

WAR CRIMES  
AND POLITICS OF TERROR  
IN CHECHNYA  
1994-2004

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**MSF SPEAKS OUT**

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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

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

<b>A</b>	Member of MSF North Caucasus staff (in Russian, translated into English by an MSF interpreter) interviewed in 2008.
<b>B</b>	Member of MSF North Caucasus staff (in Russian, translated into English by an MSF interpreter) interviewed in 2008.
<b>Loïck Barriquand</b>	MSF France Programme manager, September 2000 to 2005 (in French) interviewed in 2009.
<b>Dr. José-Antonio Bastos</b>	Director of Operations for North Caucasus, MSF Holland, 2001 to 2003 (in French) interviewed in 2009.
<b>Vincent de Bellefroid</b>	MSF France Project Coordinator in Shatoi, Chechnya, February to May 1995, August 1996 to July 1997, and Project Coordinator in North Caucasus June to October 2001 (in French) interviewed in 2008.
<b>Samantha Bolton</b>	Communications Officer MSF International 1994 to 1997 (in French) interviewed in 2000.
<b>Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol</b>	MSF France Director of Communications 1996 to 1998, Director of Operations 1998 to 2000, President May 2000 to May 2008 (in French) interviewed in 2009.
<b>Dr Rony Brauman</b>	Director of studies MSF Foundation since 1994, MSF France President from 1982 to 1994 (in French) interviewed in 2000.
<b>C</b>	Member of MSF North Caucasus staff (in Russian, translated into English by an MSF interpreter) interviewed in 2008.
<b>William Claus</b>	Emergency Coordinator MSF Belgium 1994 to 1996 (in French) interviewed in 2008.
<b>Dr Eric Comte</b>	MSF France Field Coordinator in the Pankisi Valley (Georgia) December 1999 to April 2000, Field Coordinator in Ingushetia April 2000 to October 2000, Coordinator in Georgia 2000 to 2002 (in French) interviewed in 2009.
<b>Steve Cornish</b>	MSF France Coordinator in Georgia January to April 2000, in Ingushetia September 2000 to January 2001, MSF Switzerland Officer in the Russian Federation August 2002 to April 2004, (in French) interviewed in 2008.
<b>D</b>	Member of MSF North Caucasus staff (in French) interviewed in 2008
<b>Austen Davies</b>	MSF Holland Executive Director, 1999 to 2004 (in English) interviewed in 2009.
<b>Dr Alain Devaux</b>	MSF Belgium Programme manager 1994 to 1996 (in French) interviewed in 2008.
<b>Jean-Christophe Dollé</b>	Coordinator of MSF Belgium's North Caucasus project, from March to November 2000 (in French) interviewed in 2008.
<b>[...]</b>	MSF Deputy Legal Advisor, 1995-2005 (in French) interviewed in 2008.
<b>E</b>	Member MSF North Caucasus staff (in English) interviewed in 2008.
<b>Anne Fouchard</b>	MSF France Deputy Communications Director, July 2000 to July 2004 (in French) interviewed in 2008.
<b>Kenny Gluck</b>	MSF Holland Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus November 1999 to January 2001, Director of Operations 2001 to 2005 (in English) interviewed in 2000 and in 2009.
<b>Michiel Hofman</b>	MSF Holland North Caucasus Coordinator from May 2001 to July 2003 (in English) interviewed in 2009.
<b>Anne-Marie Huby</b>	Executive Director MSF United Kingdom, (in French) interviewed in 2000.
<b>Graziella Godain</b>	MSF France Emergency Coordinator in the North Caucasus, February to October 1996 (in French) interviewed in 2008.

<b>Eric Goemaere</b>	Director General MSF Belgium, 1996-1998 (in French) interviewed in 2000.
<b>François Jean</b>	Director of Studies MSF France Foundation until December 1999 (in French) interviewed in 1998.
<b>[...]</b>	MSF Belgium Project Coordinator in Chechnya 1995, MSF USA Programme Department 2001-2002 (in French) interviewed in 2008.
<b>Dr Thomas Nierle</b>	MSF Switzerland Head of Emergencies, Director of Operations 2000 to 2004 (in French) interviewed in 2009.
<b>Dr Bart Ostyns</b>	MSF Belgium Field Coordinator in Chechnya 1995 to 1996, Task Force North Caucasus 1999 to 2001 (in French) interviewed in August 2000.
<b>Christopher Stokes</b>	MSF Belgium Coordinator in Moscow 1994 to 1996 (in French) interviewed in 2008.
<b>Gabriel Trujillo</b>	MSF France Coordinator for North Caucasus, January 2002 to July 2003 (in French) interviewed in 2008.
<b>Dr Brigitte Vasset</b>	MSF France Director of Operations 1990 to 1998, Emergency Coordinator in Pankisi valley (Georgia) October 1999 to January 2000 (in French) interviewed in 2008.
<b>Rafa Vila San Juan</b>	MSF International Secretary General, January 2001 to January 2004 (in French) interviewed in 2009.



# PEOPLE OF RUSSIA AND THE CAUCASUS QUOTED IN THE DOCUMENT AND THEIR POSITION AT THE TIME OF THE EVENTS

<b>Ilyas Akhmadov</b>	Chechen commander, Aslan Maskhadov's spokesperson during the first war, Head of anti-terrorist forces between the two wars, the Minister of Foreign Affairs from July 1999 and Aslan Maskhadov's government spokesperson abroad from 2000 on.
<b>Ramzan Akhmadov</b>	Chechen commander, allied with Khattab, member of the Akhmadov's clan, suspected of being specialised in kidnappings.
<b>Ruslan Aushev</b>	President of the Republic of Ingushetia from February 1993 to April 2002.
<b>Andreï Babitski</b>	Russian independent journalist, correspondent of Radio Free Europe in Russia; kidnapped and detained in a filtration camp in January 2000.
<b>Shamil Bassayev</b>	Chechen commander, Vice-Prime Minister of Aslan Maskhadov's government from 1997 on, then interim Prime Minister from January to June 1998. Allied with the radical Saudi Islamist commander, Ibn al Khattab and the 'legion of Islamic combatants.'
<b>Vladimir Shamanov</b>	Commander of the Russian forces in Chechnya during the first war to January 2000.
<b>Nina Davidovitch</b>	Member of the NGO Drujba, kidnapped in August 2002, one week before Arjan Erkel, released in January 2003.
<b>Dzhokhar Dudaiev</b>	Elected President of the Independent Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, from November 1991 to April 1996 (assassinated).
<b>Boris Yeltsin</b>	President of the Russian Federation from June 1991 to December 1999.
<b>Zelimkan Iandarbiyev</b>	Interim President of the Independent Chechen Republic of Ichkeria from April 1996 to February 1997; then allied with the radical Islamists Bassaiev and Khattab.
<b>Sergueï Iastrjembski</b>	Head of the Public Relations Department of the President of the Russian Federation during the first war. from January 2000 on, advisor and spokesperson of the Russian Federation's President on Chechen issues.
<b>Igor Ivanov</b>	Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs from September 1998 to March 2004, then Secretary of the National Security Council of the Russian Federation.
<b>Sergey Ivanov</b>	Secretary of the National Security Council of the Russian Federation, from November 1999 to March 2001, then Minister of Defence from March 2001 to February 2007.
<b>Vyatcheslav Izmaïlov</b>	Former officer in the Russian army specialised in solving kidnappings, then journalist for the independent Russian newspaper Novaïa Gazeta covering Arjan Erkel issues.
<b>Akhmed Kadyrov</b>	Former rebel commander, named Head of the Chechen administration by Moscow in July 2000, elected President of the Republic of Chechnya in October 2003.
<b>Vladimir Kalamanov</b>	Kremlin Envoy for Human Rights in Chechnya.
<b>Oumar Khambiev</b>	Surgeon, Minister of Health in Aslan Maskhadov's government from 1996 to 1999. In January 2000, he was detained for several weeks in a filtration camp.
<b>Ibn-al-Khattab</b>	Saudi radical Islamic commander, allied with Chechen commander Shamil Bassaiev; created and led an 'Islamic legion' of non Chechen Jihadist combatants; considered a member of Al-Qaïda by the United States and the Federation of Russia.
<b>General Koulikov</b>	Head of the Russian Federation Ministry of Interior's armed forces from March 1995 to July 1998.
<b>Sergey V. Lavrov</b>	Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the United States, Russian Federation's Minister of Foreign Affairs from February 1994 to March 2004.

<b>Aslan Maskhadov</b>	President of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, elected in 1997. Not recognized as a President by Moscow from October 1999 on.
<b>Magomegali Magomedov</b>	President of the State Council of the Republic of Dagestan from 1987 to 2006.
<b>Vladimir Putin</b>	Prime Minister of the Russian Federation from August 1999 on, interim President from December 1999, elected as a President in March 2000.
<b>Igor Sergeev</b>	Russian Federation Minister of Defence from May 1997 to March 2001.
<b>Imamutdin Temirbulatov</b>	Deputy Head of the Dagestani Anti-Organized Crime Department in charge of investigating Arjan Erkel's kidnapping.
<b>Doku Zavgaiev</b>	Pro-Russian President of the Chechen Republic from November 1995 to August 1996.
<b>Murat Ziazikov</b>	President of the Republic of Ingushetia elected in May 2002.

# ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ACF</b>	Action against Hunger (Action contre la Faim)	<b>MDM</b>	Doctors of the World (Médecins du Monde)
<b>AFP</b>	Agence France Presse	<b>MSF B</b>	Belgian section of MSF
<b>BUZA</b>	Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs	<b>MSF CH</b>	Swiss section of MSF
<b>GA</b>	General Assembly	<b>MSF F</b>	French section of MSF
<b>AI</b>	Amnesty International	<b>MSF H</b>	Dutch section of MSF
<b>BBC</b>	British Broadcasting Corporation	<b>MVD</b>	Ministry of the Interior (Russian Federation)
<b>CoE</b>	Council of Europe	<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
<b>CHW</b>	Catholic Healthcare West	<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>CIA (American)</b>	Central Intelligence Agency	<b>NSC</b>	National Security Council
<b>CNCDH (French)</b>	National Consultative Mission on Human Rights	<b>NTV</b>	Russian Independent TV channel, put under government control in 2001
<b>CNN (American)</b>	Cable News Network	<b>OMON</b>	Otryad Militsii Osobovo Naznachenia – Ministry of the Interior Special Forces (Russian Federation)
<b>IHL</b>	International Humanitarian Law	<b>ORT</b>	Russian State TV Channel
<b>DRC</b>	Danish Relief Council	<b>OSCE</b>	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
<b>ECHO</b>	European Commission for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection	<b>PACE</b>	Parliamentary Assembly Council of Europe
<b>EFTA</b>	European Free Trade Association	<b>UBOP</b>	Ministry of the Interior's Organized Crime and Terrorism Department (Russian Federation)
<b>EMERCOM (Russian Federation)</b>	Ministry of Emergency Situations	<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>EU</b>	European Community	<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
<b>EP</b>	European Parliament	<b>UNSECOORD</b>	Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator
<b>FSB (Russian Federation)</b>	Federal Security Service (ex-KGB)	<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organisation
<b>HRW</b>	Human Rights Watch		
<b>ICRC</b>	International Committee of the Red Cross		
<b>IDP</b>	Internal Displaced Persons		
<b>IFHR</b>	International Federation of Human Rights		
<b>MOFA</b>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs		
<b>MOI</b>	Ministry of the Interior		



Extract from MSF archives or press clippings.



Extract from interviews conducted in 1998, 2000, 2008, 2009 people who participated and/or witnessed the events.



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



▲ Chechen IdP/refugee camps.

# INTRODUCTION

On November 1<sup>st</sup> 1991, Chechnya, a republic in the Northern Caucasus whose people had more than once paid a heavy price for their opposition to the central government in Moscow, declared its independence from the Russian Federation. In January 1992, the Chechen President, Djokhar Dudaiev, refused to sign Chechnya's membership treaty with the Russian Federation, and went on to introduce a Chechen constitution. In June 1993, he dissolved a parliament still loyal to Moscow, and accorded himself full powers. During the summer of 1994, Dudaiev's forces overcame the internal opposition forces, supported and trained by Moscow.

In December 1994, Russian forces crossed over onto Chechen soil, officially 'to disarm the parties to the conflict.' The war that followed was presented by the Russian government as a police operation conducted on Federation soil. The federal forces pounded and destroyed whole towns and villages, blocking international witnesses from the civilian bombings by denying access to humanitarian organisations. Entire regions were thus closed off. In the summer of 1996, the conflict abated with the Chechen separatists' victory over the Russian army. The latter temporarily withdrew from the country.

The new Chechen President, Aslan Maskhadov, elected in 1997, failed to bring stability to the country. Brought to its knees by the war and riddled with a flourishing mafia, Chechnya also struggled to contend with an upsurge of radical Islamism. The kidnappings of senior corporate staff, humanitarian workers, and international journalists multiplied, contributing to the destabilisation of the Northern Caucasus and depriving Chechens of much-needed aid while discouraging the presence of foreigners.

In August 1999, a group of radical Chechen rebels led an armed incursion into Dagestan. The same rebels were held responsible for a string of bomb attacks staged in Moscow, leaving hundreds dead in their wake. The Russian forces thus returned to the fray in Chechnya, rolling out a Moscow-termed 'anti-terrorist operation.' After an intensive period of bombing, wiping out towns and villages and uprooting more than 200,000 Chechens to neighbouring republics, the federal government embarked on a 'normalisation' phase. Based on the imposition of terror, it led to the disappearance of thousands of civilians in cleansing operations and torture camps. Meanwhile, part of the Chechen resistance radicalised, overwhelming President Maskhadov, whom Moscow no longer recognised. The rebels scaled up the attacks against the federal government and the pro-Russian Chechen administration, put into place by the Kremlin.

From late 2000 on, the federal government started applying pressure on Chechen refugees in neighbouring republics, forcing them to go home. Such a return would show other nations and international institutions that the country was indeed reverting to normal. In reality, the living conditions and security in Chechnya were in a disastrous state. Only a trickle of assistance reached the Chechen population, as a climate of terror compromised international organisations' work while the armed forces and a corrupt administration practiced wide-scale misappropriation of aid. In May 2002, a 20-step repatriation agreement was signed by the Ingush authorities and the federal government, formalising the forced dismantling of the Chechen refugee camps and a return to their devastated country.

## **WHAT DID MSF DO AND SEE?**

During the first war, the Médecins Sans Frontières teams battled against the obstacles the Russian forces threw in their path so as to assist civilian populations in Chechnya and neighbouring republics. They supplied hospitals with medicines and medical materials, operated on the wounded and negotiated and sometimes secured the evacuation of patients during village bombing raids.

In April 1996, an expatriate administrator working for the Belgium section was kidnapped for several weeks. This was followed by a succession of threats, other kidnapping attempts, armed hold-ups, robberies of the MSF premises, and the assassination of six ICRC employees in December 1996. These events led to the closure of MSF's programmes one by one. In July 1997, the French section's administrator was kidnapped in Ingushetia. He escaped the following October, and all MSF sections withdrew from the Northern Caucasus.

In autumn 1999, when hostilities in Chechnya flared anew, MSF's operational sections struggled to work in a context of all out war, exposing expatriate volunteers to the dangers involved. In 2000, the different sections tentatively initiated support activities for refugees in the neighbouring republics of Georgia, Ingushetia, and Dagestan. In Chechnya, the operations were mainly run by national staff members trained and managed from a distance, by teams based in Moscow and Nazran conducting sporadic field visits. This cautious approach was consolidated in January 2001 following the kidnapping of the MSF Holland Coordinator who was held for three weeks in Chechnya. Before this kidnapping, with the assistance of a solid national team, the Dutch section had managed to set up a supply system for the Chechen hospitals, bringing in medicines and medical materials. In Ingushetia, the MSF team's efforts to improve the refugees' living conditions were thwarted by the authorities' determination to perpetuate the misery, thereby pressuring the refugees to return to Chechnya.

In the summer of 2002, alerts, threats, and attempted and successful kidnappings swelled in the Northern Caucasus. On 12<sup>th</sup> August 2002, the MSF Switzerland Coordinator a Dutch national, was kidnapped in Dagestan. During the eighteen months of his captivity, over and above the drama itself, the deterioration of MSF's relations with his family and the Dutch government, and the climate between the MSF sections handling the kidnapping, all conspired to weaken the organisation's work and position in the Russian Federation. Nonetheless, the national staff continued to run activities in Ingushetia and Chechnya.

Throughout the entire period of its presence on Russian Federation soil, MSF was the repeated target of rumours launched and fanned by army or administration representatives, and relayed by the Russian media. The teams were accused of espionage and supporting the Chechen rebels. The strategy of intimidation and terror employed by the Russian authorities in the Northern Caucasus impacted on humanitarian workers as well as on the populations they were trying to assist.

## **WHAT DID MSF SAY?**

During the first war, press releases and volunteers' personal accounts delivered in the international press described the violence inflicted by the Russian forces on civilians and the obstacles thrown in aid organisations' paths. In May 1995, the massive bombing of Shatoi, the merciless killing of civilians, and the forced evacuation of the MSF team and its patients were followed by a press release and a report denouncing the Russian forces' disrespect for humanitarian law

In April 1996, after the bombing of several towns in southern Chechnya, which was bolstered by a prohibition of access for assistance organisations, MSF staged an international press conference in Moscow and circulated a report documenting, through the personal accounts of survivors and volunteers, the targeting of civilians by the Russian forces. The kidnapping of the Belgian section's administrator a few days after the press conference, led to a certain amount of discussion regarding a causal link between the two events.

From July to October 1997, during another kidnapping, this time the French section's administrator in Ingushetia, MSF limited its communications to journalists likely to provide information. In October, after the hostage's extraordinary escape, which incited some considerable incredulity, MSF organised a press conference during which the ex-hostage provided some very real details of his flight.

When hostilities flared up again in Autumn 1999, MSF was running limited operations, yet chose to publicly denounce the Russian army's conduct during the war. In November, the organisation called for the immediate opening of the border between Chechnya and Georgia, and demanded respect for Chechen civilians' right to flee. In December, when receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, its representatives launched an appeal for a ceasefire in Grozny, the Chechen capital that was under the Russian army's ultimatum of evacuation and total destruction at the time. In early 2000, a report containing accounts collected from Chechen refugees in Georgia was disseminated to the international press, and MSF employed the term 'war' to describe the Russian government's 'anti-terrorist operation.'

Within MSF, certain people questioned the validity of the refugee's accounts, labelling them 'second hand.' Others considered that qualifying the situation as a war didn't change a thing, and furthermore it wasn't up to MSF to make this call. Meanwhile the national staff working for MSF's Dutch section spent much of the year 2000 collecting accounts, through their activities in Chechen health facilities, on the Russian forces' assaults on civilians. In Autumn 2000, these accounts were used as a basis for a communication campaign conducted in Europe. The Dutch section's Coordinator was highly vocal in the campaign and in the Russian media as well. He was then kidnapped for a three week period in January 2001. Here again, a causal link between the two events was evoked by certain parties, although the identity of the kidnapers eventually contradicted such a theory.

In January 2002, MSF launched a communication campaign denouncing the pressure exerted on the Chechen refugees in Ingushetia to return. It gave a press conference in Paris, together with Sergei Kovalev, the former dissident, Duma deputy and human rights activist. This campaign was extended to the spring and summer of 2002, opposing the 20-step repatriation plan drawn up by the Russian and Ingush authorities.

When MSF Switzerland's Coordinator was kidnapped in Dagestan in August 2002, the organisation limited its initial communications to calls for the volunteer's release. Thus in October 2002, the organisation abstained from all public communication on the health disaster its team witnessed in a Moscow hospital, after the Russian forces launched an assault using narcotic gas to end the Chechen rebels' kidnapping of nearly 800 people in the Dubrovka theatre.

From January 2003 on, given the dearth of information about its volunteer's fate, MSF changed its strategy and raised the visibility of the kidnapping in the media: launching of a worldwide petition demanding the hostage's release; press releases on anniversary dates or when proof of life was received; and press conferences with the family and representatives of the Dutch government, etc.

In March 2003, despite the caution that was required for the kidnapping, MSF publicly denounced the destruction of refugee housing its teams had built for Chechens in Ingushetia. In May, it gave a press

conference in Moscow and published a report based on a survey conducted amongst the refugees, revealing that more than 90% of them refused to return to Chechnya, mainly for security reasons. Throughout 2003, in press releases and statements issued by members of the organisation's senior staff, MSF drew attention to the Russian government's lack of involvement in investigations and efforts to secure the hostage's release, despite the fact that the latter had been kidnapped on the Federation's soil.

From March 2004 onwards, a more offensive strategy was launched, based on information obtained from private investigators and a journalist from an independent Russian weekly paper. It accused members of the Russian and Dagestan parliaments and pointed to the involvement of the Russian Secret Services. This line of communication led to some serious disagreements between MSF and the hostage's family, along with members of the Dutch government, who considered that raising questions on the authorities and secret services could only damage the chances of a release. It also created some serious friction within the movement. Some parties considered that as MSF had no proof to prop up these accusations, it should refrain from broadcasting them thus. Moreover, the Dutch section was experiencing serious difficulties adopting a position contrary to national public opinion, which supported its government's approach of diplomatic caution. The hostage was eventually released on 11<sup>th</sup> April 2004.

During this entire period, MSF backed up all instances of public speaking out, be it on the situation in Chechnya, the refugees' fate, or the kidnapping of volunteers, with regular meetings held at diplomatic level. They aimed to raise the awareness of policy deciders prone to influencing the warring parties. Furthermore, all official Russian visits to European or North American states, and any international summits including the Russian Federation, were taken as opportunities to question the various parties publicly. On three different occasions, MSF was heard by the Council of Europe on the situation in Chechnya and the refugees' fate (January and November 2000 and January 2002). The organisation was heard by the United Nation's Human Rights Commission in April 2002. Each of these hearings was taken up by a press release issued by the organisation.

## QUESTIONS AND DILEMMAS

Throughout this period, MSF's operational positions and the way it spoke out publicly evoked a series of questions and dilemmas that led to reflection, debate, and controversy within the organisation and beyond:

- Was speaking out publicly the right thing to do?
  - With regard to Russia, a super power with a veto at the UN Security Council and a tradition of propaganda control of the public arena inherited from a past which paid little heed to the freedom of expression:
    - Is it realistic to rely on raising the awareness of other UN member states via their public's opinion?
    - Should MSF have ignored or addressed the accusations of espionage regularly levied against it in the Russian media?
  - In a context of terror, when dealing with a regime in denial of the reality of a war:
    - Why is it important to have this situation termed a 'war'?
    - Is it up to MSF to call for this qualification?
- Given the risk of assault and kidnapping of staff working in the Northern Caucasus, can we justify MSF's limited operational presence by the necessity to bolster our public speaking out in which we denounce persecutions against the Chechen population?



- Should public speaking out on the Northern Caucasus be moderate so as not to jeopardize MSF's activities elsewhere in the Russian Federation?
- Is there a casual link –as the chronology of events might suggest– between instances of MSF public speaking out and the security incidents involving MSF staff? Should we take this possibility into account when deciding whether to speak out publicly, and how?
- When a member of MSF's staff is taken hostage:
  - should we speak out in the media to create visibility that affords him/her some protection, or conversely remain as discrete as possible so as to avoid a rise in his/her 'market value?'
  - should we publically point out a government's responsibilities, negligence, or even complicity when a kidnapping occurs on its soil, thereby taking active steps to secure the hostage's release, or should we refrain from such a discourse so as to avoid the opposite effect, when a government digs in its heels?
  - should we continue to publically denounce the violence inflicted on people in the region, at the risk of radicalising those parties to the conflict responsible for the kidnapping, and place the hostage's life in danger?

#### **NOTA BENE**

**For safety and confidentiality the names of the MSF staff interviewed or quoted in this document have been reduced to a single letter which does not correspond to their initials.**

**This study only mentions the kidnapping of Arjan Erkel in so far as concerns MSF's public statements and the dilemmas these involved. There are therefore no details regarding the investigation or the particulars of this affair.**

**Likewise this document does not contain any elements concerning the legal action taken by the Dutch government against MSF concerning the resolution of the Erkel Affair.**



## WAR CRIMES AND POLITICS OF TERROR IN CHECHNYA 1994-2004

In 1859, after a century of resisting colonisation, Chechnya was annexed by Russia. It became part of the Soviet Union in 1921, and then joined Ingushetia in 1936 to form the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic. In 1944, the republic was disbanded by Stalin, who accused the Chechens of collaboration with the Nazis and ordered their deportation en masse to Central Asia. The inhumane conditions of the deportation and the harshness of life in these regions decimated much of the population. In 1957 the survivors were politically reintegrated and returned to their country. They settled alongside the Russians and Ukrainians who had moved into the region. Thus, the Chechen-Ingush Republic was re-established.

In 1990, Boris Yeltsin, the President of the Russian Federation, told the smaller states of the ex-Soviet Union that they could "take as much independence as they could swallow." On 1 November 1991, Dzhokhar Dudayev, Chechnya's elected President, took him at his word and proclaimed his country's independence. On the 8<sup>th</sup> November, the Russian government declared this self-proclamation illegal and sent in troops, only to rapidly withdraw at parliament's request. In December 1991, following a referendum, Ingushetia separated from Chechnya.

In January 1992, Dzhokhar Dudayev refused to sign the Russian Federation treaty. On 12 March, a Chechen constitution was adopted. Russia consequently imposed an economic embargo. In June 1993, Dzhokhar Dudayev dissolved the Chechen parliament (still in the hands of the internal pro-Russian opposition) and accorded himself full powers. On 14 January, he renamed Chechnya "The Chechen Republic of Ichkeria."

By the summer of 1994, the internal opposition had stepped up its activities and created the Provisional Supreme Council. However, opposition troops, which were backed by Moscow, were regularly defeated by the forces of the independent republic. On 1 September, following an attempt by Russian troops to overthrow the regime, president Dudayev declared a state of emergency. Fighting broke out in October, spreading to the outskirts of the capital, Grozny. On 26 November, after a series of attacks, the opposition forces temporarily withdrew.

At the time, MSF France had a team based in Pyatigorsk, a town in southern Russia on the Caucasian border. The programme in Ingushetia offered assistance to Ingush refugees driven out of the Prigorodnoye region in North Ossetia<sup>1</sup> and supplied four hospitals in Grozny with medicines and medical supplies. In the summer of 1994, MSF intervened during a cholera epidemic in the Chechen towns of Kurtchaloi, Gudermes, and Grozny. MSF Belgium had been working in the neighbouring Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan for a number of years.

On 11 December 1994, 25 000 Russian soldiers crossed into Chechnya, charged with the mission of "disarming the conflicting parties." On the 20 December, the first Russian bombs fell on Grozny. The city centre was shelled and the vast majority of the city's 350,000 inhabitants fled for their lives.



*"Chechnya: Moscow's Tanks Siege the Secessionist Republic's Capital – Boris Yeltsin Gambles with High Stakes,"* Sophie Shihab, *Le Monde* (France) 13 December 1994 (in French).

### Extract:

On Sunday morning the Itar-TASS press agency announced, "Russian troops have crossed into Chechen territory," the day before a national holiday, while President Boris Yeltsin claimed to be ill. [...]

Television reports are already showing battle scenes: armadas of advancing tanks, helicopters shooting at a village, armoured cars ablaze, a train carrying tanks blocked by dismantled tracks. Given the uneven odds, this resistance appears hopeless but resistance took root in neighbouring Ingushetia before the Russians ever crossed the border. Yet the three hundred thousand inhabitants of this tiny Republic, members of the same 'Vainakh' people as the Chechens, were supposed to be loyal to Moscow. Unlike their

1. Prigorodny is a district in the Northern Ossetia Republic peopled by Ingush. In October and November 1992, the Ingush fought against Ossetian para-military troops, leading to the death of 600 civilians and the expulsion of 60,000 others to Ingushetia.

Chechen neighbours, they had agreed to form part of the Russian Federation. The Russian media has been circulating biased information for months, presenting the small Chechen Republic, which declared its independence three years ago, as a hotbed of international terrorism and militant Islamism, and where the local Russian population is persecuted. The media has highlighted the emergence of a local opposition that denounces the 'dictatorship' of the Chechen President, Dzhokhar Dudayev. It is true that this opposition does exist, but its financial, political and military backing from the Kremlin has discredited it in most Chechens' eyes. [...]

The incursion of Russian tanks in this irredentist Russian enclave did not follow 'repeated calls for help from a friendly regime,' as was the case in Afghanistan, but otherwise the pattern has been much the same. The head of the Chechen 'Provisional Council,' armed by Moscow, has welcomed the Russian troops with open arms in the part of Chechnya under its control. Although the Russian troops have officially been sent in 'to disarm the conflicting parties in Chechnya,' the Provisional Council has announced their participation in the military operation underway. The initial ITAR-TASS bulletins have been peppered with such contradictions. This 'botched' roll out of the Muscovite plan would never have happened fifteen years ago. The censorship imposed on the Chechen crisis by the Russian government's 'temporary information centre' has also had little effect.

The headlines of the liberal Russian press have spent the last two weeks decrying the futility of applying military 'solutions' to a problem posed by a minority, in a region as unstable as the Caucasus. They have denounced the Kremlin's lies about its role in the troubles preceding last Sunday's events. And have sounded the alarm on the threat posed to the future of Russian democracy by such an invasion.

**The teams of MSF Belgium and France provided assistance to the wounded and displaced in Chechnya and the neighbouring Republics of Ingushetia, Dagestan, and North Ossetia. They also supplied hospital facilities in Grozny and elsewhere with medical material and medicines. In a press release on 20 December, MSF Belgium announced the start of its aid to Chechen victims through a programme based in Dagestan. [V1](#)**



'MSF Sets Up Aid for Chechen Victims,' **Press release**, MSF Belgium, 20 December 1994, (in French).

An exploratory mission conducted last week found large numbers of refugees arriving in Dagestan, the region bordering Chechnya. Their numbers are currently estimated to stand at around 8,000. The head of Médecins Sans Frontières' emergency unit deployed to Baku without delay to set up a response.

The MSF team in Baku is preparing an initial convoy of


medical-surgical and sanitation supplies. It could reach Khasavyurt, Dagestan by the end of this week, taking the only road accessing the border. A number of Russian checkpoints have sprung up along the way. We are currently awaiting permission to transit back and forth over the Chechen border, delivering aid to the wounded over the next few days. MSF is preparing a full cargo of shelter and extra supplies, to be dispatched to Baku in Azerbaijan.




*Everything kicked off on 11 December 1994. We didn't know anything about Chechnya at the time. We'd never been there before and we didn't know the region at all. As soon as the war began, MSF Belgium launched an intervention from Azerbaijan, as they were the closest team geographically to Chechnya at that stage. The team drove up to the border from Baku, but never managed to cross. Meanwhile, I was the coordinator for the Moscow programme. We were running projects for the homeless, and carrying out exploratory missions that would eventually lead to tuberculosis projects in Russian prisons. It had nothing to do with the Caucasus. I'd already worked in war zones, particularly Rwanda in 1994, and the director of operations called us, saying that the war had been going on for twenty days and the Belgian team had still not managed to intervene, so we had to go there ourselves. We were told to take a plane with the Russian Emergency Minister's teams, arriving at a military airport. We were to be met by the Ministry of the Interior's troops, who had a bad reputation at the time, even within Russia itself. I refused. I had a long discussion with my programme manager, that told me that either I went, or I returned to Brussels. So I agreed. We loaded up the cars and left the following day, the 31 December, telling the programme manager that we missed the flights. It was a week of festivities in Russia, and everything was closed. People slept all day and drank all night. We didn't even take MSF cars, preferring Russian ones. We broke down several times. We stopped in towns where people still used ration cards. Even the Russian staff with us didn't know that this practice was still going on. We covered around 2,500 km in five days. The initial plan was to enter via Dagestan, another new place for MSF. We headed for Makhachkala. We had no contact with the Chechens. We had the impression, based on what our Russian drivers told us (they repaired the vehicles during the day and we drove them at night) that the border officials knew that we had crossed, but this may just have been Russian paranoia. We spent the day in Makhachkala, then drove to the town just before the border, without permits or papers. We met some Chechen refugees, and asked them questions about what was going on. We waited for the sky to cloud over - the Russians bombed less then - and crossed into Chechnya, with no means of communication on board. We just made one call to say we were going in. It was an 'urban' mission; we only had a few supplies in the car, hardly anything. The Russian drivers refused to go in - and I could see his point. Only one really brave interpreter, with his Moscow accent, accepted to come. We headed for Argun, then further south, towards Novi Atagi,*


and explored the surrounding area. We soon made contact with the rebels, which we came across in meetings in the villages and hospitals. We donated supplies and medicines, and started introducing ourselves and collecting information. They were surprised to see us; they'd seen no one else and didn't know we were there. With hindsight, I admit we were ill prepared. We knew nothing about the Chechen context and the tradition of kidnapping. We only found out about it later. We underestimated the intensity and nature of the bombing. We had no security guarantees whatsoever. Our group consisted of three members of MSF Belgium and a Russian interpreter. We travelled around Chechnya for two or three days. We had to negotiate with the Ministry of Interior's troops all the time. We told Brussels that we had to be replaced as soon as possible, because we had to get back to Moscow. We tried to take the road to Grozny, but the bombing forced us back. William took over from us at that point.

Christopher Stokes, Coordinator MSF Belgium in Moscow (1994-1996), (in French) interviewed in 2008.

 I left Belgium for Stavropol with a full charter. The Moscow team was waiting for me there. We drove down to Dagestan in a truck, reaching Makhachkala, the capital. We then started to explore around the border, and distributed surgical supplies to two or three hospitals. We decided to open a base in Khasavyurt, near the Chechen border, and started by working in a health centre giving medical consultations. It didn't work out that well, but we mainly did it to make contact with the Chechens.

William Claus, Emergency Coordinator, MSF Belgium (in French), interviewed in 2008.


**On 19 January 1995, after weeks of pounding Grozny with bombs, the Russian troops took over the presidential palace. Throughout January, volunteers gave eyewitness accounts to the European press. MSF Belgium and France's press releases presented a united front, describing the bombing of civilians, particularly the bombing of markets and Chali hospital, the destruction of health facilities, and the teams' efforts to provide assistance to the victims. [V2](#) **

 **Press release** by Médecins Sans Frontières, 'North Caucasus,' MSF France, 2 January 1995 (in French).


A Médecins Sans Frontières team has to supply health facilities in and around Grozny again this week. The team has already reached the capital on several occasions, distributing medicines and medical materials to hospitals

and facilities located to the south and west of the city, where large numbers of displaced persons have congregated. According to people in the area, patients don't stay in the hospitals for long, preferring to leave the city as soon as their wounds have been treated.

MSF volunteers are also working in Chechnya's neighbouring republics, where civilian refugees have fled from the fighting. We estimate that around 100,000 refugees have reached Ingushetia, and there are 20,000 more in Dagestan. Most of them are currently housed with local families. The teams have started distributing blankets and jerry cans, and have increased their support to medical emergency facilities. Health facilities across the region, already in relatively poor shape, are struggling to cope with the increased needs generated by this flow of new arrivals. All lack medicines and materials.

 'Chechnya: High Numbers of Civilian Deaths and a Hospital Bombed,' **Press release**, MSF France, 6 January 1995 (in French).

A Médecins Sans Frontières team has The Médecins Sans Frontières team, just returned from the town of Chali (20km south of Grozny), reported today that indiscriminate bombing has killed a number of civilians. The town's market and hospital were hit by aerial bombs last Wednesday, destroying the maternity and paediatric wards, killing 30 people and wounding 150. The conditions for treating the victims are extremely taxing; the hospital, which has treated 350 wounded patients since the fighting began, has no running water, electricity, or heating. The medical staff has to collect water from the nearest river. Medical stocks are running low, and there is a shortage of surgical supplies, disinfectant, soap, and blankets. As things stand, most victims are too scared of aerial bombardment to seek care in any medical facility. Médecins Sans Frontières urges that civilians and hospitals be spared by the bombing, in accordance with humanitarian law.

 'Assistance for the Victims of the Chechen conflict,' **Press release**, MSF Belgium, 12 January 1995 (In French).

24 tons of medicines and medical-surgical, sanitation and logistics supplies for the victims of the Chechen conflict are about to arrive in Makhachkala, the support base of the MSF team. This material will be used to supply medical facilities in Chechnya and Dagestan. The MSF team present in the region has spent the last few days visiting villages in southern Chechnya, evaluating the needs and preparing for the transport and arrival of supplies coming from Brussels and Vilnius. It observed that many of those wounded during the intensive bombing have avoided hospital care, preferring to stay held up in their underground shelters. Several of the areas' hospitals have had to evacuate their

patients. Chali hospital, 20km south of Grozny, re-opened its doors today. A large number of the seriously wounded have been transferred to Khasavyurt hospital, on the border with Dagestan. Yesterday, during the space of just one day, our team saw 40 wounded persons arrive, despite the shortage of transportation means. Another 4 MSF members left Brussels this Tuesday, driving overland to strengthen the team in the region. MSF's activities include supply to medical facilities and support to the medical staff present.



*'Influx of Wounded to the Hospitals – MSF Equips the Emergency Sites,'* Press release, MSF Belgium, 17 January 1995 (in French).

24 tons of medicines and an MSF team spent all of yesterday distributing medical-surgical supplies and basic medicines in the outskirts of Grozny. The MSF team, operating from its base in Dagestan, includes 8 expatriates. It is currently carrying out evaluations, supporting local personnel, and distributing the material sent in from Brussels and Vilnius last week. William Claus, coordinator of MSF's mission in Chechnya, confirmed yesterday evening that the bombing had continued in Grozny and the south-eastern part of the Republic. Argun hospital, some ten kilometres away from Grozny, was hit by rocket fire a few days ago, destroying the paediatric ward and forcing all activities to a halt. MSF intends to support the local personnel so that this critical emergency centre for the wounded is up and running again as soon as possible.

Further to the east, Gudermes hospital and a makeshift hospital set up in Chochin'jurt's school have both been overwhelmed with wounded patients. In Khasavyurt, a Dagestan city on the Chechen border, there has been an average of thirty new wounded cases a day. Our team estimates that there are some 40,000 people seeking refuge in the town of Khasavyurt alone, and 80,000 throughout Dagestan as a whole.



*'The Russians Thwart Evacuation of the Wounded,'* *Le Parisien* (France), 21 January 1995 (in French).

#### Extract:

Elisabeth Szumilin (39 years old), a volunteer for Médecins Sans Frontières since 1986, is now the organisation's medical advisor for all countries in the ex-USSR, and has been travelling around the Caucasus since last May. Returned from Chechnya a week ago, she recounted the horrors of the fighting and blind bombing raids (in spite of which she intends to return to the region next week).

"In Chali, one of the towns we try and supply that's harbouring thousands of refugees from the capital, I saw the town centre market being deliberately targeted by a Russian plane" she confides, accusing the Russians of conducting a "campaign of terror" over the Chechen population. "On arrival in Grozny", she adds, "there were again two enormous bomb craters where the markets used to be, at the junctions of the city's main roads. All the city's hospitals had been

destroyed, because they'd become targets, like the others.» "Only the areas to the north east of Grozny are spared by the Russian planes," she observes. "They're held by the opposition to president Dudayev, which has been allied with and armed by Moscow for years. But in the rest of the country, it's a scorched earth policy, just like in Afghanistan." [...] Doctor Elisabeth Szumilin continues indignantly: "The Russians respect absolutely nothing – neither the Geneva conventions, nor the wounded. They don't let anyone through to receive care. They evacuate their own victims to their headquarters in Mozdok, North Ossetia, but they leave the Chechens to die. It's pure butchery."

"We're trying to set up mobile assistance posts to evacuate as many wounded as possible behind the lines, but it's really hard going because there's often no water or electricity," she explains. She concludes: "One thing's for sure, the Chechens won't be armed, but they'll keep giving the Russian soldiers a run for their money in the mountains. While there's a Chechen still standing, the war will keep going, and we just have to cope with the consequences."



*'The Fighting in Chechnya Drags on: MSF Sends Another 42 tons of Material.'* Press release, MSF Belgium, 9 February 1995 (in French).

Given the current impasse in the Chechen war, MSF has decided to send a further 42 tons of material in support of its programmes already underway, particularly those involving health care for the refugee and local populations, supply for medical facilities in Dagestan and Chechnya, and medical care for the war wounded. 60,000 people have taken refuge in the town of Khasavyurt, and are housed with friends or in public buildings. We estimate that some 100 new people arrive every day. Besides supplying the central hospital where most of the war-wounded go, MSF has set itself up in 3 dispensaries at strategic points in the town, offering access to health care for the refugee and local population. In Chechnya itself, our team continues to supply the main medical facilities in the region south west of Grozny, and has just set up a surgical unit in Vedenno, a town located 60km south of the capital. Since the fighting broke out on 11 December, Vedenno – on a natural evacuation route towards the south – has seen its population double in size. An 8 person strong team of MSF expatriates has been working in the country since the 8<sup>th</sup> of January.

**In mid-February, Russian troops took almost total control of Grozny, where only 100,000 inhabitants remained, most of them Russian civilians. The Chechens fled to the south and into neighbouring republics. The French section of MSF chose to focus on medical facilities in the west of the capital, and set up a team in support of medical staff in the hospital of Kurtchaloi.**



**Sitrep** MSF France, 16 February 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

On Wednesday February 15, the Russian army and separatist Chechens agreed on a new two- day ceasefire, starting on Wednesday at midnight. The truce mostly serves humanitarian and medical purposes: evacuating the dead and wounded. The non-stop fighting has made it impossible to collect many of the bodies, and with spring now on its way, there are fears of epidemics. (AFP)

Since the separatist forces withdrew from Grozny, the front seems to have stabilised to the south, between Goyti, Stary Atagi and Argun. The north west of Grozny is accessible and relatively safe, but the centre and south of the city are under constant fire. At night, the entire city is exposed to the risk of snipers. The Dagestan border is becoming increasingly difficult to cross. The Russians have barred all exits for the last few days. An ICRC car was turned back on Monday.

[...] Grozny: Following an evaluation of the four medical facilities to the north west of the city, the team plans to focus on two hospitals. [...] The south: The team has based itself in Kurtchaloi. Antoine (surgeon) is there, and will evaluate the surgical set up until Saturday or Sunday.

**In a press release taken up by the MSF International Office, the Belgian section announced the evacuation of eleven orphans from Grozny to Vedeno, where their teams were working in the hospital. It also announced the launch of a medical and sanitation programme to the east of Grozny. The MSF volunteers were shocked by the destruction in the capital, which they claimed was considerably worse than anything they had seen in other wars.**



*"Médecins Sans Frontières Evacuates 11 Children from Grozny Orphanage - New Medical and Sanitation Programme to be Launched,"* **Press release**, MSF International, 21 February 1995 (in English).

**Extract:**

During a recent exploratory mission in the Chechen capital, Grozny, Médecins Sans Frontières volunteers came across 11 orphans abandoned along with their nurse in a derelict building in a southern suburb of the town. Unlike 34 of their companions, the orphans aged from 7 to 11 years had not been able to find foster homes and were living in miserable conditions. MSF decided to evacuate all 11 by bus to Vedeno (20kms south of Grozny), the aid agency's Chechen base, where it is expected that they will all be taken in by local families.

In Grozny, MSF volunteers also observed that there was a large number of old people still living in the decimated area

around the presidential palace. They too live in deplorable conditions without running water or electricity. The local population is, in fact, obliged to draw water from the river. Medical needs in Grozny are not being met. The central hospital has been completely destroyed and although the local branch of the Red Cross has set up several temporary health posts, the necessary medicines are lacking. MSF will, therefore, launch a medical and sanitation programme in the eastern part of the capital for the vulnerable local populations.



*We went into Grozny with William Claus, during the last of the bombing raids. We made contact with the health authorities there. I remember the first meeting with the Ministry of Health took place under a table as the bombs were still raining down. The Russian troops were stationed all around the city, and shots were constantly ringing in the air. I'd been shocked by the violence of the Yugoslavian war, but things were far worse in Chechnya. Without trying to hide our presence, we'd reached Vedeno by some roundabout routes, and then used a system of hidden roads to reach Grozny. I wasn't expecting to find such a big city (I million inhabitants), and as we edged towards the city centre, the destruction just got worse and worse. The city centre itself was totally ravaged. Russian soldiers were moving around the area in tanks, wearing hoods and waving a banner with a dead man's head. The army was mostly made up of delinquents and ruffians. They were still shooting. Everything had been flattened, apart from a few buildings. The presidential palace had completely collapsed, and it was weird seeing the bullet-ridden concrete with its reinforcement bars all jagged and bent. We wondered where the people were. They were in basements under the buildings. So we went down to find them, leaving the car behind, as there were mines. They'd got themselves organised, with beds and kitchens set up in the dark, and a just a candle here and there. When the fighting died down, they went out to collect snow, to melt it. They ripped up park benches for wood, along with anything else they could find for heating and keeping the cooking fires going. I remember evacuating an old dying woman. She needed treatment for her heart and respiratory problems.*

Dr Alain Devaux, Programme manager MSF Belgium (1994-1996), (in French) interviewed in 2008.



*It was really hard getting into Chechnya. We reached Pyatigorsk, then moved on to Nazran. As we couldn't reach Grozny directly via Samashki, we went to the north of Chechnya, through the Russian Federation. We followed a kind of railroad, where a mass of refugees had put up their tents. We reached Khasavyurt (Dagestan). From there, we found a little road taking us into Chechnya from the east. I was with a doctor and a nurse. There were two cars loaded*

with medicines. We found someone from MSF Belgium. The first place we reached was Kurtchaloi. We set ourselves up in a borrowed house. We had one driver from Armenia, another one from Azerbaijan, even though their two countries were at war in Karabakh. We had an Uzbek interpreter. I think we were probably the first MSF France team to enter Chechnya, apart from the one that'd worked on the cholera in the summer of '94. So we started to take a good look around, making donations to hospitals. We had French interpreters, because the Russians refused to go into Chechnya. I remember a complicated border crossing because the soldiers wanted our syringes. Then we went on to Grozny, where we found a hospital, and a house to live in. Later on, when I visited the south of Kabul, in Afghanistan, I said to myself that Grozny was worse: 1.5 metres deep in rubble. Trees blackened and charred. The parliament building was completely flattened, the debris and ruins still in flames. We found ourselves a place in the northern suburbs, and then criss-crossed the city via the Russian checkpoints. There were 'nasty' and 'nice' Russians. The 'nice' soldiers requested lice and scabies treatment, because their hygiene conditions were so bad. The nasty ones were the highly paid mercenaries, the 'Kontraknikis.' They were really scary. The dogs roaming the city grew fat, and we didn't like to imagine what they'd been eating. One day, when heading for Shatoi, we were overtaken by a Mercedes, which then ground to a halt. The guys said that they didn't want our dressings and our medicines. What they wanted, they said, was that we talk to Chirac [President of the French Republic], to tell him to bring this war to an end. These guys pulled over on the road to tell us that. And I heard the same things from Chechens on several occasions.

Dr Brigitte Vasset, Director of Operations (1990-1998), Emergency Coordinator in Pankisi valley, (October 1999 to January 2000), MSF France (in French), interviewed in 2008.

**As the Russians were obstructing the team's movements and access to southern Chechnya, MSF France combined diplomatic steps and press releases to denounce the situation.**



**Letter** to the head of the territorial administration of the Chechen Republic, from Marie Davy, Coordinator for the Caucasus and Brigitte Vasset, Operations Director MSF France, 27 February 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

We have spent the last two weeks bringing convoys of medicines and/or medical supplies up to the Russian military checkpoints on the borders between Dagestan, Ingushetia and Chechnya. We have tried to transport these convoys across the borders ourselves, so as to ensure their safe delivery into the hands of our European doctors and nurses.

Our medical staff is currently working in two hospitals based in southern Chechnya. Another team should be starting work in Grozny this week, to be joined by a further team shortly. During our last meeting with the Head of the Provisional Council of the Chechen Republic, Mr. Avtourkhanov, and the Minister of Health of the Chechen Republic, Mr. Sadave, they approved of our endeavours and promised their support. [...] We are sometimes forced to take risks while going about our work. We are aware of this, and we accept it. If we do not find a way to adhere to these humanitarian principles, particularly access to all populations, those people in Europe who support us will not understand our approach. This is why we are insisting that we receive the documents required to transport these medicines and our volunteers into the Chechen Republic via the borders between Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Chechnya.



'Normalization,' **The Mission**, satirical in-house magazine of MSF France, 3 March 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

This morning at Saint Sabin, a little ambassador's breakfast took place on the subject of Chechnya. We denounced the burgeoning number of impediments to humanitarian assistance in the area. The representative of the Russian Embassy was present. He strongly held the usual lines: "We'll do everything we can. "It's not our fault; it's because of the war. And as for Dudayev's gang..." [...] Then he went one step too far: "I hope that the situation gets back to normal soon." The representative of the Czech Republic, who was sitting just to his left, replied: "Excuse me for pointing this out, but to my knowledge, it's the Red Army, not Dudayev's armed gang, who are assassinating the civilian population. And on that topic, I saw for myself what normalisation "à la Russe" means- in Prague in 1968. I wouldn't wish such a terrible experience on my worst enemy." We couldn't have said it better ourselves.



'Médecins Sans Frontières Barred from Entering Southern Chechnya.' **AFP** (France), 13 March 1995 (in French).

The Russian authorities have 'clearly forbidden' Médecins sans Frontières from entering southern Chechnya to transport medical material and medicines to Kurtchaloi and Shatoi, two villages located south of Grozny, MSF reported on Monday, in an announcement to AFP. MSF points out that the situation for the 250,000 displaced persons is going rapidly downhill, and they require urgent humanitarian assistance.

"The southern regions are struggling to cope with the displaced persons' needs and health conditions are getting worse and worse (rampant scabies)," declares the humanitarian organisation. "The situation is aggravated further still by a lack of the most basic medicines and surgical supplies. Food supply is also becoming more difficult," continues MSF. Furthermore, "Médecins Sans Frontières only



has three weeks of stocks left for its activities in Kurtchaloi hospital. The continuation of our work there is reliant on the urgent and regular supply of material," stresses the humanitarian organisation.

## WORKING UNDER FIRE

**The MSF Belgium team continued its work in Vedeno hospital, under the threat of the Russian air force, which bombed this region under the Chechen rebels' control.**

Vedeno was 7 km away from the front line. So the fighting was intense. The pressure was huge. I didn't know anything about war contexts, bombs, amputations or serious wounds. I ended up being Project Coordinator, even though this wasn't planned at all. I wasn't experienced enough, and it was really tough. People were stressed. I was stressed myself, about the team's security. In the end, our security strategy involved just keeping our heads down and working. Some journalists saw Russian helicopters dropping right down to the level of houses and throwing grenades through the windows. They also saw them firing rounds into fields where children played. The MIG<sup>22</sup> bombers were particularly destructive. We were amputating every day. There was one time when Christina, the nurse, and I went two days without a surgeon – it was a nightmare. There were bombing raids, and people were coming in with a leg missing, and so on. Things improved dramatically when Pablo, an Argentinean surgeon, arrived. He'd spent months barricaded in the hospital in the Bosnian enclave of Gorazde<sup>33</sup> and so had experienced this kind of situation before. Fighters came in for treatment too, and we really struggled to keep arms out of the hospital. I told them that we wanted to treat them, but we couldn't work in these conditions, and if they didn't leave their guns outside, we would leave. I remember we had to amputate most of one man's leg, and then he lost the other leg because of poor plastering. He was in charge of guarding the arms depot, and his own grenade went off while he was praying. He survived, and asked when he could go back to the front. The rebels also brought us Russian prisoners of war to treat. They had problems with infected scabies, due to their thick woollen uniforms. It was horrible. The Russian troops were malnourished and hungry. One night, the rebels came battering on our door to treat a young Russian who'd stolen some chickens. They'd wounded him, and they wanted us to treat

him. We thought that he'd died in surgery, but he survived. We also treated a Russian soldier who'd injected salt water into his feet to avoid going back to the front. We treated Afghans too. They'd come to help the Chechens fight against the Russians. It was really weird because they didn't speak Chechen, like the rebels, they spoke Russian, like their enemy. We met them at the hospital, and in the markets. Unlike the Chechens, who were dressed in fatigues, they were in Afghan outfits, with the rolled up hats. In Moscow, Christopher Stokes, the Coordinator, had warned the Russians that we had a team in Vedeno, and they couldn't pretend that they didn't know. So we hoped they wouldn't bomb us directly. But they still tried to intimidate us. They dropped their bombs less than a kilometre away from our house. At one point, we were outside the hospital and we saw them coming. There were so many wounded – one of the worst nights we had – children blown apart, some hideous wounds. I don't remember how many days we spent in the operating theatre, non-stop. We were under-staffed. So when the surgeons treating the rebels reached Vedeno, we worked with them. Then we decided that we needed to set up somewhere else. When we left, we gave them supplies so they could keep operating. We spent a bit of time in Dargoi, a little village, thinking about what we should do, because the tension was so high. The hospital director put us up in a house, and we distributed medicines. In the end, we set ourselves up in Makhkety, which was far calmer, to "relieve" some of the caseload from Vedeno, and then set up an extra surgical care unit.

[...], Project Coordinator, MSF Belgium in Chechnya, (1995), MSF USA Programme Department 2001-2002 (in French), interviewed in 2008

I was not working with MSF. But MSF was working at the places where I was surgeon. The majority of the population perceived MSF very well. As a surgeon, I understood that without their support we wouldn't manage with the scope of problems we had then. The support was very significant. The expatriates were really volunteers and they were taking risks. And there were people that were burning with the idea of humanitarianism.

B, MSF North Caucasus staff (in Russian, translated into English by an MSF interpreter) interviewed in 2008

2. MiG: Russian-made bomber plane.

3. In March – April 1994, an MSF team found itself trapped with the population of the Bosnian enclave Gorazde during a siege by the Serbian forces.

During the second half of March 1995, the Russians hurled bombs on the Chechen towns. The OSCE<sup>4</sup> representative stated publicly that access conditions for humanitarian aid were improving in Chechnya. The Belgian and French sections of MSF issued several press releases in response, along with a report describing the displaced population's plight and the health situation in Grozny. The report denounced the upsurge in civilian bombing in the south east of the country and the daily violations of human rights, including impediments to delivering assistance, inflicted by the Russian Federal army. On the 30 March, during a press conference, MSF Belgian volunteers, recently returned from Chechnya, described the difficulties faced by civilian populations and the problems in carrying out humanitarian work. In March, a MSF France team started working in Shatoi, southern Chechnya, offering support to the hospital and clinic staff.



*'Whilst the International Media Loses Interest in the Chechen Conflict, 80,000 People are Wandering the Ruins of Grozny,'* Press release, MSF Belgium, 22 March 1995 (in French).

MSF has set up a permanent base in Grozny to tackle the city's catastro-phic medical situation. Of the ten or so health centres operational before the war, only three (hospitals 9, 10 and 3) still offer care to the victims. Those people still trapped in the city live in precarious health and hygiene conditions. The 2 MSF Belgium expatriates based in the capital's east are setting up dispensaries all over the city and distributing the medicines and material required for surgery and medical consultations. 20,000 hygiene packs (soap, blankets, etc.) have been distributed so far, but a full charter is due to arrive shortly, carrying extra material (surgical and hygiene kits and medicines) in response to the urgent needs.

According to Doctor Alain Devaux, Programme Manager for Chechnya and recently returned from Grozny, the city has been pulverised by the bombing. Only 80,000 people are left (401,000 before the fighting broke out), living in the ruins of their houses without water, electricity or heating. The health situation is appalling. So MSF is sending in a water and sanitation specialist to supply the population with drinking water and a general logistician to organise the rehabilitation of medical facilities. The lack of water and hygiene combined with Grozny's exposure to the risk of cholera generate fears for future epidemics. MSF will be conducting epidemiological monitoring so as to fend off any potential outbreaks.

4. The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (The Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe up until 1995) is an international organisation composed of European states and those who came into being on the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The United States and Canada have an associated status. The OSCE's primary aims are to oversee the application of the Helsinki accords signed in 1975: non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, self-determination for people, the inviolability of borders drawn up after the second world war, increased cooperation and the guaranteed defence of human rights (freedom of movement, freedom of the press, etc.). It endeavours to maintain a dialogue between the states of Western Europe, the Russian Federation and Central Asia.

Meanwhile MSF has set up a surgical unit in Venedo, on the main evacuation route 60 kms south east of Grozny, offering surgery to the war wounded. Given the upsurge in fighting in the south, MSF has even opened an orphanage in Venedo. It has taken in 20 children so far, all evacuated from Stary Atagi. At present, there are 45 MSF expatriates working in Chechnya. They are based in Grozny, Venedo, Shatoi and Kurtchaloï, and Khasavyurt in Dagestan.



*'Massive Bombing of Several Chechen Towns. Médecins Sans Frontières Sends in a Full Charter of Supplies.'* Press release, MSF Belgium, 27 March 1995 (in French).

The situation in Chechnya is deteriorating day by day. The town of Shali and the outskirts of Venedo were heavily bombed this weekend, whilst Sergenyurt and Elistanji were pounded today. Shali is a ghost town; its population has fled. Only Russian soldiers roam the streets. Shali hospital patients were evacuated to Kurtchaloï and Venedo, where MSF teams are working. The roads linking Shali to Avturi and Makhkety have also been severely hit, and rising numbers of civilian wounded are being admitted to the hospital where MSF works. Thus MSF took the decision last Friday to send a full charter carrying 45 tons of medical, sanitation and logistics supplies to its MSF teams in the field. At present, there are 45 MSF expatriates involved in the Chechnya programme. They are based in Grozny, Venedo, Shatoi and Kurtchaloï in Chechnya, Khasavyurt in Dagestan and Nazran in Ingushetia.



*'Civilians Targeted in the Fighting,'* Press release MSF France, 30 March 1995 (in French).

While the special representative of the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is congratulating himself on the 'constant progress made' in his discussions with the Russian authorities about Chechnya, Médecins Sans Frontières insists on voicing its' concerns about the population's welfare in the south east of the country, still in the hands of Chechen rebels. Our teams in Chechnya have spent the last two weeks struggling to deal with the unacceptable consequences of the widespread bombing of civilians. The Russians' relentless pounding of the towns of Shali and Gudermes has now spread to the south of the country. Civilian refugees have taken refuge here, escaping the mayhem in and around Grozny. The towns and villages in the regions of Kurtchaloï and Venedo are now the targets of these indiscriminate raids, leaving untold numbers of victims in their wake.

On Monday 27 March, a building sheltering displaced persons in Elistanji (between Shatoi and Venedo) was hit. Other sites in the valley offering safe haven to civilians suffered similar fates, and a number of civilian wounded have been admitted to Venedo and Kurtchaloï hospitals, where Médecins Sans Frontières is based. The bombing makes it extremely

hard for the teams in Kurtchaloi hospital to work (10 to 30 admissions a day), and the operating theatre has been relocated to rooms fitted out underground.

The relentless bombing has uprooted the civilians once again, driving them to look for safety further south. Shali, previously a town of some 50,000 people, emptied completely when the Russian troops moved in on Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> March. But the fate of these displaced lurches from bad to worse: many places have already been inundated by waves of people, dating from the start of the war. Living conditions are extremely difficult, with no water, electricity or heating. These people have been living through four months of conflict, and are in critical need of medical and sanitation assistance. But humanitarian aid, already obstructed by the Russians from reaching areas in Chechen rebel hands, is further crippled by the indiscriminate bombing along the country's major roads. The few humanitarian organisations present in the country are thus completely unable to provide these displaced with the aid they need to survive.

Given this context, our teams in the field are struggling to understand the OSCE representative's claims that access conditions for humanitarian aid 'are improving.' The OSCE delegation has still not been allowed to evaluate the situation in Chechnya for itself, and considers their long-awaited arrival in Nazran, the capital of the neighbouring republic of Ingushetia, as 'progress.' In light of the daily violations of humanitarian law and impediments to the distribution of aid, Médecins Sans Frontières appeals for a firm and immediate reaction on the part of the international community. The Russians must be urged to respect the principles of the Geneva Conventions, which expressly condemn all acts of war targeting civilians and call for independent and impartial humanitarian organisations to have free access to the victims of war.



Chechnya: the Continuation of Humanitarian Aid Relies on Transport of Relief Supplies,' MSF France **report**, March 1995 (in French).

#### Humanitarian aid impossible

- 19 February: two vehicles loaded with medicines were turned back at a checkpoint on the road to Gudermes.
- 20 February: the same vehicles were turned back at the same place. The team tried to enter the Republic via another checkpoint, and access was again refused. It finally managed to enter Chechnya via a mountain road.
- 22 February: a car was turned back on the Chechen-Ingush border.
- 25 February: same refusal, same place.
- 2 March: agreement to allow two vehicles to cross over.
- 8 March: a truck was turned back on the Ingushetia border.
- 12 March: the same truck was turned back on the Dagestan border for 'administrative reasons.'
- 15 March: two cars loaded with medicines were also turned back at the Dagestan border. Over the past few days, the civilian population has been subjected to fresh waves of blind, intensive bombing. Humanitarian needs are constantly on the rise, yet convoys have been blocked

outside Chechnya for weeks. The vice tightens daily on the civilian population. Only Médecins Sans Frontières and the ICRC are present in southern Chechnya. The hospitals in this area are short of medicines and medical material. Médecins Sans Frontières' own stocks in Chechnya will be finished by the end of March. Without medicines and medical material, the Médecins Sans Frontières teams will be unable to continue their work among the Chechen people, whose fate gives increasing cause for concern with every day that passes.

#### Health facilities stripped bare: Kurtchaloi hospital as an example.

Located 30 kilometres south east of Grozny, Kurtchaloi currently accommodates 30,000 displaced persons – most of them from Grozny – on top of a pre-war population of 15,000. There is no electricity or gas in the village. The one hundred-bed hospital is also without electricity. The building runs on a generator. 90% of the hospitalised patients are war wounded. A lack of privacy, dilapidated sanitation facilities, a shortage of medicines and medical material all mean that the care and hygiene conditions in the hospital are desperate to say the least. Six patients are squeezed into rooms barely ten metres square.

The smell is nauseating: rubbish is piled up in the hospital's central corridor before auxiliary staff can take it out. There are only two toilets for nearly 100 hospitalised patients. The absence of showers means the patients cannot wash, even though some of them have been in hospital for over a month. The patients have to provide their own food and buy their own medicines – and prices of the latter have doubled since the war began. The dressings for patients with open wounds are only changed once every three days, so infections are rampant, resulting in amputation at times. Infections also spread by the shortage of suitable antibiotics. The hospital's only operating theatre is antiquated and short of surgical and sterilisation supplies. Those medical staff still at work have not been paid for over two years.

*\*[based on the ] Evaluation carried out by Médecins sans Frontières [in this hospital] from 15<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1995.*



**Email** from Iseult O Brien, MSF International to all Delegate Offices, 31 March 1995 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

As you already know, yesterday morning MSF Belgium gave a press conference denouncing the targeting of civilian zones in Chechnya. [...] The presentations were given by William Claus, former co-coordinator of the mission who described the current situation in Grozny, and Christina Schmitz, an MSF nurse, who had just returned from Vedeno. They described the current situation and showed a series of slides.

[...] William and Christina were particularly outraged that human rights continue to be violated on a daily basis. "Helicopters are launching attacks on villages – purely civilian zones – and continually injuring women and children. Most of the injured are suffering from shrapnel wounds." He also warned "thousands of refugees have fled into

neighbouring republics, such as Dagestan, where cholera is endemic in the region.” Although there has been no outbreak as yet, water is in short supply. “Most horrifying is the fact that splinter bombs, prohibited under the Geneva Conventions, are being used.”

Vedeno

On 4 March 1995, there was a helicopter attack on Vedeno, a village 60 kms to the south of Grozny, where MSF runs the hospital and has opened an orphanage. The hospital is under-equipped to treat these patients. MSF's 5 expatriates had “to decide who to operate and who to leave. The people are terrified of future attacks, which they fully expect. Health conditions are poor and almost everybody has scabies.”

Grozny

“Before the war, Grozny numbered 400,000 inhabitants. There are presently a mere 80,000 inhabitants and the city has been virtually flattened. The survivors are scraping out a living in the shells of buildings and underground cellars where they sleep on mattresses in overcrowded conditions. There is no main water source, so people are forced to use contaminated water supplies – and are forced to drink from puddles. There is of course no central heating. Some people light fires with construction material.”

In Grozny, MSF and ICRC are only NGOs present. After consultations with the ICRC, MSF has decided to step up activities in the city. Priorities include water supply (15 water points would be installed throughout the city), rehabilitation of a hospital to the north of the city, greater medical and surgical activity, and the launch of 10 new dispensaries.

**By late April 1995, the Chechen plains were under Russian army control. François Jean, Research Director for the MSF France Foundation, visited the region and initiated a network of contacts between Europe and the Caucasus. For years, his analysis and historical perspective helped the teams understand the context where they worked. He suggested that the teams collect information from the patients on the circumstances in which their wounds were inflicted, and then disseminate it.**



**Letter** from François Jean, MSF France Foundation, to Sylvie Gries and Natalia Dudova, Coordinator and Deputy Coordinator, MSF France, 29 April 1995 (in French).


Sylvie, Natalia

It's been a good day for contacts in Moscow. In a rush before I dash for the airport, here's a suggestion and a few impressions. First of all, we met members of Memorial, a Russian human rights organisation that is closely involved in Chechnya, and, according to Human Rights Watch, does some very good work (HRW supports it, especially for translation of some reports). After a long discussion on the respective vocations of humanitarian and human rights organisations, I took the liberty of broaching a possible future collaboration,


bearing in mind, of course, that you have the final say on this... I was extremely clear that we would not take active steps to collect information on individual abuses (we're not equipped for such work!). Likewise, an exhaustive listing of all humanitarian law violations seems completely beyond us. On the other hand, I do think it would be possible – given Natalia's presence in Nazran - or advisable (as we don't want to stay utterly silent about the major abuses we witness ourselves) to pass on information to Memorial about the main problems we see for ourselves. To be a bit clearer, the idea would be that when we receive the wounded from a bombed bus, or children who have been hit by a mine (to take a few recent examples), we would pass this info on to Nazarene, and Natalia would then pass it on to Memorial. The info should be factual only, of course, with no embellishments. E.g.: on the ... April, ... hospital received X civilians, wounded in the bombing of a bus. In short, we would just pass on information about major incidents (not stray bullets) when, through our medical work, we witness it for ourselves. And we should only report in factual form. I don't know what you think of this idea, but unless I'm mistaken, it's the type of information field missions pass on to journalists anyway when they come through, and I think it could easily be centralised in Nazran. [...] Otherwise, using more discreet tactics (no dissemination of info in the press or reports), we could, I think, if the occasion arises, let Memorial know when patients in our hospitals are being treated after torture or episodes of mistreatment. It would then be up to them to make contact with these persons and collect witness statements. But we should only do this if MSF is never cited as being part of this process.

Meanwhile, I had an unpleasant meeting with a representative of the State department, who was in Nazran for the Fred Cuny<sup>5</sup> investigation (the thousands of deaths in this war are nothing compared to the disappearance of one American citizen). Whether for their own ends or based on real info, he's convinced that Cuny was kidnapped by the 'nasty Chechens who are rebels, Islamists, and anti-American terrorists' (OK, he didn't use those terms exactly, but it amounted to as much). There's going to be a lot of back and forth on this subject over the next few days. If need be, if we are contacted, I have the impression - and I'm sure it's the case – it is useful to remember that independently of this climate of espionage, we have sometimes suffered from both sides. We haven't really suffered from any anti-western feelings, or been treated with excessive suspicion – by the Chechens at least, despite the fact that we drive around with big radio antennas! [...] On the contrary, I have the impression that our field teams talk more about the hospitality and welcome from the Chechens.

5. Fred Cuny, an American humanitarian volunteer known for his criticisms of the Russian's behaviour in the war, was held as a spy by the Russian authorities, and later disappeared in Chechnya in April 1995, along with two Russian Red Cross doctors and a translator.

 *I first went to Chechnya in October 1994, on a hunch. I knew that an independent republic had been created, and that dangers and tensions between Moscow and the new republic were mounting. The thing that really set off alarm bells in my head was the United Nations Security Council vote on Haiti. I honestly had the impression, like many others, that the Americans and Russians had cooked up a kind of deal to stay out of each other's backyard: the Russians didn't veto an American intervention in Haiti, and in return, with no real explanation, it was clear that they received carte blanche to clean up their own patch, particularly Chechnya. Once the war got going, I only went back in '95. I spent a week in the region, mostly in Chechnya. I was really critical of how the mission was being run. At that time, in April, there was a kind of logistic overload, and teams were spending 90% of their time and energy organising the stocks and material instead of tackling a delicate situation appropriately or reaching out to the people around them. They were locked in a kind of bubble. So I got heavily involved in the Chechen affair from Europe. I set up support networks, tracked down activists. As time passed, I set up a whole network of relations on the Chechnya issue, in Europe and in Chechnya itself, establishing connections between Chechens and universities, intellectuals, and European supporters.*


François Jean, Research Director MSF France Foundation (until December 1999), (in French) interviewed in 1998.

 *We only really developed our reading of Chechnya during François Jean's visit. I think we saw him at least twice. He'd seen the Chechen war coming. It's the only time I saw someone in MSF anticipate a war (there may be other examples) through strategic insight and positioning. In Russia, we were reading the papers, but we didn't have the historical overview of Chechnya that François was providing in Paris. We paid for this in the end, because it took us some time to understand what we were actually dealing with.*

Christopher Stokes, Coordinator MSF Belgium in Moscow (1994-1996), itw 2008 (in French) interviewed in 2008.

## **"HUMANITARIAN LAW FLOUTED IN CHECHNYA: MSF DENOUNCES THE BOMBING OF CIVILIANS IN SHATOI AND MAKHKETY"**

**In May, the bombing raids intensified in southern Chechnya. The MSF teams, alone in the south of the country, continued to work in basements or underground, alongside the Chechen surgeons. MSF Belgium's team provided surgical care in Makhkety hospital, leaving the Vedeno operating theatre to a Chechen surgical team. MSF France worked in Shatoi hospital.**

**In a press release dated 24 May, MSF Belgium appealed to the Russian army to "spare" the medical facilities in Makhkety, where its team represented the last medical resort for people fleeing the front line. Six days later, in a new release, MSF Belgium announced that the town had been bombed, and urged the Russian forces to protect its team and the hospital grounds. On their return from Chechnya, MSF volunteers continued to feed the press with accounts of what they had seen and experienced in the field. [V3](#) **



Médecins Sans Frontières Calls on the Russian Army to Spare Medical Facilities,' **Press release**, MSF Belgium, 24 May 1995 (in French).

Over the last month or more, dozens of the seriously wounded military and civilian people have been flocking to Médecins Sans Frontières' hospital in Makhkety, a small town located close to the current front line. Médecins Sans Frontières' surgical unit in Makhkety is the only sanctuary for many of the victims of this horrifying war. Our team, made up of a surgeon, an anaesthetist, a nurse, a doctor and a logistician, works around the clock to admit, treat and offer comfort to the mass of patients concerned. As the front line edges closer to Makhkety, the hospital, like Chechen hospitals elsewhere, could become a target for bombs. Médecins Sans Frontières thus appeals to the Russian troops to spare the town's medical facilities and their surroundings. They have been clearly marked with the organisation's logo. Extract from one of the last telexes sent by the Makhkety team: "MIG attacks this morning. From 07.15 through to midday. A bomb fell 300 metres away from the hospital. Some windows were shattered. The hospital is badly positioned, but we don't have any choice. The patients have been taken to the basements. [...] No more general hospital activities for the moment. Just haven't got the time.



'Médecins Sans Frontières Appeals to the Russian Army to Protect Medical Facilities,' **Press release**, MSF Belgium, 30 May 1995 (in French).

Médecins Sans Frontières has learned from its team in Makhkety that the town is currently being bombed. MSF urgently calls on the Russian authorities to ensure the protection of its team and spare the hospital, which serves as the only sanctuary for the victims of this war, whoever they may be. MSF also calls on the Russian troops to halt their blind bombing raids.



*We set up a hospital in the basement in Makhkety, where we fitted out an operating theatre and an emergency ward in the former kitchens. We disinfected everything and covered a table with plastic; it had been used in the past to prepare meat but we turned it into an operating table! We turned bunk beds into shelves. I also insisted on keeping the stock in the hospital. If there was a bombing raid, we were safer working in the basement. We had bomb shelters everywhere. One day, when we were eating breakfast at home, they bombed the hospital. We reached it via a bomb-shelter. All the patients were already there. We settled them on the shelves in the cellar. All the windows were shattered. There was a huge crater 100 metres away from the hospital. The Russians knew we were there; they were trying to intimidate us. [...] The MIGs flew overhead – they were so low we could see the pilots. [...] There was no way out. I was convinced they wouldn't kill humanitarian workers, but I had the impression that we'd dug ourselves a hole and we had to negotiate a way out. That's what happened in the end. When the new team arrived to replace us, I had to insist that they wore bulletproof jackets. They did. But when I told them that the Russian troops were just behind them, they didn't understand. We headed south – our mission was over and we were leaving the country. We handed over just in time. They started bombing Makhkety again soon after we'd left. The Russians finally arrived with their tanks. They set up a humanitarian corridor for the ICRC to transport the wounded, but they told the MSF team to 'get out.'*

[...], Project Coordinator, MSF Belgium in Chechnya, (1995), MSF USA Programme Department 2001-2002 (in French), interviewed in 2008

**On 27 May, MSF France called for a cease-fire to evacuate civilians from Shatoi. It stressed that the civilian population and medical facilities should not be targeted by Russian planes, in conformity with humanitarian law. Two days later, a new press release denounced bombing raids on the town itself and appealed for civilians to be spared and access granted for humanitarian aid.**



'Médecins Sans Frontières Calls for a Cease Fire to Evacuate Civilians,' **Press release**, MSF France, 27 May 1995 (in French).

Médecins Sans Frontières has learned Bombing in the south of the country has redoubled in intensity over the last two weeks, hitting the region of Shatoi, 60 km south of Grozny, particularly hard. This morning, civilians from villages around Shatoi called on the Médecins Sans Frontières team based in the hospital for help to cross the front line. These villagers were ready to abandon their homes because of the threat of Russian bombs. A convoy transporting more than 400 people (19 vehicles, including 10 trucks), accompanied by a Médecins Sans Frontiers car, spent all day Saturday waiting for a chance to leave. Another 10 vehicles were waiting in a village further south, hoping to join the convoy. But the bombardment was so intense, that the evacuation could not take place. Médecins Sans Frontières appeals to the Russian military authorities to agree an immediate ceasefire so this civilian convoy can move forward in safety.

Over the last 15 days, 74 victims of indiscriminate bombing raids have been admitted to Shatoi hospital, where the MSF team is based (a surgeon, a doctor, a nurse, a logistician, three translators and two drivers). The team has performed 50 surgical procedures, 33 of them major, in the last 10 days alone. Médecins Sans Frontières reiterates its call that the civilian population and medical facilities should not be bombed by the Russian forces, in conformity with international humanitarian law.



**Fax** from Sylvie Gries, MSF France Coordinator for the Caucasus, to François Calas and Martine Guillod, programme managers MSF France, 29 May 1995 (in French).

- MSF/B, MSF/F, ICRC meeting this morning with Stepanov, Tegorov's assistant + CL Panine.

The offensive has started, it can't be stopped. Civilians should leave during a ceasefire. We are barred from travelling to Shatoi over the next few days, until the front line is secured. Even if we try, they won't let us through. They're not hitting villages, but rebels. The Shatoi team will have to make do with the medicines it has.

Next meeting Wednesday at midday, no news before. MSF/B is going to try and get through tomorrow. We'll monitor the situation closely. FYI, a car managed to reach Kurtchaloi today, but couldn't get back. Ainga [MSF logistician] is going to try and get it through one more time. Three different routes have been tried so far... We'll keep you posted.



**Civilians Still Under the Russian Bombs in Shatoi.'** **Press release**, MSF France, 30 May 1995 (in French).

While the Russian bombs keep pounding the outskirts

of Shatoi (60km south of Grozny), hundreds of civilians have been desperately trying to leave the town since last Friday. Shatoi, wedged between the Caucasian mountains and the ever-approaching front line, has become a trap for its inhabitants caught under a hail of Russian bombs. Last Sunday, a bomb blew apart a house on the road leading into Shatoi, killing four people and wounding two others. Another fell 400 metres away from the hospital, which then had to be evacuated. The most seriously wounded patients were transferred into the basements that have been turned into operating theatres by Médecins Sans Frontières. This makeshift set up is now at saturation point, following the arrival of yet more freshly wounded.

Médecins Sans Frontières, who last Saturday called for a ceasefire to evacuate the town's civilians, met the Russian military authorities in Moscow on Monday. The latter refused to halt the fighting, and barred the passage of any convoys (civilians or humanitarian workers) going to or coming from the North. As has been the case since the war first begun, they claimed to be only targeting 'rebels.' As has been the case since the war first begun, Médecins Sans Frontiers regularly bears witness to the fact that the civilian population is its foremost victim – either because they have to flee or because they are dying in droves. Access to humanitarian aid in this region, still in the Chechen rebels' hands, is completely blocked by the Russian military.

Once again, Médecins Sans Frontières urgently calls for:

- the civilian population to be spared from the fighting, and for those who wish to leave Shatoi to be given safe passage accordingly;
- the unconditional access for humanitarian aid to reach these people.

**In the field, the teams tried to negotiate with the Russian soldiers in vain. On the 2 June, following an ultimatum posed by General Kulikov, commander of the Russian forces, the MSF team evacuated Shatoi, along with several hundred civilians, via a humanitarian corridor negotiated by the OSCE. On the same day, MSF Belgium and MSF France disseminated a joint press release announcing the forced evacuation of their teams from southern Chechnya and denouncing the Russian forces' clean-up operations, being conducted unobserved.**

**During a meeting on 9 June, MSF France's Board of Directors discussed its future involvement in Chechnya, both on the operations front and in terms of advocacy. General Kulikov refused to meet Philippe Biberson, the president of MSF France. In the English-speaking daily, "The Moscow Times", Christopher Stokes, MSF Belgium's Coordinator, denounced the denial of access imposed by the Russian forces – a situation that MSF had rarely come across elsewhere, including Rwanda, where the organisation had managed to reach all victims.**



**Message** from Natalia Dudova, Assistant Coordinator, MSF France in Chechnya, to the MSF France programme manager, 2 June 1995 (in French).

Hi Martine,

I managed to see Kulikov at 9.30 this morning. I was on my own because Thierry, from the Belgians, didn't manage to get there in time. So I told Kulikov that we were leaving that day. He 'congratulated' me on this initiative, telling me that our 'mission' was over in Chechnya. He told me that we wanted us in Grozny by 18:00 at the latest. Our only choice was to leave, and we should do just that, today.

Neither the ICRC, the OSCE nor MSF could return to the South without his personal permission. He called Trochev (commander of operations in the South) while I was there, and ordered him to block all passage to international organisations, with no exceptions. He told me: "You can help as many people as you want in the plains, but not in the mountains. You can stay in Grozny or Kurtchaloi as long as you like. But if you don't leave Makhkety and Shatoi today, your work in Chechnya will be over, and you'll answer to me personally. He also ordered Trochev to arrange a safe passage for the Belgians, so they could leave today too. A military doctor was present throughout the meeting: Kulikov asked him to "witness the discussion." You can imagine what the atmosphere was like...



**'Declared Persona Non Grata in the Region of Shatoi and Makhkety, MSF is Forced to Withdraw from Southern Chechnya,' Press release, MSF Belgium, MSF France, 2 June 1995 (in French).**

*MSF Belgium:* Southern Chechnya is being brought to its knees by the sharp escalation in widespread and indiscriminate bombing raids conducted by the Russian armed forces. All transportation of aid to the south has been blocked since 23 May. The Russian army has expelled Médecins Sans Frontières' surgical team from its underground hospital in Makhkety. The village fell into Russian hands two days ago. In Shatoi, still under the bombs, Médecins Sans Frontières' medical-surgical team has spent the last week operating on the wounded in a basement, in an operating theatre cobbled together by the team. Both teams were forced to leave today.

General Kulikov, the head of the armed forces in the Ministry of the Interior, in charge of operations in Chechnya, met with an MSF representative in Grozny this morning. He issued an ultimatum: all MSF teams had to be out of Shatoi and Makhkety by 18:00 tonight. He made it clear that no passage would be accorded thereafter.

[MSF France] Declared persona non grata in the region of Shatoi and Makhkety, MSF is forced to withdraw from southern Chechnya. Since 11 May, the Shatoi region has been brought to its knees by the sharp escalation in widespread and indiscriminate bombing raids conducted by the Russian armed forces. Médecins Sans Frontières' medical-surgical team has spent the last week operating on the wounded in a basement, in an operating theatre cobbled together by

the team. Another team was operating in the neighbouring village of Makhkety, and has also been obliged to withdraw. All transportation of aid to the south has been blocked since 23 May. General Kulikov, the Head of the Armed Forces in the Ministry of the Interior, in charge of operations in Chechnya, met with an MSF representative in Grozny this morning. He posed an ultimatum: all MSF teams had to be out of Shatoi and Makhkety by 18:00 tonight. He made it clear that no passage would be accorded thereafter. [...] *MSF Belgium/MSF France*: This warning heralded the final assault on Shatoi, one of the last regions under rebel control, and one that harbours a number of civilians caught between the bombing, the approaching front and the Caucasian mountains. Without medical assistance or any foreign presence, these civilians have been utterly abandoned to their fate. Sticking to the tried and tested methods of Grozny and Samashki in particular, the Russian military forces are now free to pursue their clean-up and normalisation operations in Chechnya in total impunity and without witnesses.



*'Russians Capture Dudayev Stronghold'* by Thomas de Waal, *The Moscow Times* (Moscow), 6 June 1995 (in English).

#### Extract:

Shortly before Vedeno fell, Médecins sans Frontières, or MSF, said it had been ordered out of two southern Chechen villages. Christopher Stokes, the organization's Moscow coordinator, said Kulikov, at a private meeting in Grozny on Friday morning, had ordered the organization to quit the region by 6 p.m. the same day.

Kulikov told them they could not return there for the next two months, a time limit which may allow Russian forces to complete their conquest of southern Chechnya. MSF was the last international humanitarian relief body in rebel-controlled territory, where "from a medical point of view the needs are enormous," Stokes said in an interview Monday. "Our greatest fear is that for the first time since the start of the war there will be no humanitarian presence in areas not controlled by federal troops," he said.

MSF had a French medical team in the village of Shatoi and a Belgian one in Makhkety. They had set up field hospitals and were tending both wounded civilians and combatants, Stokes said, despite heavy shelling, which blew in the windows of the Makhkety hospital. They had already managed to evacuate 300 civilians from Shatoi. The French team decided to leave Shatoi on Friday anyway, because the fighting was so bad, Stokes said. In Makhkety, Russian troops drove the six-person Belgian medical team from their hospital, when they entered the village Friday.

Stokes said Kulikov's order ran counter to verbal assurances and the permission of the Chechen provisional Prime Minister, Salambek Khadzhiev, and was against all international practice.

"It is quite rare that we are denied complete access to one side," Stokes said, citing experience in other wars. Despite the difficulties there, MSF managed to work on both sides

in the Rwandan conflict, he said. He said MSF had been independent observers in southern Chechnya and "we wanted witnesses there to prevent any Samashki-type incidents occurring," he said, referring to the killing of civilians in the western Chechen village of Samashki in April.

An aide to Kulikov in Moscow, who declined to be named, said Monday that he was not familiar with the details of the case but that "the situation does not allow" the continued presence of humanitarian organizations in the region. "I can dispute with you what kind of humanitarian aid is going on there," he said, but refused to clarify his remarks.



**Minutes** of the MSF France Board of Directors meeting on 9 June 1995 (in French).

#### Extract:

It's impossible to be with the civilian population. We think there are about 400,000 internally displaced, but many of them left before the war started, and there are quite a few Russians in the population captive in Grozny. We registered 140,000 refugees in Ingushetia, but it's hard to count the internally displaced and conduct an evaluation mission in the mountains.

There are some serious hygiene problems, and we're "expecting" cholera. We're seeing increasing anti-Russian feelings in the Caucasian region. There's real solidarity between the Ingush and Chechen people, but we don't know if it goes hand in hand with military aid. The question is: What should we do next? Should we stay in Chechnya or leave? Should we go back to Shatoi? Etc.

Kulikov is the only figure we can negotiate with, but this is "his" war and he doesn't want to see anyone. Up to now, he's refused to meet Philippe Biberson – currently in Chechnya – because of MSF's press releases on what's going on. A discussion took place on what attitude MSF should adopt. Martine [Guillod, programme manager] suggested collating all the information into a white paper, disseminating it and spelling out what's been happening in Chechnya since December. But this option gave rise to some questions, as Mado [Nurse, just returned from Chechnya] pointed out that we've heard about many atrocities, but we didn't seem them for ourselves (other than the war and the bombing). How can we bear witness on what we experienced while disassociating that from the war? Once you've got a war, when do the atrocities begin? (Alain Devaux)

If the Russians aren't creating clear and definitive obstacles to humanitarian action (François Jean, MSF Fondation), it's because they don't need to – the bulldozer's making ground. (Odile Cochetel). We should wait for Philippe's return to move this discussion forward.

**On 16 June, MSF France circulated a report describing what its team had been through when Shatoi was taken, preceded by an editorial denouncing the 'dirty war' led by the Russian forces and the impunity they enjoyed.**





'Humanitarian Law Flouted in Chechnya: the Example of Shatoi,' MSF France **report**, 16 June 1995 (in French).

### Extract:

Ten months after the fighting began, the war is still raging in Chechnya, leaving devastation in its wake: most towns are in ruins, there are thousands of freshly dug graves and hundreds of thousands of people have been uprooted...

The destruction of Grozny, a city of 400,000 inhabitants, is a tragic illustration of the methods employed to liquidate the 'rebel groups.' Since the bloody failures of the first Russian offensives on the capital, which resulted in all out carnage for the young recruits used as cannon fodder, the military authorities settled for wiping out the pockets of resistance with a veritable deluge of artillery fire, then occupying the ruins and "normalising" them, using the tried and tested methods of draconian enforcement. In this respect, Grozny seems less like Beirut, Mogadishu or Sarajevo than Hargeisa, in Somalia, blown to smithereens by Siyad Barré in 1988, or Hama, in Syria, methodically bombed in February 1982 before being delivered to the forces of repression.

All the major cities in Chechnya have been subjected to wide-scale and indiscriminate bombing, leading to heavy losses among the civilian population. Furthermore, the war's foremost victims, the civilians' plight becomes ever more dire: the Russian troops have been taking them hostage, using them as bargaining chips for the surrender of fighters. Under the threat of blind bombing raids, many villages have tried to save themselves by submitting to the Russian armed forces. However, the promises made are not always respected, as demonstrated in the tragic case of Samashki: once the departure of fighters had been secured, two hundred defenceless civilians were massacred on 7<sup>th</sup> April. Apart from the escalation in bombing raids and military operations in the mountains of southern Chechnya (still in separatist hands), the fighting has spread right up to the towns controlled by the Russian forces. This is a dirty war, made up of ambushes and reprisals, arrests and disappearances, torture and summary executions...

After six months of bombing and large-scale offensives, the Russian forces have gradually become an occupying army, and the presence of humanitarian organisations is even less welcome than ever. Thus Médecins Sans Frontières was forced to leave southern Chechnya on 2nd June. With the withdrawal of the only humanitarian organisation still present in the non-controlled zones, the civilian population has been utterly abandoned to the unstoppable Russian war machine. There are no outside observers to monitor the outcome. Over and above the egregious halt to any medical aid in the south, MSF's forced withdrawal may well have direct repercussions on the population's fate, in protection terms at least, as the underlying principles of the Geneva Conventions have been systematically violated since the start of the war, and this in complete impunity.

In an effort to "re-establish constitutional order", the Kremlin has resorted to brutal and arbitrary methods, with little respect for the law, or indeed human life. To 'clean up the rebel groups,' the Russians have bombed their own fellow-

citizens and recruited mercenaries to sow seeds of terror throughout the civilian population. It should not matter that this population is governed by Russian 'internal affairs,' but sadly, in the case of Chechnya, western countries are trading human rights for the delicacies of realpolitik.


### Civilians caught up in the war

The Russian army states that it only targets Chechen rebels, but MSF can attest that civilians are in no way spared by this war, and that the underlying principles of the Geneva Convention are being flouted to the hilt. Whilst General Kulikov was explaining MSF's forced withdrawal from the Shatoi region for security reasons, he said that Natalia, MSF's Assistant Coordinator voiced surprise that he had focused on this point. Natalia: "But you told us yourself that the military doesn't bomb civilian sites, let alone medical facilities." Kulikov: "But you know very well that bombs can veer off course."

### Testimonies


[...] Nadine D, Nurse and Project Coordinator in Shatoi  
 "From the moment the Shatoi offensive restarted, the majority of our patients were civilians - around 80% of them. Mortar shards caused most wounds. We carried out a lot of amputations. Some of the wounded had shrapnel in their bodies of up to 5-6 centimetres long. These were bombs that sprayed shrapnel on explosion, causing horrific damage. On arrival, the patients often talked about 5 or 6 dead people they'd left behind. These civilians really didn't understand why the Russian army kept hammering away at them."

[...] Sara S, interpreter in Shatoi  
 "One of the last wounded patients we treated told us that his village, Barzoi, had reached an agreement with the Russian military, swearing that there were no more fighters or arms in the village - only civilians, who should be spared. The Russian army didn't stick to its word. This man had lost two of his daughters, hit by mortar shards during the bombing. He was in total shock. The rest of his family was hiding in the forest, but he didn't know where they were, and he was terrified."

 *We really wanted to stay. But the bombing intensified. We carried out surgery in the basements, and consultations on the hospital's first floor. But eventually the Coordinator said that we couldn't keep going. The situation had become so tense that we decided to evacuate. So we formed a column of cars, with all the hospital patients who wanted to leave. The patients in one of the two basements wanted to stay. When I went back some time later, this basement had been totally destroyed. When the cars started to move off the entire village evacuated behind us. The military offensive was really huge. As if it they aimed to flatten the place, with their delayed action bombs and rockets fired from planes. I don't know what arms they were using exactly, but when we saw the results, we could feel they wanted to wipe*

*the village out. We took parallel roads, but we were still bombed. It was really dangerous. We waited for the Red Cross to recover the wounded; some of them were soldiers.*

Vincent de Bellefroid, MSF France Project Coordinator in Shatoi, Chechnya, February to May 1995, then August 1996 to July 1997, then Project coordinator in North Caucasus (June to October 2001) (in French), interviewed in 2008.

 *I was a surgeon working in Chatoi in 1995. We were not working in MSF but we were collaborating with MSF in the same hospital. I remember this girl of about ten or twelve and she ended up in the bombardment. She was hit by the shell and she died in my bare hands with her eyes like this big. And, well, the war goes on. There was always chaos. Lots of people were trying to save their own lives. At one moment, we had organized a convoy. MSF was the organization in charge of this convoy and we tried, to take out the immobile patients, who could not move out of the place of hostilities. We were moving through villages, bypassing rules, taking detoured roads. The convoy went through without any problems and we managed to dispatch these patients in Urus Martan. It wasn't possible to continue working in Chatoi. We were working in different places. Everyone was working in the place he could find himself.*

A, MSF North Caucasus staff (in Russian, translated into English by an MSF interpreter) interviewed in 2008

**On 20 June, Philippe Biberson, President of MSF France, wrote a letter to the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly describing the situation observed by MSF's volunteers in Chechnya, and deploring the fact that during the European parliamentary members' visit to the country on the 9 June, they had failed to meet up with our teams to learn more of the situation on the ground.**



**Letter** from Philippe Biberson, President of MSF France, to Miguel Angel Matrinez, President of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, 20 June 1995 (in French).

#### **Extract:**


Whilst working in Chechnya, we have encountered a series of obstacles to the provision of medical aid (in February and March in the Kurtchaloi region, and in March in the Shatoi region). We still face problems with the circulation and distribution of humanitarian assistance in regions secured by the Russian army. In keeping with our principle of assisting people most affected by war, we were present

amongst the Chechens until the day our teams' security could no longer be guaranteed. We thus withdrew from Shatoi and Makhkety on 2nd June. However, other teams pursue their activities in Grozny and the Kurtchaloi region, and through their presence we have witnessed the impact of these armed operations on human rights.

Médecins Sans Frontières was the only humanitarian organisation with an uninterrupted presence in southern Chechnya until the 2nd June. The war in Chechnya is being, and always has been, fought with the utmost disregard for the civilian population's right to be spared. Worse still, these people are often targeted, their belongings looted, and their homes destroyed in efforts to place Chechen fighters under pressure.


We find it deplorable that the meeting planned between our organisation and parliamentary members did not, in the end, take place. The latter were in Chechnya on the morning of 9<sup>th</sup> June to analyse this very human rights issue. It was indeed advisable for the Human Rights sub-commission of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly to have made some time for our representatives. Our team would have shared their findings and observations gathered through MSF's medical work in Chechnya carried out over these last few months.

**During this period, the press agency Reuters drew the attention of MSF Belgium's Coordinator in Moscow to accusations of arms transportation levied against MSF by the Russian authorities.**

 *We received a telephone call from Reuters who told us that the Russian army, or the FSB [Russian Intelligence], had accused us of transporting arms in our vehicles. I hadn't heard these accusations, and Reuters asked me: "What do you have to say?" I was caught totally off guard, and I think I said "no comment." Reuters replied: "No comment? What do you mean, no comment?" So I said: "Wait. Come to the office, we'll organise a press briefing." So we organised a press briefing in Moscow, with about ten Russian journalists. We called the field, and we replied to the accusations of arms transportation. It was one of the first times we were really put on spot by the authorities.*

Christopher Stokes, Coordinator MSF Belgium in Moscow (1994-1996), itw 2008 (in French) interviewed in 2008.

**In late June, a group of Chechen fighters led by commander Shamil Basayev attacked the town of Budennovsk, in southern Russia, and seized the hospital taking several**

hundred hostages. The Russian forces attacked the hospital, resulting in 200 deaths, whilst the rebels pulled back into Chechnya. When the convoy of hostages passed through Khasavyurt, a team from MSF Belgium managed to treat the wounded. This information was reported in a press release on 20 June. 



*'Chechen Gunmen Head Home; Deal Lets Rebels Quit Russian City with Volunteers,'* by Lee Hockstader, **The Washington Post** (USA), 20 June 1995, (in English).

**Extract :**

Buses carrying a band of Chechen gunmen and scores of 'volunteer' hostages wound their way through southern Russia toward the breakaway region of Chechnya tonight, as a five-day ordeal of mayhem and hostage taking apparently neared its end. [...] Earlier, more than 700 hostages walked safely out of a hospital in this provincial city, where they had been held since last Wednesday by Chechen rebels. Under the terms of a deal with the Russian government, the gunmen, numbering about 70, were allowed to leave on six buses, accompanied by 139 politicians, journalists and others who the government said had volunteered for the trip and whom the rebels used as human shields. [...] The men, women and children held captive since last Wednesday were released under a deal brokered during two days and nights of tense telephone negotiations between Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and Chechen guerrilla leader Shamil Basayev. In addition to promising safe passage to the hostage-takers, the government also ordered a cease-fire by its forces in Chechnya -- about 100 miles south of here and 1,000 miles south of Moscow -- and sent a high-level team there to begin negotiations with Chechen separatists. [...] Before boarding the buses, the volunteer captives were presented with disclaimer forms to sign excusing the government from any responsibility for their safety. "It is a rather risky undertaking," said Russian Interior Ministry spokesman Vladimir Voroshtov. "The word 'hostage' no longer applies from the moment they get on the bus."



*'Info Update, Chechnya: MSF Manages to Treat Hostages,'* **Press release** MSF Belgium, 20 June 1995 (in French).

Towards 07:00 this morning (09:00 local time), the convoy of hostages coming from Budennovsk stopped in Khasavyurt in Dagestan, at the roundabout on the way into town. Teams from Médecins Sans Frontières and the International Committee of the Red Cross managed to treat the wounded. Around ten of them were in a serious condition. They also provided the hostages with water, food and medicines. Towards 16:00 (17:00 local time), the convoy continued on its way, heading for the village of Novolak, in southern Chechnya.

On 30 July, a military agreement was signed between the Russian forces and the Chechen separatists. On 31 July, Boris Yeltsin disbanded the Russian Federation's Human Rights Commission and the Constitutional Court found the military intervention in Chechnya to be constitutional. On 2 August, Dzhokhar Dudayev, President of Chechnya, signed a decree creating a regular Chechen army, 'not bound by the agreements.'



*'The War in Chechnya Found to be Constitutional,'* Sophie Shihab, **Le Monde** (France), 2 August 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

The use of armed force to resolve an internal ethnic conflict, even on the scale of events in Chechnya over the last seven months, is now 'absolutely constitutional' in Russia. This was the finding of the Constitutional Court in Moscow on Monday 31<sup>st</sup> July, to the government's satisfaction and the utter dismay of the country's remnants of active democracy. "Power has once again been concentrated in the governments' hands," deplores Sergei Kovalev. The Russian Human Rights Commissioner also reacted in much the same terms to Boris Yeltsin's decision, delivered on the same day, to revoke his commission. It was the last remaining space for an independent voice within the governmental structures. Parliament's impotence in the face of the executive is well known. All the deputies' votes on Chechnya were brushed aside, and it took them five further months to refer their complaints to the Constitutional Court. They accused the executive of acting illegally in its orders to launch the war. The Court then awaited the signing of an initial agreement between the Russians and Chechens in Grozny last Sunday (...) before handing down its' finding. All of which implies that the "President can once again, should he so wish, unilaterally decide to deploy an armed intervention anywhere in Russian," Sergei Kovalev believes.

**In the summer of 1995, refugees started returning to Grozny, where MSF was supporting various health facilities, largely destroyed during the war. During their consultations, the patients described the violence they had been forced to endure, to MSF volunteers.**



*We went there for distribution not only in the centre of the city but also in the suburbs of Grozny. We were looking for people in basements, in hidden places. For instance, once we heard there were wounded people and we visited this family: a man and his son who were wounded by a Russian. They told their story while the nurse was putting the bandages. In the surgical ward, where mainly wounded*

people were, they were telling their stories themselves saying 'I was sitting some where and the soldiers came and they fired at me' and they showed their wounds. They would say that they do not mind that their stories were written down or even explained. They were saying over the TVs that they were expecting their rights to be respected. During the first war people were more open, not like it is now. The fear appeared after the first campaign.

E, MSF North Caucasus staff (in English)  
interviewed in 2008

## HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE AGAINST HUMANITARIAN TEAMS

Meanwhile, humanitarian workers were increasingly exposed to harassment and assault. In June, a Russian tank targeted an MSF Belgium car. In August and September, MSF France's base in Grozny had to deal with three armed attacks. On 28 September, MSF's new base was attacked, even more violently than before, so the mission closed.

On 13 October, the MSF Belgium team was harassed at a checkpoint. On the 30, armed men in Grozny held up the ICRC team. On 15 November, it was MSF Belgium's turn to be robbed, forcing activities to a halt for a week. On the 22 November, the team was caught in an ambush between the Russians and Chechens. On 25 December the team was again, held up by armed men.

In January 1996, a Russian helicopter fired on an MSF Belgium truck, killing the Chechen driver. An MSF Belgium volunteer was held hostage for several hours in Vedeno. The MSF France team in Karabulak, Ingushetia, was robbed. In late February, MSF Belgium's base in Vedeno was the target of an attempted armed robbery. In March, a loaded MSF France truck was stolen from a warehouse in Nazran. un entrepôt à Nazran.



'MSF Team Attacked by the Russian Army,' **Press release**, MSF Belgium, 25 June 1995 (in French).

In the early afternoon of 24 June, an MSF car left its base in Vedeno, heading for Dargo, with humanitarian material on board (blankets, hygiene kits). A doctor, a logistician, a translator, and a driver were part of the MSF team delivering these supplies. Three kilometres from Vedeno, the team heard two warning shots fired a few metres in front of the car. The driver swung into a u-turn, but the car hit a volley of fire, and bullets started piercing the doors. Hands in the air, the passengers climbed out of the vehicle, with shots flying over their heads. Some minutes later, a Russian tank arrived on

the scene. After a thorough search of the car, the team had to backtrack to Vedeno.

Médecins Sans Frontières is deeply shocked by this hostile act on the part of the Russian forces, at the very time the Russian army had announced a ceasefire for the peace talks due to take place with the Chechen separatists. Médecins Sans Frontières has complained to the military and civil authorities in Moscow, and calls for the persons responsible for this incident to be sanctioned.



**List** of Security Incidents in Chechnya, Merlin, 24 December 1996, (in English).

### Extract:

Aug/Sept:[...]

MSF F two armed robberies at base in Pervomaiskoye.

18-24 Sept 95: [...]

MSF/F armed robbery at base in Pervomaiskoye.

28 Sept 95: [...]

MSF F armed robbery at new house in Katayama (closed mission). [...]

13 Oct 95: [...]

MSF B caught in Chechen/Russian ambush outside Popedinskoe. [...]

15 Nov 95: [...]

MSF B caught in Chechen/Russian ambush outside Popedinskoe. [...]

25 Dec 95: [...]

MSF B armed robbery from base in Popedinskoe. [...]

11 Jan 96: [...]

MSF B expat held hostage for a couple of hours in Vedeno. [...]

30 Jan 96: [...]

MSF F in Karabulak, were robbed by armed men. [...]

27 Feb 96:[...]

MSF B in Vedeno had an attempted robbery. 3 or 4 armed men tried to break into the house, but were deterred following a confrontation with the owner.



**Message** from Thierry and Hilde, MSF Belgium, Grozny to Alain and Roby, MSF Belgium programme manager, 26 December 1995 (in English).

1) Brian, Tim and Andres walked home a few minutes before 9:00 pm Christmas night.

2) On the road app. 60 meters from our house an old passenger car stopped, 5 of the 6 men in the car got out, grabbed us, and took us to the end of the street. One man had a small knife, and another a Kalashnikov gun. In the car, was a bazooka.

3) All of us then drove to an empty warehouse. The men did not seem very familiar with the area. Only two of them were wearing masks. None of them spoke any English. The driver was the oldest, the front seat passenger was looking like a Chechen fighter and had hard eyes. The other 4 were peons.

4) Tim and Andres were then separated from Brian. We were

asked who spoke Russian the most. I volunteered my limited translating skills (free of charge).

5) Andres gave me the key to the safe. Now we just needed the key to the radio room. It was established that Sophie had this key.


6) After long discussion with the three men in the car, it was decided that I would get the key and Sophie and return to the vehicle. They would not let me return with only the key. I was repeatedly told that if anything went wrong Tim and Andres would be shot. Most fortunately Sophie had the key and was able to come with me.

7) Next we drove to the office and Sophie went to the empty the safe. One of the men was fondling Sophie. Her safety and well-being were in serious doubt...until the old man told the other to stop. One of the men followed Sophie to the gate of the office but did not enter the compound.


8) They told us if Sophie would not come back after three minutes they would kill Brian.

9) We then returned to Tim and Andres at the warehouse. After some time they came to the car. Everyone got into the vehicle except two of the peons who left by foot.


10) We were then safely deposited near the office.

 *I wasn't at all surprised that we became the target of so many hold ups, or that we were the first NGO to leave in September '95, following repeated attacks of this kind. As far as I could see, each incident took place around pay time, at the end of the month. But in between the two hold ups, hardly any initiative was taken, no efforts were made to reach out to the neighbourhood, respected public figures, or the authorities to discuss the problems with them, and make sure they didn't happen again.*

François Jean, Research Director MSF France Foundation (until December 1999), (in French) interviewed in 1998.

 *At the time, when there was a whole series of attacks, MSF had a high volume of activities in Chechnya. We were far too visible. We were covering way too many zones, all MSF sections combined. MSF was running around everywhere. We emptied entire trucks of medicines into the hospitals. We knew we'd certainly ruffled some feathers with our presence, but we also attracted the out-and-out criminal kind, because our safes were constantly being robbed. We had a lot of cash in the field; we were running a big outfit. When there was robbery after robbery, we ended up evacuating from Chechnya, but we stayed in the Northern Caucasus. One of our big questions was: "if we re-open, how should we do it?"*

Graziella Godain, Emergency Coordinator, the Northern Caucasus, MSF France, February to October 1996, (in French), interviewed in 2008.

**Meanwhile, on 10 January 1996, a commando unit of separatist Chechens took a thousand civilians hostage in Kizlyar hospital, Dagestan. They then took one hundred of their prisoners and retreated to the village of Pervomayskoye, which the Russians proceeded to siege and bomb. Members of MSF Belgium's team in Dagestan offered to provide the hostages with medical care. MSF Belgium called publicly on the President of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin, to intervene with the military authorities so as to secure an evacuation of the wounded. V5** 



**Memo** from Anouk Delafortrie, MSF Belgium Press Officer to all communications departments, 11 January 1996 (in English).

For your info: some of you might have seen an MSF volunteer being interviewed concerning the taking of hostages by the Chechen rebels. MSF has a team of 3 people in Chazavjurt, a town in Dagestan near the Chechen border. Els Mathieu is a Belgian MD and together with the other team members she has been carrying out a medical and sanitary assistance programme for the Chechen refugees that have fled the conflict in the neighbouring republic. She has been following the convoy with 160 to 200 hostages together with the International Red Cross and journalists (Reuter, AFP should be there).

She first went to Kizljär yesterday, then to the village of Pervomaikskaya on the border between Dagestan and Chechnya. Today she managed to talk to some of the hostages (ICRC didn't), who looked very anxious. The convoy is stuck in the village for the time being. Els finally returned to Chazavjurt this evening and will return to the village tomorrow. Although she has offered to help and suggested to put up an emergency post, the Russian commanders have kindly declined the offer. The rebels, however, asked for food for the hostages and themselves and also for medical care for some of their men. A Russian medical team is present, but Els is convinced the rebels don't want Russians to come in and provide help. We managed to have a brief contact with Els over ICRC's phone this evening. It is difficult to reach her (especially during the day) since MSF doesn't have telephone, only telex. She however continues to talk with the journalists that are present.



**Letter** from Eric Goemaere, General Director of MSF Belgium, to Boris Yeltsin, President of the Russian Federation, 17 January 1996 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

This fighting represents a real danger for the innocent hostages held captive in Pervomayskoye. We therefore appeal to you, as part of our humanitarian mandate, to intervene with the military authorities present on the ground so as to evacuate the wounded and sick to the different hospitals in the region. Such an operation must take place in full security,

so we urge you to arrange a ceasefire for the time required by our teams to see it through. In the hope of saving these victims, please accept, Mister President, our very best regards.

**On 21 January, the Council of Europe parliamentary members<sup>6</sup> passed a unanimous vote accepting Russia's membership, without making any particular demands with regard to the human rights situation in Chechnya. Yet this issue lies at the heart of its mandate.**



'Boris Yeltsin's Russia Admitted without Reserve to the Council of Europe,' *Le Monde* (France) 27 January 1996 (in French).

#### Extract:

Against all expectations, the parliamentary members have pronounced themselves over-whelmingly in favour of Moscow's membership while demanding little in return in terms of respect for human rights. An 'ad hoc' commission may be set up to 'examine the situation in Chechnya.' By pronouncing themselves so overwhelmingly in favour of Russia's membership in Strasbourg on Thursday 25 January, the parliamentary members of the Council of Europe have wiped Boris Yeltsin's slate clean. The undertakings given by Moscow impose few constraints, particularly regarding the continuation of its war in Chechnya. Yet one year ago, this very same conflict led the Council of Europe to defer Russia's membership request.

**On 6 March, MSF Belgium published a press release announcing a Chechen offensive on Grozny and describing the bombing and the populations' flight (including its own team) to the outskirts of the city. MSF France, which had retreated to Nazran, Ingushetia, in September 1995, prepared an exploratory mission to Chechnya.**



'Chechen Offensive on Grozny,' Press release MSF Belgium, 6 March 1996 (in French).

Since 08:40 this morning (local time), different neighbourhoods of the Chechen capital have been pummelled by heavy artillery and successive bombing raids. A team from Médecins Sans Frontières managed to reach hospital n° 3, situated to the north of the city, where a number of wounded had gathered, and distribute emergency medical supplies. "The bombing is still going on in the city centre, and

the situation is totally confused", relates Peter Vanquaille in Grozny. "We had to evacuate the MSF office this morning, as it's situated in one of the hardest hit areas, and set ourselves up in the outskirts. There's a steady flow of people arriving, fleeing the fighting or the risk of being taken hostage. We're still supervising hospital n° 3 and other health facilities, whenever the security conditions permit".




MSF France was not brimming with enthusiasm about a new start in Chechnya, to say the least. So I began to get seriously involved, arguing for an exploratory mission that could lead to new activities in a country still at war. Like at the conflict's outset, there were very few external parties involved, very few humanitarian organisations present, despite the violence from the fighting and the repercussions on the population. So, from early '96 on, I started raising the issue whenever I could, and it turned out that I wasn't the only one with concerns. Brigitte [Vasset, Operations Director] had been really shaken by the hostage incident in Pervomayskoye and the possibility of a spill over into Dagestan. She asked me to go and take a look. Everyone knew that I wanted to see if we could start up a new mission. So this wasn't just about 'taking a look.' I went in April '96. I was put up by the Belgians at first, because we weren't in Chechnya at the time, and it wasn't easy just being an observer. I arrived at the worst possible moment, when things were really tense in Grozny following the separatist's March offensive. They re-took half the city before pulling back again three days later. It was a sign, particularly to Yeltsin, on the run up to the elections, which said, 'look what trouble we can cause - restart negotiations, or we'll wreak havoc with your campaign.' This offensive was followed by an extremely tough period of all-out reprisals. Some of MSF Belgium's local staff was wounded. MSF cars driving in front of Russian soldiers were shot at, and so on. So when I arrived, the Belgians were cutting back their teams for security reasons. And I arrived completely in the dark! At one point, I was travelling around in a normal, unmarked car, without any authorisation... It caused a lot of tension and I had to leave the Belgians. I found places to stay here and there, with AICF, among others. Then, as soon as I had the authorisations to travel in clearly marked MSF cars, I brought in Guy, a doctor from Toulouse, who was waiting for me in Nazran. We went to Shatoi and looked around, and on our return to Paris, we proposed a new mission.

François Jean, Research Director MSF France Foundation (until December 1999), (in French) interviewed in 1998.

**In mid March, Boris Yeltsin promised a peace plan by the end of the month. But in the meantime, the Russian armed forces continued bombing and cleaning up the regions, first Samashki, then Sernovodsk, located to**

6. Created in 1949, the Council of Europe served to enhance European integration by focusing in particular on respect for the rule of law and human rights, through the European Convention on Human Rights and the court bearing the same name.

the west of Chechnya. The MSF teams were refused any access. MSF was the only presence in the region at the time, along with the ICRC. When permission finally came through to visit Sernovodsk - which had been bombed for three weeks solid - the teams found neither wounded, nor corpses. V6 



'Sitrep 07 Sernovodsk,' from Graziella Godain, Project Coordinator MSF France North Caucasus, to the North Caucasus programme manager, MSF France, 13 March 1996 (in French).

#### Extract:

A lot of coming and going this morning. Access is open to private vehicles and IOM cars [International Office for Migration]. Saw women, children, and elderly moving about, but men of all ages as well. However, no change for humanitarian workers. Access denied. So on standby all day, discussing with the passersby, the checkpoint commander, and organisations present (IOM, ICRC and us).

#### Contact:

At 14:00, contact made with the soldiers, through our interpreter: they suggested that MSF ente with unmarked cars only, no identifying clothing, 3 expats, a translator and our medicines. Agreed to accompany us to the hospital, so we could take stock of the situation and the wounded (if there were any...) and treat them on the spot. However, no guarantee was given for evacuating the wounded. The one big unknown factor was that this plan was totally unofficial, and we knew that the final checkpoint controlling entry to the village (couldn't be seen from where we were) was unaware of it. So how would they react when they saw us coming?? Reply: 'the post commander would assume all responsibility...' Not too reassuring.... Should we have taken this opportunity or was it too risky? Would the impact be too small if no potential evacuation of the wounded was possible?? ICRC had mixed feelings. Some said 'it smells bad,' others said, 'you, MSF, you can do it, you should try...' IOM's feeling: strongly advised against - far too risky and could be stopped on a whim because it's unofficial and we had no identification.

So contact 00: feelings shared and all round agreement, decision taken not to go in. We went back to find the commander and explained that we needed more guarantees, and we've got nothing to hide, and we don't want to hide ourselves, etc. We thanked them anyhow, but said it wasn't enough.

Info on the situation had been made public by journalists, so why were humanitarian workers still being kept out? No reply, or rather 'we're not the ones who decide...' Impression: he seemed bothered by the situation (if this is the right way to describe it...). So this may have been an entirely personal initiative on his part, but we had a hard time grasping what was on his mind. End of story.

[...] Testimonies: nothing new, still hard to form an idea of the numbers of wounded and dead, and how many people have stayed in the village. With the constant comings and goings, the situation is more complicated still.

14/03/96: things got much tougher today. The IOM bus couldn't go up to the village, and men are barred once more. A woman was killed late yesterday by a sniper. But business is busy, and cars get through no problem: they pay ++++

11:00: Visit from a colonel from the Minister of Extraordinary Affairs: announced that from now on, their department would issue people with authorisations to come and go. The Kommandantur is tightening their grip.

11:30: ICRC asked for a meeting with the head commander... it never took place, he refused to meet humanitarian workers. Testimonies: a lot of military in the interior - numbers??? Nothing new on the population. Discussed the situation with an Associated Press journalist yesterday, because he got in: he was there for three hours, and not one night (translation error), paid 200\$ to the MVD, [Ministry of Internal Affairs] and his colleague 1000\$, because had a camera. Was accompanied throughout, but said he could go wherever he wanted.

Population: masses of coming and going so difficult to evaluate, but about a hundred people who stay in the village all the time. The gap in the population is expanding, I don't get it.... The figure of 24,000 is confirmed, so where are all these people? Didn't visit the basements or the hospital. I have increasing doubts that we'll find any wounded... he said that if we paid, we'd get through... that there's no risk. The MVD guys are relaxed, as opposed to the soldiers, who are totally strung out. He only saw 3 corpses, no graves, but he said they didn't take the main route out because mines +++ Drawing a blank for more information. Whatever the case may be, even if hardly anyone's left, we know that some of them are settling back in the village - they don't want to lose the little they have left. So there are still some people living without water, heating and medical care.

However, we're not going to besiege the place for days either. If things don't thaw a bit over the next two days, we'll take stock and reach a decision. The ICRC is pushing because it's their mandate. On our side, only one thing's for sure, and that's the 12,500 people at the sites who are in the programme underway. We can't just drop them, the programmes must go on. A hard situation to analyse: what I hear about their capacity to block off an area for months isn't exactly reassuring (local sources). About communications: if things ease up, I think we can wait for now, but if access is blocked for months, we should speak up. Didigov: Prime Minister seen today. Promised future help. That's it. More later...



'The Russian Army Steps up Aerial Bombing of Chechnya,' *Le Monde* (France), 16 March 1996 (in French).

#### Extract:

President Boris Yeltsin's Security Council is due to reconvene on Friday 15 March. Yet it seems the Russian forces have already received their orders: use all means available to bring the Chechen separatists to their knees. Supported by strategic bombers pounding at the little Caucasian republic, the Russian army, with its flimsy hold over the northern half

of the country, is attempting, for a second time, to capture the mountains of the South. In Grozny, the capital, where the Russians claim to have regained control following the intense fighting of the last few days, the separatists have resorted to taking pot shots at the Russian army posts. Russia, for its part, is regaining its place among the world's main arms exporters, with a rise of nearly 80% in sales compared to the previous year.

There was a series of camps in Ingushetia holding a whole mass of Chechens. The border was like a sieve. There were no checks anywhere. Then the Russians opened a new front in the west of Chechnya, on the Ingushetia border, to cut off supply lines to the Chechen rebels. The Ministry of the Interior's Russian troops started manning this border, and tightened up the checkpoints considerably. The Assinovskaya base expanded, and they started cleansing all the villages around. They'd 'cleaned up' Samashki some weeks before, a village where, at the same time the previous year, they had massacred civilians with flame-throwers. This time, they circled Sernovodsk for three solid weeks. It was 4 kms away from the border. And here again, civilians were massacred. We spent the whole time - nearly three weeks - MSF Belgium, MSF France and the ICRC - cooling our heels from 8 o'clock in the morning to 6 o'clock at night, in front of the border post, trying to get in to Sernovodsk. We would hear the bombing, we could feel it under our feet, because we were only 3 km away. It echoed for miles. We only got access once the 'clean up' was done, so three weeks later, in other words. The village was deserted. We went in as they were bringing out civilians, and we picked up most of those who were able to leave. We never really knew what happened to the others. When we talk about a 'clean up,' that's literally what it was. There were signs of bombing and artillery in the village, but not one single wounded, not one single corpse. Nothing. The fighting went on for three weeks, we interviewed people who talked about bodies, burning corpses, and such like, but every last trace had been 'cleaned up.'

Graziella Godain, Emergency Coordinator, the Northern Caucasus, MSF France, February to October 1996, (in French), interviewed in 2008.

**The MSF Belgium team withdrew from Vedeno. It assumed that the Russian forces would finish their bombing of the south before Boris Yeltsin announced a ceasefire and peace accords, expected on Sunday 31 March. MSF Belgium pulled back to the village of Makhkety, where it treated the people wounded by the bombings of the villages surrounding Vedeno.**

It was the last week of March, all the bombing in Samashki was over, everything had been flattened, and there was still a week to go before the announced peace accords. We could see everything heading for the south, and our teams in Vedeno were saying: 'it's going to get bad, they've still got the whole weekend, right up until Sunday, they're not going to stop: it's now or never to finish things off. They can still do it, with the time they've got left.' On the Wednesday, we'd decided to stay. On the Thursday, we started having doubts. I told the staff that we needed two translator-drivers to stay with us, and everyone else should forget about work, stay at home with their families, and go wherever they wanted. On the Friday, we stayed, just three expatriates. We could really hear it closing in. There were more and more planes circling over our heads. On the Friday night, we decided to leave. It was a waste of time staying; they were going to bomb. So we stole out like thieves on the Saturday morning. We went to Makhkety, a village on the road between Grozny and Vedeno, 15 kms away from Vedeno, where the situation was calm. At Vedeno hospital, I said: "I know this is ridiculous, but we're leaving anyway, and we'll come back on Monday. Yeltsin will have made his declaration this weekend. If nothing happens, we'll have a good laugh. We'll say we were cowards." So on the Saturday, we left for Makhkety. One hour after we'd been through the last village, it was bombed. The villagers brought three children to Makhkety hospital for care, one wounded in the head, one in the abdomen, and one in the legs. It took us three hours to stabilise them and send them to Grozny. Otherwise, on the Saturday, things stayed really calm. But when we went to the hospital on the Sunday, we found some wounded rebels. We treated them. And then things really took off. From midday on, the airplanes flew over, one after the other. We could see the bombs dropping, like in a 2nd World War film. We could count them. We felt everything shaking in Vedeno. I was with the women in the bunker; it went on for hours and hours. It just didn't stop. At 18:00, Yeltsin appeared on the telly, declaring that it was all over. But the bombs kept dropping. We went to the hospital to see if there were wounded. We stayed there a good while. A rebel commander from Vedeno came to see us, saying: "what are you doing here? If you don't come back to Vedeno, I'm coming to get you because that's where you're needed!" I didn't sleep that night. I could hear the planes. The next day, there was total silence. For the rest of the world, the war was over. The media didn't mention Vedeno, and I asked for permission to go back. The entire road had been destroyed. We'd thought, from 15 kms away, that all the bombs had been dropped on the village, but in fact they'd aimed for the hills around. There was glass everywhere, but no wounded...

Dr Bart Ostyns, Field coordinator in Chechnya (1995-1996), Task Force North Caucasus (1999-2001) MSF Belgium (in French) interviewed in August 2000

**On 31 March, as the Russian Federation elections drew nearer, Boris Yeltsin announced the 'peace plan' he'd been promising for weeks. But the bombing continued. On 5 April, MSF issued a press release describing the fate**



**of the Samashki survivors, one of whom, its teams had assisted. The press release also referred to the evacuation of the team from Vedeno, following the local population's warnings about bombing raids on the town itself.**



*'Facing Election, Yeltsin is Halting War on Chechens,'* by Michael Specter, *The New York Times* (USA), 1 April 1996 (in English).

**Extract:**

*"We will be able to give more autonomy to Chechnya than to any other republic of Russia,"* Mr. Yeltsin said in an interview that was also televised nationally. *"We are not afraid of doing that."* This is not the first peace plan Mr. Yeltsin has offered, and it may not be any more successful than those that have come before it. But the 65-year-old President is running hard for re-election, and he has said publicly that he cannot win if he does not find a way to end the war. Even as Mr. Yeltsin spoke, Russian warplanes continued to strike at rebel bases in southern Chechnya, and the Russian commander in the region, Lieut. Gen. Vyacheslav Tikhomirov, said it would be "impossible" to turn war to peace so quickly. [...] *"This looks far more like a bunch of promises with a political purpose than a concrete, workable plan,"* Grigory A. Yavlinsky said tonight. He is the leader of Yabloko, the only reform faction in Parliament, and Mr. Yeltsin's chief liberal opponent in the race for the presidency. Earlier this week, Mr. Yavlinsky accused Mr. Yeltsin of genocide in Chechnya particularly because Russian forces have recently stepped up their bombing attacks, apparently hoping to kill as many opponents as possible before hostilities stopped.



*'Samashki Razed to the Ground by the Russian Army - Vedeno also Under Threat,'* **Press release**, MSF Belgium, MSF France, Paris 5 April 1996 (in French).

Médecins Sans Frontières had to withdraw from the town of Vedeno yesterday morning. Having been warned by the population of a threat of shelling of the town by the Russian army, the team moved out after the surrounding villages had already been hit. The populations of the villages to the east of the town also evacuated.

A Médecins Sans Frontières team went to Samashki, 30 km west of Grozny. This place had been heavily shelled by the Russian army throughout the previous week. The team found a ghost town. Only about 300 people have returned to Samashki, which normally has a population of 12,000. Ninety-five percent of the houses were destroyed. The bombing and shelling had spared nothing. Both the hospital and the schools were completely destroyed. Two hundred deaths have been recorded so far, but bodies are still being found. The population is now slowly returning to Samashki, which has been transformed into a ghost town and is still awash with mines. In Samashki, Médecins Sans Frontières organised the distribution of food, blankets, and mattresses.

Médecins Sans Frontières is concerned for the population of Vedeno and are worried that the town might suffer widespread and indiscriminate bombardment similar to that, which led to the near total destruction of Samashki.



*We were the first to enter Samashki. It was quite accidental. By chance we managed to enter. What we saw was really horrible. When we were approaching the village, there was a big open space where there were plenty of animals, cattle lying there on the ground, dead. Big cattle with legs [sticking] up... This was really horrible. I've never seen things like this in my life before. Then when we entered the fully destroyed village, we didn't see people at first. Very rarely we would find 1, 2, or 3 people in the house. After some time there was an armoured vehicle. This officer who was either a Colonel or something, when he saw our land cruiser with MSF logo, he started to shout saying "How did you come here? I give you 10 minutes to get out of here. If I come back in 10 minutes and find you here, you will be killed. So we decided we should leave. We had already seen what we wanted to see.*

E, MSF North Caucasus staff (in English) interviewed in 2008



*Tuesday, the bombardment started again. That was when I dropped everything I said before. I said: 'Now he's got his peace agreement and they're still bombing.' So we can say, 'it's not finished, it's not peace.' I was ready to issue declarations even though I knew that in Grozny the team were still terrified and that it would have to be done discretely. The idea was to select journalists and pass information to them in secret, so that they could write their articles, but without really saying that it was MSF who said this or that.*

Dr Bart Ostyns, Field coordinator in Chechnya (1995-1996), Task Force North Caucasus (1999-2001) MSF Belgium (in French) interviewed in August 2000

## CHECHNYA, A FAR CRY FROM PEACE: MSF DENOUNCES THE "CLEANSING" OF SERNOVODSK, SAMASHKI AND VEDENO

**At the end of March, given that it was impossible to help the victims of the bombing and cleansing in Sernovodsk, Samashki and then Vedeno, the programme managers and the field teams decided to prepare to go public. Under the supervision of Samantha Bolton, the Communications officer for MSF International, public statements were scheduled for mid-April, to coincide with the Moscow visit of the American President, Bill Clinton, for an exceptional G7<sup>7</sup> summit.**



*'Witnessing in Chechnya,'* Email from Samantha Bolton, MSF International Communications Officer, to MSF Chechnya programme managers, MSF B and MSF F directors of communication, MSF international general secretary, MSF UN liaison officer and, MSF USA executive director, 27 March 1996 (in English).

### Extract:

Following up from my conversation with the comm depts on Chechnya, and the willingness of the teams to do temoignage [witnessing], here are some dates and facts and comments to be thinking about as we try and plan what to do.

#### 1) Crisis in Chechnya

As you all know, MSF has been working in Chechnya since December 94 when Moscow sent 10,000 men with heavy weapons to crush the rebels who had declared independence of Chechnya from Russia in 91.

For a few months now, MSF is the only NGO working in Chechnya - apart from the ICRC who are not an NGO! Over the past couple of weeks, the situation has deteriorated and MSF teams are now blocked from entering [...] and the war is getting worse. Teams are blocked from entering the villages of Sernovodsk and of Samashki, which for the past two weeks have been systematically bombed by the Russians. Thousands have fled, but hundreds remained trapped in the cellars. Women protesting about the fate of their loved ones were shot at by Russian troops over the weekend.

Cleansing of Sernovodsk has more or less finished and now the other villages in the area are being circled by the Russian army and are being bombed, the ideal is to kill anyone and anything systematically - to kill the rebels 'hiding' in the villages. The ICRC have only been given limited access by the Russians to Sernovodsk, and for the past two weeks, the

ICRC and MSF teams wait at the Russian roadblocks, talking to people fleeing the villages to neighbouring Ingushetia. The ICRC can't say anything, and the MSF teams are frustrated and ready to do temoignage [witnessing]. Bénédicte from MSF F has gone in with a TV camera. If we want to do effective temoignage then it should be in Moscow. I would suggest we do it before Clinton's visit. If we are going to do a press conference in Moscow, here are a few things to bear in mind. [...]

#### 2) Chechnya and the UN

Chechnya is considered to be an internal Russian matter. No country has recognized Chechnya as an independent country and as the Russians refuse to talk about the matter within the Security Council. [...] Boutros Ghali has himself said that it is not [an interstate conflict] and will not be discussed.

If Chechnya is to be discussed then that opens up the can of worms for Tibet and all the other internal conflicts (in which case why are people paying attention to Burundi? and why does the UN and international community wish it had paid more attention to Rwanda? Surely what is going on in Chechnya must be contravening some rule in the book!) [...] The only aspect of Chechnya which is discussed officially within the UN is the DHA coordination of humanitarian relief [...]

#### 3) Yeltsin's peace plan

On March 31, Boris Yeltsin is due to announce in Moscow the 'Plan for Peace in Chechnya.' This follows public reports of heavy fighting in the breakaway republic as well as charges of Russian atrocities against civilians (even in the Russian press). On March 16, the Russian Security Council came up with a 'Plan for Peace in Chechnya,' in which all the different members of the Council had to choose between 7 peace plans. The results were supposed to be announced on the 16<sup>th</sup>, but no one could decide and so they decided to keep it secret until the 31<sup>st</sup>. [...] Journalists in Moscow suspect that the chosen peace plan to be announced on the 31<sup>st</sup> will include some sort of a proposal to withdraw regular army troops in Chechnya and to leave the Ministry of Interior troops within Chechnya. No one believes this will actually bring peace - but will be interesting to see what really comes out of it.

\*\*\*\*\*According to Graziella at the roadblock outside Sernovodsk, some of the Ministry of Interior soldiers have already replaced the Russian regulars. Interestingly enough, they are much tougher, more disciplined and intransigent. Under no circumstances are they ready to chat or to talk about how pissed off they are about the war etc. Graziella says that in one incident she witnessed, the women were coming up to the checkpoint, and without discussing, the new soldiers got down on one knee, guns pointed to make their point.

Also, in one of the previous attempts at brokering a peace, 150 villages signed accords with the government in which they agreed not to harbour rebels in exchange for protection from attacks from the Government - Sernovodsk was one of the villages, and look what happened.

#### 4) Clinton's visit to Chechnya

From the 19 - 25 of April, US President Clinton will be visiting Moscow to discuss with President Boris Yeltsin about the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. As far as the White House Press Office is concerned here in DC, 'Chechnya is not officially on the agenda.' Although according to journalists who covered his last Russian visit, when Chechnya was also not officially on the agenda, 'there is a 50% chance that Clinton will make some sort of a weak statement about Chechnya - after all - he doesn't want to sour what bargaining power he has on other issues.'

\*\*\*\*\* The interest in the Clinton visit is that according to the UN Security Council, the only way to put pressure to get things done on Chechnya, is by bilateral and multilateral pressure of individual nations.

#### 5) What information is coming out of Chechnya

There are a few hardened correspondents going in and out of Chechnya - mostly Grozny, and there are fairly regular wire reports coming out of the country, which most of the Moscow correspondents use (Reuters and AP).

TASS - the Russian news agency produces the most information, and that is also a source of admittedly biased information (thus the more regular newspaper reports we get of Russian soldiers being wounded). Many of the wires are also relying on second hand reports of women or wounded saying they saw or heard such and such. This is ok but is not that strong. What all the journalists say they are missing are direct eyewitness reports and accounts of atrocities as witnessed by reliable unbiased sources such as aid workers, or by the journalists themselves.

#### 6) Other condemnations of Russia

A recent report by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe says Russian soldiers in Chechnya have used excessive force against civilians and engaged in robbery, looting and arson. The report also criticized the rebels for systematic hostage taking in recent weeks. Also there seems to have been some kind of a film made by a Swiss journalist and presented at a human rights press conference (which one?). No one else is saying anything - the only recent reports here in the US have been about the disappearance of Fred Cuny.

#### 7) What does MSF need to do to "témoigner" [witness]?

For this reason, MSF could have an impact as we are the only ones on the ground ready to speak. But it is only worth communicating if we have something new to say or if we have details and firsthand accounts to prove what has been said. If our teams have not been direct witnesses to abuses then we have to have statistics and facts on wounded - conditions of victims etc - even if it is information on condition of refugees arriving in Ingushetia and other neighbouring countries.

- How many trucks of men did we see being taken from the villages?

\*\*\*Graziella reports having seen 3 trucks with 100 men, any other reports? When? Where?

- What is the medical/psychological condition of the refugees arriving in the camps in Ingushetia etc where we are working?

- Do we have written accounts of the people we have interviewed and what they have said?

- What projects is MSF doing in Chechnya and how have the recent attacks affected what we are doing and the populations we are working with?

- How many times and with what regularity have the teams heard bombings? Have they seen direct shootings?

\*\*\* Graziella reports that the hospital is the first place to have been bombed in Sernovodsk - and that MSF picked up 36 wounded by bullet/grenade. Anymore?

#### 8) What can we say already?

- Civilians are the target. This is the bloodiest and worst war we are working in at this moment (Graziella says it makes Burundi look like a tea party). The bombings are constant and heavy


- People coming out are completely traumatized. Graziella herself has picked up hysterical, traumatized women, wounded and others fleeing the razing. All are shocked by what they found when they went in.


- This is just the beginning - now that Sernovodsk and Semanski have been crushed, the same is beginning to happen to the neighbouring villages - encircled by the Russians, bombed and razed to the ground. Graziella says, "it is systematic crushing and bombing of civilians, village by village." This is the worst the teams have ever seen. Can we and the world and president Clinton stand by without even asking a few questions?

- The Russian peace plan probably won't work - if already the villages who signed the previous agreement are being savagely attacked and if the Ministry of Interior soldiers replacing the regulars are even tougher - then it hardly constitutes a withdrawal.

- Humanitarian aid blocked by the Russians for 3 weeks from entering/ helping the wounded - Russia has signed the Geneva Convention - MSF had no access during the bombings or after when the wounded really need it most and still have to stand by and listen to the other villages being bombed and pick up the victims as they flee the razing.


**The teams in the field and the head offices of the two MSF sections discussed how to go about advocacy on this subject. During the course of a 'mini general assembly' in Piatigorsk, Russia, the teams discussed the content of the message and its format with the representatives from the head offices. The volunteers were sickened by the level of violence they had witnessed and were torn between their desire to bring it out into the open and the fears for their own safety. They wondered how public this communication should be. The coordinator of the MSF Belgium team, based in Venedo therefore wanted this position to be made public before the date of the G7, but said that it should remain 'discrete,' focusing on releasing information to journalists who would not quote MSF as the source. Others were radically opposed to any declaration from MSF. In the end, the head offices**

of the two sections agreed that a breakfast meeting with journalists would be organised by the two mission coordinators, in the presence of Eric Goemaere, the Director General of MSF Belgium. The eyewitness accounts collected from refugees by the MSF France team based in Ingushetia, in particular the survivors of Sernovodsk, would be the basis for this briefing. They were filmed by a video team from the communication department. **V7** 


 There was much debate over what should or should not be said. There were arguments between the sections. They needed someone with experience of war situations, and I was used to working with everyone. We held a meeting in Piatigorsk that lasted the whole day. Nearly the entire team was there. It was a very difficult meeting. I had to really work hard to reach an agreement, because the teams were afraid. They wanted to talk, but without holding a major press conference. We went through each word with a fine-tooth comb. Even I was a bit scared about working in Chechnya. After the events in Rwanda and Zaire [the Rwandan Tutsi genocide from April to July 1994 and the subsequent events<sup>8</sup>], I had thought about it but, had not truly realised how much it had traumatised me. This was a year and a half later and it brought all those emotions flooding back. I was also ill at ease because I was used to working in Africa, but this was different from an African regime, which has no control over anything at all. Here we were dealing with an extremely powerful regime that was afraid of nothing. And it also brought back all our childhood fears. Whereas for our parents the Germans were the ones to be feared, for us, it was the Russians. We were so used to hearing about secret agents, telephone tapping, and so on, it was full-blown paranoia. I was therefore highly aware of the insecurity and the fears of the teams. We were very careful and really negotiated every single word. We discussed what they were happy about saying and what they were not. I remember that Graziella [Godain, the Coordinator at MSF France] was all for going further. Hilde [Sleurs, the Coordinator at MSF Belgium] also clearly wanted to speak out. But she also had to support her teams and that put her in a somewhat difficult position. The teams were sickened by what they were seeing and were in full agreement as to the gravity of the situation. There were rumours that women and children were tied to the tanks as they entered the villages, to prevent people from shooting at them. That was totally unacceptable for everyone. [All this information was collected by volunteers who had given all their emotional energy to this collection of eyewitness accounts and medical data. It was extremely important for them. So, in the end, as is often the case at MSF, the disagreements and discussions were more about the form than the content. The real question is always

the same: 'what do we do with this information?' The volunteers wanted a 'big wig' from head office to come out. It was Eric Goemaere, the Director General of MSF Belgium who did come.

Samantha Bolton, Communication officer,  
MSF International, 1994-1997 (in French)  
interviewed in 2000

 Yeltsin was about to announce his peace plan. What troubled us, and myself in particular, was that it was a way for him to buy some time with the international community so that he could do whatever he wanted until then. I had already clearly stated: "Something must be done, we have to say what is going on." There were then discussions within MSF Belgium and the idea was put forward to speak out at the time of the G7, which was to be held in April in Moscow, with many journalists in attendance. I did not agree. I thought it absurd to issue declarations about people once they were dead, while we had done nothing for them when still alive. I was really in favour of speaking out earlier. In the MSF Belgium team in Grozny, opinions were divided. There were some who were fiercely against saying anything, even via an anonymous declaration. I think that those who had been in Vedeno were the most motivated. I certainly was. One colleague said: 'if you do something, I'm leaving, I don't want to know about it.' And he left, no doubt because his programme no longer existed. But he was right to do what he believed in. Others in the Grozny team said the same thing, but in the end they stayed. The MSF France team were in possession of eyewitness accounts and wanted to do something. MSF Belgium said: 'we don't agree with the implicit accusations and their potential consequences. We must not forget that these accounts directly accuse the Russians and their conduct of the war.' We therefore held extensive discussions on what to do. Along with others, I accepted a compromise. Personally, I had been profoundly marked by what happened in Vedeno and sided with those who said: 'we can't just say nothing.'


Dr Bart Ostyns, Field coordinator in Chechnya  
(1995-1996), Task Force North Caucasus (1999-2001)  
MSF Belgium (in French) interviewed in August 2000

 What really triggered this desire for advocacy was Sernovodsk, but there was also, the MSF Belgium team on the other side of Vedeno that couldn't work either, because of the bombardment. We therefore decided to strike hard and call a press conference in Moscow. We prepared the texts, the eyewitness accounts, and so on. We hadn't finished editing the film but we had all the interviews with the refugees who escaped from Sernovodsk. Hilde, the MSF Belgium Coordinator, and myself worked very well


8. See *Genocide of Rwandan Tutsis 1994, Violence of the New Rwandan Regime 1994-1995, and Rwandan Refugee Camps of Zaire-Tanzania 1994-1995*, by Laurence Binet, in the MSF Speaking Out, Case Study Collection, MSF International.

together, and we were fully convinced of the need to hold this press conference; Samantha Bolton [Communication officer, MSF International] came to help us organise it. The MSF France programme manager and myself were completely in favour of speaking out but the press conference was hard to arrange because the head office in Brussels was tending more towards the, 'if we talk, we'll get thrown out and will never be allowed back into Chechnya' line. Shut up and stay, or speak out and leave... That was the situation and the reason for the painful birth of this press conference. Finally, Brussels said: 'We're sending Eric Goemaere.' He was the Director General of MSF Belgium. I only knew him by name. At first I said to myself: 'He's come to control what we say, he's come to keep us quiet.' I believe that he was sent for that reason. But in Paris, the only way they had of ensuring that this press conference was a joint one was to agree that Eric came to hold it. Eric spent 48 hours with Hilde, Samantha, and myself and we showed him the eyewitness accounts. He saw the extent of the violence and what the populations had to say about it, the difficulties we had in working, etc.

Graziella Godain, Emergency Coordinator, the Northern Caucasus, MSF France, February to October 1996, (in French) interviewed in 2008.

 We said that the systematic bombardment of villages couldn't go on like this and we decided to hold a press conference in Moscow to coincide with the G7. We wanted to strike a blow directly at the Russians at home – I believe for the first time ever – regarding the Chechen issue, which was a very delicate one. There was no shortage of first-hand accounts, especially from the French section. There was absolutely no incident between the sections over there, even though we were all involved operationally. We agreed that we had to go and speak out about what was happening.


Dr Eric Goemaere, Director General MSF Belgium, 1996-1998 (in French) interviewed in 2000

 The MSF Belgium head of communications telephoned me and told me that they intended to speak about the situation and asked Samantha Bolton and Eric Goemaere to go out and organise it. We decided to align ourselves with the proposal from Brussels. In the field, their teams were expressing the same degree of indignation as us, about the way the Russians were conducting the war. But I don't remember them asking us to intervene in the public debate. This was really a move that came out of head office in Brussels. As head of communication, I was somewhat surprised, but then again not all that much. I had a good working relationship with Gerda (Bossier, Head

of Communications at MSF Belgium), and I knew Eric Goemaere a bit. I know that when faced with war crimes on such a scale, he is all in all, a fairly motivated person. I also get on well with Samantha Bolton who was suggested as the person to organise it all. I would therefore say that at a professional level I was satisfied with what was being suggested. MSF Belgium took the initiative and the message denouncing the way the Russian army was conducting the war was fine with us. Although the subject itself was not an issue, there was a divergence of views regarding both the form and the content. François Jean had a more political approach to the subject. It was hard for us to agree on the content of the message and we finally opted for a relatively conventional one.

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of communication (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000- May 2008) (in French) interviewed in 2009

**Before the press campaign, the MSF team took care to inform the ambassadors of the Western countries in Moscow, most of which strongly advised them to abandon this notion of speaking out in order to avoid embarrassing Boris Yeltsin in the run-up to the elections.**

 We went around to the main embassies to explain what we were going to say. All the ambassadors, even the United States, agreed to see us. However, they all said: 'we strongly recommend that you do not release this report now, because we really need Yeltsin to win the elections. That's really what we need and you have to be quiet.' They said that very clearly and we said that we would not be quiet. They amplified the pressure and said 'we won't support you and we won't be responsible for the safety of your expatriates.'

Samantha Bolton, Communication officer, MSF International, 1994-1997 (in French) interviewed in 2000

**On 18 April, owing to the number of journalists present, the press breakfast turned into a press conference. The previous day, one embassy informed the MSF team that it had received a letter from the Russian Interior Ministry saying that they declined all responsibility for the safety of its citizens present on Russian territory. The MSF team then arranged for this information, which it saw as a disguised threat, to be released during the press conference. In addition to the accounts collected by the**

volunteers, showing that civilians were being targeted, and that humanitarian aid was being hindered, a letter denouncing the violations of human rights in Chechnya was sent to all the heads of State taking part in the G7 summit. The Communication officer took the initiative of reading the reply from Bill Clinton, the President of the United States, whose presence had created quite a stir in Moscow. In fact, it turned out that both the content and form of the messages delivered by MSF were to prove far stronger than initially intended. While regretting that it had received no reports on the abuses committed by the Chechen rebels, the international community was stunned by the level of violence inflicted on the civilians by the Russian forces.



'The Chechen Republic, Far from Peace,' MSF Belgium **Report**, April 1996 (in English).

While the members of G7 meet to discuss the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, the systematic shelling continues in the Chechen Republic using conventional weapons, causing many victims among the civilian population. The Chechen Republic is no longer a Russian "internal affair". At this very moment violations of human rights are continuing and international humanitarian rights are being held up to ridicule on a daily basis.

Since December 1994 it is estimated that 40,000 civilians have been killed. This "simple policy operation", which was supposed to last only a few hours, has been transformed into a mire for the federal troops and a massacre for the civilian population. On 31 March 1996 the long-awaited peace plan from Boris Yeltsin was announced. But since then the military actions of the federal army have only increased. In the absence of any genuine will to look for a political solution to the conflict, Moscow is condemned to incessantly "reconquering" a population, which is becoming more and more hostile, despite being war-weary.

Thousands of civilians are on the roads and pouring into the republics neighbouring the Chechen Republic. No-one knows how many others have disappeared or been killed. While the villages are being shelled, and at the moment when medical needs are most urgent, the humanitarian organizations find themselves systematically refused access to these zones.

Médecins Sans Frontières is a witness to the fact that: Civilians are being systematically murdered and the villages burnt to the ground.

As the federal army proceeds southwards the villages find themselves being offered a "peace agreement". The villagers have to give money and weapons to the Russian soldiers. The troops then surround the village and stop anyone from leaving. Then the shelling starts. Every time the scenario is the same (Sernovodsk, Samashki, Atchoi Maratn area). After the shelling the military authorities open a "humanitarian corridor" to allow the women and children to leave, after paying a sum of money. They are not allowed to return. The wounded and dead cannot be evacuated (one of our nurses saw soldiers refuse to allow a woman carrying her

dead child to pass). Once the village has been shelled, the looting begins.

Human rights are being held up to ridicule.

During the shelling one of our teams saw Russian soldiers take away a lorry full of men and boys aged above 12 years and boys accused of being Chechen combatants simply because their hands had calluses and other "signs of being combatants". When the fighting has finished whole families are tied to the armoured vehicles whilst these are paraded through the village. As the soldiers take part in the looting they push women and children before them as human shields. Medical teams have seen the federal army lorries full of the products of looting making for the frontier. Any livestock still alive are also stolen and members of MSF saw these livestock in the market places of the Republic of Ossetia.

Humanitarian aid cannot get through.

It is very difficult to work in the Chechen Republic. Where the fighting is thickest the humanitarian organizations find that they are denied access when it is precisely at this time that the need for assistance is most urgent (surgical intervention, evacuation of wounded, supplying food and water).

At Samashki the humanitarian organizations were only authorized to enter the village 25 days after the beginning of the shelling. Even today Médecins Sans Frontières is regularly held up at the checkpoints at the border with neighbouring republics. Military action makes movement more and more difficult: ten days ago our team had to be evacuated from Vedeno. Moreover the humanitarian organizations are finding it supremely difficult to clear antibiotics and other medicines essential for tending wounds and infections through customs.

"Human rights" observers from OSCE are ineffective.

Their action in the field gave the illusion of an international presence. Since their arrival the Russian military have intensified their actions, which are systematically aimed at civilians and are practicing their "scorched earth" policy with total impunity.

Considering all the points mentioned here, Médecins Sans Frontières demand:

- the stopping of the systematic attacks on civilians
- access, and respect for emergency aid operations
- stopping of looting, racketeering practiced on civilians and the destruction of civilian property
- the reinforcement of the OSCE observation mechanism.



"Chechnya, Far from Peace" MSF Belgium/MSF France **Report**, April 1996 (in French).

**Extract:**

My name is Louisa, I'm from Samashki. I have been a refugee in Sleptsovskaya since 21 March. On 14 March, the Russian troops arrived. The population of Samashki did not know

that they were going to be attacked: we had already been attacked on 7 and 8 April last year. We found out at the last moment. I myself found out on the same day, the 15, like all the others. The attack began on the 15, between 10 and 11 in the morning. Heavy bombardment. At that time we were in the cellar of our house and were completely unaware. Half of the population was in the village and few people had left. A humanitarian corridor was opened on the morning of the 15th. The Russian military separated the population: the men and young boys on one side and the women on the other. They took away young boys aged 13, 15. I can't say exactly how many, but there is talk of about 140 people. They took them.... young boys aged 13 to 15... The bombardment began that evening, the evening of the 15. I only left on the 5 day. On 19 March, as people were beginning to leave, they were firing from helicopters and killed three women on the road, refugees. They made the people come out of a cellar and lined them up to shoot them. Their leader arrived and he told them to go back into the cellar. They were barely back inside when the troops threw in two hand grenades. Three women were killed.



*'MSF Issues Damning Report on Continued Violence against Civilians by Russian Troops in Chechnya – MSF Calls on British Government and Other G7 Nations to Pressure President Yeltsin.'* **Press release**, MSF, Moscow/London, 18 April 1996 (in English).

As the G7 heads of states meet to discuss the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons in Moscow this week, the international humanitarian aid agency Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has released a new report documenting the systematic bombing and killing of civilians by the Russian military in Chechnya in recent months.

Despite President Yeltsin's peace initiative and the presence of observer's from the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), MSF's field teams in Chechnya report that the situation has deteriorated drastically over the past few weeks. Civilians continue to be targeted and villages flattened, in blatant violation of the Geneva Conventions and other international agreements, to which Russia is a signatory. The MSF report contains damning new evidence of violence against non-combatants, including the use of civilians, including pregnant women and children, as human shields on tanks. It documents the systematic pattern of attacks against Chechen villages, the looting and destruction of civilian installations (including hospitals, schools and mosques), arbitrary arrests, and the hindrance of humanitarian assistance.

The only remaining non-governmental agency on the ground in the territory, MSF sent letters earlier this week to the heads of states attending the G7 summit in Moscow, urging them to put pressure on the Russian government to stop the gross and systematic targeting of civilians and the violations of humanitarian law in Chechnya, which have claimed an estimated 40,000 lives to date. *"Our teams on the ground are taking considerable security risks by speaking out on this*

*issue,"* Coordinator Dr Hilde Sleurs said. *"But the situation for the civilian population has become so bad, that we have no other choice."*



**Letter** sent to all [G7] Heads of State, by Eric Goemaere, MSF Belgium Executive director, 18 April 1996 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

As you are about to attend the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons summit in Moscow this week-end, I am writing to draw your attention to the deteriorating human rights situation in Chechnya in recent weeks and urge you to put every possible pressure on the Russian government to stop the gross and systematic violations of human rights and humanitarian law committed by its forces in Chechnya. [...] The only international response to the crisis has consisted in providing financial support to humanitarian operations and deploying a handful of human rights observers from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe – although the latter were never allowed to move outside those newly "pacified" areas of the country. We strongly believe that the current international appeasement of the Russian government has had no visible effect on its operations in Chechnya.

Doctors and bandages are no longer enough. Before more civilians are killed and to prevent the further flouting of international humanitarian law, Doctors Without Borders hopes that you will take this opportunity to hold the Russian government accountable to the standards of conduct it undertook to adhere to by its signing of international agreements and by its membership of the OSCE. If you are in any doubt as to the extent of these abuses, our representatives in Moscow have met officials of the US Embassy to officially report on the brutal actions of the Russian military in Chechnya over the past two months. We also include a copy for your information and hope that something can be done for the people of Chechnya.



**Letter** from Bill Clinton, President of The USA to Joëlle Tanguy, MSF USA Executive Director, 26 April 1996 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

Thank you for sharing your concerns about the Chechnyan conflict. The violence in Chechnya is a tragedy for all involved. While we have stated that Chechnya is part of Russia, we have also made clear our views on the unacceptable toll of death and suffering that the military action has inflicted on innocent civilians. The events in Chechnya are a reminder that the processes of transformation underway in Russia - and throughout the former Soviet Union - will encounter setbacks. While no one can predict the outcome, it would be a mistake to write off reform in Russia. Indeed, our policy aims to maximize the chance that reform will be sustained and will succeed. It is important during these periods of

uncertainty to recall the profound stake the United States has in promoting Russia's further progress on the path to reform.

I appreciate your interest. Sincerely, [...]



'Yeltsin Faces Atrocity Claims,' **Daily Telegraph**, Nanette Van der Laan, Moscow, 18 April 1996 (in English).

#### Extract:

A report drawn up by aid representatives who have been working in the area since February 1994 appealed to leaders attending the summit to urge Mr Yeltsin to stop the "widespread violence against non combatants, including the use of civilians as human shields on tanks."

Eyewitness accounts gathered by MSF said Chechen women were strapped to Russians tanks to prevent attacks; civilians were forced to leave their dead behind; houses were pillaged and burned, and villagers were shot at indiscriminately.

The report said that on March 4, near the village of Sernovodsk, an MSF nurse saw soldiers force a woman to leave her dead baby on the roadside. On March 17, an MSF team watched soldiers at a roadblock arrest a young man who was trying to return to the village of Samashki, which had been bombed. When his sister and mother tried to intervene, the soldiers fired over their heads. Aid workers have also seen Russian troops loading villagers' belongings into lorries. On March 9 and 10, MSF teams saw three 10-tons lorries leave Sernovodsk with pillaged goods, it said.

Villagers claimed that they had to pay soldiers 50 millions roubles (about £7,000) per village to ensure a "humanitarian corridor" for them to leave before a bomb attack. Men trying to leave area of fighting were often turned back or diverted, MSF said. On 15 March, teams at a roadblock outside Sernovodsk saw two lorries carrying around 100 men turned back by the Russians. They have had no information of their whereabouts since.

Medical teams also regularly picked up hysterical wounded civilians who had been shot at by snipers while fleeing the fighting [...] MSF said repeated requests to enter Samashki after the March attack had been turned down. On April 1, an MSF medical coordinator was allowed in. She said that the village had been flattened by heavy bombardments and there were 120 dead cattle in the streets. Only 300 of the 12,000 villagers were still in Samashki, she said. [...] Samantha Bolton of MSF called the Chechen war the worst conflict of the 20 war zones that the organisation is working in at the moment. More than 30,000 people had died since Mr Yeltsin sent troops into Chechnya in December 1994 to quell an independence bid, she said.

"We have noticed that diplomats in Moscow do not want to raise the issue before June she said, referring to month in which presidential elections will be held." But this is not an internal issue, it is an international one." In a letter to John Major, Anne-Marie Huby, Director of MSF's British mission, said Britain must denounce the Russian government for the attacks, which were a "blatant violation of the Geneva Convention and other international agreements to which Russia

is signatory". She said: "The Russian military have consistently failed to respect the neutrality of hospitals and clinics both in areas of intense military activity in the centre of the country and in the capital Grozny, where the MSF hospital is under regular sniper fire."



"G7 Pressed on Chechnya", Chrystia Freeland, **The Financial Times** (UK), Moscow, 19 April 1996 (in English).

On the Eve of a prestigious international summit, the war in Chechnya yesterday delivered two fresh political embarrassments for Russian President Boris Yeltsin. The first was a call by Médecins Sans Frontières, the respected international medical aid group, to the Group of seven leaders who will meet in Moscow today and tomorrow to put pressure on their Russia hosts to end flagrant human rights abuses in Chechnya. Mr Yeltsin is hoping to use the two-day meeting on nuclear issues as a platform for raising his domestic profile ahead of June 16 presidential elections.



'Chechnya Campaign Report,' **Message** from Samantha Bolton, MSF International Communications Officer to Chechnya programme managers, Communications Departments, and Executive Directors, Delegate Offices, 25 April 1996 (in English).

#### Extract:

**1) OVERVIEW** – Well done to Andres and all those who worked on the report. Despite coordination problems and too many people getting involved at the last minute, especially at a headquarter level, it is clear that in the short and especially in the medium to long term, as various diplomats and journalists commented: 'the MSF report put Chechnya on the international map'. The report will continue to be seen and used as a source of reliable information and evidence. All the diplomats in Moscow received copies, as did ministries around the world and other organizations. More importantly requests for copies of the report continue to come in all around the world in delegates and headquarters. [...]

**2) MOMENTUM NEEDS SERIOUS FOLLOW UP** – If we want to keep Chechnya on the agenda, and if we want to maintain the credibility we have built up, it is crucial that the Chechnya desks and teams continue to collect information so that we can do an update of the report in a few weeks time. Nicholai is keeping the diplomats informed in Moscow. On a press level, need to keep up the pressure for coverage of Chechnya in press both in Moscow and from headquarter/ delegate level. Both dips and press expect us to follow up to show that we were serious about our concerns in the first place. [...]

#### B) MOSCOW

##### 1) DIPLOMATIC FEEDBACK IN MOSCOW

Teams met with Moscow diplomats of following missions:




Belgium, Holland, Canada, UK, USA, France, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, EU, and Italy. Diplomats are now very aware that we exist and that we have reliable information. On a political level, they really quizzed the teams for as much information as possible and were very keen to make the meetings a regular occurrence. On a funding level, many of the diplomats were very interested in what we had to say about the humanitarian condition, and where the US and Canadian embassies/humanitarian aid sections refused to fund us last month, they now were asking for our proposals and for regular contact.

All diplomats were impressed with the report. In addition, they:

- tried to get us to say that Dudayevs Chechen rebels were equally bad
- were surprised and shocked at the extent of what we reported
- wanted us to come out strongly so that they could use our credible report at headquarter level
- want regular updated information and meetings in Moscow
- Were more concerned about criticism/pressure in own national press than anything else (this was particularly true of Scandinavians who said "we are very aware of the strength of public opinion at home on human rights issues". It also seems that Scandinavian correspondents are particularly critical of own govts handling of Chechnya issues)
- wanted updated on humanitarian needs
- still believe Chechnya is an internal issue (UK even said "we have a similar problem with Northern Ireland")


[...] 2) PRESS FEEDBACK IN MOSCOW

The Moscow International Press Corps is one of the biggest in the world, along with New York, London and Paris. Many of the journalists did not know that MSF works out of Moscow, and were pleased to get contacts. Correspondents cover the whole region from Latvia to Kazakhstan, including Georgia and are very keen to get information. Unlike in Africa where the correspondents see us all the time, they did not even know we were working in Georgia or anywhere else and were hungry for all information and contacts (MSF had good reputation and have seen us in Afghanistan and Middle East). nous ont vus en Afghanistan et au Moyen-Orient.


 We had planned a press breakfast rather than a press conference, but there were far more journalists present than we anticipated and it turned into a real press conference. Everyone spoke about what was going on, but we were the first to put it into a report made public. On the eve of the press conference, one of the ambassadors informed us that he had received a letter from the Russian Interior Ministry, advising that the Russian Government would no longer be responsible for the safety of expatriates, because of 'uncontrolled rebel elements.' The threat was plain. The representative of the embassy in question told us: 'You

absolutely must cancel this press conference.' We called a crisis cell meeting with Eric Goemaere and the teams to decide what to do. They asked me: 'what do you think?' I said: 'we have to go on and show that we received a threat, albeit indirectly.' I have good contacts with a journalist to whom I can entrust this. I suggest that we invite her a little bit early, because we don't want to talk about this over the telephone, that we give her the letter so that she can say she received it from an embassy. At the press conference, she will show the letter and ask the question: 'are you aware of this letter sent by the Interior Ministry to one of the embassies?' This is what it says: 'she will read the letter in front of the press conference so that it is made public and we answer the question.' They all said: ok, that's a good idea. We decided that Eric Goemaere would answer the question and we carefully prepared his reply. He was to say: 'That's very surprising. MSF has been working in war zones for 25 years and we have very rarely received or even heard of a letter sent by the Interior Ministry on the subject of expatriate safety.' The journalist said exactly what we decided: 'do you consider that this is a threat on the part of the Russian Government?' All the cameras were on her, the journalists were taking notes, and they read the letter. This was a really good neutral way of getting the information across. It was very clearly a threat. The diplomatic community was shocked by the eyewitness accounts. The civilian populations were being affected. It was very powerful. But they also asked us about accounts of all the abuses committed by the Chechens. Each time we repeated 'you hear this version of events because you are in Moscow, but the Chechens don't go around attacking the Chechens, it's their population that is targeted.' It was incredible to see the extent to which the diplomats did not want to hear this. [...] We briefed the journalists individually about what the various embassies said. They followed this up and badgered the embassies for a response. Coverage was really good.


Samantha Bolton, Communication officer,  
MSF International, 1994-1997 (in French) interviewed  
in 2000.

 So there were three of us giving a press conference: Eric, Hilde, and myself. We spoke in French, and then in English. Eric did most of the talking. He went much further in criticising the Russian authorities than had been planned by head office in Brussels. Hilde and I were extremely surprised. It was total panic because several questions were raised about the vulnerability of the expatriates: 'Are you concerned about your safety?' Eric replied: 'Yes, in speaking out here today, we are taking risks and everyone is aware of this.'


Graziella Godain, Emergency Coordinator, the Northern  
Caucasus, MSF France, February to October 1996,  
(in French) interviewed in 2008.

