiality. They see the accusation as "unjust and offensive." The three largest and most influential sections of MSF (France, the Netherlands and Belgium) are united in condemnation of Greece. They claim their colleagues in Athens were not only helped by the Greek government, but that their expedition bore Greek flags. Furthermore, another MSF mission was awaiting visas for Kosovo (which were not forthcoming), when Belgrade gave visas to the Greeks, who went ahead alone. This compounded suspicions within MSF that the Greeks were not "impartial" towards the Serbs (it was feared that their medical supplies might end up with the Serbs), and that they were not acting "transparently".

Odysseas Boudouris, 46-year-old President of MSF Greece, is horrified by the charges. Although some of the protocol may have been dispensed with, the Greeks were acting according to their deeply held beliefs. "For us there is no distinction between good and bad victims: there is only the moral objective to offer our contribution. We acted under the gaze of media reporters in Kosovo and our conscience is clear." Boudouris stresses that Serbia would have been unlikely to give visas to doctors from NATO countries that were bombing its people, and that the Greeks took advantage of their neutral status. Although Boudouris and his colleagues wholeheartedly condemned Serbia's regime and its crimes against humanity in Kosovo, they simultaneously condemned NATO bombing for hitting non-military targets. They believed western aid organisations, including MSF, virtually ignored Serb victims, and focused only on the suffering of the Albanians.

Boudouris denies that MSF Greece was acting under the protection of its government which, he claims, merely helped to establish a "humanitarian corridor." The use of Greek flags was also "innocent," he said. Some hours before they entered Kosovo, NATO announced that the Serbs were using red crosses on their military transport vehicles. Thus MSF Greece was told to replace the red crosses painted on top of its vehicles with blue and white stripes, similar to the Greek flag, so that they would not be bombed by NATO aircraft. Once in Pristina, the Serbian authorities asked the doctors to hand over their emergency medical supplies to the Yugoslav Red Cross, but they refused. Ultimately, about 18 tons of supplies were sent by the group to the Serbian population together with four volunteers. More than 50 tons of aid and 15 volunteers went to Albanian refugees.


At the time of the conflict, NATO praised the work of the Greek doctors, and the alliance spokesman Jamie Shea mentioned their contribution at several press conferences. He hoped that the Belgrade authorities would not impede them "from carrying out their extremely important mission in the present circumstances." But the Greek doctors' pleas have cut no ice with 17 out of the 18 MSF sections which

voted them out of the organisation (Japan was their only supporter). According to Austen Davis, the British General Director of MSF Holland, "there was deep insecurity surrounding the situation" in Kosovo, and it became more important than ever that the "principles of impartiality" should be followed. Whenever MSF, or other humanitarian groups, enter a war zone, "they are encountering difficult, violent, foreign environments, and young, often inexperienced medics are extremely open to manipulation," he explained. Therefore "there has to be a consensus, and an agreement to abide by the will of the majority in an organisation like ours. Sometimes that means not going in."

Although the Greeks are the first members to be thrown out of MSF since its foundation in 1971, there has been a history of quarrels and tension in the world's largest private humanitarian relief organisation. "We are constantly bickering," comments Davis. In the 1980s, the founding French department [section] took the Belgians to court because of internal politics, and in 1979 Médecins du Monde was formed as a breakaway group. This kind of behaviour is inevitable "with committed, often militant, people, who are unwilling to compromise," argues Jean-Marie Kindermans, General Secretary of MSF's International Bureau. With an international staff of 2,500 in 80 countries, and about 10,000 local staff, there are bound to be disagreements. According to Kindermans, the Kosovo episode was really only "the straw that broke the camel's back."

Initially, the Greek doctors were given the option of staying in MSF as a non-operational centre, but they chose not to comply and were therefore expelled. Speaking for his colleagues in Athens, Boudouris believes they still belong to MSF and that the work of the Greek doctors has contributed to the Nobel Peace Prize. He and his colleagues therefore intend to be at the awards ceremony in Oslo. Geir Lundestad, Director of the Nobel Institute in Oslo, is not concerned that the Greek presence will disrupt the ceremony: "If the Greek doctors are not on the invitation list from MSF, then we won't invite them. To get into Oslo City Hall you need an invitation." He confirms, however, that while it is MSF's long-term record of work across many continents that won them the prize (from among 136 candidates), the work carried out in Kosovo was also a positive contribution.

Meanwhile, perhaps the most conciliatory move towards internal peace among the doctors has come from MSF's Austen Davis. He believes that while the Greeks have been difficult to work with, part of the credit for the Nobel Prize is undoubtedly theirs. The present separation is "born of a passionate conviction of the same ideals."

 *We were very happy not to see the Greek business discussed in the press. That was what I was afraid*

*of. It all came out in October when the award of the Nobel Prize was announced. The Greeks congratulated themselves on the prize. And Philippe [Biberson, MSF France President] said in Le Monde that there was one section less, and that they had been expelled according to the rules. In fact, we had severed all connections, but we hadn't yet legally expelled them. I spent half my time issuing statements about it. Internally, people hadn't kept up with it, and it had to be explained to everybody. That was the first time that I found the section presidents as a group very happy to off-load this problem. All the journalists were calling Brussels. So I got landed with all the interviews. The thing they were most interested in was the disagreement. That was difficult to explain, and took a long time, because it's not a very exciting subject. We put heavy emphasis on the breach of the principle of independence, for which we had two or three key elements, anyway. On top of that, there was all the internal dissension, which weighed very heavily on us.*

Jean-Marie Kindermans, Secretary General,  
MSF International (in French)

**On 27 and 28 November 1999, the International Council of MSF unanimously adopted a resolution expelling MSF Greece from the movement for not having complied with decisions taken at the meeting on 12 June 1999. However, it decided to maintain contact with the Greek society, in order to promote MSF's principles and values.**



'MSF IC Meeting **Minutes**,' 27-28 November 1999, Brussels, Belgium (in English). [D301](#)

#### **Extract:**

Item 2: Greek Update, and Formal Vote on the Expulsion of the Greek Section from the MSF Movement.

The situation regarding the former Greek section was reviewed in detail by Jean-Marie Kindermans, and particularly the fact that the issue has been discussed in the news media in recent months. A distinction between the political decision of the IC made in June 1999 and the legal issues surrounding this was made in the discussion. During discussion, the IC gave a clear indication that an 'end date' to legal procedures must be defined, so that the legal issues do not drag on, providing a potentially unnecessary form to the underlying political issues.

The IC also gave a clear indication that we must not over-react to over-dramatised portrayals of our views in the media. During discussion, the IC also gave a clear indication that the political decision of the MSF movement regarding the expulsion of the former Greek section is clear, firm and unequivocal. We must now close a recycling of this decision that was made clear in the unofficial CC: mail vote held on September 16, 1999, where 17 members

of the IC voted informally to expel the Greek Section from the MSF Movement. Further discussion emphasised that a formal vote confirming the informal CC:mail vote of September 16 was required. Discussion also emphasised that while this political decision is clear in regard to the frontier Greek Section of MSF, the MSF Movement is open to re-establishing contact with Greek Society so that the principles and values of the MSF Movement can be promoted and engaged.

The following resolution was put to a vote: November 27, 1999 MSF International Council Resolution: Without prejudice, the members of the current assembly are formally confirming the informal cc-mail vote of September 16, 1999, establishing the expulsion of the Greek section of Médecins Sans Frontières, based on the issues discussed and resolution passed at the MSF international Council on June 12, 1999.

The September 16, 1999 MSF IC CC:mail Resolution reads: "Because of non-compliance with the June 12, 1999 MSF International Council resolution, the MSF International Council expels the Greek section from the MSF International Council and association. The MSF International Council consequently demands that the former Greek section a) immediately ceases use, in any way whatsoever, of the logo and name of 'MSF/Médecins Sans Frontières' and of any related distinctive sign, publicly or privately in or out of Greece and b) refrain from making any misleading representation that they are affiliated, in any way whatsoever, with MSF International or the MSF movement generally. Finally, the former Greek section is required to immediately withdraw the trademark 'MSF/Médecins Sans Frontières,' which was filed in the Greek Trade Mark Office in bad faith, without MSF International's expressed or implicit consent."

The number of votes for: 17

The number of votes against: 0


The number of abstentions: 0

The total votes cast: 17


The number of absent IC members: 1 (MSF Australia).

The resolution was adopted.

**On 10 December 1999, the day on which the Nobel peace prize was awarded to MSF, the Greek section held a press conference, as a fringe event alongside the ceremonies taking place in Oslo. According to the president of MSF Greece, his response was in regards to what he considered a provocation on the part of the international movement: the choice to represent the Greek section in Oslo, of two former members that had a long time ago resigned from the association.**

 It was obviously a tricky situation. It was understandable that journalists would be interested in it. But in my opinion, our friends in MSF Greece behaved pretty badly, and didn't properly bridge the gap between Greece and the rest of Europe. That's how I interpret it. Their frame of mind didn't go down well with a panel of mainly Scandinavian and European journalists, all of whom were very pro-intervention. It was probably for not very good reasons (on the humanitarian front, at least) that they had mixed success. But I think that was it, essentially. There was somebody in MSF who listened to what they were saying. But I wasn't there. I would immediately have been drawn into the discussion and put on the spot. That would have been a really bad move. And that's just about all. They made no impact. Absolutely none. It was like a pebble in a calm lake. It had absolutely no influence. Just after the award of the prize, I spoke in the Greek press. Greek anti-nationalists in Paris had alerted me, and told me about the hysterical raving against MSF in the Greek press. He sent Greek journalists to me. And I also spent endless hours on the telephone. Some of them came to see me at home on this subject. It overwhelmed me. What's more, it took up a disproportionate amount of time given the importance of the matter. So I soon gave up, but they were very persistent. The little band of Greeks...