 We held a conference in Moscow with Graziella [Godain, Emergency Coordinator MSF France] during which we clearly denounced the human rights violations being carried out through the bombardment of villages and the strategy which is to let the villagers believe that they have a choice and then to encircle them and wipe them out. We said it somewhat harshly there was a mass of journalists there and TV cameras from around the world. I think that we created quite a stir. Beforehand, we wrote to the various Presidents at the G7, which earned us a letter in reply from Clinton. He said that we were absolutely right, that he really felt very concerned and would raise the issue with President Yeltsin. Holding these press conferences with Samantha was without doubt effective, but also created significant levels of stress. She was in front of the cameras, showing Clinton's letter and reading what it said. But I didn't want to show on TV that I had written a letter to Clinton, because I believe that we should never show that we are lobbying behind the scenes! This was broadcast on who knows how many American and European TV stations. We plainly stated that there were massacres. Now everyone understood this.

Dr Eric Goemaere, Director General MSF Belgium, 1996-1998 (in French) interviewed in 2000


 We helped prepare the press release. It attracted huge media coverage. They had set up the whole thing on their own and we were delighted because they had told us about it. I wrote a letter to the Prime Minister, John Major, before the G7 and we used this letter, saying: 'on the eve of the G7 summit, MSF asks John Major to raise the question of war crimes.' I believe that we used the words 'war crimes.' We said that it was a violation of the laws of war. We forced John Major to raise this issue publicly. I circulated the report containing the eyewitness accounts to the heads of the Parliamentary groups. Questions were asked of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and we rode that particular wave for quite a time. This struck quite a blow; it happened quickly and had a significant impact.

Anne-Marie Huby, Director General, MSF United Kingdom, (in French) interviewed in 2000.


 Our communication received little press coverage, as it was not exactly controversial. Except for the Russians, nobody was really in any doubt as to the excesses of the war in Chechnya because of the reports sent in by journalists and so on. Holding this press conference created no argument between us and no controversy on the outside. After two years of war, what we had to say was nothing new.

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of communication (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000- May 2008) (in French) interviewed in 2009

**The Director General of MSF United Kingdom however questioned the credibility of certain eyewitness accounts from the refugees and survivors reproduced in the report and taken from interviews filmed by the MSF France video crew.**


 Something was bothering me a lot, but we decided to step round it and carry on. I found that the eyewitness accounts were not particularly credible. Fortunately the press did not look too closely. If the standards of journalism had been more rigorously applied to this story, we would not have been allowed to release it. It was very powerful, with these people relating their experiences, their fears; it was highly emotional but not particularly robust as testimony. We had to do it, that's certain, but the quality of the research was not good enough. It bothered me because we were nonetheless accusing a super-power of war crimes. We're always saying that you have to take refugee stories with a pinch of salt. But at the same time, when it suits us, we take a small group of people and ask: 'about how many of you were there?' I don't find that very credible. I didn't release these eyewitness accounts with any great enthusiasm. I know that there are some journalists to whom I decided not to send certain accounts. I kept them behind. I published the letter saying: 'our teams, our patients tell us the following things and we feel that they are coherent enough.' But I didn't refer to any research because I didn't find it credible. This is a recurring problem. Maybe it's a cultural thing. I often find that the eyewitness accounts coming out of Paris are a bit lame. The answers we got were those we wanted to hear. That bothered me. I often had to wash over the cracks to avoid the embarrassment of revealing my sources. I believe that this is a problem of credibility. At the same time, it's hard to find the right angle for situations like that.

Anne-Marie Huby, Director General, MSF United Kingdom, (in French) interviewed in 2000.

 We used two sorts of interviews: those conducted by the teams in place, using their own interpreters, which were of good quality, and those filmed by the video crew, which we then re-transcribed. We gave this crew just one instruction: 'if you only manage to conduct one interview, we must have that woman who is in the hospital and who was tied to a tank. This is one of the only living proofs of the use of human shields.' But they were unable to find her. The report was in fact poorly organised. The questions were not precise enough and the answers were therefore a bit of everything. And as the answers were only very roughly translated at the time, they only realised this at the editing stage, when they called in a real translator. That's when they realised that the people were talking about their cow that lost a leg, or things like that. It was incredibly time-consuming, and in the meantime, we were waiting in Moscow. Moreover, they didn't even write down where the people were from. It was anything but thorough. But there were also some good accounts. There was a lot of medical data. It's true that we could have collected information better. But it was done at the initiative of the teams in the field, who did their best. They were neither journalists nor lawyers. We worked with what we had.


Samantha Bolton, Communication officer,  
MSF International, 1994-1997 (in French)  
interviewed in 2000.

**In the field, the members of the team who wanted to were able to leave the mission. The others received instructions to stay put. On the advice of the expatriate teams, the choice was made not to invite the Russian media to the press conference in order to minimise local security problems, given the electoral context. There was the risk that this low profile in the Russian media would give the Chechen personnel of MSF – who were strongly in favour of speaking out loudly about the fate of their fellow citizens – the mistaken impression that the organisation was staying silent. There was also the risk of reinforcing the fears of the expatriate volunteers who stayed behind, already extremely worried by the fact that the message put across was stronger than anticipated.**

 The volunteers were very close to the local teams, who asked them to speak out and they felt that it was their duty to do so. But they were afraid of their statements being manipulated in the context of the elections. They did not want to inflame the situation in the Russian press and preferred that we speak to the international media. Not being particularly familiar with Russia, I trusted them. If they thought it dangerous for this to come out in the Russian press, I could hardly argue. MSF is not used to addressing the local press. We are usually more at ease talking

to the correspondents of the international media, because we speak the same language, we know where they're from. The local media journalists for their part are very well aware of the situation and really push their questioning hard. That's normal and they are often highly politicised. You have to assume your responsibilities and reply very clearly. We therefore decided not to alert the Russian media and we stuck to that. From that point of view, we were very successful: there was little or nothing in the Russian press. But I don't know if this was the right strategy. When the volunteers went back to Chechnya, the local team said that nobody had heard about what we had done, because in general nobody there listens to the BBC or RFI news. There was virtually no coverage in the Russian press, so nobody had heard and all this effort seemed to be for nothing when we consider that one of the main reasons for this communication was to satisfy the Chechen personnel who wanted us to talk about the fate of the Chechens! I also believe that this further increased the fears of the volunteers on-site. Having heard no official reaction, nothing on the radio and nothing in the press, their imaginations began to run riot and they were all wondering what was really happening behind the scenes. When you make a public declaration, it's best to make it completely public and pull out the teams. I believe that what we did was something of a compromise. We decided: no Russian media, but we leave those teams that want to stay out in the field, and that's where the problem really laid. The MSF Belgium team was great but really tired, exhausted and at a certain moment it might have been better to pull everyone out. But they didn't say 'you go,' they said: 'you go if you want to.' That put a lot of pressure on the team and divided it, because some of them left and some stayed. That created a lot of individual tension. Were those who left being weak and betraying the Chechens? There was a debate on the subject. They were crying. They were exhausted. They had to make a very difficult choice.

Samantha Bolton, Communication officer,  
MSF International, 1994-1997 (in French)  
interviewed in 2000.

 I believe that we had to speak out like this. We had a message and a methodology I believed in and which we had to use. We agreed to it in this way. I knew that it was hard because the French wanted to do much more. It was easy for them to say, because they had no one in Chechnya at the time! So when I heard that the message went beyond what was agreed, my first reaction was: 'So the French went ahead and did it anyway!' It was only afterwards that I understood that it was Eric. (Goemaere, Director General of MSF Belgium) I found out at the same time that Eric Goemaere had arrived, which had not been planned, and that we had absolutely no control over what he was going to say. He used all the eyewitness accounts and didn't understand why we were afraid. He chose to do things on which we disagreed. The methodology was not followed. What we should

have done was pass the information on to journalists and then, we had no first-hand accounts of what the rebels were doing, and that bothered me. The victims were victims of a war, and you also have to try to say something negative about the other side as well. I saw interviews in the press, so I know that it was circulated in Grozny. I don't know the details, but it was clearly 'MSF said...' and it was in the Russian papers, from Russian journalists. Even if the papers were in English. It was nonetheless in the *Moscow Times*<sup>9</sup>, which is fairly critical of the Russian authorities on the war in Chechnya, and it was clearly going to be picked up by other papers.

Dr Bart Ostyns, Field coordinator in Chechnya (1995-1996), Task Force North Caucasus (1999-2001) MSF Belgium (in French) interviewed in August 2000



*I did not go through Grozny before reaching Moscow. But we took precautions. We clearly announced to the team what we were going to say. I received the green light from the Coordinator. But it's true that I didn't ask each individual for his or her opinion on the question.*

Dr Eric Goemaere, Director General MSF Belgium, 1996-1998 (in French) interviewed in 2000

**On 21 April 1996, the Chechen President, Dzhokbar Dudayev, was killed by the Russian forces, which located him through his mobile phone. Zélimkan Yandarbaiev replaced him as the President of the Independent Republic of Chechnya.**



*'Chechen Rebels Say Leader Died in Russian Air Attack.'* by Michael R. Gordon, ***The New York Times*** (USA) 25 April 1996 (in English).

#### Extract:

After a night of rumours and flatly contradictory reports, a senior rebel commander said today that the Chechen insurgents had confirmed that Dzhokhar M. Dudayev, the rebel leader, had been killed in a Russian rocket attack. Speaking on a television broadcast from his mountain hideout, the commander, Shamil Basayev, announced Mr. Dudayev's death and proclaimed a three-day mourning period. Mr. Dudayev's death thrust the spotlight on Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, the Vice President of the rebel Chechen government who has now risen to head the separatist movement.

## MSF VOLUNTEER KIDNAPPED IN THE CAUCASUS

**On 27 April, nine days after the press conference in Moscow, the administrator, the new Coordinator and the interpreter for the MSF Belgium team were kidnapped on the road from Piatigorsk to Grozny, 10 km from the Chechen capital. In the following hours, the Coordinator was released and instructed by the kidnapers to demand a ransom. The event was immediately covered by the media, even before MSF had made it public, which obliged the organisation to issue a communication, although they only released the first names and nationalities of the hostages. [V8](#), [V9](#), [V10](#)**



*'Hostage in Chechnya,'* 27 April 1996, **Email** from Anouk Delafortrie, MSF Belgium press officer to MSF Communications, Operations, General Directors (in English).

This morning two members of the MSF staff in Chechnya were taken hostage by a group of armed men. The incident took place at about 10 am (= 8 am central European Time) on the road between Grozny (capital Chechnya) and Piatigorsk (logistic base in the Russian federation). Two expatriates, the coordinator of the mission and the administrator, together with the interpreter and two drivers left Grozny in two cars. At about 10 km North West from Grozny they were passed by a car, which a few minutes later was waiting for them. The passengers, armed men, stopped them and took the administrator and the Chechen interpreter with them. They told Marcello, the coordo [coordinator], that they wanted a ransom and made an appointment with him this evening in a village nearby. The talks will probably take place tomorrow morning. From 9 am onwards we will be working in the office and give you more updates (474.74.88 or reception). MSF in Brussels will co-ordinate the info flow so don't take any initiative to inform the press (there are lives at stake here!) The word got around in no time! Although MSF would have preferred the event to be dealt with confidentially, journalists and agencies got hold of the news very quickly via non-MSF sources. Now we have to be able to reply to their questions in a coherent way!

#### What can we say?

MSF will have contact with the hostage takers to make sure both persons are doing okay and also to discuss how they could be released. Our position is that we are a humanitarian organization and that the money we have is used to help the Chechen people and also Russian citizens in Chechnya. Of course the security of our people is our biggest concern. Do not talk about the amount of the ransom nor give the names of the expatriate! We will try through local networks to obtain the release of our two collaborators

9. *The Moscow Times* was read mainly by English-speaking expatriates living in Russia.

### Who did it and why?

Although a lot of speculations will be made, we actually don't know who precisely are the hostage takers. They are Chechens which is all we know. We don't know whether they have a cause. Concerning the reason, speculations will be made with regards to the report we issued ten days ago in Moscow. We cannot confirm this thesis since banditry is very regular.

### Precedents

In January and March of this year two ICRC expatriates were taken hostage and released without paying the ransom. For MSF, it is not the first security incident, but never to this extent. There were some burglaries but never hostage takings.

### Background info/Security

MSF respects strict security measures in Chechnya: volunteers don't circulate after dark, on important roads like the one to Piatigorsk. MSF drives with at least 2 cars with at least two passengers.



'MSF Makes Contact with Chechnya Kidnappers,' **Reuters**, 28 April 1996 (in English).

The international medical charity Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) made contact on Sunday with gunmen holding two of its aid workers in Chechnya, an MSF spokeswoman said. The two medical workers were abducted on Saturday near Grozny by armed men who made confused ransom demands ranging from \$100,000 to \$300,000. The spokeswoman, contacted at MSF headquarters in Brussels, said the two hostages were a woman from ex-Yugoslavia and her Chechen interpreter. She would not give details about their identities or the negotiations in order to safeguard their security. [...]

MSF has said that the gunmen, who had set a first deadline at 9 p.m. (1700 GMT) Saturday for the ransom to be paid, appeared to be criminals. Armed bands are common in the Chechen capital, much of it reduced to rubble in 16 months of fighting between Chechen rebels and Russian troops. Aid workers have been seized before in the lawless region, but Fere Aalame, deputy head of the Red Cross mission in Grozny, said the earlier kidnappings were ail resolved within 24 hours and the Red Cross had never paid a ransom.



**Minutes** of MSF Belgium Board Meeting, 3 May 1996 (in French).

### **Extract:**

11. Questions / Answers: Board / Executive  
- Chechnya: Mario recalls the facts. Saturday spent near Grozny, D[...] was kidnapped with her interpreter. Mario and Alain were quickly informed. The events were rapidly given media coverage. Russian television quickly interrupted its programmes to announce the kidnapping. The pro-Russian

militia then visited our offices. A project committee meeting was held that evening. There were three possibilities: We were dealing either simply with bandits, or Chechen rebels, or finally, given the campaign carried out in Moscow and Brussels, a possible reaction by the Russians to compromise the humanitarian presence and operations.

The ransom demand fell from 300,000 dollars to 200,000 dollars.

In the following week, several approaches were made through local people to make contact and begin negotiations. It proved impossible to arrange a first meeting. They then wanted to negotiate directly with the local populations. On Sunday, there was quite a lot of communication with the press. The kidnappers issued a message; they wanted there to be no communication about the capture. The interpreter was released. At present, there are two people negotiating, but we don't know any more. Alain left on Tuesday and Eric also went. Operations stopped, apart from sending supplies to the hospitals. The Board wants to point out that they are monitoring the subject closely and that the executive has their full confidence.

**On 8 May, in a letter calling for funds from donors, MSF Belgium mentioned the kidnapping and demanded a solution in order to continue humanitarian operations in Chechnya.**




**Mail Shot** to Donors, Special Edition, MSF Belgium, 8 May 1996 (in English).

Dear Sir, Madame

When you read this letter, we hope that D[...], our colleague kidnapped on 27 April last in Chechnya will finally have been freed. Unfortunately, she is still captive at the time of writing this letter. We have very little information about her captors. D[...] was kidnapped in an extremely difficult situation for our staff.

As you will see in the information enclosed, despite the so-called peace treaties, the war is continuing unabated in Chechnya. Mortar fire, bombing and looting are daily occurrences. The city of Grozny has been completely destroyed. The villages have been abandoned; thousands of refugees are fleeing to the neighbouring republics.

Médecins Sans Frontières is one of the last humanitarian organisations working in Chechnya. Every day, men, women and children turn to us for help that cannot unfortunately come from anywhere else. Despite the anxiety and pain caused to her family and to everyone at Médecins Sans Frontières by the kidnapping of a member of our organisation, our work must go on. More than ever we need your support. Thank you for staying with us.

**The inquiry conducted by the MSF teams revealed that a local staff member was in league with the kidnappers, leading to negotiations and the release of the administrator on 10 May, after two weeks in captivity. MSF Belgium claims to have paid no ransom. V11** 



*'The End of the Hostage Taking – Two MSF Team Members are Finally Released,'* Press release, 10 May 1996 (in English).

**Extract:**

D[...], logistician/administrator, and S[...], translator, were finally released near Grozny at 13:30 local time, after being held hostage for 14 days. They are in good health. While hostage, the two MSF team members were not mistreated, were well fed, and were given bedding. [...]

It was thanks to various lengthy negotiations between the MSF team leaders in Grozny and Chechen civilian representatives, that the two were released. No ransom was paid. Following the kidnapping, MSF decided momentarily to suspend activities in Chechnya. However, the relief programs for Chechen refugees in the neighbouring countries of Ingushetia and Dagestan carried on as normal. As a neutral and impartial humanitarian organization, MSF requests that the security of its teams and activities be respected so that they can continue to assist the Chechen civilians.

**Within the Belgian section, but also within the MSF movement, questions and indeed arguments began to emerge over the possible link between this kidnapping and the public accusations aired by MSF on 18 April. This paralleled the questions raised concerning the risk of speaking out publicly about the events in the Great Lakes region in Central Africa, which was the subject of fierce controversy within the movement.**



*'Chechnya, the Price of Witnessing,'* Editorial by Eric Goemaere, Director General, MSF Belgium in Contacts, MSF Belgium in-house newsletter, 30 May<sup>th</sup> 1996 in French).

When I returned from Moscow, a month ago, I wrote about our qualms, our fears for the mission in Chechnya. We firmly condemned the massacres committed by the Russian troops, a condemnation which was made public worldwide. Two weeks later, D [...] and S [...] were taken hostage by bandits on the road between Grozny and Piatigorsk. Both are now free after an emotionally exhausting period of captivity, with constant psychological games played by their captors, threatening execution and then freedom in the same evening!

What a relief it was to see D[...] again, to hear her explain how she managed to withstand the psychological warfare.

Thanks to all the team who, in Grozny - at great personal risk, in Moscow and in Brussels instantaneously mobilised to create an international chain of solidarity. The kidnappers were surprised and one day asked us if we were a family, or a clan! If the price we pay to stay in Chechnya is high, too high, we still have to answer the question: who ordered this kidnapping? We met the captors: low-level Chechen bandits and certainly not the 'brains' behind it all. There are signs that it was a set-up by the Russian authorities as a shot across the bows to warn off troublesome witnesses. Other signs however, indicate that this scenario is improbable. Although we may never have conclusive proof, we want to do everything we can to find out more, to get to the bottom of things and find out whether it is still possible for us to stay in Chechnya.

Whatever the answer, Brussels spoke out in Moscow more firmly than ever before. This major incident in the history of our association forces us to reopen the debate on advocacy, a debate that began in the general meeting. Even if, in Chantilly, we clearly stated that the issue was to speak out AND to stay, antagonism is created when we denounce. The conflict between head office and the field reappears whenever the advocacy issue rears its head. This question is one of the major issues our association faces in the future. A Chechen leader came to tell us that since we spoke out, he now has access to the ear of European governments. Now that peace negotiations are under way, we can hope that we have added our own particular stone to the edifice. This debate is too fundamental for it not to affect all of us. Thank you all for your commitment.



**Minutes** of MSF France Board Meeting, 31 May 1996 (in French).

**Extract:**

CHECHNYA (Eric Goemaere)

Eric has just talked about the kidnapping of D [...] and her interpreter S[...]. They were ambushed on the road by a car and D[...] and S[...] were taken away, with the kidnappers demanding a ransom of US\$ 200,000. Lengthy negotiations took place over a 13-day period, with large numbers of intermediaries at the beginning (militia and FSB offered their services), which was problematic because, strangely, the media was quickly aware of it in Moscow. MSF was initially sent down misleading or even dangerous paths. [...] The request for direct contact with the hostages turned up nothing. [...] On the 4<sup>th</sup> day, S[...] was released, stressing that the money really had to be paid. [...] On the 7<sup>th</sup> day, MSF demanded to see the hostage-takers. The meeting 'in the middle of nowhere' was with extremely nervous bandits, clearly little-used to this kind of thing. [...] At the 2nd meeting, MSF gave the captors walkie-talkies and negotiations continued in this way for 3 days (5 hours of discussions every day). [...] Finally, an agreement was reached, exchanging D[...] directly against a smaller sum than that initially demanded. Officially, MSF does not admit to having paid and the sum will not be released (even at the board meeting).

Many questions:

- Who set it up?
- Chechen bandits (incapable of organising an exchange scenario?),
- Orders from the FSB? This kidnapping took place 9 days after the MSF press conference in Moscow where the Russian military were clearly accused (and did we pay the price for this?). However, if it were a case of State terrorism, surely we would have been dealing with more competent people, able to drag the affair out for longer, it is possible that certain combatant factions were involved.
- what was the role of the interpreter (a native Russian, member of the FSB)? Even if Eric believes that he was not in on it at the outset, he nonetheless helped rack up the pressure and increase the confusion (no doubt against payment).

Mistakes were probably made:

- by “demonising” relations with the political authorities, MSF Belgium had not had any contact with the Grozny authorities for 2 months and some may have taken us for spies. We have to go and see the military and the authorities and explain to them what we’re doing.
- during the press conference, we should not have said that we were engaged in political lobbying
- we should doubtless have had Chechens with us during the transport (language problems)
- we wanted to carry out our investigation alone, without Chechen networks.

Three members of the Belgian team are staying in Grozny and Eric will no doubt go back there at the end of the month to review the situation. He would like the French section to return to Grozny because so much needs to be done and there’s not really anyone else left in Chechnya. Brigitte explained that MSF France had decided to return to Chatoy, at a time when soldiers were getting killed. MSF France is now waiting for MSF Belgium to say whom they really believe was behind the kidnapping.

MSF Belgium will carry out further investigations for a month, by meeting people in Moscow and Grozny, This is not an isolated incident and kidnapping is a national pastime in Chechnya. The ICRC has had this type of problem on several occasions and there is a very significant risk from bandits. [...] It is also clear that some members of staff were involved. MSF is infiltrated left, right and centre and finds itself in a situation where those who are there to offer protection can often be the hostage-takers.



**Minutes** of MSF Belgium Board Meeting, 9 August 1996 (in French).

Chechnya: [...]

Pascal [Meus] is wondering about the identity of potential attackers and the underlying reasons, in the light of the analysis of the kidnapping: were these kidnappings simply the work of bandits or were they linked to our press conference?

Eric [Goemaere] replied that there is a bandit element, compounded by a political issue. He added that the fact

of contacting the authorities gives us credit, because beforehand we were considered as spies.

Pascal hopes that we will continue to play both sides.

Mario [Goethals] said that official contacts must take priority, but that we must then see whether action is possible.

Wim added that we must also aim to obtain guarantees for the safety of the teams. We have to avoid being barred from one camp because we are working with the other.

Pascal asked whether it was possible to analyse the impact of the press conference that we had called in Moscow.

Mario replied that this kind of impact is not always measurable. Moreover, in this particular case, the situation had gone beyond what was tolerable, we had no choice. We had to speak out.

Marleen [Bollaert] replied that even if the impact is not measurable, we must evaluate our testimony in the same way as the medical work we do. She also recalled that the board asked the executive for a critical assessment of the program and that it wanted to see the report as soon as it was ready.



*Unfortunately, the hostages were taken two weeks after the press conference, and the team in Chechnya, who in fact agreed to us speaking out, said ‘it’s because of what Eric said in Moscow that this happened.’ I have just come back from Moscow, the general assembly is starting, and I’m jumping back on a plane to go over there. As director general, I’m not supposed to disappear from my section just when the General Assembly is starting! But in this case I have to go because, rightly or wrongly, I believe that it’s up to me to be on the front line. I feel guiltier going than coming back. When I left, I said to myself: ‘what an idiot! I didn’t think for a moment that they were going to do that!’*

*From a distance, it seems obvious. But once you’re over there, you realise that first of all, kidnapping is a national pastime, secondly, there were Chechen criminals involved, even if this proves nothing because they could just be working under orders, and thirdly there is nothing to indicate that the Russians were implicated. If it had been the Russians, I believe that they would have drawn things out for far longer to tire us, wear us down, to be sure that we wouldn’t come back. They have no qualms about this type of strategy and wouldn’t have allowed things to be wrapped up so quickly. They would have tired us out, completely worn us down.*

Dr Eric Goemaere, Director General MSF Belgium, 1996-1998 (in French). interviewed in 2000




*The administrator was based in the North Caucasus. She was under instructions not to come down. But as the bloke who was supposed to bring the money down didn’t want to go, she came in his place. She came down with the new Coordinator. The kidnappers only kept her and told the Coordinator to tell the others that they wanted money. They kept her for three weeks. We conducted an investigation. We*

worked on following leads, and that's how we managed to break a guy, who had infiltrated the group and who finally began to talk. Strangely enough, he gave us sketches of those who carried out the kidnapping. I kept these pictures in my files. They must still be in the MSF office in Brussels. There was the whole chronology of the capture and what we did.<sup>10</sup> We had some doubts that information about the movements of the kidnapped team had been given out by one of our staff members. We questioned him and he confessed that he himself had been pressurised to give the bandits information. We'll never really know the truth on this, but it was almost certain that he was a former agent of the "[Intelligence] services." I believe that the press conference and the report radicalised the Russians with respect to our presence and that they stepped up this kind of action. Another element confirmed that people controlled by the Russians carried it out. Through a colleague who had contacts with the 'services' we managed to obtain an interview with Oleg Lobov, President of the Russian Security Council. This was at a time when all our contacts were proving fruitless. There was no progress and all we had was contradictory news.


Finally, we found ourselves in the Kremlin, with the head of the FSB, the President of the Security Council, the pro-Russian Chechen President, an interpreter – and our MSF colleague of Georgian origin, who understood Russian very well and who from time to time warned me that we had to be careful. The Russians told us that they would help us get the hostages released, but that in these conditions, the next time we did something like the report, it might be a good idea to let them know first what it was about, thereby avoiding this kind of problem. That was when my colleague and I became firmly convinced that these guys were controlling all the mafia and all the collaborating Chechen groups. We had called the press conference and issued the white paper [report], and as a result, one week later, the kidnapping took place.

Dr Alain Devaux, Programme manager MSF Belgium (1994-1996), (in French) interviewed in 2008.


 The Coordinator came home between 11:00 and 12:00 to warn us. Of course we telephoned Brussels, but word did not get out straight away. At around 2 or 3 in the afternoon, we received a phone call from the MSF France team in Moscow who asked us: 'what's going on?' We were watching the football on the television and we saw the banner along the bottom of the screen announcing that someone from MSF had been kidnapped in Chechnya. Everyone who knows anything about Russia found that highly surprising. MSF was 'nothing' and a kidnapping was nothing new and hardly an extraordinary event in this society. Why did the Russians immediately 'build up' the affair? It was probably

directly linked to our declarations. It must have been a way of showing the public what happens to those who issue that kind of statement. We had done absolutely nothing to tell anyone about the kidnapping. Of course we contacted people in Grozny, but it was strange that it could reach journalists in Moscow so quickly. Therefore, and perhaps not all that logically, we were wary of people we believed could have had a vested interest in passing the message on quickly, or who were waiting for the result of this message. A certain number of factors gave us to believe that the Russians were behind it all. The least you could say is that it was intriguing and worrying. But what troubled me most in this whole affair was that here in Brussels, the director general and the operations director, people who took decisions for us, who were supposed to protect us, completely denied the link between the communication and this event. That shocked me; it made me completely doubt everything I was doing for MSF. I don't have any problem with the statement, it's not because something happens and then something else happens as a reaction that you shouldn't do it in the first place. You just have to realise that there can be extremely serious side-effects, that we are taking a risk, and to act accordingly, possibly by toning down the statement and being less of a 'loud-mouth.' Like many people, I was pretty low. I stayed here for three months wondering what I was going to do with my life, whether I would still go out with MSF.

Dr Bart Ostyns, Field coordinator in Chechnya (1995-1996), Task Force North Caucasus (1999-2001) MSF Belgium (in French) interviewed in August 2000

 Personally, I think that we're ignoring the obvious. For me, it was simply a question of money. The Chechen mafia was not exactly unknown. I believe that an MSF declaration changed nothing for them. They worked like the Russians, and I couldn't see any difference. I think that they were possibly half-Russian, half-Chechen bandits. In any case it was not politics, that's my own personal feeling.

William Claus, Emergency Coordinator, MSF Belgium (1994-1996) (in French). interviewed in 2008

 After the kidnapping, I went to Brussels where I found myself up before a sort of 'people's court.' I was called in to face everyone. They said that it was the fault of the media and myself. Things got very personal and I had to say that the decision was taken by the organisation at an institutional level and that everyone was involved. I found myself in a very difficult situation and asked that Eric Goemaere come and confirm to everyone what I had just said. He did: 'This is what we said in the meeting over there and this is what we did. We did everything that we said we would.' Things

10. No document/file on this affair was found in either MSF Belgium head office in Brussels or in the Moscow office. More generally, no file in the MSF Belgium archives concerning the activities of the section in the North Caucasus during the first Chechen war could be found.



were tough and I believe that it was also because at a certain level, the decisions were not backed up as strongly as they should have been. The teams were allowed to get angry and worried about the decisions taken. It could have been handled more constructively, but they were placed in a very tough position with this decision to either stay or leave. After the kidnapping, they were totally traumatised. I was traumatised. I was also angry because I felt that I was perceived to be the guilty party in the institutional decision that had been taken by everyone.

Samantha Bolton, Communication officer,  
MSF International, 1994-1997 (in French)  
interviewed in 2000.

know that we are probably in the sights of those in favour of the Russian military intervention in Chechnya. Moreover, the Chechen picture is complicated by a host of different groups. It is extremely difficult to reach a conclusion on such a subject. On the other hand, during these debates (which have been going on for more than ten years) I do not recall having heard anything either precise or circumstantial to significantly back up the hypothesis that the kidnappings and violence inflicted on our team were committed on the orders of the Russians.

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of  
communication (1996-1998), Director of Operations  
(1998-2000), President (May 2000- May 2008) (in French)  
interviewed in 2009


At that time there was great tension between the sections concerning speaking out about the Great Lakes of Africa region<sup>11</sup>, with a crisis leading to the seminar at Chantilly<sup>12</sup> where one of the workshops dealt with the question of advocacy. At the time, we were already debating the dilemma of speaking out, keeping quiet, security, and so on. And then the kidnapping happened. During the workshop, the director of operations at MSF Belgium stated: 'We only speak out if we're certain of the impact, otherwise we keep quiet.' I answered that you can never measure the impact of advocacy and he ironically replied: 'Yes I can see that with this kidnapping.' At the time, suggesting a direct link between our advocacy and the kidnapping was tantamount to setting off a bomb in the discussions on the subject between the sections.

Graziella Godain, Emergency Coordinator, the Northern  
Caucasus, MSF France, February to October 1996,  
(in French) interviewed in 2008.

Within ten minutes one would realise that it was not at our initiative even though at MSF France we had been asked to speak out. At the time there were a lot of press releases from MSF Belgium and very few from MSF France. The situation was in fact the opposite of many others' cases. Brussels was in fact more active on the communication front and Paris was being more reserved. This type of superficial accusation was a knee-jerk reaction dating from 1994-95 during the Great Lakes crisis. Impossible to reach a definitive conclusion one way or the other. What is remarkable in this affair is that even those who say nothing are not spared. We

When we are making strong statements, there is a risk that it will endanger our access. That's a risk we should take; it's worth it. For the population in Chechnya this is a risk that we should take for them. There is also a risk that these statements that we make could lead to physical attacks—to kidnapping and assassination. That's a harder decision to take—we don't know enough about it. The Belgians think that during last war their statement led to retribution. Our team also, they are convinced.

Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and  
Regional Advisor in North Caucasus, (November 1999-  
January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005)  
(in English) interviewed in 2000

After a truce resulting from the temporary cease-fire signed on 10 June, the fighting resumed at the beginning of July, once Boris Yeltsin was elected President of the Russian Federation. During the months of July and August, François Jean and Vincent de Bellefroid, the two MSF France volunteers who left for an exploratory mission in Chechnya with the aim of reopening a program in Shatoi, began to supply the Chechen health structures with drugs and medical equipment, supported by the team in Ingushetia. In August, they continued their activities in the besieged city of Grozny, taking huge risks. They left on the eve of the ultimatum given to the civilian population by the Russian forces. They fled the bombardment of a town where it had become impossible to bring in emergency aid. During that period, François Jean described to various journalists the extent to which Grozny had become a trap for the civilian population. He condemned how the war was being waged by the Russians and the inertia of the international community. Within the MSF movement, some were beginning to worry about the risks he was running in speaking out so publicly. **V12** 

11. See footnote n°5

12. On 8 and 9 May 1996, 200 members of the various MSF sections, including a majority of mission coordinators, held an international meeting in Chantilly (France) to discuss and conduct workshops on the organisation and cohesion of the movement with regard to operations and advocacy.



'Grozny, a Trap for the Civilian Population,' according to MSF, **AFP** (France), 15 August 1996 (in French).

**Extract:**

Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) has become alarmed at the civilian population's situation in Grozny, believing that the Chechen capital has become 'a veritable trap for both able-bodied and wounded civilians.' MSF, which has had a team in Grozny for 10 days, is concerned that the wounded are finding it nearly impossible to reach the few health care facilities still operating.

MSF is worried about the 'city's pervasive lack of security, indiscriminate bombing that causes numerous injuries among the population and damages hospitals, and the absence of safe-passage corridors' for civilians. According to MSF, the medical situation in Grozny is appalling. Humanitarian teams 'have extreme difficulty entering Grozny and supplying centres capable of caring for the wounded.'



'I was in Grozny this Afternoon.' **Interview** with François Jean, MSF volunteer in Grozny, Le Soir (Belgium), 22 August 1996 (in French).

"My name is François Jean and I'm a member of the Médecins Sans Frontières team in Chechnya. I'm speaking to you from the city of Nazran in the Russian Republic of Ingushetia, which neighbours Chechnya. I just arrived in Nazran after leaving Grozny this afternoon. Late Wednesday evening, I had an impromptu interview with a person who directly witnessed the events of the past few days in Chechnya."

What was the situation in Grozny Wednesday evening the day before the Russian ultimatum was to take effect? "I left Grozny this afternoon. As in the past three days, certain areas of the city were very heavily bombed by the Russians."

What was the population's reaction to General Pulikovski's ultimatum? Have civilians continued to flee? "Yes. The number of people leaving grew considerably after the ultimatum was issued and has reached huge proportions over the past two days."

Is it still possible to leave the city? "Yes. Sometimes it's risky because of gunfire and bombs. There are also obstacles, like checkpoints that slow down the queue, but overall civilians are managing to leave the capital."

According to news services, more than 100,000 civilians remain in Grozny. "In my opinion, there are a lot more than that – maybe 200,000."

Why are they staying? "Some are staying because they're afraid their houses will be looted. Others, because they fear being arrested when they leave the city. Many of the men could be arrested. And finally, still others are remaining because they don't know where to go. That's especially the

case with the Russian population. Chechens often have friends and family outside the city, while the Russians..."

In other words, the Russian civilians are at great risk of being bombed by Russian soldiers? "That's one of the risks. For the Russians living in Grozny, there are few alternatives or ways out."

And the others? "People are extremely afraid and don't believe that things will change in any significant way. Everyone remembers what happened in December 1994 and January 1995." (Editor's note: the start of the Russian operation, i.e. massive and indiscriminate artillery and air strikes, which mainly victimised the civilian population.) "Those able to do so, fled the city before it was too late."

I understand your duty to preserve confidentiality on political matters. Could you tell us, however, whether the Chechen population still supports the separatists after the terrible suffering they have endured? "That, in any case, is the general impression. I have to say that the way the Russian forces have 'managed' the Chechen problem has helped strengthen a certain solidarity among Chechens. The massive, blind, and indiscriminate nature of the Russian strikes has resulted in people believing that they no longer have any choice."

What can we do here to end the massacre? "Again, ask the politicians. Since the beginning of this war, Westerners seem to have very well tolerated what has been happening here, seeing civilians blindly massacred. As for our involvement, we, Médecins sans Frontières, are going to continue trying to provide medical help to the population. But it's extremely difficult."

Are you returning to Grozny this Thursday? "We're going to try."




**Minutes**, MSF France Board of Directors, 6 September 1996 (in French).

**Chechnya: François Jean**


We had decided to restart the Shatoi mission and when we returned to Grozny, it was in a state of war. We had very few resources so we had to take advantage of our contacts and personal relationships and seek allies among the population. In fact, many people helped us and what may appear as operational weakness (no cars, no walkie-talkies, no flags), paradoxically opened doors. We relied quite a bit on other organisations, which were paralysed due to their withdrawal [from public life] and thus little involved in this phase of the war.

During the period from 6-20 August, Russia carried out an offensive against Grozny and clearly sought to prevent humanitarian aid from reaching the capital. Medicines and equipment could nevertheless be transported on foot from Nazran to Grozny. It was difficult to assess patients' needs, functioning [of health structures], and access routes. For that

reason, we decided to supply certain facilities in the outer suburbs, including the Tsoetsen Yurt and Chiri Yurt hospitals. This was, overall, not a very orthodox or spectacular operating method, but it was suited to the situation and Chechen society's way of operating. This mission is truly special and valuable as long as we can maintain the very important contacts we have made with the population. We have been setting up the Shatoi mission since the peace agreements were signed.

 As we approached Grozny, the fighting intensified. With the help of François [Jean, MSF Foundation] and Graziella [Godain, Coordinator, MSF France North Caucasus], we provided medical supplies, mainly drugs and the famous blue surgical kits. We tried to provide as many drugs as possible inside the city. We gave them to groups to transport the drugs to Grozny. It was a little tense with Graziella because we gave them to groups we didn't know very well. But we found out that they reached their destination. When we were able to go into hospitals, we saw doctors effectively using the kits we returned to Grozny in August. We went looking for wounded people under extreme conditions. We were completely reckless. The car was marked 'MSF,' but that didn't change anything. We were fired on as we drove around the city. Our driver was taking enormous risks. When we entered Grozny, CNN wanted to film us. They were in an armoured car behind us. I remember the scene: Grozny was deserted and we may have been the only car entering the city and CNN was filming us. At the time, François was a little 'allergic' to CNN, so we didn't do a real interview. I think he must have talked to the reporters from time to time, but I let him take care of that sort of thing. He undoubtedly talked to RFI reporters, especially one from the [French] newspaper *Libération* whom he really liked. And then we had to stop and walk with the mass of refugees leaving Grozny because of the ultimatum issued by the Russians, who had opened a corridor. So we left Grozny on foot with the Chechen staff and their families until we reached Ingushetia, where Graziella picked us up.

Vincent de Bellefroid, MSF France Project Coordinator in Shatoi, Chechnya, February to May 1995, then August 1996 to July 1997, then Project coordinator in North Caucasus (June to October 2001) (in French), interviewed in 2008.

 The media is covering the situation. We are more concerned about getting our aid into the city from Ingushetia through trips that are a bit daring. François [Jean, MSF Foundation] is going there in August to try to develop connections that will help us transport relief supplies. A minor controversy is brewing about endangering our teams. I'm head of communications, but I'm also the interim chief

of mission in Burundi. I receive phone calls there from international colleagues about Chechnya. They ask me if I don't think that what François is doing is too dangerous. He must have talked to some reporters.

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of communication (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000- May 2008) (in French) interviewed in 2009

**On 22 August, a cease-fire agreement was signed and Russian troops started to withdraw from Grozny. On 31 August, in Khasavyurt, Dagestan, the Chiefs of Staff of the Russian and Chechen militaries, Alexander Lebed and Aslan Maskhadov, signed a peace treaty.**




'Russian Troops begin Withdrawing from Grozny,' *Le Monde/AFP, Reuters* (France/RU), 25<sup>th</sup> August 1996 (in French).

#### Extract:

General Alexander Lebed was scheduled to return to Chechnya during the weekend of 24-25 August in an attempt to conclude a political agreement with separatist leaders. Boris Yeltsin, who had initially refused to receive his emissary Friday in Moscow and stated that he was not "at all satisfied with his mission," finally granted him his support. In the evening, he telephoned General Lebed to give him the green light to conduct negotiations and "sign an agreement to settle the political conflict and define Chechnya's status as an integral part of the Russian Federation." The Head of State announced his intention to "closely follow the entire peace process."

In the field, Russian troops began to withdraw from Grozny on Saturday in compliance with the cease-fire agreement signed on 22 August between Alexander Lebed and Chechen rebel leaders. The two parties agree that the cease-fire was generally observed on Saturday morning throughout the Caucasian Republic. According to Interfax, seven Russian soldiers were injured in Grozny over the past 24 hours.

 In late August, we were travelling near Khasavyurt. In a field, we saw huge tents surrounded by men who looked like Chechen rebels, with the clothes and appearance we had heard about. With them were 'bearded men' from Bosnia-Herzegovina. In any case, all we knew was that they were Islamist Bosnians who had come to reinforce the rebels. It was an impressive scene. They stopped us. They were celebrating their victory. There was a certain euphoria along this road; the few Russians who were there with their tank had a funny look on their face. And someone said to us:

*'They're here.' We were astounded. So that's what was occurring on this route after the signing of the peace treaties. We happened to find ourselves in a place where an historic event was taking place.*

Graziella Godain, Emergency Coordinator, the Northern Caucasus, MSF France, February to October 1996, (in French) interviewed in 2008.

**A few days before, the MSF France team picked up two volunteers of the humanitarian organisation ACF from the side of the road. They were kidnapped on 27<sup>th</sup> July and had just been released by their captors. V13 **



*"Humanitarian Organisations in Hell" La Wallonie (Belgium), 6 August 1996 (in French).*

On Monday, the French organisation Action Contre la Faim [Action Against Hunger] still had no news about its two staff members, who were kidnapped by six unknown gunmen on 27 July in the capital of Grozny. Since then, a man has demanded ransom of \$500,000 in exchange for freeing Frenchman Frédéric Malardeau, 35, and Briton Michael Penrose, 24. He did not, however, provide any proof of his involvement in the abduction.

[...] Médecins sans Frontières-Belgium has also learned a bitter lesson from its Chechen misadventures. Two of its staff members, an administrator of Yugoslavian origin and a Russian translator, were kidnapped on 27 April by a group of gunmen between Grozny and Piatigorsk, Russia, and later liberated on 10 May. MSF has since withdrawn from Chechnya. [...] Separatists have denied any involvement in the abduction of the ACF staff members, and humanitarian organisations state that, in most cases, they maintain good relationships with separatist groups.

The separatists accuse the pro-Russian Chechen government of having recently formed armed groups to commit acts of violence while passing themselves off as secessionist fighters. In any case, the kidnapping of ACF staff could raise the question in humanitarian circles about the wisdom of staying in Chechnya. ACF, which distributes free food in Grozny and other locations, is one of the last major aid organisations remaining in the country, together with the Red Cross, Merlin, and Médecins du Monde [Doctors of the World]. However, a humanitarian withdrawal from Chechnya would create more suffering for the civilian population, which has already paid a terrible price, with over 30,000 dead and 400,000 refugees.



*While leaving Grozny with François, we picked up two men lost on the side of the road. They were the two ACF staff members, who had just been released. They*

*were walking to Nazran. That would have taken them quite a while because there weren't many NGO cars passing by! They were in full Stockholm syndrome mode. They had been held for three weeks. I think the rebels thought they could be used as bargaining chips if things turned out badly. Later, because of the victory, they let them go.*

Graziella Godain, Emergency Coordinator, the Northern Caucasus, MSF France, February to October 1996, (in French) interviewed in 2008.



*The ACF hostages were held for three weeks. It took place during the war and lasted so long simply because people were stuck in basements during the bombing. But the matter was quickly resolved. ACF's executive director contacted a certain number of people that I had suggested he contact. One of the hostages I saw when he was released told me that in general they felt completely at ease eight to ten days after their abduction. They felt that the Chechen leadership had given very clear orders that they be released as quickly as possible and that stooping to anything like that [kidnapping] was out of the question. In fact, it lasted as long as it did more because of the fighting than because of the hostage-takers' bad faith. At the time, it was a conflict situation and the Chechen political and military authorities had, it seems, much more influence over these groups. In any event, in the ACF matter, it's clear that a firm response by the authorities resolved the problem.*

François Jean, Research Director MSF France Foundation (until December 1999), (in French) interviewed in 1998.

## **FOR HUMANITARIAN WORKERS, INSECURITY IS RISING WITH THE PEACE**

**In September, the MSF France and MSF Belgium teams resumed their respective activities in the Shatoi hospital as well as in a maternity hospital and five general hospitals in Grozny. But during the night of 25<sup>th</sup> September, three volunteers from the Belgium section were assaulted and taken hostage for several hours after having been forced to hand over money from the mission's safe. The team then began working under the protection of armed guards.**

**On 20 November, an MSF France vehicle was stopped by a**

**Chechen commando between Nazran and Shatoi and taken to Alkhan Kala's headquarters, where the commander humbly apologised. He had confused MSF's vehicle with that of the ICRC.**

**In fact, the same day, an ICRC volunteer was kidnapped from a car then released several hours later.**

**In November, MSF Belgium's house in Grozny was again burglarised. Then, on 14 December, MSF Belgium and UNHCR vehicles were taken during a battle between a group of Chechen fighters and Russian forces and held for several hours.**



**Minutes**, MSF France Board of Directors, 4 October 1996 (in French).

**Chechnya**

Alain Devaux: Alain reported on the abduction of three members of the MSF Belgium team in Grozny last Friday. They were freed three to four hours after their abduction [...]. MSF Belgium's presence, however, was very discreet: only three people and two cars. But the teams are extensively infiltrated and banditry very extensive. A team meeting was held to discuss what to do. Both Grozny and the southern part of the country have major [humanitarian] needs. Two team members decided to stay and one to leave. Safety measures will be strengthened, with an official guard on duty 24/7 (an unmarked car for travel). MSF Belgium will move its office to southern Grozny.

Philippe Biberson recounts the Chechen foreign minister's visit to MSF's headquarters in Paris to discuss the establishment of a humanitarian centre for all NGOs in southern Grozny. The visit lasted one hour and felt manipulative because the minister had invited an LCI [La Chaîne d'Information, French News TV Channel] journalist, who filmed a handshake in front of the MSF logo.



**Minutes**, MSF Belgium Board of Directors, 13 December 1996 (in French).

**Extract:**


**b. Chechnya**

The board recognised the Project Committee's decision to suspend the Chechen mission for security reasons. A report will be written about the situation after the elections. The board underlined that it feels responsible for the safety of its staff in the field and therefore emphasised the importance of sending them necessary and complete information. As such, the testimony of people on the ground would be very valuable for board members. Janek asked whether strengthening cooperation among NGOs in response to threats might put enough pressure on extremists to prevent them from continuing. Eric responded that the NGOs meet weekly but have not been able to exert sufficient pressure and the threats continue unabated.



*We took almost full security measures. In Dagestan, which is not particularly pro-Russian, we even had the special services of the police keeping watch over our buildings. But we were told to be careful, that the time would soon come when the police officers themselves would no longer be able to protect us because of elements that had infiltrated Dagestan. The Russians weren't very happy to have us there. They just tolerated us. And as it was officially difficult to expel the humanitarian groups and NGOs, they went about it differently by ultimately using pro-Russian Chechen groups or simply criminals, because the mafia was extremely visible, to pressure the NGOs and get them to leave. As a result, the MSF staff suffered a series of violent and sometimes very violent attacks and abductions to drive them out. We wavered for a while. But the pressure became too strong when events reached unfathomable levels of violence.*

Dr Alain Devaux, Programme manager MSF Belgium (1994-1996), (in French) interviewed in 2008.

**During the night of 16 December, six ICRC employees in Novye Atagi, Chechnya were killed in their sleep. V14**  **In late December, all MSF teams ended their activities and left Chechnya due to the risk of assaults and abductions.**



**'Medical Charity Suspends Work in Chechnya,' AFP** (France), Paris, 18 December 1996 (in English).

Medical charity Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) on Wednesday suspended its work in Chechnya until further notice after gunmen killed six Red Cross workers in the breakaway Russian republic, MSF said. The last MSF team still working in the southern Chechen town of Shatoi pulled out early Wednesday "as a sign of solidarity with the ICRC," the International Committee of the Red Cross, an MSF official told AFP. The four-member team which was about to resume work at the war-ravaged hospital in Shatoi has left Chechnya, the official added. MSF will decide whether or not to return to the North Caucasus republic after talks with other humanitarian organizations and its own workers. Masked gunmen shot dead five women -- two Norwegian, one Spanish, one New Zealander, and one Canadian -- and a Dutchman as they were sleeping early Tuesday in their residence at Novye Atagi, 20 kilometres (12 miles) south of the Chechen capital Grozny. The massacre comes amid an increase in the instances of banditry and hostage-taking in Chechnya which pose a direct threat to the peace deal signed by Russia and Chechen separatists in late August which ended 21 months of fighting.



**Minutes** MSF France Board of Directors, 20 December 1996 (in French).

**Extract:**

Early Tuesday morning, gunmen entered a hospital in southern Grozny, killed six individuals and wounded a seventh. The next day, all humanitarian organisations operating in Chechnya decided to leave the country as a sign of solidarity. Vincent [de Bellefroid], the coordinator, left for Shatoi to explain to the population the reasons for MSF's departure. François Jean will be joining Vincent and Jean-Marc Séraphin [Human Resources Manager] will be going to visit the teams.

The ICRC issued a press release stating that the assassination was deliberate and that the organisation was directly targeted. It wasn't a normal crime (no theft involved). The next day, a Russian family of six was killed in Grozny. Other people disappeared. All of the NGOs held demonstrations in Geneva and Nazran to express their solidarity with the ICRC. The ICRC suspended all of its activities in Chechnya and the other humanitarian organisations did the same thing (for at least a week).

The elections were scheduled for 27 January and it appears they have been postponed (no confirmation yet). Philippe [Biberson] noted that for the time being we have not come to a final decision. We withdrew after this shameful act to acknowledge the assassination and also to protect the young team on-site. This act is different from previous incidents in the way it unfolded. We would like to resume this mission (given the needs of the population), but it's too early to make a decision in view of the widespread tension in Chechnya. We have not ruled out the possibility of not returning to Chechnya.

In Guy's [Hermet] opinion, it's not the ICRC that's targeted, but the symbol it represents. We are all targeted and we must not provide targets on the ground for people who undoubtedly work for others in Russia. Odile [Cochetel] stressed that not knowing is worse than anything and that we should not plan on returning until we gain a better understanding of the situation.



*And then our International Red Cross colleagues were assassinated. At that point, we decided to keep a low profile, so I went to Chechnya for a final visit, and to bring the teams back to Dagestan. I was surrounded by Maskhadov's [Chechen rebel army Chief of Staff] men, who were armed to the teeth, with two cars on either side, so that I wouldn't be kidnapped. We took everyone back to Khasavyurt. And we continued to work with the Chechen teams who lived on-site and wanted to continue working with their people. We used a system we didn't like very much – remote medical care – but it was our only option. We experienced other threats of this type. There had been several minor abductions that had lasted a few hours, but the level of violence was increasing each time, with threats and mock executions. One time, colleagues were tied up next to a grave. One of them had to*

*go get a sum of money to liberate his friend. At that point, Chechen separatists attacked [the kidnapers] to free him, which posed its' own risks.*

Dr Alain Devaux, Programme manager MSF Belgium (1994-1996), (in French) interviewed in 2008.



*To my mind, what happened with the ICRC was a political act that meant, 'now, shut up.' I remember that at the time, I was very surprised about the amount of information the ICRC was providing about Chechnya. I think that contributed to it. Its Coordinator was constantly on the radio talking about what was going on in Chechnya. He even gave some rather surprising details on the bombing targets and type of missiles. They don't usually provide as many details. He was really saying, "such and such a missile fell on such and such a place." He was discussing specific places.*

Samantha Bolton, Communication officer, MSF International, 1994-1997 (in French) interviewed in 2000.



*First they started to steal and rob NGOs and these were the first attacks and they didn't kidnap but they took money – MSF France and MSF Belgium. They started like this and then at that moment the first reaction was no, we will not accept this. They used to not touch the foreigners. It was enough at the beginning, the fact that they took the money from the organization. Then they saw that it didn't work, then they started to beat the foreigners. I remember the story with Merlin and I saw the prisoners with bruising and red eyes. And then they started with kidnappings and it worked at the beginning. But people did not leave and then with ICRC it was like the last drop.*


E, MSF North Caucasus staff (in English) interviewed in 2008



*In summer 96, François [Jean] and us decided to resume operations in Shatoi because people knew us there. We wanted to be somewhat isolated in a mountain village, to work in a safe setting with a small staff in the hospitals at the foot of the mountain and take care of the entire mountain region. We spent quite a bit of time setting up the programme. The team gradually grew until it reached five or six people. We got the programme up and running, with mobile clinics in Shatoi and the surrounding*

area – until the assassination of our Red Cross colleagues in late 1996. We then withdrew the entire team. I myself was willing to continue the programme. I had a very long discussion with François [Jean] and Brigitte Vasset [Operations Director, MSF France]. It's true that staying is pretty hard to justify when this type of assassination takes place.

Vincent de Bellefroid, MSF France Project Coordinator in Shatoi, Chechnya, February to May 1995, then August 1996 to July 1997, then Project coordinator in North Caucasus (June to October 2001) (in French), interviewed in 2008.

 The situation gradually grew worse. The hostage taking was nothing new because it had been going on throughout 1996. It had happened to the ICRC six or seven times. But each time, the problem was quickly resolved at the local level – sometimes in a few days, sometimes in a few hours. But starting in October and November, when InterSOS staff were taken hostage, then from late 1996 to early 1997, with the series of abductions of Russian journalists, we realised that the situation was no longer the same and that we were dealing with better organised groups whose intent was obviously far more criminal in nature.

François Jean, Director of studies MSF France Foundation (until December 1999), (in French) interviewed in 1998.

**In late 1996, MSF published a book called *Populations in Danger* that included an essay by François Jean strongly condemning the violations of human rights and humanitarian laws perpetrated by Russian Federation armed forces in Chechnya.**



'Chechnya: Resistance to Oppression.' François Jean in *World in Crisis – Populations in Danger at the End of the 20th Century, 1996* – Médecins sans Frontières, Editions La Découverte (in French and English).

On 11 December 1994, Russian Federation forces intervened in Chechnya to 'reestablish constitutional order [...] by any means necessary.' Twenty months later and the outcome was devastating: the major cities have been razed, most of the villages bombed, innumerable homes ransacked, tens of thousands of people killed – mainly civilians but also thousands of Russian soldiers. Over the months, this 'simple police operation' has turned into a quagmire for the federal troops and a slaughterhouse for the civilian population. This conflict, which has left 50,000 dead and prompted

hundreds of thousands of people to flee their homes, has been marked by flagrant and systematic violations of international humanitarian law. The civilian populations, deliberately targeted, are subjected to indiscriminate and disproportionate bombing and suffer collective reprisals and large-scale acts of violence. The situation is especially serious since humanitarian organisations are hindered in their efforts and prevented from providing relief to populations trapped by fighting and bombing raids.

This merciless war, which has serious consequences for Russia's future, reveals democratic countries' pathetic complaisance towards massive human rights violations. And the stubborn resistance is a striking example of the powerful sway of the idea of freedom in the face of lies and indifference.

**Late February 1997, MSF France begins to resume its mission in Shatoi, Chechnya with minimal staff. This resumption is made official in April with full awareness of the kidnapping risks. Another team based in Nazran moves its displaced persons activities from the camps to the hospital for security reasons. de sécurité.**



Fax from Martine Guillod, MSF France programme manager, 10 January 1997 (in French).

#### Extract:

Following are the information and 'feelings' of the two people who recently went to Chechnya. The goal of this visit was to look into the situation, respond, and develop a position on the attack against the ICRC. [...] It is clear to everyone that this act was conducted very professionally, which implies real preparation and a determination to kill. This must certainly be placed in a context of political, pre-electoral destabilisation – destabilisation coming from Russia and certain Russian groups to give a disastrous image of Chechnya and drive out observers from the elections so it will be easier to make them 'illegitimate.'

Chechen groups are currently satisfied with the country's unsafe and chaotic situation and may not want order to be restored in the Republic by leaders legitimised by the popular will. None of our contacts first pointed the finger at Russia. Everyone distrusts everyone else. Everyone is armed. There may be a group that is 'more Islamist' than others that felt protected enough to commit this horrific act. (I'll talk to you about this by telephone if you prefer but you probably already know).

Our decision – which is set for this afternoon so that it can be conveyed by all of us – is to go on active standby. That means that two people will go once or twice to Chechnya for a short unorganised, unscheduled, unannounced stay (one night in Shatoi). Medical care has been suspended for the time being. All we have left to do is supervise completion of the hospital renovation. Our goal is to maintain the progress and contacts we have made and to be able to assess the

situation with a view of returning, which may end up with a permanent departure.



*Right after the assassination of the ICRC staff in Novye Atagi, I went to Chechnya and decided to put the missions on standby to give ourselves two months to think things over. In late February or early March, we had decided to resume a minimum level of services focused solely on the hospital, with little travel around the region. And we decided to review the situation after a month. So I returned in April with Marc [Gastellu-Etchegarray, Emergency Manager, MSF France] and that's when we decided, firstly, to resume the Chechen mission and, secondly, given deteriorating security conditions in Ingushetia, to revamp the mission in this country, including a gradual withdrawal from our activities in the camp over a one-month period. We were working in some 90 camps in Ingushetia, which meant an enormous amount of travel, so we refocused our efforts on certain diseases in the hospitals in Nazran. Everyone, both the field team and head office, began to sense a change during the final months of 1996, a change that became very clear in early 1997. We resumed the mission, stating very clearly that Novye Atagi was very much an exception that we did not think would be repeated elsewhere. But we also clearly stated that resuming the Chechen mission meant taking the risk of being kidnapped. That may have been an illusion, but we could tell ourselves that there were ways to operate, that paying attention to the situation would allow it, that it was a matter of political rationality that could be taken into account without, however, maintaining full operations.*

François Jean, Director of studies MSF France Foundation (until December 1999), (in French) interviewed in 1998.

**On 5 January 1997, the last Russian troops officially left Chechnya. On 27 January, Aslan Maskhadov was elected President of the independent Republic of Chechnya. The election was monitored by OSCE observers. But Maskhadov refused to sit on the Federal Council. On 12 May, a formal peace treaty was signed that created the foundations for future relations between Chechnya and the Russian Federation. The two parties pledged to renounce violence. The Duma, the lower house of the Russian Parliament, refused to ratify the treaty.**



*'Chechnya: Last Russian Troops Leave Grozny Civilian Airport,' **Le Monde/AFP** (France), 2 January 1997 (in French).*

**Extract:**

On Monday evening, 30 December, the last Russian troops withdrew from the civilian airport of Grozny, the Chechen capital, the news service Interfax reported Tuesday, citing Russian military sources. Only units guarding the Russian president's representatives in the Republic, who are based in the airport, remain on-site, according to Interfax sources at army headquarters in Moscow. However, the withdrawal of these last units from Chechnya, of the Defence Ministry's 205<sup>th</sup> brigade, were scheduled to leave Tuesday.



*'Russian and Chechen Presidents Sign "Historic Peace Treaty,"' **Le Monde** (France), 14 May 1997 (in French).*

**Extract:**

Meeting for the first time, the Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov and Russian President Boris Yeltsin signed a peace treaty on Monday 12 May in the Kremlin. The treaty "puts an end to a centuries-old conflict" and permanently renounces "the use of force to resolve differences" between the small separatist Muslim Caucasian Republic and the huge Russian Federation.

Yeltsin, who only half-heartedly approved the Khasavyurt agreement and whose representative in Chechnya, Alexander Lebed (since fired), signed a cease-fire agreement on 31 August, said, "We have signed a peace deal of historic proportions, putting a full stop to 400 years during which there has always been some type of war and uncertainty for an entire nation."

## THE MAN WHO ESCAPED

During the night of 1 July, Christophe André, administrator of the MSF France mission in Ingushetia, was abducted from the team's house in Nazran. MSF France officials decided to take a discreet approach with the media, so they did not speak with reporters the entire time he was held except on those occasions that could help gain his freedom, such as the French President's visit to Moscow in September. Meanwhile, in August, four volunteers from the French organisation Equilibre (Equilibrium) were kidnapped in Dagestan.





**Message** from Philippe Biberson, President of MSF France, to members of the MSF France Board of Directors and to the MSF Sections, 3 July 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

Our administrator in Nazran, Ingushetia was apparently kidnapped from his home the night of 1 July after his guard was knocked out and tied up. The office was not looted; the mission was in the process of being significantly downsized and quite a few of the local staff had recently been laid off. We have received no other news. The family was notified the day of the abduction by Jean-Yves de Lempis and Anne Marie Gloaguen. Arnaud Laurent is on-site with Aleth [Jaurou] the Coordinator, and Vincent de Bellefroid, who came from Grozny to join them. The rest of the mission is returning home. François Jean left for Nazran this morning.

The news has not leaked out for the time being but we have confided in all of the NGOs, our 'cousins' [the other MSF sections] and the French embassy in Moscow. We will issue a terse press release as soon as we have to, but in the absence of any contact or demand, we do not want to report a kidnapping without having any proof. We want to maintain the initiative on media coverage because it will serve as leverage in any negotiations that may occur, so the information we're giving you is confidential. We are very concerned because Christophe is alone and this is his first mission, but he's a very sturdy guy. Also, contrary to Chechnya, we have few political contacts in Ingushetia, which leaves the field open to all the government bodies and little room for maintaining the initiative. We are taking the necessary steps to make sure that lasts.



**Minutes**, MSF France Board of Directors, 11 July 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

Ingushetia (Marc Gastellu)

Christophe André, administrator, was kidnapped from his residence in Nazran during the night of 1 July and we have yet to receive news about him or his abductors two weeks after his disappearance. Once again, we are reduced to conjecture, but we are leaning toward a criminal abduction (a common occurrence in the Caucasus), with a political component. The latter could be interpreted as an attempt to destabilise and delegitimise Russia by imposing isolation on Chechnya and its ally, Ingushetia. Moreover, this kidnapping has prompted a new wave of abductions and acts of violence in Ingushetia and Chechnya. All of our activities have been suspended. French and Ingushetian officials have been informed, but MSF believes that discretion is the best way to ensure the success of negotiations.

François Jean is on site. After making many local contacts (speaker of parliament, reliable personal networks, clergy), he is scheduled to meet with the Ingushetian president in the coming days. A Franco-Ossetian journalist has also offered to intercede on our behalf with the Ingushetian and Ossetian presidents. After discussing the matter, the board

of directors has not ruled out hiring an expert to locate the kidnapers. This course of action is particularly favoured by Frédéric Laffont, who calls this an "asset," and Jeroen Jansen, who believes that "thinking we can act alone is arrogance and we must recognise our limits." Contacts will be made, but for the moment we do not know where it would best to apply pressure and we are also afraid of interference.



**Minutes**, MSF France Board of Directors, 29 August 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

Nazran: Situation report (Graziella Godain)

Following the kidnapping of Christophe André on the night of 1 July 1997 in Nazran, we received a letter on 21 July demanding a ransom of \$1 million; a photo was attached. The letter stated that Christophe was being held in Chechnya. One month later, we received another message that asked us to wait another "month or month and a half." Contrary to what we had thought, the passing months clarified the situation. We now favoured the idea that a more political approach should supplement local strategies, so we redirected our approach. Christophe's family has shown great confidence in us and has agreed with our decision to keep this out of the media.

Due to the political intricacies of the 'kidnapping industry' (four Equilibre staff members and several other foreigners are also currently being held), we have asked that our demands be addressed during the coming visit of several French dignitaries to Russia. We know this matter is being closely monitored by the government, but we are wondering what actions are being taken. A preparatory meeting has been scheduled at the Quai d'Orsay [foreign ministry]. At present, François Jean, Arnaud Laurent, Aleth [Jaurou] and Vincent de Bellefroid are on duty in Grozny and Nazran and have developed a large number of official and non-official contacts. Jean-Hervé Bradol is in Moscow and Philippe Biberson will be travelling to Moscow shortly.

During the discussion, two major points were addressed:

How will we respond to the ransom demand?

Philippe Dabadie raised this issue, noting that several abductions recently ended with negotiated settlements. Philippe Biberson confirmed that this option has always been on the table, but that it seems premature for now. However, if we could be fully assured of freeing our hostage this way, we would agree to it.

Do we have to communicate with the kidnapers through the press?

Maurice Nègre said he thought that this method, still untried, could speed up negotiations. Marc Gastellu disagreed, stressing the risk of one-upmanship and counterproductive effects.



'Two French NGOs Urge Jacques Chirac to Win Release of Staff Held Hostage in Russian Caucasus,' Jean Baptiste Naudet, *Le Monde* (France), 24 September 1997 (in French).

#### Extract:

French humanitarian organisations Médecins sans Frontières and Equilibre are asking Jacques Chirac to pressure Russian authorities to win the release of the five French citizens held hostage in the Russian Caucasus during his state visit to Moscow from 25-27 September. "We are expecting Jacques Chirac to put this case at the top of his agenda during his discussions with the Russian authorities. We are waiting for a firmer position from the French government. It would be hard to understand how this could be an ordinary visit while five French hostages are being held on Russian Federation territory," said François Jean, MSF Coordinator for the Caucasus, in Moscow the day before the arrival of the French President. Christophe André, 30, a native of Valenciennes and an administrator for Médecins sans Frontières' North Caucasus missions, was abducted on the night of 1 July at the organisation's office in Nazran, the capital of Ingushetia (southern Russian Federation).



**Minutes**, MSF France Board of Directors, 26 September 1997 (in French).

Nazran (Graziella Godain)

A great deal has happened since the last Board meeting. The first lead fizzled out, because the people involved didn't show up. The second one is still active. We have made contact with the kidnappers, and we managed to talk to Christophe for three minutes on the phone. He's doing 'well,' he seems lucid and his reactions were clear. He told us he could hang on in there. We told him he wasn't alone.

#### A kidnapping 'industry'

Over the past year, the number of kidnappings in the region has shot up. Ten internationals have been kidnapped in the area. Everyone is on tenterhooks, and it's difficult to react because all our movements and negotiation efforts are probably being monitored. We need to be extremely cautious and proceed step by step (Philippe B.).

#### Reflection required on the terms of exchange

The negotiations aren't easy. We need guarantees on the conditions of exchange, and this is what takes the longest. The kidnappers apply constant psychological pressure with new deadlines, so as to push the ransom up. It's gruelling for the MSF team in the field, dealing with these on-going threats. But they are coping so far, and are working on the ins and outs of the exchange so as to ensure its success. François has held some long meetings with Russian journalists to form an idea of how things have worked during previous kidnappings. There's always political involvement at some point in time (Graziella). Kidnappings have been continuing throughout this negotiation period, and the negotiators themselves run the risk of being taken. Poor planning could

give way to a bad outcome: the money being robbed, being caught in cross-fire... (Jean-Hervé). We depend on phone calls that sometimes come, sometimes don't. We don't have any control over our contact with the kidnappers, which is why we're looking for a go-between (Philippe B.).

#### What do the kidnappers want? (Odile).

We've offered all sorts of things: medicines, cars.... All they're interested in is money.

#### Aren't we encouraging kidnapping if we pay over a ransom? (Odile).

It's not those paying ransoms that encourage the trafficking, but the permissiveness of the political regime. It's the state of Chechen society that produces this system (Jean-Hervé). The kidnappers wait until the people claiming the hostages understand that the authorities are helpless or involved, and they're ready to pay. We're not going to find another way out - even the anti-terrorist groups agree. In these situations, there are only imposed options (Philippe B.).

#### Publicise the kidnapping or not?

Given the inevitable media interest in the region during Jacques Chirac's trip to Moscow, MSF has decided to keep tight control of the information given out, in an effort to avoid negative fallout. People are kidnapped on Russian Federation territory. The authorities have some responsibility, and moreover they have intervened in the past to secure the release of certain hostages. The Security Council has intervened in other kidnapping cases, and we think that J. Chirac [President of France] could influence the situation. It seems that the subject was raised with Boris Yeltsin and the Prime Minister (Jean-Hervé).

#### What does Christophe's family think?

The family does not want to speak to journalists, so MSF is handling interviews.

#### How will it all end?


Do we have contacts with groups or organisations for which things have turned out badly? (Maurice) We don't know how the kidnappings among the Chechen population end, they take place by the hundreds, but to our knowledge, things have never turned out badly for internationals. It's always involved paying up, except on two occasions: the hostage managed to escape, and a group that recovered the money at a later date. (Graziella)



*It only came out in the press about a week or ten days after the kidnapping. If we compare it to other kidnappings, which were all over the papers 24 or 48 hours later, it really shows that the communication department kept a tight lid on things. We gave a few interviews at first, but the journalists didn't particularly hound us. Later, interviews were all initiated by us. As it was, we decided not to give interviews focusing on the details of Christophe's kidnapping. We spoke out to apply pressure, using political windows of*


opportunity to draw attention to the hostage, to keep him visible. So during the official visits of Védrine and Chirac [Minister of Foreign Affairs and President of the French Republic], we flagged that fact that one of our staff was being held captive, and that the hostage taking issue needed addressing. We constantly had to strike a balance to avoid raising the price tag on the hostage's head, make sure he retained a human value. So we had to present him as a 'humanitarian worker,' in the region to save lives. This was our line when we spoke out, but we didn't communicate proactively on the subject. There was a limited inner circle of journalists: correspondents from the dailies, *Le Monde* and *Libération*, a Russian journalist, a few English-speaking journalists. At the time, these journalists spent a lot of time in Chechnya. We spoke to them off the record, rather than giving interviews. They told us what they thought of this kidnapping issue, and gave us contacts to pursue. In any event, we didn't have that much to say. They published more general articles on hostages and the Chechen problem, not interviews with MSF.

Graziella Godain, Emergency Coordinator, the Northern Caucasus, MSF France, February to October 1996, (in French) interviewed in 2008.


 In the beginning, the team members in the field replied to certain journalists' questions because we didn't want to hide the kidnapping. Afterwards, everything was handled with Paris' agreement. I think that François Jean had selected the people he was ready to speak to, and he was in a win-win situation: if you give me info, I'll give you info. He chose three or four people he trusted. He was really wary of the rest. It was more like a network of people who could lead us to other people, to informers. We had contacts from time to time, when we went to Moscow, for example. We rarely talked about the kidnapping; we said that we had no news, which was true. We gave out a bit of information, but not much. And we were suspicious, almost paranoid, with certain persons. We were also asked for interviews by a Chechen journalist, which we refused. I think we spent days, weeks, discussing the whether or not to speak out. There's never one right answer. When we decide to speak out, we do it with the quiet, and terrifying, conviction that we are placing the hostage's life in danger, but if we don't speak out, he could be forgotten, overlooked. In the end MSF decided to use highly calculated, specific windows of opportunity to speak out. It suited us, because it left plenty of room for manoeuvre, probably because there wasn't too much media pressure, and discussions with the family were handled entirely at headquarters.

Vincent de Bellefroid, MSF France Project Coordinator in Shatoi, Chechnya, February to May 1995, then August 1996 to July 1997, then Project coordinator in North Caucasus (June to October 2001) (in French), interviewed in 2008.

**Throughout the period of Christophe's kidnapping, a crisis cell supported the four volunteers who had stayed in Nazran, endeavouring to track Christophe down. Headquarters staff took turns to replace them and be with them on a temporary basis. They worked with the help of the Chechen government's anti-terrorist group.**

 Based on a specific request made from the autumn onwards by Vincent and the Chechnya team, it was agreed that I more or less handle the security back up. Whenever the slightest thing happened, I'd fly in without delay, tap into the network, and try and sort it all out.

François Jean, Director of studies MSF France Foundation (until December 1999), (in French) interviewed in 1998.

 We dug around to find out who was behind Christophe's kidnapping, and that's when we got hold of a video filmed during the field coordinator's leaving party, and we started to put names to faces. We went to Grozny to see Chechen leaders and identify those we thought were behind it all. And this is where we ran head-on into certain realities. When we put the tape into the anti-terrorist group's video recorder (and this was the group designated by the Chechen government at the time to investigate kidnappings) the guys nearly collapsed. They weren't faking it. They went white as sheets, they turned round to us, and told us that if people got to know that we'd already worked out this much, we'd be in trouble; our personal security was in danger. By having them on a tape in our possession, and by poking around asking questions about them, we were putting ourselves at risk. According to them, this was highly valuable, but risky, information. The people filmed at the party were highly placed. Among others, there was a guy who during the first war was on the separatists' side. He got drawn in to human trafficking with the Russians, and then his group went over to their side. After that trip to Grozny in 1997, we had a more concrete take on the situation. We saw that the Chechen leaders who didn't get involved in the kidnapping game were powerless. And those who did get involved didn't want to meet us. One day, we were lunching in a restaurant with our bodyguards. They were concerned about what was going on in the restaurant. They started to take the safety locks off their guns, and went off to talk to other Chechens who were still around, and who'd been leaving the restaurant just as we'd gone in. When they came back, they told us that the guy they'd just spoken to was one of the main leaders of the kidnapping business in Grozny, and he had suggested that they kidnap us... That's when we realised how hard it was to protect ourselves against this type of problem. Then we went to visit former hostages, particularly Russian journalists from the private Russian [television] channel. François went to see

a member of the Russian Security Council, who told him that he'd been able to do something in a previous kidnapping of a journalist; bit-by-bit we got to understand how to approach this kidnapping issue. It's a culture of techniques too. You have to go through the material conditions for release: how to protect a "money for prisoner" exchange, and which intermediaries should be involved. That's when we learnt that a colonel or general in the Russian army could facilitate such an exchange. In certain cases, the private militia of a bank would secure the exchange location. The editor in chief of a press agency that'd had some journalists kidnapped in the past, told us that when he'd got to negotiate the practical conditions for release, the people in charge (his superiors and Russian officials) cut him out of the discussion. Which is when he understood that certain aspects of the payment were kept quiet. We dug all this information up ourselves. So we started to decode the environment.

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of communication (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000- May 2008) (in French) interviewed in 2009

**On 21 October, Christophe André, a hostage in Chechnya, escaped. The MSF team picked him up, and took him to safety in the OSCE's headquarters in Grozny. The OSCE premises had embassy status. But the Chechen anti-terrorist group, who feared a ransom had been paid, circled the buildings until they were accorded an interview with the ex-hostage. On his return from Moscow, the latter gave a press conference to allay journalists' doubts on the truth of his escape.**



*'Hostage/Northern Caucasia: Christophe André Left Chechnya Early this Afternoon.'* Press release, Médecins Sans Frontières, 24 October 1997 (in French).

Christophe André left Chechnya by plane early this afternoon. He is about to land in Moscow. He will reach Paris in the hours or days to come. Christophe, held hostage for several months in Chechnya, is free and safe. This is an immense relief for his family and all of Médecins Sans Frontières. After more than three and a half months of imprisonment in Chechnya, Christophe finally managed to escape his kidnappers. He was abducted in Nazran (Ingushetia) on the night of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> July '97, whilst on mission. No ransom was paid over. A team of five people, based in Northern Caucasia, has been working for his release since last July, along with the authorities concerned. We remain concerned about the foreign hostages still captive in this region, including four members of the organisation Equilibre. These kidnappings are unacceptable for humanitarian organisations, and deprive the populations they are trying to assist of vitally needed aid.



*'Caucasia: MSF Hostage Describes his Escape,'* Véronique Soulé, **Libération** (France), 27 October 1997 (in French).

"The worst part for me would have been an exchange for money, like I was some kind of merchandise," confides Christophe André, the French hostage in Caucasia and a member of MSF. On 20th October, he escaped his kidnappers, who had demanded a ransom. "Right now, I feel like a football player who scored the winning goal of the match." Arrived in Moscow on Friday, the former administrator for MSF in North Caucasia related the details of his escape to several journalists. Despite the fifteen or so kilos lost during nearly four months of detention, he declared that he was feeling good, "maybe never so happy in my life." The end of a nightmare, but also, and above all, the way it ended: "Proud to have gotten out of there, to never have cried in front of them."

Handcuffs forgotten That Monday evening, like all the others before, the watchman had brought him his meal: watery vegetable soup and some tea. "There were small miracles from time to time: a plate of pasta, and on four occasions, some meat." Handcuffed to an iron bar, he ate off the bed. Ten minutes later, as always, the watchman cleared away the plate and offered him a bucket to relieve himself in: the only moment of the day when his handcuffs were unlocked. "I always replied yes, if only to take my daily three steps." That evening, as usual, the watchman left to empty the bucket and forgot to re-lock the prisoner's handcuffs.

"It seems hard to believe, but it's not really so strange" relates Christophe André, "The kidnappers were a very amateur bunch. They did their jobs, nothing more. They forgot to re-lock my cuffs for a whole night once. And the following morning, when he realised what he'd done, the watchman didn't seem unduly concerned." This 30-year old former financial controller with a calm and composed air considers that his behaviour helped to take his jailors off guard. "I made a real effort to play the good boy: I never caused problems. They thought that I was incapable of trying anything."

Christophe was stunned. He hadn't stopped plotting a means of escape since the night he was abducted in Nazran, on the 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> July. And on this occasion, everything fell into place: the door to his jail – a kind of shed – couldn't be locked like the previous ones.

#### A blind dash for freedom.

He decided to wait for nightfall. And then made a blind dash for freedom. Christophe didn't know where he was; he took a road lined with houses to try and blend in. His kidnappers had given him outsized shoes, without laces or soles. His feet started blistering in no time. "I was terrified I was going round in circles." Once he'd left the area, he walked across fields. Then he spotted a canal, and decided to follow it, to be sure he was heading away. Exhausted, he lay down on the ground and "stared at the stars." Arriving by the side of a road, he flagged down a car. Christophe André, on his

first mission for MSF, spoke neither Russian nor Chechen. Using gestures and international words, he explained that he was French, and that he'd had an accident. The driver took him to his home in Gudermes, some forty kilometres from the Chechen capital.

#### The "good Samaritan."


On Tuesday night, the MSF office in Piatigorsk (Caucasia) received a telephone call: the Chechen who'd picked up Christophe had come to use the telephone in Grozny. The man explained that he'd picked up a Frenchman, and he didn't know what to do with him. He seemed terrified. "My good Samaritan" Christophe calls him. A little while later, he shouted down the telephone himself: "I got away!" He asked that any negotiations in progress should be brought to a halt, right away. A meeting was fixed up with the Chechen and Christophe for the following day, at 11:30 am near the deportation memorial, in the heart of Grozny. At the specified hour, the ex-hostage stepped out of the car, and joined the MSF team waiting there for him.

#### Questioning in Grozny.


The group then sped to the OSCE's headquarters (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe), the only diplomatic mission in Grozny at the time. This is where the second part of the drama unfolded; this time with the Chechen authorities. Christophe André wanted to leave Chechnya immediately. He had to wait 48 hours for official authorisation. On Wednesday night, at midnight, the head of the Chechen anti-terrorist group telephoned the mission: he wanted to interrogate the ex-hostage, there and then. "He was too tired, we refused," explains François Jean, of MSF, who'd stayed with Christophe at the OSCE. In the small hours of the morning, the mission was surrounded by armed men. By the end of the morning, the ex-hostage had given his account to the Chechens. But the interrogators, doubtless deeply frustrated by their inability to stem this growing "industry" of abducting foreigners, demanded to see him again. They suspected a ransom had been paid. "The kidnappers had asked for 1 million dollars," recalls François Jean, "but we told them that we didn't have it, and without shutting any doors, we asked them to re-negotiate in vain." "I was being treated as the accused," recalls the ex-hostage, "it was too much to take." On Friday, he finally boarded a plane for Moscow.

#### Using his imagination to resist.

Christophe André states that he was held captive in five different places, and is convinced that Chechens held him in Chechnya. To keep going, day after day, attached to a radiator or a pipe, with nothing to read, no one to talk to, he needed, he says, "a lot of imagination." The hostage spent a great deal of time observing and considering the smallest chink in the security set up. Every morning, he noted the date of dawning day, "to not lose track of things completely." And he made up stories for himself. After several days spent in Moscow, back with the "MSF family," and having thanked all those who had helped during his captivity, the young Frenchman from Valence prepared to return to France. MSF France has decided to close its mission in North Caucasia.

 *The worst moment with the press was the period after Christophe escaped. From Thursday onward, when he was at the OSCE, surrounded by the guys from the Chechen anti-terrorist group, the news that he'd escaped exploded all over the press. It started to get complicated. Some were saying: "It's complete twaddle, MSF's telling a pack of lies," etc. The weekend before Christophe returned to Paris, I gave an interview to a journalist over the phone. He said to me: "So, he escaped, how did he get away?" I gave him the details. And then at some point, I must have said "and Christophe's release...." And he said: "Ah ha! We're talking about a release or an escape?" I said to him "Listen, once and for all, it's an ESCAPE!" And he replied "But you said "release," it's not the same thing at all." It was as if he was saying, "there you go, I tripped you up, I caught you out." I said to him "Listen, you can think what you want, I'm telling you what Christophe's saying." I found it totally mind blowing that he'd managed to do what he did, and he couldn't convince people of what had happened. Fortunately, the interviews given to a selection of journalists in Moscow allayed a lot of the doubts, and let him establish the truth. I discussed this episode with journalists later on. They told me that during that whole time, before the press conference Christophe gave in Moscow, they thought we were telling a load of fibs. But later, when the Libération journalist, who had a certain credibility, a certain notoriety, wrote a piece describing the escape, they said to themselves that if she believed it, it must be true.*

Graziella Godain, Emergency Coordinator, the Northern Caucasus, MSF France, February to October 1996, (in French) interviewed in 2008.

 *We made a really proactive move: we decided to speak to the press, because there were rumours circulating after what had happened in Grozny. So we saw Le Monde, La Libération, and some radio stations, and described to them what had happened. And from the moment we'd talked to them, once they'd seen me in person, we had no more problems about disbelief of my escape. The journalists stirred things up a bit when the French government paid a ransom for the release of the Equilibre members. They asked "wasn't it the same deal for MSF? Someone paid? Who?" One investigative journalist from France 2 looked into MSF's case to see if things hadn't been the same. I agreed to talk to him on the phone. I kept it very simple: "It would be completely absurd to pay something for the release of someone, and not benefit from it at all. As François Jean says: "There's always someone who wants to be on the souvenir photo." Yet no one was on the souvenir photo here. I was the one with total control of the game from the minute I was out and running free." 'Libération' questions were more of the type: "Should ransoms be paid or not? What's your take on the kidnapping stories?" Things along those lines. François and I, we told her, "obviously it's better not to pay a ransom, but given the incapacity of the local police force to intervene, there's no*

other choice but to start negotiations. Escape is pretty unlikely, and clearly something that shouldn't be counted on." So yes, there were negotiations, to and fro on the issue of money and exchange of prisoners. But there's always a deal, at some point in time. I was furious that I was suspected of lying. I wanted to yell at them: "I'm telling you the truth!!!" So we used the press for precisely that end, and I think we did a good job of it. It wasn't my thing, being on TV or giving interviews... From the moment we left the OSCE, everything was great, MSF organised it all really well. I told Graziella what I wanted, and above all what I didn't want, and my wishes were respected in every way. At some point in time, the communications officer said to me "Elkabach [a well known journalist from a French television channel] has called. I'll give you his number." And to Elkabach, he must have said: "I've given Christophe your number. Now it's up to him whether he calls you or not." I wasn't tempted, because I was wary of myself. I had the impression I was sliding into a kind of self-congratulation, diving into the folly of stardom. I didn't want to play that game, because it could draw out the less attractive side of my character. In any event, the fact that I'd managed to escape was more than enough for me. I didn't need to see my photo in all the papers to be pleased with myself.

Christophe André, MSF France Administrator in Ingushetia, April to July 2007, (in French) interviewed in 1998

**National staff continued to run MSF France's programme in Shatoi, southern Chechnya, throughout the entire kidnapping period. It closed down in the weeks that followed.**



*The Shatoi programme wasn't closed until November 1997. We didn't want to shut everything down, because Shatoi could be a contact point. And we also didn't want to spoil the image Chechens had of MSF. So the national staff kept the programme running throughout this period. It wasn't a difficult one to manage. It involved supplying medicines and running mobile clinics. It ran until the end of September/early October 1997. Once Christophe was free, we returned to shut it down officially and laid off all the staff...*

Vincent de Bellefroid, MSF France Project Coordinator in Shatoi, Chechnya, February to May 1995, then August 1996 to July 1997, then Project coordinator in North Caucasus (June to October 2001) (in French), interviewed in 2008.

**In January 1998, the elected Chechen separatist President, Aslan Maskhadov, nominated the wartime leader Shamil Bassayev to the post of Prime Minister. In July, the President escaped an assassination attempt. From October on, his authority waned, whilst that of Bassayev, under the influence of the radical Saudi Islamist commandant, Ibn al Khattab, was on the rise. In January 1999, in a spate of one-upmanship, Maskhadov announced the introduction of Sharia [Islamic law] in Chechnya within three years. The kidnapping of corporate and international organisation staff multiplied, following the example of local kidnappings. In October 1998, the heads were found of three British citizens taken hostage some months earlier. Vincent Cochetel, the UNHCR delegate, kidnapped in Grozny, was imprisoned for more than 10 months in particularly dire conditions, and released on 12 December 1998 following a violent intervention by the Russian Special Forces. [V15, 16](#)**




**Minutes** of the MSF France Board of Directors' Meeting on 18 December 1998 (in French).

#### Vincent Cochetel's release

Vincent Cochetel, the UNHCR representative in North Caucasia, was kidnapped in Vladikavkase in January 1998. He was released a few days ago, following an intervention by the Russian 'special forces.' A telephone link was set up with Odile Marie-Cochetel [Member of MSF France's Board of Directors] and Grégoire Cochetel in Tours. They thanked MSF for all the support provided over the last 10 and one half months of Vincent's captivity. Vincent seemed to be back on his feet on the intellectual and emotional front, but the psychological damage had been profound. He was subjected to constant pressure and threats. His physical wounds were superficial [but] three psychiatrists had been with him day and night at hospital since his return. Vincent had no information, except about the kidnappings and release of hostages. He said he knew who had held the Englishmen executed last week. We don't know if a ransom was paid or not. The release was probably partly negotiated, and everything had been planned, except for the final volley of gunfire. We need to know more before deciding if we can return to this region or not. We need to think about the hostages still in captivity (including many Russians), and the future negotiations.

Only part of the release was filmed. It's impossible to know if the film really follows the order of events as they unfolded. There were probably around 2/3 dead. Whatever the case may be these images do a world of good for Russia's reputation. The release took place at exactly the time media impact would be at its greatest, four days after the execution of the four British hostages had become known. Odile thinks that the Russian's role and timing was plain cynical

 *Chechnya was always a place, which only needed a little spark to flame up. All those events that took place in between those two wars were results of hard work, of our 'bastards' together with their 'bastards' that led up to 1999, that led public opinion to think: 'yes, they are bandits. These are people who will never be able to live alone and organize their own state.' The invasion of Dagestan was previously planned and all designed to come to what we have come to. There is a guy sitting somewhere up there giving a little sweet to you, a little sweet to another, and plays with us like chess figures.*

A, MSF North Caucasus staff (in Russian, translated into English by an MSF interpreter) interviewed in 2008

## “THE RESPITE WOULDN'T HAVE LASTED”

Meanwhile, Russian/Chechen negotiations on the issue of independence had stalled and Russian troops were still stationed on Chechen soil. On 7 August a group of Chechen freedom fighters, led by Chamil Bassaiev and Khattab, entered Dagestan with the aim of “liberating” the State from Russian forces. They acted without the support of the elected Chechen President, Aslan Maskhadov. The new Russian Prime Minister, Vladimir Putin, vowed to stamp out the rebellion in less than a fortnight. On 15 August Aslan Maskhadov declared a state of emergency. On 6 September, in retaliation for a new incursion by Chechen freedom fighters into Dagestan, Russian troops pounded both sides of their border with Chechnya. Hundreds of civilians were killed and thousands of others fled to neighbouring republics. At the end of August and the beginning of September, a series of attacks in Moscow claimed the lives of several hundred people. The minister of the interior and the Russian secret services attributed them to the heads of Dagestani “Islamist rebels.” On the 11, September President Maskhadov gave the order for a general mobilisation. On 23 September the Russian forces began their bombardment of Chechnya.



*'Moscow Embroiled in a New War in the North Caucasus,' Sophie Shihab, **Le Monde** (France), 8 September 1999 (in French).*

### Extract:

The attacks launched over the last month in Dagestan by radical Islamists trying to ‘chase the Russians out’ of the North Caucasus are the result of a poorly managed decolonisation process that has spiralled into bloodshed and chaos. The Kremlin should have seen it coming when

negotiating the terms for Chechen independence, acquired three years ago by its moderate leaders. However, today the Russian authorities under pressure over corruption charges and a threatened regime change, and seem less able than ever to respond to such challenges except in the only way they know how: adding more troops. Their refusal to seek the middle ground and the on-going blockade to an already shattered region have given a major boost to armed Islamist groups and gangs of hostage-takers. The area has now become a ‘terra incognita’ for Westerners. The result has been renewed fighting in the Caucasus for the past month, unfolding out of sight, and this time centred on the Republic of Dagestan, the new weak link in the Russian Federation. Things escalated on Monday 6th September, with intense aerial bombing by the Russians on both sides of the Chechen-Dagestan border in retaliation to a second Chechen incursion into Dagestan. These attacks alone resulted in more than one hundred deaths. Repeated Russian declarations that the ‘separatist brigands’ are about to be eliminated have met with fresh incursions from Chechnya and unexpected resistance from new Dagestani villages. [...] The moderate (though pro-independence) Chechen President, Aslan Maskhadov, distanced himself from this raid, launched in the Botlikh border region by his radical rival, Chamil Bassaiev and the Wahhabite brigades of the notorious Jordano-Saudi Khattab, and financed by arcane backers. The other Chechen commanders also refused to join the fray, believing that the timing was ‘off’ with regard to their neighbours. But this changed with the ‘second stage’ of the Russian counter-offensive launched in central Dagestan, targeting Karamakhi and surrounding villages south of Bouïnaksk. Bassaiev’s men returned to Novolakskoïe and Khassaviurt (to the north east of the country) this weekend as a consequence. There is no doubt some sort of tie with the explosion in Bouïnaksk, costing the lives of sixty-one family members of Russian and Dagestani military staff who’d taken part in the village bombings. Negotiations to evacuate women and children had just faltered. [...] Independence is hindered by the risk of civil war, which the Russian army is doing its best to provoke. It has legalised the possession of arms amongst the various ethnic clans in Dagestan for their own ‘self-defence’ against the Chechens. And the promises by the bankrupt Russian State (which can barely pay its own soldiers) to finally grant Dagestan more than just military assistance and launch socio-economic programmes, are quite simply laughable. Yet according to the legion of Russian analysts, this is ‘the only way Russia can keep the region.’ [...] By contrast, Chamil Bassaiev declares that “a twenty or twenty five year civil war has begun in the Caucasus, to liberate Muslims from the Volga to the Don.” The perpetrator of the 1995 hostage-taking from a hospital in the Russian town of Boudiennovsk also threatened Russia with a ‘spectacular response’ to the Monday bombings. [...] The Kremlin’s desire to appear to the West as an ally under threat, could not be better served. However, while the Chechen President, Aslan Maskhadov, condemns such declarations and the raids on Dagestan, he can only put his conflict with the Wahhabites on the back burner as his country buckles anew under Russian fire. The Kremlin, for its part, hopes to shake off its reputation as a

mafia haven and emerge as the last bastion of the civilised world against Islamic barbarism. Failing a real strategy, there is a tactic, and an unwavering one at that. The attack on 31 August in the centre of Moscow echoed those that shook the city on the eve of the '96 presidential elections, apparently staged by the Russian Secret Services. Yet the finger was pointed at the Chechens then, and is again today. In the month of August alone, over three hundred Chechens were imprisoned in Moscow. This resurgence of repression based on ethnic appearance, like the Russian leaders' 'Slav-Orthodox' and pro-Serb views, also result in a deadlock for any integrationist plans for Muslims in the North Caucasus. Uncertainty regarding the Kremlin's next occupant does not inspire hope for an imminent breakthrough.

**On the night of 3 October, the Red Army tanks rolled into northern Chechnya. The Russian authorities no longer recognised the government of the elected President, Aslan Maskhadov. The United States called for a halt to the bombings, but Moscow compared its intervention in Chechnya to NATO's campaign in Kosovo in 1999. The Russian forces hampered assistance to the wounded and aid for the Chechen refugees in Ingushetia as they tightened their grip on Grozny. While Ruslan Auchev, the President of Ingushetia, whose country was host to the Chechen refugees, tried to draw the world's attention to the humanitarian disaster, the Russian government denied its existence. It blamed the population displacement on the insurgents, labelling them 'terrorists'. On 24 October, Russia closed the border between Chechnya and Ingushetia, preventing Chechen civilians from escaping the bombings and imposing a total blockade on Chechnya.**



*'Washington Calls for Restraint in the Bombings,'* Sophie Shihab, **Le Monde** (France) 3 October 1999 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

The American State Department is now making open calls for restraint on the part of the Kremlin one week after the widespread bombing of Chechnya began. And even though Bill Clinton, when receiving Vladimir Putin in early September, pressed him to enter into 'political dialogue' with the Chechens, his words fell on deaf ears. The reaction became even stronger after Mr Putin announced on Friday 1<sup>st</sup> October that he no longer recognised President Maskhadov. "They say that there is nobody they can talk to," declared the assistant Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott at Harvard University, "but we don't think that can really be true."

That same day, the State Department expressed outrage at the comparison made by Moscow between the NATO campaign in Kosovo and the Kremlin's invasion of Chechnya. "It's an insane analogy, bordering on absurd, both in substance and

form," declared the spokesman, James Rubin. "NATO bombed Yugoslavia in response to a military attack on Kosovo which had driven out hundreds of thousands of refugees, however the situation in Chechnya is very different," he affirmed, without going into any further details.



*'Humanitarian Organisations Experience Worsening Problems in Providing Aid to Refugees in Ingushetia,'* **Le Monde** (France) 17 October 1999 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

"We are now the world leader for refugees," Ruslan Auchev, the President of Ingushetia, declared ruefully this week. This tiny Caucasian Republic of 340,000 inhabitants has, in the space of six weeks, become home to 147,000 Chechen refugees fleeing Russian air raids.

As the head of the only Russian Federation member with its borders still open to Chechens, Ruslan Auchev has spent the last few weeks trying to alert the Russian authorities and the international community to the humanitarian disaster. "We desperately lack food, especially for children, and beds and blankets," said Mr Auchev. "Most refugees don't have shelter. They're camping out in cars or buses; or have set themselves up in the station or airport. Only a minority have been taken in by family or friends."

The first deaths among the displaced were reported on 11th October by the Ingush Ministry of Health: an eight-month old baby died of cold after its parents had been sleeping on the street for three weeks; five adults were killed by heart attacks and pneumonia. Five hundred refugees have already been hospitalised; and these are the ones who can afford medical treatment. Sick and wounded from Chechnya have been turned back at the border.

To Moscow's mind, however, the situation is "under control". And "there is no reason to believe that it could result in a humanitarian catastrophe," assures Sergei Khetagurov, the Russian vice-Minister for emergencies. For her part, Valentina Matvienko, Deputy Prime Minister and President of a commission responsible for the 'social rehabilitation of the free territories' (the 'security zone' north of Chechnya), declared that "gangs were chasing the civilian populations from their villages to give the impression of a humanitarian disaster." She added that Russia needed no external aid. Both were reiterating the position Moscow has been maintaining for weeks.

To date, only eight camps, with a capacity for 6,000 people (i.e. 4% of the total number of refugees), have been set up by the Russian migration services. A further six thousand refugees are 'housed' in a hundred odd railway cars. The cost of Ingush housing, where 'well-off' Chechen families are crowded into, stands at over 200 dollars a month. Increasingly reticent about the fate of refugees in Ingushetia, the Russian media spoke two weeks ago of 175 tonnes of aid being sent by Moscow; but in the camps, the 'displaced' only receive bread and water. Several eyewitnesses cite exhausted food stocks. Last Friday, the mayor of Moscow did, however, send through a trainload of goods to Ingushetia, containing a number of building site shelters, among other items.





'Moscow Inflicts a Total Blockade and Massive Bombardments on Chechnya', *Le Monde* (France) 26 October 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

On Sunday 24 October, the Russian army sealed its total blockade of Chechnya by closing the border with its neighbour, the Republic of Ingushetia. Its troops, flanked by armoured vehicles, have blocked off all the roads to Nazran, the Ingush capital, along which 170,000 refugees, mainly women, children and the elderly, have fled the Russian bombing of Chechnya since the beginning of September. [...] Moscow wants to stem the flow of refugees, which escalated after the market massacre in Grozny (137 dead and 200 wounded according to the Chechen authorities) caused by a volley of Russian missiles fired on Thursday 21 October. On Friday, 4,000 people took flight into Ingushetia. In Geneva, the spokesperson for the United Nations' High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) believes that "if the conflict continues, we expect some 300,000 people to take refuge in Ingushetia." The FSB (ex-KGB) explained that the blockade serves to prevent the "infiltration of terrorists" into Russia. Over the weekend, the Minister of the Interior and representatives from the Security Services explained that "Bassaïev and Khattab [the Chechen Islamist leaders] had given the order to commit terrorist acts in Moscow, Saint Petersburg and other regions."

The Ingush President, Ruslan Auchev, denounced the closing of the border. "Now the population has no means to leave Chechnya," he declared. "The war should be conducted against terrorists, not refugees." At the same time the Russian army has pursued its offensive on the outskirts of Grozny and bombed the town of Vedeno, close to Dagestan.

## HOW CAN WE HELP CHECHEN CIVILIANS?

**The different MSF sections assessed the possibilities for assisting the thousands of Chechen civilians under fire or fleeing the bombs and for applying pressure to ensure the provision of aid and protection. MSF's absence in the North Caucasus since late 1997 (due to the risk of abduction) limited their operations in the region.**



'Project Committee **Minutes**', North Caucasus/Russia MSF Belgium, 30 September 1999 (in English).

#### Extract:

Due to unacceptable working conditions (insecurity: killings of foreign aid workers and hostage takings) MSF-B closed

its offices in Chechnya and Dagestan in respectively '96 and '97. Since the hostilities in Dagestan last August, MSF-B is in contact with ex-local staff on the spot to monitor the situation.

#### Objectives:

To come to a more formal positioning of MSF-B with regard to the worsening humanitarian situation in the North-Caucasus; the main purpose of this Copro [Project Committee Meeting] is to come to some scenarios of intervention or non-intervention;

#### Important factors:

- Time-factor in function of political considerations: the air bombing campaign and its humanitarian side-effects (the refugee flow) risks to last several weeks or even months. The public opinion in Russia seems to be in favour of a 'once and for ever' solving of the Chechen problem. As long as this support is guaranteed (contrary to the war in 1995-1997) the Russian government has its hands free and will play it through. Moreover, the vox populi can express itself during the parliamentary elections in December '99 and presidential elections during spring 2000.

- Kosovo-effect: NATO obtained its political goal thanks to airstrikes without the use of ground troops; the Russian government may opt for the same scenario: bombing for weeks on end to weaken the adversary;

- access to reliable information: as there are for the moment, few foreign journalists on the spot, the available information is filtered and hard to verify; therefore we are reactivating existing local contacts (ex- local staff) in Chechnya and Ingushetia;

- Coordination information sharing meetings with participation of NGOs, humanitarian agencies and donors will take place in the coming days at Geneva and Moscow-level;

- security for expatriates is the main concern in all ongoing discussions; the Ingush and Chechen government would have 'guaranteed' full security protection if actions are undertaken on their respective territories;

- Emergency preparedness at Moscow-level: no stock of relief goods (hygiene, shelter, blankets, food), very little medical goods for emergency intervention; importation in the short-time is not an option (just a nightmare);

#### The Copro concluded:

- Past experiences in the North Caucasus have shown that the security situation did not allow MSFB to create sufficient added value/impact during its operations;

- The security situation has only deteriorated since MSFB withdrawal in 1997...



«*Explo !*» **Email** from Marcel Van Soest, MSF Holland Director of Operations, on field visit, to MSF Holland Executive Director, Emergency programme manager, Communication Officer, 13 October 1999 (in English).

#### Extracts:

- Of course our main concern is the PiD [populations in danger] and their suffering. No question about that.
- Operations are mostly desired but not feasible in the way we would like to do it for the reasons all know
- Remote control can be done if history and contacts and local partners would be in place, which is not the case for MSF-H, and even too little in place for MSF-F. [...]
- It is very likely that the only structures in place are gov or ICRC or MDM. No other structure to be identified during a possible explo. Except maybe a former local contact of MSF-F (still to be contacted). Hit and Run actions/interventions not very feasible to be set up and not to be considered to be more effective than remote control and no own structure in place.
- We can be as innovative and creative as we want but being realistic, it is going to be almost impossible to identify a compromise intervention which will have an added value for the PiD and what is done by the actors already acting.

What is left for us to do????!!!!!!

- PiD suffering
  - no pressure of intern comm
  - sympathy expressed for the Russians even by Mary Robinson
  - UN silent and not pro-active to get something of the ground
  - double standards more than ever on all levels
  - remote control programs not sufficient for sure and maybe completely ineffective
  - Russian hum ass [istance]. said to be taking place but not likely to be in reality.
- And thousands of other things.

The point is that we should be on the ground but we cannot. 1 of the 2 following things needs to be addressed

- 1) to eliminate the need for us to be present by urging the state (RF) [Russian Forces] to take up their own responsibility to deliver effective hum ass and by stopping the violation of humanitarian law and the human rights of these PiD.
- 2) to make the circumstances acceptable for us to come in, meaning a safer humanitarian corridor for INGO's.

IMPORTANT: Both things need to be addressed and the only ones addressing it are some journalists and Human Rights Watch. We can't continue to be silent. We need some credibility to indeed advocate and lobby for the sake of the PiD's (not for our image!!!!). A hum agency not being able to work where we should be working even for all the good reasons needs to communicate that to all levels and we don't. We have an obligation to change the circumstances of the hum assistance by lobbying the Russians directly and more the International communication to push Moscow to take up the responsibility for being the state. [...]

To start the advocacy campaign and to hook up with HRW we need credibility and we get that by going there. Yes.

[...] Yes we do have a msg [message] that needs to be addressed before we can become operational and yes that msg will be understood.

So not a statement for the sake of statement making but an active advocacy campaign starting with a visit and media followed by visits of key players (Moscow, UN, USA, Paris, EU, Geneva) with the ultimate goal/objective to change a bit the situation on the ground for the PiD's so we can start working there or others will have taken up the job.

We are lucky that our absence is not (yet) questioned by media, but we have not yet pro-actively ourselves expressed our feelings/frustrations of being absent let alone explain what needs to take place before we can start working there. WE NEED TO DO THAT!

During field visit we will focus with media on hum situation, and answer operational questions. Stronger msg can be given during some relevant advocacy visits afterwards if needed. IMPORTANT: there won't be huge implications for the current programs in Russia! Especially looking now at what HRW is stating towards Moscow and having them still in the same building!!!

What if we say no to a visit now?

- Journalists to be able to continue to visit and to show the starvation in future????
- Not going now is already politically manipulated by Moscow to show their own population that hum relief agencies do not go there as the bandits over there are too dangerous (contribute to justification of war)
- deportations of the IDP's by the Russians to North Chechnya (still being a military zone) and than request of Moscow towards relief agencies to come in and help while not having been in any other location 'independently,'



'*Some Thoughts,*' **Email** from Leslie Lefkow, MSF Holland Humanitarian Affairs Department, to MSF Holland Caucasus team, MSF Holland Executive Management team, 14 October 1998 (in English).

#### Extracts:

I took a look through the ICRC archive of press releases related to Chechnya, and that's quite an interesting exercise, partly because of the volume and partly because of content, which is quite amazingly strong given that it's the ICRC speaking publicly. Between 1994-1996, ICRC was enormously active in calling for IHL [International Humanitarian Laws] to be observed, in calling for humanitarian truces, even for the establishment of humanitarian corridors (under IHL). [...] From what I've read and heard in the past days, there are a few basic points that make application of any of the protective concepts of IHL very difficult in this situation:

1. The lack of organizations/coordination of both the Russian forces and the Chechen groups; ignorance of the principles of humanitarian law among the military (including an absence of any notion of the proportionate use of military force); the use of counter-insurgency strategies by the Russian military that squeeze civilians in order to flush out combatants and 'collectively punish' entire communities for any acts of

combatants; the use of civilians as human shields by rebel forces; and finally, the existence of numerous individuals and small groups of militias wreaking havoc for self-interest, thereby disrupting agreements for ceasefires etc.

2. Lack of political will: for reasons we all know...blah blah blah.

Finding a pressure point will be most difficult, and I'm not convinced that the political will is so different from '94-'96. I'm also not sure that MSF alone can really exert much influence - my gut instinct (very scientific!) is that only by really trying to get a broad coalition of groups on board would we have a hope of raising enough domestic concern in the West to put pressure on the Russians - and that would only be the Russians.

[...] I do think that for this one we would have to be quite creative and go beyond the usual ideal of lobbying at diplomatic levels.



**'Chechnya' Email** from MSF deputy legal advisor to the Heads of MSF France, 3 November 1999 (in French).

Various navel-contemplating articles by humanitarian NGOs (including MSF H) have appeared in the French and European press; along the lines of 'Why we're not there. Sorry we're absent.'

After thoroughly examining Russian diplomatic declarations under a microscope, the message is as follows:

- this is an anti-terrorist operation to maintain order;
- it is an internal affair and so any interference will not be tolerated.

It would be good if we could break with this humanitarian navel-contemplation, and yet still demolish the Russian rationale, by maintaining the public line we have taken so far, particularly on the following points:

- rarely does an operation to maintain order result in a wave of 200,000 refugees, or does it warrant the dispatch of such significant military means or imposing a blockade.... In short, explaining that the level of violence corresponds to that of an armed conflict having an indiscriminate impact on the civilian population (wholesale bombings, deprivation of items essential for the survival of the population, break up of families as they cross the Ingush border, etc.).
- humanitarian activities carried out by independent and impartial organisations never amount to interference and in the absence of care for the civilian population being provided by Russia, humanitarian organisations must be allowed to intervene. It is critical that our public positions seek to increase guarantees for aid and protection for these populations.



**Minutes** of MSF Belgium's Board of Directors, 5 November 1999 (in French).

#### 4. Chechnya: Why aren't we there?

Vincent presented the situation.

We left Chechnya following 2 kidnappings in 1996, which targeted us directly. As for a programme in Ingushetia, this region is still part of the Russian Federation and is very similar to Chechnya in cultural terms. So it may well be as risky as Chechnya. The Russians initially bombed Chechnya to secure northern Dagestan against Chechen terrorist incursions. These days, things have taken a radical turn for the worse. There's a real intention to bring all nationalist tendencies in Chechnya to a definitive end. The Chechens are trying to escape through the east and south of the country, heading for Ingushetia in particular, which currently houses some 200,000 to 250,000 Chechen refugees.

At present, we're only running operations in Russia, and MSF F in Georgia. The insecurity and traumatic experiences in the past hold us back from examining if we could actually return. Up until now, only the UN and the OSCE have conducted some 'in and out' visits, accompanied by Russian or Ingush soldiers. So we have no idea of the global needs. We need to be there at least a month to properly assess the security situation (the needs are obvious). But this has to be possible in security terms...

So we've got no one operating there right now, but we've strengthened the team in Moscow so someone can attend all the meetings, take up contacts with the Russian and Chechen authorities and carry out a short 2-day visit to Ingushetia to assess the aid given to the refugees, either by the Russians (they claim they're giving aid), MDM or the ICRC, who are operating in 'remote control' (distribution from the border). Given the circumstances, we could opt for remote control too. But there's no guarantee that the population would really benefit. The exploratory mission would look into this.

MSF F is operating in Georgia, and it could set up a support programme for Chechnya by sending in medicines and goods from the south. But we would need to proceed with great caution, as the Russians don't like people 'working on the sly.' MSF F is not present in Moscow. MSF B is. So we need some tight coordination, and for advocacy issues as well. We could support local NGOs.

But no NGOs are present on the ground.


On the media front, we haven't adopted an active communication approach. The journalists are curious to know why we're not going in, but above all spread messages about the insecurity.




*In early November, I was at the Brussels' headquarters, and I asked: 'so what are we doing for Chechnya?' Everyone stared down at their feet. I brought this up with everyone, and they all shared my concerns. But there'd been project committees that had decided: 'No, we're doing*

nothing.' These decisions were mostly taken by people who weren't in the field during the first war, who'd run things from headquarters and who felt bad about everything that'd happened. And because of that, we didn't want to start something new.

Dr Bart Ostyns, Field coordinator in Chechnya (1995-1996), Task Force North Caucasus (1999-2001) MSF Belgium (in French) interviewed in August 2000.


 In 1999, I became Operations Director. Obviously, we knew we were in the firing line, whether we spoke out or not. We were well aware that the people who'd had problems weren't always those who'd spoken out. From the moment we were present, we were exposed. From Moscow's point of view, we were supporting the rebellion; but we were exposed on the Chechen separatist side too. We'd spent enough time with Chechen groups to know how unpredictable and manipulative they could be, with major criminal cells in their midst. We thought that our security was completely compromised in such an environment. We weighed up the pros and cons; we knew that there were risks. But the extent of the violence was such that when the war re-started, we decided to intervene anyway, even if we laid ourselves open to serious consequences. We worked as intelligently as we could. We were deeply shaken by the Novye Atagi tragedy, with the murder of the ICRC members. The ICRC didn't say a thing, and yet they took the biggest hit. Public protest presented a risk for whoever was involved, but all the others were in danger too.

Dr Jean- Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of communication (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000- May 2008) (in French) interviewed in 2009

 I think we should have been more aggressive getting access to Chechnya sooner—in retrospect. We definitely should have done it sooner and now it took us till after New Year to have a level of access. [There was access. What was keeping us out was our fear. MSF did not try to get back in at that point. [A lot of the lack of access was based on our own fears not on Russia's interference. Just looking back on it, we can't be denouncing Russia for not letting us in when we were really not trying to get in. We never asked Moscow for access, we still have not asked even though we work everywhere in Chechnya now. I think in a situation like this we establish access—we don't ask for access. We get access because we drive in and we start working and that's what eventually happened. [...] The fear was there for a good reason. There were the kidnappings in 1996. People think only in terms of the kidnappings but there were also the assassinations. We still do not know

what motivated them. We don't know who or why they are doing this. It is very hard to say that something is changed when we haven't figured out what happened last time. The people who are doing the kidnapping are still active—they're still in Chechnya they're still at liberty—we don't have any other reason to think that they would be engaged in anything else. Plus, in addition to the kidnapping and the assassinations, there were waves of very violent robberies—the kidnappings were not even the worse that MSF Belgian went through. There were some very scary armed robberies which were short-term hostage taking incidents. Everybody had all those memories on their minds. And that's what HQ was asking us when we were setting up: 'What has changed? What makes you think that this will not happen again?' There was no willingness—both from the people in the field and at HQ to go through that again.

Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus, (November 1999-January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005) (in English) interviewed in 2000

 I'm not critical of MSF's position at the time – I understand it absolutely. The experience of managing the hostage crisis was so traumatic for many of the headquarters' senior staff, the people who had influence here - particularly over what we could do in this type of situation - that I really understood that everyone had cold feet. I thought that activities in Chechnya could only ever be symbolic, because I couldn't see anyone, and I include myself here, saying 'I'm hiring you for a mission in Chechnya; the minimum conditions we require have been satisfied.' No, it was out of the question; the chances of being taken hostage were too great. So we didn't go back.

Dr Rony Brauman, Research director, MSF Fondation since 1994 (MSF France President from 1982 to 1994) (in French) interviewed in 2000

**The General Director of MSF Holland and the Coordinator in Moscow explained the reasons and above all, the security risks preventing MSF from working in Chechnya, to the international press.**



'Fears Rise for Chechen Refugees as Winter Nears,' Celestine Bohlen **The New York Times** (USA), 30 October 1999 (in English).

**Extract:**

International agencies have additional concerns in the North Caucasus and those are kidnapping and violence, which over

the last several years, have driven nearly all foreign aid and human rights workers out of Chechnya and its surrounding regions, including Ingushetia.

Soon after the 1994-96 war here, when Russian troops tried unsuccessfully to put down a secessionist movement in Chechnya, the region was swept with a wave of lawlessness, as Chechen warlords -- some of them former war heroes -- turned to hostage-taking as a way to finance their operations. [...]

All told, Russian security officials say that more than 2,000 people -- including Chechens, Russians and foreigners -- have been taken hostage in and around Chechnya since 1996.

"There was one case after another," said Mamar Melzouk, who heads the Moscow-based mission of Doctors Without Borders, the French organization that recently was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for its work in war zones around the world. "The humanitarian world became a target. It is obvious that the risk is very, very high."

Doctors Without Borders maintained a large and visible mission in the region during the 1994-96 war, in which tens of thousands of civilians were killed. But in 1996, when the war ended with a victory for the Chechen rebels, the organization withdrew from the region, soon after two of its employees were kidnapped. So far in the current conflict, Doctors Without Borders has not returned. "The security and access to beneficiaries are not assured and because of those criteria, we are not planning to intervene for the moment," said Mr. Melzouk. "We know problems are arising, especially with the oncoming winter. But it is a very complicated issue."

According to Ingush security forces, no kidnappings are known to have taken place in the region in the last two months, although a reporter for the newspaper Moscow News, who has been missing for two weeks, was last seen in Ingushetia. But local authorities concede that the situation is dangerous, and they provide armed guards to journalists and aid workers who come in for short trips to the border regions.



*'Chechnya, Failure of Humanitarian Action,'* Austen Davies, Executive Director of MSF Holland, originally written in English, published in Dutch in **NRC Handelsblad** (The Netherlands), 1 November 1999.

Why is hardly any aid being given? Or to put the focus on ourselves, why is MSF not on the spot? Aid organisations have had bad experiences in Chechnya. International aid workers have become the favourite targets of a violent kidnapping industry. Since its presence in the country, from 1995 on, MSF has experienced two kidnapping cases involving employees. This has made practical aid in the area all but impossible and caused MSF, like most other organisations, to leave in 1997, thus making Chechnya a blind spot on the world map.

It should not be thought that the presence of humanitarian aid workers could have prevented or ended the conflict in Chechnya. During the last few years, humanitarian interven-

tions have often been criticised: humanitarian aid does not save all victims of disasters and conflicts; humanitarian aid does not end conflicts; humanitarian interventions may even complicate and prolong wars. However, in complex conflicts the importance of humanitarian aid is mainly an organisation's presence. By being present in crisis areas, aid workers can stand up for the basic rights of victims and urge all parties involved to respect human rights and international conventions. By being present, aid workers can reintroduce a human element in a dehumanised environment.

MSF was established in 1971 to defend the right for humanitarian intervention. Often, the sovereignty of countries was considered more important than the rights of people, and the world community allowed leaders to kill and repress their populations. MSF has always fought for every individual's right to humanitarian aid. That is a matter of humanity, of medical ethics. A right, moreover, which has been laid down in international conventions. Borders and international politics should not stand in the way of these principles.

Now, 28 years later, we are once more confronted with such a border. In Chechnya, gangs are making the provision of aid impossible. Local authorities that are seeking to separate their country from the Russian Federation have not been able to bring security and care to the Chechen people. And Russia is waging a war which it is justifying as a fight against terrorism, but which affects the population to a disproportionate degree. The international community cannot turn a blind eye to this conflict. The proposed UN mission to the area may be the first bit of good news in this regard. However, the conditions under which this mission is to take place are hardly promising. For instance, the mission will only visit the neighbouring countries, not Chechnya itself. Furthermore, it will travel under heavy protection of Russian squad troops. This will make it impossible to gain an objective picture of the humanitarian situation in the area. Russia's bland denial of the many reports of civilian victims is not enough. That the population is fleeing en masse is simply unacceptable. The absence of aid for the refugees and the impossibility for Chechen refugees to travel on to relatives or acquaintances in other areas of the Russian Federation is also unacceptable. If anything, this is a message the UN will have to give loudly and clearly to the Russian authorities. The UN mission alone is not enough, however. Earlier this year, the international community took responsibility for the humanitarian abuses in Kosovo and later on in Timor. However different these crises were, human suffering is the same everywhere. It is high time that the international community breaks its attitude of non-involvement. International pressure must bring home, to the responsible parties, that they are obliged to guarantee safety and create the conditions for the provision of independent humanitarian aid. [...] The combatants must guarantee the rights of their population and enable independent aid workers to help victims. If they fail to do so, the international community must take an active role upon itself. It is high time to break the ominous silence around Chechnya.

**In November, the French section, already based in Georgia, sent three convoys of medicines from the Pankisi Valley to Chechnya via the mountains, before the border shut. In the weeks that followed, it developed external consultations and surgical referral activities in the Pankisi valley and Tbilisi, Georgia. The Board of Directors suggested speaking out during the ceremony for the Nobel peace prize, which had just been awarded to MSF. In the French press, volunteers described the desperate fate of the Chechen refugees blocked in the mountains between the two countries.**



*'Georgia, the Only "Free" Exit for Chechens Under Fire,'* Sophie Shihab, **Le Monde** (France), 8 November 1999 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

The last Russian border guards have just left the country. Nearly 200,000 refugees should now be hastening to the border crossing in the snow-covered mountains. [...] These groups would rather go to Georgia than Ingushetia, an ethnic brother and neighbour, but a member of the Russian Federation, where the Russian military blocks the border at will. [...] It's an escalating drama, viewed from here: 'There are now some 200,000 civilians in the southern Chechnya mountains. They try and escape the bombs by hiding in the forests around the targeted villages,' explains Jean-Pierre Tremblay, Coordinator for MSF (Médecins Sans Frontières), from Tbilisi, which, like other humanitarian organisations, has been unable to send aid into Chechnya. The difficulties of the task are illustrated, in part, by accounts given by refugees who finally made it into Georgia. But they only total some 2,000 to 3,000 people. [...]

Getting into Georgia poses problems in itself. It involves crossing an initial, snow-covered mountain pass, then sweet-talking one's way past the Georgian border guards before crossing a second pass, on the Georgian side, higher still, and which is, it seems, constantly closed. Helicopters are needed to cross it in winter. But in any event, men aged between '15 and 60' can't get across, barring specific interventions, the details of which are thin on the ground.



**Minutes** of the MSF France Board of Directors' Meeting on 19 November 1999 (in French).

Chechnya (Jean-Clement Cabrol, Emergency Desk)

#### The situation [...]:

The (rare) journalists who have returned report that the Chechens consider the Russian offensive as an effort to wipe them out (doubling as a racist campaign against Caucasian people throughout the Federation).

Whatever the case may be, there are still 750,000 people in Chechnya forming a collective target for the Russians' blind air raids. The Russian army only deploys land forces once an area has been destroyed, i.e. on they comb the ruins label-

ling all the people trying to escape as 'rebels or terrorists.' Meanwhile, the UNHCR President has declared that there is no 'humanitarian crisis' in Chechnya!

#### MSF set up:

The hospitals are no longer operational, except for the maternity ward, which is still functioning in a basement. The wounded are mostly civilian, and are evacuated, whenever possible, to hospitals in other towns.

MSF Belgium and MSF Holland are in Moscow, working on their regular programmes. One person has left to investigate possibilities of working in Ingushetia. MSF Paris has contacted two NGOs on the ground to distribute supplies (surgical and small logistics equipment) and is working from Georgia, using local channels.

We're also working on programmes in Georgia itself, and a number of Chechens have taken refuge in the Akhmeta region. They're women and children for the most part – very few men. They receive health care in the local medical facilities. There are plans to run a vaccination campaign and conduct interviews with these refugees.

#### Planned strategy:

An analysis of the situation shows little room for manoeuvre. Access is a serious problem - the roads and mountain passes are the only access routes not under Russian control. But it's now the middle of winter, and extremely hard to get aid across.

The situation is even more unacceptable when we compare it to the international treatment of Kosovo or Timor, for example, where there was a real urge to separate those massacring, those deporting, and the victims.

So we have decided to write to all the Heads of States attending the OSCE summit in Istanbul, to voice our indignation, our outrage, and call for respect for Chechen civilians.

We also met a Russian diplomat in Paris, and presented our project for transporting food and supplies to the refugee populations. In a very diplomatic manner, he gave us to understand that every sort of aid is possible, on the condition that it is transited through Russian hands, and Russian hands alone. In short, they aim to maintain total control. The Belgium team based in Moscow has applied for visas by way of announcing our arrival and our intention to bring in a plane. We need to decide if we put staff on this plane, and if so, whom: people to handle the cargo, or doctors and nurses to monitor its distribution? We have to acknowledge that during the 5 months of Christophe André's detention, after his kidnapping in Chechnya in the summer of '97, we stalled the launch of such an operation. The most acceptable approach in terms of risk would be the discrete distribution of supplies through Georgia, or, if we want more visibility, through Ingushetia. We've committed ourselves already by meeting Ilyas [Akhmadov, Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Maskhadov government]. [...]

Jean-Hervé Bradol (Operations Director): There's currently a real anti-Chechen campaign, even anti-Caucasian campaign, being mounted throughout the Russian Federation.

Christian Losson (Board member): Even in the Duma (Russian Parliament), only two deputies opposed this war, and a handful of isolated intellectuals.

Françoise Saulnier: We shouldn't ignore the economic aspect

of this situation: part of the Chechen's misery derives from the fact they live on an oil field. The people of Congo Brazzaville have had the same bad luck, as it happened. When considered from this angle, we're dealing with economic violence, pure and simple.

Jean-Hervé Bradol (Operations Director): "The Chechens already lost a large part of their population in the 19th century, then another 10 to 20% at the beginning of the 20th. So with the 'industrial' means being employed these days, we have reason to imagine the worst.

Philippe Biberson (President): Moreover, the Russians have managed to organise the perfect closed-door scenario: virtually no journalists (one Frenchman is being held hostage), no international aid organisations.

Virginie Raisson (Board Member): 'Yes, but paradoxically, this conflict is constantly being covered in the press; so if we get publically involved in the issue - I've still got the Nobel Peace Prize speech in mind - we need to add our two cents' worth to the general understanding of the new world order (two weights, two measures, etc.)

**Conclusion:** The absence of MSF's presence in Chechnya can be explained by the intensity of the war, the 'administrative obstacles' being thrown up by Moscow and the constant pressure of kidnapping threats (part of this terror strategy is probably orchestrated by the Russian secret services, so they can ensure this war is totally sealed off).

*At the time, we didn't have the means to be everywhere at once. And as there were already two MSF sections in Ingushetia, we decided to go to Georgia. We went to Ingushetia later, when we had the operational capacity to do so. We were even ready to go in convoy, we asked journalists if we could. But it just wasn't allowed. Certain people did it anyway, like Renaud Girard from Le Figaro [French Newspaper], who went into Chechnya via Georgia. But it was highly risky.*

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of communication (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000- May 2008) (in French) interviewed in 2009

*Our overriding aim was to reach the displaced persons trapped on the other side of the mountain. We met an MSF Holland team on an exploratory mission. We tried to go by road to Shatili, a town on the border with Chechnya, and the Dutch suggested that we go by helicopter, as they had better contacts. The mission was to pick up the seriously wounded, including a young pregnant woman, and take them to Tbilisi for hospital care. We knew that it had been bombed, and we fought hard to get the wounded through. But we only managed to get there once. We tried to go with UNHCR via another route. But it didn't work out. I couldn't*

*stand the fact that we were standing idly by. I wanted to prepare trucks, take the road, get to Itum Kale and start getting involved. But the programme manager didn't agree with my ideas.*

Dr Brigitte Vasset, Director of Operations (1990-1998), Emergency Coordinator in Pankisi valley, (October 1999 to January 2000), MSF France (in French), interviewed in 2008.

**The Belgium section of MSF sent out an exploratory mission from Moscow to study the possibilities of working in Ingushetia. Some weeks later, after a number of lengthy discussions (mainly focused on security issues), it decided to open a mission. It was to be run by national staff, trained and supervised at a distance by the expatriate team based in Moscow.**

*Some people were saying: 'They'll never let us in.' We said: 'We can't know that for sure, we have to try, at least.' To our vast surprise, at headquarters, at least two people accepted that one person should leave for Moscow, to check the situation out. Would it be possible to explore the south, while remaining within the law? We went in December, to see how a remote control set up could work. It seemed like the only solution at the time. Once there, we came across two tremendously valuable people E and F. Once we'd trained them, we could build up a team and get to work. On the security front, we knew that there were big risks, but the only thing we could say was that there were no kidnappings. We felt that there was a window of opportunity, and the situation could only get worse with time. If the war slacked off a bit, there would more movements; the borders would be more open. The risks of kidnapping would also rise. We proposed to send a team of expats, nonetheless. Once everything was underway, it could pull back to Moscow and work via remote control. The project committee rejected this idea. It didn't want an expatriate presence in the region, and said that in any event, we wouldn't find anyone willing to go. I was furious. I was really clear with them, saying: 'What you're suggesting cannot work!' The project committee's idea was to train E in Moscow: 'If it can work with E, it could work with others. If E finds other people and brings them to Moscow, we could train them there. Then they'd all go back to Ingushetia, and we'd call them back to Moscow from time to time. We'd give them all the communication means they need to work in Nazran. We'd really invest in these people, without having any expatriates on the ground.' That's when the Human Resources department said: 'we can guarantee you human resources if it's for Moscow. But if it's for Nazran, we don't want to do it.'*

*I said to myself: 'It's not so bad. It's better than nothing.'*

After a while, they'll see that it doesn't work, that we need to send someone in from time to time. Maybe we'll get there, despite everything.' Two or three days later, they phoned me to ask me if I wanted to go to Moscow. I said to myself: 'If I say no, it's going to drag on, they'll have an excuse for doing nothing.' So I said yes, and I left on 5th January. I stayed until mid-February, and we did the training. I was initially sceptical about the idea of bringing a group of Chechens to Moscow. Would the Russians let them in? They did, and the training was a big success. E had done a good job of recruiting. We'd said to him: don't focus on people who speak good English, get people who're good at their job. It wasn't easy training people through translators, but it went well despite it all, and bit by bit, I started to believe that it could work.

Dr Bart Ostyns, Field coordinator in Chechnya (1995-1996), Task Force North Caucasus (1999-2001) MSF Belgium (in French) interviewed in August 2000

The idea put forward during the project committee was to base an expatriate team in a hospital or hotel 24/7. We would build up a team with experienced national staff – people we'd worked with during the first Chechen war. They would run the consultations and deliver the assistance, and join the expats every night to debrief on their work, on how to assist the displaced, on medical practices, but also on the psychological and emotional effects of helping their compatriots like this. This project was refused by headquarters, who considered that the added value was too small compared to the risk, and there was no direct contact with the beneficiaries. Yet we did pretty much the same thing in Iraq in 2003 and 2004, but with a team based in the thick of the fighting. It had taken five years of trial and error to set it up. The proposition that did get through involved running a team in total 'remote control,' with expatriates based exclusively and permanently in Moscow. A Chechen and/or Ingush team based in Nazran would do the work. They would come to Moscow to debrief every six weeks, and there would be daily contact by phone or mail between the expatriate and national teams.

Jean-Christophe Dollé, Coordinator of MSF Belgium's North Caucasus project, March to November 2000 (in French), interviewed in 2008.

Meanwhile, MSF Holland recruited Kenny Gluck, a former journalist, who worked in conjunction with humanitarian organisations. He knew the Caucasus well, and had built up a solid network of contacts during the first Chechen war. In late 1999/early 2000, he opened an office in Nazran, Ingushetia, and recruited a local, experienced team who started to organise distributions of medicines and supplies in hospitals and Chechen refugee camps in the area.

In October of '99 MSF Holland, who I was not working with, - I had done some short-term things with them - they called me up saying: 'you know Chechnya, would you be willing to help us?' So I took a leave of absence from my other job, and I said 'yes, and I went with an agreement to go for one month'. And I helped them set it up. I could go to Chechnya and I had friend [to stay with] where I felt safe. From the first war, I knew a lot of people and I didn't want to bring other people. So I spent a few weeks in Moscow, I spent a few weeks in Nazran meeting old friends from Chechnya to see what I thought was possible to do. I just went back and I said: 'You can organize it with a base in Nazran with certain individuals who I think we can trust.' And I said, 'I'll just do it for two or three months.' I went and I created an office. I became, really, the Coordinator for that period late '99 and the beginning of 2000. I had worked in Chechnya in '95-'96, it was a very bad time, and so I said, 'I'll set up the mission but really I don't want to stay here a long time.' So they found another Coordinator, and I handed over to him and they agreed that I would stay for three or four months to help, get him settled.

Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus, (November 1999-January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005) (in English) interviewed in 2000

I came to Moscow to visit Ton Koene, the Coordinator, as a representative of my organization. I proposed him a project on providing assistance to refugees. In a short while after that, I received the proposal from Ton Koene to come to Moscow again to discuss the options about the assistance that can be provided. The first project was with refugees and distribution of hygiene items, and then with drugs for medical facilities. MSF has actually implemented these first two projects through my organization. During that period, Ton Koene and Kenny have come to get acquainted to the situation. And during the first days of December, they made me a proposal to head the project of MSF in North Caucasus. I knew Kenny from the first war. He worked with my brother and after the attack we were living in neighbouring compounds. So he knew me quite well.

C, member of MSF North Caucasus staff (in Russian, translated into English by an MSF interpreter) interviewed in 2008

On the 4 November, the border crossings between Ingushetia and Chechnya re-opened leaving the Chechen refugees free to return. A UNHCR delegation conducted a five day visit to Ingushetia and Dagestan. Meanwhile, the Russian forces continued to encircle and fire on Grozny. The German Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that the Russians had created a humanitarian disaster in the Caucasus.





*'Ingushetia's Border Reopens. The Russians Move Closer to Grozny.'* Nicolai Topouria, **AFP** (France) (Kavkaz, Russia) 4 November 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

The Russian forces, which bombed the area around Grozny last Thursday, are moving in on the Chechen capital, cutting off the road leading to the neighbouring region of Alkhan-Kala, according to an AFP reporter on the ground.

A senior Ingush officer at the checkpoint in Kavkaz, told AFP that civilians were once again free to enter Ingushetia, after several days of Russian soldiers holding back such traffic. A UNHCR delegation run by Nikolas Kossidis headed out to Kavkaz, on the Chechen side of the border, where several thousand people were waiting.

The delegation carried out a five day visit in the two republics neighbouring the separatist Chechnya, Ingushetia, and Dagestan, to evaluate the refugees' humanitarian needs.

In total, 195,135 people have fled Chechnya, and 178,000 of them have taken refuge in Ingushetia (340,000 inhabitants), stressed the Ingush president Ruslan Auchev in a press conference on Wednesday evening.

Russia has created 'a humanitarian disaster' in the Caucasus by using the military to intervene against Chechnya, decried the German Minister of Foreign Affairs, Joschka Fischer, during a trip to Washington.

**On 5 November, the Russian Minister of Defence admitted that besides eradicating the terrorists, the operation had the unambiguous aim of gathering Chechnya back into the Russian Federation's fold.**



*'Russian Generals Want to Crush the Chechens, not Negotiate with Them.'* **AFP** (France) (Moscow), 5 November 1999 (in French)

The Russian military have made it very clear these last few days that their aim in Chechnya (north Caucasus) is victory and crushing the separatists, rather than negotiating a new outcome to the war, as in 1996.

Apparently, they have the total support of the government, particularly the Prime Minister, Vladimir Putin, who has the final say in the Chechen affair and adopts a hard line in the name of 'the fight against terrorism.'

"It's hard to really understand who is in charge of what. But one thing is for sure, the Russian generals seem to have obtained an unprecedented degree of autonomy from the Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and Boris Yeltsin in how they run this war," observed the English-speaking paper, the Moscow Times, on Friday. On Wednesday, the Minister of Defence, Field Marshal Igor Sergeev, revealed for the first time that the military operation's aim was not just to wipe out the 'terrorists,' but to gather Chechnya in its entirety back into the Russian Federation's fold. 'The army

has the full support of President Yeltsin, and understands that it can go all the way' expounded Field Marshal Sergeev, hammering his point home.

**On the 12 November, the UN Secretary General declared that he was monitoring events in Chechnya with considerable concern. His position nonetheless garnered no support amongst the Security Council's permanent members.**



*'SG on Chechnya,' Email* from Laura Brav, MSF UN Liaison in New York to MSF Internal Caucasus Network, 12 November 1999 (in English).

#### Extract:

NOTHING WILL HAPPEN IN NY, not at SC [Security Council] level FOR SURE (they don't want to make waves, especially because US and UK are next 2 SC presidents, and with Iraq on agenda next month, can't upset the Russians...), very little at UN agency level. This SG [Secretary General] statement is about this best will get (and OCHA briefing UN people 'informally' and Ogata discussing it openly at lunch with them yesterday), and it is quite strong language for an SG who has NO support from permanent members. [...] The following statement was issued today by the Office of the Spokesman for Secretary-General Kofi Annan:

The Secretary-General has been following the situation in the Northern Caucasus with great concern. While committed to combating and ending terrorism, he considers it vital that the use of force to combat this scourge should be proportional, and should be focused directly on the terrorists themselves. He recalls that international humanitarian law - including, especially, the Geneva Conventions - is binding and must be fully respected at all times. This means that the protection of innocent civilians from the effects of conflict should always receive the highest priority.

The Secretary-General, therefore, is disturbed to see that the scope of the military offensive in Chechnya seems to have evolved far beyond a campaign with the limited objective of rooting out terrorists, and that it has caused great suffering and high casualties to civilians, including the elderly and women and children. He renews his appeal to the Russian leadership to take immediate steps to protect the civilian population from further suffering. He urges them to lose no time in seeking a long-term solution to the conflict, which he believes can only be done through a political process. The Secretary-General wishes to thank the Government of the Russian Federation for receiving, and cooperating with, the humanitarian mission which he sent to the region at the end of last week. He has now received the report setting forth the mission's findings and recommendations. He has asked the United Nations humanitarian agencies to keep the report's recommendations in view as they prepare to strengthen and expand their relief programs. This will be essential in ensuring prompt international action to alleviate the suffering of the innocent civilian victims of the conflict.

## SPEAK OUT, AS WE CAN'T TAKE ACTION?

The same day, the president of the Organisation for Security in Europe (OSCE) voiced its powerlessness in public, after its delegates had been turned back from Chechnya by the Russian authorities.

During the OSCE's summit in Istanbul on 17th November, MSF France published an open letter calling on the member countries' Heads of State to 'employ all means available to bring the Russians' indiscriminate bombing to a halt, secure the Chechens' right to flee for safety in Georgia, and assure access for organisations providing aid.'

The General Director and Operations Director of MSF Belgium, and the Medical Coordinator of MSF Holland questioned the relevance of this open letter, and regretted that the decision had been taken, according to them, without consulting the teams in the field. They feared that it would undermine their sections' operational efforts underway in Ingushetia. MSF Belgium was also concerned about the Russian government's reaction with regards to its other programmes in Moscow and Siberia.



'The OSCE Powerless in Chechnya, Observes its President,' **Associated Press**, Helsinki, 12 November 1999 (in French).

### Extract:

The OSCE, created in Helsinki 24 years ago and encompassing 54 participating states, strives to play at least a humanitarian role in Chechnya. 'However, the OSCE must also be involved (politically) in the search for a long term solution for the region,' added Mr Vollebaek.

An OSCE delegation has just tried to visit the separatist republic, but was turned back by the Russian authorities. Mr. Vollebaek said that Mr Ivanov later claimed it was a 'misunderstanding.'

'I deeply regret that he has stripped the OSCE of any political role,' continued Mr Vollebaek. Igor Ivanov added that he did not want the OSCE summit, to be held in Istanbul the following week, to veer off onto a debate on Chechnya, and thus (we can conclude) raise questions on Moscow.



"Re: communication on Chechnya" **Email** from Alex Parisel, director general of MSF Belgium, to the general directors of all MSF sections, 16 November 1999 (in French).

The reaction from Moscow is understandable, and it places our operations in Russia, and so our entire section, under

considerable pressure. There are fears that all our efforts to access the region will come to nothing, and our projects in Siberia will take a severe hit. Because of this logical and pertinent reaction, I think that:

- It is too late to stop things now. As announced last night, Paris has started the ball rolling.

- I would ask all operational centres to take note that this initiative, according to our Moscow contacts, quashes any possibility of exploratory or other initiatives begun from Russia for the next few weeks at least (physical danger for expats, as well as administrative problems), and so too, all potential MSF presence alongside the refugees – unless the comm initiative launched takes a very low profile.

- I would also ask everyone to ensure that this initiative relating to Chechnya is clearly dissociated from the other work carried out by MSF in Russia (TB programme in Mariinsk - tied in with the access to medicines campaign).

There is a real climate of paranoia in Moscow, and it is about to make itself felt. Our head of mission has several years' experience in the region and I trust his analysis and the risks he describes. Nonetheless, our wait-and-see attitude towards Chechnya is as difficult to swallow as ever. So it's in the temperance of our communication that will make the difference and this difficult balance. This is, by the way, the same argument used by the MSF sections in Georgia not to placie the other projects in danger.

It's a real shame that no MSF section, including MSF B, took the initiative to meet the Russian authorities before embarking on this process. This initiative was planned for the end of this week. Such haste will only add to the pressure on our Moscow teams.



'AM: Communication on Chechnya,' **Email** from Vincent Janssens, Director of Operations MSF Belgium, to MSF Executive Directors, Communication Directors, Operation Directors, 16 November 1999 (in English).

### Extract:

It is only now, with more details on the initiative (until yesterday it was never the idea to make it a press release!) and feedback from the field that I realize that the form and the timing will match neither our objective of seeking assistance of the vulnerable populations [nor] [n]either our objective of confronting constructively the local authorities with our opinion. It would just give us the satisfaction (at HQ) to have spoken out.

I think that although temoignage [advocacy] has as such not an obligation of impact or result, that we shouldn't be blind for the probable consequences by going for what some consider as a unique opportunity. Already, before sending it out we [all] agree that given the fact that thousands of similar letters were brought out already by different instances, the Russians will probably [be] the only ones to take notice of it, [n]ot necessarily of the content (which is not at all "scoopy"), but of the signature.

A recent meeting of humanitarians (UN-NGO's) in Moscow

with the Russian authorities reveals that there is evolution towards humanitarian access to the refugees but also that the Russian authorities are particularly distrustful about NGO's in general, and French NGO's in particular (Védrine?). It is foreseeable that these kind of messages can stop this evolution, in particular for MSF (our choice?) but possibly also for all NGO's.

So far MSF-B:

At present the only section really operational in Russia did not take up direct contact with the authorities on this issue. Maybe we lost some time but now we have a 'special envoy' for that matter there.

This communiqué would as such:

1. Render totally impossible (not to say [create] a possible physical target) [expulsion] of this person
2. Make fools of us towards the media whom we'll have to admit that thus far we didn't take any formal initiative with the Russian authorities either to express directly our concern on the situation, [or] to formally ask humanitarian access.
3. Put us internally in contradiction with the temoignage principle that we should first tackle the issue with local authorities before going public.

The field team (and if somebody knows the Russians I trust them to be it) concretely expects the authorities (apparently already very hyper-sensitive on the issue) to overreact, both to the form (foreign accusation) as to the content (a political message without additional specific MSF elements).

The negative [reactions] to any operationality in the Northern Caucasus is guaranteed, but measures might extend towards other operations in Russia, inclusive the MDR-TB programme.

I understand from feedback from Georgia that other sections are also sensitive to such an argument.

In conclusion, given the fact that the starting point was that we should all agree on such an initiative, I ask for the [cancellation] annulation of the initiative, both the sending of the letter and the press release. In exchange I propose an agenda for taking up the issue locally in Moscow with feedback to all.



*'Urgent Message Regarding Press Statement,' Email from Ton Koene, MSF Holland coordinator and Marie Skinnider, MSF Holland Medical Coordinator, 16 November 1999 (in English).*

An advocacy strategy addressing the humanitarian crisis in Chechnya and Ingushetia has to address the abuses of international humanitarian law and human rights with regards to the affected population. The balance between speaking out and being able to provide assistance to this population must be considered and in this process, the field should be consulted.

MSF Holland Russia would support (if we had been notified in advance), a letter of concern regarding Chechnya, addressed to international leaders (excluding Russia). However we do not support the MSF France press statement. MSF France is

not operational in Russia and should therefore have consulted the sections that are operational in Russia prior to any action. MSF Holland is starting operations in Ingushetia and such speaking out could potentially jeopardize the provision of aid to the displaced population. We therefore appeal to reconsider this advocacy letter as a press statement.



*'Open Letter from Médecins Sans Frontières,' to the Presidents and Prime Ministers of the OSCE Member States, 17 November 1999 (in French/in English).*

Mr President

On the eve of the OSCE summit to be held in Istanbul this week, we feel it important to express our revolt and indignation concerning the plight of the civilian population in Chechnya. The Chechen population has been the target of systematic, indiscriminate bombings by Russian forces for over two months. Under the pretext of a fight against terrorism, it is subject to collective retaliations that mainly effect civilians. Hospitals, markets and schools have repeatedly been the targets of attacks by the Russian army. The haphazard closing of borders by the Federal Authorities has furthermore aggravated the population's survival conditions: neither those who wish to seek refuge and assistance in neighbouring republics nor the wounded who seek treatment can leave. The all out war led by the Russian military on Chechen territory renders all independent humanitarian aid in favour of the displaced and wounded civilians impossible.

The first war in Chechnya (1994-1996) was already of unprecedented violence and decimated the Chechen population: there were over 50 000 deaths out of a population of 1,000,000 inhabitants. The war waged by the Russian forces today is even more deadly as it deploys a strategy of long range shelling using particularly destructive weapons that result in carnage and countless loss of lives amongst civilians. Given the systematic violation of International Human Rights and OSCE rules regarding Human Rights and Minority Rights, we ask you, during the summit in Istanbul, to exercise all the pressure in your power on the Russian authorities to:

- immediately stop the indiscriminate bombing of the Chechen population
- authorise those who wish to leave Chechnya to seek refuge outside the country to do so
- give refugees and wounded access to humanitarian assistance.

As Head of State, it is within your power to restrict your support and aid to the Russian government on the condition that the indiscriminate killings cease.

We sincerely hope that you will give the urgent matter your utmost attention.



*Even if we overlooked the humanitarian or human rights aspects and took the political side alone, there was no way this crisis could become international, because it involved Russia, a permanent member of the Security Council. Normally, in the event of an outbreak of war, the Security Council is in charge of maintaining peace and international security. It's supposed to take more or less involved decisions, set up mediation, name an emissary to resolve the conflict, impose embargos, etc. But in this case, there was no question of the war being discussed by the Security Council, nor could the UN Secretary General nominate a special envoy. All the UN human rights systems were paralysed as well. The OSCE was also crippled, being an organisation created by Russia, for Russia, with a system of reaching decisions by consensus, i.e. according all its members the right to veto.*

[...] MSF deputy legal advisor, 1995-2005  
(in French) interviewed in 2008

**On 4 December, the Russian forces launched a substantial air attack on Grozny, totally cutting it off. On 5 December, the Russian military commander distributed tracts informing Grozny's population that all persons remaining in the town after the 11 December 'would be considered terrorists, and annihilated by artillery and aerial fire.' In practice, the civilian population was completely hemmed in, and refused to use the corridor set up and controlled by the Russian armed forces, which lead to Russian territory, and not Ingushetia, as announced. The international community's condemnation gained momentum. On 5 December, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs declared that the West would maintain pressure on Russia to call a halt to its military operation. On 7 December, Bill Clinton, President of the United States, condemned the Russian's strategy to bring Grozny to its knees. On 8 December, several European Ministers of State, along with the Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs, declared that the ultimatum on Grozny was inadmissible, and brandished the threat of sanctions against Russia. On 9 December, Boris Yeltsin reminded the United States that Russia was a nuclear power.**



**Sitrep 004 North Caucasus – 29/11 to 7/12 1999,**  
MSF Holland (in English).

#### **Extract:**

General situation

[...] Russia's military issued an ultimatum on 5.12.99 telling all Chechens to leave Grozny within five days or face an onslaught by artillery and aircraft. An unknown number of civilians remain trapped in Grozny. Russia's migration service said it expected 20,000 to 30,000 people to flee in the next five days. Others (e.g. BBC) report that 50,000 civilians are

still in the capital. The 'safe passage' is routed to the North to the Russian controlled area, not to Ingushetia.

International criticism is increasing. However, Putin openly stated that he believes that western leaders will not act to oppose the Russian campaign:

Blair said European Union ministers were likely to discuss Chechnya (and ultimatum) at a meeting in Brussels on Monday and at an EU summit in Finland at the end of this week.

Clinton condemned the Russian strategy to wipe Grozny off the map (7.12.1999).

French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine said on 5.12.1999 the West would keep up pressure on Russia to make Moscow end its military campaign in the rebel region of Chechnya and reach a political settlement.

Human Rights Commissioner of the Council of Europe Alvaro Gil-Robles arrived in Moscow on 28.11.1999.

IMF reports to seriously reconsider withdrawing funding if the international community does not support (27.11.1999)

Norwegian Foreign Minister and present Chairman of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Knut Vollebaek met Prime Minister Igor Ivanov in Moscow. Russia flatly rejects OSCE mediation offer on Chechnya on 29.11.99

An envoy of Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov warned on 3.12.1999 that Russian forces were preparing to use chemical weapons in their military onslaught on the breakaway Caucasian region.



**'Chechnya: Yeltsin Issues Serious Warning to Clinton'**  
AFP (France), Beijing, 9 December 1999 (in French).

"It seems that Mr Clinton has forgotten that Russia is a great power with a nuclear arsenal in its possession," declared the Russian President to journalists just before a meeting with China's number two, Li Peng. "We aren't at all afraid of Clinton's anti-Russian position" he added, in strident tones. "I want to tell President Clinton that he alone cannot dictate how the world should live, work and play. It's up to us to dictate" he said, in words translated into English by a Russian official.




*The most important thing is the continuing level of violence for the last 10 years. I've worked in a lot of places as a consultant for aid agencies and you hear that this war is unique everywhere. All wars are unique; this is the nature of war. The Chechen war is specific among recent wars because it is an old war—old weapons unlike Sudan and other places where most of the wars we fight now are fought with a Kalashnikov and an RPG. This is an old war and it is fought with a lot of World War 2 weapons. The bombing of Grozny—we don't see this anymore—the last time it happened was WW2. There are no cities like Grozny—none of the African conflicts have something like that level of intensive*

bombardments. They targeted a huge city and completely destroyed a huge city—a city of 400,000 people. In which the centre of the city is completely gone.

Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus, (November 1999-January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005) (in English) interviewed in 2000

## MAKING THE MOST OF THE NOBEL PRIZE

On 10 December, while 40,000 civilians once again found themselves trapped under fire in Grozny, a delegation of MSF members went to Oslo to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, awarded to the organisation on the 15 October. The speech given by James Orbinsky, the MSF movement's President began with a call to President Yeltsin to stop bombing Chechnya's civilian population. Overriding the tradition of Nobel Peace Prize winners appearing on the City Hall balcony, the MSF representatives demonstrated in front of the Russian Federation's Embassy in Oslo. **V17**  MSF France launched a petition on the internet urging the French President and Prime Minister to take heed of these calls.



'Re: Regards from Ingushetia,' **Email** from Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland Regional Advisor Caucasus to MSF Holland Coordinator in Moscow, 9 December 1999 (in English).

### Extract:

I did speak with Bart [Ostyns] and Jean [Pletinckx] about MSF's upcoming statement about Chechnya. They also agreed that the statement was worth any obstacles that it might cause in our work in Ingushetia. We did think that it will be important that the statement does not distort the reality here. The problem in the region - the humanitarian catastrophe - does not lie in the condition of the IDPs in Ingushetia, but rather in the activities of the Russian troops in Chechnya and the treatment of the civilian population there. I assume that any statement, which hopefully will be heard loudly in Oslo, reflects this reality.



**Delivered** by James Orbinsky, President of MSF International at Nobel Peace Prize Reception, 10 December 1999 (in English/in French).

### Extract:

Your Majesties, Your Highness, Members of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen: The people of Chechnya—and the people of Grozny—today, and for more than three months, are enduring indiscriminate bombing by the Russian army. For them, humanitarian assistance is virtually unknown. It is the sick, the old, and the infirm who cannot escape Grozny. While the dignity of people in crisis is so central to the honour you give today, what you acknowledge in us is our particular response to it. I appeal here today to his Excellency the Ambassador of Russia and through him, to President Yeltsin, to stop the bombing of defenceless civilians in Chechnya. If conflicts and wars are an affair of the state, violations of humanitarian law, war crimes, and crimes against humanity apply to us all—as civil society, as citizens, and as human beings.



'Russia Must Stop Indiscriminate Attacks Against Civilians in Chechnya – the People of Chechnya Must be Given Access to Humanitarian Aid,' **Press release** (MSF UK) 10 December 1999 (in English).

### Extract:

MSF's international president, Dr James Orbinsky, says that an entire city cannot be regarded as a legitimate military target. "Even assuming that people want to leave, no provision has been made for them to evacuate safely, particularly the sick and injured," Dr Orbinsky says. "We urge all parties to the conflict to restore the conditions in which independent, neutral organizations such as MSF can return to the republic and help meet the needs of civilians." It has become all but impossible for independent humanitarian aid agencies to maintain a sustained international presence in the republic, following the kidnapping and killing of aid workers in recent years. "The presence of medical and humanitarian staff in war is not a privilege for a government to grant or withhold at will. The people caught in the fighting in Chechnya have a right to humanitarian assistance and protection now," Dr Orbinsky says.



'MSF Demonstrates in Front of the Russian Embassy in Oslo,' **AFP** (France), Oslo, 10 December 1999 (in French).

### Extract:

Some one hundred members of the French humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), who had just received the Nobel Peace Prize, demonstrated in front of the Russian Embassy in Oslo on Friday, protesting against the bombing in Chechnya. Members of MSF, sporting T shirts blazing 'Grozny' in red across the front, were accompanied by Chechens and members

of Amnesty International, a human rights organisation. According to Françoise Saulnier, Legal Director for MSF, the organisation was demonstrating to “lift the ultimatum ordering Grozny’s population to leave the city, which was issued by the Russian Army. We know that there are still women, children and elderly people there who cannot get out.”



**Petition Text**, MSF France, 10 December 1999 (in French/in English).

Dear Sir,

Dear Madam,

For more than three months, the city of Grozny, like all of the Chechen Republic, has been unrelentingly bombarded by the Russian armed forces. Cities, villages, hospitals, and markets have been taken as targets. No person or place has been spared.

More than 200,000 civilians have come to seek refuge in neighboring republics, after having walked in cold and snow, after having waited hours for the borders to be opened... the wounded, the sick, and the old are not able to undergo this long exodus.

We were bringing emergency aid to the men and women attempting to escape this terrible war from 1994 to 1996. Today, the violence is such that we are not able to be physically present in Chechen territory. Even if we deploy all our efforts to make medical materials available to destitute hospitals, our actions are limited. We have been forced to accept our powerlessness.

Against this unbearable war, against the indiscriminate massacres, voices have already been raised, but to no avail. To save the Chechen population that remains in the territory, we have to do more, and we have to do it fast.

At a time when the Russian army is engaging in a full-scale massacre of civilians and is blocking humanitarian aid from reaching the conflict’s victims, it is unacceptable that Russia sits on the European Council. It is also intolerable that this merciless war be funded by the citizens of democratic nations, through European Union financing and through International Monetary Fund credits.

Last November 16<sup>th</sup> we asked the Heads of States and Governments, assembled at Istanbul, to intervene and stop this violence. Today, it is your turn to ask the President of the French Republic and the Prime Minister to use all the means in their power to obtain the following from the Russian authorities:

- The immediate halt of indiscriminate bombing of the Chechen population
- The authorization for those wanting to leave Chechnya to seek refuge outside of the Republic
- Medical aid access to wounded refugees

Those of you who know us and support our actions, please get involved by sending us your signature.

*in December. I skipped Oslo. I found it far more meaningful being in Chechnya than strutting around Oslo with a Grozny t-shirt on. I wasn’t against the idea of demonstrating with t-shirts at the Nobel reception, but I thought my idea was better. It bothered me that the French were going to make waves when we weren’t doing anything in the field at that time.*

Dr. Bart Ostyns, Field coordinator in Chechnya (1995-1996), Task Force North Caucasus (1999-2001) MSF Belgium (in French) interviewed in August 2000




*I think we knew that we were going to have the most amazing audience when the Nobel Peace Prize was handed over, and as we had real trouble raising interest in Chechnya, everyone agreed that we had to make the most of the moment to put Chechnya on the table. It was like we started spreading our wings, thanks to or because of the Nobel Prize. In MSF’s collective unconscious, we maybe thought we could push things really far.*

[...], MSF deputy legal advisor, 1995-2005 (in French) interviewed in 2008



*The Nobel Peace Prize was a golden opportunity. When you’re given the Nobel the day before an ultimatum runs out, you’ve just got to demonstrate in front of the Russian ambassador. On the contrary, it would have been shameful to indulge in diplomatic niceties during a prize ceremony like that. But that’s it. There was such huge internal frustration, it was hard to really put on diplomatic airs, thus any gesture of defiance that was acceptable to all had to be carried out. And the actions we took around the Nobel Peace Prize were acceptable.*

Dr Rony Brauman, director of studies, MSF Fondation since 1994 (MSF France President from 1982 to 1994) (in French) interviewed in 2000

**On 13 December, the border between Chechnya and Georgia closed, and civilians in southern Chechnya were trapped. On 17 December, in a letter addressed to Georgia’s President, MSF France and MSF USA called for the immediate re-opening of the Georgian/Chechen border. Two press releases supporting this call were issued on 17 and 23 December, respectively, along with a report giving eyewitness accounts collected from Chechen refugees. V18** 



*I had the enviable choice of going to Oslo to represent MSF Belgium or going to Chechnya for my explo mission*



'Georgia-Chechnya – Update, 12 December 1999,'  
programme manager MSF France, 12 December  
1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

C/ Our role with regard to public opinion/the international community

The war in Chechnya has received widespread coverage so far. Journalists have been to the field several times, bringing back reports and images. But the momentum has started to wane – due to the security risks involved in these trips rather than by choice, for sure – while the public's interest was only partially roused in the first place (despite certain journalists' militant approach). The humanitarian community has not set foot in the field, despite a few half-hearted attempts by MDM, and this is unlikely to change in the near future. Thus all independent sources of information on the Chechen war have now inexorably dried up.

The work begun by Benedicte [Jeannerod, Communication officer] and Brigitte [Vasset, MSF F Emergency coordinator in Pankisi Valley] with the Akhmeta refugees is now critical: these refugees are our last source of credible information regarding the Chechen population's fate. So it's important to spend more time collecting firsthand accounts from the latest arrivals (especially those transferred by the UNHCR over the last few days).

Questions pending: should we be doing this work ourselves, or encouraging organisations like Amnesty or HRW [Human Rights Watch] to do it? In so far as we are planning to start up a regular intervention in Akhmeta, this 'witness account collecting' musn't be completely disconnected from our daily medical activities. Is this clearly stated in our objectives? How will this information be used coming out of Chechnya? (Preparation of a western government lobbying doc = too long, insufficiently reactive? Frequent press releases based on accounts by the last people out of Chechnya = problem with the Georgian authorities?)



'Refugees are Broken, Unable to Look to the Future,'  
**Le Monde** (France), 14 December 1999 (in French).

Brigitte Vasset has just returned from Georgia, where she spent a fortnight as an "emergency coordinator" for Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF).

"How many refugees have reached Georgia so far?

- We've counted around 5,000. They've been arriving in waves since October. But hardly any have crossed over during the past few weeks. It's too dangerous in the Argun valley, which leads to the border and the Russians bomb night and day. The number of new arrivals has dropped to a trickle of five or ten a day: women and children, with a rare, often elderly man.

- What help do they receive?

- The refugees cross at Shatili, a village on the border in the heart of the mountains, at an altitude of around 2,600 metres. MSF plans to set up heated tents there as soon as the weather permits. 4,000 refugees have been taken in by families in the Akhmeta valley, 100 kilometres south of

Shatili. These people have traditional ties with the Chechens, and they understand each others' languages. The thousand or so others have been put up in crèches and schools in the same valley.

- What do the refugees have to say?

- They seem far more desperate than during Chechnya's first war (1994 – 1996), which they now call the 'democratic war.' They tell us that in the past, they could always run to a neighbouring village for safety if theirs was bombed. This time, they were bombed relentlessly, and they didn't know which way to turn.

Many of them seem lost, broken, and unable to look to the future. They say that they don't understand why the Russians want to 'wipe them out.'

- What's the emergency in Georgia?

- Until now, things have been more or less under control. But the needs will become far more pressing if new waves of refugees make it across the border. The possibilities for shelter in Georgia are saturated. The Georgians themselves are short of resources, and winter's about to set in. The road leaving Shatili will soon become impassable, blocked off by snow right through to March. We need to find alternative means of transport.

- How are relations between humanitarian organisations and the Georgian authorities?

- The Georgians accept international assistance with good grace. Meetings are held with their government, the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and MSF. For sure, the situation's tense: the Chechens helped the Abkhazians during their struggle against Georgia in 1993. But any negative feelings towards Chechens aren't apparent near the border. Before we arrived, the Georgians couldn't vaccinate their children against diphtheria, tetanus, measles or poliomyelitis. In Akhmeta, the UNHCR is distributing mattresses, saucepans and should start with food this week.

- What's MSF doing to help the 230,000 Chechens holed up in Ingushetia?

- We've repeatedly asked the Russians to let us bring aid into Nazran. For a long time, they flatly refused, and then they agreed on the condition that they distributed the aid themselves, which is unacceptable, of course. We'll keep the pressure up so at least the hospitals can receive help – the minimum we should expect in times of war.



**Letter** to the President of the Republic of Georgia,  
from Philippe Biberson, President of MSF France,  
17 December 1999 (in French).

#### Extract:

We are extremely concerned about the fate of the Chechen population who have been heading for the Georgian and Russian Federation border over the last few days. They are trying to escape the random bombing, and they know there is no other way out. Several hundred Chechens are already scattered along your country's border, living from hand to mouth, with no means of crossing as the border is administratively closed. Given these people's living conditions (no shelter, food or health care), the risk of

being bombed and their longing to escape this war, we urge you to reopen the border without delay, thereby saving hundreds of civilian lives.

Time is also of the essence in light of the weather - the logistic conditions for evacuating these people to other sites will become increasingly hazardous as winter sets in. As Georgia should not be left to bear the weight of this new influx of refugees alone, Médecins Sans Frontières calls on all United Nations member States to support such a move, particularly with offers of taking those Chechens wishing to leave the Russian Federation into their countries.

Médecins Sans Frontières insists on the urgency of such decisions. This suffering of a civilian population threatened by death must stop. I write in the hope that we can count on your support, Mister President, by suggesting the immediate opening of your border with the Russian Federation.



*'The Tracking of Civilians, Interviews with Chechen Refugees in Georgia,' Report, MSF December 1999 (in English).*

#### Extracts:

Although Russian authorities have announced a cease-fire for a few hours a day in Grozny and the setting up of 'humanitarian corridors' to allow civilians to 'safely' leave zones and cities that are under attack, the latest information gathered by Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) from Chechen refugees in Georgia refutes the reality of these measures.

It appears that the Russian announcements amount to little more than propaganda and do not correspond, whatsoever to the reality of the situation. Chechnya is today a trap in which the civilian population wanders around desperately seeking shelter. The refugees' accounts show that:

The Russians are continuously bombing the whole of Chechnya - no region is spared. The villages in the south of the country where thousands of displaced have fled to escape the bombings of their own towns or regions, are being bombed intensively at this very moment. Today, there is no region where civilians can shelter from Russian attack. Furthermore, the last interviews on December 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> describe the relentless attack of Russian troops on civilian targets.

There is no safe exit for those people who wish to find refuge outside the Republic. The last people to arrive after the bombings in the region of Itum Khale on December 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> tell of the tracking of civilians that try to flee towards Shatili (Georgia) via the narrow Argoun Valley: the last escape route for the populations in the south. They tell of the Russian air force bombing the road leading to Georgia and helicopter attacks on groups of refugees on this road.

The intensive bombings prevent any humanitarian action on Chechen territory, preventing assistance to the wounded, the sick, and the most vulnerable. Despite the large movement of population towards Ingushetia, an estimated 500,000 people are still inside Chechnya.

against 'Chechen bandits' has every appearance of a collective punishment inflicted on the whole of the population. The intensity of the military operation in Chechnya denotes an internal armed conflict and is therefore under regulation of humanitarian law. Certain practices by the Russian military manifestly contravene these laws and could be qualified as war crimes or crimes against humanity. Included in these practices are:

- indiscriminate bombings,
- deliberate attacks on civilians or civilian targets,
- acts or threats of violence to terrorize the population,
- displacements of the population without measures undertaken to ensure satisfactory conditions of food, shelter, and security, and
- the prevention of all medical and humanitarian assistance to the population.

These issues are the responsibility of the international community. It is imperative that concrete actions be taken to qualify and stop the crimes committed against the Chechen population.

A small MSF team was sent to the region of Akhmeta in the northeast of Georgia from November 24 to 29. MSF had two objectives: 1) to evaluate the situation of the Chechen refugees who have fled to this region and 2) to collect information from them on the situation of the civilian population within the Republic. MSF organized interviews with twenty refugees and their families. Refugees were asked about the bombings and/or violence undertaken by the Russian forces, the different ways in which they had managed to survive since the beginning of the Russian offensive, the circumstances of their flight to Georgia, and their feelings regarding this new war.

Given the crowded conditions of both the collection centres and the families who have taken in the refugees, we were not able to conduct one-to-one interviews. Generally, people were interviewed in the presence of all their family and their relatives. Therefore, some of the interviews turned into group discussions that prevented retracing the whole story of the person being interviewed. This explains why only parts of the interviews are included in this report.

In addition to these interviews, the latest information that the MSF team in Zinvali, Georgia, has sent is also included. This team has been providing medical care to the refugees transferred from the border by the High Commissioner for Refugees (HCR). On December 11 and 12, nearly 400 people (mainly women and children) arrived in Georgia after fleeing the bombing of villages in the south of Chechnya by the Russian army. The state of the refugees on their arrival and their description of the conditions in which they left Chechnya indicates that conditions for civilians in the south of the country have seriously deteriorated.

Given that this document has been compiled using the accounts of refugees in Georgia, it does not cover the question of refugees who have found refuge in Ingushetia.





'MSF Calls for Immediate Re-Opening of Border Between Georgia and Chechnya\,' MSF France/MSF USA, **Press release**, 23 December 1999 (in English).

The international humanitarian agency Doctors Without Borders/ Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) today called on the Georgian authorities to re-open their border with Chechnya to allow civilians caught up in the fighting to escape Russian bombardments. The border has been closed since December 10. Because the capacity of the Georgian authorities to accommodate large numbers of refugees is limited, MSF also calls upon third countries to offer temporary asylum to Chechen refugees. There are about 5,000 Chechen refugees currently in Georgia.

The last groups of refugees to arrive in Georgia say that they left their homes in the region of Itum Kale on December 10 to escape shelling in the area. Unable to cross the Georgian border, some turned back toward their homes, while about 100 people amassed in a 'no man's land- between Chechnya and Georgia.

It wasn't until Friday, December 17, when the no man's land came under direct fire that Georgian border guards agreed to allow the women and children in the group to cross the border as a one-time measure. By then the refugees had spent several nights in the open in harsh conditions, during which time two infants reportedly died. After another bombardment the following day, the Georgian authorities agreed to let the men through. According to the most recent arrivals, several thousand more people are still looking for a way out of southern Chechnya but no one else has been allowed to cross since. "By closing its border, the Georgian authorities are denying refugees their right to seek safety in the face of life-threatening danger; this is unacceptable," says Denis Gouzerh, MSF Head of Mission in Georgia. "However, Georgia is already home to refugees from the Abkhazian conflict so its ability to cope with refugees from Chechnya is limited; the international community must assist."



*We couldn't get in. There were people trapped in horrific circumstances, wounded, and we just couldn't get through. The Georgians wouldn't let us. We went to see a really pleasant Minister who was in charge of this affair, but he said that things were tricky with the Russians. From time to time, they reasserted their claim that they weren't flying over Georgia, but we could see their planes going over, and they were bombing everything in sight. In Tbilisi, we prepared cases of medicines that we gave to people crossing the border, in the evening. We wrote a pile of letters to get access, but nothing worked.*

Dr Brigitte Vasset, Director of Operations (1990-1998), Emergency Coordinator in Pankisi valley (Georgia), (October 1999 to January 2000), MSF France (in French), interviewed in 2008.



*As the exit was blocked on the northern front, a lot of people headed for the area around Shatoi, in southern Chechnya, thinking they'd be able to cross over into Georgia. But the Russians had already parachuted in border guards, and so the whole population found itself trapped between two Russian fronts. It was terrible, so violent. And it was winter, too. The elderly, women and children had to walk in the snow. It was one of the worst events I'd seen: all these people blocked in the high mountains, without food, water, anything, caught between two fronts, with planes and helicopters bombarding them non-stop, totally snared in a trap. Some of them got across; I don't know how many stayed. MSF called for a humanitarian corridor. There were helicopters waiting for them, and the Red Cross. But the Russians were employing their favourite method: negotiate while bombing, spread terror, and let the population go once it'd been psychologically destroyed. These were people who'd seen their children die before their eyes. It was a nightmare. We worked in the refugee camps in the Pankisi. It was heaving with extremist Muslims at the time, and it wasn't easy. We found it hard to take a position, and the refugees implored us for one thing: to speak out. On the medical front, we'd sent a nurse and a doctor, but they really wanted us to speak out. It came up again and again, with all the refugees: 'we don't give a damn about your medicines. Say something!' It was really striking, this urge to speak out, to tell people what had been going on.*

Vincent de Bellefroid, MSF France Project Coordinator in Shatoi, Chechnya, February to May 1995, then August 1996 to July 1997, then Project coordinator in North Caucasus (June to October 2001) (in French), interviewed in 2008.

**During the meeting on 19 December 1999, the French section's Board of Directors raised the possibility of sending a clandestine team into Chechnya via the Georgian mountains. The idea withered on the vine.**



**Minutes** of the MSF France Board of Directors' Meeting, on 17 December 1999 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

The question of sending a team into Chechnya arose. **Philippe Biberson:** We're conscious that we're making a paltry gesture (sending medicines across the border) in light of the situation. The issue of sending in a team has been tabled a number of times. On his return from Georgia, François Calas explained that if we approached the border with caution, and made sure we were not alone, we could cross to the other side to take a quick look. Generally speaking, we weren't opposed to such a move, even if we had grave reservations about exposing our staff to bombing and kidnapping risks. But if there's a Russian helicopter battalion right on the border, then that would complicate things a bit.

**François Calas:** We've examined this idea from every angle, and I think it would be feasible as long as we identify sufficiently reliable Chechen networks to minimise the Chechen risk (kidnappings), but the Russian risk would remain unchanged. So with this in mind, are we ready to accept the risk of bombing, etc.? And this raises another question: to do what? We've also been through this many times, and we still don't all agree. Several ideas were aired:

- The idea of carrying out an exploratory mission with a surgical intervention in mind, for example,
- doing an in-and-out visit to meet up with the Chechen authorities, consolidate our network and monitor the aid we send in,
- or lastly, going in, taking stock, coming back and condemning what we see to the public.

At present, we haven't decided on the objectives, or even how to organise this exploratory mission, which is becoming more and more difficult as the fighting and bombing raids pick up... We're constantly posing the question of sending in a team, but when and how to do so is no longer very clear.

**Maurice Nègre:** 'I imagine there are fighting units moving round Chechnya? Where do they take cover, other than in Georgia?'

**François Calas:** In the south, towards Shatoi, and then in the mountains, because the entire plain is occupied by the Russians. This guerrilla warfare will probably take root, and the Russians will meet the Chechens head on very soon.

In sum: at present, our activities only include the (insufficient) aid to refugees in Georgia and Ingushetia, and the channelling of a bit of equipment to hospitals in southern Chechnya.

Follow up is required....

**On 20 December, the United Nations Secretary General's representative for displaced persons reminded Russia of its responsibilities to assist and protect the Chechens displaced by the fighting, in other words respect the principles of international law relating to displaced persons.**



*'UN Representative Calls on Russia to Provide for Displaced Chechens,' Press release, United Nations, 20 December 1999 (in English).*

Francis M. Deng, the United Nations Secretary General's Special Representative on internally displaced persons, called on the Russian government December 20 to assist and protect residents of Chechnya displaced by the fighting. [...] Deng said the Russian campaign in Chechnya has uprooted more than 250,000 citizens from their homes, adding that "the overwhelming majority of the internally displaced remain within the borders of the Russian Federation, principally in Chechnya and Ingushetia. As such they are internally displaced persons and responsibility for meeting their assistance and protection needs rests first and foremost with the Russian Government."

He said there have been reports of Russian soldiers firing on Chechens attempting to flee and that Russia has set up "filtration camps" where displaced Chechens suspected of being rebel sympathizers are detained illegally. Chechens in refugee camps in Ingushetia have inadequate shelter, heat, clothing, bedding and cooking facilities, and lack access to medical care and social services, Deng said.

He also accused Russian authorities of using "bureaucratic obstacles" to prevent international relief organizations from gaining access to the displaced Chechens.

"I call upon the Russian authorities to observe the relevant principles of international law as restated in the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement," Deng said.

**On 23 December, MSF Holland and Amnesty International organised a demonstration in front of the Russian Embassy in The Hague and called on the Russian Federation's Ambassador to respect the demands of international law in terms of civilian protection and assistance.**



**Letter** from the Director of Amnesty International and the Director of MSF Holland to Ambassador of the Russian Federation in The Hague, 23 December 1999 (in English).

**Extract:**

Both organizations deplore all violations of human rights and international humanitarian law which reportedly continue to be committed in the context of the armed conflict in the Chechen Republic. [...]

(i) The Russian military should comply with the provisions of international humanitarian law prohibiting indiscriminate attacks and direct attacks on civilians and civilian objects, and therefore to immediately desist from carrying out any such attacks;

(ii) The Russian military should take sufficient precautions to protect civilians;

(iii) The Russian authorities should ensure humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons and other civilians trapped in the conflict areas in Chechnya;

(iv) The Russian authorities should take measures to stop the campaign of intimidation against ethnic Chechens and other people from the Caucasus who reside in Moscow and other cities of the Russian Federation. [...]

Médecins sans Frontières and Amnesty International would like to stress that, without taking any position on Chechnya's legal status we also call upon the authorities of the Chechen Republic and the military leadership of the Chechen armed opposition groups to comply with international humanitarian law regarding the protection of civilians during armed conflict. The command of the Chechen armed groups should take sufficient precautions to protect civilians and should ensure that any Russian prisoner is treated humanely. [...]

Médecins sans Frontières and Amnesty International also call for an international investigation into allegations of

violations of international humanitarian law in Chechnya to establish the truth and to identify those responsible. The Russian government should grant immediately safe access to Chechnya to such a team of international investigators.

## INITIAL CALLS TO THE "ORGANISED" INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

**On 22 December, the President of the United States, Bill Clinton, assured MSF USA in a letter that its administration condemned the indiscriminate use of force against civilians and was striving to find a political solution and bring civilian losses to an end. In early January, various senior members of the United States administration, including the President, declared that the political future of Vladimir Putin was tied to a peaceful resolution of the Chechen crisis.**

**On 12 January, while the Russian forces led a new offensive in Chechnya, the New York Times published an open letter written by MSF to President Bill Clinton and the Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, urging them to convince Russia to put a stop to the war. MSF accused the Russian state of committing war crimes, called for respect for the right to flee, and questioned why the United States was not addressing the Chechens' fate at the highest possible levels, as it did for the Kosovars. This message, prepared in collaboration with MSF France and MSF UK at a time when the United States presided over the Security Council for a few months, was taken up by a much of the international media.**



**Letter** from Bill Clinton, President of the USA to Joëlle Tanguy, Executive Director MSF USA, 22 December 1999 (in English).

### Extract:

Dear Ms. Tanguy:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Chechnya conflict. I share your concern about the growing humanitarian crisis in the North Caucasus and the terrible price that the conflict is exacting on innocent civilian lives.

[...] My Administration recognizes Russia's obligation to uphold its territorial integrity and protect its citizens from terrorism and lawlessness. At the OSCE Summit in Istanbul, however, I made clear that indiscriminate use of force against civilians is unacceptable, and the means Russia is using, in Chechnya could lead to a cycle of violence and undermine Russia's integration with the international community. For

these reasons, we have impressed on Russia that a purely military solution is not possible in Chechnya and have called for a political dialogue.

In Istanbul, we were successful in getting Russia to acknowledge a role for the OSCE in settling the conflict. The recent visit to the North Caucasus by OSCE Chairman-in-Office Vollebaek is an important step, and we will continue to work with the Russians to define further that role.

[...] The position my Administration has taken on the Chechnya conflict and its impact on civilians is firm and clear: civilian casualties must end, a military solution will not work, and Russia must start a meaningful political dialogue to end the conflict. We will continue pursuing the bilaterally and multilaterally, privately and publicly.



*'U.S. Officials say Putin's Fate may Depend on Chechnya,'* **The Associated Press** (Washington) 3 January 2000 (in English).

### Extract:

[...] "The question for President Yeltsin's successors is not only how to liberate Grozny without killing thousands of civilians; it's also whether this war becomes a model for how to deal with other problems involving terrorists and separatists," President Clinton wrote in an essay in this week's Time magazine.

"Russia has to find the right balance between the use of effective force and decent respect for individual rights and international norms," Clinton said.

[...] "Chechnya now is a dilemma," national security adviser Samuel Berger said on ABC's "This Week." "If it goes on too long or if it begins to cause increasing Russian casualties, as we seem to be seeing now, with an intensified resistance, this could become something that mires Putin down, and the wave he rode up could become the wave that engulfs him."

[...] The Chechnya war won't be settled on the battlefield, but around a negotiating table, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright asserted on NBC's "Meet the Press."

"There can only be a political solution to this," Albright said.



*'Open letter Chechnya Recommendation (MSF F & UK),'* **Email** from Françoise Saulnier Legal advisor, MSF France and Anne-Marie Huby MSF UK Executive Director to Antoine Gérard, MSF USA Program Director, and Kris Torgeson, MSF USA Communications Director, 7 January 2000 (in English).

Dear Antoine and Kris,

Thanks for the letter. Just one suggestion: we are still vague about what we expect the president and sec of state to actually DO. As we can't ask for the launch of the 3rd world war over this, could we at least request that the US govt be MORE SPECIFIC in its condemnation of Russia's conduct in Chechnya. Though we welcome the pdt's

[president's] recent criticism of the treatment of refugees, he has failed so far to remind Russia of its legal obligations under international law and to mention that Russia should, and will, be held ACCOUNTABLE to these standards by the international community. Public statements to date have just been empty rhetoric.

Voilà – that's all for us.

All the best. AM

Hello Antoine,

After discussing here in Paris [...], our last comments about the draft letter are as follow:

1/It is a good point that the qualification of war crimes is included in the letter. Don't you think that we could have reinforced the parallel with the Kosovo situation by rather introducing this qualification of war crimes at the end of the paragraph concerning Kosovo and having this reference positioned nearby our appeal in the letter, could underline its strength?

What do you think of something like?

'Do they suffer any less than the people of Kosovo? Is it less of a war crime that it was in Kosovo?'

2/Our main remark is about the last point of the appeal: 'unimpeded and secure humanitarian access to all populations...' Even if this point depends of international humanitarian laws, this sounds more in the present context as being of our responsibility of humanitarian actors.

To our knowledge, the Russians don't oppose to the access of humanitarian aid in the neighbouring republics or in Russian controlled areas of Chechnya. The limitation come more from our perception of security issues.

Then, concerning the independently-controlled areas; did we ask already to Russians and Chechens the possibility to go there? The Russians could easily justify that their military action will also restore a secure humanitarian access to populations and areas inside Chechnya.

On another hand, we should not give in again to the politics a humanitarian escape way. This could lead again, as seen in previous contexts, to a dismissal of the responsibility of politics as they could work [wiggle] out more easily on this point to the detriment of the two other above it (stop indiscriminate bombings and free and safe passage for those who want to escape) which are in our mind the most essentials

So we believe that the third point of the appeal concerning access of humanitarian does not make sense in this context and should be cancelled.

Last remark but more important: about the swift improvement of the humanitarian situation for the Chechen people. The qualification of humanitarian does not add more. It is used more and more systematically in the media (humanitarian situation or catastrophe... etc.)

Maybe could we speak simply of the situation of the Chechen people...?

Françoise [Saulnier]



**'Open letter to President Clinton and Secretary Albright – 'Humanitarian Law Must be Respected in Chechen Conflict'** from Joëlle Tanguy, MSF USA Executive Director and James Orbinsky, President of MSF International, 12 January 2000 (in English).

**Extract:**

Mr. President,

In a recent article in Time magazine, you stated, "We have a profound and open disagreement with the Russian government, not on its right to oppose violent Chechen rebels, but on the treatment of refugees."

Mr. President and Secretary Albright, while such words against the violence in Chechnya are encouraging, they mean little unless they result in swift improvement of the situation of the Chechen people. You must prevail upon Russia to abide by its obligations under humanitarian law. Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders is urgently appealing for:

- An immediate halt to the indiscriminate bombings and attacks on Chechen civilians.

- Safe and unhindered passage for those wanting to leave Chechnya to seek refuge outside or the Republic, including the opening of the Georgian border, which has been impassable due to daily bombing over the past 3 weeks.

- Free and unimpeded humanitarian access to all populations and all areas inside Chechnya and the surrounding republics as guaranteed under International Humanitarian Law.

We sincerely urge you to give this matter your utmost attention.



**'Chechnya Coverage,' Email** from Anne-Marie Huby, MSF UK Executive Director, 13 January 2000 (in English).

**Extract:**

A brief note to let you know that the story of MSF accusing the Russians of war crimes in Chechnya, was the 2<sup>nd</sup> item on BBC news (domestic) today, with more to come.

We did not expect so much interest – given that we have published no new hard facts but, obviously the accusation of war crimes is serious enough to warrant coverage.

The main line of questioning here is: what are the parallels with Kosovo (double standards in international law enforcement)? Do you realistically think you will achieve anything with this (i.e. won't you antagonise the Russian govt further etc.)? What can the intl [international] community do to deal fairly with crimes committed by a permanent member of the SC, and a nuclear power at that?

**The communication efforts were reinforced by diplomatic steps taken by MSF USA and MSF France's project coordinator in the Pankisi valley, with the American and Canadian governments.**



'State Department Briefing on Chechnya,' **Email** from MSF USA Program Department to MSF programme managers, Executive Directors, Communication Directors, 13 January 2000 (in English). (edited)

**Extract:**

I spoke this afternoon with [...] the [State Department] who said "off the record" that in effect there was not much to be expected from the US on this... they were more concerned about Russian stability and "you know what its like with 2 nuclear powers"! ... He added that he believes the conflict will be long and drawn out and the Russians are using more brutality (if that is possible) than in the last Chechen war.



**Email** from the MSF France programme manager to the Programmes Director, MSF United States and the Operations Directors, MSF Belgium and MSF Holland, 14 January 2000, (in French).

**Extract:**

Concerning the call for a halt to the indiscriminate bombing of the Chechen population, we would to take tings one step further by questioning the 'qualification' of current events in the Republic of Chechnya. Up until now, the Russian Federation has talked of a 'fight against terrorism' in Chechnya, and not one member of the United Nations has contested this "qualification". Yet in our eyes (MSF's, but also the journalists' who have spent the last few months covering the zones under the freedom fighters' control), this is a 'war.' The accounts collected by MSF teams from Chechen refugees in Georgia also lean heavily towards a referring to war rather than an anti-terrorist surge.

We, MSF, should ask the expanded Security Council (the current president is American) to table a debate aiming to qualify the operations carried out by the Russians in Chechnya: is this an anti-terrorist operation, or an armed internal conflict? We could make a passing reference to the American administration's tardiness to qualify the events of 1994 in Rwanda as genocide...



'Chechnya Temoignage – Short Version,' **Email** from Laura Brav to MSF programme managers, Directors of Communications, Executive Directors, 21 January 2000 (in English).

**Extract:**

- We then let the administration people talk. They basically had speeches prepared, about how much they'd been doing (i.e.: saying), how this situation was really not like Kosovo at all, how they were noting all our points, etc. - Brigitte then raised our main appeals/questions/recommendations. We got no responses on these points, which were 'carefully noted' for further review/consideration.

1. The "situation" in Chechnya must be clearly qualified as

an internal armed conflict so that there can be no more doubt, and more importantly increased accountability, as to the applicability of international humanitarian law.

2. OSCE observers must be sent (the US govt very in favor of this...)

3. The UN Security Council should debate Chechnya. We said we were aware of the Russian veto obstacle, but pointed out that everyone knows who says, or even suggests, anything at the SC, and even that can have an impact, so just trying to raise the issue is an important first step and veto is no excuse not to try.

4. States should show their support for Chechens and concern for Georgia by accepting, even as a symbolic gesture, to take some Chechen refugees. Our point is not to allow Georgia to disregard its duties under refugee law, especially in light of its new membership in the Council of Europe, but to help allow civilians the possibility to flee the bombing. Also, we don't think Georgia's fear of a risk of destabilization if there's a large influx of Chechen refugees is too unfounded.

5. MSF asked Canada (and told US about this) to seize the International Humanitarian Fact- Finding Commission (mandated by Protocol I, and both Canada and Russia have accepted the Commission's competence, so Canada can seize it and Russia has to accept – as a precision, the Commission has recognized its own competence over internal armed conflicts, although it's mandated by Protocol I which is for international conflicts.)



*I went to America. I have a less clear, less satisfactory memory of this visit than of the first one in 1995.*

*They didn't listen as closely. It's true that we weren't present in Chechnya, that we were only reporting what the refugees were telling us. We didn't have much to say. I didn't go and see the Americans that often, but they liked us to give them info, and they noted EVERYTHING down.*

Dr Brigitte Vasset, Director of Operations (1990-1998), Emergency Coordinator in Pankisi valley, (October 1999 to January 2000), MSF France (in French), interviewed in 2008.

**The publication of an open letter to Bill Clinton did not meet with unanimous approval within the MSF movement. Some thought that the letter should be addressed to the Russian government rather than the president of the United States. MSF USA's purchase of advertising space in the New York Times also provoked some criticism.**



Chechnya,' **Email** from Samantha Bolton, MSF International Communications Coordinator to MSF USA Communication Director, Programme Director and UN liaison, copy to MSF International President and General Secretary, 18 January 2000 (in English).

Dear Kris, Antoine, and Catherine,  
I was shocked (as were James and JMK) to find out that MSF paid around 100,000 USD for the page in the NY Times. This was not mentioned anywhere in the communications asking for signatures and on content. I do not think that MSF should be spending that much money on a temoignage campaign when our ops are very weak and have probably barely even spent [in total] what you spend on the [one] ad. Also, this kind of decision goes beyond the US office. No one in ops or in all the sections was aware and nor were the Dir Comm [communications directors of all sections]. How much money do you have in your budget for further actions like this year? Surely there are other ways of doing temoignage beyond money.



*I had a problem with that letter to Bill Clinton because it seems to me that things like that should be addressed to the Russian government not to the USA. It also didn't seem to make sense why [publish it in] the USA, except for the fact that it has been done principally by members of MSF USA. I think that each MSF does have a right and obligation to put pressure on its own government.*

Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus, (November 1999-January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005) (in English) interviewed in 2000

**In its January issue, the French review *Esprit* published the last article written by François Jean, from the MSF Foundation. François' analysis and commitment contributed to the development of MSF's operational policies during the first Chechen war. He tragically died on 25<sup>th</sup> December 1999. In this article, which was also published in English in the September 2000 issue of the *International Harvard University Review*, he analysed the new Russian-Chechen conflict as being the fruit of a Russian desire for revenge after its defeat in the first war. After his death, his analyses continued to draw MSF to the Chechen people's cause.**



'*Chechnya: Moscow's Revenge*,' François Jean, **Harvard International Review**, 22 September 2000 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

The Human-Rights Debacle in Chechnya  
[...] After three years, the course of history appears to be repeating itself. It would be comical if it were not so disastrous for Chechnya, Russia, and the Caucasus. This new war will be even crueller than the previous war, which decimated the Chechen population. It will be a more absurd war, too, because neither of the two goals formulated by Russia's reckless leaders--the "liquidation of the terrorists" and the "liberation of Chechnya"--is likely to be achieved. And it will also be a more worrisome war because it casts a particularly harsh light on the present state of Russia's social and political systems and threatens to drag the entire Caucasus into the dispute.

#### State in Crisis

[...] Because the Chechen state has been unable to assert its legitimacy and the Chechen leader Aslan Maskhadov has been unable to assert his authority, the country has become a hunting ground for criminal and fundamentalist groups that operate with impunity. [...] The election of Aslan Maskhadov testified to the aspirations of a people weary of war. They expected their president to normalize relations with Russia, to win international recognition for the Chechen Republic, and to obtain the funds needed to rebuild the country and kick-start the economy. Moscow did not make this task easy, leaving Maskhadov with no concrete results and no room for manoeuvre. His position grew weaker with respect to Shamil Bassaev and Chechen partisans hostile to Russia. The prospects for peace grew increasingly dim.

#### Russia's Revenge

On October 1, 1999, after subjecting the villages close to the Dagestan border to three weeks of intensive bombing, the Russian army went on the offensive and penetrated Chechen territory. Russia's Prime Minister Vladimir Putin refused to recognize the legitimacy of Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov, and federal forces moved to create a "security zone" by occupying the Chechen districts of Naurskaya and Shelkovskaya--traditionally regarded as the least hostile to Russia. Russia initially appeared content to establish a "cordon sanitaire" and to bomb alleged terrorist bases. Two weeks later, however, the federal army crossed the Terek River, declared its intention to "destroy armed bands throughout the territory," and began its march on Grozny. Meanwhile, Vladimir Putin declared that his military objective was the "reconquest of Chechnya." This policy shift reflected the irrational Kremlin decision-making process. Today, as in 1994, the fate of Chechnya is in the hands of irresponsible politicians who understand only the language of force and who are incapable of proposing a model for a balanced relationship between Moscow and the countries that made up the former Soviet empire. This time, however, there is a difference. The Russian people, who in 1994 opposed the "Kremlin's war" against Chechnya, now wholeheartedly

support Putin's intransigence. Even politicians regarded as "liberals" in the West dare not question this vast outpouring of patriotic fervour, fuelled by a media machine manipulated by political authorities and ridden with racist and xenophobic overtones. Even though most Russians admit that Chechnya is not Russia, they see Chechen independence as a violation of Russian territorial integrity. Russia is thus defending borders within its own territory in what George Charachidze calls a "war of independence in reverse." [...]

From the first days of the conflict, massive, indiscriminate bombing caused hundreds of thousands of civilians to flee. 150,000 managed to find refuge in neighboring Ingushetia until the army seized control of the border at the end of October. Since then, the exodus has slowed to a trickle; border crossings are now very rare. Most of the population has now made its way back to the mountains of southern Chechnya in a frantic bid to escape the Russian steamroller. But the mountains have become a dead end, subject to constant airplane and helicopter fire concentrated in particular on the last remaining road out of Chechnya: the trail that crosses the Caucasus in the direction of Georgia. There is no sanctuary. Chechnya has become a giant human trap in which over half a million displaced people wander back and forth, desperate to escape the bombing.[...]


Russia's leaders believe that comprehending Chechnya's clan system is key to understanding Chechen society. Typical of colonial ethnography, this approach has always led Russians to exaggerate the unchangeable and rigid nature of a society that has in fact been profoundly transformed by a number of political traumas, the most significant of which was deportation. [...] If Russia's leaders have never succeeded in undermining the influence and cohesion of the separatists, they have also never been able to convince the Chechen people to accept Moscow's authority. During the last war, it was clear to all observers that Russia's so-called "pacification" strategies were erratic and often quite absurd. Even villages reputed to be "pro-Russian" or those that had signed peace accords were bombed, attacked, or pillaged; cooperation with federal forces never offered a guarantee of safety. This time the eyewitness accounts gathered by western journalists in the officially pacified "security zone" to the north of the Terek River testify to the brutality of federal forces and the climate of suspicion and hostility that reigns in Chechnya.

Russian soldiers have become prisoners of their own propaganda. Their traditional aggression toward the Chechen people is being exacerbated by their erratic discipline. Some units have been manipulating the war on their own while others simply run amok. It is Chechen civilians who must deal with the bloody consequences. [...]


#### Searching for Solutions

It is clear that war will not help Moscow achieve any of the objectives it declared at the onset of hostilities. Far from bringing Chechnya back into the Russian Federation, the latest war only intensifies the feelings of suspicion and hostility that have been built up over two centuries of confrontation. Far from weakening the hard-liners, the war cannot fail to harden the attitudes of the Chechen people and strengthen the cause of those who favor all-out war with


Russia. Consequently, Russia's only solution is negotiation. Sooner or later, Russia must return to the negotiating table. Unfortunately, this war has little to do with Russia's declared goals in Chechnya, and the decision-making process at the Kremlin is so tortuous that it defies all reason. All democratic nations must try to convince Moscow that it is in its own interest to find a political solution to the conflict. [...] Western nations have an essential role to play in helping Russia out of the morass. Even if Chechnya were an internal Russian affair, democratic nations cannot possibly remain passive in the face of this conflict. The means being employed are simply unacceptable and in violation both of the "demands of public conscience" and of Russia's obligations as a member of the OSCE, the Council of Europe, and the United Nations. If unchecked, the fighting in Chechnya threatens to destabilize the entire Caucasus region while spelling disaster for the Russian people and their political system.

 *François Jean's work should not be under-estimated. Throughout the second war, many of us re-read his writings on Chechnya. What came out of his analyses was the issue of a genocidal push (sorry, but I'm using that term), pointing to a drive to wipe out a people. So the violence, and the international community's refusal to acknowledge it, meant we had to shoulder the responsibility of speaking out on the Chechen conflict. François' weight in MSF, the quality of his reflections, and his work on Chechnya moulded our analysis, and as a consequence, the efforts we chose to assume in terms of public communication and lobbying. He facilitated the task of those who wanted MSF to be a watchdog over Chechnya. I think that if we hadn't had his work or his articles, we may have let it drop earlier.*

[...], MSF deputy legal advisor, 1995-2005  
(in French) interviewed in 2008

 *There was something about François Jean and Chechnya. François knew everything, and no one felt equipped to take his place, to analyze Chechnya at the same level, after his death.*

Anne Fouchard, MSF France deputy communications director, July 2000 – July 2004 (in French)  
interviewed in 2008

 *François knew himself, that he had a sympathetic lean towards the Chechen resistance. He didn't want MSF's messages to be too naive, but on the other hand he didn't expect MSF to support the Chechen resistance either.*

*He was very aware that that couldn't be the case. MSF let him publish what he wanted. No one stopped him in any way.*

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of communication (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000- May 2008) (in French) interviewed in 2009

**For MSF Holland, the priority was to set up programmes in Ingushetia, and as soon as possible, in Chechnya. The speaking out and lobbying for calls to halt the war and violence were considered highly necessary, but lacked legitimacy if not underpinned by operational activities. Questions were also raised on the impact of communication in the international press, which the Russian regime held in almost total disrespect. It seemed a better option to target the Russian and Chechen press so as to influence local opinion on the conflict.**



'Re: A Question or Two,' Email from Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland Regional Advisor in North Caucasus to Rendt Gorter, MSF Holland North Caucasus HOM, 21 January 2000 (in English).

**Extract:**

Human rights advocacy.

I can't count how many times in 1995 and 1996 that people in Chechnya told me to stop wasting my time rebuilding clinics or giving out aid - just get them to stop the bombing they would tell me. In this war, I have heard the same on many occasions in the camps in Ingushetia. Advocacy towards stopping the war or limiting Russian or Chechnya abuses of the civilian population is necessary and appropriate. There is a very legitimate worry that our advocacy will lead to Russian or the Chechens interfering with our ability to provide assistance in the region. This is a real concern and some people still think that some of the "criminal attacks" on aid agencies in 1995 and 1996 coincided with anti-Russian statements by MSF France or Belgium. During the current war, Human Rights Watch has been releasing reports which are extremely critical of Russian army and government actions in the Caucasus, yet they have not faced any unusual obstacles in the work, either in Ingushetia or in Moscow. It is very likely that an effective advocacy campaign would cause some interference from the Russian government. That in itself doesn't mean that it is not worth doing. Where we do think that our advocacy would lead to a complete inability to work in the region we always have the option of working through agencies such as HRW with whom we have very close relations.

A more serious problem with the type of international advocacy, which MSF has done in other countries, is that it seems very ineffective in this context. The Russians are largely resistant to current Western opinion, while the Chechens remain wholly ignorant of it. I will be suggesting

that we develop a different advocacy strategy here which is more oriented towards local public opinion. [...]

I think it would be possible to develop an advocacy strategy which focuses on contacts with the local press, helping them gain a better understanding of the real situation in the Caucasus and of the nature of the humanitarian issues which are faced in the area. Russia's vibrant and active press presents a great opportunity for the dissemination of humanitarian concerns and principles which could play a role in changing public opinion towards the war and the treatment of Chechen civilians. It will be more difficult to work along the same lines within Chechen society, but I think that this would be worth exploring as well. [...] It will be necessary to see what Amsterdam and the other MSF sections are up for, because advocacy is something which needs to be agreed upon by all of the sections, but I think there are a lot of possibilities for constructive work here.



*We thought that it could worsen our ability to set up programs—we wanted to have the programs set up and then start doing advocacy--as opposed to doing advocacy while we were making the first attempts to get into Chechnya. [...] There was a lot of info about Chechnya and the violations of humanitarian law all over the newspapers. There were organizations that were doing advocacy based on what was coming out of Chechnya—like Human Rights Watch. We didn't think that our additional voice—especially without a presence—would change things that much. It was more important to establish ourselves, to get our programs working, and then to start whatever advocacy strategy we would do.*

Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus, (November 1999-January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005) (in English) interviewed in 2000



*There was this big report coming out from MSF France but at the moment, no one was on the ground in Chechnya. So that whole report was based on taking witness from people that came to Georgia from Chechnya. I said 'well, if MSF has zero presence on the ground in Chechnya, then I find that too weak, to sort of publish second hand accounts of, "We have heard that."' The strength of MSF is always, we are there, and our doctors have seen that. That's what makes your advocacy legitimate. And once you do that sort of advocacy, the same that MSF is doing which we have also disagreed with in North Korea, "we have heard from refugees that." Yeah, we've all heard from refugees, but it doesn't mean you've seen it. And that's what makes it. So, after that, it was decided to get more systematic about the effort with this type of advocacy about violence. It will be based on MSF-employed doctors that have seen a patient with*



war trauma and take statements from this patient about where this war trauma is coming from.

Michiel Hofman, MSF Holland North Caucasus Coordinator from May 2001 to July 2003 (in English) interviewed in 2009.

**On 24 January, the NATO Secretary General declared that his organisation “understood but did not accept” Russia’s action in Chechnya. For their part, the European Union ministers of foreign affairs reaffirmed their opposition to the way Russia was conducting the war, but did not decide on any sanctions.**



*‘Robertson: NATO Understands, but Does Not Accept Russia’s Action in Chechnya,’ AFP (France), Warsaw, 24 January 2000 (in French).*

**Extract:**

NATO “understands” but “does not accept” Russia’s action in Chechnya, divulged the General Secretary of the North Atlantic Alliance, George Robertson, during a twenty-four hour visit to Warsaw. “Obviously we understand the reasons for Russia’s action in Chechnya, but we most firmly do not accept what the Russian forces are doing there” said Mr Robertson.



*‘Russia: The EU Continues to Condemn, but Seeks to Keep Dialogue Open,’ AFP (France), Brussels, 24 January 2000 (in French).*

**Extract:**

Continuing on from the European summit of Helsinki in December, in which the Fifteen strongly condemned Russian military operations in Chechnya, they now plan to reaffirm their staunch opposition to the way these operations are being run. But on Monday morning, during discussions among policy makers, they failed to agree on any major steps towards hard sanctions, according to a diplomatic source. The European Union agreed to remind Russia of the necessity of respecting its commitments and contractual obligations in the commercial sector.

“At best, we could make a few admonishing gestures through trade,” indicated a European source during the discussions. But the EU should also take into consideration the need to keep dialogue with Moscow open, in the hope of some positive changes in Russia. “It’s critically important for the future. We must keep up the contact” summarised the Luxembourg minister, Lydie Polfer.

[...] The German Minister of Foreign Affairs, Joschka Fischer, who visited Moscow last week, related his meetings with the Russian government to his colleagues.

“There is a long term interest in maintaining relations

with Russia”, he expounded in front of journalists. He also considered that the arrival on the scene of Mr Putin amounted to a “new factor.”

“A war against a people cannot be a way to fight against terrorism [...] but we have limited means to intervene,” he added. “Politics is the art of the possible, not the desirable.” *désirable* ».

## QUALIFYING THE WAR AND DENOUNCING THE RUSSIAN FORCES’ CONDUCT

**On the eve of an extraordinary meeting of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE), the European sections of MSF sent an open letter to the heads of member States urging them to recognise the state of war in Chechnya. MSF Holland opposed MSF calling on States to qualify the situation in Chechnya as an internal conflict, and thus subject to the application of Protocol II of the Geneva conventions. It preferred to call on all parties to respect the Geneva Conventions.**

**Moreover, according to MSF Holland senior staff, this sort of declaration could be viewed as participation in a political debate on the legitimacy of a separatist Chechen government; a controversial issue in Russian society and its press. As a consequence, the version of the letter circulated by MSF Holland excluded the paragraph on the existence of an armed conflict.**



*‘Open Letter to the Council of Europe: Member States Must Recognize the State of War in Chechnya and Demand the Application of International Humanitarian Law’, MSF Holland, 27 January 1999, (in English).*

**Extract:**

For the last six months Chechen civilians have been subjected to relentless indiscriminate bombardments by Russian forces throughout the territory. There is no place in Chechnya today where civilians can be safe either from indiscriminate attacks or the arbitrary rule currently in force in ‘liberated’ zones. Boys over the age of ten are threatened with arrest by the Russian authorities. The nature and scope of military operations prevent all forms of independent humanitarian relief, including the care of wounded, sick and vulnerable people within Chechnya.

The regular and arbitrary closure of escape routes, fear of arrest, the threat of forced repatriation from Ingushetia, as well as the many attacks against refugees and the presence of mines, considerably curtail any possibility of escape for those who wish to leave Chechnya.

Such military operations amount to a collective punishment whereby all civilians are considered suspects. The international community has so far failed to oppose the violence, which Russia claims is justifiable anti-terrorist action. Despite all evidence to the contrary, governments have so far endorsed this fiction, which deprives the population of all rights to protection and assistance. No government to date has officially recognized the state of war. The UN Security Council has not even discussed the Chechen situation, [which is] de facto sanctioning the Russian position.

As the Council of Europe holds its emergency session on Chechnya today, Médecins sans Frontières calls upon Member States to;

- Officially recognize the state of war in Chechnya and call upon Russia to respect international humanitarian law, which applies in such circumstances.
- To demand that the UN Security Council discuss the Chechen crisis as a matter of urgency.
- To commit the case of Chechnya to the International Fact-Finding Commission, which is mandated by governments including Russia, to investigate war crimes under International Humanitarian Law.
- To demand that Russia immediately suspend indiscriminate bombing, to respect the principle of 'non-refoulement' [no forced repatriation] of refugees, to ensure that civilians have free access to humanitarian assistance and to allow the deployment of international observers to the war zone.



*'Re: Urgent Draft Letter to Member States of EC,'* **Email** from Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland Regional Advisor Caucasus to MSF France programme managers, MSF Holland Humanitarian Affairs Officer (HAD), Executive Director, 26 January 2000 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

Thanks sending us a copy of the open letter to the Council of Europe Member States.

As I have stated in the past, we fully support advocacy statements aimed at limiting violations of humanitarian law in the area.

I don't think, however, that we should make demands concerning the legal definition of the conflict. As James pointed out yesterday, the designation of the conflict as an "armed conflict" does not alter in any way the obligation to respect humanitarian law. The Russian government has never officially stated that there is no armed conflict in the region. Calling the conflict an anti-terrorist operation is their description of their opponents in the conflict and does not influence its legal standing in international law. Such an appeal does however create the impression that we are participating in the political debates within Russia on the characterization of the war.

There is extensive debate in the Russian press regarding the political legitimacy of the rebel Chechen government. This is a political rather than a legal debate, but it is not one that we should be taking sides in. This is something that

we should strive to avoid in order to maintain our ability to raise humanitarian concerns in the conflict. We support advocacy statements which are based on the humanitarian needs of the civilian population in the area. We should strive to avoid the debates on political status of the war.  
Kenny Gluck



*"For James and MSF Moscow,"* **Email** Exchange Between Françoise Bouchet - Saulnier, MSF Legal Advisor and James Ross MSF Holland HAD Officer, 26 January 2000 (in English).

Dear all,

I think Françoise is making an issue out of a non-issue - and thereby diluting our message, which should be that the Council of Europe needs to speak out more strongly, and take stronger action, regarding the widespread violation of humanitarian law in Chechnya.

No one, including the Russians, has been arguing that because Russia is engaged in "anti-terrorist" activities only, humanitarian law doesn't apply. So why should we go to great lengths to convince the Council of Europe to state formally that a "war" is taking place (something they won't do, and which isn't necessary for humanitarian law to apply)? It is a given that IHL applies. The problem is that governments aren't taking Russia to task sufficiently for violating it. For us to request this from the European states implies that we feel this is needed for IHL to apply, which we all agree isn't our position.

The letter should not focus on winning legal points. I don't want to repeat Kenny's concerns, but these are based on Russian perceptions, which unfortunately matter more in Moscow than the intricacies of the law. MSF should focus on the horrible condition of the Chechen people and the fact that the governments of Europe and the US should be doing more to address their concerns. Saying a war officially exists will not add to their existing obligations (unlike with respect to the Genocide Convention, where calling a genocide a genocide had important legal implications.)

Cheers, James

I would like to make two points briefly because we are running short of time, in order to comply with the time frame of the Council of Europe meeting.

1) On the recognition of the war in Chechnya.

I agree with James Ross that there is no need of official recognition of the war to create the obligation of the belligerents to respect IHL.


But when it comes to the obligation of the other states to ensure the respect of IHL by the belligerents (article 1) the first step is to make sure that these states acknowledge that the situation is a one of armed conflict.

Their duty in such situation is to ensure that IHL is respected by belligerents or to act collectively to sanctions violations of IHL.

We are, at this stage with Europeans and western countries, taking care to avoid qualifying the situation and thus avoiding their responsibilities toward the implementation and sanctions of violations of IHL.

It reminds us of the Rwandan genocide when states refrained to use the word genocide because it would have created a duty to act.

2) On the debate about the legitimacy of the actual Chechen government. It is again a good point and I understand a hot debate in Moscow. But on our side we have the possibility to avoid entering such a debate. When we want to qualify the situation as an armed conflict we do not say internal or international (in our view it means of course an internal one). The very nature of an internal armed conflict is to oppose two parties of which only one (by definition) is a state actor. The second one is represented by authorities of a non-state nature and of course, not recognized by the national authorities. IHL has been written in such way to be able to cope and apply in such situations. It states that the application of IHL will have no consequences on the recognition (political, legal...) of the parties to the conflict. So I think we can use this legal argument to avoid entering the political debate about the legitimacy of the Chechen government (which will not be a good think for MSF). [...] Bises Française

 *There was already a political debate going on in Russia about how to call this war. I didn't think that it was something that MSF should be involved in. We should be basing all of our international advocacy on the consequences to the population. And the consequences to the population were the deaths from the indiscriminate bombings and destruction of peoples' homes—that should be the basis of our advocacy, not an abstract political debate which was a politicized debate in Russia. That one piece, that one sentence, I didn't agree with. We called up Paris and we said: 'we do not think that this is an appropriate statement.' We were told largely that it was too late. This was four hours after we got it. We told them: 'We need to talk about it. We also need to check about some of the things. Not everyone on the team speaks French.' But by four hours later they said it was too late, it was being given to the press.*

*We were not happy. I think that they didn't prepare the statement until they were preparing to leave for Strasbourg so it left us very little time to say no. It was only one piece of the letter that we had a problem with. This question of the state of war—it did not seem rooted in our work as MSF. I thought that it created a misunderstanding of what MSF is. And that's why it was not helpful. I did not think that it was a tragedy—that because of this statement they would say that you are not allowed to work—so that's why we did not make a big fuss about it. We thought that it was an inappropriate statement. Our objections were not heard so we went to work the next day. I don't know if the aim of the war is to kill civilians or if they just don't care at all about civilian casualties. There would be a difference in humanitarian law between those two. Anyway, they said that humanitarian criteria are only applicable in states of war. There is no legal*

*thing that a government has to do to recognize a state of war. A state of war is a fact. That level of bombing—that's a war. Nobody had any doubt internationally or even in Russia that this was a war in accordance with international law—whether it is an internal war or interstate war—you could argue. But nobody argued that it was a war. That seemed self-evident. And it seemed that we were trying to make a point of it. I think that it was misunderstood in Russia but again it didn't cause any problems and we [MSF Holland] supported the statement, just not that paragraph.*

Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus, (November 1999-January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005) (in English) interviewed in 2000

**On 27 January, representatives of MSF France held a press conference on the sidelines of the PACE (Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly) meeting in Strasbourg, questioning the Russian army's handling of the Chechen war and its impact on civilians. The open letter was distributed to parliamentary deputies.**



'Chechnya European Council,' Email from Benedicte Jeannerod, Communications Officer MSF France, to MSF sections' Communications Officers and Directors, 27 January 2000 (in French).

Hi everyone  
Just a quick word about what will happen at the European Council today.  
As you already know, an extraordinary meeting on Chechnya is being held in Strasbourg today, following the return of a delegation from the North Caucasus.  
Yesterday, we wrote an open letter to all the European Council members' heads of states or governments. The letter [...] was sent to Chirac and Jospin last night [President and Prime Minister of the French Republic] and was published in Le Figaro this morning (which just goes to show.).  
The other sections based in other member countries should have done the same thing on their side.  
A press release was issued this morning (see the AFP clip below).  
As far as Strasbourg goes, Rony, Françoise Saulnier, François Calas and Cécile left this morning to do a bit of attention-getting propoganda where the meeting's being held. They'll make sure the letter's passed onto the parliamentary deputies attending.  
And they'll hold a press conference, at the European Council's meeting place itself, at 14h15, just before Mr Ivanov's press conference (the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs). That should stir things up a bit...  
There you go, that's it for the moment. I'll keep you posted as things



'Doctors Without Borders Demands Action on Chechnya,' 27 January 2000, **AFP** (France), Strasbourg, (in English).

#### Extract:

Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders, or MSF), which was awarded the 1999 Nobel Peace Prize, appealed to the Council of Europe to acknowledge the existence of a state of war in the breakaway southern Russian republic. Denouncing the "complicity of states," MSF said in an open letter the international community had "refused to acknowledge the existence of an armed conflict, failed to meet their responsibilities and avoided the application of humanitarian law to help victims."

MSF asked the 41-member Council of Europe - a trans-European human rights watchdog which was holding an emergency debate on Chechnya Thursday - to "recognize officially the existence of an armed conflict in Chechnya and remind Russia of its obligations to respect human rights law." MSF called on the UN Security Council, the European Court of Human Rights and the international commission for the establishment of facts to conduct investigations into whether war crimes had been committed.[...]

Council of Europe deputies were to vote later on a resolution to offer "appropriate support" to Russia.

A resolution said the executive of the Council of Europe should offer "suitable support to Russian authorities" as part of a policy to "end the crisis in Chechnya."

Earlier this week, Christian Democrats called for a suspension of Russia's membership of the Council of Europe because of alleged human rights abuses in Chechnya.



*We had the impression that the major foreign states and United Nations were being too soft with Russia, and this heavily influenced our lobbying. While there was international state mobilisation to moderate Moscow during the first war, there was nothing of the kind during the second. The Germans, for example, who'd applied pressure on Moscow during the first war, did nothing during the second. So at the start of the second war, we spoke out in public a lot, because we thought that there was a real failure on the political front. It was a bit naive on our part; we thought we could change public opinion, and that would sway international attention.*

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of communication (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000- May 2008) (in French) interviewed in 2009

**In the end, the PACE refused to sanction Russia for its conduct in Chechnya. It nonetheless considered that the Russian state violated certain obligations imposed**

**by the European convention on human rights and international law. It called for an immediate ceasefire and the initiation of political dialogue with the elected Chechen government. It also issued a certain number of recommendations, some of a humanitarian nature, and announced that it would review their application in April. Igor Ivanov, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, realleged that events unfolding in Chechnya were neither a conflict nor a war, and that Russia would pursue its "anti-terrorist operation" right through to the end.**



'Chechnya Follow Up,' **Email** from Françoise Saulnier, MSF Legal Director to Brigitte Vasset, MSF France Coordinator in Georgia, 4 February 2000 (in French).

#### Extract:

Recommendation 1444 (2000) of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly did not exclude the Russian parliamentary delegation. But after some debate, it voted on a recommendation that displeased Mr Putin.

The parliament 'condemned as totally unacceptable the current running of military operations.' It affirmed that 'Russia was violating some of its most serious obligations in terms of the European convention on human rights and international law.'

The Assembly considers that the military operations violate the rule of law, because the law governing campaigns against organised crime (anti-terrorist campaigns) does not cover operations on a scale such as these. No state of emergency was declared, and these operations are therefore arbitrary and beyond the scope of any legislation.

The Assembly has not imposed any sanctions so far. But it did issue some specific demands to the Russian government, and 'will judge' Russia's compliance (or not) with them in April. As a certain number of the recommendations are of a humanitarian nature, I think that it's important to document them so as to bring the European Council into the loop from our side. They mainly involve:

- abstaining from all forced repatriation to Chechnya
- manifesting scrupulous respect for the fundamental rights of the population on Chechen soil under Russian control...
- allowing free channelling to the region of effective international humanitarian aid and assistance offered by governmental and international non-governmental humanitarian organisations.

On a more general note, the parliamentary assembly called for an immediate and total ceasefire and a halt to ill-considered and disproportionate military activities. It also called for the immediate initiation of a political dialogue, without prior conditions, with the elected Chechen government in the aim of brokering a ceasefire and reaching a political solution to the conflict.

This last argument answers MSF H's concerns regarding MSF lending credence to the current Chechen government by referring to a conflict. The European Council recognises the legitimacy of this government, and calls on Russia to negotiate with its elected members. Regarding the

development of ties between MSF and Russian public opinion, we have talked of re-establishing contacts with representatives of Russian civil society opposed to the war in Chechnya. FYI, Mr Kovaley and Ms Elena Boner will be passing through Paris on 19<sup>th</sup> February, invited by the Chechnya support committee. We must meet up with them, and organise something together.



**'Russie - Tchétchénie' Email** from Françoise Saulnier, MSF Legal Director to James Ross, MSF Holland HAD, 4 February 2000 (in English).

Just a note to follow up on our Chechnyan discussion. I enclose the main lines of the speech of M. Ivanov stressing that what happen in Chechnya is not a war.

This can fuel our position to press for an international recognition of the existence of an armed conflict by the Council of Europe for example. I have the text of the recommendation of the parliamentary assembly of the council of Europe on Chechnya which is of some help on this issue (plus the reports of the legal commission and the one from the political commission).

The council of Europe takes also a clear position on the legitimacy of the actual government of Chechnya. It asks Russia to start immediate political dialogue without any precondition, with the actual elected authorities of Chechnya, in order to achieve a cease fire and to reach a global political settlement of the conflict.

This statement may be of some interest for Kenny in Moscow? I[...]Françoise

STRASBOURG (European Council), 27<sup>th</sup> January 2000 - AFP (in French).

Igor Ivanov, Russia's Minister for Foreign Affairs, reaffirmed to the European Council in Strasbourg on Thursday that, "Russia would pursue its anti-terrorist operation" in Chechnya "through to the bitter end."

"The anti-terrorist operation in Chechnya aims to re-instate law and human rights in the region. It is impossible to carry out such an operation without pursuing it right through to the end," declared the head of Russian diplomacy during a speech delivered to the parliamentary deputies of the organisation's 41 member countries.

According to Mr Ivanov, with this "anti-terrorist operation," "Russia was protecting its border with Europe against barbaric terrorist attacks," which were raging, he alleged, in Afghanistan, the Balkans, and the Caucasus.

This situation "on the border with Europe" threatened the security, lives and well-being of all European citizens, continued the Minister.

He repeatedly hammered home that events in Chechnya were neither "a conflict" nor "a war", but "anti-terrorist actions." "We are only fighting the terrorists and criminal gangs" he claimed, alleging that "the use of force by the Russian army was proportional" to the situation, given the "foreign mercenaries" fighting in Chechnya.



*The only forum we had was the European Council. In the panoply of intergovernmental organisations, it was the only organisation that kept Chechnya on the agenda, from a political, humanitarian, and human rights point of view. There were a few active deputies in the parliamentary assembly who tried to move things forward, but they ran headlong into the European Council's executive. The Secretary General was under particular pressure from the European Council's ministerial committee. Amongst the 41 members, the heavy weight players such as France and the United Kingdom adopted a soft line, saying "we mustn't get at Russia, because of the gas, and so on." They put strategic and economic interests before the situation in Chechnya."*

[...], MSF France deputy legal advisor, 1995-2005 (in French) interviewed in 2008

**On 27 January, during a visit to Moscow, Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary General, called for an immediate ceasefire in Chechnya, along with civilian protection in the war zone.**



**'Annan Wants Chechen Conflict Over,' AP (UK), Moscow, 27 January 2000 (in English).**

**Extract:**

Russia has been widely criticized in the West for its offensive in the breakaway republic, with much of the criticism focusing on reports of high civilian casualties and indiscriminate Russian bombing and shelling. Russia says the five-month campaign has targeted rebels it considers to be terrorists.

Annan said that though he supported efforts to root out terrorists, "we should take every step to protect the rights of the civilians and ensure that they don't suffer undue hardship."

"We would want to see an end to this conflict as soon as possible," Annan said after meeting Igor Stroyev, the chairman of Russia's upper house of parliament. Annan arrived in Moscow on Thursday for a three-day visit.[...] Annan thanked the Russian government for providing police protection for those workers, and expressed hope that U.N. workers soon will be allowed into Chechnya, which has been closed to international organizations.

**On 3 February, the Russian forces announced they had taken Grozny. The city had been deserted by the Chechen fighters for some days. Continuing to bar access to humanitarian teams, they started harassing the wounded and medical staff. Thus Omar Khanbiev, a surgeon and Minister of Health for the independent Chechen government, was arrested, along with his team, while operating in a hospital. They were imprisoned in a 'filtration' camp, where torture was a standard**

**interrogation technique. As Khanbiev had been one MSF's closest contacts in Chechnya since the first war, there was talk of speaking out to call for his release. He was finally let out on the 18<sup>th</sup> February, and kept under house arrest in Gudermes.**



*'Masters of Grozny, the Russians Hunt Out Injured Chechens,'* Pierre Flambot, **Le Monde** (France), 8 February 2000 (in French).

**Extract:**

Acting President, Vladimir Putin, announces, the "final seizure", on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> February, of the separatist capital, Grozny. On the ground, a handful of doctors try to evacuate the injured fighters who did not manage to escape. The city, symbolising Chechnya's struggle for independence has fallen, but no political solution to the war is yet in sight. Russian soldiers are hunting for any injured Chechens still surviving amongst the ruins of Grozny, now abandoned by the fighters. According to an announcement by acting Russian President, Vladimir Putin, the "final seizure" of the city took place on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> February.

NGOs are now concerned about the fate of refugees, who are being more or less forced to return to the 'liberated' territories. No more heed is being paid to the Geneva Convention protecting medical personnel, journalists, and civilians than to that prohibiting torture or arms of mass destruction. Moscow claims it has been unable to identify any Chechen representatives to take part in the process of re-establishing federal order, which, according to the Kremlin, is preventing any kind of political solution from being found [...].

Meanwhile, the Russian army is justifying its refusal to allow humanitarian assistance into the city - or into any part of Chechnya - by the need for mine clearance. "What this really means is that they are pillaging every house before setting fire to it," according to Adlan. "Or they are laying new mines themselves. One woman was blown to pieces opening a gate she went out of just few hours earlier."



*'Chechnya,'* Email from the MSF deputy Legal Advisor to Programme Managers and Communications Officers, 8 February 2000 (in French).

**Extract:**

This message from the Chechnya committee [...] reports the arrest of surgeon and Health Minister, Omar Khambiev (we know him well and have had good relations with him for a number of years) and his medical team.

Given the relations between us and our position as a medical organisation, I think we should be thinking about making a public statement.

The right to care for the wounded and sick during conflicts is one of the basic principles of international humanitarian law, and the medical mission is also at the heart of humanitarian law. With this arrest (not counting the fact that we don't

know what has happened to the wounded and injured in Grozny hospital), MSF's own vocation is under attack. For all these reasons, I think we should feel concerned by what has happened.



*'Medical Staff,'* Email from Brigitte Vasset, MSF France's Coordinator in Georgia, to the MSF deputy legal advisor, 13 February 2000 (in French).

**Extract:**

It is 'legitimate' for us to take an interest in these two arrests:  
- We have known Omar Khambiev, Chechnya's Health Minister, since 1995. He came to Shatoi when the team was working there and was our contact right through the mission until we left after Christophe's kidnapping. Ask Vincent for the details, but during the kidnapping, he did what he could to help us.

- For this war, the big consignment of medicines that we sent out in December '99 was delivered to him. He distributed it at a meeting with the top managers of the different Chechen hospitals. He thanked us for the consignment (the letter wasn't from him, but came through an intermediary). NB: find out whether the consignment was acknowledged publicly.

- In 95, we worked at Kurtchaloi hospital for a few months. Lastly, I asked for news of Omar Khambiev in January. I was told he was alright but that his brother had been killed. [...] I'm all in favour of Fabien's proposal. We need to do the same as for Babitski, make sure he and his team, and the Kurtchaloi team, are known to exist to stop them disappearing. But we need to get a move on.

I was planning on discussing it with the two ambassadors I'm trying to meet next week: US and UK. If you have a more specific message, let me know before then.



*'ICRC and Rony's Position on Khambiev,'* Email from the MSF deputy legal advisor to the programme manager, 18 February 2000 (in French).

**Extract:**

2) Rony's [Brauman, MSF France Fondation] position on the Omar Khambiev initiative (broadly speaking):

- Public statements by MSF must be in relation with the organisation's presence in the field. He is unhappy with the fact that this is not the case here. Although MSF-F has operations in Georgia and MSF-B and MSF-H are in Ingushetia, MSF is not where it needs to be on this one.

- MSF's public statements must provide new information or be saying something different from the media. The issue of 'filtration camps' has been widely covered in the press.

- Rony is also unhappy with the idea of looking at the torture of a whole population through the wrong end of the telescope (this individual story). There you are. To my mind, this position, which in fact encompasses the broader question of the legitimacy and limits of MSF's testimony

action, is highly debatable. We could put it on the agenda for discussion at the first Monday meeting, but I think it's a bit late now to consider making a public statement.



**'Omar,' Email** from Denis Gouzerh, MSF France programme manager to the MSF Deputy Legal Advisor, 19 February 2000 (in French).

**Extract:**

Omar has been released from the filtration camp along with his medical team. He is now under house arrest in Gudermes and is being threatened along the lines 'work for us (the Russians) or your medical team could be in danger... of being sent back to the camps (?).' To be continued...

**The Russian authorities began forcing refugees to return to Chechnya in spite of the absence of any planned humanitarian assistance and the fact that the country is still at war. On 11 February, Poul Nielsen, the European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, expressed his concern and called on the Russian and Ingush authorities to allow humanitarian aid operators free access to the region's populations, and to guarantee their security. On 16 February, Mary Robinson, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, publicly called for the Russian authorities to allow human rights observers, access to Chechnya. Her request was denied.**



**'Poul Nielsen Pays Visit to Russia and North Caucasus to Assess the Humanitarian situation in the Region,' Press release, ECHO, 10 February 2000 (in English).**

**Extract:**

Mr Nielsen praised the role being played by the humanitarian agencies in this crisis in helping to alleviate the plight of the IDP[s]. Mr Nielsen called on the Russian and Ingush authorities to provide the necessary guarantees, particularly concerning security, allowing the humanitarian agencies to carry out their role according to their normal standards and working conditions. In this context, Mr Nielsen stressed the importance of ensuring free access for humanitarian workers to civilians in need in the whole region. Mr Nielsen expressed concern over civilians in need in the whole region. Mr Nielsen expressed concern over the question of reports of forced repatriation of IDP to Chechnya by the authorities.



**'Human Rights High Commissioner Calls on Russia to Allow Greater International Access to Chechnya.' Press Release UN Human Rights High Commission, 16 February 2000 (in English).**

**Extract:**

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson today called on the Russian Government to allow human rights monitoring of the situation in Chechnya, Russian Federation, and to act on mounting evidence of serious human rights violations during and after the assault on Grozny and other parts of the territory. Expressing deep regret that the Russian Government had not agreed to her request to visit Moscow and the areas affected by the conflict, or to her earlier offer to send a personal envoy to the region, Mrs. Robinson said the failure of the Russian authorities to respond to legitimate worries "leads to heightened concern that allegations of human rights violations may be well-founded."

**On 11 February, the Chechen President Maskhadov announced the start of a guerrilla war against the Russian forces from the mountains of Chechnya.**



**'Maskhadov Announces the Start of Country-wide Guerrilla War,' AFP (France), Moscow, 11 February 2000 (in French).**

**Extract:**

"Separatist rebels are to launch a guerrilla war in the mountains, plains, and in every village of the Republic," declared Mr Maskhadov. "The people of Chechnya know that the Russian campaign had nothing to do with the fight against crime or terrorism. It was a war against the Chechen people," declared the President, whose authority is not recognised by Moscow. During the previous conflict (1994-1996), Chechen combatants had launched a war of ambushes and skirmishes against the Russian 'occupier,' which enabled them to reclaim a number of localities. On Monday, President Maskhadov declared his intention of recapturing the capital, which has been under Russian control for almost a week. The separatist rebels fled Grozny on 1 February, withdrawing to the mountainous region in the south of the Republic, where the Russians have been carrying out intensive bombing raids for several days in preparation for the next offensive.

**Russia's public opinion was mostly in favour of the war in Chechnya. Those who were against it, members of human rights organisations, or some of the media which had remained independent of the government, were censured**

or punished. Thus, on 16 January, Andrei Babitski, a journalist with Radio Svoboda who had been covering events in Chechnya since the first war, was arrested by the Russian army and accused of 'taking part in an illegal armed formation.' He was finally exchanged for three Russian soldiers at the beginning of February. However, he didn't surface again until 24 February, claiming to have been held prisoner and beaten in the Tchernokozovo filtration camp during this time.



*'More than 60% of Russians in Favour of Intervention in Chechnya,' AFP (France), Moscow, 24 February 2000 (in French).*

#### Extract:

Approximately 61% of Russians support the military operation in the separatist republic of Chechnya, with only 19% opposed, according to a survey by the ARPI institute quoted on Thursday by the Interfax agency.

54% of the people questioned consider the losses recorded by the federal forces to be unavoidable if the Chechen rebels are to be completely exterminated, according to the survey of 1,600 people conducted between 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> February in 49 regions of Russia.

However, 29% of Russians questioned, consider that Chechnya's civilian population is the chief victim of the hostilities and that, for this reason, they should cease immediately [...]. At the beginning of February, a survey by the Public Opinion Institute revealed that 73% of Russians were in favour of continuing the offensive by the federal forces in Chechnya.



*'Journalist Babitski Claims to have been Beaten by Russian Forces,' AFP (France), Moscow 29 February 2000 (in French).*

#### Extract:

Babitski, 35, who had been covering the war from the side of the Chechen separatists for the Russian branch of Radio Free Europe, was arrested near Grozny on 16 February by Russian forces who accused him of 'taking part in an illegal armed organization.'

"I was handed over to a group of sadists who held me prisoner in Chernokozovo concentration camp. I received the same treatment as absolutely everyone else that spends any time in that place. I'm talking about dozens of blows with a cudgel," declared Babitski, stressing that other prisoners in Tchernokozovo had been tortured. [...]

"I intend to make public what happened to me, what is happening in Chechnya, and what I have seen. I feel this will not only be a way of guaranteeing my safety and that of my family, but also of taking some small action against the horrendous lawlessness and terrible nightmare being suffered in Chechnya," he said.

The journalist, whose disappearance caused a considerable stir in Russia and abroad, reappeared on Friday in Dagestan, a Republic on the borders of Chechnya, after 40 days of silence. He was immediately arrested by police for 'possession of a false passport' before being released and sent back to Moscow on Monday evening. On 23 February, the anniversary of the deportation of Chechens to central Asia, MSF France and MSF Belgium sign a petition launched by numerous human rights organisations, entitled, 'Crime without punishment in Chechnya: Vladimir Putin is pursuing Stalin's work.'



*'Crime Without Punishment in Chechnya.' Petition published in France Soir (France), 23 February 2000 (in French).*

February 1944: Deportation of Chechens

February 2000: Massacre of Chechens

Vladimir Putin is pursuing Stalin's work. Putin, the patriot, has ordered Grozny to be razed to the ground, allows surviving civilians to be finished off and injured combatants to be shot. Putin, the humane, is flattening villages with incendiary charges and fragmentation missiles. Putin, the modern leader, is denying access to medical relief organisations. Putin, the democrat, is muzzling the press and has had the best informed Russian journalist kidnapped by his FSB henchmen, who beat him up and handed him over to his jailers without identifying him. Putin, the efficient, is organising 'filtration camps' where Chechens of all stations are beaten to death, sodomised and, whenever possible, offered for ransom.

Russia is a permanent member of the UN's Security Council and a full-fledged member of the Council of Europe and the OSCE; it is invited to the G7 and is a client of the IMF and the World Bank. Over recent days the Russian authorities have committed massive war crimes and acts so barbaric they should be qualified as crimes against humanity. But there is not one word of condemnation, not the slightest hint of a sanction from these international bodies. [...]

Philippe Biberson signs for and with Médecins sans Frontières.

## DESCRIBE THE SITUATION OR QUESTION POLICY MAKERS?

At the end of February, the different MSF sections working on the Chechnya question shared their approaches on how to communicate on the crisis. While the Dutch section wished to let the description of the humanitarian situation it had given to journalists 'speak for itself,' the French section thought it should make a public appeal



to the political world to take a firmer stance on the humanitarian dimension of this conflict.

On 25 February, the Belgian section's Project Committee agreed to strengthen MSF's communication in Russia, but for security reasons, wished to limit its public testimony. On 29 February, Bart Ostyns, Head of the North Caucasus 'Task Force' gave an interview on the situation in the region and MSF's activities, to the Belgian daily, *La Dernière Heure*.



'Conclusions of COPRO Caucasus,' Memo from MSF Belgium, 25 February 2000 (in English).

#### Extract:

##### 4. Communication:

A. Although for the moment, there is little said in press, and not enough pressure on EU and national governments to make a stronger stand, we are accepting the limitations on temoignage in order not to put into danger our operations; our priority is now getting the operations going, which for the time being are considered the surest (most efficient) humanitarian answer on the needs of the endangered population.

Communications (with the above limitations) targeting the international community could include:

- An event in Brussels to mobilize the European authorities and the Belgian public opinion on the situation in the North Caucasus;
- Invite a Russian legitimate person (ex: widow Sakharov-Yelena Bonner...) to Europe to witness directly to the western public opinion on the situation in the North-Caucasus;
- Reinforce our contacts with local Russian associations active in the field of human rights (Memorial, Russian Soldiers Mothers,...) and with foreign HR-organizations (Human Rights Watch,...);
- To provide, if the opportunity is present, medical competence to confirm physical HR-rights abuses;
- To take witness of HR-abuses if we have the opportunity, during an expat presence in Ingushetia and/or Chechnya; to report this info for discrete lobby to embassies/discussion remained whether this is really the mandate of MSF - and that surely this kind of activity will stand in the way of operational activity (explo cannot be for both purposes: it was said before to make a fixed agenda and timeframe).

E. In the Russian society, there is obviously little change to be expected in the way the conflict is regarded by the average Russian citizen.

Nevertheless, communication objectives could include:

- To continue gathering info and analysis on the interaction of the Russian public opinion and Russian media with regard the Chechen conflict;
- To improve the understanding of the MSF mandate and activities within Russia (Comops);
- Further on, to attract the attention of the Russian media on the situation of the civilian victims of the Chechen conflict; not upon the right-or-wrong of wars, but upon the

humanitarian implications of the war for civilians method: to contact pro-actively Russian journalists (press lunches).

In discussing these lines with the other sections on Monday, the feedback was:

- Overall worry for security implications of denunciation
- MSF H therefore does not communicate at all upon their activities on the international level, while MSF F sees her task exactly in mobilizing the political world to take a much firmer stand in the humanitarian aspect of the conflict
- MSF H sees no objection of approaching the journalist world, as they believe the message should be purely and only humanitarian (not condemning the war, -avoiding judgment, and let the humanitarian picture of the Chechen civilian population speak for itself). [...]
- MSF H likewise does not believe in the appropriateness of inviting 'Russians with high moral standards' to speak out, as these are in every way still political. It is meanwhile, not the role of MSF to join the anti-war lobby, as this is not our mandate.

##### 5. MSF-International:

- All sections are operationally independent and identify themselves officially beforehand as such to the Russian authorities;
- Witnessing initiatives are taken together in a transparent and co-operative way in function of security and operational potential impact;
- Veto upon witnessing activities in case of security risks for MSF staff (both national and international staff)! [...]
- Propose/impose obligation to all sections to inform and discuss 48h before temoignage action.



'Europeans are Obvious Targets,' Hubert Leclercq, *La Dernière Heure* (Brussels), 29 February 2000 (in French).

#### Extract:

Doctor Bart Ostyns worked for MSF during the Chechen war from 1994 to 1996.

This time, Doctor Ostyns, currently on a quick trip to Belgium, has to make do with missions to Moscow and fleeting visits to Ingushetia.

"Everything needs doing, I was in Ingushetia last December," explains the doctor, who is now back in Belgium. "It's difficult to work over there. There's no infrastructure, of course, but we're used to that. However, we've rarely seen a criminal organisation like it - revolving around the kidnapping of westerners. We have to work with the Russians who joined us in Chechnya in '96. We trained them in Moscow before they went out to the field. But it's difficult to communicate on what's happening over there as we don't have any eye-witness accounts." [...]

«The official refugee camps are no longer big enough. A huge number of refugees are living in small communities in unused factories or warehouses. These are the people we are trying to get aid to.» [...]

«Like the other NGOs in the field, MSF has gathered testimony

from refugees who have suffered ill-treatment in the Russian camps. We have heard talk of torture or, at the very least, ill-treatment,» Doctor Ostyns continues, «but as we can't verify these claims, we can only confirm that there are reports of this. The longer it goes on, the more reports we hear, but we need to be on site to assess the situation. We mustn't delude ourselves. This is a war, and there are no holds barred.»



**Minutes** from MSF Belgium's Board of Directors Meeting, 2 March 2000 (in French).

### Extract:

#### a. Chechnya

[...] Stefaan wants to know what MSF-B's communication policy is.

Alex [Parisel] (General Director of MSF Belgium): For the time being, we can't provide much added-value in this area. MDM has kept up its presence since '96-'97 via a local network- so they can react more quickly and are better able to communicate. So, in the short term, we have decided to give priority to getting an operation underway in Chechnya. We can start thinking about developing an effective testimony policy later.

[...] Stefaan asks about the objective of this operation. It involves developing MSF's presence, but without expats: caution is still needed. Security reports haven't improved and things are likely to get worse with the reduced military presence.

The prevailing sentiment is one of optimism, confidence in the team, but we know the project has its limits (remote control, Chechen team). It's the first time we've operated by remote control from the start of an operation. Considerable resources have been allocated (5 people in Moscow).

There is also a feeling of impotence, as we'd like to be much closer to the population. But we need to move slowly to find our way back in and do what we want to do. The fact that the mortality rate hasn't increased, so there's no life-saving issues, has played a part in the decision.

Relations with the Health Ministry are good. They accept the system, as their own facilities can't provide optimal health-care. We also have the Interior Ministry's support on security and supply.

Alex informs the Board of Trustees of a request made to MSF by Georges Dallemagne (Member of Parliament and former General Director of MSF Belgium) to take part in a Chechnya Committee. In Belgium, it's the only attempt at collective mobilisation there has been... (unlike in France where the intellectual community is much more active in attempting to get the Chechnya question on the political agenda). The Committee is made up essentially of Georges and some Chechens and Russians living in Belgium. We haven't joined this movement, but we regret the absence of any other form of mobilisation.

He [Alex] wonders whether there might not be a Kosovo-Chechnya deal going on: if the Russians say nothing about Kosovo, we'll say nothing about Chechnya.»



**'CNN,' Email** from Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland Regional Advisor Caucasus to MSF Holland Caucasus Network, 21 March 2000 (in English).

There will be 2 short CNN pieces which MSF-Ingushetia gave interviews for.

You can look out for a piece on the Chechnya health care system featuring B, one of our medical staff in Chechnya. The piece should be about how the health system there has managed to continue providing services through two wars and 6 years without salaries or inputs. B, a surgeon, tells his story of having several hospitals destroyed around him and yet continuing to treat wounded in a basement with materials rescued from the ruins of his old hospital.



*During the first war we were working in different hospitals, in Grozny, then Starye Atagi, then Shatoi.*

*During the second war there was no place for that either because they were bombing all over the place. Actually this did not happen the way it happened during the first war. You could have cases where you were supposed to go to the house of the patient, did the operation, and go from house to house and provide the assistance like that. If the person happened to be wounded or does not want to participate or cannot participate in the hostilities anymore, according to all humanitarian laws, he has a right to receive the medical assistance. But [in] those days, [just] for providing assistance to one of the sites, they could easily shoot you down.*

A, MSF North Caucasus staff (in Russian, translated into English by an MSF interpreter) interviewed in 2008


**Meanwhile, MSF Holland started up a programme distributing medicine and medical materials to Chechnya's hospitals, with the help of a network of Chechen surgeons, respected by all sides, for their professional activity during the first war.**




*I hired some staff, and we actually started doing some things in the camps in Ingushetia and we planned to do some things then in hospitals in Chechnya. It was going to be very light things, some surgical support, some reconstruction of surgical theaters, and finding some hospitals and clinics where we could provide some assistance. And that's when we hired B. He was the director of surgery in the biggest surgical facility in Chechnya before the war and he knew all the surgeons. And we hired H. who was an orthopedic surgeon. We hired them partly because they had been the rebel surgeons in*

the mountains in 1995. So they knew everybody. They had operated on a famous commander and it made it easy for them to just walk into his house and say, 'We need this, this, this, and this.' And they knew all of his fighters because they had really travelled with the rebels in '95 and '96, even though politically, they had become separated from the rebels. Because of the disaster of '97, they no longer believed in the rebels, but they knew them, they had personal relations with them, family relations... They were also able to work with the Russians, and the pro-Russian Chechens, which they did. They had obligations on both sides, which was very important for us. They could work with both sides. They were seniors. B was used to running a hospital in the war. He could buy medicines on the black market, he could convince doctors to work, and he could organize salaries for his nurses and so on. And that gave us a lot more autonomous organizational capacity, as having very senior people, who had no problem walking into Kadyrov's office or going straight to Bassayev and saying, 'Hey, I need something, you can't tell me to wait. I pulled a piece of metal out of your head. Now, I need some help.' It made us feel much safer and it gave us some organizational capacity.

Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus, (November 1999-January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005) (in English) interviewed in 2000


 I had my family in Ingushetia and I was in Chechnya itself. And when the whole Chechnya was occupied or shall we say captured, I came to visit my family. That was the end of February 2000. I had no income, no means and the family had no means either. I was introduced to the head of MSF office in Nazran. And then he invited me for an interview with Kenny Gluck. I knew Kenny from the first war. He was a journalist at the time. I said then that I would work for one month and then return back to Chechnya, but Kenny convinced me to sign a contract for two months with MSF. [By] 26 February I was working with MSF, [and on] 3 March we went to Chechnya. I went back and forth. We had 25 hospitals in Chechnya that we were assisting. This was a program of drug distribution in these hospitals. It wasn't straight to 25 hospitals, in the beginning it was 1-3 hospitals. Gradually we increased the number of hospitals. I was continuing to do surgery. Going back home I had to operate sometimes. We always had the box of instruments. There were a lot of wounds by explosions and I was always meeting the terrible ones on my way.

Dr.B, MSF North Caucasus staff (in Russian, translated into English by an MSF interpreter) interviewed in 2008

 Our answer in Chechnya took some time. That was connected to certain difficulties: first to cross the boarder and then to reach certain villages and settlements. A simple example to show you: from the boarder between Chechnya and Ingushetia until Grosny, about 50 km at most, there were about 18 checkpoints. These were not the checkpoints with a little stick but checkpoints with concrete fences around them and with military, armoured personnel, and also with thorough checks of documents and everything else.

C, MSF North Caucasus staff (in Russian, translated into English by an MSF interpreter) interviewed in 2008

**The first aid convoy from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees reached Grozny. Aid workers described a population trying to survive in a devastated city, starving and without shelter or medical care.**

 'Grozny is Devastated; the Needs are Tremendous,' AFP (France), Geneva, 3 March 2000 (in French).

The needs of the population of Grozny, the Chechen capital devastated during the fighting, are "tremendous," declared the Spokesperson for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (HCR), Ron Redmond, in Geneva on Friday. "Judging from the initial reports from our monitors who accompanied this convoy, the needs inside Grozny are tremendous," said Ron Redmond. "The monitors describe a devastated and still insecure wasteland where only 21,000 civilians remain, this is according to local registration lists." The HCR monitors reported continued fighting in certain parts of the city. "Bodies of civilian casualties are still being recovered from collapsed buildings, and mines, unexploded grenades and shells are a problem in many areas," he reported. "In addition to the lack of security, their greatest problems are a lack of food, health concerns, in particular tuberculosis, and a shortage of warm clothing," added the HCR Spokesman.

**RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA ON MSF'S WORK IN THE CAUCASUS**

For several weeks during February and March 2000, MSF had to cope with a series of rumours and public statements in the Russian Federation questioning the neutrality of its presence in the Caucasus.

**On 29 February, the Russian Justice Minister declared publicly that Russian forces were doing nothing to prevent the Red Cross and Médecins sans Frontières from transporting medicine to the Chechen separatist fighters in the mountainous regions. This statement, distributed by the various press agencies, was interpreted by the Russian television station Ren TV<sup>13</sup> as an accusation of MSF delivering medicines to separatist fighters, and it invited MSF teams to come and explain its actions on television. The teams refused the interview, explaining that they were not delivering medicine to the separatists, and decided to take measures to ensure the local press was better acquainted with MSF's activities.**



'Press Statement MSF Chechnya,' Email from Ton Koene, MSF Holland Coordinator in Moscow to MSF Holland Field Coordinator in Caucasus, Programme Manager, Director of Operations and Communications Officer, 1 March 2000 (in English).

#### Extract:

1) Yesterday, MSF-B was contacted by a Russian TV station (REN), the translation of the request/statement is given hereunder:

[...] According to the reports by the ITAR-TASS news agency federal forces do not prevent international organizations such as the "Red Cross" and "Médecins sans Frontiers" from supplying medical drugs to the Chechen fighters.

Is it actually true that MSF is supplying Chechen fighters with medicines? Why?

Do the federal authorities try to prevent that?

Question: what is the mission of MSF in Chechnya?

2) MSF B and myself met this morning and discussed how we should respond to this. After contact with ICRC, we obtained a copy of the Reuters briefing:

It is a short message on 6 women who are freed and the last two sentences are:

Quote: Major Nazarkin (Russian min of justice saying in Chernokozovo) said that the federal forces in Chechnya do not put any obstacles to officials of international humanitarian organizations - the Red Cross and Doctors without Borders - in transporting medicines for wounded militants to the highland areas.

Unquote

3) So what happened is that Reuters made this statement yesterday (29.2.00) picked up and copied by Itar Tass and then seen by REN TV. Ren TV then sent the above request to us (in which they ask whether MSF supplies drugs to Chechnya fighters). So it is REN TV who actually turns Reuters/Itar Tass statement into a kind of accusation. REN TV requested an interview with MSF.

4) What we have decided with MSF B

- we will inform REN TV that we kindly decline doing a TV interview

- we will state that we are not supporting (providing) the Chechen fighters with drugs

- if they are interested in knowing how we work and want to have an update of our activities, we are glad to provide that within a few days (since our HQ has to approve all external statements).- I have drafted a general statement about MSF and its activities in North Caucasus which I have just sent to MSF B for their comments before we will send it to HQ (for your consideration).

- in case the media wants to have such overview/statement, we can provide that this week but avoid being interviewed on TV about such a delicate/political issue. I think we have to be careful not being dragged into a discussion where we do not belong.

5) I think we need to have some kind of press papers anyway because if we increase our presence in Chechnya, we will be more and more under fire from the local press. We have to prepare ourselves for this. Giving general info [about] who we are, what our aims are, and what we do (without going too much into detail but transparent).

**Three days later, on 4 March, General Vladimir Shamanov, Commander of the Russian Forces in Chechnya, declared on Russian television that "MSF has interests that are harmful to the Russian state." Whereas MSF Holland wanted to make a simple response to this statement on principle so as not to endanger its projects in the region, MSF France considered this incident to be serious and proposed a strong reaction. After discussions, a letter was sent on 16 March to the Russian Federation's Ambassador to the United Nations on behalf of the whole MSF movement. The letter qualified the statements made by General Shamanov as slander that could jeopardise international relief organisations' ability to work in the Caucasus.**



'ATTN Bart/Kenny/Denis-Didier,' Email from Jean-Christophe Dolle, MSF Belgium North Caucasus Coordinator to MSF France and MSF Belgium programme managers and MSF Holland Regional Advisor Caucasus, 9 March 2000 (in English).

Hello,

Here is the translation of the extract of General Chamanov's interview to Dorenko, March 4, 2000, 9 pm, on ORT Russian Central Channel (state-owned).

"We made several mistakes during the previous Chechnya campaign. In reality, intelligence services worked under the colours of OSCE, Médecins sans Frontières, and other "specialists" - Russian enemies, they purposefully prejudiced the interests of Russian state. And we tried to seem good in the eyes of world public opinion.

We are not a banana republic. We cannot be driven [lead] on. At the same time, we're not a closed country anymore,

we are a state which has done a lot to become a normal democratic state.” (Original in Russian, unofficial translation by MSF-B Moscow).



**Email exchange** between Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland Regional Advisor Caucasus and Bart Ostyn, MSF Belgium North Caucasus Task Force, 9 March 2000 (in English).

#### Extract:

Here is a draft letter to the Ministry of Defense in response to sortie of the recent statements. As I explained yesterday the tone and content are informative rather than indignant. At this point I do think that it is essential that we keep this approach

- 1) Because we are currently engaged in local negotiations on access and our staff, local and expatriate, will be passing army checkpoints this week and
- 2) It would be very damaging to become engaged in a public argument with the Ministry or particular generals about the role of MSF at this point. This would undermine both our access and the strength of future advocacy
- 3) The statement was an off the cuff remark rather than an official statement and has not been followed by any actions or restrictions against MSF activities
- 4) The statement is likely aimed at aid agencies in general rather than MSF

I would also like for any letter to be delivered only after our Tuesday meeting with the military on more permanent access to Chechnya. There is no particular urgency to respond to the Ministry of Defense.

Let me know your thoughts and recommended alterations.

Hello Kenny,

We've read your letter.

Obviously, it speaks for itself that we shouldn't bring our own operations in danger over this issue (I should've added that in the objectives)

On the other hand, we believe that we should raise the question of how we should "interpret" this declaration and this for the same reasons: our own security - operations and staff.

"Are our operations not already endangered by this kind of declaration?" knowing the consequences:

- In the worst case: a negative feeling at the checkpoints towards MSF.

- In the best case: still, a signal that humanitarian presence is not appreciated by the military hierarchy.

I therefore would ask you to find a compromise between the two letters (the first draft, but without the "we-are-the-champions" spirit of the introduction)

Hope you can come to an agreement.

Bart

Bart,

[...] I do think that we can combine elements of the two drafts. I think it is very good to emphasize the thousands of volunteers from many countries who work with MSF. Unless

there is some reason not to mention it, I do think we should include mention of MSF other interventions in Russia.

I would very much advice against requesting any follow-up statement by the ministry to disavow Shamanov's earlier remarks. Asking for a rebuttal from the ministry runs the risk of provoking further antagonistic statements by Shamanov or other which could turn into a public debate with the ministry. This would only further undermine our security, our ability to work and our future advocacy in the region. I agree that we need to respond, but I would rather keep our statement limited to stating our position without indignation or demands. It is extremely unlikely that they will give an official disavowal of Shamanov's statements. If we did provoke a response, it is more likely to be hostile. I don't see what we gain by demanding it outside assuaging our own indignation. At this stage in our intervention, it is not worth the risk.

I will try to combine aspects of the two letters tomorrow. I will also give you a call in the morning to make sure that we are thinking along the same lines.

Take care, Kenny



**'Teleconf Chechnya/Shamanov vs MSF', Email** from Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of Operations to MSF Holland, MSF Belgium, MSF Switzerland Executive Directors and Directors of Operations, MSF International President, 13 March 2000 (in English).

#### Extract:

Dear colleagues,

You will find enclosed a briefing paper including Paris's position. The topic is important enough to have a teleconf tomorrow before the next HOM meeting in Moscow (Wednesday).

[...] Friendly

Jean-Hervé [...]

Shamanov vs. MSF file [...]

Draft response drawn up by the field teams so far (they are to meet in Moscow next Wednesday to finalise it).

Dear Igor Dmitrievich,

Since 1971 Medecins Sans Frontieres has worked to provide assistance to populations in danger all over the world. At present MSF is working in over 80 countries and we have been providing support in Russia since 1991.

Millions of contributors and thousands of volunteers from many countries have participated in this action of solidarity aimed at providing medical assistance to populations in need.

Unfortunately, some representatives of the Ministry of Defense in Russia have misunderstood the activities of MSF and suggested that humanitarian agencies, including MSF, have engaged in inappropriate activities. These statements misrepresent our activities

in Russia and undermine our ability to provide assistance in Russia.

In order to avoid any misunderstandings in the future we take this opportunity to acquaint you with MSF's programs in Russia and MSF's international humanitarian mission. MSF will be continuing to provide assistance to populations in need in Russia. We hope that the personnel of the Ministry of Defense will demonstrate respect for MSF's humanitarian mission and facilitate the activities of MSF personnel in the field.

If you have any questions about MSF's humanitarian mission or our activities in Russia, please feel free to contact us. [...]

#### Analysis

These declarations are worrying for the safety of the teams. We don't want to add fuel to the fire, but an inappropriate response that underplays the seriousness of the situation by talking about a "misunderstanding" would be even more dangerous.

Here is what I think we should put in our response to these statements:

- 1 a reminder of the facts
- 2 a characterisation of the facts
- 3 a protest
- 4 a demand for an explanation

This text (open letter) should be addressed to the Defence Minister and the Chief of State and our reaction should be relayed to a few of the "big" Russian diplomatic representations abroad (New York or Washington, representatives in Brussels, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, etc.) We should also inform diplomats involved in the Russian question of Shamanov's statements and our reaction to them, as well as any journalists working on this file.

#### Draft letter

Dear Sir,

We are writing to you in the wake of statements made by General Shamanov on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2000 during an interview on the state television channel, ORT.

During this interview, General Shamanov described MSF as an organisation engaged in information activities intended to harm the Russian state.

We consider this statement, which was not backed up by any specific facts, to constitute both slander and a threat. We wish to stress the threatening nature of these comments made in the context of a war in which the civilian population is hard hit by the military offensive underway and where international aid organisations have limited scope to intervene.

We would also like to draw attention to the fact that the action undertaken by Médecins sans Frontières is covered by the Geneva Convention, signed by Russia. In keeping with the Convention, our action is aimed solely at providing assistance to the civilian population and people injured in the conflict, whoever they may be.

We are concerned by the threatening hostility displayed to us by a high-ranking army officer, and respectfully request clarification of this matter.

#### Conclusion

Reacting to this type of problem typically falls within the remit of the Operations Directors.

Maintaining a position such as the one made in the draft from Moscow would inevitably lead to the French section adopting an independent stance.



*'Re: Teleconf Chechnya/Chamanov vs MSF', Email from Vincent Janssens MSF Belgium Director of Operations to MSF Holland, MSF France, MSF Switzerland Executive Directors and Directors of Operations, MSF International President, 13 March 2000 (in English).*

In reaction to the "petit dossier" de JHB, and given the cancelling of the teleconference, hereby some personal comments.

I have no idea how useful they still can be at this stage, but I give it a try.

#### 1. To react or not?

-From a distance it is difficult to judge: as Thierry Durand [MSF Switzerland's Director of Operations]] states, we've been often accused of things in Serbia, where the sole intention was to fill the papers and hope for reaction; we responded sometimes, sometimes we didn't; none of both apparently resulted any effect (positive or negative).

One should locally appreciate how the statement was received.

-Almost 10 days have passed so one should appreciate how opportune/useful a late reaction still can be.

-Personally I think it is still worth responding, but that's an appreciation from here.

-To decide on the reaction, we should analyze what we want to achieve; personally I think that it is better for our safety (and operational margin on the ground) to correct clearly but respectfully these kind of statements that seek to discredit MSF. It remains difficult to assess to which degree these kind of messages (and responses) really influence the safety on the ground, but if there is, then I think a correct answer might reduce the risk rather than increase it.

#### 2. If we respond, what should be the content?

-I would agree with points 1-3 of JH (recall the facts, qualify them and protest) but not with the 4<sup>th</sup> (request clarification): we know what's behind this and we know what the answer will be (more of the same vague accusations) and the risk is there that this will drag MSF into a kind of public debate we have nothing to win at.

-I feel like the original text from the field gives the impression (at a distance) of answering without saying something; or even giving the impression that we are afraid of calling a cat a cat: even the Russians won't believe that this was all a misunderstanding; so we should not pretend so; I personally would rather not react than to send that version.

-In JHB's version there are on the contrary (in chapter 3) references to the present war (to which Chamanov did not refer) and that unnecessarily can again drag us in a kind of public debate that is lost in advance in Russia, particularly if set up in this way.

#### 3. Whom do we aim at?

I think basically the same public as for the interview; I would therefore check whether useful and possible to send it to

the ORT and would definitely not send it to the president (he won't react and all the in betweens will feel bypassed). [...] Reacting to the conclusion of JHB, I would just precise that, if no consensus can be found and one section decides to go solo, it should then also assume the responsibility and sign only for itself, allowing the other sections to adopt then their own position.



**Letter** from Catherine Dumait-Harper, MSF Liaison to the UN to Serge V. Lavrov, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the UN, 16 March 2000 (in English).

**Extract:**

Your Excellency,  
I am writing to you concerning the comments made by General Chamanov, on March 4, 2000, during an interview on the state television channel ORT.  
During this interview General Chamanov qualified Médecins Sans Frontières as an organization which shelters intelligence services that prejudice the interests of the Russian state. This declaration, not backed by concrete facts, is to our eyes a calumny and, in effect, a threat. As signatory to the Geneva Conventions, Russia is, on the contrary, under the obligation to ensure that humanitarian organizations and personnel are respected and protected, and that their freedom of movement is guaranteed. General Chamanov's statement jeopardizes the possibilities of action by international aid organizations.  
Médecins Sans Frontières has been working with populations in need for many years, in over 80 countries throughout the world. Our only legitimacy lies in the quality of the assistance we provide and in strict respect for the humanitarian principles.  
With full respect for these principles, Médecins Sans Frontières has been assisting vulnerable populations in Russia since 1991, apparently to the full satisfaction of our partners concerned.  
partenaires concernés.



*Shamanov accuses us on state television of trying to act against Russian interests. The other sections don't want to react to this. I don't want to let these accusations go unanswered. I don't think sticking our heads in the sand will make us any safer. It'd be better to show our colours, including in our public messages - even if they upset some people. Given the way the secret services see us, there's no point in trying to keep a low profile. We might as well be clearly identified as an opponent to what they are doing. If they attack us publicly, we absolutely must react. Then, if anything happens to us, it'll be important to show that we already had problems with them. I'm ready to take risks in our communication. I'm writing a letter. There'll be no public*

*statement. Vincent Janssens for MSF Belgium is weighing up the pros and cons of doing anything. Thierry Durand, Operations Director at MSF Switzerland, is not really in favour of responding because, to his mind, we are constantly being accused of this kind of thing. He's brought up what happened during the war in ex-Yugoslavia. We first wanted to write to the Russian Defence Minister ourselves. In the end, we went via the New York office.*

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of communication (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000- May 2008) (in French) interviewed in 2009



*We did have a big argument with MSF France. General Shamanov—he was the Commander in General of the Western Group of forces in Chechnya - went on television. It was a field interview. He was standing somewhere in the Caucasus. A journalist stuck a mike in his face and he said that OSCE and MSF are spies and enemies of Russia. There were differences between MSF Paris and MSF Amsterdam. We felt that we should give an information letter to the Ministry of Defence and that's it. MSF France wanted to do a much larger statement and demand a retraction and so on. Our attitude was that attacking the General would just provoke him. He will make another statement and we will end up in a fight between the General and MSF. We said any advocacy and temoignage should be about the people in Chechnya, it should not be about MSF. It seemed to us to be a distraction. We were going to ruin our chances to do temoignage and ruin our chances to do work by getting into a public fight as if we were offended because he called us a bad name. That was not the right issue. I think MSF France felt that we could not let these things pass. When someone throws down a glove, you have to pick it up. Or else, you're just showing that you're afraid of him. Unfortunately it took us three weeks to argue this point. We ended up compromising but it was very bad.*

Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus, (November 1999- January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005) (in English) interviewed in 2000

**A week later, on 22 March, the official Russian press office, Itar Tass, claimed the MSF office in the Pankisi Valley in Georgia, was opened as a base for transporting humanitarian materials and arms to Chechen fighters. These accusations were part of the authorities' strategy to discredit Georgia. In the Pankisi Valley, the MSF teams were treating all the wounded brought to them, wherever they came from.**



'Chechen Boyevics, Penetrated to Georgia Establish their own Rules There,' Moscow, Caucasus Press *Itar Tass*, 22 March 2000 (translated from Russian into English by MSF).

**Extract:**

Chechen Boyevics, who penetrated to the territory of Georgia establish their own rules on the territory of the country, Pankisi mountain valley. Akhmeta region of Georgia turns into a 'little Chechnya' with all its criminal features. Georgian laws practically do not work here, and real power is based on the ideas of field commanders and their assistants. They openly say they are not going to return to Chechnya, but intend to stay in Georgia. They are not going to breed cattle or deal with farming works. They intend to restore their usual business here - kidnapping people, slavery, robberies, and money extortion. On the available information Georgian authorities try to have unofficial contacts with the authorities of Chechen diaspora, so that they would persuade their countrymen to leave the territory of Georgia. However their appeals do not work. Chechens keep pressing Tbilisi claiming for free transportation of humanitarian loads, arms, and ammunition to Pankisi mountain valley. For this purpose offices of Turkish Red Crescent and Médecins Sans Frontières opened in Jokolo village.



**Email** from Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland Regional Advisor Caucasus to Rendt Gortner, MSF Holland North Caucasus Project Coordinator, and MSF Holland Headquarters Caucasus Team, 29 March 2000 (in English).

**Extract:**

It's good to hear that MSF is retaining its prominent place in the Russian media.

1) Until this is really up and running, we do need to respond to report like the recent TASS report from Georgia. I agree that another low key approach is appropriate. I assume that Jean-Pierre (HoM MSFF) will have an easier time convincing Paris of this than we did.

The contacts could include an information letter explaining MSF's activities in Georgia. I might be helpful to add a phone call and one-on-one meetings to complement this. It would be good for MSF to establish some contacts with TASS and other Russian journalists in Georgia in order to prevent this sort of commentary in the future. This should be done by MSFF because they can demonstrate ongoing activities. MSF-H's presence without activities could create more suspicion than understanding.

Our response to MSF's enduring popularity in the Russian press should be more pro-active. This has been part of the plan for an advocacy strategy all along. We should be careful to build contacts and understanding before we do anything like a press release or a press conference. [...] Putting our name more up front may give understanding of our activities to some, but it will certainly put us on the list for attack by others.

2) We should certainly work to convey greater transparency to the variety of power structures. This could include better and more regular reports to The Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and just about anybody else who might be interested. We will need to give a lot of attention to how we present our activities and we should not be under the illusion that this will alter our sterling reputation in the higher levels of the military or security structures.

We should not press for access to Grozny at a high level as a way of getting information to key decision makers. I think that any such request at a high level will generate unnecessary suspicion and would also undermine our access to Grozny. We have been told that we cannot go to Grozny, but I think we should resolve this first at the local level, as we have with access to Chechnya overall. Once we have access we should be aggressively transparent about what we are doing.



*We were taking things as they came. Patients turned up and we treated them. I think the business with Christophe [André] being kidnapped had a major influence on things. The programme manager was convinced that if we wanted to work in any security, we would need a priority agreement with a clan. In Pankisi, MSF's first contacts were with a Chechen businessman. The programme manager had met with him, and placed itself under his protection to a certain extent. For example, when we first got there, the blokes we employed as security had been recommended to us by him. And he was close to the network of fighters. So via this Pankisi network, we were treating fighters, that's for sure, but there were not that many of them. And the question was more complicated than it may seem because, within the factions of Chechen fighters, there were the 'nutcases and the not-so-nutcases,' the radicals and the moderates. But we had doubts about it. I had inherited this situation and was uncomfortable with it. I had talked about it.*

Dr Eric Comte, Field Coordinator in the Pankisi Valley (Georgia) December 1999 to April 2000, Field Coordinator in Ingushetia (April 2000 to October 2000), Coordinator Georgia (2000-2002) (in French) interviewed in 2009



*MSF Holland hired a helicopter to fly people from the mountains down to the hospital in Tbilissi, and made some big mistakes. I even found out later about some of the things. I went to see one of these contacts in the Pankisi in Georgia. And he told me things which I didn't know about. He said: 'I am so grateful; you evacuated 10 family members who were freezing to death in the mountains, with horrible wounds, some of them had already been amputated, and were lying in the snow, and you organized a plane to fly them to a hospital in Tbilisi. They're alive to this day because*



*of you. I will do anything for MSF.' MSF Holland also sent truckloads of medicines across the mountains, into certain surgical facilities, and it was complete zero control. When I found out, I was a little bit 'OK this is a little excessive.' Because I was very strict with the rebels and we would not let them have anything. We would only use facilities that we felt were open and were not really rebel facilities.*

Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus, (November 1999-January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005) (in English) interviewed in 2009

**At the beginning of April, the United Nations passed an agreement with the Russian Federation defining a framework for their humanitarian operations in Ingushetia and Chechnya. The modalities of this agreement, which notably imposed armed escorts, were considered by both sides as applying to all humanitarian operators. MSF refused these escorts on the basis of its operational principles of independence.**



**Internal notes** – Meeting with OCHA April 4 on Chechnya and Ingushetia,' Laura Brav, MSF Deputy UN Liaison, Kenny Gluck MSF Holland Regional Advisor North Caucasus HoM, 4 April 2000 (in English).

**Extract:**

Kenny then raised the issue of impartiality. MSF is very worried about the use of Russian armed resorts. Chechen soldiers cannot tell the difference between NGOs and EMERCOM putting the independence of NGOs in jeopardy. [...] This discussion returned to the MoU and the stipulation that Russians are to provide "modality." Kenny said that UNHCR has set a bad precedent by using Russian guards, even Russians who have been implicated in the atrocities. David said the Russian government is insisting that the UN operate through EMERCOM. Kenny replied that this was also asked of MSF, but MSF spoke with the local EMERCOM officials and worked out an agreement so that MSF could work independently. Once Moscow becomes aware of this, they seem to let it go.

When asked about the return of refugees, Kenny replied that many will return, even if it's dangerous. As it is, the refugees are not more than a 30-minute drive away from Grozny. A steady level of conflict is what keeps them away for now. With respect to coordination in the field, Kenny said the problem lay in the fact that there are many differences of opinion among NGOs about security, not to mention between NGOs and the UN. [...] Kenny said that MSF is frustrated by the UN's fear of Russia, given the ease with which the Russians could expel MSF from the region. They have already accused MSF of spying. He remarked that the Russian government cannot do that to the UN as the UN is the only "club" in

the world where Russia is still a superpower, and ordinary Russians are "in awe" of the UN. He asked OCHA to consider this when the UN makes statements about protection and humanitarian access. The Chechens, on the other hand, feel that the UN betrayed them in the last war.

**On the diplomatic front, governments and international institutions continue issuing indignant statements, with no effect.**

**On 13 March, a PACE delegation sent to Moscow and to the North Caucasus to observe the implementation of the recommendations it had made in January, called for a bi-lateral cease-fire and urged the Russian authorities to investigate human rights violations and war crimes, and allow humanitarian organisations free access to the region. It also called for the opening of negotiations with 'elected Chechen representatives.'**

**At the beginning of April, PACE voted unanimously in favour of Russia's suspension should it not immediately begin seeking a means to achieve peace in Chechnya and put an end to human rights violations.**

**Moscow's reply, in so many words, was that it should mind its own business.**



**'Findings of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Mission to Moscow and North Caucasus,'** Moscow, 13 March 2000, (in English).

**Extract:**

- "It is beyond comprehension that at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a European city like Grozny could be systematically destroyed by the forces of its own government", said Lord JUDD, Leader of the COUNCIL OF EUROPE Parliamentary Assembly delegation at the end of their fact-finding mission to Moscow and the North Caucasus from 9 to 12 March.

The objective of the mission was to monitor progress made by the Russian authorities on the requirements voted by the Parliamentary Assembly as its January 2000 session. The delegation was deeply disturbed by the distress and the trauma suffered by civilians as a result of indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force by the Russian military. The delegation calls for an immediate cease-fire to be respected by both sides and for arrangements to be made to guarantee the secure and free access of humanitarian agencies to the area.

At the same time the delegation calls on the Russian government, without any further delay, to begin negotiations on a political solution to the conflict with the elected Chechen representatives and other influential Chechens. These discussions could also involve the provisional Chechen administration. The delegation firmly supports the proposal

for a Regional Conference on the North Caucasus with the participation of representatives chosen by the Chechens. The delegation believes that serious human rights violations and war crimes have taken place in Chechnya on both sides. Eyewitnesses gave accounts of arbitrary killings and harassment by Russian forces, as well as unacceptable acts of violence by Chechen fighters, the implementation of the Sharia Law and hostage taking.

The delegation therefore calls on the Russian authorities to intensify investigation of all alleged violations in co-operation with international representatives. The delegation also urges the Russian parliament to set up without delay a special committee to investigate these crimes. It further underlines the importance of access by all prisoners to legal advice and calls for the release of all hostages.



*'European Snub Renews Russia's Identity Crisis: Council's Action May be a Sign of its Wider Estrangement,'* RC Longworth, **The Chicago Tribune** (USA), 9 April 2000 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

The Council of Europe, normally a docile body with a reputation based more on talk than action, has asked Vladimir Putin's Russia the question it has never really wanted to answer:

Is Russia a European nation? Does it truly want to belong to Europe and the West, and how much?

The parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe voted overwhelmingly last week to suspend Russia's membership unless it moves "immediately" to seek peace in Chechnya and stop violating human rights there.

Moscow, with a fury seemingly all out of proportion to the rebuke, told the council to mind its own business.

The parliament's recommendation to suspend Russia must be approved unanimously by the other 40 governments in the 41-nation organization. This could take months. Before then, diplomats will try to head off a confrontation.

Even if the suspension goes through, Russia won't suffer any practical penalties. The council is a consultative body with little power; it is no kin to the European Union, an economic union with real influence over the economies of its 15 West European nations, nor to NATO, the transatlantic defense alliance. Despite this, the council parliament's vote stung. It was a highly symbolic act that called into question Russia's right to consider itself part of Europe.

The Russians themselves have never really settled this issue, so the vote challenged Russia's role in Europe, its relations with the West and its very identity.

The Council of Europe sees itself as the embodiment of European values. It was founded in 1949 by 10 West European nations, with a mandate to promote democracy and "safeguard and realize the ideals and principles which are their common heritage."

**On 22 April, during a visit to Ingushetia by the European 'troika,' made up of the French and Portuguese ambassadors and the European Union's representative to Russia, Ingushetia's President, Ruslan Auchev, pleaded in favour of dialogue between the Russian leaders and the Chechen president, Aslan Maskhadov. The 'troika,' which was not allowed into Chechnya, declared Russia's humanitarian efforts towards Chechen civilians to be insufficient.**



*'Ingushetia Pleads for Dialogue between Putin and Maskhadov before Visiting Europeans,'* **AFP** (France), Moscow, 22 April 2000 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

Ruslan Auchev, President of Ingushetia, a Republic on the border with Chechnya, pleaded for dialogue between Moscow and the separatist president Aslan Maskhadov on Saturday, during a visit from the European 'troika' to this North Caucasus Republic [...].

"Certain issues must be discussed with the legally-elected President of Chechnya, Aslan Maskhadov" insisted President Auchev, who has acted as intermediary between Moscow and Grozny, the Chechen capital, on a number of occasions. "He (Maskhadov) is the only person with whom the Chechnya problem can be resolved, as there is nobody else on the Chechen side who has the legal or moral right to represent Chechnya in negotiations," added President Auchev, whose Republic is sheltering the majority of Chechen refugees. Moscow left little hope of dialogue with the separatist President on Friday, esteeming that Maskhadov had insufficient control over his warlords to be considered a valid interlocutor.

While acknowledging having received peace proposals, amending them and sending them back to the separatist President, the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, is still calling him a "criminal."

Moscow has not recognised the legitimacy of the Chechen President, elected in 1997, since the launch of its ground offensive against Chechnya on 1st October. It has launched a criminal investigation against him for 'illegal rebellion.' [...] The European 'troika' was to end its tour of the North Caucasus on Saturday after a visit to Chechnya on Friday [...] According to the Interfax agency, the 'troika' presented itself at the Kavkaz 1 checkpoint on the border between Ingushetia and Chechnya, but the Russian helicopter meant to take it to Chechnya didn't show.

The visit of the 'troika' – the Portuguese Ambassador, José Luis-Gomes, the French Ambassador, Hubert Colin de Verdière, and the EU Representative to Russia, Gilbert Dubois, - was intended to 'help prepare the Russia –EU summit' to be held on Moscow on 17<sup>th</sup> May, according to the Portuguese Ambassador.

The troika, which was not allowed into Chechnya, declared on Friday that Russia's humanitarian efforts towards Chechen civilians were insufficient.

**On 9 June, the United States Senate passed a resolution condemning the Russian forces' brutal policies in Chechnya, and called for an immediate cease to military operations and access for international humanitarian organisations. It also called upon the Clinton administration to meet with elected representatives of the Chechen government, firmly condemning its lack of initiative.**



*'Senate Approves Helms Resolution on Chechnya,'* **Press Release**, US Senate, 9 June 2000 (in English).

**Extract:**

The Senate approved, by voice vote, an amendment introduced by Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Jesse Helms to the Department of Defense Appropriations Bill this morning condemning Russia's brutal policy in Chechnya and urging the Secretary of State to meet with representatives of the freely elected Chechen government. Senior State Department Officials have previously refused to meet the Chechen representatives.

The resolution also calls on the Russian government to immediately cease its military operations in Chechnya and to allow international humanitarian organisations access to the victims of the conflict.

**In September, after another visit by a delegation to Chechnya, the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly acknowledged the efforts made by Russia to set up human rights monitoring institutions. However, it again urged the Russian authorities to take action to end abuses and violence and to investigate violations. It also called for emergency measures to be put in place before the onset of winter, and free access to Chechnya for humanitarian organisations.**



*'Assembly Urges Russia to Act without Delay in Chechnya,'* **Press release**, Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, Strasbourg, 28 September 2000 (in English).

The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly today reiterated its conviction that Russia's conduct of its military campaign in the Chechen Republic and the resulting human rights violations are unacceptable in terms of the Council of Europe's principles and objectives.

[...] The Assembly accepted that there were some encouraging developments, based on the results of its Ad Hoc Committee's visit to Chechnya and its participation in the hearing organised by the Russian State Duma in September. The human rights machinery put in place to deal with the conflict – the Office of Mr Kalamonov, the Russian President's Special Representative for human rights in Chechnya, the State Duma

Committee on the normalisation of the situation in the Republic, the National Public Commission on crime investigation and human rights in the North Caucasus - began to work. [...] The parliamentarians urged Russia to act without delay on those bodies' reports to ensure criminal prosecutions of the federal servicemen implicated in human rights violations, limit the number of checkpoints to an absolute minimum and stop illegal practices at them, stop arbitrary detentions and abuse of those detained, clarify the fate of all missing persons, restore an effective judiciary in Chechnya, issue speedily identity documents, compensate for the loss and destruction of property, speed the return of refugees and displaced people to their own homes and ensure their full rights, security and dignity in the meantime.

Russia was also urged to speed up its search for a political solution, including negotiations with both civilian leaders and the Chechen military commanders without preconditions; investigate all alleged mass killings of civilians by Russian troops; limit law-enforcement operations to the minimum necessary for the protection of troops and civilians; and ensure freedom of movement for civilians as well as the media in Chechnya.

The Assembly called for emergency measures to provide winterised accommodation, heating, food, basic medical care and education to refugees and displaced people, with the financial assistance of relevant organisations. It stressed that international humanitarian organisations and NGOs willing to operate in Chechnya must be granted access to the Republic, and appealed to Council of Europe member governments for generous support to its humanitarian rehabilitation and reconstruction.

**MSF seized every opportunity to raise the Chechnya question with governments and international institutions.**

**On 12 April, during a visit to Russia by an OSCE delegation, MSF Holland, followed by MSF United States, issued a press release calling on the organisation to set up an independent monitoring presence in Chechnya.**



*'MSF Calls for Independent Monitoring Presence in Chechnya,'* MSF USA/MSF Holland **Press release**, New York/Amsterdam, 11 April 2000 (in English).

On the occasion of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) visit to Russia, the international medical relief organization Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) urges the OSCE to establish a monitoring presence throughout Chechnya. "The fighting is still continuing, and incidents of violence against civilians remain commonplace," stated MSF Head of Mission Rendt Gorter in Chechnya. "Independent monitoring could help to address these incidents and reduce fears."

MSF is concerned about the humanitarian situation inside Chechnya. MSF medical teams have found many health facilities in to be severely damaged. They have also reported a widespread lack of medicine and medical supplies. Initial findings confirm a paramount need for humanitarian assistance, but access into Chechnya by humanitarian organizations remains haphazard.

Access of civilians to the health facilities that are still functioning is limited due to the continuing insecurity--especially during the evenings and nights due to curfews and checkpoints. People report to be scared and hesitant to move around and therefore can not immediately visit a clinic when needed. This presents the patients with complications that could have been avoided.

The health situation in Chechnya remains precarious. Poor living conditions, overcrowding in shelters, and lack of hygiene have resulted in a high number of skin diseases, diarrhea, and other gastrointestinal infections, especially amongst children. Also, gunshot wounds amongst civilians, including elderly, women, and children, have been widely reported. Rendt Gorter warns, "Thousands are suffering from preventable diseases. A return of even part of the displaced population will increase the population at risk and put further pressure on a totally inadequate infrastructure." The remaining population on Chechen territory is estimated to be around 350,000.

Health workers still do their work, although in desperate need of drugs and medical materials. "It is impressive to see how hard health staff has been working, trying to maintain their services. There are medical teams working in completely gutted buildings. But it is inspiring to see doctors and nurses pick up hammers and shovels and attempt to repair their damaged health posts," stated Gorter.

MSF will raise its concerns with the OSCE mission during its visit to Russia this week.

**On 30 May, MSF Austria devoted its annual press conference to Chechnya and organised a series of briefings with the biggest delegations to the OSCE, chaired by Austria at the time.**



**Email** from Gabi Farber-Wiener, MSF Austria Director of Communications, to MSF Caucasus Network, 9 June 2000 (in English).

Dear all,

As some of you already know, the main focus of our annual press conference that was held last Tuesday was Chechnya. The reason behind: Austria is this year's chair of OSCE and we are lobbying for a stronger presence in the region.

For this reason we organized on the day before the press conference, an OSCE-briefing with the 10 most important delegations (France, USA, Germany, UK, Portugal, Switzerland, Denmark, Norway, Romania, Finland). The Head of Mission of MSF-H in the North Caucasus held a very

impressive presentation on the humanitarian situation in Chechnya and showed a video of Grozny and the MSF activities in the area. It was a very open and positive discussion with the OSCE, and we made our points very clear towards a stronger presence in the area.

The result of lobbying is always hard to judge, but it was definitely a very important back up of the OSCE-members who pushed for a stronger approach than exists now. (And now they are even asking us what house they should rent in Znamenskoje!)

The press conference itself went very well. Our main message was the fact that the war in Chechnya is continuing, although it disappeared from the TV-screens.

We had no new message, therefore we did not send around an international press release, as was agreed with MSF-H. It was a classical but very effective witnessing issue, living of [taken from] the experiences and personality of Rendt. We made clear to the press that it is difficult for us to have concrete political demands that could endanger our people in the field and that we concentrate on witnessing. Therefore it was the media who added the political demands to the stories.

It resulted in several very long and excellent reports in the Austrian newspapers (exact amount unknown yet), 5 radio interviews and a TV-interview.

**On 8 June, Vladimir Putin placed Chechnya's civil administration directly under his control and appoints Akmad Khadirov, a religious leader, clan chief, and erstwhile separatist fighter, to its head. During the whole of July, there was an increasing number of police raids on families in Chechnya, resulting in a series of suicide attacks. Another inflow of displaced Chechens arrived in Ingushetia, and it became more difficult for humanitarian workers to travel around Chechnya. In September, Akhmad Kadyrov declared that Russian aid to Chechnya was insufficient. He claimed there was a danger of Chechens rising up against the abusive policies being pursued by the Russian forces, which he believed were preventing a resolution to the conflict. However, he disputed the Council of Europe's claim that thousands of people had disappeared.**



**'Putin Places Chechnya's Administration Under Direct Presidential Control,' AFP (France), Moscow, 8 June 2000 (in French).**

**Extract:**

According to Serguei Ivanov, Secretary of the Russian Federation's Security Council, Russian President, Vladimir Putin, passed a decree on Thursday imposing direct presidential rule on Chechnya, reports the Interfax agency. "The president has taken full control of Chechnya's administration," said Mr Ivanov.

[...] "Direct presidential, followed by federal administration of the separatist republic will remain in effect for two to three years until the election of a national legislative authority in Chechnya," continued Mr Ivanov in a quote by Interfax.

[...] In a visit to Moscow on Monday, the American President, Bill Clinton, had again criticised the war in Chechnya, calling for a "political solution."

"It is likely that the political component (of the conflict) will now take on much bigger proportions," commented Serguei Iastrjembki, the Kremlin's Representative for Chechnya, adding that this decree did not mark the end of the "anti-terrorist operation in Chechnya," according to Interfax.

[...] The head of the Chechen administration, to be appointed shortly, will be "head of the executive authority in the Chechen Republic," according to the decree.



« *Sitrep MSF H North Caucasus*, 3 July 2000 (in English).

#### Extract:

The Chechen administration headed by Akhmed Kadyrov, which was appointed by Russian President Putin in early June, was finally inaugurated on June 20 after a delay of several days. Kadyrov's appointment has provoked the resignation of a large number of local heads of administration, who are protesting Kadyrov's past support for the separatist rebels and his "fuelling of religious fanaticism."

[...] Chechen separatists have greatly expanded the use of suicide bombers which began in early June. On July 2nd and 3rd there were suicide attacks on five separate Russian outposts.

[...] Access to Chechnya for humanitarian agencies has worsened following the recent upsurge in attacks on Russian outposts. The Danish Refugee Council, which is the largest distributor of food aid in Chechnya, announced the suspension of its operations in Chechnya after a convoy of trucks was not allowed to pass a checkpoint in Chechnya for 5 days consecutively. ACF convoys have also experienced increased difficulties in passing Russian checkpoints.

MSF vehicles have generally been able to pass the checkpoints although there have been specific days, particularly following the suicide attacks, in which passage was denied. MSF is currently discussing the issuance



'*Chechnya's Administrator Denounces the Lack of Russian Aid*', Françoise Michel, **AFP** (France), Moscow, 26 September 2000 (in French).

#### Extract:

"Aid from Moscow is totally inconsequential. There is no programme for reconstructing the country, and we have only received enough money to cover pensions and welfare payments and finance some healthcare and education," claimed the former Chechen mufti, appointed to the head

of the Republic by Vladimir Putin on 12<sup>th</sup> June. "All the humanitarian aid is going to Ingushetia," (a Republic on the border with Chechnya that is sheltering most of the refugees) the administrator complained to the AFP.

"Ingushetia is exaggerating the number of refugees," he claimed, estimating it to be 115,000 at most.

According to the Ingush President, Ruslan Auchev, there are 200,000 or so refugees in the republic of Ingushetia.

"For the time being, the only support we are receiving from Moscow is moral, and yet the situation is very difficult. People have no roofs over their heads, no work," stressed this former mufti who fought alongside the separatists during the first Russian-Chechnya war (December 1994-August 1996).

He claimed to have split from Aslan Maskhadov after incursions into Dagestan by radical Islamic fighters in August 1999, led by rebel chiefs Shamil Bassaiev and Khattab. He also criticised Maskhadov for allowing Wahhabism (Islamic fundamentalism) to develop in the Russian republic.

Akhmad Kadyrov acknowledged that he has limited powers, as the Duma (lower house of Russian parliament) has still not adopted the law on the status of the Chechen administration.

"Neither the army nor the interior forces are under my command, even if we do work together. It would have been preferable to have a single commander (...), but that's not realistic," he added.

He repeated his warning that the exactions being carried out by the Russian forces could lead to "troubles" in the separatist republic.

However, he challenged the figure of 18,000 disappearances given by the Council of Europe's Secretary General, Walter Schwimmer, during the hearings on Chechnya at the Duma last Thursday.

"18,000 people disappeared is not a realistic figure. There are about 400 localities in Chechnya. There would need to be at least 40 people missing in each village, and that's not possible," the Chechen republic's former mufti declared to the AFP.

"The number of disappearances is in the hundreds, not in the thousands. There may well be 18,000 dead, but not 18,000 disappeared." He pointed out that the Kremlin's representative to Chechnya, Vladimir Kalamonov, recently reported 379 confirmed disappearances since the beginning of the Russian intervention in Chechnya on 1 October 1999. Mr Schwimmer has given no clear indication of the source of his figures.

Akhmad Kadyrov acknowledged that the separatists were far from defeated, even if they are "disunited," because they have "enough forces to carry out acts of terrorism."

Seen as a traitor by the separatists who have put a price on his head, Akhmad Kadyrov claims to be "used to living with this threat," having already survived a number of assassination attempts.

## CAUTIOUS RE-START TO MSF OPERATIONS IN NORTH CAUCASUS

**MSF Belgium's women's health programme in Ingushetia was managed entirely by a Chechen team, "remote-controlled" by a team of expatriates based in Moscow, who for several months rarely venture into Chechnya.**

*When I arrived, the rule was: 'You'll be based in Moscow; you're never to go into the field. The Chechen team is trained and in place. It knows more than just the MSF basics.' So I ran things as a project coordinator because that was more or less the management level that had been defined. And that's when questions-marks started appearing. Is it a real project or not? How should I be handling this team in the field which, in fact, is looking more and more like a project team made up of locals rather than expatriates, with a project coordinator, a project logistician, a medical coordinator, when there is already the equivalent team in Moscow made up of expatriates? How can I run these two "field teams," one of which is really in the field and the other really in the capital? This caused a lot of frustration in Moscow every day. All the more, so as I also had a Coordinator to report to. But she had decided never to go into Ingushetia or Chechnya for reasons of personal security (she had a young child at the time). We finally get her to understand that she was not part of the equation in the Caucasus, and could concentrate on the other projects in the Russian Federation. At that time, we had the tuberculosis project in Siberian prisons and the "homeless" project in Moscow. So the Ingushetia project was managed more or less directly from Brussels by both the regular group and a taskforce made up of the doctor and logistician who helped carry out the exploratory mission. So it was partly managed like an emergency project, with regular contacts with head office once or twice a day, although it wasn't really an emergency any more. The mobile clinics were launched in the December and operated throughout 2000, mainly in the Malgobek region in the north-east of Ingushetia. We set up in existing health centres or in the displaced persons camps and went in every day to hold consultations. Then in March or April, quite early on, we got minibuses fitted out as gynaecological examination rooms and concentrated on care for women and the distribution of non-food products.*

Jean-Christophe Dollé, Coordinator of MSF Belgium's North Caucasus project, March to November 2000 (in French) interviewed in 2008.

For several months, the MSF Belgium local teams explored ways of working in Chechnya. It was finally decided that the initial project for opening a programme managed by local teams was not feasible for the time being.



*'Opening in Chechnya – Three Months of Discussions,'* Memo from Bart Ostyn, programme manager MSF Belgium and Jean-Christophe Dolle, MSF Belgium Coordinator in North Caucasus, 4 August 2000 (in English).

### Extract:

Today, during our visit to Nazran and after discussion with E and Kenny Gluck from MSF H, and collecting the points of view of other such as ICRC and MDM, we have come to a number of conclusions that are, if not definitive, at least quite strong in terms of our chances of working in Chechnya today and in the near future. Although nothing is stable in the region, and the situation can change fast, (if it does it won't be for the better), it is very like that these conclusions will apply for the whole autumn and winter to come, so for quite a long time.


[...]We have drawn the following conclusions and strategy guidelines for the months to come:

1. To cancel all explo visits into Chechnya that were scheduled previously for the following reasons:
  - a. team is obviously uneasy with the idea, which we respect
  - b. too big security risk for the team to go cross border and try to make it back in time
  - c. the explo [was] aimed at inventorying the existing health facilities, in order to select some for future action. However, I believe we should aim at working there where the structures are not functioning, no longer exist, or have never existed – while [where] there is a considerable target population (e.g. spontaneous settlements)
  - d. at this stage, any kind of intervention in Chechnya through our teams seemingly requires first the identification of a base as "safe haven" on Chechen territory, which, in its turn requires the conditions mentioned above. Therefore the explo visit is a needless exercise that in no way justifies the risks.
2. to continue to have "occasional" visits by E for coordination purposes, the way she did until now. This is assisting to [means going to] the meetings organised inside Chechen territory, and remain in touch with the security and humanitarian situation. These visits should always be justified to- and approved by- the Project Coordinator in Moscow.
3. As such, an expat could also participate in such occasions, while on visit in Nazran. It makes part of the "appropriation of the context." Logically such visit has to be approved and backed up by Moscow and Brussels).
4. Finally, there is one particular condition in which an intervention in Chechnya could be decided. That is in case a (medical; not war-related) [an] emergency occurs on Chechen territory for which the medical team could give a lifesaving helping hand.

For this, a number of conditions are required:


- a. the security situation allows, and the national team feels safe to do it
- b. the intervention can be expected to be lifesaving
- c. the green light is given from Moscow/Brussels
- d. an expat team comes down to Nazran to give technical back-up from Nazran (avoiding this way a supplementary level in the remote control) and if necessary and justified, with field visits (in Chechnya).

Notwithstanding these conditions, such decision should and can be taken very quickly. It requires an emergency preparedness (that has been started, but needs to be further developed) and a quick decision making at Moscow and Brussels level.


 I have always pushed for visits by expatriates to Ingushetia, and during the first six months of the projects we went seven times, an average of more than once a month. At the beginning, we needed an agreement from the project committee) to decide whether we could go down as far as Nazran, but it's now got to the stage where these visits are more or less accepted by Brussels as long as we can explain their objective and can guarantee people's safety. We don't force anyone to do it. It isn't ideal, but it works. We only ever make progress on these visits. Without them, the programme wouldn't work. We have done an exploratory mission into Chechnya to see what it was like. Of course, we could do like the other sections: ask a team to go in, go as far as the hospital, drop off the medicines and come back to Ingushetia. But I don't agree with this approach. If I did, I would already be using it in Ingushetia. I chose to build a team with doctors who provide care to people on behalf of MSF. We have built medical teams with women because we mainly wanted to treat women. The activities are completely different: caring for people is not the same thing as delivering medicines, arriving at a checkpoint, deciding "I don't like the look of this", and turning back. For the moment (interview in August 2000) we can't work in Chechnya because that would mean the team entering the country in the morning, working until 2pm and then going back to Ingushetia. On the way back, they could be arrested by soldiers, be attacked, or get stuck on the wrong side of a closed border point. I can't ask that of them. The members of our team are always saying they want to go into Chechnya to work. But whenever we actually suggest it, they change their minds. I see now that for them, the only way to work is to be based in Grozny permanently, because they come from Grozny. But I can sense they're not ready to work, and more particularly, travel anywhere outside Grozny. We could also consider the team in Grozny working by "remote control" with the team in Nazran and us "remote controlling" the Nazran team from Moscow. In theory, I've already accepted the idea that, in the event of a "non-military" emergency, such as an epidemic, for example, our team from Ingushetia would go into Chechnya as long as, at the same time, the expatriates can get down to Nazran. Whatever the principles, I think we can make an

exception in cases like that, because it involves life-saving. That's why I want a strong team in Moscow that monitors the programmes by going down to Nazran at least once a month and that is ready to provide the support needed in an emergency.

Dr Bart Ostyns, Field coordinator in Chechnya (1995-1996), Task Force North Caucasus (1999-2001) MSF Belgium (in French) interviewed in August 2000

 As ever at MSF, it's a question of individuals. Bart Ostyns is a doctor and knows Chechnya well, as he worked there in 1995-1996. He also knows the Chechen field manager really well. On 26 April, we held a project committee meeting in Brussels and again suggested providing the same type of assistance in Chechnya as in Ingushetia – essential provisions and mobile clinics, with the focus on women. A team also based in Nazran could do the round trip to Chechnya and back every day. The challenge is trying to identify an Ingush team along the same lines as the current Chechen team in Ingushetia, then replacing this Chechen team and allowing it eventually to set up in Grozny and get a project off the ground. But eventually no decision has been taken. In fact, the Chechen team based in Ingushetia has lost touch with its contacts in Chechnya. Its members have all sorts of good reasons for not wanting to be replaced in Ingushetia. 'The Ingush are not reliable, the project is growing and so we need all our resources here before wanting to start a second project.' After just a few months, the 'remote-control' situation has turned around: those being 'remote controlled' are not the ones we think. I am now sure that the life-span of this kind of project can't be any more than six to nine months maximum. During the first 3-4-5-6 months, there might be some added-value in wanting to work by 'remote control,' because we come with all our MSF experience – it was my second mission, the third for the Coordinator and the eighth or ninth for Bart – but the fact of rapidly getting out of touch with what's really going on, the lack of evaluation, not being able to apply the famous operational space triangle, all start to take their toll. It's the local team that guides us in the right or wrong direction.

Jean-Christophe Dollé, Coordinator of MSF Belgium's North Caucasus project, March to November 2000 (in French), interviewed in 2008.

 There was real solidarity between the sections. Whenever we needed a hand, the teams from the other sections helped us out. The Belgians had handed over the keys of the mission to the Chechen field manager. Her priority was to manage her programme, but whenever we asked her for help she was really great. She gave us advice

on recruitments. I didn't want to head off with just any driver, and she advised me.

Dr Eric Comte, Field Coordinator in the Pankisi Valley (Georgia) December 1999 to April 2000, Field Coordinator in Ingushetia (April 2000 to October 2000), HOM Georgia (2000- 2002) (in French) interviewed in 2009

**The Swiss section opened a mission in Dagestan with the objective of eventually working in the east of Chechnya. For security reasons, it had two heads of mission who took over from each other in the field every three months. MSF Switzerland also opened an office in Moscow.**



**Report** of Dagestan Field Mission 30/06/01 – 08/07/01 – Dr Christine Chevalier, Head of MSF Switzerland's Medical Department, 9<sup>th</sup> July 2001 (in French).

#### Extract:

At the start of 2000, the emergency desk was responsible for MSF Switzerland's mission in Dagestan, which involved providing medical assistance to Chechen war victims and displaced persons in Dagestan (along the Chechen river), while seeking a way to work in Chechnya (main aim). Activities were run from Moscow, Bakou and Marachkala. The approach was based on that used by MSF-B 4 years earlier in a similar context. The handover between the emergency desk and regular desk n°1 took place in May 2000.

*We began to take an interest in Dagestan in 2000 with an initial exploratory mission out of Azerbaijan for establishing contacts. The priority was to find a way to work in Chechnya. The different MSF sections were well-positioned, especially out of Ingushetia where most of the big organisations were based. There were no international organisations at all in Dagestan because of a spate of kidnappings. From the media and contacts we'd made, we thought that the east of Chechnya could be an interesting possibility over the longer term. The aim wasn't to go into Chechnya straight away, but to take it slowly, step-by-step, getting to know the context from out of Dagestan and trying to get ourselves accepted by working on the border with Chechnya. The humanitarian situation was nothing like in Ingushetia. We began with a programme in Khasaviurt on the Chechen border that we ran out of Moscow and Makhachkala, the capital of Dagestan. The programme expanded, and we began working in the health centres along the Chechen border – nothing very spectacular, but providing basic care in areas that were otherwise overlooked. This enabled us to make contact with a number of Chechens. As far as security went, we had*

*quite a strict policy. We never left people there for very long. They were sent back to Moscow rapidly. We had two heads of mission who took over from each other. For us, the Coordinator was essential to the projects' success, so we couldn't, and didn't want to run them by remote control through the coordination team in Moscow. We didn't want to take that risk.*

Dr. Thomas Nierle, MSF Switzerland, Head of Emergency then Director of Operations 2000-2004 (in French) interviewed in 2009

**The French section remained undecided about the level of risk acceptable for working in the Caucasus. In April, following on from an exploratory mission, a programme providing basic support to Nazran hospital in Ingushetia was opened. In the weeks that followed, the team decided on an intervention in the displaced persons camps in Ingushetia and the distribution of medical materials and medicine to the maternity hospitals of Grozny and Sernovodsk in Chechnya. Finally, it launched an exploratory mission to Shatoi where MSF France had mission for some time.**

*Within MSF there was a wall of resistance that was very hard to break down. A lot of people were against the idea of us working in this region; the moment we did anything there were fifty pairs of eyes fixed on us, and it was very difficult working in those conditions. Everyone was afraid we were going to get kidnapped. It was really paralysing. And also the margin for manoeuvre on the programme manager was much tighter than elsewhere, which weighed heavily on the teams, as this pressure was passed on to them. Nobody had much freedom of action.*

Loïck Barriquand, MSF France programme manager, September 2000 to 2005 (in French) interviewed in 2009

*MSF's 'old hands' who had already worked in the Caucasus didn't want to go back there. If I had been in the team then, I think I would have had the same reaction, but at the time I was working there with MDM. So I knew all those people, but as I left just a week before Christophe André was kidnapped, I was protected from all that in a way. One day, I said that we needed someone to go back to the region and that I was willing... It had to be someone who knew the sector a bit, who the programme manager had some confidence in and who wasn't reckless. And then Maurice Nègre and Denis Gouzerh did the exploratory mission in March and came back really motivated to move operations forward. They had found an administrator with*



lots of experience of Eastern Europe, who spoke Russian and had worked for MSF in the past. And they found me. Maurice and Denis' plan was not to go into Chechnya straight away, but just to Nazran central hospital's paediatric unit. They wanted to support it in exchange for treatment at the hospital for between 5 and 10 Chechen refugees in Ingushetia. They had decided to keep a low profile and I think it was a good way of winning people over.

The people at the hospital were glad to see us come to help, but they were not willing to take in many refugee patients. When I went to negotiate with them about taking in five a month, the woman I was dealing with almost had a fit. There was a huge need for primary health care for the refugees. In fact, it went well beyond the need for medical care. The camps had to be organised, the sanitation sorted out, accommodation, etc. It was pointed out to us in meetings that there were thousands of refugees to care for, but we weren't treating many people at the hospital. So after a month or two, the situation became unworkable. All the more so as the security regulations were verging on paranoia. Nazran is only a small town. We were living in a hotel guarded by members of the militia and were under orders to stay there all day and inform them of our appointments. We were only allowed out to the hospital 500 metres away - in an armoured car. We were bored, and could see that it was in the camps that things were really happening. Then we started going into Chechnya, to Sernovodsk, the village just over the border. At first, it was really just to say that we'd been, then the programme manager started saying: 'you've got to go to Grozny; you've really got to.' That was when the head of Grozny maternity hospital came knocking on our door in Ingushetia to ask for our help. So in September, when I left the mission, we had two programmes in Chechnya: Sernovodsk and Grozny maternity hospital. Meanwhile, headquarters had been hinting that it wanted us to go back to Shatoi because we'd been there during the first war. It was not really a formal request. It was more like, 'It would be good, if ...' So, when Steve Cornish arrived, we took advantage of the fact that there were two of us and he made a round trip to Shatoi. So, it happened bit by bit. And once things were up and running, we began making progress.

Dr Eric Comte, Field Coordinator in the Pankisi Valley (Georgia) December 1999 to April 2000, Field Coordinator in Ingushetia (April 2000 to October 2000), HOM Georgia (2000- 2002) (in French) interviewed in 2009

Some didn't want this mission at all; they thought it wasn't worth it. So each time we were in Paris, every two or three months, we always had to convince everyone. It's thanks to Eric Comte, the Field Manager before me that we went back into Chechnya. He went in every time without asking for authorisation, then he explained what he had seen and done to the programme manager, and that's how we moved forward. When I arrived in August, we had a quick handover as he had to leave really quickly. I was told to go to Shatoi. So I re-opened Shatoi. But he was the one

who took the decision to go - and the risk with Paris. I was going backwards and forwards into Chechnya. I went in for periods of between three and ten days, then went back to Ingushetia. There wasn't much communication. I would go with an interpreter and a driver who had already worked with MSF during the first war. The interpreter was a bloke I knew from Pankisi that I trusted. In MSF France, we were taking risks to be on the ground, but we couldn't work the way we wanted to. I wanted us to handle 10,000 refugees before the end of the winter, but I was really hesitant about it, because in Paris they thought it was too big and too risky. But in the field, we saw things differently. We thought the opposite: 'Why be here and take risks for next to nothing?' Our national staff saw what the Dutch were doing, and that was starting to weigh on us. So we pushed hard, and did a really big job.

Steve Cornish, Coordinator MSF France in Georgia (January to April 2000) then in Ingushetia (September 2000 to January 2001), MSF Switzerland officer in the Russian Federation (August 2002 to April 2004), (in French) interviewed in 2008

We were willing to take risks for the right reasons, but also for the wrong ones. The right reasons were that there was real need for assistance. The wrong ones were that we were just coming out of a really bad period operationally-speaking over the last few years. Our emergency intervention capacities had dwindled and we weren't in good operational form - so we wanted to get back on top of things. Looking back, some of the things I did send shivers down my spine. If I had volunteers, I was ready to take risks to get operations moving again. When you're in that kind of mood, it's difficult keeping things in perspective, and sometimes the right motivations get mixed up with the wrong ones. Steve Cornish and I were quite worked up. Denis Gouzerh, who was on the programme manager, was a bit more cautious than us. If Steve didn't go into Chechnya to set up an operation any sooner than he did, I think it's because Denis stopped him. Otherwise he'd have gone in. Denis thought it was too dangerous at that point. And he was right. Steve and me, we were both ready to go in ourselves. We saw the danger as relative, as we weren't putting anyone at risk who didn't know what they were doing. The contract between us was clear: if he needed me as a doctor to go with him, I'd go. We were perhaps a bit too carried away and I'm not sorry Denis was there to calm us down a bit.

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of communication (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000- May 2008) (in French) interviewed in 2009

It was funny working with Steve Cornish, because with MSF France on one hand it was centralized, but on the other hand Paris would change its mind twice a

day about what it wanted. Steve would always complain to me. In Paris they would complain to him in the morning; why wasn't he in Grozny like MSF Holland and then in the afternoon they would call him up and say, 'You can't go there, it's too dangerous! This is impossible.' I had a much more weakened design of strategy.

Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus, (November 1999-January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005) (in English) interviewed in 2009

**At the beginning of June, Kenny Gluck, regional adviser on the Caucasus with MSF Holland took over as Coordinator after his predecessor was fired for taking a camera into the field. Because of his knowledge of the Chechen situation and his networks, Kenny was given a lot of freedom by his section's headquarters. Strategic decisions were discussed and developed in collaboration with the Chechen team, especially on security matters, which often served as a reference for the other sections' teams.**

*I came back to Chechnya. In the meantime, the Coordinator had smuggled cameras into Chechnya for television without telling anybody. He really did it secretly. His argument was, 'Oh, it's not dangerous.' I said: 'It is fine, maybe you are right, but I don't care, don't do it, don't do it behind people's backs because the whole team is very scared, with good reason.' That's why I brought people with experience in the region. Amsterdam was very angry. They said, 'We're giving you all of these people, it's like you have four Heads of Missions in the same project.' I said: 'If you want to work here, I want experienced people. I don't want young people who have never been to the Caucasus, I want people who have spent some time here.' When I was there, the control from headquarters on MSF Holland communication regarding Chechnya was very light. It was designed in the field. I would have a phone call once every two weeks where it updated, and nobody really knew anything about, and that was a real problem. Nobody knew anything about Chechnya in MSF Holland headquarter, and they really just said, it was carte blanche. Our operational strategy was really designed with our medical staff in Chechnya and with Steve (Cornish, MSF France HoM). We had a very good relationship we spoke a lot, lived two minutes away from each other. I spoke also a lot with Jonathan [Littell] from ACF, who knows all the details about Chechnya. So it was very helpful. With the Chechen staff, we worked out a lot of theories about what was possible and what was not possible.*

Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus, (November 1999-January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005) (in English) interviewed in 2009

*Kenny knew Russia and Chechnya much better than anyone else at headquarters and he was a very powerful person. So in practice, he was both very much in control in Chechnya of his team, and very influential with regard to decisions about what to say and when to say. That doesn't mean that we didn't have very strict, rules. It talks about who is there to implement rules... The programme manager manager was very hands-off and very process-oriented. He very much believed in leaving the field to do as much as possible. He was afterwards criticized for not being in control enough, particularly with specifications of who should be involved at each step. The emergency team was involved but it wasn't in daily contact. And some of the people in communications were involved for speaking-out purposes, but also the management team and myself, in particular, as well. Still, it was by far the most managed program we had, with far the most developed rules for security management. So every movement had to be pre-planned, pre-justified and pre-approved by headquarters. And in a similar way any kind of public communication had to be pre-planned, pre-approved by headquarters and that involved a certain number of people and beyond a certain threshold of either danger or potential public attention, it had to involve more and more people.*

Austen Davies, MSF Holland Executive Director, 1999 to 2004 (in English) interviewed in 2009

*Kenny acted like a bit of a father figure to us all. He had a lot of experience and MSF Holland set itself up quite quickly and established an efficient network for distributing kits and medicines. He got a bit on our nerves, as he was always coming by to check we weren't doing anything silly. He'd come for a drink in the evening, but I could tell he was really coming to coach us! He wasn't completely wrong, especially at the beginning! We had just arrived, six months late, and had set ourselves up in our little hospital with a team made up of an administrator/ translator and one 'odd bod,' me, in fact, who did everything and nothing much. I could see why he would think we hadn't proved ourselves, either personally or collectively. It must be said that sending in a team of two into a situation like that was probably not a brilliant idea: too small, too close to events, no discussion, no Coordinator and too much work! Kenny was terrified we were going to get ourselves kidnapped and that all the MSF teams would have to leave the region. One day, in an intersection meeting in Moscow, the Coordinator for MSF Switzerland explains to us that they're going to send in medicine via Dagestan. He says that they've found some blokes they can trust and they're going to give the medicines to them, etc. Kenny raises his arms in despair and says, 'they're completely mad, that the blokes in question could be Chechen fighters who are transporting weapons along with the medicine.' And then bit by bit, I could see Kenny was starting to relax*

Dr Eric Comte, Field Coordinator in the Pankisi Valley (Georgia) December 1999 to April 2000, Field Coordinator in Ingushetia (April 2000 to October 2000), HOM Georgia (2000- 2002) (in French) interviewed in 2009

## A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY BASED ON COLLECTED PERSONAL ACCOUNTS

**In its operational plans, MSF Holland set out the following advocacy and public communication policy with this goal: to provide information on the humanitarian situation in Chechnya. The strategy was based on collecting information from patients on violations of human rights and humanitarian law and it gave priority to developing contacts with Russian journalists and media rather than with the European or North American press. On 18 July, the programme managers from the various sections present in the Northern Caucasus agreed on the principles of a public communication policy along similar lines to MSF Holland.**



'MSF Advocacy Policy,' Draft, 9 May 2000 (in English).

### **Extract;**

#### Advocacy challenges

##### Russia

- To heighten awareness of the humanitarian situation in Chechnya and Ingushetia in the Russian public in order to raise pressure on the Russian government to
- Lessen the abuses of federal forces and violations of humanitarian law in Chechnya and
- Provide increased levels of support to the social services in Chechnya and Ingushetia.

##### - Strategy:

- Regularly disseminate information about the humanitarian situation to Russian journalists including 1) The condition of medical facilities, 2) the levels of support for health facilities in Chechnya and Ingushetia, 3) the levels of war wounded among civilian population.
- Acquaint Russian journalists' writing about the Caucasus with the basics of humanitarian law as it applies to the Chechen conflict (ICRC materials)?
- Facilitate direct contacts between Russian journalists and staff from the Chechen health care system. These contacts could include both MSF local medical staff, who are engaged in assessing and gathering information about the Chechen health care system as well as staff from Chechen hospitals and clinics.

MSF attempts to influence the perspectives of Russian journalists and the Russian media will need, wherever possible, to engage personally with the Russian journalists. Press conferences and statements will be, in many cases, counterproductive because of the suspicion with which the Russian press views international agencies. In working with Russian journalists, the goal should be to acquaint them with the humanitarian situation to the greatest extent possible rather than present our conclusions. Seeing the health consequences of the war will itself produce greater concern about the conduct of the war than would MSF's statements condemning Russian actions there. The personal contacts with journalists will allow MSF to convey current information to the Russian press in the event that the bombardment or blockading of villages resumes.

#### Northern Caucasus

- To strengthen understanding and respect for humanitarian principles and actors in the northern Caucasus.
- MSF will work with the local media in Ingushetia and Chechnya in order to generate a better understanding of the work of MSF and other aid agencies in the region and to better acquaint the public with humanitarian principles. This will be necessary to begin lessening the suspicion which exists in the public towards humanitarian agencies. The impact of this approach will be limited by the general distrust towards the media, which has not declined since the end of Soviet censorship, and the lack of popularity of the local media. Local newspapers have very low readership. The only remaining Chechen newspaper, the Grozny Worker, which has continued functioning thanks to international grants, still have a very small distribution in Ingushetia and almost none inside Chechnya.
- MSF will prepare information brochures describing the agency, its principles and work in the northern Caucasus. This material can be made available through mobile clinics in Ingushetia as well as through health facilities in Chechnya and Ingushetia.
- MSF will seek to make a wide range of personal contacts throughout Chechnya which will be used to disseminate information about MSF and humanitarian activities. These contacts will include authoritative individuals in the community and local administrations. These contacts will be used to lessen suspicions which exist towards humanitarian actors in the northern Caucasus and learn more about potential security threats. These contacts should both with groups that represent a security threat to MSF as well as with those which could assist in controlling these threats. (See Outreach strategy)

#### International

- To ensure international and independent monitoring of the human rights and humanitarian situation in the northern Caucasus.
- To ensure that all international organizations in the conflict (UN, OSCE) are able to operate independently of Russian government influence.
- To raise awareness in the international community regarding the humanitarian situation in the northern Caucasus. Wherever possible, MSF's international advocacy should

be firmly rooted in our work with health facilities and the target populations in Ingushetia and Chechnya. MSF will use medical data collected in cooperation with health facilities in Chechnya in order to maintain international awareness and in order encourage the international community to establish a human rights monitoring presence in Chechnya. This data could focus on the levels of war wounded among the civilian population or the extent of damage to the health facilities in Chechnya. Where necessary, MSF [will] collect individual testimonies of violations of human rights for use in the international press and in order to advocate for expanded international presence in Chechnya.

If there is a resumption of Russian indiscriminate bombing in Chechnya, MSF should well placed to collect information on civilian casualties in the area and bring this to the attention of the media and other international organizations. The Russian federal forces in past have frequently blockaded areas. The lack of free movement has often had severe implications for the health of the trapped populations. The blockading of villages has not been a factor since mid-March 2000, but will likely be a factor if fighting resumes later in the year. MSF should be ready to collect data on the consequence of a lack of freedom of movement in order to advocate for lifting restrictions on movement and ensuring access for humanitarian agencies.

#### Advocacy towards international agencies

In most international organizations, the Russian government is a member while, Chechnya for obvious reasons, is not. Particularly with the UN and UN agencies, where Russia has an inordinate degree of influence because of its seat on the Security Council there is a great danger that the UN or its agencies will not operate in accordance with the principles of neutrality and impartiality. Any international monitoring presence in Chechnya must be able to function independently of Russian political control or interference. [...] MSF will work to ensure that UN agencies engaged in the provision of relief do not work in any way that creates a perception that they are supporting one party to the conflict. In the past, the use of armed Russian military escorts on UN and NGO convoys has demonstrated to the population in Chechnya a lack of neutrality in the conflict which undermines the humanitarian space in which MSF and other relief agencies operates.

#### Security Implications

Any calls for action by the international community or statements with the international press should be reviewed from the point of view of security risks in the region. Several agencies (including MSF-B) suspected that some of the attacks on NGO offices in 1995-1996 corresponded to statements that were made to the international critical of the Russian government and Russian military. There has been great suspicion that there was some Russian involvement in the ICRC killings in December 1996. Because of the possible security implications of any public statements, it will be essential that all sections which are operational in the northern Caucasus be consulted before any public statement or actions are planned. Within each section, it will be

necessary that the teams in the field evaluate the security risk of any public statements before they are released.



**“Summary of the Brussels Intersectional Meeting, 18 July 2000, by Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland North Caucasus HOM to MSF Holland programme manager (in English).**

#### **Extract:**

##### Advocacy/Temoignage

The Belgians are gradually getting over their reluctance to be engaged in advocacy activities concerning Chechnya, which grew out of the sense that their 1996 kidnapping was actually retaliation for public statement. We explained some of the war trauma data along with case histories which we are collecting and about some of the work with the international and domestic press which we have started. There was a consensus that advocacy rooted in our work with health structures in Chechnya is positive and should go forward at this point. There was also consensus on the need to keep all of the sections informed and involved in any public advocacy regarding Chechnya. Belgium may also join us in collecting case histories of war trauma victims through their mobile clinics in Ingushetia. There was a suggestion that MSF put together a longer compilation of case histories from victims of the conflict. We agreed to come back to this possibility after further consideration in the field.




*Once we received the permission to enter Chechnya, we formed teams in which we had a doctor, a medical assistant, and a logistician. So during the monitoring and drug supplies, we had the following work: while they were handing over the drugs to the people in charge, the head doctor of the facility would also see the other medical workers. The medical assistants meanwhile would collect all these cases and sort of fill in the form of these cases directly from people who suffered and also medical staff.*

C, MSF North Caucasus staff (in Russian, translated into English by an MSF interpreter) interviewed in 2008




*If we would hear on the way that someone was taken away, detained, or someone was assassinated, we would go to the village or family and register this case. Kenny and I would work quite extensively with this issue. And this year, we were the first ones to travel there. For each case of this kind we had a special form we would fill in. We were collecting these files on every case of violation of human rights.*


B, MSF North Caucasus staff (in Russian, translated into English by an MSF interpreter) interviewed in 2008

 We were the only ones in Grozny so there were always people coming to us for tracing and so on. That was one of the problems. ICRC was still not going in. [...] I could go in Chechnya, so mothers would come to me inside Chechnya and say, 'My son had this happen,' and often I would say, 'We're trying to run the hospital, we're not researching cases, we're not tracing cases.' I said, 'You can go to ICRC and you can go to Human Rights Watch, they will try to trace your case.' I would sometimes bring them physically. We would drive them and introduce them to ICRC or Human Rights Watch, who would try to follow up individual cases.

Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus, (November 1999-January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005) (in English) interviewed in 2009

 Kenny did not in any way ask us to work on collecting witness statements. Had he asked, we may have done so. But we had neither the methodology nor any experience in collecting witness statements. It was also, perhaps, a little early to do so. We were not yet at the point of seeking to speak out. We were even not speaking much about what we were doing. We were mainly interested in finding ways of working. Our strategy was essentially to keep quiet so we could have access to patients. However, in Grozny opportunities for direct witness accounts were readily available. We were conscious, for example, of the state of the city: it had been razed, there were checkpoints everywhere and deserted streets with occasional old women sweeping the roads and people emerging from cellars... The maternity hospital had been completely destroyed. We were well aware of the horrific incidents that had taken place there. And yet there were still one or two births a day and people spoke about the horrors of their everyday lives. We had a good perspective on this, because these were not combatants but rather women and children – it was everyday life continuing through the birthing process, and thus a good source of information. It was a matter of collecting information on child health, of seeing whether there were malnutrition problems, or childbirth difficulties, etc. So I felt sufficiently at ease to do some witness accounts in this area, and during one programme manager visit the question was raised. In my view, this would have provided a good MSF account, because it would have demonstrated a particular reality and highlighted some personal stories, but that did not happen.

Dr Eric Comte, Field Coordinator in the Pankisi Valley (Georgia) December 1999 to April 2000, Field Coordinator in Ingushetia (April 2000 to October 2000), HOM Georgia (2000- 2002), (in French) interviewed in 2009.

 The most important thing for me at that time was to go and see what was happening and to provide a

witness account, and the key to that was the delivery of medicine. The situation was indescribably horrific, and for me the most important thing was to be there to support people so they knew we had not abandoned them, and then, afterwards, to speak up. We took quite a few risks in seeking to meet them. However, they had no problem speaking. Some witness accounts arrived via our staff, while others came from the medical centre or just spontaneously. When people knew that someone was available to receive witness accounts, they came along, but all this remained, nevertheless, connected to our medical activity. I really thought that it was necessary to do it, and that it was worth taking risks.

Steve Cornish, Coordinator MSF France in Georgia (January to April 2000), in Ingushetia (September 2000 to January 2001), MSF Switzerland Officer in the Russian Federation (August 2002 to April 2004), interviewed in 2008 (in French).

**In mid-August, MSF's Belgian section anonymously leaked to the press, the results of a survey conducted in June by its team working with Chechen refugees in Ingushetia. This survey concluded that 70% of refugees feared returning to Chechnya because of security concerns. At the same time, MSF Belgium established a second team in Moscow, whose sole responsibility was the management of the missions in the Northern Caucasus. Another team concentrated on programs for the homeless in Moscow and for prisoners suffering from tuberculosis in Siberia.**



'Chechen Refugees in Ingushetia, Results of a Survey by Médecins Sans Frontières', MSF Belgium, 15 August 2000 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

##### Introduction

MSF teams conducted a survey in June 2000 among the Chechen refugees in the district of Malgobeck, located in northwestern Ingushetia. This district harbours about one fourth of the total refugee population, which is currently estimated at more than 150,000.

The purpose of the survey was to measure and improve MSF's response to the needs in this district, where teams have been providing medical care and distributing relief items since February 2000. 400 heads of families in the 11 villages of the Malgobeck district were interviewed, representing 10% of the district's total refugee population. Below are some results of the survey. [...]

##### Main needs and MSF Assistance [...]

Measuring their own impact, MSF teams found that in 61% of the refugee families, at least one member had been consulted by an MSF doctor. 95% of the families had received relief items (such as hygiene kits and blankets) distributed by the organization. Contrary to their desire, the

majority of refugees will stay in Ingushetia throughout the winter [...]. As the needs during the cold season will grow more acute, MSF will increase its medical and winterization activities (including the distribution of stoves, blankets, warm underwear, and plastic sheeting). [...]

#### Plans to return to Chechnya

Only 8% of the refugees in Ingushetia returned to live in Chechnya between September '99 and June 2000. However, many were able to make round trips to Chechnya. These movements explain the fluctuating figures on the total size of the refugee population.

An overwhelming majority of the refugees (98%) said that they want to return to Chechnya. But 82% of them added they didn't know when they would go back, while 16% said they planned to return sometime before the winter.

The high level of incertitude about the time of their return reflects their strong feelings about the dangers in Chechnya (these fears are grounded in their occasional visits). Indeed, in their first response, more than 70% of the refugees expressed the view that the biggest problem in Chechnya is the security situation. When they gave a second answer, the problem of housing was most often cited (30%), food and health followed closely behind (25%).



*It was hard to know how to speak of this conflict. We told ourselves that we would attempt to carry out a quasi-sociological survey, one that was as objective as possible, and that we would avoid taking any stance that could be interpreted as political since we knew that Brussels was hyper-sensitive on that score. We wanted to do something with columns and numbers. If we asked people for their main reason for not wanting to return home and 30% replied: 'for fear of being killed,' another 30% replied: 'our home has been destroyed,' and the remaining 30% said: 'because I do not want to be tortured,' then that in itself should be sufficiently instructive. We said to ourselves: 'we have a great team in the field, so let's have it work on the survey.' The sample was quite significant. A questionnaire was given to at least 100 families, if not more, and the replies were entered into a database. The report was distributed at least as widely to the Russian press as to the international media, although without the usual hullabaloo. It was not really a question of speaking out, but more of producing a reference document in the form of fact sheets. On the whole, the French told us that it was not a statement, and ignored it; the Dutch told us that it was very good but that they were unable to associate themselves with it because it related to Ingushetia and that they were not working there; and MSF Belgium headquarters accepted it because it was not a statement that, on the face of it, seemed likely to draw us in to taking any risks. This ambiguous position by MSF Belgium was also due in part to somewhat shaky management at the decision-making level. To simplify: the Executive Director tended to be in favour of speaking out, whereas the Director of Operations tended to be opposed. At programme manager level, it was a time of transition between*

*two managers, so it was a somewhat confused time. As for the Coordinator, her view was that 'we are not going to speak out because that would risk compromising our tuberculosis program in Siberia. In any case, we are already about to make a statement on our program for the homeless in Moscow.' In fact, in August/September there was an exhibition in Moscow on the homeless issue, with posters in the subway. Moreover, at the time we were also about to sign the famous protocol on tuberculosis in prisons, which we had been discussing for years. That, by the way, was also part of the reason why, in Brussels, the Executive Director was pushing to have a specific management team established for the Northern Caucasus, in parallel with the team handling other programs in the Russian Federation. And it is true that if, on top of everything else, all our actions in the Caucasus needed to take into account the operations in Siberia and for the homeless, then there would be no end to it.*

Jean-Christophe Dollé, Coordinator of MSF Belgium's North Caucasus Project, March to November 2000, (in French) interviewed in 2008.

**Interviews and accounts from MSF volunteers, describing the extent of destruction in the country, the disastrous situation of Chechen hospitals, and the commitment of Chechen doctors were regularly published on MSF section websites and in the international press.**



*'Despite the Overwhelming Ruin, Small Acts of Reconstruction,'* by Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland Regional Advisor Caucasus, **MSF International Website**, 11 April 2000 (in English).

#### Extract:

After arriving for the first time in summer 1995, I had then described the city as 'completely devastated.' What is the superlative up from that by an order or two? There is life - best estimates place the number of residents at around 50,000 and growing steadily. Many represent temporary visitors checking on home and contents, although it is not clear how large this portion is. What they find is barely a home left untouched. [...]

I remember finding Lécha not far from here just as the fighting was ending back in August 1996. We are relieved to see him alive and well - unlike some others whose corpses were lying not far away. His home had suffered then, too. But with some work he had made it livable again. Only to be driven from it again a few years later. And when will be the next time?

Twenty percent of homes have been reduced to rubble, we are told by an informed source. Only another twenty percent remain habitable and the remainder will need serious repairs to become homes again. And that does not mention the lack of gas, water and electricity. We saw numerous people dragging and carting canisters of water

which were collected where it [water] could be found. Just like in nearby Lermontova, where over 60 people now have come down with typhoid, which has infected the water source for the village. [...]

We come to polyclinic with another garage-door sized hole. Two women (in normal times they are nurses at the clinic) are busy dragging twisted metal sheeting and debris to the side. The head doctor is there to meet us. She is setting out to turn this window-less shell without instruments and drugs back into a clinic. And yes, the help is needed.

Also at another city hospital the medical staff is busy cleaning and repairing. Here too all the windows are missing. But gracious Fatima, a midwife by training, is busy sweeping the floor of their little office, oblivious of the line of bullet holes along one wall. Outside a trailer-mounted stove is preparing food for the nearby inhabitants. There would be water too, except that the water tank installed when I was here after the previous war - or was it the war before that? - has numerous bullet holes in it. 'Don't worry,' we were told. 'Tyre patches will fix the rubber lining.'