Rony Brauman, Director of research,  
Foundation MSF France (in French)

 When the Nobel Prize was awarded, at the press conference given in Oslo by the international MSF movement, we were asked only one question about it. It didn't disrupt the press conference. Everybody knew about it. It wasn't a scoop. We were more upset about our experiences in Grozny<sup>18</sup>. I believe MSF Greece held a press conference in Oslo. I didn't see them. In the end, I spent two hours with journalists from a Greek television channel, but I didn't think that had created a scandal. Anyway, the interviews always focused on the same questions: neutrality, support for NATO. But the timing was bad, because in its speech at the award ceremony, the Nobel committee made a big point of our independence! The difficult time was the month between the announcement of the prize and the ceremony. That caused us a bit of trouble, people didn't understand this: you mustn't get involved in a dispute. But that wasn't the case in Oslo. We had warned the people on the Nobel committee. They already knew about it when they decided to award us the prize. They told us this was nothing compared with some other laureates – they'd managed to handle Arafat and Rabin, so it was child's play to them. They told us that in writing!

Jean-Marie Kindermans, Secretary General, MSF  
International (in French)

18. The team representing MSF at the Nobel prize award ceremony demonstrated outside the embassy of the Russian Federation in Oslo, demanding a halt to the Russian army's intensive and indiscriminate bombardment of the Chechen capital.

**On the 20th December 1999, the Yugoslav minister of information publicly described MSF as an 'espionage organisation'.**




'Médecins Sans Frontières - an "Espionage Organisation" - says Belgrade,' **AFP** (France), Belgrade, 20 December 1999 (in French).

**Extract:**

The Yugoslav Minister of Information, Goran Matic, accused Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) of being "an espionage organisation", at a press conference held in Belgrade on Monday. Mr Matic also accused the founder of MSF and current UN Civilian Administrator in Kosovo, Bernard Kouchner, of smuggling, and again demanded that he be sacked. "MSF is operating today like an administrative firm possessing the most sophisticated communications equipment, a system of codes and anti-bugging devices, and a plan for destroying information in case of evacuation," declared Mr Matic. "Does a humanitarian organisation, whose work is public, need such equipment?" he asked, declaring that the 1999 Nobel Peace Prize awarded to MSF "has been given to spies and warmongers." Mr Matic showed journalists slides, claiming they involved "reports written in accordance with detailed instructions" by MSF teams operating in Bosnia at an unspecified date. These reports, said Mr Matic, "look more like the reports of members of intelligence services than those of humanitarians." MSF, he said, had introduced into ex-Yugoslavia "the principle of 'humanism against totalitarianism,'" a concept supported by funding from the French, Belgian, Dutch, German, British, American, Danish, Austrian, Swedish and Italian governments." This principle was designed, said the Minister, to provide a "legal framework for espionage activities." In Kosovo, said Mr Matic, members of MSF had provided their employers with information about the number of police officers, soldiers and army reservists present in the province. "They assisted the strategists of last spring's attack on Yugoslavia," he said.

**On 26 January 2000, the International Council of MSF voted to formalise the expulsion of the Greek section. In November 2003, a process of reintegration was opened, under the operational responsibility of MSF Spain. The Greek section was readmitted to the MSF movement on 15 January 2005.**



'Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of the International Council' 26 January 2000 (in English). **D302** 

**Extract:**

[...] 1. Vote on the expulsion of Médecins Sans Frontières-

Greek section (MSF Greece) for the following reasons:

- Violation of the resolution passed by the International Council meeting of 11 and 12 June 1999 calling on MSF Greece to immediately halt its operations outside Greek territory;
- MSF Greece's violations of the fundamental principles of the movement. The said violations are based on the report of Stephan Oberreit and Morten Rostrup of 3 June 1999. [...]

#### V) Summary of discussions

1) Statement by Morten Rostrup: Morten Rostrup presented his report, a complete copy of which is to be found in the annexes of the present Minutes.

2) Statement by the Greek party: O. Boudouris declared that the report did not reflect reality. He invited members to take note of the memorandum distributed by MSF Greece and sent to IC members the previous day by email (to be found in annex to the present Minutes). (...)

#### b) Background

Sotiris used a metaphor to describe the relationship between MSF Greece and the rest of the movement (MSF should be seen as a country with a very small minority on its southern frontier, which is MSF Greece - see annex). He then developed the argument contained in the memorandum presented by MSF Greece and transmitted by email to other members. A copy was distributed during the meeting. MSF Greece would like to open up an unconditional dialogue with all subjects open for discussion. But the IC must make known whether it wishes to exclude the section or whether it wishes an intensive dialogue. If the IC wants an expulsion procedure, it cannot be prevented from this, but the problem will not be resolved; two conditions are required for this:

- There must be a serious breach of obligations, not merely a difference of opinion. In the recent history of MSF there have been greater failures of transparency and more serious violations of principles than those for which MSF Greece is reproached (he gave two examples: the article entitled "J'accuse" in *Libération* and the fact that 60% or more of MSF Belgium's funding was institutional); each case was resolved by dialogue.

- The right of defence must be respected, which is not the case here as MSF Greece has been cut off from cc-mail system for 7 months and therefore cannot make its side of the dispute known.

Therefore, if the IC opts for expulsion, MSF Greece will contest this on the basis of the two points listed above. A procedure must be found to re-launch a dialogue, even if expulsion has to be postponed to a later date. He invited IC members to read the memorandum distributed to all participants.

#### 3) Questions from the floor

(...)

Morten of MSF Norway recalled that the Greek mission had been prepared with a total lack of coordination or transparency, and also violated the principle of independence. He stated that Greece wanted to become the sixth operational centre and that Kosovo was an opportunity for realising this wish. The proposal offered to MSF Greece

to remain as a partner section had been refused, even if this was a 'suicide operation' (according to him). MSF decisions are very much more transparent today within the framework of the new IC, and this transparency has not been respected. We cannot waste too much energy and resources on this matter if there is no transparency.

Eric Vreede for MSF UK: it has been clear since 97 that MSF Greece could not be operational. It had the chance to become so via the common centre (Greece-Switzerland). The idea of operationality has changed. It is not true MSF Greece did not have the chance to defend itself because they decided to leave during the IC meeting of June 99 and have refused to give an explanation.

Olivier Dechevrens for MSF Switzerland: the accusation that the IC lacks transparency is incorrect. Furthermore, Odysseas Boudouris was Vice-President and should therefore have sent a mail to everybody to resolve the crisis over Kosovo. Odysseas replied that he had done so. Miguel-Angel for MSF Spain: there were 5 hours of debate on the situation regarding MSF Greece during the IC meeting in June 1999. It is untrue to say that MSF never condemned the NATO bombings.

Vincent Janssens for MSF Holland: referring to Accusation 4 in the memorandum which mentioned that the Belgians did not succeed in obtaining visas "which was very much foreseeable." Why was this foreseeable?

#### Replies from MSF Greece (Sotiris Paspaspysopoulos)

(...)

- In regard to the IC meeting of June '99: there was an extraordinary Board of Directors

- As regards the six operational centres: false, we respect IC decisions. Today, for historic reasons, there are only 5 centres, but we accept this. We just want to find ways to integrate our existing operationality. There is a refusal to maintain commitments made by MSF International in regards to MSF Greece.

(...)To reply to V. Janssens' question, in any case, visas were not obtained. The Milosevic regime had identified certain MSF countries as countries supporting NATO's actions because of statements made by some senior representatives of MSF. This is why visas have now been granted to MSF Switzerland (and perhaps to MSF Belgium)? The Nobel Prize vindicates MSF's history and we should therefore not be expelled from it. What would be the sense of this expulsion? MSF Greece has an obligation towards its donors and towards the populations for which it has a responsibility to continue to exist. Within MSF Greece there is a desire to find a formula for continuing with 5 operational centres. If we are expelled, we wish to continue for several years as MSF. We propose that all legal procedures should be terminated and a working group nominated to find possible solutions to the existing problem, which began 8 months ago.

(...) Sotiris for MSF Greece: the proposed working group would have the possibility of discussing all proposals and we are only calling for a working group to be nominated to hold a dialogue.

Odysseas for MSF Greece: the proposal of MSF Greece must be submitted to a vote.

(...) Pascal for MSF Belgium: MSF Greece has had the

chance to explain and must therefore be ready to comply with the June IC 99 resolutions.

(...) Morten for MSF Norway: it was clear at the June 99 IC meeting that if the resolution regarding Greek operationality was not respected, MSF Greece would be expelled from the movement. However, you have opted in favour of your operationality.

#### VI) Summing up

Odysseas Boudouris for MSF Greece: raised a procedural question about the proposal of MSF Greece, which must, according to him, be put to the vote.

Sotiris Papaspyropoulos: the proposal from MSF Greece is an alternative to expulsion and must therefore be voted on before the expulsion itself.

Lawyers debated over the procedure: should the proposal by MSF Greece be regarded as an alternative to the vote on the expulsion procedure (view promoted by the lawyers of MSF Greece) or a new point on the agenda (view promoted by Mr Druylans, lawyer for the International Office)?

(...) P. Druylans, lawyer for the IO: an AGM decides on the points on the agenda. There is disagreement on whether or not the proposal of MSF Greece is contained in the agenda so the International Council must, as an AGM, rule on this matter.

Sotiris Papaspyropoulos: proposed that his proposal should be reformulated

- MSF Greece not to be expelled this day;
- All legal or administrative procedures by one side or the other to be halted;
- A committee to be formed to undertake a dialogue.

James Orbinsky: then reformulated the motion on the agenda.

Odysseas Boudouris: refused to vote.

-> The President asked the International Council if it agreed to add a new point to the agenda, which would be the new 3-point proposal of Sotiris Papaspyropoulos. Objection from Sotiris Papaspyropoulos who said that this was not another subject on the agenda. Voting: 2 in favour, 1 abstention, 16 against. Odysseas Boudouris expressed reservations regarding the legality of this vote.



'Minutes of MSF IC meeting in Paris, 29 June & 21, 22, 23 November 2003 (in English). **D303**

#### **Extract:**

##### VIII. The Former MSF-Greece

The issue was introduced by Kostas - President of MSF-Greece.

The vision set out from early 2001 was to start knocking on the door of the international movement. The process started within MSF-Greece and then planed out to the international movement. It's a long process with many discussions. We believe that today we've reached a level of transparency where reintegration becomes possible. Would like to thank Eric, Bernard and MSF-Spain for the work over

the past three months. As the President of MSF-Greece I bring with me the full support of the Greek AG and a unanimous approval from the Board of Directors of MSF-Greece to respond positively to the conditions set by the IC. Our efforts today will be in integrating with an OC - I believe that MSF-Greece can be an added value to the movement. The commitment is there on both sides - it is a big challenge we have ahead of us, there are many things to define such as decision making processes, etc. over the next year and I hope that this transition period will help us answer all these questions. It is important for MSF-Greece that the IC gives us a clear political commitment - it is important for us, for our association, our donors and it will help frame the process until the end of the year. Reintegration is a critical priority in our agenda. We also need the IC's support on the procedure - an agreement by 2 sections on rules is not enough - we need IC leadership on this issue.

Emilia Herranz / President of MSF Spain

There is clear commitment within our associative and executive to share our operationality with MSF Greece. It is our only way to grow operationally. To us this is a good opportunity, a challenging opportunity but we are willing to take the risks. We do need the IC's back-up on this, to help us along on the process. We are accountable to the IC and need your commitment.

Eric Stobbaerts / GD MSF Spain

This will mean a lot of work, time, energy and mind-set change but by going this way we also believe that we will be able to propose another way of sharing operationality.

Morten Rostrup / ICP

This is a historical moment even if this isn't the final decision. The IC has been clear on the conditions of reintegration - I hope that MSF Greece clearly understands how this decision will impact the control of their operations. The pattern of accountability will change and the IC must state this very clearly. There must be no ambiguity; operational responsibility lies with the Operations Director in the operational section, which integrates the former MSF Greece. I point this out specifically as it has been part of the reason for the split. I would also like to say that there have been a lot of changes since this has happened and I feel very positive about this reintegration. I believe in the contribution that can be made by MSF Greece... very happy to end this circle with a clear IC commitment towards reintegration.

Further comments were made by the IC members

-MSF Greece's attitude in Afghanistan & Iraq has demonstrated their drastic change of positioning. They have shown 'in context' that they are able to clarify the role of humanitarian organisations and this should enable us to welcome them back in full confidence.

-Re: their acceptance to lose sovereignty: Do not view reintegration like this - strongly believe in the idea of MSF as an international humanitarian organisation and are willing to pay the price to be part of this. Furthermore, MSF is not about sovereignty - it is about going beyond borders.

-MSF-Luxembourg mentioned that they had gained enormously out of joining up with OCB [Operational Centre in



BXL] and is more than willing to share their experience with MSF Greece.

-Re: the medical agenda: MSF-Greece has been following MSF's medical agenda closely and has now introduced ARV in Zambia and Malawi. Believe that MSF is a driving force in the medical field in general.

A resolution was proposed and unanimously approved.

**IC Resolution:** The IC states a clear political will to reintegrate the former MSF Greece section in the international MSF movement. MSF Spain is assigned to work on the practical implementation. The pending court trials will be stopped. The final inclusion of the former MSF Greece section is foreseen at the IC meeting in November 2004 dependent on the feasibility and former MSF Greece's fulfilling the conditions stated by the IC in its November 2002 resolution. In the meantime former MSF Greece is assigned an observer status in the movement. The IC Board has a special responsibility to monitor the integration process and all IC members express their commitment to support the process in various ways. Unanimously approved.



'MSF Greece Reintegrated into the MSF International Movement,' **Press release**, Athens/Geneva, 9 February 2005 (in English).

**D304**

#### **Extract:**

Representatives from the International Office of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and from MSF Greece have signed an agreement granting MSF Greece the license to use all MSF trademarks and related distinctive signs, thus reintegrating the Greek section into the International Movement of MSF. As a result, after more than five years, MSF Greece is back to being one of the 19 sections of the movement, having agreed to share, with all other sections around the world, MSF's humanitarian and operational principles.

MSF Greece was expelled from the movement in November 1999 after strong disagreement over the operational implementation of MSF's principles of independence and impartiality in Kosovo. This agreement is the result of a process that lasted for more than a year during which MSF Greece's operations have been integrated in the support structure and aligned with the operational policy of the organisation. MSF Greece is currently running missions in Malawi, Zambia, Ethiopia, Armenia and the Palestinian Territories. Projects in Serbia are being handed over to other organisations. Ongoing activities include the provision of antiretroviral treatment for HIV/AIDS patients, treatment of sexually transmitted infections and malaria as well as emergency response to epidemics. The reintegration of the Greek section into the international MSF movement comes at a time when all MSF sections are, more than ever, committed to working together at improving MSF's response to the needs of populations in danger.



*All I can say is that we wished to expel them. Other people went along with us, but without enthusiasm.*

*We weren't even very enthusiastic ourselves. We organised an extraordinary Council meeting in order to expel them, but it was more form than substance. This episode with MSF Greece raised questions of incorrect behaviour and poor organisation, which are to be found in all human groups and are of no interest. What was specifically related to Kosovo was the inability of a group to extricate itself from its own social context. If you make a comparison with what the Americans have done in Afghanistan, it's striking.*

Jean-Marie Kindermans, Secretary General MSF International (in French).



*We considered we were punished because we wanted to be impartial. The intention was not to be rebels.*

*The intention was humanitarian, that we would like to have both sides. In the history of MSF Greece in the movement, there was a lot of goings up and down. We didn't exactly know what we were: operational or non-operational, partners or a non-partner section. Even the merge with MSF Switzerland came out of long negotiations. So some of us considered that like a punishment. Secondly, it was not the first time that within MSF movement, different sections were disagreeing, even for such serious issues, but the result was not something like that. The result was not an expulsion. I think that people from MSF Greece saw this crisis as the opportunity to prove themselves and to the movement that they were capable of participating in an emergency. On the other side, the MSF movement saw the opportunity to get rid of the situation with MSF Greece: that they had pissed us off coming up and out, and going in there.*

*In addition, I think that MSF cannot admit that during the Kosovo crisis they were manipulated, in a way. It is not that we are so nationalistic, Serbian friends or orthodox whatever - I heard all these rumours going around. [...] The Kosovo crisis was an opportunity for MSF Greece, politically, to find itself within the MSF movement and to say: "Here we are, you have to pay attention to us, all these years you didn't...you just want to get rid of your problem initiated in 1991, and enlarged in 1994 with the veto when we were supposed to become operational." On the other side, first of all there was manipulation by the media, I don't know by whom, but certainly at this point when they evacuated the teams that were inside Kosovo on security issues, and when although there was the opportunity for MSF Greece to get in during the strikes, they didn't. So there is an issue here. I guess both sides found there was an opportunity, and this came with such results that I don't consider it as a way of discussion to solve problems between two families.*

Hereklea Kaltezioti, Human Resources Officer, MSF Greece (in English).



*MSF Greece relationship with the Balkans is unique. Throughout this crisis, they have taken sides. To them, the Serbs and Orthodox Serbs were doing no more than avenging themselves. They put everyone on the same level: Croats, Bosnian Muslims, and the KLA. Odysseas even wrote it down in black and white, when he described what the Milosevic regime was doing in Kosovo as harassment. As if it was some form of 'hazing!' They were very far from MSF and our way of doing things. Sotiris was more of a fighter; he had taken part in missions with MSF France. He didn't have the same mind-set as Odysseas. I think he was manipulated, that he got caught in it. When you're in your own country, and every day, for months, events are presented to you from a particular angle, you end up believing it. That must be what happened in Greece.*

Thierry Durand, Director of Operations,  
MSF Switzerland/MSF Greece Operational Centre  
(in French).

## EPILOGUE

**On 11 February 2000, a study commissioned by UNHCR by independent experts was made public in Geneva. It demonstrates UNHCR's inadequate response to the influx of Kosovar refugees into Macedonia, Albania and Montenegro between March and June 1999. The study suggested that this inadequacy was, to a great extent, due to its being sidelined by NATO and western governments, who wished to retain control of humanitarian operations for strategic and political purposes.**



*'UNHCR: a Report Condemns its Ineffectual Response During the Kosovo War,' Jean-Louis de la Vayssière, AFP (France), Geneva, 11 February 1999 (in French).*

### Extract:

The UN High Commission for Refugees failed to foresee the influx of refugees from the war in Kosovo and found itself in a difficult position vis-à-vis NATO and strategic interests of individual governments, said a report published in Geneva on Friday. This highly critical study, which makes a scathing attack on the marginalisation of the UN agency in the period between March and June 1999 (the period of NATO strikes and the massive exodus of the Kosovars), was made public by UNHCR in Geneva last Friday. It condemns the "blurring of the boundaries between humanitarian and politico-military missions," NATO's autonomous humani-

tarian programme, and the over-intense media coverage of the crisis.

The study was commissioned by UNHCR from four independent experts, when its response to the influx over a period of a few weeks of 850,000 ethnic Albanians from Kosovo into neighbouring countries (Albania and Macedonia in particular) was revealed as totally inadequate. "Many factors that influenced UNHCR's performance were not under our control" during the conflict, UNHCR Spokesman Redmond acknowledged on Friday, admitting that much of the criticism contained in the report was justified. For example, the report stated that UNHCR had contributed only 12% towards the cost of accommodating the refugees on some 278 sites in Albania. For its part, NATO organised operations whose mission was humanitarian, such as AFOR in Albania.