At the national Children's Hospital - the four storey building is still standing and only missing one corner - there is work going on too. Sultan the head doctor - he was Deputy Minister of Health when I first met him in 1997 - is busy with a welding team he managed to beg from the Russian Emergencies ministry. [...] Khadija is busy applying mortar where bullet holes have left ugly holes. She tells me of how Sultan brought them together and how he has been energetically trying to revive this hospital, 'with his own hands' she laughs.

The medical supplies we bring are eagerly unpacked. They are keen to receive patients again as soon as possible. '8,000 children are in the city,' Sultan asserts confidently. 'And they need looking after,' he insists.

We ask about water. 'We bring in jerry cans from down by the lake.' And? 'We disinfect it of course,' he assures us. Sure enough, they still have the remnants of sterilizing tablets judiciously cached when last donated by an aid organization a few years ago.

And is it safe?

'Of course. There is a Russian military post only a hundred meters away. They provide security. We can hear them shooting every night,' he laughs.

But when we ask him about what the future holds in store, his smile dies.

'People are coming back. Maybe 5,000 to 10,000 a week, but the war is far from over yet. Still, there are people, and they need help,' he says - if now somewhat subdued.



*'Doctoring a Broken Society; Chechen Medical Workers Ignore Sparse Supplies, Ruined Facilities to Tend to the Victims of War'* by Sharon Lafranière, **Washington Post Foreign Service**, 21 July 2000 (in English).

#### Extract:

To say Chechnya's hospitals are ill-equipped is like saying

its roads are bumpy. Of 28 hospitals and 28 outpatient clinics visited recently by the aid group Doctors without Borders; three-fourths had no medicine or other supplies. Most had neither running water, a refrigerator to store drugs, nor a working X-ray machine. Forty-seven percent had no electricity on the day of the survey. What they do have is staff.

"The hospitals are full of doctors, full of nurses, after four or five years of no salary," said Kenny Gluck, who travels throughout Chechnya assessing health care needs for the group. The staffing levels actually exceed the minimum set by the World Health Organization, the group says.

"There is just this enormous level of commitment," said Gluck. "There are not many places in the world where you find that level of commitment. It's one of the saving graces of this society."

Gluck knows many medical workers who have gone to extraordinary lengths, such as one doctor who searched the ruins of a hospital in the devastated town of Shatoi to recover anaesthesia, and another who operated for three months in a candle-lit basement.

He finds Bakayev the most impressive of them all. "People told us, 'If it wasn't for this man, our village wouldn't be here,'" Gluck said: "He managed to keep the hospital going in the face of all this chaos and social breakdown, and that was essential not just for health care, but for the society. People said the hospital in a way became the backbone of the village."

[...] Bakayev well remembers the patients he could not save. In April, a young man not yet 30 tried to defuse a mine in the nearby village of Alhazurovo. Bakayev amputated his leg and hopped in a car to take him to the neighbouring region of Ingushetia. The man died while relatives tried to negotiate an emergency pass through military checkpoints. A 10-year-old girl, whose stomach was torn to shreds from shrapnel, went through surgery but then died from blood loss. Bakayev treats anybody--a policy that caused a serious breach with the head doctor during the first war. He doesn't feel obliged to report the rare occasions when a wounded Chechen fighter asks for treatment. When Russian soldiers came to search his hospital in January, Bakayev said, he didn't mention that five Chechen fighters had just fled.



*'The Continuing Cost of War,'* by Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland North Caucasus Regional Coordinator, **MSF International Website**, 1 August 2000 (in English).

#### Extract:

Many thousands of displaced persons have started to return to Chechnya hoping to rebuild their lives. For those who have returned to Chechnya's villages, Russian artillery and aircraft continue to bring death and destruction. The huge numbers of mines and unexploded ordnance which dot the Chechen landscape are continuing to kill and maim the population. [...]

The enormous needs inside Chechnya and in neighboring Ingushetia were met first and foremost by the good will and

deeds of neighbors, friends and especially by a Chechen health system which refused to die. [...]

The doctors, who have already gone through two wars, don't understand why so many resources are available for the war, while so few for the hospitals. In May some of the medical staff in Chechnya received one or two months' salary. For many it was the first, long-awaited payment they had seen in five years, but it came to only US \$25. In some hospitals, even this pittance hasn't yet arrived. [...]

#### An effort to respond

MSF has been trying to find ways of supporting the clinics and hospitals that have managed to keep functioning. Since February, the organization has been providing medicines and medical equipment to health structures throughout Chechnya. Unable to import because of Russian customs restrictions, MSF logisticians [...] have become experts in the complicated task of procuring medicines to Russia. Every month MSF has been able to supply basic drugs for 120,000 people in Chechnya and Ingushetia. Where clinics were destroyed in the bombing, MSF teams also carry out light repairs – giving each clinic at least several furnished and enclosed rooms where patients can be examined.

Supplying the hospitals and clinics in Chechnya requires the MSF staff to negotiate their way through the dozens of Russian military checkpoints that dot the roads in the war-torn republic. There are 19 Russian military checkpoints between the Stary Atagi hospital and the MSF office in Ingushetia. The needed supplies make it through to the hospital only thanks to the charm, bravado and persistence of the staff here. [...]

#### A needed presence

All of the MSF national staff are themselves refugees. Some [...] lost their homes in the first war and moved to neighbouring Ingushetia. Others, [...] saw their neighbourhoods reduced to rubble and ashes in the bombing of Grozny in 1999 and 2000. Still others [...] rebuilt their homes in the months of hope that followed the end of the war in 1996 only to see them destroyed again in the current fighting.

The medical personnel in Chechnya's hospitals and the MSF national staff watched with desperation as humanitarian agencies fled the region in 1996 and 1997, in the face of violent attacks on aid workers. They waited in frustration for months in the current war for aid to finally arrive. A doctor in the Starye Atagi hospital was extremely thankful when the first MSF team visited the hospital. His gratitude, he said, was more for the fact that we had come than for the boxes of medicines. For years people in Chechnya have felt rejected by the world – left to suffer in isolation.

"The fact that you have come back reminds us that we are part of the same world," he said. "That is more important for us than anything else that you could bring."

In spite of the insecurity and the risks, Chechnya is one of the places where MSF should be present. Hopefully, we can learn from the dedication of the hospital staff here and their ability to continue working in the most difficult situations.

**In early October, with a view to avoiding politicising its image, MSF Holland declined a request by the British actress and activist Vanessa Redgrave to visit its missions in the Caucasus. Several months beforehand, the actress had accompanied the presentation of her film on Chechen children in the war, in the House of Commons, by a speech consisting of Extracts from the account by MSF Holland's Coordinator.**



*'House of Commons,' Email* from Frances Stevenson, MSF UK to Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland North Caucasus HOM, 11 July 2000 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

Vanessa Redgrave read out Extracts from your paper to illustrate the humanitarian situation.

Otherwise the meeting was more human rights oriented, co-hosted as it was by Amnesty, who presented their report 'For the Motherland' - the one published last December, which you've seen no doubt.

Vanessa Redgrave's little film was amateur and emotional, pictures of war wounded children, interview with a paediatrician in Chechnya. The discussion led by Vanessa and her husband was what you'd expect from well-meaning Actors (with a capital A!) who've found a cause... rather naive (in my opinion) ranting/acting against the govt, the int'l community etc.

They had a Chechen politician there who gave a calm considered but, of course political speech about the noble Chechen cause, thanking Amnesty for their support for the Chechen cause...! I was surprised.

Amnesty didn't say something about this apparent co-option. There were a number of MPs there, plus press and various others. Much indignation [about] that this can be allowed to happen. It all helps keep the issue alive. No follow up so far - will let you know if there is (although I don't expect it).



*'Re: Vanessa Redgrave,' Email* from Ruud Huurman, MSF Holland Director of Communications, 4 October 2000 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

1. I spoke with Marcel [Van Soest, MSF Holland Director of Operations] this morning. He said there was no final agreement or promise to Vanessa, but he was interested in working with her somehow, as he felt there was a positive experience earlier this year, when she also asked [for] MSF's involvement, but we decided to just give her information. Marcel felt it was important to ask Kenny first whether or not a visit would at all be feasible. So it is still possible to discuss the pros and cons [...]

3. In a teleconference with Kenny this PM, Kenny made it clear that a visit to Chechnya is out of the question (security, period). Would she come to Ingushetia, he would be willing to brief her and maybe advise her re: contacts, drivers etc, but NOT providing her with MSF staff or facilities.



Kenny is not in favour of inviting her, having her as a guest of MSF.

4. Let me reiterate here Martyn Broughton's [MSF UK Director of Communication] warning: Vanessa may be committed and understanding towards MSF's interest, previous experience indicates that she may "use" people/organisations in the heat of her battle.

[...] So if we were to work with her there should be strict separation.

We can provide her with information, like we would do with journo's, but we can not have her (and in fact will not allow her) to speak in any way on behalf of MSF or include our name in her campaign. Of course we don't want to be rude to her -- we do appreciate her efforts to stimulate the discussion about the Chechnya-crisis. We can not facilitate her, but can help her with some advises re. security etc.

[...] Last remark: I have been out of the loop for a while, but am curious if we feel that MSF should more actively look for coverage on the Chechnya crisis (although can be very difficult). Do we have info, points of views that deserve attention? Do we have a position that we would like to more actively advocate?

## CONTROVERSY ABOUT A MEDIA CAMPAIGN PROPOSAL

**In September, in preparation for the visit to Paris by Vladimir Putin for the EU-Russia summit on 30-31 October, MSF's French section began considering a campaign aimed at refocusing media attention on the situation in Chechnya. Opinions were divided on the need for any public statement to be underpinned by a collection of epidemiological data.**



*'On the Occasion of Vladimir Putin's Visit to Paris', Médecins Sans Frontières Speaks Out about Chechnya – a Brief Document Written Following the Meeting of Thursday 21 [September] 2000, 'Memo from the Deputy Director of Communication, MSF France, 25 September 2000 (in French).*

During an impromptu meeting on Tuesday 10 October (involving the desk, communication and Guillaume), following up earlier meetings and email exchanges (see the preceding paper), decisions were taken that will be the subject of our meeting tomorrow. As a reminder, Putin's visit begins on 30 October, so we have two weeks to set up the operation. **THE FINAL DECISION MUST THEREFORE, WITHOUT FAIL, BE TAKEN AT THE CONCLUSION OF THIS 12 OCTOBER MEETING.**

What do we think about the current situation in Chechnya?

- Russia's official line is that it is not a war but rather an anti-terrorist operation, and that the situation is returning to normal. Describing it as an anti-terrorist operation enables the media's work to be hindered (security reasons can be invoked) and also impedes the work of humanitarian organisations ("you go there at your own risk"), while a policy of terror is pursued against the Chechen people, far away from prying eyes;

- The population's needs are enormous - medical equipment, health facilities, treatment of war wounded and mine victims, 200,000 refugees who are about to spend a second winter on the border, etc;

- Terror and social control are more than ever the norm in Chechnya: hospitals are occupied by the Russian army, there are checkpoints limiting access to treatment facilities, refugees are unable to return (and in any case they are not given any assistance to rebuild), there are arrests and torture (see the reports by human rights organisations), channels for treating war wounded with foreign countries are controlled, etc;

- People are unable to return to their homes, which have been razed; they are left in a state of total dependency on humanitarian assistance;

- The war is continuing behind closed doors, or almost so; Chechens are caught in a blind alley and a hopeless stand-off with the Russian forces. The battle is very one-sided.

What is the humanitarian, media and political context in which this meeting is taking place?

- We don't have any real access problems: humanitarian equipment and personnel are entering the country. The "weakness" of our action is a result of the very precarious security situation and our fear of kidnappings and violence. Thus any idea of sending trucks to the border loaded with equipment and in full view of the cameras, does not hold water;

- Journalists have very limited access to the territory: cameras are not allowed and male journalists run too much of a risk, so female reporters are the only ones continuing to work – as discreetly as possible;

- The objective of the EU-Russia summit (which is the reason for Putin's visit to France) is to review the amount of EU aid allocated to Russia. This aid, of course, is not conditional on respect for human rights or the Geneva conventions.

On this basis, and taking into account the position we have always adopted on Chechnya (during the first and second wars), it is our view (expressed in the meeting of 10 October), that MSF should take advantage of this visit by Putin to raise public and media awareness about this very violent and secretive war and its consequences for civilians (including access to the wounded, the mines question, and the refugees waiting for winter).

In short, MSF should play the provocation - perhaps even the subversion - card during the Putin visit. The main aim of doing so would be to expose the situation, and three subsidiary objectives would be to break down the wall of silence, protest against the hypocrisy of such a meeting, and force Chechnya to be included on the Summit agenda.

How should this be done?

- By acknowledging the low level of our operations, explaining volunteers' security concerns;
- Since we do not have the resources to gather data (such as witness accounts or disease data) in the field to underpin a report on the humanitarian situation, we are accepting the need for a "media stunt" to express MSF's position;
- And then by actually organising a media stunt in France, such as a poster campaign or another sort of event - the actual format needs to be decided.

The Communication Department has thus been 'mandated' to suggest ideas for campaigns or events, which need to be decided on tomorrow. We have ideas...the decision is in your hands!



**Exchange of Emails** between Jean-Hervé Bradol, President, Anne Fouchard, Deputy Director of communication, Virginie Raison, Member of the Board of Directors, MSF France, and Françoise Saulnier, MSF Legal Advisor, 7,10, 11, and 12 October 2000 (in French).

#### Extract:

Greetings all,

[...] Our analysis needs to be solidly backed up if we want to take Putin on. It also seems to me that there would be considerable advantage in discussing our statement on Chechnya with teams in the field. Steve, the Head of Mission in the area, has a very clear idea of the various issues that could be covered in our public statements. It seems to me that he had already undertaken to send information to headquarters on the various issues he had identified. As to the possibility of a pro-active approach using a collection of information, he could also tell us what is already in the works, or what is feasible, and (Chechnya and/or Ingushetia) the operational constraints and security considerations. For example, would there still be time to put something together that associates a quantitative collection of information (Epicentre to provide) with a qualitative report (based on interviews with displaced persons and put together in the field or during a rapid visit by someone from headquarters)?

Yours

[MSF deputy legal advisor]

Greetings,

I have two comments to make. In the first place, I am sick of hearing about MSF's low level of operational effectiveness in the Caucasus. Do the people who actually run these programs (namely the field team, the HOM, the Program Manager and the Deputy Program Manager) share this view? If we believe in what we are doing in the field (irrespective of the operation's size and limitations) and if we have something to say that is not just the usual stereotyped information, then we should not be reluctant to say it. This argument has thrown the debate off track right from the start, by discouraging people from speaking out or, on the contrary, by provoking a sense of guilt that seems to

justify making more 'radical' pronouncements. For my part, it made sense to get surgical equipment into Chechnya last year, to treat the refugees in Georgia (even though there were not tens of thousands of them), etc. Having said that, we do have our limitations and 'the Christophe kidnapping' is one limitation that personally I am quite prepared to live with. Nevertheless, as soon as we found the resources to do so we went back into Nazran (where Christophe had been kidnapped). The mission was difficult to open, but this is hardly surprising. In every discussion, suspicion seems to be cast on what we are doing in the field, and I find that rather demagogic. The Caucasus is not a fairground where setting up relief operations is easy.

The text dealing with children (Adam) is moving, but does not in itself constitute a message beyond saying that 'children suffer during wars.' Re "Operation Get On Putin's Wick : ' to say the least, the principle does not appeal to me. Quite simply, we are not dispensers of justice. Just like during the meeting I attended, the radical nature of the comments seems to me to mask a lack of assurance on the substantive issues. I believe that there could well be a message based on the theme that 'the war continues to hit civilians hard (attacks continue, there are arbitrary arrests, daily life is one of great privation, etc), and there is a lack of assistance as winter approaches (we could refer to private dwellings, the state of the hospitals, etc).' It is not at all essential to produce a report, assuming we have a team able to associate with this message and to substantiate it with accounts drawn from daily experience. This seems to me quite justifiable, because even though the condition of the population and the availability of assistance are poor, this is no longer getting any public attention.

Jean-Hervé Bradol  
Good morning, good evening

In the first place, thanks for the various contributions below. At the risk of being 'epidemiologically' iconoclastic and 'not in the spirit of MSF,' I cannot help asking the following questions:

On the one hand, like Jean-Hervé and others I agree completely with the idea that some witness statements, backed up by an Epicentre survey, could at some point usefully support what we have to say, and provide a methodological basis without which we risk being caught out with extrapolations and manipulation. One only has to call to mind the Kosovo precedent. Nevertheless, I am somewhat wary of precisely this requirement for methodology, given the ideas and principles we stand for. If you will allow me to be very provocative, would we require a nutritional survey to speak about North Korea? Did we need live television news coverage and retrospective mortality surveys to be convinced about what was happening in Srebrenica? And, since 'I was there,' I still wonder whether we needed an Epicentre survey in Kosovo to rally common sense (even the NATO line) on the front page of *Libération* (but this is another discussion).

Who are we seeking to address? For what purpose? On what basis?

- It seems to me that the answer to the last question is straightforward, since we have intent, we have action, and we also have some limitations. Do we need anything more to be able to speak out 'legitimately?'

- For what purpose? Probably not in hopes of making Putin change his mind, but rather of reminding those concerned of their responsibilities. On this basis, the Europe-Russia summit seems to me to be more relevant than the France-Russia summit.

- Who are we seeking to address? No doubt the Russians as well. Where are we up to on this score?

We have the right to make errors, but we have less right to fail to try, using the excuse that we do not have an epidemiological survey on the suffering and fate of Chechen children, which would provide us with the certainty of believing what we have believed for a long time. If what has been reported of A'dam's comments is true, and bolstered by our experience on the ground, then this seems to me amply sufficient to undertake 'a campaign' when the opportunity to do so arises. The aim in this case relates not to our scientific objectivity, which nevertheless remains a fallback position, nor to MSF's credibility vis-à-vis its donors and other providers, but rather to what our independence can bring to the Chechen people. I say this without wishing to seem utopian. And for this reason I hope that we will not restrain our imagination.

Virginie Raison

[...] I should just like to ask a number of questions, in no particular order:

- Operation 'Annoy the Hell out of Putin,' I do not believe that this is or should be our target. Rather, we are seeking to annoy the hell out of the EU summit organisers, on whom we have some real means of exerting democratic pressure. We are talking about the governmental and diplomatic heads of the EU member countries. We may want to annoy Putin, but what do we want to say to our heads of government?

- France has already taken a somewhat different stance on Chechnya from other European countries. It seems to me important that MSF not be seen as a French organisation on this matter. We must seek to raise public and diplomatic awareness in Britain, Germany, etc. In short, those who count in Europe. So let's be very careful not to get on to a narrowly French bandwagon. We have offices in these countries, and it would be a sign of strength to involve them. Where is the field in all of this?

- Following our last meeting on this subject, several people from the field undertook to send us information. What more do we know now about people's needs, about what MSF is doing or not doing for them, about what we know, about what refugee and health issues the field considers we should speak out on, etc? What about Emercom?<sup>14</sup>

- What will be the impact of any statement on our programs and presence on the ground - not only on MSF F, but on other sections as well?

- Who is talking about all of this in the field?

- Personally I have virtually no field information about MSF F, B, and H - and yet this information exists. Is it of such poor quality, or unusable?? Who is talking about all of this with the field?

I would not want us to be stuck in a position where a lack of

information led us simply to rehash institutionalised public communication. I would not wish to take the decision today to be seen as a test of loyalty and commitment to the MSF cause, or for our vote this afternoon to be a sort of Stalinist referendum: i.e., for or against Putin.

Françoise Saulnier

**A draft campaign to place posters in the Paris underground was rejected by the contractors responsible for allocating space, who considered it too political. MSF France continued to press to have the events in Chechnya described as a 'war,' thereby hoping to counteract the 'anti-terrorist operation' description promoted by Russia. MSF Holland disagreed with this proposal. On the other hand, everyone agreed on the need to document the situation more thoroughly and to the potential associated risks of increased problems in program delivery. However, the risk of being expelled by the Russian authorities seemed low.**



**Message** from Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland North Caucasus Regional Coordinator to MSF France and MSF Holland Chechnya Group, 14 October 2000 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

##### The Message

It is essential that we better define what we are trying to achieve with this media campaign so that we can bring more clarity to our position. There is a value in putting Chechnya back on the media map in Europe and in making it more likely that European leaders press Putin on Chechnya. We should also have a better sense of what changes in Russian behavior we would like to see. The statements proposed so far have focused very much on Russia's characterization of the war as an 'anti-terrorist operation.' These are not only arguing that the war is continuing, but to dispute Russia's public portrayal of the conflict. MSF-F has demanded that Russia and the international community recognize that this is a war. I think the approach is flawed for the following reasons.

1) The first problem is that Russia has never disputed the fact that the conflict is 'an internal armed [conflict]' as defined in the Geneva Conventions. The agreement with ICRC on detention center visits in Chechnya is an implicit confirmation of this position. We are demanding something that has already been recognized in practice. Even if the government claimed that it is not an internal armed conflict this would in no way alter the obligations of the government to respect humanitarian law. In the Russian media there is frequent reference by Russian officials to the military activities as part of the anti-terrorist operation.

2) There is little value in disputing Russia's propaganda

14. Ministry of Russian Federation for Affairs of Civil Defence, Emergencies and Disaster Relief

terms. All countries engaged in war come up with innocent-sounding euphemisms to describe their activities. Demanding that Russia change its favored euphemism, we deflect attention from the conduct of the war and its human consequences which should be our focus. In concentrating on the characterization of the war we find ourselves inevitably trapped in arguments on the legitimacy of the war. If it is not an anti-terrorist action, are we saying that the bombings in Moscow were not terrorist acts, or that they were not planted by the Chechen military or government? [...] We should leave these arguments for the Russian newspapers where they are debated at length by the country's hyperactive political analysts and wits.

3) By focusing on the continuing trauma, we focus attention on the war's conduct and its human consequences. Here we actually can speak about something we know about. Highlighting the continuing levels of war trauma is based on our work with hospitals but still makes the point that the conflict is continuing and the population there is in need of assistance. The statements based on the actual suffering of the population can be both strong and political, but they keep us out of useless legalistic wrangling about the characterization of the war.

Instead, our message should be firmly rooted in our work with medical facilities in Chechnya. [...]

1) [...] We should be urging the military to take greater measure to ensure that civilian areas are not targeted. We have several interviews with victims of recent bombings in civilian areas. The largest numbers of war trauma coming into Chechnya's hospitals are mine-related. In most cases we cannot say with any certainty whether the mines were placed by separatist forces or by the Russian army. The only exception is cases in which mines were laid around Russian outposts or checkpoints and were not removed after these outposts were removed. We do have some testimonies of injuries from mines around former Russian positions. We should be very careful in not attributing blame where we do not know the source of the mine. We can also cite here the abuse of people in detention. This should be based on medical reports from the hospitals where these torture victims have been treated.

2) The lack of support for health facilities in Chechnya. In most of the facilities which we are supporting there have been almost no Russian government input since the beginning of the war. We should be calling on Russia to provide the necessary support and services in areas under its control at the same level which is provided for populations elsewhere in Russia. The continuing military occupation of hospitals in Shatoi and elsewhere should be raised here as well.

3) Lack of access to health facilities because of restrictions on movement in Chechnya and the inability of Chechen families to earn a living as a result of these restrictions. We have the story from Gikalo where a mine victim was not allowed through a checkpoint until the next day.

4) In the explanation of our position, we should take care not to speak on the origins of the war. We don't have a position on this. We will undoubtedly be asked questions

about terrorism. Any misstatements in the areas will likely be seized upon by the Russian media and will worsen the program. [...]

Conclusions

We will support the conduct of a media campaign with [...]

2) Message clarified so as to move [be more] rooted in our work [activities] and more related to the changes we would like to see in Russian behavior.



'Public Communication on Chechnya, 'Email from Bénédicte Jeannerod, Communication Officer, MSF France, to MSF Northern Caucasus managers, 18 October 2000 (in English).

#### Extract:

We approached the groups that handle poster publicity in Paris. Most of them rejected the campaign on the grounds that it was too political. We had only one proposal, using a small network and that would not have produced the desired impact. So on Monday afternoon we gave up the idea of a poster campaign. In tandem with this, our internal discussions (i.e. Paris, Moscow and the field) showed that Médecins Sans Frontières' position on the situation in Chechnya is very unclear. Comments by various players are totally contradictory: e.g. the war is over/it is ongoing; there are bombardments/they have ceased; humanitarian organisations are being blocked/there are no access problems; refugees are not returning home because their houses have been destroyed/they are not returning because of the terror caused by Russian troops – etc. As for the information we have on the situation of the Chechen people today, it is either very meagre or it is not being distributed within the network.

Discussions have also shown that there are significant differences over the type of public communication MSF should be striving for: should it be purely humanitarian (along the lines that 'suffering continues, Chechens need humanitarian assistance') or should it be more political ('Chechens are caught in an inextricable deadlock with Russian troops; they certainly need humanitarian assistance but beyond that they need to cease being the main targets in this war'? In conclusion: If we want to go on the offensive when we speak out on 30 October (through a press campaign, press conference, interviews, opinion pieces, etc) we need not only to obtain more information (see the attached piece on refugees, displaced persons, access to treatment, etc) but also to produce a clearer analysis of what is happening to civilians in Chechnya today. This is really a precondition before we start to make statements. Jean-Hervé Bradol, the President, who agrees in principle with our speaking out, has reiterated that he would not be prepared to do so himself if the statement were not strongly argued and documented. Thus we are counting on operational staff and on Moscow to send in information. For our part, we continue to work and to follow the case very closely, but we will not be able to move forward unless we have this material.



'Paris Advocacy Event,' **Email** from Kenny Gluck MSF Holland North Caucasus Regional Coordinator to MSF Holland HAD Officer, Communication Officer, Executive Director and programme manager, 22 October 2000 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

##### Security

In the past there have been concerns, particularly in MSF-B, that public advocacy would lead to security problems. This is still a risk. It is unlikely that the Russian government would do anything directly against MSF offices of staff. There is evidence to suggest that there is some part of the Russian security services which has been involved in both kidnappings and other security incidents against international representatives in the northern Caucasus in the past. A high profile media campaign does increase the likelihood that these groups, if they become active again, would take actions against MSF in retaliation for our statement or in order to remove our discomfiting presence in the region.

Unfortunately, the level of additional risk as the result of a media campaign is impossible to assess. The response, if there is one, is not likely to be immediate. The fact that MDM has not suffered any consequences for its advocacy in the spring (which did not have any resonance in the Russian press), should not lead us to believe that there is not risks associated with public campaigns. The campaigns do make it more likely that there will be elements in the security services willing to take action against international relief agencies. Our media campaigns make it more likely that we will be the target in the event that these groups again begin the intimidation activities. There is a much greater risk that a media campaign would lead to difficulties for our programs in the field. There is very little risk that the Russian government would expel MSF or directly interfere with our access to Chechnya as a result of the media campaign. It is more likely that the media campaign would lead to a series of minor actions undermining our ability to work. People in Chechnya, including MSF's local staff, have continually supported our advocacy activities. The principle danger is that the media campaign will interfere with our programs or make it more difficult to work. This is a risk we should take. [...]

##### Working with Paris

There is a great deal of suspicion with regard to working with Paris on any media campaign. We would very much like for this media event to be an example of positive collaboration. In the field there is a commitment to work together and to put out a message which all the sections can support. We should do everything we can to ensure that this collaboration doesn't collapse under the weight of our past experiences and mutual suspicion.



*Programme managers thought that in order to open doors we needed to make a big splash during Putin's visit to Paris. We had planned a poster campaign, with a photo of an old lady sitting on a pile of ruins, with a carpet and a picture of her husband. The poster had been designed internally and we had negotiated to have it displayed gratis in the underground. However, political posters are prohibited in the Paris underground, so we were unable to do it. However, this project had already given rise to two or three operations meetings to which I had been invited, because there queries about whether the posters were too aggressive.*

Anne Fouchar, MSF France Deputy Communications Director, July 2000 – July 2004, interviewed in 2008, (in French).

**In the end the communication campaign took the form of interviews and articles in the French and international press by the coordinators from MSF Holland and MSF France, and by programme managers. They explained that the situation in Chechnya had not at all been 'normalised,' and that the war was continuing. The Moscow coordinator of MSF Belgium's Caucasus missions helped prepare the campaign.**



'Difficulties Encountered by Foreign NGOs Seeking to Operate in Chechnya,' **AFP** (France), Paris, 27 October 2000 (in French).

"Given the situation, it is rare to see so few NGOs present," notes MSF France. Security problems and difficult work conditions mean that very few foreign humanitarian organisations are operating in Chechnya. [...] According to MSF France's Chechnya Program Manager Denis Gouzerh, "soldiers and Chechens form a maze of different groups. One may well establish contacts in one area, but 10 kilometres down the road you need to start all over again. It is an enormous job, involving trying to progress a kilometre at a time." MSF France, which was traumatised by the kidnapping of one of its volunteers in 1997 and the assassination a year earlier of six ICRC delegates, resumed its presence only in July. And its commitment remains a prudent one, with two doctors, one logistician and a coordinator, who are responsible for supplying hospitals in Shatoi, Grozny, and Sernovodsk. They are based in Nazran and make "regular round trips." [...] MSF does not hesitate to speak in terms of psychological obstacles: "we have the necessary authorisations, but we also need to come to terms with our own anguish," says Denis Gouzerh. "We have lost our former contacts and it is difficult for us to understand the situation and this military presence. There may also be a vague desire to let fear take hold – it is difficult to say," he adds. "In any case, in the current circumstances we are not prepared to send in 50 people." [...]

Thousands of patients need further surgeries or to be fitted with prostheses, and there is a “constant flow” of war victims and civilian mine casualties - to which should be added mental health problems, respiratory infections, and untreated and potentially very contagious tuberculosis. MSF admits that, considering the destruction that has taken place, the foreign humanitarian presence is “insignificant,” underlining however that “this is first and foremost a political problem.” “The real human catastrophe is the way civilians are being treated – people are being wounded, subjected to harsh treatment in prison, beaten, etc,” says Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland’s Head of Mission, speaking by telephone from Nazran (Ingushetia). “Doctors are continuing now, as they did six months ago, to work in the dark and in the cold,” he notes. “The difference is that today they say they no longer have any hope.”



*“War Behind Closed Doors in Chechnya,”* Kenny Gluck, Coordinator, Northern Caucasus, MSF Holland, ***Ouest-France***, 29 October 2000 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

Next week, President Putin will visit France for twin EU-Russia and France-Russia summits. It is essential that these major diplomatic meetings not fail to address the unbearable situation of the Chechen people, who are being held prisoners in an undeclared war. When Russian jetfighters flew overhead, 16 year-old Adam Gaitarov gave no thought to hiding. He was at the entrance to Duba-Yurt with his father and grandfather, cleaning the cemetery. “The planes flew so low that we could see the pilots very clearly,” says Adam’s uncle, who at the time was working in a nearby field. “I am sure they were well aware we were not combatants but rather simple village folk going about our work. The aircraft made several passes over the village before opening fire directly on the cemetery,” he says. “I ran over, and saw immediately that Adam’s father and grandfather were already dead. Adam was covered in blood, but was still alive. Several graves had been blown to pieces.” Today, Adam is one of the patients in a hospital in the south of Grozny, and doctors do not know if he will ever walk again.

During last winter and spring the bombing of Grozny and of Chechen villages was widely covered in evening television news broadcasts. But despite the media spotlight, Chechens endured the war and its consequences with no - or very little - assistance from the outside world. A year later, the war continues to wreak havoc on the Chechen people. Russian artillery and aviation are still active. Each day the mines that litter the soil of this tiny Republic and the unexploded munitions mutilate and kill civilians, in the majority women and children. Still today, war wounds account for most of the surgery performed in Chechnya. Subsistence agriculture was, for many Chechens, the only way of feeding their families. However, that has become a high-risk activity. Ilias, aged 16, who comes from a village near Grozny, was wounded in an explosion which killed five of his close relatives. The

vehicle taking the whole family out to the fields ran over a mine and was blown up. His legs and hips shattered by the explosion, Ilias was taken to hospital in Grozny. Doctors who operated on him are distressed that they will not be able to find the medicine required for healing his wounds.

Many of the wounded never make it to hospital. Recently Imran, aged 27 and the father of two children, stepped on a mine while he was trimming some hedges. His left leg was completely blown off and the right one was severely wounded by shrapnel. When his neighbours attempted to take him to hospital, they were stopped at a Russian military checkpoint. Imran spent a whole night losing blood, without any treatment or any medicine to ease his pain. The next day, when he was finally able to get to the hospital, doctors had no choice but to amputate. Hospitals in Chechnya desperately need to be put back on their feet and to receive assistance. The Starye Atagi hospital, which was destroyed during the 1995 war, has only been partially repaired. The main building of Hospital No. 9 in Grozny looks like Swiss cheese, full of holes from artillery shelling. Patients are crowded into corridors in the only building that has been repaired (by the staff themselves, using whatever they could lay their hands on). In May, for the first time in five years, the Russian government paid one or two months’ salary to the medical teams - a grand total of 25 dollars. Since then, they have received nothing.



*Kenny and I wondered whether we should present the report ourselves, but it was important that it not be people from the field who were doing the talking. In the end, he decided to speak out in any case, and a number of journalists were directed to us. So there was no very firm policy; we certainly spoke out more than we would have if there had been some directive.*


Steve Cornish, Coordinator MSF France in Georgia (January to April 2000) then in Ingushetia (September 2000 to January 2001), MSF Switzerland Officer in the Russian Federation (August 2002 to April 2004) (in French) interviewed in 2008.




*When we wanted to do things communications-wise, I went to Paris and talked with them! I still had a very good relationship with Jean-Hervé. So I said to Steve: ‘the Dutch don’t know what they’re doing on communications, so let’s do it with Paris.’ Anyway, Holland is not a media market, so I figured by doing it in English and in French, you can actually have more resonance. I was very happy to work with the French. And in Holland they were very angry. Because when I went on some of these things [media interviews] I didn’t even go to Amsterdam. I went straight to Paris. There was some criticism, and I think some of this was right, saying: ‘OK, Kenny is not being managed. He is just doing his own*

thing,' because I said OK, if I want to work with Paris, I'll work with Paris.

Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus (November 1999-January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005), (in English) interviewed in 2009

 Kenny travelled to Paris several times and met with the operational directors in meetings, met with Jean-Hervé [Bradol MSF France President], debated what MSF Holland was finding, and how we were going to say something about it, both in terms of the content and the methods but also in terms of the security implications. There was sometimes a bit of disagreement, but no major controversies and on the contrary, I think in general we, MSF Holland, got a lot of compliments from Belgium and France for finding someone like Kenny.'

Austen Davies, MSF Holland Executive Director, 1999 to 2004, (in English) interviewed in 2009

 I continued to work with the programme manager on these questions. In this way I got to know Kenny, and was very happy to see that we had a Dutch colleague who was very motivated to speak out publicly on such a touchy subject. He was one of the important people at this time. He came to Paris, we spoke about the matter, and we came to an agreement. These were important stances.

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of Communications (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000-May 2008) (in French) interviewed in 2009.

**At the Russian/European summit, Vladimir Putin succeeded in having EU representatives (who were increasingly dependent on Russia for their energy supplies) remain mute on the Chechnya question.**



'Putin in Paris, Russian Media, Deutsche Welle,'  
**Memo** MSF Regional Information Officer (RIO),  
Moscow, 3 November 2000 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

Russia and the EU said on Monday they planned to forge a long-term strategy partnership to ensure energy supplies in the 21st century and avoid the kind of fuel crisis faced by Western Europe this year. Regarding Chechnya, Chirac said

it was the first time Russia and the EU had agreed that a political solution had to be sought (Moscow Times, October 31). The EU-Russia summit, which took place at the Elysée Palace on Monday, not only signaled intensified cooperation between Russia and the 15-nation EU, but it gave Moscow and Paris a chance to patch up relations that have been soured by differences over Moscow's military campaign in rebel Chechnya. [...] What did Gazprom sign in Paris? The economical effect of Putin's visit is \$1-2 billion.' Gazprom and Gaz de France have signed agreement of cooperation. It is the first official document, which confirmed the intention to build the pipeline directly from Russia to Western Europe via Belorussia, Poland and Slovakia bypass Ukraine. (Kommersant, November 2).

#### Russia, EU and Chechen problem

The voices of French intellectuals protesting against human rights violations in Chechnya were not audible in Paris. Unfortunately, this time Western society couldn't influence Russia's position concerning Chechnya. First of all, because the worst things in Chechnya have already occurred and now the situation there is improving (this was recently confirmed by the EU Commission). Secondly, Putin continues to talk about the struggle against international terrorism. And thirdly, the price of oil now is very beneficial to Russia because of the crisis in Middle East. Looking towards the future, we can say that Russia will neither win nor lose in Chechnya for years to come. And this situation turns the war into an element of political trade by Western politicians: when they need to push Russia, they increase the volume of the public's voice, but when the political and economic relations with Russia are more or less normal - they keep these voices behind the scenes. And behind the scenes, these voices are not very audible.

## **MSF DENOUNCES THE POLITICS OF TERROR AGAINST THE CIVILIANS OF CHECHNYA**

**On 22 November, a delegation from MSF France appeared before the Council of Europe in Brussels to discuss the humanitarian situation in Chechnya. In a press conference, during which a collection of patient accounts was distributed, the delegation described the climate of terror prevailing in Chechnya. This was widely reported in the international press.**



'Council of Europe Meeting on Chechnya,' Email exchange between Denis Gouzerh Programme manager, Jean-Hervé Bradol, President, Benedicte Jeannerod, Communication Officer, MSF France and MSF Deputy Legal Advisor, 12 October 2000 (in French).

**Extract:**

Mr Perin, the Secretary of the Political Affairs Committee of the Council's Parliamentary Assembly, would like to invite MSF to Brussels (the Belgian Senate) on 21 November in the context of a meeting on 'the humanitarian situation in Chechnya,' with participation by Parliamentarians from the Council and by NGOs. The aim is to gather information for the January 2001 political report to the CE Assembly and for the decision on whether or not to extend the suspension of Russian voting rights in the Council. Mr Perin has already contacted AI and HRW. According to him, a significant lobby within the EC is currently trying to push the cause of reinstating Russian voting rights. Our presence has been requested, and indeed it seems to me essential that we attend. Listening to Mr Perin suggests that he is pushing the line of lack of access to Chechnya by various organisations, but to substantiate this he is pointing to the OSCE and UNHCR, etc - i.e. not really our area. However he believes (without any concrete evidence - it is just a feeling) that our organisation also has problems operating, linked to the behaviour of the Russian authorities. He will soon send us a program for 21.11.00.

Bye for now.

Denis

I believe we should attend, because:

- We can say things in a more nuanced and controlled way in such a forum than if we speak publicly. However, we need to let the teams in the field know and ask them to send some up-to-date information.

- In discussions with Françoise and Rony we had decided to lobby the Council of Europe assiduously, both because the Council appreciates us and also in view of our consultative status.

For some time, in fact, Parliamentarians in the Council of Europe have been under enormous pressure, because they considerably embarrassed the Council of Europe executive by formally seeking to refer Russia to the European Court and by proposing the suspension not only of the Parliamentary delegation but of Russia itself. For information, shortly before the Executive meeting following the last Parliamentary session, the USA contacted the Council of Europe's Secretary General, along the lines of: 'calm down, it is in all our interests not to burn our bridges with Russia.' So there is a very strong current supporting the idea of normalisation in Chechnya.

Yours



'MSF Denounces Politics of Terror On Civilian Populations of Chechnya - Calls on European Council Member States to Take Issue to the UN Security Council,' **Press release** MSF USA, 22 November, 2000 (in English).

The international humanitarian organization Doctors without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) today issued a public report addressing the consequences of the policy of terror by the Russian federal troops on the civilian populations in Chechnya. These include: arbitrary executions, cleansing operations; arrests and disappearances, extortion and a racket in corpses. The report, "Chechnya/ the Politics of Terror," was issued to coincide with a public hearing this morning, given by the organization to the Political Affairs Committee of the Council of Europe.

300,000 people are currently refugees or displaced by the Chechnya crisis. Medical data prove that the indiscriminate use of force always creates high numbers of civilian victims. The wounds are a result of artillery fire, bullet wounds, aerial attacks or land mines. Between September and October 2000, over 280 fresh war wounded were treated in twelve to thirty still functioning hospital structures. The war continues in Chechnya, despite the illusion of normalization given by the Russian leadership. People are forced to live in a ghetto, which locks them into a deadly day-to-day, face-to-face confrontation with the Russian army. They cannot move freely, and the wounded and sick are prevented from passing the military barriers. As soon as civilians move, as they are treated as suspects: staying alive turns into a game of "Russian roulette."

"These military operations and acts of violence committed against individuals are like a collective punishment, which turns each and every civilian into a suspect and a potential victim," said Loïck Barriquand, MSF desk officer for Chechnya. "This unrelenting terror in Chechnya is worsened by the massive humanitarian needs in Chechnya, to which there is little response," he concluded. In the absence of consistent international reaction and of sanctions against the perpetrators of the crimes, not only are Chechens lacking all forms of protection and of recourse, but they are also only receiving inadequate assistance. None of the member states of the Council of Europe, or indeed on the part of any other state, have raised any opposition to the violence perpetrated against civilians. The only international instance, which resulted in concrete measures, was when the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe decided to suspend the right to vote of the Russian Delegation.

MSF today denounced the massive aggressions and the policy of terror towards the civilians of Chechnya. The daily violation of their fundamental rights, including freedom of movement, also prevents them from having full access to what little humanitarian or medical assistance is available. MSF calls on the Member States of the Council of Europe to raise the suffering of Chechnya with the European Court of Human Rights and the Security Council of the United Nations, so that they take on their roles and responsibilities.





**'Chechnya: the Politics of Terror,' Report, MSF, November 2000 (in English, in French).**

#### **Extract:**

The war in Chechnya is not over. More than a year after the federal troops first intervened, bombs, mines and bullets continue to kill civilians. Despite the illusion of normalization upheld by the Russian authorities, and the resignation of the international community, the violence against civilians is ongoing, and has merely changed its appearance. Data from Chechnya hospitals shows that the indiscriminate use of force is still causing many civilian casualties. The war, which caused hundred of thousands to flee, has entered a new phase. After intensive bombing and massive destruction, the army, in the 're-conquered' zones, has turned a more vicious form. It has installed a state of terror, perpetrating acts of violence designed to humiliate civilians: arbitrary executions and mopping-up operations, arrests and disappearances, extortion, racketeering of cadavers...

The Russian forces have transformed Chechnya into a vast ghetto. In this ghetto, every civilian is a suspect, and freedom of movement is denied. Even the sick and wounded are prevented from passing through military checkpoints. And each and every checkpoint is a 'Russian roulette' which puts their lives at stake. In this ghetto, terror reigns. After having been subjected to months of intensive bombardment, the people of Chechnya are today exposed to the worst kind of violence. In the absence of a coherent international response and of sanctions against the perpetrators of these crimes, Chechen civilians, deprived of any kind of protection or recourse, are trapped in a confrontation with soldiers whose impunity gives them free rein to act as they please.

Confronted, in the field, with a terrorized population, and with needs that humanitarian organizations cannot meet, Médecins Sans Frontières has responded to the invitation of the Council of Europe, and has come here today to bear witness to the unacceptable events now taking place in Chechnya. The witness accounts - of medical personnel, residents, the sick and the wounded - were gathered by our teams between August and November 2000, during their relief work. Through their accounts of daily incidents, the witnesses portray the unbearable reality of the Chechen people's lives. They clearly describe the impossibility of dealing with medical emergencies, the perils faced by those who dare to seek hospital care, and the continuation of war. [...]

#### I. The consequences of the war on civilian lives

##### Civilian casualties

[...] Hospitals report on a constant stream of civilian casualties resulting from gunfire and artillery, from aerial attacks and mines. Bombs intended for the Russian military or police outposts have also been placed in areas where civilians live. The military forces in Chechnya have paid scant regard for civilian casualties or civilian space in the conduct of the war. Villagers live in constant terror of indiscriminate gunfire which fills the nights throughout Chechnya. [...]

##### A return compromised by insecurity

Around 300,000 people are still displaced, either inside or outside the Chechen Republic. Half of these are in Ingushetia, which still provides shelter for 150,000 people. Despite the prospect of spending a second winter in appalling conditions, and despite their attachment to their land, a huge number of refugees and displaced persons have decided not to return to Chechnya. This is due as much to the destruction of their homes and the loss of their possessions as it is to the terror imposed by the Russian army in re-conquered zones. In a survey conducted by MSF teams last summer among displaced Chechens in the Ingush district of Malgobek, 98% of those interviewed said they wanted to return home, but more than 70% of them felt that insecurity in Chechnya prevented them from doing so. [...]

#### II. A constant climate of terror

##### Civilians subjected to the indiscriminate violence of Russian forces

The witness accounts gathered recently by MSF teams describe indiscriminate shootings, arbitrary arrests, summary executions, beatings, etc. which the people of Chechnya are subjected to daily. Abuses such as these are most often committed by Russian soldiers during the 'zachistka' or clean-up operations aimed at rooting out 'terrorists.' Most, however, are committed on a daily basis, in a wholly arbitrary fashion, during displacements of populations, and especially at military checkpoints set up at all major intersections and entry points. [...]

#### III. Obstacles to health care

##### Destroyed health structures

Chechnya's hospitals have all suffered massive destruction during the two recent wars. At Grozny's Hospital No9, for example, the main building is riddled with holes from artillery fire. The patients cram into the corridors of this building, which has been repaired with the meagre resources available. Only one maternity hospital is still functioning in the capital of the Chechen republic. In the entire republic, 10 hospitals (including the Vedeno central district hospital) and 11 dispensaries were completely destroyed during the bombings between late 1999 and mid-2000. Many other structures suffered extensive damages. Moreover, at least three health structures - among them the Shatoi hospital - are still occupied by the Russian military. There is only one surgical facility left in the entire south of the republic. Persons who need to be operated on must travel long distances and pass through numerous military checkpoints. Although the wounded continue to make up the majority of those receiving surgical treatment, the hospitals lack the resources to take care of these patients. There is no heating, no electricity, not enough anaesthetics [...].



**'MSF Slams Russia for Chechnya Abuses,' BBC World Service (UK), 22 November 2000 (in English).**

The international medical charity, Médecins Sans Frontières, has sharply criticized the conduct of Russian forces in the breakaway republic of Chechnya. A report by the group said

the Russians were still causing many civilian casualties by the indiscriminate use of force, which it denounced as the politics of terror. It also cites a litany of eye-witness accounts, gathered by the charity's relief workers, which the BBC Moscow correspondent says paint an appalling picture of summary executions, arbitrary arrests and the beating and torture of civilians. The charity estimates that three-hundred-thousand people are still refugees. The Russian authorities have repeatedly denied human rights abuses, except in a few individual cases. More than two-and-a-half-thousand Russian military personnel have died in the conflict.



'Russia - a Damning Report from Médecins Sans Frontières: Terror Continuing in Chechnya,' Isabelle Lasserre, *Le Figaro* (France), 23 November 2000 (in French).

Three human rights organisations - Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Human Rights Watch and the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH) – appeared yesterday before the Council of Europe to speak about Chechnya. Coinciding with this, MSF has published a new report on the pro-independence republic. This work, entitled "The Politics of Terror" and based on accounts from witnesses on the ground, once again highlights the many atrocities committed by Russian soldiers against Chechen civilians. [...] MSF regrets that there has been no reaction to these acts of violence from members of the Council of Europe, and the NGO calls on these States to refer the question to the relevant international authorities.



'Press coverage review – MSF 'Chechnya: the Politics of Terror Report,' Samantha Bolton, MSF International Campaigns Coordinator 28 November 2000 (in English).

#### Extract:

##### 1. Brussels release strategy:

The MSF report and press release "Chechnya, the politics of terror", was issued publicly from Brussels, on Wednesday, November 22, 2000, to coincide with a briefing to the Council of Europe Foreign Affairs committee. MSF, Amnesty, MDM and Human Rights Watch were invited that morning to brief the Council as part of a review of whether the suspension of Russian membership should be reversed. A final decision will be taken on Russian membership in January 2001.

The planning, content and idea for the MSF report came out of discussions in Paris, between the field and sections, a couple of weeks earlier, in the run up to Putin's visit to France (in retrospect, generally agreed to have been a better media hook, but which stimulated the whole process). The HOMs then went back to the Caucasus and began collecting testimony on what is going on in Chechnya. The strategy discussed with field and desks was to release the MSF Chechnya report in time for the Council of Europe Hearing, out of Brussels, not Moscow. Although web and media is

global, tactically it was felt to be less dangerous in terms of security, for the teams, to issue the report out of Europe to lessen the risk of aggressive press attacks on Putin. Clearly this involves an element of pot luck given the web, and meant it was a harder sell to the papers in Europe, as even for the European press, it is the Moscow correspondents who would have covered the report. In the event however, the strategy worked, in that there was little coverage in Russia, but strong coverage elsewhere where sections pushed the report. However, had the report been covered by the foreign correspondents out of the region, it is likely that there would have been more informed coverage, especially in the Anglophone world.



'MSF + Chechnya + Russian Media,' Email from Gazelle Gaignaire, MSF RIO in Moscow to MSF Communication Officers, 24 November 2000 (in English).

#### Extract:

##### RUSSIAN PRESS

THE MOSCOW TIMES picked up AP and Reuters and put us on page 4 today: title = "MSF: Russia Imposes 'Terror' on Chechnya." Bolded text = "**The Nobel-Prize winning group says the Kremlin is guilty of 'ethnic cleansing'**" (!)

KAVKAZ CENTER, the Chechen rebel's website, spoke about the conference in Brussels and attendance by the Chechen Minister of Health, Omar Khanbiev, who spent time in "Chernokosovo<sup>15</sup>" and intervened during the session (Kenny, Cyrus, thanks for your feedback on this).

OUTRA.RU, the Russian website, citing "RADIO SVABODA" as a source, wrote: "'Doctors without Borders' imposes 'policy of terror' in Chechnya. In the report, published in Brussels, MSF speaks about massive ethnic cleansing in Russia. MSF gives examples about how civilians are forced to live in a ghetto..." etc.

Before the hearing in Brussels, at the beginning of the week, there was a bit of coverage in the Russian press of the PACE delegation's visit to Chechnya, for 2 main reasons: 1) the Chairman of the Duma International Committee (Dmitry Rogozin) was going as a member of the delegation, and 2) it's the first time PACE representatives were supposed to see not only Chechen, but also Russian IDPs and refugees.



'A New Report is Damning for the "Russian illusion" – MSF: "Chechnya is an immense ghetto," Jean-Paul Collette, *Le Soir* (Brussels), 24 November 2000 (in French).


#### Extract:

The report's title, "Chechnya: The Politics of Terror," is

15. Russian army's "filtration camps" where prisoners are being tortured.


unambiguous: what Médecins Sans Frontières is reminding Western public opinion of today comes under the heading of the unspeakable. Because atrocities, torture, violence and the arbitrary use of power are what civilians in the independence republic are being subjected to every day. All of this is directly attributable to the Russian army - soldiers' behaviour or as a result of decisions further up the line from a hierarchy which, in MSF's words, has transformed Chechnya into an immense ghetto. MSF has once again attempted to persuade European decision-makers about what is occurring. On Wednesday, together with Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch the humanitarian organisation testified before the Council of Europe, the only European authority so far to have spoken up in any way against Moscow. MSF's testimony is based on accounts and documents put gathered by its teams on the ground between August and November this year, and supplied by medical staff, patients, wounded and civilian inhabitants. This documentation underlines the impossibility of treating medical emergencies, the dangers to which the ill or wounded are exposed on their way to hospital and the numerous obstacles placed in the way of medical activity. The accounts tell the story of ongoing war, or, to quote MSF again, "the population's unbearable daily lot." The organisation has no hesitation in providing its own analysis of the political, military and human situations. Notwithstanding the illusion of normalisation maintained by the Russian authorities and the international community's abdication of responsibility, violence against civilian populations is continuing, in other ways. Medical data prove that the indiscriminate use of force is still resulting in high numbers of civilian victims. For MSF, the war has entered a new phase, with the Russian army resorting to more insidious violence in the "reconquered" zones: terror, humiliation of civilians, executions, "cleansing," and even rackets involving bodies, etc. MSF claims that whenever they move about, civilians play a sort of "Russian roulette" with their lives as they pass through the numerous obligatory and inescapable checkpoints. It is notable that this new and damning report strikes a very similar note to that published by the International Federation of Human rights in late October, on the eve of Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to Paris.

As noted above, MSF regrets that this chorus of cries of alarm has not galvanised European leaders more, including the Council of Europe. However, a delegation from the Council's Parliamentary Assembly has been in the Northern Caucasus since Tuesday evening, on a visit entirely focused on the situation in refugee camps.

 *It tended more towards this documentation of abuses. That was the period of MSF where everyone was doing that. The MSF France report on Kosovo<sup>16</sup> as well was*

*a very human rights type of report. Jean-Hervé [Bradol, President of MSF France] Loïck [Barriquand, programme manager MSF France] and I went to Brussels for this testimony at the Council of Europe. Looking back on it, there were things the rebels were doing which we said in the report about putting explosives in populated places. It didn't say 'rebels,' just like we often didn't say 'Russian army,' but it's clear in the context who we're talking about. And I had to fight to get these things in—about putting explosives in public places. I felt MSF France was reluctant to criticize the rebels, which I didn't feel was appropriate, but also, all of our staff people, M, R, and so on, they were very anti-Russian. Our view of the conflict came very much through their view. Naturally, it's hard to avoid that. I don't think the European testimony had much of an impact. I think it was worthwhile doing, we have an obligation to do it, but you shouldn't have the expectation that it's going to have much impact. We used our fame and in Europe we brought a little bit more attention to Chechnya. It was a little bit more difficult because journalists were so scared to go into Chechnya. So we provided a kind of legitimacy of image by having foreigners who would speak about it, whereas so many of the journalists had never been inside. Even the Human Rights Watch people, the foreigners, had never been inside. It was all done with Russians and Chechens. And, sadly, in the Western press, having a foreigner speak about it has more weight than having a local person. I think morally it was very important for the Chechens.*

Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus (November 1999-January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005), (in English) interviewed in 2009.

 *Journalists were pressing us to make statements. This whole affair was like a dog biting its tail: journalists needed to be able to 'source' their information - to be able to say that MSF had published a report - and so we needed to do so. Steve Cornish, who was in the field, was pushing hard to obtain witness accounts, but in fact he had nothing to give us. The only ones who had something to say were the MSF Holland team. Kenny, who was briefed by Steve, contacted us. He came to Paris and we worked together, using the accounts he provided, to compile a report that he presented to the Council of Europe. We had to re-photocopy the seventy copies at the last minute because a witness name had remained on one page, which was not acceptable. So we refined the report, and I think it stood up well. The aim was to demonstrate, from a medical perspective, the violence people were suffering. But what we had - which in the end was not much - was over-used. It consisted mostly of indirect accounts.*

Anne Fouchard, MSF France Deputy Communications Director, July 2000 - July 2004 (in French) interviewed in 2009.

16. See 'Violence against the Albanian Kosovars, NATO intervention 1998-1999,' MSF Case Studies on Speaking Out, by Laurence Binet, internal MSF document.

**In his monthly activity report, claiming that Russian television channels were covering the war in Chechnya in great detail and reasonably objectively, MSF Switzerland's Coordinator questioned MSF's public stance which, he claimed, 'demonised' the Russians and remained silent about atrocities carried out by the pro-independence side.**



**'Monthly activity report,'** Jean-Emile Canut, MSF Switzerland Coordinator in Dagestan, November 2000 (in French).

**Extract:**

Reports on the situation in Chechnya can be seen virtually every night on the various Russian and Dagestani television channels. I do not know what the Press Office in Moscow's take is on this (or even if it has one), but some of the reporting is no different in presentation from what is done by Western crews. We have even seen footage filmed by 'boiviki,' showing successful action against Russian troops. Similarly, a photographic exhibition entitled 'Chechnya-Dagestan: Refugees Who aren't There' was recently held in the A. Sakharov museum in Moscow.

In practice, the spin given by the various public statements out of Paris seems to me to result more from a determination to attack at all costs rather than from a clear vision, with goals and desired outcomes. I have not seen, anywhere, any mention of what the Chechens have inflicted on the Russian and Dagestani populations, for example. After all, in legal terms the 1995 hostage-taking in Boudienovsk by Bassayev was also comparable to a war crime. The language being used demonises the Russians and tends to exonerate the Chechens, which I consider to be somewhat unbalanced. It is true that people like to sound off when they have nothing else to do.

**Within MSF sections, these public statements were being made by very motivated people, who were urging the institution to take a stance despite the reluctance of some others who were especially conscious of security constraints. The statements were supported by national staff who, like all Chechens the MSF teams met, wanted above all else to have the fate of their people made known.**



*I thought it would be better to speak out, for the whole world to know. Whether we were to die after this or not wasn't important to me because I thought people do not know and I would like everyone to know the truth. Not only was the national staff on this line, but also the population. The population was wondering: Why are the foreigners not talking? Why are they keeping silent? This was the feeling. Sometimes I had to explain to the population:*

*'you see, it's because if they say something, then they will be closed and nobody will let them [work]'. Then we will stay without any kind of assistance. The fact that they are here somehow helps us to avoid some of the tortures and mistreatment. Without them it would be much worse than what we have now. Everybody understood the presence of NGO's. This is not only humanitarian; I mean not only direct help but also moral support and also the thought that somehow it stopped the authorities and the military forces behaving more brutally.*

E, MSF North Caucasus staff (in English)  
interviewed in 2008



*My opinion is that there were days that it was necessary to try and influence and stop the situation. If it wasn't necessary in those days, Kenny would not step up and speak out. This is quite clear. He was not the kind of man who would stand up and speak out only for the sake of winning some bonuses. It was necessary to influence the situation somehow because it wasn't quite visible that there was arbitrariness because the human being there simply was a target. There have been no consequences for the military people who performed these actions. I don't think we should have just sat and watched. First and foremost our very presence helped these people. First to be less exposed to this violence and second to find the way according to which they could restore their rights, of which they were deprived. Our counsellors were referring them to those organizations because people simply did not know where to go or what measures to take.*


C, MSF North Caucasus staff (in Russian, translated into English by an MSF interpreter) interviewed in 2008




*Chechens were telling us that they did not wish to die in silence. They wanted us to take a stance. They asked for it, even cried out for it. They were aware of the risk. When I arrived they were beginning to be very disappointed in the west. After the first war, they had received a lot of support from people working directly with them. In our case, we were working more from a distance. They felt we were too concerned with our security and were not showing sufficient commitment to their plight. They saw the atrocities being committed, while at the same time western leaders embraced Putin as if he were a great man. They were very cruelly disappointed. The feeling was that since we could not stop these daily horrors from occurring in the surgeries, hospitals and streets, then it was necessary to speak out. That was the only thing that could have an impact on making the war a cleaner one. People spoke about this every day. And they were sick of speaking to people without receiving any assistance. Assistance alone was not enough: what was needed was to*

*provide both assistance and public statements. You either do the job or you go home. And if you do the job, there is no point in taking all these risks if you remain silent. In the end, remaining silent was equivalent to being a Russian accomplice. The United Nations, and all our countries were, indeed accomplices.*


Steve Cornish, Coordinator MSF France in Georgia (January to April 2000) then in Ingushetia (September 2000 to January 2001), MSF Switzerland Officer in the Russian Federation (August 2002 to April 2004), (in French) interviewed in 2008.

 *In general, there were no difficulties between us. I was just a little wary that we were inclined to be somewhat indulgent when problems were created by Chechen groups linked to the pro-independence movement, compared with our determination to let nothing pass when it came from Moscow. There was bias. Basically, François Jean was not totally alone in thinking this.*


Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of Communications (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000- May 2008) (in French) interviewed in 2009.

 *In Chechnya, there were almost no NGOs, it was just MSF, and so you felt a different sense of obligation. I think there was a kind of this long-term involvement from Francois Jean, but also from our team. It creates often a sense of obligation in a team, and this is where it was—in a way incautious. It wasn't so much MSF Holland as an institution. It was me and some people in France. On the other side, a lot of people were saying: 'this is crazy! What are you doing?' Jean-Hervé's point was that I shouldn't have been doing it because I was working in Chechnya. It should have been left to people living in Europe. I don't think it makes much of a difference who is actually doing it, but it's a fair point. Before we issued the 'Politics of Terror' report, and before we did the television interviews, we had a meeting with the whole local staff, in which we kind of had a debate, saying, 'Is this worth it? MSF could be thrown out, MSF could be shot, and you guys, Chechens, can be arrested and tortured and so on.' The initial reaction of the more junior people, the guards, and the drivers and so on was reluctant because they wanted to keep their jobs. And it was the seniors of our team who were pushing with this very proud attitude: 'We are Chechens, these are our people, communicating this internationally is more important than the program. And we are willing to take this risk.'*


Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus (November 1999-January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005) interviewed in 2009 (in English).

 *Concerning speaking out, the Chechen staff often put on the brakes, saying 'you don't know what you are talking about as when you speak out, we take the risks.' They were partly right. This was, without a doubt, less true in Ingushetia.*

Jean-Christophe Dollé, Coordinator of MSF Belgium's North Caucasus Project, March to November 2000, interviewed in 2008 (in French).

 *I had tried to ensure that we identified leverage points in chanceries and international organisations – that is why we had started work with the Council of Europe. Then, once Anne [Fouchard, Deputy Director, Communication, MSF France] had taken up her position it was decided that we would organise ourselves virtually along campaign lines. It was clear that, even though the name was never used, it had been decided that we needed a sort of full-time MSF Communication office on this question and that we should identify and use every possible media initiative and occasion to maintain the pressure. We had teams on the ground, the Chechen population and national staff urging MSF strongly to speak out. And notwithstanding the security risks I don't recall any discussions where, for example, Jean-Hervé or Loïck told us not to proceed with a particular press release or not to go to the Council of Europe because it was too risky for the teams in the field. This is not at all my recollection. I believe we were encouraged by the teams on the ground and by the national staff, and broader population.national et les populations.*

[...], MSF deputy legal advisor, 1995-2005 (in French) interviewed in 2008

 *It was felt, I think, quite explicitly and clearly amongst all sections that public communications could result in some form of aggression or attack on MSF sections, whether that be in terms of kidnapping or whether that be in terms of official obstruction and/or harassment, but we clearly balanced our desire to represent some of the things that we were seeing and feeling about Chechnya with the sense of potential risk to our mission. And that was discussed between the sections. That was not just an implicit fear, that was explicit, discussed, and to the degree possible, attempted to be managed.*

Austen Davies, MSF Holland Executive Director, 1999 to 2004, interviewed in 2009 (in English).



*In Chechnya, if there was one group or body that did admirable work, it was certainly the journalists. They risked their lives and did exceptionally courageous and lucid work. You don't come across people like that every day. Chechnya was one of the golden moments of modern journalism. The handful of journalists who were on the ground there deserve everyone's admiration. They saw what was going on, and thanks to them no-one could be unaware of what was happening in Chechnya. MSF did not play a role in alerting people, because no-one saw Putin as a liberator of Chechnya.*

Rony Brauman, Director of Studies, MSF Foundation,  
President of MSF France 1982-1994,  
interviewed in 2000 (in French).

**For their part, non-operational MSF sections took advantage of any available occasion to question Russian officials about the situation in Chechnya. In mid-December the Canadian section publicly asked the Prime Minister to raise the matter of human rights violations in Chechnya with the visiting Russian President. During a conference in Berlin on 'threats to Russian security,' the Executive Director of MSF Germany reminded the Operations Controller of the Russian army in Chechnya that Russia had signed the relevant international conventions and was thus responsible for protecting the civilian population.**



*'Canada Could Help End Chechen Horror,'* David Morley, MSF Executive Director, **National Post** (Canada) December 2000 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

Next week, as the President of Russia meets with the Canadian government, the horror in Chechnya continues. The Russian army has installed a state of terror, perpetrating acts of violence: arbitrary executions and police sweeps, arrests, disappearances and extortion. Russian forces have transformed Chechnya into a vast ghetto where every civilian is a suspect, and freedom of movement is denied. Even the sick and wounded are prevented from passing through military checkpoints.

After months of intensive bombardment, the people of Chechnya are trapped in a confrontation with soldiers whose impunity gives them free rein to act as they please. MSF teams working with the Chechens have heard countless stories of indiscriminate shootings, arbitrary arrests, beatings, disappearances and summary executions. One doctor in Urus Martans puts it simply. "It's impossible to live here. They arrest people all over the place -- for no reason. For young men, it's dangerous to be anywhere on the street. They pick them up and take them to army headquarters. They beat them." Torture is common. "In the past two months, we've seen a lot of people who were previously arrested," says a doctor in Grozny. "They suffer from multiple injuries., fractures, head injuries. Several said they had put some kind

of metal wires over them and shocked them with electricity. They are so scared that most of them come out not talking. They try not to come to the hospital, because we register them. None of them file any complaints. They don't want to go through that hell again."

Another surgeon in Urus Martans concurs. "I have seen a lot of them with burn marks on their bodies, usually on the back or on the chest. In some cases there were electric burns. They tell me what happened to them. They said they take two wires and put them together on their skin. You can tell by the marks on their bodies. There is a small burnt point, surrounded by a black and blue mark." The war has ravaged Chechnya. A surgeon in Grozny describes the conditions in one of the cities best hospitals. "We get about 15 severely ill patients a day. About a third of them should be hospitalized. But we can't do this. We just don't have the necessary conditions here. We don't have the beds. We don't have the rooms. We don't even have any toilets." Many hospitals and clinics were destroyed by indiscriminate bombing by the Russian military. "When there was the blast last week," recounts another surgeon, "21 people with severe injuries were brought here -- people with multiple and complex trauma. The blast happened right near Hospital No. 2, but that was bombed to Hell, so they had to come here. Eight needed immediate abdominal surgery with general anaesthesia. But we already had an operation under way when they were brought in. We only have two operating tables with anaesthetic equipment. Seven of the eight patients who needed urgent and major surgery died." "Births are the most dangerous problem," says another doctor. "There is very little pre-natal care now. Women wait until there is a crisis to go to the hospital. But who is going to risk travelling at night? It's too dangerous."

This state of terror keeps the international media out of Chechnya. With almost no witnesses to these atrocities, the Russian army can carry out its unrelenting campaign of terror with impunity. The shocking silence of the international community and the reluctance of any Western government to call the Russian government to account for their actions against Chechen civilians, means that we are all complicit in these crimes. Next week in Ottawa, Vladimir Putin, the President of Russia, is meeting with Jean Chretien and other Canadian government officials. The Prime Minister has a historic opportunity to show global leadership and call the Russian government to account for the continuing abuse of basic human rights and violations of international humanitarian law in Chechnya. Canadians should expect nothing less from our government. The horror in Chechnya has gone on for far too long. It must be stopped now.



*'General Milanov on Chechnya,'* **Email** from Ulrike Von Pilar, MSF Germany Executive Director to MSF Holland North Caucasus Group, 15 December 2000 (in English).

1. It was not Serge Yastrezhensky who attended this conference as originally announced (he had to return because of the attack in Chechnya the day before they said), but

General Milanov, who was introduced as the deputy head of the chief of staffs of the Russian army. [...].

In addition there was quite a Russian delegation in audience - this being part of a German-Russian Conference. Among others there was a secretary of state from the Russian Ministry of Defense, General Mihailov. [...]

4. My impression was that this speech served as a preparation for future interventions on terrorist grounds. There were attacks against the NGOs (in general), against Human Rights Watch in particular, against the Western media and all the rest.

5. When I presented our findings and our position (Russia had signed the conventions and they were responsible for the protection of the civilian population etc) he answered by hailing MSF's heroism and good deeds. Then he admitted to the wrongdoings of some Russian soldiers and told us that they had put 300 on trial, that 20 had already been tried and punished and that if it was to him he would execute them all. He also said that there were 116 checkpoints in the country and those were only there to prevent acts of war on the soldiers and civilian population. And that they were very eager to improve protection of human rights and the construction of a state of law and all the rest. [...]

7. Apparently, I was the only member of a NGO in the room - and a lot of people came afterwards to thank MSF and to point out how important our field experiences were to them and that we should continue to speak up.

## SECURITY ALERTS

**On 29 November, a local team from MSF Holland was detained for three hours at a checkpoint near the border between Chechnya and Ingushetia. A local MSF employee had a number of patient accounts confiscated, as well as the copy of the report on the politics of terror she was carrying. She only just avoided being detained in a holding centre. On 2 December, the FSB (Russian Intelligence Service) questioned another local MSF employee in regards to Kenny Gluck, the Coordinator for MSF Holland in the Northern Caucasus.**

**On 8 December, two members of MSF Holland's local team were attacked and detained for several hours by masked men dressed in fatigues. The team was convinced that the assailants wanted to kidnap an MSF expatriate, and that they had been released only when no expatriate was found.**



*'Follow-up to 11/29 Incident,' Email from Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland North Caucasus Regional Coordinator, 7 December 2000 (in English).*

### Extract:

Dear all.

[...] Following further discussions with the team and considering the discussion that K [...] had with the FSB [...] it has become evident that the Nov 29<sup>th</sup> incident was no coincidence. It is clear that they were looking for K [...] as mentioned below. It is not clear whether this was a response to the Brussels report or to the knowledge that we were engaged in human rights type activities. There has been a lull since last week's incident. There was no follow-up besides the meeting with the FSB, which is described below.

FSB meeting with K [...]

A FSB officer visited K's [...] home in Stary Atagi [...] on December 2 and asked her to contact the local FSB office in Nazran. She spoke with an ethnic Russian there named D on December 3. According to her, D was very friendly and informal and spoke about his family. He explained that MSF was involved in inappropriate activities and that we are using information about robbery and violations of human rights to increase international pressure on Russia. D asked her if she thought it was a coincidence that she was stopped and searched last Wednesday. He implied that they had information about her and what she was up to. [...] She said that she could give them any information they wanted about what we are doing.

They said they wanted information on what Kenny is up to. She asked what information they wanted but they refused to say demanding that she sign a non-disclosure agreement first. She refused to sign anything but again said that if they told her what information they wanted she could tell them verbally. She didn't want to put anything on paper (this discussion is similar to the discussion with S [...] in the same office 2 months ago. Like S [...], K [...] does not want to enter into a formal relation with the FSB because it is seen as less than honourable and because it is hard to stop once you start. He explained that she should cooperate because she had already violated Article 275 and could be prosecuted (as had been referred to at the Kavkaz 1 checkpoint on 11/29. This is nonsense given the kind of information in the notebook, which is all interviews with patients and hospital staff) and she should help them. He asked if K [...] loved her 'fatherland' as a way of convincing her to cooperate. [...]

They will likely leave us alone for a while until they feel a need to poke us again. Their knowledge that K [...] was the person most involved in the HR work and their knowledge of who to look for at the checkpoint shows a higher level of surveillance of our operations than we had thought. We know that our phones were being tapped but we should now assume that there is someone giving reports from among the staff as well. It is very unlikely that there will be any further actions taken against K [...] outside of continued requests to spy on us. In Ingushetia there will likely be no

reprisals against her for her continued refusal. According to our consultant on these matters – a senior member of the Ingush parliament – the local Ingush authorities are able to influence the FSB to ensure that nothing else happens.

I find it positive that all they seem [to want] from K [...] is information about me. We want the FSB to be dealing with the expatriates on these issues rather than with the local staff. I would be more worried about potential security problems if they were focusing more on the local staff. I assume they are more interested in me than other expatriates mostly because of having been here longer being American and being more comfortable in Russian. The local FSB obviously does not love their language enough to think that anyone would learn it in order to be anything other than a spy. I will try to meet with the local head of the FSB again. We haven't met him since August after we had similar problems with S [...]. Following that we will meet again with the Head of the Security Council of Ingushetia [...] and the person responsible for Ingushetia's relations with the security services. In our last meeting in Oct. he promised to assist us if we had any problems with the security services here.



'Dec 8<sup>th</sup> Incident – the Full Story,' Email from Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland North Caucasus Regional Coordinator, 13 December 2000 (in English).

#### Extract:

R [...], T [...] and E [...] had arrived in the Stary Atagi hospital at approximately 10:00. They were mostly finished with their work by 13:30, but they were still waiting for the senior nurse who was supposed to arrive shortly. They decided to leave T [...]’s car at the hospital and travel in R [...]’s car to drop off a sack of flour at the house of a relative who lives in the village. Approximately 1 ½ kilometres from the hospital in the town, an old beige car cut them off and forced them to stop. Four armed men in camouflage uniforms and masks immediately surrounded R [...]’s car, ordered them out of the car and demanded R [...] and T [...]’s documents. Without looking at the documents they forced R [...] and T [...] into their car, leaving E [...] behind in [...]’s car. R [...] protested explaining that they were doctors and that the attackers were making a mistake but they did not pay any attention to this. R [...] was pushed into the back seat between two of the attackers. T [...] was forced into the front seat also between the driver and one of the attackers.

The entire attack was conducted very professionally. T [...] and R [...] believe that it was less than two minutes between when they were stopped and when they were taken away in the attacker’s vehicle. T [...] and R [...] noted at the time of the attack that the attackers were dressed in completely new summer camouflage. They felt that the uniforms had never been worn before as they still had their creases from being folded. R [...] was forced to cover his head with his coat. T [...] was largely allowed to see where they were going although on occasion his face was covered with a mask. As they were driving one of the attackers, seating to the left of R [...] repeatedly threatened him, “We wouldn’t think twice

about cutting your throat. You are carrying wounded fighters in your cars.” R [...] responded to this charge that all of our cars are forbidden from carrying any military personnel.”

[...] They asked T [...] who does not look Chechen, several times who he was. He told them that he was Chechen. (“I wanted to add that I am Chechen just like you, but I didn’t want to provoke them since they were pretending to be Russians.) They initially didn’t believe him and demanded that he say something in Chechen. After each phrase he said, they told him to translate what he had said. On one occasion, T [...] said that they responded before he could translate implying that they understood Chechen. After this discussion, R [...] and T [...] heard the attacker’s state that “they had taken the wrong people.” [...] The attackers told them to walk away from the compound, not looking back until they had left. R [...] and T [...] walked a few dozen meters until they heard the car with attackers leave. They returned to the compound where they had been questioned and asked a local resident there if they know whose car had been there, but the people claimed not to know.

[...] Our thoughts

According to T [...] and R [...]’s report, it is clear that the attack was targeted against MSF. In a well planned attack of this nature, it is unlikely that the attackers would have mistaken the vehicle, which was clearly marked with magnetic stickers. The attackers, however, did not find what they were looking for. They seemed particularly disappointed to find out that T [...] was Chechen. All of this suggests that they were looking for an expatriate. The professionalism and the speed with which the attack took place suggested that the purpose was neither simple robbery nor intimidation. It is not necessary to use a well-planned ambush to intimidate or rob. This leaves kidnapping as the most likely intent of the attack. Stare Atagi [...] is a place which MSF expatriates have visited frequently in the past because of extensive rehabilitation work in the surgical ward and the continuing work in the maternity ward there.

Under the surface of Russian control, an Islamic group referred to as Wahabi, is largely in control of Stary Atagi and to a lesser extent, Novy Atagi. There is also a large group of active Gelaiev supporters in the area. MSF staff has already made initial contacts with both groups. The Wahabi group initially denied any involvement in the affair and claimed to have no knowledge. This was a semi-official meeting in which it is unlikely that they would admit any involvement. The local staff has asked for contacts in Atagi to follow up with this group in a more informal way to see if they have any information.

[...] Response:

We have cancelled all expat travel in Chechnya until further notice. We cancelled work involving local staff for Wednesday as well. Only one team travelled into Chechnya on Wednesday in order to gain more information.




*In the fall, we started to have more problems with security locally. Not huge things, but, when we did*



that report in Europe, 'The Politics of Terror,' there was one, very smart but very young, member of the staff, who - I don't know why - she brought a copy into Chechnya with her, which was not smart. She was stopped at a checkpoint, and they found the report in English. They took it from her, and they caused problems for her with that. It wasn't huge problems. There was another woman, who was picked up by the FSB and they wanted regular reports about what was going on with MSF, but she said no. And they threatened her. So we started to have problems like this but interestingly, with the junior people. They never went to the seniors, the more well-known people with contacts. They picked out young women in their twenties, who are more vulnerable.

Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus (November 1999-January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005), (in English) interviewed in 2009

 The situation in which we were working then was that daily, there were tens, dozens, hundreds of people going missing. There were practically very few organizations that came to the territory to try and protect the civilian population from impunity. And by organizing and collecting the data, our objective was to reach these people and provide possible assistance to them. But the fact that it was not safe, it was not secure, was understood by everybody. Practically every one of us have witnessed and come across cross fire or explosions and see people arrested at the checkpoints, taken into their special tent, and then taken into their attendant's office. These were places people would enter and then nobody would know their whereabouts. And that's why we had quite clear tasks and assignments. That was to make as much acquaintances as possible for rapid reactions whenever these kinds of situations occurred. It was said quite clearly that if the person feels some threat and feels afraid, it is his/her choice not to go. But there were no cases when someone refused to go because we had an objective and we were going to accomplish our objectives, whatever it took. And we knew that quite well. But there were a big hope on the almighty that we may skip that risk. There were incidents with other organizations whose members were taken. We were trying to assist them and. While other organizations were standing in a long queue at the checkpoints, we were avoiding them and we'd go on, passing by, without any stops at some checkpoints. Thanks to Kenny, we had worked out very carefully the rules of communicating with soldiers and the rules of behaviour at the checkpoints. At the same time, we were not distributing anything at checkpoints, not giving bandages or drugs. And we were covered by Geneva conventions and our MSF ID's. And while they were trying to figure out what all these things were, we were really far away.

B., Member of MSF North Caucasus Staff since 1999, interviewed in 2008 (in Russian, translated into English by MSF).

**Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland's Coordinator in the Northern Caucasus, continued to speak out in the international media. He also attempted to target the Russian press to raise awareness in Russian society about the fate of the civilian population in Chechnya. On 22 December, during a broadcast on the Russian NTV channel, in the presence of Akhmad Kadirov, the pro-Russian administrator of Chechnya, and of a doctor from MSF's Chechnya team, he spoke about the continuation of the war and about violence against civilians in this region.**



**Vox Populi** (Glas Haroda), NTV, 22 December 2000 (in English).

#### Extract:

**Kenneth Gluck:** My name is Kenneth Gluck. I am head of the Médecins Sans Frontières program. We have been working in Chechnya for nine months already. I am concerned that we are now speaking about this suffering as if it was back in the past. This pediatrician in Gekhi-Chu, that you have seen, is still working in the destroyed clinic. He is still not getting any medicines, except for what is brought by the Médecins Sans Frontières and the Red Cross. The children there would freeze, if they did not get help from the Red Cross and other humanitarian agencies. I saw him last month. [...] Plus, we cannot speak about atrocities as something that happened in the past. Children who get killed and wounded, now as before are brought to hospitals in Chechnya.

[...] **Surgeon:** Right in Gudermes a girl is dying of cancer getting no help from the Health Ministry. She keeps asking: When will I die or when will it all end? I am asking this: When will slander against the Chechen people end? The poll on the eve of Bassayev's invasion of Dagestan showed 99% negative responses about Chechens. Why did mass media ignore the fact that in Nozhay-Yurt district Bassayev was countered by men with self-made rifles because he disgraced the honor of the mountain people? What do Chechens want? 99% of Chechens are afraid of federal troops. Is this the right policy? Why do the military lie about the militants? Why is Asti-Su bombed when there is not a single militant here? We need support from the Russian public to get across the idea that basically Chechens are law-abiding people.

[...] **[Akhmad] Kadyrov** [Head of Chechnya pro-Russian administration]: As to how to end all that is happening, we all have to be honest, including the Chechens. This guy who says he is a surgeon says there are no militants in Asti-Su, but my people caught one. He had 20,000 dollars that he got as advance payment to blow me up. He was promised another 100,000. I have always condemned bombing, but we Chechens have to realize what goes on. Only Chechens can put an end to this war. I will put an end to it and there will be no terrorists here.

**Woman:** This discussion may produce a wrong impression that only the West provides humanitarian aid. This is wrong. It is Russia that provides the bulk of assistance. Our hospital has

received 75,000 patients, including 25,000 children over 1 year and 2 months. Now we are working in the Sleptsovskaya refugee camp. The Health Ministry provided over 130 tons of medicines and medical equipment to Chechnya and Ingushetia with a total cost of 30 million rubles. It was handed directly to head physicians depending on their needs and number of patients. This is very realistic and qualified help.



*'Chechnya in Clutches of Quicksand Conflict,'* Colin MacMahon, **Chicago Tribune** (USA), 21 December 2000 (in English).

#### Extract:

"For the most part, the average Chechens don't view this as a conflict between two sides," said Kenneth Gluck, an American who works with Doctors without Borders in Chechnya. "They view this as a daily torment that they are being subjected to. They view themselves as hostages of this conflict." [...] Human-rights groups allege, in well-documented reports, that Chechens have been tortured and summarily executed by Russian forces. "The level of terror is rising daily in Chechnya," Gluck said. "Assassinations. Arrests. Torture. Since the summer it has gotten worse. All of this is contrary to what people are saying about normalization in Chechnya."



*Our communication was supposed to expose and humanize what was going on inside Chechnya. The image of it was largely of the military aspect, the bombing of Grozny, and so on, and we were trying to give it a more personal, human character. And that's why in our reports we tried to introduce a lot of stories of people who were encountering this and trying to bringing it in to the Russian media. I knew a lot of Russian journalists because I had been a journalist in Moscow... [...] because I spoke Russian, I felt comfortable doing it in Russian, and nobody else did. One of our surgeons went on radio, he did television things [interviews], and he was in the press, with his picture. We spoke a long time about it and he felt safe. [...] In November 2000, I did interviews on Russian television, some of which was controversial, when I appeared with (Akhmad) Kadyrov. It was a live broadcast and a lot of people said that I insulted the Russians on Russian television. I do not think it's true. [...] Russians were incredibly ignorant about what was going on in their own country and what was being done by their army. Having gone on to Russian television, gone to the Russian media, and, providing a little bit of the human face of what was going on with Chechens, we created a domestic pressure. I think it was positive much more in a moral sense than in a practical sense.*

Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus (November 1999-January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005), (in English) interviewed in 2009.

## "THE MAN BEST PREPARED IN THE EVENT OF KIDNAPPING"

**On 9 January 2001, in Starye Atagi in Chechnya, a convoy consisting of a vehicle from MSF Holland and one from Action Contre la Faim (Action Against Hunger) was attacked by armed and masked men. Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland's Coordinator in the Northern Caucasus, was kidnapped. Over the preceding days his team had received information about the imminence of the kidnapping of an international worker, and he was making a final contact visit to help enhance security. On 10 January 2000, all MSF sections distributed a press release announcing the kidnapping and calling for the coordinator's release.**

V19 ▶




*'MSF Condemns Attack on Humanitarian Relief Workers,'* MSF Press release, New York/Amsterdam 10 January 2001 (in English and French).

The international humanitarian aid organization Doctors without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) strongly condemns the attack on a humanitarian convoy and the capture of an MSF relief worker in Chechnya yesterday. Kenny Gluck, a US citizen, was taken by unidentified armed individuals, yesterday afternoon while travelling in a clearly marked humanitarian convoy in western Chechnya. Other members of the relief convoy managed to get away. MSF demands the immediate release of Mr. Gluck unharmed.

MSF entered Ingushetia at the end of 1999, following the resumption of the Chechen conflict, and began assisting the displaced Chechen population. In February 2000, MSF gained access to Chechnya and initiated medical relief projects for the most vulnerable people. From the beginning of its operations in Chechnya, MSF has always worked with the approval and permission of the civilian and military authorities. MSF does not operate under armed protection as this would compromise the independent, humanitarian principles under which the organization works.

At the time of his capture, Mr. Gluck was travelling in an unarmed, humanitarian convoy that had official permission to deliver humanitarian aid supplies to hospitals inside Chechnya. MSF supports hospitals, maternity wards and dispensaries throughout Chechnya, providing medical supplies and rehabilitating surgery facilities and patient wards. Besides their activities in Chechnya, MSF is also assisting displaced Chechens in neighbouring countries with food provision, medical supplies and shelter. Following yesterday's incident, MSF suspended its operations in Chechnya for security reasons [...].


 On the evening before, I told Kenny that I had information from some other people that there was a kidnapping prepared against him.

It was his last week and he was about to finish his mission in Chechnya. We had an idea that we needed to know personally all the rebel commanders. We had a list of people we had to meet and explain to them what MSF is. Kenny wanted to transfer to the next Coordinator, this complete system of interlocking terms for security. We had a meeting appointed with a commander with Wahhabit seniors in Atagi, but we were told not to go there because there would be an attack on us. In the evening, we had discussed it for a while and Kenny said: 'I have a week to finish this file so we must go.' With Kenny I felt myself more confident. On the way there we had a military convoy 200 meters before us and the whole convoy was blown up, just in front of us. The bodies were flying all over. We managed to quickly turn around, we drove back and with the dirt tracks we finally reached Starye Atagy. But they said the man we were supposed to see was not there and will come later. Then we met another guy who had authority on side of Federals and rebels were respecting him as well. While in the hospital, the local surgeon came and said: 'there is a Wahhabit that just come into the hospital yard. It is getting dangerous.' We had two options. One was to stay in the hospital overnight, the other to go back to Ingushetia. So we decided to hit the road back to Ingushetia. We thought this choice was safer because there is no village in Chechnya that did not know me or I., since we provided much medical assistance as surgeons. We thought that if Kenny was with us, nobody would dare to attack us. But that was our failing option. Just in case, we took another vehicle, which was the ambulance. We also put some medical staff there, some doctors. And Jonathan (Littell, ACF Coordinator) was there in his own vehicle with his driver. We had decided to leave the village not by the normal road but the dirt track which we had not used before. And we were expecting that they had already made an ambush on that road, so if we took another road we would be able to snake through. But those guys were very well equipped and they had the means of communication.


I was driving, I. was in the passenger seat, and Kenny was in the seat behind me. Jonathan was in front of us with his driver A. We were blocked by three vehicles. When he tried to reverse A. actually hit my car. And my car went off... "puhshs". The kidnappers jumped out of their vehicles and started to shoot in the air. I was pulled out of the vehicle, I. as well. I started to reply as they hit me with a rifle butt in my head. Two of them stuck the rifle barrel to my ribs and they said: 'don't move.' Kenny said 'stop.' He came out of the car then went back into the car pulled out his notebook, his laptop computer. And then he was taken away. Two vehicles with Kenny left and the third one was waiting there with us, with these guns pointed at us for about 30 minutes until the others disappeared. And they left as well. A. and Jonathan had disappeared from that place immediately. I left my car because I was hit quite well. The whole front of the car was broken. And I took another car and I went back to Ingushetia. The attack was 200 meters away from a futile checkpoint.

There were shooting in the air, down and up. Still, nobody moved from that checkpoint.

B, MSF North Caucasus staff  
(in Russian, translated into English by an  
MSF interpreter) interviewed in 2008


 The trip was planned and the meetings and appointments were made. Kenny was not a coward. On the contrary, he was always brave and I felt quite confident and cosy driving through Chechnya with him and as was he, driving through with us. He never gave any opportunity to say things about him like 'he started to be afraid.' So this confidence was forcing us to be the same, especially when crossing the checkpoints where the drunken soldiers were pointing guns at us trying to threaten us with murder, with assassination.

C, MSF North Caucasus staff (in Russian, translated  
into English by an MSF interpreter) interviewed in 2008


 From the beginning, I was the best-prepared hostage. I always had a kidnap bag with me. Twenty-four hours a day: toothbrush, toothpaste, change of clothes, medicines, and a big book with me all the time. We knew that kidnapping was a big risk, so we had a strategy in case of kidnapping which was very detailed about who were our local advisors. We had this developed with the staff and written out before the kidnapping. We knew it was dangerous, and that's why we had a kidnapping plan, that's why we had these discussions with the staff: 'are you willing to take a risk of assassination, are you willing to have a risk of kidnapping?' Before people went to Chechnya, we used to show them a video of what happened to hostages... I was in a rush because I had already been appointed to the Operations Director position in MSF Holland, so I was trying to finish. And there were certain things I wanted to do before I left. We had a threat that there was going to be a kidnapping. We heard the message that they were looking for someone to kidnap. And we wanted to have this negotiation because we thought it was a new group that was threatening to kidnap. Then we checked with our contacts, and I went with M to several meetings, and they said, 'Ok, this is the group that's doing this. We know them, we are friends with them, we can set up a meeting so that you can talk with them' I was going to that meeting when I was kidnapped. To this day we don't know what went wrong. It's fair to say we were not cautious enough. On the one hand, with the communication, we knew there was a risk but we thought it was worth it. In the end, we said, 'This is why we're here.' If we didn't want to take risks, don't come to Chechnya. The reason why they called me in to open the mission was because they couldn't go


otherwise, because they thought it was too dangerous. MSF France wouldn't go and MSF Belgium wouldn't go.

Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus (November 1999-January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005) (in English) interviewed in 2009

 A few days prior to his kidnapping, Kenny sent us a very worrying email letting us know, essentially, that a group was trying to get hold of him. When we learned that despite this, he had gone to the region where he was being sought, we simply did not understand. Up to then, we had found his behaviour to be audacious, but rational, but this time we were at a loss. All the more so in that there was absolutely no one apart from him in MSF Holland who understood the situation and who would be capable of setting action in place to look for him. Amsterdam sought our assistance. We were the ones who brought representatives of the Chechen resistance to see them in their office.

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of Communications (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000- May 2008), (in French) interviewed in 2009.

**Many humanitarian organisations were convinced that the kidnapping was a warning from the Russians, who hoped to use the incident to limit the presence of humanitarian organisations among Chechen refugees. Within MSF, opinions were divided on this question. Nevertheless, all MSF sections as well as ACF and UNHCR decided to suspend operations in Chechnya, although assistance to Chechen refugees in the other Caucasus republics was to be maintained. The Kremlin spokesperson accused MSF and ACF volunteers of having travelled around Chechnya without authorisation and directed responsibility for the kidnapping to Chechen war leaders. MSF stated that its team had been travelling around perfectly legally, and also pointed to Kenny's fragile health. [V20](#) **

 'Questions Relating to the Kidnapping of an American Doctor from MSF in Chechnya,' Sophie Shihab, *Le Monde* (France), 12 January 2001 (in French).

#### Extract:

The kidnapping in Chechnya of an American, Kenny Gluck, the Head of Mission of Médecins sans Frontières Holland in Nazran (Ingushetia), has once again raised the classic questions in such cases, of which there have been dozens since the 1996

failure of the first Russian campaign in Chechnya. Did the kidnapers want a ransom, or were they – at the instigation of Russian forces - seeking to intimidate foreigners who, after all, are only trying to help victims of the conflict and to provide first-hand accounts of what is going on?

Early indications, provided on Thursday 11 January by non-government organisations (NGOs) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) working out of Ingushetia, suggest rather a 'Babitski scenario,' in the words of one local coordinator who cannot be named. In other words, a kidnapping carried out by Chechens working for the Russian forces. The journalist Andreï Babitski had, by his own account, been detained in March 2000 by Chechens from the Deniev clan, known to be in the pay of the Russian services. In Moscow, however, the authorities have always maintained that Babitski, who had been arrested by Russian forces, had been 'exchanged' and returned 'at his request' to 'pro-independence bandits.'

[...] Various Russian officials have been quick to accuse 'rebel leaders,' including Chechen President Maskhadov, who for their part have denied any involvement. In time-honoured fashion, the office of the Kremlin's spokesperson for Chechnya, Sergueï Iastrjembski, has explained that MSF Holland was responsible for what had happened because "they were moving about in flagrant breach of the rules." The humanitarian organisation's Moscow office has been quick to deny this suggestion, stressing that its team had all the required authorisations, which it regularly obtains from the Russian authorities after providing details of objectives and itineraries.

As a result of this new kidnapping, foreigners working for UN organisations in Ingushetia could be seen once again packing their bags on Wednesday, even as a new flood of thousands of refugees was being admitted, the result of the intensification of Russian raids and bombardments in Chechnya.



'MSF urges for immediate release of abducted aid worker in Chechnya Kenneth Gluck medically at risk' MSF **Press release**, 12 January 2001 (in English and French).

Today, the international medical aid organization Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) together with the family and friends of the abducted MSF coordinator Kenneth Gluck expressed their extreme concern for his fate and urged his captors to release him.

No news has been heard of Kenneth since he was abducted by unidentified armed men in Chechnya on January 9, 2001. Physically dependent on medicines to control his asthmatic condition, concerns have been expressed that he could suffer a potentially very dangerous asthma attack if he does not receive further medication. MSF is ensuring that stocks of this medication are maintained in MSF offices in the region. Recent Russian media reports have suggested that MSF was working illegally in Chechnya and have even accused the organization of purposefully orchestrating the abduction to gain international attention. MSF refutes all such accusations and reiterates that it has been carrying out its operations in the region with the full authorization of the Russian

authorities. All the relevant documents confirming the legal status of MSF operations were offered to the Presidential Aide's office this afternoon with a request for an explanation regarding the previous accusations.

Until now MSF has been providing vital medical assistance to the civilian victims of the armed conflict, supporting and rehabilitating a barely functioning health System and providing essential medicines. Following the recent abduction of Kenneth Gluck, MSF and other international actors, including the UN, have suspended all activities in Chechnya. With the collapsed health System, ongoing fighting and a severe winter, the Chechen people need humanitarian assistance more urgently than ever.



**Minutes** of 'Intersectional Meeting on the Need to Continue Assistance in the North Caucasus Following the Kidnapping of Kenny Gluck, Moscow Office MSF Holland' 15 January 2001 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

##### COMMON VISION OF MSF ON CONTINUATION OF WORK IN NORTH CAUCASUS:

Since the needs of the IDPs in the North Caucasus remain very high, MSF considers that aid in the North Caucasus HAS TO CONTINUE. Actions in Dagestan and Ingushetia will continue unchanged. Actions in Chechnya are for the moment suspended. The possibility of continuation or not of the programs in Chechnya is being studied by the different headquarters.

##### Thoughts on the subject:

If activities restart again in Chechnya, no witnessing activities should be done, at least until there is a clear view on the reasons behind the kidnapping of Kenny (if ever). As (for the moment at least) we will not go in with expats, the programs may have to be redefined. A big part of the added value of the presence of expats in the field was exactly witnessing.

##### Press:

We need to keep the momentum going.

- This will be easier in America (Kenny being American).
- In Europe it will be harder (already now interest is not as high).
- Also very important in Moscow. Already reporting in the Russian press is clearly improving.

Last reports are very much objective and open, very positive. All decisions on how to approach the press will be taken in common by Moscow, A'dam and New York. Final decisions however are taken in Moscow. If anyone from one of the sections is approached by the press for an interview on the subject, they should contact MSF-H A'dam first before going ahead. This year MSF exists [turns] 30 years [old], and is in Russia since 10 years. We should take advantage of this fact to pass the message on our presence in the Caucasus and on the case of Kenny.



'NGOs are the Only External Witnesses to Russian Army Violence,' François Bonnet, *Le Monde* (France), 20 January 2001 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

The kidnapping in Chechnya of Médecins Sans Frontières coordinator Kenny Gluck on 9 January has reopened a debate between humanitarian organisations. Should they, despite the risks, work in Chechnya, and if so, how? On Thursday 18 January, most NGOs held a meeting in Moscow. With the exception of Médecins du Monde and the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross), all have decided to pull out. Some of them are questioning whether they should maintain their operations in the small neighbouring republic of Ingushetia, which is sheltering almost 200,000 refugees. MSF Holland, which employs Kenny Gluck, suggested the withdrawal and sought a gesture of solidarity from its colleagues. Médecins Sans Frontières began its operation in Chechnya in February 2000; six months after the conflict began, and intensified its work in August. Médecins du Monde [MdM], on the other hand, has decided to maintain its operations in Chechnya. MdM has been on the ground since the first war (1994-1996) and has maintained local medical teams over all these years. It describes itself as "an organisation that is different from the others," which enables it to provide supplies for a number of hospitals in the region of Grozny, Argoun, Ourous Martan and Vedenov. "We are continuing because we have specific resources and because we need to preserve some place, however small, for the humanitarian cause. There is already very little aid in Chechnya, and if everyone pulled out there would be nothing," explained a Médecins du Monde official in Moscow. Indeed, the humanitarian presence has remained extremely slight over the last year and a half of the war. While around thirty organisations are working with the Ingushetia refugees, only six of them have progressively set up programs in Chechnya. [...] To this can be added food deliveries from HCR (High Commission for Refugees) and the ICRC. "After this kidnapping we need to take the time to reflect and to review our operational methods, even though our in-principle position is to continue in Chechnya. We will take a decision over the next two or three weeks," says Action Contre la Faim [Action Against Hunger]. Its coordinator in Russia, Jonathan Littell, was in the same convoy as Kenny Gluck and was able to evade the kidnapers. [...] The NGO withdrawal may thus only be temporary but this will, once again, depend on the attitude of Moscow - because there are questions on everyone's lips about the possible involvement of Russian services in Kenny Gluck's kidnapping. The precedents of the journalist Andreï Babitski, last year, as well as other hostage-taking, "make this a legitimate question," says one humanitarian worker: "did the Russians want to send a warning?" Ever since the beginning of the conflict, the Russian authorities have raised major obstacles. Initially, Moscow simply prohibited humanitarian access to Chechnya, as it did for foreign journalists. It limited NGO operations to the Republic of Ingushetia alone, attempting in the process to take control of this aid through its Ministry for Emergency Situations. Discussions were tough, and it was only after Grozny had been taken in February 2000 and

the most violent bombing and “cleansing” operations had ended, that humanitarian organisation were gradually able to move into the Republic.

“We are sick and tired of doing the job the Russians should be doing in Ingushetia, whereas the real catastrophe is occurring in Chechnya,” said one NGO official shortly before the Kenny Gluck kidnapping. The Russian authorities quickly ceased managing the Ingush camps, stopping deliveries of hot meals, food, and equipment. HCR and the NGOs had to take up the slack, and the 200,000 Chechen refugees are surviving thanks to international assistance. Yet even according to Mr Kalamonov, President Putin’s Representative for Human Rights, the situation in Chechnya is far worse: 300,000 people have fled their homes. Famine is threatening and the possibilities for receiving treatment are virtually nil. Through tough negotiations, the humanitarian organisations were able to get the Russian authorities to agree to a number of basic principles: no armed escorts for operations in Chechnya; free access to the various zones (subject to prior authorisation); control of deliveries to remain with the organisations themselves. This autonomy has taken a constant pounding from the Russians. Given the refusal to admit journalists, this has only been reinforced: NGOs became the only observers of Russian army violence and the worsening humanitarian situation in the Republic. Kenny Gluck’s kidnapping has put a stop to that. The Russians are likely to take advantage of it to establish a new operational framework for NGOs and attempt to strengthen still further the closed-door conditions under which this war is taking place.



**Minutes** of MSF France Board of Directors, 26 January 2001 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

Contribution from Marie and Mickaël (members of the team on mission in the Caucasus): we have come to give feedback from people currently working in the field. We are all convinced that there should be a presence and humanitarian action as the needs are great (more than 200,000 Chechens are registered in Ingushetia). Aid (Russian or international) is concentrated in the large camps which is why we chose to help organisations receiving less support to prepare for the winter and refurbish structures (materials, wood, sheet metal, etc.) In Chechnya, 12,000 people are being given prenatal care (thirty women per day are received at two weekly consultations provided by Chechen doctors).

The team considers that if they pull out now, they would have to assume that they would not be going back as it would be impossible to manage the shaken confidence of our Chechen team members. This is partly why we have already trained staff to take over the programmes by building the necessary synergy to enable activities to continue in our absence. Although all is not yet perfect, the team is functional. Extra training is needed to improve organisation (this could be done in Moscow as the Chechens can travel freely there). New operational methods perhaps need to

be devised to work with Chechnya, and we might have to accept distance ‘remote-control’ operations.

#### Discussion

[...] Odile Cochetel: It seems to me that the chronology of events highlights the gradual increase of the threat and, in particular, the precise targeting of MSF for its role of witnessing [témoignage], which was ensured by the presence of expatriates. We need to be aware of this threat in order not to be provocative and endanger Kenny’s safety. We need to make a symbolic gesture to show that we have understood and that we don’t intend to raise the stakes.

François Bourdillon: But how has MDM been able to carry on working without encountering problems?

Jean-Hervé Bradol: What they have done is to have a continuous presence in the field without any permanent expatriates and direct connections with the Chechen health ministry. Their witnessing has been similar to ours and even more critical.

Maurice Nègre: I remember that when we returned to this area we deliberately did not want to do remote-control like MSF Holland was doing. And we need to bear in mind that MDM has always operated with a regular number of expatriates visiting the field, always the same three or four people for years. Having said this, our return was conditional on our safety. With all our contacts there, it was understood that if there were the slightest incident to remind us of Christophe André’s kidnapping, then we would cease our activities immediately.

Graziella Godain: We need to decide whether we can remain involved in this situation and accept that if we change to a remote-control operation we will deprive our mission of the witnessing function.

Xavier Jardon: We cannot have this discussion without thinking about how we will be perceived by the kidnapers. At least, it seems to me that this should be our main concern.

François Bourdillon: What is MSF Holland’s position?

Mickaël: For the time being MSF Holland has suspended all its activities in Chechnya and asks the other sections to stand by this decision.

Jean-Hervé Bradol: Following Christophe’s kidnapping, we decided for the entire Caucasus, not to expose staff (national and international) to any further risk. When the second war started again, we thought that the situation between the two sides was less conducive to kidnappings, but as time goes by it is clear that Russia is stumbling and this is going to create political uncertainty which will foster all kinds of manipulation. We should also remember that after Christophe’s kidnapping the pace quickened and scores of people were abducted. Obviously, in this situation our primary aim is to make it quite clear that we have got the message, so as not to jeopardise our staff overall and Kenny in particular. This is why I would not be particularly bothered to change to remote-control, if we have assurances that only foreigners are being targeted for kidnapping.

Bruce Mahin: I have some comments to make as it seems from my viewpoint that, for Kenny’s safety, changing to remote-control would make our message to the kidnapers less clear. Furthermore, remote-control implies (as I see it for this particular moment) that we continue to make one-

off visits, which are still very dangerous. We also need to coordinate our position with MSF Holland's, as they are still working in Ingushetia with permanent expatriates.

Maxime Filandrov: I was administrator in Moscow from May to August and one of the conclusions arising from my experience is that it would be worthwhile to learn how to work with the Russian military and particularly with the interior ministry. Although we are currently operating but ignoring them, we have to realise that the Chechen crisis is first and foremost a Russian crisis. If we can use the idea of working with them in Moscow, we can expect direct benefits on the ground where abuses are taking place.

Didier Fassin: These abductions show how vulnerable we are, as they force us to stop speaking out (denouncing the credibility of the Council of Europe which has now re-admitted Russia, and withdrawing from activities in the field. When we look at how MDM are operating, you can see that they behaved differently by focussing on long-term work rather than building their image. [...]

Xavier Jardon: Should we not, for instance, consider a permanent office in Moscow with a truly political brief which could be very useful for getting ourselves known and recognised and gaining clout in the trials of strength in which we have no interest in keeping a low profile?

#### Decision:

The Board agreed unanimously against a permanent presence of international staff in Chechnya and Ingushetia given the current climate of increased kidnap attempts. This decision did not preclude the possibility of continuing to provide help through the network of national staff and the supervision of this activity by short visits from international staff. Only international staff involved in the search for Kenny Gluck are authorised to remain permanently in the region.



*The attackers had a very loose understanding of those who are trying to intervene and they had a very loose understanding of the different organizations or people.*

*So it is possible that someone specifically tried to target MSF Holland, or specifically tried to target Kenny, but the coordinator of ACF was also in the convoy, a foreigner, and managed to escape the attack, so there's no evidence. Secondly, the hard evidence that we have of who did it and why, doesn't indicate anything attached to this specific outburst that we made beforehand. We can't map it and say, look, there's cause-effect there, we can't.*

Austen Davies, MSF Holland Executive Director, 1999 to 2004 (in English) interviewed in 2009.



*There is disagreement between us in Paris. Anne Fouchard, Deputy Communications Director, is very much in favour of making it publicly known as soon as possible—that it seems this has been done by the Russians. Her point of view is not irrational given that just*

*before Andrey Babitsky [Radio Liberty journalist kidnapped some months earlier in Chechnya] was released thanks to a campaign his friends undertook over the involvement of the Russian special services. Anne therefore wanted to do the same thing for Kenny. There was, however, disagreement about the probabilities of who were the kidnappers. I am convinced that it is not the Russians. I am convinced that they might be involved in some way and that there is probably some idea of an exchange behind this, but I do not think that the initial idea came from the FSB and its friends. Before being kidnapped, Kenny himself had explained that there were groups with whom he had problems. Eight days before his abduction, he had sent an email which basically said 'if I'm kidnapped, go to such and such an address.' This address was clearly known to be a Bassayev's address. The main person concerned, who had investigated the threat, arrived at this conclusion with what he had learned on the ground. I did not therefore see why we should look to the other side. Therefore we will not make a statement saying we think it is the Russians. I impose my view in this matter.*

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of Communications (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000-May 2008), (in French) interviewed in 2009.

**With the exception of a press conference given together with Kenny Gluck's brother, the MSF- USA team was keeping contacts with the media to a minimum in favour of diplomatic efforts. V21** However, in Moscow, the MSF Holland team and the MSF regional communication officer were trying to get as much press coverage as possible for the kidnapping of the Coordinator. V22



*'Kidnappers in Chechnya Urged to Free Brooklyn Man,' The New York Times /AP (USA), 13 January 2001 (in English).*

#### **Extract:**

Joëlle Tanguy, the executive director of Doctors without Borders, and Daniel Gluck said that Kenneth Gluck suffers from severe asthma that requires continuous medication. It is not known how much medicine he had with him when he was abducted, Ms. Tanguy said. "Without it, his condition can seriously worsen and even become a life-threatening condition," she said. "So we are appealing to whoever is holding him to take into account his medical condition." [...] The Russian Foreign Ministry on Thursday accused Kenneth Gluck and Jonathan Little, a worker for the humanitarian group Action Against Hunger who escaped the ambush, of using a faked pass to enter Chechnya through a checkpoint from the neighbouring republic of Ingushetia. Ms. Tanguy disputed claims by Russian authorities that aid workers did not notify them of their travels and were moving without a military escort. "We

absolutely deny it," Ms. Tanguy said. "Absolutely, this information is false." She said the convoy had "official permission from all authorities to provide humanitarian aid to hospitals in Chechnya. The convoy in which Kenneth Gluck was travelling was fully authorized by all civil and military authorities," she said.

She said Doctors without Borders workers in Moscow gave documents confirming the authorization to the Russian Presidential Aid office yesterday. Ms. Tanguy also insisted the convoy was not armed. "We never operated under armed protection," she said, "because in this conflict, particularly recently, it would have compromised the independent and humanitarian principles by which the organization works and which Kenny was so forcefully supporting." Doctors without Borders, which received the 1999 Nobel Peace Prize, has been a fierce critic of Russia's conduct of the war, accusing troops of randomly executing civilians and inflicting a campaign of terror. It and many other relief agencies suspended operations in Chechnya after Mr. Gluck's kidnapping. "In this situation, Kenny did not choose sides," Ms. Tanguy said. "Kenny chose to serve the victims. He helped alleviate their suffering and he bore witness to it."



'Brainstorming' (Comms) **Email** from Gazelle Gaignaire, MSF International Regional Information Officer in Russia to MSF North Caucasus Network, 15 January 2001 (in English).

#### Extract:

- Marcel Van Soest just finished intv with Radio Echo Moskvi's "open" program [...]. Present were: AP, REUTERS, 3 major TV stations (ORT, RTR, NTB) and "Russia" newspaper. [...] Marcel emphasized the terrible situation in Chechnya and expanded on MSF's advocacy mandate. I found the Qs to be surprisingly "soft" and straight-forward. Note that ORT's "nasty" broadcasts (ORT pro-Putin) in the first few days have given way to very positive coverage, and the switch was quite sudden and noticeable by Russians. Could the switch reflect the political pressure from Americans? Or...?

- Canadian TV had one-on-one with Marcel after radio show, which by comparison was much trickier. Ex: Can you rule out that the FSB might have done this to get rid of NGOs in Chechnya?

- Very very good, balanced story on NTV (National, independent TV station in Russia) broadcast last night at 8:15 pm on "Itogi", an analytical news program with the highest reputation and public ratings in Russia, duration 1h30 min, every Sunday (\*). In a few days we are far from the cacophony of the last Tuesday and Wednesday when the papers, internet, and airwaves were being flooded with inaccurate and accusatory reports (ACF-MSF confusion, illegality of our work, Kenny did it on purpose, he's hiding, he escaped). [...]. On Friday/Saturday Kenny was a military excuse: according to interfax, 6 Russians were killed while looking for him, and a top-news story showed Russian soldiers who, allegedly searching for Kenny, had

found a warehouse near Stare Atagi full of weapons, but the rebels had gone...

- (\*): appearances on the "Itogi" program included Sergei (Kenny's good Russian friend), Marcel van Soest (operational director from Amsterdam, part of crisis team, brought Kenny into the North Caucasus program), Kenny (re-broadcast of a talk show "Voice of the People" which he lately participated in, making a few strong remarks to Kadirov about the horrors for civilians in Chechnya), Chechen refugees in Ingushetia. Main points that got across strongly: the abduction was well orchestrated and targeted (Sergei), Chechens had no interest in doing this (male Chechen refugee interviewed in the camp), Kenny adhered to all official procedures, had strong networking abilities and had built up good relationships with Ingush and Russian authorities (Marcel), he was outspoken and critical of Putin (journalist and presenter), count on us for not dropping this case (presenter).

#### [...] COMM STRATEGY

- I feel "Itogi" program is a perfect example of the comm strategy we should pursue: high-profile, continuous, aggressive efforts to keep Kenny in the public eye, to pressure for prompt release.- Moscow will appreciate New York's effort to tone down the American hero stories while we work here on bringing out the Russian side of Kenny, working closely with his Russian friends - many of them journalists - and set in place our Russian-specific approach to the media.

- Well synchronized, international media strategy would have three axes: Russian, Western European, and American. In Russia, we need to build on the momentum we've started. Also, this year marks our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary [in the region] (MSFB has planned a special budget for advocacy). Besides North Caucasus, MSF programs include TB, AIDS, the homeless, and these should help us counter-balance our pro-Chechen image. It would be preferable if comm decisions could be taken quickly in Moscow.

- We need to quickly define our threshold for correcting inaccurate info or responding to accusations : a few bullet points that will help us put on the same "glasses" when we monitor the media - for example, "when Kenny's life is at stake" or "when MSF's image is being grossly and deliberately tarnished"...

- While we concentrate on the Russian media we must not forget the Chechen/Ingush media. It is harder to establish contacts with the latter, but extra efforts must be made (example: Kavkaz center with semi-legal office perhaps in Tbilissi (?)) - e-mail will be sent to MSFF to try to get contact info).




*We wondered what should be done. First of all we called the French for advice about how to manage the initial contacts with Kenny's next of kin. Graziella Godain [who had managed the business around Christophe André's kidnapping in 1997] told us: 'firstly, you have to get*



their confidence straight away. Secondly you have to show that you are determined and that you are managing, that everything is under control. Otherwise they will undertake their own initiatives.' New York imposed the channel of communication. We were under a lot of pressure because of the family. American NGOs wanted to get involved. The American government wanted to deploy its intelligence agencies in Chechnya. The Americans were interested in the region, as there were very fundamentalist Muslim groups there and I think they were interested with respect to the fight against terrorism. In fact, the people at the FBI we spoke to, did not seem very well informed. Or they were pretending to be innocent! It was really problematic. That's why I said that we should not go to see American administration without a definite strategy and a precise request. Indeed, the first thing they asked us is what we wanted to do. We did not want a public statement; we preferred to work behind the scenes. We had no idea who had kidnapped him, whether it was the Russians or the Chechens. We did think, however, that if it was the Russians, they had done it to keep us quiet and make us leave the region. We wanted the Americans to say that it was not good that someone had been kidnapped in the region, but we did not want to highlight the fact that Kenny was an American national. We asked them for silent diplomacy, but nothing official. The only time there was a public communication was two days after the kidnapping. Daniel, Kenny's brother, spoke publically on behalf of the family at a press conference. He said that his brother was a humanitarian worker, who had been kidnapped while doing his work for the people of this country. Kris [Torgeson, Communications Director MSF-USA] managed the communication contacts always repeating the same thing "he's a humanitarian worker, a humanitarian worker..." We wanted to disassociate him from anything to do with American policy and say that he was something who had nothing to do with politics. The strategy was therefore to tell the kidnapers that they had got the wrong target, by playing the humanitarian card.

[...], Project Coordinator, MSF Belgium in Chechnya, (1995), MSF USA Programme Department 2001-2002 (in French), interviewed in 2008

 Kenny gave evidence to the Council of Europe and he was kidnapped at the beginning of January. I was much shaken and I asked myself whether we hadn't stuck our necks out too far to end up with these problems. We confirmed his disappearance which had been announced by Reuters. In terms of communication, our instructions were to be prudent. I think that the kidnapping of I[...] in Colombia<sup>17</sup> happened at about the same time and we had the same reaction to it. I was in favour of our speaking publically about Kenny's kidnapping, but I fell in line with the general

opinion. We managed Kenny's kidnapping and the one in Colombia in much the same way, by keeping quiet. We arranged for others to follow through, diplomatically for instance. We did not have much to go on, but sensing that things were being negotiated in New York, I did not get over-excited about saying we absolutely had to give it more visibility. And as it lasted for a sufficiently short period of time, we did not need to get further involved.

Anne Fouchard, MSF France Deputy Communications Director, July 2000 – July 2004, (in French) interviewed in 2009.

**In its issue of 16-22 January, the Russian weekly Moskovsky Novosti [Moscow News] published an interview that Kenny Gluck had done with them ten days before his abduction and in which he said that the Chechens were still being injured by bullets and explosives and accused the federal authorities of blocking supplies to the hospitals.**



'Gluck Interview in Russian Weekly Ten Days before his Abduction,' AFP (France), Moscow, 17 January 2001 (in French).

#### Extract:

The Russian weekly Moskovsky Novosti published this week an interview with Kenny Gluck, the American voluntary aid worker with Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), they had conducted ten days before his kidnapping on 9 January in Chechnya. The MSF's Moscow office confirmed to AFP that the American had "contacted Moskovsky Novosti" a few days before being kidnapped. Mr Gluck had said in the interview that "officially the war has been over for a long time, but nothing has changed for Chechen civilians." According to him, 90% of the Chechen civilians seeking medical help were suffering from "wounds from bullets or explosives. There are several hundred people every month. This means that arms are still being used as much as during the war," he added. The checkpoints set up by the Russians in Chechnya "are the greatest problem" for civilians, according to Mr Gluck. "They are closed after four o'clock in the afternoon and it is impossible (for civilians) to get to medical institutions in the evening and at night-time," he explained. "A gynaecologist friend told me that a pregnant woman who needed surgery died because of this," Mr Gluck explained and added, "There are hundreds of similarly savage stories." Many civilians "try to avoid medical institutions" for fear of being denounced or accused of being combatants," the American added. "I remember a Chechen who was arrested in hospital and accused of being a combatant. It was impossible to prove or refute this accusation." Mr Gluck also accuses "the federal authorities" of "not organising regular supplies of medicines to Chechen hospitals." Asked about the risks run by staff of humanitarian organisations in Chechnya, the American

17. I [...], At the same time, I [...], logistician of the MSF France team in Colombia was taken hostage on 25 July 2000 and released on late January 2001.

replied: "Of course, we are aware of the risks, but things are less difficult for us than for the civilians. When you see the constant threats they have to live with, it's not right to complain."



*Misha Shevelyov was the managing editor of Moskovskie Novosti which was a very influential newspaper, and had a very good Caucasus coverage. We dealt with him a lot. We did a roundtable discussion with one of our surgeon's, in which they had two full pages of in the newspaper. It was kind of an interview with the two of us where B could talk about what it's like in a surgical theatre during the bombing of Grozny. Before we would speak out, we went to people like Misha and asked them: 'is this worthwhile, does this have an impact?' He said yes. He was self-interested because he wanted it in Moskovskie Novosti, but he also said: 'the Russian people have to see that the people they're fighting against are doctors trying to do surgery in a hospital, and are seeing children with their faces blown off and so on. The Russian people need to know this. That's why you have to speak out.' And I think that goes back to the sense of what, at least at MSF Holland, we were trying to teach people: 'don't look for a cost-benefit analysis in terms of how many lives will it save. See it as a moral obligation. You are there, you are in a way a participant in this massive crime of war, and you have an obligation if you're there to not hide it, along with everybody else. Think of it in those terms don't look for the concrete benefits.*

Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus (November 1999-January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005) interviewed in 2009 (in English).

**Speculation was rife about where Kenny Gluck was held and by which group. On 18 January, the Interior Minister of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Rushailo told the press that he was being held in the Vedeno region by the radical Islamic group Khattab and that Russian forces were carrying out searches to find him. On 23 January, the pro-independence Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov accused the bodyguards of Akhmad Kadyrov, the head of the pro-Russian Chechen administration of Kenny's kidnapping. On 27 January, Maskhadov said that he did not rule out involvement of the Russian forces, given that he believed that Kenny Gluck was gathering information about the atrocities they were committed. Then the Procurator of Chechnya announced the arrest by the Chechen police of a suspect involved in Kenny's kidnapping. The Kremlin then spoke out against the 'principle' paying a ransom. On 1 February,**

**in the independent Russian weekly Novaya Gazeta<sup>18</sup>, the journalist Viatcheslav Izmaïlov, a former Russian army officer, specialist in abductions, pointed out that the Russian services were not committed to searching for Kenny Gluck. On 2 February, appearing on the Russian television station NTV, Izmaïlov accused them directly of holding Kenny and said that the latter was linked secret services.**



*'American Kenny Gluck is Probably in Khattab's Hands,' NTV<sup>19</sup>, 18 January 2001 (in English).*

Today the press center of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the North Caucasus announced that according to their data, Kenneth Gluck, American, is in Khattab's hands, whose band is hiding in the Vedeno district of Chechnya, as reported by ITAR TASS. This information was distributed less than 24 hours after Vladimir Rushailo, Russian Minister of Internal Affairs (MVD) had a meeting with the journalists in Nalchik. The head of MVD assured the media representatives that the armed forces are actively working to find and release Gluck. According to Rushailo, for now the law enforcement forces already have the various "operational information about the people related to the abduction of Kenneth Gluck, U.S. citizen, as well as the information about his possible location."

By kidnapping the U.S. citizen shortly before the arrival of the PACE delegation to Chechnya, the rebels are "showing their real face." This incident has "influenced the position of the Council of Europe in a definite way." The divisions of the armed forces are now running special operations in Starye Atagi, Novye Atagi, Mairtup and in [the] Grozny suburbs to find the US citizen. Announcing the information about Gluck's search, the official Russian sources also provided the data concerning the hostages' release from Chechen captivity. According to Rushailo, during the last 2 years more than 50 foreign citizens were released from captivity. Iastrjembski office gave the following information: during [the] last years, 66 persons were kidnapped and 203 people were released. In 2001 one person, Kenny Gluck, has been kidnapped, 5 people have been freed.



*'Nobody Intends to Flee from Chechnya,' Kommersant-Daily<sup>20</sup>, 27 January 2001 (in English).*

#### **Extract:**

Aslan Maskhadov was elected President of Chechnya on January 27, 1997. As it is claimed by representatives of the present

18. Novaya Gazeta is an independent weekly, supported by the former president of the Russian Federation and architect of Perestroika, Mikhail Gorbachev.

19. NTV: Russian television channel that used to be independent but now controlled by the government.

20. Kommersant: Russian daily focusing on economic issues, fairly liberal, considered as serious and competent, belonged to a steel magnate and was widely read in the major Russian cities.

Chechen authorities, Maskhadov's presidential term expires on January 27. But in his interview to the newspaper Kommersant Daily, Maskhadov refutes these contentions and says that the American Kenneth Gluck could have been abducted in Chechnya by the Russian military. [...] About the fate of the American Kenneth Gluck from the humanitarian organization Médecins sans Frontières: "We know that Kenneth Gluck had problems in his relations with the Russian military. There was an attempt to abduct him even before [...]. According to my information, during his last trip he had collected materials which could have been used during the discussion of the Chechen question at the PACE session or other international forums. That is why I do not rule it out that the Russian military could be involved in the abduction of the American because they were not interested in a disclosure of facts of their violation of the rights of the peaceful population. If this is so, it will be difficult for us to find him."



'Moscow's War Against Humanitarian Action in Chechnya,' Sophie Shihab, *Le Monde* (France) 4 February 2001 (in French).

#### Extract:

Speaking on Friday 2 February on the NTV television channel, whose independence is threatened, Viatcheslav Izmailov, a Russian officer specialised in hostage exchanges, publicly accused the Russian 'special services' of holding the American, for the first time. He also maintained that the latter is "himself linked to secret services." The day before, this expert had published an article in Novaya Gazeta which ended with an appeal to the "gentlemen" of the Russian service: "If a tragic fate was to strike Kenny Gluck because of your games, not you, nor your children, nor the whole of Russia could be absolved."

Viatcheslav Izmailov believes that those who planned the abduction did not want to kill the American, but they might lose control of the operation because of the "disturbed psyches" of those holding him hostage, "as this had nearly been the case with Andrey Babitsky," the Radio Liberty journalist, kidnapped a year ago by Russian soldiers and handed over to a Chechen group described as "independence bandits," but who were, in fact, working for Moscow. "The political objectives of kidnapping Gluck have been achieved, it is time to release him," the Russian officer concluded and is the first to say out loud what everyone in Chechnya believed, i.e. that it was the Russians, and not "Chechen bandits," who had kidnapped Gluck.

This interpretation of events is based, not only on the obvious advantage of the abduction for Moscow, but also on all the circumstances, as reported by witnesses. (*Le Monde* of 27 January). Furthermore, it took place in a village totally controlled by Russian soldiers, who waited three days before sealing it off and carrying out one of their customary "sweeps." [...] But officials from the NGOs and from the UN continue to speak cryptically in order not to embarrass Moscow, or otherwise quite openly favour, as the Council of Europe has done, the official Russian version of accusing Chechen rebels. This is upsetting humanitarian

workers on the ground, "We can pull out, all right, but at least we need to be told the truth," say some, while others think, "No, let's not pull out, we shouldn't give in to Russian blackmail, we can continue with local staff and by taking as many precautions as possible."

This latter option was taken by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Médecins du Monde, who are working in Chechnya with their own resources. MSF, for whom Kenny Gluck was working, also have enough resources available to ignore calls to suspend activities from UN and EU funding sources. However, its top management have decided at least for now, not only to suspend all action in the North Caucasus, but to call on other NGOs to do likewise as a gesture of "solidarity." This was very badly received by workers on the ground and as the internal debate progressed, the position of MSF's leadership changed: they are no longer calling for other NGOs to withdraw. MSF's aid programme for Chechen refugees ought to be maintained.



*The Russian journalists, especially these friends of mine, they were convinced it was the Russians. So, they immediately said: 'Kenny denounced the Russian government; the Russian government is making him pay.' My friends didn't really know the Chechens that well. They knew the Russian government and they didn't like it. So they were immediately writing articles about the Russian press and feeding it to their other journalist friends. So there were several articles, like for example, the articles of Viatcheslav Izmailov.*

Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus (November 1999-January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005), (in English) interviewed in 2009.

**On 25 January, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe cancelled the sanctions imposed on Russia nine months earlier for its conduct of the war in Chechnya. Lord Judd, the British rapporteur who ten days earlier had declared that Kenny Gluck's kidnapping would have serious consequences for the Chechen population, launched an appeal for his release, in a manner accusing Chechen independents of the kidnapping.**



'Kidnapping of an American Volunteer: "Serious Consequences" for the Population,' (Judd) *AFP* (France), Znamenskoie (Russia) 15 January 2001 (in French).

#### Extract:

The kidnapping of an American volunteer with Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) "will have serious consequences" for the

Chechen people, said CoE parliamentarian Lord Frank Judd during a visit on Monday to Znamenskoie (North Chechnya). The abduction is a “blow to the humanitarian organisations and it will have serious consequences for the people of Chechnya,” warned the British parliamentarian. “I do not know whether the people who kidnapped Kenny Gluck are aware of the price the Chechen people will have to pay for this,” added Lord Judd. Following the American’s abduction last Tuesday, while he was on mission south of Grozny, capital of Chechnya, the humanitarian organisations ceased operations in the North Caucasian independent republic. As for the Representative of President Vladimir Putin for Human Rights in Chechnya, Vladimir Kalamonov, he considered that Kenny Gluck been “unwise” in the first place to visit Stary-Atagi (20 km south of Grozny). The Russians stated that the MSF volunteer had travelled without a permit. This was denied by MSF.



‘Council of Europe Parliamentarians Restore Russia’s Rights,’ Sophie Shihab, *Le Monde* (France), 27 January 2001 (in French).

#### Extract:

The session was hurried through with cowardly relief for the sake of realpolitik. On 25 January the members of the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly lifted the sanction imposed on Russia nine months earlier, the only one ever to have been imposed on Moscow for its war in Chechnya. By 88 votes for, 20 against and 11 abstentions, the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) decided to ratify the powers of the Russian delegation, without conditions or limitations. This means that the suspension of voting rights of the delegates from the Duma has been lifted. It was a light sanction that the Assembly had surprised itself by imposing in April 2000, fearing discredit. The PACE had, at that time, been under pressure from European public opinion, shocked by the bombing of Grozny, which had caused several thousand deaths and which, according to television reports, was constantly ‘intensifying.’ [...] The report “took note of encouraging, although still limited progress, made since September 2000.” However, this “progress” has been questioned by those who have regular access to the area. The Russian NGO Memorial and others have reported on the systematic use by the Russian forces of torture, rape, summary executions, “sales” of hostages, pillaging, etc... Others such as Human Rights Watch, who were only able to gather information from refugees in Ingushetia, and Médecins Sans Frontières, which, before the 9 January abduction of their American Coordinator, Kenny Gluck, was also operating in Chechnya.

Did Gluck pay the price for what he had just publically reported in Moscow and to European parliamentarians? “What is most alarming, he had said, was that nothing has happened, hundreds of war-wounded continue to arrive in the hospitals every month. That is 90% of patients, often women and children and nobody knows how many of those who cannot get through the military checkpoints are dying.”

Evidence seems to show that Mr Gluck was abducted by the Russians. In addition there is the question: “Who would benefit from this?” (All the foreign humanitarian workers, the undesirable witnesses, have suspended their activities in Chechnya).

Then there are the circumstances of the abduction. It was carried out in a village controlled by the Russians, by “eight masked giants, in identical new uniforms, one of whom spoke Russian without an accent,” according to a reliable witness. In addition, any war act attributed to the Chechens is always followed up by cordon and search action, whereas “the Russian military waited three days before ‘cleaning up’ in this particular village,” according to Memorial. [...] However, Lord Judd chose to appeal for the release of Mr Gluck in the paragraph following his condemnation of the violations of humanitarian law committed by the Chechen combatants and “terrorist activities,” which is tantamount to accusing the latter of the abduction.

**For safety reasons, the MSF Holland crisis unit decided not to comment on the PACE’s decision and to treat the information on Kenny’s kidnapping with greater circumspection.**



‘Chechnya Comms Update 26 Jan,’ Email from Ruud Huurman, MSF Holland Communications Officer to MSF Communications Network, 26 January 2001 (in English).

#### Extract:

Media-wise we are looking for ways to keep the story ‘alive,’ but we have to be extremely careful to not fuel the discussions about our legal status, about our advocacy statements last year about Russian politics, etcetera. In the first week, we got involved in discussions and speculations about the Who and Why behind this abduction. We believe this is not in Kenny’s interest and we should prevent this from happening again.

- As you know, the Council of Europe yesterday restored the Russian voting rights. You may wonder what MSF’s position on this issue is. We have decided that we should refrain from comments on this issue. We are convinced that at this stage MSF should not become the focus in the discussions about Russian-CoE politics and about human right situation. You may have noticed that other NGO’s, particularly HR organisations have been very vocal on this issue.

> Please refrain from comments on the CoE issue, just refer to the abduction of our worker and that this abduction, and Kenny’s security is our priority.

> If they want to challenge you further on this issue. Please refrain from discussion, and if necessary refer to Amsterdam.

**On 4 February, MSF announced the release of Kenny Gluck. However, before being truly free, he spent another two days in the hands of the Russian forces, who wanted to make him hold a press conference to say that they were responsible for his release. On arriving in Moscow on 6 February, Kenny refused to speak to journalists, who then started making all kinds of speculations.**



*'Médecins sans Frontières Relief Worker Released in Chechnya,'* Press release MSF Moscow, 4 February 2001 (in English).

This afternoon Doctors without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) received confirmation that its aid worker Kenneth Gluck, who had been abducted on January 9, 2001, in Chechnya, was released yesterday and is safe. In a short telephone discussion this afternoon Mr. Gluck confirmed his release. He is now under safe protection of the competent Russian authorities. The priority for MSF is now to work on a safe return of Mr. Gluck.



*'The silence of Dr Gluck'* Sergei Vanin, *Segodnya*<sup>21</sup> (Ukraine), 7 February 2001 (translated from Ukrainian into English by MSF).

#### Extract:

It seems that the mysterious Odyssey of the MSF aid worker Kenneth Gluck comes to an end. Yesterday at 5:15 p.m. he arrived in Moscow in the airport Vnukovo from Nazran with a regular flight. He plans to go home to the USA on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February. But on the 5<sup>th</sup> of February he was questioned in the procurator office of Chechnya in Gudermes on the conditions of his abduction by the unknown assailants. The Procurator of Chechnya Vsevolod Tchernov confirmed that "they got the information that will help the investigation to identify the abductors." In particular, Kenneth Gluck gave the description of the persons that kept him in the captivity recalled the names of some of them. "Due to the investigation the details are not revealed," said the procurator.

The conditions of the abduction and the release are still under the veil of secrecy. Yesterday night in the airport Gluck totally refused to talk to the journalists. "No comment" - those were the words the journalists were knocked off with in the FSB of Russia, in the FSB of Chechnya and even in the Moscow office of the MSF. Two sudden versions explaining that silence were received from the informants close to the special services. The "Humanitarian" version: Kenneth Gluck was really abducted by the Chechen rebels though the main role in the liberation was played by MSF and not by the special services. According to the newspaper *Segodnya*, owing to certain reasons, a considerable part of the humanitarian aid provided by this organization goes 'behind' the front line to

the Chechen rebels. The representatives of the organization (possibly via special service mediators) made a strong ultimatum to the Chechen field commanders: either they give back Gluck, or the humanitarian aid won't be supplied into Chechnya. Dr. Gluck was released supposedly after that. Another less exotic version was as well proposed. One former FSB worker assumes that Kenneth Gluck was taken by the Russian special services as he was suspected of being an agent of some foreign secret service. This version says that organizers framed the abduction to unmask the agent. In any case, the result of the operation for the FSB was positive: the suspect was evicted [freed], the public applauded. In the press office of the FSB, both versions were described as delirious.



*I was released on the fourth. Then the Russians held me on the fifth and the sixth, and I didn't get to Nazran until the sixth, so it was two days in a Russian army base. I was released to one of our staff's house. We tried to arrange that he smuggled me out to MSF but, he said 'it's too dangerous: I have to give you over to the Russians because we might get killed.' He said that there were a lot of rumours that they wanted to re-kidnap me or assassinate me. He was very scared. He had a contact who called the Russian army by radio and they drove me to the Russian army base in Starye Atagi. I spent the night there. Then I was driven to the Russian army base in Khankala, just east of Grozny. Then I spent another night in Khankala, and so I spent two nights with the Russian army. I didn't sleep at all both of those nights. They refused to release me because they wanted me to go on television and thank the Russians for rescuing me, which I refused to do. They threatened me and said: 'We're not going to release you until you do this.' I started to threaten them saying, 'If you don't let me out I'm going to call this a second kidnapping. This is ridiculous. Already it's been two days since you said I was released and I'm not released.' I had written a hand-written message which I managed to send out with a friend of his. So MSF actually knew I was released, because they had a hand-written message. The message then said, 'The Russians now have me, not the Chechens. Follow up with the Russians.' So MSF was already putting pressure on the Russians saying, 'We know you have him, where is he?' Then on the second day they let me make some phone calls. So I called MSF and I called my father. Just to say I'm in a Russian army base.*

Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus (November 1999-January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005), (in English) interviewed in 2009.

21. Newspaper from Kiev (Ukraine). At the time, it had an editorial bent close to that of the West European press.

Putin had just transferred the management of operations in Chechnya, claimed that they had freed Kenny Gluck. Then another FSB officer, based in Chechnya, declared anonymously to the Russian weekly *Kommersant* that Kenny Gluck had been delivered by his kidnappers to a house in Starye-Atagi. After interviewing Kenny, the Procurator of Chechnya announced that he had been abducted by "Chechen bandits from Yakub's gang." In the weekly *Novaya Gazeta*, the journalist Viatcheslav Izmaïlov retorted that Yakub did not exist and again accused the Russian secret services. He considered that they wanted 'to make sure that there would no longer be witnesses in Chechnya.' The spokesperson of the United States Department of State expressed doubts about the truth of the official information given by the Russian authorities.



*'Washington Doubts the Official Russian Version of the Gluck Affair,'* Sophie Shihab, *Le Monde* (France), 7 February 2001 (in French).

#### Extract:

The State Department in Washington is not content simply to doubt the truth of the official Russian explanation of the abduction and release in Chechnya of Kenny Gluck, the American working for Médecins Sans Frontières. It has also made this known. State Department Spokesman, Richard Boucher, declared on Monday 5 February, that his country "is seeking further information about the circumstances surrounding the release," of Gluck the day before. He noted that with respect to the "conditions of his abduction" on 9 January, there remained a "source of concern." Washington could hardly do less, given the increasing testimony about the role of the FSB (former KGB) in the American's abduction and the fact that official explanations from Moscow were full of inconsistencies. However, by asking too forcefully for the truth, does Washington run the risk of pushing Moscow to seal the gates to Chechnya even more firmly?

For the time being, an initial fear has been removed, which hung over the fate of Kenny Gluck. "Many people shared my view, but were afraid of saying openly that the Russian services had kidnapped him, as nobody knows what the services could have done if they felt their cover had been blown" said former soldier Viatcheslav Izmaïlov, last Monday in an Ekho Moskvyy broadcast. He started to write his version of the kidnapping on 18 January in *Novaya Gazeta*, an opposition newspaper, in which he has been recounting his work as a professional hostage liberator and member of an ad hoc Kremlin committee for years. "I know all the people in the secret services who could have looked for Gluck in Chechnya, after his abduction," he said. "However, none of them did so, nor received instructions to do so," noted Izmaïlov, considering that this backed up his belief that the Russians had carried out the kidnapping. "This was the case with Andreï Babitsky," a journalist who had "disappeared" in Chechnya a year ago.

Former officer Izmaïlov is helping Gluck's friends as much

as he can: "We agreed that I would say things how they were, whereas others would conform to official customs, i.e. a President would speak to a President, a minister to a minister, humanitarian organisations likewise. Finally, thank God, good sense prevailed and those who had taken him let him go." The release was described by another witness, an anonymous FSB agent quoted on Monday by the daily *Kommersant*: Gluck had been taken blindfolded and on foot at night, to the door of a doctor he knew well in the village of Starye Atagi, the same place, strictly controlled by Russian soldiers, where he had been abducted and held by "unknown persons." The latter took off his blindfold and quietly went their way.

Officially, Gluck was liberated by the FSB from a gang of "Chechen bandits led by Yakub," during a "special operation," which took place "without shots being fired, without loss to the FSB and without paying a ransom" And without the arrest of any one of the kidnappers, noted Izmaïlov perfidiously, asserting that there was no known commander going by the name of Yakub. The Russian generals had sometimes described this Yakub as an intermediary, sometimes as a kidnapper, a role which they successively also gave to most of the famous Chechen rebel chiefs.

According to Izmaïlov, "Patrouchev, the FSB Chief and perhaps Putin, were aware of everything that was happening." The aim was to make sure that there were no more witnesses in Chechnya: "Kenny was not keeping quiet; he gave evidence to the Council of Europe and had to be put in his place, like the other humanitarian workers in Chechnya. After Babitsky's abduction, no journalists could move around freely. It's now the turn of humanitarian workers. They might come back, but only if they are accompanied by the army." The NGOs are resisting this option, but the UN institutions are pushing them to give in.



*Vyatcheslav Izmailov wrote an article about how I was kidnapped by the Russians. He called a very good friend of mine and she called me, and she said, 'Look, Viachek says he's going public with this tomorrow. Can you talk to him?' I said 'No. I don't want to talk to any journalists yet.' And she then called me back, and she said, 'Look, he's going with this story tomorrow, that you were captured by this unit in the Russian army and you were held, and moved in an armoured personnel carrier. All he wants is for you to say if this true?' I don't know where he got this. It was very detailed. He's an ex-military officer. I just told my friend that it wasn't true at all. I said, 'tell him it's completely false.' So, they published some things that they knew were false. Maybe he thought I was lying. He wanted to write that I was being held in one of the MSF surgeon's villages, which was also false. It's important because if I was being held in this village, it meant that someone was trying to blame this surgeon for the kidnapping. It's a small village, it's a single clan, and he's very big in that area. You can't do things in this village without his family being involved. So then I called*

*Viacheslav and I said: 'Really, this is a complete lie, and it's going to get somebody hurt, so please do not do this.' He did not publish. That was nasty. I never found out who was spreading this rumour.*

Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus (November 1999-January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005), (in English) interviewed in 2009.

**On 8 February, during a brief press conference in Moscow, Kenny Gluck said that he had no idea about who had kidnapped him and that he did not wish to speculate about their identity. In New York, he only met the press two weeks after his return and he said he had seen no sign of the hand of the Russian services at the time of his release. In his view, his unconditional release was a sign that the humanitarian organisations' message of independence was successful. V23, 24**



*'Kidnapped MSF Aid Worker Kenneth Gluck Relates Details of Captivity,' MSF Press release, Amsterdam, 8 February 2001 (in English).*

#### Extract:

At a press conference held in Moscow today, released aid worker Kenneth Gluck, Head of Mission for the North Caucasus operations of the international medical aid agency Doctors without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), related details of his kidnapping, captivity, and release. Gluck, 39, was abducted by armed individuals while travelling in an unarmed humanitarian convoy near the village of Starye Atagi in Chechnya on January 9. Gluck described being held in a dark basement for part of his captivity and passing the time listening to the radio, reading, and worrying over the fate of his co-workers and his own release. "Gratefully, I was never gagged, beaten or tortured in any way during my period in captivity," said Gluck. "I was always given three meals a day and always had enough to eat." After being driven in a car blindfolded, Gluck was released on Saturday, February 3 in the village of Starye Atagi. Throughout the nearly month-long period that Gluck was held, MSF was never contacted by anyone claiming to be Kenny's kidnappers, nor were any demands made.

"It was a complete and happy surprise to learn of Kenny's release," said MSF Executive Director Austen Davis. "This incident is a personal tragedy for Kenny, his family and many others," Davis continued. "It is also a tragedy for the doctors and nurses who continue to carry out surgical operations in Chechnya and provide assistance and care to the sick and wounded, despite the harsh conditions, without supplies and pay. They deserve our respect and support, but as a consequence of this incident all humanitarian assistance was put on hold." MSF reiterates its serious concern with the

desperate situation facing hundreds of thousands of people in Chechnya and those who fled Chechnya to Ingushetia.

MSF will now begin the process of re-evaluating the role the organization will play in the delivery of aid in the region. Whether MSF continues to work in the Northern Caucasus or not depends both on its capacity to do so effectively and on the conditions for access and provision of help. MSF calls on all parties to the conflict to re-affirm their commitment to humanitarian action and to create the conditions in which humanitarian actors can provide help and care without threats or restrictions, and with free access to evaluate the needs and to monitor the programs. Without the assistance of independent humanitarian actors MSF is very concerned that the availability and access to care will be further reduced. Gluck plans to return to New York for a reunion with his family and friends.



*'American Details Ordeal in Chechnya - Mystery Surrounds Abduction, Release of Aid Organizer,' Sharon La Franière, The Washington Post, Foreign Office (USA), 27 February 2001 (in English).*

#### Extract:

Was Gluck taken by one of the notorious Chechen gangs that have seized a dozen or more humanitarian workers since 1995? Or were Russian authorities involved, perhaps staging his abduction for propaganda or political purposes? Radio Liberty reporter Andrei Babitsky claims this is what happened to him in Chechnya last year. [...] A spokesman for the Federal Security Service, Russia's domestic intelligence agency, described Gluck's release as a daring coup on the part of intelligence agents, who tracked his captors for days and then moved in at just the right moment, freeing Gluck without firing a shot. But Gluck said he saw no trace of such an operation. No military vehicles accompanied the car that dropped him off. No Russian officers met him. The Chechen doctor simply alerted the local military commander, who sent him to the main Russian military base outside Grozny. Gluck said he remains committed to humanitarian work. He doesn't regret talking to journalists about the suffering of civilians he observed in the region, even if it made him more noticeable -- and placed him more at risk. [...] "Part of the service we render is to bear witness to people's suffering," he said Sunday. Gluck takes heart from the fact that his kidnappers released him without any conditions or demand for ransom -- a possible sign they got the message that humanitarian workers are out of bounds. He and other humanitarian workers who want to help Chechnya wonder whether to believe what Gluck's captors told him before they let him go: "This will never happen again."



*The American press wanted it to be about the kidnapping and we wanted it to be about the*

kidnapping in the context of the Chechen war and what MSF was doing. So we actually selected three journalists, all of whom had worked in Chechnya during the war. So it was Dany Shevsky, Carlotta Gall, and Sharon Lafranière. Carlotta apologized to me later, she said, "They took out everything about Chechnya, and it was all about the kidnapping. I am sorry the editors just cut everything out." Whereas the other two it was a little bit better, I thought. There was a lot of coverage while I was kidnapped, and in the week afterwards, but by the time I got back to the United States and I did these interviews, the coverage was already pretty much dead.

Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus (November 1999-January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005), (in English) interviewed in 2009.

## "KIDNAPPED BY MISTAKE": APOLOGIES FROM BASSAIEV

**On 11 March, the Russian television station NTV announced the arrest of two men, one close to the pro-independence commander Shamil Bassayev, both were accused by the Russian Interior Minister of Kenny Gluck's kidnapping. On 12 March, the Chechen independence website 'Kavkaz Centre' published a letter that had been addressed to Kenny Gluck by Shamil Bassayev before his release. In it the commander apologised for the abduction which he described as arising from a misunderstanding and reproached Kenny for not having published the letter.**



*'The Success of the Russian Special Services,'* Transcript of the Story that Ran on **NTV's program 'Itogi,'** 11 March 2001 (translated from Russian into English by MSF).

### Extract:

The search for the two persons in Baku (Azerbaijan), who have just been arrested by the Russian Interior Ministry's Combating Organized Crime Squad, lasted several years. One of the persons is Ruslan Akhmatov (the famous Chechen warlord); the other is Batroudin Mourtazajev, the assistant of Shamil Bassayev. Ruslan Akhmatov is one of most cruel warlords in Chechnya. And Akhmatov's clan is considered to be the main founder and organizer of the business of kidnapping for ransoms. These shots [two abducted women are shown, they are asking to be released] were made by the rebels themselves, when they kept two female Polish academics.

and his brothers are directly related to the abduction of 34 people, including General Shpigun, the ITAR-TASS correspondent, Yatsina, and the New Zealand citizens that were killed. There have also been the Akhmatov brothers' involvement in the abduction of Kenneth Gluck. Russian federal security services searched for Russian Akhmatov via Interpol. The second detainee was identified thanks to a videocassette, which was distributed by rebels in Chechnya during the first Chechen war. It is clear that Mourtazaiev was present during the execution of a Russian officer. Now Mourtazaiev fully admits his guilt.



**Letter** of Shamil Bassaev to Kenneth Gluck, Version Posted on Kavkaz Centre.net, 12 March 2001 (in English).

### Extract:

Dear Kenneth Gluck! [...]

The High Military Madjlis Shura of the Mudjaheeden apologizes for your detention and informs you that, thanks to Allah, you are free. An unhappy misunderstanding occurred, which however could be explained. [...] A group of our Mudjaheeden decided on their own to liberate several their comrades in exchange for you. There were many pretexts to do so, and Russians make them feel that they can exchange even 10 people for a foreigner. We have no possibility to be in permanent contact with all our groups, and that was the reason for our comrades' acts on their own. Another reason was our fighters' weak knowledge of Sharia. To avoid all the misunderstandings and rumours, we decided not to solve the problem in a way of superiors' orders but transferred it to the High Sharia Court under the High Military Madjlis Shura. [...]

The High Sharia Court under the High Military Madjlis Shura examined your case and found your detainment illegal for different reasons. The main reason is that your security had been guaranteed by a Muslim, Doctor A [...], and that you were a member of a humanitarian organization. [...] There is no difference if the security was granted by a powerful Amir or by a simple weak Muslim, the most important is to respect Sharia rules when the security is granted. Taking into consideration the fact that doctor Abdurakhman granted you security, but also the fact that the Sharia law is not sufficiently understood, we won't punish your abductors. Despite the fact that they are ready to endure any punishment agreed in our High Sharia Court. Also, we don't care about your nationality, though Russians speeded up to inform us about it through mass media. [...]

It took so long time to take a decision on your question because there were certain difficulties in regards [to] with the necessity of a meeting of the assembly of the High Sharia Court under the High Military Madjlis Shura. The only condition of your release is your obligation to avoid disseminating any information that could harm your abductors. For this, you as a faithful, swear for the sake of god, and if, God forbid, you are a non-believer, give us the word of honour of an honourable man.


We would like to ensure you that our acts are explained by a



simple desire of being fair and of respecting properly the law of the High Allah - Sharia. We are deeply negative in regard to international community that became a community of cowards and hypocrites, and we are not going to make politics over your liberation. [...] High Military Madjlis Shura of the Mudjaheeden wants to apologise again for everything that happened to you and undertakes to reimburse the damage it caused. We hope that you will change your opinion of our people to the better and we also hope that everything that happened to you will be of use for others. We also inform you that when examining your case the Assembly of the High Sharia Court decided to forbid abductions of members of humanitarian agencies.[...]

Editor's note: the letter was given to Kenneth Gluck before the very release


**The President of the French section of MSF then criticised the Dutch section for not telling the movement about the existence of this letter and of having given an untruthful account of the abduction which had been drafted after Kenny Gluck's release.**

 I had 30 days to talk with the kidnappers. We know who they are. I have documents from Basaïev himself, which I received during the kidnapping. It's been confirmed at the top levels of the rebels who said: 'yes, we're sorry. It was hard to make an agreement, it was done in the last days of my kidnapping, when they said we will release you, with a full apology and, we will promise that MSF can continue and will not be targeted. They really said: 'we are very, very sorry this happened, but please do not embarrass us.' So, the assumption was that releasing the letter would be embarrassing them. And that it would make it impossible for MSF to work in the future. Later on, Bassaïev said: 'why did you not release the letter...?' That was the strange thing. But then they published the letter, on Kavkaz.net, their web site, and then they complained to us directly: 'why didn't you thank Bassaïev for releasing you?' We sent back a message saying: 'We couldn't thank you for releasing me, without saying you took me. So, it's embarrassing.' That's why in the end we did not release the letter, but they released it and we refused to comment on it. [...] What Bassaïev said is that none of the units were very well supervised. So he said, 'they didn't know that we had all of the guarantees.' This makes sense because most the rebels didn't have good means of communication. They're scared of using electronic communication, because of Dudaïev's death and so on<sup>22</sup>...

*So, yes, you could say they're under the spiritual leadership of Bassaïev or Gelaïev or somebody else, but they would operate in small cells throughout the country, largely independently, in terms of attacking and doing their operations. They took me hostage and it took him a little bit time to get the message to them to say: 'this is not allowed.' Then it took a little bit more time to actually organize the release, and it took a little bit more time for our Chechen senior staff and the others, to communicate with everybody and say: 'you're not allowed to do this, we had an agreement.' Then somebody had to travel to Bassaïev, somebody had to travel back and these things take several days each. This is consistent because my quality of treatment improved dramatically on Day 9. I was allowed out of the cellar, I was given better food. They said: 'We are sorry. We promise we're going to release you. What do you want?' And they gave me a radio, a razor, books.*

*It would make a mockery of the whole sort of concept, if Bassaïev is seen as a Russian agent. What I believe is that all of the Rebel leaders had relationships with the Russians. Maskhadov and Dudaïev, for instance, spent their whole life in the Russian army. They knew people all through the Ministry of Defense. So there was, without question, communication between Russian officers and Bassaïev, Maskhadov and many of the others during the war. They bought things from the Russians. They traded information with the Russians. Most rebels maintained relationships with their enemies. That's the nature of civil war and that means that there's openness to levels of collaboration. Certainly the Chechens got most of their weapons from the Russian army. You can't do that without some relationship, but that doesn't mean they're working for the Russians. It means that there are points of collaboration within a larger war. And I would put Bassaïev in that category. He maintained levels of collaboration with parts of within the Russian regime which was far from unified. Part of that collaboration could have been on kidnapping, certainly in weapons trade, and in local cease fires like: 'let's have a deal not to kill each in this area at this time. We do business, so we can trade things, or even we can rest for a while.'*

Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus (November 1999-January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005), (in English) interviewed in 2009.

 There were certainly people that very strongly made the connection between the statements made in the Council of Europe and the kidnapping of Kenny, thereafter. Kenny's own opinion was extremely strong the other way around. He thought that it was quite obvious that the Russians had nothing to do with it, that it was a splinter group of the rebels. They had the letters to prove it. That's also why it was resolved so quickly, because the main rebel groups were able to put pressure on the splinter groups saying: 'You got the wrong guy actually. This one has our protection,

22. On 21 April 1996, the President of Chechnya at the time, Djokhar Dudaïev was identified through his mobile phone and killed by the Russian forces.

so you have to let him go.' Therefore most people would go with that analysis. However, a lot of people would have gone with that explanation: 'You speak out, and then the Russians kidnap you.' Of course, any issue with Kenny is very strong, but if you're the one that's been abducted, and are regarded as being the Chechnya expert, if you so strongly state the opposite, obviously that creates momentum as well.

Michiel Hofman, MSF Holland North Caucasus Coordinator from May 2001 to July 2003 (in English) interviewed in 2009.



This letter was really written and released by Bassaiev. As far as I can judge of why did that happen or how did that happen, there was a few high ranked rebels involved. FSB actually dropped the information for them that if they take Kenny in return, they will liberate or release other rebels from their jails. Perhaps there were not direct links between them and FSB, but there was an indirect connection that's quite certain. The second thing was there was quite a good chance for the kidnapers to make quite a bit of money. These guys are also human beings, people who don't reject money. In the political context of the whole event the objective was the war, but if you go one level down, there the financial aspect appears. In this regard Bassaiev, as they figuratively say, is quite a pig for that. Kenny was released without a ransom because Bassaiev found out, he was actually rebutted on this issue. In this letter, there were not only apologies to Kenny but also apologies to MSF Chechen doctors.

Dr B, surgeon, MSF North Caucasus staff since 2000 (in Russian, translated into English by an MSF interpreter) interviewed in 2008



What I understood from this story was that the kidnapers wanted to make a deal with the Russians. They had Russian prisoners and thought they could swap them with the FSB. I think this is where the FSB got involved by saying clearly that if they had a westerner, they would make a deal. [...] At MSF Holland they told me that when Kenny was released they were under the impression that Bassaiev's group was assuming responsibility for the release, but did not want it talked about too much. They felt that the fact that this information was circulating could irritate this group and jeopardise the safety of MSF. Bassaiev did not want it to be known that he was so deeply involved. This was the only explanation that they gave us. We got very angry with them – not only us, but also other directors in the international movement – when Bassaiev later spoke saying that 'We don't understand why MSF does not mention that Gluck's release was thanks to us, etc.' He published the famous letter that he had given to Kenny. In that letter, he invoked

'the word of Ashura, the word of a Muslim, which had been given as a guarantee of safety--we are men of our word.' I had a fairly harsh discussion with Austen Davis [Director General of MSF Holland] about the fact that they had hidden the letter from us, that they had lied to us. For the sake of our teams' safety, it is important to keep the other sections informed. I think it is disgusting that they hid this from us. Austen justified it by fear of the danger. I warned him that if something like this happened again I would take serious institutional action against him in MSF in his capacity as Director General, and would call him to account individually. I think that it [hiding the existence of this letter] was not a collective decision made by MSF Holland. Rather it was made by a small group of individuals. I do not think that the board of MSF Holland was aware of this kind of thing. Some of the management was, but not all of them... We did the work to find Kenny, and when they had information which was critical for the safety of the teams, they hid it from us! We were furious. As usual, there were three or four versions of the MSF Holland report on Kenny's kidnapping. Which one was definitive? We don't know, but the one which was sent to us, was an institutional lie

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of communication (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000- May 2008) (in French) interviewed in 2009.



I think the weird thing about Chechnya and working in Russia in general was the degree of secretiveness, and how that rubbed off on the MSFers. I understand still, to this date, it is believed that MSF Holland didn't share all its documents. There's nothing we can say to persuade people that we did, but everyone believes we didn't. And between Kenny and me it was a running joke, because so many people got so emotional about our supposed withholding of documents. Then we would remind them: 'You came on this date and we passed it all around.' They would answer: 'Yeah, but you must have had something else,' because they were just told that we withheld. It was really weird. There was just this assumption of an enormous withholding of information. So when you don't, and then people accuse you of it, you assume that they are withholding information from you on their previous cases, because the only reason they could possibly suspect us of doing so is because they've done it themselves. We had a draft report, and there was a meeting, and Jean-Hervé came, from France with Steve [Cornish] the coordinator. I explained to him: "we showed you Bassaiev's letter in Moscow, we translated it with you there. What do you think we're withholding? When we got back we passed copies of it and the translation around the room when all the operations people came over for a briefing. We shared our full report. We didn't do a report like you in France did after your kidnapping [of Christophe André, kidnapped in Ingushetia, in 1997] with

*a 500-page analysis<sup>23</sup>. We did a 30-page report.' That was it. We don't have the same culture of analysis and discussion. When people just said they didn't get the right report, we'd get it back to see which draft they'd got. We made sure everyone had the right one, but the rumours went on and on and on and on and there was nothing we could do about them. So in the end we just gave up and started laughing about it. When we were in Moscow, managing Kenny's abduction when we would want to talk seriously about something, including with the Chechen staff, we would go out of our own office and down to use different cafes to sit in and talk. We had this strange feeling that we were either under surveillance or that there were people who were going to be reporting on us. I guess that comes out of the Communist period, but I just don't believe it was true, that there were informants, and that there was surveillance. Even within sections there was a real need-to-know kind of management of information and a real sort of sense of secrecy. When we got this letter on Kenny's release, Kenny myself and Steve went and hid in a old freezing - minus 20 - stairwell of a giant building to open this letter and to look at it and read it. We could have gone into any office of ours, closed the door and read it, but we were crouching in this cold Communist staircase. [...] You recreate environments depending on your suspicion or your perceptions of your environment. It became very cold-war, in a sense.*

Austen Davies, MSF Holland Executive Director, 1999 to 2004, (in English) interviewed in 2009.

**Some months later, the president of the French section communicated with the Foreign Affairs Minister of the independence government, in exile in Europe. He expressed MSF's incomprehension about the abduction of one of its volunteers by independence Chechen combatants, while their leaders pronounced their support for humanitarian action. The MSF president asked him to explain how MSF could be expected to work in such an environment. He took the same line in a letter requesting a meeting with Aslan Maskhadov, President of the independent Chechen Republic of Ichkeria and its Prime Minister Shamil Bassayev.**



**Minutes** of the Meeting on 15/06/01 with Ilyas Akhmadov and Ali Bassayev in Paris, Loïck Barriquand, programme manager MSF France, 15 June 2001 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

Jean-Hervé started by outlining our actions in the Caucasus (displaced persons in Ingushetia, hospitals in Chechnya

and war wounded, including combatants, in Georgia) and reiterated our solidarity with the population and our intention to continue to provide medical aid. He also repeated our public statements to emphasize that our position has always been clear and committed. However, it was now necessary to clarify our respective views and to avoid propaganda between us. We had been victims of three abductions, two of which were the responsibility of Chechens at the highest level: Asimov and Bassayev. Our aid was also being hindered by attacks coming from the Chechen side, which forced us to make decisions that we did not wish to take, far from it. Any new threat or attack would lead us to cease our operations completely and withdraw our teams. Such a decision would necessarily be accompanied by a public explanation of the reasons why.

The question that we now have to ask ourselves is about the perception of MSF among Chechen political and military leaders. Was it 'acceptable' to attack volunteers, how were we perceived and should we be afraid of becoming a target again. We asked for meetings with Maskhadov and Bassayev, to discuss this question, and to get clarity on their political position with respect to us. Ilyas's reply: Bassayev had indeed accepted responsibility for the abduction (nor did Ilyas dispute the involvement of Arsanov) and he confirmed that the letter from Bassayev was authentic. He noted that he had himself been convinced that the Russians were responsible until the letter had been received. He found our approach legitimate (although to my mind he was surprised, but did not show it).

"The Chechen people will be the first to suffer when you leave" and he suggested contacting Maskhadov as soon as he returned to Baku (end June), and thought it would be possible to get a meeting. However, he thought it would be more difficult to see Bassayev, not because he would refuse, but for practical and security reasons. He suggested we write him a letter that he would transmit. Bassayev would reply to us. A telephone discussion (5 mins) was also an option. As to the recent appearance of uncontrolled groups in Chechnya, Ilyas replied that the situation had not changed recently. He did, however, advise us strongly against sending foreigners to the region.



**Letter** from Jean-Hervé Bradol, President of MSF France to the President of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, Aslan Maskhadov, 11 July 2001 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

Mr President,  
You are aware of the involvement and the role of Médecins sans Frontières in your Republic during the first conflict in 1995. Since the resumption of the war in 1999, our teams have returned to provide aid to the Chechen people, in Chechnya itself, in Ingushetia, in Georgia and in Turkey. As you know, following last January's kidnapping of Kenny Gluck, a volunteer with the Dutch section of MSF, we have had to reduce our staff numbers and limit our assistance

23. In fact, the report on Christophe André's kidnapping is a 100 pages internal account, more factual than analytic.

programmes for the victims of war. We are still, however, convinced that the situation is serious and of the increasing need to help the Chechen people.

We have appreciated your public statements condemning the abduction and would like to thank you for your role in its happy outcome. However, despite our deep commitment to continue to help the victims of the war, we no longer wish to put our teams in such situations of danger and therefore wish to redefine the frame of our engagement. We therefore request a meeting with you in order to understand your views and to help us appreciate the conditions under which we may operate.



**Letter** from Jean-Hervé Bradol, President of MSF France to General Shamil Bassayev, Government of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, 11 July 2001 (in French).

#### Extract:

Since the end of 1999, and despite the risks to which our teams are exposed, we have been supporting the hospitals of Chechnya and have been caring for the Chechen people who are refugees in Ingushetia, Georgia and Turkey. In these two latter countries, we are helping by operating on and treating the war wounded, including wounded combatants, in accordance with the Geneva conventions. As we are direct witnesses of the war, of the suffering inflicted on the population, the abuses committed against our patients, and the hindrances affecting the work of the medical staff, we have on several occasions taken strong public positions. We have called upon western and Russian political leaders to respect civil rights. On 23 November 2000, Jean-Hervé Bradol, President of MSF, Loïck Barriquand, MSF Programme Director for the North Caucasus and Kenny Gluck, Head of Mission of the Dutch section of MSF, gave testimony in this respect to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (report in annex).

Kenny Gluck's kidnapping last January shocked us and led us to considerably reduce our operations in Chechnya. However, as you pointed out in your letter addressed to Kenny Gluck, the President elect Aslan Mashkadov invited all the international humanitarian organisations to come to Chechnya and gave guarantees for their safety. It has therefore, been extremely difficult to understand that we could be victims of an attack by Chechen combatants. This act, which went totally against the interests of the people, happened when our teams were already subject to great constraints while trying to carry out their work.

By identifying the group which carried out the kidnapping as being under your authority, you personally became involved in resolving the situation. Your involvement and the decision of the Assembly of the Sharia High Court made it possible to free Kenny Gluck unconditionally and without any harm to his person. We thank you sincerely and wish to interpret your gesture and your letter as a positive political signal. However, and despite the favourable outcome, we cannot overlook the consequences of this action for the population

and for the humanitarian aid being provided in Chechnya. Indeed, after the kidnapping, the federal forces have carried out numerous house-to-house searches and arrests. Humanitarian aid has been drastically reduced and the rare, indispensable witnesses have left the country. As far as our organisation is concerned, we are no longer prepared to expose our volunteers to such risks. New threats or attacks would make the risks we still take, unjustifiable. If another incident should occur in the future, we would be obliged, against our will, to withdraw our teams completely and definitively from the North Caucasus. This would mean that we would no longer be able to provide aid to the victims of war; no longer bear witness and no longer express our solidarity with the Chechen people.

As we are transparent in our actions, first and foremost with respect to the people we help, we would necessarily have to justify publically the decision to stop our missions. We are aware that these explanations of the reasons for our withdrawal would be detrimental to the Chechen population as a whole. Your letter (as well as your recent video recording, a copy of which we would be very grateful to receive from you) encourages us to believe that you are committed to a political course that is firm and of good will with respect to your combatants and compatriots, and which aims to respect humanitarian teams. We would like to discuss with you the specific role of Médecins Sans Frontières and arrange a meeting with you. We would therefore wish to understand your opinion of the help we are providing, our role as committed witnesses, and the scope of work that you think can be possible for our foreign and Chechen teams.



*My view at the time was that we needed to shake the moderate pro-independents to put pressure on Bassayev, and to tell him to stop messing about with us. We had been on fairly good terms with him. In 1997, when we were looking for Christophe André, we had asked Ilyas Akhmadov, who had been one of his close advisors, to lend us bodyguards. I did not therefore, understand why we had a problem with Bassayev. Among the moderate pro-independents, Ilyas was fairly honest. Later, I officially reprimanded him, by saying that we weren't cattle to be rustled. He knew what was going on, otherwise he wouldn't have stood for a dressing down by young upstart westerner in the comfort of his office. He wasn't the type. From my point of view, bawling them out was a way of confirming their guilt. As for Omar Khanbiev [Health Minister in the Mashkadov government], he tried to have us believe that it was the Russians. During a meeting, he had ticked off the programme manager for not denouncing the Russians. The Russians are always involved in everything, whatever it is. That was expected, it's their territory, but that was about it, the way I saw it.*

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of communication (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000-May 2008), (in French) interviewed in 2009.

## 'RUSSIAN PRESSURE ON REFUGEES' RETURN TO CHECHNYA

Throughout 2001, the federal authorities, the pro-Russia Chechen administration, and the new Ingush administration stepped up their policy of enforced repatriation of Chechen refugees in Ingushetia. Apart from subjecting the refugees in Ingushetia to a daily regime of terror, one of their preferred methods of action was to put pressure on the humanitarian organisations so that they stop helping Ingushetia and refocus on Chechnya.

On 14 February, while the humanitarian organisations were preparing to resume their aid work with the Chechen population, which had been suspended during Kenny Gluck's abduction, Akhmad Khadirov the head of the pro-Russian Chechen administration announced that these organizations would no longer be allowed to operate independently in Chechnya.



*'Humanitarian Organizations are ready to Resume their Activities in Chechnya, which were Suspended after Kenneth Gluck's Kidnapping,' RIA Novosti (Russia), 13-14 February 2001 (in English).*

### Extract:

All the humanitarian organizations working in the Chechen region expressed their desire to resume their activities in Chechnya, which were suspended for security reasons after the kidnapping of Kenneth Gluck, the MSF worker. According to Aslambek Dahkilgov, Head of the High Commissioner of Refugee Affairs in Ingushetia said the convoys with food and non-food products are ready to leave. For the moment, RIA Novosti got the information that the Chechen populations have received humanitarian assistance from ICRC - the only organization that continued to work in the republic during the period of Kenneth Gluck's captivity.



*Kadyrov Criticized the Activity of Humanitarian Organizations in Chechnya,' Interfax (Russia), 14 February 2001 (in English).*

### Extract:

The Head of the Chechen Administration Akhmad Kadyrov criticized the independent work of humanitarian organizations

in Chechnya. "Chechen authorities don't intend to allow the independent activity of humanitarian organizations," Kadyrov said on Wednesday in Gudermes during his meeting with Vladimir Kalamonov. Kadyrov explained this by the fact that some of the agencies just use their support to refugees as an umbrella, but in reality they "speculate on the problems in Chechnya and on the people's blood." He said that humanitarian assistance from the international organizations doesn't reach the republic. He criticized the practice of transit loading of food cargos in Mozdock (North Ossetia), in Ingushetia, and in Dagestan. But he supported the direct delivery of humanitarian cargos to Chechnya. Kadyrov also said that all refugees will have the possibility of returning to Chechnya. To this end, it is planned that each family will be provided with a house or wagon. Kadyrov characterized the situation as close to stable, and gave the return of Russia's voting rights in PACE as evidence of this.

At the beginning of March, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) requested NGOs to sign a protocol agreement, which would subject humanitarian activities to the arbitrary control of the FSB, the Russian Federation's internal security service. In line with the Belgian section, MSF's various sections refused to sign the protocol agreement. On 6 March, the French section's programme manager met Victor Kalamonov, the Kremlin Representative responsible for human rights and declined his offer to provide an armed escort for the team's movements. He also informed him that MSF had not yet taken a decision about the resumption of its activities. However, the day after the meeting, the Kremlin Representative announced to the Russian press agency, Interfax, that MSF would resume its activities in Chechnya and that it approved the decisions of the Russian authorities concerning humanitarian operations. MSF made an official, but not public, denial.



**Letter** from Sylvie Schwall, MSF Belgium coordinator to Toby Lanzer, OCHA Head of Office for the Russian Federation, 1 March 2001 (in English).

As you may recall, Médecins Sans Frontières-Belgium presented its decision not to sign the protocol between the United Nations and NGOs working in the North Caucasus at the UN meeting on security and coordination, on February 23rd in Moscow. MSF-B agrees that close cooperation and coordination is indispensable between all humanitarian actors present in the field. Information sharing, cooperation through sector working groups, and transparency are all indeed, necessary to guarantee an adequate assistance to the people in need in the North Caucasus. MSF-B also wholeheartedly agrees that information concerning security and staff safety should be shared with all parties concerned.

However, MSF-B insists that it remains completely impartial and independent in its analyses and decision-making. This holds equally for our operational decisions as for our security concerns. As you mentioned, MSF-B has initiated and has suggested to other humanitarian actors to sign Codes of Conduct elsewhere in other crisis contexts. This particular protocol, however, clearly exceeds the scope of practical operational matters and affects, as such, the independence of all NGOs.

We therefore do not see any compelling reason to condition UN assistance (such as travel passes or VHF communications) upon the signing of this protocol. Of course, we hope and expect the current cooperation to continue, regardless of whether this protocol is ratified. We also hope and expect that our refusing to sign the present protocol will not hamper or weaken future occasions to improve upon our existing cooperation.



'Médecins sans Frontières Prepared to Return to Chechnya – Russian Human Rights Envoy,' **Interfax** (Russia), Moscow, 6 March 2001 (in English).

#### Extract:

The international organization Médecins Sans Frontières, which suspended its activities in Chechnya after its worker Kenneth Gluck was abducted in January, is prepared to return to the Caucasian republic, Russian presidential human rights envoy Vladimir Kalamonov told Interfax after meeting with one of the organization's coordinators on Tuesday. The meeting was held in a constructive atmosphere and the Médecins Sans Frontières representative agreed with Russia's position concerning the rules of behavior for international and non-governmental organizations working in Chechnya, Kalamonov said. "We reached a mutual agreement on new forms of cooperation with the republic's government and Kadyrov's administration.

We also agreed to hold talks with the Chechen leadership, so that an agreement could be signed between it and Médecins Sans Frontières," Kalamonov said. The matter involves not only interaction but also the guaranteeing of security to the workers of the organization in Chechnya while they provide medical aid to the republic's population, he said.



**Summary** of Intersectional Meeting for North Caucasus Held March 7, 2001 in Moscow, Gazelle Gaignaire, MSF RIO for CIS, 7 March 2001 (in English).

#### Extract:

##### Comments [...]

- The morning after the meeting, Loïck [Barriquand, MSF Desk] called Kalamonov re the Interfax press release. K said he was only expressing his personal opinions and views, and tacitly admitted his mistake by telling L that if we wished to, MSF should not restrain from clarifying some points with

the media. K said he could have a follow-up meeting with L next Monday (March 12) but the meeting was not set up (L returning to Paris).

- Given the time of the Interfax press release, K must have called the wire agency immediately after the meeting was over at around noon. L also recognizes K's wording and feels K knew exactly what he was doing. Tim suggested that L's follow-up letter to K could more clearly summarize the various points discussed and diplomatically use the statements from the press release as a reason to clarify the "differences" in their 'conclusions.'

#### Decisions

- No public statements. Loïck said he would have preferred doing a brief press release in order to show those persons who closely follow developments that MSF stands against manipulation. But he said this was not a sufficient reason to fight for a press release. Others added that a public statement would be inconsistent with MSF's initial intention to open the door for future talks. Gazelle confirmed that headquarters of various sections also did not feel that a public statement was a good idea.

- Info-sharing among sections regarding intentions or plans to meet high officials and authorities; and pairing-up (versus going alone) in case of particularly sensitive meetings. Need for close cooperation re-emphasized.

- Follow-up letter to Kalamonov to be signed by Loïck as a representative of MSF France (rather than all sections) and will be cc'ed to all others. [...]

#### Comments

- A common viewpoint raised by the Russian authorities is that they want to bring the IDPs back into Chechnya. They are clearly giving off signs of openness in their dealings with NGOs, no doubt because they can obtain 2 objectives in 1: flatter the West and move everyone over to the other side.

- Summarizing the picture MSF gets so far from its various meetings with officials, Tim said no one understands the overall purpose of OCHA's protocol, nor the security measures it contains: neither the Dutch understand, nor the French, nor the Canadians, nor ECHO... Tim suggested that accumulating these reactions from donors could help MSF build its case for opposing the protocol and refusing to sign it, and convince other NGOs to do the same.

**During May, the Dutch section of MSF was enjoined by the pro-Russian Chechen administration to refocus all its aid on Chechnya, while the Russian authorities continued to reduce their aid to displaced Chechens in Ingushetia.**



**Letter** from A Magomedov, Deputy Head of the Administration of Chechen Republic to José-Antonio Bastos, programme manager North Caucasus MSF Holland, 17 May 2001 (in English).

**Extract:**

At present the Administration of Chechen Republic is facing a serious problem to return home refugees, who are located outside the boundaries of Republic. For that purpose, we are creating necessary conditions, i.e. we are preparing places to live, solving a question to provide them security. In connection with these facts and with the cases of misappropriation of humanitarian aid, I ask you earnestly to direct all the aid, your organization provides, step-by-step at the territory of Chechen Republic and to coordinate your work with the Permanent Representation of Chechen Republic by the President of Russian Federation, which is assigned to solve the questions of humanitarian aid by the decree of the Head of the Administration of Chechen Republic. The employees of Permanent Representation, who are located in Republic, have already worked through a good scheme to accept, accompany and distribute humanitarian aid.

**In mid-July, the international humanitarian organisations were officially informed of the contents of Resolution 22, decreed by the pro-Russian Chechen government laying down the conditions for their work and residence in Chechnya. These conditions drastically limited their scope of action.**



**'Resolution 22 Chechnya,' Email** from Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF France Legal Advisor to MSF France North Caucasus programme manager and coordinators, 2 September 2001 (in English).

**Extract:**

These provisions raise many problems for the work of NGOs. They contradict the provisions and spirit of international humanitarian law and thus impede and limit the possibilities of humanitarian activities. I will try to list them and the main legal arguments here. [...]

**Comment**

Rather than giving a more secure environment for the work of NGOs as it claims, this text creates a very dangerous context for such work. The responsibility of individuals and organisations are never defined, the nature of violations are not defined, the nature of proceedings and sanctions, whether administrative or criminal, are never defined. Anyone (individuals and organisations, local or international) can be punished for acts committed by others. It favours the paralysis rather than the actions of humanitarian organisations. It exposes expatriates and local to arbitrary decisions that may have dramatic consequences on their protection.

For all these reasons, this text contradicts some basic legal and humanitarian principle such as:

- The legal principle of personnel responsibility by opposition to collective one (everyone can be held responsible for anything done by others)
- The ethical principle of do no harm: because local personnel and organisations could suffer (to undefined extend) from the actions of international humanitarian actors (in violations of res 22)
- The principle of humanitarian independence, because the provisions of the text are so vague and so dangerous that there is not free capacity of choice and vision [oversight] in the hands of humanitarian organisations.
- The operational principle of humanitarian actions defined in humanitarian law that gives NGOs the capacity to take actions, even without formal approval when humanitarian needs and emergencies require it. It is clearly stated by the Geneva Conventions for the medical work. Geneva conventions says that no one can be held accountable for having carried out needed medical activities whatever the circumstances (provided only that it was in respect with medical ethics). That is all for now I wish you all the best for the negotiation. We could think of proposing amendment to this res 22, drafting for example a resolution 22bis [22a] depending of you own feeling about our room of manoeuvre about this new regulation process.

## MSF RE-STARTS ITS PROGRAMMES IN NORTH CAUCASUS

Following the release of Kenny Gluck, the different sections of MSF resumed their programmes in Ingushetia and developed them for the rest of the year 2001. Opportunities to intervene in Chechnya were explored then progressively implemented.

**The Coordinator of the Dutch section discussed with the local staff about the possibilities of returning to work in Chechnya, but their local team continued to tell the press that they were not yet ready to return. The Dutch section only officially resumed its activities in Chechnya on 1 November.**



**Itar Tass News**, 4 May 2001 (in English).

**Extract:**

Today, after three months pause, the humanitarian organization 'Médecins sans Frontières' resumes its activity in Nazran. This work was suspended due to the abduction of MSF worker Kenneth Gluck, U.S. citizen, who was released on February 4, 2001. According to the words of MSF worker in Nazran, B [...], since today, MSF started the distribution of the medicines for the health institutions in Ingushetia. The Republican and Sounzhen hospitals, which took the biggest part of medical assistance to Chechen refugees based in Ingushetia, got the medicines. B. Badijev said that MSF doesn't plan to resume its activity in Chechnya territory so far.



*After Kenny's kidnapping and release, there was an internal review of security, and one of the conclusions reached was that the operations director in charge of these programmes should change. I offered to take on the job. I started in March-April 2001, and visited Chechnya for the first time in May 2001, to re-start our activities. There was little internal debate at the time. A minority group said: "there will always be risks in Chechnya. We shouldn't be taking them any more, we shouldn't be working in countries like this." But most people agreed that we should, but with a different approach. The idea was to be reasonable, and at the same time highly ambitious. Our plans for development were very focused on a presence in Chechnya, with an initial evaluation stage, run from Moscow, without expatriates in Ingushetia, then a second stage with teams coming and going between Moscow and Nazran, on and off, for periods of two or three weeks. An irregular presence but spending real time there. They carried out security evaluations around Ingushetia. We had accommodation built for these expatriates in Nazran. Then we started considering access to Chechnya. But we wrote it down, in black and white, so it was totally clear, that whilst we accepted working in remote control, we didn't find it satisfactory, and we aimed to end up with an expatriate presence. There was no question of re-organising everything "to work in remote control". This was a temporary set up, and not an objective in itself at all.*

Dr José-Antonio Bastos, MSF Holland Director of operations in charge of programmes in North Caucasus  
MSF Holland, 2001 to 2003 (in French),  
interviewed in 2009



*The program in Chechnya remained suspended even after Kenny was released. And there were a lot of discussions whether I should or should not start a*

*program again. And then when they decided we should, they asked me to try to reengage in Chechnya. The first part of the plan was to ensure that the national staff was on board, because that is the base of our intervention there. Without the national staff, we neither have the security or the access to Chechnya to do anything, so they have to be in agreement with the restart. The second was to design a way of working that would take into the account the lessons learned of what MSF did wrong from the Kenny kidnap case. One important part of that was the lack of good contacts, and discussions with the Russian governmental officials that had to be built up to match, a bit, the level of contacts that were there from the Chechen rebels, it was a bit one-sided. So the first thing was a big meeting in Moscow with all the national staff outlining the plan of return to Chechnya and seeing if they were going to be willing to engage with us. If they weren't, then we could probably not start. Even, we probably would have had to do something completely different. But they were ready and eager to restart, and they wanted to do it much faster than I wanted to do it. I knew a lot of conditions first had to be met, to make sure they would enter in a different way, and not just six months later get kidnapped again. There were expatriates in Nazran, and the design of the program for me was always that if there was zero possibility of expatriate visits in Chechnya, then I would not want to have a program. One of the big points of Chechnya was the speaking out and the witnessing, and to make that credible, then you have to have expatriates and witnesses as well.*

Michiel Hofman, MSF Holland North Caucasus  
Coordinator from May 2001 to July 2003 (in English)  
interviewed in 2009.

**During the spring, the Swiss section's team in Dagestan initiated a programme to refurbish the maternity clinic at Gudermes in the East of Chechnya, and then a programme of mobile surgeries in the surrounding health centres. Visits by expatriates were undertaken with an armed escort, imposed by the authorities. Other sections considered the positions in Dagestan and Chechnya and the methods of intervention to be dangerous. The assessment made by one of the two heads of mission differed considerably, from the view of the MSF movement overall, whose public positions were rarely taken up by the Swiss section.**



**Report** on a field visit to Dagestan 30/06/01 - 08/07/01 - Dr Christine Chevalier, Director of the MSF CH Medical Service, 9 July 2001 (in French).

**Extract:**

There are also unspoken issues between MSF CH and the other MSF sections, who have favoured witnessing in Chechnya at all costs, although nobody, apart from MSF CH, is actually



physically present. MSF CH opted to be and work there discreetly for the time being.

[...] Recommendation:

It would be good to improve medical coordination and dialogue with the other MSF sections operating in Moscow, all the more so since Chechnya will become an increasingly topical subject (according to MSF-H people met in Moscow, who are planning an exploratory mission to Chechnya in the coming two to three months, with the intention of fitting in with the activities of other sections in the country). A visit by the MSF-CH doctor every two months should be scheduled for the coming months.



MSF Dagestan/Chechnya - Safety, **Specific Rules** Chechnya, September 2001 (in French).

#### Extract:

Since March 2001, the MSF CH teams in Dagestan have had to travel into Chechen territory, mainly to the city of Gudermes. These trips require specific organisation and are carried out neither with local staff nor with equipment (vehicles) assigned to the Dagestan mission. They are random, not part of a regular schedule, and must only be communicated internally at the last moment. They should be justified by a practical action (assessment, distribution of equipment), approved by headquarters (Desk 1), and require the agreement of the relevant administrative and military authorities. During trips of this type, other activities - with the exception of the mobile team - are put on hold. [...] Vehicle: [...] Military escort (imposed) in sight but as far away as possible (250 to 500 metres). Do not stop in case of shots or explosions (the escort is probably the target).



*The operations director was the one who took the decision to go to Chechnya. He went on an exploratory mission in February 2001. It was his idea on how MSF and how the Swiss section should develop. I think it was a bit hurried, but that's a different story. When he left his job in 2001, I was appointed operations director. We took over the project and in the end the programme worked out quite well in Khasavyurt. We were supporting health outposts near to the Chechen border and we had taken a first step into Chechnya in Gudermes. From there on, we started looking into the South/Southeast of the region to find out what was needed. The rebels had moved way down south. I remember that we did two or three exploratory trips in the less-controlled areas, but the Russian command of the south was already very strong. One of the heads of mission had a vision of Chechnya as a maelstrom of wicked men and bandits; he didn't draw many distinctions. As the needs of the Chechen population in Dagestan were not considerable, he over-estimated the normality of the situation, and would say that there were some bad guys among the Russians, but that they had good guys too and, anyway, in this region, they were all bandits and*

*thieves. This obviously went against the MSF line, which aimed to publicise and highlight the responsibility of the Russian administration quite rightly so, because although they may not have been responsible for all the atrocities, the Russians had responsibility towards the people.*

D. Thomas Nierle, MSF Switzerland, Head of Emergencies then Director of Operations 2000-2004, (in French) interviewed in 2009.



*After Kenny's kidnapping, we stopped going to Chechnya. The Swiss were the only ones still going. At that time, they had just opened in Chechnya, in the main pro-Russian town [Gudermes], and we didn't really understand why they were there rather than elsewhere. Our Chechen contacts told us to go to such and such a place and we replied that the Swiss would go as they were already operating in Chechen territory, but the Swiss didn't go. The Swiss section never really participated in speaking out. They said that they had nothing special to say. One day I gave a statement to CERI<sup>24</sup> at a meeting for members of parliament who were trying to go to Chechnya, and who wanted to be briefed. One of the two heads of mission of the Swiss section said that Chechnya had not been more badly damaged than Kosovo, and that the situation should not be exaggerated, that the Russians were letting us work, and in terms of safety, it was enough to stay near to the people, like anywhere else. In fact, he was denying the reality. I said to the meeting that that was not our position. I called Thomas Nierle, Operations Director of the Swiss section. He contacted the members of parliament again to say that that was not the position of the Swiss section either.*

Loïck Barriquand, MSF France programme manager, September 2000 to 2005 (in French) interviewed in 2009.



*When I arrived, the Belgians and the French were also based in Moscow, and they were all saying: 'The Swiss, they are basically based in Dagestan and they go into Chechnya with tanks'. I just phoned the Swiss up and invited myself to Dagestan. They were enthusiastic about that because for a very long time they hadn't seen anybody from any other MSF sections. I got the grand tour of their programs. There are a few things about Dagestan that I thought were a bit tricky. One, in Dagestan, except for these Chechen IDPs on the border region, the whole dynamics of it really has little to do with Chechnya, and it is about 10 times more complex than Chechnya. Chechnya was a very dangerous place, but it was very easy to understand. You had like 2 or 3 different parties on the*

24. Centre for Research on International Relations (Paris).

rebels' side. You had about 1 or 1 and a half parties on the non-rebel side. The relations between those [factions] were relatively clear, and where the main zones of influence were on the map was also quite clear. You could deal with that. In Dagestan, it's a complete soup: 200 different tribes, speaking 40 different languages that have been cutting each other's throats for the last 2,000 years. The program was set up, relatively quickly with very few people and with a rotating Coordinator. With this set up there was no way that you would have any idea of what was going on there.

There were no humanitarian actors there other than MDM, who was making a monthly visit from Ingushetia and the Danish Refugee Council that also dropped foods there for refugees, and that was it. There was also nobody else you could ask what was going on here. As long as you were just dealing with a part of this whole humanitarian circus of Chechnya and Ingushetia, these 10,000 refugees in that zone, that was within the sphere of influence of Chechnya. As long as the Chechens declared that they protected you - and they could actually protect that zone - it was ok. But Dagestan is literally on the other side of the river where you come from, that's already within the Dagestan tribes, you have no protection there whatsoever.

So, it's a very tricky situation, and at that stage, when I visited them, they were just expanding their program to the hill tribes on the southern border with Chechnya. They were into a complete clan zone: centuries of clan warfare and almost impossible to negotiate access. It was an extremely remote region, which means that if you look at medical needs, then you would find them, because there is hardly any new good-functioning clinics, or whatever. And the justification of MSF activities wasn't so clear. It was more like, 'Ok we are in Dagestan Ss it is nice to do something for the Dagestan people elsewhere.' Fair enough! But the region that you chose is one of the most dangerous of the whole Caucasus, far more dangerous than Chechnya!

On Dagestan, MSF Switzerland said they got guarantees. But I couldn't see how they could get guarantees when doing mobile clinics in this region where, like almost every kilometer you are going into a different clan area. So it is an extremely dangerous place to be at. Probably if there was a huge need, and MSF invested a year in just trying to figure out who is who and start a negotiation process, it would have found a way to work it. But just driving there... No, that wouldn't work.

Michiel Hofman, MSF Holland North Caucasus  
Coordinator from May 2001 to July 2003 (in English)  
interviewed in 2009.

## RUSSIAN "NORMALISATION" THROUGH TERROR, THE RADICALISATION OF SEPARATISTS

In Chechnya, the 'sweeps,' disappearance, torture, and summary executions were becoming more commonplace and even banal, and in reply, murderous attacks organised by the most radical pro-independents were increasing. The international community regularly manifested its disapproval of the violence, but no effect was given to these reactions.

**On 15 February, the European Parliament called for a cease-fire, the opening of negotiations in the presence of international institutions, and access to refugees for NGOs.**



'The European Union Calls for a Ceasefire in Chechnya,' *Le Monde /AFP* (France), 17 February 2001 (in French).

The European Parliament adopted, on Thursday 15 February, a resolution calling for a ceasefire in Chechnya and the opening of negotiations in the presence of international institutions. The Members of the European Parliament insist on the need for an independent committee "to investigate the allegations of war crimes committed by the two parties in the conflict." They urged the European Commissioner for development and humanitarian aid, Poul Nielson, to visit Chechnya and the Republic of Ingushetia to assess humanitarian aid needs. The MEPs also called on Moscow to give "international humanitarian NGOs the necessary means" to gain access to the refugees. On Thursday, the Russian Defence Ministry announced that a "phase of reducing troop numbers" in Chechnya had begun. The Chechen President, Aslan Maskhadov, immediately denied this. "The Russians are passing off a simple troop rotation as a withdrawal of their forces," alleged the Chechen Presidency.

**On 22 April, the UN Commission on Human Rights adopted a resolution tabled by the European Union condemning the brutal conduct of the Russian war in Chechnya. During the session, the Russian delegates obstructed the representative of the Chechen independence government when the latter took the floor. In mid-June, Moscow presented the reopening of the OSCE offices in Chechnya**

**as sign of normalisation, as they had been closed in 1998 because of abductions.**



*'The Chechen Voice Stifled at the UN Commission on Human Rights,' Le Monde (France), 7 April 2001 (in French).*

**Extract:**

Called to order last year for human rights' violations in Chechnya, Russia is working to avoid a new resolution by the UN Commission that would challenge its military intervention in the Caucasus. The Russian delegation therefore showed its great irritation at the evidence given to the Commission on Thursday 5 April at the end of the afternoon by Omar Khanbiev, health minister of the Chechen government. Mr Khanbiev told of his experience as a doctor, speaking under the aegis of the Transnational Radical Party, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) which had given him five minutes of their speaking time. He was careful not to raise issues which were directly political or concerned with sovereignty. However, even this was too much for the representatives of Moscow, who interrupted him four times with comments about official terminology, then purely and simply had the chairman prevent him from speaking before he could finish what he had to say.

In his unfinished speech, the Chechen doctor spoke of the hours he had spent in Grozny during the bombing "until the end of the city's resistance" and his arrest on 2 February 2000 at Alkhan-Kala, where he had withdrawn with 18 members of the medical corps and 76 injured to a hospital, which had also been bombed. [...] He then spent eight months hidden in a mountain village caring for the wounded, until he fell ill himself as a result of the torture he had suffered. "There are now more than 800 camps and filtration points in Chechnya," he indicated. [...]

Mr Khanbiev estimated that more than 20,000 people had disappeared and that about as many are currently being detained. According to estimates made by the Chechen health Ministry in August 2000, "there were 87,000 dead, 200,000 wounded, more than 30% of the population chased from their homes, and 90% of hospital facilities destroyed." In this war, which he described as "colonial, and, almost all forms of arms available have been used. I have treated people wounded by ground to ground missiles, by Grad, Uragan (Hurricane) and Buratina arms systems, by air blast and all types of fragmentation bombs, by disguised mines, and by bombs containing nerve gas."

While speaking about "this tragic situation for his people," Mr Khanbiev was interrupted and prevented from launching an appeal for medical aid "for those who are still alive in Chechnya and for the refugees abroad. Humanitarian aid is fundamental, but will not be of much use until the sources of the catastrophe can be stopped. To use the language of doctors, the UN needs to play the role of therapist, who cures the sickness and not the symptoms which continue to develop."



*'Russia Condemned at the UN for its Action in Chechnya,' Le Monde, (France), 22 April 2001 (in French).*

**Extract:**

For the second consecutive year, Russia was condemned by the United Nations' Commission on Human Rights for the brutality of its military operations in Chechnya, where the war has been conducted for a year and a half. The text proposed by the European Union calls for the establishment of an independent "national commission of enquiry" into the abuses in Chechnya, and permission for human rights' experts to investigate freely in the region. In 2000, Moscow was condemned a first time for the same reasons, a unique case for a permanent member of the UN Security Council. The text adopted on Friday sharply criticises Russia for the lack of measures taken in the last year to end the abuses in Chechnya. Twenty-two of the fifty-three members of the Commission who met in Geneva approved the resolution, including the United Nations, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Twelve other members, including China and India, voted against. A large number of member countries (19) abstained.

**In May, the ongoing conflict in Chechnya cast a shadow over the Russia/European Union summit, however it did not lead to the latter imposing sanctions.**



*'The Russia - European Union Summit Stumbles Over the War in Chechnya,' François Bonnet, Le Monde (France), 19 May 2001 (in French).*

**Extract:**

Wednesday 16 May, Sergey Yastrzhembsky, one of the Kremlin's spokesmen opined: "It seems to me that the west is tired of the Chechen story. [...] World public opinion is now more focussed on Kosovo and the Near East." The EU-Russia summit, which was held on Thursday in Moscow, disproved him in part. [...] Although Chechnya was only one among many other issues raised, it thickened the prevailing atmosphere of mistrust and wait-and-see. As expected, Vladimir Putin signed a joint statement explaining that the Europe-Russia partnership could only be built "on the basis of shared values," including democracy and respect for human rights. The Russian president also "agreed" with "the need to urgently seek a political solution in Chechnya." The Swedish Prime Minister also took note, but was under no illusions. "It was a good discussion, but there is what you say and what you do... So I hope that what has been said will be followed up with action." Since the beginning of the war, this has never been the case.

Romano Prodi highlighted the humanitarian situation, as Europe is the leading provider of aid to the refugees and victims of the conflict. "We know what the obstacles are and request better access to the regions affected," he said. Russia "reasserts its intention to cooperate" on this issue,

but, in fact, humanitarian organisations are practically forbidden from entering Chechnya.



*'Reopening of the OSCE mission in Chechnya on Friday,'* **AFP** (France), Moscow, 14 June 2001 (in French).

**Extract:**

The European members of the OSCE mission left Chechnya in December 1998 because of the increasing risks of kidnapping. The OSCE's permanent mission, located in the Chechen capital Grozny, had played an important role in establishing a political dialogue between Moscow and the separatists during the previous conflict in Chechnya (1994-1996). For several months, Moscow had been applying pressure for the OSCE to return to Chechnya, which is, according to the Russians, a sign of "the progressive normalisation of the situation" in the rebel republic. "The Russian side hopes that the OSCE mission will support the activities of the federal authorities and the Chechen administration, which aim to improve the socio-economic situation in the republic," indicated the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in a statement on Thursday.

**In Russia, the process of muzzling the independent press continued. One of its main targets was the NTV independent television station. However, in June an opinion poll showed that, for the first time, Russian public opinion rejected the policy undertaken in Chechnya.**



*'Russian Public Opinion is Starting to Say that it Rejects "Moscow's Policy" in the Region,'* Sophie Shihab, **Le Monde** (France), 7 April 2001 (in French).

**Extract:**

The Romir Institute, a member of Gallup International, announced that 46.4% of people questioned "condemn Moscow's Chechen policy," whereas 42.8% support it. According to VTSIOM, another independent institute, the number of people saying that they are "concerned" by President Putin's inability to end the fighting has doubled in a year, increasing from 22% in March 2000 to 48% last month. It has taken twenty months of conflict – with tens of thousands dead and hundreds of thousands of refugees – for Russian opinion to start to express its rejection of a war, which in its first phase, from 1994-1996, had been massively and immediately condemned.

At the time, the reason was the 'NTV phenomenon': the leading private Russian television channel was then a window on the war, as it so happened. It showed Russian soldiers taken prisoner when the Kremlin was stating that there were none. It showed bombs falling when Boris Yeltsin was

confirming that the raids had stopped and it showed Russian soldiers and then independence leaders interviewed by the channel. [...] Opinion has now been so slow to distance itself from official propaganda. It's also because NTV – closely controlled on the ground by the army – has ceased to play its role of revealing the lies about the conflict.

**At the end of May, MSF Belgium intervened to help flood victims in Lensk in Siberia and announced this in a press release.**



*'Help to Flood Victims,'* **Press release**, MSF Belgium, 28 May 2001 (in French).

**Extract:**

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has just begun distributing various supplies to the flood victims, who were struck in the city of Lensk, in eastern Siberia. Following an invitation from the local authorities, an MSF team from Moscow, comprising a logistics expert and a doctor, have travelled to the disaster zone to assess immediate basic needs. In the meantime, a 1.4 tonne load containing medicines, medical equipment, blankets, and warm clothing has been dispatched to Lensk. [...] The organisation is providing basic medicines and medical equipment, which the local doctors and medical staff in health centres are lacking. MSF also continues to provide first aid to prevent the risk of disease. de prévenir les risques de maladies.

The various MSF sections continued their efforts to report on the violence suffered by the people they are treating and the obstacles to their humanitarian activities placed in their way by the authorities. MSF had to reconcile these procedures with safety constraints for the teams and their efforts to uphold all of their programmes in the Russian Federation, which depended on the goodwill of the authorities.

**Remaining discreet about the Caucasus, the Belgian section's team undertook communication campaigns in the Russian media about its programme for the homeless in Moscow and its tuberculosis programme in Siberian prisons. On 14 May, when an FSB official alleged that a Russian Chechen citizen, arrested for spying, was travelling in Russia as an MSF representative, the organisation immediately published a press release**

**describing these assertions as defamatory and pointing out the organisation's principles of independent action.**



**Sitrep** MSF Belgium, January 2001, (in English).

**Extract:**

Raising awareness:

In response to our complaint to the Committee of Tele Communications and Media of the Moscow Government, concerning the delay in the decision taking about the demonstration of our film "Homeless People" on the TV, the tele-company "TVZ" asked for the videocassette with our film. The issue is presently being considered by the Vice-President of the TVZ tele-company, Mr. Nekhoroshev.

The magazines "Narodonaselenie" and "Pravozaschitnik" agreed to edit our articles which cites the opinion poll, carried out in autumn 2000 among the former inmates. It appeared that among the released prisoners for the period of the amnesty-2000, the number of TB affected is three times higher than that of the whole year. The majority of them have no passports. MSF is well known in prisons, as the released people directly turn to us for help. The program Coordinator took part in the television program, dedicated to the homeless parents – "Versty" that was broadcasted 11/06 at 13p.m. at the TVZ Channel, as well as in the radio program of the Christian Channel, broadcasted 6/06.



*'MSF Indignant about the Defamatory Assertions of the FSB Spokesperson,'* **Press release** MSF, 14 May 2001 (in French).

**Extract:**

In a recent Interfax dispatch, Lieutenant-Colonel Bolshunov, in charge of the Voronezh Oblast's Federal Security Service's Public Relations Department, alleged that a Russian Chechen citizen, arrested for having sold information to the French intelligence services, had "maintained contacts with several other persons, who were directly connected with the French secret services and who travelled in Russia as a representative of several international humanitarian organisations, including Médecins Sans Frontières." Médecins Sans Frontières is indignant that these accusations have been made with no proof to support them. They are pure and simple defamation and cast unacceptable discredit on all the humanitarian organisations that are present in this region. MSF is astonished that at no time was it consulted before the publication of these allegations in the media and has officially requested an appointment with the authorities concerned for an explanation.

MSF recalls that its principles as well as its actions are independent of all political, economic and religious power. It is in accordance with these principles of neutrality and impartiality, as set out in the Médecins Sans Frontières charter that the organisation is operating in the Russian

Federation. Since 1991 MSF has been providing health and medical assistance in Russia (assistance programme to the homeless in Moscow and a programme to combat AIDS throughout Russia), as well as programmes in Siberia (fight against tuberculosis in Marinsk and Kemerovo), in Ingushetia (assistance to displaced Chechens) and in Chechnya (supplies to health institutions).

**On 12 June, the programme director of the French section in Georgia wrote to the UNHCR to request that they ensure the populations' right to flee and the principle of non-repatriation are respected in the Caucasus.**



**Letter** from Pascal Vignier, Coordinator of MSF France in Georgia, to Jean-François Durieux, UNHCR Operations Director Europe, 12 June 2001 (in French).

**Extract:**

Dear Sir,

I wish to draw your attention to the precariousness of the status of protection given to the Chechen refugees in Georgia (approximately 6,000 people) and Azerbaijan (approximately 9,000 people) and to the practice of repatriating these people to Chechnya, which has been taking place.

As you are aware, the vast majority of the Chechens, who have fled the conflict and the massive violations of human rights and humanitarian law, do not enjoy refugee status according to the Convention of 1951. Most of these people have an alternative protection status, which can be withdrawn at the discretion of the Georgian authorities if they consider that the situation in Chechnya has changed and that it no longer requires this temporary asylum.

In fact, the line about "normalisation" in Chechnya and pressure brought to bear by the Russian Federation on Georgia, give us reason to fear that these refugees will be repatriated, although the situation on the ground in Chechnya is particularly worrisome for them in terms of security, humanitarian assistance, and access to health care. The latest resolution 2001/24 of the Commission on Human Rights recognizes that "large-scale violence against the civilian population" continues to be perpetrated in Chechnya and that the "security situation remains unsatisfactory."

Médecins Sans Frontières also welcomes the UNHCR's position quoted in the latest report on Chechnya by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in which the UNHCR considers that the situation in Chechnya is not suitable for the return of refugees and displaced Chechens, and in which the concern of the UNHCR is "not to give a false sense of security while it is impossible to exercise a minimum level of control in terms of protection and to respond to the enormous needs for assistance."

Our medical teams confirm that the number of war wounded

being treated has increased and they continue to report cases of torture, arbitrary detention, and indiscriminate bombing. Serious violations of human rights and of humanitarian law, therefore, are still being perpetrated in Chechnya against civilians. Furthermore, the age of the wounds treated by the MSF teams also indicates that medical treatment is impossible in Chechnya and confirms that Georgia is currently one of the rare medical sanctuaries in the region. From January until the present, some 60 individuals have been treated by our teams for open fractures and shrapnel wounds to the lower limbs and eyes. In accordance with the UNHCR's statement and your mandate, we request that you ensure that the right to flee and the principle of non-repatriation, which constitute the two pillars of refugees' rights and human rights, are respected by Georgia, Azerbaijan, the Russian Federation and the neighbouring countries.

**On 4 July, the MSF French section's team in Nazran (Ingushetia) informed the programme manager that they had received direct testimony about 'cleansing' operations taking place in the Chechen villages of Serdnovosk and Assinovskaya by Russian forces and was concerned by the lack of reaction by United Nations representatives to this news. The team collected evidence from the inhabitants of the two villages who had taken refuge in camps in Ingushetia, and they attempted to go into Chechnya to treat victims and to gather other evidence. However they were unsuccessful. In the end, the testimony gathered in the camps would be appended to a report on the living conditions of the refugees, which was published some months later.**



*'About Cleansing in Chechnya,' Email* from Marie-Madeleine Lepomb and Vincent de Bellefroid, Medical Coordinator and Field Coordinator, MSF France in Ingushetia, 4 July 2001 (in French).

**Extract:**

The situation here is getting more and more deplorable for the Chechens and that's putting it mildly. We knew that one after the other the towns in Chechnya were being cleansed by Russian soldiers, particularly from the RUBOP antiterrorist branch of the Interior Ministry, but now we have had direct testimony, which is disturbing us enormously with respect to our reactivity.

Today, the head nurse from Sernovodsk came to collect her medicines. Yesterday RUBOP operatives arrived in their small town and started encircling the town with helicopters, cars, and troops. They entered houses, the hospital, and the camps and rounded up 800 people who they then took to a place to check their identity and register them on a computer database. While rounding up the victims, they pillaged the houses (televisions, tape players, and what

they couldn't take, they threatened to destroy unless they received payment), mistreated people, broke window-panes in the hospital, broke down doors, and opened boxes of medicines (looking for hidden money!).

Then they probably carried out interrogations and torture by electrocution; the victims could easily be heard, civilians who hadn't been arrested. Then they were released at night. Ten were missing, two were injured, and one of whom was referred to Septovskaya. We heard more about this during an OCHA meeting, from one of the women victims who explained that not everybody had been released like that. Some of them had been taken by bus to Akhchoy Martan, others had been sent to the mosque after signing a 'discharge' paper and were forced to undress and put their clothes on their heads.

The local people wanted to retaliate with stones and sticks, the soldiers took aim at them, so the women lashed out at the soldiers to project the men. Then finally the colonel overseeing the operation declared the cleansing over and promised to return in six days. Then they went away towards Assinovskaya. We don't know what was behind this ferocity; perhaps it was an explosion at Sernovodsk which killed a soldier before the cleansing operation.

Following this testimony, which was given directly to a group of NGOs and the UN, the chairman simply invited everybody to move on to the next topic as if nothing had happened, although this witness had taken huge risks in coming to make a statement like this. Nobody reacted, not even us, as we were stunned by the indifference of the OCHA guy. We have given you a summary of what happened and now we need to make some things clearer. We wanted to let you know about the discrepancy between the seriousness of the events and the lack of consideration given to situations like this by the UN representatives. We have also just learned this evening, that the RUBOP have apparently surrounded the Sputnik camp at Septovskaya, the information needs to be checked, as it's astonishing given that the hunger strikers are near to Sputnik and visited regularly by journalists, so there's something not quite right, perhaps it's a rumour. What should we do given this situation? Go and bang on the table at OCHA, take a look around Sputnik, meet Aushev, the Ingush President, hassle Human Rights? What seems the most relevant? This might seem a stupid question to you, but we're a bit dazed by it all.



*'Arguments' Email* from Anne Fouchard, Deputy Communications Director, MSF France to Joanne Liu and Loïck Barriquand, programme manager North Caucasus MSF France, 11 July 2001 (in French).

**Extract:**

Difficult to give strong, clear arguments, we feel we 'must' do it, yet always keeping the risks in mind. However at this level, the first step is exceedingly difficult. Tomorrow, Julie and Dr R [...] are going to the camps and the hospital on the 'green' side [code word for Ingushetia] and they will

most certainly be able to get the necessary testimony and perhaps the trip to the 'red current' country [code word for Chechnya] will not be necessary. But...

According to Dr R [...] many of the injured are in hiding at home. The local doctors are probably treating them at home. Are they receiving all the treatment they need? Can they be treated at home without endangering their lives? Are they refusing treatment for fear of being registered somewhere? Difficult to know, and would an expat doctor make any difference? Or as far as medical issues are concerned, could R [...] do the job?

In addition, new horror stories are coming to light, are there others?

- Male rape (60 cases according to what we have been told, including a 16-year old boy)
- Use of dogs: at least one man severely bitten
- Men hung up by their arms
- One man lost his eye following electrocution??

This is why we think that it is important, if Marie agrees, that she visits the area with R [...], and tries to gather testimony accompanied by thorough medical examinations. That's objective Number 1. As for Julie, she could also take witness statements and bring specific cases to Marie's attention. This could be done in the camps if we are only aiming to get witness statements, but it seems to me also very necessary to see it there are people who need greater medical care than what is already provided, to have our own vision so that we can really understand.

There is the case of a man with a ruptured liver who is apparently dying in hospital on the green side. Are there others who are quietly dying at home?? Met Memorial and HRW today. They won't go to the other side and are already having problems contacting people here: scarcely a dozen interviews in the past week. People are reluctant to talk to 'human rights activists,' but would perhaps be more willing to talk to a 'very well-known' medical NGO, than some one like HRW. Memorial and HRW are very keen to share information: we already have the name and address of one of the people 'missing' from the cleansing, who was apparently picked up in the street and taken home.

Two journalists; one English and one Danish, went there today and interviewed people, in particular the families of some of the injured. Impossible to speak to them this evening. Cleansing operations are ongoing, in two villages south of the Rostov-Baku highway, the last villages at the foot of the mountains, south of Urus Martan: Chalaji, Roshni-Chu.

Technical aspects: travel with S, R and L, without asking for a propusk [laissez-passer], and not taking the Caucasus One (Kavkaz Adin), but another parallel road. Impossible to say whether mobile phones work in this area. I think not, so let's consider the risk of taking a sat phone (completely forbidden in the red current country) or going without anything... We shall also contact M [...] to see if he can help us get information about the male rape cases.

**In the meanwhile the perpetration of the massacres was made public. On 9 July, Akhmed Kadirov, the pro-Russian Chechen Administrator accused Russian troops of targeting civilians. On 10 July, Sergey Yastrzhembsky, the Kremlin Spokesperson announced that a preliminary enquiry had been initiated into the accusations of abuses committed by Russian soldiers in Chechnya. On the same day, the Council of Europe called on Russia to provide a full report on the accusations of torture in Chechnya. On 11 July, Vladimir Moltenskoy, the Acting Commander of the Russian forces in the Caucasus admitted that "large-scale crimes" had been committed against civilians in Sernovodsk and Assinovskaya. On 12 July, Lord Russell-Johnston, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe condemned the 'sweeps' of Chechen villages by Russian forces and called on Western leaders to put pressure on the Russian authorities to change their behaviour.**



'A Russian General Denounces "Large-Scale Crimes in Chechnya,' **Le Monde** (France) Moscow, 13 July 2001 (in French).

#### Extract:


"Those who carried out 'sweeps' in Sernovodsk and Assinovskaya behaved in a gross and anarchic manner, destroying everything in their path, but claiming afterwards that they knew nothing of the destruction," declared General Vladimir Moltenskoy [Acting Commander of the Russian forces in the North Caucasus], quoted by Itar-Tass, in an unprecedented criticism of his troops. However the Russian Interior Ministry called on Russian officials not to comment on these operations until the investigations underway had been completed. A spokesperson denounced those who had described the army's activities as "illegal and useless," saying that these statements were irresponsible and aimed to mislead public opinion.




*I was the project coordinator. We were three expatriates in the team, mainly based between Moscow and Nazran and we travelled all the time between them, as we had no permit to stay overnight in Nazran. We had come to an ambiguous agreement with the programme manager. Officially we had undertaken not to go to Chechnya, but in fact we had their tacit agreement to 'go and see.' In June or July, in a town right on the border with Chechnya, there had been several incidents. We were in regular contact with the Communications Director of the French section who was willing to get involved. The problem was that we couldn't get into Chechnya. It really was a big mistake on my part and on the programme manager's part; they weren't flexible enough. That meant we didn't have direct information about what was happening on the ground, so we had a problem of*

legitimacy. At the time, information did circulate, but we didn't do enough to get really relevant information, especially about these incidents and there was always the huge question of safety.

Vincent de Bellefroid, MSF France Project Coordinator in Shatoi, Chechnya, February to May 1995, then August 1996 to July 1997, then Project Coordinator in North Caucasus (June to October 2001), (in French) interviewed in 2008.

 There was Sernovodsk in July 2001. The administrator was in the field to gather testimony from people at the border. I went to Moscow to finalise this work. I remember discussions with the team who felt very lost and trapped by the atmosphere of insecurity and the omnipresent risks of being kidnapped. In fact, after Kenny's abduction, there was an increasing number of incidents targeting other NGOs. We did all we could to keep close to what we knew directly about what was happening on the ground. Every time we could collect testimony we did so, but that didn't move many people. The journalists continued courageously to write their articles and rose to the challenge, but there was a desperate, hopelessness about it all...

Anne Fouchard, MSF France Deputy Communications Director, July 2000 – July 2004, (in French) interviewed in 2009.

 International organizations saved lives for many people, as was the case in Sernovodsk. Realistically, the male population from seven years up to sixty years was taken away into the field and they started to mistreat them up. Then all organizations interfered and thanks to that, people did not perish. That is a concrete case that I am aware of when the intrusion or interfering of the organization led to some result. I was sent there by MSF. It was surrounded. There was a ring of forces. We did not stand up there directly with a flag saying "release them." But I went to the hospital and I was told that people were held in an open field. There were a lot of foreign organizations and they were standing at the border of the village and they were not let in. They were actually demanding a meeting with the authorities saying: "let us see the commanders of the village what is happening there and why?" In other words the organizations made noise there. And I think that held the military from performing there whatever they want.

B, MSF North Caucasus staff (in Russian, translated into English by an MSF interpreter) interviewed in 2008

## RUSSIAN ANTI-TERRORIST RHETORIC PREVAILS

**In a statement after the attacks 11 September 2001 on the towers of the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, Vladimir Putin linked Russian military operations in Chechnya with the anti-terrorist combat launched by the American government. He then enjoyed greater tolerance for these operations from western countries. Journalists found it increasingly difficult to interest their editors in coverage of the situation in Chechnya.**



'Moscow Offers to Cooperate with Washington to Combat Terrorism,' **Le Monde** (France), 14 September 2001 (in French).

### Extract:

Slow on the uptake following the sinking of the Kursk a year ago, Vladimir Putin has now been quick to react. According to the Kremlin, President Bush, with whom he spoke twice on the telephone on Wednesday 12 September, thanked him for being the first to express his compassion. A minute's silence is to be observed on Thursday midday in Russia. The Kremlin offered to send rescue teams and many Russians have offered to give blood. People "feel this tragedy profoundly, because unfortunately, on several occasions, we have lived through the horror of terrorist attacks," explained Foreign Affairs Minister, Igor Ivanov.

Bold as it is, the parallel between the attacks on the United States and the war in Chechnya that the Kremlin describes as an "antiterrorist operation" (which was drawn following the attacks whose origin has never been proved) is to be found everywhere in official commentaries. Moscow is redoubling efforts to foster "an international union against terrorism," thereby hoping to achieve a better understanding of Russia's policy in Chechnya. According to the American ambassador in Moscow, Russia has requested an emergency meeting of the G8 countries and is seeking a "special resolution" on the fight against terrorism to be adopted at the United Nations General Assembly.

Above all, the Kremlin is increasingly calling for enhanced relations between Washington and Moscow. The American ambassador, Alexander Vershbow, has said that he hopes the tragedy will lead to closer cooperation between the two countries. However, the diplomat noted, "That does not mean that we have a 100% identical opinion on the problems of Chechnya."





'Vladimir Putin is Committed to Combating Terrorism with the Fifteen,' *Le Monde* (France) 4 October 2001 (in French).

#### Extract:

Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to Brussels, from 1 October, as part of the twice yearly Russia-European Union summit, has come at just the right moment for both parties. It is set centre stage in the international crisis caused by the attacks against the United States, with Russia unambiguously condemning these acts, clearly falling into step with the international coalition that the Americans are taking pains to build. Of course, in exchange for these gestures of solidarity and political support, Moscow is hoping to obtain something in return (particularly with regard to Chechnya), but the general feeling is that the context of terrorism should provide an opportunity to strengthen the 'strategic partnership' between the Fifteen and Russia, with the latter also wishing to foster closer ties with the Atlantic alliance.

[...] The text of the joint statement reviews the main aspects of EU-Russia cooperation and devotes a paragraph to the situation in Chechnya. The "respect of Russia's sovereignty and territorial integrity" is reasserted, as is the need to "respect the fundamental principles of human rights, even in exceptional situations such as in Chechnya." The text of the statement stresses that it is particularly important "to urgently find a political solution" to the conflict, "and quickly to shed light on the cases of human rights' violations, and to facilitate the expedition of humanitarian aid in the North Caucasus."

From a European source it has been pointed out that this prudent condemnation of human rights' violations in Chechnya shows the Fifteen's determination not to accept the Russian equation, which would have the terrorism label being applied, de facto, to Chechen combatants. According to some diplomats, the Europeans recognise that they now have a better 'perception' of the situation in Chechnya. This realpolitik is being fed both by the attacks against America and by the significant political gesture achieved by Moscow, by facilitating the decision of three countries in its sphere of influence (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan) to grant logistical amenities to American forces taking positions against Afghanistan.



*September 11 has not helped. It silenced the minority of political leaders who wished Chechnya to remain under scrutiny. There was definitely a 'before and 'after' September 11. For sure. After September 11, for instance, French journalists and correspondents in Russia had to fight with their editors to talk about Chechnya. Deploying much propaganda, the Russians had succeeded in winning minds over to the view that the Chechen rebellion had connections with Al-Qaeda or, at*

*least, with fundamentalist Islamic movements<sup>25</sup>, whereas obviously the majority of the population in Chechnya is Sufi. It worked very well. For a while the journalists of Le Monde or Le Figaro, in particular, with whom I had very close relationships throughout this time, told me that they had to fight in their editorial offices to get an article published about Chechnya.*

[...], MSF deputy legal advisor 1995-2005 (in French)  
interviewed in 2008.

**In mid-September, a huge offensive by the independence combatants took Russian forces by surprise in Eastern Chechnya. The headquarters of the pro-Russian administration were targeted in the attacks. The Russians responded with increased bombing and 'sweeps.'**



'Moscow-Caucasus, September-October 2001,' MSF  
**France Sitrep**, September-October 2001 (in French).

#### Extract:

Chechnya

##### 1. Overall situation

After the attacks in the USA, we were expecting the Russians to take a harder line, but it was the Boievikis [Chechen fighters] who resumed the offensive by launching a series of military actions, including several dramatic ones, such as recapturing Gudermes within a few hours – actions that have continued ever since (intense activity before the break for winter?). Attacks on Russian checkpoints, buildings used by the pro-Russian Chechen administration (particularly the militia), BTR convoys etc. In response, the Russians resumed bombing the mountain regions, and zatchiskas [cleansing operations] continued at a frightening pace. Every day, you hear and/or read consistent accounts of cleansing operations. Even Russian propaganda barely dares talk anymore about the return of Ingush refugees. In a new development, we are hearing an increasing number of stories about masked people conducting special operations who are vague about their nationality. (Everyone here is convinced they are the Russian special services; an article in Prague Watchdog tells the story of Chechens in the pro-Russian militia who were attacked by men, women, and several members of the medical team. The entire hospital staff went on strike to protest this allegedly rebel attack by masked assailants. Some of the assailants were caught and found to be officers of the GRU [Russia's largest foreign intelligence agency].

A story from Argoun: a couple wounded in their home by an armed group was rushed to the hospital; a group of

25. This assertion, which was untrue at the time, became a reality with the weakening of all the moderate pro-independents and the radicalisation of the rebels. The Chechen people, however, continue to practise a type of Islam which is far from radical.

masked men killed the man on the operating table and wounded the woman. [...]

MSF-Netherlands officially announced during a meeting in Grozny that it would resume its activities in Chechnya beginning 1 November.

**In October, the North Caucasus programme managers of the different MSF sections launched a survey and began collecting personal accounts of the precarious conditions of displaced persons in Ingush camps. The survey was conducted in November, while MSF determines the best way to speak out publicly.**



*'North Caucasus Update,'* Gazelle Gaignaire, MSF International Regional Officer, Russian Federation, 4 October 2001 (in English).

**Extract:**

- MSF sections working in Ingushetia are thinking of carrying out an independent assessment on the living conditions of IDPs. The results could potentially be used to lobby the UNHCR to provide shelter.
- MSFF has begun meeting with a few government and NGO representatives in Ingushetia to get a sense of their "official" positions. 1 expat + 1 local doctor also began individual, open-ended interviews with Chechen IDPs in Ingushetia, asking them a set of basic, standardized questions to better understand their living conditions in host families, collective centers, and tent camps; any pressures on their departure; their vision of a possible return to Chechnya, etc. 25 questionnaires have been filled so far. Discussions are underway in Paris comms office about whether such work will continue and whether it could be useful for external comms in the future.



*'Ingushetia,' e-mail* from Françoise Saulnier, Legal Manager, MSF France programme manager, Communications Department, MSF France, 19 November 2001 (in French).

**Extract:**

Following up on our latest meeting, here are some comments I had promised to provide that outline ways to take a public position, that include all of our information and concerns.

1) the level of assistance provided to people who have fled to Ingushetia is unworthy of humanitarian aid standards. This can be illustrated by:

- Actual stories
- The amount of funding provided by the various donors, which are giving priority to domestic needs in Chechnya rather than Ingushetia...
- Underestimating the number of displaced persons given the halt in registrations and the continued influx of refugees

2) The level of violence in Chechnya remains very high - the ongoing violence contradicts statements that the situation in the country is normalising

- the violence also prevents any possibility of repatriating Chechens who have found refuge in Ingushetia.

- furthermore, it requires an improvement in facilities and services for displaced persons in neighbouring countries, particularly in Ingushetia.

Based on an analytical report, personal accounts, photos and, other evidence, MSF wants to alert decision-makers (donors, governments, Council of Europe) and Russian and western public opinion, and bear witness to the fate of displaced populations:

- Victims of inappropriate aid

- Victims of the persistent violence in Chechnya

- Victims of the illusion of normalisation, which (1) limits their opportunity to flee the country, (2) restricts the amount of aid they receive and (3) exposes them to the dangers of forced repatriation.

For its part, MSF commits to providing more assistance and informing decision-makers of the gravity of the situation. This is an outline of the work I had suggested. We could definitely prepare a report based on this outline that would include refugees' personal accounts and provide the accompanying text for a photo exhibit. → une exposition photo.



*'OD Trip report, Russia 4-9 December 2001,'* MSF Holland, 10 December 2001 (in English).

**Extract:**

13. Advocacy situation IDPs Ingushetia. Survey done, result and interpretations delayed for different reasons. Photo exhibition in Moscow plus presentation results survey is being prepared for next Friday 14 December. To lobby Russian authorities, UNHCR and donors about bad living conditions of IDPs. The photo exhibition and report should be presented in Amsterdam and PSs, both public and inside MSF.

ADVOCACY (mini workshop by Dick van der Tak)


14. National staff very aware of risks and limits of 'human right' type of advocacy they have done in the past. They also understand and accept MSF choice for temoignage and want to continue doing it but they request a different approach.

15. Points raised during the discussions: PS (mental health program) will not be used as a source of individual information for advocacy; violence on civilians and violence against medical staff identified as main issues; medical information should be the base for advocacy and can be recorded openly i.e. as part of the monitoring of drug distribution, human rights violations information will not be formally recorded during activities; request for training in advocacy for national staff; need for better surveillance on the situation of IDPs in Ingushetia.


16. The level of awareness, experience and exposure to advocacy activities of the national staff team is very high. The situation in Chechnya (still continuous aggressions on the civilian population) and the current near absence

of international staff inside the republic means that unavoidably, MSFH will be confronted with important advocacy issues.

17. An extended workshop/training (longer than the 2 half days done this time) facilitated by someone from HAD and done in the coming months will prepare the mission for the dilemmas and challenges that are certainly about to show up as soon as MSFH expats will be traveling inside Chechnya.


 *On the speaking out side, for decisions like the one to go into Chechnya, we said to ourselves: "We can't make compromises here. We're in a crisis situation, we have to go in. And if MSF goes into Chechnya, we can't decide to do it without speaking out. But we should share this conclusion with the national staff. They're running huge risks. We can't expose them without warning them first." MSF Holland made big efforts to explain the situation and convince them, saying: "sorry, but we can't drop this side of MSF, so it's up to you to decide if you want to keep working with us, but that's why we do it. That's what we can do in Chechnya." Dick Van de Tak, from the Humanitarian Affairs department, went to the field with me, and organised a discussion workshop with the national staff on MSF's speaking out. They also discussed it between themselves, and most of them said that MSF hadn't spoken up enough about Chechnya: "We're ready to risks, and we should speak out." And with the medical department, Dik Van der Tak developed a form for collecting information from patients who were victims of violence in the hospitals we supported. We compiled it all, and wrote a big report on the violence in Chechnya.*

Dr José-Antonio Bastos, MSF Holland Director of operations in charge of programmes in North Caucasus, 2001 to 2003 (in French) interviewed in 2009

 *Any Chechnya medical program without the witnessing part doesn't work for me. The witnessing part just based on the national staff does not carry the legitimacy that it needs to make an impact. Speaking out against Russian state has very little impact because it is Russia. And if on top of that, you are speaking out on statements made by what is regarded as very biased, rebel-loving Chechens, then the legitimacy of your statements is zero. So unless you have expatriates in there, then your future plans of witnessing will not be there. Obviously you would not have a program with expatriates present in Chechnya. But that's not the same as not having any expatriates in Chechnya ever. So whatever the end program was going to be, it had to be with the possibility to have expatriates going into Chechnya so you would have a firsthand witnessing account. From your position in Moscow, you are not saying*

*things about Chechnya unless you're working there. And everybody realized that it was going to be another six months away at least, before you had any type of activity again in Chechnya.*

Michiel Hofman, MSF Holland North Caucasus HOM from May 2001 to July 2003, (in English) interviewed in 2009.

 *I found it really interesting to work closely with the people. What they were asking was, 'Be our voice.' Gathering stories takes much longer than writing a press release. You have to be careful because you often raise people's expectations and in the end, no one responds. You ask them for a lot of information and if nothing happens, they get frustrated.*

Vincent de Bellefroid, MSF France Project Coordinator in Shatoi, Chechnya, February to May 1995, and August 1996 to July 1997, then Project Coordinator in North Caucasus (June to October 2001), (in French) interviewed in 2008.

**In mid-December in Moscow, MSF held a photo exhibition taken in the refugee camp in Ingushetia and distributed a report with the survey results, which showed the poor quality of assistance.**



'Survey on Living Conditions of Internally Displaced Persons in Ingushetia – Summary,' MSF Moscow, November 2001 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

Introduction [...] As security has not improved in Chechnya, it became evident that the majority of the IDP's in Ingushetia would not be able to return to Chechnya and would enter their third winter in often less than adequate conditions. The humanitarian community started to prepare for a continuation of activities in Ingushetia during the months of September and October of this year. A number of factors were identified which raised concern in the actual living conditions of IDP's:

- private financial resources of IDP families are diminishing with consequences on individual coping mechanisms.
- shelter assistance provided in 1999/2000, most notably tents, show considerable wear and tear after two years of use.
- The number of IDP's unregistered by federal institutions increased over 2001 which limits their access to work, allowances and some of the federal and humanitarian assistance.

As concrete information on how these factors have influenced the actual living conditions were not available, MSF decided to conduct:

a survey of the collective sector (both tented camps and spontaneous settlements) randomly sampled throughout the territory of Ingushetia. This survey was based on a questionnaire for IDP families, and a separate questionnaire (combined with visual inspection) of the administrators of each collective centre. A sample survey of the private sector, based on a questionnaire for IDP families, randomly sampled amongst the IDP population of Malgobeck city [...]

**On 21 December, in a press release published on the occasion of its 30th anniversary, the MSF France section stated that it acts “on behalf of victims, not regimes,” citing as example, its work with Chechen refugees in Ingushetia.**



*'Thirty Years of Service on Behalf of Victims, not Regimes,' Press release, MSF France, 21 December 2001 (in French).*

#### Extract:

Médecins Sans Frontières is celebrating its 30th anniversary today. And today, winter is dawning in the Caucasus. Today, like every day for more than two years, Khuzimat will wait for the food that her neighbours will bring her this evening – her only meal of the day. Khuzimat is 101 years old. Her husband died eight years ago and her only son died three years ago. Her sisters and brothers died during the current war in Chechnya. She is originally from the Urus-Martans region, where she was born in 1900. Fleeing to Ingushetia in late 1999, she first lived with friends. However, 10 people were crowded together in a place that was too noisy for a person of her advanced age. She was able to move here on her own when the former tenants left. When it rains, water leaks from the roof, and the damp and cold affect her health. When she's sick, it takes her six months to recover. The two beds in the room belong to her neighbours. All she owns are the two red blankets, a small prayer rug and a pillow. She generally receives aid from a Danish organisation, but her name no longer appears on the lists, so she hasn't received anything in three months. Her neighbours, however, come every night to bring her food. She makes her own bread outside.

Like 200,000 other displaced Chechens in Ingushetia, Khuzimat has no hope of returning nor any future. Like so many others, she is not only a victim of an extremely violent war but also of the lack of assistance to people in danger. It is for people like Khuzimat that Médecins Sans Frontières has been fighting for 30 years. It is for them that, tomorrow, we will continue to fight by serving victims, not regimes.

## “CHECHNYA-INGUSHETIA: A DELIBERATE STRATEGY OF NON- ASSISTANCE TO PEOPLE IN CRISIS”

In January 2002, after a December of increased bombings and combing operations by the Russian forces during their ‘final offensive’ in Chechnya, a series of international events and declarations is again creating momentum for MSF to make a strong public statement about the fate of Chechen refugees and the climate of violence in Chechnya.

**On 10 January, the United States State Department declared that Russia’s military actions and human right violations in Chechnya were encouraging terrorism. It again urged Russia to initiate dialogue with Chechen separatists as pledged previously.**



*'US says Russian Stance in Chechnya Encouraging Terrorism,' AFP (France), 10 January 2002 (in English).*

Russia’s continued military actions in Chechnya coupled with human rights abuses by its troops are encouraging terrorism, the United States said Thursday, urging Moscow to follow through on a pledge to seek dialogue with separatists in the republic. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said Washington thought it “unfortunate” that Moscow had not seriously followed through with an offer for dialogue with local Chechen rebels made in September by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

And a senior US official said unless the Russians took steps to address the Chechen situation, it could have a negative impact on attempts to forge a new post-Cold War relationship. [...] The senior official, speaking to reporters on condition of anonymity before the briefing, said the United States was “disappointed” that Putin’s offer of talks had not been pursued. [...] The US comments come as Russia has moved to take advantage of its alliance with the United States in the war on terrorism, branding the Chechen rebels terrorists. And they came a day after Russian federal forces wound up a sweep through Chechen towns, killing 92 rebels, amid mounting evidence of human rights abuses by Russian troops during a 10-day military operation. Human rights groups have detailed a wide array of abuses - reports that Washington has deemed “credible” - including arbitrary killings, beatings and hostage taking.

**Ingush President Ruslan Aushev, who had always openly advocated for a political settlement of the Russian-Chechen conflict, resigned from office, leaving the Ingush administration free to take a more radical position. A few months earlier, MSF had diplomatically declined a request to support President Aushev's candidacy for a Nobel Peace Prize.**



**Email** from Austen Davis, MSF Holland Executive Director to Morten Rostrup, MSF International President, and Rafa Vila San Juan, MSF International General Secretary, 6 April 2001 (in English).

**Extract:**

Dear Morten and Rafa

As you may know we have a good relationship with President Aushev in Ingushetia. He is fighting for international support to continue to play a role between Russia and Chechnya. We do not wish to alienate him. There is a committee working for the nomination of Aushev as a Nobel laureate for peace. They have approached us to nominate him. Operations from all sections think we have to let him down softly. A letter has been written and agreed upon. Operations would like someone, not in operations locally, to deliver the letter and the message and it was suggested that you go to Nazran to meet these people and deliver the letter.



*'Ingush President Ruslan Aushev Forced to Resign by Kremlin,'* Sophie Shihab, **Le Monde** (France) Nazran, 16 January 2002 (in French).

Ruslan Aushev, the only President of a Russian Federation Member Republic who dared condemn the war against his Chechen neighbours, announced his resignation from the Ingush presidency on 28 December. The announcement was greeted with sadness by a majority of the Ingush population. Thousands of Ingush demonstrated in front of the presidential palace in an attempt to dissuade him from resigning. They were joined by Chechens and 'friends of the Caucasus,' for whom Auchev represented a unique figure as a popular, energetic and modern leader. For that reason, he was very unconvincing when he said his decision was motivated by "fatigue" after eight years as President. However, he undoubtedly made no real effort to be credible.

Auchev was first elected in March 1993, with more than 95% of the votes in a small, very young republic of 300,000 people. Ingushetia had been founded two years earlier when its citizens, choosing to remain within the Russian Federation, separated from their Ingush cousins, who were preparing for independence. They put an end to the Chechen-Ingush Republic of the Russian Federation from the Soviet era. Auchev, however, maintained good relations with his Chechen neighbours and, most importantly, with the elected President, Aslan Mashkadov, with whom he shared moderate, pro-Western views. He nevertheless did not sever ties with Moscow or get dragged into a war that

the Russian generals wanted to expand into Ingushetia. His good relations with Boris Yeltsin made this young general a mediator between Moscow and Grozny, a role he played discreetly and effectively.

It was not surprising that the new Kremlin master felt threatened by the only president who had no qualms about denouncing the new Chechen war as politically motivated. This challenged the official version of his predecessors, i.e. Russia's unproven claim that the September 1999 attacks in Russia were carried out by 'Chechen terrorists.'



*Aushev had planned to make Ingushetia a safe haven. After he was sacked, all of the NGOs began having problems. I think the Russians had already stated their intentions of kicking the Chechens out of Ingushetia. But with the departure of Aushev, it became an official policy.*

Loïck Barriquand, MSF France programme manager, September 2000 to 2005, (in French) interviewed in 2009

**In mid-January, a parliamentary delegation from the Council of Europe, followed by Ruud Lubbers, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, visited camps in Ingushetia. In a press release distributed by every section and in an interview with the Belgian section's Coordinator, MSF condemned the intentionally created precarious living conditions of displaced Chechens in the Ingush camps and publicly urged the HCR to provide aid and set up a refugee registration system. Lubbers stated that Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov was not a terrorist and expressed his concern about the attacks perpetrated by the Russian forces.**



*'Chechens Still Fleeing Violence,'* MSF International **Press Release**, 16 January 2002 (in English).

**Extract:**

Today the international medical relief organization Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) calls upon High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Ruud Lubbers, to ensure that the poor living conditions of the displaced Chechens in Ingushetia will be improved. The plight of the displaced population has lost the attention of the international community. Thousands of displaced Chechens live under unacceptable conditions in Ingushetia and many more Chechens arrive on a daily basis. MSF raises its concerns in a letter to Mr. Ruud Lubbers, which today will be presented when he visits Ingushetia. MSF is very concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation of an estimated 180,000 displaced Chechens who face their third winter in Ingushetia. The majority of the Chechens have found a place to stay with Ingush families.

Over 60,000 people live in tents, empty school buildings and factory buildings. Shelter and sanitation facilities are the most pressing needs. Tents are worn out and leaking; they need to be urgently replaced. The sanitation facilities are far below acceptable standards, with examples of one latrine for 100 people or more.

MSF is also worried about the unclear registration system of newly arrived displaced persons. With different organizations using different systems, a considerable number of people are not registered at all. Moreover, the Russian authorities stopped the registration of newly arrived persons one year ago in February 2001. The federal authorities consider the people who arrived over the last year 'economic migrants' and do not register them. Without registration, people have no legitimate status, are not entitled to benefits, face difficulties finding work, and often are not able to get the humanitarian assistance they need. MSF asks UNHCR to ensure that the official registration of displaced Chechens will be resumed. Meanwhile the violence in Chechnya continues. The civilian population remains under threat and many families have lost their homes and households. MSF provides health care and supports health facilities in Ingushetia, Dagestan, and Chechnya.

In Ingushetia MSF has been providing humanitarian assistance to the displaced Chechens since 1999, when the majority of displaced arrived. For security reasons, MSF can only give limited assistance to health facilities in Chechnya, but within these limitations MSF is able to provide some support to health facilities and to distribute drugs and medical supplies.



*"Nicolas Cantau: 'HCR's Position on Chechnya Called Delusional,' interview with Karim Talbi, **Le Figaro** (France), 19 January 2002 (in French).*

#### **Extract:**

Ruud Lubbers, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (HCR), visited Ingushetia on Wednesday. Nicolas Cantau, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Head of Mission in Moscow, called upon the HCR and Council of Europe to play a more active role in aiding 180,000 displaced Chechens.

**Le Figaro:** Why did you appeal to the HCR?

**Nicolas Cantau:** We're afraid that this will be a courtesy visit that leads nowhere. The Russian government's top priority is to send the refugees back home. We're asking the HCR to replace the tents that are sheltering the refugees. They're in bad shape and full of holes, and some of them had already been used. The position taken by the HCR and Council of Europe that the situation in the camps has improved is completely delusional. How could that be possible after three winters? The statements made by the Council of Europe emissary, that 30% of the refugees are economic migrants, are also distressing. These are simply Chechens who are doing little jobs to survive, but they're real refugees who cannot return to their country during a time of war.

**Le Figaro:** What are the Chechens' living conditions in the Ingush and Dagestani camps?

**Nicolas Cantau:** The vast majority of the refugees most often

live in schools, abandoned factories, and even stables in deplorable conditions. Some 24,000 live in camps. They live 10 to a tent that often has holes and is heated by a simple gas stove. Gas mains cut through the camp and I keep wondering how it's possible that fire hasn't broken out. There are also sanitation problems because some of the camps have only one lavatory for 200 people.

**Le Figaro:** What will become of the Chechen refugees?

**Nicolas Cantau:** The Russians have announced that they want the refugee camps closed by the end of March under the pretext that the situation will be normalised in Chechnya. The Kremlin's emissary for human rights, Vladimir Kalamonov, said on Thursday that 6,000 refugees would be relocated to two hotels under construction in Grozny and Sernovodsk. But what are they going to do with the thousands of other refugees? Put them on the street? Force them to return? The refugees have no desire to go back. They know very well that the war is continuing on the other side of the border.



*'Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov is Not a Terrorist,' **AFP** (France), Moscow, 18 January 2002 (in French).*

On Friday, Ruud Lubbers, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (HCR), denied that separatist President Aslan Maskhadov was a "terrorist," calling him a "key figure" in efforts to settle the Chechen conflict. [...] "He can be criticized because he hasn't always been able to prevent certain acts of violence. However, if I speak of Chechens who are seeking a way out (of the conflict), not including foreign parties and new acts of violence, I have to include Maskhadov as a key figure", he added.

Since the launch of their "anti-terrorist operation" in Chechnya on 1 October 1999, the Russian authorities no longer recognise the legitimacy of President Maskhadov, who was democratically elected in 1997. Contact between Moscow and the separatist presidency had already been broken off due to differences on the issues up for discussion. On Friday, Sergei Yastrzhembsky, the Kremlin's advisor for Chechnya, did not rule out the possibility of resuming contact with Aslan Maskhadov's representatives for exclusive discussions on "their surrender and return to civilian life."

Moreover, the head of the HCR expressed concern about human rights violations committed by Russian soldiers in Chechnya, calling them "absolutely unacceptable." At the same time, he condemned the radical Wahhabi Islamist movement to which the Chechen rebels close to the Arab commander Khattab owe allegiance, stating that it is foreign to Chechen tradition. [...] "However, some people currently hiding in the mountains are not terrorists," he stressed.

**On 15 January, during Vladimir Putin's visit to Paris, the French section distributed a press release requesting that the Franco-Russian discussions focus on the fate of displaced Chechens and announcing that its**

**representatives would appear before the Council of Europe on 22 January to address this issue.**



*'Vladimir Putin to Paris: MSF Denounces Living Conditions of Chechen Refugees,' AFP (France), 15 January 2002 (in French).*

**Extract:**

In a press release, MSF underlined "the intentionally precarious conditions in which the displaced Chechens are kept in neighbouring Ingushetia, a situation that has become even more dire with the arrival of cold weather." Recalling that the population's flight is the "direct result of bombings, summary executions, torture, massacres and extortion that are still occurring in Chechnya," MSF, which has teams operating in Chechnya, Ingushetia, Georgia and Dagestan, said it believes that the official figure of 150,000 refugees is "a significant underestimate." The organisation also announced that it would appear before the Council of Europe on 22 January to "report on this strategy of non-assistance to people in danger in Ingushetia and the terror that continues to reign in Chechnya." Putin travelled to Paris for a few hours on Tuesday for a working visit, then left the same evening for Warsaw on an official two-day visit to Poland.

**While the French president called for political dialogue, Putin stated during his visit in Paris that "all means" could be used against the "criminal" Chechen regime.**



*'President Putin: Fighting 'the criminal regime' in Chechnya 'by every possible means' AFP (France), 15 January 2002 (in French).*

**Extract:**

"What makes this criminal regime (in Chechnya) different from the Taliban? It is no different, except only perhaps that it is bloodier," said President Putin. "And we have a full right to use all the available means against it, if legal means are not enough," he added, during a joint press conference with his French counterpart, Jacques Chirac, after a discussion at the Elysée Palace which lasted nearly two hours. For his part, Mr Chirac said he had reaffirmed to Mr Putin that the "Chechen problem" was not limited "to the terrorism aspect" and that its solution required "political dialogue."

The French Head of State talked of terrorist attacks carried out in Russia "in collaboration with Chechnya" and denounced "the links that exist between certain individuals and the Al-Qaida network." "I repeated to President Putin that there were no double standards and that France condemns all acts of terrorism, wherever they are and wherever they come from," Jacques Chirac said. For his part, Mr Putin

emphasised that the victims of the attacks in Moscow in 1999, which were attributed by Russian authorities to members of Chechen independence groups, were comparable to those of the attacks on 11 September in the United States.

**On 22 January, representatives of MSF were heard by the "Refugee and Migration" Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), which was expected to give its opinion on the human rights and humanitarian situation in Chechnya by taking a vote. Over time, the PACE became more and more tolerant of Russia's actions and was now calling for the refugees to return to Chechnya. The president of the French section denounced the council's passivity in the face of what he described as "a new episode of attempts to wipe out a people."**



*'Chechnya - Médecins Sans Frontières' Hearing at the Council of Europe - What Responsibility will the Council of Europe Assume?' Press release MSF France, 22 January 2002 (in French).*

**Extract:**

During its hearing in Strasbourg today, in front of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe's Committee on Refugees, Migration and Population, Médecins Sans Frontières will again bear witness to the extreme violence that the civilian population in Chechnya is subject to. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is expected to express its opinion on the Human Rights and humanitarian situation in Chechnya by taking a vote on Wednesday 23 January. At a certain point in time, the international consensus took a gamble, reinforced since 11 September 2001, to treat the new Russian ally with care within its 'war on terror.' Will the Council of Europe take up the responsibilities which are incumbent upon it?

The Council of Europe is the only international organisation that has discussed the new war that was started in 1999 on Chechen territory. After having excluded the Russian parliamentary delegation from the Assembly and suspended its voting right in April 2000, the Council of Europe restored its rights a few months later. Will the Council of Europe choose to assume its mission, to ensure that Human Rights are respected in its 43 member states? During its hearing, MSF will bear witness to the real strategy of failing to provide assistance to people in danger put into place by the Russian authorities towards the Chechens taking refuge in Ingushetia. This strategy aims to force these people to return to Chechnya, a lawless state, where a policy of terror against civilians is still running with impunity.



**'MSF presentation to Council of Europe regarding Chechnya and Ingushetia,'** presented by Jean-Hervé Bradol, President of MSF France on January 23, 2002 (in French).

**Extract:**

Mr President,  
Deputies,

I would first like to thank you for inviting Médecins Sans Frontières here today. Our presence here reflects the relationship that exists between the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and Médecins Sans Frontières. Since 1995, we have been publishing reports and informing the committees of the Council of Europe on the extent of the crimes committed against the Chechen civilian population. Likewise, we have described the restrictions imposed on humanitarian aid, which affect both the population who have remained in Chechnya and those who have fled to neighbouring Ingushetia. Through regular contact with you, we have always been able to speak frankly. Our various reports describe events over several years and reading them is as depressing as they are tedious. The tedium comes from the unwavering repetition of violence that is committed against the Chechen population. This repetition demonstrates the policy to destroy a people through bombing, sending them into exile, enslaving those who cannot flee and executions. We are witnessing another attempt to destroy a people.

The history of the Russian-Chechen confrontation began at the turn of the 19th century with the campaign of terror during the Russian colonisation. A hundred years later, history repeated itself with massive repression during the civil war that followed the Russian revolution.

In 1944 nearly the entire population of Chechnya was deported. More than a third of those deported died whilst being transferred to the frozen steppes of central Asia. All Chechens over 50 years old today have experienced deportation and, confronted once again with a campaign of terror, they are convinced that their lives are threatened. The events confirm this fear. During the first period of conflict, from December 1994 to August 1996, 100,000 Chechens are estimated to have died – literally; a decimation. After a brief period of calm, punctuated by the election of a Chechen president recognised by the international community, the war started again with a vengeance. Once again civilians began falling by the thousands under the bombs, arbitrary arrests, torture and force deportations. They are even deprived of the minimum assistance needed to help them out of their misery. Tens of thousands have died since autumn 1999.

The Council of Europe's mission is to monitor the respect of human rights in the 43 member states. Has Russia been excluded from the Council of Europe? No. At one point, the Parliamentary Assembly suspended the Russian delegation's right to vote, but only to lift this suspension a few months later - despite the fact that none of the conditions for lifting the suspension had been fulfilled. Have the member states of the Council of Europe taken the crimes of the Russian Federation before the European Court of Human Rights? No. Over the last two years there has been no independent

international investigation into the crimes committed by the Russian forces and, to a lesser extent, by the Chechen fighters.

In Russia, the work of Vladimir Kalamanov, in favour of human rights is systematically thwarted by the public and military prosecutors. In fact, the Council of Europe has given in to the pressures of the influential member states of the European Union (France, United Kingdom and Germany). You have opted for 'a logic of cooperation' with Moscow, i.e. to keep quiet about the massive violation of human rights and humanitarian law perpetrated in Chechnya. For over two years you have chosen to ignore, in full knowledge, the repression of the Chechen population and the crimes committed in the name of the 'fight against terrorism.' By 'you,' I am addressing the Parliamentary Assembly, in particular the Committee of Ministers and the General Secretary of the Council of Europe. Your passivity over the last two years, and the new free hand given to Russia since the 11th September 2001, implicates your responsibility with regards to the gravity of the crimes committed against the civilian Chechen population.

Médecins Sans Frontières is also here today to underline the precarious situation of the displaced Chechen population in Ingushetia. This unacceptable humanitarian situation is the direct consequence of the policy, set up over a year ago by the Federal Russian authorities. By depriving the displaced population in Ingushetia of assistance, the Russian authorities hope to force this population to return to Chechnya. The pressure to return has increased markedly over the last few months and is of great concern to us. The border which separates Ingushetia and Chechnya separates a lawful from a lawless state – where rape, summary executions and torture reign.

Your responsibility when voting of January 23rd is to state clearly that the living conditions and security in Chechnya do not permit the civilian population to return. It is your responsibility to recall that the right to flee one's country when one is threatened is one of the fundamental principals of human rights. On January 23rd, during your discussion on Chechnya, it will be your responsibility to either bury the identity and values of the Council of Europe or the start to defend them. de l'Europe ou de commencer à les défendre.




*In our relations with the Council of Europe and in our public communications, we went from co-operation to clashing in public: we accused them of collaboration.*

*Before that, we had informed them and done everything we could do. You must be aware that just in going to brief the Parliamentary Assembly and the Committees at the Council of Europe, we were taking risks, because there were obviously Russian members in these bodies. We were putting ourselves at risk.*

[...], MSF deputy legal advisor 1995-2005, (in French)  
interviewed in 2008.



 I was still affected by the events in the Great Lakes<sup>26</sup>, where I worked a lot. And frankly I thought that the campaign of repression in Chechnya was becoming genocidal in its historical continuity. After the event you can call it collateral damage, but if every decade 10%, 20% or 30% of a population is wiped out and that carries on... That's the question that had to be asked. Isn't the aim to physically destroy the Chechen population? That's what I said to the Council of Europe. I didn't experience the first war, apart from as Director of Communication at the end, but that's what I understood from it, and we would see about the second. I was also reading on the subject. My speech to the Council of Europe was tough, it posed the question of genocide. I also quoted the dates of repression of the Chechen population since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I said that the series of events led to this question. I probably used the term 'destruction of a population' instead. I thought that the Russian representative in the room was going to have a heart attack. What tops it all is that we're giving interviews to Radio Moscow on these positions, on his telephone, in his office, at the Council of Europe! Half of his staff agreed with us.

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of Communications (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000- May 2008), (in French) interviewed in 2009.

**On 23 January, the Council of Europe announced that it did not envisage sanctions against Russia. On 24 January, the Belgian section condemned its hesitation in a press release, whereas the French section accused it of "collaboration."**



*'The Council of Europe does not Envisage Sanctions against Russia,' Denis Rousseau, AFP (France), Strasbourg, 23 January 2002 (in French).*

#### **Extract:**

In Strasbourg on Wednesday, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe did not even envisage sanctioning Russia for human rights violations in Chechnya, thus turning a deaf ear on urgent calls made by humanitarian organisations for firm action. The Parliamentary Assembly, gathered for its winter sitting, warned Moscow that, "the legitimacy of military action against terrorists cannot be used by any state, including the Russian Federation, to justify short-comings in respect of human rights and of the supremacy of the rule of law, or the refusal to look for a political solution.

The parliamentarians from the 43 member states of the

organisation still followed the Rapporteur on the conflict in Chechnya, Lord Judd (Labour, UK), for whom "new sanctions against Russia would only bear testimony to our inability to reach an effective solution through cooperation and dialogue". [...] This week, the humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières, (MSF) and the Russian human rights organisation, Memorial, strongly accused the Council of Europe of abandoning the Chechens to their fate. Appearing to agree with the detractors of the pan-European organisation, Lord Judd's report judges that "the primary responsibility to end the conflict and to build peace does not lie with the Council of Europe – it lies with the people of Russia and Chechnya," although the 43-member organisation intends to continue exerting "pressure" on Moscow. Despite this, the atrocities committed by Russian soldiers and human rights violations were denounced on Wednesday by various Rapporteurs from the Parliamentary Assembly. [...] The Council of Europe is the only political organisation to have punished Russia politically for human rights violations in Chechnya. In spring 2000, the Russian parliamentary delegation was deprived of its voting rights. But the sanction was short-lived; a few months later, the Russian delegation's rights were restored.



*'Médecins Sans Frontières' Reaction to the Council of Europe Vote on Chechnya, Council of Europe from Co-operation to Collaboration,' Press Release, MSF France, 24 January 2002 (in French).*

Yesterday's vote at the Council of Europe not to sanction Russia for its behaviour in the war in Chechnya is a sign of the failure of the organisation's strategy for over seven years. Despite the Council of Europe's claim that its policy of co-operation would bring Russia into the fold of democratic states, it must be noted that this organisation is siding with a state whose policy is to violate the most basic rights of civilians in war. Despite the particularly sombre situation in Chechnya in terms of serious and continuing human rights violations described by the Parliamentary Assembly, it is content to "urge the Russian authorities to continue to co-operate with all Council of Europe bodies."

The description of the humanitarian situation produced by the Committee on Refugees and Migration's Rapporteur reveals the deficiencies and weaknesses of the working methods used by this body. When faced with such an attitude of resignation and lack of sanctions that the Council of Europe, which is supposed to ensure that human rights are respected within the territories of its 43 Member States, is displaying towards Russia, which international institution is capable of ending the massive human rights violations in Chechnya today?

Médecins Sans Frontières, granted an audience by the Council of Europe on 22 January, is organising a press conference tomorrow, 25 January (at the MSF headquarters, 8 rue St Sabin, 75011 Paris) in the presence of Sergei Kovalev (Honorary President of Memorial, member of the Russian delegation to the Council of Europe, Member of the Duma). MSF will publish its report 'Chechnya-Ingushetia: a Strategy

26. The Great Lakes in Central Africa, including the genocide of Rwandan ethnic Tutsis in 1994.

of Failing to help People in Danger,' and will inaugurate an exhibition of photos taken by Alexandre Glyadyelov in Ingushetia.

**On 25 January, the French section held a press conference in Paris, with the presence of Sergei Kovalev, member of the Duma (parliament) of the Russian Federation, former dissident during Soviet times and Honorary President of Memoria<sup>27</sup>. They published their report based on research in the camps in Ingushetia.**



'Chechnya/Ingushetia: Vulnerable Persons Denied Assistance,' **Report** Doctors Without Borders, January 2002 (in English and French).

#### **Extract:**

##### Contents

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- Statements recorded by MSF staff
- Main results of the investigation conducted in Ingushetia
- Sernovodsk: A massive cleansing campaign [...]

#### Chechnya-Ingushetia:

##### A Deliberate Strategy of Non-Assistance to People in Crisis

In November 2000, Médecins Sans Frontières testified before the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe at to the grave humanitarian situation in Chechnya. At the time, we denounced the policy of terror conducted by the Russian and pro-Russian authorities following the resumption of war in 1999, and the difficulties encountered by civilians seeking access to vital health care. Testimony gathered in the field by our staff illustrates the arbitrary and violent nature of treatment meted out to civilians.

Today, it is harder than ever to deliver humanitarian aid inside Chechnya, because of the deterioration in security

conditions for aid workers and the increasingly obstructive bureaucracy. In fear of their lives, and without access to assistance in their home country, civilians continue to flee in massive numbers to neighbouring Ingushetia. There they are forced to live in inhumane conditions. Civilians in Chechnya live under a reign of terror, in a prison-like environment characterized by arbitrary rules and daily violence. In the last two years, there has been no independent international inquiry into the large-scale violations of human rights and international humanitarian law that are perpetrated on a daily basis in Chechnya.

Now in its third year, the war in Chechnya is still causing large numbers civilians to arrive, seeking refuge, in Ingushetia. These new arrivals are 'clandestine' and are not officially registered. Between 20,000 and 50,000 persons have not been officially recorded. Once they have arrived in Ingushetia, the refugees are housed in squalid and inhumane conditions, a fact even recognized by the Russian authorities. The paucity of assistance offered, combined with threats against them, are intended to drive these undesired refugees back to Chechnya. Médecins Sans Frontières wishes to point out that under international refugee law repatriation may only take place on a voluntary basis and if the conditions in the country of origin permit it.

These observations are based on testimonies heard by MSF staff working in Ingushetia whilst providing assistance to the displaced, and on a study concerning the beneficiaries of aid there, conducted by MSF. [...]

#### Conclusion

Is there a double standard? As it enters its third year, the conflict in Chechnya has yet to be described as what it is: an extremely brutal war with devastating consequences on civilians. The international indignation that ought to be aroused by this war being waged against the Chechen civilians in the name of an anti-terrorist campaign led by Moscow, seems to have disappeared in the face of more pressing international political interests. Despite the inhumane living conditions in Ingushetia, seeking refuge there has been a matter of survival for many of the displaced. They have chosen to take the risk of being forced to live like rats in cellars, in the cold, or even of finding no shelter or assistance because they do not feel able to stay in Chechnya in the current climate.

Clearly, the strategy of providing no assistance to these refugees in the hope that this will force them to go home, has failed. Maintaining these displaced persons in such deplorable, inhuman and humiliating conditions has not halted the exodus. It also will not propel these exiles to return to the prison-like, dangerous conditions, unpredictable violence and looting that reign in Chechnya today. The reality of this exodus, and the true number of refugees present in Ingushetia must be acknowledged, so that sufficient quantities of decent aid may be provided to the refugees.



*'The Russian Deputy Kovalev Criticised the West's Pusillanimous Attitude to Chechnya,' AFP (France), 25 January 2002 (in French).*

**Extract:**

"The west has a short-term, cowardly attitude, opting for a comfortable position by avoiding exerting political pressure on the Kremlin," Mr Kovalev declared in Paris, at a press conference called by Médecins sans Frontières (MSF), the organisation which wrote a report denouncing a "deliberate strategy of non-assistance to persons in danger" in Chechnya-Ingushetia. "On 11 September, Bin Laden offered a personal gift to the Russian President Vladimir Putin, the Russian deputy added. However, the western politicians knew very well that the war in Chechnya was totally unrelated to the war against terror. The only thing is that for political reasons they are willing to follow Putin's policies."

The former Soviet dissident and Honorary President of Memorial, a Russian human rights organisation, recalled that, "violation of rights is never the purely domestic business of a country, wherever it is." [...] For his part, the President of MSF, Jean-Hervé Bradol, declared "that it was unacceptable to transform the international fight against terrorism into a policy of terror against a population."

**The High Commissioner for Refugees is singularly unimpressed by the MSF report, in which it feels accused of being complicit with the Russian authorities by maintaining poor conditions for the Chechen refugees in Ingushetia, in order to encourage them to return home. For their part, the Russian authorities perceived the conciliatory position of the Council of Europe as indicative of a lack of European interest in Chechnya.**



*'Minutes of [UN]HCR Meeting,' E-mail from Loïck Barriquand to MSF France North Caucasus programme manager 26 February 2002 (in French).*

**Extract:**

This meeting follows the publication of our 'Strategy of Non-assistance,' report.

1) Our report was poorly received by the [UN]HCR because they felt themselves to be accused of complicity with the Russian authorities in forcing the Chechen refugees to return home. We clarified our position (I first of all explained the objectives of our report), we agree with the HCR's policy line, which is clearly and publicly against repatriation. However, we believe that this aim must be accompanied by tangible measures to give the refugees a real choice of whether or not to stay. In the field, we observed no concrete change in the [UN]HCR's actions, nor were we informed by them of projects in this direction. Our goal is not therefore to criticise their official position, but simply their actions in the field.

In response, she said that she agreed with our analysis of the situation in the report as a whole: ferocity of the violence taking place in Chechnya, constant flight to Ingushetia and

need to give the refugees the choice of staying, and also give them the means to do so. With regard to the [UN]HCR's objectives as a result of this analysis, they are looking for a longer-term solution. Politically, they feel that this entails pressure on the federal government to take responsibility for its population (with a 'threat' of disengagement?) employing intermediate solutions between emergency aid and the return home. Operationally, the question of shelter and sanitation are always supposed to take priority, and they for example, recommend replacing the tents with prefabricated shelters that could be dismantled (for possible reuse in Chechnya later, as a means of selling the idea to the Russians?). She also said that they were encountering enormous difficulties with obtaining authorisations. With regard to the tents, they would have liked to replace them this winter, but were having problems with their supplier.



*'Chechnya is No Longer of Any Interest to Europe,' (Russian Deputies), AFP (France), Moscow, 28 January 2002 (in French).*

**Extract:**

"It was only the fourth point on the agenda [...] Unlike the other sessions, Chechnya was not a priority subject," declared Mikhail Margelov [President of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Council of the Russian Federation (Upper Chamber)] during a press conference held on the delegation's return to Moscow. "The Russian delegation received a warm welcome" added deputy Alexandre Plechakov.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe had suspended the Russian delegation's voting rights in the Council of Europe in April 2000 owing to the human rights violations in Chechnya. These rights were restored in January 2001. [...] Four of the twelve delegates present at the press conference attributed this change in the European attitude to Russia's position after the events of 11 September, when Moscow offered the Americans unprecedented support for their operations against the Afghan Taliban.



*In the report, we spoke of the situation of the refugees in Ingushetia, but also of the situation in Chechnya and the reasons for which the displaced did not want to go back. We based our report on eyewitness accounts collected in the camps and we opted for widespread communication. We got in touch with everyone we knew. We sent out letters everywhere. We held the press conference. I went to see English members of parliament who were very receptive and in turn asked a number of questions during one of their Parliamentary sessions. This is how we knew that they had listened to our comments.*

Loïck Barriquand, MSF France programme manager, September 2000 to 2005, (in French) interviewed in 2009.



*We held the press conference in January 2002, with much fanfare. We exhibited photos in the room, placed blankets everywhere. We invited Sergei Kovalev, a 73 year-old gentleman who was used to seeing Putin's forces turning up at his home in the middle of the night. He offered a particularly lucid picture of the situation and played his role perfectly. We didn't make the front pages, but everything went very well. We got lots of media feedback because Kovalev knows how to turn a phrase. He in particular gave a very tough interview to the Le Monde newspaper. We knew that diplomatic pressure was needed, so we focused on articles in Le Monde. We wouldn't have said 'no' to a spot on the 8 o'clock TV evening news, but we were concentrating more on this type of article.*

Anne Fouchard, Deputy Director of Communications  
MSF France, July 2000 – July 2004, (in French)  
interviewed in 2009

**In the meantime, in the Russian Federation continued to muzzle or liquidate the independent press. After the Government had taken control of NTV a few months earlier, TV6 was the last independent television station to go off the air.**



*'Russians Find Suspicious Fly as Network Goes off Air,' Michael Wines, **The New York Times** (USA), 23 January 2002 (in English).*

#### **Extract:**

It was the first sign that TV-6, Russia's last independent television network, had succumbed to what its managers and most outside analysts called a Kremlin plot to force it off the air. Plot or not -- and the Kremlin denies it -- death came to TV-6 with a twist of the knife: Most of the network's top staff had fled from NTV last summer, when a Kremlin-controlled company took over that network in a boardroom coup. [...] While most analysts consider it a given that TV-6 was silenced on a Kremlin order, not all were so quick today to conclude that press freedom has been silenced. "I think it's impossible to take the national press under control, even with the monocentric system which the Kremlin is building," Igor Bunin, a political analyst, said in an interview. "Putin cannot help but realize that the press is necessary for expression, which is important for the development of a free-market economy."

The overriding reason for the shutdown of TV-6 remains unclear. Civil liberties advocates note that the government has expanded its control of national television from one state-controlled network three years ago to three today. But others, like Mr. Bunin, say the Kremlin may actually be settling scores with those few tycoons who are still trying to wield their wealth for political gain.



*'A flinch on Chechnya,' by Fred Hiatt, **The Washington Post** (USA), 25 February 2002 (in English).*

#### **Extract:**

Memorial has documented in sickening detail the Russian method of operation, as, in different ways, have Human Rights Watch, Physicians for Human Rights and Doctors Without Borders. Russian troops surround a village or small town and force all its inhabitants into an open field, where they are required to stay, sometimes for a day or two. Many of the men and some women are badly beaten. Many men are taken away -- in some cases, to be ransomed for cash; in others, never to return. Russian troops drive trucks up to each house and carry off anything of value -- rugs, radios, shampoo. Then they destroy what they cannot carry, smashing mirrors, shooting sheep, setting fire to haystacks. [...] When Memorial holds news conferences in Moscow to release its findings, some newspapers publish reports. But no television or radio station any longer dares to cover such news, Orlov [Oleg, one of Memorial officials] says. Such is the success of Putin's campaign to acquire or intimidate Russia's broadcast media.

**After an exploratory mission in January, the Coordinator of the Dutch section was led to the conclusion that the situation was now less dangerous than in Ingushetia. As a result, MSF transferred the local team from Ingushetia to Chechnya, where it opened a program. A team of expatriates set up a base in Nalchik in the neighbouring republic of Kabardino-Balkaria. A support program for the surgical unit in a Grozny hospital was gradually put into place.**



*It started around January 2002, when I made my first trip to go and see for myself, which was quite useful because there was a major shift in strategy at that point. Before, everything was still based on teams from Nazran and going in and out of day trips. Being in Grozny, I realized that Nazran was rapidly becoming as dangerous as Grozny. So if you're sitting in Nazran, you might as well sit in Grozny, but in my opinion both of them were unacceptable to have a permanent presence of expatriates. We could not afford that with the way things were going with new leadership in Ingushetia and also new leadership in Chechnya, and a very clear policy of the Russians to try to normalize Chechnya. To achieve anything we needed to have permanent people based in Grozny, not in Nazran. I decided that MSF needed to get an office in Grozny. And the expat team was going to be based in Nalchik in Kabardino - Balkharia. The Chechnya staff, was very happy with it, because being Chechens, they were less and less welcome in Ingushetia themselves. We also considered some additional components in Grozny itself, like getting*

some surgical assistance in this Hospital Number 9 set up. Then we had doctors on the ground in Chechnya that were seeing patients. They also started collecting this war trauma data in a systematic way. The program, in the end, that came off the ground was a restart of the drugs supply to hospitals and clinics. It was the easiest and the first one we could do, which gave you the room to discuss further programs. Of course, if you are giving something, then it is easier to talk about other things. And then the two main components besides that first were mental health and tuberculosis. The tuberculosis programme was the most difficult to open, because of security reasons, simply because matching tuberculosis and the former Soviet Union is very difficult on the level of the medical negotiations. So that took the longest to get off the ground. And then later, once I decided we needed to have a permanent presence in Grozny, we added an emergency surgical component as well. And we had a permanent staff based in Grozny

Michiel Hofman, MSF Holland North Caucasus HOM  
from May 2001 to July 2003, (in English)  
interviewed in 2009.

Following on from the public advocacy of January, and at a time when European civil societies were increasingly mobilising around the fate of the Chechens, MSF continued to alert the international players to the humanitarian situation of the refugees and the violence inflicted upon them.

**In February, the French section seized the opportunity of the Paris visit by the Russian Prime Minister Igor Ivanov to once again turn the spotlight on the strategy of non-assistance to the refugees used by the Russian authorities to force them to return to Chechnya.**



*Visit by Igor Ivanov to Paris: Chechnya at the heart of the Debate,' Press release, MSF France, Paris, 15 February 2002 (in French).*

**Extract:**

On the occasion of this Friday's visit to Paris by the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Igor Ivanov, Médecins Sans Frontières wishes to recall the extremely precarious situation of the Chechen refugee population in Ingushetia. This situation is the direct result of a very real policy of non-assistance implemented by the Russian federal authorities, to force the population in question to return to Chechnya. The pressure to return, which has increased and become more forceful over the last few months in Ingushetia, and more recently in Azerbaijan and Georgia, is a major source of concern for MSF. The borders separating Ingushetia and Georgia from Chechnya are in fact the frontiers between

havens and an open-sky prison where arbitrary punishment and impunity reign.

Médecins Sans Frontières also wishes to recall that the "war on terror" cannot be an alibi for summary execution, torture, massacre, and bombings, which has been the case in Chechnya for more than two years now. Will the French authorities bring Russia before the European Court of Human Rights? Do France and the European Union intend to obtain a condemnation of Russia at the next meeting of the UN's Human Rights Commission, which will be from 18 March to 27 April? Which international body is capable today of putting an end to the massive violations of Human rights and international humanitarian law in Chechnya?

**In the following weeks, to mark the commemoration of the deportation of Chechens by Stalin, European civil society and a number of political figures publicly expressed their support for the Chechens. The matter was also raised at the European Parliament.**



*'A Chechen Support Campaign Launched in Europe,' Le Monde (France), 22 February 2002 (in French).*

**Extract:**

The Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Igor Ivanov, was received last week in Paris and complained to his counterpart Hubert Védrine that "envoys from the Chechen President, Aslan Maskhadov, are continuing to be received in France." [...] His protests only concerned the meetings granted two weeks earlier by those in charge of the Europe department at the Quai d'Orsay to the 'Minister for Culture' of the pro-independence government, Akhmed Zakaïev, and by Jacques Lang to the Minister for Education. Akhmed Zakaïev represented the Chechen President at the initial, aborted, negotiations between the combatants last November. It was in this capacity that he was received in Strasbourg by the Parliament of the Council of Europe and in London at the Foreign Office.

In reprisal, the French and British ambassadors were summoned – a process that had already become 'routine' – to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow. What would minister Ivanov do when he learned of the invitation issued in France not just to one of Maskhadov's ministers, but three of them, along with representatives of Russian and Chechen civil society? And when he found out that the invitation came from representatives of the French cultural scene – actors, directors, writers, etc., over which Russian bureaucracy has absolutely no control?

The 'Ministers' Ilyas Akhmadov (Foreign Affairs), Omar Khanbiev (Health) and Akhmed Zakaïev (Culture), along with the President of the Association of Mothers of Russian soldiers of Saint-Petersburg, Elia Poliakova, and the Head of a Caucasus women's' NGO, Zainab Gachaeva, were first of all invited to meet the press on Friday 22 February. The following day, the anniversary of the 1944 deportation of the entire

Chechen population to central Asia, demonstrations were planned in Paris and in ten or so European cities, followed up in March by symposia, exhibitions and shows put on by Chechens, a 'non-people.'



'The European Parliament [EP] Now Involved,' *Le Monde* (France), 9 March 2002 (in French).

**Extract:**

The European Parliament (EP) contacted by a group of deputies – including Olivier Dupuis, Secretary of the Radical Party and who had been on hunger strike for the previous two weeks – decided on Thursday 7 March to include the Chechen issue on the agenda of its plenary session of 14 March in Strasbourg. In a letter to the EP President, Pat Cox, Mr Dupuis underlined that, "assuming that President Putin really wants to begin negotiations with the representative of President Maskhadov, our blinkered policy of silence and cynicism will be of no help to him when faced with a military lobby that is thriving on the Chechen tragedy." To support this action, aimed at ensuring the application of the resolutions already adopted by the Parliament, more than 200 people, including Elena Bonner, the wife of Andrei Sakharov, intend to take part in the fast, from 12 to 14 March. The President of the EP delegation for relations with the Russian Federation, Bart Staes, is organising a hearing of the representatives from the Chechen President, Aslan Maskhadov, on 14 March.



'Chechnya: The Indignation of Joshka Fisher,' *Le Monde*, AFP/AP, (France) 22 March 2002 (in French).

**Extract:**

The German Minister for Foreign Affairs, Joschka Fischer, denounced the violations of human rights in Chechnya as serious and systematic on Wednesday, 20 March before the UN Commission for Human Rights, "saying there should be no anti-terrorist windfall." For his part, Ilyas Akhmadov, the Chechen Independent Minister for Foreign Affairs, who was received by the Danish Parliament on Wednesday, denounced the deterioration of the situation in Chechnya since September 11<sup>th</sup>.

**MSF USA in turn, issued the report entitled "Chechnya-Ingushetia: a Deliberate Strategy of Non-assistance to People in Crisis" to which it added a number of recommendations. It organized an information tour to various political officials. At the beginning of March, it was the turn of MSF Belgium to release a report, backed up by a press release including the eyewitness account of the Coordinator in Moscow.**



'Chechnya Report/US,' E-mail from Patrice Page, Programme Department, MSF USA to Loïck Barriquand, programme manager and the MSF Deputy Legal Advisor, 15 February 2002 (in French).

**Extract:**

In short, with regard to the content, it is exactly the same report as that from MSF-F but with modifications concerning the format/order of presentation and some additional information [...] which simply supplements rather than modifies the content. The main difference is on page 5 where we included recommendations and that entailed lengthy discussions here between Nicolas [de Torrente, MSF USA Executive Director] and myself about which recommendations. Let's just say that in the US, it's really important to include recommendations, because the officials want to know more precisely/concretely what we are expecting of them [...]. Adding recommendations is so important that it can make the difference between being totally ignored by the politicians in Washington or not, when presenting the report (it seems stupid but that's the way it is). I believe that the recommendations reflect the spirit of the report fairly accurately but I am of course waiting for your feed-back. At first, they were a little too soft and after the discussions with Loïck this last week-end, I gave them some teeth... About these meetings, they will be on Thursday and Friday next and there's already some good news, in that the head of the BPRM (Bureau of Populations, Refugees and Migration), in other words one of Powell's [Colin Powell, US Secretary of Foreign Affairs] 4 direct political assistants at the Department of State, has agreed to see us. He is the highest ranking political contact at the Department of State for strictly humanitarian questions. This is clearly a victory because we were only hoping to be seen by one of the desk managers (bureaucrats) and not one of the 'politicians,' given the sensitive nature of the subject.



'Chechnya/Ingushetia: Vulnerable Persons Denied Assistance,' **Report**, Doctors without Borders, February 2002 (in English).

**Extract:**

Recommendations

MSF calls upon the Russian authorities to:

- Fully respect international humanitarian law in the armed conflict in Chechnya. In particular, ensure the adequate protection of civilians remaining in Chechnya.
- Immediately reverse policies intended to pressure displaced Chechens in Ingushetia, Dagestan, and other republics to unwillingly return to their homes in Chechnya despite ongoing warfare and insecure conditions there. In particular, resume registration of displaced Chechens and provide humanitarian assistance according to the real needs of the actual number of displaced people.

MSF urges all parties to the conflict in Chechnya to:

- Respect access for humanitarian organizations to operate

unhindered in Chechnya, Ingushetia, and other neighbouring republics according to the Geneva Conventions, including the simplification of administrative regulations.

- MSF urges the United Nations Security Council, especially key member states like the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, to immediately hold Russia accountable for violations of international humanitarian law in the region by:
  - Taking appropriate measures to hold Russia responsible for respecting international humanitarian law both inside Chechnya and in neighbouring republics, particularly by implementing policies assuring adequate protection and assistance of civilian Chechens.
  - Raising the issue of the consequences of the war in Chechnya on the civilian population (especially repeated violations of fundamental rights under international humanitarian and human rights law and denied access to humanitarian assistance) with the relevant international bodies, particularly the United Nations Security Council, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, and the European Court of Human Rights.
  - Calling for an international independent inquiry on the war in Chechnya and its consequences on the Chechen civilian population.



*'Civilians Continue to Flee Violence in Chechnya,'* MSF USA Press release, 28 February 2002 (in English).

#### Extract:

A report released by the international humanitarian organization Doctors without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) shows how ongoing insecurity and indiscriminate violence in Chechnya continue to drive large numbers of Chechen civilians to seek refuge in Ingushetia and other neighboring republics only to receive inadequate humanitarian assistance there due to a policy of refusing to register new arrivals. "Chechen civilians are caught between a rock and a hard place," states Jose-Antonio Bastos, Operational Director of MSF relief efforts in North Caucasus. "In Chechnya, they face daily violence and harassment, bombings, and arbitrary arrests, but when they try to flee to safety in neighboring republics, they are denied official registration and adequate assistance."

Testimonies documented in the MSF report, "Chechnya/Ingushetia: A Deliberate Strategy of Non-Assistance to People in Crisis," reveal that in the third year of a war described as an "anti-terrorist operation," civilians in Chechnya continue to live under a reign of terror, in a prison-like environment characterized by arbitrary rules and daily violence. The testimonies show that innocent men and women continue to die every day inside Chechnya, either by direct acts of violence or by getting caught in the crossfire. Daily survival is becoming harder and harder and many residents spend much of their time in cellars, guarding the few personal belongings they still possess.

Thousands of Chechens continue to seek refuge in neighboring Ingushetia, Dagestan, and other neighboring

republics but since the beginning of 2001, these new arrivals are considered 'clandestine' and no longer officially registered. MSF is concerned about the humanitarian situation of an estimated 200,000 displaced Chechens now facing their third winter in Ingushetia and an additional 10,000 in Dagestan. Without registration, the newly arrived displaced are often unable to receive official relief assistance and in the absence of a complete census of the displaced population, non-governmental organizations have to plan their assistance programs on the basis of incomplete lists and a partial picture of the needs. This deliberate strategy of non-assistance is intended to drive the Chechens back to Chechnya. MSF is particularly concerned by the increasing pressure on the displaced in Ingushetia to return home, and requests that any return of Chechen civilians to Chechnya take place only on a voluntary basis and if the conditions in Chechnya permit it.



*The diplomatic approaches were discussed by the sections, but in New York we were also taking initiatives whenever we saw an opportunity. We felt that we should continue the pressure on Chechnya and maintain the contacts we had made during the Kenny affair. We have annual intervention plans, which enabled us to leave certain things on the back burner. But as soon as there was a report like that one, we had to turn the heat up. New York became the place where the information and messages were centralised. We stopped some campaigns, which were felt to be inappropriate, but generally we acted as an intermediary. The sections also wanted to talk to the American office. The programs department, who wanted to talk to the United States, but in doing this, we spoke with everyone. We had a very different view of things, but that enabled us to compare the styles of the sections, and we were able to make comments and suggestions. So when we saw the report on the camps in Ingushetia, which described the volatile situation and the desire to normalise the situation by force, we wanted to send it up to the American administration, explaining that this was not normal. We went around and presented what we had found in the report.*

[...], Project Coordinator, MSF Belgium in Chechnya, (1995), MSF USA Programme Department 2001-2002, (in French) interviewed in 2008.

**In anticipation of the next session of the United Nations Human Rights Commission, the French section informed the various European Union bodies and the French Government, via the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (CNCDDH), of which it was a member, of the situation of the Chechen refugees.**



**'Minutes of Meetings in Brussels - 4 March 2002,'**  
MSF deputy legal advisor, 18 March 2002 (in French).

**Extract:**

Note: none of those we spoke to disputed MSF's analysis of the strategy of deliberate non-assistance implemented by the Russian authorities against the displaced Chechens in Ingushetia. We were nonetheless expecting to have to argue our case on this point.

1) Meeting with Poul Nielsen, European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid

[...] In the light of the mandate of the Commissioner and of ECHO, the purpose of this meeting for MSF was above all to alert them of the problems with assisting and protecting the Chechen refugees, in particular:

the precarious situation of the displaced population in Ingushetia, linked to the strategy of non-assistance implemented by the Russian Federal authorities (central topic of our report published last January);

in recent months, the racking up of the pressure to return in Ingushetia and more recently in Georgia. For information, MSF has been spotlighting this issue for more than a year now. Concerning the first part of our message, but without calling into question our analysis of the deliberate strategy of non-assistance, Nielsen sought to avoid any 'politicisation' of the problem. He fell back on a highly restrictive interpretation of his mandate and that of ECHO and in so doing, resorted to a purely humanitarian reading of the situation. In his opinion, his and ECHO's responsibility can be boiled down to the following equation = where there are humanitarian needs, there must be humanitarian assistance. He dodged the political causes of these needs (= the strategy of non-assistance), which we presented to him but he dismissed when asked what types of concrete measures he intended to take to reduce the pressure to return and the problems of assistance. He told us that the only areas in which the Commission and ECHO could help us and maintain pressure, were issues of access to Chechnya, the freedom of action granted to humanitarian organisations, and the possibility of NGOs being allowed to use means of communication.

2) Meeting with the Council of the European Union

[...] This meeting was the more political of the two. We repeated the message we had taken to the European Commissioner, and added some more political elements as a result:

the specific nature of this conflict when compared with the thirty or so armed conflicts ongoing around the world; the huge gap between the gravity of the conflict and the passivity of the 'international community';

a request for the European Union, at the next session of the Human Rights Commission, to table a resolution on Chechnya demanding an independent international inquiry on the large-scale violations of human rights;

referral of the matter to the European Court of Human Rights by one or more member States of the European Union.

[...] For the rest, they underlined the difficulty with keeping Chechnya on the agendas of the Heads of State of the European Union. On this point, they offered a small

incentive by reminding us that a summit between the European Union and Russia was scheduled for May and implicitly invited us to stimulate public pressure on this occasion. We then mentioned that after a period of apathy, we felt that the European media were once again keenly interested in Chechnya. According to them, the reticence of the heads of state to mention Chechnya is mainly linked to the desire to keep Russia on-board, given the next major politico-strategic objective of the European Union, which is expansion to about twenty members, some of whom share common borders with Russia.

They seemed to take due note of our demand for 'action' by the European Union at the session of the Human Rights Commission. However, they did say that there was a consensus among the member States that referring the matter to the European Court of Human Rights was not a realistic option. They seemed (or at least pretended) to be unaware of the procedure currently under way in the Danish Parliament, which could lead to the Danish government bringing Russia before the European Court.



**'The CNCDH Denounces the Tragic Situation in Chechnya,'** AFP (France), Paris, 11 March 2002 (in French).

**Extract:**

In a memo dated 7 March addressed to French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (CNCDH) described "the serious violations against human rights and international humanitarian law [...], the massive difficulties civilians face in accessing humanitarian aid, and the acute insecurity of the Chechen population who have taken refuge in Ingushetia." The Commission, which drafted a similar memo a year earlier, stated that it was "extremely concerned." "The disparity between the human rights violations being committed by the Russian forces in Chechnya and the proceedings engaged bear out the Russian authorities' unwillingness to sanction the perpetrators of such violations," declared the Commission, adding that "the international bodies tasked with investigating the human rights situation in Chechnya have encountered huge problems in carrying out their work." The CNCDH has asked the French government "to ensure that the European Union takes the initiative at the next session of the UN Human Rights Commission to again introduce a resolution condemning the Russian Federation for the massive violations against human rights and international humanitarian law." It also asked the French government to demand that the Russian authorities "sanction the immediate visit of special reporters." It also hopes that "if the measures taken thus far ultimately end in failure, France and the members states of the Council of Europe will appeal to the European Court of Human Rights."



*At the time, the French section was a member of the French National Consultative Mission on Human Rights,*



an independent body under the Prime Minister set up to advise and criticise the French government on issues relating to human rights and the humanitarian situation. We soon came to realise that this organisation could be leveraged to maintain pressure on the French government. Therefore, MSF, in conjunction with the IFHR [International Federation of Human Rights] and other humanitarian organisations such as MDM [Médecins du Monde] drafted and coordinated a number of memos from the French National Consultative Mission on Human Rights.

[...], MSF deputy legal advisor 1995-2005, interviewed in 2008 (in French).

**On 14 March, in an open letter published in the *daily International Herald Tribune*<sup>28</sup>, MSF criticised the Council of Europe for abdicating its responsibilities concerning the human rights situation in Chechnya. On 15 March, the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe replied with a summary of the efforts which, according to him, had been made by the Assembly to put an end to the Russian –Chechen conflict.**



'No End in Sight to the War in Chechnya,' MSF open letter in *International Herald Tribune* (Europe), 14 March 2002 (in English).

#### Extract:

After two years of war, Chechen civilians have reached a sinister conclusion: in the fight against terrorism following the events of 11 September 2001, no international power is prepared to stop the Kremlin and protect Chechens' lives or even their most fundamental human rights. At its winter session on January 23, 2002, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe did not consider imposing sanctions on Russia for violating human rights in Chechnya. The Council thus heeded the recommendations put forward by the British rapporteur, Lord Judd, for whom "new sanctions against Russia would only bear testimony to our inability to reach an effective solution through cooperation and dialogue." And what of the fate of the Chechen refugees in neighboring Ingushetia? The rapporteur of the special commission ignored the concerns and recommendations issued by Rudd Lubbers, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, as well as the report ("Chechnya/Ingushetia: vulnerable persons denied assistance") published by MSF (a copy of the report can be downloaded from the MSF website: [www.msf.org](http://www.msf.org)). Lord Judd described that, although the situation remains difficult, he had witnessed "tangible improvements" during his two-day visit in the field: apparently a few new tents seemed to do the trick. Close to 200,000 Chechens are living

in increasingly precarious and dangerous conditions. Winter sees refugees crammed into tents, riddled with holes so they cannot even escape the cold and the snow; or else taking shelter in cellars and farms, squalid and unheated, where the refugees take turns sleeping in the limited space available. One toilet for 200 people, one shower for 400 people; the hygiene is appalling. This unacceptable humanitarian situation is the direct result of Russia's non-assistance of displaced Chechens in Ingushetia, a strategy deployed for almost a year to pressure the refugees to return to Chechnya. And the problems refugees face upon their return, which have increased and worsened over recent months, are of major concern to Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). The border which separates Ingushetia and Chechnya separates a state of law from a lawless one, in which disorder, rape, summary executions, and torture are rife. This is why MSF is asking the UN agencies and donors to do their utmost to bring about concrete improvements in terms of assistance, notably by reinstating the registration of new refugees so that aid supplies match the number of recipients and taking into immediate account the most urgent needs: housing and heating.

The Council of Europe is the only international body to have put Chechnya on its agenda. In April 2000, the Parliamentary Assembly had suspended the Russian delegation's right to vote on the Council of Europe, before reinstating it a few months later. The Council of Europe's mission is to monitor the respect of Human Rights in the 43 member states. And yet the Council shirked its responsibility on January 23 when it failed to clearly state that the living conditions and security in Chechnya do not permit the civilian population to return. It was also its responsibility to recall that the right to flee one's country when one is threatened is a fundamental human right. It abstained from doing so. The Council also had a responsibility to defend and uphold its identity and values. Again, it abstained. The parliamentarians of the Russian delegation stated with overt satisfaction that "Chechnya is not, for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, a matter of priority." While the Council of Europe may not consider Chechnya a priority, representatives of humanitarian and human rights organizations do.

Since 1995, groups have been publishing reports and informing Council committees about the extent of the crimes committed against the Chechen civilian population. Likewise we have described the restrictions imposed on the delivery of humanitarian aid, restrictions that affect both the population who have remained in Chechnya and those who have fled to neighboring Ingushetia. Our various reports, like those of human rights' organizations such as Memorial or Human Rights Watch, describe a disturbing and repeated pattern of violence committed against the Chechen population. This repetition reveals a policy aimed at destroying a people through bombing, sending them into exile, enslaving those who cannot flee and executions. We are witnessing another attempt to demolish a civilian population.

During the first period of conflict, from December 1994 to August 1996, 100,000 Chechens are estimated to have died - literally a decimation. After a brief period of calm, punctuated by the election of a Chechen president recognized by the international community, the war started

28. American newspaper (in English) published from Europe and dispatched in 180 countries.

again with a vengeance. Once again, civilians began falling by the thousands under bombs, arbitrary arrests, torture, and forced deportations. They were even deprived of the minimum assistance to help them out of their misery. Tens of thousands have died since autumn 1999, while hundreds upon hundreds have been tortured or have disappeared. Are international bodies and Western governments going to continue accepting this line of thinking that has, in the past, allowed some of the worst atrocities to take place? When faced with such general indifference, an end to the violence in Chechnya does not yet seem to be on the horizon.



'Re: Response to MSF from the Council of Europe,' e-mail from the MSF deputy legal advisor to Isabelle Lasserre and Laure Mandeville, Journalists at the French Daily Le Figaro, 20 March 2002 (in French).

[...]

For information, in case you do not already have it, the open letter from the President of the APCE. I don't know in which paper this open letter was published. It's the response to an open letter that we ourselves published in the International Herald Tribune. Moreover, I confirm that we are organising a joint briefing with Memorial, HRW, MDM, FIDH and Amnesty on 2 April next, in front of the Human Rights Commission in Geneva. This briefing will be preceded in the morning by a press conference.

Enclosed are some minutes of meetings that were part of our lobbying and I am posting you the CNCDH opinion that we introduced and had jointly voted with the FIDH to exert pressure on France on the eve of the Human Rights Commission + the minutes of the meetings in the United States with the American authorities. On the European Parliament side, we thought about writing a letter to the President of the Parliament (who we should also be meeting) and a press release because Chechnya had been withdrawn from the agenda of the session debates at the beginning of April, which was a highly negative symbolic gesture right in the middle of the Human Rights Commission session. Following the mobilisation by several deputies from various groups, Chechnya was reintroduced with the aim of voting a resolution. We'll see what happens...

Finally, the MSF UK section is also preparing a briefing for the House of Commons in London.

Open letter by Peter Schieder, President of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly to Médecins Sans Frontières (Strasbourg 15 February 2002).

In a statement published in the international press on Monday, 4 March, Médecins Sans Frontières criticizes the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe for 'shirking its responsibility' with regard to the conflict in Chechnya. MSF quotes the members of the Russian delegation, stating that Chechnya is no longer a matter of priority for the Assembly. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Council of Europe was the first international body to react to the outbreak of the second Chechen conflict two and a half years ago.

Today, in the aftermath of 11 September, the Council, and the Assembly within it, is the only international body, which continues to deal with this tragedy as a matter of priority. As an organization, which was set up by governments to defend human rights on the basis of legally binding international treaties, we can neither engage, nor disengage as a matter of political opportunity.

From the very beginning, the Assembly's efforts in Chechnya have been an up-hill battle. The January debate was typical - the resolution adopted was criticized by everyone. The Russian delegation was upset by the call to Moscow to negotiate with Aslan Maskhadov, while the representatives of Mr Maskhadov expressed their disappointment at the absence of sanctions against Russia because of its conduct in Chechnya. Human rights and humanitarian non-governmental organizations - MSF included - also hoped for a tougher line and stronger condemnation of Russia in Strasbourg.

If the Assembly became involved in the Chechen conflict to please, I would have to admit that we are not doing very well. But we did not get involved to please. What we are doing is trying to help end the human suffering of the Chechen population, to improve the human rights situation, and to bring about a political solution to the conflict. In doing so, we are deciding on a course of action, which may not always be liked by the two sides in the conflict, or by the general public, but it is a course of action that is carefully thought through and for which we are taking full political responsibility.

We are often criticized for not doing enough. Perhaps rightly so. Everyone has their share of responsibility and, in the face of such human tragedy, one always feels that more could have been done to prevent, or stop it. We do not claim to be able to provide immediate comfort to the suffering population. People who have gone through the hell of the past 28 months of war will find little instant consolation from political deliberations two thousand kilometers away. What we can do, and are doing, is working towards a change of attitude within Russia, a change that has already started and should, eventually, lead to the end of violence and human rights abuses.

The Council of Europe is involved in Chechnya through its experts in the Office of the Russian President's Special Envoy for Human Rights. For a year and a half, they represented the only foreign presence in the Chechen Republic. Their work, under very difficult and dangerous conditions, is helping to reveal the truth about the conflict and to justice being done. For the first time ever, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe invoked Article 52 of the European Convention on Human Rights; and requested from the Russian authorities to furnish an explanation of the manner in which the measures put in place to deal with the situation in Chechnya 'ensure the effective implementation of any of the provisions of the Convention.' The reply by the Russian authorities is being examined by the Committee of Ministers.

Last July, the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) issued a public statement. Only its second ever in which it criticized the Russian authorities' failure to carry out a thorough and independent

inquiry into events in the Chernokozovo detention facility as well as to take action to uncover and prosecute cases of ill-treatment of persons deprived of their liberty in the course of the current conflict in Chechnya. The European Court of Human Rights - the judicial pillar of the Council of Europe's mechanism to uphold human rights in its member states has received hundreds of complaints of violations of human rights in Chechnya. Many are likely to be found admissible and will lead to court decisions binding on the Russian government.

The Parliamentary Assembly pursues its efforts to initiate a political process, which is the only way to reach a lasting and peaceful solution. Through the Joint Working Group created by the Assembly and the Russian State Duma, and the beginning of an intra-Chechen dialogue under the Assembly's auspices, we are trying to change the entrenched attitudes, which are keeping the conflict alive. The focus on a political solution has not affected our unequivocal criticism of continued violations of human rights. Those who doubt our resolve in insisting on full compliance with Russia's obligations as a Council of Europe member state, are invited to read carefully the integral text of the Assembly's last resolution on the conflict in Chechnya.

**On 2 April, during a briefing of the 58th session of the UN Human Rights Commission, MSF recalled that the last participation by this session was for the Rwandan Tutsi genocide in 1994 and that it was justified today, by the grave and specific nature of the situation in Chechnya, referred to as the 'policy of destruction of an entire people.'**



*'MSF Intervention at the 58th Session of the Human Rights Commission.'* **Press release**, MSF France, MSF Switzerland, 2 April 2002 (in French).

**Extract:**

The participation by Médecins Sans Frontières at this session is exceptional. It is reserved for situations of extreme gravity, such as the Rwandan genocide in 1994, and such as the situation in Chechnya today. This intervention is a further step in the MSF advocacy aimed at denouncing a situation in Chechnya, which is simply getting worse.

During a hearing at the Council of Europe on 22 January last, Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, President of MSF, spoke of the "fresh attempt to destroy a people" in Chechnya, as well as the restrictions on humanitarian aid both to the populations who remained in Chechnya and those who had sought refuge in neighbouring Ingushetia. Despite our advocacy, the Council of Europe – which is nonetheless supposed to protect human rights on the territory of its 43 member states – did not sanction Russia for its conduct of the war in Chechnya.

Faced with such an abdication of responsibility, which international body is today able to put an end to the large-scale violations of human rights and international

humanitarian law in Chechnya? This is the question that MSF posed on 25 January 2002, during a press conference timed to coincide with the release of its report entitled "Chechnya-Ingushetia, Non-assistance to People in Danger." This is the question that MSF again poses today to the Human Rights Commission. In speaking out in this way, MSF clearly indicated its refusal to become resigned to silently treating the victims of attacks who would be immediately returned to the maelstrom of violence, torture, and execution on their discharge from hospital.



**Briefing** before the 58<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Commission,' MSF France, 2 April 2002 (in French).

**Extract:**

Thank you for agreeing to listen to us. 'The cleansing carried out at Tsotsen Yurt between 31 December and 6 January last, left the population paralysed. They weren't even asked for their passport and if anyone tried to show one, they became furious. Each house had to pay 5,000 roubles, and if there was no man in the house, then the woman became the victim. Three days later, two young people were killed in Argoun, torn apart between two armoured vehicles.' This is only an extract from the numerous eyewitness accounts collected by our teams in the field and that I wanted to read to you as an introduction.

The participation by Médecins Sans Frontières in the session of the Human Rights commission is unusual and, for us, exceptional. It is reserved for situations of particular gravity. For information, our last participation goes back to the Rwandan genocide. If we came here, as a humanitarian medical NGO, it's because we refuse to silently care for patients who are the victims of aggression and who are once again faced with violence, torture, or execution as soon as they leave hospital, and sometimes even while they are in hospital. The act of care and treatment cannot be taken out of its past and future context, failing which it becomes pointless. We are thus faced with a situation which recalls that of doctors tasked with restoring torture victims to health so that their torturers can get back to work on them.

Our presence at the Human Rights Commission today and the presence of other organisations bears witness to the gravity and the specificity of the conflict in Chechnya. What we have been seeing for more than two and a half years in Chechnya, is a further episode in the attempt to destroy an entire people. The history of Russo-Chechen confrontation is marked by the use of terror, from Russian colonisation to the present day, not forgetting the civil war which followed the Russian Revolution. All Chechens aged over fifty experienced the 1944 deportation and are once again faced with this policy of terror. They are convinced that their very survival is at stake. The facts unfortunately bear out this viewpoint. During the first conflict in Chechnya, from December 1994 to August 1996, Chechen losses were estimated at about 100,000 dead. According to some estimates, nearly 100,000

people have been killed during the course of the current conflict, or nearly 10% of the population each time. Even in strictly mathematical terms, the population is being decimated.

As shown in our report, the violence against civilians is today extreme and completely unrelated to the fighting between armed forces. The acts committed against them have become systematic. Encirclement of villages, raids and round-ups, pillage, arbitrary arrest and torture, nothing stops the Russian armed forces, and certainly not the walls of a civil hospital, as shown by the attack on the Chiri Yurt hospital on 28 January last. Right now, thousands of civilians are continuing to flee Chechnya for Ingushetia, even though everything is being done on their arrival to ensure that conditions are kept as unacceptable as possible in order to deter them. As if the reign of terror and arbitrary punishment in Chechnya was not enough, the federal authorities also intend to keep the population there in a sort of open-sky prison and force those who seek refuge outside the Chechen borders to return, on peril of their lives.

However, our aim here today is not to lay out before you facts that are already known to everyone and which are even openly admitted in part by the Russian federal government itself, but to make the following observation:

- At a time when violence and the denial of help to the suffering populations are still the rule, the federal authorities are showing a clear desire to continue this policy and take no sanctions against the perpetrators of the crimes in Chechnya. At the same time, no international institution or government has attempted to recognise the facts or exert pressure on the Russian Federation. On the contrary, they have even been granted a completely free hand since 11 September. To date, no international inquiry into the large-scale violations of human rights and humanitarian law has been conducted.

The question facing you today is a simple one: during the course of this 58<sup>th</sup> session of the UN Human Rights Commission, will you choose to close your eyes to a policy of destruction of an entire people?

**On 10 April, the European Parliament voted in favour of a resolution that refrained from condemning Russia and demanded both parties negotiate a political solution to resolve the conflict. On 11 April, MSF issued a press release describing these recommendations as 'cosmetic.'**



*'Chechnya: the Cosmetic Recommendations of the European Parliament,' Press release, MSF, 12 April 2002 (in French).*

**Extract:**

On April 10th, the European Parliament addressed the serious situation in Chechnya. Whilst it is positive that the European Parliament is debating the dramatic situation of the Chechen population, the resolution adopted does

not correspond to the gravity of the facts that have been presented. Recent reports published by NGOs (including the MSF report mentioned in the resolution) and delivered to the European Parliament unanimously denounce the grave, intentional violence committed by the Russian forces against civilians: repeated acts of torture, rape, arbitrary arrests, cleansing operations, and frequent attacks (including attacks on hospitals). However, the resolution voted today will do nothing to improve the situation.

The resolution does not call for any concrete measures such as demanding that an international and independent observatory mission be sent to Russia, or that European States call upon the European Court for Human rights to take a stand against Russia. The European Parliament has not even asked the UN Commission for Human Rights, which is debating until the end of April, to adopt a resolution on Chechnya. For instance, one recommendation consists of recalling a resolution voted in 2000 by the European Parliament which calling for 'an ad hoc delegation to visit the North Caucasus' (art. 8 of the present resolution). This recommendation was not put into effect: an international and independent mission has never set foot in Chechnya. This new resolution also calls for the creation of a work group, along with its Russian colleagues, which would observe and investigate the situation in Chechnya. Is this not yet another pious recommendation? The text adopted on April 10 by the European Parliament highlights the disparity between the reality in Chechnya and the weak declarations of the European Parliament on the situation. This resolution Chechnya shows, once again, the lack of political will in Europe to impose the respect of civilian rights in Chechnya.

**On 20 April, it was the turn of the UN Human Rights Commission to reject a resolution condemning abuses by the Russian forces in Chechnya.**



*'Russia Escapes Condemnation,' Le Monde (France), 21 April 2002, (in French).*

**Extract:**

On Friday, the UN Human Rights Commission shockingly rejected a resolution condemning Russian abuses in Chechnya, which it had condemned in 2000 and 2001. Inviting 16 'no' votes, 15 'yes' votes and 22 abstentions, Russia escaped condemnation by a single vote. China and India gave their support to Moscow. "We cannot make a distinction between good and bad terrorists," explained a Chinese delegate.

## AGAINST THE REPATRIATION PLAN IN 20 STEPS: MSF REACTS AND DENOUNCES

Federal, Ingush and Chechen authorities step up pressure on refugees to return and on those humanitarian organisations that refuse to redirect their aid to Chechnya. MSF responds by establishing its diplomatic and public alert campaign on the dangers of a forced return.

**In April, the spokesperson for Vladimir Putin, in charge of Chechen issues, Sergueï Yastrzhembsky, accused the human rights organisation Human Rights Watch and MSF of publishing reports biased towards Chechnya. While pressure mounted in Ingushetia and Georgia to urge refugees to return to Chechnya, Stanislav Illyasov, the Prime Minister of the pro-Russian Chechen government, announced that all refugee camps in Chechnya would be dismantled by 1 April.**

**Vehicles transporting medical equipment and drugs into Chechnya, including MSF's, were subjected to stricter administrative inspections. The managers of the different MSF teams for the North Caucasus are planning to replace damaged tents in several refugee camps in Ingushetia. They are discussing the media plan for the operation and the public position the organisation should take more generally. The representatives of the Belgian and Dutch offices have criticised the French office for adopting a public communication strategy that, in the eyes of the Russian authorities, makes it no longer possible to differentiate MSF from human rights defence organisations.**



*'Re Michiel/Com,'* Email from Loïck Barriquand, MSF France North Caucasus programme manager to Michiel Hofman MSF Holland Coordinator, 15 April 2002 (in English).

### Extract:

I read very carefully your paper on the communication in the North Caucasus. I appreciate the fact that you clarify your position, which obviously was a necessity. However, I am very surprised and I totally disagree with some points and I can't accept some, which are inaccurate. [...]

### Chapter 1

I agree that the year 2000 'campaign' was good, but the result is not so straightforward. After our hearing to the PACE, they decided to reintegrate Russia.

### Chapter 2

"The campaign of MSFF on human rights in Ch[echnya] access and non assistance in Ingushetia has fallen largely on deaf ears, the methodology has been criticized by Russian authorities and others as a duplication of HRW, with no link to MSF mandate, which undermined the impact of a valid message..."

I remind you the objectives of this report:

- To put again the Chechen civilian sake [plight] on the media and political agenda, at a time when no more information was published.

- To raise the issue of non-assistance in Ingushetia towards the main players.

Contrary to what you said, I think the first objective was rather successful. All together there were more than 20 newspapers, 6 TV and 10 radios, including all the main French media. I don't know how many we had outside France. Several gvt or institutions have publicly acknowledged the reception ('accusé réception' in French) of our report including the US and French gvt (mentioning credible NGO report, just after we gave them) the PACE president and lately the EU parliament resolution.

If you think that there is no need to speak out if you can't directly change the life of the Chechens, then you'd better never do it. Our job is more to speak when no one does it, rather than to shout with the crowd. Of course it is also more difficult and requires some efforts. I also think the timing was good as it has allowed to fuel different political foras (EU, PACE, HR Commission), even if their position doesn't change. As well, it came in a period of time when a few other initiatives or debates have followed. At least we tried, at least we do our job and at least no one can pretend not to know.

We never had any feedback from you or anyone else about Russian, or others, or comments on the lack of links with the medical activities. Regarding the link between what we say and our field activities, you just forgot that the people we interviewed were, as always, only our PATIENTS and refugees we HELP DIRECTLY IN THE CAMPS. It seems to me that it is more your personal opinion that you expressed..



**'Discussion paper – draft,'** Koen Repriels, Project Coordinator Northern Caucasus, MSF Holland, 27 April 2002 (in English).

### Extract:

Unless [After] intensive lobbying of several human rights groups and MSFF [towards] on the European parliament, UN commission for Human Rights in Geneva, and the Council of Europe, they produced only mildly or no resolutions at all. The efforts of MSFF upon these organizations have fallen on deaf ears. In a mail sent on April 12 MSFH clearly suggests that lobbying and communication efforts for the coming months rather should focus on improved access to Chechnya and that future MSF advocacy activities inside Chechnya linked with MSF activities would certainly provide a much more justified and powerful message. The witnessing methodology used by MSFF is not different [from] human rights [groups]

like Human Rights Watch [and] Amnesty International. Not surprisingly, it becomes more and more different [difficult] for the concerned authorities to differentiate between MSF as a humanitarian actor and human rights groups.



**Sitrep** n° 02-03 2002, MSF Belgium, April 2002 (in English).

#### Extract:

General:

##### 1.1 Humanitarian issues: Chechnya and Ingushetia

- An UN delegation accompanied by representatives of MSFH and other NGOs went to Grozny to negotiate access for humanitarian organisations with military/civilian authorities. [...] Very little results from this meeting: as of March 1, no NGO's have official access to Chechnya. A follow-up meeting to sort out these 'misunderstandings' takes place Wednesday, March 6. Commander Filitov [explained] what he regarded as good news: the Zakhistas (mopping-up operations), were no longer a strategy, to be replaced by 'Sting'-operations, targeted, quick and forceful arrests.'

- Encouraged return of IDPs to newly renovated social reception hostels in Grozny from the Znamenskoe en Sernovodsk camps is ongoing. Only women, children and elderly take the risk to move to these hostels.

- Increased pressure from Russian and Georgian side on the 7,000 Chechen refugees in the Pankisi region to return to Chechnya. [...]

Refugee camps in Chechnya to be removed. Chechen Prime Minister Stanislav Ilyasov said that all refugee camps in Chechnya are to be removed by 15 April. Especially the 8,000 IDPs in tents camps in Znameskoye in northern Chechnya are likely to suffer directly from this political pressure. The statement by the Chechen prime minister caused also a lot of anxiety among the people in Aki Yurt tent camp in northern Ingushetia only a few kilometers further down the road from Znamenskoe, which suffered during several days in March from gas and electricity shortages.

##### Russian official criticizes MSF

Russian President's Spokesman Yastrzhembsky criticized Human Rights Watch and MSF for biased reports of "dogmatic character" on human rights situation in Chechnya. Order signed on the detention of vehicles transporting medical equipment and drugs signed in military commandants [posts] of Chechen districts have been ordered to pay particular attention to vehicles transporting any sort of medical equipment or medicines. All vehicles transporting medicines or medical equipment without relevant documentation will be detained. The rumors of medical material being illegally smuggled to Vedeno and Nozhay-Yurt districts have spread, and checkpoints have been ordered to look for medical transports without proper paperwork since. MSFH and MSFF were specifically targeted during the past weeks at checkpoints inside Chechnya. This has culminated into a reported 'order' by the chief military commander of Chechnya

to be especially vigilant in checking any kind of medical supplies entering the republic.[...]

#### 4. Advocacy

- Intersectional. An intersectional meeting on advocacy strategy was held on April 4. The issue of advocacy possibilities was discussed in connection with the tents replacement in several refugee camps made by MSF Holland together with MSFF and MSF Belgium in Aki-Yurt tent camp. The potential organization of media events to coincide with tents replacement will be looked into by MSF press officer. The sections agreed that the events could be first organized on Ingushetia level.

MSFH defended strongly that the general advocacy challenge for the future will be to move a bit away from advocacy which stresses on human rights violations to successful lobbying on access and freedom of movement in Chechnya as well as advocate for at least a basic respect of humanitarian law and humanitarian principles (the example with the rule on the medicines early April shows once more that the most elementary principles embodied in the Geneva conventions are not respected any more). Therefore the communication strategy should not only focus on MSF as a UNHCR watchdog and on Human rights advocacy. More attention could be paid to start a constructive dialogue with ICRC and authorities to counter the anti-terrorist rhetoric in Russia and to see how at least basic principles of humanitarian international law can be applied in times of ardent anti terrorist rhetoric throughout the conflict zones in the world.

MSFB: While making the assessments for targeted distributions, the Nazran assessment team also asks IDPs several general questions on eventual forced pressure in Ingushetia to return to Chechnya, living conditions and their thoughts about going back to Chechnya. The most interesting answers can be eventually used for advocacy.



*Due to our mobility and thanks to our fast communication, we managed to quickly solve the situations. After this case with Kenny, there were times when our organization was checked at the spots [locations] of our work. Seemingly by accident, there would be certain authorities coming to the hospital where we were giving the drugs that would accidentally come across us and check our documents, our drugs: Our team was detained by Federal Security Bureau members. Not harassment, I would say more there were attempts to find a reason to make serious problems for us, [such as] legal problems. At the same time, we had officially registered the organization. We were a law-obeying organization, trying to fulfil all the demands and pay the taxes and sleeping well.*

B, MSF North Caucasus staff, interviewed in 2008 (in Russian, translated into English by MSF).

**On 8 May, invoking the framework agreement that it signed in October 2001 with the humanitarian community, the Chechen Republic's government commission for displaced people put in a request to MSF Holland office to supply 200 tents to the refugees who returned to Chechnya, rather than to those who remained in Ingushetia.**



**Letter** from the Committee of the Government of the Chechen Republic for Internally Displaced Persons, to Michiel Hofman, Coordinator of MSF Holland in the Russian Federation, 8 May 2002 (in English).

**Extract:**

Attaching importance to the help being delivered by Your Mission, the committee, which is making arrangements for returning IDPs from Ingushetia, is perplexed by the fact that you invest additional financial resources in tent camps on the territory of the Republic of Ingushetia. At the same time, as is well known, the villages of Barnut and Komsomolskoye were practically completely destroyed during the war. Nevertheless, the inhabitants of those villages are ready to return to their permanent residence areas and start reconstructing their houses, provided they will be given temporary shelter, at least in the form of tents.

However, despite the 'Letter of Understanding between the Government of the Chechen Republic and representatives of humanitarian community,' signed on 31st of October 2001, according to which, the representatives of humanitarian community undertake to respond to the requests of the government, our repeated appeals to humanitarian community about providing tents for inhabitants of those villages were set aside. Taking into consideration the above stated, the Committee of the Chechen Republic makes a new request for providing 200 tents for the inhabitants of the villages of Komsomolskoye and Bamut.

**On 29 May, Murat Ziazikov, the new Ingush President, supported by the Kremlin and the pro-Russian Chechen government, signed a 20-step repatriation agreement concerning the return of the displaced persons to Chechnya. On 3 June, the French and USA sections issued a press release that set out this agreement and reiterated that refugees should return of their own free will, a condition that was not being met. This information received a good deal of coverage in the international press.**



**'Ingushetia: Kremlin-Backed FSB General Wins Controversial Victory,'** Arbi Arbiev, **AFP** (France), Nazran, 29 April 2002 (in French).

**Extract:**

Contrary to all expectations, the Kremlin's candidate

was declared the President of Ingushetia on Sunday in conditions deplored by human rights defenders and which risked destabilising the North Caucasus republic that is being flooded with Chechen refugees. Murat Zyzikov, 45, a General in the FSB (former-KGB), received 53.15% of the votes according to the preliminary results announced on Monday by the electoral commission. The candidate, supported by former Ingush president Rouslan Aushev, Deputy Alikhan Amirkhanov, received just 43.21% of votes although he had the lead in the first round as shown by the results communicated by Kazbek Kastoiev, President of the Electoral Commission.

[...] Amirkhanov had the backing of the former President, who recommended initiating negotiations with the independent rebels to end the Russian-Chechen conflict, in opposition to Vladimir Putin, a former head of the former KGB. General Aouchev resigned on Sunday from his position as Senator in protest against legal violations he believes were committed by the Russian authorities during the electoral campaign.



**'MSF Concerned Over New Pressures Exerted on Chechen Refugees in Ingushetia to Return to Chechnya,'** **Press release**, MSF USA, 3 June 2002 (in English).

Paris, June 3, 2002 — On Wednesday, May 29, 2002, Mourat Ziazikov, the new president of Ingushetia and General of the Special Services, along with Akhmad Kadyrov, head of the Chechen pro-Russian administration, signed an agreement foreseeing the return to Chechnya of Chechen refugees currently in Ingushetia. This agreement raises major concerns for the future of almost 200,000 Chechens who have taken refuge in Ingushetia.

Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) reasserts that the current climate of extreme violence in Chechnya is the principal reason why the civilian population has fled from, as well as why they have refused to return to, Chechnya.

Any repatriation must only take place on a voluntary basis and only if the conditions for safety in the country of origin permit repatriation. It is clear that these conditions are absolutely not in existence today.

In Chechnya, the intensity of violence has not diminished. On the contrary, bombardments, cleansings, rackets, death squads and tortures are the norm. The war, always described by Moscow authorities as an anti-terrorist operation, targets a civilian population that has been deprived of all rights, assistance and protection—and who have been subjected to particularly violent abuses of power.

The weakness of aid being provided whether incentives or threats to try to force the refugees to go back to Chechnya has not, to the present day, involved massive voluntary returns. On the contrary, the exodus from Chechnya has continued. MSF is disturbed by this agreement which constitutes a new stage towards the forced return of the civilians, with the question of their safety not being solved nor even asked.



'*Moscow Wants Ingush Refugees to Return,*' Laure Mandeville, *Le Figaro* (France), 4 June 2002 (in French).

**Extract:**

"To my mind, normalisation merely consists of giving an impression of normality," sums up Gabriel Trujillo [Coordinator, MSF France]. This is undoubtedly how we need to comprehend the surprising 'agreement' signed on Wednesday in Grozny by the Head of the pro-Russian Chechen administration and the new President of the neighbouring Republic of Ingushetia Mourat Ziazikov, an agreement that provides for the return of some 150,000 Chechen refugees who fled at the start of the second war in 1999 to Ingush soil. If their return is now possible, it is because normalisation is gaining ground, argue Kadyrov and Ziazikov, who promise an extensive programme to assure "jobs, accommodation, and security" to the Chechens who return. Nobody is prepared to use force to encourage the refugees to go back," said the Minister in charge of Chechen affairs, Vladimir Elaguine, who estimates the number of people who refuse to return at just 40,000.

So is the opinion of the Chechen refugees in Ingushetia who say they would rather live in sodden tents or squalid caves than return to 'hell,' and are convinced that the new Ingush government, answerable to the Kremlin, wants to turn them out. "The refugees don't want to return to the open-air prison that is now Chechnya; they no longer want to live in a place where every time you go to fetch water you risk being killed by soldiers," says Gabriel Trujillo, incensed by the west's "guilty silence." What's more, the usual fear of returning to the country is coupled with another concern: the increasingly uncertain status of refugees in Ingushetia. Military pressure and passport inspections are more and more frequent. Rumours of Chechens disappearing are circulating. "All the refugees are talking about a rampant Chechenisation policy in Ingushetia," says Trujillo, who notes that his own organization is facing problems too.



'*Editorial in the Washington Post/Chechnya,*' Email from Patrice Page, MSF USA Programme Department to MSF North Caucasus Group, 27 June 2002 (in English).

**Extract:**

We got the editorial today in the Washington post, the newspaper read by all lawmakers in this country. Quite a fast reaction... MSF is not mentioned in the edito. Even if we gave them info but hey, this is not the most important thing...  
Pat.

'Chechnya's refugee'

[...] Russia has long wanted to force the Chechens to return home, a move that would expose that population to the brutal "cleansing" operations of its military forces and help Mr. Putin make the case that the republic was returning to normal. Fearing Russian abuse, and mostly having no

homes to return to in Chechnya's devastated towns, the refugees until now have refused to budge. But things began to change in April, when a former general of Mr. Putin's Federal Security Service, the successor agency to the KGB, was declared the winner of an election for president of Ingushetia, amid credible allegations of fraud from Russian journalists and other observers. Almost immediately the new president invited units of the Russian army to deploy near the Chechen camps and met with Mr. Putin to discuss sending the refugees home.

Last week he signed an agreement with the head of Moscow's puppet Chechen administration that calls for the return of the refugees and the elimination of their camps by the end of September. Human rights groups believe that those who do not volunteer for resettlement will be targeted by the Russian troops; there already have been reports of night raids in the camps staged by men in masks and camouflage uniforms. The Russian government's own human rights ombudsman, Oleg Mironov, has forecast what will happen if Mr. Putin's latest plan is implemented: one of the worst human rights disasters in recent Russian history. But it's not yet clear whether there will be any significant opposition to the operation, either in Russia or internationally.

The United Nations' refugee agency, UNHCR, which Russia is counting on to cooperate, has not taken a position yet, though it has a policy of opposing all forced movements of refugees. It should oppose this one - and so should the Western governments, Russia's new partners in NATO, on whose silence Mr. Putin is banking.



'*FWD: Washington Post on Chechnya (again!),*' Email from Patrice Page, MSF USA Programme Department to MSF North Caucasus Group, 1 July 2002 (in English).

*The Washington post* is striking again on Chechnya. Another very good editorial this morning, on the new relationship between Moscow and Washington, the war against terror and the consequences for Chechen people. [...] Patrice

"Bush's Comparison of Convenience" by Fred Hiatt.

President Bush last week embraced Russian President Vladimir Putin as a fellow foe of terrorism. "President Putin has been a stalwart in the fight against terror," Bush said as the two leaders stood shoulder to shoulder in Canada. "He understands the threat of terror, because he has lived through terror."

"He has lived through terror" -- what could that mean? Bush presumably was talking about Chechnya, a mountainous region of southern Russia whose inhabitants, or at least some of whose inhabitants, have been waging a war of independence. Putin frequently has portrayed these Chechen fighters as terrorists, "as some clearly are. Bush was endorsing that official Moscow view. But if terror is, by definition, the harming of innocent civilians in order to frighten a larger population, then the chief terrorists in Russia today work for Putin; they are his soldiers and police. Bush understood



this once; the question is what he thinks is to be gained by pretending it is no longer true. The latest reminder of Russian terror came in a dispatch Saturday by The Post's Sharon LaFraniere, who described a *zachistka*, or cleansing- operation, in Mesker Yurt, a Chechen village of about 2,000 only seven miles from the supposedly pacified capital of Grozny. [...]The war now gets less attention than before. That's in part because Putin has muzzled much of his domestic media, especially the broadcast media; in part because reporters in Chechnya have been attacked and kidnapped by both sides, and so few dare go; in part because European governments, though still terribly concerned for Palestinians, have pretty much given up on championing human rights in Chechnya. (Putin can export a lot more gas and oil than Ariel Sharon.) And in large part, it's because Bush has slipped effortlessly into the Clinton role he once criticized: excusing, enabling, and pretending. "He understands what I understand, that there won't be peace if terrorists are allowed to kill and take innocent life," Bush said. "And therefore I view President Putin as an ally."



**Update** Caucasus, MSF France, 4 June 2002 (in English).

#### Extract:

Communication:

The main focus for our communication, in the coming time will be the return of the refugees. This shall be based on how we can describe the means used to pressure the refugees, their willingness [to return] and on a close monitoring of the assistance provided to them. In this regard, the UN shall become more clearly a target except if they change their position, which is doubtful. Regarding Chechnya, it will be very difficult to get information from the medical staff and the patients and [this] could be very risky for them. This shall not prevent us from making statements if necessary. Going to Chechnya certainly does not mean that we should stop talking when we think it's needed but this should be adapted to the real possibilities and advantages/disadvantages of doing so.



'A MSF Team Travelled to Grozny where the Situation is Particularly Tense: the Extreme Misery and the Daily Violence,' **MSF France website**, July 2002 (in French).

#### Extract:

Chechnya: When the Absurd has Stopped Being Shocking.  
By Gabriel Trujillo, MSF Head of Mission in Moscow and Nazran (Ingushetia).


"The city of Grozny is nearly completely destroyed and the situation there remains extremely tense. The Chechen capital is now made up of several islands of populations that are surrounded by no man's land. People gather together in buildings or clusters of houses that have not been destroyed as badly as the others, for fear of being isolated. They look

like zombies and move around in groups. It's too dangerous on your own because in Chechnya, kidnappings, beatings and murders are part of daily life.


Although the conventional armed clashes have stopped, there are still daily incidents in several regions in the Republic during which civilians are directly affected. The population is victim to extreme violence: cleansing operations, arrests, torture, disappearances, denunciations, male and female rape, executions, pillaging, and the sale and purchase of people or bodies. And all this happens under total impunity. The situation in Grozny's hospitals is catastrophic. The maternity ward in the central hospital is devoid of all equipment and medicine. When we were there, the children were packed into tubs for newborns. There was only one incubator with a premature baby in it. Five others were next to it waiting their turn, wrapped up in blankets. The hospital (number 4) had been destroyed, so the doctors transferred it into a block of flats close by. We visited the severe burns unit on the third floor. The staircase leading up to it is too narrow to allow a stretcher up it. There is no water or electricity. The injured are laid out on spring beds, without mattresses, blankets, or sheets. A gas camp stove and a bucket to fetch water from the garden are the only sterilisation method available. The doctors are doing their best. They are continuing to work with very few means, but it's extremely difficult. You have to be very devoted to fight like that under terror and fear. There are no antibiotics or painkillers available and the infection rate is 100%. The medicines supplied by MSF to these two institutions are practically the only ones available, and there aren't enough of them. There isn't much to say, among the dank and the patients who are rotting alive. It is the most extreme misery.

#### Zatchiskas: the Chechens' Daily Lot

"On Thursday 6th June, local and Russian soldiers came into the camp. It was 10 p.m. They took all men they saw without saying a word, without explaining why. No-one could enter or leave the camp until 10 a.m. the next day. 10 people were kidnapped that day. Two of them never reappeared." The village of Mesker Yurt was closed off for one month. A 'Zatchiska' (a cleansing operation by the Russian military) was underway. The village was so hermetically sealed that even the Russian colonel couldn't enter. The women told us: 'It was horror there. They took the men into the mosque and tortured them with electricity. A pregnant woman saw that the soldiers wanted to take her brother-in-law and she tried to ask them not to take him. They raped her. There are two young girls who have never returned since then.' In the displaced persons camps, the discussions on the cleansing operation in Mesker Yurt were not about the numbers of deaths, men, and women included. No, they wanted to know if they had been burned, electrocuted, or 'exploded.' The Russian human rights non-governmental organisation, Memorial, showed the remains of four men from the village of Alkhan Kala at a press conference four months ago. They had been 'exploded' during a cleansing operation. In Mesker Yurt, 25 dismembered bodies were found, and no one knows if there are more. Is that really the question? A mass grave has to be dug, but people are afraid to get close to it, because it's possibly mined.

 When Ziazikov arrived, we had to deal with the famous 20-step plan and we had difficulties putting in place shelters and even toilets. There was pressure not to build any additional infrastructure for the displaced persons. Initially, the field team was not supposed to make any communication. It was up to headquarters to do it, but at the General Assembly Meeting, the programme manager put me in contact with a journalist from the French Figaro newspaper, for me to give an interview. That's when I spoke about Ingushetia. The article was also published much later in Washington. It was translated in full into Russian and published with my photo... There was also the National Geographic documentary in Ingushetia. They followed us day and night, for three or four days. We visited camps. The authorities didn't like this documentary either. I went to see them while the camera behind me was filming soldiers in a camp who were preparing forced displacement operations.

Gabriel Trujillo, MSF France Coordinator for North Caucasus, January 2002 to July 2003, (in French) interviewed in 2008.

 The authorities were encouraging people to return to Chechnya by saying that things were improving there, that living conditions and housing there were much better than in Ingushetia. However, the people who returned to Chechnya were saying, was that in Grozny, there wasn't any water or electricity, you had to buy them, while in Ingushetia they were free because the NGOs guaranteed supply. In Chechnya, in the TACs [accommodation provided by the pro-Russian Chechen administration], supply was irregular and insufficient, because there were no NGOs present, and the people were complaining about the lack of aid from Emercom [Russia's Emergency Control Ministry].

There were no schools nearby, nor doctors or free medical checkups. So the people who returned to Ingushetia said that there was nothing there; that they were made to return just to show others that people were returning and that the situation was becoming stabilised. This was all just about image. The federal administration paid for trucks to move people. At the start, they were giving out kinds of compensation to those who agreed to move back, and conditions were better. After that, things got worse and they stopped giving anything to the people who moved. MSF said: 'If we take part in this operation, it means that we support the return. Therefore, we don't get involved in the politics; we just stand by, neutral and wait. We can't tell people not to go back because things are bad, people have the choice, and so we wait. If people prefer to move, they will move and it's government policy.'