In addition, governments encouraged their national NGOs or civilian and military agencies, which was an enormous drain on resources and also created a plethora of actors, and problems of coordination. At the height of the crisis, approximately 250 NGOs were operating in Albania and Macedonia, of which only 20% were partners of UNHCR. "The high stakes impelled governments to look for independent action. The high visibility of this crisis motivated them to wave their national flags on the humanitarian front," the report said. The six principal European contributing governments gave only 3.5% of their public humanitarian aid directly to UNHCR, out of a total of 279 million dollars. UNHCR also found itself wrong-footed when western governments set up a number of 'de-luxe camps', and evacuated refugees to them, in order to lighten the burden on Macedonia. UNHCR, the report repeated, "is not in favour of differential treatment of refugees."

While UNHCR supported the unconditional granting of asylum in the first instance by Macedonia, the United States and Great Britain had particular concerns for the possible destabilisation of that fragile country. The critical moment when thousands of Kosovars were held up in terrible conditions at Blace, between Kosovo and Macedonia, was mentioned. The immediate cause was Macedonia's refusal to admit a flood of refugees unless it received assurances that other countries would contribute aid, and a programme of "shared responsibility" was then established, the experts recalled. "More than UNHCR, individual governments – the United States in particular – took the initiative in these programmes, led by interests that were as much strategic and political as humanitarian," they said.

Poor forecasting and instances of structural dysfunction are also cited in the report: inadequate supplies, and emergency staff who arrived too late, or were lacking at certain levels, etc. UNHCR was taken to task for having anticipated "an ordinary crisis" and for not having foreseen the more tragic alternative of this massive exodus. "The response was too weak, too late" says the report.

**In 2000, Rony Brauman, former President of MSF France and Director of Research at the Foundation MSF France, refused to speak at a NATO seminar, attacking its propagandist reference to the 'humanitarian war' waged in Kosovo.**



*'Mr. Brauman (MSF) Rejects Nato's Use of the Term "Humanitarian War,"* **AFP** (France), Geneva, 3 March 2000 (in French).

**Extract:**

In a interview published on Friday by the Swiss newspaper La Tribune de Genève, Mr. Brauman accused the NATO military forces of trying, at the time of their intervention in Kosovo, "to gain total control" of the refugee camps, and of "throwing out" the humanitarian organisations, including the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). Mr. Brauman was due to speak on Thursday at a seminar of NATO's Parliamentary Assembly in Montreux, on the subject of "military participation in civilian and humanitarian operations."

He was due to give a talk on "the dilemmas posed for civilian organisations by military support for humanitarian assistance missions," but he refused, "because there is no place for MSF in such a context." "To mix war and humanitarian action," he said, "is simply mystification." "When NATO military forces were deployed in Kosovo, there was considerable friction with non-governmental organisations, mainly at the time the refugee camps were set up, and over their management. In order to gain total control of these camps, they threw us out, including UNHCR," said the former director of MSF. "To us, refugee camps are humanitarian sanctuaries, but the NATO forces used them as camps in which to hold reservists for the army fighting for independence for Kosovo. In return, that army provided a source of intelligence for the allied bombardments. MSF is unable to accept that kind of slippage," he said. The actions of MSF, which was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, "are motivated solely by the notion of need, and in no case by strategic, diplomatic or political considerations, as is the systematic practice of NATO, which conflates everything," M. Brauman said.



*'Jamie Shea, Spokesman for the Secretary General of NATO: We Have Established a Norm of Transparency vis-à-vis the Media,'* reported by Luc Rosenzweig, **Le Monde** (France) 25 March 2000 (in French). [D305](#)

**Extract:**

To me, it was a question of getting the military to realise the necessity of issuing precise and speedy information, because the war in the media is no less important than the war on the ground. And that holds good even if this information may be embarrassing to NATO, as in the case of the notorious 'collateral damage'.

[...] – How do you explain that the information you yourselves published on Serb abuses in Kosovo was not subsequently confirmed by investigations on the ground?

– I emphasise the fact that information of this type - on systematic rapes, for example - was always reissued by me with an indication of its sources, which were essentially the accounts given by refugees. But if you take the position of saying nothing until you have absolute proof of the facts, you say nothing at all... People forget that I was excessively cautious with regard to the facts. For example, I never suggested a figure for summary executions that was greater than 2,000.

[...] – Today, in your public interventions, you pull no punches with the journalists who covered the war in Kosovo with NATO. You say they were like a bunch of sheep, and they all copied from each other!

– I wouldn't wish to generalise. I made no general accusations. I simply wanted to point out that, in a situation like that, when 400 journalists are all shut up in a closed space; there is the risk that these journalists will be somewhat dependent on a single source of information. I was slightly embarrassed at being in a situation where the journalists, who could not be on the ground in Kosovo, saw me as a kind of universal source, someone who was omniscient. The journalists had invested rather too much in me as an individual, and that wasn't healthy..."



*I had allowed NATO to announce this meeting, with my name appearing among the participants. But when I saw the invitation card, I said I wouldn't go, because I believed that the idea of humanitarian war was very much present in the heading of their meeting, very prominent, and because I felt I had been used by NATO. It was in March, the first anniversary of the war. It seems to me that the idea of humanitarian war is a piece of shameless propaganda. I find it an expression full of cynicism, and lack of thought. It's a hateful expression.*

Rony Brauman, Director of studies, Foundation MSF France (in French)

**In May 2000, in his annual report, the MSF France president said MSF had not been sufficiently opposed to the definition 'humanitarian', applied by NATO to the war waged in Kosovo from March to June 1999.**



**'President's Annual report: 2000, Annual General Meeting of MSF France,'** Philippe Biberson, MSF France President, 20 May 2000 (in French). [D306](#)

**Extract:**

1) Kosovo

First of all, at this time last year, we were casting a perplexed eye over this war, and especially over the involvement of humanitarian organisations and MSF. It was a difficult, disconcerting mission, we said; we condemned the leaders of the Greek section for accepting the grotesque 'lone wolf' offered to them by Belgrade; we asked ourselves what was going to happen to the refugees and the role we would be asked to play, once the war was over. Looking at it from a distance, we must agree that we were not in a strong enough position in opposing the 'humanitarian' label imposed by NATO - and the individual governments - with the sole aim of winning public acceptance for the war.

Fortunately, we were able to demonstrate our financial independence, but it must be admitted that taking all sections together, had it not been for the substantial private funding received from the new sections the decision would not have been as clear everywhere. The irony is that all this private funding came from a public that had been won over to the cause of 'humanitarian war'. Whatever the case, that determination to give our independence concrete form, had practically no visibility outside a few forums for debate in which we were able to make our point. While in all honesty I believe that we maintained a position independent of NATO in this conflict, our position, as Europeans and thus parties to this war, was in fact ambiguous, and we ought to have made our voice heard much more clearly.

We should have condemned much more strongly than we did, NATO's imposture in talking about humanitarian action, and made much clearer our refusal to cooperate with the military, by reminding people that they were making war, quite simply. During a war, it is mischievous to try to separate what belongs to the armed offensive from what emerges from the handling of the rear, and from public opinion. The so-called military-humanitarian deployment in Macedonia and Albania was intended entirely to provide support for the armed offensive. Our section certainly did the right thing in concentrating on Montenegro, but as I see this period now, the overall image given by MSF was rather dubious in terms of independence and impartiality.

## **CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS 1389 - 2005**

The main purpose of this chronology is to help the reader by reconstructing MSF's actions and public statements in regional and international news reports of the period. It is intended as a tool for this specific document, and not as an academic reference.

International	Kosovo/Balkans	MSF
<b>1389</b>	Kosovo Polje Battle ( <i>'Field of Blackbirds'</i> ) Kosovo under Ottoman domination.	
<b>1913</b>	Kosovo incorporated into Serbia.	
<b>1944</b>	Birth of Yugoslav Federation of six republics: Slovenia, Montenegro, Serbia (including Kosovo), Bosnia-Herzégovina, Macedonia and Croatia.	
<b>1974</b>	Marshal Tito's presidency: Kosovo enjoys considerable autonomy.	
<b>1980</b>	Tito's death	
<b>1981</b>	Start of 'Albanians demonstrations/ repression by Serb police' cycle.	
<b>1987</b>	Perestroika in USSR: birth of independent and nationalist movements.	
<b>1989</b>	<p><b>27 February</b> - Strikes and demonstrations of Albanian Kosovars - Belgrade declares 'State of Emergency' and troops intervene.</p> <p><b>23 March</b> Slobodan Milosevic, new President of Yugoslav Federation ends Kosovo's autonomous status and places the province under the direct trusteeship of Serbia.</p> <p><b>28 June</b> Slobodan Milosevic's nationalist speech before thousands of Serbians at the <i>'Field of Blackbirds'</i>.</p>	
<b>1990</b>	Constitution of Serbia reformed; Albanians political institutions in Kosovo are suppressed.	<b>March</b> An MSF Belgium team conducts an investigation into the possible criminal poisoning of 2,000 Albanian adolescents.
<b>1991</b>	<p>Instruction in Albanian language in Kosovo schools is abolished.</p> <p><b>September</b> Clandestine Kosovars referendum proclaiming the founding of the "Republic of Kosovo."</p>	