D, MSF North Caucasus staff since 2001 (in French) interviewed in 2008

**The campaign of diplomacy towards states and international organisms that were likely to put pressure on Russia continued: members of the Council of Europe who contested the policy towards Russia adopted by their assembly and the Foreign Affairs Minister from Denmark, which took on the presidency of the European Union.**



'Ingushetia Com and Lobby,' Email from the MSF deputy legal advisor to MSF France and MSF USA North Caucasus Network, Philippe Couturier, MSF International UN Liaison, 5 June 2002 (in English).

**Extract:**

As you know, MSF France (with the help of MSF UN liaisons officer in NY and Geneva) has been particularly active since January in terms of lobby and public communication on Chechnya:

- press release during Putin visit in France;
- hearing before the refugee and migration committee of the APCE [PACE];
- publication (under a heavy media coverage in France) of our report during a joint press conference with Kovalev;
- 2 press releases to denounce the policy of the Council of Europe on Chechnya;
- press release during the visit of Ivanov in France;
- preparation and negotiation of an official declaration from the French National Consultative Commission for Human rights on Chechnya asking to the French government a series of concrete actions vis a vis the Russian Federation, just before the session of the UN Human rights Commission;
- joint hearing with MDM, Amnesty, HRW, Memorial and FIDH before the UN human rights Commission (very rare for MSF, the latest one was for Rwanda);
- Press release to denounce the position of the European Parliament on Chechnya;
- Press release to warn on the risk of forced return
- several meetings with the European Commission, European presidency and Solana cabinet, UNHCR in Geneva, State Department and NSC [National Security Council] in Washington, French Ministry for Foreign Affairs.
- information transmitted to UN in NY, Special Rapporteurs for Human Rights (UN human rights protection System), UNHCHR...

Sorry for this long list but this is just to mention that this aggressive strategy combining public communication and lobby is a deliberate choice. This action is linked to the specificity and gravity of the conflict in Chechnya. Since January, our public message was based on the following core elements:

- among the conflicts currently taking place in the world, the war in Chechnya has a specific dimension, if looking at the level and nature of the violence perpetrated against the civilian population;
- the lack of assistance for the IDPs in Ingushetia is the direct result of a deliberate strategy set up by the Russian authorities to push back the people in Chechnya;

-the pressures from the Russian authorities on the IDPs to force them to go back to Chechnya have been increasing since the past months.

From this 6 months experience of communication and lobby, I personally draw the following conclusions for the 6 coming months:

- it is crucial to maintain this aggressive strategy;
- it is crucial to maintain a high level of public pressure, meaning that an only-lobby-based strategy is useless;
- I seriously doubt whether our meetings with officials and decision makers have had a real impact. Nonetheless, I think we should maintain targeted contacts, keeping in mind that this action is for us, responsibility- and moral-driven rather than efficiency-driven (even is of course, we all hope that MSF positioning has a small and concrete impact that is impossible to evaluate). I fully sustain the ideas of Michiel of taking rapid contacts with UNHCR in Geneva, European presidency and the APCE presidency to underline the risk of forced return.

I would add:

- US State department and other relevant actors in NY or Washington to be identified by Antoine, Patrice, Catherine and Nicolas;
- Mary Robinson at the HCHR in Geneva;
- Francis Deng, Special Representative of US SG on IDPs.



*'Chech/CoE [Council of Europe],'* **Emails** from the MSF deputy legal advisor to MSF France programme managers, Director of Communications and Aurélie Grémaud, Communications Officer, 17 June 2002 (in French).

Hi Friends,

I'm re-sending you the message I sent last week because I've seen that people are deliberating over the suggestion made by many human rights organisations of a renewed lobbying action at the Council of Europe. The IFHR (International Federation for Human Rights) got in touch with me about it on Friday. They've been approached too, but they have reservations. Broadly speaking, they don't think that the organisations in question know much about Chechnya, but at the same time we agree that there can never be too many people maintaining the pressure on this issue. I'm supposed to be seeing the IFHR this week to take stock of the situation in Chechnya and Ingushetia and of future actions. They still think that MSF is the most serious and most committed humanitarian organisation at the heart of the matter.

Just to remind you: Loïck has given his go-ahead to contact the group of Members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe who contest the CoE's policy on Chechnya and who question the independence of its human rights monitoring mechanisms. First of all, we need to try and understand their motives and goals to see if we can envisage working with them. I'll keep you informed.



*'Letter to Danish Foreign Minister on the Repatriation of Chechen IDPs in Ingushetia,'* 10 June 2002 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

As a consequence of the latest outbreak of conflict in Chechnya since 1999, some 180,000 Chechens have sought refuge in the neighbouring territories of Ingushetia and Dagestan. This population is scattered over these territories in tented camps, in 'collective centers' (usually disused industrial buildings) and in private accommodation.

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has been providing assistance to these people since 1999, and through our contacts with these people are aware that many wish to return to Chechnya, but for the moment do not consider it safe enough to do so. Their viewpoint is supported by continuous reports of indiscriminate violence and human rights violations taking place in Chechnya.

On Tuesday (June 4) plans for the repatriation of the Chechen refugees from Ingushetia to their homeland was revealed at a meeting of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The Chechen government head of state committee on IDPs described the return program at the meeting, a plan agreed by both the Chechen and the newly-elected Ingush government. Repatriation from the IDP camps in Znamenskoye, in northern Chechnya, has already started, with 300 people relocated in the past two weeks. Their tented accommodation and infrastructure in the camps has already been removed.

MSF is concerned that this repatriation will not be a voluntary return on behalf of the Chechen IDPs, whose flight from and within Chechnya was originally provoked by the ongoing conflict.

For example, the recent positioning of military forces in the direct vicinity of the camps (e.g. the newly installed military post of Troitskaya about five km from the Sputnik and Alina tented camps in Sleptovskaya, eastern Ingushetia) has coincided with an increased number of arrests of IDPs, as well as strong rumours of the 'disappearance' of others from these camps. We are concerned that military operations in this area might be putting pressure on the population in the camps to return. In addition, there are plans to close the tented camps completely, without provisions for an alternative relocation for those who do not wish to return.

MSF is also extremely concerned that this repatriation is taking place to a territory which is still effectively in a state of civil war. International humanitarian agencies have had virtually no access to Chechnya during the last year, which means that reliable information about conditions on the ground is not available.

Given the repeated reports of human rights abuses in Chechnya, a proper independent monitoring and follow up of a voluntary repatriation process would be essential. Furthermore, even for those who do wish to return voluntarily, the provisions in Grozny for the IDPs who have lost their homes are currently too few and of inadequate quality.

Denmark takes over the EU Presidency in a few weeks time. As the Danish Foreign Minister you will also be representing the combined foreign policy of the European Union. I therefore urge you, as the representative of both the Danish government and EU, to take all steps in your power to ensure that any repatriation of IDPs to Chechnya is carried out voluntarily, without any form of coercion, and that this is followed closely by independent international monitors. I also request the opportunity to have a meeting with you on this issue at the earliest convenient date.

**The Belgian Section announced in a press release on 27 June that it was distributing basic supplies and medicines to the victims of the floods, which had hit the Stavropol region in Russia, in the northern Caucasus.**



*'MSF's Reaction to the Floods which have Struck the South of Russia,' Press Release, MSF Belgium, 27 June 2002 (in French).*

**Extract:**

The MSF team travelled to the Stavropol region in the northern Caucasus on the 25th June, to evaluate the emergency needs of people hit by the floods. The MSF team began by visiting several towns and villages in the region to gather more information enabling them to evaluate the situation. Their initial information suggests that the regions worst hit are Kochubeyevski, Georgiyevski and Nevinnomyssk. Following visits to Barsukovskoye (population: 4000) and Nadzornoye (population: 3,000), the MSF doctors observed a slight increase in cases of respiratory infections and health problems linked to stress.

As soon as MSF has more information on these illnesses and has evaluated the capability of the local health centres to deal with them, the organisation will commit to supplying any necessary medicines to the local doctors. Currently MSF plans to distribute medical/surgical and hygiene kits which should benefit at least 2,500 people. In light of MSF's experience in similar emergency situations, especially the support given by MSF to the victims during the floods in Lensk in Yakoutia (May 2001), the most urgent needs would seem to be in terms of disinfection equipment, as very few stocks are available. MSF plans to supply local doctors with medicines and chlorine tablets to disinfect water, and to distribute hygiene kits. In the near future, and if weather conditions allow it - strong rains are expected again, which could cause new flooding - MSF will remain on site and will continue its evaluation of the situation in the region.

**On 4 July, the Caucasus programme managers in the different sections established a joint reaction strategy to the 20-step plan for the repatriation of the displaced Chechens. They decided to alert the regional, national**

**and international institutions involved in the region again and to ask for the assistance and support to the displaced to be reinforced.**



*'July 4th, Paris, Chechnya: Michiel's View' Email from Michiel Hofman, MSF Holland North Caucasus HoM, 4 July 2002 (in English).*

**Extract:**

Dear All,

As I unfortunately cannot be present in Paris, I would like to briefly expose my viewpoints on the topics under discussion. Following Loick's agenda: (Update on programmes was sent yesterday) [...]

4. Communications/Témoignage

Ingushetia: The most pressing issue for which the burden will be largely on organisations like MSF, is the encouraged return of IDPs. Lukewarm reactions from UN and donors in the last months do not suggest any strong reactions unless visible deportations are underway. From our side we have spoken directly to many of the international actors with limited results, other than that, none of them can say now they were not aware, a few of them have spoken out a bit more strongly than they would otherwise have done and some international media attention was generated. But if MSF is one of the few who will speak out more strongly, we need to make sure we stand on firm ground as we do so. For this we need to agree on an approach which enables us to react fast and accurately.

In the past month on several occasions it has proven useful to do on-the-spot, expatriate verifications of rumoured changes/events in Ingushetia, which so far we can do whilst we enjoy uninhibited access anywhere in Ingushetia. Rumours we become aware of, including those from our national staff, have a tendency to be exaggerated, so cannot be taken of face-value for immediate lobby/communication. Actual population movements, always exaggerated to the extreme by local authorities, can be better monitored by more direct links to the DRC database [Danish Refugee Council], which so far has proven reliable as people, regardless of the voluntariness of their return, will always ensure DRC is informed to make sure the food-parcels will be waiting for them on return. So far DRC reports as many returnees as new arrivals in Ingushetia.

Chechnya: A strategy of communication to speak on behalf of IDPs wishing to stay, cannot work without continued communication about the situation in Chechnya, which is the reason they do not want to return. With three sections present, and a fourth on its way, we should be able to maintain a strong communication on Chechnya with first-hand information. I still firmly believe a more systematic medicalised approach would enhance the strength and audience of the message.

I would propose to focus on war-trauma and patient protection, which will be regarded as legitimate for MSF to raise, as well as contain a strong enough message

in itself, even as just data. To make this work, a much stronger coherence between the sections would improve the effectiveness tremendously. One system of data collection on violence related trauma (war wounded, mines, beatings etc.) as well as a system of recording cases of patient-protection inside the hospitals, between all sections would cover all but a few areas in Chechnya.

Secondly western governments need to be included in strong, public pressure from MSF next to the Russian authorities. Before 9/11, some of the governments and international bodies were still willing to publically denounce the situation in Chechnya, be it watered down and reluctantly, now all powers-that-be seemed to have sold out to larger interests of trade, war-on-terrorism, new alliances etc. The European Union has completely sold out, OSCE has been made useless, and the UN was never in the game to begin with. All of these however, are publically funded bodies with alleged mandates to monitor and report on human rights, protection etc. in Chechnya.

OSCE is especially disappointing as they are the only ones with a direct mandate inside Chechnya to monitor the situation on behalf of the international community. [...] The embassies of OSCE countries confirm they receive strong information from OSCE, but are not at liberty to share. This self-censorship is not imposed only by Russia, but also by western states like Portugal who hold the OSCE presidency currently. On this I would suggest a high-profile, public action in which all MSF offices present in OSCE member states, which includes more than half the members, to demand the OSCE reports to be publically available. [...]

Policy to the UN: Has not changed dramatically, but perhaps it's good to remind ourselves what, if any, policy we have adopted so far: UN is NOT politically independent; therefore any kind of implementing partner agreement is unacceptable. The UN is regarded by all authorities as representing the whole humanitarian community, either out of lack of understanding of the humanitarian system, or out of convenience of only talking to a receptive partner. This means any kind of high level negotiations on access or freedom of operations it is crucial to have a representative of MSF present to maintain an independent voice, otherwise it will be assumed that MSF is in agreement with whatever the UN decides in those meetings.

To counter the impression that MSF (or ICRC for that matter, who also maintain always and independent representation) is part of the overall UN system, it is also crucial to profile MSF separately with the authorities. [...] Otherwise MSF can participate in the various coordination meetings to ensure proper representation of the issues, but not enter into any formal coordination agreements. Inaction by UN can continue to be exposed, but more fierce reaction is necessary in those cases where UN actively blocks assistance: The case of UNHCR advising against donor funding for additional tents, and recently a possible WHO involvement in blocking the MSF TB centre in Ingushetia.



**Minutes** of Intersection Meeting, Ingushetia/Chechnya/ Dagestan, 4 July 2002 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

##### Lobbying:

MSF's lobbying is an on-going activity on different levels (field, Moscow, Geneva, NY, Danish EU presidency). Our lobbying is more responsibility-driven than results-oriented. We know we have to address the UN bureaucrats out of principle, but should not expect any outcome considering Russia's influence within the UN. However, regarding UN agencies with a specific mandate like UNHCR we will be more precise in our demands and questioning, ex: guarantees for voluntary repatriation of IDPs. [...] We will have to find out more about planned visits to the region: Oshima (OCHA) end of August, EU troika, EU summit meeting... to see whether they represent interesting lobbying opportunities (Philippe-Geneva, Patrice-NY, Phil-Denmark).

Regarding the OSCE however, we feel MSF should be tougher. The MSF teams find it very disappointing as OSCE is the only organisation with a direct mandate inside Chechnya to monitor the situation on behalf of the international community. The field staff seems to have access to most places in Chechnya and say that they do report about their direct observations, but nothing is made public. MSF considers urging these reports to be made available in an uncensored form.

This is why we will be preparing a letter mentioning our concerns and recommendations /demands to be sent to international institutions (signed by Morten Rostrup) and OSCE member states (signed by MSF section director). Phil Clarke has proposed to prepare a draft in line with the messages in his letter to the Danish Foreign Minister (see international website). We want all partner sections' help to disseminate this letter from mid-July onwards. 15 of the 18 offices are located in OSCE member states (not: Australia, Japan, Hong Kong). [...]

##### Communication

We need to think about the message and whether to include clear demands, ex: UN protection officers or OSCE reports to be made public. There was a clear wish for the regional information officer in Moscow to be more involved in the Caucasus and to help with the press liaison work.

- communicate whenever grave violations of human rights and/or forced repatriation occur (however, concertation between all sections present considering the insecurity in the region)

- lobbying should be going on

- need to start preparing now

- send formal letter (like the one Phil sent to the Danish Foreign Affairs Minister) with examples to international protection actors (OSCE, UN, EU) and Security Council members. Involvement of MSF partner sections (US, UK, Danish, and as many others as possible). make public the letters we will send to international institutions and OSCE member states by publishing them on the website(s)

Use WHO and UNHCR examples

Include a clear message /demand

OSCE reports to be made public

UN protection officers  
 Inform whole movement of communication strategy  
 Formalize communications to UN

**In mid July, a letter was sent to the United Nations, to the signatories of the repatriation agreement, including Vladimir Putin, and to the OSCE, as well as to western foreign affairs ministers, including the French minister on the eve of a Franco-Russian summit.**



**Draft** 'The Overall "Combined" letter: Concerns about Forced Displacements of the Chechen Population, MSF, 18 July 2002 (in English).

Dear "name,"

[...]

For United Nations Agencies Only:

The United Nations, which is mandated to provide humanitarian assistance to the Chechen IDPs in Ingushetia, are becoming increasingly slow and ineffective in the implementation of this assistance. The lack of reactivity of UNHCR to concretely assist and protect the displaced Chechen population in Ingushetia and in Chechnya itself adds yet more pressure on the Chechen IDPs to leave Ingushetia for Chechnya.

The original flight of the Chechen IDPs to Ingushetia and Dagestan was prompted by both civil war and widespread abuses of human rights. Chechnya is effectively still in a state of civil war, and there are repeated reports of human rights abuses still taking place in the territory. Conditions in Chechnya are therefore still inadequate for these IDPs to return home.

For OSCE and Ministers of Foreign Affairs Only :

Reliable information detailing these conditions is not however available, as international humanitarian agencies have had very limited access to Chechnya during the last year, and the OSCE has refused to publically report the information they have on the situation in Chechnya. A recent example is the closure and dismantling of two tented IDP camps in Znamenskoye in Chechnya on the 7th July 2002, which left the displaced with no other option but to move onto Grozny. Medecins Sans Frontieres is aware that the OSCE is in possession of detailed information on the circumstances surrounding this closure, but are concerned about OSCE's refusal to make this information public.

As the OSCE has been mandated by the international community to monitor the situation in Chechnya and has good access to all parts of the territory, Medecins Sans Frontieres is concerned by OSCE's lack of transparency. It is crucial that the information at the disposal of the OSCE is published, to demonstrate that conditions in Chechnya are not yet adequate for the displaced to return, and to prevent the ongoing abuses against the Chechen people from being masked in secrecy. The availability of this information is a pre-requisite for the international community to react

more appropriately to the Chechen crisis than it has been doing until now.]

The international community must stop turning a blind eye to the situation in Ingushetia and Chechnya, and must do significantly more to ensure that the basic rights and needs of the Chechen people are being met, whether in Ingushetia or Chechnya. I therefore urge you, in your capacity as "title" of the "organization," to take all steps in your power to:

- Ensure the delivery of adequate and continued assistance to the Chechen IDPs in Ingushetia in proportion to their needs.
- Defend the fundamental right of Chechen population to seek refuge and to remain in Ingushetia.
- Prevent any forced displacement of population to Chechnya, in conformity with international with humanitarian law.
- Make sure that OSCE reports on Chechnya and Ingushetia are made public in an uncensored form. Medecins Sans Frontieres requests that you ask your representative at the permanent council of OSCE for the publication of all of these reports.] \*OSCE and Foreign Ministers only

For UNHCR only :

- [Reinforce protection through the provision of an adequate number of international protection officers in Ingushetia]
- \*UNHCR only



**'Draft Letter** from MSF to Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation and 4 signatories of the 20-Step Plan,' Email from Michiel Hofman, MSF Holland North Caucasus HoM, to Jose-Antonio Bastos, MSF Holland programme manager, 25 July 2002 (in English).

Your Excellency President Vladimir Putin, Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) is deeply concerned for the future of approximately 180,000 Chechen civilians displaced by the ongoing war in Chechnya and living in Ingushetia and Dagestan. MSF is assisting most of the medical structures in Chechnya and all of the medical structures in Ingushetia. MSF is providing medical care and trying to improve the most basic living conditions of the IDPs in Ingushetia and Chechnya.

We have been informed of a 20-point plan to move all displaced Chechens in Ingushetia back to Chechnya by October 2002. It was on the 29<sup>th</sup> May 2002 by Federal Minister Yelagin, Presidential Plenipotentiary Kazantsev, President Zyazikov of Ingushetia, and Head of Administration Kadyrov of Chechnya. This plan includes the complete return of all IDPs living in Ingushetia, without provisions for an alternative relocation for those who do not wish to return. This measure was confirmed in a press conference on the 11th July 2002 by Stanislav Ilyasov, Head of the Chechen administration citing your order to close these camps before the autumn. We acknowledge your assurances that the displaced persons in the Republic of Ingushetia are to return only voluntarily, and those who wish to stay are welcome to do so and as you declared on 18/07 that people ought to return to their homes not under administrative pressure, but thanks to conditions allowing them to deliberately do so. However, it is not

possible to ensure a voluntary return, while simultaneously announcing the closure of tent camps and not offering any other choice than returning to Chechnya. In Znemonskoye, all 2,200 persons were forcedly moved to Temporary Accommodation Centers in Grozny, the accommodation facilities and infrastructure were liquidated (used in here at all official levels of communication) as of 9<sup>th</sup> of July.

Presently the same procedures that were used in Znemonskoye are taking place in Aki Yurt camp. In both of these places MSF works providing medical care, shelter, and water and sanitation assistance. The reality is that the IDPs have been subject to constant harassment and misinformation on return. The option to stay is not presented to them as a choice. They have been told that the camps will close, and that they should return. They are receiving threats of eviction as well as of cutting of gas, water and electricity, by members of the Chechen administration. They are also receiving promises of benefits in the form of housing, material for reconstruction and money. However, visits to the Temporary Accommodation Centres in Chechnya show that there is no sufficient infrastructure to support a return and that these promises have not been fulfilled. Neither are the security conditions met.

We recognize that the living conditions for many IDPs in Ingushetia are terrible. In spite of this the people have decided to stay because it is not the aid which keeps them in Ingushetia, but the insecurity in Chechnya. The people choose to stay because of the ongoing violence in Chechnya from which, they are not protected in any way. On the contrary, civilians have been deliberately targeted by the Russian forces, as well as militant groups. Civilians suspected or working with the Chechen and/or Russian authorities are assassinated, kidnapped, and threatened by the militants. Civilians are subject to arbitrary arrests, torture, rape, summary executions, disappearance, pillage, threats, and extortion by Russian Federal forces.

MSF has called upon the international community to stop turning a blind eye to the situation in Ingushetia and Chechnya. We ask you that their full rights be respected as citizens of the Russian federation, that they not be subject to discrimination or cruel treatment, and that humanitarian aid be provided to them. We ask you to defend the fundamental right of the Chechen population to seek refuge and to remain in Ingushetia, Dagestan, or anywhere else in the Russian federation where they feel is safe. We ask you to do all in your power to prevent any forced displacement of population to Chechnya, in conformity with international humanitarian law, and to ensure the delivery of adequate and continued assistance to the Chechen IDPs in Ingushetia in proportion to their needs. We ask you to make it clear to all level of Russian authorities, be it local or federal, that the Chechen people have these rights as defined by Russian law itself and that these rights are to be respected.



**Letter** from Karim Laouabdia, Director General of MSF France to Dominique de Villepin, French Minister for Foreign Affairs, 16 July 2002 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

On the eve of the Franco-Russian summit to be held on 19 and 20 July, we would like to draw your attention to the real threats of forced return that the Chechen people who have taken refuge in Ingushetia face. As you know, approximately 180,000 people have taken refuge in Ingushetia, fleeing the war crimes and the crimes against humanity, which have been committed in Chechnya for nearly three years.

Since Murat Ziazikov has taken power as President of the Ingush Republic, our field teams have been informing us of a significant increase in the pressure being placed on the displaced persons to force them to return to Chechnya. The recent military deployment close to the displacement camps of Sleptovskaya has been accompanied by a sharp increase in the numbers of arrests and 'disappearances' amongst the Chechen population. [...]

We are asking you and President Chirac to bring up this issue with the Russian authorities during the summit on 19 and 20 July. We are also asking you to urgently take any measure you judge useful, bilaterally and multilaterally, to avoid these forced displacements of people, to ensure the voluntary nature of repatriation and to defend the zone of refuge that Ingushetia represents, in accordance with international refugee law and international humanitarian law.



*When Hubert Védrine left the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, things changed completely. Dominique de Villepin, the new Foreign Affairs Minister, met us, granted us time, took us seriously, and explained the new policy to us. He didn't emphasise economic interests as much as the risk of chaos in the former Soviet Union. According to him, order must be established, which is what Putin is doing. He told us: 'To get back on his feet, Putin is leaning his stick on Chechnya. The human price is terrible but politically it is "necessary..." We were all very shocked.*

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of Communications (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000- May 2008) (in French) interviewed in 2009.

**In the meantime, on 9 July, in a press release initiated by the field teams, MSF condemned the coercive and violent closure of the tent camp in Znamenskoye, in Northern Chechnya.**



'MSF Condemns Relocation of Displaced Chechens,'  
**Press Release**, MSF Moscow, 9 July (in English).

**Extract:**

The international relief organization Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) condemns the forced relocation of displaced Chechens and Russians to temporary locations in Grozny, where violence and insecurity are a common feature of life. The closure on Sunday of a camp in Znamenskoye, in northern Chechnya, was accomplished by an organized campaign of harassment and coercion by the authorities, which left people with no option but to move out.

MSF condemns the Russian authorities for this action and condemns the inaction of the OSCE, the UN and the international community in the light of clear evidence of widespread coercion and harassment. A UN fact-finding mission to Znamenskoye today is urged by MSF to put an end to the forcible relocation of displaced people.

"It is obvious that this is not a voluntary movement," said Jose A. Bastos, an Operational Director for MSF. "Mothers in Znamenskoye told us they dread returning to Grozny as they fear for their lives, and particularly for the lives of their sons." The actions in Znamenskoye lead MSF to believe that this pattern of so-called 'voluntary' return will repeat itself elsewhere in the Caucasus region, where another estimated 180,000 displaced have moved to, escaping the violence in Chechnya, where bombings, shootings, arbitrary arrests and torture are routine.

Znamenskoye, which used to be home to 2,200 displaced people, had tents torn down and latrines shut during the final weeks. The remaining occupants were encouraged to leave by being told that gas, water, and electricity was to be cut off. Additional psychological pressure was applied by telling people that they would lose entitlement to benefits and grants if they did not punctually relocate to Grozny. Western Governments have been informed by the OSCE about the coercion used in Znamenskoye and other camps. In spite of this, no action is being taken to prevent such measures. The UN fact-finding mission to Znamenskoye today is too late to help the 2,200 Chechens and Russians who have been relocated to Grozny. For the sake of the remaining displaced people, MSF demands that the UN put an end to forcible relocation. A '20-point plan' for the resettlement of up to 180,000 displaced people over the next twelve weeks was recently put into action by the authorities who assured that it will be conducted on a voluntary basis. MSF considers that any campaign of voluntary return includes the option of staying behind. This implies that essential services and facilities remain in place for those who want to stay.

The UN guiding principles state that internally displaced persons have the right to be protected against forcible return to or resettlement in any place where their life, safety, liberty, and/or health would be at risk. MSF insists that the internally displaced Chechens receive the full protection from the responsible agencies such as UNHCR and the UN Commissioner for Human Rights.



'Displaced Chechens Under Pressure,' **MSF Belgium website**, 26 July 2002 (in French).


Not long ago, three medical organisations were still working in Aki-Yurt, in a camp of tents that was home to about 1,600 displaced Chechens, just over the border in Ingushetia. Now MSF is alone in supplying the medical care needed in this camp (another organisation is giving care in a neighbouring village). The reservoir that supplied drinking water to the camp has deteriorated due to lack of maintenance and has been put out of use. Furthermore, two weeks ago, the displaced persons were again registered by Emerson, the Russian government service responsible for emergency situations. When the people asked the staff about the reasons for being re-registered, they replied that it was for their imminent return to Chechnya.

The displaced Chechens are undergoing a lot of pressure aimed at speeding up their repatriation. Some of the pressure appears to be deliberate. For example in the camps in Znamenskoye, in Chechnya, the pressure was particularly palpable in the first few weeks in July. The authorities had warned the families who were settled in the camps that basic supplies such as water, gas and electricity, were going to be turned off. Tents and latrines were taken down, and the families were recommended to go to the temporary hostels in the outskirts of Grozny before they were full. They had no choice but to go there.


During this time in Ingushetia, the Chechens were continuing to be registered. Some registrations were done by humanitarian organisations in the aim of supplying the aid needed. But others were carried out by the government. These latter registrations were problematic as the official numbers of registered displaced persons steadily decreased. In fact, if you were not present when the procedure was taking place, you lost all chance of being registered one day. Anyone situated in the north of the Republic was obliged to travel at their own costs to Malgobek, to have photographs taken (40 roubles) and to register (another 40 roubles). Most of the time, they were asked to come back the following day, or even the next week. Without any resources or goods to sell, many displaced persons did not have the means to register and therefore could not benefit from any government aid. Furthermore, those who were not able to register were often considered terrorists.

So, as the pressure on Chechens to return home increases and as the authorities organise the dismantling of all the canvas camps between now and the winter, many displaced persons are falling into anonymity. The temporary hostels in Grozny are already full. Furthermore, without water or sewage, and with the torrid heat of the Caucasus summer, the risk of contracting illness increases. Grozny, along with most regions in Chechnya, is far from being safe: the war between the Russian army and the rebels is still raging. Officially, the authorities have confirmed that any return to Chechnya would be on a voluntary basis. However, it seems that displaced persons are being forced to leave where they are to go elsewhere. The MSF teams in Ingushetia are however determined to respect their commitment to the displaced persons and are continuing to work for these people..



 When I started the program, all of the clinics that we were supporting were in the south, in the area hold by the rebels. I argued that it is always good to balance it out a bit that we should not only work in the rebel zone. But in this case there were good reasons to work there, because there was these two rather large camps, in the north of Chechnya, very close to the Russian border with a particularly vulnerable population there, that actually needed medical assistance. It was one of the few places you could always reach, you had witnesses of this process on how these camps were broken down, and people were forced out of these houses. There were some public statements in the press at that time about this forced closure of these camps.

Michiel Hofman, MSF Holland North Caucasus coordinator from May 2001 to July 2003 (in English) interviewed in 2009.

 I went to Znamenskoe camp a month before they broke it up. I wanted to hear how the refugees felt about their repatriation and note the pressure applied by the Russian authorities, who were cutting off the water and gas. I looked into everything. I'd asked Michiel, the Coordinator, permission to take photos. People were ready to talk. I held discussions with a group of mothers, *baboutchkas*, who had some very firm ideas. It was easy to sit down and chat with people in the Ingushetia refugee camps. I remember once, in Karaboulak camp where MSF Belgium was working, we were surrounded by refugees who had a go at us because we hadn't spoken up enough. They said "If you don't want to spell out loud and clear what's happening here, then don't bother coming to see us." They weren't scared of speaking up. When Znamenskoïe camp was broken up, we prepared a joint press release for the three sections. The Znamenskoïe refugees didn't want to go back at all

Dr José-Antonio Bastos, MSF Holland Director of Operations in charge of programmes in North Caucasus, 2001 to 2003 (in French) interviewed in 2009

## A SUMMER FULL OF DANGER

While observers report an escalation of the violence, the Russian federal authorities announce a 'normalisation' of the situation in Chechnya. An increasing number of reports circulate concerning threats

to kidnap foreign nationals in the North Caucasus.

**On 26 June, on the eve of the G8 summit, Vladimir Putin described the war in Chechnya as a "tragedy" and announced a "normalisation" thanks to the take-over of power in a year's time by pro-Russian Chechens. Aslan Maskhadov, the separatist Chechen President, vainly called on the members of the G8 to put pressure on Russia to open negotiations. Meanwhile, on the ground, heavy artillery fighting and 'cleansing' continued.**



*'For the First Time, Vladimir Putin Describes the War in Chechnya as a "Tragedy,"* **Le Monde** (France), 26 June 2002 (in French).

### Extract:

On the eve of the G8 meeting, the Russian president hints at an opening, yet the fighting continues. On Monday 24<sup>th</sup> June, the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, toned down his rhetoric on the war in Chechnya for the first time, giving the impression that he might be seeking a gradual withdrawal of Russian troops from the Chechen Republic, where the conflict has been underway for almost three years. The situation was left unclear, however, as the leader of the Kremlin made no specific mention of the withdrawal of troops or of negotiations with the elected Chechen president, Aslan Maskhadov.

The war in Chechnya is "a tragedy today," according to Mr Putin. We need to put an end to the "myth of Chechnya, the enemy," he continued, although this is a notion that he has actively helped cultivate since the autumn of 1999 when the launch of Russian military operations accompanied his coming to power. "The Chechen people are not guilty," said the Russian president on Monday. "The federal authorities have abandoned the Chechen people. The State has shown itself incapable of defending them. The extremists (Islamists, Editor's note) have taken advantage of the situation."

Questioned about the daily roundups being carried out by Russian troops in the villages of Chechnya, Mr Putin replied that these "cleansing operations should stop by the end of the year," but gave no further detail. He made no mention either of the war crimes, the torture, and the disappearance of civilians, of which human rights defenders regularly accuse the Russian army. "The Chechens must take control," declared Mr Putin, explaining that he meant responsibility for law enforcement in the Caucasian republic should be entrusted to pro-Russian Chechen military formations.

Today almost 100,000 Russian soldiers are deployed in this region. The conflict is estimated to have caused the death of 15,000 of these soldiers in the last three years, according to the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers (4,700 according to official Russian Ministry of Defence figures). The Russian president maintained there would be a "normalisation" of the situation in Chechnya "within one year" with the Republic's "adoption of a Constitution". [...]

In a rare interview with a British journalist made public this month, the Chechen President, Aslan Maskhadov, repeated that he was ready to negotiate and consider a special status for his republic. If the Russians “cease all armed aggression against Chechnya,” stated Mr Maskhadov, “then we are ready to discuss any issues with the Russian side.” He has received no reply to his proposal. On the ground the fighting continues. Heavy artillery and Russian helicopters are currently bombarding the region of Argoun. Every week, the human rights organisation, Memorial, gathers fresh reports from civilians of pillaging, torture, and the summary execution of detained persons.

**On 20 July, Abdoukhakim Soultgov, the Russian president’s new Representative for Human Rights in Chechnya, qualified the situation as “unacceptable.” The Russian human rights organisation, Memorial, maintained dialogue with the authorities as best it could, in order to be allowed to continue its work. However, Memorial decided to cease all collaboration so as not to support the situation.**



*‘The Situation in Chechnya is “Unacceptable” According to Mr Soultgov,’ Le Monde (France), Moscow, 20th July 2002 (in French).*

**Extract:**

On 18 July, Abdoukhakim Soultgov, the Russian president’s new Special Representative for human rights in Chechnya, qualified the human rights situation in the separatist republic as “unacceptable.” “At the moment, it’s chaos. Nobody knows who is arresting people, or where these people are being taken,” he declared, adding that one of his priorities would be to enact new rules on “sweep” operations to prevent abuses by the Russian army. Mr Soultgov stressed the importance of cooperation between the Russian authorities or pro-Russian Chechens and human rights organisations if the situation is to improve.



*‘NGOs Denounce the Army in Chechnya,’ Patrick de Saint Exupéry, Le Figaro (France) 25 July 2002 (in French).*

**Extract:**

There are signs of a tougher stance being taken on Chechnya, with relations between humanitarian organisations and Russian officials on the verge of being severed. Since the war started up again in 1999, humanitarian and human rights organisations had managed to establish a sort of modus operandi with the authorities. In exchange for authorisation to pursue their work and surveys, they had agreed, without renouncing their integrity, to keep a low profile, providing advance communication of reports to

the Russian authorities, and attending informal forums of representatives of humanitarian organisations and the FSB (ex-KGB).

This arrangement of exchanging certain information looks likely to come to an end. The Russian human rights organisation, Memorial, for example, has suspended all cooperation with the Russian authorities. “We have come to the conclusion that nothing will change,” confirmed Tatiana Kassatkina, one of Memorial’s top people. “We do not wish to endorse such a situation, [she said]. Like many other Russian and international organisations, Memorial has been taking part, for almost a year now, in regular meetings between the local Chechen authorities, the public prosecutor, the security services and the Russian army.

Last March, in the wake of these meetings, the Russian army’s high command issued a directive supposedly intended to regulate the army’s sinister “sweep” operations. Memorial’s findings several months later were unequivocal: “The order has never been followed and no soldiers have been punished. Hence our decision to put an end to cooperation that was beginning to bring discredit to our organisation,” continued Memorial’s representative.

[...] Médecins sans Frontières (MSF), which has paid a heavy price in the war in Chechnya, is increasingly concerned by the extremely ‘proactive’ policy in place for making refugees return to Chechnya. By cutting off the water and electricity supplies in the camps and repeatedly threatening and pressurising the destitute, the authorities hope to make 300 families return every week. “The refugees return of their own free will,” assured Stanislas Illiassov, the Chechen Prime Minister. “It would be senseless and criminal to force people to leave the camps’ [he furthered]. Untrue, reply the NGOs, openly implying that the policy being carried out is ‘senseless and criminal.’

**On 12 July, the Ingush Health Minister informed MSF Holland’s Coordinator that he is reneging on the agreement, signed just ten days earlier, authorising the opening of a hospital to treat refugees suffering from tuberculosis, on the basis that they can now get care in Chechnya. On 26 July, the director of the federal migration service announced that the camps, which he called a disgrace, will be closed by the end of the year.**



**Letter** from Ministry of Health of Ingushetia to Michiel Hofman, MSF Holland Coordinator, 12 July 2002 (in English).

**Extract:**

Ministry of Health of Ingushetia and Medecins Sans Frontieres - Netherlands on July 2, 2002 concluded a Memorandum of Understanding about the opening of a tuberculosis hospital on the territory of the Republic Ingushetia for treatment of the population from Chechnya. But at the present time an Agreement has been concluded between leadership of

republics of Ingushetia and Chechnya about the returning of Chechen IDPs to the places of permanent residence during this year. The medical facilities have been opened on the territory of the Chechen Republic to render specialized services. Ministry of Health of Ingushetia, for its part, cancels the Memorandum of Understanding between Ministry of Health of Ingushetia and Medecins Sans Frontieres from 02.04.2002.



*'Russia to Close Chechnya Refugee Camps by End 2002,' Reuters (Moscow), 26 July 2002 (in English).*

**Extract:**

Russia said on Friday it would close 'tent cities' housing tens of thousands of refugees from Chechnya by year's end, despite rights groups' fears that the rebel republic was not yet safe enough for a mass return. Igor Yunash, Deputy Head of the Federal Migration Service, told a news conference that the refugees would be given the choice of an apartment in Chechnya, or the neighbouring province of Ingushetia where the tent cities are based. "These tent camps where people are suffering are a disgrace and must cease to exist. We should provide people with decent accommodation instead," Interfax quoted Yunash as saying. He said some 90,000 Chechen refugees were currently in Ingushetia, 25,000 of them in tent camps. At the height of the three-year conflict more than 200,000 people fled Chechnya. Yunash said that only 30,000 refugees, mostly ethnic Ingush, had so far refused to return to Chechnya.

**On 10 July, the FSB informed UNSECOORD, the Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator in the Russian Federation, that due to threats of kidnapping, visits by international staff to Chechnya had to be suspended.**



*'Document on the Closure of Aki Yurt Tented Camp in Northern Ingushetia MSF Belgium mid-December 2002 (in English).*

**Extract:**

On July 10, 2002 the FSB advised the UNSECOORD that because of imminent kidnapping threats, no missions involving expats should be undertaken in Chechnya, till a review is done.

**On 23 July, Nina Davidovitch, an employee of the humanitarian organisation Drujba working with UNICEF, was kidnapped in Chechnya. The United Nations and most of the other aid organisations, including MSF, condemned**

**the kidnapping and announced the suspension of their operations in Chechnya.**



*'Press Release Chechnya – for Issue Today- Message from Michiel Hofman, coordinator MSF Holland,' Email from Anouk Delafortrie, MSF International Communications Coordinator to MSF Communications Departments, 6 August 2002 (in English).*

**Extract:**

In order for you to understand the 'why' and 'why now' of this press release, I've copied & pasted the following bits from a message from MSF-H HoM Michiel Hofman (of course this is ONLY FOR INTERNAL USE).

"Monday morning UN (29 July) made a high profile press release in which they announced the agreed suspension for two days in Ingushetia, but also an INDEFINITE suspension in Chechnya. This announcement (the indefinite suspension in Chechnya) was made without any consultations with donors, partners, and independent NGOs. The press, local and international, latched on to this and started calling the main known organisations: ICRC, MSF and Danish Refugee Council. All three were caught unaware of the indefinite nature of the Chechnya suspension, and forced to formulate ad-hoc positions there and then.

This leaves us with:

- ICRC continues, but is willing to put this continuation in a suspension framework.
- UN partners suspended for Chechnya, but for reasons of 'UN told us so'
- Local NGOs, including Druzbha, continue.
- Independent NGOs divided on the issue, although most have not worked as the security is bad, and passes for August were not issued. None work with expatriate staff in Chechnya, again, for security reasons.
- All activities in Ingushetia have resumed as normal. (No disagreement on this by anyone, in light of the 20-point plan)

The UN has messed up, first with their management of the security incident itself, and later with their management of the decisions and communications on suspension. This is partly acknowledged, and can be addressed later. MSF is in an awkward position of being well-known, both internationally as a major humanitarian actor, and specifically in relation to kidnaps in Chechnya. Also well known is the fact that MSF operates independently from the United Nations. Therefore MSF needs to make its position clear on this matter.

**MAIN ARGUMENTS:**

This is the first kidnap of a humanitarian worker since Kenny. Although it can never be proved, the one month suspension of everybody after Kenny's kidnap, could have contributed to the fact that for a year and a half no such incident occurred. By partially ignoring this incident, we might create a dangerous precedent in which kidnaps can occur regularly without any serious repercussions. MSF

might have benefitted from the consolidated response by the humanitarian community to speed up the unharmed release of Kenny last year. This gives some moral pressure to replicate this action for a fellow humanitarian worker.



*'MSF Strongly Condemns Kidnapping of Head of Druzba - Operations inside Chechnya Continue to be Suspended,'* Press release, MSF Moscow 6 August 2002 (in English).

The international medical humanitarian organization Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) will continue the suspension of its relief programme in Chechnya for another period of two weeks on account of the kidnapping of Ms. Nina Davidovich, Head of the Russian non-governmental organization Druzba. MSF strongly condemns the kidnapping of Ms. Davidovich and urges all parties to ensure her immediate release.

MSF stopped its operations in Chechnya on July 29th, following the news of the abduction of Ms. Davidovich. MSF supplies health facilities with drugs and medical materials and runs a mental health project in Chechnya. MSF will review the situation on August 20th and decide whether or not to continue with the suspension. However, MSF will continue to provide direct life-saving assistance in case of emergencies, which include cooperation with surgical facilities in Chechnya. All operations in both Ingushetia and Dagestan will continue to function as normal.

This kidnapping unveils once again the continuous life-threatening risks civilians, including humanitarian workers, are subjected to in Chechnya, where war still rages on. To this day, MSF is extremely preoccupied with the fate of hundreds of thousands of Chechen civilians living in war-ridden Chechnya and in neighbouring republics.

**At the beginning of August, the Dagestan authorities warned the Swiss section that serious threats of kidnapping had been made against foreigners in the North Caucasus. Expatriates were no longer going into Chechnya but nobody believed the threat was aimed at the neighbouring republics. In spite of the warning, the Swiss section therefore maintained a skeleton team made up of three expatriates and a few national staff in Makhachkala, the capital of Dagestan, in order to keep abreast of the situation.**



*'Dagestan Update,'* Email from Arjan Erkel, MSF Switzerland Coordinator, to Bruno Lab, MSF Switzerland programme manager, 7 August 2002 (in English).

**Extract:**

ICRC called to ask us what is going on here and also to inform us that they have information from the local staff that they

expect problems or that problems are already going on in Novolak region. This is information from a newspaper, but we cannot get it confirmed and also [did] not see it in the newspaper. MSF-Holland thinks it will not be quiet until a big fish is kidnapped. They also think, after consulting info sources that because no one was travelling to Chechnya any more that Khasavyurt was easier for bandits to access than Nazran and that might be a reason that MSF Swiss or expats in Khasavyurt became a target.

Yesterday evening I met with the colonel for kidnap affairs also head of directorate of law and order bodies in Dagestan. He himself was very friendly and gave us enough time to explain the situation and give his opinion. Main conclusions are that for him, Makhachkala is safer than Khasavyurt due to the border of Chechnya, which is easier to access for bandits. [...] He sees reasons to be extra careful due to the celebration of 6 August but, for him he did not see any increased activity of bandit involvement.

It would be good for MSF to liaise with him every now and then he said, because then the bandits will know that we are in good contact with this department and will hesitate to harm us. [...] FSB was also friendly and worried. For them it is more related to celebration of the 6 of August or 23 of February (memorial of Diaspora). [...] After discussion with Geneva and with the team, it was decided to make some sort of assessment in Khans on Friday to meet the head of admin, etc. Bruno you know what we discussed.

**On 8 August, an ICRC team was kidnapped in the Pankisi valley in Georgia. The French section announced the suspension of its operations in this region. Rumours of kidnapping threats were rife.**




*'MSF Suspends its Activities in the Pankisi Valley (Georgia),'* Press release, MSF France, 8<sup>th</sup> August 2002 (in French).

**Extract:**


MSF is suspending its activities in the Pankisi Valley in the wake of the kidnapping on Friday of an ICRC team in this northeastern region of Georgia, close to the border with the Russian Federation, (Chechnya). Under the circumstances, MSF considers that the security of the four volunteers working and living in the valley is no longer assured. They therefore returned to Tbilisi, the Georgian capital, on Saturday 5 August.

Since October 1999, MSF had been providing assistance to the 7,000 refugees who had managed to flee the Russian army's bombing of Chechnya before the borders were closed by the Georgian authorities in December 1999. These refugees have found shelter with the inhabitants of the valley, the Kistines, and in schools and factories. Over the last ten months, MSF's medical assistance to this population had evolved from emergency relief to more targeted aid. The


team began by vaccinating 4,500 people, and then set up a system for referring patients with serious pathologies to the region's hospitals (Akhmeta, Telavi or Tbilisi), offering this service to the valley's whole population. Finally, faced with a population highly traumatised by the war, the team opened a psychological support programme caring for 125 children aged between 6 and 12.

 *There were certain signals and warnings from special services during the trips to Chechnya and the organizations had problems while crossing checkpoints and travelling. We, the MSF Holland team, never left any of these warnings unattended.*

B, MSF North Caucasus staff, interviewed in 2008  
(in Russian, translated into English by MSF).

 *All the warning lights were flashing. We were waiting for something bad to happen. There had already been Nina. We could feel it. We could feel the hostility very close and real everyday. I was living in the same building as colleagues of Nina, and they had received a number of visits and they had their flats and cars searched. Same for us. We could feel the hostility all the time. Rumours started circulating in the market places about the prices on the heads of expatriates. The authorities were not allowing us visits; we could feel the pressure in the behaviour of the people we were working with.*

Gabriel Trujillo, MSF France Coordinator for North Caucasus, January 2002 to July 2003, (in French)  
interviewed in 2008.

 *The two heads of mission had diametrically opposed views of the situation in Chechnya, of the need to go in. One was saying we needed to go in, to be on site, that there were needs; and the other was saying that for security reasons we shouldn't go in, that the Chechens were all mafia, that we needed to remain cautious, that they were fine as they were with their little programme and we shouldn't press things. It wasn't easy working like that. The programme was just starting when the tour for the two heads of mission came to an end - there was too much tension. We were desperately trying to find another Coordinator, and we came across Arjan Erkel, who already knew something of Dagestan. The Dagestan administration told us to be careful, that something was being hatched against a foreigner and that we were particularly at risk. So we withdraw all the expatriates from Khasaviourt [on the Chechen border]. We evacuated most of the team to Moscow. But we kept a small team in Makhachkala to get information and stay up to speed with*

*what was happening. Initially, I had asked that everyone leave and said we shouldn't take any risks. But in the end, after talking it through, the programme manager convinced me to leave a couple of people on site. The Coordinator, a logistician, and a nurse, I think, stayed with some local staff that we trusted.*

Dr Thomas Nierle, MSF Switzerland, Head of Emergency then Director of Operations 2000-2004, (in French) interviewed in 2009.

## ARJAN ERKEL KIDNAPPED IN DAGESTAN

**In the evening of 12 August 2002, Arjan Erkel, MSF Switzerland's Coordinator, was kidnapped in Makhachkala, the capital of Dagestan. MSF Switzerland issued two press releases, relayed by the other sections, announcing the kidnapping and the suspension of MSF's activities in the North Caucasus.**



*'Médecins Sans Frontières Confirms Kidnapping of its Staff Member,'* **Press release**, MSF Switzerland, 13 August 2002 (in English).

### Extract:

The international humanitarian organization Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) confirms today that Arjan Erkel, a Dutch national working as Head of Mission for the organization since February 2002 in Makhachkala, the Russian Republic of Dagestan, was abducted yesterday evening. The kidnapping occurred in Makhachkala at around 10 pm. On his way home, the MSF car was intercepted by a local vehicle with three men on board - two of them being armed - and Arjan was abducted and pushed into another car. MSF is extremely concerned about this incident and demands the immediate release of Arjan in good condition.



*'MSF Condemns Kidnapping of Relief Worker - Operations in Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia are Suspended,'* **Press release** MSF, 14 August 2002 (in English).

### Extract:

Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) strongly condemns the abduction of Arjan Erkel, MSF's Head of Mission for Dagestan, in the regional capital of Makhachkala on the evening of August 12. MSF is extremely

concerned about Erkel's fate and urges whoever is holding him to respect his physical and mental integrity and to release him unharmed. Following this incident, MSF has decided to also suspend its operations in Dagestan and Ingushetia for the time being. MSF had already stopped its operations in Chechnya on July 29 in response to the kidnapping of Ms. Nina Davydovich, Head of the Russian non-governmental organization Druzhba. These consecutive kidnappings demonstrate the risks civilians and relief workers run in this conflict-ridden region. Because the position of ordinary people, particularly Chechens, is so precarious and the medical needs are great, MSF will continuously review the situation to decide whether to maintain the suspension. Throughout the region, MSF runs mobile clinics and supports hospitals and dispensaries, providing them with medical supplies and rehabilitating surgical facilities, maternity and medical wards.

MSF is an international medical humanitarian organization that provides medical and humanitarian assistance to victims of war, conflict, and disasters. This assistance is given without political, religious or ethnic discrimination. MSF is independent and is mainly funded by public donations from the 18 countries where it has representative offices. Further information on this incident is not available at present. For any inquiries, contact MSF in Geneva: Michel Clerc +41 22 849 84 92. Please do NOT contact our field missions in the region for security reasons.

#### Biographical Information on Arjan Erkel

Peter-Arjan Erkel is 32 years old and a Dutch national. Since April 2002, he has been the Head of Mission for the Swiss branch of the humanitarian organization Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in Makhachkala, the capital of the Russian Republic of Dagestan. Erkel studied management training in Logistics (Transport Academia) and later attended Nijmegen University, graduating with a M.Sc. in Cultural Anthropology. He started working with MSF in 1994 as a logistician in Uganda. Since then, he worked as logistical and country coordinator for MSF in Tajikistan, and as project coordinator in Uzbekistan, Russia, and Sierra Leone.

**In the days following the kidnapping, a crisis cell was set up at MSF Switzerland to handle the Erkel case. It was coordinated by Thomas Nierle, MSF Switzerland's Operations Director, who leaves immediately for Dagestan. Once on site, he discovers that a few days before his kidnapping, Arjan had dinner with two American military attachés, against the advice of his team, and that of MSF Holland's Coordinator in Moscow, from whom he had also sought advice.**



'Note for the log - 26 August 2002,' Michiel Hofman, 3 September 2002 (in English).

#### Extract:

Q: How was contact established between US Embassy & MSF Switzerland?

A: S [...] C [...]: When the mission of 2 defense attachés was discussed in the Embassy, Major Meyer inquired if anybody in Dagestan was present from international agencies whom they could contact to discuss an outsiders view on the security situation. S[...] suggested Arjan Erkel, Head of MSF Switzerland, whom he had met one month earlier at the Embassy, and provided the telephone number of the MSF Swiss office in Moscow. Major M[...]: I contacted the office and spoke to a lady called Aida. She informed me Arjan was in Moscow and gave his mobile phone number. I called him and introduced myself as Major Meyer from the US Embassy. Arjan was very receptive and suggested to contact him on arrival in Dagestan and provided his local telephone numbers.

Q: What was the nature of the discussions in Dagestan with Arjan Erkel.


A: Major M [...]: On arrival in Makhachkala we contacted Arjan Erkel in his office. We agreed to have dinner that evening. He picked us up from our hotel in the Lobby at 7 pm. We went with him to a pizzeria downtown in Makhachkala. Only Arjan was present for MSF Switzerland. We had dinner for two hours until 9 PM, when we went back to our hotel. The first hour we discussed his views on security for foreigners in Dagestan, and what kind of security arrangements MSF was using inside Dagestan. The second hour was spent on general social talk about himself, how he ended up in this job in Dagestan, about his partner in Makhachkala and how he had met her in Tajikistan.

At the end of the dinner he suggested we visit Khasavyurt the next morning (we were flying back the next afternoon) to see the situation with the IDPs, so we could give some firsthand impressions to S[...] back in Moscow. We agreed to have contact about this trip the next morning to see if from our side and his side this would be possible, as originally this trip was not planned. The next morning 9 AM, Arjan came to our hotel again to tell us that the trip to Khasavyurt was cancelled for security reasons. He informed us that they had received a warning from FSB regarding security of expatriates in Khasavyurt, and they had withdrawn their team back to Makhachkala. He also informed us that Americans specifically might be in danger. After that morning we did not see Arjan again, that afternoon we flew back to Moscow. [...]


Q: Was the trip to Khasavyurt initiated by the US Embassy?

General R [...]: No, this was an initiative of Mr. Erkel.  
S [...] C [...]: I wanted to visit Dagestan, but that has not been approved by the Embassy as UNSECOORD is not operational there. However, I did not ask the military attachés to visit the IDPs on my behalf. [...] S [...] C [...] apologized for suggesting MSF Switzerland and Arjan Erkel to his colleagues of the military department. He said he realized in retrospect this was a mistake, and it was now obvious to him MSF cannot afford to be associated with military of any kind. S[...] also informed me that the actual nature

of the mission was originally to be military observers on joint exercises on the Caspian Sea by the Navies of Russia, Azerbaijan, and Iran. The mission was reduced to liaison with Emercom after Iran objected at the last moment to the presence of American observers during these joint exercises. He further more emphasized he understood that he would not pro-actively approach MSF for the time being, unless MSF contacted him.


 I got a call the night of the kidnapping, about 11 o'clock, I think, from Christopher Stokes, MSF Belgium's Operations Director. Our team in Dagestan had managed to get hold of Nicolas [Cantau], their Coordinator in Moscow, who passed the message on to Christopher. Straight away, that same night, we managed to contact our team to check the facts. And I left the next day, or the day after, just the time to get a visa. One of the reasons I went was to take over as Coordinator, as we no longer had one. It needed someone with enough clout to get a few things moving. After the warning, I had wanted the team to leave Dagestan, but the programme manager said there was no risk. The two weeks I spent between Moscow and Dagestan after the kidnapping helped me get a few things straight about the whole American soldiers story. It also helped me to understand a few things about Arjan's personality and made me wonder whether this kidnapping wasn't more than just an organised crime situation: I got this impression pretty quickly. When Arjan met the American advisers, this triggered quite a debate among the team. The logistician, a young bloke with his head screwed on, told him he was mad, that he shouldn't do it. MSF Holland's Coordinator, Michiel Hofmann, was a friend of Arjan's, and there was quite a reassuring bond between them. He told me he had tried to set him straight and warn him off, but he hadn't listened. I asked a bloke from MDM, whose contacts were helping him get to Chechnya via Dagestan, if he would try and find out what he could. He came back with a whole load of accusations against MSF Switzerland, about our projects for opening up in Chechnya, but also and mainly against certain members of the team. He said it was chaos and that it was impossible to work in conditions like that. The message was a pretty local one, but there was still this idea in the back of my mind that this type of exaction had to be authorised somewhere, that in this game, it's the people with the power who hold the cards.

Dr Thomas Nierle, MSF Switzerland, Head of Emergency then Director of Operations 2000-2004, interviewed in 2009 (in French).

 My opinion is that the first reason for this kidnapping was the complete ignorance of security regulations.

*I think one of the reasons beyond that is because there was no team. The team is not when you have ex-pats and local staff, it is when you have people who are speaking and are listening. In other words, when one is listening to what he is told and the other one is actually saying what he is expected. In other words, all members of the team should do both listening and speaking. There should not be a structure of authoritarian management in emergency situations. The expat may not possibly know the situation of the current place better than I do. I have a feeling they did not tell Arjan, they did not have this communication. And there were no clear security regulations.*

C, MSF North Caucasus staff, interviewed in 2008 (in Russian, translated into English by MSF).

 After Kenny's abduction, MSF Holland, like Belgium and France before them, became much more risk-conscious and very much more located in our base area in Ingushetia. And then it was the time the Swiss expanded and became more adventurous. We would all joke quite openly that the Swiss would be next taken captive. And that was, I think, predictable. So it didn't come as a surprise when Arjan was taken. It was maybe a surprise that he was taken in Dagestan rather than inside Chechnya, but everyone, at least in my team was expecting someone to be taken in the Swiss team at some point.

Austen Davies, MSF Holland Executive Director, 1999 to 2004, interviewed in 2009 (in English).

MSF contacted the different political stakeholders in the Caucasus as well as any international leaders capable of persuading them to take action to secure Arjan Erkel's release.

**MSF Switzerland entrusted its representation in the Russian Federation to Steve Cornish, a former Coordinator for MSF France who also took part in the search for Kenny Gluck in 2001 and knew the region well. MSF International and MSF Switzerland approached the Russian authorities for support in finding Arjan Erkel.**

**At MSF France's request, the MSF USA team contacted the rebel Chechen government's foreign affairs minister, in exile in New York. It also met with various members of the US administration, hoping they might feel guilty about the meeting between Arjan and the American military attachés and so be more cooperative in putting pressure on their Russian counterparts.**



**Letter** from Thomas Linde, Director General, Médecins Sans Frontières, Dr Morten Rostrup, President of the International Council of Médecins Sans Frontières to the Ambassador of Russia in Switzerland, 23 August 2002 (in English).

**Extract:**

Médecins sans Frontières - an international humanitarian organization that has been working over the past 10 years in the Russian Federation - would like to inform your Excellency of the abduction of one of our international staff in Dagestan, and solicit your support in our efforts to obtain a rapid and unconditional release of our colleague. [...] Médecins sans Frontières is aware that relentless and patient efforts are required. This implies also that initiatives that could put the life of our colleague at risk should by all means be avoided. While the competent authorities - at federal and national level - have already been most helpful and active, we certainly will have to count on their continued support. In particular, Médecins sans Frontières has requested national and federal authorities to provide us with any information or any contact that may lead to a solution of the problem. We have assured them that we will, of course, keep strict confidentiality on any support we obtain from them. Furthermore, Médecins sans Frontières has assured them that we will not make any statement on the background of this abduction, neither during the crisis nor after its resolution. Only the release of our colleague is important to us.



*'Chris in New York,'* **Email** from MSF USA Advocacy Programme Department to Kenny Gluck, Director of Operations, MSF Holland, 13 August 2002 (in English).

Hello Kenny,

Hope this finds you well. As you may already be aware, Loick has asked me to be in contact with Ilias Akmadov here in the US in the hopes that they could have direct contact with him. Patrice has met with Akmadov once before in the recent months. MSF France wanted to renew contact with him especially to discuss recent developments that led to our partial suspension of activities in Chechnya. I was told that you have ties to his personal translator. [...] Can you provide me with another number that could eventually lead me to Akmadov?

Thanks



*'Meeting at the National Security Council, Washington DC, 18 October 2002,'* **Minutes**, Patrice Page MSF USA Programme Officer, Nicolas de Torrente MSF USA Executive Director, MSF USA, 21 October 2002 (in English).

**Extract:**

He suggested that we (in Moscow) raise openly and directly with the Russians, the hypothesis of a political component

in our case, in a non-accusatory way, something like 'are you exploring/working on the possibility of a political component as a motive for the abduction, are you exploring/working on the possibility of some rogue elements within your administration which can be involved in the kidnapping?' [...] Then, a serious discussion when we raise the 'incident' involving Cheevers and the two military attaches. [...]

Conclusions from the meeting:

- We are uncertain whether US authorities have directly raised Arjan's case with their Russian counterparts above the level of Sarge Cheevers (and our feeling is that it was probably not done).
- It was important to involve the NSC to get more relevant action from the US side at higher level in Moscow (the US ambassador or his deputies with the Russian counterparts). The State Department [...] was possibly not active on the case because of the incident for which they feel some responsibility and embarrassed [...]. We must underline here that since the kidnapping, it is the first time that MSF in the US is meeting with a political appointee within the US administration as all other meetings were with staffers at the Department of State (D of S) [...] and this is an important fact considering the current mood in Washington (increased tension between the D of S and the Bush administration). Therefore and if needed by MSF-CH, potential future action here can be to get meetings with political appointees at the D of S (...).


It was important and very relevant to openly and directly raise the issue of the incident with the 2 military attaches. G's reaction was encouraging after having heard about the incident, he became more interested in getting the US involved. He repeatedly mentioned the possibility of "rogue Russian elements" being connected to Arjan's abduction. Earlier, there was some reluctance from MSF to 'play the US card' because of the potential impact on Arjan arising from the incident with the military attaches. We are in a different situation now since the 'abcès a été crevé' (the abscess was opened) with the US administration and since we have now raised the issue to the level of an influential political appointee within the US administration which promised us to take concrete action with Moscow based on our request. Therefore, Geneva will have to coordinate tightly between Moscow and New York to utilize efficiently the contacts and influence of the US towards the Russian administration.




*I was Head of Mission, and the mission was to get Erkel out.*

Steve Cornish, Coordinator MSF France in Georgia (January to April 2000) then in Ingushetia (September 2000 to January 2001), MSF Switzerland Officer in the Russian Federation (August 2002 to April 2004), (in French) interviewed in 2008.



 I was the only Coordinator in Moscow at that moment and MSF Switzerland did not have a Coordinator anymore, so someone had to take charge of the first 48 hours. I got in contact with the Russian authorities, dealt with the press and all that, until Switzerland had their visa together and they could send their people in. Then I stayed involved after that, because at that point we did not know if it was a Dagestani or a Chechen affair. Both were possible. Everybody recognized from the start that the strongest and the most well-connected people that MSF had in Chechnya were those people working for MSF-Holland. They just have the most direct and strongest links to the necessary rebel commanders. They would check out: 'did you kidnap them,' if yes, 'can you please let them go.' You say it very simple. So straight on arrival, the Swiss requested that they would make use of these people and obviously, because they were working for me, I was involved in the contacts for Chechnya. I was also in the process when there were direct face to face discussions with the other side in Chechnya, the pro-Russian side. At that time Akhmad Kadirov had become the strongest man in Chechnya. So we also had to deal with him as he was either involved or had the connections to be able to do something about it. That was a face to face meeting. I did that myself as I didn't want anybody bumbling into Grozny to destroy the very delicate network I had built up there.

Michiel Hofman, MSF Holland North Caucasus coordinator from May 2001 to July 2003, (in English) interviewed in 2009.

 It was becoming increasingly obvious that the American representatives had been in the field in Dagestan, that they had spoken to Erkel openly, and that he may well have been abducted as a result. Erkel had made the mistake of being seen with these people in public. I had contacts at the State Department who went back to Kenny Gluck's kidnapping, and we arranged to meet with them. The first time we went to see them we talked things over openly without really pointing the finger but we did want to twist their arm into helping us find a solution. So we broached the subject. However, when we went back again with Patrice [Page, Programmes Department, MSF USA], they denied ever discussing it with us. Then Patrice and Nicolas [de Torrente, General Director of MSF USA] went to the National Security Council. The people they met there played dumb, acting like they'd never heard anything about it.

[...], Project Coordinator, MSF Belgium in Chechnya, (1995), MSF USA Programme Department 2001-2002, (in French) interviewed in 2008.

**The European press interpreted the kidnapping of foreigners as a means of putting pressure on international**

**organisations to leave the North Caucasus, thereby depriving displaced persons of humanitarian aid and forcing them to return to Chechnya. A journalist with the *Novaïa Gazeta*, Vyatcheslav Izmaïlov, a former Russian army officer and a specialist in kidnappings, pointed to the Russian internal security services as responsible for Arjan's abduction.**



'Resurgence of Activity by Chechen Rebels,' Karim Talbi, *Le Figaro* (France) 21 August 2002 (in French).

#### Extract:

This rebel offensive comes as Russia is seeking ways to solve the refugee problem. The return to Chechnya of tens of thousands of refugees announced several months ago is soon to begin. Humanitarian non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have unanimously denounced this project and almost all of them have suspended their activities since the kidnapping on 23rd July, of Nina Davidovitch, the head of a Russian NGO. A week ago, the head of Médecins sans Frontières' Swiss mission in Dagestan, the Dutchman Arjan Erkel, was abducted on his way home. Under cover of anonymity, the heads of humanitarian organisations in Moscow stated yesterday that the purpose of these kidnappings was to make NGOs leave Chechnya and the surrounding republics as the refugees begin returning home.



'Who Abducted Peter-Arjan Erkel?' Vyacheslav Ismaïlov, *Novaïa Gazeta* (Russia), 29 August 2002 (translated from Russian into English by MSF).

#### Extract:

There are three main versions about the abduction of the Dutch missionary. The first version is – he was kidnapped by illegal military units, stationed in Chechnya. At the present moment all the illegal military units in Chechnya, without any exceptions, are experiencing severe financial shortages. [...] The majority of bandit groups, subordinate to Maskhadov, Basaev or Gelaev, are fully independent in terms of financing.

In particular, one of the biggest bandit groups, which is headed by Doku Umarov, Maskhadov's secretary of the Security Council, is mainly stationed in Achkhoy-Martan district of Chechnya. [...]. The sources of financing for Doku Umarov and his bandits are kidnapping of people (in particular, kidnapping of 6 local oilmen at the border of Northern Ossetia and Ingushetia) and armed attacks and robberies of the Chechen population in Grozny and other towns. The bandits take money, gold jewelry, and vehicles. The majority of robbed victims are under the threat of physical harm and are afraid to apply to the federal and local law enforcement bodies. According to our information, the Umarov's band plans kidnappings of Russian and foreign journalists and workers of relief organizations with the

objective of ransom. There are reasons to surmise that Nina Davydovich, the Head of non-governmental 'Druzhba' organization, who was kidnapped 23 July of this year, is being kept by Umarov's bandit group.

The probability that Peter-Arjan Erkel was kidnapped by the band connected to Doku Umarov is also very high. He is likely not to be kept in Chechnya but in Dagestan, where despite strict measures undertaken by the Interior Ministry, there are vast opportunities for holding a hostage, especially in the mountainous areas of the republic. Yet the severe prevention measures undertaken by the Interior Ministry after the terrorist attack in Kaspiysk in May, refer mainly to Makhachkala and some other cities of the republic. For example, Peter-Arjan Erkel could be easily taken from the suburban site of the kidnapping, escaping the police checkpoints [...]. Such a possibility is not excluded, even by Dagestani law enforcement bodies (the Sixth Department of Dagestani Interior Ministry) themselves, which directly execute investigation of this case.

The second version is a political one. Let's recall several most significant provocations arranged by the special services – a 'false' exchange in January 2000 of Andrey Babitskiy, a Radio Liberty correspondent, for Russian soldiers and passing him to the hands of allegedly Chechen bandits but in fact, to G D, connected to the special services. The same picture was seen with the kidnapping of Kenneth Gluck, a manager of MSF (Holland) in Chechnya and Ingushetia, arranged by the special services in January 2001, which happened after a report on the situation in Chechnya was published and disclosed in the European Council in November 2000. We knew the Chechen people who kept him (they were working for the Russian special services) and we also knew the place where he was kept. Truth to be told, we don't have any information regarding whether Peter-Arjan Erkel or Nina Davydovich were of a certain interest for the Russian special services. Anyway, some details of Erkel's kidnapping, familiar to us and to the 6th Department of Interior Ministry of Dagestan can indirectly witness against the Russian special services.

The third version is that Erkel was kidnapped by some other bandit group from Dagestan, pursuing the same objective, as in the first version – a ransom. This version however, has less probability compared to the first ones. During the last two years the problem of kidnapping, having been very typical for Dagestan in 1996-1999, became less popular. In mid 2000, a special department responsible for prevention kidnappings stopped their activities here. And currently only several people from the 6th Department of IM in Dagestan work on this problem.

From September, humanitarian activity in the North Caucasus which was suspended since the kidnapping gradually started up again in response to the population's humanitarian needs. However, delivering

aid was rendered increasingly difficult and pressure mounted on the refugees to return home.

**On 14 August, the United Nations condemned the kidnapping of Arjan Erkel. On 15 August, the ICRC evacuated its personnel from the Caucasus. On 9 September, the UN agencies restarted their activities in Chechnya, while calling for the release of Nina Davydovich and Arjan Erkel.**



*'The United Nations Condemns the Abduction of an MSF Representative,'* **Press release** UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Moscow, 14 August 2002 (in English).

**Extract:**

The United Nations joins Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in strongly condemning the abduction of MSF's Head of Mission for Dagestan, Mr Arjan Erkel, in Makhachkala, the capital of the Republic of Dagestan, on 12 August. The UN also remains extremely concerned about the fate of Mrs. Nina Davydovich, the humanitarian worker from the NGO Druzhba who was abducted in Chechnya on 23 July. Actions of this kind compromise the effective provision of humanitarian assistance to the many people who are in need in the Northern Caucasus. The UN also wishes to reiterate its solidarity with the hundreds of civilians who have been abducted in Chechnya in recent years, and calls on those responsible to ensure the safe return of their victims. UN activities in Chechnya remain suspended until further notice. The UN is keeping the situation under continued review.



*'UN Returns to Chechnya,'* **AFP** (France), 9 September 2002 (in French).

**Extract:**

"The decision to restart activities (in Chechnya) was taken after numerous consultations with the Russian government, the medical community, non-governmental organisations and the population on needs in the Caucasian republic," according to a communiqué issued by the UN's office in Russia on Monday. The UN had suspended its humanitarian activities in Chechnya on 29th July for an undetermined period after the kidnapping of Nina Davydovitch, the Director of the Russian NGO, Drujba, which had been working for UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund). "The growing need for humanitarian aid among the civilian population in Chechnya is the main reason for the return (of the UN) to the region," explains the communiqué. The United Nations are "extremely concerned about the situation in the North Caucasus and the risks taken by humanitarian workers," it continues.

The UN also expresses its solidarity with Ms Davydovitch, and with Arjan Erkel, Head of Mission with Médecins sans Frontières, kidnapped in Dagestan, a republic bordering Chechnya. The United Nations condemns these acts and demands the immediate release of these two aid workers. [...] The Russian authorities have not yet commented on the United Nations' decision. However, human rights activists in the separatist republic are asking why the organisation is returning when neither Ms Davydovitch nor Mr Erkel have yet been found.

**In October, the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly's delegation that visited the Caucasus in July and September published its report. It noted that "mop-up" operations in Chechnya are continuing and demanded systematic investigations. However, it also called on NGOs to increase their aid to Chechnya, thus indirectly supporting Moscow's policy of forced repatriation. Because of the kidnapping of Arjan Erkel, the MSF sections unanimously decide to make no public comment on the report.**



'Council of Europe and Chechnya,' Email from the MSF deputy legal advisor, 14 October 2002 (in French).

#### Extract:

A quick note to tell you about the contents of the latest report by the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly's joint working group, chaired by Lord Judd. This document, which is public, is the product of two visits (in July and September) by a Council of Europe delegation made up of members of the Political Affairs Commission, the Commission on Human Rights and Legal Affairs and the Commission on Refugees.

All these actors have already been contacted by MSF as part of the formal alert issued in July on the risks of forced repatriation. On this subject, and for info, it appears that the European Union's Executive, via Solana's cabinet [Javier Solana, Secretary General of the Council of the European Union] put discreet but real pressure on Russia on the repatriation issue last July. I don't know whether this stance by the EU had anything to do with our mobilisation (PC + major lobbying), but it does seem that from mid-July until the beginning of August, there was pressure on the Russian authorities from several sides on the issue of the forced return of refugees.

The PACE report has two parts to it and looks at:

- Perspectives for a political solution to the conflict;
- The human rights situation;
- The humanitarian situation. [...]

#### On the human rights situation

The Judd report is clear on the fact that "mop-up" operations

are continuing, as well as extra-judicial executions, torture and pillaging, and stresses the impunity that reigns in Chechnya, particularly for the Russian forces. He demands systematic investigations and the application of "order 80," requiring detailed reports to be written after every operation by the authorities involved (prosecuting bodies, military commander, head of the local administration...), as well as authorisation for the media to cover these military operations. Russian human rights NGOs have often condemned the fact that this order is not being observed. The Judd report also states that the office of Putin's new special representative for human rights (Solytsov) was moved from Znamenskoye to Grozny in May (how strange – that was just after the displaced persons camps were closed...), but that material conditions stop it from operating: no electricity, no telephone, water seepage, and humidity (which of course makes it difficult to preserve the complaints files...). [...]

#### The humanitarian situation

The report mentions forced displacements from Znamenskoye and indicates that non-voluntary displacements could take place by way of the 20-point repatriation agreement signed on 29th May. It also describes the living conditions in the TACS, the feeling of insecurity among people forced to return to Grozny, and the false promises of aid made to the IDPs to encourage them to leave the camps. Unfortunately, it calls on the international community and NGOs to substantially increase humanitarian aid in Chechnya. The report notably quotes the official figures given by the head of the Chechen government (Ilyasov), according to which there are only between 30,000 and 40,000 people left in Ingushetia and 350,000 people are supposed to have returned to Chechnya over the last 18 months...

There you are. It's not much. It's not likely to change the situation on the ground, but at the end of the day this is the only organisation to be debating the Chechen conflict, that has taken a public stance against human rights violations and that is seeking an alternative political settlement to the scarcely credible solution imposed by the Kremlin. It is not enough, that's for sure, but any sanctions to be imposed on Russia depend on the Council of Europe's Executive (the Committee of Ministers), which is totally silent on the matter. All this could of course be much tougher, but with the free hand given to Russia after 11th September, we need something to cling on to, however small, if we are not to give up hope completely...



'Update Arjan (06-13.10.02),' Email from Marc Joly, MSF Switzerland Communication Officer to MSF Communication network 14 October 2002 (in English).

#### Extract:

A press release had been foreseen for the second month of Arjan's detention. It's put on hold for now, at least for one week, due to operational reasons linked with Arjan's family. [...]

KEEP INTERNAL: Pressure by Russian authorities is still being

put on Chechen refugees in Ingushetia to be displaced to new locations inside Ingushetia. NO PROACTIVE MSF communication or comments should be made regarding these pressures. If asked, just say that MSF teams are fully concentrating on delivering assistance to IDPs (for more details on the assistance, please go back to September 10<sup>th</sup> press release), given the new security conditions and instability in Ingushetia.

**On 21 October, the operations directors of the different MSF sections again discussed the suspension of operations in Chechnya and the extent to which there might be a real link between Erkel's kidnapping and operations.**



**Minutes** Coordinators Meeting, 21 October 2002 (in English).

1. Review of suspension in Chechnya  
During the last Dirops meeting four weeks ago it was decided to continue the MSF suspension in Chechnya as long as the motives behind the kidnapping were not clear and as long as more details about possible Chechnya links in the kidnapping case are not known. No timeframe was set to review this decision during the last dirops meeting. MSFH will now propose to the Dirops to discuss the decision again on the suspension in Chechnya for the following two reasons:
  1. To obtain a more detailed argumentation in case of a yes/no decision on MSF resumption in Chechnya
  2. To understand to which extent the MSF operations in Chechnya might be linked with the kidnapping of Arjan. [...]
5. Shelter: moratorium on tent replacements by authorities

One year after the MSF campaign to draw the attention on the difficult living conditions of the IDPs in Ingushetia, the humanitarian situation in the tented camps and the collective centres only worsened. The same problems remain: overcrowding and water/sanitation conditions well below internationally accepted standards and on top of that a new problem occurred for the IDPs in the tented camps: attempts to force people back from Ingushetia to a war zone in Chechnya. The fact that some NGOs who want to replace worn out tents throughout the tented camps of Ingushetia did not receive (after their request) a confirmation to implement this plan, shows that the situation with the IDPs remain highly politicised in the tented camps. For the moment hundreds of tents remain in warehouses.

**On 14 November, MSF condemned the kidnapping by armed men of two ICRC employees on the road between Grozny and Malgobek. The movements of humanitarian organisations in this district were severely restricted as a consequence.**



**'MSF Strongly Condemns Kidnapping of ICRC Employees and Expresses its Solidarity with the ICRC and the Abductees' Families,'** Press release, MSF, 15 November 2002 (in English).

**Extract:**

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) strongly condemns the abduction of two employees of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) by unidentified armed men Wednesday afternoon near Grozny. MSF is deeply shocked by this unacceptable act and would like to express its solidarity with the ICRC and its sympathy with the families of the abductees Alexander Panov and Moussa Satushiev. MSF denounces the consecutive kidnappings that have taken place in the region over the last couple of months. Nina Davydovich, Head of the Russian non-governmental organization Druzhba, and Arjan Erkel, MSF's Head of Mission for Dagestan, who were also kidnapped by unidentified gunmen this summer, have still not been released. This latest kidnapping demonstrates yet again how insecure this conflict-ridden region continues to be and the permanent life-threatening risks civilians and relief workers run. MSF is deeply concerned about the fate of the abductees and urges those responsible to respect their physical and mental integrity and to release them without any further delay.

**In the camps in Ingushetia, an administrative re-registration operation deprived more than 40,000 people of legal status. On 2 December, the Aki Yurt camp was forcibly emptied. In spite of threats from the authorities, the team from MSF Belgium, which had been documenting security incidents for several months, continued providing medical care to those IDPs still in the district. Within MSF, opinions were still divided on whether it was appropriate to communicate on this subject and the consequences this could have on the fate of Arjan Erkel.**



**Document** on the Closure of Aki Yurt Tented Camp in Northern Ingushetia through the Lens of the MSFB Operations in Ingushetia,' MSF Belgium, mid-December 2002 (in English).

**Extract:**

- Visit of a member of the MSFB HQ communications department to Ingushetia between July 8-12 2002. Training of all layers of staff in Nazran on MSF witnessing role, IDPs rights, etc... This visit was concluded by the set up of an information gathering system. It was decided that the MSFB network of 26 community health workers (CHW) in the Malgobek district would be an integral part of the information-gathering network. After this visit, it was our impression that forced return would also start to take place in Ingushetia. Incident forms were now regularly sent to Moscow. Following the first incidents forms from the field

sent to Moscow from July, we voiced our concerns to the UNOCHA and UNHCR in Moscow in July 2002 that Aki Yurt might be the first tented camp in Ingushetia to be closed in Ingushetia along the same pattern as what happened in Znamenskoe. [...]

- During early September IDPs of Aki Yurt tented camp had issued various petitions towards ambassadors of European countries, the UN, the OSCE and Pace, towards the President and the people of Ingushetia, towards IDPs in other camps in Ingushetia claiming that they did not want to be moved out of the camp, to Chechnya, or to other locations in Ingushetia. Two female representatives and one male representative of the IDPs who petitioned for non-relocation were taken to the Ingush MVD [Ministry of Interior] for questioning on Thursday September 19 and only released after several hours. [...]

- Incursion of a group of armed Chechen fighters into Ingushetia. On Wednesday September 25, these Chechen rebels shot down a Russian Mi-24 military helicopter, killing several crewmembers, near the village of Galashki in Southern Ingushetia. During the fighting, which erupted afterwards, seven Russian soldiers and several rebels were killed. This incident further fueled arguments of the Ingush and Federal migration services and the military that the tented camps were posing a security threat to its surrounding areas. It also further sped up the efforts to close the tent camps and reinforced already established screening methods of all movements in and out the tented camps. [...]

- In September 2002 IDPs started to leave the tented camp of Aki Yurt. More and more IDPs were psychologically pressured to leave the camp. On September 22-23, 2002 a representative of the Migration Services and Emergency Ministry representatives dismantled two tents in the tent camp located in Aki-Yurt village. Incident forms reported that according to the refugees, a family who lived in one of the dismantled tents, agreed to go to a spontaneous settlement in Malgobek as a result of propaganda. However when the family arrived at the site and saw that the offered conditions were not better than those in the camp, they refused to leave the camp. However the migration service head in Malgobek [...] and the deputy head of the Ingush migration services, [...] ordered their subordinates to remove the tent and leave the refugees' property at the place where a tent stood. Having been left without a roof, this family had to rent a room in a small shack in the vicinity of the tent camp. [...]

- October 2002. Approximately over 30 households left Aki Yurt camp during October following mounting psychological pressure. IDPs were entitled to take tents with them. On two occasions Emercom and Migration services provided trucks to transport IDPs to Chechnya.

- Federal migration services concluded their re-registration in Ingushetia in October 2002. According to their numbers, there remained only 70,000 IDPs in Ingushetia in October 2002. The number of registered IDPs in Ingushetia in the humanitarian registration of DRC decreased from 153,000 in January 2001 to 116,000 in August 2002. [...]. However this discrepancy signified that 40,000 IDPs remained 'invisible' in Ingushetia. 5,000 of these invisible IDPs were still located, for the moment, in tented camps throughout Ingushetia

without any protection. DRC stated that the decrease in the IDP figures in the course of 2002 is mainly a result of the removal from DRC distribution list of people commuting from Chechnya for food assistance in Ingushetia. According to DRC, 1,700 IDPs remained in Aki Yurt tented camp by the end of October 2002.

- November 2002. The head of the federal migration services informs UNHCR in Moscow that all tent camps will be closed in Ingushetia by December 20. Deterioration in the security situation in the Malgobek district. The Malgobek district was declared out of bounds for the humanitarian community by UNSECOORD [Office of the United Nations Coordinator] for about 10 days starting from November 15. Law enforcement agencies reported that a reminder of an armed group involved in the Galashki fighting found shelter in the Malgobek district and that therefore special operations were under way in the district. At the same time, this coincided with several reports of abductions and disappearances of IDPs all over Ingushetia including in the Malgobek district and reports of the presence of armed officers belonging to the pro Chechen administration on the territory of the Malgobek district. [...]

- MSFB reduced activities in the Malgobek district after incidents starting from November 17. All logistic activities were suspended for about 10 days but all mobile medical teams kept working according to the normal plan in the Malgobek district, when the Malgobek district was out of bounds for the UN network and its implementing partners. During this period our medical teams and CHW [community health workers] reported that gas and electricity would be cut by December 1 in Aki Yurt tented camp. Several high ranking Chechen and federal authorities were pressuring people to leave and repeated all the time that the camp will be closed by December 1. An OMON [Special Units of Russian police] detachment was installed in the premises of a school belonging to an Austrian NGO in the direct vicinity of the camp. More and more households started to leave Aki Yurt camp. Information on the situation in Aki Yurt was now shared with the UN and ECHO in Moscow on an almost daily basis.

- After UNSECOORD lifted its travel restrictions for the Malgobek area in the end of November 2002, the UN and ICRC were often barred from entering Aki Yurt tent camp. MSFB medical teams remained operational and managed to continue the project activities and to enter the camp on a daily basis.

- Authorities closed the Iman camp in Aki-Yurt, which accommodated 1,700 refugees according to the DRC database and only 700 according to the Migration services database. IDPs had been subjected to intimidations, legal pressures, and psychological pressures during several months. People were transported into the wilderness of the private sector in Chechnya by trucks and buses provided by Emercom and Migration Services in the last days of November 2002. The campaign culminated Sunday December 1st when Ingush policemen and an OMON detachment, began to dismantle the tents of those refugees who had refused to leave. Only the 700 IDPs registered with the federal migration services were offered financial incentives to resettle in the private sector in Chechnya as all temporary accommodation centres in Grozny were already occupied.

- Closure of Aki Yurt tented camp by December 2, 2002. Memorial described the events as a deportation in Stalinist tradition of IDPs being forced into the wilderness of war torn Chechnya. MSFB reported to the IDPs that it will continue to support the IDPs who will remain in the private sector or in spontaneous settlements around Aki Yurt. UN reported that according to their initial figures around 40% of the former Aki Yurt residents found shelter in spontaneous settlements or the private sector in Ingushetia.
- On December 3, the Federal Representative of Migration Services, Rostovtsev threatened that the MSFB field team should dismantle our own medical point. On December 10 the MSFB medical point is still standing.



'Re: Ingushetia Comm., Please cc to Mark Walsh [MSF Regional Information Officer in Russia],'  
**Email** from Marc Joolen, 17 December 2002 (in English).

I think some confusion is creeping in gradually about what we communicate, could communicate, or should communicate. In the latest days I seem to be hearing 2 versions on the matter. Mind you, this is not in any way a note to ventilate frustration, rather a little discussion pièce to see if we're all still in the same line of thinking.

First, what I feel are the two versions:

Version 1:

- Due to the abduction of Arjan it would be highly dangerous to communicate in a *témoignage* sort of way about the situation of the IDPs, be it in Ingushetia or Chechnya. The fact that we officially still don't know 'who's behind it all' determines this to a great extent; any sort of *témoignage* could easily lead to endangering Arjan's situation even more. In connection to this, any type of communication is to be determined by the Crisis Cell. Whether or not to communicate certain issues directly via MSF therefore is in the hands of the Cell. I think over the past months most have complied to this by refraining from any external communication directly. I think from the Ops side it has generally been regarded as: 'the crisis cell determines what can be communicated' (rightly or wrongly interpreted, I leave untouched here). As a result, some indirect communication has continued to take place over the past months, basically by, say, putting attention on certain incidents taking place (Aki Yurt via HRW etc.). One exception was clearly discussed in August, in case of a 'real disaster', we would look into our external communication again. The closing down of Aki Yurt was clearly such an occasion. In a meeting in Moscow, attended by MSFB Ops and HoMs then present in Moscow, decision was clear: no direct communication. Instead MSFB opted, upon suggestion of the meeting to start its 'Cash for Shelter Programme,' in an effort to indeed make a statement. It was also decided that this move was to be communicated with the appropriate authorities. Until now, this has not yet been done. The reason is a purely operational one: we want to be absolutely sure that the system worked out (avoiding security obstacles) will work. The first payments

will take place around 24/25 December. This will be also the moment that the action will be communicated by letter to the authorities.

Version 2:

- If I understand well, the Crisis Cell would like to take a bit more of an ad hoc approach, in other words, Ops (never mind which section) should/would put forward the issues they would like to communicate externally, be it on different activities undertaken or to be undertake-on the one hand-or issues of *témoignage*. On the issue of Ingushetia specifically, since the Swiss section has never been operational in Ingushetia, so no position a priori?? In my eyes, if this is the case, then this is a major shift in the approach re: external communication as far as MSF is concerned. And in that sense I would like to know what our approach could or should be:


- do we communicate on our activities only??
- can we communicate on the IDP situation to a certain extent??? (Ex: people that have stayed in the direct vicinity are currently very heavily pressured to leave the area...is this communicable or not??)
- Though the pressure on the other camps seems to have been reduced lately (following a discussion Putin-Moscow Helsinki Group), no apparent action has been taken to withdraw the *prekaz* on having the camps empty by December 20. Vigilance therefore is still needed, and what do we do when these places are indeed emptied all at once??? Build only??? Communicate??? Denounce??? Cash for Shelter even more?? Voila, this is a little bit with what I mean with getting things clarified. I think we've basically followed version nr one. No need to say, that of course Aki Yurt as such has been experienced by MSFB as highly frustrating, but comprehensible given the situation on Arjan. [...] Given the current situation, by the way, I am indeed in favour of coming out on our activities, including our interventions to those that have had to leave Aki Yurt.

Loick Barriquand:

I discussed with José Antonio and Marc regarding the closure of the camps. We think that we should communicate about it. But we are a bit out of the timing now (too late after Aki Yurt). So I propose instead that we get ready now for the next time, as if we agree and prepare now, we will save a lot of time. The reason would be of course to speak about what is going on for the refugees but also to "re-position" [...] us as MSF/humanitarian organization and as well to use this occasion that will open some space in the media, to speak about Arjan. Please confirm (inform?) your agreement. For the last point, regarding Arjan, what do you think Thomas?

## MSF AND THE HOSTAGE TAKING IN DUBROVKA THEATRE

On the evening of 23 October, a group of Chechen fighters launched an assault on the Dubrovka theatre in Moscow, taking 700 members of the audience hostage. On the morning of 24 October, the services of Sergei Lastrajembsky, Vladimir Putin's Special adviser on Chechnya, asked the ICRC and MSF to take medicines into the theatre. The ICRC team entered the theatre and successfully negotiated the release of three hostages. MSF team, considering that it did not have the same mandate to mediate, replied that it is on standby to deal with any medical or humanitarian needs. Within the MSF movement, opinions were divided about whether this was the right attitude to take. Some people felt that MSF could not refuse to help the hostages. Others feared that acting as an intermediary in the negotiation could compromise any chances of an opening on the Erkel business. Everybody felt that having an MSF team on the scene could be a useful opportunity for making contacts.

The Russian press claimed that the hostage-takers had asked MSF to mediate. On 25 October, MSF issued a communiqué explaining the conditions of its presence on the scene. The President of the French section also gave an interview to a French news magazine, stressing that the situation in Chechnya was getting steadily worse. [V25, 26](#) 



'MSF Statement regarding Hostage Taking Moscow,' MSF Press release, Moscow, 25 October 2002 (in English).

### Extract:

Yesterday, 24 Oct., Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has been asked by the Russian authorities to the scene of the hostage taking as there was a request to assist. Two representatives of MSF are currently present at the scene, but so far have not been requested to intervene. MSF is very worried about the fate of the civilians taken hostage: this is why we remain available to help should there be any medical or humanitarian needs. We are willing to intervene where and when necessary to assist the hostages in our field of expertise which is medical, humanitarian aid. If further developments should have consequences of that nature, we are ready to treat injured or sick people and provide aid to the hostages.

MSF is an international medical humanitarian organization that provides medical and humanitarian assistance to victims of war, conflict, and disasters. This assistance is given without political, religious, or ethnic discrimination. MSF is an independent, international non-governmental organisation and is mainly funded by public donations from the 18 countries where it has representative offices.

### Q&A:

Does MSF rule out mediating between the hostage takers and Russian authorities? > We have not been requested so far to mediate, so it is not an issue at present.



'The Chechens Hope for Nothing from No One - Three Questions to Jean-Hervé Bradol,' interviewed by Laure Gnabé, *Le Nouvel Observateur* (France) 25 October 2002 (in French).

### Extract:

What is the current situation in Moscow?


We don't know anything much about the hostage-takers, and we don't want to know. [...] Our only role in this hostage-taking is humanitarian. We have received confirmation from the Russian authorities that there has been a request for mediation by MSF, the ICRC, and foreign diplomats. We will only take part in the negotiations from a purely medical angle. We will intervene on matters concerning the release of foreign hostages and medicines. At the moment, four of our representatives, including one doctor, are inside the theatre to try and clarify these issues. There is no question of discussing anything else; we are not diplomats and have no ambition to be.

What are the living conditions like in Chechnya?

As far as the violence committed against Chechens is concerned, the situation has been getting worse over the last three years. Torture, massacres, rapes, neighbourhood sweep operations, and kidnappings are day-to-day occurrences, with all the additional horrors that result from this, such as human body trafficking. The Russian authorities are organising forced repatriation in appalling conditions and in other places, are turning back populations. The Chechens are lacking in everything and no longer hope for anything from anybody. They've been sleeping in tents for the last two winters and it looks like it's going to be three. They live in the mud and have nothing to eat. It's for these reasons too that they condemn the international community for their complacency towards Russia.

What kind of difficulties are you encountering?

The atmosphere has been very difficult since the beginning of the war, and since the kidnapping of MSF's head of mission in Dagestan on 12th August, we are feeling increasingly vulnerable. In fact, we don't go into Chechnya any more. We cover the surrounding areas, Ingushetia and Dagestan. And now that the big war against terrorism is underway, we can't even talk about Chechnya any more. This is probably partly why the hostage-takers have done what they've done. They want to draw attention to the conflict, but I don't think this is going to help. It's causing a big stir, of course, but it's likely to do more harm to their cause than good.


 From what I could gather, for some reason, one of the rebels/terrorists who was inside the theatre didn't ask for the usual thing, which was mediation by ICRC.

They asked for MSF as well. Then you have a wild scramble from the FSB, who was involved at the start. They tried to reach someone from MSF at 7 a.m. And because the Swiss were so high on the agenda at this moment, their number was highest on the: that's who they called. Later we found out they had also called Holland and the French. Its not that they wanted the Swiss. They'd have taken anyone as there was a guy in a theatre with 20 bombs in the place saying that if they didn't get someone from MSF there in 20 minutes they'd blow the place up. By the time, I heard about it when I came into the office at 9 a.m. – 'FSB were looking for you' – and I thought: 'oh that's nice to know.' Then when I saw the news about the theatre, the connection was made. That was about 9.30 a.m. or 10 O'Clock.


Michiel Hofman, MSF Holland North Caucasus coordinator from May 2001 to July 2003, (in English) interviewed in 2009.

Chechens than it would be for them, that they'd have better access. It might even have been the Chechens who asked for a mediator. I don't know. In theory, that was the ICRC's role. And in the end, they preferred to use the ICRC. And then they behaved as if they'd never asked anything of us. We discussed it within the movement. My point of view at the time was that it wasn't MSF's role to act as a mediator. But if they wanted us, perhaps we could make the gesture and that might help us with the Arjan business. I wouldn't say I was convinced of it, but there was no point refusing if we had the people to do it. It then depended on what MSF staff we could mobilise on site. Obviously, it wasn't MSF's usual role, but we were in such an unusual and terrible situation. Even the ICRC had never been faced with a situation like it, with hundreds of hostages who might explode at any time. I'm not sure it was the Chechens who asked for us to be there. I'm not sure either that it did us a disservice. I think it was very strange situation, difficult to handle for everyone, and everyone saw it differently.


Dr Thomas Nierle, MSF Switzerland, Head of Emergency then Director of Operations 2000-2004, (in French) interviewed in 2009.

 The hostage-takers had asked the ICRC and MSF to come. I think the request came through the Russian Interior Minister, who called us. We sent Manana [Anjaparidze, doctor of Georgian origin and MSF's Medical Coordinator in the Russian Federation], with Steve [Cornish, MSF Switzerland' Representative in Moscow] into the security perimeter. They spent the night there. Then we asked Jean-Hervé [Bradol, doctor, and President of MSF France] and Morten [Rostrup, doctor, President de MSF International] to come. We took Jean-Hervé straight to the theatre with André [Slavuckijl, MSF doctor of Lithuanian origin]. The idea was that they'd be called in if they were needed. But the police had evacuated all the civilians from the surrounding area. So they spent the night without ever going into the theatre. A Russian paediatrician and a journalist managed to go in twice. At that time, we still didn't know who had asked for MSF. At international level, we were stupefied by the idea that it might have been the hostage-takers. Steve Cornish was worried we were going to be associated with the terrorists but in fact, the request had come through the Ministry of the Interior. We took no action inside the theatre. We weren't visible.

Gabriel Trujillo, MSF France Coordinator for North Caucasus, January 2002 to July 2003, (in French) interviewed in 2008.


 One very difficult moment was the theatre siege in Moscow. We chose a strategy that wasn't necessarily consensual with differences of opinion between those who wanted to go and those who didn't. MSF Holland's Coordinator called me to say Russian radio had reported that the hostage-takers wanted MSF and the ICRC to act as mediators. Jean-Hervé also rang to say the Embassy of the Russian Federation in France had also called asking us to go over there. I organised a conference call with Jean-Hervé [Bradol, President of MSF France], Kenny [Gluck, Operations Director for MSF Holland], and a few other people. I advised Morten [Rostrup, President of MSF's International Council] to leave for Moscow. There were 700 people involved, and even if the issue was not a medical one, if someone told us we could do something for the lives of those people, I thought we should do it. Others were saying we were doctors not conflict mediators. They were completely opposed to us being at the theatre. They thought we shouldn't do anything to upset the Russian government. There was a clash between Kenny [Gluck, Operations Director for MSF Holland] who didn't want Jean-Hervé to go, and Jean-Hervé who did. There was a very tense discussion to establish where the responsibility lay in all this.

Rafa Vila San Juan, MSF International Secretary General, (January 2001 to January 2004), (in French) interviewed in 2009

 It was Yastrzhembsky [the Kremlin's Special Adviser on Chechnya] who asked for MSF to be there. I think the Russians were taken a bit off guard. They thought it would be easier for certain organisations to discuss with the

**In the night of 25 October, Russian special forces launched an assault on the theatre. Before going in**



they pumped gas through the ventilation system. All the hostage-takers, except for two women, were shot dead, and more than a hundred people died of gas poisoning. The survivors were taken to the hospitals, which were totally overwhelmed and unprepared to receive patients suffering from this type of pathology. Two MSF doctors did what they can to help out in one of the two hospitals, in spite of the extreme reluctance on the part of certain of the movement's leaders who feared this might be detrimental to Arjan Erkel. [V27](#) 



'Moscow,' Email from Michel Clerc, MSF Switzerland Director of Communication to MSF Communication network, 29 October 2002 (in English).

#### 1- What we did

Operations carried out by MSF in Moscow since last Saturday. Donations of medical material, drugs, food, and items for personal hygiene to hospital number 13 in Moscow for patients admitted following theater crisis and continued assistance to hospital 3 in the management of the aftermath of the crisis.

3- What we say? ... Basically nothing for the time being. Nothing more than last Friday. No pro-active communication from MSF. No comment on the technique used for the storming of the building. MSF had been removed from the scene before the assault took place anyway. No comment on the obvious lack of preparedness in terms of the possible consequences on the hostages. All this is being portrayed in the media, no need for MSF to have a say on that and further the hospital staff members, at least most of them, are not in favor of MSF going public about their work. In Moscow, Mark and Morten are organizing another press briefing for tomorrow in order to clarify, if need be, the 'role' of MSF during this crisis from the beginning but they will not get into any appreciation or speculation other than the established comms line.



Letter from the Chief Doctor of the City Clinic Hospital n°13 to Morten Rostrup, President of the International Organization Doctors Without Borders, 30 October 2002 (in English).

#### Extract:

Administration and staff of the City Clinic Hospital No. 13 is hereby expressing deep gratitude for assistance and support you have rendered to the patients who suffered in the result of terror act in the northeast Dubrovka Theater Center. You were among those first who have extended a helping hand to our hospital. Throughout those days of hard times, you were close to the patients helping them with medical drugs, food and clothing items, and individual hygienic items.



Sitrep Moscow mid-October – mid-November 2002  
MSF France, November 2002 (in English).

#### Extract:

##### Moscow Hostage Crisis

On the 25 of October, 30 – 40 armed Chechens under Movsar Barayev took a theatre and held about 700 people hostage for 3 days. Russian forces stormed the theatre after spreading a gas through the ventilation system sending everyone to sleep... The latest official numbers of hostages killed, due to the gas, amounts to 128, but reaches 136 according to media reports. The hostage takers were all killed by the RF, either due to the gas, or by being shot at while they slept. There are still about 71 hostages missing. About 35 people were re-admitted to hospital several days/weeks later. About a week later, the Health Minister revealed that the gas used was an aerosol version of fentanyl. There are many unclear versions and unanswered questions on what actually happened during the raid. How many hostages to begin with? Why weren't hospitals prepared? Why was the gas kept secret? Why wasn't medicine prepared for gas effects? How come some hostages 'disappeared'? Why were the hostage takers killed? Why didn't the women blow the place up? Why weren't family members allowed to see the patients in the hospital? How did the hostage taking come to happen in the first place? Etc, etc. A few days following the raid, the media questioned what had happened. However, this was quickly clamped down on. The Duma refused to accept two parliamentary commissions to investigate what happened. The Union of Right Forces is carrying out its own inquiry. MSF was called to the scene by the hostage takers through Yastrazhensky's office. There were many diverse opinions between the different sections on what our role should be during the crisis. Externally, the message we gave was that we were a medical humanitarian organisation ready to help in anyway we could. However, internally, there was dispute over how far we should go if the opportunity or circumstances arose. Finally, we did not go into the theatre. As doctors, we were not allowed inside, but as 'hostage releasers' we chose not to go. This was not an agreed decision, but made by the person present at the scene at the time. When asked by officials whether we could go in and bring out some foreign hostages who had no embassy representatives present (ICRC was not present at that moment), the MSF rep present at the time refused on the basis that it was not our mandate. Later we managed to contact ICRC to come and do this task.

**Following the raid by Russian security forces, we supported the two hospitals, which received most of the hostages mainly through medical donations, but also with food and hygiene kits etc. Our intervention/non-intervention in this crisis raises a series of questions on our action in possible future crisis of the same kind. In this case, we felt that many decisions/non-decisions taken were dominated by fear – fear for MSF as an 'institution' to become involved in such emergencies.**



*There was nothing but soldiers, snipers everywhere. I could feel how tense the atmosphere was. I was careful where I walked so as not to trip up and trigger a reaction from the armed men. The night passed and we helped evacuate the hostages by bus, etc. Manana and Andrei, our two doctors, went to the hospitals and witnessed the scale of the disaster. Several of the Russian doctors had fallen into comas: there weren't any respirators, so they had had to do mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and had poisoned themselves. People had arrived more or less unclothed, and there were no sheets, no blankets, no toilet paper, water, or soap...not to mention medicine. It was a bit apocalyptic. We were lucky to get Manana and Andrei into the hospital to lend a hand. After that, the administration was quick to close all doors. There were people in the sections who were against our MSF doctors being involved in the theatre siege business, because of Arjan. They said it had nothing to do with us, that we shouldn't get involved. Manana and Andrei went ahead anyway. And perhaps we could have done more.*

Gabriel Trujillo, MSF France Coordinator for North Caucasus, January 2002 to July 2003, (in French) interviewed in 2008.



*I think it was good that MSF was there. We tried to help the hospitals that didn't have much in the way of resources. But I think we could have done more. Before the evacuation we had two doctors available, but they weren't used. As we couldn't help the people inside, I think we could have been looking after the ones outside. We could have distributed blankets to the people waiting outside who stayed there for three days, and given them food. The problem was that the two coordinators we had on site were on the front line, inside the security perimeter, and they couldn't necessarily see what was going on outside. They were there as medical personnel on standby, but they weren't used. In truth, it might have been better to get them out of there and concentrate them on what could actually be achieved. As for the evacuation, having two doctors there wouldn't have made a big difference... Morten and Jean-Hervé saw people die in the bus, completely unconscious, without any protection of the airways. There was a problem. We had information about the poor quality of the treatment.*

Dr Thomas Nierle, MSF Switzerland, Head of Emergency then Director of Operations 2000-2004, (in French) interviewed in 2009.

**The United States ambassador in Moscow raised questions about the conditions in which the raid on the theatre was carried out by the Russian forces, and especially about the supposed harmlessness of the gas used. The international press echoed these doubts.**



*'The Aftermath in Moscow: Investigation,'* by Michael Wines and Steven Lee Myers, *The New York Times* (USA), 30 October 2002 (in English).

**Extract:**

The American Ambassador to Russia said today that Russian secrecy about the use of a powerful anesthetic gas may have needlessly raised the toll in Saturday's raid on Chechen terrorists in a Moscow theater. At least 116 hostages died during the raid; another was shot dead in the hours before it. The Ambassador, Alexander R. Vershbow, said the United States would not second-guess the Russian decision to use the gas, the decisive factor in ending the three-day siege, which trapped 763 hostages inside. But he suggested that officials were mistaken not to tell physicians about the gas and an effective antidote until minutes before the theater was stormed. "We regret that the lack of information contributed to the confusion after the immediate operation to free the hostages was over," he said. "It's clear that with perhaps a little more information, at least a few more of the hostages may have survived."

**MSF chose not to make a public statement about what its team had seen: the serious condition of the hospitalised victims, or about certain doctors, poisoned in treating them.**




*MSF Switzerland's Coordinator wanted to hold a press conference. Kate [de Riveiro, MSF France's Coordination Team] heard about it by chance when she visited the Swiss office. They had already invited all the journalists, but it was a mistake. All we had to say was that we hadn't done much.*

Gabriel Trujillo, MSF France Coordinator for North Caucasus, January 2002 to July 2003, (in French) interviewed in 2008.




*I don't remember the details, but I think we deliberately decided not to talk about it at the time. I think it was to do with Arjan, but also we were involved in such a major incident... In the end, we decided that talking about the poor treatment people had received would go down really badly with the Russian population. I think that was the main argument. It wasn't what people wanted to hear. It was about terrorists who had taken innocent people hostage and the Special Forces who had heroically rescued them... The last thing the Russians wanted to hear was that a number of deaths could have been avoided.*

Dr Thomas Nierle, MSF Switzerland, Head of Emergency then Director of Operations 2000-2004, (in French) interviewed in 2009.

 *Some people didn't subscribe to this type of communication, and others like me, thought we should take care of the victims and also send the Russian community a sign of our presence. This shows that there were problems within MSF.*

Rafa Vila San Juan, MSF International Secretary General, January 2001 to January 2004), (in French) interviewed in 2009.

 *We had Andrei's and Manana's eye-witness accounts, but it was double-edged! We knew how seriously the Russians were taking it, but on the other hand, there was Arjan. We were able to deliver two tonnes of material to the hospitals. We ran a good operation and said nothing. We knew what was happening; we wanted to talk, but in the end we stayed silent. I think we didn't want to endanger the national staff that had taken risks in delivering the material, or be forced to put an end to our collaboration with them. We were also worried for the doctors who had been poisoned. The hospital thanked us.*

Steve Cornish, Coordinator MSF France in Georgia (January to April 2000) then in Ingushetia (September 2000 to January 2001), MSF Switzerland Officer in the Russian Federation (August 2002 to April 2004), interviewed in 2008 (in French).

**On 29 October, Steve Cornish, MSF Switzerland's Representative in Moscow, and Morten Rostrup, President of MSF International, managed to get an appointment with a high-ranking FSB official. According to Steve Cornish, he told them that Arjan Erkel was alive and that the person responsible for his kidnapping was a 'local commander.' He said he thought it strange that the kidnappers hadn't asked for a ransom. However, he reminded them that the body of Fred Cuny, an aid worker kidnapped in 1996, was only found three years later... According to other accounts, he made it clear to his visitors that this was the kind of thing that could happen to aid organisations that cause trouble.**



**Minutes** of Meeting with FSB, by Steve Cornish, MSF CH representative in Russia, 29 October 2002 (in English).

**Extract:**

He chastised MSF, for non-cooperation with Services and with UNHCR. Stated that Dutch Embassy had not cooperated in giving them information, which FSB requested. [...] He stated that info from M [...] (Special Terrorist division FSB


Mahatchkala) from Oct 27th placed responsibility for Arjan's case with a field commander (did not specify location or name) and that they had no information that Arjan had been killed. Kutzura at one point stated that we had had various cases together in the past. He mentioned Fred Cuny as being an MSF. His assistant tried to correct him, but he continued speaking like Cuny was MSF\*\*\*\*. I strongly denounced this information. Then Kuzura stated that he referred the case, because it took three years to find the body.

This, he said, was in response to my question that MSF was also open to hearing bad news, if there was bad news. Kuzura also stated that it was very rare to have such a silence in a purely financial case. That it was not understandable that hostage takers had not put forth ransom or conditions for release, that it was not a standard situation.

He put forth three scenarios.

- 1) To obtain ransome
  - 2) To put pressure on federal authorities to stop their actions in TT.
  - 3) In order to arrange a prisoner exchange
- I made it known that we have provided information requested of us, and that we will cooperate with FSB.

\*\*\* It should be noted that this may have been a tactic on FSB's part, or it may in fact be simply that to Kuzura, all humanitarians are the same.

 *The Russians were interested in our presence on the site of the hostage taking. They were the ones who asked us to be there. So we went. Until then, we hadn't managed to see anyone high-ranking and thanks to the theatre business, we finally got an appointment with an FSB dignitary at central level. Morten went to see him. I debriefed him several times, I made him repeat what he had heard, alone, and then in the presence of Nicolas de Torrente [General Director of MSF USA] to be sure there was no misunderstanding... Morten told me that this high-ranking FSB official had made it clear that this was the kind of thing that happened to people who pissed them off, people like us. From then on, it's our belief that an FSB General has informed us of who is guilty. When it comes down to it, if we listened carefully enough, the FSB itself was telling us. We thought that what happened was part of the toughening stance being taken at the time. At the theatre, I saw them, the dead piled up in the buses.*

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of Communications (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000-May 2008), interviewed in 2009 (in French).

During the same time, the MSF France President met a diplomat, who after getting posted to Moscow, remained in contact with the Permanent representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations. This diplomat advised him to remain extremely firm with the Russian political authorities.



*Around same time, in New York, I had a talk with an ambassador to the United Nations who was a personal friend of Lavrov [Permanent representative of the Russian Federation to the UN]. He told me that, even if he was a personal friend, the only advice he could give me was to have a go at him in public. He told me, word for word: 'If you want a result, you shouldn't be here in my office; you should be in the offices of the New York Times, because the Russians only react to pressure. It is not the intermediaries we usually talk to who will put pressure on a file.' I said I agreed with him to a large extent, but asked him to let Mr Lavrov know anyway that MSF was willing to sort this business out as adults. What was worrying us was the time it was taking and the state of Arjan's health.*

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of Communications (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000-May 2008), (in French) interviewed in 2009.

## MORE THAN PUTTING OUT A "MISSING PERSONS" ALERT

For six months MSF did a minimum of communication on Erkel's kidnapping, then with no sign of life, it decided to increase the pressure on the Russian authorities.

**On 19 August 2002, MSF Switzerland, echoed by the other sections, once more appealed for the release of its Coordinator. On 22 August, it announced the continuing suspension of its activities in the Caucasus.**



*'MSF Demands Unconditional Release of Arjan Erkel - MSF Offices In Dagestan Remain Open, Operations Continue To Be Suspended,' Press release, MSF Switzerland, 19 August 2002 (in English).*

### Extract:

Geneva, August 19, 2002 - Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is very concerned about the fate of Arjan Erkel and demands his unconditional release. MSF continues to suspend relief operations in Dagestan, but its offices in Makhachkala and Khazaviurt remain open. MSF demands the unconditional release of Arjan Erkel, a Dutch national and Head of Mission of the Swiss section of MSF, who was abducted last Monday, August 12th, in Makhachkala. Since then, the organization has received no news from Arjan and is extremely concerned about his fate. MSF offices in Makhachkala and Khazaviurt remain open, however, all field operations in Khazaviurt and Tsumada region are suspended.

MSF had been providing health care to thousands of displaced persons in this area and had also been assisting with housing and sanitation. More than 50,000 Dagestani people were benefiting from improved access to health care through MSF's mobile clinics and the provision of drugs and medical equipment to several medical structures in the Tsumada, Botlikh, Novolak and Khazaviurt districts. The recent kidnapping of Arjan as well as that of Ms. Nina Davydovich demonstrate the risks civilians and relief workers run in this conflict-ridden region.



*'MSF Maintains Suspension of Activities in North Caucasus,' Press release, MSF Switzerland, 22 August 2002 (in English).*

### Extract:

Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has decided to maintain the suspension of its activities in Ingushetia, Chechnya, and Dagestan. The decision to suspend had been taken by MSF following the abduction of Arjan Erkel, MSF's Head of Mission in Dagestan, as well as of Nina Davidovich, Head of Druzhba, a Russian NGO in Chechnya. MSF still has no information regarding Arjan Erkel, Head of Mission in Dagestan, abducted on August 12th in Makhachkala. MSF remains extremely concerned about Arjan's fate and asks for his immediate and unconditional release. MSF operations in Ingushetia, Dagestan, and Chechnya are thus put on hold until further notice. In order to keep contact with the population and follow closely the evolution of the situation, all MSF offices in Makhachkala, Khazaviurt and Nazran remain open. MSF provides health care to thousands of persons through mobile clinics in Ingushetia, Chechnya, and Dagestan, with special attention given to mother and child care. Some programmes are as well dedicated to their improvement of shelter, water and sanitation conditions in the area. Furthermore, MSF provides drugs and medical material to various health structures in Chechnya.

**On 11 September, one month after the kidnapping of Arjan Erkel, MSF repeated that it was still without news of the hostage, but announced that its activities were starting up again in Ingushetia.**



*'Doctors Without Borders Coordinator Remains Missing -Relief Operations Resume in Ingushetia,'* Press release, MSF, 10 September 2002 (in English).

**Extract:**

Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) strongly reiterates its demand for the immediate and unconditional release of Arjan Erkel, Head of Mission in Dagestan, abducted on August 12, 2002, in Makhachkala. MSF once again condemns the kidnapping of humanitarian workers in the Northern Caucasus. However, MSF has decided to resume its activities in Ingushetia. This decision has been taken for the sake of the thousands of civilians in the republic who are in need of assistance after nearly a month of a suspension of activities.

MSF operations in Ingushetia begin again today. MSF distributes essential drugs and medical material to over thirty hospitals and clinics in Ingushetia. General, gynecological, and prenatal consultations are given to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and the local population through clinics and mobile clinics. MSF also runs pediatric consultations in Ingushetia as well as carries out water and sanitation activities in IDP communities, rehabilitates shelters, and distributes relief items. MSF has decided to restart its activities in Ingushetia in order to continue its policy of attending to the humanitarian and medical needs of the IDPs and the civilian population. Activities were suspended in Chechnya following the kidnapping of Nina Davidovich, Head of Druzhba, a Russian non-governmental organization. All of MSF's operations in the Northern Caucasus were suspended after the kidnapping of Arjan Erkel, MSF's Head of Mission in Dagestan.

Activities in Dagestan and Chechnya continue to be suspended. In Chechnya, however, MSF will continue to provide direct life-saving assistance in case of emergencies that include cooperation with surgical and maternity units. In order to monitor developments, MSF offices in Makhachkala, Khazaviurt, and Grozny remain open. MSF will continue to actively seek the immediate and unconditional release of Arjan Erkel, 32, a Dutch national, who is still missing after his abduction by three gunmen in Makhachkala, Dagestan, on August 12, 2002.

**On 20 November, MSF deplored the fact that it still had no news of Arjan Erkel a hundred days after his kidnapping, and demanded his release and that of Nina Davydovitch.**



*'Head of Mission of MSF in Dagestan Remains Missing after 100 days - Efforts by Authorities Fail to Secure Release,'* Press release MSF, 20 November 2002 (in English).

**Extract:**

100 days have passed since Arjan Erkel, Head of Mission of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in Dagestan, a Russian republic neighbouring Chechnya, was abducted by unidentified gunmen in Makhachkala. Despite efforts by the Russian authorities to secure his release, Arjan remains missing. Although 100 days have passed since the abduction of Arjan Erkel on August 12th, MSF and his family still have no information as to his whereabouts or as to why and by whom he was kidnapped. Efforts by the Russian authorities to solve the case have yielded no results so far, leading MSF to be deeply concerned about his fate.

MSF has informed international donor countries to the Northern Caucasus of its concern for Arjan and that of Nina Davydovich, the Head of Druzhba, a Russian NGO, as well as the recent brief kidnapping of two International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) workers, and reminded them that when planning humanitarian aid they should not forget the plight of detained workers as this causes obstacles to the delivery of assistance. Morten Rostrup, the International President of MSF welcomed the release of the two ICRC workers on Sunday. He said: "their speedy release is a positive example of how political pressure can resolve these matters quickly. In this light, MSF urges the Russian authorities to maximize their efforts to secure the safe release of Arjan Erkel."


MSF suspended operations in Chechnya after the abduction on July 27th of Nina Davydovich, and in the Northern Caucasus on August 12th after Arjan's kidnapping. MSF had been providing health care to thousands of displaced Chechens and more than 50,000 Dagestani people were benefiting from improved access to health care through MSF's mobile clinics, and the provision of drugs and medical equipment to several medical structures. On September 12th, MSF decided to resume its activities in Ingushetia. This decision was taken for the sake of the thousands of Chechen displaced persons and Ingush civilians in the republic who were in need of assistance after nearly a month of a suspension of activities. Activities in Dagestan and Chechnya continued to be suspended. In Chechnya, however, MSF continues to provide direct life saving assistance in case of emergencies, which includes cooperation with surgical and maternity units. In order to monitor developments, MSF offices in Makhachkala, Khazaviurt and Grozny remain open. Today, on the 100th day of Arjan's captivity, MSF once again demands from Arjan's and Nina's abductors that they respect their physical and mental integrity and release them unharmed.




*This first thing I did was to hold a press conference in Dagestan. I didn't occur to me for a minute that we shouldn't be communicating on this. I think we*

had to protest noisily at first. We tried giving interviews and issuing press releases, making very basic statements. We talked about immediate release, we asked the authorities to do what they could. We had no idea how things worked. Then, once I'd got it into my head, after my first visit to Dagestan, that the kidnapping was perhaps not a simple act of criminality, I became more hesitant about communication. I wanted to get a clearer idea of what was happening before launching into attacks or demands. So we continued with basic communications.


Thomas Nierle, Head of Emergencies, then Operations Director for MSF Switzerland (2000-2004), (in French) interviewed in 2009.

 We started by issuing a statement on Arjan's disappearance which consisted of saying next to nothing. MSF France's communication director summed it up; he said it was like putting up a little 'missing' poster in the street saying, 'MSF has lost its cat.' So for a very long time, our communication strategy consisted of 'looking for our cat.' There was a nice photo of Arjan with a caption: 'we've lost the poor dear.' It was all very feeble.

Anne Fouchard, Deputy Communication Director, MSF France, (July 2000-July 2004), (in French) interviewed in 2009.

 For three months we were paralysed. Then, I think because there had been no sign of life, people began imagining Arjan was dead. At first we were really frightened of saying anything at all, but that faded after a while. The realisation came when everyone agreed there was no other option.


Steve Cornish, Coordinator MSF France in Georgia (January to April 2000) then in Ingushetia (September 2000 to January 2001), MSF Switzerland Officer in the Russian Federation (August 2002 to April 2004), (in French) interviewed in 2008.

 For six months, we just did what I call 'marketing communication.' We couldn't say anything. There was an operational veto as the trails to Arjan could have gone cold once we started speaking about it in public. But during these first six months, we didn't receive the slightest hint of his whereabouts. We knew things, but we didn't want to use them. Why? At operational level, they were afraid. In

my opinion, I think we took too long to react. We didn't really know what action to take.


Rafa Vila San Juan, MSF International General Secretary (January 2001 to January 2004), in French, interviewed in 2009

**In the field, the heads of mission from the different MSF sections and the international movement's information officer were frustrated by what they considered to be a lack of dynamism on the part of MSF Switzerland. They tried to gather information on Arjan Erkel's situation.**

 We were extremely frustrated from the outset. By 'we,' I mean the heads of mission of MSF France, MSF Holland and MSF Belgium, plus the RIO<sup>29</sup> at the time [Marc]. We set up a sort of alternative cell to discuss how to handle the Arjan business and see whether we could suggest anything to the Swiss that they hadn't thought of themselves. We bypassed procedures. We needed certain meetings, so we organised them. We were uncomfortable with the way MSF Switzerland was doing things.

Gabriel Trujillo, MSF France Coordinator for North Caucasus, January 2002 to July 2003, (in French) interviewed in 2008.

**In the middle of November, an informal international group of MSF managers was set up to provide support and advice to the Swiss section, where internal tensions weighed heavily on the crisis cell. This 'international monitoring committee' was made up of the presidents of MSF International and MSF France, the General Secretary of the International Office, the general directors of MSF Switzerland, MSF Belgium, MSF Holland and MSF USA, and MSF Holland's operations director.**

 There was already tension within MSF Switzerland: the team from the first few months had burnt out. Thomas Linde, the General Director, didn't agree with Thomas Nierle, the Operations Director. The movement decided that because of these internal tensions, we couldn't leave

29. Regional Information Officer in Moscow: in charge of regional information for the MSF international movement.

things entirely up to MSF Switzerland; we had to assume our responsibilities. So we said that MSF should take the initiative on communication, but that strategy should be managed by a committee.

Rafa Vila San Juan, MSF International General Secretary (January 2001 to January 2004), in French, interviewed in 2009

Given the subject, we needed solidarity and solidity internally to be able to communicate externally. But at MSF Switzerland, we no longer had either solidity or solidarity. At MSF Switzerland, everything has always been very much centralised at operations director level. Too much power is given to one person. And in moments of crisis, especially if the crisis goes on for any length of time, this undermines the organisation. When Thomas Linde took up the post of General Director, this was really the first time there had been any power sharing. We did have a system in place for moving forward together, but certain directors didn't get involved, either for personal reasons or because they'd just arrived or were about to leave. Everything started to give way, including me. So we needed to identify some people we could work with. The international monitoring committee was created at the end of 2002 to share information that we couldn't share over the phone or by email. There were discussion meetings to make sure all the sections were on the same wave length, that they understood our thinking and the strategy we were following. This gave us a chance to share information and hear everybody else's ideas. And increasingly, because of the absence of MSF Switzerland's general manager and president, it became a steering committee, a sort of strategic reflection group. But it wasn't a decision-making body, because the decisions couldn't be taken there. There were too many differences of opinion among the participants.

Dr Thomas Nierle, MSF Switzerland, Head of Emergency then Director of Operations 2000-2004, (in French) interviewed in 2009.

MSF Holland doesn't have a policy for every single thing. But basically we had a specific strategy around crisis management, particularly for Chechnya. We contacted the Swiss immediately, we briefed them on what our mode of operations would be in such a case, we offered them support, in terms of people and capacity and we acknowledged that other sections might deal with it in a different way and that the biggest danger that they had was trying to manage different strategies and that they needed to be very clear about what their approach was. If it wasn't ours, that's fine. So I guess you could say our strategy was to advise and offer support. [...] There emerged a group of

international leaders or managers of the MSF sections that were called on a regular basis to establish international policy and to try and agree, and try and keep the whole thing together. And I think we were a very active part of that group, and our strategy was to strongly argue our position in that, and then follow the collective decision.

Austen Davies, MSF Holland Executive Director, 1999 to 2004, (in English) interviewed in 2009.

**At the international monitoring committee's first meeting, the president of the French section strongly criticised his colleagues from the Dutch section for using the services of a British security firm to find Arjan. They replied that they were only using the firm's services for context analysis, training and, above all, to reassure Arjan Erkel's family.**

Jean-Hervé asked a question about a private company employed by MSF Holland. MSF Holland's intentions didn't go any further than a bit of information gathering and training, but he got angry and said: 'I can't accept the fact that we are working with ex-spies.'

Rafa Vila San Juan, MSF International General Secretary (January 2001 to January 2004), in French, interviewed in 2009

They [MSF Holland] had started to use this kind of approach. We told them to stop, not to do it, not to get mixed up with the secret services. We felt it was dangerous, for Arjan, for the teams, for ourselves.

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of Communications (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000-May 2008) (in French) interviewed in 2009.

It's a group of ex-security people, mostly British, and American. MSF Holland had hired them for some analysis. They handled hundreds of kidnappings. So MSF had just asked for a paper, an analysis about kidnapping trends and so on. And MSF Holland had also asked them to do, kind of training in the office. In the end, they weren't very good. They had been hired during my kidnapping, not to do anything, just to come to the office in Holland and talk

about the strategy and to meet my family. Wouter [Kok, Head of MSF Holland Emergency Unit in charge of the relationships with the Erkel family] said that it was good, because it reassured him that they weren't missing anything on the strategy. That was also reassuring for my family. They wanted to know that MSF is not going to put its own interests above the interests of the kidnapping. Because my family's attitude is, 'if you don't hire them, we'll hire them.' And it's much better to keep it centralized.

We didn't ever want them involved in an operational role, but sometimes they were useful in a training role, or a review of strategy, or for the family. And that's what our policy says, we don't use them in an operational sense, but if we need to use them for information or so on it's ok. I don't know why, generally they got very angry at this. It was here in Barcelona, Rafa took me back to the café and we had a big meeting at a round table. It was actually an ex-com and I had come for the Arjan things. Jean-Hervé said, 'I want you to guarantee you will never use this company,' and we said, 'This is our policy, we don't use them operationally, but if we think they're useful, we're going to use them.' And he said, 'No, I want a guarantee you're not going to use them.' We said, 'no.' And he said, 'If you use them, I will declare war on MSF Holland.' We started laughing: 'What does it mean? To declare war one section on another?'

Jean-Hervé had good points on some of the things, he just doesn't know how to project the points. Actually, in many ways, we agreed with him. That's why we never used the guys from CRG in the field, because of the risk of the image. We only used them as background, because they might have information. In the end, if they would have information on a critical thing, we would have used it. We would not put the principle above the utility. And we wanted to show the family that we would not put our principles above the utility of saving a life. And that was very important for the family. I told the Swiss, 'The family does not trust you, you should do something. They want an external expert like this firm offers, hire them.' Just so that they will go to the family and say, 'We have reviewed the MSF strategy and we think it's good.' The family will feel better. They will stop attacking you a little bit. It'll be good for their mental health it'll be good for your mental health. And there's no risk. It'll be a consultancy in Holland. In Geneva, there's no image risk.' But because of this pressure from Jean-Hervé they wouldn't do it. The Swiss were always worried about being criticized in the movement. We said, 'Who cares what the Dutch and the French think, that's not your problem, your problem is running a kidnapping. Your problem is not your image in the movement.'

Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus, (November 1999-January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005), (in English) interviewed in 2009.

**On 10 December, the 'Erkel' crisis cell drew up a communication plan in several stages designed to maintain the pressure on the Russian authorities and made them**

**take steps to ensure Arjan's release. In the weeks that followed, it decided to stress the responsibility of the Russian authorities in helping to secure Arjan's release.**



'Arjan's Solidarity Ad campaign Plan.' Email from Pere-Joan Pons, and Michel Clerc, Erkel Crisis Cell to MSF communication departments, 10 December 2002 (in English).

#### Extract:

Hi all,

Following Arjan's family final approval last Friday, here is the COM plan (December 2002-February 2003) we came up with that aims at maintaining ongoing pressure on Russian Authorities to resolve the case in a positive way and to provide supportive messages that can hopefully reach Arjan. This plan is in connection with and in support of Crisis cell operational action plan for this period. Besides, it's subject to constant review and revision in accordance with changes in ongoing situation.[...] The plan consists of 3 phases which aim at gradually increasing the pressure on the Russian authorities. We will address only the first phase for now.

1. The publication of a short personal letter (with photo) from Arjan's family to Arjan. We plan to publish in three of the most popular Dagestani newspapers and in a couple of Russian papers/regional edition. The letter was sent to Mark Walsh, RIO in Moscow, for translation. Mark is now purchasing space in the Media. The letter will be published during several days in the course of next week (likely 16 and 18 Dec). This action aims at sending a supportive message to Arjan (hoping his abductors will give him the article) and also to give Arjan a human face to the public opinion in Dagestan. Not for publication elsewhere than in Dagestan.
2. Before Christmas, we will also launch a 'Solidarity Ad Campaign' in some newspapers/magazines internationally with the support of MSF section countries. It will be a short message with photo to remind the public opinion that Arjan is still being held hostage and to contribute, indirectly, to the diplomatic pressure that MSF currently applies on Russian authorities through donor countries. The scope of the action is to increase pressure on the main donor actors following the recent contacts MSF has established in several countries and institutions. To implement all at the same time the 'Solidarity Ad Campaign,' we ask you from today to Friday to purchase Media space in a national daily newspaper (the most significant one + odd page if possible + 1/4 page maximum, on the International/Politics pages if possible) in order to publish the AD by the 17th or 18th December. [...]
3. We want to reinforce our press contact with journalists who understand the need not to speculate on Arjan's case but rather be supportive at the time when reporting will be needed.
4. Mark in Moscow will enhance more institutional communication on MSF in Russia based on our presence and projects in other places than in North Caucasus.



5. Arjan's family is writing and sending a private letter to Putin.

**On 10 January, Nina Davydovitch, the Director of Druzba who was kidnapped a few days before Arjan, was freed. In a press release, MSF expresses its delight and repeats its demand for the immediate release of Arjan Erkel.**



*'MSF Welcomes the Release of Nina Davydovitch - Head of MSF Mission in Dagestan Remains Missing - MSF Demands his Immediate Release,' MSF Press release, 10 January 2003 (in English).*

**Extract:**

MSF welcomes the release of Nina Davydovich, the head of Druzha, a Russian NGO, after 168 days of captivity. MSF wishes her the strength to make a speedy recovery from her ordeal and hopes that she will be reunited with her friends and family as soon as possible. Shortly after Nina was kidnapped on July 23rd, Arjan Erkel, the Head of Mission for MSF in Dagestan was abducted by unidentified gunmen in Makhachkala. Arjan is 32 years old and has been a volunteer with MSF for more than 6 years. He started working in Dagestan in April 2002. After nearly five months, efforts by the authorities to solve the case have yielded no information as to Arjan's whereabouts or his state of health. Nina's release gives MSF and Arjan's family the hope that Arjan may also be released soon. In this light, MSF insists the authorities do everything in their power to obtain his safe release. MSF demands from Arjan's abductors that they respect his physical and mental integrity and release him unharmed. Since Arjan's kidnapping, MSF's activities in Dagestan and Chechnya continue to be suspended. In Chechnya, however, MSF continues to provide direct life saving assistance in case of emergencies, which include cooperation with surgical and maternity units. MSF continues to provide assistance to the Internally Displaced in Ingushetia.

**On 13 January, the Erkel Crisis Cell launched the second phase in its communication strategy, intended, among other things, to draw attention to the fact that the Russian authorities were capable of helping secure Arjan's release. However, on 29 January, in a meeting with the Dutch foreign minister and MSF, the Erkel family asked that no public criticism be made of the Russian authorities so as not to make Arjan's situation worse.**



*'Implementing Phase 2- Rough draft,' Michel Clerc, Pere Joan Pons, MSF Switzerland Erkel Crisis Cell, 13 January 2003 (in English).*

**Extract:**

- 2- Targets :
  - Russian authorities (in Moscow and in Makhachkala): political, judiciary and investigation bodies
  - Russian representations worldwide (or at least in countries where MSF has an office)
  - Donor community, in fact major countries or international org. that we have been/still are lobbying in order to put pressure on Russian authorities (UN, UE, NL, CH, F, D, UK, US)
  - International media
  - Public opinion in Russia, Holland (and Switzerland...)
  - International public opinion

3- Message for phase 2:

**To Russian authorities:**  
MSF believes that Russian authorities have the capacity to work towards Arjan's liberation. Nina Davydovich release is the proof that it takes a strong involvement of Russian authorities to resolve such a case. MSF does not accept that after 6 (?) months of investigations by Russian authorities, the latter have produced no concrete results. Consequently MSF requests that (more) appropriate means be indeed committed by Russian authorities in order to set Arjan free immediately.

**To Donor countries:**

Lack of security for humanitarian workers in North Caucasus region is an obstacle to distribution of aid from donor countries. Arjan's case is not the only one where a hum. worker was abducted. As a consequence, assistance cannot be properly delivered and reaching the most needy. Donor countries, when channelling aid to the region, must request from Russian authorities that humanitarian workers who are delivering the aid be respected (and not targeted). Donor countries must request from relevant authorities that Arjan (and other hum. workers??) be freed immediately. The situation prevailing in this region of the Russian Federation is absolutely unacceptable.

4-Implementation :

- By :
  - MSF network
  - Family Erkel
  - General public
- Actions :
  - editorial work in worldwide papers and media work
  - press conference, press release
  - petition by msf staff at large (10,000 ??) and by supporters from solidarity ad campaign (more than 5,000) addressed to Russian Authorities
  - demonstration in front of Russian embassies at least in 17 countries where MSF section and at UN
- Where:
  - 1-in Russia,
  - 2-in Holland
  - 3-in countries with an MSF section
  - 4-at UN places



**Minutes** of Arjan Erkel meeting, BUZA (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) Office, The Hague (The Netherlands), 29 January 2003 (in English).

**Extract:**

Till that moment, the family wants to state explicitly the following points:

- 1. No other press contacts than the ones accompanying the diplomatic and other efforts, without prior consultation.
- 2. No accusatory tone versus Russian Authorities; in family's opinion, this could work against the case.
- 3. Family claims the right to initiate its own press contacts if so desired, without prior consultation.
- 4. MSF is invited to initiate, in cooperation with other NGO's, a worldwide public debate on the safety and security of humanitarian workers in general.

**After a meeting at the Dutch embassy in Moscow, MSF Holland's Coordinator expressed doubts about the Dutch government's commitment to demanding that the Russian government do its utmost to help secure the release of Arjan Erkel.**



*'Discussion with Michiel, MSF-H,'* Email from Marc Joly, Communications Director, MSF Switzerland to Thomas Nierle, Operations Director, MSF Switzerland and the Dagestan crisis cell, 27th January 2003 (in French).

- Ref. cocktail at D[utch] embassy: Michiel's analysis is clear. The D. are not even willing to breach protocol for Arjan (someone from MSF wanted to speak to the queen's sister). What's more, the ambassador made a speech for the occasion in which he announced that 2002 had been a very good year for Dutch-Russian relations, and didn't even mention Arjan's abduction! Michiel is very critical of the Dutch gvt and thinks it doesn't want to jeopardise its trade relations, not for Arjan, not for the OSCE, and not for Chechnya. For him, there's no doubt that we need to keep up the pressure on the D. as it's the only way of getting them to move their a.... He also thinks that the elections were a missed occasion for influencing the D. political parties via the media/public opinion. But as the government is to be formed in the coming months there's still time to put pressure on people directly (i.e. Foreign Affairs minister) if they want to keep their post.



*The Dutch had economic interests in the Caucasus (BP, Shell, etc.) and were defending them at the time. Austen [Davies, General Director of MSF Holland] came back from his first meeting with the Dutch foreign minister convinced they would never confuse Dutch economic interests*

*with the Arjan problem. So we took this as a clear sign that we would have to do battle with the Dutch government, but without making it obvious. We decided we'd have to slant our communications in such a way as to show the kidnapping was political. If it had been criminal, we'd have seen it. We found it totally unacceptable that the Dutch foreign affairs minister didn't question the Russian foreign affairs minister about what he intended to do.*

Rafa Vila San Juan, MSF International General Secretary (January 2001 to January 2004), in French, interviewed in 2009

**On 19 January, in a letter to Morten Rostrup, President of MSF International, the Dutch foreign affairs minister expressed surprise at remarks allegedly made by the president of MSF France to the French foreign affairs minister, suggesting that Russian intelligence services were involved in the abduction of Arjan Erkel and deploring the Dutch authorities' lack of commitment to resolving the situation.**

**On 5 February, Morten replied that what the president of MSF France had meant by his remarks was that MSF needed assurance that all competent parties were actively involved in trying to find Arjan, including the Russian security services. He repeated MSF's desire to collaborate effectively with the Dutch authorities.**



**Letter** from Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Dr Morten Rostrup, President of MSF International, 29 January 2002 (in English).

**Extract:**

I understand that the President of MSF France recently went to see my French colleague, Dominique de Villepin, to enlist the help of the French authorities in the search for the Dutch national, Arjan Erkel, who was abducted in Dagestan in August 2002. It goes without saying that any assistance in solving this complicated and painful abduction case is most welcome. I would have preferred, however, for MSF to have coordinated with my ministry before submitting its request to the French authorities, since a joint approach might have proved more effective. During the meeting with Mr de Villepin, MSF apparently expressed the belief that the Russian intelligence services were involved in Arjan Erkel's abduction. We, for our part, have no firm or specific information that points unambiguously in this direction. Irrespective of whether this is the case; we feel that it is unhelpful to make such explicit allegations. By making direct accusations against the Russian authorities, we run the serious risk that they will refuse to cooperate any further in the search for Arjan. It is our strong belief that, without the active support of the Russian authorities, it will be far more difficult to trace Arjan and bring him back safely and in good health.

I am also concerned that the President of MSF France told Dominique de Villepin that the Dutch authorities do not appear to be taking much action to secure the liberation of Arjan Erkel. I disagree. The Dutch Prime Minister, myself, our Ambassador in Moscow and many others have persistently brought up the matter with the Russian authorities, at both central and regional level. In my view, close and constructive cooperation between the Dutch authorities and MSF is the best way of bringing about the rapid liberation of Arjan Erkel. Our two organizations should therefore stick to the arrangements that were made on the matter in September 2002.



**Letter** from Dr Morten Rostrup, President of MSF International to Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, 5 February 2002 (in English).

#### Extract:

Thank you for your letter of 19 January which has retained all my attention. Let me assure you that Médecins sans Frontières values, and gives high priority to the cooperation with your Ministry on the difficult and painful case of Arjan Erkel. I appreciate the frankness of your letter, and would be glad to meet you, at your earliest convenience, in order to explore with you how our relations could be improved should there be any problems.

As you have noticed, from the end of last November on, we have intensified our contacts with international organisations and governments in order to highlight the fact that the case of Arjan Erkel remains unresolved. We informed your Ministry about this initiative, directly in The Hague as well as through your embassy in Moscow and your Permanent Representative in New York.

Our international-contacts included the EU Commissioner on Foreign Policy and Security, the UN Secretary General and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, as well as high level foreign affairs officials in - amongst others - France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, the UK and the US. It goes without saying that we concurrently maintained contacts with the Russian authorities, both at a federal and regional level, and at a diplomatic level such as with the Russian Representative to the UN in New York.

Consistently we requested support in reminding the authorities of the Russian Federation of the need to mobilize additional means to bring about a solution. There are first indications that, in the meantime, the higher authorities in Moscow have taken up the signs, and are responding positively. It is, of course, in this sense that the President of Médecins sans Frontières France talked to Mr. de Villepin: We need to make sure that all competent parties, including the Russian security apparatus, are active in seeking ways of obtaining Arjan Erkel's release. Russian authorities at the highest level must be seized upon, for this case goes beyond a simple criminal or consular affair as was sometimes suggested.

As regards the action of the Dutch Government to secure the liberation of Arjan Erkel, I am well aware that Dutch authorities have persistently used their bilateral channels

to bring up the matter with the Russian authorities. I am confident that the additional attention which the matter received during the last weeks in a multilateral context will strengthen our action and enable us to reach our common objective.

**On 16 and 31 January, the European Parliament and afterwards, the President of the European Union, called on the Russian authorities to do everything in their power to secure the release of Arjan Erkel. MSF expressed its satisfaction in two press releases.**



*'The European Parliament Urges Russia to do Everything in its Power for Arjan's Safe Return,'* Press release, MSF, 26 January 2003 (in French).

The European parliament has raised the question of Arjan Erkel, the MSF volunteer abducted on 12th June 2002 in Dagestan, a Russian republic on the border with Chechnya. European members of parliament have also urged the Russian government to make all possible efforts to secure Arjan's release. In its plenary session of 16th January, the European Parliament passed a resolution demanding that, "the Russian government take all action necessary to ensure the rapid release of Arjan Erkel, an MSF aid worker still held captive in the region".

Arjan Erkel was abducted in Makhachkala, the capital of Dagestan, by unidentified gunmen and five months later, the authorities investigating the incident have still not produced any information on his whereabouts or state of health. During the debate that preceded the resolution, Arie Oostlander, a Dutch member of the European Parliament, declared that, "Mr Erkel, who was Head of Mission for MSF in Dagestan, is still being held captive. We do not know who is holding him. There has been no ransom demand. I have put questions to the Commission and the Council on this subject. Colleagues from other parties fully agree with and support my action. We ask the Commission to do whatever is necessary to discover what has happened to Arjan Erkel and to investigate why he is still being held captive." Fodé Sylla, French member of the European Parliament, declared that, "Holding an aid worker captive is absolutely scandalous." MSF urges Arjan's captors to show consideration for his physical and mental well-being and release him unharmed.



*'MSF Welcomes European Union Call for Release of Kidnapped Aid Worker,'* Press release, MSF, 5 February 2003 (in English).

Moscow, February 5, 2003 - Doctors Without Borders/ Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) welcomed the recent declaration by the European Union (EU) calling for the

release of Arjan Erkel, head of mission for MSF's medical relief programs in Dagestan, who remains missing after nearly six months. MSF welcomes the public statement made on January 31 in Brussels by the Presidency of the EU calling for the "immediate and safe release" of Arjan Erkel kidnapped in Dagestan, a republic of the Russian Federation bordering Chechnya.

In its public statement, the EU and its acceding and associated countries along with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) declared that, "the kidnapping of aid workers can only aggravate the situation in the Northern Caucasus and worsen the humanitarian conditions." In light of this, MSF once again urges the Russian and Dagestani authorities to do everything in their power to bring about Arjan's safe release and reunification with his family.

Arjan Erkel was abducted by gunmen in Makhachkala, the capital of Dagestan on August 12, 2002. Arjan is 32 years old and has been a volunteer with MSF for more than 6 years. Since Arjan's kidnapping, MSF's activities in Dagestan have been suspended. MSF continues to provide emergency life saving surgical and maternity assistance in Chechnya, and delivers humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons in Ingushetia.

**At the beginning of February, MSF Belgium issued a press release about the information campaign launched by the Duma (Russian parliament) aimed at Moscow's homeless.**



*'The Duma Launches an Information Campaign for Moscow's Homeless,'* Press release, MSF Belgium, 3 February 2003 (in French).

The Duma has ordered the production and distribution of posters aimed at the 100,000 homeless people living in the streets of Moscow. The city of Moscow hopes this action will encourage them to prepare themselves for the harsh winter weather. MSF, which is campaigning for better medical and social assistance for the homeless, has welcomed this initiative. "These measures prove that the Russian authorities have not turned a deaf ear to our pleas and have in fact decided to help those Muscovites living on the fringes of society in the streets of the capital," declared Alexey Nikiforov, Coordinator of MSF's programme in Moscow. The posters being put up in the capital's streets, squares and underground stations by the social protection services give the address of eight reception centres where the homeless can find shelter, food, and medical care. Given the large number of victims, urgent action was needed. Every winter, four people a day freeze to death in the streets of Moscow. This year, the harsh conditions have already killed more than 330 people. MSF had previously addressed a letter to Moscow Town Hall urging it to show more concern for the city's homeless. Since this initiative, night shelters have been opened for anyone seeking shelter and protection.

In the ten years MSF has been running this project, it has

provided medical and social assistance to over 70,000 people. A quarter of Moscow's homeless are in fact former convicts and the Russian authorities do very little to help them find their way back into society.

**On 10 February, Vladimir Putin was received by the President of the French Republic and the French daily, *Le Figaro*, published an interview with the president of MSF's French section describing the Russian Caucasus as a "Bermuda triangle" in which people disappear. While admitting he had no tangible evidence of who was responsible for the abduction of Arjan Erkel, he denounced the lack of results on the part of the Russian investigators.**



*'Putin's Russia is a Bermuda Triangle,'* Interview by Laure Mandeville, *Le Figaro* (France), 10 February 2003 (in French).

**Extract:**

The president of Médecins sans Frontières describes the difficulties encountered by aid organisations working in Chechnya.

Le Figaro: Your organisation is still on the front line in the Caucasus. What do you think of the fact that Chechnya is no longer a diplomatic priority in the West?

Jean-Hervé Bradol: It's worrying, but we're used to it. Since the conflict started up again three years ago, there has never been any strong international pressure to control the violence inflicted on the civilian population. And the uncontrolled nature of the violence is particularly dangerous for international aid organisations. For Médecins sans Frontières, it has resulted in four abductions since 1996 and there has been a series of attacks on our offices. We have no news of our Dutch Head of Mission to Dagestan, Arjan Erkel, who disappeared without trace on 12th August in Makhachkala. We don't even know if he's still alive. The investigators have come up with nothing. It is clear that the Russian government is not assuming its responsibility as a constituted state with an obligation to ensure security within its borders. The fact that nationals and foreigners can disappear in such large numbers and so mysteriously in a member state of the Security Council is totally aberrant! The Russian Caucasus has become a Bermuda Triangle and its President is President Vladimir Putin. That this causes so little upset in diplomatic relations can be interpreted as a form of passivity. We are waiting to see a diplomatic upsurge, an upsurge in collective dignity

Le Figaro: In whose interest is it to discourage aid organisations from working in the Caucasus?

Jean-Hervé Bradol: We've got all kinds of ideas on Arjan's abduction, ranging from an interpersonal conflict to a crime for financial gain to a politically motivated act. In the eight years we've been working in the Caucasus, we've been hit by purely criminal groups, groups of separatist

resistance fighters, but also by groups from the Russian secret service. In the case of Arjan, there's total confusion – there's nothing to indicate who is really behind it. This is why we are appealing to Mr Putin, currently on a visit here in Paris. The matter has already been referred to the United Nations and the European Union, as well as to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Le Figaro: MSF hasn't communicated as much as usual on this situation. Why is that?

Jean-Hervé Bradol: It's due to fear. Doing aid work in Chechnya has never been a stroll in the park, but we are increasingly frightened. Frightened to work in the field and get abducted. Frightened to say anything about the conflict as the belligerents are ultra violent and a wrong word can be fatal when there's a team-mate missing. We can't say there's been much progress in terms of freedom of speech on Russian politics over recent years! The Russian journalists say so themselves, and the abduction of the journalist Andrei Babitski in 2000 just went to show that violence against those who speak up can even come from the Russian security forces, supposedly there to maintain law and order. Journalists, relief workers, diplomats, civilians, everybody is frightened.

Le Figaro: In spite of the hostage-taking incident at the Dubrovka, western diplomats are saying that Putin's Russia is stabilising...

Jean-Hervé Bradol: I'm no expert, but I see this political stabilisation argument as an excuse used by all our western interlocutors to justify doing nothing about the repression of Chechen civilians. The Russians are even talking seriously about democratic elections in the republic, but how can you reconcile this with the climate of total insecurity and war that I've been telling you about? It's the Coué<sup>30</sup> method applied to politics!

## PRESS CONFERENCE AND PETITION FOR ARJAN ERKEL'S RELEASE

**On 12 February, six months after the abduction, Morten Rostrup, President of the MSF International movement, together with the father and the brother of Arjan Erkel, and the Dutch ambassador to Russia gave a joint press conference in Moscow. Arjan's family and the representatives of the Dutch embassy present the kidnapping as a purely criminal act. The representatives of MSF, on the other hand, highlight the political dimension and a lack of results on the part of Russian and Dagestani authorities. The Russian press echoes these statements.**

30. Emile Coué was a French psychotherapist who believed in the powers of autosuggestions and routine repetition as a means of altering states of the unconscious to affect problems in the conscious.



*'Arjan Erkel, Abducted Six Months ago in Dagestan, Still Missing: MSF Calls on the Russians and Dagestani Governments to Give High Political Priority to the Case.'* **Press release**, MSF Moscow/Geneva, 12 February 2003 (in English).

### Extract:

Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) International President, Dr Morten Rostrup, announced at a press conference today in Moscow that the absence of contact from Arjan Erkel's abductors, six months after his abduction, leads MSF to believe that the non-resolution of this kidnapping may have a political dimension. Despite the efforts of the Russian and Dagestani law enforcement agencies over the past six months, Arjan is still missing and MSF doesn't even know if he is alive.

Arjan Erkel, Head of Mission of MSF in the Northern Caucasus, was abducted by three unidentified gunmen on August 12, 2002, in Makhachkala, capital of the Federal Republic of Dagestan. MSF demands that President Putin and the Chairman of the Dagestani State Council, Mr Magomedov, do not treat Arjan's investigation as just any criminal case. "It is imperative that the Russian and Dagestani governments live up to their obvious responsibility to solve this case: That means treating it with the gravity it deserves. The Russian authorities have proven in the recent past that they can successfully solve such cases," said Dr Rostrup.

The investigations carried out in Dagestan, under the supervision of the Federal authorities, have yielded no significant results. The Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation, the Prosecutor of the Republic of Dagestan and the security services have so far not provided MSF with any information on why and by whom Arjan was abducted. Today, exactly six months after Arjan was abducted, MSF launches a worldwide petition to address our message to President Putin and to the Chairman of the Dagestani State Council, Mr Magomedov.



*'Press conference Arjan,'* 12 February 2003 (in English).

### Extract:

Participants: Erkel family, Morten Rostrup, Bruno Lab [programme manager MSF Switzerland], Embassy of Holland

#### A. Main messages delivered from MSF to Media during press conference:

1. The abduction took place in a Republic of the Russian Federation, in the capital of Dagestan. Therefore, the Russian Federation is responsible of the resolution of the case of Arjan Erkel.

2. MSF takes the opportunity to appeal directly to president Putin: Do whatever is in your power to resolve the case and secure a safe release of Arjan.

B. Transcription of message delivered from Morten Rostrup: MSF shows deepest sympathy for family and expresses that is an unbearable situation. It is difficult for us to understand the situation. Arjan is our colleague, our friend. An he was abducted six months ago. We are a medical humanitarian

organization. We are totally focused on the situation of Arjan to influence his release.

We are receiving support from other organizations. Tomorrow the humanitarian agencies working in the region, in the Caucasus, will celebrate a day of action in solidarity to Arjan. But today, after six months of abduction, the only fact is that we do not have any facts, despite the investigation. We do not even know whether Arjan is alive. After six months, MSF is led to believe that the resolution of the case has a political dimension. And investigators have also told this to MSF. The case of Arjan is not just a simple criminal case. It goes beyond that. [...]

Moreover, we strongly believe that more political engagement is needed and other kidnapping have been solved with political engagement. Today, MSF launches a worldwide petition appeal addressed to the highest political authorities to do all within their power to resolve the case of Arjan. And I take this opportunity to do a direct appeal to President Putin to do all within his power to resolve the case and secure the safe release of Arjan Erkel.

Thank you.

#### C. Questions from journalists during press conference:

Russian Radio to MSF: Who is behind that case?

(MSF): Political element to be addressed, but it is impossible to speculate.

(Same journalist) Did you define the ransom for the liberation of Arjan?

No contacts, no facts, means no information.

(Russian journalist to all, but especially to Dutch embassy) Concerning Human Rights... When will OSCE be in Chechnya again?

(Embassy): Dutch Ministers met with Ivanov and must likely a fact finding mission will take place, but let's focus on the safe release of Arjan.

Radio Freedom to MSF: Other cases of kidnapping. We were talking about other cases. What is the fate of these cases?

(MSF): We refer to recent cases of kidnapping, the two ICRC guys and Nina Davydovich. It shows that when there is a sufficient political will, there is a possible release. In the case of ND, it took time.

Same journalist: What kind of investigation you refer to?

(MSF): We met with many officials including Prosecutor Office, in Dagestan and in Russia, at Federal level. Clearly, no results today.

Reuters to MSF/Talking about political will, can you elaborate?

(MSF): Until now only criminal investigation took place. It has yielded no results. We have asked to meet with high political officials but not yet took place. Responsibility of the resolution of the case is within the Federal government

Foreign journalist to MSF/Elaborate more on the political aspect?

(MSF): To enter into details maybe only speculations. To resolve the case it is needed to be looked from a political point of view. This was confirmed by the investigators themselves in our meeting.

From Dutch (NRC/Andelsblad): Political aspect means that Russian authorities are willing to put pressure on MSF

(MSF): The response of MSF is that this is too speculative and specific.

Journalist to Erkel family: You said that you kept a low profile on Arjan's case. When did the investigations started and when did you address the case?

(Family): Right after the kidnapping we asked MSF and BUZA to start investigations.

(MSF): We were told that 3 months intensive investigation started the same night of the kidnapping. MSF suspended the activities but kept the team in MAK to continue contacts with authorities.

Same journalist to MSF: When you started the program in Dagestan, were you aware of the risks for your workers?

(MSF): After many years working in NC, MSF is aware of the security condition. MSF works in many countries in which there are confronted to security problems. Those areas are places where civilians suffer a lot and where MSF is very needed. In Dagestan, we thought the risks were not so high in comparison to the needs of the people.

Journalist to MSF: Are the Russian authorities themselves behind the kidnapping. Your political mention is very vague....

(MSF): It a strange way to put the question. Answer to it would be very speculative. What we mean that other elements, not just criminal, should be taken into account. Russian journalist Interfax Dagestan to MSF/Family: Do you insist for immediate release or are you ready to negotiate ransom?

(Family): We are a simple family with four children. We have not the money to pay any ransom. I can send my other son...

(MSF): Our policy is not to pay ransom. In previous kidnappings cases, we never paid ransom. Besides, we find unacceptable to ask for a ransom after kidnapping of an aid worker who gives his life to help people.

US Embassy in Moscow to MSF: Did you see any negative attention from officials as a result of MSF activities? Is the situation worsening in the Northern Caucasus?

(MSF): Non specific pressure has been put on us, but the situation for humanitarian workers in the region is pretty difficult. There is a comment feeling of fear and obviously it is not possible to operate in a normal way. It is frightening that people can disappear just like it happened to Arjan.

Dutch journalist from NRC/Andelsblad to MSF: Is MSF ready to offer some kind of reward for information? It has not been discussed so far, but any alternative will be considered. But it is clear to us that the Russian authorities have to resolve the case.

Final statement from father to journalists:

Stay with us for the next time. We cannot do this alone to get him back alive.



*'Doctors Ask President Putin to Find their Colleague,'* by Yuliya Govorun, **Stolichnaya Vecherniyaya Gazeta** (Russia), 13 February 2003 (translated from Russian into English by MSF).

#### Extract:

President of Medecins Sans Frontières, Morten Rostrup, is of the opinion that Arjan Erkel was kidnapped, [as part of]

a political case, not criminal as was thought before. "There is no doubt that possibility of the release of Arjan Erkel depends on Russian authorities. As not a single fact casting light on the matter became known during past 6 months, it seems to us that there is certain political context underlying criminal case in question, however I cannot announce who is behind it."

Bruno Lab, who had been investigating this kidnapping, announced that Médecins Sans Frontières organization held meetings with many prosecution offices and governmental officials at different levels, "but [these] meetings did not bring any tangible results. We were provided with the information on the investigation process, but nothing can be ruled out." Mirzabala Mirzabalaev, the Head of Investigation Unit of [the] Makhachkala Prosecution Office, hopes that Arjan Erkel's case "would not turn into an endless one." According to Mr Mirzabalaev, [the] investigation is being hampered by the fact no demands are forwarded by the criminals. "Why are kidnappers keeping that sustained silence for so long? I cannot make that out," [he] asked himself as he was interviewed by Stolochnaya newspaper. [...]

[The] General Prosecutor Press Office Deputy Head, Natalya Vishnyakova, reported that General Prosecution office will not handle that case, saying "It is always sad when human life is concerned, but that does not mean all cases of the sort have to be handled from Moscow. They are numerous. And in Dagestan they will definitely handle the case." Arjan Erkel's father is communicating with [the] Prosecution office in Dagestan on a regular basis to monitor investigation progress. At the press conference yesterday, while looking [to his] second son Diderick, brother of Arjan, he said that his second son is ready to go in exchange for his brother.



*'The Prosecutors Keep Silent,'* by Anna Politkovskaïa, *Novaïa Gazeta* (Russia), 13-16 February 2003 (translated from Russian into English by MSF).

#### Extract:

A 32-year old Dutchman Arjan Erkel, a staff of the humanitarian organization Doctors without Borders in Dagestan, was kidnapped in Makhachkala half a year ago. Not a sound [has been] heard about him since then. Neither from the kidnappers, nor from the authorities. We know absolutely nothing about where Arjan is and who kidnapped him. We hope that our arrival is a signal for them to [get] in touch at last, - said Dick Erkel, father of Arjan, who arrived in Moscow together with Arjan's 28-year old junior brother to have meetings with the officials involved into this tragedy. Arjan Erkel, [the] MSF-Swiss coordinator, went missing on 12 August 2002 in Makhachkala. Since then, the life of his parents, Dick and Fransann, turned into a hell. 24 hours, day and night, either his mother or his father are on standby at their telephone at home - in a small Dutch village Vestdorp in the South of the country, not far from the border with the Belgium and France. What if the signal comes? That's why Fransann did not come to Russia, someone has to stay by the phone.

Over the past half a year the investigation did not yield

any concrete result the investigation conducted by the Dagestani Prosecutor's Office under the control of the Prosecutor General's Office. "I can't understand it, that no results were obtained whatsoever..." says Morten Rostrup, General President of this famous international organization, who is also in Moscow these days due to Arjan's case. No results [surfaced], even after Erkel's parents sent a letter to President Putin last December via the Russian Embassy in The Hague [...]. As Bruno Lab, Head of MSF Crisis Cell in Geneva, specifies, "concrete results in their understanding is the information on whether Arjan is alive or not..." A tradition with MSF is that they don't employ armed guards in 'hot spots' and don't pay ransom, regarding this as a guarantee for future kidnappings.



*Morten's press conference marked the start of a much more political phase in our communication strategy, and caused considerable tension inside the organisation. After six months without news, we were beginning to understand that the Russian government wasn't at all put out by this kidnapping. We couldn't carry on like that. That's when the communication strategy split. Two ideas emerged. The idea that we should continue being very diplomatic with the Russian government, and the idea that, whoever the kidnappers [were], the Russian government had a responsibility, and more to the point, the ability to get him released, and so that's where we should apply pressure. This is where the big divide between MSF Holland and the rest of the movement occurred. My opinion is that communication doesn't kill. It makes people face up to their responsibilities.*

Rafa Vila San Juan, MSF International General Secretary (January 2001 to January 2004), in French, interviewed in 2009



*At MSF France, we'd thought it was the Russians right from the beginning. Rafa and Morten thought so, and so did New York. At that time, the Belgians were keeping their distance. The real intersection discussion was between the Dutch, the Swiss, us, and the international office. On the Swiss side, Thomas Nierle [Operations Director for MSF Switzerland] and Thomas Linde [MSF Switzerland's General Director] were pretty much convinced it was the Russians. As for our Dutch counterparts, I don't know what each of them thought personally. Kenny Gluck thought the same way we did. But for institutional reasons, MSF Holland couldn't adopt this position. They refused to draw the same conclusion as the majority of us.*

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of Communications (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000-May 2008), (in French) interviewed in 2009.

At the beginning of March, the MSF Switzerland team in Moscow received Arjan's mobile phone bill. The numbers called since the date of his abduction were followed up by the official investigators. At the end of April, MSF Switzerland's representative in Moscow, Steve Cornish, learned from the deputy prosecutor of the Russian Federation that at the time of his abduction, Arjan was being tailed by FSB agents who were eye-witnesses to his kidnapping. At the end of May, he discovered that the investigation into Arjan's abduction had been closed in November 2002. Although Steve had been in regular contact with the Dagestani authorities, they had neglected to inform him.



**Narrative Chronology** AE Case Period 2002 - April 2004, MSF Switzerland Cell Crisis, 2004 (in English).

#### Extract:

Early March: MSF-CH office in Moscow receives the telephone [bill] of AE's cell phone. It shows that the telephone had been used during the first two weeks of February. After some searches, [...] in Makhachkala it appears that some of the numbers belong to:

- The FSB Major General K [...] from the B [...] garrison
- An MVD [Ministry of Interior] officer
- The son of the Prime Minister of Dagestan [...],
- I, a former hostage, now working as Deputy Director of Education of Makhachkala University
- D [...] an oil company controlled by G (Dagestani parliamentarian at the State Duma in Moscow)
- AE's neighbor from the MSF flat in Makhachkala
- Some phone calls were also made from Rostov on Don? to Chechen people.



*We received Arjan's mobile phone bill in the post. This didn't fill us with confidence. We felt the authorities didn't give a damn about our affair. What's more, at about the same time, at the beginning of 2003, we discovered that Arjan was being followed by local FSB agents at the time of his kidnapping, who told us, "We were following him, we saw what happened, but our agents couldn't intervene when he was kidnapped... Steve got in touch with the prosecutor and discovered the file was being closed. The region's prosecutor had dropped it at the end of 2002 because he didn't see any point in keeping it open.*

*We thought something wasn't right, and started changing our minds about what might be behind all this. Locally in Dagestan, we had really frequent contacts with the administration. Steve went to see them once a month. We'd set up quite a system for getting information and making sure the authorities were doing what they should. Locally, they were reassuring us that they were, whereas in fact the general prosecutor for the*

*North Caucasus region was busy closing the file. That really made us angry.*

Dr Thomas Nierle, MSF Switzerland, Head of Emergencies, then Director of Operations 2000-2004, (in French) interviewed in 2009.

On 7 March, on Arjan Erkel's birthday, MSF launched an international petition demanding that Vladimir Putin and Mr Magomedov, the President of the Dagestani Council of State, do everything in their power to secure the hostage's release. At the request of the Dutch Foreign Affairs minister, the launch of this petition, originally scheduled for the joint press conference on 12 February, was postponed for fear that it might be perceived as being overly aggressive towards the Russian authorities.



**Letter** from Willem Andrae, Director Consular Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Netherlands to Austen Davies and Thomas Linde MSF Holland and MSF Switzerland Executive Directors, Steve Cornish Representative MSF in Moscow, 10 February 2003 (in English).

#### Extract:

As clearly explained during the aforementioned meeting, the Ministry does not support the launching of a petition on 12 February during the family's press conference in Moscow. The launch would distract attention from the human message of the distress of the family. I wish to underline as well that during the meeting on 7 February, the representatives of the Ministry explicitly stated disagreement with the petition's text as included in the MSF-Communications Plan Phase II, because of its partial and accusatory tone, which may prove counterproductive.



*'Birthday of Arjan, a MSF Volunteer who has been Held Hostage for Seven Months in the Caucasus, Marked by an International Appeal for his Release: Russian Authorities not Facing up to their Responsibilities.'* MSF **press release**, 7 March 2003 (in French).

One month after MSF's press conference in Moscow calling on the Russian and Dagestani authorities to do everything in their power to secure Arjan Erkel's release, the evidence is that these authorities are not showing the slightest willingness to resolve this matter. Seven months after Arjan's kidnapping, the Russian federal authorities in charge of the investigation in Dagestan are still unable to provide the slightest piece of information about the reasons for his abduction, or who the perpetrators might be, or on how to make any progress in this affair. Moreover, MSF's requests



for a meeting with the office of the President have so far been rejected.

Arjan Erkel, Médecins Sans Frontières' Head of Mission in the North Caucasus, was kidnapped by three unidentified men on 12 August last in the streets of Makhachkala, the capital of Dagestan, a republic bordering Chechnya. "The lack of any progress whatsoever amounts to obstruction. To date, the Russian authorities have not shown the political will required to resolve this matter. We therefore call on them to secure Arjan's immediate release and to accept their responsibility for guaranteeing the security of civilians and humanitarian workers on their territory," said Dr Morten Rostrup, MSF's International President.

On Monday 10 March, on the occasion of Arjan's 33<sup>rd</sup> birthday, the MSF movement throughout the world invites people to sign a petition calling on President Putin and Mr Magomedov, the President of the Dagestani Council of State, to do everything in their power to secure Arjan's immediate release. To date, over 150,000 people in Switzerland and throughout the world have signed this petition. It will be handed over to the Russian and Dagestani authorities in the coming days.

**In late March the federal authorities announced that over 80% of Chechens had participated in the referendum to adopt a new constitution bringing their country back into the fold of the Russian Federation. In the opinion of many observers, the referendum had been rigged. Pointing to the recently launched United States offensive in Iraq, Russian authorities used the referendum to portray themselves as pacifists and to claim that a process of political settlement was under way in Chechnya.**



*'Vladimir Putin, Chechnya and the War in Iraq,'* Natalie Nougayrède, *Le Monde* (France), 29 March 2003 (original in French).

If you explain to a Muscovite the extent to which the 23 March referendum in Chechnya was rigged, with an official participation figure (89.5%) nothing like the reality seen by independent observers on the ground, the Muscovite's reaction is: 'so our leaders have lied to us once again... but on the other hand, Bush has not told the truth about Iraq either...' By condemning military operations in Iraq and boasting about a 'process of political settlement' in Chechnya, as supposedly illustrated by the contested referendum, the Kremlin is seeking to take on the mantle of the pacifist. There is no lack of irony in this situation, when one recalls the militaristic and war-mongering attitude towards 'Chechen terrorists' that has characterised the Putin Presidency over the past three years.

According to the Kremlin spokesperson, Sergueï Lastrjanski, Russia's condemnation of the war in Iraq, an Islamic country, has increased its chances of reconciliation with the Chechens, an Islamic minority. "The Iraq war can help

consolidate Chechen society, because there is solidarity between Muslims and Russia opposes military operations," he said. [...] Vladimir Putin apparently saw the referendum as a means for him to claim that the war – which he knows to be unpopular – was 'over,' in this Russian election year. According to some sources, he might also be seeking to reduce the predominance of the military on the Chechen issue by using elections to legitimise pro-Russian civilian power in the republic. The referendum has 'resolved the last problem concerning the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation,' Mr Putin declared.

**In late March, representatives of the Dutch Foreign Ministry passed proof, which they had recently received, that Arjan was alive to the Erkel family and to MSF. This consisted of photos of the hostage holding a recent newspaper, as well as a letter for his family and another for MSF.**



*'Narrative Chronology: The Dutch Government,'* AE Case Period 2002 - April 2004, MSF Switzerland Cell Crisis, 2004 (in English).

#### Extract:

31/03: Meeting with the Dutch MoFA representatives (W-Palthe amongst them), the Erkel family and MSF-CH (T-Linde) in The Hague: The Dutch MoFA shows proofs of life (2 pictures (...)) plus 2 letters - 1 letter for MSF and 1 letter for the family - written by AE).

**Persons close to the pro-independence Chechen commander Shamil Bassaiev, delivered the results of an investigation, which they had carried out at MSF's request, on the fate of Arjan Erkel and the identities of his kidnappers. According to the report, the kidnappers worked for the Russian services and had attempted to sell the hostage to them for several million Euros.**



*We considered that Bassaiev owed us, ever since Kenny's kidnapping. So we went to see his representative in Paris and asked his group, as a service to us, to do the investigation for us. They accepted, and when they came back they told us that it was so-and-so and so-and-so, and that these persons worked for the Russian services. They told us that they knew the starting price for the ransom negotiation because the kidnappers had proposed selling the hostage to them for several million Euros. It was probably Bassaiev's people who, out of self-protection and to help the investigation, let it be known that they might be buyers. That is what I*

understood. They were not interested in buying, but wanted to know who was selling. And to do this they passed themselves off as potential buyers.

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of Communications (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000- May 2008), (in French) interviewed in 2009.

**In mid-March, during a meeting with the Erkel family and the Dutch authorities, MSF reaffirmed its aim of keeping pressure on the Russian authorities. The Dutch government representatives, on the contrary, reiterated that in their view it would be counterproductive to publicly implicate the Russian authorities. Arjan Erkel's family, while expressing satisfaction with the petition campaign, nevertheless requested that pressure not be increased.**



'Report of Meeting on Arjan Erkel at Ministry of Foreign Affairs,' 12 March 2003 (in English).

#### Extract:

MSF reiterates its aim to pressure and irritate the Russian authorities at the highest level in order to assure that at working level relevant authorities remain vigilant and active and to assure that MSF is received at high level. The refusal of Yastrzhembski, Presidential spokesman and advisor for Chechnya, to receive MSF, confirms unwillingness of Russian authorities to co-operate. These facts warrant higher levels of pressure and crossing the irritation threshold. MSF sees references made by Russian Embassy in The Hague in contacts with MoFA [Ministry of Foreign Affairs] to petition and publicity as a good sign that Moscow begins to feel the pressure. Based on specific examples (e.g. meetings denied to MSF in October/November when the public profile of the case was low on purpose), MSF is convinced that the unwillingness of RF authorities should be addressed now by public appeal.

In reaction to this, MoFA repeats once more its position that politicized, public declarations by MSF in which the Russian authorities are accused indirectly or explicitly of non-co-operation or obstruction in solving the case, or even complicity in it can only be counterproductive. MoFA reminds those present that this fear was one of the main reasons why it could not support the petition on Arjan's behalf. Our common goal is to assure a safe release of Arjan and such statements could undermine our joint efforts in achieving this aim. MoFA warns that MSF is reducing its chances of being listened to by the Russian authorities, not to mention of being received at high level.

Division of labor between MSF (informal contacts, diplomatic contacts with different roles compared to BUZA's one, non-diplomatic channels) and MoFA (political, diplomatic channels) is useful and was agreed upon at earlier stage,

but MSF-statements, charging Russian authorities with obstruction in solving the case (Rostrup in MSF press release of 7 March: "The lack of progress whatsoever points to the obstruction of Arjan's release") seriously affects MoFA-efforts in favor of Arjan through diplomatic and political channels. Russian authorities are responsible for tracing Arjan and investigating his case. No information whatsoever exists, suggesting that Russian authorities would be involved or would be working against a solution of the case. Diderik Erkel says the family asks not to raise the pressure above its actual level and not to increase irritation on the Russian side. The family wants to be thoroughly consulted if and before MSF plans to increase pressure.

**On 2 April, representatives from MSF sections handed over the signed petitions to Russian embassies throughout the world, and issued a press release. Dick and Diderick Erkel and Rafa Vila San Juan, the Secretary General of MSF International, submitted the full 339,000 signatures to the Kremlin. In the presence of Nina Davydovich, who had been kidnapped several days before Arjan and recently released, Dick Erkel made a further appeal for his son to be released. In public, Arjan's father praised the "good coordination between MSF and the Dutch Minister for Foreign Affairs." In private, he criticised MSF's Secretary General for stressing the Russian authorities' lack of commitment to the investigation.**



'Doctors without Borders Demands Putin Help Obtain Release of Kidnapped Aid Worker,' Press release, MSF, 2 April 2003 (in English).

#### Extract:

Two hundred and thirty-three days after the kidnapping of Arjan Erkel, head of mission for Doctors Without Borders/ Medecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in Dagestan, MSF and over 300,00 people worldwide call on President Vladimir Putin of Russia to do everything in his power to secure Arjan's release. Today, the first 300,000 signatures of a petition will be delivered to his office. After almost eight months, MSF believes that local investigators have come up against insurmountable obstacles that have hampered their efforts to free Arjan. MSF concludes that the higher-level authorities responsible for this case are either unable or unwilling to solve it.

"It is totally unacceptable that all requests for meetings with the presidential administration have until now been rejected. The lack of political will to resolve this case has left us with no choice but to address our demands directly to President Putin. MSF along with over 300,000 people believe that he has the power to bring about the safe release of our colleague. We sincerely hope that he will use this power." said Rafael Vilasanjuan, MSF Secretary General.

Arjan Erkel is a humanitarian volunteer whose work consists entirely in helping alleviate the suffering of civilian

populations. Unfortunately, his case is not an isolated one. For months, the humanitarian community has been the target of threats, violence and abductions in the Northern Caucasus. Until Arjan is freed, MSF will continue to gather signatures for the petition, to demand from the Russian authorities that they live up to their responsibilities and secure his release.



**Mémos** from MSF Japan, MSF Australia, MSF teams in Latin America, Mexico, Nairobi, & Armenia, April 2003 (in English).

**Extract:**

MSF Japan:

On April 2nd, we MSF-Japan had an appointment with the Russian embassy in Tokyo for the handover of two boxes full of petition names. However, the promised meeting did not take place due to some technical misunderstanding. [...] We did deliver the two carton boxes full of names and the letter and press release to the reception desk of the embassy on the day. [...] At the meeting today, we obtained the information from the secretary Sukhanov that a special investigative joint task force for Arjan's case is being formed (or is going to be formed soon) by the Russian public prosecutor general, the department of interior, and the federal security bureau (FSB). This is unconfirmed info, we are only being told. [...]

MSF Latin America:

Here is a little debriefing from the events in Latin America: - Meetings with the Russian embassy in Bogota (...) and Mexico DF (...). MSFE was trying to have an ITW with the Russian embassy in Buenos Aires (waiting for their news) and in Lima, the Russians refused to receive MSFB. However, the HoM will send them the petition and we planned an ITW about this Action Day in the most important radio of Peru (RPP).

In COLOMBIA: [...] The answer: The Representative communicated that he had no knowledge of the situation (?). His reaction was very supportive. He promised to raise the matter with the ministry of Foreign Affairs and send a letter of inquiry about the status of the situation. It was agreed that RIO would be in touch for more feedback later. It was accorded to ask for a follow up next week. Media attention: very good reaction despite the fact that Colombia has his own internal kidnapping affairs... we were received at four national radio stations in Colombia. [...]

MSF Nairobi:

Hereby a little debriefing from the events in Nairobi: around 70 MSF workers, all in shirts and with posters (incl. the big ones from Europe), photos, balloons, etc. walked to the Russian embassy to do the handover of the petition. There we were received by First-Secretary Mr. Edward Sinytsyn. Frederic Royce, MSF-CH HoM for Somalia held a pretty peppered speech [...], and Sinytsyn replied that the Russian authorities did everything they could, that they could not do more but would keep on working on the case, that he did not understand why we target the Russian authorities

or Nairobi. [...] He accepted the petition and said he would hand it over to the 'highest authorities.' [...]

MSF Australia:

We had a low key petition presentation in Australia yesterday. Giuseppe Scollo (Executive Director) and I flew to Canberra to visit the Russian Embassy – but were not able to be received by him! We did a couple of interviews with the media – although a number of other outlets were sympathetic, Iraq is dominating most journalists' efforts right now.

MSF Armenia:

We (MSF-F and MSF-B) met today with the first counselor of the Russian Embassy in Armenia and handed over the Arjan petition. He promised to send the petition forward to Moscow and said he hopes for the release of Arjan. A press release was sent out to local news agencies and was already on the news on the first Armenian TV channel.



**'Press release Grozny for Thursday,' Email** from Susanne Staals, MSF Holland Press Officer to MSF Communication Network, April 2003 (in English).

**Extract:**

Hello everyone,  
Please do not send out the press release on the murders in Grozny before Thursday. It is important that this message does not get mixed with the message on Arjan of tomorrow. So if you want to issue this release as well, don't do it tomorrow! Attached is a corrected version of the release as well. Thanks, and sorry for the confusion.



**Speech** Rafael Vila San Juan, MSF International General Secretary, Press conference Moscow 2 April 2003 (in English).

**Extract:**

Thanks for coming, particularly because of these unpleasant weather conditions for a public demonstration. We are here to hand over part of the 339,069 signatures collected around the world and in Russia and the Caucasus to demand to President Putin to secure the release of Arjan Erkel. Part of the signatures is still coming to Moscow and will continue over the next few days. You may ask why did we launch this petition. Almost eight months have past and even though we have been told that the criminal investigation is on the way, what is the result? Information is inconsistent and MSF and the family remain in a state of unbearable ignorance. To put it simply, neither Arjan is with us nor do we have evidence of where he is.

We are therefore here to voice our concern to President Putin to provide the political support to secure his release.

Let me remind you of one thing, Arjan is a humanitarian worker. His aims and those of our organization are to alleviate the suffering of civilian populations without any political

agenda. And this is as good and pertinent in the Caucasus as it is in Baghdad where MSF is working around the clock with Iraqi doctors. It is in this sense that we consider this kidnapping a hostile act towards independent humanitarian action. We cannot separate this kidnapping from the environment he was working in. Permanent insecurity in the Caucasus is a political problem, which does not only affect civilians but also extends to humanitarian workers. That is why we cannot accept that this case is simply left in the hands of investigators. Is it that the President does not want to use his power to address the security in the area? Is it that the international humanitarian presence is not appreciated or not even wanted?

So far, we have only silence to these questions from the federal authorities. In particular from the president's office. We consider this attitude not only obstructs the possibilities of his release, it also raises doubts. It is in that sense that we urge to President Putin to show clear commitment and support. The release of Arjan can only be possible if a strong political will is shown. So far it is non-existent.



*I went to Moscow with Arjan's father to hand over the petition signatures and to hold a press conference.*

*He had gone back to Holland the previous day to consult the Dutch Government, at its request, and had then returned to Moscow. He asked me what I was going to say. My feeling was that we needed to be strong and stand up to the Russians. He told me that I would not leave the room with my document if that was the attitude I was going to adopt. And there, in the space of an hour, I understood what MSF Holland was experiencing – they were under pressure from Dutch public opinion, which was dominated by the family and the Government. The family wanted to remain on satisfactory terms with the Russian Government, whereas our view was that the best way forward was to make the Russian Government accept responsibility. I told Arjan's father that I was defending not only his son but also the other 3,000 persons that MSF had in the field, and that I needed to speak in these terms because I was responsible for the entire MSF movement. But the family did not want to hear this. I had received calls from people in MSF Somalia and MSF Colombia asking me what we were doing, because they were afraid of being kidnapped... They were afraid because if we paid a ransom, even without saying anything, then the same thing would happen in Somalia or elsewhere.*

Rafa Vila San Juan, MSF International Secretary General, January 2001 to January 2004, (in French)  
interviewed in 2009

**On 3 April, in a press release that deliberately did not mention the fate of Arjan Erkel, MSF Holland said that**

**it was shocked by the assassination of two cardiologists from hospital no. 9 in Grozny, noting that its local team was still working in that facility.**



*'Médecins Sans Frontières Shocked by Brutal Murders in Grozny,' MSF Moscow/Amsterdam, **Press release**, 3 April 2003 (in English).*

**Extract:**

Medecins Sans Frontières is shocked by the news of two brutal murders of doctors working in Grozny, the capital of Chechnya. The doctors both worked in the cardiology department in Hospital # 9 in Grozny. MSF has supported the hospital for many years and at this time there is a team of 5 national staff working there. Last Thursday, the bodies of the two doctors were found in their car. The motive of the murders is not yet known. MSF sympathizes with the family, colleagues and friends of the victims. MSF is very concerned about the increase of violence in the region. The organisation had already suspended its non-lifesaving activities in Chechnya and all activities in the neighbouring Republic of Dagestan. In Ingushetia, MSF is providing help to displaced Chechens.

**On 3 April, the Dutch Foreign Ministry asked MSF to stop distributing the petition, so as to attract as little press attention as possible. MSF refused and kept to its communication strategy, this time with the agreement of the Erkel family.**



Re: FYI, **Email** from Stella Ronner, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Netherlands to Pere-Joan Pons, MSF Erkel Crisis Cell, 4 April 2003 (in English).

**Extract:**

As I already indicated to you, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has its doubts about the possible effect of continuing the petition under the current circumstances. In fact, we would prefer to see that activity ended, and consider this moment appropriate to do so, since the delivery of the signatures took place in Moscow on 2 April. Our position is based on the belief that it would be preferable in the coming period to attract as little attention from the press as possible. This would help to avoid or to reduce speculations from the media about the course that events are taking in Arjan's case.

Having said that, I appreciate your comment that the amount of TV spots drawing attention to Arjan's case is likely to be reduced. Furthermore, I have also taken note of the fact that the family is particularly attached to continuing this petition until Arjan has returned safely. Also, the family (Dick Erkel) has assured me that they are not now actively looking for

media coverage (such as interviews on Dutch radio, TV). Therefore, while we will not insist on seeing this activity being put to a stop (simply because we cannot), I thought it wise to draw your attention to this concern of ours and to put it 'in writing.' As discussed, I take it that you will share this with your colleagues in Amsterdam, as you deem fit.

## 'LEFT WITHOUT A CHOICE - CHECHENS FORCED TO RETURN TO CHECHNYA'

MSF maintained public opposition to forced repatriation and continued to assist Chechen refugees in Ingushetia

**On 12 March the French section sent a letter to the Ingush President, Muratz Ziazikov, asking him to allow Chechen refugees to occupy accommodation its team had been building, with the agreement of the local administration, since the end of 2002. In the following weeks, the MSF movement as a whole, sent copies of this letter to various Western officials, so they could reinforce the request. A supporting press release was issued, condemning the destruction orders as an infringement of refugee rights. MSF France decided to present Arjan's kidnapping (and that of all humanitarian aid workers) as an extension to the fate being suffered by civilians in Ingushetia and Chechnya.**



**Letter** from Nicolas Cantau, MSF Belgium HoM, Gabriel Trujillo, MSF France HoM, Michiel Hofman MSF Holland HoM to Murat Ziazikov, President of Ingushetia, 12 March 2003 (in English).

**Extract:**

Mr President,  
In the meeting we had in January, you gave verbal approval to our efforts to construct rooms, to house displaced Chechen civilians living in substandard conditions. We have constructed basic chipboard rooms targeted to the most vulnerable families occupying worn out tents and insalubrious kompaknikis. More are in process. This activity is conducted in full cooperation with the Migration Service of the MVD and with its written agreement. We signed other agreements with the gas and electricity services, with the land owners, and with the head of Sunjzensky District.

In the last six weeks, and in contradiction with your approval, authorities in your administration have refused to allow vulnerable families to occupy the completed rooms. Mr Makhauri, Vice-Prime Minister informed us that the government will prevent the occupation of the rooms by any refugee and threatened to expel MSF from the Republic. Moreover, the prosecutor of the Sunjensky district is ordering us to destroy these rooms by the end of the month. Despite our attempts to clarify the situation, through meetings with Prime Minister Aleksentev, Mr Makhauri and several of their deputies, the situation remains blocked and they advised us to address the problem to you. This situation is unacceptable and we request you to solve these problems immediately, that is to allow the refugees to move in the completed rooms, and to give clear orders so that ongoing and future construction activities not be subject to such harassment.

How can the federal law on architectural activity and the town planning code be applied to our simple rooms when a large proportion of the displaced population is living in completely inadequate and dangerous squats? This is in contradiction to your public statement that alternative solutions would be proposed to the refugees who do not want to return to Chechnya. Therefore, we also request you to take up the necessary measures with the prosecutor and make sure that the international humanitarian convention will prevail. We would also like to request a meeting with you in order to discuss MSF future programmes in Ingushetia.



**Minutes** of Operations Meeting, 25 March 2003, MSF France (in French).

**Extract:**

CHECHNYA/INGUSHETIA - Loïck  
The current context is extremely worrying. The situation has steadily worsened since last summer, with a campaign of violence against individuals and NGOs taking a number of different forms:

- kidnappings,
- warnings, threats,
- workspace reduction.

What we are suffering is an extension to humanitarian workers of what is being inflicted on civilians. Arrests of civilians in Chechnya and Ingushetia are increasing. People don't want to return to Chechnya for obvious reasons of insecurity there, although some are giving in because they are victims of increasing harassment and pressure to return. In practice, we have only been to Chechnya once since last summer, and we are less and less present in Ingushetia. Our intention today, is to work on an operational plan that seeks to react to this violence.

In this sense, the Arjan case needs to be linked to the situations in Ingushetia and Chechnya. We cannot continue our current communication strategy: it seems essential to us to engage the authorities much more aggressively, even if this complicates our relations with the other MSF sections.

Letters have been despatched seeking meetings with the United Nations, Echos and governments with an interest in the question of the destruction of Chechen refugee houses. A copy of the letter to the Ingush President has been included. A press release will be issued on Wednesday 26 March. More later.



*'Order to Destroy Shelters for Displaced Chechens Constitutes New Obstruction of Rights,'* **Press release**, MSF 26 March 2003 (in English).

**Extract:**

The Ingush authorities have given the international medical humanitarian organization Doctors Without Borders/ Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) until March 26, 2003, to destroy 180 shelters constructed by MSF for the most vulnerable displaced Chechens in neighboring Ingushetia. This order represents an additional obstacle preventing humanitarian organizations from aiding a population increasingly threatened by forced repatriation. These shelters are constructed of plywood on concrete foundations and are equipped with a gas stove and electricity. Showers and toilets have been constructed outside. In addition to the 180 shelters that have already been built, 1,020 additional such shelters are currently under construction or planned to be built by the end of 2003 by MSF in Ingushetia.

The work in progress was interrupted by this new order. MSF, however, had previously received verbal guarantees from the president of Ingushetia, as well as all the necessary written authorization, to carry out this shelter construction project at a cost of approximately one million US dollars. By suddenly claiming that these shelters do not conform to urban building codes, the local judicial and administrative authorities have imposed a new obstacle to providing much-needed assistance to war-affected Chechen civilians. These shelters are destined for displaced Chechen families who do not want to return to Chechnya and are currently living in deplorable conditions in weather-beaten tents and abandoned buildings in Ingushetia. At the end of January, MSF met with all of the families living in the tented camps in Ingushetia to determine their housing needs. Of 3,191 families (16,426 individuals) surveyed, 98% did not want to return to Chechnya and 92% gave insecurity as the main reason for this reluctance.

Displaced Chechens risk their lives by returning to Chechnya, where insecurity and violence continues. Yet the pressures to return have been since the spring of 2002, especially for those living in the tented camps. Military detachments near the camps and the deletion of names from lists of beneficiaries of humanitarian assistance compound military closures of certain camps. The Aki Yurt camp was emptied in such a manner in December 2002.

The insecurity in the region extends to aid workers. Arjan Erkel, MSF head of mission in neighboring Dagestan, was kidnapped in Makhachkala on August 12, 2002, and MSF still

has no news of his whereabouts. It is the responsibility of the Russian authorities to do everything in their power to obtain the immediate release of Arjan. MSF is demanding that the Ingush and federal Russian authorities provide humanitarian organizations with the guarantees necessary to provide displaced persons with proper assistance, as well as assurances that these same persons will not be forced to return to Chechnya. MSF also urges United Nations agencies and the donor community to defend the right to refuge for war-affected Chechen populations.

MSF has been present in the North Caucasus since 1999 providing assistance to civilians in Chechnya, Ingushetia, as well as Dagestan, where programs are currently suspended due to the kidnapping of Arjan Erkel.



**Letter** from Nicolas de Torrente, MSF USA General Director to Paula J. Dobriansky, Under Secretary for Global Affairs Department of State USA, 1 April 2003 (in English).

**Extract:**

Dear Secretary Dobriansky,

I am writing to share with you our deep concern for the plight of the Chechen civilians who have sought refuge from ongoing fighting and insecurity in Chechnya in the neighboring Russian Republic of Ingushetia. [...] Since MSF resumed its work in Ingushetia in 1999, the authorities have repeatedly obstructed the provision of humanitarian assistance to Chechen displaced in Ingushetia. Such unacceptable obstructions reached a critical point this month when the Ingush authorities issued MSF an ultimatum to destroy 180 shelters that the organization had recently constructed for the most vulnerable Chechen displaced in Ingushetia by March 26, 2003.


MSF built these shelters as part of a plan to erect a total of 1,200 such shelters for Chechen families who are currently living in deplorable conditions in weather-beaten tents or abandoned buildings in Ingushetia. The work in progress was interrupted by this ultimatum despite the fact that MSF had previously received verbal guarantees from the president of Ingushetia, as well as all the necessary written authorization from the relevant departments of the Ingush Administration, to carry out this shelter construction project.

The claim by local judicial and administrative authorities that the MSF shelters do not conform to urban building codes is just the latest in a litany of administrative measures taken to block the provision of much-needed assistance in Ingushetia and to exert pressure on Chechen displaced to leave the safety of Ingushetia and return to Chechnya. Additionally, such measures have included the establishment of Russian military detachments near camps for the displaced and the deletion of names from lists of beneficiaries of humanitarian assistance. [...]


Therefore, MSF urges you to take the necessary means in your power to ensure that the Russian and Ingush authorities will protect the rights of Chechens civilians seeking refuge in Ingushetia, and more specifically that:

- The delivery of efficient and sustainable assistance to displaced Chechens in Ingushetia will be facilitated and not impeded by the authorities;
- The basic right of Chechens to take refuge in Ingushetia will be respected by the authorities;
- In conformity with international humanitarian law, forced repatriation of war-affected civilians will not take place.

In relation to these issues, we would like to reaffirm the imperative for humanitarian aid workers to have safe access to the civilian populations. International humanitarian law provides that the responsibility for the safety and security of humanitarian personnel rests primarily with the authorities of the host country. In conflict areas such as the northern Caucasus, a pattern of violence directed at humanitarian aid workers is harming civilian victims of war in need of assistance and protection. As an example, our medical assistance to the civilian population in Dagestan has been suspended since the abduction on August 12, 2002 of Arjan Erkel, 32-year old Head of Mission for MSF in Makhachkala, Dagestan. We reiterate our concern over the fact that, to date, the investigation of this case led by the authorities of the Russian Federation has failed to yield any significant information as to Erkel's fate or whereabouts. We would be happy to address any questions you may have on these urgent issues.

 We used the housing theme quite extensively in our communication activity. These houses had become something for diplomats to visit in Ingushetia. Russian journalists also visited, and wrote articles on the subject.


Gabriel Trujillo, MSF France Coordinator for North Caucasus, January 2002 to July 2003, (in French) interviewed in 2008.

 The situation in the tent camps in Ingushetia was not good; people were living not only in tents but were also squatting in buildings, farms, etc. There were problems despite the presence of 100-200 humanitarian organisations working in the region; living conditions were poor and everyone was doing whatever they could. It was not universally bad, however; it depended on how small the camp was. If people were more or less from the same village they respected each other and kept their own property – it was better. There was no gas or water: NGOs were supplying these. Same thing as concerns bathroom facilities; NGOs were providing them.

In Sleptsov [Ingushetia], MSF France had built 80 shelters for displaced persons from Chechnya. But we were unable to move people into this accommodation because the authorities kept putting obstacles in our way - telling

*us that the houses were not fit to live in, that the conditions were bad, etc. They criticised us, as a foreign humanitarian organisation, for not having respected their building regulations. Our representations and attempts to convince the authorities that we had done so had no effect. Furthermore, this was the time when the President had just changed, and we were unable to arrange a call to the new President. He refused to see us because he did not have time to do so. We were stymied because we were unable to get into a dialogue with the relevant authorities, the ones on whom everything depended. Heads of Mission had many discussions in Moscow, including meetings with the United Nations, which agreed that something needed to be done, but no one had any ideas on how to go about it. We finally managed to get a joint MSF/UN call to the Ingush President. We explained that, if the camp closed, it was better for refugees to live in the houses we had built than in tents. The Ingush officials said that it was sub-standard accommodation, that it needed to be improved and that this would take time, etc.*

D, MSF North Caucasus staff (in French) interviewed in 2008.

 We were sick and tired of doing things but saying nothing. Our aim was twofold: both to expose publicly what was going on in Ingushetia – notably that the Russians wanted to expel the refugees – and also to convince other aid players that current assistance was of mediocre quality, that it was contributing to a policy of forced repatriation and that therefore the other aid organisations had a responsibility to adopt a different approach. As a result, other MSF sections and also other NGOs set about building shelters. For a time there was a significant number of projects to build shelters on our model, which was quite suitable when compared with average housing in the area. The places were not very big for a family, but there was heating, four solid walls, a proper roof, bathroom facilities nearby and electricity. We had insisted on certain standards such as hot-water showers, brick toilets, etc. These had been taken on board by ECHO, which agreed to fund the project. We were, for once, happy to receive this type of funding because it obliged the Europeans to react when there were problems - we could go to them and say that the Russians wanted to pull down what they had paid for. The houses began to be very visible and the Russians said 'stop,' following which, there were all sorts of administrative hassles, including threats along the lines that: 'you don't have certification that fire standards have been met. It would be a pity if your facilities were to burn down. So you cannot let people live in them, etc.' On one occasion a delegation visited from Moscow, including Ambassadors whom the Russians wanted to convince that NGOs were able to go about their work. They visited one camp and, in an attempt to show they had nothing to hide, the authorities told the refugees they could ask any questions they liked. The first question asked by a Chechen refugee was 'when

can we move into the MSF accommodation?' Of course, the official did not give any reply...

Loïck Barriquand, MSF France programme manager, September 2000 to 2005 (in French) interviewed in 2009

**On 5 April, in an article published in the Dutch daily *NRC Handelsblad*, the journalist Coen Van Zwol, who had been investigating the Erkel affair using hypotheses raised by Vyatcheslav Izmailov from *Novaya Gazeta*, reported remarks by MSF's information officer in Moscow and MSF Holland's Coordinator in the Russian Federation. These two suggested a link between Arjan's kidnapping and the Russian authorities' reluctance to accept the presence of humanitarian organisations in the Caucasus. They spoke about what the MSF team had seen after the Dubrovka theatre attack in October 2002, explaining the organisation's silence at the time by its concern not to cause any harm to Arjan Erkel.**



'A Young Fair-haired Man is Worth Millions in Dagestan,' Fenneken Veldkamp, Coen Van Zwol, *NRC Handelsblad* (The Netherlands) 5 April 2003 (translated from Dutch into English by MSF).

**Extract:**

233 days have passed and still no news of Arjan Erkel since his abduction in Dagestan. Who's behind it? The Chechen rebels? The Dagestan mafia? Or a Russian secret service? This week Arjan's family were on their way to Dagestan but got no farther than Moscow. About pragmatic idealism and compromises between Médecins sans Frontières and the Foreign Office, 'publicity could prove damaging.' [...]

Arjan Erkel is a newcomer to the Caucasus, says Izmailov. But there could still be political motives at play. Russia is trying to cut Chechnya off from the outside world: journalists may only travel there with Russian minders. At the time of the abduction, the government was trying to push back the refugees in the neighbouring republics to Chechnya. MSF protested against the force and intimidation and drew attention to the useless reception in Chechnya. Izmailov: "There was and is good reason to intimidate MSF."

MSF is aware of this, but cannot say so aloud. Spokesperson Mark Walsh comes close: "The climate of threats and violence against aid workers in the Caucasus raises the question of whether President Putin wants us there at all." Michiel Hofman is more frank: "I believe in this organisation and our critical approach. Others can drive to hospitals with boxes of pills but we want to be sure that they haven't been stolen right away and that the patient hasn't been shot dead after he has swallowed them. If that is what happens then we say so." Hofman realises that this kind of approach makes MSF vulnerable: "It is possible that Arjan has been kidnapped by the security services or by someone else and that the authorities are happy to let it happen.

After Arjan disappeared we suspended many operations. And we keep quiet."

An example Hofman says that after the hostage tragedy in Moscow last October, MSF was providing large-scale assistance in Moscow hospitals: "The Chechens demanded on the first day that we come to the theatre. The Kremlin rang us. There was an MSF medical team among the crisis staff." Then the tragedy unfolded. "That morning our people saw hundreds of hostages being carried outside, either unconscious or dead." MSF rang its contacts in the Moscow hospitals and learned that it was absolute chaos. Hofman: "And that two FSB agents were standing beside each victim and sometimes blocking medical treatment [is] totally insane." The situation was especially urgent at Hospital 13: hundreds of unconscious and dying hostages and only 50 members of staff. MSF organised lorries carrying medicine, food packages, clothing, and toiletries. Later Hospital 13 wanted to thank them. Hofman: "We asked them not to. It would be painful for the authorities if it emerged that we had delivered emergency aid amid the freezing Moscow cold and that the relief services were such a shambles. So we hushed it up. Definitely didn't voice any criticism. And it's all to help Arjan." The staff at Hospital 13 confirmed Hofman's story.

**On the same day the French daily *Le Monde* reported on problems that relief organisations were experiencing in getting EU-funded aid into Chechnya, and mentioned the threats to destroy the accommodation MSF had built for displaced persons. On 10 April, the Coordinator and MSFF's programme managers called on Ingush President Ziazikov and asked him to have these threats withdrawn. However, this was to no avail. Under the pressure being exerted, increasing numbers of displaced persons were returning to Chechnya.**



'Moscow Putting Further Obstacles in the Way of Humanitarian Assistance,' *Le Monde*, (France), Natalie Nougayrède, 5 April 2003 (in French).

**Extract:**

It is very quiet discontent, and is making its way through diplomatic channels. The letters to Vladimir Putin are almost never made public, as if to avoid making waves. However, the evidence is there, and many representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) vouch for it: humanitarian assistance, funded by the European Union and intended for Chechnya, is in grave danger. Bureaucratic obstacles raised by Moscow and an apparent desire to bring humanitarian assistance under political control "mean that, on the ground in Chechnya, we no longer have any means of checking whether our aid is actually reaching its destination and being properly distributed," says one European representative. [...] The Russian authorities are



using double talk: “a political settlement” of the conflict is said to be in the pipeline, making it possible for refugees to return, but the ‘security’ situation is apparently such that humanitarian organisations cannot be allowed to work freely. Any trip by a humanitarian assistance vehicle inside Chechnya must be ‘authorised’ beforehand by means of a document issued by the Russian secret service, the FSB, setting out the date, times, and intended itinerary as well as passengers’ identities. “This virtually amounts to giving notice to kidnappers,” says one indignant member of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). The association is struggling to secure the release of one its staff members, Arjan Erkel, who was kidnapped by armed men in Makhatchkala (Dagestan) on 12 August 2002. “The Russian presidential administration – Putin’s entourage – is refusing to meet with us,” notes MSF’s spokesperson in Moscow, Mark Walsh.

[...] In Ingushetia, where thousands of Chechen refugees are spending their fourth winter under canvass tents, the local authorities – under FSB control – recently ordered the destruction of 600 small brick houses built by MSF as alternative family accommodation. “The priority for Russian officials is to conceal the refugee drama and thus to send the refugees back to Chechnya, where foreigners have practically no access. Moscow is doing all it can to block any aid that would ‘settle these people in Ingushetia,’ according to one source who knows the situation well.



**Minutes** of MSF France Operations Department Meeting, 29 April 2003 (in French).

**Extract:**  
NAZRAN-

Loïck [Barriquand, MSF France programme manager] has just returned from a visit to Nazran and informed us of the situation there. Together with Gabriel [MSF France HoM], he called on President Ziazikov to remind him of his commitment and to request that he:

- remove the threats to destroy the houses we have built; and
- obtain concrete guarantees for the construction of new shelters.

These shelters have been built so that displaced persons who do not wish to return to Chechnya can remain. Double talk from the President, who supported our activities but insinuated that they served no purpose because all of the displaced persons wished to return home! He ordered the creation of a commission – which has not seen the light of day – to help us resolve our administrative problems. Following this meeting, Gabriel wrote to the Prime Minister, but no response has been received. It has now been two weeks since the meeting with the President, and nothing has been done.

Currently, displaced persons are giving way under the pressure to return home, and some of them are beginning to leave. They are leaving in dribs and drabs, so it is difficult to estimate how many are involved. Just as pressure from the Ingush authorities on NGOs has intensified, it is also increasing on displaced persons. From a security point of view, there is no objective reason to believe that the situation

is improving. A press conference is scheduled next week to announce the results of the survey carried out last February. This covered 16,400 people living in the camps and showed that 98% of families do not want to return to Chechnya, and that in 93% of cases this is because of security concerns.

**On 11 April the pro-Russian Chechen Government published a report describing the atrocities perpetrated by Russian forces against civilians. However, on 16 April a draft resolution put to vote in the UN Commission on Human Rights condemning Russia for these atrocities was not adopted.**



*‘Massacres in Chechnya: an Official Document is Damning for the Russian Army,’* Natalie Nougayrède, **Le Monde** (France) 12 April 2003 (in French).

**Extract:**

According to our sources, this report, of which *Le Monde* has obtained a copy, was submitted to Russia’s ‘highest federal level’ in late March. That means Vladimir Putin. When questioned on this point, the office of Sergueï Lastrejmski, the special Kremlin spokesperson for Chechnya, denied all knowledge. “We can neither confirm nor deny. This report may exist. It may have been submitted to the President, but it did not pass through this office.” The document, some thirty pages long, represents a first attempt to draw up an official estimate of crimes against civilians in Chechnya. Part of the report, headed ‘Information on Assassinations on Chechen Territory between 1 January and 31 December 2002,’ puts at 1,314 the official count of assassinations ‘among the civilian population’ for 2002 alone. These are deaths that occurred outside of any armed conflict, artillery fire, bombing, or remote mine explosion. The figure relates to victims of summary executions. According to this official document, that means that on average 109 Chechens were killed every month. This is double the assessment provided by the Russian Memorial Association, which keeps a ‘chronicle’ of atrocities in Chechnya but acknowledges that its data is incomplete because it lacks the resources to cover the whole country. Thus, the human rights defenders seem to be well below the real figure.



*‘Russia Escapes UN Condemnation over Chechnya,’* **Le Monde** (France), 18 April 2003 (in French).

**Extract:**

On Wednesday 16 April, for the second consecutive year, Russia escaped condemnation in the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (CHR) over atrocities committed by its forces in Chechnya. The draft resolution, presented by the European Union, was rejected by a majority of 21 votes against, 15 in favour and 17 abstentions. This resolution

was put to vote after the failure of negotiations between the European Union and Russia, undertaken in the hope of drafting a text that could have been adopted by consensus among the 53 members. Russia described the European draft as 'regrettable' and as 'running counter to' a political solution, at a time when there was 'a very clear positive movement' in this direction, as evidenced by the approval of the 23 March constitutional referendum in the rebel republic.

The United States voted in favour of the text, but did not co-sponsor it. They underlined that the text condemned very energetically terrorist acts committed by Chechen groups, accusing three of these groups of having links with the Taliban and the Al-Qaida network. China and India voted against the European draft, invoking the rights of countries to settle their problems without interference and to tackle international terrorism. Apart from the Europeans, countries that voted in favour of the draft resolution included Australia, Canada and Mexico. Japan and South Korea abstained.[...] Human Rights Watch (HRW) regretted that the text had been rejected. "This decision reflects the CHR's composition, which includes many countries that cannot say they respect human rights," noted Anna Neistat, who represents HRW in Moscow. However, "if the UN is not ready to call on Russia to face up to its responsibilities over Chechnya, we hope that Europe will do so," she added, recalling that the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly had recently spoken out in favour of the creation of an international criminal court to judge "war crimes" in Chechnya.



'Statement by Médecins Sans Frontières to the 59 Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights,' 7 April 2003 (in French).

#### Extract:

Madame President

I should like first of all to thank the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances for providing this opportunity for Médecins Sans Frontières to make a statement. Arjan Erkel, aged 33, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Head of Mission in the North Caucasus, was abducted by three armed men on the night of 12 August 2002 in Makhachkala, the capital of the federal republic of Dagestan. Seven months later, we still have no concrete information either on the reasons for his kidnapping or on where he is being detained.

We believe, today, that local investigators are encountering obstacles that are hampering efforts being made to release Arjan. In our view, the senior authorities in charge of this matter have not yet shown the will required for its resolution. In its efforts to secure Arjan's release, MSF's policy is to bring his case to the attention of governments, authorities, international agencies, and individuals who are in a position to help bring about a successful resolution. In addition to diplomatic approaches, we have carried out numerous public activities in order to keep Arjan's case on the political agenda.

A petition was launched on 12 February 2003, calling on President Putin to do everything in his power to secure the release of our colleague. This petition has obtained over 300,000 signatures and on 2 April was officially handed over in Moscow as well as in numerous Russian embassies throughout the world. We are convinced that only strong political will on the part of the highest Russian authorities can help, finally, to make progress in resolving this crisis. Arjan Erkel is a humanitarian assistance worker. In this regard, his only commitment is to contribute to easing the suffering of civilian populations. His case is unfortunately not an isolated one in the North Caucasus region. Since 1995, 56 humanitarian workers have been kidnapped in the North Caucasus. In recent months the humanitarian community has been the target of repeated threats and kidnappings. This intimidating behaviour is unacceptable. It is clear that it deprives the civilian population of considerable quantities of vital aid, and the question that needs to be asked is who profits from these criminal acts. The respect for and integrity of humanitarian volunteers and legal entities should be a constant concern for the authorities. The responsibility for the security of humanitarian workers lies principally with the authorities in the host country. It is up to the Government of the Russian Federation to take all necessary measures to put an end to the illegal detention of humanitarian workers in the North Caucasus. It is also its responsibility to guarantee access by humanitarian agencies to displaced persons and to any civilian who requires aid and protection.

Ladies and gentlemen, on the occasion of this 59<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on Human Rights we ask you to join with us in calling on the competent authorities in the Russian Federation to accord political priority to securing the release of Arjan Erkel.

**On 6 May the French section, in the name of the MSF movement, held a press conference in Moscow during which it released a report on the fate of refugees in Ingushetia, based on a survey carried out by the teams over the preceding weeks. It showed that over 98% of displaced families did not wish to return to Chechnya. This report, which had been strategically leaked to the press a few days before the press conference, was submitted to the High Commissioner for Refugees, among others, asking that he intervene to help put an end to enforced repatriations.**



'Re: Report Ingushetia Urgent,' Email from Aurélie Grémaud, MSF France Press Officer to Kurt Tonini, MSF Switzerland Press Officer, 2 May 2003 (in English).

#### Extract:

Hi Kurt, yes Gabriel HOM and Mark Walsh 'leaked' a small part of the results a week before to Reuters. They leaked

out basically 2 results: the 98% who do not want to return and the 93% who say it because of insecurity. Since then, quite a few journalists are calling to get more information, which is very positive for the press conference on Tuesday May 6<sup>th</sup> which is a bit of a slow week in Russia.



*'Left Without a Choice - Chechens Forced to Return to Chechnya,'* **Survey** carried out by Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), April 2003 (in English).

**Extract:**

The main purpose of this survey was to identify the most vulnerable families in order to provide them with alternative housing in advance of the planned closure of tented camps. A total of 16,499 persons were seen and counted by MSF monitors (out of the 19,035 people reported displaced Chechen) and 3,209 families were interviewed for the survey, covering almost all the displaced Chechen population living in eight tent camps (including Logovaz, Rassviet, and Uchkhoz). Only 39 families were not interviewed, as they were not found after repeated visits. More than 98% of the interviewed people did not want to return to Chechnya in the near future. Insecurity is the main reason why displaced Chechen families did not want to go back to Chechnya. 93% of those who declared they do not want to go back to Chechnya expressed fear for their family's safety.

Lack of housing in Chechnya was the second main reason given as to why displaced Chechens do not want to go back to Chechnya. 74% of families stated having no home in Chechnya as a reason for not going back. Humanitarian aid was not a decisive element in people's choice to go back to Chechnya or to stay in Ingushetia. 88% of families did not talk about aid at all as a reason for them not to go back to Chechnya. Most families interviewed continue to live in poor conditions, with 54% of families living in tents that leak, are not insulated against the cold, or are even without a floor. Out of the 98% of families who do not plan to go back to Chechnya, 90% replied that they did not know of an alternative shelter where they can stay in Ingushetia. This represents 2,827 families out of 3,151 families, or 14,443 people, in need of immediate shelter. In spite of this, it is visible in the camps that families have been returning to Chechnya, without prior knowledge of possible alternative shelter. To this day, the provision of alternative shelter in Ingushetia continues to be blocked.



*'Left Without a Choice - Chechens Forced to Return to Chechnya,'* **Press release** MSF USA, 6 May 2003 (in English).

**Extract:**

As the tent camps are about to be closed in Ingushetia, an MSF survey shows that more than 98% of Chechen

displaced families living in the camps do not want to go back to Chechnya. Moscow, May 6, 2003 - The international medical humanitarian organization Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) today reveals the results of a survey carried out in the eight tent camps used by displaced Chechens in Ingushetia. Over three thousand families were questioned and the results show that 98% of those people do not want to return to Chechnya, mainly because they fear for their lives. MSF is particularly concerned because of the persistent pressure from the authorities on Chechen families to leave the camps and return to what is clearly still a very threatening environment in Chechnya itself.

The survey shows that people are afraid to return despite the fact that living conditions in the tent camps continue to be totally unacceptable, with 52% of families living in tents that either leak or lack a floor or do not have any insulation against the fierce climate. At the same time, 90% of those who want to stay in Ingushetia do not know of any alternative shelter if the camps close. As one mother put it, "If they are closed, I will dig a pit in the ground and sit in it with my children." There have been official statements that no one will be forced back but at the same time the provision of alternative shelter by humanitarian organizations continues to be blocked.

At the end of January 2003, Ingush authorities suddenly declared the improved temporary shelters being built by MSF as illegal. Mr Zyazikov, the Ingush President, has twice given his approval to this program. Yet, a month after our last meeting with the president, shelter construction is still completely blocked by the authorities. The most vulnerable families, identified through this survey, have not been allowed to move in to the 180 shelters that are already completed. The additional 1,200 shelters planned for construction have been stalled.

The survey contradicts official statements that aid provision in Ingushetia keeps people from going back to Chechnya. Of the families who told MSF that they did not want to return, only 12% gave assistance as a reason for staying. It is however very clear that aid in Chechnya itself is completely inadequate, largely because the violence seen as a threat by Chechen civilians is also a major hazard for humanitarian workers.

MSF calls upon President Zyazikov and federal authorities to respect people's basic right not to be forced back to Chechnya. MSF demands that the Ingush authorities stop administrative harassment against humanitarian organizations trying to provide assistance to refugees. It also calls on UN agencies which are mandated to guarantee that the choice of people who want to stay is being respected, to give real protection to the displaced families from Chechnya and to take a clear position on the current policy of forced return. The MSF survey was conducted between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of February 2003 with 3,209 families.

Arjan Erkel, MSF head of mission in Dagestan, was kidnapped on August 12, 2002 in Makhachkala. His whereabouts remain unknown.



'Refugees Barred from a MSF Village,' by Simon Ostrovsky, *The Moscow Times* (Russia) 6 May 2003 (in English).

### Extract:

"We never had any problems until we started building permanent-looking structures, like toilets out of brick with metal doors instead of the wooden structures that look temporary but fall apart quickly," said Kate De Rivero, a MSF volunteer. A representative of Ingush President Murat Zyazikov, Islam Merzhoyev, denied that the Ingush government was trying to prevent refugees from settling down in the republic but declined to comment specifically about the MSF houses. "Only the president, who is unavailable, can talk about that," he said. [...] The refugees badly want to be allowed to move into the houses. "They are 10, 20, 100 times better than going back to Chechnya now," said Muradov, who sleeps in an abandoned garage in the camp. His windowless room is covered with carpets and a solitary light bulb hangs from the ceiling. A few steps away stands the tent where one of his sons and his family live.

Russian officials for months have been saying that peace has returned to Chechnya and that it is time for refugees to return home. Zyazikov said earlier this year that 136,000 people have gone back voluntarily. But a survey taken by MSF in February and March, paints a drastically different picture. The survey of 16,499 refugees from eight official and unofficial camps in Ingushetia found that 98 percent of them would refuse to voluntarily return to Chechnya. Ninety-three percent of those polled cited security concerns as their primary reason for not wanting to go back. The Kremlin's human rights envoy on Chechnya, Abdul-Khakim Sultygov, called the survey a "provocation," saying "the figures presented by the organization are pure lies," Ekho Moskv<sup>31</sup> radio reported. [...] In the meantime, Ingush authorities have banned the construction of new refugee camps, and two have been shut down in recent months. Some 28,000 of the official 64,000 refugees in Ingushetia have been forced to settle in caves, abandoned farms, and garages, MSF said. [...] MSF officials said many refugees feel that they have no choice but to leave. "Officials from the Chechen Internally Displaced Persons Committee tell them that if they don't go now, they won't get accommodation in the temporary accommodation centers inside Chechnya," [Kate] De Rivero [MSF France coordination team in Moscow] said. "That's why many people are leaving now, because they don't want to be forced out and get nothing later." De Rivero said the authorities are taking a more low-key approach than in December, when they shut off electricity and gas at the Aki-Yurt refugee camp, sparking international outrage. "They have learned that forcing people onto trucks at gunpoint is not considered voluntary," she said. "They understand now that switching off the gas to make them go is not acceptable. That's why they are being more subtle now."

Dudayev, the head of the Chechen Security Council,

suggested that refugees are being coddled in the camps and need to start fending for themselves. "The problem with the refugees staying in Ingushetia is that they are becoming more and more accustomed to getting everything they need for free," he said in an interview. "They are becoming lazier the longer they stay in the camps." His assessment was echoed by other pro-Moscow Chechen officials and soldiers in Ingush camps. De Rivero said widespread beliefs like this make it easier to justify moving entire families into an unstable region - even when there is brand-new housing available where it is safe. "They are leaving these people with no options," she said.



*When discussing with the other sections, we had found it necessary to start saying something again about Chechnya. There was a change in Ingushetia that was aimed at trying to get all the Chechens back to Chechnya. So the whole politics changed in Ingushetia, and now there was all these limitations put in place: reduction of the water supply and gas supply to the camps, all kinds of harassment. Then the worst blow was the illegal settlements. The figures were something like 150,000 IDPs, and then 50,000 of those were not in the official settlements. It was really small settlements in old schools; in old factories; with 100 people there, 150 people there, that were never officially recognized as IDP settlements. And, so that's when we decided to have this quick and dirty survey of living conditions, looking at space per person, and at the food that they received, and at the water, with the aim of highlighting the difficulties of the IDPs in Ingushetia, when all these policies about what assistance they could get were changed. It was an intersectional decision. I don't know who started the discussion, but it was very quickly agreed on and implemented.*

Michiel Hofman, MSF Holland North Caucasus  
Coordinator from May 2001 to July 2003, (in English)  
interviewed in 2009.



*With regards to speaking out around the Ingushetia resettlement, there became increasing tension as the Arjan case dragged on, that our operations were sort of dead in the water. And everyone was just waiting for this. Yet, real events were happening, and real programs were happening. It was the French section that had a significant intervention in the IDP camps, who had invested in building a large number of better-quality housing, and who had done a house-to-house survey regarding the desire to repatriate, which indicated that what the Russian government was saying about volunteer repatriation was entirely false. That report was released. We were very concerned with the IDP situation and about the duress that the IDPs were put under, and the way*

that the international agencies which were supporting IDPs were being abused.

We thought MSF was doing a good job and that the prime movers on that good job were France and Belgium and not us. So we recognized the leadership of the other sections in that, and both in terms of what they were doing, but also in terms of their particular sophistication and evidence, that first-hand experience that they had in determining what to say. Therefore we acknowledged their responsibility to say something because of all of this experience. We did not have the same degree of experience or contact with those people. We were involved in the collective argument about whether we should stay quiet or not, and by the time it came along, we had argued that we didn't feel that the connection between speaking out and Arjan's safety was that close and that it was worth speaking out about that issue. We supported the release of that report, and the effort by the French and Belgians. We felt that it should happen.

Austen Davies, MSF Holland Executive Director, 1999 to 2004, (in English) interviewed in 2009.

## TENSIONS AND THREATS AGAINST HUMANITARIAN WORKERS

**This public statement took place in a tense security context. Over the preceding weeks a number of officials from humanitarian organisations, including MSF, had been victims of incidents that they considered to be warnings. MSF representatives, accompanied by the Dutch Ambassador, held a meeting with an assistant director in the FSB who told them, essentially, that Arjan had only got what he deserved. MSF's statement at the press conference was discussed in detail beforehand. The proposal to have MSF team members wear tee-shirts mentioning Arjan Erkel was abandoned. Some members of the national staff were hesitant about this public statement – and indeed of any public stance. Their view was that, henceforth we should not talk about the fate of the Chechens, rather that we should try to provide assistance to them.**

*This survey mobilised a great many people. The Ingush authorities and the Russians took it very badly, and did not hesitate to let us know it. We remained on reasonable terms with officials, but nothing moved. While Michiel [Hofman, MSF Holland Coordinator] and I were briefing the senior HCR official on the situation of the displaced persons – he was not at all receptive and seemed rather annoyed that we should come and discuss this with him – two individuals broke into Michiel's house and stole his computer's hard disk and a*

*number of documents. Everything was strewn about all over the place and a bottle of whisky had been opened, but his passport and some cash on the premises had not been touched... They had been after information. Then, during a meeting in a park, an official from another organisation was handed a diskette containing death threats against senior figures in the United Nations, if they did not keep quiet on the accounts of enforced refugee transfers. We got together with the other organisations once a week or fortnight for a discussion and exchange of views. And then I was beaten up. Someone knocked at the door and when I opened up I was smashed over the head by my neighbour, who I knew only by sight. He hit me and then took off. The police were called; they went to find him and he then claimed I was an illegal resident. I had just been attacked and I had to show my passport to the police, even though there was nothing at all illegal about my status! That's as far as things went. We moved out that night, and subsequently sent back drivers to collect our belongings. We never returned. Our Field Officer represented MSF on the spot. There were some things she was not aware of, but she knew other things – as a result of having better contact than we did with the authorities, for example. She was trying to balance MSF on one side, and her personal life on the other. In principle she was not very much in favour of speaking out, and she was opposed to the survey we had carried out. She was against illegal actions such as distributing wood to refugees when the authorities had cut off the gas, because she was afraid. In general, the Chechens had significant reservations about public communication. They considered that we should have nothing to do with it and that it served no purpose. What they wanted was that we should be present in the field, and that we should provide equipment to hospitals.*


Gabriel Trujillo, MSF France Coordinator for North Caucasus, January 2002 to July 2003, (in French) interviewed in 2008.

*We went along to the FSB. Their office is a 'chateau' [the Lubyanka] in the middle of Moscow, and is quite lugubrious! We entered, and there was no one around. Then someone came to fetch us; we passed along a corridor where we could almost hear Solzhenitsyn<sup>32</sup> crying out from the cellar... But nothing was said – the atmosphere was extremely intimidating. We entered a meeting room and were given a small pencil with 'FSB' stamped on it. There was no electric light... We began to wonder if we would ever get out... They were doing this on purpose. We were received by one of the assistant directors, with the rank of general. Throughout the meeting he had an underling by his side, who did not say a word but continued to stare at me in a threatening manner. The only reason for his presence was to stare at me. I was sitting in front of these gentlemen together with Steve Cornish and the Dutch ambassador, who had arranged the meeting. We aired all our concerns about the incompetence of the local*


32. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the Russian writer, who was persecuted by the Soviet regime and whose work describes the regime's concentration camp system.

investigators. The response was that 'Arian Erkel got what he deserved...' Of course, they did not say this in so many words. They also said that he would get through it one day. The general tone was that 'we are going to teach him a lesson.' It was very intimidating. The FSB couldn't care less about MSF.

Dr Thomas Nierle, MSF Switzerland, Head of Emergencies, then Director of Operations 2000-2004, (in French) interviewed in 2009.


 I was sent to Moscow to hold this press conference for the Russian and international press. I had already met a series of journalists before this. The coordination team was there, including the medical coordinator who had come along to answer medical questions. The field coordinator, who was in the room, was ill at ease because she was afraid. MSF Holland's communication officer came to see me the night before the press conference to ask if I could read my statement to her. She did it very politely, but in such a way that I would understand she was placing me 'under her control.' I had no wish to get out of step – that would have made for an impossible scenario. We had already put pressure on the Dutch. They had accepted this in relatively good faith, it must be admitted. As concerns not only witness statements but everything else as well, she refrained from making comments. She had only one obsession, which was what I was going to say about Erkel. In everything else, MSF Holland had already given way. Kenny [Gluck] was Operations Director at that time. I always felt that he had gone along. In any case, he never prevented any statement. And when I read out my statement again, at 9 in the evening in the Moscow apartment, our Coordinator in fact, had more comments to make than the MSF Holland communication officer on the statement's content and the toughness of some of the remarks. Over the previous two days there had been regular discussions about whether or not we could wear 'Arjan has disappeared' T-shirts. It seemed self-evident to our team that we could, but in the end we were not authorised to do it. It was said that we should not talk about Arjan. My response to this was that we could not hold a press conference without saying that someone from MSF had been kidnapped. So each word of the statement that I made was carefully weighed. I nevertheless succeeded in saying that someone had been kidnapped in Chechnya, but it was couched in extremely cautious terms.

Anne Fouchard, Deputy Director of communication, MSF France, July 2000-July 2004, (in French) interviewed in 2009

 MSF decided to make this statement because the authorities were closing camps without proposing any alternatives to the people concerned. We – the national

staff – were not in favour of this public statement because we were afraid of the consequences. The press release was prepared in Moscow. We read it, and already had problems with the expression 'enforced return' in the heading. We said: 'we should tell the truth, but we should do so discreetly.' I fought for this, and was really aggressive with Gabriel. I said: 'we can't do it this way – it's impossible – we need at least to change the heading.' In the end, they did change it. Our reasoning was that: 'when you speak out, something serious ends up happening afterwards.' We had seen Kenny on television and we thought that it was perhaps for this reason that he had been kidnapped. We did not know Arjan at all; he had not worked directly with us in Chechnya. I do not know why he had been kidnapped. During visits by Loïck [Barriquand, MSF France programme manager] I always told him that I was not in favour of press releases speaking about human rights. We are not an organisation for the defence of human rights. There are other organisations for doing that. If we, as Médecins Sans Frontières, want to speak out then we should talk about what we see by ourselves. We agree with describing what we see every day as we go about our activities in the countries where we work, but we should do it discreetly. If a careless word or sentence can create problems, is it worth coming out with it? The pros and cons need to be weighed: we can have all our activities brought to a halt because we speak out or else we can wait, or comment in a different way. Our concern was that if we said anything against the authorities, it could have consequences not only in terms of a kidnapping but also by causing problems for the performance of our activities.

D, Member MSF North Caucasus staff since 2001, (in French) interviewed in 2008.

 We did not undertake to refrain from putting out information in the future, but said that for 'hard-hitting' public statements we would use an official from headquarters rather than from the field. We were keen that people who had exercised responsibilities in the field should be able to return there without having problems, and we also wanted to avoid pressure on the ground. So we needed to keep the two separate. National staff members did not agree, because they were afraid for their safety and for their jobs. Before this we had sat down with them and if they said 'no' to something, we did not do it. Now we still consulted with them, but their advice was no longer taken into account. During the summer I learned through various embassies that during this public session, some declarations had been made that went well beyond what had been said in the report, and that had not helped the situation. Perhaps they had got a little carried away by the emotion of the moment. In any case, the national staffs were not happy.

Steve Cornish, Coordinator MSF France in Georgia (January to April 2000) then in Ingushetia (September 2000 to January 2001), MSF Switzerland officer in the Russian Federation (August 2002 to April 2004), (in French) interviewed in 2008.

**In May, the trial of the two men accused of Kenny Gluck's kidnapping in January 2001 took place in Rostov-on-Don. Kenny declined an invitation to appear in court, so as not to appear to be supporting a verdict that he feared would be a harsh one.**



'Article from *Kommersant* (Russia) Regarding the Trial of the Two Supposed Abductors of Kenny Gluck,' 20 May 2003, (translation from Russian into English by MSF).

#### **Extract:**

Yesterday the trial on two Chechens - Gakaev (26 years) and Kataev (32 years) resumed in Rostov-on-Don. They have been charged with the abduction of Kenny Gluck, the head of MSF mission in the Northern Caucasus in 2001. The victim of the crime has never showed up in Russia, so the court has decided to continue the hearing of the case without him. According to the investigative lead Gakaev and Kataev had been the members of the detachment of the field commander Anzor Mukaev. The trial on this case started at the beginning of April 2003, but it was soon suspended: the defendants, their attorney, and the prosecutor wanted the victim - 41 year-old American Kenneth Gluck - to be present at the court.

However, the MSF HQ in Amsterdam informed the court that Mr Gluck was at the moment in Iraq with humanitarian mission and could not assist at the trial. The hearing of the case was postponed till the 19th of May with the expectation that the American could come to Rostov by that time. Especially that two months earlier he sent a fax to Rostov Court saying that he wanted to attend at the trial in person. But he's never showed up. According to the judge, Yury Minenko, on the second request to Amsterdam it was answered that Mr Gluck could not come to Russia because he was still in Iraq. After that, the judge took the decision to go on with the trial without the victim. The persons concerned were informed that the court authorities did their best to get the victim in the court, but the representatives of MSF told them 'it was not possible.'

However, yesterday the deputy prosecutor general of RF Sergueï Fridninsky declared on the press conference that the prosecutor office would do their best to get Kenneth Gluck to the court. According to him, the procedure of examination of the foreign citizens is very difficult, because those people are the members of international organizations and "they have the legal exemption from being questioned." The public prosecutor, Vyacheslav Dmitrienko commented that the accused are interested in the presence of Mr Gluck because he said many times in his interviews to the foreign media that the abductors treated him nice, fed him well, and almost never beat him. On the first sitting of the court, it claimed that they have never seen the victim before.



*It was actually a debate. When Russia requested our testimony, we didn't refuse. We sort of said as the*

*Spanish would say: 'manana, manana' [tomorrow, tomorrow]. We didn't, because the Russian system of justice would be extremely corrupt. We felt we did not want to participate in an illegitimate process because the Russians normally use torture and violence to coerce and we couldn't control [the process]. We thought it would send the Chechens the wrong message. What we told the Russians, in an official letter to the judge, was: 'we will cooperate, but in a kind of controlled process. We will give you testimony in front of a Dutch judge.' There is an international treaty about handling of evidence and a third country can provide evidence in a Dutch court and then the evidence is handed over to the Russians. So a Russian prosecutor would have to travel to Holland and we would do it in front of a Dutch judge. But they didn't do it: 'forget it.' Pretty much, 'we don't need your information.'*

Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus, (November 1999-January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005), (in English) interviewed in 2009.

**In the 8 May edition of the independent Russian weekly *Novaya Gazeta*, Vyatcheslav Izmailov claimed that Arjan Erkel could be alive and that prior to his kidnapping, he had made his concerns known to the security services, while at the same time declining an offer of armed protection. On 12 May, MSF issued a press release saying that according to Russian investigators, Arjan was alive and expressed delight at this news and calling for redoubled efforts to bring about his release.**



'Arjan Erkel Might Still Be Alive,' Vyachaslav Izmaylov, *Novaya Gazeta* (Russia), 8-11 May 2003 (translated from Russian into English by MSF).

#### **Extract:**

Up till now no information on Arjan's case was available. However, according to the Dagestan security services, Arjan's cell phone rang about a month ago, and a mediator showed up... Dagestan's RUBOP (Regional Department on Organized Crime), headed by Colonel Kuliyeu and [the] regional Federal Security Service department are working on Arjan's case in close cooperation. Ten days before his abduction, Arjan visited RUBOP along with his interpreter. Colonel Kuliev suggested that Arjan should use an armed-guard. Arjan refused to employ an armed guard as MSF representatives do not usually use them. According to our sources, Arjan shared concerns on his possible abduction with the regional security service department. However, regional security service did not take any measures to prevent [his] kidnapping. We assume, some of the security service people are actually involved in Arjan's abduction.

Some similar abduction cases are well known. In January, 2002, Andrey Babitsky, [the] Radio Svoboda (Radio Freedom) correspondent was taken hostage in Avtury village of

Shalinsky district, by a Federal Security Service man GMD [...]. In January, 2001, Kenneth Gluck, [a] MSF-Holland representative, was kidnapped in Stariye Atagi village. He spent some time in Chishki district. A month later, FSB (Federal Security Service) staged his release. FSB's actions can be explained by the fact that security services do not like humanitarian missions' presence on the North Caucasus as they inform European Council on the human rights violations in the region.

After the trip to Dagestan and informal meetings with security services' representatives, I tend to believe that Arjan Erkel is still alive. Magomedali Magomedov, [the] Head of the Republic, thinks the same. I guess, he has reasons to think that.



*'Russian Investigators Assure that Kidnapped Aid Worker is Alive. MSF Welcomes News, Demands More to be Done to Secure his Release,' MSF Press release, New York/Geneva, 12 May 2003 (in English).*

#### Extract:

Nine months after the kidnapping of Arjan Erkel, Head of Mission in Northern Caucasus, Russian investigators have assured the international humanitarian organization Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) that Arjan Erkel is alive. However, where he is being kept, who abducted him and for what reason remains a mystery which is an unbearable situation for Arjan's family and MSF alike. "Recently, we have had several meetings with Dagestani and Russian officials working on the case of Arjan. They have confirmed to MSF, that according to their investigations, Arjan is alive. However, since they do not know where he is, clearly, they are in no position to give any guarantees for his security. For the sake of Arjan, decisive progress in this case has to be made rapidly. For this reason, we once again call upon President Putin to use all his powers to help secure a positive resolution to this case," states Morten Rostrup, MD, MSF International President.

Arjan Erkel, 33, was abducted by three gunmen on August 12, 2002, in Makhachkala, capital of the Federal Republic of Dagestan. Until now, investigators have failed to establish Arjan's whereabouts or the reasons for his detention. MSF believes that strong political will from the highest Russian authorities is crucial in bringing about the safe release of Arjan. However, MSF's repeated requests for a meeting with the presidential administration to discuss this matter have, until now, been denied. "President Vladimir Putin should be doing everything in his power to help secure Arjan's release. Until Arjan is released, it will remain difficult to believe that there is a real commitment in the Kremlin to humanitarian values and the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the Northern Caucasus," says Dr. Rostrup.

Arjan Erkel is today the only foreign humanitarian worker remaining kidnapped in the Caucasus. As long as he is abducted, a part of the humanitarian ideal in the Russian Federation also remains in captivity. Unfortunately, Arjan's case has not been the only one in the North Caucasus region:

for months, the humanitarian community has been the target of threats and repeated kidnappings. In 2002 alone, there were at least four instances of aid workers having been taken hostage. «Kidnappings of civilians, including abducting aid workers, are heinous crimes. In the later case - apart from endangering the physical and mental integrity of an individual who intended to help victims of armed conflict - the fear of further aggressions paralyzes the aid community to a considerable extent. Again, the civilian population has to pay the price. As long as a climate of terror is reigning in the Caucasus, it is, indeed, an illusion to believe that human suffering can be effectively countered," adds Dr. Rostrup. Until Arjan is freed, MSF will continue to gather petition signatures to demand from the Russian authorities that they live up to their responsibilities and secure his release.

**On 14 May a press release from MSF France announced that its medical teams had provided assistance to victims of an attack on an FSB building in Znamenskoye in Chechnya, which had resulted 57 dead and 300 injured.**



*'MSF Sends Medical Teams to Help Civilians Wounded in Znamenskoye and Ilaskhan Yurt Blasts,' MSF Press release, 14 May 2003 (in English).*

#### Extract:

Following the explosion in Znamenskoe on May the 12th, an MSF medical team provided assistance to the wounded as well as medicine and medical material. A dressing kit for 300 wounded, infusion sets, and antibiotics were given to the hospitals, which received 103 wounded in Znamenskoe and 46 wounded in Mozdok. Three other hospitals had already been provided with medical material the previous week. After the explosion today 14th of May in Ilaskhan Yurt next to Gudermes, an MSF medical team composed of two surgeons is providing assistance to the injured as well as medical material and medicine to Gudermes Hospital. Dressing, infusions, and medical kits for wounded have been donated.

Since the kidnapping of MSF Head of mission, Arjan Erkel, in Makhachkala, MSF has suspended all operations in Chechnya, except for emergency support. MSF continues to provide hospitals with vital medicine and medical equipment. The latest explosions in Znamenskoe and Gudermes region, resulting in a high number of casualties and wounded, show once again that the situation in Chechnya is far from normal contrary to declarations made by the authorities.

**On 17 May, during MSF France's General Assembly,<sup>33</sup> in response to a question on his policy report, the President**



**drew attention to the Russian authorities' responsibilities in the Erkel affair.**



**'Moral Report** to MSF France General Meeting,' Jean-Hervé Bradol, President, MSF France, 17 May 2003 (in French).

**Extract:**

Chechnya

This is another example of total war, where we remain present on the ground despite violence against the population and also against aid agencies. We have not simply resigned ourselves to inaction in the face of intense repression. We have fought to construct decent shelters as well as latrines, showers, laundries, water supply points, and heating systems (which are very important in this region, where the winters are very cold) for Chechens who have taken refuge in Ingushetia. We are providing medical assistance for women and children refugees in Ingushetia or who are living in adjacent areas of Chechnya. We have dug in on one particularly difficult issue, namely our attempt to care for the injured in this conflict, including pro-independence fighters, by supporting either functioning hospitals in Chechnya or doctors who still agree to treat people without distinction, in the spirit of the Geneva Conventions.

Why have we needed to dig in? Because we ourselves, like other aid agencies, have been the victims of particularly callous attacks. I have in mind our colleague Arjan Erkel, Head of Mission of the Swiss section in Dagestan, who was kidnapped on 12 August 2002 and who has still not been released. The good news is that we know that Arjan is alive. We are delighted by this, but we are still waiting for his release. The work to attempt to secure his release explains why Thomas Nierle, one of the members of our Board of Directors, is absent today; he is in Moscow working on this issue. I won't go into details because this is a sensitive issue, but in reporting to the General Meeting I need to be clear on the matter. Persons who are working on the Arjan case on a daily basis, who have led the investigations, are convinced that we are facing hostility from the Russian State and its security services.

The mission to assist the Chechen people is a difficult one; we have been able to carry it out in the past, and we continue to carry out now, because our Chechen field staffs have taken on significant responsibility.

**In late May, the final declaration of the EU/Russian Federation summit in St Petersburg mentioned the need for a political resolution of the Chechen question. During this summit, Dutch Prime Minister Balkenende publicly raised the question of Arjan Erkel's fate and Vladimir Putin declared that this question was one he was dealing with.**



**'EU Pledges Support for Russia's Peace Plan in Chechnya,' AFP (France), 31 May 2003 (in English).**

**Extract:**

The final declaration issued after the summit's end mentioned the contentious Chechen issue despite initial opposition from Moscow. Russia and the EU "note the recent referendum and express the hope that the recently launched political process, as well as social and economic development, will bring back a state based on law that favours the protection of human rights and finally a real reconciliation in Chechnya," it said. [...] Putin assured his Dutch counterpart Jan Peter Balkenende that the search would continue for a Dutch doctor kidnapped in Dagestan in August while working with aid group Medecins Sans Frontières (Doctor Without Borders) in the southern republic, which neighbours Chechnya. "The case of Arjan Erkel is a manifestation of the terrorism that also threatens other countries. We will continue our search efforts," Putin said. Russian officials have said they know the Dutch doctor is alive, but have no idea of his whereabouts.

**On 12 June, ten months after Arjan's abduction, MSF issued a press release emphasising once again the absence of news on Arjan, notwithstanding assurances from the Russian authorities.**



**'Arjan Erkel, Kidnapped 10 Months Ago,' MSF Press release, 12 June 2003 (in French).**

**Extract:**

Today, Thursday 12 June, marks exactly 10 months since Arjan Erkel, an MSF Head of Mission and a Dutch citizen, was kidnapped in Dagestan, Russia. Several weeks ago Russian investigators assured us that Arjan was still alive. However, we still do not know where he is, who is holding him or why he was kidnapped. This uncertainty is causing increasing distress for Arjan's family and for MSF. During the European summit in St Petersburg, President Putin informed Minister-President Balkenende, the Dutch Prime Minister that investigations were continuing. To date, investigators have still not been able to say where Arjan is being held. Since day one of the kidnapping, MSF has been constantly involved via crisis teams in Moscow, Geneva, and Amsterdam. Contacts have been made at all levels - from international and national political contacts to informal local networks. Unfortunately, these efforts have also been fruitless in establishing contact with the kidnappers. However, MSF is not giving up and once again urgently appeals to Arjan's kidnappers to release him immediately.

**The Coordinator of MSF's French section in the Russian Federation was arbitrarily prevented from leaving Russian territory. In his stead Nicolas de Torrente, the Director-**

**General of MSF United States, made a statement on MSF's position on the forced return of refugees in Chechnya before the Caucasus Commission of the US Congress Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe<sup>34</sup>. This statement was accompanied by the publication of a press release.**



*'Internally Displaced Persons in the Caucasus Region and Southeastern Anatolia,'* **Speech** by Gabriel Trujillo, MSF Coordinator in Russia, delivered by Nicolas de Torrente, MSF USA Executive Director, 10 June 2003 (in English).

**Extract:**

Gabriel Trujillo, our Head of Mission in Russia would have very much liked to be here today and to share with you his first-hand experience of working with this population. I regret that administrative delays have prevented him from testifying today. [...] To conclude, I would like to turn to the role of the international community in what we feel has been a failure to uphold the rights of Chechen civilians, and in fact abandoning them to their fate. With the exception of making obligatory statements at summit meetings, press conferences, and public forums, the international community, including the United States, have failed to alleviate the suffering of Chechen civilians. For years, the United States has made general statements that there must be accountability for human rights abuses in Chechnya, that humanitarian organizations must have unlimited access to people in need and that displaced Chechens should not be forcefully sent home.

I believe this administration has also stated that it raises these points with their Russian counterparts at every possible occasion. Yet, the results are that the strategy has not had any positive impact on the lives of civilians in Chechnya and displaced Chechens in Ingushetia. On January 2003, after the closure of the Aki Yurt camp, the State Department spokesperson welcomed Russia's repeated assurances that persons displaced in Chechnya would not be forced to return against their will. These so-called assurances did not prevent the campaign of pressure on displaced Chechens to return. It seems clear that it is not enough for the United States and the international community to repeat the same empty diplomatic statements on their worries about the situation in the region.

The US-led war on terror also should not be used as a pretext for Russia to continue violating fundamental rights. By linking incidents in Chechnya with the global war on terror, the Russian Government has written itself a blank check to continue its repressive campaign with impunity. [...] To conclude, the recommendations that we'd like to make, MSF would urge the US Government and the US Congress, to take all appropriate measures, whether political, diplomatic,

or public to urgently press Russian, Ingush, and Chechen authorities to immediately cease all official and unofficial measures currently forcing displaced Chechens to return to war-torn Chechnya, particularly from Ingushetia.

We also urge the United States to press Russia to respect displaced persons' physical integrity and their basic rights to be adequately assisted and protected in a safe region in Ingushetia and elsewhere in the Russian Federation. To press Russia to respect its obligations according to international humanitarian law, to allow humanitarian organizations to fully exercise their rights to assist Chechens in the northern Caucasus, especially by lifting administration measures blocking the provision of the alternative shelters for displaced Chechens in Ingushetia. Press Russia to take all necessary steps to bring an end to the illegal detentions and other forms of violence affecting humanitarian workers in the northern Caucasus and assume their basic responsibilities, according to the international humanitarian law, is to provide safety, security and freedom of movement for humanitarian personnel. Also, to urgently raise the case of kidnapped MSF volunteer Arjan Erkel to President Putin and other high-ranking Russian officials, particularly by asking them to give the highest political commitment and priority to assure the immediate, unconditional and safe release of our colleague and ask them to accept meetings with MSF representatives to discuss the investigation of the case. Arjan Erkel has been missing now for 10 months. We have been informed by authorities that they have knowledge that he is still alive, but they have failed to provide us with any verifiable information on where he's being kept, who has abducted him, for what reason, guarantees for his current safety, and the way to move forward to secure his safe release. After 10 months, the lack of significant progress in this investigation points, in our view, to an obstruction of Arjan's release, and raises concerns about the willingness of Russian authorities to really solve this case. As of today, our repeated requests for a meeting with the presidential administration in Russia to discuss the case have been denied, even as we brought over 300,000 signatures from concerned citizens from around the world requesting this meeting.



*'Displaced Chechens Forced Back to War zone,'* **Press release** MSF USA, 10 June 2003 (in English).

**Extract:**

In testimony delivered to the Helsinki Commission, the House and Senate's Joint Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the independent medical humanitarian organization Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) urged the United States government today to press Russian authorities to immediately stop all official and unofficial measures forcing thousands of displaced Chechens to return to war-torn Chechnya. For months, authorities in Ingushetia have diminished assistance, shut-off electricity and water, threatened to close tent camps, and blocked independent organizations from providing aid to the thousands of displaced people. MSF built 180 alternative shelters, which stand empty because people are not allowed to move in.


34. This is an agency composed of Senators and Congressmen. It is independent of the US Government and is responsible for overseeing and encouraging a coherent approach in the application of the Helsinki Accords and undertakings made in the context of the OSCE.

Military detachments have taken up positions near many camps, much as they did shortly before emptying the Aki Yurt camp in December 2002.

Even in the face of these pressures, nearly all of the 16,499 displaced people MSF interviewed this February said they would rather stay in these appalling conditions than return to Chechnya, with more than 90% saying they feared for their safety in Chechnya [...].

“These people are desperate. One man told our staff that if the camps were closed, he would simply dig a pit in the ground and sit there with his children,” de Torrente said. “While Russian, Ingush, and Chechen administration authorities act with impunity toward civilians displaced by war, these families have been left without a choice and have to return to a war-zone. The United States must use all appropriate measures, whether political, diplomatic, or public, to help stop this abuse.”

MSF has been present in the North Caucasus since 1999 providing assistance to civilians in Chechnya, Ingushetia, as well as Dagestan, where programs are currently suspended due to the kidnapping of Arjan Erkel. Arjan Erkel, MSF Head of Mission in Dagestan, was kidnapped in the capital Makhachkala on August 12, 2002, and MSF continues to call for his immediate and safe release.

 *We were careful, but that did not detract from the fact that the content of our messages was liable to be badly received. I was to go to the United States to do a joint presentation with Nicolas de Torrente [Director-General of MSF United States] on the pressure being exerted on displaced persons. I went to Moscow airport with my wife and son. As we were going through airport controls, immigration officials declared that my wife and son could not travel because they did not have exit visas. I told them that I did not have an exit visa either. They replied that, regardless of this, I could still travel. When I responded that I would not travel without my family, they confiscated all three tickets. It was impossible to discuss the matter with anyone. So we decided to go back home, and began the process of obtaining the copies of police records that the authorities were asking for. This process can take months, and meanwhile we were without our passports and could not move. The British Embassy<sup>35</sup> was reluctant to do anything. They said that these things happen from time to time... In the end we worked it out all by ourselves, and lost only a week. Meanwhile, however, Nicolas was the one who made the presentation.*

Gabriel Trujillo, MSF France Coordinator for North Caucasus, January 2002 to July 2003, (in French) interviewed in 2008.

**Once the MSF F HOM in Russian Federation’s “administrative” problems solved, the MSF United States team organised for him to undertake a series of briefings with various UN bodies, the US administration and the US press, covering the situation of displaced persons in the Caucasus and the fate of Arjan Erkel.**



*‘Meetings in Washington on the Humanitarian Situation in the Northern Caucasus Region June 16-18, 2003,’ Memo from Patrice Page, MSF USA Advocacy Officer, 25 June 2003 (in English).*

#### **Extract:**

It is clear that they are all embarrassed/nervous about the situation in Chechnya and neighboring republics but also, about their own policies towards Russia. They don’t like to hear and they don’t want to hear anymore about Chechnya. It is starting to be like at the UN where Chechnya has always been a taboo, while in the past in Washington, Chechnya always raised some attention and reaction since it was a good thing to prove that the “evil/ soviet monster” was still alive... Sensitive/nervous about the subject because they need to defend the personal relationship between the two presidents the best way [possible] to move forward but also towards us, because of the embarrassing case of Arjan. If we compare with last year (February 2002) when we did the round on the former report of MSFF, there were more positive reactions at that time about the possibilities to raise the issues, on the potential to make them move on these issues, etc. Now, they are pitching the usual lines on the subject (‘we are raising the issues at every occasion we are talking with them, at all levels’) without any conviction, and clearly, they are sticking to the referendum to justify a smooth approach towards Russia (‘it might be the start of a solution or a start of a real political process...’). They are also mixing HR abuses committed by Russia with the whole issue of terrorism, something that they were not doing even a few months ago. Finally, they are telling us that we shall not have great hopes on the capabilities of the USG to convince Russian authorities about these issues (‘it is more difficult to work with this government now, they are very sensitive, they move slowly, we don’t have any leverage anymore, etc.’). So obviously, choices were made between other international priorities and the fate of displaced Chechens. They are basically dropping the ball. On the situation in Chechnya and neighboring republics, they don’t contradict our analysis of the situation, not at all. They agree about our assessment of the situation (humanitarian, human rights) and the responsibilities of the authorities. They are even talking about an immoral repatriation process, a nest of impunity, etc. They asked precise questions on the repatriation process (statistics, types of measures employed, by which authorities), the humanitarian situation on Chechnya (housing capabilities, space of work for us) and the security situation in Ingushetia (whom precisely is responsible for the HR abuses, response from Ziazykov on the alternative shelter issue, other administrative constraints, etc.). They were a little bit surprised that even if camps are

35. Gabriel’s wife and son are British citizens.

not closing down anymore, the process is ongoing. fermés, le processus continue.



'Forced to Return,' editorial page, *The Washington Post* (USA), 28 June 2003 (in English).

#### Extract:

From time to time it suits Mr. Putin's purpose to announce that the war is over. Tens of thousands of homeless Chechens in neighboring provinces, afraid to return, are an embarrassingly visible refutation of this fiction. So, Russian forces have begun pressuring these displaced people to return against their will to refugee-style camps in Chechnya. This pressure is accomplished by various means, according to employees of the nonprofit Doctors Without Borders, who have investigated: destroying the tents they live in, cutting off water or electricity, menacing Chechen men with arrest or worse.

This forced return is only one small part of the misery that has been visited on the Chechen people, but -- unlike the fighting, which at this stage no one seems to know how to stop -- it is easily preventable. In past years, the State Department has objected to overt Russian return programs, with some effect. This year, the Russian pressure is more oblique, and the U.S. government seems to have no desire to trouble "my good friend Vladimir Putin," as President Bush recently called him. The Russian president was honored last week with the first state visit for a Russian ruler in London in 129 years, banqueting with Her Majesty and riding in the royal carriage. Meanwhile, no one speaks for the Chechen civilians being herded back to a war and kidnap zone.



*Following that, we organised meetings with people who were following Russian affairs in the administration and the American press and at the United Nations, both in Washington and in New York. One morning I gave an interview to the Washington Post and, a little later, a fairly tough press conference. I asked Kris [Torgeson, Communications Director, MSF USA] if I had been sufficiently clear, and her look was enough to convince me that I had been. After the press conference the representative from the Russian Federation Embassy came to see us and asked if I considered that the airport problem had been just a small administrative hiccup, or something else... This sent a shiver down my spine. During the meetings, we raised the Erkel question. We thought that the Americans also bore some responsibility in this affair, and would feel concerned by it. In reality, we had the impression that they realised that what they thought we knew, we did not in fact know. When I began speaking about displaced persons, one of our interlocutors sat back in his chair, put his feet on his programme manager, yawned, closed his eyes ... and that was that. In any case, US policy towards Russia was clear. There had been a change of direction and*

*they did not want to know about anything else. Even the Germans said nothing. Everyone was totally indifferent. .*

Gabriel Trujillo, MSF France Coordinator for North Caucasus, January 2002 to July 2003, (in French) interviewed in 2008

**On 3 July the European Parliament adopted a resolution describing violations of human rights by Russian forces in Chechnya as 'war crimes and crimes against humanity.' It also adopted a resolution once again calling on the Russian authorities to intensify their efforts to find Arjan Erkel. The next day Akhmad Kadyrov, the Head of the pro-Russian Chechen administration, declared that all displaced persons must have returned to Chechnya by September, prior to the Presidential elections.**



'Chechnya: the European Parliament Condemns Russia,' *Le Monde* (France), 5 July 2003 (in French).

In a resolution adopted on 3 July, the European Parliament (EP) considered that the "persistent and recurring violations" of human rights "by Russian forces" in Chechnya constituted "war crimes and crimes against humanity." The EP "reiterates its concern at, and firm condemnation of, the persistent and recurring violations of humanitarian law and human rights committed against the civilian population by Russian forces," according to the terms of an amendment proposed by the Greens and adopted by 242 votes in favour, 200 against and with three abstentions. The MEPs also call on the 15 to "raise the issue of Chechnya at their meetings with the Russian Federation in order to make sure that this theme does not escape the (USA) international community's attention and care.



'Chechen Leader Says All Refugees to Return Home by September,' *AP* (USA), 4 July 2003 (in English).

#### Extract:

All Chechen refugees from camps in neighboring Ingushetia will return home by September ahead of presidential elections in the province, Chechnya's Kremlin-appointed acting president said Friday. "There will not be a single tent in Ingushetia in September," Akhraad Kadyrov told Russian President Vladimir Putin at a Kremlin meeting with Chechen leaders. Kadyrov said Chechens now living in tents will move to newly built houses in Chechnya, the Interfax news agency reported. Russia has been at pains to encourage the tens of thousands of refugees living in camps in the neighboring region of Ingushetia to return home as part of broader efforts to show peace is returning to Chechnya. But humanitarian organizations say the refugees don't want to return, fearing

for their safety in the wartorn republic. Refugees and human rights organizations say officials have threatened to close refugee camps and are using intimidation and blackmail to convince people to return. According to a February survey by Médecins Sans Frontières, or Doctors Without Borders, 98 percent of the more than 3,200 families living in tent camps didn't want to return to Chechnya..

**On 16 July, in an article in the Dutch daily *NRC Handelsblad*, the journalist Coen Van Zwol reported that Russian secret service agents had been present during the kidnapping and that Erkel had not been aware of the identities of the two American attachés with whom he had dined some days prior to his abduction. This information, which was new to MSF, had not been made public.**



*'Identity of the US Attachés was Unknown to Erkel,'*  
Coen Van Zwol, *NRC* (The Netherlands), 16 July  
2003 (in Dutch translated into English by MSF).

Arjan Erkel (33), the Dutch Chief of Mission of Doctors without Borders in the Russian Republic of Dagestan, who disappeared on the 12th of August last year, was being followed by the Russian Secret Service, FSB. A car of the FSB was on the spot while unidentified men with Kalashnikovs pushed the aid worker in a car. The Russian secret agents didn't interfere. The FSB of Dagestan took an interest in Erkel after he treated two American military observers to a dinner earlier that week in Makhachkala, the capital of Dagestan. Erkel supposedly is in Chechnya at this moment. His kidnappers have sent at least two pictures of the aid worker in captivity to the Dagestan authorities. [...] In the Dagestan capital, two American diplomats contacted Erkel; at least one of the diplomats was a member of the military section of the American embassy in Moscow. The diplomats were visiting Dagestan on invitation of the Russian ministry of Emergency Situations to observe a big Russian fleet exercise in the Caspian Sea. The drill took place between the 8th and the 15th of August. Before it was over, Erkel disappeared.

[...] Dagestan borders on the Caspian Sea, rich in oil and gas. The five Caspian states can't agree on the demarcation of the coastal waters, however. The Russian security apparatus is rather suspicious about American intentions in the Caspian. Russia likes to maintain it semi-monopoly on the transit of Caspian oil and gas. But since the start of the first Chechen war, in 1994, the Russian oil pipeline through Chechnya is virtually out of order. Russian hawks traditionally suspect the Americans want to prolong the Chechen conflict for this reason. Recently, an international consortium opened a second pipeline through Kazakhstan and Russia to the Black Sea port of Novorosiisk. Another consortium is currently building a second pipeline by way of Azerbaijan and Georgia to the Turkish port of Ceyhan - out of reach of Russia.

The Russian fleet exercise of August last year was hard to disconnect from this 'Great Game' for Caspian oil. The Russian authorities stressed the purpose was to sharpen the preparedness against ecological disasters, terrorism, drugs trade and organized crime. In August, the Russian forces abundantly showed their ability to protect Russian oil-rigs and tankers against attacks, as well as their savvy in cleaning up oil-spills. [...] In this high-octane environment a meeting between American military observers and a local western aid worker was not the best of plans. Still, the American observers contacted Arjan Erkel during, or just before, the Russian naval exercises to get information on Dagestan. Erkel obliged; moreover, he invited the Americans to a dinner that night in a restaurant in Makhachkala. A risky step. When Americans are in town, an especially if they are military guys, all the signs are on red with our local FSB-guys," a source tells us. "After all, this is what they've been training for all their life: American spies."

The dinner was even worse because Doctors without Borders enjoys a ghastly reputation with the Russian authorities because of their unrelenting criticism of human right abuses in Chechnya. In the Russian army and secret services, Doctors without Borders carry the nicknames 'CIA without Borders' and 'Doctors without Medicines', wrote the Russian Newspaper *Rosikaya Gazeta* in 2001, during the short abduction of Doctors without Borders' American celebrity Kenny Gluck in Chechnya. The American embassy in Moscow refuses to give the names of the military observes who visited Dagestan last August. It will not comment on the dinner with Arjan Erkel. "This is a very sensitive issue," says spokesperson Tom 'O Leary.

Of course, the Americans feel guilty. They know by now that this fun-filled evening in Makhachkala brought Arjan Erkel into great peril. After dinner, Erkel was supposedly shadowed permanently by the Russian Secret Service of Dagestan. For sure a car of the FSB was on the spot later that week, when Arjan Erkel was kidnapped after he drove his Dagestan girlfriend Aminat Gunasheva (25), interpreter with Doctor without Borders, home to the suburb of Sputnik the 12<sup>th</sup> of August. An eye-witness noticed the FSB-car and wrote down the number of the licence-plate. The car disappeared. The Dagestan police later checked the license plate and asked the FSB-colleagues why they didn't interfere, or at least follow the kidnappers. "The FSB-men were unarmed so they couldn't interfere, that's what they told us," one of our sources remembers. "We didn't linger to much on this one. After all, they're our boys too." [...] According to our sources, Arjan Erkel is in Chechnya right now. Journalist Vyateslav Izmailov, who participated in this investigation, will write tomorrow in *Novoya Gazeta* that Erkel is being kept by a gang supporting Akhmed Kadyrov, the current Head of the Moscow-friendly Chechen administration. Izmailov, a former native of Dagestan, investigated the Erkel-case earlier this year on the request of Mikhail Gorbachov, the former Soviet-leader. Gorbachov is interested in the case since the Italian office of his Glasnost Foundation alerted him. This was right after the father of Arjan Erkel, a Catholic Dutch politician was granted an audience in Rome with the pope.

**On 29 July a representative of the Dutch Foreign Ministry spoke to journalists to inform them they received a video from the FSB which showed Arjan alive, two weeks after Putin's speech in St Petersburg. He also told them that in his view, MSF was acting irresponsibly in the management of the Erkel affair. The journalists published only the information about the video and not the representative's comments on MSF.**



*'The 'Unofficial' Meeting between MoFA and Dutch Journalists,'* Source of Information: Anonymous, **Memo**, Mark Walsh, MSF Information Officer in Moscow, 29 July 2003 (in English).

**Extract:**

Note: The briefing was at times contradictory and emotional giving the impression that it was badly prepared. The following is a comprehensive summary of what was shared.

Meeting took place on Tuesday 29th July at request of Peter Van W de P. (claims to be main interlocutor of Thomas Linde) Claims to be on top of the case. However, he was visibly nervous, had sweaty hands and insisted that the meeting never took place.

Three journalists invited, two press and one television for the off the record meeting.

Peter informed the journalists that MoFA had received a video of Arjan from the FSB two weeks after the speech of Putin in St. Petersburg. FSB claimed they received the video from their 'mole' in the criminal group that had abducted Arjan. When MoFA asked them to negotiate they refused as MSF has also done.

In fact, MSF's role in this affaire has been relatively irresponsible so far. They have not made any attempt to cooperate with the investigation or to further the cause of Arjan other than their stupid internet campaigns and other public manifestations which they have been told time and time again are counterproductive. Indeed, they are hanging posters around Holland with Arjan's picture with a bank account under it which gives the impression they are collecting money for a ransom but are in fact using Arjan's to collect money for other purposes.

MSF's relationship with the family, the Russian authorities, the FSB and the Dutch foreign ministry is extremely bad. They are a very difficult crowd to work with.

They do not accept responsibility for Arjan's fate and as a consequence are not prepared to enter into negotiations to pay a ransom. They also claim that they do not have the money.

[...] MoFA then proceed to repeat that all the information could not be attributed. The journalists then said that they could not run with the story as they had no source and not even a decent smokescreen. MOFA then claimed that MSF leaked the photographs and the journalists had no problem making a smokescreen for that. The journalists left and made a deal. They would only run with the story of the existence of the video and its content and only on

the 12th, the rest was unusable. On Wednesday, [...] one of the three journalists broke the agreement, which started the panic. This is the same woman that rang me on Tuesday demanding an interview the next day. She has just returned from maternity leave and her job is on the line and is under great pressure to get a good story. She has just pissed of a lot of Dutch journalists as she broke her word.

Finally MOFA admitted to sabotaging the planned trip to MKLA in April, as they did not want the Erkel family travelling to there and saying that they had no contact with the abductors. And very finally, an Internet poll published last week in Holland showed that 60% of the Dutch public do not think that MoFA is doing a good job for Arjan.

**On 11 August, a press release from MSF condemned the expulsion of Chechen refugees from the Bella camp in Ingushetia, in an atmosphere of general indifference.**



*'One of the Three Largest Camps in Ingushetia, Bella, is being Emptied Under the Indifferent Watch of the International Community,'* **Press release**, MSF, New York/ Paris, 11 August 2003 (in English).

**Extract:**

Chechen civilians continue to face increasing pressure to leave Bella camp, a displaced persons tented settlement that is gradually being emptied in Sleptovskaia, Ingushetia, a Republic of the Russian Federation. Doctors Without Borders/ Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) witnessed today that only 930 people remain in the camp. Statistics from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) showed that 3,200 people were living there in January and 1,430 at the end of July. More than 200 people were pressured out of the camps without prior notice in the last 3 days, and are now living in 45 of the 180 shelters built by MSF to give to people who chose to stay in Ingushetia an alternative to returning to Chechnya. This is only the most recent alarming example of the constant psychological pressure exerted on displaced civilians to go back to war-torn Chechnya. Even though these circumstances are unacceptable for the people pressured to leave Bella camp, MSF logisticians will ensure that the newly occupied shelters will be connected to the gas and electricity networks.

In March 2003, Ingush authorities said that the 180 alternative shelters built by MSF, as well as 1,020 MSF planned to build by the end of 2003, were illegal even though MSF had obtained all necessary official authorizations. As a result, the most vulnerable families were not allowed to live in the new shelters, and construction on the additional 1,020 was stalled. As of today, 135 of the pre-existing shelters remain empty. A February 2003 survey conducted by MSF showed that more than 90% of the Chechen people living in such tent camps in Ingushetia did not want to return to Chechnya because they feared for their lives. Even so,

Russian, Ingush and Chechen authorities have used a wide range of means in the past months to implement a policy of forced repatriation.

Confronted by the emptying of Bella camp as well as several statements made by Russian, Ingush, and Chechen authorities in the past months about the imminent closure of all tented camps in Ingushetia, MSF demands that authorities respect displaced peoples' basic right not to be forced back to war-torn Chechnya. MSF also insist that the authorities live up to their responsibilities to assure that displaced persons who choose to exercise their right to stay in Ingushetia be adequately assisted and protected either in tented camps or in the unoccupied alternative shelters, and that they lift administrative restrictions blocking the planned construction of additional shelters.

## ARJAN ERKEL, ONE YEAR IN CAPTIVITY: MSF DENOUNCES THE RUSSIAN AND DUTCH GOVERNMENTS' INERTIA

A year after the kidnapping, an MSF media campaign criticised the ineffectiveness of Russian investigators in the search for Arjan Erkel and the lack of willingness on the part of the Dutch Government to put pressure on its Russian counterparts

**This campaign, which was supported by demonstrations in Makhachkala, Moscow, Geneva and Amsterdam, was widely reported in the international press. Dick Erkel, Arjan's father, attended the demonstration in Moscow and thanked the Dutch and Russian governments for their efforts, but added that it was time to "do more." MSF Holland represented the position of the MSF movement.**



*'One Year after Arjan Erkel's Kidnapping, MSF Considers the Investigation to be a Failure and Calls for more Action by the Russian Authorities to Resolve the Case,' MSF Press release, 12 August 2003 (in English).*

### Extract:

It has been one year since Arjan Erkel, a volunteer for the humanitarian medical aid organization Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), was abducted in Makhatchkala, the capital of the Russian Republic of Dagestan. MSF expresses its indignation about Arjan's

continued captivity. "It is a scandal that after one year, our colleague Arjan Erkel is still detained," said Dr. Morten Rostrup, International President of MSF. "This can only be attributed to the mishandling of the investigation and a lack of commitment by Russian authorities. The presence of two intelligence agents at the scene of the abduction, and the fact that they stood by while Arjan was kidnapped, should surely increase their motivation to resolve this case. However, to our dismay, the investigation was halted in November 2002 and only reopened in May 2003. We were not told of this but instead authorities kept assuring us they were doing everything to secure Arjan's release."

During the European Union summit St. Petersburg, Russia in May 2003, President Putin made public assurances to the Dutch Prime minister that Russian services would be deployed to resolve the case, but no results have been forthcoming. MSF believes that Russian authorities must again be reminded of their legal responsibility to secure Arjan's immediate and safe release. MSF is also disappointed by the reserved attitude of the Dutch government towards Russian political authorities. More generally, the support provided by the international community, in particular key Western governments, has lacked intensity. "It is difficult to understand why governments have been so reluctant over the past year to hold the Russian authorities accountable for their lack of commitment in resolving this case," Rostrup said.

To MSF, Arjan Erkel is a symbol of "humanitarianism at risk" in the Northern Caucasus. The whole humanitarian community has become a hostage to the climate of violence and insecurity prevailing in the region. MSF today calls on Russian authorities and the international community to multiply their efforts to bring Arjan back to his family, friends and colleagues.



*'Kidnapped in Russia,' Editorial The Washington Post (USA), 13 August 2003 (In English).*

### Extract:

One year ago today a Dutch humanitarian worker, Arjan Erkel, was forcibly abducted in the Caucasus region of Russia, reportedly while two Russian law enforcement officers looked on. Recent videotapes suggest that Mr. Erkel, 33, a regional director of Doctors Without Borders, is alive and still being held against his will, either in the breakaway region of Chechnya or in neighboring Dagestan, where the abduction took place. His continued detention reflects poorly on Russian President Vladimir Putin most of all but also on U.S. and European leaders, each of whom for his own reasons seems to have been less than zealous in efforts to win Mr. Erkel's release. The ultimate victims of this neglect, in addition to Mr. Erkel and his family, are the long-suffering civilian victims of Russia's war in Chechnya and civilians elsewhere who depend on the free passage of aid workers.

[...] Because of pressures from Mr. Putin's government and dangers in the field, few journalists dare report on

the war, and Doctors Without Borders (often known by its French name, *Medecins Sans Frontiers*) is one of the last humanitarian organizations to assist Chechen civilians and bear witness to their suffering. That suggests one possible motivation for the reported complicity of parts of Russia's security bureaucracy in the kidnapping. It also may explain why the government has not been more active in seeking Mr. Erkel's release: As long as the region is so dangerous to outsiders, none can testify to the rapes, torture and disappearances that Chechens continue to suffer at the hands of Russian forces. Just recently, Russian officials have been pressuring displaced civilians to return from refugee camps to unsafe zones of Chechnya, a violation of international law but a way of hiding what has become an embarrassment for Mr. Putin.



'US-EU Urge Putin to Act in Aid Worker Kidnap Case,' **Reuters** (UK), 12 August 2003 (in English).

#### Extract:

The United States and European Union urged Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday to do more to help secure the release of a kidnapped Dutch aid worker while his family and colleagues accused Moscow of inaction. [...] MSF joined Erkel's father and sister in a picket near the Kremlin, denouncing Russia's failure to win the release of the 33-year-old, who is the only foreign aid worker still held in captivity in the turbulent region. "Today all our thoughts are drawn to Arjan. All actors that had a role to play in resolution of this case have failed," said Morten Rostrup, international president of MSF.

The Dutch ambassador to Moscow handed over to the Kremlin a letter signed by EU and U.S. representatives in which they asked for Putin's help to get Erkel freed, the embassy said. Ambassadors from Greece, Italy and Ireland - representing the EU's rotating presidency from 2003 through mid-2004 - joined their Dutch, Swiss and U.S. counterparts and a United Nations representative in signing the letter, the Dutch government said. "The letter writers, all representatives of countries and organisations which provide humanitarian aid in the North Caucasus, renewed their calls on Vladimir Putin to do all in his power for the quick release of Arjan Erkel unharmed," the Dutch foreign ministry said.

The silent protest under falling rain outside the central Moscow headquarters of Russia's FSB security service drew about 20 people. They wore white T-shirts with Erkel's pictures and held slogans reading "President Putin, help to release Arjan". [...] "Arjan has become a symbol of humanitarian aid workers at risk. Resolution of his fate will have very positive consequences for assistance for the civilian population in the Caucasus," Rostrup said. MSF has also criticised the Dutch government, saying it had been excessively cautious in its handling of the case, while other key Western governments had been reluctant to press Russia too hard over the issue.



*It was clear that progress needed to be made, that we needed to start speaking about what was not working and about Russian incompetence, that we needed to ask if there was not some special interest in getting rid of witnesses from Chechnya. We had proof that they were not doing enough and that, if one thought about it, this was serving their own interests. But we needed not to point the finger directly at them. Even then, we were far from being prepared to say whether it was the Russians, the FSB etc.*

Dr Thomas Nierle, MSF Switzerland, Head of Emergencies then Director of Operations 2000-2004, (in French) interviewed in 2009.



*Our only motivation in making these public statements was to help improve Arjan's situation. We would have preferred to avoid public polemics, but since no progress was being made... It was in the spring of 2003 that we first ventured somewhat gingerly into this area. As soon as we began this sort of agitation there were concrete results – the first proof of life appeared. We then calmed down, and started over again in the summer. We achieved a sort of negotiation, via intermediaries.*

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of Communications (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000- May 2008), (in French) interviewed in 2009.

**In the French daily *Libération* Thomas Nierle, MSF Switzerland's Operations Director, criticised the negligence of the Russian services, in particular their lack of follow-up in the investigation into the numbers called from Arjan's mobile phone since his abduction. He raised the question of whether Erkel's kidnapping was not playing into Moscow's hands by keeping international humanitarian organisations away from a region presented as having been 'normalised.'** In an article gathering together all available information on the affair, the French daily *Le Monde* compared this kidnapping with those of André Babitsky in 2000 and Kenny Gluck in 2001; in these latter two cases, according to the newspaper, links had been brought to light between the Russian services and a number of local criminal groups. [V28](#)



'Moscow's Murky Role in an Abduction in Dagestan,' Pierre Haski, *Libération* (France), 12 August 2003 (in French).

#### Extract:

A year to the day since the kidnapping of Arjan Erkel,



aged 33, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Switzerland's Head of Mission in Dagestan (the neighbouring republic to Chechnya), the atmosphere is heavy in the organisation's Geneva office. "We had thought that quiet diplomacy would enable our colleague to be released. That was a mistake. There has never been any political will in Moscow to make progress in this affair. As for western governments, in particular the Netherlands (Erkel is a Dutch citizen), they have never put any pressure on the Russian authorities," notes Thomas Nierle, MSF Switzerland's Operations Director. Today, he is making no secret of his concern. "There is no sign that Arjan Erkel will be released any time soon. There are no negotiations currently taking place. We have had some contacts with intermediaries, but we have never been able to have a real discussion with the kidnappers." MSF's concern is heightened by the attitude of the Russian authorities, particularly the FSB (ex-KGB), which appears increasingly suspicious." [...]

The Russian authorities favour the criminal scenario. "But if gangsters were to blame, how is it that no ransom has ever been sought?" asks Thomas Nierle. There was another bizarre event some six months after the kidnapping. Arjan had his mobile phone with him when he was abducted. MSF received an itemised bill in February, with 50 calls having been registered! Some numbers can be linked to some shady – to say the least – local personalities. MSF passed the invoice to the FSB, believing that the intelligence services would exploit this incredibly lucky lead. Not at all however. "On the contrary, they decided to suspend the service to that phone, thereby perhaps destroying the only indirect link with the kidnappers," says a dumbfounded Nierle.

Amazement.

During the Russian-EU summit in St Petersburg on 30 May, President Putin stated his determination to see the hostage released. But nothing has happened. The organisation learned, with astonishment, that notwithstanding official statements that, "the investigation was proceeding normally," in fact it had been suspended for several months as from late November. "We can only speculate in trying to understand the absence of determination on the part of the authorities to secure a concrete result. Are the Russian authorities ineffective? Or is that, by dissuading humanitarian organisations from being present the North Caucasus, Erkel's kidnapping plays into Moscow's hands, since it does not want embarrassing witnesses in a region which is not as "normalised" as Putin claims?"



*'Russian Services Accused in the Abduction of a Member of MSF in Dagestan,' Natalie Nougayrède, **Le Monde** (France), 12 August 2003 (in French).*

#### Extract:

This affair, which has long received subdued treatment in the media, is beginning to raise numerous questions about the role of the Russian secret services. On several occasions MSF has accused the authorities in Moscow of a

lack of zeal, indeed of being "obstructive" in their searches and investigations into the Arjan Erkel case. [...] Moscow is placing considerable pressure on foreign humanitarian organisations active in and around Chechnya as it seeks to control their aid while at the same time preventing them from speaking out on the atrocities to which the civilian population is being subjected.

[...] Several sources in Dagestan have confirmed that, on the night Arjan Erkel was kidnapped, a vehicle from the local branch of the FSB – the Russian secret service – was present at the scene. Its occupants reportedly witnessed the abduction but did not intervene. This information, which was published in the Dutch newspaper *Handelsblad*, has been confirmed by a Dagestani police official, who added that the FSB agents who were indeed present, "were not armed and had no means of intervening." According to the former Russian military officer Viatcheslav Ismailov, who for some years has been active in operations to release prisoners in Chechnya, the FSB's involvement in Arjan Erkel's kidnapping is hardly in doubt.

A particular circumstance adds weight to this version. Several days prior to the kidnapping, Arjan Erkel had dined in a Makhatchkala restaurant with two representatives from the office of the Military Attaché in the United States Embassy in Moscow. In August 2002, Russia was carrying out large military manoeuvres offshore from Dagestan in the Caspian Sea, aimed at reasserting its weight in this oil-rich and geopolitically fractious zone bordering on Central Asia. In Moscow, the American Embassy has confirmed that two of its officials had contacted Arjan Erkel, although they refused to make the slightest link between that meeting and the Dutchman's kidnapping. Today, however, the United States are reportedly putting pressure on Moscow to ensure the hostage's quick release.

[...] "The Russians are looking for a way out that would enable them to save face," says one source close to the affair. Moscow denies any involvement by its services and has at various times over the months accused "Dagestani criminal groups," then "Chechen terrorists" of being responsible for Arjan Erkel's abduction. Diplomatic pressure on Moscow increased during the Russia-EU summit in St Petersburg on 31 May. For the first time, President Vladimir Putin made a public reference to Arjan Erkel: "the search will continue," he said when questioned on the matter by the Dutch Prime Minister. "Like other countries, we are facing problems of organised crime and terrorism," Mr Putin added.

In the spring, two photos of Arjan Erkel reached his family. In one of them the haggard-looking young Dutchman was holding a copy of a Moscow newspaper dated 26 February. Despite repeated requests, no official from the Russian presidential administration has agreed to meet with representatives from MSF, or with the Erkel family. On 30 July Russia's top diplomat, Igor Ivanov, did however receive the President of MSF Switzerland, Thomas Linde, in Moscow. But it was not until 25 May 2003 that the investigation into the kidnapping, which had been closed by the Russian authorities after only three months, was finally reopened. Kidnappings are not rare in the Caucasus, which are home

to armed groups who specialise in ransom requests. But persons close to the Arjan Erkel affair see a parallel with two other cases that occurred in Chechnya and where the involvement of Russian services had been strongly suspected. These episodes shined a harsh light on links between Russian services and various local criminal groups, who were used to remove embarrassing witnesses from the region. These cases were the abduction in 2000 of Radio Liberty journalist Andrei Babitski, and the kidnapping in 2001 of the American Kenny Gluck, who was also an MSF representative in the region. The American Department of State had sought an explanation from Moscow following Gluck's release (after a three-week detention), which had occurred in strange circumstances described by the Kremlin as a "special operation by the security services."

**In an open letter published by the British daily The Independent, Kenny Gluck, former Coordinator of MSF Holland kidnapped for three weeks in January 2001, and Vincent Cochetel former representative of the UNHCR kidnapped for 12 months in 1998, call on Russia to protect humanitarian workers in the Caucasus.**



*'Letter Russia Must Act to Protect Aid Workers in the Caucasus,' Kenny Gluck, Director of Operations, Médecins Sans Frontières, Amsterdam, Vincent Cochetel, UNHCR, Geneva, The Independent (UK), 13 August 2003 (In English).*

#### Extract:

Sir: It has now been a full year since unknown gunmen in Dagestan abducted Arjan Erkel, the head of mission for Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). Arjan had come to the Caucasus with the aim of providing assistance to people affected by the conflict in Chechnya and Dagestan. His continued absence is an affront to the both to the rights of civilians in crisis and the ability to provide assistance to them. Aid workers like Arjan are largely defenceless against these abuses. We don't use weapons. We don't travel in armour. When we seek to aid people in need, our only true defence is the acceptance of the idea that people in crisis have a right to assistance. We survive on the trust that the powerful of the world - those with armies and guns - will leave us out of their equations of violence. We survive on the trust that they will observe the laws that provide some space for humanity in the midst of war. Arjan's kidnapping is part of a long chain of abuses against aid workers in the Caucasus. There have been more than 27 aid workers kidnapped in the region over the last seven years of tragedy. Neither the Russian government nor the Chechen rebels have shown much will to stop the kidnapping and violence against aid workers. What has happened to Arjan is an insult to the guarantees of safety for civilians in war and for aid workers. It should be an affront to all of the states and societies that claim to stand by them. It pains us to see that despite killing after killing, kidnapping after

kidnapping, there is still a lack of will on the part of states, and in particular the Russian state, to act clearly and forcefully to end this type of abuse against aid workers and other civilians. They can start now with doing everything possible to free Arjan.

Kenny Gluck, Director of Operations, Médecins Sans Frontières, Amsterdam

Vincent Cochetel, UNHCR, Geneva

The writers are aid workers who have themselves been abducted and held hostage in the northern Caucasus.

**This media campaign was, however, called into question by the representative of MSF Switzerland in Moscow. He was on leave when it took place and considered that it jeopardised the trail of a hostage release he had been working on for several weeks.**



*What shocked me the most was that we had just had the first official evidence that he was still alive and we had started to follow a lead. After a year, it was very important to get proof that he was alive, and yet we were behaving as if it wasn't much. [...] I believe that it was not a good idea to speak out, but we couldn't stop it. It was the anniversary of Arjan's kidnapping and the pressure was too much. I imagine that it was the fact of speaking out that ratcheted it up a notch and got us into a situation where we could no longer hope for a friendly solution. We tried to continue chasing up the lead, but it seemed that every time something happened which stopped it all. It was too late. Was it just because we had spoken out? One way or another, if something were to change at that point in time, would it have been by following that lead? It's still questionable as we weren't able to follow it up right to the end. It was not a strategic choice, but a response to our frustration. In fact, it was probably our frustration that blinded us to the importance of the evidence we had just got. They were so fed up that they needed to lash out, yet it was speaking out that collectively trapped us. There were some people, the Dutch for instance, who didn't want to speak out, but it was so strong that we couldn't stop it. Our need to speak out overcame us.*


Steve Cornish, Coordinator MSF France in Georgia (January to April 2000) then in Ingushetia (September 2000 to January 2001), MSF Switzerland officer in the Russian Federation (August 2002 to April 2004), (in French) interviewed in 2008.



*Steve was always ready to use his veto to speaking out. He believed he could find a solution through*

negotiation. It was one of the aspects of his commitment. Because of the way he was and the acquaintances he had, he thought he could develop contacts that would enable him to find a solution. We have to understand that he was more exposed. He took a lot of risks, for himself and for his contacts. We used the fact that he was on holiday to communicate more aggressively. We took the risk of influence what was being done on the ground. He still holds this against us, even now. He was following a lead and he was sure he'd get there and he said that in the end we spoiled it all. Obviously, communication is necessarily very productive when you're negotiating. But I believe we were in a situation in which questions were permitted, given that it was more than a year and that the authorities had nothing at all, which was quite shocking.

Dr Thomas Nierle, MSF Switzerland, Head of Emergency then Director of Operations 2000-2004, (in French) interviewed in 2009.

 I spoke with Steve Cornish. He has always said that at the time of the anniversary, a year after the kidnapping, the communication had perhaps jeopardised the search for Arjan. However, we never had any proof that was the case. We could never say that it was the communication which had closed the trail. I don't remember the details, but I think that the lead was already dead. But I say that with reservations. In fact, I think there are leads which were opened up by the communication. In our international follow-up committees, we have never taken the view that communication could close off a trail.

Rafa Vila San Juan, MSF International Secretary General, January 2001 to January 2004) (in French) interviewed in 2009

**In profound disagreement with the campaign undertaken by MSF, and more generally by its choice of using public political pressure, the Dutch Foreign Affairs Ministry broke off all contact with the organisation for several weeks.**



Meeting in NY with Dutch Prime Minister, Mr Belkenende, September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 'Minutes', MSF International, September 2003 (in English).

#### Extract:

Morten briefed the PM about MSF analysis of the case with emphasis on the political aspects, the need for political pressure, the perception we have that the Dutch government has done far too little to put pressure on the Russians etc. referring to the public criticism on the 12<sup>th</sup> of August. The


meeting went well, there was an open and frank tone, and a clear willingness from the Dutch government to reestablish the relationship with MSF. They mentioned to put [together] a policy group including MSF and Foreign Ministry. They stated that we share the same objective, and that we have to work together in a complimentary way. However, they don't fully share our analysis of the importance of political pressure. Obviously they have been reluctant to 'offend' the Russians, and said they had to be 'friendly' with them. They clearly wanted to avoid further public dispute with MSF. They said they had their own channels from both Moscow and St. Petersburg, but did not want to explain what they actually were doing in the field. [...] After Morten briefed him, Mr. Balkenende stated that:

-1/ the Dutch government found itself in a 'strange' situation after learning of Morten's and MSF criticism last August, especially after receiving appreciation from MSF's Dutch President earlier the same day.

2/ he has personally raised the issue of Arjan a number of times (with Putin in St Petersburg, with Bush as well, etc) and the Foreign Ministry has been 'very busy all this time' with that issue, including with the family of Arjan. He put quite some emphasis on the relationship with the family also saying 'you know, we are from the same political party.'

3/ he was very disappointed that MSF was so critical. This issue is very important for all Dutch people. It's not in Arjan's interest to have a crisis and public dispute between his government and our organization. It would be better to work together.

Furthermore, the Prime Minister asked Morten for the latest info we had on our side. Following our mentioning of our upcoming meetings in Washington, he suggested that, in these meetings, we make reference of his own discussion with Bush and the need for Bush to raise Arjan's case with Putin during their summit in Camp David. To Morten's specific question about political pressure, the Prime Minister's advisor, Mr. Swartbol said that their colleagues in Moscow were working on it, with their own method (diplomatic one and friendly with the Russians...) and stated that they were doing more but that they could not discuss the details. They also stated that they were recommended by specialists that silent diplomacy was the best in such cases.

 It was obvious that what we were doing was secret and that we should not speak about it. And they did speak. They used words that they should not have. That angered the embassy of the Netherlands, which cut us off. They continued their approach without us and so we no longer knew what was going on.

Steve Cornish, Coordinator MSF France in Georgia (January to April 2000) then in Ingushetia (September 2000 to January 2001), MSF Switzerland Officer in the Russian Federation (August 2002 to April 2004), interviewed in 2008 (in French).

**On 26 August, following the attack on the UN in Bagdad, the UN Secretary General announced the adoption of a resolution on the protection of humanitarian workers in conflict zones. On 28 August, MSF published a press release highlighting the fact that this resolution had been adopted by the Russian Federation and calling on the latter to secure the release of Arjan Erkel.**



'Now the Time to Act - After the UN Security Resolution on the Safety of Aid Workers, MSF Presses Russia to Secure Arjan Erkel's Release,' MSF Press release, New York, 27 August 2003 (in English).

**Extract:**

Following the unanimous adoption of a resolution on the protection of humanitarian aid workers by the UN Security Council, Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders (MSF) presses Russia to take decisive action in implementing the resolution by securing Arjan Erkel's immediate and safe release. Arjan Erkel, a volunteer for the international medical humanitarian aid organization, has been held hostage in the North Caucasus since his abduction in Dagestan on August 12, 2002.

"While it is important that the Security Council has sent a strong political signal that attacks against humanitarian aid workers will not be tolerated," said Dr. Morten Rostrup, President of MSF's International Council, "all member states must hold President Putin accountable for allowing Arjan's intolerable captivity to go on for more than a year." Aid workers have increasingly become targets of violence in many conflicts where attackers aim to make a political point by preventing them from providing assistance and raising awareness about the plight of civilians in distress. The UN Security Council and member states need to urgently respect the neutral and independent character of humanitarian action and clearly distinguish it from their political activities. Concrete actions must be taken to uphold the fundamental principle that all civilians in need, whoever and wherever they are, are entitled to protection and assistance. Humanitarian organizations must also maintain an independent, impartial and neutral character in their aid activities.

"Attacks on humanitarian aid workers are of critical international importance. Such violence is devastating for civilians in need of assistance because the ability to deliver aid is dramatically curtailed," Dr. Rostrup continued. "But aid workers will not be safe unless warring parties and the UN's member states stop misusing humanitarian aid to advance their political interests. The growing insistence on making aid a tool in responding to crises endangers the lives of humanitarian aid workers." More important than adopting the resolution is for all UN members to hold every state accountable for acting in accordance with the Resolution's terms. "Russia adopted this resolution," said Dr. Rostrup, "and yet it continues to evade its responsibility to secure Arjan Erkel's immediate and safe release. Two Russian officials were even present when Arjan was kidnapped and they did nothing to prevent or stop it. The UN Security Council has allowed this

intolerable situation involving one of the Council's permanent members to go on for far too long. Every state in the UN must raise Arjan's case with President Putin. It's not enough to make a statement. The resolution requires President Putin to demonstrate clear results to immediately bring Arjan's captivity to a safe end. Now is the time for action."

**On 18 August, Morten Rostrup, President of MSF International wrote to George W Bush asking him to raise the issue of Arjan Erkel's release with Vladimir Putin at their forthcoming summit meeting at Camp David. In particular, he mentioned the limits of the American diplomatic approach and the political context of the kidnapping, noting that Arjan had been kidnapped the day after a dinner with American military attachés.**



**Letter** from Morten Rostrup, President of MSF International to Georges W. Bush, President of the United States, 18 August 2003 (in English).

**Extract:**

Since the resumption of the war in Chechnya in 1999, MSF has been providing direct medical assistance to war-affected people in Chechnya and in the neighboring Republics of Ingushetia and Dagestan. As we do whenever we witness abuses committed against civilians we are assisting, MSF has also regularly spoken out about the plight of victims of the ongoing brutal war in Chechnya. MSF's public testimonies have often been met with the disapproval of, and even threats from, Russian authorities.

It is well known that Russian security services (FSB) keep a close watch on foreigners in the Northern Caucasus. Since MSF is the only international humanitarian organization based in Dagestan, it is no surprise that the security services were closely monitoring Arjan Erkel. Their surveillance of Arjan's movements clearly intensified after he met with two military attachés from the United States government on August 4, 2002, in Makhachkala. This meeting heightened existing baseless suspicions among the Russian security services that Arjan's activities went beyond humanitarian action and it thus directly contributed to his kidnapping nine days later.

Senior officials and investigators from the government of Dagestan have confirmed to MSF that two officers from the FSB were present during Arjan's abduction, but did not intervene to prevent or stop it. These officials also confirmed that Arjan had been suspected by the same services of working for the United States government. Under international humanitarian law, authorities of a host country bear the primary responsibility for ensuring the safety of humanitarian aid workers on their territory. This includes an obligation to take all necessary measures to vigorously investigate and solve cases of abduction. But not only were Russian officials present during the kidnapping and did

not intervene, they have also treated Arjan's abduction as a simple police matter even though it clearly extends far beyond that.

Mr. President, it is unacceptable that Russian authorities have not given Arjan's release a matter of high political priority one year after his abduction. It is also unacceptable that the international community, including the United States, has allowed such a situation involving a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council to last for so long. President Putin should be held accountable for the failure of the investigation in resolving this worrying case, something that hasn't happened so far as the community of states has been reluctant to raise the issue with their Russian counterparts.[...]

As a result of diplomatic efforts from a number of governments in the past weeks, Russian authorities have finally shown more interest in Arjan's continued detention. On May 31, 2003, President Putin for the first time acknowledged publicly his concerns about the case. Mid-June, the FSB in Moscow told the Dutch government that they established indirect contact with the group detaining Arjan. On My 30, the FSB provided further evidence to the Dutch government that Arjan was still alive. Even so, Russian authorities, especially the security services, are not yet taking clear and concrete steps on ways and means to ensure his release. Representatives of MSF have been permanently in contact with US officials since the abduction of Arjan Erkel, especially with the National Security Council, the Department of State, and the US Embassy in Moscow. We understand that the US Embassy in Moscow and other senior officials have recently made demarches towards Russian senior officials to express the United States' concern for Arjan. MSF welcome these developments.

Officials from several European governments have expressed similar concerns. Unfortunately, this approach has reached its limit as it has failed to lead to Arjan's release. [...] Because of the political circumstances of the abduction and the United States' special responsibilities, I urge you to raise the issue of Arjan's immediate and safe release with President Putin during the upcoming summit at Camp David. Because of the urgency of the matter, I am also urging senior US officials to do the same with their Russian counterparts during the summit's preparatory sessions.

## A BOAT ON THE HUDSON: THE ERKEL CAMPAIGN IN THE UNITED STATES AND THE UN

**On 25 September, the MSF USA team gave a press conference at the United Nations' headquarters, which the Russian President was visiting. MSF then organised a demonstration on a cruise boat on the Hudson by the UN building. The New York Times devoted its editorial to Arjan Erkel. At the same time MSF members continued to lobby American and European leaders.**



'President Putin Called on to Fulfil Obligation to Ensure the Release of Abducted MSF Aid Worker Arjan Erkel – UN Members Urged to Hold Russian President Accountable for Resolution of the Case,' **Press Release**, MSF New, York, 24 September 2003 (in English).

As world leaders meet at the United Nations General Assembly this week, the independent humanitarian organization Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) calls upon President Vladimir Putin to live up to his obligation to ensure the release of Arjan Erkel, the MSF volunteer abducted on August 12, 2002 in the Russian republic of Dagestan. MSF also urges all UN member states to hold the Russian leader accountable for the resolution of the case. For more than a year, Russian officials have assured MSF that they were working on Erkel's case. In spite of this, there has been no substantial evidence of action taken by the Russians to find and free Arjan. In August 2003, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1502 on the safety and security of humanitarian aid workers, reiterating the responsibilities of host countries. Arjan Erkel, however, is still in captivity, and threats and violence to humanitarian workers in Russia's Northern Caucasus region have increased. On September 12, a general warning about kidnappings brought humanitarian aid to a standstill in Ingushetia, home to 80,000 displaced Chechens. "If the newly adopted UN resolution on the safety and security of aid workers is to have any meaning, President Putin must live up to his responsibility under international law to find and free Arjan and allow humanitarian assistance to reach those in need in the Northern Caucasus," said Dr. Morten Rostrup, MSF International Council President. MSF strongly urges President Putin to use his speech before the UN Assembly on Thursday, September 25 to reaffirm his commitment to implement the Resolution 1502 and therefore to secure Arjan's release. MSF also urges the other member states of the United Nations to live up to the principles of Resolution 1502 by ensuring that President Putin will urgently mobilize all necessary resources to secure Arjan's release. "By allowing Arjan's case to remain unresolved, the Russians are undermining their own credibility in the face

of the international community. So far, international efforts to hold Russia accountable have been insufficient. World leaders must send a strong message to Russia that Arjan's release must be secured immediately," stated Dr. Rostrup.



'MSF Holds 'Free Arjan' Rally at the United Nations,' **Press Release**, MSF USA, 24 September 2003 (in English).

**Extract:**

As Russian President Vladimir Putin addressed the United Nations General Assembly in New York City today, seventy Doctors Without Borders'/Medecins Sans Frontières' (MSF) staff members, volunteers, and supporters rallied in front of the UN headquarters to call for the release of kidnapped MSF aid worker Arjan Erkel. Erkel, the head of mission for MSF's programs in Dagestan, has been held captive since August 12, 2002. His whereabouts and condition remain unknown. "We are here today to demand that President Putin does everything in his power to secure the safe and immediate release of Arjan Erkel and that UN member states hold the Russian leader accountable for failing to resolve Arjan's case," stated Dr. Morten Rostrup, MSF International Council President, at the start of the rally.

"If the newly adopted UN resolution on the safety and security of aid workers is to have any meaning, President Putin must live up to his responsibility under international law to find and free Arjan and allow humanitarian assistance to reach those in need in the Northern Caucasus," continued Dr. Rostrup. Actor Patrick Stewart read a letter to Arjan written by Vincent Cochetel, an aid worker who was kidnapped in Chechnya for 11 months. The letter begins, "It is such a strange thing to feel so close to someone without knowing the person. I have known like you the unbearable depths of loneliness, too much time to think, too much time to look back." Daniel Gluck, a New York attorney and environmentalist, whose own brother Kenny Gluck, an MSF aid worker, was kidnapped in Chechnya in 2001 and held for almost a month, spoke passionately about what Arjan's family must be going through. "Although the world is large and the wounds too easily overlooked by those preoccupied by more mundane concerns, Arjan is never forgotten," Gluck said. Co-sponsored by Amnesty International and emceed by actor Kathleen Chalfant, the rally also drew attention to the plight of Chechen civilians suffering from years of war and displacement. At present in Ingushetia, 80,000 displaced Chechens living in tent camps and makeshift shelters are being increasingly pressured by the Russian authorities to return to war-torn Chechnya where little or no humanitarian aid is available. The rally concluded with the reading of the names of ten aid workers kidnapped in the Caucasus since 1999. Rally-goers then made their way to the East River to board the 'Free Arjan Boat' which cruised in front of the UN building for two hours, sending a strong message to the General Assembly that Arjan must be freed.



**Memo** on the meetings with French Foreign Minister De Villepin (Sept 25 '03), with Deputy National Security Advisor of the US (Sept 24 '03), with Congressman Weldon and Shays, Morten Rostrup, Patrice Page, Catherine Harper, Nicolas de Torrente, MSF (in English).

**Extract:**

Meeting with French Foreign Minister De Villepin (Sept. 25, '03)

[...] From him, it must be a mix of criminal and politically driven motives and people, and the Russian government must have some leverage/control on this case but for sure, not the total control to resolve the case. [...] Through the diplomatic efforts, you will maybe help to create a climate to facilitate the evolution of these negotiations, but that's it. The release of Erkel will only come with direct negotiations between the abductors and a neutral and respected group that we have to find. [...] Furthermore, they might not be able to deliver Erkel, as it will increase the current suspicions that the case is political, or it will show that the FSB is weak or not totally controllable; that's why you must bring in a neutral, independent, credible, and well known third party to negotiate for us with the abductors. The Russians must also be very worried about the 'day after the release.' What would Erkel say about all this? On that point, we made it clear that the message after the release will be factual, no political polemic, very much controlled, and that he must pass this message to Ivanov.

Meeting with Deputy National Security Advisor of the US (Sept. 24 '03)

[...] The striking thing here is that they don't deny at all the responsibilities or the leverage of the Russian government to make progress on the case; the deputy national security advisor is not even trying to balance the whole thing by saying stuff like "it must more complicated than that, it is difficult for the Russians, etc." So of course they have their own intelligence on the case (more than 500 people in the US embassy in Russia...) and if they agree for Bush to raise the case of a Dutch national while there are so many other sensitive issues between the two governments, it is maybe perhaps because they understand that at least, Russia is not doing the maximum and that progress can be made. Also for sure, the fact that the Dutch PM made an appeal played a role and finally, the damage control link to the issue/ responsibilities about to the story of the military attaches, as the attitude about their own capability to raise this issue with Russia at a high level drastically changed since we brought up the story at the NSC some months ago.



*The only initiative to make a public statement that I blocked was when it was proposed that we confront Putin publicly during a lecture he was giving at Columbia University as part of United Nations meeting in New York. The MSF USA team had displayed a banner on the Hudson*

River. Morten [Rostrup, Board President of MSF International] called me to say that he had access to the meeting room at Columbia, and would therefore be able to confront Putin publicly. I told him that under no circumstances should he do that. It was the only time I said no. We should not make it personal. In my view, that would have been a tactical error. It was going far enough to attack a State, so did not seem to me that we would move things forward by attacking Putin personally on this issue.

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of Communications (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000- May 2008), (in French) interviewed in 2009.

**On 26 September, on the occasion of a meeting of the Russian and American presidents, MSF launched a public appeal to Vladimir Putin calling on him to assume responsibility to have Arjan Erkel released.**



'President Bush Urged to Press President Putin for Aid Worker's Freedom,' **Press release**, MSF, New York, 26 September 2003 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

The independent humanitarian medical aid organization Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) today called upon U.S. President George Bush to press Russian President Vladimir Putin at Camp David to ensure kidnapped aid worker Arjan Erkel's immediate and safe release. Arjan Erkel is the Dutch volunteer for MSF who was abducted on August 12, 2002 in the Russian republic of Dagestan. Since the end of July, there has been no information on his condition and his whereabouts remain unknown. Russian officials have assured MSF for more than thirteen months that they were working on Arjan's case, and yet there has been no substantial evidence of actions taken by Russian authorities to find and free Arjan.

In August 2003, Russia voted in favor of the unanimously adopted UN Security Council Resolution 1502 on the safety and security of humanitarian aid workers. According to Resolution 1502, all member states must take appropriate steps to ensure aid workers' safety and security. "During his speech this week to the United Nations General Assembly, President Putin told the world that countries must be duty-bound to observe the norms of international law," said Dr. Morten Rostrup, MSF International Council President. "President Putin must live up to his obligations and his own statements to secure Arjan's immediate and safe release. It is up to all heads of state, including President Bush, to hold President Putin accountable for resolving this crime against an aid worker."

To date, more than 400,000 people around the world have signed a petition calling on President Putin to do everything in his power to secure Arjan's release. Members of the US

Senate and US Congress have also written to both leaders about Arjan, and have urged President Bush to raise the matter directly with President Putin. In the past week, officials in the Bush Administration have assured MSF that Arjan's case was of great concern and that it was on the summit's agenda. It will be critical for President Bush to discuss it directly with President Putin. "An aid worker held captive is an international issue." Dr. Rostrup continued. "Because of threats and violence in the Northern Caucasus, aid agencies have almost no access to people in the region, even though the needs are enormous. This is why President Bush must insist that President Putin urgently mobilize all necessary resources to secure Arjan's release."



'Kindness's Cruel Reward,' Bob Herbert, Editorial, **The New York Times** (USA) 26 September 2003 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

Russia has shown no eagerness to vigorously investigate the Erkel kidnapping, which is hardly surprising when you consider that government agents watched passively as the man was abducted. The initial (and extremely tepid) investigation was closed in November and would have remained closed if Doctors Without Borders and others had not succeeded in turning the case into an embarrassment for the Putin government. It was reopened in May. Since then videotapes have reportedly surfaced indicating that Mr. Erkel is alive.

Chechnya and, to a lesser extent, Iraq are disaster areas, and the suffering of innocent civilians in both places is profound. More, not less, humanitarian aid is desperately needed. This week's summit meeting is a perfect time for Presidents Bush and Putin to affirm their commitment to the protection of humanitarian workers in the regions for which they are responsible.

**At the end of September, following the rejection by the Russian authorities of its programme to treat multi-drug resistant tuberculosis, which had been approved by the WHO, MSF Belgium closed the programmes it had been running for over seven years for tuberculosis sufferers in Siberian prisons. At the beginning of October, MSF Belgium intervened to help to earthquake victims in la Siberia and publicised this in a press release.**



'MSF Ends Tuberculosis Treatment in Kemerovo Region, Russia,' **Press release**, MSF Belgium, 30 September 2003 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

After seven years of groundbreaking treatment of tuberculosis

in prison colonies and communities in the Kemerovo region of Siberia, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has decided to stop its involvement in TB control. MSF saw no option but to discontinue its work after the Russian Ministry of Health rejected the organisation's project for fighting drug-resistant TB. The MSF project was in accordance with the WHO guidelines for treatment of the disease. In the spring of 2003, the Ministry of Health informed MSF that the treatment schemes proposed in the project contradicted regulations of the Russian Pharmaceutical Committee. MSF reviewed the project document, with support of leading and recognised Russian authorities in the field of TB treatment. The new project proposal was approved by the Central Tuberculosis Research Institute (CTRI), the Russian prison authority GUIN and the Novosibirsk TB Institute which is responsible for monitoring TB activities in the Kemerovo region. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Health rejected the project for the second time in September 2003.

"After years of efforts, we are back at square one," says Nicolas Cantau, Head of Mission for MSF in the Russian Federation. "We are forced to quit, as the only alternative would be to provide incomplete, inadequate treatment to the patients. We have no options left, but given the scale of the problem with TB in Siberia and our investment over seven years in trying to tackle it with the Russian authorities, our decision to leave feels like a very painful defeat." The reasons given by the Ministry of Health for this second rejection refer to Russian legislation that prohibits the extended use of certain second line anti-TB drugs, crucial for the fight against drug-resistant TB. In order to comply with existing legislation, MSF is asked to implement a treatment strategy that is in complete contradiction with the one proposed by WHO.

High-level representation in Moscow earlier this month failed to change the position of the Ministry of Health. Since the beginning of 1996, upon invitation of GUIN Kemerovo, MSF has been involved in tuberculosis control activities in the penitentiary system of Kemerovo region. Since 2001, MSF has also been active in the civil sector. By June 2003, over 10,000 TB patients had received treatment based on WHO strategy through cooperation between MSF and regional structures. Apart from supplying TB drugs and side-effect drugs to these patients, MSF has also assisted the region with providing supplementary food to the patients, rehabilitating health structures, and providing materials for laboratories. MSF fully renovated and equipped the laboratory of the TB colony 33 in Mariinsk which is the referral laboratory for the whole prison system in the region.



*'MSF Intervenes in Siberia Following the Earthquake,'*  
**Press release**, MSF Belgium, 8 October 2003 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

MSF has sent an emergency team to Siberia (Russia) following the various earthquakes which have struck the area. The Kosh-Agach region, which has nearly 17,000 inhabitants, has been the worst affected by the tremors, which in places have

left crevasses 6 metres wide and 400 metres long. Twelve villages have been struck by the series of earthquakes of a force greater than seven on the Richter scale. The authorities estimated that six hospitals have been destroyed and twelve other at least partially damaged.

Charles Goethals, MSF emergency coordinator, considers that "The region's inaccessibility is one of our major challenges, not only because the distances are so great, but also because the debris generated by the shocks have blocked the road for more than 100 kilometres. However, in the last few days we have been able to send two teams from Moscow and Kemerovo, with medicines, medical equipment and blankets." Although initially the casualty count was low, in the days following the earthquakes there was a marked increase in the number of traumas, post-traumatic stress syndromes, and respiratory problems. MSF took action by distributing the necessary medicines to the health centres and hospitals that were still operating. Charles Goethals concluded: "One of our greatest concerns is the cold weather which could prove to be as dangerous for the population as the earthquake itself. This is because so many houses have been destroyed and the temperature drops to below -15° C at night." In addition to distributing medicines, the seven-member MSF team is also currently distributing clothes bought locally, 1,500 blankets, and 1,500 hygiene kits.

**On 1 October, the Ingush authorities definitively closed the Bella camp for displaced persons. In the preceding weeks, hundreds of displaced people were pressured to leave the camp and the humanitarian organisations had problems gaining access. MSF denounced this situation in a press release. A month later, Ivan Pomeschenko, head of the migration service in Ingushetia would declare that the humanitarian organisations working in the displaced persons' camps, were openly using propaganda to dissuade people from returning to Chechnya and that their activities were being closely studied by the Russian Federation's security services.**



*'Camps Closed, People Expelled: Displaced Chechens Must Have Option to be Re-located in Ingushetia,'*  
**MSF Press release**, Nazran/Moscow 3 October 2003 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

On Wednesday, October 1, authorities in Ingushetia closed Bela Camp, which housed up to 3,500 displaced Chechens, according to Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). This is only the most recent step authorities have taken in implementing a strategy of closing down camps for displaced people in Ingushetia, a Russian Republic neighboring Chechnya. Most of the final 168 families living in the camp in the Russian Republic were relocated over the past week to tents provided by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in Satsita Camp. The displaced families are able to stay in



Ingushetia and not return to Chechnya, where a climate of extreme violence, abductions, assassination, torture, and “cleansing” operations persist. Unfortunately, at least an equal number of families left the camp before September under constant pressure from authorities. They were given no alternative except to return to Chechnya, and no one is able to say precisely where these families have gone.

The night before Bela Camp was closed, families squatting in Logovaz and Oushkoz, spontaneous settlements called kompakniki in Russian, were threatened with expulsion. That same day, the military conducted a new “cleansing” operation in the MTF-Karabulak camp. One hundred soldiers surrounded the camp to ‘check papers.’ Two men were arrested and detained until that night. The following morning, nearly thirty masked men returned to the camp and arrested another man. Such operations are becoming everyday occurrences in the neighborhoods outside Ingushetia’s capital Nazran. During the same period, access to the camps for humanitarian aid workers has been severely limited. Entry is prohibited without special authorization, and officials cite insecurity and warnings of kidnapping for the restrictions.

Providing alternative shelters to people who are forced out of displaced-person settlements in Ingushetia should be done in all instances when people do not want to return to war-ravaged Chechnya. The relocation of displaced families from Bela Camp clearly shows it is possible to rapidly provide alternative housing to people who choose not to return to Chechnya, and each expelled family should receive concrete offers of housing in Ingushetia. MSF is ready to resume construction of temporary shelters as soon as promised authorizations are given.



*‘FSB of Russia Analyses Activity of Some International Humanitarian Organisations in Ingushetia,’ RIA Novosti (Russia) 5 November 2003 (in English).*

#### **Extract:**

With the beginning of 2004 the Migration Service Department of Ingushetia (a republic in the Southern Federal District) intends to study the activity of some international humanitarian organisations in the camps of forced migrants. Department chief Ivan Pomeshchenko spoke about it at the meeting with a group of Russian journalists, who are making a tour of North Ossetia and Ingushetia under the aegis of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in the Russian Federation. “The missions of some international humanitarian organisations are engaged in open propaganda in the camps for migrants, aimed against the stabilization of the situation in -Chechnya and Ingushetia,” Ivan Pomeshchenko said. According to him, “the activity of such organisations is now being thoroughly analyzed by the bodies of the Federal Security Council of the Russian Federation.” Speaking about the return of Chechen migrants from Ingushetia to Chechnya, Pomeshchenko underscored that “the process is taking place on a merely voluntary basis.” According to him, the results of the latest public poll of the migrants show that only two percent of the respondents refuse to return to Chechnya. In October,

more than 1,200 migrants voluntarily returned to Chechnya. The chief of the Migration Service Department of Ingushetia pointed out “the great assistance of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees [had aided] in resolving the problems of the Chechen migrants.”

**On 5 October, Akhmad Kadirov, who had until then been interior minister of the pro-Russian Chechen administration, was elected president of Chechnya. According to observers, the election was extensively and openly manipulated. In the 8 October issue of the independent Russian weekly Novaya Gazeta, Vyacheslav Izmaïlov suggested that the release of Arjan Erkel would be the first international task of the new president, who, he said, had already been involved in the release of other hostages.**



*‘The Kremlin’s Candidate becomes President of Chechnya Following a Rigged Election,’ Natalie Nougayrède, Le Monde (France) 7 October 2003 (in French).*

#### **Extract:**

On this Election Day, Grozny is a ghost town. The roads are deserted, the markets empty, the inhabitants holed up in what they call ‘homes’ – apartment blocks with the facades ripped off by the bombs which rained down on the city in 1994, 1995, 1999, 2000. Everywhere there is the same misery, the same fear, and the same feeling of indescribable absurdity. After the massacres, the summary executions, the torture, after the violence that was unleashed following the arrival of the Russian army four years ago, the Chechens are asked to go and vote.

“Pure intentions, strong power”, proclaims the poster which shows the designated victor of the presidential ‘election’ on 5 October, Akhmed Kadyrov, shaking hands with Vladimir Putin. That evening, the authorities announced ‘participation of more than 80%.’ Nobody in Grozny believes that this figure is credible. People stayed home, fearing armed confrontation and attacks, and were convinced that the election was just for show. [...] To give an impression of active participation, people were taken from one polling station to another. Dozens of foreign correspondents invited by the Kremlin were given a guided tour under heavily armed protection to witness the staging of this electoral Potemkin village. When they speak freely, far from eavesdroppers, the Chechens describe a terrorised society, a world of condemnation and threats. For instance, one woman called Aminat, in her ministry office adorned with a picture of Akhmed Kadyrov, waits for her boss to leave the room before whispering “We were forced at gunpoint to become members of the Russian People’s Party [pro-Kremlin], as Moscow promised our boss a seat in the Moscow parliament if he stood as candidate for that party. I didn’t go to vote, but they have the details of our passports and they’d already voted for us.”

The vote-rigging takes place in broad daylight. Officially, '561,000 electors' were 'registered' for the election which took place without European observers. This figure alone would account for more than the total current population of Chechnya. Furthermore, according to the authorities '30,000 Russian soldiers' voted on Sunday, but the true figure could be two or three times higher. The three or four candidates who might have overshadowed Mr Kadyrov have thrown in the towel under pressure from the Kremlin.



'Vladimir Putin, Release of Arjan Erkel is in Your Hands,' Vyacheslav Izmailov, *Novaya Gazeta* (Russia) 8 October 2003 (translated from Russian into English by MSF).

#### Extract:

After President of Russia was appealed [to] for aid in the release of Erkel by the prime ministers of the Netherlands and Greece during the jubilee festivities in Saint-Petersburg in May this year, Vladimir Putin stated that he was aware of the case and the work on release of the abducted was underway... True, the president gave instructions to the leadership of FSB and MVD and these two establishments combined their efforts on release of Arjan Erkel. [...] "I can witness that I have personally and repeatedly met with the Head of administration of Chechen Republic Akhmed Kadirov in 2000-2001 on the issue of liberation of the Samara journalist Biktor Petrov and an activist of the female movement Svetlana Kuzmina who had spent more than two years in captivity of the bandits in Chechnya."

Long negotiations gave a result: the people of Akhmed Kadirov helped indeed although we had to resort to this for the leaders of the illegal bandit units – Russian Gelaev and Doku Umarov. [...] This issue of the newspaper will appear when the results of the presidential elections in Chechnya are known already. Their results cause no doubt. Kadirov will be made president. So let Arjan Erkel's release become his first international mission. Provided of course, the president of Russia charges him with such a task.

**In mid-October, on an official visit to Switzerland, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs told his Swiss counterpart that Arjan Erkel was alive and that Russia was doing all it could to release him.**



'The Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs States that Arjan is Alive,' **Press release**, MSF Switzerland, 19 October 2003 (in French).

#### Extract:

According to the ITAR-TASS press agency, Igor Ivanov told Micheline Calmy-Rey [Swiss Minister of Foreign Affairs] that

Arjan, who was abducted more than 14 months ago, was still alive and that Russia was doing all it could to have him released. Since May 2003, the Russian authorities have been saying that Arjan is still alive. Evidence of this has been shown to MSF. The first piece of evidence was sent at the end of March to the Dutch authorities, more than seven months after Arjan's kidnapping. It includes two photos and two letters handwritten by Arjan. At the end of July, a second piece of evidence was received.

**At the end of October, the Director General of MSF Switzerland moderated the MSF movement's proposals for communications support and lobbying. His intention was to avoid situations which could provoke accusations that might compromise progress being made with some leads. However, on 1 November a poster campaign with portraits of Arjan and information about his plight were displayed by MSF in strategic places in Moscow's airports.**



'Arjan,' **Email** exchange between Thomas Linde, MSF Switzerland Executive Director and Ulrike Pilar, MSF Germany Executive Director, 30 October 2003 (in English).

#### Extract:

Ulrike [...]:

Hi Jana - any news about next steps regarding Arjan? We were thinking of organizing a background discussion with some selected journalists - if Thomas Nierle would come? What do you think? [...]

Thomas:

a) Our focus in public communications today is somewhat different than before. Intermediaries in the field appear to [be] making progress, and we have seen during the last 6 weeks that too much rhetorical noise at this stage may confuse the guys - both those who must finally let Arjan free, and those who need to give green lights for this. Therefore, we should do our best to maintain awareness on the predicament of Arjan but avoid situations that could force us to repeat accusations that we do not want to put forward at this stage. It therefore, might not be the right moment for a background briefing with journalists (if you do this you need to give some juicy info, but then you can't control how it will get out). [...]




'**Narrative chronology**, Arjan Erkel Case,' MSF Switzerland Cell Crisis, April 2004 (in English).

#### Extract:


01/11: In Moscow, beginning of the billposting campaign with AE's pictures. The idea is to have billboards informing on AE's situation. In both of Moscow's biggest airports, the

billboards are situated in strategic places in order to attract the attention of politicians flying to Moscow. The campaign is planned to go on till AE's release, unless there is something counterproductive coming up through this action.


 *There were days when Thomas Nierle or Thomas Linde [Director of Operations and Director General of MSF Switzerland] called to tell us to stop communicating.*

*I can remember two occasions when Thomas Linde said to me 'wait, we mustn't go ahead with this' and on both occasions we stopped.*

Rafa Vila San Juan, MSF International Secretary General, January 2001 to January 2004) (in French) interviewed in 2009

 *For each communication operation there were discussions among the sections. It had been decided at international level that our section had a right of veto, which meant that we could veto communications if we deemed them dangerous or counter-productive with regard to current activities or negotiations. It was well-respected.*

Dr Thomas Nierle, MSF Switzerland, Head of Emergencies then Director of Operations 2000-2004, (in French) interviewed in 2009.

 *Things worked pretty well between the Swiss, the international office, and ourselves, we did things together. Every time we adopted a position, we were very worried about whether Arjan was alive or unwell. This was what motivated us; otherwise we wouldn't have done it. We measured how far it could be dangerous for Arjan, for ourselves individually, and for the teams.*

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of Communications (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000- May 2008), (in French) interviewed in 2009.

**On 5 November 2003, on the occasion of Vladimir Putin's visit to Rome for a summit with the European Union, MSF gave a press conference in which it called on the President of the Italian Council, Silvio Berlusconi, who also held the Presidency of the European Union, to apply**

**pressure on his Russian counterpart to secure Arjan Erkel's release. On 7 November, Vladimir Putin was in Paris. MSF asked the President of the French Republic, Jacques Chirac, to raise the issue of Arjan's plight and organised a demonstration near the presidential palace to denounce the situation of displaced Chechens and to call for the release of Arjan Erkel.**

**The European Union was divided about President Berlusconi's unconditional support for Vladimir Putin's policies. On 9 November, the UN Commission on Human Rights published a damning report about human rights violations in Chechnya.**



*'EU President Berlusconi Called on to Press President Putin to Secure the Release of Arjan Erkel, MSF Aid Worker in Captivity in the Caucasus since August 2002,' Press release, MSF Rome, 5 November 2003 (in English).*

#### **Extract:**

As European Union (EU) and Russian leaders convene a summit meeting in Rome this week, the international humanitarian medical aid organization Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) calls upon the president of the European Union to press Russian President Vladimir Putin to secure the release of Arjan Erkel, the MSF volunteer abducted on August 12, 2002 in the Russian Republic of Dagestan.

At the end of July, MSF was shown proof confirming that Arjan was alive. On October 13, Igor Ivanov, Russia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Minister, also confirmed that Arjan was alive during an official visit to Switzerland. In addition to this, Mr. Ivanov said that Russia was doing everything possible to secure Arjan's release. Even though such statements are reassuring to Arjan's family and to MSF, the lack of resolution of the case clearly indicates that much more must be done. "After more than 14 months of unbearable captivity for our colleague, we urgently ask all members of the European Union and especially its president, Silvio Berlusconi, to hold the Russian President Vladimir Putin accountable for securing Arjan Erkel's safe release," said Dr. Morten Rostrup, President of MSF's International Council.

Since the day of the kidnapping, the European Parliament has twice called on Russian officials to find and ensure Arjan's safe release, first in a resolution adopted in January and again in a plenary session on July 3. The European Parliament called upon "the Russian authorities to step up their efforts to find and free Arjan Erkel, the head of the MSF mission in Dagestan." "As Arjan is a European citizen, MSF takes the opportunity today to appeal to the European Union Presidency, led by Italy until the end of the year, to follow the European Parliament's resolutions and call on Russian authorities at all levels to substantially increase their efforts to secure Arjan's safe release," added Rostrup. Arjan Erkel is the only foreign humanitarian worker who remains in captivity in the Caucasus. His case has become a clear expression of the reduced humanitarian space in the Caucasus. This is a region that has been in conflict for

more than ten years and where independent humanitarian organizations today are unable to deliver effective assistance to thousands because of enormous insecurity and instability. In August 2003, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1502 on the safety and security of humanitarian aid workers, reiterating the responsibilities of host countries. Arjan Erkel, however, is still in captivity, and humanitarian workers in Russia's Northern Caucasus region continue to be threatened.



*Freedom, Human Rights, and Chechnya: "Uncomfortable Themes" Behind the Scenes,' La Repubblica* (Italia) 5 November 2003 (translated from Italian by MSF).

#### Extract:

The Yukos<sup>36</sup> question does not appear in the official agenda, just as there lacks another theme the Italian president has promised to raise: the kidnapping of Arjan Erkel, the Doctors Without Borders (MSF) volunteer kidnapped 12 August 2002 in the Soviet Republic of Dagestan, where he assisted refugees fleeing the war in Chechnya. Since that day, all traces have been lost of Erkel: two pictures, one dating back a year ago and one from last summer, and some informal communications to his family and MSF via Russian channels show that he is still alive. "Russians have contact with the kidnappers," explains Morten Rostrup, international president of MSF, "We don't know what kind of contact, but we believe they can do more so that Arjan will be released." Arjan's father, Dik Erkel, has arrived in Rome to put pressure on Europe and push it to demand Putin take control of the situation. "Tomorrow (today for readers, editor's note), 450 days will have passed since the kidnapping," he says, "Since then my family's life has become a nightmare: I know my son is alive, but I don't know where he is. He appears very worn out in the pictures I've been sent: I don't think he could survive another winter in the Caucasus." For this reason Erkel and MSF are asking the EU to push Putin, who has shown interest in the issue only after much international pressure – from Kofi Annan, the Pope, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Ruud Lubbers and the many EU governments which have taken on the case. Chechnya must be one of the priorities of the talks, sustains Amnesty International, which will present a document in three points today to urge the EU to demand answers from the Russians regarding human rights in the area, where, according to the words of Ilyas Akhmadov, exiled Foreign Secretary of the nationalist government, "genocide" is occurring. Akhmadov has asked the Pope and participants in the summit to call upon Putin to start a "political dialogue" with Chechen opposition.



*'MSF Demonstration in Paris for Arjan Erkel,' Le Monde* (France), 7 November 2003 (in French).

#### Extract:

Members of Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) have demonstrated near the Elysée, on Friday 7 November, to demand the release of their colleague Arjan Erkel. [...] "Arjan's life is in Vladimir Putin's hands. We have asked President Chirac to raise the matter", explained Rafael Vilasanjuan, Secretary General of MSF-International. On 31 July, the Dutch government (Arjan Erkel is a Dutch citizen) received a photo of Arjan. Recently MSF-Switzerland published a report bringing to light "strange coincidences, inconsistencies, and dissimulations" by the Russian side during the enquiry into his abduction. According to this report, Arjan Erkel "was under surveillance by FSB agents (former KGB) when he disappeared".



*'Europe in Complete Disarray Facing Vladimir Putin's Russia,' Laurent Zecchini, Le Monde* (France), 9 November 2003 (in French).

#### Extract:

The Commission has strongly criticised Mr Berlusconi's unconditional support for the Russian President. Jacques Chirac is increasingly considerate towards Moscow. Berlin and London are keeping quiet, whereas Denmark, Sweden, and the President of the European Parliament reiterate their criticisms about Chechnya. Silvio Berlusconi again provoked deep tensions in Europe by giving his unconditional support to Vladimir Putin on Thursday in Rome. On Friday, the European Commission strongly criticised the statement made the day before by the President in office of the European Union, considering that he had not defended the positions of the Fifteen. Nevertheless, at the same time, Jacques Chirac in Paris showed his friendship towards Vladimir Putin by accompanying him to the airport. Most European leaders have decided to support the Kremlin in spite of the massive violations of human rights in Chechnya, which have again been condemned in a UN report. In Moscow, one month ahead of a general election, traditionally divided democratic movements, are beginning to rally.




*'Damning UN Report on Chechnya,' Afsane Bassir Pour, Le Monde* (France), 9 November 2003 (in French).

#### Extract:

In a damning report published on Friday 7 November in Geneva, the UN Commission on Human Rights says it is "profoundly preoccupied" by human rights violations in Chechnya, the Russian Federation's pro-independence republic. According to one of its experts, "executions, torture, crimes, and rapes seem to have been committed with a large dose of impunity." At a press conference, the Rapporteur, Mr Nigel Rodley, also indicated that the explanations given by Moscow "had done nothing to dispel

36. In October 2003, the Russian Oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Yukos's owner, was arrested and jailed.

the Commission's concerns." The experts are worried by the "persistent and evidence-supported" information on human rights violations in the Chechen Republic. The rapporteurs indicate that 54 police officers and soldiers have been prosecuted for crimes against civilians in Chechnya, but note that the "charges and sentences do not seem to fit the gravity of the acts." They added that "all the extrajudicial matters, enforced disappearances, and cases of torture and rape" should be subject to an enquiry and that the guilty parties "should be prosecuted and the victims compensated." The 18 authors of the report also stress that the Chechen presidential election, held on 5 October, did not respect the requirements of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

 MSF Holland advocated silent diplomacy with all the governments of Europe. I went to see Jose-Maria Aznar [the Spanish Prime Minister], Javier Solana [European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs], Berlusconi's number two, all those people. Russia did not then have as much power from energy, but it was beginning. Putin wanted to play with that and we started playing with Europe to get Arjan's case on the agenda of all those meetings between Europe and Russia. Solana's head of private office told me that Solana had tried to raise the issue of Chechnya, but Putin had said that he would never accept interference from Europe. None of the presidents had done anything, except for Silvio Berlusconi [President of the Italian Council] but that was in private context. During a private visit to Sardinia, he told Putin that if he wanted to improve relations with Europe, he would need to send a strong signal by finding, for instance, a solution to the Erkel problem. Putin replied that he wasn't the one responsible and he did nothing. Aznar didn't want to mention Arjan in order not to anger Putin. Villepin [Dominique de, French Foreign Affairs Minister] mentioned Erkel to Ivanov, the Russian Foreign Affairs Minister, at a visit to the United Nations, but not to Putin. So there was no real political pressure.