International	Kosovo/Balkans	MSF
<b>1992</b>	<p><b>24 May</b> Ibrahim Rugova, head of the Democratic League of Kosovo (DLK), is elected president of the self-proclaimed Republic of Kosovo. A parliament is also elected. The Belgrade regime declared the body illegitimate and transferred its powers to the Serb parliament.</p>	
<b>1993</b>		<p><b>6 to 18 February</b> MSF France evaluation mission in Kosovo.</p> <p><b>April</b> A joint MSF Belgium-France team starts working in Kosovo</p>
<p><b>1995 14 December</b> The Bosnian peace accord, signed in Dayton. It ignores the fate of Kosovo's population.</p>		
<b>1996</b>	<p><b>February</b> The Kosovo Liberation Army – KLA [UCK] emerged and claimed several bombing attacks.</p>	
<b>1997</b>	<p><b>March</b> Macedonia: demonstrations by Albanian minority</p> <p><b>September</b> - DLK becomes more radical - Demonstrations of Albanian students are repressed.</p>	
<p><b>1998</b></p> <p><b>31 March</b> UN embargo on weapons deliveries to Belgrade.</p>	<p><b>28 February - 1 March</b> Serb police and the Yugoslav army attack, loot and set fire to villages in Drenica valley: death of 2,000 Kosovars and subsequent flight of 250,000 to Albania.</p> <p><b>22 March</b> Election of Ibrahim Rugova: not recognised by Belgrade nor by the International Community</p> <p><b>10 April</b> Kosovars starts daily demonstrations in Pristina.</p> <p><b>23 April</b> The Serbs approves Slobodan Milosevic's rejection of international mediation on Kosovo by a vote of 94.73%.</p>	<p><b>March</b> MSF forms a mobile emergency team to care for displaced persons in Drenica Valley.</p>

International	Kosovo/Balkans	MSF
<p><b>1998</b></p> <p><b>9 May</b> The European Union and the US prohibit investments in Serbia.</p> <p><b>June</b> First mention of a possible NATO intervention.</p> <p><b>11 August</b> UN Security Council calls for a ceasefire in Kosovo.</p> <p><b>23 August</b> The UN demands that Belgrade agree to a ceasefire, withdraw its forces, dialogue with the Kosovars, and facilitate the refugees' return.</p> <p><b>23 September</b> UN Security Council Resolution 1199 demanding that Serb forces retreat and that negotiations begin under threat of 'new measures'.</p> <p><b>24 September</b> NATO begins to prepare an aerial force.</p> <p><b>26 September</b> Human rights watch Press release: 'Eighteen Civilians Massacred in Kosovo Forest – Thirteen Others Believed</p>	<p><b>29 May</b> A Serb offensive starts in West Kosovo.</p> <p><b>June - July - August</b> KLA [UCK]/Serb forces fight in west Kosovo. The Kosovars flee en masse to the interior of the province, but also to neighboring countries.</p> <p><b>22 August</b> New offensive of the Serb forces in central and northern Kosovo.</p> <p><b>22 to 24 September</b> Serb forces launch a new offensive in central and northern Kosovo.</p>	<p><b>June</b> - Emergency team (ET) exploratory mission in Macedonia and Albania. - An MSF base is set up in Pec, west Kosovo.</p> <p><b>5 August</b> - Press release MSF Belgium: '<i>MSF Mobile Teams Report Alarming Medical Situation in Kosovo,</i>' - MSF teams are asked to collect witness statements from refugees'.</p> <p><b>28 August</b> Press conference MSF Belgium and public awareness campaign in Brussels: '<i>Kosovo Burns at Europe's Door.</i>'</p> <p><b>15 September</b> - Press release MSF Belgium: '<i>New Abuses in Kosovo – Populations in a Deadlock.</i>' - Press release MSF France: '<i>Mobile Teams Based in Pec Report Serious Deterioration in the Situation in Western Regions Over the Last Few Weeks.</i>'</p> <p><b>23 September to 5 October</b> The MSF mobile team provides aid to people in the Pristina-Pec-Prizren triangle and gather testimonies of exactions committed by the Serb army and police.</p>



International	Kosovo/Balkans	MSF
<p><b>1998</b> Executed,' (information on the Vatchac and Golubovac region provided by MSF teams there).</p> <p><b>6 October</b> Russia threatens to use its veto against any NATO intervention.</p> <p><b>12 October</b> NATO is about to issue an activation order to its troops, without having obtained UN agreement.</p> <p><b>13 October</b> Draft agreement on the deployment of an OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM), with aerial support after the withdrawal of Serb forces.</p> <p><b>19 October</b> First OSCE mission started in western Kosovo.</p> <p><b>23 October</b> UNHCR: the refugees can't return because villages destroyed and Serb forces still present.</p> <p><b>25 October</b> - UN Security Council resolution 1203 requiring immediate application of the agreements signed by the government of the Yugoslav Federation with NATO and the OSCE.</p>	<p><b>28 September</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Belgrade announces the end of military operations.</li> <li>- Military operations resume in southern Kosovo.</li> </ul>	<p><b>1 October</b> The programme managers officers and information officers from the Belgian and French sections draft an information strategy.</p> <p><b>7 to 15 October</b> Following rumors of possible danger the MSF team in Kosovo evacuates to Macedonia for several days.</p> <p><b>9 October</b> MSF Belgium Press conference in Brussels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Condemnation of the assassination of Dr Lec</li> <li>- Warning on the humanitarian situation in Kosovo.</li> <li>- <i>AFP: 'MSF Asks for a "Strong International Physical Presence in Kosovo.'</i></li> </ul> <p><b>13 October</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Dutch section suggests giving operational responsibility back to the ET (the international emergency team).</li> <li>- The MSF Belgium programme manager decides to further internationalise the Kosovo mission.</li> </ul> <p><b>23 October to mid November</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Job description for an international information officer for Kosovo under discussion.</li> <li>- MSF Press-line on Kosovo: situation and needs of displaced and returnees</li> </ul>

International	Kosovo/Balkans	MSF
<p><b>1998</b> - USA mediator discusses with Yugoslav Government a possible agreement on the future of Kosovo.</p> <p><b>27 October</b> After a substantial pullout of Serb forces, NATO abandons the immediate use of force but maintains its military forces ready to intervene.</p> <p><b>13 November</b> - NATO's plan for an 'Extraction Force' based in Macedonia to help OSCE if needed. - UNHCR: over 100,000 displaced in Kosovo.</p> <p><b>1 December</b> Positioning of 500 (out of an agreed 2000) OSCE verifiers.</p> <p><b>23 December</b> Physicians for Human Rights publishes</p>	<p><b>19 October</b> Witnesses report on bombing by the Serb military, who denies any offensive</p> <p><b>27 October</b> - Thousands of Kosovars return home. - The first OSCE 'verifiers' arrive in Kosovo.</p> <p><b>21 November</b> Belgrade proposes its own text: for a strengthening of ties between Kosovo and Serbia.</p> <p><b>December</b> KLA leaders meet regularly with William Walker, the American Representative on the KVM.</p> <p><b>13 December</b> Slobodan Milosevic: an intervention of the NATO extraction force in Yugoslavia would be considered an aggression.</p> <p><b>14 December</b> - 36 KLA-fighters killed by Yugoslav border guards. - Anti-Serb bombing in Pec killed six.</p>	<p><b>28 October</b> <i>Le Monde</i> (France): 'Kosovo: New Accounts of the Barbarity of the Serb Forces,' eyewitness accounts collected by MSF team on atrocities committed by the Serb army and police in the Pristina-Pec-Prizen triangle between 23 September and 5 October 1998.</p> <p><b>November</b> MSF teams note that Serb police harassment and intimidation of Albanians, notably members of the medical corps, continue.</p> <p><b>December</b> MSF France decides to send an exploratory mission to Montenegro.</p> <p><b>December</b> Discussions inside MSF about whether or not to make a public comment on the PHR report.</p>

International	Kosovo/Balkans	MSF
<p><b>1998</b> extracts from a report planned for release in February 1999, denouncing the arrest, torture and murder of Kosovar medical personnel and the destruction of medical infrastructure by Serb police (information gathered with the support of the MSF information officer in Kosovo).</p> <p><b>29 December</b> NATO reiterates that it is prepared to intervene in Kosovo.</p>	<p><b>24 December</b> Serb forces launch a substantial offensive against a KLA stronghold in northern Kosovo.</p>	
<p><b>1999</b></p> <p><b>18 January</b> Access to Kosovo denied to Louise Arbour, International Court for Yugoslavia Prosecutor, who came to investigate on the Racak massacre.</p> <p><b>20 January</b> <i>New York Times (USA): 'US to Push NATO to Issue ultimatum to Serb Leader.'</i></p>	<p><b>15 January</b> 45 people killed in the Albanian-speaking village of Racak, in the south of Kosovo, on the road between Pristina and Prizren.</p>	<p><b>1<sup>st</sup> January</b> First MSF France exploratory mission in Montenegro.</p> <p><b>January</b> 'The Hidden War in Kosovo,' by Myriam Gaume and MSF is published.</p> <p><b>4 January</b> The Serb official responsible for health matters in Kosovo, states to the Serb and international press that the MSF teams in Kosovo are taking advantage of the hospitality afforded by Belgrade and engaging in arms traffic to the benefit of the Albanian terrorists'.</p> <p><b>16 January</b> An MSF team goes to Racak and discovers a decapitated corpse.</p> <p><b>17 January</b> A convoy of two trucks and two MSF cars bringing assistance to Racak and the surrounding villages is stopped by the UNHCR representative. .</p> <p><b>18 January</b> MSF assessment in Racak area.</p>

International	Kosovo/Balkans	MSF
<p><b>1999</b></p> <p><b>21 January</b> Investigations and analyses by different international press outlets regarding the Racak massacre: question raised of possible manipulation of the facts.</p> <p><b>6 to 23 February</b> Negotiations between representatives of the Serb Republic and the Kosovar Albanians to begin at Rambouillet (France), under the auspices of the Contact Group.</p> <p><b>19 February</b> NATO statement: - Ready to launch air strikes against Serbian targets if the Rambouillet talks fail. - If agreement, willingness to deploy a peacekeeping force.</p> <p><b>23 February</b> End of the negotiations in a framework proposal for the establishment of an autonomous province of Kosovo.</p>	<p><b>2 February</b> UNHCR: in the last month 45,000 people have fled their homes because of the fighting.</p> <p><b>23 February</b> UNHCR: 9,000 displaced in Kosovo since the fighting resumed.</p> <p><b>25 February</b> The Serbian government continues to mass troops on the border with Kosovo. Fighting between Serbian forces and Albanian rebels intensifies.</p> <p><b>3 March</b> - Serb bombing of southern Kosovo - Fighting between Serb police and armed Albanians kills 20.</p> <p><b>10 March</b> Milo Djukanovic, the president of Montenegro, claims that NATO air strikes would strengthen Slobodan Milosevic, whom he accuses of concentrating troops on the border between Kosovo and Montenegro.</p>	<p><b>29 January</b> MSF France programme manager announces to its Board they plan to set up an autonomous programme in Kosovo.</p> <p><b>3 February</b> MSF France programme manager expresses reservations over the line of communication maintain-ed by the coordination team in Kosovo.</p> <p><b>25 February</b> MSF Belgium/ MSF France director of operations/programme managers meeting: MSF France announces its decision to leave the joint mission in Kosovo and set up an autonomous mission. MSF Belgium disagrees.</p>

International	Kosovo/Balkans	MSF
<p><b>1999</b></p> <p><b>11 March</b> Richard Holbrooke, the United States Envoy in Belgrade, acknowledges his failure to persuade the Serbian president to accept the peace plan tabled at Rambouillet.</p> <p><b>19 March</b> Negotiations between Serbs and Albanians (resumed on 15 March in Rambouillet) adjourned due to the Serbs' failure to come to an agreement.</p> <p><b>21 March</b> Albania asks for NATO's help.</p> <p><b>22 March</b> - The Yugoslav government requests a meeting of the United Nations Security Council on Kosovo and the threat of NATO air strikes.</p> <p><b>24 March</b> - NATO announces the decision to launch air strikes against Serb targets. - The Russian foreign minister states his opposition to the strikes. - Greece strengthens surveillance of its borders with Macedonia. - ICRC asks for full respect of civilians. - UNHCR announces the evacuation of all personnel from United Nations humanitarian agencies.</p> <p><b>Night of 24 March</b> First NATO strikes on Yugoslav territory.</p>	<p><b>11 March</b> UNHCR: over a period of 2 years 400,000 Kosovars have fled their homes. 230,000 are displaced inside Kosovo.</p> <p><b>19 March</b> Start of the process of evacuating the OSCE's Kosovo Verification Mission and western embassy personnel in Belgrade.</p> <p><b>21 March</b> - Military pressure on Kosovar civilians is increasing. - 5 – 6,000 people fleeing from the Pec region arrive in Rozaje, Montenegro. - NGOs reduce their staff and consider evacuating from Kosovo.</p> <p><b>23 March</b> UNHCR: 201,500 Kosovars are refugees: 25,000 in Montenegro, 18,500 in Albania, 18,000 in Macedonia.</p> <p><b>24 March</b> - The government of Montenegro refuses to acknowledge the state of emergency decreed by Belgrade in the territory of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and to be a base for NATO bombings. . - Organised deportation of Albanians by Serb forces starts. - Kosovars have difficulties to enter Albania because of landmines and Macedonia because of administrative constraints.</p>	<p><b>12 March</b> <i>Libération (France): 'Save Kosovo,'</i> appeal advocating a firm stand against Milosevic's policies in Kosovo and, for self-determination for the Albanian people, signed by Rony Brauman, former President of MSF's French section.</p> <p><b>20 March</b> <i>Libération (France): 'NATO, Humanitarian Aid Workers and Death,'</i> J.C Ruffin (former MSF France Vice-President).</p> <p><b>23 March</b> MSF Pec and Prizren teams withdraw to Pristina.</p> <p><b>24 March</b> - MSF Prizren and Pec teams evacuate to Macedonia: in addition to the ICRC staff, three MSF volunteers remain the only humanitarian presence in Kosovo.</p>

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<p><b>1999</b></p> <p><b>25 March</b> Breakdown of diplomatic relation between Belgrade and Washington, London, Bonn and Paris</p> <p><b>26 March</b> NATO bombing of military targets in Kosovo.</p> <p><b>27 March</b> NATO speaks of 'ethnic cleansing' in Kosovo.</p> <p><b>29 March</b> - Start of phase 2 of NATO strikes campaign. Ground intervention is excluded. - Russia negotiate with Belgrade and announces that NATO bombing killed 1,000.</p>	<p><b>25 March</b> In Skopje (Macedonia) 10,000 people demonstrated against NATO strikes.</p> <p><b>29 March</b> NATO, OSCE, Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro announced the arrival of tens of thousands of Kosovar refugees in countries bordering Kosovo.</p> <p><b>30 March</b> UNHCR: more than 90,000 Albanians have left Kosovo since the beginning of the air strikes, driven out by a systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing. The refugees arriving in Albania and Montenegro confirm that they have been subjected to violent attacks.</p>	<p><b>26 March</b> - Launch of MSF exploratory missions: MSF Holland to Macedonia. MSF France to Montenegro (through Croatia without visas). - MSF Greece requests that MSF be prepared for refugee arrivals in Greece.</p> <p><b>29 March</b> - The last MSF volunteers leave Pristina for Belgrade. - MSF Belgium team from Fier (southern Albania) to Kukes (northern Albania) - The Operations Director of the MSF Switzerland/MSF Greece joint operational centre requests that MSF Greece be involved in MSF Operations in the Balkans.</p> <p><b>30 March</b> - Press release MSF Belgium: '<i>MSF Leaves Kosovo,</i>' - Press briefing MSF France: '<i>Médecins Sans Frontières Evacuated its Personnel from Kosovo Yesterday Evening and is Focusing its Efforts on the Province's Border Regions.</i>' - MSF Greece volunteers do an explo northern Greece in case of refugee arrivals.</p> <p><b>31 March</b> - Arrival of a new MSF Belgium team in Albania (7 people) + 2 MSF France supporting team. - MSF Greece insists that Greek volunteers be integrated into MSF teams. - During a teleconference, MSF directors of operations decided to launch the collection of refugee accounts.</p> <p><b>1st April</b> • Press release MSF Belgium: '<i>MSF Prepares to Receive Tens of Thousands of Refugees. Two Cargo Planes Leave for Albania and Macedonia.</i>' • Press briefing MSF France: '<i>MSF Reinforces its Presence with Kosovar Refugees.</i>' • <b>Libération (France):</b> '<i>The Situation is</i></p>

## International

## Kosovo/Balkans

## MSF

1999

### 2 April

Press release Sadako Ogata (UNHCR): 'UNHCR's Ogata Demands an End to Expulsions as Humanitarian Crisis Mounts.'

### Night of 2 April

NATO 's first bombing in the heart of Belgrade.

### 6 April

- Milosevic announces a unilateral ceasefire.
- Russia and China accuse NATO of targeting civilians.
- International Conference States/ UN /NGO: refugees welcomed in other states, humanitarian aid coordinated by UNHCR, NATO in charge of transportation of relief and refugees.
- the Clinton Administration sets up a media campaign to raise and manage contributions to the NGOs helping the Kosovar refugees

### 7 April

NATO states that Milosevic 'ceasefire' announcement is not enough.

### 2 April

At the Macedonian border, tens of thousands of Kosovars fleeing their country are blocked by Macedonian authorities in the no man's land of Blace.

### 6 April

- Refugees in the Blace no-man's-land are forcibly evacuated by the Macedonian authorities to the camp at Stenkovec
- Brazda set up by NATO for UNHCR; as well as to Albania and Turkey.

### 7 April

- UNHCR: 460,000 Kosovars have fled their country.
- Macedonia allows the presence of a NATO force on its territory.

*Volatile; the Refugees are Not Limited to Fixed Areas,'* interview of J-H. Bradol, MSF France Director of Operations.

### 2 April

MSF Greece Board of Directors asks the IC that the Greek section be involved in MSF operations concerning the Kosovo crisis.

### 4 and 5 April

Press release MSF Holland, MSF UK, MSF USA, MSF France, MSF Spain (7 April): 'MSF Calls for Immediate and Unconditional Access to Kosovar Refugees in No-Man's-Land on Macedonian Border.'

### 6 April

- Decisions of the MSF operations directors:
- Operational sharing: MSF Belgium in Albania, MSF Holland in Macedonia, MSF France in Montenegro.
  - MSF's commitment to taking action, again, as quickly as possible in Kosovo.
  - MSF does not finance Kosovo-related operations with NATO member countries funding.

### 7 April

- **Le Soir (Belgium):** 'On Western Ambivalence Regarding Acceptance of Refugees from Kosovo,' interview by Alex Parisel, MSF Belgium Executive Director.
- **Libération (France)/ El Mundo (Spain):** 'The European Union Will Have to Recognise Kosovo's Independence – The Case for Military Action,' signed by Rony Brauman, 'Honorary President of MSF'
- Collection of refugee accounts starts in Albania, Macedonia, and Montenegro.

### 8 April

- James Orbinsky (President MSF IC) to **AFP:** 'The Kosovar Refugees are in a State of Psychological Shock.'
- MSF Belgium and MSF Switzerland programme managers agree to integrate Greek volunteers in the Kosovo crisis operations.

International	Kosovo/Balkans	MSF
<p><b>1999</b></p> <p><b>9 April</b> Sadako Ogata (UNHCR) Press conference in Skopje (Macedonia)</p> <p><b>11 April</b> NATO decides to launch the 'Joint Guard' operation: deployment of a force of 8,000 men to Albania, tasked with transporting and distributing humanitarian assistance to the refugees from Kosovo, and guaranteeing their security.</p> <p><b>13 April</b> - UNHCR spokesman reacts sharply to MSF's allegations of failure. - FIDH's report: crimes against humanity in Kosovo.</p> <p><b>14 April</b> <i>El País</i>: 'More than 3,200 Civilians Assassinated since the End of March in Kosovo, According to a US Report'.</p>	<p><b>11 April</b> The Macedonian authorities claim control over the refugee camps in their territory.</p> <p><b>14 April</b> New influx of refugees in Montenegro and in Macedonia.</p>	<p><b>9 April</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Press release MSF Belgium/Holland/France/USA: '<i>Médecins Sans Frontières Asks that UNHCR Carry Out its Mandate with the Refugees.</i>'</li> <li>• MSF USA letter to InterAction's President expresses disagreement with InterAction joining the Federal Kosovo Refugee Fund.</li> </ul> <p><b>10 April</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The Scotsman (UK)</i>: '<i>War in Europe – Medical Charity Accuses United Nations Official of Failing Refugees - Organisation says minimum standards ignored for 600,000.</i>'</li> <li>• <i>The New York Times (USA)</i>: '<i>With NATO in Charge, Relief Looks Less Neutral,</i>' MSF USA Executive Director quoted.</li> <li>• MSF Holland takes over from NATO in Stenkovec- Brazda camp.</li> </ul> <p><b>11 April</b> Press release MSF Tirana: '<i>UN Agencies Must Lead Humanitarian Aid Efforts – Military Support for Humanitarian Aid Risks Being Seen as Support for Military Action.</i>'</p> <p><b>12 April</b> Press release MSF France, MSF UK: '<i>New Influx of Kosovar Refugees Arrive in Montenegro - Thousands Left Without Shelter.</i>'</p> <p><b>13 April</b> Press conference MSF Tirana: - Plight of the populations still trapped inside Kosovo - Misunderstanding on MSF having information about NATO troops in Kosovo. - First leaks of refugees accounts. Press release: '<i>Silence Over One Million – MSF Demands an Immediate Solution to the Security of Civilians in Kosovo.</i>' MSF Belgium announces that it does not participate in the construction of 'NATO' camps. <i>The New York Times (USA)</i>: '<i>In Kosovo, Time for All to Save Face; Aid Groups Do Best,</i>' 'Letter to the Editor-in-Chief' from the MSF USA Executive Director.</p> <p><b>14 April</b> Letter from MSF USA to President of InterAction: 'MSF USA withdraws from the Disaster Response Committee.'</p>



International	Kosovo/Balkans	MSF
<p><b>1999</b></p> <p><b>15 April</b> The Greek government starts negotiating with the government of the Yugoslav Federation and with NATO to set up a humanitarian corridor for Greek NGOs.</p> <p><b>17 April</b> Deployment of NATO 'Joint Guard' operation in Albania.</p> <p><b>18 April</b> NATO Secretary-General statement about the possibility of a land intervention in Kosovo.</p>	<p><b>16 April</b> Departure of the last NATO troops from the camps in Macedonia: worried refugees fear the brutal methods used by the Macedonian police.</p>	<p><b>15 April</b> MSF's address to the Council of Europe on the humanitarian situation in the Balkans.</p> <p><b>16 April</b> - Press release MSF France, MSF UK: <i>'MSF Calls for Protection for Kosovar Refugees in North-eastern Montenegro'</i> - <b>The Independent (UK):</b> <i>'Investigators Told of 15 Mass Graves – War Crimes,'</i> quote Christopher Stokes, Head of Mission MSF Belgium in Albania.</p> <p><b>19 or 20 April</b> The Operations Director for the Greek-Swiss Common Operational Centre (COC) refuses to assume the operational responsibility of the 'observer mission' in Kosovo proposed by the president of MSF Greece.</p> <p><b>20 April</b> - Press conference MSF Belgium in Brussels: <i>'Médecins Sans Frontières and Balkanactie Launch "Family to Family" and a Food Drive Among the Belgian Public.'</i> - The director of operations for the Greek-Swiss Common Operational Centre (COC) informs the president of MSF Greece of his decision to give up his responsibilities as director of operations for MSF Greece.</p> <p><b>21 April</b> - Press Conference MSF France in Podgorica (Montenegro). - The executive director of the Swiss section proposes launching an international exploratory mission in Serbia and Kosovo to his counterparts in the other sections</p> <p><b>22 April</b> - The executive director of MSF Norway announces to his colleagues that his section will return the funding granted for operations related to the Kosovo</p>

International	Kosovo/Balkans	MSF
<p><b>1999</b></p> <p><b>23 April</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- NATO imposes an oil embargo on Yugoslavia.</li> <li>- OSCE 's report revealing the scope of atrocities committed by the Serbian armed forces and paramilitary militias in Kosovo</li> </ul> <p><b>25 April</b></p> <p>The Greek Prime Minister announces that Greece will not participate in a land intervention.</p>	<p><b>22 April</b></p> <p>Montenegro president publicly opposes Belgrade.</p> <p><b>25 April</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Vuk Draskovic, Yugoslav Vice Prime Minister states he will approve a UN force in Kosovo.</li> <li>- A humanitarian aid convoy organised under the auspices of the Greek government enters Serbia.</li> </ul> <p><b>28 April</b></p> <p>Vuk Draskovic, Yugoslav Vice - Prime Minister is dismissed.</p>	<p>crisis to the Norwegian government.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The executive directors of the operational sections decide to launch an international exploratory mission in Kosovo and Serbia, under MSF Switzerland responsibility and including MSF Greece volunteers.</li> <li>- The executive director of MSF Switzerland informs the President of MSF Greece of this decision (according to MSF CH ED).</li> </ul> <p><b>23 April</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>El Mundo (Spain): 'There is no Humanitarian War,'</i> Eric Stobbaerts, MSF Spain Executive Director</li> <li>- Letter from MSF Switzerland/MSF Greece Director of Operations to MSF Greek and Swiss sections Presidents: 'Resignation as Operations Director for Athens.'</li> </ul> <p><b>24 April</b></p> <p>Press release, MSF Belgium: <i>'50,000 Children to be Vaccinated in Northern Albania,'</i></p> <p><b>26 April</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Press release MSF Belgium: <i>'More than 20,000 Food Parcels for Kosovar Families and Their Albanian Host Families.'</i></li> <li>- Press release MSF Norway: <i>'MSF Independent of NATO Funds in the Balkans – Do Not Want Support From the Warring Parties.'</i></li> <li>- MSF Greece president begins telephone discussions with the director of the Pristina hospital regarding medical aid the Greek section could provide.</li> </ul> <p><b>27 April</b></p> <p>First version of the document: <i>'Kosovo, History of a Deportation,'</i> circulated for approval within the MSF movement.</p> <p><b>28 April</b></p> <p>The executive directors decide to release the document: <i>'Kosovo, History of a Deportation,'</i> to the press at the end of the week.</p>



International	Kosovo/Balkans	MSF
<p><b>1999</b></p> <p><b>7 May</b> NATO raid strikes the center of Nis (Serbia).</p> <p><b>8 May</b> 3 NATO missiles fall on the Chinese embassy in Belgrade.</p> <p><b>10 May</b> <i>Newsweek (USA)</i> David Rieff: '[...] <i>There are No Humanitarian Solutions to Humanitarian Problems.</i>'</p> <p><b>13 May</b> Petition from the Balkan Action Council (USA): '<i>Only Ground Troops Will End Ethnic Cleansing in Kosovo,</i>'</p>	<p><b>7 May</b> The Yugoslav government agrees to allow a UN humanitarian assessment mission on its soil.</p> <p><b>8 May</b> UNHCR: since 25 March 1999, half of the population of Kosovo has been driven from the province, and launched an appeal for funding.</p> <p><b>10 May</b> The Yugoslav government announces the start of withdrawal of its troops from Kosovo. However, NATO air strikes continue.</p> <p><b>11 May</b> UNHCR begins to transfer people from the camps in Macedonia and northern Albania to southern Albania.</p> <p><b>15 May</b> Refugees report offensives by Serb forces in north-western Kosovo.</p>	<p><b>7 May</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The MSF Greece exploratory team enters Kosovo</li> <li>- Most MSF executives express disagreement with MSF Greece's action.</li> <li>- The MSF International secretary general asks the communications officers to keep a 'low profile' on the issue.</li> </ul> <p><b>12 May:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Le Monde (France): 'Ethnic Purification in Kosovo – Seven Weeks of Mass Exodus in Kosovo.'</i></li> <li>- <i>Le Monde (France) Régis Debray: 'Letter from a Traveler to the President of the Republic,'</i> MSF Greece doctors mentioned as witnesses.</li> </ul> <p><b>14 May</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Press release MSF Spain: '<i>Médecins Sans Frontières Rejects Government Funds for the Balkan Crisis,</i>'</li> <li>- Press conference of the President of MSF Greece in Athens: he claims that the road, which MSF Greece's car was traveling on, was bombed by NATO near Nis.</li> </ul> <p><b>15 May</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Libération (France): 'Debray Sees What he Believes,'</i> Rony Brauman, Former president of MSF,</li> <li>- IC envoys start investigations on MSF Switzerland /Greece operational centre breakdown and unilateral Exploratory mission in Kosovo.</li> </ul>

International	Kosovo/Balkans	MSF
<p><b>1999</b></p> <p><b>18 May</b> OXFAM criticises NATO and demands that UNHCR be strengthened in its role as emergency aid coordinator. Its message is widely reported by media in the UK.</p> <p><b>20 May</b> - UNHCR plan for returning refugees to Kosovo made public. - UN Secretary General's visit to Albania.</p> <p><b>21 May</b> Press release MDM: 'MDM Condemns Restrictions on Humanitarian Work in Montenegro.'</p> <p><b>25 May</b> UN report on numerous rapes committed by Serbian forces against Kosovar women.</p>	<p><b>16 May</b> Montenegro's president supports the G8 decisions but asks for a halt to NATO strikes.</p> <p><b>17 May</b> Severe crackdown on protests by the families of Serbian soldiers in southern Serbia. In response, some local soldiers stationed in Kosovo desert.</p> <p><b>24 May</b> - 1000 Kosovar men released from the prison of Mitrovica describe the abuse they have been subjected to. - UNHCR opposes the Macedonian authorities' decision to transfer Kosovar refugees from Macedonia to Albania in the middle of the night.</p>	<p><b>17 May</b> - MSF Greece President's open letter to IC members. - Newsweek (USA): 'Letter to the Editor,' MSF USA: 'Contrary to Rieff's assertion [...], Doctors Without Borders has always known that the presence of medical aid is not enough to stop the forces of oppression.'</p> <p><b>18 May</b> MSF Switzerland informs MSF Greece that it is ending their collaboration.</p> <p><b>20 May</b> - MSF disseminates an Epidemiological study conducted by Epicentre with Kosovar refugees hosted by families in Albania and a Press release: '<i>Refugees in Albania: Refugees Living with Albanian Families Neglected by International Aid Agencies According to a Survey by Médecins Sans Frontières.</i>' - Press release MSF Kukes, MSF Skopje: '<i>MSF Calls on Governments to Support Effective and Principled UN Leadership over Kosovo Refugee Relief Effort and Stresses the Need for Registration and Protection.</i>'</p> <p><b>21 to 27 May</b> 7 medical staff leave MSF programme in Albania to join the UCK.</p>

International	Kosovo/Balkans	MSF
<p><b>27 May</b> Slobodan Milosevic is charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia [ICTY].</p> <p><b>28 May</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Yugoslav presidency accepts the 'principles' laid out by the G8.</li> <li>- NATO maintains its air strikes.</li> <li>- The Russian and Finnish emissaries continue to negotiate with Milosevic</li> <li>- 3 members of Care [NGO] are found guilty of espionage and given severe sentences by a Yugoslav military tribunal.</li> <li>- UNHCR announces a new fundraising campaign to finance assistance for the return of the refugees.</li> </ul> <p><b>31 May</b> <i>El Mundo</i> publishes details of a NATO report, which admits that the Alliance is losing the information war in Kosovo and recommends using journalists and NGOs to improve its propaganda.</p> <p><b>2 June</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- MDM and FIDH report: the Kosovo Albanians have been subjected to a 'systematic process of deportation.'</li> <li>- UN commissioner for humanitarian affairs, back from mission in Serbia and Kosovo: delivering aid to the displaced populations inside Kosovo is an urgency; abundant evidence of the violence committed by Serbian forces in Kosovo.</li> </ul> <p><b>3 June</b> Yugoslav Government agreement on Russia/Western countries Peace Plan.</p>	<p><b>27 May</b> UNHCR:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 800,000 Kosovars have fled their province.</li> <li>- Camps in Macedonia overcrowded again.</li> </ul>	<p><b>1<sup>st</sup> June</b> <i>La Libre Belgique (Belgium): 'Humanitarian - Military Organisations: A Dangerous Alliance.'</i> Alex Parisel, MSF Belgium Executive director quoted : "Our humanitarian agenda differs from that of NATO members."</p> <p><b>3 June</b> 'Fact Finding Mission Regarding the MSF Greece Mission to the FRY and the Breakdown of the MSF Greek-Swiss Common Operational Centre Agreement,' finalised by the MSF IC envoys.</p> <p><b>4 June</b> Press release MSF Tirana -Skopje, MSF Spain, MSF Holland: 'Kosovo: the Return of the Refugees Should Take Place Without Political or Military Interference – Médecins Sans Frontières Calls for a Clear</p>

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<p><b>1999</b></p> <p><b>8 June</b> The foreign ministers of the G8 countries adopt a peace plan that includes an UN-led international peacekeeping force.</p> <p><b>9 June</b> NATO suspends air strikes as Serbian forces begin their withdrawal from Kosovo.</p> <p><b>10 June</b> UN Security Council resolution 1244 authorises the immediate deployment of KFOR in Kosovo.</p>	<p><b>10 June</b> First Kosovar returnees enter Kosovo.</p> <p><b>Night of 11 June</b> Several hundred Russian troops began arriving in Pristina, the capital of Kosovo.</p> <p><b>12 June</b> KFOR British and French troops enter Kosovo.</p> <p><b>15 June</b> As Kosovars return, acts of vengeance against the minority Serb and Tzigane populations start.</p> <p><b>17 June</b> Over 90 mass-grave sites are found in Kosovo.</p>	<p>Separation of Military and Humanitarian Action.'</p> <p><b>12 June</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- MSF teams enter Pristina several hours before the arrival of KFOR troops.</li> <li>- MSF IC meeting:</li> <li>- MSF Greece refuses to discuss their exploratory mission.</li> <li>- Resolution: the Greek section is given until 28 June 1999 to provide a written commitment to terminate its operational activities or face expulsion from the movement.</li> <li>- Discussion about principles, objectives and strategy of MSF return to Kosovo.</li> </ul> <p><b>12 and 13 June</b> UNHCR/MSF/MDM/IMC joint exploratory mission in Kosovo.</p> <p><b>15 June</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Press release MSF Belgium: <i>'Médecins Sans Frontières Sends 90 Tonnes of Aid to Kosovo.'</i></li> <li>- Press release MSF France: <i>'Médecins Sans Frontières, Present in Two Regions of Kosovo: 140 Tonnes of Emergency Equipment Ready to Leave.'</i></li> </ul> <p><b>18 June</b> MSF Belgium closes its camp in Kukes (security reasons).</p>

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<p><b>1999</b></p> <p><b>20 June</b> NATO announces the formal cessation of bombing over the territory of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.</p> <p><b>21 June</b> Agreement between KLA and KFOR on KLA immediate demilitarisation and disarmament process within 3 months.</p>	<p><b>20 June</b> Serb forces finally withdraw from Kosovo.</p> <p><b>2 July</b> Bernard Kouchner (one of the founders of Médecins Sans Frontières ) is named 'High Representative of the United Nations for Kosovo'.</p>	<p><b>23 June</b> Press release, MSF France: '30 Volunteers from Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) are Working in Kosovo.'</p> <p><b>24 June</b> Press release, MSF Spain: 'Antipersonnel Mines Represent a Grave Danger for the Civilian Population.'</p> <p><b>28 June</b> Press release, MSF Skopje, Macedonia: 'Médecins Sans Frontières Provides Medical Aid to the First Official UNHCR Refugee Convoy to Kosovo.'</p> <p><b>14 July</b> Dilemma posed by dead bodies in wells; public health constraints/the need to preserve evidence so justice can be done; MSF Kosovo HOM chose not to speak out but to push on and collaborate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the ex-Yugoslavia (ICTY).</p> <p><b>16 July</b> Press release, MSF France: '50 Volunteers from Médecins Sans Frontières are Working in Kosovo.'</p> <p><b>5 August</b> - Letter from MSF IC President to MSF Greece President and Executive Director demanding that the former MSF Greece ceases all use of the MSF logo and the name 'MSF/ Médecins sans Frontières'.</p> <p><b>27 August</b> MSF France's Board of Directors debate on MSF's role in denouncing acts of vengeance against the minority Serb and Tzigane populations: decision not to speak out.</p>



**International****Kosovo/Balkans****MSF****1999****30 August**

UNHCR/OSCE report: 180,000 - 200,000 Serbs have left Kosovo since the withdrawal of Serb troops.

**9 -10 September**

KFOR intervention between groups of Serbs and Albanians who clashed violently (150 wounded) in Mitrovica.

**9 September**

Press release MSF France: 'Press Update – Kosovo "Objective: 1,000 Roofs for Winter," Médecins Sans Frontières Launches its Programme of House Repair in the Region of Pec.'

**16 September**

The Serbian nationalist press associates the High Representative of the United Nations for Kosovo with MSF and compares MSF with the Ku Klux Klan.

**15 October**

The Nobel Peace Prize is awarded to MSF.

**17 October**

*Le Monde (France)*: '[...] MSF Greece was expelled from the movement [...].'

**October**

Press release MSF Greece: 'MSF victim of the Conflict in Kosovo.'

**13 November**

*Le Temps (Switzerland)*: 'Médecins Sans Frontières Expels Its Greek Section, which was Seen as Too Pro-Serb.'

**27-28 November**

MSF IC:

- Unanimously adopts a resolution expelling MSF Greece from the movement for not having complied with decisions taken at the meeting on 12 June 1999.
- Decides to maintain contacts with Greek society.

**4 December**

*The Financial Times (UK)*: 'Doctors Operating in a Divided House.'

**10 December**

- MSF officially receives the Nobel peace prize in Oslo.
- The Greek section holds a press conference in Oslo.

**20 December**

The Yugoslav minister of information publicly describes MSF as an 'espionage organisation'.

International	Kosovo/Balkans	MSF
<b>1999</b>		<p><b>26 January</b> The International Council of MSF votes to formalise the expulsion of the Greek section.</p>
<p><b>2000 11 February</b> A study commissioned by UNHCR by independent experts demonstrates UNHCR's inadequate response to the influx of Kosovar refugees and suggest that this inadequacy was, to a great extent, due to its being sidelined by NATO and western governments.</p>		<p><b>3 March</b> Rony Brauman, (Foundation MSF France) refuses to speak at a NATO seminar, and states to La Tribune de Genève (Switzerland): "To mix war and humanitarian action is simply mystification."</p> <p><b>20 May</b> MSF France President's annual : the 2000, Annual General Meeting of MSF France: "the overall image given by MSF [in the Kosovo crisis] was rather dubious in terms of independence and impartiality."</p>
<b>2003</b>		<p><b>21 to 23 November</b> IC meeting: A process of reintegration of MSF Greece is opened, under the operational responsibility of MSF Spain.</p>
<b>2005</b>		<p><b>9 February</b> Press release MSF International/MSF Greece: 'MSF Greece Reintegrated into the MSF International Movement.'</p>