Rafa Vila San Juan, MSF International Secretary General, January 2001 to January 2004) (in French) interviewed in 2009.

## JOURNALISTS POINT TO PEOPLE WHO MAY BE BEHIND THE KIDNAPPING

In the Dutch daily NRC's editions of 5 and then 16 November, Coen Van Zwol returned to the hypothesis postulated a few days earlier by Ismailov in *Novaya Gazeta*. This designated a criminal businessman, member of the Dagestani Parliament, and close to some Wahhabite groups, as the person who had ordered Arjan Erkel's kidnapping. The article maintained that MSF, as well as Dagestani and Russian investigators, had been following this lead for a long time. In addition to his Dutch colleague, Ismailov was also considered a particularly good source by MSF, which extensively used his information to build its analysis of the 'whys and wherefores' of Arjan Erkel's kidnapping.



'Identity of Arjan Erkel's Kidnapper is Known,' Coen van Zwol, *NRC* (The Netherlands), Moscow, 5 November 2003 (translated from Dutch into English by MSF).

### Extract:

Dutch aid worker Arjan Erkel was abducted on 12 August last year on the orders of a Dagestan parliamentarian and businessman. In the spring, his kidnapers made it known that they would soon be issuing their demands. Since then, a rumour has been circulating in Dagestan that Erkel will have to bring in a ransom of five million dollars. The identity of the person behind the abduction is known to the Russian investigators. At the moment Arjan Erkel is said to be back in Dagestan, in the region of Shamilski.

These are the results of an investigation by journalist and retired Major Vyatcheslav Izmailov, who recently visited the South Russian federal state of Dagestan. Izmailov comes from Dagestan and mediated in many kidnappings in the 1990s. In his newspaper, *Novaya Gazeta* he calls the kidnapper by the false name of Imam, but in such a way that everyone in Dagestan knows immediately who he means. The name is also known to *NRC Handelsblad*. According to Izmailov, Arjan Erkel was abducted by Imam's gang in the Dagestan capital Makhachkala, while two agents of the Russian secret service, the FSB, looked on and did nothing. But the story really begins earlier. On 23 April 2002 the FSB announced triumphantly that they had murdered the Jordanian warlord Khattab. Khattab was the leader of the Arab volunteers in Chechnya and had close ties with Al-Qaeda. He died after opening a poisoned letter which he had received via Imam's cousin, Ibrahim, who lived in Baku (Azerbaijan). This dentist and former fellow-fighter of the Chechen leader Dudaiev

dealt in gold in Baku. Ibrahim was a member of Imam's criminal network, which survived mainly by doing odd jobs for Chattab's Arab legion. Some members of Imam's gang were FSB 'moles.' It was they who sent Chattab the poisoned letter via Ibrahim – possibly without his knowledge. The Chechen rebels saw Ibrahim as a collaborator.

On 14 May 2002 the Arab network Al Jazeera reported that a Chechen court had sentenced the man to death. According to Izmailov, he was murdered in September 2002, apparently on the orders of Imam. Imam had every reason to be furious. After the death of Khattab he lost the lucrative contact with Khattab's Arab paymasters. His gang decided to concentrate again on an older speciality: kidnapping. Imam wanted a foreigner because foreigners raised a lot of cash. In early August, Erkel, who was in CKhasavyurt near the Chechen border, was warned of danger by the FSB. He evacuated the foreign MSF workers – a doctor and a logistician – to the Dagestan capital Makhachkala. In Makhachkala Erkel then made a serious error by having dinner with two US military observers who were in Dagestan to watch Russian naval exercises. This and other 'suspicious' behaviour on the part of Arjan Erkel led the local police and secret service to believe that he was a western spy.

All of Izmailov's sources still share this opinion. They say: one thing is certain, Arjan Erkel had secrets. They also find it dubious that an aid worker refuses an armed bodyguard when, around the same time, the police warn him of danger. In their opinion, the aid worker did not want anyone snooping around. Imam's gang had informants among Dagestan's corrupt police force and the FSB. It is not inconceivable that the suspicions surrounding Arjan made him even more attractive as a kidnap candidate: the story has also filtered through to Dagestan that the CIA has huge resources and always pays up to get its people back. Izmailov's sources have no answer to the question of why the Dagestan FSB, who was shadowing Erkel, did not intervene on 12 August and then scarcely put any pressure on Imam. "Ask Vladimir Suratov," (the local head of the FSB), said the Dagestan police.

Izmailov's report is based on fourteen sources: ten policemen, two FSB agents in Dagestan and Moscow, and two brokers in kidnapping cases. The team in charge of the Erkel case on behalf of MSF, says that it is a "highly plausible account" and a "very good analysis" but not necessarily "the one true version because you never know who is manipulating who". Jean-Christophe of MSF: "The fact that the authorities in Dagestan are now suddenly talking freely to a journalist tells me that something is going on. It's like a move to put further pressure on the kidnappers. That's good, I hope." In the meantime, the situation in Dagestan has acquired a whole new dynamism. In June, after talks between Prime-Minister Balkenende and President Putin, the Moscow FSB sent an independent team of agents to the south to solve the Erkel case. They are coming down hard on the 'locals'. Christophe, MSF: "It's no longer a question of ransom money. Everybody wants to see this business come to an end, but the kidnappers want guaranteed immunity. They don't want to be punished later."

MSF denies that it is in touch with the kidnappers. Demands for five million dollars "have only reached us as rumours

since May." Christophe says that there have only been three signs that Arjan is still alive: two photos and letters and later a video tape: "As the video looked like a kind of ultimatum we asked for another sign that he was alive. They gave us one." According to Izmailov, the Dagestan police are running out of patience with Imam and there are plans to kill him. "The only thing that's stopping them is that they might endanger Arjan. But, at any rate, Imam knows for sure that he will die if Arjan dies." Christophe admits that he knows this as well. "The Dagestan police spoke to us about storm tactics but we are very wary. If they kill the leader, we're scared that his men will kill Arjan."

Is it the endgame for the Erkel case? Izmailov knows that his report will bring things to a head. He also has to think about his own safety: "Imam knows that I have a lot of information. I consider it now very dangerous to keep this to myself. I've let him know through my Dagestan sources that all the information, including the names of the kidnappers, is stored in a safe place and will be published if anything happens to me." Izmailov is still giving nothing away about the location where Arjan Erkel is being held. But if the report in his newspaper, *Novaya Gazeta* does not lead to Arjan's release, he might reveal more details in two weeks. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs has said that it does not comment on operational matters.



*'Death for the Living,'* Coen van Zwol, **NRC** (The Netherlands) 16 November 2003 (translated from Dutch into English by MSF).

#### Extract:

This week, the local newspaper *Noveye Delo* ran an article by retired Major Vyacheslav Izmailov about Arjan Erkel (33), the Dutch humanitarian aid worker who disappeared on 12 August 2002 in this southern Russian republic. The perpetrator, it is claimed, is a 'businessman' and a member of the Dagestani parliament. Izmailov uses the pseudonym 'Imam' but peppers his story with so many details that we came up with the real name after a day and a half's digging. Let us use a first name: K. [...] MSF considers it 'a plausible theory' that this Kazimagomed is the perpetrator but not necessarily 'the only correct theory.' It appears that his name has been known to the aid workers for at least eight months already. The Dagestani policeman, Temirbulatov, who is in charge of the investigation, says: "As a policeman, I make no comment. As a private citizen, I say: he's the one." A Dutch diplomat says: "It's a good story. It explains the kidnappers' curious behaviour."

Major Izmailov is an insider. He comes from Dagestan, where Erkel disappeared fifteen months ago. As a major in the Russian army, he built up a good relationship with the rebels in the first Chechen war (1994-1996). During the Russian withdrawal, he left the service and became a mediator in kidnappings, which were a true epidemic in the Caucasus at the time. A 'normal' Russian person brings in 5,000 – 10,000 US dollars, a foreigner often millions. Izmailov is now a reporter for the *Novaya Gazeta* newspaper. We spoke to Izmailov when he had just published his article. In the

courtyard of the Novoya Gazeta, he was busy unloading flour, rice, and canned meat from the boot of a black Mercedes: food aid for a Chechen refugee camp that he has adopted near the town of Tver. Last year, I accompanied the portly, balding major on just such a 'food drop.'

Our paths crossed again in February of this year when MSF broke the silence surrounding Arjan Erkel. Ex-president Mikhail Gorbachov, patron of the newspaper Novoya Gazeta, then asked Izmailov to investigate the kidnapping in Dagestan. This yielded little, except evidence that Erkel was still alive. We kept in contact and exchanged information. In July we checked a tip together: a car belonging to the Russian secret service FSB had been following Arjan Erkel when he was kidnapped – the aid worker had dined earlier in the week with two American military observers. Within an hour, all the facts were confirmed. At that moment, a lot [of clues] pointed to an active role by the Russian secret service FSB that had traditionally been hostile to MSF owing to its sharp criticism of the brutal Russian intervention in Chechnya. And the FSB is certainly in contact with the kidnapers. In June, a secret agent brought a video with pictures of Erkel to the Dutch embassy in Moscow, but the FSB refused to mediate any further. On 12 August 2003, a year since Arjan disappeared, MSF protested on the Lubyanka Square in Moscow, near the headquarters of the FSB.

Now, after a fresh visit to Dagestan, Izmailov is looking in a completely different direction: the kidnapper is a 'businessman' who works closely with Chechen Wahhabite warlords. He can substantiate this with fourteen partially independent sources from the police, FSB, and the 'milieu'. If this is all true and apparently common knowledge among insiders, it gives rise to three questions. Why is there no negotiation with K[...] about Erkel's release? Why do the local authorities not arrest Kazimagomed? And what does Major Izmailov think he can achieve by making all of this public? [...] Who is K [...], the suspected kidnapper of Arjan Erkel? He is a 32 year-old businessman belonging to the Avars, the biggest ethnic group in Dagestan. He comes from a poor family in the mountain village of G[...] and since March of this year has been a member of the Dagestani parliament for the district of Untsukul. Such a position provides one big advantage: immunity from prosecution.

Formally, K[...] is the sub-manager of [a] small electronics factory being built in M [...], a company that received a hefty subsidy of ten million dollars in 1999 from a then-unknown top bureaucrat in Moscow, the present prime-minister [...]. That fact that the factory has still not been opened and that the money seems to have disappeared is a local scandal. This week, the newspaper Dagestani described K[...] as 'an angel.' 'Because he comes from a poor family, he helps ordinary people.' But he is not an angel without enemies: in July, his car came under fire and his 33 year-old chauffeur died. K[...] sometimes drives along the dusty mountain paths around G[...] in a black Mercedes 600 and sometimes in a BMW 750.



MSF France Board Meeting **minutes**, 28 November 2003 (in French).

#### Extract:

Arjan's kidnapping

MSF now has very precise information about the people and bodies implicated in his kidnapping. All diplomatic possibilities have been exhausted. [...] We hope to get to the end of this in the coming weeks, but we are not certain of it. We do, however, know that Arjan is still alive.



*I remember this famous journalist, Ismailov, who I met two or three times. He was one of our sources on the alleged involvement of the FSB. The problem with him was that he had made his name on this and so we could not be sure how reliable his information was. I thought that his reputation was based entirely on the attacks he made on the authorities. He was accepted as long as he did not go beyond certain limits and, in the end, was used by the powers that be to say that there was freedom of speech. We had to be very careful with him. He was independent, that's for sure, and he was certainly the one who wrote the most about Arjan and asked the most questions in the Russian press.*

Dr Thomas Nierle, MSF Switzerland, Head of Emergencies then Director of Operations 2000-2004, (in French) interviewed in 2009.



*We were trying to change Arjan's narrative from 'the spy who was doing so and so' to that of 'the humanitarian worker doing such and such.' There was a journalist at Novaya Gazeta, Izmailov, who we used to place positive messages in the press. It was clear that the ministries followed the media much as our contacts did. I remember times when it was clear that they had just read something somewhere in the media.*

Steve Cornish, Coordinator MSF France in Georgia (January to April 2000) then in Ingushetia (September 2000 to January 2001), MSF Switzerland Officer in the Russian Federation (August 2002 to April 2004), (in French) interviewed in 2008

**On 10 December, the camp for displaced persons at Alina in Ingushetia was definitively closed and its inhabitants sent back to Chechnya. In the British daily *The Guardian*, the Coordinator of MSF France described the obstacles hindering humanitarian intervention in the camps for displaced Chechens.**



'Doctors Acting at Long Distance Across the Caucasian Frontiers,' *The Guardian* (UK) 20 December 2003 (in English).

#### Extract:

Perhaps nowhere else in the world does MSF go so far beyond its original medical brief as in its work in Ingushetia with refugees from the two recent wars in the neighbouring republic of Chechnya. About 90% of the 70,000 Chechen refugees no longer live in tents. To escape the winter cold, they moved into *kompanniki*, a vague term which covers a variety of disused garages, pig farms, chicken factories, bakeries and workshops. Besides arranging the installation of floors and ceilings, MSF has supervised repairs and even built new housing. MSF's work in the northern Caucasus is unique for other reasons. It faces a huge security problem and very difficult relations with the authorities.

Although there is no fighting in Ingushetia or Dagestan, the two republics which border Chechnya, the danger of kidnapping is ever present. In August last year, Arjan Erkel, its head of mission in northern Caucasus, was abducted in Dagestan and he has not been seen since. MSF suspended all its operations in Dagestan, and forbids its international staff to enter Chechnya. Although it resumed work in Ingushetia a few months later, their foreign staffs no longer sleep in the republic. To add to the security problems, the Russian government prohibits radio communications. This is not a place for the familiar sight of white Toyota Land cruisers with large antennae and the red MSF logo on the side. "In virtually every other country the government either supports or is neutral to MSF," says Duccio Staderini, Head of MSF Mission in Russia. "Here officials often create deliberate difficulties." He served in western Afghanistan before going to Moscow and says even the Taliban were easier to work with.

"The latest restriction is that we have to get passes to go into the tented camps in Ingushetia. In another case, we were given permission to build 140 houses for refugees and then told to destroy them." The authorities' policy is not to make life too comfortable for Chechens. To prove that, the war is almost over and Chechnya is "normalising," they have been putting pressure on the refugees to go home. The crudest method is to close the tented camps. One shut in December last year after the authorities gave a deadline for cutting off its gas and power supply. Another closed in October, and early this month refugees in the Alina camp were told to pack and find somewhere else to live because the tents were to be pulled down. It was the last stage in a slow squeeze, which has reduced Alina's numbers from 3,944 in early January to 818 by the beginning of December. About 30,000 refugees have returned to Chechnya this year, lured partly by supplies of flour and other food from the World Food Programme and partly by promises of compensation for damaged homes made by the pro-Moscow Chechen administration, although so far, fewer than 100 families have got it. Once there, they still benefit from MSF programmes. Although no international staffs go there, MSF uses a network of Chechen staff to take medicines and equipment to 25 Chechen hospitals, clinics and pharmacies in six regions of the war-torn republic. It has paid special

attention to Grozny's central hospital, helping to restore its operating theatre. The hospital managed to perform 395 operations last month.

**At the beginning of December, a lead for Arjan's release, through a Veterans' Association of the Russian Secret Services, which was recruited by MSF in agreement with the Dutch authorities, seemed to be on the verge of succeeding. However, following condemnations prompted by internal rivalries in the Dagestani police, the arrest of Imamutdin Temirbulatov on 10 December, the Dagestani police officer in charge of the Arjan Erkel investigation, threw the region into confusion. This temporarily blocked the various trails and leads, including the one followed by the Veterans' Association. In *Novaya Gazeta*, Vyatcheslav Izmailov took Temirbulatov's defence and published the information that MSF was still investigating. On 16 December, an article in the *Chechen Times* mistakenly announced that Chechen Special Forces had freed Arjan Erkel.**



'Narrative Chronology: The Dutch Government' AE Case - Period 2002 - April 2004, MSF Switzerland Cell Crisis, 2004 (in English).

#### Extract:

- 01/12: Two operational tracks are opened, one with the Veterans and one with the Dutch lawyer Rammelt, T-Linde (MSF-CH General Director) is doubtful about the fact to keep two tracks opened. [...]
- around 07/12: An opportunity to release AE is on the way to become a reality. The Veterans are part of the plan, maybe not initiating it but being accepted to play the role of intermediaries with the kidnapers. The release is planned in around the 11<sup>th</sup> of December. It is supposed to occur in Dagestan. [...]
- 10/12: Arrest of the Colonel Temirbulatov, (Deputy the Head of the Directorate for Organized Crime UBOP-MVD in Dagestan) suspected to be corrupted in the release of Dzhamal Gamidov, [the] eight-year old boy kidnapped more than three years ago. The arrest makes such a mess in the region that the chances of release for AE failed. The Veterans moved back to Moscow and expects more for the end of the month.



'Sensation or Fabrication,' Viatcheslav Izmailov, *Novaya Gazeta* (Russia) 15 December 2003 (in English).

#### Extract:

Last week national media broke sensational news. Head of Dagestani kidnapping police unit Lieutenant-colonel Imamutdin Temirbulatov was detained as one of



the suspects in the kidnapping of 11-year-old Dzhamal Gamidov. I know Imamutdin Temirbulatov personally as a policeman actively involved in resolving kidnapping cases. I have reason to suppose that Imamutdin Temirbulatov's "case" was set up. There were several attempts made to fire and compromise Temirbulatov. Imamutdin Temirbulatov's a troublesome person for both militants and his own bosses. [...] Temirbulatov made a personal report to the Dagestan Interior Minister regarding the abduction of Arjan Erkel, the case that had international repercussions. He had the most strained relations with his direct authorities. Temirbulatov has repeatedly accused his chefs of being corrupted and [an] accomplice to criminals.



'Special Operation,' by Chechen Special Forces to Liberate Arjan Erkel: Our Line is No Comment Please,' **Email** exchange between Pere Joan Pons, MSF Erkel Crisis Cell and MSF Communications Network, 16 December 2003 (in English).

**Extract:**

Please read the article below regarding the case of Arjan Erkel. Don't forget that this is only a new article.... Our external COM LINE:

If you receive any Media requests, MSF has no comments to de regarding the information published by The Chechen Times. Our line is very simple: "No Comment." Take care, for the time being, I have no more information to share.

**News**

"Special operation" by Chechen Special Forces to liberate Arjan Erkel

The editorial staff of The Chechen Times has learnt that a Chechen Special Force on December 13 carried out a special operation in the Tsuntitinsky district of Dagestan; to liberate the member of the organization "Doctors Without Borders," citizen of the Netherlands Arjan Erkel, who, according to preliminary information, was seized by members of the RF FSK more than a year ago and kept in captivity under the guise of a 'kidnapping' in the mountain area of Dagestan, near the border with Chechnya. The editorial staff of The Chechen Times doesn't have any available information if Arjan Erkel was liberated from Russian captivity as a result.



*Later on, the Dagestani Chief of Police responsible for investigations, and therefore, for finding Arjan, was arrested during his searches and was accused of being involved in the kidnappings himself. They [the Russian intelligence services] were right up to their necks in these affairs!*

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of Communications (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000- May 2008), (in French) interviewed in 2009.



*How to say that? Judging from my experience, I am convinced that there is practically no kidnapping case without some sort of participation of secret services.*

B, MSF North Caucasus staff, (in Russian, translated into English by MSF) interviewed in 2008.

**On 25 December 2003, the 500<sup>th</sup> day since Arjan Erkel's kidnapping, MSF issued a press release calling for his release and held a candle-lit vigil in Amsterdam.**



'August 12 - December 25, 2003 Arjan Erkel, 500 days in Captivity, Still Missing,' **MSF Press release**, 25 December 2003 (in English).

Arjan Erkel, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Head of Mission in the Northern Caucasus, has spent 500 days in captivity since he was kidnapped on the night of August 12, 2002 in the Russian Federation. Arjan Erkel, a 33-year-old Dutch man, was abducted by three armed gunmen in Makhachkala, the capital of Dagestan, a Russian republic neighbouring Chechnya. "500 days in detention without knowing what will happen the next day, without being sure that he will leave his prison alive one day is an unimaginable ordeal. We call once again upon all parties of good will to release Arjan now," says Thomas Nierle, MSF Switzerland's Operations Director. Since the day of the kidnapping, MSF has received proof that Arjan Erkel is alive. The latest dates to the end of July 2003, when MSF was shown a picture of Arjan Erkel. Since then, MSF has also continually been told by sources that Arjan is alive. This was confirmed by Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Igor Ivanov on October 13, 2003, during an official visit to Switzerland. Igor Ivanov also said that Russia was doing everything possible to secure his release. International organizations such as the United Nations, as well as the European Parliament and the European Commission have repeatedly expressed their concern about the fate of Arjan Erkel. World leaders have personally intervened on his behalf. Over 380,000 individuals worldwide have signed a petition to the President of Russia expressing their dismay about the fate of Arjan Erkel. Despite all these efforts, Arjan Erkel, who has been working with MSF since 1994, is still the only foreign humanitarian worker remaining in captivity in the Northern Caucasus.

## "MSF ACCUSES"

Against the wishes of his family and the Dutch authorities, MSF publicly accused Russian and Dagestani politicians of being responsible for Arjan Erkel's kidnapping

On 28 January 2004, the Erkel family urged representatives of MSF and of the Dutch government to maintain the strictest confidentiality around the leads followed in efforts to secure Arjan's release, so that they would not be compromised by leaks to the press. However, in February, after several weeks of near complete silence, the failure of several leads and the worrying rumours that were circulating about Arjan's health, the Erkel crisis unit and the international follow-up committee<sup>37</sup> re-launched an action plan for diplomacy and public communication. There were differences of opinion in the international follow-up committee, as to whether it was a good time or not to apply pressure publicly on the Russian authorities. These gave rise to very strong tension, in particular between the President of MSF France and the MSF Holland Director of Operations. In the end, the follow-up committee decided to accuse the Russian authorities publicly. This decision would be approved on 19 February by the Excom, the platform of General Directors of the operational sections. A press release was published on that day, marking Arjan Erkel's eighteen months in captivity.



'Meeting between the Erkel Family, BUZA and MSF,' Confidential - **Minutes** 28 January 2004 (in English).

### Extract:

6. Confidentiality of operational information: The family presented two specific situations where operational details of negotiations in process were known publicly and made the point that it is not a good negotiation strategy for others to know what MSF is willing to do. It is agreed that operational details are to be strictly confidential. Ability to maintain strict confidentiality is limited as services and journalists sometimes independently obtain and use information. [...]

9. Political attention: Agreed that the current diplomatic demarche will not be accusative, but questioning, reminding and exerting pressure. The family believes that the new Int'l President of MSF, Dr. Rowan Gillies, may be a new start in the political effort and Dick [Erkel] would like to meet him as soon as possible - agreed.



**Minutes** of the Board Meeting, MSF Switzerland, 6 February 2004 (in French).

### Extract:

Information about Arjan from Jean-Christophe Azé of the crisis unit. The lead of former FSB agents had not produced anything for the time being, after the release of a child kidnapped by the same group who had kidnapped Arjan and following the arrest of an investigator who was also working for us. For the intermediary groups, work was becoming difficult and they were feeling more exposed. The man responsible for kidnapping Arjan, who was the one with decision-making power, had faded into the background and was reticent about making contact again. [...] In consultation with Holland and the international movement, we gave ourselves until mid-February to see how we would start communicating publicly again. We had remained silent for four months, yet we did not think that this had helped us move forward. Arjan had been in captivity for a year and a half, so we thought that we could not remain silent and we started working again on an action plan and scheduled a timetable for diplomatic actions. We decided to change our messages, as we had seen that having contacted Bush and Berlusconi, we had reached the limits of what they were prepared to do. We considered that the only solution was to be more vocal, to push them to take a stand and to be more dynamic. The crisis unit was to change in mid-February, posts were being cut here in Geneva and in Moscow, one person was to replace Jana and Père, and if there was going to be more communication, we could always use the communication department for back-up. [...]

Thomas Nierle: [...] Psychologically and morally it was very hard work, which required a lot of energy. By launching a new phase with new people, we wanted to create a new impetus. [...]

Jean-Christophe Azé: [...] The Dutch government and the family were finding it difficult to sit by and wait. The sensitive issue was how to start communicating. We had a very passive position and a lot of pressure from the family; we had always to be ready for a clash with the family.



'Crisis Cell Communication Plan' – February 2004 - May 2004 (in English).

### Extract:

#### PHASE 1 – FEBRUARY-MARCH

Primary focus for Crisis Cell will be on the relaunch of operational diplomatic meetings (Dutch government, EU officials, Russian authorities, international donor & diplomatic community, UN) with aim of keeping pressure on Russian authorities & international community to reactivate the resolution of the case. Communications will remain in a secondary position and act primarily to support diplomatic meetings. However, during this period Communications will aim at reactivating the public pressure over the main actors: Dutch government, EU institutions, and Russian authorities.

Main goals of communications plan for Phase 1: Send open messages to the abductors via the Dagestani press. Encourage Dutch officials to pursue their efforts to resolve case. Keep Arjan's profile in international media to encourage authorities to press for safe resolution of case. -Send a clear message to Russian authorities before the Presidential elections: we don't give up.

#### Possible Communications Actions

- MSF Appeal in Dagestan: Public appeal addressed to the kidnappers: THE FAMILY IN DAGESTAN [...]
- Press conference after one year and a half mark: relaunch pressure and set up new campaign

#### PHASE 2 – MARCH-APRIL

Increase pressure via Media and diplomatic channels over three key actors to resolve case –Russian officials and Chechen Administration, Dutch government, Russian secret services- by pointing out their total lack of political will to solve case. On the Media, Communications is focused in denouncing the lack of commitment from the Dutch government to solve the case of Arjan. On the other hand, MSF evidences the total lack of progress of the investigation and the secret services to solve the case and demands more commitment from the Russian administration to accelerate the liberation. During this period, MSF goes public with last images of Arjan Erkel.

#### Possible Communications Actions

- Arjan's birthday on March 10, 2004 (34 years old)
- Kenny Gluck's + Cochetel + C. André + Carrs (The other family of Arjan)<sup>38</sup>
- Press conference during European Parliament session or EU Council meeting
- Ad Campaign on Economic Press

#### PHASE 3 – APRIL-MAY

'J'accuse' [I Accuse] strategy...

Message:

MSF, if there is no progress in terms of operational developments, attacks bluntly the Dutch government: Dutch are not committed to solve the case. We have evidence that they are not doing enough. They are guilty because they never have pushed the Russians enough at diplomatic level to solve this case. As a European citizen and Dutch citizen, the Dutch government has a clear responsibility in this affair. The EU officials have always kept a low profile towards the Russian in this case. We thank your all the efforts made by the European Parliament, but this is not enough. We consider that the efforts made by the EU presidency and the European Commission in the past, are a failure. The Russian authorities are not able to solve this case. But what is more dangerous, in more than 18 months they have not undertaken enough measures to solve it, which is unworthy of a country member of the UN Security Council. The Russian secret services are unable to solve this case (and then we detail our the story of the case).

38. Kenny Gluck (MSF H), Christophe André (MSFF), Vincent Cochetel (UNHCR), Camilla Carr (journalist) had been abducted and detained in Caucasus, in the previous years.

#### Possible Communications Actions

1. Arjan video tape release on the day of the Russian presidential elections
2. Off the record meetings with EU + Swiss + German + Dutch Journalists to keep case alive and to put pressure on key political actors
3. Key economic journalist briefings to keep case alive and to put pressure on key political actors
4. Humanitarian press conference in Geneva
5. Lobbying over journalists in charge of EU issues preceding Dutch European presidency



*'After 18 Months of Captivity, Arjan Erkel Still Missing - Ongoing Violence Limits Relief Efforts to Thousands of Displaced People,'* **Press release**, MSF, Moscou, New York, 12 February 2004 (in English).

One-and-a-half years after the abduction of Arjan Erkel, Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is deeply concerned by the failure of the Russian authorities to bring about a positive resolution of his case. MSF believes that the absence of any progress in the case is a clear indication that a firmer political commitment is needed by the Russian Federal and local authorities to ensure the safe release of Arjan. "The Russian authorities have repeatedly expressed their commitment to solve this case, but so far this has yielded no concrete results. The recent arrest of the investigator in charge of the Arjan's case only further erodes MSF's confidence in the investigation. Therefore, we urge the Russian authorities to live up to their commitment and secure Arjan's safe release," said Dr. Rowan Gillies, MSF International Council President.

Arjan Erkel, a 33-year-old Dutch national who had been working with MSF since 1994, was abducted on August 12, 2002, by three armed men in Makhachkala, the capital of Dagestan, a Russian republic. Over the last eighteen months, MSF has repeatedly received reports that Arjan is alive. The Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Igor Ivanov, gave the most recent confirmation on October 13, 2003, during an official visit to Switzerland. However, since then there has been no indication that any progress has been made that would lead to Arjan's release. Recent statements by international and humanitarian organizations, such as the United Nations and the European Parliament, and statements, in particular, by Jan Egeland, the UN Undersecretary for Humanitarian Affairs, have indicated that the release of Arjan Erkel would increase confidence in security for humanitarian workers in the region.



*In view of the internal situation at MSF Switzerland, I found myself dealing with the whole situation alone, so I finally turned to people who seemed willing to support us on the Arjan case. We had to get this guy out so*

that MSF could regain some peace of mind. [...] In the end, we followed the broad outlines suggested by MSF France, whose ideas had gradually taken hold anyways, as did the ideas of our strategic think tank, which had to be adapted a little to the Swiss situation. Some people had said they saw a video of Arjan looking unwell and being abused. It's clear that this type of information had upset us quite a bit. We were trying to get this video, which we had never received. At that point, supported mainly by Jean-Hervé [Bradol, President of MSF France] and Rafa [Vila San Juan, Secretary General of MSF International], some of us started to say that we needed to be more aggressive, that it wasn't enough to just ask questions. There was a lot of resistance among all the other players. We first managed to convince Thomas Linde [Executive Director of MSF Switzerland], then gradually the others. Some pretty stormy meetings took place at international level, including a major discussion with all the executive directors and the international office to determine our communications strategy. Jean-Hervé and Kenny [Gluck, Operations Director of MSF Netherlands] got into a big shouting match. They almost ended up insulting each other. But finally the decision was made to proceed. [...] We decided to blame the FSB without naming any names.

Dr Thomas Nierle, MSF Switzerland, Head of Emergencies then Director of Operations 2000-2004, (in French) interviewed in 2009.

The committee was working very well at the beginning, but relations had already been deteriorating for six months. And there was tension that went beyond the Chechnya issue – a personal conflict as well. I remember how difficult it was. Jean-Hervé only came to what turned out to be our last meeting because I had convinced him to come. When he walked in, the room went silent. At the end, he said to Austen and Kenny that he didn't want to continue working with Russian spies. Austen and Kenny no longer wanted to hear anything about him. So try to build a relationship in that situation! From that point on, Jean-Hervé decided to go his own way. I think it was necessary after everything we had experienced. I don't know whether he wanted a war between sections, but maybe [he wanted one] against the FSB! And the Dutch didn't want him to take a position. What an incredible battle.

Rafa Vila San Juan, MSF International Secretary General, January 2001 to January 2004, in French, interviewed in 2009

I held nothing against the people who were playing it safe. Nobody has a monopoly on truth in these situations. Each time we communicated, I kept in

mind that my Dutch colleagues might be right, that maybe it was better to remain silent than to say things that might have deadly consequences for Arjan. I was convinced that I had made the right choice, but I also thought arguments could be made to support the other point of view. We had too few demonstrable demands to be able to choose between the various positions in a more informed and solid manner. The various positions could be, 'I defend this position because Arjan is in danger;' [or] 'I'm silent because talking could put his life in danger;' or 'I'm talking because if I don't, he could end up at the bottom of a ditch.'

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of Communications (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000- May 2008), (in French), interviewed in 2009


MSF Holland believes that during a kidnapping you have a single objective, which is releasing the hostage. All of your other humanitarian objectives are secondary, and can be sacrificed. The humanitarian image of MSF [is secondary], you are ready to sacrifice it in order to save the life of the hostage. That becomes your single priority. And that is why MSF Holland believes in segregating kidnapping management from program management. You never have the programme manager or the OD of that area manage the kidnapping. You always have a separate unit to do it, which is very different from how MSF France would manage things. Secondly, the saying is, "You only know what you know." So, you don't make assumptions about things. Kidnappings end when the kidnappers want to end them. So we were not convinced that it was really the Russian government that was key to the kidnapping. Partly because all of the indications were - which turned out to be true - [that an] isolated Islamist group in the mountains [was responsible]. They had probably much deeper relations with the Chechen rebels that they do with the Russian government. They might have relations - weapons, information, and criminality—with the Russian government.

But the idea that MSF France became more insistent about that it was 'the Russians the Russians the Russians, pressure the Russians, hit the Russian, that's the only way to do this,' we couldn't find the logic in that. If the Russians did do it, pissing them off is not necessarily going to make them interested in releasing the hostage. It might make them interested in just executing the hostage. And, we said, 'Show us your evidence. There is no evidence that the Russians are so involved.' They would point to facts like that the Dagestani FSB was involved. But what's the extent of control of Moscow FSB over the Dagestan FSB? Dagestan FSB is much more run by Dagestani clan politics, which are much more similar to Chechen clan politics than they are from the Kremlin. The relationship between Moscow and Dagestan, even within the KGB in the 90s, is something you would call negotiated authority. It's not implicit authority. When the French government orders a unit in a region to do something, they just do it, because

the officer's the boss. Between Moscow and Dagestan, it's more like, 'How much are you going to pay us to fulfil these orders?' Or 'What are you going to give us?' So it's not direct line management.

And, so the Dutch approach is that if there's no evidence or no logic, to necessarily just condemn the Russians, you actually have to look at it from the ground up, which is from the information you have. We think [this] was much more nuanced. That was where we would argue, and it would often come back to my kidnapping. Jean-Hervé would often say, 'Yeah, it was the Russians.' We would say, 'You have no evidence, and actually there's evidence that it was the Chechens,' or at least, Bassaïev groups, and so on. So, we said, 'Given the evidence of the past kidnappings, you cannot just say the Russians could snap their fingers and resolve this,' which is what Jean-Hervé often said, 'If you put enough pressure on the Russians, they can resolve this in ten minutes.'

Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus, (November 1999-January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005) (in English) interviewed in 2009 (in English).

 I don't remember we ever agreed that there was evidence that the Russian authorities were involved. I don't believe that there was ever an international consensus on that. I don't believe ever seeing any evidence or any credible evidence. I do sort of vaguely remember that there were a number of positions that MSF Holland was against, and when they were collectively agreed on, we then had the hard job of going back and trying to sway the office and the board and to play our role in communicating in Dutch society. And we did that when we faced down our boards, and we faced down the whole of our office staff, and we tried to explain the international decisions, even though we didn't always fully support them ourselves. And we did do the communication, but I don't remember any decision to say: 'The Russians are responsible, and because of the lack of movement we're going to push it.' That was a position that was taken, certainly, but I don't think it was ever negotiated internationally and I don't think we agreed with that. We didn't think we had any evidence or any credibility in pointing the finger at the Russian authorities. We thought some of the things that were being said about the Russian authorities was just absurd, was just emotional, and not based on any evidence or experience. So, we were very against a number of those actions, but most of the formal communication that was done, was hammered out in this international group, and despite considerable emotional feeling against it in Amsterdam, we finally agreed with most of the formal decisions. And maybe the enthusiasm with which we delivered some of those public messages wasn't as high as other groups, but we even led the communications. I went on TV and said half these things.

Austen Davies, MSF Holland Executive Director, 1999 to 2004, (in French) interviewed in 2009.

**On 16 February, in an article in Novaya Gazeta, Vyatcheslav Izmailov again accused an influential Dagestani member of parliament and businessman, for the abduction of Arjan Erkel.**



'Khattab's Financier,' Vyatcheslav Izmailov, **Novaya Gazeta** (Moscow), 16 February 2004 (translated from Russian into English by MSF).

**Extract:**

From the first days of his abduction, I launched my own investigation, suspecting Russian security forces had something to do with the kidnapping. I had reasons to think so. Erkel was free in setting contacts. He met with opposition leaders, was interested in military objects, and finally Federal Security Service (FSB) of Dagestan set up control over Erkel's activities. Soon, security people noticed that some criminals were following Erkel as well. After that Arjan was officially warned by FSB on the possible abduction. The Dagestani Police Department of Organized Crime, [...] suggested Arjan should take bodyguards. Erkel refused. Soon after that he was kidnapped before FSB officers' eyes.

Detailed investigation of this abduction was published in Novaya Gazeta from 27 October 2003. The article was called 'From the life of double agents.' I concluded that Arjan Erkel was kidnapped by the people, whose relatives were used by FSB (most likely blindly) to eliminate terrorist Khattab in spring 2002. [...] Meanwhile G [...] has significantly increased his official status. Since last spring, he is a Deputy of the National Assembly of Dagestan elected by the Untsukul'sky region. Apart from it, G [...] received a Diploma of the San-Marino University. And now G [...] has got his chance to become famous. To this end, he must help in the release of Arjan Erkel. I am convinced that this is in his power and authority. However, I believe, that in the existing status quo, which we have today, it's not only a chance for G [...] and his deputy [...] and all their team to save a Swiss missionary, but also to save themselves.

**On 27 February, the MSF France board of directors reviewed the difficulties hindering efforts to liberate Arjan Erkel and discussed whether to expand its activities in Chechnya.**



**Minutes**, MSF France Board of Directors Meeting, 27 February 2004 (in French).

**Extract:**

Jean-Hervé Bradol: [...] the forced population transfer argues for expanding our operations in Chechnya at the present time. Members of the team [...] recently visited the Paris headquarters to convey this request. The level of violence, however, remains very

high even though it's not as conspicuous and we still haven't made any progress on the Arjan kidnapping. In addition, the negatives are adding up because the intermediaries have withdrawn; Arjan is supposedly ill and the kidnappers are allegedly planning to execute him. Furthermore, the Russian media wants to revive the idea that separatists are responsible for the abduction, while we're certain the opposite is true (FSB and Dagestani groups). The only positive information came from a meeting with Kadirov, an ally of Putin's, who offered to help us with this matter in a declaration of intent. We're thinking about doing another public campaign, like the one we did in August, but Arjan's family is opposed (out of fear of negative repercussions). [...] Should we expand our operations in Chechnya and thus further expose our teams to a risk that we have a hard time managing, as demonstrated by the Arjan affair? That is why the board is discussing this mission's situation – because of the danger faced by our teams.

Xavier Trompette: We're not currently present in Chechnya and expatriates go to Ingushetia once every seven months. I think we should now monitor the beneficiaries who are starting to return to Chechnya. [Focusing on] the work of local personnel remains a good idea and it's completely foreseeable that expanding our operations could depend on Arjan's case, so we still have to consider various scenarios. Jean-Hervé Bradol: The Belgian MSF made a different choice by expanding their activities in Grozny with local personnel (which also carries a risk of exposure). A member of the Duma [parliament], FSB operatives, etc., are directly involved in the abduction of our colleagues. We conveyed this clear message to Kofi Annan and Dominique de Villepin in early 2003. Now it seems as if over the past few years, the authorities have grown accustomed to purchasing hostages from the Russian intelligence services and that seems normal (a Russian military leader just received a Legion of Honour award at the French embassy).

Philippe Houdart: I don't think it would be logical to expand our activities!

Denis Lemasson: What does the future hold for our operations once Arjan's case is resolved?

Michel Janssens: The main issue remains our staff's exposure to risks!

Xavier Trompette: Arjan was kidnapped in Dagestan and now we're part of a process that's 'punishing' Chechnya?

Philippe Houdart: I don't agree; we're not punishing the Chechen population!

Thierry Durand: No, not being able to help a population doesn't mean we're punishing it.

Pierre Salignon: The situation is appalling because we're doing little to meet the population's needs while the Russians are continuing their provocations.

Xavier Trompette: We're going to reduce our activities in Ingushetia and we have to decide what to provide to our local teams.

Milton Tectonidis: We're buying drugs at a steep price in Russia, then transporting them, and that costs a considerable amount. Maybe we shouldn't expand our activities but change our strategy by offering services in Grozny (hospital/maternity care) instead of the long-distance support we

currently provide. Our team is increasingly going to Grozny because the roads are less dangerous than before and half the population has access to this city. There's no longer a total war or a 'dirty war' – it's now a 'dirty peace.'

We have learned from our conversations with MSF Switzerland that the Dutch government is making little effort; the Swiss section and all MSF members were expecting more direct involvement from this government, although other sections were more doubtful. Diplomats are advising us not to put too much pressure on Moscow, but it is only by acting more forcefully that we've received any responses and opened any negotiation channels. As a result, we've concluded that there's nothing to be gained from being calm and passive; that, at least, is the firm belief of the two people following Arjan's case in Geneva. Other MSF staffs do not share this opinion. We would be willing to go further, especially in breaking the taboo on discussing the kidnappings carried out by the Russian intelligence services.

Sylvie Lemmet: Should we partially withdraw our teams?

Jean-Hervé Bradol: The team is Chechen so it's not going to 'withdraw' and we mustn't forget that withdrawing could leave them unprotected or at least make them more visible. The ICRC is experiencing the same problems with its national staff, and while it's working under military escort and making more compromises, it continues to be threatened (accused of being spies, etc.). Personnel from such organisations have also disappeared, proving that no one is immune.

Sylvie Lemmet: And Dagestan?

Jean-Hervé Bradol: The situation there is very unstable and under the control of organised criminal gangs, and one of Dagestan's officials is likely involved in Arjan's kidnapping.

Thierry Durand: Can we act without the family's blessing?

Jean-Hervé Bradol: We think so because doing nothing doesn't seem the most appropriate thing for either Arjan or the safety of our teams.

[...] Michel Janssens: Is there any possibility of returning to Chechnya?

Jean-Hervé Bradol: We need to be vigilant about reducing the risks. In 1999, when the war broke out again, we accurately assessed the kidnapping risks – had declined, and then there was only Kenny's abduction in 2001, which we were able to easily resolve. But then a campaign of assaults and kidnappings resumed in spring 2002, which means that authorisation had again been granted to kidnap international aid workers. At the time Arjan was abducted, the staff wanted us to provide more personnel, but we refused. At present, sending more staff would mean making them continually vulnerable to kidnapping. But we've always said that we wouldn't withdraw without getting more specific information about Arjan's situation, and certain staff members in Chechnya are key players in his case.

**On 1 March, MSF circulated a summary report to the politicians concerned as well as to targeted international**

**media. The report highlighted the inertia of the Russian and Dutch authorities, despite the fact that they knew the kidnappers identities.**



'Arjan Erkel Hostage in the Russian Federation since August 12, 2002,' **Press Dossier** MSF, 1 March 2004 (in English).

**Extract:**

MSF was often told not to communicate on the fate of Arjan in order to preserve the investigative efforts of the authorities. We must do the contrary: Break the silence, denounce the scandal of international complacency around this case, demand concerted action, and cry out for Arjan's freedom.

1. Arjan Erkel's kidnapping must be more than a concern of quiet diplomacy: The Dutch government, with the support of partner governments, must hold the Russian government accountable for the action undertaken during the past 18 months to obtain Arjan Erkel's release. Moreover, the Russian government must provide concrete information on the next steps they will undertake.
2. Arjan Erkel's plight must be an issue of consultations and concertation at the highest level at the EU. A meeting must be organized by EU member states to plan joint action on the case of Arjan Erkel, in connection with the ongoing intimidation and threats weighing on humanitarian organizations in the Northern Caucasus.
3. The UN must take up Arjan Erkel's kidnapping as a concrete obstacle to humanitarian action in the Russian Federation. This includes for the case to be raised in discussions at the level of the UN Security Council.
4. Put the involvement of and lack of action by Russian and Dagestani officials under formal scrutiny: Competent mechanisms and instances at the UN Commission on Human Rights and other forums of international law must be seized on the issue of the kidnapping of Arjan Erkel.

[...] The facts surrounding Arjan's kidnapping are known. Russian officials are even in the position to publicly affirm they know that Arjan is alive and well. Russian federal powers have a firm and far-reaching grasp on the Northern Caucasus. They are deeply involved in the regional play of forces. They are well-connected with the circuits of local politics. In all evidence, they must know who is behind Arjan's detention and what power game he is caught in. Yet, after 18 months, they have not succeeded in obtaining Arjan's liberation. Instead, they have repeatedly withdrawn from action, shifted responsibilities from one instance to the other, and played for time. At no point have the authorities provided to any party directly concerned, a clear and detailed account of what has been done for the liberation of Arjan, and what will be done in the future. Arjan seems not to be worth the resources – in terms of political determination, in terms of engagement by the state apparatus, and in terms of

means and measures that are required to reach a solution. The local and regional equilibrium of power and profit seem to be a higher priority than Arjan's life.

MSF will not accept this state of affairs, and demands that partner governments of Russia, European institutions, and international bodies, join MSF in refusing to condone the de facto connivance of Russian and Dagestani authorities in Arjan's continued detention. [...] When the life of a Dutch citizen taken hostage is under threat, the Dutch government's considerations of diplomatic form and of the politics of gas, petroleum, and commerce, must give way to those of moral and legal responsibility, and of humanity. The Dutch government can do more to hold the Russian authorities accountable for the involvement of officials in the kidnapping of Arjan, and the inconsistencies and lack of determined action in their operations to obtain Arjan's release.

Moreover, the Dutch government can and must demand full transparency on the strategy and the concrete plans of the Russian authorities in view of resolving Arjan's case. The Netherlands is a respected and influential member of the European Union and of the Western world. The Dutch government has the means to mobilize the support of other key governments and international bodies in insisting that the Russian government devotes the necessary authority and resources to bring Arjan to freedom and safety. MSF reminds the Dutch government that it has considerable economical and political leverage in Russia, and in conjunction with other governments, it must use it on behalf of Arjan.

**In late February, the Erkel family's lawyer threatened MSF with legal action if it did not halt its communications campaign. They felt that the media activity was hampering Arjan's release. On 4 March, Thomas Linde, MSF Switzerland General Director, sent a letter to Dick Erkel stating that although MSF understood his reservations, it intended to step up pressure to highlight the fact that the Russian and Dutch authorities were not doing everything they possibly could to secure his son's release; but he did not make clear the nature of the statements MSF would issue in the following days. [V29](#)**



'Embargo on Communications Campaign,' **Email** from Thomas Linde and Thomas Nierle, MSF Switzerland General Director and Director of Operations to MSF's International Reflection Cell on Erkel's Case, 26 February 2004 (in English).

**Extract:**

This afternoon we received a phone call from a law firm representing Arjan's family. Basically, they [are] trying to block any communication on Arjan issued by MSF through legal action. In their logic, MSF's communication is the main reason why Arjan is still detained. In our opinion, legal grounds for stopping our communications do not exist.

However, statements from the family that MSF is - because of repeated communication activities - co-responsible for the prolonged detention of their son would have damaging effects on all our efforts to free Arjan. In order to make a last effort to find a solution with the family, we will try to meet them tomorrow or on Monday. The press conference in Amsterdam or elsewhere - and, thus, the start of the comms campaign - has been postponed to Wednesday. It has to be underlined that we do not intend to give in to the pressure of the family. We will just try to avoid open and public hostility against MSF with all the negative effects for our public message while being aware that we are losing precious time.



**Letter** from Thomas Linde, MSF Switzerland General Director to Dick Erkel, 4 March 2004 (in English).

#### Extract:

After careful re-evaluation of all elements of the dossier, our conclusion - which is shared by a number of other organisations and analysts - remains that a marked change of strategy is required. MSF must aim at mobilizing additional energies and investments by the Russian and Dagestani authorities in arranging a solution to Arjan's case. In fact, they are in the best position to establish contact with the kidnapper and to secure Arjan's release, even if MSF and the Dutch government must provide energies and resources of their own. In other words, new pressure must be built up now. MSF insists that, in this, the leadership of the Dutch government is indispensable. The economic and political leverage of the Netherlands on Russia should not be underestimated, particularly if the Dutch government acts in alliance with other European governments.

For quite some time, other European countries have declared their readiness to support the Dutch government if it signals the need for increased, multilateral support. This is why representatives of MSF will step up efforts to brief government officials, parliamentarians, selected journalists, and opinion leaders on Arjan's situation, and convey to them our sense of urgency. They will agree that the Russian capacities are greater than anybody else's in the northern Caucasus, and that the Dutch and other western governments must demand that these capacities be used to their fullest extent, and without any further delay. Please accept the expression of my sincere hope for a continued dialogue with you and your family on further ways and means to bring Arjan's predicament to a good end as soon as possible.



*Everyone agreed, and we just needed to let the family know. I was not very comfortable because I didn't know the family or Arjan Erkel. I therefore agreed to take this public stand on one condition: that the family be truthfully informed beforehand of what we intended to do. I wrote a*

*draft of the letter to notify the family and gave it to Thomas Nierle. And it never occurred to me, once I had written the draft, that the letter would be so bad and that the only condition I stipulated would not be respected. When I saw the contents of the letter that was finally sent, I was furious. I understood why the family was so indignant. The letter gave them no idea of the type of public statements that were to follow. In trying to keep the Dutch happy, we created confusion. Kenny Gluck [MSF Holland Director of Operations] was not working for MSF during the first war. But we got on well with him, as a committed and well-connected journalist working in Chechen territory. I talked to him before making a statement to Le Monde. I put him in somewhat of a tight spot by asking him 'What are your Russian friends advising you to do? Speak up and confront the Russian authorities over their responsibilities, or keep quiet?' He told me that they advised him to confront the authorities publicly. I asked him why then did he not support our actions? His answer was: 'Because the Erkel family doesn't want me to.' So we could see that the Dutch had more than one point of view. But they all united behind that position: the family. This made me furious, because the first thing I was asked to do in this kidnapping affair was to go to Geneva and brief the Swiss team dealing with the case. At the time, most of my briefing was about how to manage a family in these sorts of circumstances. I told them to deal with the family directly, or even include them in the arrangements. The next day, the decision was taken to entrust the family to MSF Holland...*

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of Communications (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000- May 2008), (in French) interviewed in 2009.



*We had a major problem with the family. I'm not talking about the first four weeks, but the period that followed, which lasted throughout Arjan's captivity. They were dead set against all forms of communications. They were influenced by the Dutch government, which wanted to use diplomatic channels and was hostile to all communication. When we dared speak up a little, Arjan's father threatened to take us to court if his son died. It was a very visceral matter for him. For us, it was an important factor to be taken into consideration. We could not go against the family's wishes and say anything and everything. From the outset, people with experience in managing kidnappings told us that it was crucial to have the family on our side, but we never managed it.*

Dr Thomas Nierle, MSF Switzerland, Head of Emergencies, then Director of Operations 2000-2004, interviewed in 2009 (in French).



*If my kidnapping had gone on for a year and a half, my family would have lost faith in MSF and they would*



have become very demanding. Like the Erkel family was. The difference is, my family thinks that MSF is wonderful, from before the kidnapping. The Erkel family didn't. They didn't like the fact that Arjan was with MSF, they thought it was not good work; they thought that MSF was not professional. In my family, it was ex-communists, 'red-diaper' babies. They grew up suspicious of government. The Erkel family was right wing, Christian Union Dutch people, so they come up very trusting of the government. So MSF's attitude towards the Russian and towards the Dutch government didn't resonate with the Erkel family. With my family, when MSF said, 'Look, we think MSF has to manage this, and you have to tell the U.S. government to back off,' that made sense for my parents, because they didn't like the American government, they were very suspicious of the government. But after a year, my family would have, also created lots of problems. That's where the Swiss, I think with a little bit of French influence, didn't invest a lot of energy into developing a trusting relationship with the family. We recommended to the Swiss, to create a buffer, between the family and the operations management. The family is very demanding and you don't want the operations manager to be too influenced by that pressure of the family. But any family demands more senior contact very quickly. So the first few weeks it was ok to leave it with the Dutch because we were not operationally in charge. However, gradually that became untenable because the family said: 'no, we want to talk to the people who are managing the kidnapping, we don't want to talk to your psychologist and so on.' So they gradually demanded direct contact with the Swiss. Occasionally I would go together with Thomas Linde [MSF Switzerland General Director] to meet with the family in order just to advise the Swiss on how to manage the family. But the Swiss were very insistent, saying, 'No, we have our strategy and you have to just follow it,' and I don't think that was wise. I think we ended up losing the family more quickly that way.

Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus, (November 1999-January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005) (in English) interviewed in 2009.

**On 8 March, in an interview with the television network CNN, the MSF USA General Director declared that the balance of power and profit motives in the Caucasus region seemed to take priority over Arjan's life. On 9 March, MSF France's President declared to AFP that Dagestani and federal Russian officials were involved in Arjan Erkel's kidnapping. On 10 March, he was quoted in the French daily newspaper *Le Monde*, as naming two members of parliament, a Russian and a Dagestani, and accused them of holding Erkel hostage. On 12 March, he made similar statements to *Le Figaro*, another French daily newspaper.**

**On 11 March in the Swiss daily newspaper *Le Temps*, Thomas Nierle, MSF Switzerland Director of Operations, and Jean-Christophe Azé, Head of the Erkel Crisis Cell, accused the Russian authorities of doing nothing to help**

**Arjan's release. When questioned about the claim made by MSF France's President, they indicated that in the absence of any proof, he was merely expressing assumptions. On 12 March, Marc Walsh, MSF Information Coordinator in the Russian Federation, declared on the Russian website *Gazeta.ru*, that the information provided by the MSF France President in *Le Monde* came from an article by Viatcheslav Izmailov published a few weeks previously in the independent Russian weekly *Novaia Gazeta*. The Russian President's deputy representative in the Caucasus asked MSF to provide proof of its accusations, which he claimed were groundless. Serguéï Iastrjembki, the Russian President's advisor on Chechnya, accused MSF of wanting to politicise the situation surrounding the kidnapping.**



**Interview** with Nicolas de Torrente, MSF USA Executive Director, CNN, 8 March 2004 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

SAVIDGE: You believe the Russians aren't doing enough here to aid this situation. What is it they should be doing? Do you want some sort of military action launched to rescue him? Where are they falling down?

DE TORRENTE: They have clear obligations and responsibilities, as you say. They have the responsibility for the safety of aid workers on their territory. And Dagestan is clearly on their territory. And they have responsibilities to ensure his release. What we know is that they're able to communicate and have been able to communicate with the captors in the past. They've obtained proof of life from him, video, and photos from the captors. We know that they could do a lot more. And really they can and must do more.

SAVIDGE: What is it you would like to see them do?

DE TORRENTE: We're not dictating to the Russian authorities how they should resolve this case, but they have means. They have a very big military and security presence in this area. It's a complex place, but nothing happens there without their involvement. So we think they can do it -- there needs to be political will, basically, and resources devoted to this.

SAVIDGE: You deal and work in such dangerous places around the world, routinely. Has this happened before? Have you had kidnappings?

DE TORRENTE: Yes, this has happened in different places before. The Northern Caucasus is a very dangerous place for aid workers. There have been over 56 international aid workers abducted. But Arjan's case stands out. He's the longest detainee in this region. And frankly, there's really not enough that's being done to release him. And that's really the problem right now. The onus is on the Russians, but it's also on the international community to step up and demand much more from the Russians. They've been saying for months now that they know he's alive, they know he's well, and that they're doing their best. Now it's time for the international community to hold them accountable for this. Really to press them, to push them. We know the issue has

been raised by U.S. officials by European Union officials. But now it's time to really ask for answers, and ask for results.



*'MSF: Officials Implicated in the Kidnapping of the MSF Representative in Dagestan,' AFP (France), Paris, 9 March 2004 (in French).*

#### Extract:

On Tuesday, Médecins sans Frontières' (MSF) President Jean-Hervé Bradol denounced the "involvement of Dagestani and federal Russian officials in the kidnapping of the MSF Head of Mission in Dagestan, Arjan Erkel, abducted in August 2002. He also condemned "international leniency." "Following 19 months of pragmatism, we have decided to break the silence," Mr Bradol told AFP, stating that he is "very worried about Arjan's survival," since he is ill — he suffers from a lung infection — and is in danger of execution, according to MSF sources. He stated that the last sign of life from the Dutch humanitarian worker, now 35, came in October. "Until December, negotiations were underway through intermediaries. But the intermediaries all suddenly withdrew in late December and all contact has been cut off," he explained. "We don't know who is handling the investigation. And our chief contact, the Dagestani Chief Investigator Imamudin Temirbulatov, was arrested in late December," continued Mr Bradol.

"Dagestani and federal officials are involved in kidnappings," he claimed, according to "the results of an MSF investigation." "We are not saying these things lightly. Very powerful people are involved, members of parliament. It's an open secret," he said. Mr Bradol feels that Arjan Erkel's kidnapping is "part of a campaign of pressure and intimidation intended to silence people who are still talking about Chechnya, where crimes on an extraordinary scale have been occurring for the last decade," he said, condemning "international leniency." "Kidnapping is practised on a huge scale in this region. European governments have known about these practices for years." "We want the EU and UN to wake up," he said.



*'MSF Accuses Russian Officials of Keeping One of Their Volunteers Hostage,' Marie Jégo, Le Monde (France), 10 March 2004 (in French).*

Who kidnapped Arjan Erkel, 33 years old, volunteer for Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in the Caucasus; taken hostage 19 months ago in Dagestan, a republic neighbouring Chechnya where important military and police means are deployed? The humanitarian organisation knows. "The head of the group that detains Arjan is a member of the Dagestan Duma Parliament. And his 'boss' is a member of the federal Duma in Moscow," assures Jean-Hervé Bradol. The President of MSF says he holds this information "from various sources, including from members of the forces: military, FSB (ex-KGB), police — local and federal," and has done so for some months already.

Although this information has been transmitted to

"Dutch. French, European, United Nations diplomats," it has not enabled progress toward the liberation of Arjan Erkel. "Diplomats recognise this established fact in their conversations with us but there is a public taboo. "One cannot upset Russia", 'You will end up putting your colleague's life in danger if you keep on making noise,' is what we are being told in the embassies," comments Doctor Bradol. Although silent until now, the humanitarian organisation has decided to lift the taboo. The investigation on the kidnapping of Arjan Erkel is officially at standstill. The main investigator has been arrested and the Russian authorities in charge of this case — the Russian Ministry of Interior and the FSB — say they have no information on the kidnappers. Meanwhile, the heads of MSF have been approached by "two or three intermediaries, all recommended by the local or federal administration, who have offered to exchange Arjan against ransom money." The first ransom requests appeared nine months after the kidnapping, and MSF claims that came in rather late for supposedly isolated criminals. A certain sum was decided on but "all vanished at the end of December."

The level of uncertainty is total and the concern is great within MSF. "We are alarmed by recent information on the state of health and threats of execution that hang on the life" of the young man, explains his president. The kidnappers talk of 'clearing up the field before the Russian presidential elections.' The case of the kidnapping of the young Dutch volunteer, that came to bring his help to local populations who have endured nine years of war, has, involved Russian or Dagestani officials since the beginning. At the time of his kidnapping, on August 12<sup>th</sup>, 2001 a couple of days after he had met up with two American military attachés passing through the regions, Arjan Erkel was under the tight surveillance of two FSB agents who witnessed the kidnapping without reacting. They later explained to the investigators that they could not intervene due to their lack of weapons. The number plate of the car used for the kidnapping was taken by a visual witness, but wasn't followed up.

In February 2003, MSF received the bill for Arjan Erkel's mobile phone, the mobile phone line he was holding at the time of the kidnapping. According to this bill, more than fifty phone calls were placed after the kidnapping. The numbers called are indicated on the bill. MSF transmitted this information to the Russian authorities for their investigation. "Some unidentified people have called different subscribers from Arjan Erkel's mobile phone. But the study of this data brought out no information deemed worthwhile. The phone line of the hostage has since been cut off," the first Vice-minister of Interior, Mr Demidov, answered in writing.

What can a structure like MSF do - although renowned for its humanitarian action which was crowned in 1999 by the Nobel Peace Prize - it is entirely helpless in the face of such manoeuvres. Its President is revolted: "Hostage-taking is something we know in MSF. But in this present case, we are not facing an isolated group of kidnapers hiding in the forest. This is not FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)! We affirm that local and federal members of the Russian administration are involved in the negotiations and are taking advantage of it. Since when is human trafficking seen as a regular, recognised, political practice? Is this the

norm of the relationship between Russia and the European Union? How much longer can we ignore that human trafficking, trafficking of corpses, that rape, torture, and touch thousands of people in Chechnya?



*'MSF Accuses Moscow of Doing Nothing to Free its Coordinator, Currently Being Held Hostage,'* Pierre Hazan, **Le Temps** (Geneva), 11 March 2004 (in French).

#### Extract:

Arjan Erkel's nightmare began eighteen months ago. And now the life of the Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) Switzerland's Head of Mission, held hostage in the Northern Caucasus, may well be hanging by a thread. This is the alarming news that Thomas Nierle, MSF Director of Operations in Geneva, has learnt: "We have found out that his health is deteriorating and that he is in imminent danger of being executed by his abductors." Arjan Erkel's ordeal began on 12 August 2002 when he was taking his interpreter home. He was kidnapped in a suburb of Makhachkala, the Dagestani capital. Three masked men overpowered his driver and bundled Arjan into a white Lada car. Months later, MSF learnt that two FSB (former KGB) agents witnessed the abduction without reacting. This was the first sign of the ambiguous, at best, behaviour of the Russian authorities.

Indeed, MSF is now pointing an accusing finger at Moscow: "I'm not saying that Putin only needs to click his fingers for Arjan to reappear as if by magic. But I am saying that the Russian authorities could secure his release if they wanted to," asserts Thomas Nierle. A further infuriating factor for MSF is the fearful attitude of western governments: "Arjan Erkel is being sacrificed for reasons of state. Oil interests and anti-terrorist imperatives mean that neither the Netherlands, Arjan Erkel's homeland, nor any other government is ready to put pressure on Moscow," protests Thomas Nierle. According to MSF, the mafia alone cannot be behind this unprecedented long detention of a western humanitarian worker in the Caucasus.

The humanitarian organisation is prepared to pay a ransom to the abductors. Negotiations have been established through various intermediaries on several occasions, in an atmosphere of the utmost secrecy. But each time, patient attempts to make contact have collapsed at the last minute and the intermediaries have mysteriously disappeared. In MSF's view, it is clear that Erkel's kidnapping has a political dimension. "For reasons that escape us, Moscow is not interested in securing his release. No doubt because Arjan Erkel has himself become a pawn in the battle between the different clans of the Northern Caucasus, all with excellent contacts in Moscow," explains Thomas Nierle.

MSF France President Jean-Hervé Bradol is adamant. In an interview with *Le Monde*, he accused the leader of the group holding Arjan prisoner of "being a member of the Dagestani Duma (parliament)." Jean-Christophe Azé, member of the MSF crisis cell, explains: "All the signs point in this direction, even if we don't have any proof. Each time we have obtained information, it has been through semi-

official Dagestani channels, in other words, from people who are close to the spheres of power, either political or linked to the intelligence services. It is also obvious that certain people, both in Moscow and Dagestan, have lots of information about Erkel. We believe that they know which group abducted him, why, and what the key to solving the problem is. For reasons that escape us, no doubt related to internal struggles, they have never put anything in place to secure Erkel's freedom."

To back their claims, MSF staffs cite countless strange events surrounding an investigation that has even occasionally been suspended. In June 2003, the Russian intelligence services sent the Dutch government a video showing Arjan Erkel alive. A month later, an intermediary close to the FSB obtained a photo. Then, mysteriously, the FSB stopped playing an active role. A few months earlier, MSF had received Erkel's mobile telephone bill, with a list of 50 numbers called in February 2003. Some numbers belonged to prominent Dagestani figures. Inexplicably, the FSB made no use of this lucky break, which led to the abductors. Another puzzling event occurred on 9 December 2003 when the investigation head in Dagestan, Imamutdin Temirbulatov, was himself arrested. He is apparently still in prison. "What was behind his arrest? Does it have any link to Arjan Erkel's kidnapping? Has he been replaced? We know damn all!" says Thomas Nierle. The only thing MSF is sure of is that Arjan Erkel faces death if nothing is done.



*'The Deliberate and Systematic Practice of Kidnapping,'* Interview with MSF France President by Patrick de St Exupéry, **Le Figaro** (France), 12 March 2003 (in French).

Le Figaro. Why are you currently accusing top level Russian authorities of involvement in Arjan Erkel's kidnapping?

Jean-Hervé Bradol. Not a single promise has been kept. It's now nineteen months since Arjan Erkel was kidnapped. We are terribly worried for his life. We have had no contact with his abductors since late December; but the Russians continue to maintain the illusion. When he was in Paris two weeks ago, Vladimir Putin's personal representative in Chechnya, Sergueï Lastrjembsky, dared to state on French radio that Arjan was doing well and that the Russian authorities were dealing with the affair. And it's not true, there's no truth in it whatsoever. I'll say it again: there has been no contact at all with the abductors since late December.

Le Figaro. How do you explain this attitude on the part of the Russian authorities?

Jean-Hervé Bradol. The authorities are involved; they are playing a role in the affair. The degree of involvement was clear to us throughout the negotiations. The fact that Arjan has been kidnapped, held prisoner and still not been released is because a decision not to intervene has been taken at the highest level. His abduction was witnessed by two FSB (former KGB) officers. They did nothing. The discussions that have followed since made it clear to us that local officials are also involved. I won't give any names, but I'm talking

about the local Dagestani deputy and his boss in Moscow, also a deputy, in the Russian Duma. As for the top Russian authorities, I could mention the FSB and Vladimir Putin, who in May 2003 undertook to secure Arjan's release, and his former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Igor Ivanov, who made the same promise.

Le Figaro. Why did you decide to suddenly go public?

Jean-Hervé Bradol. We are exhausted. We've been playing the game for months now. We have listened to the recommendations and wanted to believe in the promises we have been made. But the situation is intolerable. European diplomats have all got used to the idea that it is normal and reasonable to buy people. They are fully aware of the federal Russian authorities' involvement, and they also know what is happening in Chechnya, but they have decided to live with these practices, to close their eyes, and accept them. They thereby legitimise the behaviour of a state that is a permanent member of the Security Council. It is a moral and political offence.

Le Figaro. Can you explain what you mean?

Jean-Hervé Bradol. We are not negotiating with a rebel group like FARC in Colombia, but with a ruling power, a state. And we are meant to find it normal to buy a man as though he were cattle! This is what European diplomats have been trying to beat into our heads for many months. Without ever having managed to get us a meeting with the Presidential administration in the Kremlin, a meeting they've been promising for a year. Of course, you need to be aware, as the European leaders are, that in Chechnya we are dealing with the deliberate and systematic practice of kidnapping. These kidnappings are part of a campaign. Money is not the prime purpose. The ransoms we have been asked to pay on several occasions are only there to cover costs. These are political kidnappings. And this is a policy on a vast scale. And Europe tolerates it. This is not a judgement. It's a statement of fact.



*'Médecins Sans Frontières Accuses Russian Authorities of Complicity in Abduction of Aid Worker,'* by Judith Ingram, **Associated Press** (USA), Moscow, 11 March 2004 (in English).

#### Extract:

Bradol said in a telephone interview Thursday with The Associated Press, "They themselves publicly acknowledge that they have a degree of direct involvement with the kidnapping itself, with the detention of our colleague. It's clear in their attitude in meetings with us ... that they acknowledge it already." Ali Temirbekov, a spokesman for Dagestani prosecutors, denied the allegations and said MSF was acting "unprofessionally." A Kremlin representative also denied the accusations. "These allegations are totally unfounded. If Doctors Without Borders has any evidence that can help the investigation, why don't they come forward with it?" Sayed-Selim Peshkhoyev, the deputy presidential envoy in southern Russia, was quoted as saying by the Interfax news agency.

Bradol said that two legislators -- one in the regional parliament in Dagestan, the other in the federal parliament in Moscow -- were involved in the abduction. He declined to name them or elaborate on their role. "But at least we are sure they can act quickly and efficiently to attain the liberation of our colleague. We're sure of that," Bradol said. He said it was difficult for his organization to decide to come forward with such accusations, but that it had received information in December that Erkel was ill and at risk of execution. That also appears to be the time when negotiations with the abductors, through intermediaries, broke down; Bradol said MSF had had assurances Erkel would be released in mid-December, in exchange for a ransom, but the month came and went. MSF's Moscow spokesman, Mark Walsh, said that Erkel was said to be suffering from pneumonia or a serious lung ailment. [...] Bradol attributed the kidnapping to what he called a Russian government campaign against humanitarian workers, local journalists, and human rights organizations working in Chechnya. "They're openly declaring for years that we are spies, acting as the enemy of Russia," Bradol said. "They have to be held accountable for such attitudes."



'Internet Interview with Mark Walsh, MSF International Information Officer in Moscow, to Maria Tsvetkova, **Gazeta.ru** (Russia) 12 March 2004 (translated from Russian into English by MSF).

#### Extract:

Mark Walsh: Bradol was referring to a newspaper article written by Vyatcheslav Izmailov, published several weeks ago in Novaya Gazeta. In particular, he mentions a deputy of the Dagestani parliament and the authorities did not contest those accusations. In mid-February the Russian Novaya Gazeta weekly blamed Arjan Erkel's kidnapping on Russian special services, claiming, in particular, that Gazi-Magomed Magomedov, a deputy of the Dagestani legislature, the People's Assembly, was involved in the operation.

But the main point is that there has been no information about Arjan in six months, no sign that he is still alive. All the same, in the past weeks Russian officials have twice said that he is alive. Sergei Yastrzhembsk said so last week, and Igor Ivanov (the outgoing foreign minister) has also said as much. And we would very much like to know how do they know that he is alive? And why don't they share that information with us? We have been told many times by law enforcement authorities that they know who is holding Arjan and where he is, and to us it is absolutely incomprehensible why they still have not liberated him.

Surely, you have addressed those questions to the security officials or to the police. What do they say?:

MW: Officially they say they are doing everything they can, but never elaborate. Mr Bradol also mentioned that talks on Arjan Erkel's liberation had been held in December of last year. Who acted as intermediaries in those talks? Most

of the so-called intermediaries were introduced to us by federal structures.

Who were they? FSB officers, Chechens or, maybe, Dagestani officials?:

**MW:** I cannot elaborate on that. All that I can say about them is that earlier those intermediaries somehow managed to deliver proof to us that Arjan was still alive: either in the form of photos, or videos, or answers to our questions. Special services were able to introduce us to people who were able to deliver evidence. In the period from February to October 2003 we received five different kinds of proof that Arjan was alive.

Is it possible to establish his whereabouts with the help of those materials? :

**MW:** No, we do not know where he is. We do not know if he has left Dagestan, but we have been told unofficially by special services that they know exactly where he is being held.

What kind of conditions is he being held in?:

**MW:** Judging by the videos and photos, Arjan's state of health is deteriorating. There is no evidence that he was beaten. But we have very strong information from two very good sources he is now suffering from a very serious lung infection or pneumonia. And we have also been told by good sources that the people who have abducted him are contemplating executing him.

Erkel's driver was arrested soon after his abduction. Did the investigators manage to learn anything from him? :

**MW:** The driver was detained briefly, and then he was released. But the abductors wore masks, so he was unable to identify them. He saw only a Lada car, but there are thousands of them in Dagestan.

Media reports said that several months after Erkel's abduction, MSF received his itemized mobile phone bill with calls registered as being made to unknown numbers. Did the investigators follow that up?:

**MW:** We were absolutely astounded to receive that bill seven months after the abduction. Honestly, we believed that the calls from his phone number were being monitored. You can imagine our surprise. We took the bill to the investigators, and those people were just as surprised and promised to check everything, but then said the checks produced no results. The phone was taken out of service the following day.

What are you going to do if the Russian authorities fail to respond to your accusations?:

**MW:** From the very beginning we tried to get the authorities of the Netherlands to put pressure on Russia. Now we are putting pressure on the European Union, the UN, and the international community so that they remind Russia of its responsibility. We are working at various diplomatic levels to remind the international community of their responsibilities, as well. I think it is very important to remember that in the wake of the bombing of the Red Cross mission in Baghdad, Russia sponsored a UN resolution obliging the countries

where humanitarian missions operate to ensure the personal safety of aid workers.



*'Russia Officially Accused over Kidnappings – MSF Makes Unpleasant Statements,'* by Ekaterina Blinova and Roman Ukolov, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (Russia), 11 March 2004 (translated by MSF from Russian into English).

**Extract:**

Recent Russian successes in fighting Chechen separatists became clouded by some statements coming from abroad. Unprecedented accusations were made to Russian authorities. International news agencies disseminated a statement made by [the] head of MSF Jean-Herve Bradol, where he openly accused federal Russian and Dagestani authorities of complicity in kidnapping [the] MSF volunteer Arjan Erkel. Bradol [was] quoted by BBC as saying, "Dagestani and federal officials are implicated in kidnapping case." Yesterday, it was not clear yet what kind of evidence Mr Bradol had to support those scandalous accusations. The only reaction from the Russian side to MSF demarches, was a statement made by Deputy Presidential Envoy in the Southern district Said-Selim Peshkhoyev to Interfax news agency. "What unfounded accusations!" The news agency quoted him as saying. "If MSF has any information that can be of any help to the investigation, let them share it with the investigators."

Spokesmen of different security agencies either refused to give comments or said that Bradol's accusations were unfounded. [...] [The] Communications Department of the Russian Interior Ministry stated they knew nothing about Bradol's accusations. "There are a lot of statements being made daily we can not react to all of them." The Communications Centre of Federal Security Service (FSB) refused to comment on Bradol's statement as well as on the developments of Arjan's case. We got the same reaction from the Dagestani Security Service. They said they had heard neither Bradol's statement nor about Dagestani authorities' involvement in the abduction. They also said, they are "used to Security forces being criticized, especially by international organizations." As for the Dagestani Ministry of Interior, they considered all the accusations to be "unfounded and far-fetched." "Investigation of the Arjan's case has not stopped for a day, this case remains top priority for us. [The] Ministry is following up on the investigation," Dagestani Ministry of Interior spokesman Abdulmanap Musayev told us.




*'Russia Denies being Involved in the Kidnapping of MSF Worker,'* *AFP* (France), Moscow, 11 March 2004 (in French).


**Extract:**

The Russian President's advisor for Chechnya, Sergueï Lastrijemski, has "deeply regretted Mr Bradol's unfounded accusations", describing them as "an attempt to politicise

the situation concerning the kidnapping of the MSF representative" in a declaration cited by Interfax. "We are doing everything we can to secure Mr Erkel's release," added Mr Lastrjembki, affirming that the affair was receiving "constant attention from the Russian bodies concerned." [...] "There is no information indicating Dagestani and Russian authorities' involvement in Arjan Erkel's kidnapping," declared a spokesperson for the public prosecutor's office, cited by Interfax. "The Dagestani law enforcement forces are doing everything they can to throw light on this crime, seeking to free Arjan Erkel and to find those responsible for his abduction," he added.


 We were all in agreement. Jean-Hervé's interview with *Le Monde* was not an isolated initiative. In early January, we decided to step up pressure in the media, no longer restricting ourselves to press releases but writing and giving interviews to journalists which would have an impact on the various Russian and European papers. The *Le Monde* interview was part of this increasing public activity. We did not delude ourselves: if we wanted to talk about Chechnya, it had to be in France, because at least there would be a small audience due to the presence of a fairly large Chechen community. But it has been forgotten everywhere else in Europe. In Holland, you could still talk about it a little because the victim was Dutch. No one in Switzerland was interested. It was almost impossible to place articles. I had a contact with a journalist who writes for *Le Temps* in Lausanne and for *Libération*. We tried in Germany, but MSF's German section was linked to the Dutch section. And Amsterdam did not want to communicate.

Dr Thomas Nierle, MSF Switzerland, Head of Emergencies then Director of Operations 2000-2004, (in French) interviewed in 2009.

 The person who actually carried the risks in the political and institutional sense for this affair was Thomas Nierle [MSF Switzerland Director of Operations]. In terms of issuing statements, I feel that, as I was carrying out orders, I basically had subsidiary responsibility after Thomas Nierle and Jean-Christophe Azé [MSF Switzerland]. It was very nice working with them for that reason: they assumed their responsibilities. We offered support and advice, but the roles were never reversed. They felt that it would be more visible in *Le Monde* than in the *Tribune de Genève*. It had to be visible in Moscow. In fact, I remember that they thought about asking Rony [Brauman, former MSF France President] so that our position would receive the highest possible profile, etc. They were right to think that Rony would attract greater coverage than I would, but it was not very realistic, because he was not following

*the affair. I couldn't imagine him coming in at the last minute to make a statement... So we did something different. But the decision, which was actually an order, was taken by MSF Switzerland.*

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of Communications (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000-May 2008), (in French) interviewed in 2009.

 Jean-Hervé decided that enough was enough and that we were going to take a more hardliner approach. I was leaving for Brazzaville in the afternoon, and he came to see me in the morning saying that he was ready to give an interview and tell the whole story. I called Marie Jégo at *Le Monde* and told her that I'd give her a story if she headlined it because we had to make a real impact. She agreed to the front page, and he did the interview while I was on the plane. At the end of the day, his strategy towards Chechnya was "To hell with everyone and I'll say what I have to say". He piled on the pressure whenever he intended to defend what we were doing because he thought it was right. This all happened in an atmosphere of permanent drama. There was at least one drama per week during a whole year. I think that when I left, I must have had a thousand documents on the affair. We spent our time rearranging texts and arguing over two words, when it wasn't the two words that were the problem, but what lay behind the words, our respective visions of it all.

Anne Fouchard, MSF France Deputy Director of Communications, (July 2000-July 2004), (in French) interviewed in 2009.

## INTERNAL TENSIONS, EXTERNAL CRITISISMS

**The declarations were criticised within the MSF movement by those who felt that it could put the lives of field teams at risk. On 11 March, the MSF International President and Secretary General and MSF Switzerland General Director officially reaffirmed that the movement stood behind the decisions taken by the crisis cell.**



'Narrative **Chronology**,' AE Case - Period 2002 - April 2004, David Cremoux, MSF Switzerland Cell Crisis, 2004 (in English).

**Extract:**

10/03: 'MSF Accuses Russian Officials of Holding One of Its Volunteers Hostage' in an interview in Le Monde given by J-H Bradol (President of MSF-F) after he received the green light from MSF-CH headquarters to disclose confidential information. There are controversial opinions within the Crisis team and MSF teams on the field in Russia concerning the contents of the article. The first point concerns the insinuation of the Dagestani parliamentarians, (...) mentioned in the article and the link not proven between both of them. It was agreed by the coordinator of the Crisis team that the Deputy M. [...] would not be mentioned publicly.



'Re: Any Feedback from Your Side,' **Email** from Marieke Van Zalk, MSF Holland Communications Officer, 10 March 2004 to Anouk Delafortrie, MSF International Communications Coordinator, Kris Torgeson MSF USA Director of Communications, Peter Caesar, MSF Belgium Director of Communications, Michel Clerc, MSF Switzerland Director of Communications, Martyn Broughton, MSF UK Director of Communications, Pere Joan Pons, MSF Switzerland Erkel Cell Crisis, MSF Moscow Press Officer (in English).

**Extract:**

MSF-Holland agrees with MSF-B that J-H statements are very risky for our Operations in the field and Arjan's case. (Our team got restrictions on traveling today). We - again - want to point out that we want to tone J-H statements down. This could be a possible Q & A: Isn't it dangerous what MSF is doing? "The comments of the president of MSF-France have come out too strong in Le Monde. MSF regrets this. MSF can and will not accuse anyone. There still hasn't been any direct contact with the kidnappers - we do not know who is holding him. What was written in Le Monde [reflect] are previously expressed speculations by other analysts, which were already published in various media months ago. MSF cannot confirm this or any other scenario. The reports are however, very worrying, while at the same time no clarity is being given by the Russian investigation authorities." Just to illustrate, Moscow correspondents are phoning me up, stunned by the statements by MSF (FYI, In Russia the headlines is: "MSF accuses Russian authorities of kidnapping its aid worker"), and asking us if we realize how dangerous this game "we" are playing is and how we are going to repair this damage?



"Decision making process' **Message** from Jean-Christophe Aze and Pere Joan Pons, Arjan Erkel Crisis Team to MSF Communications Network, 10 March 2004 (in English).

**Extract:**

Dear friends,

1. Decision making process:

Just to remind you that the strategy discussed during the EXCOM<sup>39</sup> on the 19<sup>th</sup> of February was:

To reinforce our lobbying action towards the EU members and UN key member states.

To push them to act in a stronger and more united manner in holding Russian authorities accountable for their responsibilities in the case of Arjan

To launch a strong public communication to back this political and diplomatic lobbying. As the basis for this strategy was articulated, we edited the Report you received last week.

We also planned press conferences for Monday March 1. The press conference and any public media event were cancelled after the family objected to any communications by MSF (meeting between Thomas Linde, Kenny Gluck, the family, and [the Dtuch] MoFA on Sunday 29, February). The family was informed by letter that we understand and respect their concern but that, nevertheless we would maintain our lobbying campaign and brief "politicians, diplomats, parliamentarians, selected journalists, opinion leaders" about our evaluation of the situation, the responsibilities of the Russian and other governments, and about the urgency of more action for Arjan given the alarming information on his state of health.

The decision to choose this strategy has been taken by the crisis cell after consultations with the ExCom. At the Com Dep level, we decided to approach 3 to 6 important media in order to raise Arjan's case. According to the impact of this first round, other interviews based on the contents of the Report would follow. Three pieces were chosen for the first round: An editorial in an American newspaper, an interview by JHB in Le Monde and an interview of Tom Nierle on BBC radio. I can understand the fears of some of you about the interview in Le Monde. It is strong and adds some commentary to the contents of the Report. But you will agree that our strategic message has clearly been passed, interest has been awakened, and the media are now following the case. This is what we wanted. I can understand the stress you have to answer questions regarding the first paragraph in this article. However, the com departments have received the indication to give the appropriate answers. If you have any difficulties with specific journalists or with regard the general message, we at the crisis team are here to support you and take over if needed. What I do not understand is that some seem to want to change completely the message and the strategy (remaining silent, following the family position by principle...). The strategy is still the same. We are counting on the MSF network to follow the line defined in the course of last weeks' consultations. Please.

39. The Executive Committee consists of the General Directors of the 5 operational sections as well as the General Secretary of the MSF Movement.

### Communications

The crisis team in Geneva would like to restate our position if media requests on the case of Arjan Erkel. [...]

#### 3. Article in *Le Monde*:

We do not correct the position of Jean-Hervé Bradol in *Le Monde's* newspaper. His article was part of the decision to brief major Media on the content of the report. J-H went obviously quite far and was very strong, but his message totally reflects our line: "everybody knows who is behind the case please it is time for the international community and European institutions to act." I gave you yesterday the line to follow for the tricky questions of the second paragraph of the article. Please stick to the line.

If you have questions on *Le Monde's* first paragraph, "Are you accusing the Russians of being behind the kidnapping?" We are not accusing the Russians of being responsible for the kidnapping of Arjan Erkel. We are simply pointing out that Russian officials know Arjan's whereabouts and, by being aware of the situation of Arjan, of lack of action to solve this case. (Everybody knows in Russia, even Yastrzemski said last week that Arjan is safe and sound, but what we want is to have Arjan safe and sound). It is of public knowledge that names have been published in the Russian and Dutch Press: Russian journalists have published that important people were involved in this case. MSF cannot verify this then it cannot confirm it. It is for us a plausible scenario. However, no one came to us to tell whether this information has been verified or not.



**Email** from Thomas Linde, MSF Switzerland General Director, Marine Buissonnière, General Secretary MSF International, Rowan Gillies, President MSF International to MSF General Directors, Directors of Communication, Presidents 11 March 2004 (in English).

#### Extract:

There have been heated discussions in the past 24 hours about the strengthened communications campaign concerning Arjan's case. We understand that everyone has in mind the safety of Arjan and his release. Whatever worries and questions there might be, we must at this stage, work together as a movement for this release. We cannot act in a divided manner. It is essential that we reaffirm our complete support to the crisis cell and the line that they have chosen to follow. Since the beginning, the crisis team has been and remains in charge of defining and putting in place the operational and communication strategy regarding Arjan. The current strategy was agreed as recently as February 19<sup>th</sup>, at the level of the Excom. As explained and re-affirmed by Jean-Christophe and the crisis cell in the attached document, the strategy has not changed. We ask that you support the crisis cell in their efforts to secure Arjan's release and in the communications line that they have defined.



**Email** from Pierre Salignon, MSF France General Director to MSF General directors, 11 March 2004 (in English).

#### Extract:

Dear Friends and excom members,  
Thank you Thomas, Marine, Rowane, Jean-Xtophe and Pere for your last message and clarifications. I just want to come back on some of the mails sent around in the movement during the last days about the Arjan's campaign. I'm really upset to see individuals and specifically communication representatives not doing what was decided at Excom level or by the crisis cell dealing with this terrible affair. I find unacceptable the mails/attitude explaining that we should change the current strategy decided by Geneva (and - if I'm right - supported by Excom), that the statement of one MSF President is not a MSF position, and that journalists - in a pro-active way - should be requested to stop communicating on Arjan case.

People acting this way are committing a serious professional misdemeanor and should assume the consequences. We need some clarifications with them on, who is deciding what, and, who is responsible for what. They are not the ones to decide in such a crisis. It should be clear for everybody and at Excom level. I hope these persons are just expressing their individual point of view... However it's not acceptable. The management of Arjan's case is difficult and painful. Decisions are not easy to take in such an affair. I trust the people dealing daily with it for months. They are the best to decide what to do and when. We are ready in Paris to provide them with more support in the future as Arjan's case is for MSF the top priority. We must continue to be public and active. If there're disagreements between sections, we have to confront them openly, transparently. I hope in this specific case, we must keep a common position and reaffirm our full support to the crisis cell members.

**On 12 March, in an interview with the Dutch radio station *Radio 1*, Dick Erkel, Arjan's father, criticised the MSF campaign. MSF Holland was having difficulty publicly supporting the MSF stance when Arjan's family and Dutch civil society rallied to the government's view, which recommended silent diplomacy. According to the people concerned, this difficulty was increased by the fact that the main members of the management team did not speak Dutch, knew little about Dutch society and had trouble representing the organisation there.**



'Dick Erkel in *Radio 1 Journaal*,' 12 March 2004 (translated by MSF from Dutch into English).

#### Extract:

MSF claims that the abductors of Erkel threaten to take his life. The Head of MSF France said this week that the kidnappers are considering 'clearing the field' before the Russian presidential elections. MSF breaks the silence,



which was agreed, by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and by the family. On the phone is Arjan's father, Good morning, 'Good morning.'

Why are you now breaking the silence yourself also? [...]

I'm breaking it because on Wednesday evening suddenly it was reported on Teletext that Arjan's life was threatened and that he was seriously ill. That led to countless telephone calls in our direction, like: what is going on? I don't have an answer to that. This report was issued without getting in touch with us. It is a one-sided report from MSF, which is copied just like that. That puzzles us. [...]

I now want to address the article in the NRC, which is another reason why we are speaking now. [...]

MSF starts by saying that Arjan has pneumonia and that his life is threatened. They know this from usually reliable sources. I don't know what this is all about. I can't verify this. Then, according to the article, two personal questions have been answered in writing. That is not true. There have been answers, but we regarded answers only then as proof of life when they are tangible and recent. [...] I doubt if it is good to make that public.

Do you think that is dangerous?

I do wonder whether it contributes to the safety of people in the field that that kind of information is shared. I'm not speaking about what seems to have been agreed, since then I will be reproached that I'm spreading the story even further, but I don't think this is wise.

The background of the report is that there are elections next Sunday in Russia, and if you read the remark "before Sunday something has to happen" does that make you nervous?

No.

Why not?

I don't assume that there is so much reason in Russia to have some kind of plan with Arjan before the elections. Why would that happen? [...] Now we have the alarming information, I'm quoting, on Arjan's condition; we can no longer be silent, it says, according to Azé. Then, apparently, Van Zwol asks MSF: "Did you try, now that Arjan is so ill, to get medication to this guy? Then there is a bewildering answer from an organisation that was founded to help people in need. What does Azé say: "No, that has not been tried. We have considered it," [...] but they even haven't tried to send medication through how do they call it 'usually reliable sources' to my son. That is bewildering. As I read that in the NRC, my thoughts went back to summer last year, when we received the videotape [voice starts trembling] and when it was played, my wife said after the first images: "Is that our Arjan? Is that our Arjan?" For this guy, they don't even try to get medication to him. That is beyond me. [...] We assume that the services in Russia work seriously. We are very content with the support we receive from the political world. Renowned world leaders have paid attention to the case. What else can I do? What else can I do? Do you really think that by a tremendous publicity campaign a case is solved? We don't.



**Letter** from Lisette Luykx, MSF Holland President to Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France President, 14 March 2004 (in English).

**Extract:**

MSF-H was taken by surprise, as the spin off of the article in *Le Monde* had just the effect, which MSF had not intended. Not intended in our view. I base myself on the communications to the family of Arjan, supported by the briefings of my team. You may say: 'Lisette, you are utterly naïve, you know once MSF's blood is boiling'... No way we ever choose not to rely on the public's pressure and support. And once we choose to get into the public eye we take the maximum out of it. I would agree with you. But, in that case I ask: why then did MSF not have the guts to be clear about this with the family? I just cannot believe that MSF takes this attitude. In my view, it is disgusting to give a false comfort to the family, and this is what MSF did. With this letter in mind, we in Amsterdam basically did not anticipate:

Answering the immediate angry but, above all, desperate call's from the family. They are loosing all hope and this adds to it. They were painfully devastated.


Responding to the media: Do realise that MSFH has to respond to the public story of a troubled relationship between Arjan's family and MSF. A situation where media and family irresponsibly exploit details as: MSF not prepared to send medicines to Arjan. This on top of the accusation to ignore the family's request for silence and the danger, they believe, which comes from our accusations. I do not have to explain to you that immediately donors started to call and to cancel their funding commitments. It definitely does not help to mobilise the Dutch politicians. If this has been the aim, MSF should have done something completely different in my view.

Immediately MSFH tried to find a way in between: respecting the family's wish and not undermining MSF's public efforts, which meant that initially we did not comment and referred to the family's request for silence. That was not more than half a day. The first reaction coming from Geneva was one of shock and considerations for rectification. You should explain these as first reactions, quite valid in my view and meant to reach a common ground, to reach a shared understanding on how to proceed. While being under the hardest of pressures, MSFH's communication team prepared suggestions for answers. Suggestions! These suggestions included: to take a distance from the message in *Le Monde*. The suggestion was not followed. MSFH never communicated a dissenting voice and always adhered to the same messages that were agreed upon by the crisis team and movement. That's all. I would be very disappointed if you cannot consider these as well intended efforts to solve a difficult dilemma. Instead of creating a conflict, I call on your sense of responsibility for the movement and respect for the intentions of all people involved with only one focus: Arjan's release.

Moving forward:

We maintain the line of demanding action and political courage to solve Arjan's case. With regards to the family we all know it has been extremely difficult for MSF. [...] It is so painfully clear that it would have been so much better

if the family Erkel would have shared Arjan's ambitions to make a difference for the people in Dagestan. We could at least have taken the situation in support of the plea we have for that region. This is unfortunately not the case. Can we repair the relationship with the family? Hard challenge. But we can demonstrate decency and compassion. We can at least demand from ourselves to stay in touch with them, to inform them on a regular basis and be transparent about our actions. MSFH is committed to invest more vigorously in demanding action from the Dutch government. It has always been the crisis team coordinating the relationship with the government in The Hague, next to the family Erkel who have their network as well. We will take an additional role.


 *What was maybe specific to us was that a Dutch citizen had been taken, and the Dutch government was involved, and the Dutch public was involved. That placed an undue amount of stress on us, more than if it had been a French person, or a Belgian person, or a Swede or a Ugandan. This was a domestic story, not an international story. And we were trying to turn it back into an international humanitarian story about what was happening in Chechnya and that's not what the Dutch media were there for. In our section, there was a high degree of often, stereotypical mistrust by members of our section towards other sections and an interpretation of what and why people were doing things. There were moments of real differences of average opinion between Dutch members of the head office and non-Dutch members. You had non-Dutch members standing up and saying: 'We should fight the Dutch government. We're MSF, you guys, you just want to support everything the Dutch government does.'*

*There were tensions between my management team and some of the members of the board, and some of the members of the organization who didn't consider me particularly Dutch. [Austen is British] It was a real constraint to the organization to have someone as incompetent in Dutch public life as me. I don't think it's illegitimate for people to be concerned about these issues. If you're going to lead an organization like that, then, if it's a civil society organization, if you don't want to be donor-driven, you have to be driven by something, and that's public opinion to a certain extent. And you need to appeal to your public, to be in contact with their mores and their graces and their passions. And it wasn't just that it was me as the Executive Director, but it was that really the three ODs, Kenny, Marilyn, and Jose-Antonio weren't Dutch. So, the opinion formers at the time, the people that were structuring our strategies and policies, and persuading people of positions, none of them were Dutch. So, we would have to go back with international decisions and explain them to a largely Dutch board and a largely Dutch office, who were very emotional and very much part of Dutch society, and were getting their information through the same channels as most of Dutch society, and couldn't understand and didn't intuitively support most of the positions that we took. The board members were not as deeply availed of all the information, they didn't spend hours of every day discussing it with a lot of different*


*people with different opinions, they didn't spend days of every month in international meetings going over and over, trying to generate a position. So, not all of the positions were simple, or straightforwardly adopted by everyone. It took a lot of work to try and explain the decisions and why we should support and implement them. We stuck to the international formal agreements as much as possible, even if we disagreed with them, and I don't remember the board ever actually ending up overruling us. In the end, they were always supporting us. It was just a lot of work.*

*There was such sense of despair between the different sections, a genuine concern that this could actually cause long-term damage to the MSF movement, even that this could destroy MSF. Seriously we just could not believe the resources we put into that, both in terms of generating public appeal for Arjan at one point and getting a million signatures, but also just the number of top officials, and the amount of board time and executive time and staff time used on that issue around the world and the percentage of it working for his release.*

Austen Davies, MSF Holland Executive Director, 1999 to 2004, (in English) interviewed in 2009.

 *Neither of us speaks Dutch. We can't read the Dutch press, we can't watch the Dutch news, so it created up a slightly difficult dynamic because Austin and I, in a way, became the defenders of the movement, saying, 'no the movement is legitimate in taking this position.' But, we also did not have the same level of pressure because we had no idea what was going on in the press. We would be told by the communications department who would bring the morning newspaper, and say it says this and this, but that's not the same as being able to read it yourself. So, internally in the office we were accused of being insensitive to the Dutch public. Because we were the foreigners, we don't listen to the news and we care much more about the place of MSF in the world than the place of MSF in Holland. Had this been in France, MSF France would be extremely conscious about MSF France's place in French society. And in the end, they just couldn't give a damn about MSF Holland, and that's why I felt they were very unfair to Lisette [Lukyx, President MSF Holland] and to Austen [Davies, Executive Director MSF Holland] in the accusations they made against them.*

Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus, (November 1999-January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005), (in English) interviewed in 2009

 *MSF Holland had a clearly defined procedure to follow if an expatriate was kidnapped. The team managing the kidnapping could not be the line management*

team running the programmes in the country, so as to protect the programme's existence, relations with authorities, etc. Everything had to be kept apart. This procedure kicked in from the first day of Arjan Erkel's kidnapping. I was operations director, in charge of the Caucasus programme, but from the moment the crisis cell was set up, all responsibility for managing Arjan's kidnapping was taken off me. In my opinion, it was a very good idea to have two different teams, but their separation was a bit too drastic in this case. The field teams' knowledge wasn't used enough.

External communication was seen as a potential risk for the kidnapping's management, so it was also managed by a special team, not by me.

And once MSF Switzerland's crisis cell took over, MSF Holland left them to it, and didn't stage any internal discussions on the affair. Only Board and Management Team members followed what was happening. MSF Holland's crisis cell managed relations with the family, protecting it by adopting a very conservative approach, minimising risks.

So the tensions within the section were partly due to cultural reasons, as the Dutch, and in this particular case, the Dutch members of headquarters staff, weren't used to being at logger heads with their governments. But they were also due to structural issues: the way MSF Holland organised itself, which cut off all contacts between the small, specialised group following the kidnapping and the rest of headquarters.

Dr José-Antonio Bastos, MSF Holland Operations Director in charge of programmes in North Caucasus, 2001 to 2003 (in French) interviewed in 2009



*Our responsibility did not concern just one person, but an entire movement. Arjan is Arjan, MSF is MSF, and it is a movement, all MSF organisations. And the actions we were taking for Arjan affected everyone else. In some ways, I accepted Jean-Hervé's approach as I accepted Austen's, when he said that Dutch society could not understand what we were doing. So I had to find a balance.*

Rafa Vila San Juan, MSF International Secretary General, January 2001 to January 2004) (in English) interviewed in 2009

**MSF also continued to inform the various political leaders positioned to bring pressure to bear and help towards Arjan Erkel's release. On 26 February, the European Parliament expressed its concern over the lack of progress in resolving Arjan Erkel's kidnapping and called on the Russian federal authorities, Dagestani authorities, the European Commission and European Parliament's Council on EU/Russian relations to do everything possible to secure his release. On 9 March, while European Commission President Romano Prodi was receiving the European Council's**

**representatives, a press release was circulated demanding the European Council take action to save Arjan Erkel's life. US leaders encouraged MSF representatives to step up the public campaigning on Erkel's case, whilst the Dutch authorities continued to contest the effectiveness of the strategy. On 12 March, during the opening of the UN Human Rights Commission's annual session, the High Commissioner launched an appeal for Arjan Erkel's release. On 17 March, the Dutch Foreign Affairs Minister launched a similar appeal.**



'European Council Must Act to Save Arjan Erkel,' MSF International **Press release**, 9 March 2004 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

On February 26, 2004, the European Parliament adopted a report on EU-Russian relations in which it expressed its grave concern about the failure to bring about a positive resolution of Arjan Erkel's case. The Parliament deeply regretted the lack of any progress in resolving this case and called for a firm political commitment on the part of the Russian Federal and local authorities, the Commission and Council to ensure the safe release of Mr. Erkel. [...] "We want to remind the Heads of State attending the European Council meeting to do everything that is humanly possible to put an end to Arjan Erkel's ordeal, to save his life, and reunite him with his family," says Marine Buissonnière, Secretary-General of Médecins Sans Frontières International.



**Main Points** of the Meeting Between, Linn Cassel, Deputy Ambassador at the US Mission in Geneva, Nancy Kyloh, Representative of USAID, Thomas Linde and Laure Delcros, MSF Switzerland Director General and Erkel Crisis Cell, 10 March 2004 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

- She advised MSF to be noisier and to alert international public opinion.
- She suggested raising the case to the communication department, through journalists' questions at press briefings.
- She also suggested having a public statement from the US department, which could come from USAID initiative.



**Minutes** of Meeting Between Ambassador De Jong of the Dutch Mission to the UN in Geneva and Thomas Linde and Laure Delcros, MSF Switzerland Director General and Erkel Crisis Cell, 10 March 2004 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

Thomas gave a long brief to the ambassador and especially

on our 'constructive dialectic' with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He explained our current disagreement on the need to put public pressure on the Russian authorities, and the MSF choice to do so. Also, the need of a multilateral approach with other European countries, and at a higher level than the ambassador's one in Moscow.

Ambassador de Jong: "MSF public communication is in a way making silent diplomacy more difficult." They are trying to make sure that pressures on the Russian authorities are constructive. Regarding the coming Human Rights Commission, no decision has been taken yet to include the mention of Arjan in the resolution against Russia or in a general statement. There will probably be no resolution, and it is perhaps a good thing as we need to keep channels of communication with Russia opened. NL concerns of not undermining the Russian wish to move towards a democratic country. Mr. de Jong raised the disagreement with Dirk Erkel. Thomas explained the situation, and denounced the united front between NL and the family which is not fruitful.



*'Acting High Commissioner for Human Rights Appeals for Release of MSF Worker Arjan Erkel,'*  
**Press release,** United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 12 March 2004 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

Acting United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Bertrand Ramcharan is appealing to all those who are in a position to assist to act expediently to obtain the release of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF, Doctors without Borders) worker Arjan M. Erkel. [...] The acting High Commissioner made his call following a meeting today with Thomas Linde, Director-General of MSF-Switzerland, and Laure Delcros, MSF Delegate to the United Nations, who asked for his good offices to help obtain Mr. Erkel's release. Mr. Ramcharan recalled that in August 2003, the United Nations Security Council adopted unanimously Resolution 1502 on the safety and security of humanitarian aid workers, reiterating the responsibilities of host countries.

**In response to the coverage generated by the media campaign and the reaction of the authorities concerned, the MSF Switzerland Erkel Crisis Cell decided to step up pressure, organise a press conference in Moscow, and invite the Erkel family to participate. In the 14 March issue of the French weekly newspaper *Le Journal du Dimanche*, the MSF France President expressed concern over the threat of execution that hung over Arjan's head and asserted that members of the Russian administration were involved in, and benefiting from, the negotiations. The same day, the French daily newspaper *Libération* also ran a story on the death threats. In its 17 March editorial, the *Washington Post* speculated on Arjan Erkel's whereabouts. On 16 March, MSF publicly released a statement by the MSF International Secretary General**

**and President and the Presidents of MSF Switzerland, Holland, and France, which restated the involvement of representatives of the Russian and Dagestani authorities in Arjan Erkel's kidnapping.**



*Arjan Erkel Operational Update + Communications,*  
MSF Switzerland Erkel Crisis Cell, 14 March 2004  
(in English).

#### **Extract:**

The past week, the Media have expressed a clear interest on the case, although some difficulties. To obtain the interest of the Media was our main objective. [...] Political and diplomatic steps were taken at the same time. During the meetings with political and diplomatic officials, the report was handed out, briefings were done, and they were asked to take up some action. [...] Even if it is not obvious to evaluate the results of those public actions for Arjan's security and the impact it may have on Russian authorities, we can still say that we did obtain more confidential information during this same period.

- 1/ The 'Ex' [Association of FSB Veterans hired by MSF] Confirmed Arjan was in a bad health state and that they should hurry (info given the 10/03/04). They are trying to put forward a new intermediary in order to recover the contact.
- 2/ Kadirov confirmed Arjan is alive. They are in contact with the group and should soon be able to take up concrete negotiations.
- 3/ New 'Expert' Ex-service confirmed Arjan is alive. Confirmed that his ex-colleagues were furious after our campaign but things are now moving.
- 4/ Other confidential but sure source. President Putin wants a positive resolution of the case. Mechanisms are starting to be put into place. Instructions were given for official reactions to be cool and minor.

What we have to do now is to prove that our past week actions was not just a 'show,' without any strategy for the future. We have to confirm our position as well as to justify the arguments (and elements) we have put forward. We also have to put forward the coherence of the MSF movement with regard to our public statements and our political lobbying. This week, a press conference will be held in Moscow on Thursday, March 18. This press conference will be preceded by a press release. The meetings with government officials and the handing out of the report both continue.

The objectives are still the same:

- Maintain Arjan Erkel alive and secure his release
- Put pressure on key actors able to contribute to the liberation of Arjan Erkel



'An MSF Member Under Threat of Death,' Karen Lajon, *Le Journal du dimanche* (France) 14 March 2004 (in French).

**Extract:**

"There is nothing to show that these last months of silence, recommended by the diplomats, have helped Arjan's case in any way," notes the humanitarian organisation's President, Jean-Hervé Bradol. "We really need to see the politicians get involved, not just the Kremlin but also the United Nations and Europe." The Russian government recently declared that Arjan Erkel was doing well. A declaration that MSF received with caution: "These verbal declarations involve no one except those that make them. We are pragmatic," continues Jean-Hervé Bradol. "We would be reassured if they gave us concrete facts: is Arjan in good health? Is he not suffering from malnutrition? We would like to be able to talk to him on the telephone, as has already been the case in the past during other kidnappings in the region." MSF is sadly familiar with such abductions. "In the present case," protests the MSF President, "we are not dealing with an isolated group of kidnappers hiding out in the forest. These are not people like the FARC (Revolutionary armed forces of Colombia); in this case, we are saying that members of the local and federal Russian administration are involved in the negotiations and are benefiting from them." The MSF office in Paris has become even more worried over the last few days. Recent information mentions death threats, with the abductors talking of 'clearing the ground prior to the Russian presidential election.' "I would just like to see my colleague alive," murmurs Jean-Hervé Bradol.



'An MSF Member Under Threat of Death,' Pierre Hazan *Libération* (France), 16 March 2004 (in French).

**Extract:**

Arjan Erkel's nightmare began eighteen months ago. And now the life of the Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) Switzerland Head of Mission, held hostage in the Northern Caucasus, may well be hanging by a thread. This is the alarming news that Thomas Nierle, MSF Director of Operations in Geneva, has learnt: "We have found out that his health is deteriorating and that he is in imminent danger of being executed by his abductors." On 12 August 2002, Arjan Erkel was taking his interpreter home. He was kidnapped in a suburb of Makhatchkala, the Dagestani capital. Three masked men overpowered his driver and bundled Arjan into a white Lada car. Months later, MSF learnt that two FSB (former KGB) agents witnessed the abduction without reacting. This was the first sign of the ambiguous, at best, behaviour of the Russian authorities. Indeed, MSF is now pointing an accusing finger at Moscow: "I'm not saying that Putin only needs to click his fingers for Arjan to reappear as if by magic. But I am saying that the Russian authorities could secure his release if they wanted to," asserts Thomas Nierle. A further infuriating factor for MSF is the fearful attitude of western governments: "Arjan Erkel is being sacrificed for

reasons of state. Oil interests and anti-terrorist imperatives mean that neither the Netherlands, Arjan Erkel's homeland, nor any other government is ready to put pressure on Moscow," protests Thomas Nierle. The MSF crisis cell has analysed this unprecedented long detention of a western humanitarian worker in the Caucasus: the mafia explanation is not viable. The humanitarian organisation is prepared to pay a ransom to the abductors. Negotiations have been established through various intermediaries on several occasions, but each time patient attempts to make contact have collapsed at the last minute.

In MSF's view, it is clear that Erkel's kidnapping has a political dimension. "For reasons that escape us, Moscow is not interested in securing his release. No doubt because Arjan Erkel has himself become a pawn in the battle between the different clans of the Northern Caucasus, all with excellent contacts in Moscow," explains Thomas Nierle. MSF staff back up their hypothesis with countless strange events surrounding the investigation. Another puzzling event occurred on 9 December 2003 when the investigation head in Dagestan, Imamutdin Temirbulatov, was himself arrested.



'Médecins Sans Frontières Confirms Implication of Russian and Dagestani Authorities' Representatives in Kidnapping of Arjan Erkel and Demands his Immediate Release,' **Statement** of Rowan Gillies and Marine Buissonnière, MSF International President and Secretary General, Eric Linder MSF Switzerland President, Lysette Luykx, MSF Holland President, Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France President, 16 March 2004 (in English, in French).

**Extract:**

The last proof of life of Arjan Erkel, kidnapped in Makhatchkala on August 12, 2002, dates back to October 2003. Since December we have been receiving information indicating that our colleague is ill and living under the threat of an imminent execution. In December 2003, all discussions held with the kidnappers, through the use of intermediaries, have been unilaterally terminated in spite of an agreement as to exchange procedures that had recently been found. Our certainty with respect to the implication of Russian and Dagestani administrative members and political personnel is based upon:

- Material evidence (vehicle number plate, phone call communications list);
- Acts and declarations of Russian and Dagestani federal administration representatives (presence during the kidnapping of FSB agents on place, unexplained interruption of the judicial inquiry during six months, arrest of the main police investigator in accused of participating to kidnappings, intimidations and threats - at public and in camera level - by military and civil administration members);
- Declarations made by European Union diplomats confirming the implication of public institution representatives in cases of kidnapping of EU citizens during the past ten years;
- Information gathered from several public and private sources given through solidarity or in exchange of money;

- Experience acquired during the past ten years through the various acts of violence suffered by our teams in the Caucasus, a number of which have seen the implication of Chechen nationalist and criminal groups.

For more than a year, this information has been transmitted by Médecins sans Frontières to the Erkel family, the Dutch government, the Russian and Dagestani authorities, the European Union and to the United Nations. Moreover, most of this information is public, and has been already distributed by different press agencies in the past months. The CIS President Vladimir Putin, following the request made by the European Union and the United Nations, committed himself towards the release of Arjan Erkel without however managing to fulfill this promise in the past ten months. The presidential administration has not even made the effort to agree to a meeting with Médecins sans Frontières even though many European diplomats had pushed for this to happen. The Netherlands has been assigned the NATO General Secretariat, the Council of Europe presidency, and in a few months the European Presidency. Important commercial contracts have been signed between the Russians and the Dutch. However, no progress has been made for the liberation of Arjan Erkel. During these last weeks Dutch diplomats advised Médecins sans Frontières to be patient, to prepare the Erkel family for the worst scenario and to keep silent.

The case of Arjan Erkel's kidnapping cannot be understood outside of the extremely violent context of the war in Chechnya and in the neighbouring republics. Since August 2002 - date of Arjan's kidnapping - thousands of civilians have been victims of extreme violence. In spring 2002, a campaign characterized by intimidation and violence was triggered against aid organizations, human rights defense organizations, and journalists. This repression campaign has been translated into dozens of violent acts and several kidnappings. Foreign diplomats and international organizations such as the United Nations have always meekly accepted to silently pay for the release of their citizens or employees. These actions certainly do not contribute to stopping this large-scale traffic of which thousands of human beings, in majority Chechens, have been and are still victims.

Médecins sans Frontières demands that:

- The Russian authorities guarantee the liberation of Arjan Erkel in total security and in the shortest of delays;
- The Dutch government, the European Union and the United Nations apply the international conventions and resolutions of the United Nations Security Council on the protection of humanitarian workers and accept to put on top of their agenda the Arjan Erkel case;
- Cease all attacks against civilians, humanitarian organisms, human rights defense organizations, and journalists in the Caucasus on the entirety of the CIS territory.



*'Where is Arjan Erkel?'* Editorial *Washington Post* (USA), 17 March 2004 (in English).

#### Extract:

In the flush of his re-election victory, Russian President Vladimir Putin promised that he would work to build democracy, civil society, and the rule of law in Russia during the next four years. Few in the outside world are likely to put much faith in such a pledge, because Mr. Putin has spent the past four years dismantling what there was of civil society and democracy in his country. But if he'd like to bolster his flagging credibility in the West, there is one step Mr. Putin can take quickly. He can free Arjan Erkel. [...] To this day the humanitarian group, renowned for its work in troubled areas around the world, is not sure who abducted Mr. Erkel or why.

But it does know that he was being shadowed by Russian security forces in the days before his disappearance; that two officers of the Russian FSB agency, successor to the KGB, were at the scene of his abduction; and that the FSB has since shown, by producing videos and photos of Mr. Erkel, that it knows who is holding him, and probably where. This is also widely known: Doctors Without Borders has been helping refugees from Mr. Putin's war in Chechnya in neighboring Russian republics, including Dagestan, and has spoken out against efforts by his government to force those refugees to return home. Mr. Erkel's disappearance was convenient for the FSB: It led Doctors Without Borders to suspend operations in Dagestan.

For many months the international agency worked quietly to free Mr. Erkel. But it has learned that his health has taken a life-threatening turn for the worse -- he reportedly suffers from a pulmonary infection -- and it has also been warned that Mr. Erkel's captors may have decided to kill him. Appeals to Russian authorities by the group and its many Western supporters, including Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, have met with the same stonewall answer: We are doing our best. That hardly seems likely. In fact, Mr. Erkel is a prime example of how Mr. Putin and his fellow KGB alumni have declined to apply the rule of law in Russia. If they really intend to do so now, his case is the right place to start.

**On 17 March, after having asked MSF in vain to cancel the press conference, the Erkel family's lawyer announced that the family held MSF responsible for anything that might happen to Arjan or any other volunteer in the field, and asked it to hand over the strategic, operational, and media management of the affair to professionals. On 18 March, the MSF Switzerland General Director acknowledged receipt of the letter and stated that MSF wished to maintain its contact with the family and Dutch government.**



**Letter** from the Erkel family's lawyer, to Thomas Linde, MSF Switzerland Executive Director, 17 March 2004 (in English).

**Extract:**

I hereby confirm our telephone conversation of this morning. In our telephone conversation you informed me that MSF will not cancel or postpone the press conference scheduled for tomorrow in Moscow. On behalf of the family of Arjan Erkel, I wish to stress that MSF, in spite of the continuous recommendations of both the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and kidnapping experts and the wish of the family not to seek publicity, has nevertheless chosen to seek publicity. The family strongly disapproves of this. On behalf of the family of Arjan Erkel, I hereby hold MSF fully liable (in a civil and a criminal sense) for all damages that may occur and have occurred (in past and present) to Arjan Erkel and/or his family, and others, such as other field workers and those involved in solving the kidnapping of Arjan Erkel. Next to that I want to put forward and repeat the strong wish of my clients to hand over the strategic, operational, and communicative management in this case to independent experts, respected by all parties involved



**Letter** from Thomas Linde, MSF Switzerland Executive Director to the Erkel's family Lawyer, 18 March 2004 (in English).

**Extract:**

Thank you for your letter dated March 17, 2004. We have taken good note of the content of your letter and we will come back to you, as necessary and appropriate. In the meantime, and as I have explained to you by phone yesterday, MSF will pursue the contacts with Mr Erkel and his family, as well as with other relevant parties, including the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

**Dutch media coverage of the Erkel affair was extensive, but concentrated primarily on the disagreement between the family and government on one side and MSF on the other. The MSF Holland team had trouble in conveying messages from the international movement, which did not handle the Dutch authorities with consideration.**



'Re: Arjan Erkel Short Operational Update + Modulating Message,' **Email** from Marieke Van Zalk, MSF Holland Communications to Pere Joan Pons, MSF Switzerland Erkel Crisis Cell and MSF Communications Network, 29 March 2004 (in English).

**Extract:**

One comment from the Amsterdam office related to the supposed 'censure' on Arjan news in Dutch media, which might

give a wrong picture. In fact, Arjan is very present in Dutch media. We had a big coverage over the last 3 weeks about Arjan up to this weekend. Thing is, that Dutch media is focusing primarily on the differences between MSF and the family. And since this weekend, focusing on the differences between the Dutch government (supporting the family) and MSF. The actual message of MSF (re: Russian authorities, international community) is secondary news for Dutch media and gets lost in all the fuzz about the relations with the family.



*At that point, the family was saying that we were killing Arjan and was trying to stop us from making public pronouncements. But I almost felt that the opposite was true, that we were trying to increase public campaigning in order to make progress. We weren't going to last six months; the situation was bound to blow up. You could see how everyone was on edge throughout the MSF movement. It was all very precarious.*

Dr Thomas Nierle, MSF Switzerland, Head of Emergencies then Director of Operations 2000-2004, (in French), interviewed in 2009



*Chechnya wasn't an area that got a lot of coverage in the Dutch media, like you had a very strong sort of intellectual connection or bridge in France. Nothing like that in Holland. There were interviews with the family, from their perspective, and that's not information-based. It's just human-interest stories, three pages long in the Sunday papers of what the family was going through. There was a Dutch journalist who was publishing weekly in the press and who was trying to write a book about it, based in Moscow, who the Swiss decided not to even talk to. So he had none of MSF's position. There was a tremendous competition in the Dutch press. Every single serious newspaper had one of its more senior international journalists working hard on this issue and publishing on a daily basis. Some of it was just opinion pieces; it was interviews with members of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, from the Dutch government, statements from every walk of Dutch life, and loads of interviews coming out of speculative opinion pieces coming out of Russia. I think that half the reason it was so hard was internal fighting within MSF and difficulties in determining the relationship with the Dutch government, rather than particularly contextually related to who took him and the power play in Chechnya. So I think that that was at least in part a crisis of MSF's own making. The international MSF position was often so manufactured and so incoherent and so peculiar. Once we'd create a position that everyone can accept, it was so elaborate that it wasn't readily understandable or easy to communicate on them. We're so desperate to control it and have quality positions that they've become completely media-unfriendly. The golden era of MSF Holland in the media was under Jacques De Miliano [former MSF Holland President for ten years]. He would literally*

*step off the plane from wherever he'd been and just speak his mind. And usually quite often say incendiary things, which then the press department would hate him because then they would have to clean up. But it drew attention and that gave MSF a space to then be much more specific when they had to justify what he'd said or qualify what he'd said. What's very difficult is to go to the media when broadly, you have a national sense of mistrust and to deliver extremely convoluted messages. And, not to have any leeway for, you know, just interpretation or flashes or metaphors or anything. Because everything has been nailed down to the last bloody sentence. So you've got no room for putting someone who's good in front of the media to go and be reactive.*

Austen Davies, MSF Holland Executive Director, 1999 to 2004 (in English) interviewed in 2009.

**On 18 March, Thomas Nierle and Kenny Gluck, Directors of Operations at MSF Switzerland and MSF Holland respectively, held a press conference in Moscow, at the offices of the radio station Echo of Moscow. They related MSF's strong suspicions concerning Russian officials' involvement in Arjan Erkel's prolonged captivity and talked of 'inaction and indifference.' Within half an hour, the Dagestani Minister of Interior told the Russian press agency Itar Tass that he was monitoring the Erkel affair on a daily basis.**



*'Arjan Erkel, Nineteen Months in Captivity - MSF Denounces Inaction and Indifference of Russian Authorities,' Press release, MSF Moscow, Geneva, 18 March 2004 (in English).*

#### **Extract:**

Nineteen months after the abduction of Arjan Erkel, the international medical humanitarian organization Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) denounces the failure of the Russian authorities to secure his release. President Putin pledged to give the case the highest priority in May of last year. The Russian government has failed to live up to this promise. As a result, MSF holds the Russian authorities responsible for Arjan's prolonged detention and demands his immediate and safe release. Russian and Dagestani authorities claim to know who is behind the abduction, where Arjan is being held and how to secure his release. Federal authorities have demonstrated that they have direct access to the kidnappers. "It is clear that the Russian authorities hold the keys to solving this case and securing the safe release of Arjan. By not doing so, they demonstrate their lack of interest in its resolution. The names of those involved have been widely published in the Russian and international media. The Russian authorities have neither explained nor denied these accusations," says Dr. Thomas Nierle, MSF Switzerland's Director of Operations.

The abduction of Arjan and the subsequent investigation has been characterized by extreme irregularities. On the night of

Arjan's abduction he was followed by two FSB operatives who themselves admit that they stood by as he was kidnapped. The prosecutor's investigation was halted for six months without the knowledge of MSF. Arjan's mobile phone, which was meant to be monitored, was used to make over 50 phone calls early last year. This fact only became known when MSF received the bill. Despite MSF having given the investigators an itemized phone list, they failed to follow up on this lead. Finally, the officer in charge of the investigation was arrested without any official explanation in December 2003. "Very few aspects of the investigation give us reason to believe that the Russian authorities are really taking this seriously. In fact, it is clear that the investigation has been hampered every step of the way. It appears they are more interested in a cover-up than solving the case", says Dr. Nierle.

MSF has not received a proof of life since last October and all discussions held with the kidnappers through intermediaries came to a halt in December. The various proofs of life as well as the introduction of intermediaries had been provided by the Russian security services. "It is unacceptable that after 19 months of captivity, all the authorities can do is say that Arjan is alive," says Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland Director of Operations referring to recent statements made by Russian officials. "MSF demands that the Russian authorities live up to their responsibilities and immediately secure the safe release of Arjan," concluded Kenny Gluck, who was himself kidnapped in Chechnya in 2001. In addition, MSF urges the international community and, in particular, the Dutch government to demand concrete results from the Russian authorities and make them accountable for their lack of commitment.



**Interview** Kenny Gluck and Thomas Nierle, MSF Holland and MSF Switzerland Directors of Operations, by Alexei Vorobyov, *Radio Ekho Moskvy*, (Echo of Moscow) (Russia) 18 March 2004 (in English).

#### **Kenny Gluck (speaking in English):**

Yes, I think we confirm that Arjan Erkel who has been abducted more than 19 month ago is still missing and that we have very strong suspicions that the Russian authorities at least are co-responsible for the prolonged detention of Arjan Erkel.

**A.V.:** What are these suspicions based on?

**Kenny Gluck (speaking in English):** Our suspicions are based on various facts. First of all, there are immense irregularities in the investigation. Russian authorities proved perfectly capable in coming into contact with the kidnappers providing very-very serious proofs of life already in May 2003. But, all these tracks were not followed-up. Furthermore, all our own initiatives in order to get in contact with the kidnappers and negotiate the release of Arjan Erkel came suddenly to a halt in December 2003. It is obviously suspicious that at the same moment the chief investigator [...] of the Arjan Erkel case was arrested in Dagestan. Last but not the least, and we have this confirmed from persons working in the



security service in Dagestan and Russia, these persons have put forward a hypotheses on the reasons why Arjan Erkel has been kidnapped involving persons in official positions in the Dagestani state apparatus, as well on the federal level. These accusations have already been published in international and national media in November 2003. And these accusations have never been denied, nor have we got any other explanation about this hypothesis so we think that this is the working hypothesis of the Russian and Dagestani security services.

A.V.: Why, do you think, FSB (Federal Security Service) might be interested in abducting, holding Arjan Erkel?

Thomas Nierle (speaking in English): I think, of course, it is a delicate question. I can't give an exact reason; I can give you my own opinion. What we think only is that kidnapping has not been taken place purely out of commercial reasons. So, the stakes are not only linked to money. But the stakes may be linked to some political reasons in the Dagestani society. They may be linked to questions of immunity, but of course, these are hypothesis as well. The only thing that we can say, there seem to be sufficient reasons for not resolving this case otherwise Arjan would have already been with us today.

Kenny Gluck (speaking in Russian): If I can add, questions of that kind should be put to the Russian government. We are not an investigative body; we are a medical humanitarian organization. We don't understand why the Russian government hasn't resolved this issue yet. The Russian government has a duty to ensure the security of employees of humanitarian organizations working on its territory. We want the Russian government to follow up all this information that they presented to us. We have not made up these accusations. It is information that we received from the Russian law-enforcement agencies and from the Russian and international press. We want the Russian government to follow this up. [...]

A.V.: [...] So can you provide us with detailed evidence of security service complicity in the kidnapping? In brief?

Thomas Nierle (speaking in English): I could start with the fact that the official investigation has been interrupted in November 2002, for a total of six months. I could as well add that members of the Federal security Bureau have been on the spot when Arjan Erkel was kidnapped. Another indication is the fact that MSF received the phone bills from Arjan's telephone. This telephone was used in February 2003, 6 months after the kidnapping, there were 50 calls. We received an itemized telephone bill with names, with telephone numbers which was shared with the authorities. As a response, the authorities just shut the telephone down and said: "There is no result and this doesn't help us." However, there were indications and information that some of the numbers led directly to persons in official positions in the security service and with the Dagestani authorities.

A.V.: Do you know it for sure or you have reasons to believe?

Thomas Nierle (speaking in English): Yes, we still have the telephone bill, and these numbers are in our possession, but it is also in the possession of the Russian authorities for more than 9 months now. Additionally, just the fact that the authorities brought us into contact with intermediaries at these occasions shows us that they are in a capacity to get

into contact with the group holding Arjan. But, then they withdraw their support and the track runs dry. To underline what Kenny said, we are not an investigative body, we are medical organization, we just diagnose the facts that are at our disposition, and that's why we are here to share our impressions and our suspicions with you.

A.V.: I looked through several reports, including those from security services, coming in the last 3-4 weeks. They state Arjan was kidnapped by Maskhadov's people. In fact, kidnappings used to be good business for the Chechen separatists. Don't you think this version should also be taken in consideration?

Thomas Nierle (speaking in English): Again, we don't speculate on who abducted Arjan Erkel. What we know and what we see is that the investigation lead is more than suspicious. This is what we now base our communication on. As we said before, we are unable to sustain, with any kind of information proof, who organized the kidnapping. And in fact, I have to say, may be it is even shocking, we don't care too much, what we care is that Arjan Erkel is back with us, with his family as soon as possible.

A.V.: As far as I understand, you are talking about low quality of investigation rather than about security service's complicity in the abduction?

Kenny Gluck (speaking in Russian): I think that it is important to stress that it is not just the poor quality of the investigation, it is the absence of the political will to carry out the investigation when the chief investigator is in prison and there is no replacement. When MSF has to provide information like telephone lists and the Russian authorities don't then follow this up. This doesn't just indicate a poor quality investigation, it indicates inaction and indifference. The Russian President Putin, during the meetings with European leaders last year in May, promised to follow up the case of Arjan and to give the case the highest priority. Up till now, we see that the Russian government has failed to live up to this promise.

A.V.: Look at the statements made by the Russian authorities in the end of February. Operational search actions were undertaken as a result and suspects in the kidnapping case were established. Investigators know the names of the suspects. Search for them is in progress.

Kenny Gluck (speaking in Russian): The Russian authorities have said for a long time that Erkel is alive and that they know who kidnapped him and how. They admit that their agents were at the scene of the kidnapping. However, 19 months later Erkel is still not free. We are very concerned about his health. It is not acceptable to constantly say that he is alive and that they know what is happening without us being able to see any concrete results: Erkel's liberation and return to his family.

Thomas Nierle: Just to sustain this argument – since last year, especially April-May, we have very-very precise information through the investigators about the condition in which Arjan is held, about facts like that he has access to journals and books and that he is well-fed. And one year after you want make me believe that with all this information, knowing who is behind it, knowing where Arjan is, that it was impossible to ensure his release. Isn't it strange?

A.V.: When did you receive information about Arjan's health?

There were reports he had kind of lung infection. How, through which channels were you able to get evidence of his state of health?

**Thomas Nierle:** We got from two very-very separate sources - one of these sources is linked to the official investigation - that Arjan indeed is in ill health. This information dates from end of January – beginning of February. And of course we are extremely preoccupied and worried about how long he will be able to cope and to resist to his disease.

**A.V.:** Tell me please. Given the circumstances, are you planning to actively cut back your activities in the North Caucasus? Or your position is going to be different?

**Thomas Nierle:** I'll leave the response to the question to Kenny Gluck; I'll just say that MSF-Switzerland has suspended all activities in Dagestan, which is extremely sad for the people we assisted on Dagestani and Chechen soil.

**Kenny Gluck (speaking in Russian):** The Abduction of Erkel is not an isolated incident. There have been 56 cases of humanitarian workers being kidnapped in the North Caucasus. This is unacceptable and, of course, has a negative effect on the provision of humanitarian and medical assistance to the population of the North Caucasus. We hope that Russian society will call on its authorities to support the principle of protecting humanitarian workers.

**A.V.:** Thank you very much. I just want to add that about a month ago, the UN stated that it would suspend delivering humanitarian aid to Chechnya until Arjan Erkel is released. The situation is still the same. Thank you very much for your position. Thank you.



*We held a massive press conference in Moscow. I went to it along with Kenny Gluck. I talked about the Russians' responsibility and wondered aloud in front of the press, if the authorities (I never specified the FSB) were behind the whole thing. So the pressure was mounting. I had almost no support left in Geneva, and I think that any support I got in this difficult phase was from Kenny, Jean-Hervé, and Rafa. Kenny was always there. He never let go. He had other fish to fry, but he was always available, even for the difficult tasks like taking part in a press conference. The press conference was a major occasion, the television was there, thirty or so journalists, it was a pretty professional event. The journalists asked us what our arguments were and I listed them. A number of the arguments created an impact, particularly the fact that the FSB, the world's largest security organisation, had tried to persuade us that its agents had lost sight of someone they were shadowing. The Russian journalists told us that was impossible, that it was hard to believe. They were open to that sort of argument. I did not come away with a bad impression, but felt that our arguments had won over the press.*

Dr Thomas Nierle, MSF Switzerland, Head of Emergencies then Director of Operations 2000-2004, (in French) interviewed in 2009.

**Before the press conference, MSF had been warned that any of its executives who took a public stand could suffer reprisals. A number of security incidents during the Moscow visits seemed to confirm this scenario. On 24 March, the MSF Switzerland Director of Operations cancelled a trip to Moscow, after having been informed that MSF representatives were subject to threats of 'provocation' by the 'services.'**




**'Russia Secu,' Email** from Thomas Nierle, MSF Switzerland, Director of Operations, to MSF Erkel Crisis Cell, and MSF International Reflection Cell on Erkel's Case, 24 March 2004 (in English).

As you may know I was supposed to go to Russia today. However, a guy, with whom we are in contact since recently, strongly recommended not to go now. According to his information services have decided to respond to the public 'insult' with a 'provocation' against MSF. He in particular, referred to persons who have been active in the media recently (myself, JHB, Kenny). Those persons may be victim of an 'incident' when in Russia. On my question on the risks for MSF international staff in general, he replied that their risk level hasn't increased. Steve is informed and he will also share this information with the other HoM's. The guy will need some days to get some more information; he will keep me updated. I don't want to enter into this paranoia thing...but I can't disregard this information either (so, I cancelled my trip). The quality and validity of information is still doubtful and I'm waiting for precisions, which won't come before next week.



*The veterans group [former FSB members, a group appointed by MSF to look for Arjan Erkel] told Steve [Cornish, MSF Switzerland Coordinator in the Russian Federation] that reprisals would not target MSF globally, but the executives who were taking a stance. Then, in late March 2004, when Thomas Nierle [MSF Switzerland Director of Operations] and Kenny Gluck [MSF Holland Director of Operations] went to Moscow for a press conference, I advised Thomas not to go, not to expose himself personally. For my part, I wouldn't have done it. And since there had already been the warning by the veterans...and then Patrouchev, Director of the FSB, had talked about his disappointment over Dr Bradol's statement following the Le Monde article... When the boss of the FSB mentions you by name, there is no way you set foot in Moscow under those conditions. I thought Kenny and Thomas were very brave to go and do the press conference.*

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Director of Communications (1996-1998), Director of Operations (1998-2000), President (May 2000-May 2008) (in French), interviewed in 2009.

 During one of my trips to Moscow, a car tried to drive us off the motorway. It was like a film, it slowed down in front of us, moved behind us, and bumped us. Our driver ended up driving into the undergrowth to get away from it. In the car with me was the MSF Holland Coordinator who had come to get me from the airport. On top of the Arjan problem, it felt like we were under pressure and it was becoming seriously unpleasant and it was getting difficult to point the finger at the FSB. We had no proof, and I could feel that our teams and I were increasingly unsafe.

Dr Thomas Nierle, MSF Switzerland, Head of Emergencies then Director of Operations 2000-2004, (in French) interviewed in 2009.

**MSF multiplied its appeals to UN Security Council members, including Secretary General Kofi Annan, who was visiting Moscow. On 25 and 26 March at the European Union Summit, when Arjan Erkel's case was brought up, Marine Buissonnière, the new MSF International Secretary General<sup>40</sup>, briefed the press and members of MSF Belgium handed out leaflets at the entrance.**



'Update Political & Diplomacy - Week 13-23<sup>rd</sup> March 2004,' MSF Erkel Crisis Cell, 23 March 2004 (in English).

#### Extract:

##### EU

- **EU Summit** took place Thursday and Friday in Brussels. Several correspondents raise the issue of Arjan at the press conference and will probably be asking questions to [the European officials]. A meeting took place between Marine and van Rij (advisor to Solana) on the 24<sup>th</sup>: A Troika meeting took place on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and the issue of Arjan was raised at the meeting. The Russian vice-minister of Foreign Affairs ensured the European parties of Russia's highest concern in regards to this case but also urged them to not make a multi-lateral political issue out of it. Also added that their energy was entirely devoted to solving this case and that if they knew who had Arjan he'd be free by now [...]. EU: will keep on raising the issue whenever meeting Russian officials but cannot see another more multilateral way of working on this.

- **Irish Presidency [...]**

- On 12/03, the Irish ambassador in Moscow met with Mr. Chizhov (Deputy Foreign Minister) and raised the issue of Arjan. She also confirmed that the EU troika reps, in Brxls met with the same Chizov in on March 23 and Arjan's case was discussed;

- She assumed that even with the presidency it will be impossible to come out publicly for Irish as Dutch wants to pursue a low profile.

- She will ask their delegations in Brxls. and GVA about an inclusion of Arjan's case in the draft of the resolution on Chechnya to be presented by the EU at the annual session of the human rights commission, but she said that it is unlikely that an individual case will be mentioned in a general resolution on Chechnya, but a reference to Arjan can be included in the EU statement to present the resolution.

- **European Parliament**

- Pat Cox (President of the European Parliament) has kept his promise and sent a letter, signed by all the European heads of political parties to: the Irish Presidency, Solana, Commissioner Patten and Prodi. A copy of the letter is attached to this update. Do not hesitate to use this letter especially if one of the signatories is one of your national politicians.

##### UN

- **Sec Gen**

Kofi Annan is on his way to Russia, departing Friday. A letter will be sent to the 15 Security Council members by the President of MSF International, with a request for them to raise the issue of Arjan at the Security Council. A letter is also being sent to Kofi Annan with the same request to put Arjan on the Security Council agenda.

- **OCHA**

Three OCHA members will be coming to the MSF office on April 1st for a full briefing on Arjan. [...]

##### Belgium 23/03

The 3 Benelux countries will send a letter signed by their foreign affairs ministers to their Russian homologue Lavrov about Arjan's case exclusively. In Moscow, the 3 ambassadors will jointly deliver the message. [...] Concerning EU summit at the end of the week, Belgium can't add Arjan on the official agenda; full pressure should be made on EU Irish Presidency. [...]

##### Switzerland

25/03 meeting between Dutch MoFA [...]. The Dutch expressed that they were annoyed with MSF-CH statements and position in the last weeks. They mentioned that US, UK & Japanese govt contacted the Dutch govt to explain that MSF is always requesting them support and assistance on the case and according to the Dutch, this is annoying them. The MoFA didn't give any feedback concerning the meeting between Balkenende (the Dutch PM) meeting with both Bush and Kofi Annan (see above Holland). Rather tense relations with our interlocutors.



'Arjan Erkel: General and Operational Update,' MSF Erkel Crisis Cell, 29 March 2004 (in English).

#### Extract:

The Dutch government is very upset by our recent campaign.

40. Marine Buissonnière replaced Rafa Vila San Juan as Secretary General of the MSF Movement.

Unfriendly meeting took place in Geneva between Dutch DG of consular affairs and MSFCH (DG and president) in an attempt to frighten and silence MSF. Following the meeting, the DG of consular affairs mentioned to a Dutch journalist that MSF needed to remain silent.

Family: Relations with the family remain very tense. After Thomas Nierle and Kenny Gluck's press conference in Moscow, a law firm on behalf of the Erkel family sent a letter to MSF threatening of legal action and requesting MSF to give up its coordination role in Arjan's crisis. Legal consultation in Geneva was done: at first sight there is little risk that a legal action can be taken currently against MSF. However, all efforts are done to keep the link with the family. A new meeting btw MSF and the family should take place early April.

Even though it's difficult to evaluate the outcome of our recent public and diplomatic actions, we feel we have been successful in bringing back Arjan to the media and international diplomatic agenda and that the pressure led to concrete results:

- Public reaction of Dag and Russian authorities mentioning that Arjan is alive (confirmed our point that they know more about the case)
- New perspectives in operational tracks,
- Strong reactions from the Dutch gov....
- Negative point is the tense relationship with the family and the 'censure' of all information regarding Arjan in the Dutch press.

**On 25 March, relations broke down between MSF Switzerland and the Dutch government, which declared that the organisation's public statements had upset the Russian authorities and brought all the efforts undertaken to secure Erkel's freedom to a standstill. Its representatives stated that they would not give MSF any more information on the investigation's progress. On 26 March, the Dutch government publicly stated its disagreement with MSF's communications policy. The Erkel family's lawyer sent a new letter to MSF Switzerland, threatening legal action and asking MSF to renounce its role coordinating the crisis resolution process.**



'MSF Must Stop the Media Campaign Erkel,' ANP<sup>41</sup>, The Hague, 26 March 2004 (in English).

#### Extract:

The media campaign by MSF regarding the kidnapped Arjan Erkel clashes with silent diplomacy. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs brought this message to MSF during a meeting in Geneva between a special delegation and MSF-Switzerland. The Netherlands asked, with emphasis, to stop the media campaign, a spokesman from the Ministry

confirmed this on Friday. Two weeks ago the family of Erkel spoke out that they are worried about the publicity that the organization is raising in the media. The father of Arjan said he is, "disconcerted" about the MSF way of working. The dissatisfaction with the way the organization is acting is also because of the criticism of MSF against the Russian authorities. MSF's message is that the Russian authorities completely failed to find Arjan. According to BUZA, such pronouncements will be contra-productive. Erkel was kidnapped in Dagestan in August 2002. At that time, he was working for MSF-Switzerland. According to the spokesman, they don't yet know what MSF is going to do with the appeal of the Foreign Affairs Department.



**Minutes** of the MSF France Board of Directors Meeting, 26 March 2004 (in French).

#### Extract:

Thomas Nierle: Position to take vis-à-vis the kidnapping of Arjan Erkel

Jean-Hervé Bradol: [...] Our primary public position (along with our opposition to the tuberculosis policy presented by the WHO). Not to beat about the bush, we should understand that the positions relating to this campaign, that were established collectively, have been undermined by certain elements within our movement; this is something that we need to consider!

Thomas Nierle: To sum up the background to the positions we have taken, you need to remember that our decision to accuse the Russians more explicitly (and the governments that back them) was taken in January 2004. It was a strategy that was reaffirmed when we were required to handle some sensitive information [...] in February 2004. The campaign launch was fairly difficult as it was opposed by the family as well as the Dutch government (a position that we respected by avoiding holding any press conferences in the Netherlands). Our unambiguous position was reported by the media, the idea being to reveal what we felt to be the truth behind Arjan's kidnapping, i.e. resulting from connivance between officials from Dagestan and members of the FSB. Our briefing was distributed primarily to diplomats (no wider, out of respect for the family's wishes). However, we quickly realized that 'discrepancies' in the interpretation had altered the nuances of the message we wanted to put across. This resulted in further voices being heard, expanding on, or contradicting what had been agreed by the movement at the international level.

I will not disguise the fact that all this went down very badly with the crisis cell in charge of this case (I myself considered quitting the MSF movement as I felt that all the energy going into solving internal squabbles was so terribly out of place given the fact that Arjan's very life was under threat). MSF Holland tried to have it both ways (the government appears as inactive as ever, as Dutch PM Balkenende was in the USA but failed to bring the case up with Bush or Kofi Annan); MSF Belgium has kept its distance; MSF Italy intervened with some type of Christian message to the effect that the family's views should be respected.

After a week of internal tensions, the campaign took off again in Russia, where it did at least manage to provoke the irritation that we'd hoped for on the part of the Russians (and the Dutch government, as it happens)

All of this means that we are under pressure from all sides (internal and external), but we are clear in our determination to continue with the agreed strategy. The next stages will be more aggressive towards the Dutch government (bypassing the press) as we will be lobbying MPs directly to highlight the fact that their government's statements are unacceptable: they accuse us of being irresponsible, whereas it's an accusation that we level against them. They've even gone so far as claiming that if a ransom is demanded, they will be able to 'recover' it from MSF funds! On a positive note, I'm glad to report that cooperation in Moscow between the Dutch diplomat and MSF is good, which is an important factor. The family of the Chechen President claims to have identified the group holding Arjan, and appears to be willing to act as go-between in negotiations. The other, more official, line being followed by the Dutch government has provided reassurances about Arjan's state of health (but no tangible proof). The crisis cell enjoys the unwavering support of the French section (for which I thank them) and I am sorry to note that the same cannot be said of all sections.

#### Debate

Bénédicte Jeannerod: What were their arguments for refusing to back you? How did the Russians make their irritation known?

Thomas Nierle: To our surprise, the noises coming from the Russians were fairly measured: 'regret attempts to politicise the affair,' etc. We've known them to be far tougher, coming out with defamatory public statements. The advice put out by the authorities was not to make use of the press to respond, but to step up the investigation seeking to locate [Arjan]. For these reasons we feel the results of this first campaign phase to be fairly positive. The crisis cell is all too well aware that in a sensitive case such as this, any public statements carry an element of risk to Arjan, depending on the relevance of our analysis and the accuracy of our strategy. This applies equally to the risks run by MSF Holland and the family; in fact, we had to convince the press not to stress the relationship between the family and MSF at the expense of the relationship between the Dutch government and the Russians.

Christian Losson: Do we know if any head of state has mentioned Arjan's plight?

Thomas Nierle: Yes; several times over the past 19 months, notably by all the European representatives (more or less formally). Pressure is rising within the European Parliament which has reiterated its demands to the Russians for this affair to be brought to a conclusion. The Dutch Foreign Minister appears not want to get too involved, and has only made cursory official mention. The Russians invariably reply: 'we're dealing with this, be patient.' But, nobody dares to hold anybody to account, to question those presumed to be involved, to demand explanations for the troubling events; such inaction feeds our despair, and we feel that the mobilisation is inadequate. [...]

Françoise Saulnier: How can we be sure that the family and

the Dutch government do not have information that we are not party to? Do we have enough contacts in common to be able to verify what we know?

Thomas Nierle: That's a question that we do ask ourselves, and one that's extremely hard to answer. However, Steve Cornish in Moscow, who is very close the ambassador, does not share our doubts in this regard. Sure, we don't know if the ambassador knows everything; it's a question that we will ask again. [...] The Holland section's communications department has been protective, masking the low-profile policy that has still not given Arjan's kidnapping any visibility in Dutch civil society. Personally, I don't want to spend any more energy tilting at these Dutch windmills!

Jean-Hervé Bradol: Since spring 2002, the repression of humanitarian NGOs and independent media that still try to work in Chechnya has intensified: there have been more and more cases. It goes hand in hand with the on-going repression of the population, independent journalists, and human rights organisations. Under these circumstances, we can try to deny that we are under attack, but then I don't see how we could try and defend ourselves when we are not even capable of noticing that we are being attacked and by whom! What shocks me deeply in MSF Holland's attitude is not their disagreement — it's always possible to have your own viewpoint — but their dishonesty. By insisting that they had not been informed of our strategy, that they thought we would fall in with the family's decisions! I can appreciate that the letter sent to the family was not clear enough and that it was cause of complaint for the family, but it is intolerable that MSF Holland claims not to be informed, when they had received the report and had in-depth discussions with the crisis cell over the action plan. These dishonest arguments are reminiscent of the worst moments of international relations within the movement ten years ago. They apply to questions other than Arjan's case, since we saw the same attitude concerning the non-commemoration of the Rwandan genocide. It means that we can no longer have confidence in the Dutch section on major security issues. It has been a long while since I have felt this pessimistic about international relations.

Christian Losson: I get the feeling that we have not been clear enough in saying that we are facing a political kidnapping, not a mafia affair. We are asking hard questions without following them through. We could ask if Putin is still controlling the FSB, even if it is provocative. I feel that the message is unclear and the arguments are not backed up systematically enough.

Jean-Hervé Bradol: I think that MSF is not standing up and saying that we are being attacked by the administration. [...]

Thomas Nierle: The message is confused and difficult to convey.

Philippe Houdart: Everything is happening as though the message has sunk in.

Thomas Nierle: We have further elements that we intend to draw on, but they do not allow us to clearly designate the culprit. Journalists are asking us for facts, but we only have strong assumptions, which makes our task difficult when you need concrete demonstrations to convince people.

Christian Losson: Only MSF Switzerland and MSF France are making statements to tackle the case of a 'Dutchman'

(who went out with MSF Switzerland): it is impossible to understand why MSF Holland does not take a more active role in the affair, and it makes the situation even less clear. Jean-Hervé Bradol: We are taking half-hearted measures in every area.

Thomas Nierle: Despite all the pressure, I still feel that our message has got through and created the irritation we expected. Now we need to keep it up and feed in tangible facts that will back up the accusation of the authorities' involvement. [...]

Françoise Saulnier: Do you think that holding back information opens them up to the possibility of thinking that they should secure Arjan's release?

Jean-Hervé Bradol: That's what we anticipated in April when we went through intermediaries to propose a payoff and a guarantee of silence as to the real authors of the kidnapping, so as not to add fuel to the flames. And afterwards, they regularly showed concern for what we were going to say publicly to accompany Arjan's release (I took this approach at some personal cost, but it seemed to hold out the best chances for Arjan).

Thomas Nierle: We should not forget that if we want to keep the media's attention, we need to keep elements over the long term that will maintain the tension, publicity, and pressure.

**On 29 March, in an interview given to Vyatcheslav Izmaïlov, published in *Novaya Gazeta*, the Dagestani Home Affairs Minister stated that he had good reason to think that Arjan Erkel was alive. He also confirmed that the results of the journalist's investigation were very close to reality.**



'Suspects in Kidnapping of Arjan Erkel Detained,' Vyacheslav Izmaïlov, *Novaya Gazeta* (Russia) 29 March 2004 (translated from Russian into English by MSF).

#### Extract:

Leaders of European countries, [and] workers of humanitarian organizations repeatedly addressed the president of Russia Vladimir Putin with this question. But there were no results – Erkel remains hostage. At the same time, the abductors of Erkel, as far as I can see, are free and they are prospering. I've read your publications about the destiny of Arjan Erkel very attentively. They are written as if you yourself were present at this. You are close to the truth in your journalist investigation. But, believe us that the destiny of Arjan Erkel worries us not less than the others. We are investigating his kidnapping together with FSB and the Prosecutor's office of Dagestan. People interested in his destiny [may] contact us. Our main priority is to save the Erkel's life. And suspects in his kidnapping are already detained. We've got guilty-pleading testimonies. Are you sure that Arjan Erkel is alive? Several months [have] passed already since the contacts with intermediaries stopped. I'll be fully confident in that only

when I'll see him. We know that the people who abducted him are very cruel. But we have reasons to consider him alive.

**Since April, Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General, Jacques Chirac, President of France, and Jaap de Hoop Schaeffer, Dutch Foreign Affairs Minister, had visited Vladimir Putin, newly re-elected as President of the Russian Federation, and pleaded Arjan Erkel's cause.**



**Letter** from Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the UN Security Council to Rowan Gillies, President of MSF International, 2 April 2004 (in English).

#### Extract:

I should recall at the outset, that I have already raised the case of Mr. Erkel with the Russian Foreign Minister, Mr. Sergey V. Lavrov, who undertook to provide me with an update on efforts currently undertaken by the Russian authorities. It is also my intention to raise the matter again with President Putin and other Russian-Officials during my upcoming visit to the Russian Federation, and request that no effort be spared to secure the release of Mr. Erkel and bring to justice those responsible for his abduction. Bringing the matter to the attention of the Security Council, however, as suggested in your letter, would raise serious legal difficulties. By paragraph 5(b) of resolution 1502 (2003) the Security Council encourages the Secretary-General "in accordance with his prerogatives under the Charter of the United Nations, to bring to the attention of the Security Council situations in which humanitarian assistance is denied as a consequence of violence directed against humanitarian personnel and United Nations and its associated personnel." The reference to the Secretary-General's prerogatives under the Charter is, in fact, a reference to Article 99 of the United Nations Charter, which empowers the Secretary-General "to bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security."

In encouraging the Secretary-General to invoke his "Article-99-powers" with respect to humanitarian situations, the Security Council envisaged that he brings to its attention situations where humanitarian assistance is denied as a result of violence against United Nations and associated personnel, including humanitarian personnel. It was also envisaged that such situations be brought to its attention at the time of their occurrence, or soon thereafter, for the Security Council to take measures to address the situations. In the circumstances, I doubt that paragraph 5(b) of Security Council resolution 1502 could be invoked to bring the case of Mr. Erkel before the Security Council. Given the imminent threat on his life, however, it is my hope that my direct intervention with President Putin would bring about the hoped for result.

On 7 April, during a meeting with the Erkel family and MSF, representatives of the Dutch Foreign Affairs Ministry reiterated their refusal to exchange any information with MSF whilst the public campaign was still running, a campaign they considered as posing a threat to Arjan's life. The family was of the same opinion. MSF maintained its stance.



**Meeting** between AE Family, MoFA [Ministry of Foreign Affairs], MSF at The Hague (MoFA), 7 April 2004 (in English).

**Extract:**  
MoFA

The meeting began with reference by Annemiek Ruigrok concerning the Dutch government position: "Regarding the MSF public campaign launched in March 2004, the ministry decided that cooperating on the case with MSF is impossible. As long as the public action will go on the ministry will not cooperate with MSF and will not share any operational details neither with the organization. This position is applicable at The Hague level and Moscow level as well." "The Dutch government noticed that the public campaign damaged the contacts with the Russian authorities, which was very irritated by this." The Dutch government has proof on paper about that Russian irritation. Mrs Annemiek Ruigrok reiterated parts of this statement during the whole meeting. AE family

Mr Erkel mentioned that the family adopts the same position as the one from the Dutch government. He requested more feedback from MSF on paper to be sent by mail instead of this kind of meeting. He concluded that contracting experts in kidnapping could be the only way to renew contacts with the organization. [...]

2-strategy update:

- T Linde commented that MSF perception of the public campaign (in March) was not the same as the one from the Dutch. He added that irritation at the Russian authorities is a fact but the objectives of the campaign were achieved: Arjan is still alive & operational activities were reactivated.
- There is no communication campaign planned at the time (linked to the operational information) but the position of the organization is permanently reassessed according to the developments of operational activities.
- MSF thinks that the Dutch government has more tools they can use to contribute to solve the case. Therefore, MSF will continue lobbying on politicians, as the organization believes that it's a way to keep the case alive and the operational moves to go on.

## ARJAN ERKEL'S RELEASE

On 8<sup>th</sup> April, the Erkel Crisis Cell asked all MSF communication departments to stay silent on the Erkel affair for tactical reasons related to operations underway.



*'Important: Communications on Arjan,'* **Email** from MSF Switzerland Erkel Crisis Cell to MSF Communication Network, 8 April 2004 (in English).

**Extract:**

Hello everybody, please take good note of the following: We just received information that warrants a temporary, i.e. tactical suspension of all MSF communications on the case of Arjan Erkel from now, April 8, until April 16 2004 latest. In other words: In order not to disturb new and imminent operational developments, we kindly request you to switch on 'SILENT MODE' concerning the case of Arjan Erkel. This concerns of course also the contents of the present message! You will receive an update as soon as possible and according to circumstances, but latest on Friday April 16. Until then, please bear with us.

**In the night of 10 April, after being transported in the boot of a car for several hours, Arjan Erkel was released and left in a room at the FSB's headquarters in Makhachkala. A few hours later, the head of a group of intelligence veterans that MSF employed for some months to help find Erkel, appeared. Steve Cornish, MSF Switzerland's Representative in Moscow heard the news at two o'clock in the morning in a phone call from the Dutch ambassador. An hour later, a representative of the FSB called to announced that Arjan is free.**

**Arjan was flown back to Moscow in a plane chartered by the Dutch government. Initially, the Dutch ambassador and Steve Cornish decided he should avoid talking to the press, although a lot of journalists were already waiting for him at the airport. Later they agreed to him holding a short press conference outside the Dutch embassy. The announcement of his release was made to the media by the Dagestani Ministry of the Interior and the Dutch Foreign Affairs Ministry at the same time, both claiming responsibility for the operation. V30**



'Arjan Erkel is Free,' **Press release**, MSF, 11 April 2004 (in French).

**Extract:**

MSF can confirm the release of Arjan Erkel, kidnapped on 12<sup>th</sup> August in Dagestan while working as MSF's Head of Mission. First indications are that he is in good health, under the circumstances. MSF is delighted to see Arjan's ordeal come to an end, after 20 months in captivity. An MSF representative is currently with Arjan and is cooperating with the Dutch government to ensure he can return home to the Netherlands as quickly as possible. After such a long period of uncertainty and anguish, MSF sincerely hopes that Arjan and his family are reunited without delay.



'Arjan Erkel, Coordinator of the Médecins Sans Frontières,' has been Released in Dagestan,' **RIA Novosti**, Makhachkala (Dagestan), 11 April 2004 (Translated from Russian into English by MSF).

**Extract:**

Arjan Erkel, Head of a Mission of the Médecins Sans Frontiers has been released in Dagestan, reported Abdominal Musayev, Head of the press-service of Dagestan's Interior Ministry. A joint operation was carried out by the republic's Interior Ministry and the FSB department for Dagestan at three in the morning, said Musayev. He did not give details of the special operation to release the official of the international humanitarian mission, explaining it in the interests of the investigation. [...] The kidnappers could not be detained right away. Dagestan's prosecutor's office opened a criminal case on facts of the abduction.



'Arjan Erkel: History,' **Email** from Pere Joan Pons, MSF Switzerland Erkel Crisis Cell, to MSF Switzerland Missions, 12 April 2004 (in English).

Dear all,

[...] MSF received a phone call from an organization called 'The Veterans of Foreign Intelligence' at five this morning Moscow Time (GMT+3) to say that Arjan was free. Arjan's family was immediately informed. Steve Cornish (Acting Head of Mission of MSF Swiss - Arjan is still the HOM) together with an MSF doctor from MSF Belgium in Moscow and the second secretary of the Dutch Embassy immediately flew to Makhachkala in Dagestan to meet Arjan. They flew there around nine on Sunday morning and arrived around twelve thirty. It was immediately assessed that there was not a need to medically evacuate Arjan. Indeed he had lost a lot of weight and will undergo detailed medical examination in the coming days, however, he was walking and talking and happy as hell to be free. Shortly before Arjan departed for Moscow, the Interior Ministry of Dagestan made a statement claiming that Arjan had been freed in a Special Forces operation. We took the line that we confirmed that Arjan was free and the above named organization was the

one who had informed us and that our main priority was to reunite Arjan as quickly as possible with his family.

When Arjan arrived in Moscow, it was decided, in consultation with him, to hold a press conference whereby he would read out a statement, MSF [would] give some background and the Veterans' organization would go into details. The conference began around six thirty. Around forty journalists, including radio and television attended. After a short introduction, Arjan began by thanking MSF, the Dutch government, the media, his family and his supporters. He then thanked the Veterans' association and proceeded to shake the hand and hug the leader of the group who was attending. Arjan then told the journalists that he knew they were wondering how he felt and he continued to say he felt fantastic. He thanked the Lord for resurrecting him on this Easter Sunday and said that if he were in Rotterdam he would kiss the ground. He wrapped up with a joke about the Easter Bunny being somehow complicit in his release. The Dutch Ambassador then led Arjan back inside while explaining to the Media that Arjan was very tired. Steve Cornish then told the journalists that the task of finding Arjan and liberating him had been a long and difficult one. He added that we had been in contact with various groups in our attempts to free Arjan and that one of them had been the Veterans' organization. He then introduced the head of the organization whose name is Valeri (full name to follow later).

The main points that Valeri made were:

- His organization is made up of 4,000 professionals who formally worked in Russian Foreign Intelligence. They have strong ties to political and commercial structures around the country.
- Nine months ago they were familiarized with Arjan's case on account of some speed skating contacts in Holland, close to the family, that were in contact with similar sportsmen in Russia.
- When asked if a ransom was paid, Valeri replied: There are two reasons for kidnapping someone: the first is financial gain. The second is political gain. The more important the person is that is kidnapped, the more important political negotiations can take place or compromises can be made. No ransom was paid.
- Arjan has no idea as to the identity of his kidnappers.

**In the days that followed, the press reported all known information about Arjan's abduction and liberation. However, it was only on 15 April, after discussions between the directors about the need to extend the message to the humanitarian situation in the Caucasus, that MSF issued an official statement setting Arjan Erkel's abduction in the broader context of the violence reigning in the North Caucasus.**





'Arjan Erkel, MSF Representative to Dagestan has been Freed – NGOs Aiding Displaced Chechens are Convinced his Abduction was Intended to Intimidate Them,' Natalie Nougayrède, *Le Monde* (France) 13 April 2004 (in French).

#### Extract:

He says he has been 'freed from a nightmare.' He has given no details about his detention or the identity of his kidnapers. Before the cameras, he twice embraced a short, chubby, white-haired man, Valentin Velitchko, President of the Russian Association of Veterans of Foreign Intelligence, affirming that this organisation played a key role in securing his release. Russian state television has maintained total silence on this liberation, making no mention of it in its evening news programmes. [...] The kidnapers were "criminals, a mixed group of several nationalities, including, I think, Chechens," added Mr Velitchko. But, in his opinion, the abduction was mainly to do with the "internal political context in Dagestan, where a battle has been going on in the run-up to local elections. There are two motives for this kind of act: a ransom and political advantage," he said, while denying - as did the representatives of MSF - that any ransom was paid. [...]

Arjan Erkel's kidnapping had led to the suspension of MSF's programmes in Dagestan. The heads of many of the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in the region are convinced that the abduction was intended to intimidate all foreign NGOs providing relief to displaced Chechens. The FSB is thought to be trying to maintain tight control over the activities of these NGOs that send out reports of exactions committed in the warring Republic.



'Light is Shed on Erkel's Release,' by Simon Ostrovsky, *The Moscow Times* (Russia), 15 April 2004 (in English).

#### Extract:

The freeing of kidnapped Dutch aid worker Arjan Erkel had more to do with a retired Soviet-era spy and his former colleagues than with the Russian authorities, Médecins Sans Frontières said Wednesday. The release early Sunday of Erkel after 20 months in captivity was secured thanks largely to the efforts of the Veterans of Foreign Intelligence, an association of former Russian security service agents hired to help secure his freedom, said Stephen Cornish, who heads the medical charity's Moscow crisis team. MSF officials turned to the veterans after becoming increasingly frustrated at what they saw as 'inaction and indifference' on the part of the Russian security services. Corruption, a lack of desire to solve the case, and competition between law enforcement bodies prevented an earlier release for Erkel, MSF's Mission Head in Dagestan, Cornish said.

On Sunday, the Dagestani Interior Ministry said that Erkel had been freed by a joint Interior Ministry and Federal Security Service operation, but an FSB spokeswoman

contacted Wednesday would not comment on the role the special services played in the Erkel case. MSF officials maintain Erkel was handed over to the head of the veterans' association, Valentin Velichko, on the outskirts of the Dagestani capital Makhachkala, at a place an hour's drive from where he was being held by the kidnapers. The release also came after a high-profile campaign by MSF and its supporters internationally to put pressure on the Russian authorities. Standing next to Erkel at a news conference in Moscow on Sunday, Velichko said that no ransom had been paid for his release, and MSF officials said they had no knowledge of any being paid.

Asked who had carried out the abduction, Velichko replied simply, "Bandits." MSF officials said last month they were not interested in who was responsible for the kidnapping, just that Erkel be freed unharmed. Since his abduction in August 2002 on the outskirts of Makhachkala, Erkel was kept in a succession of basements, moved five times, was rarely allowed outside and forced to use a bucket as a toilet, NOS Dutch public radio reported this week. During the drawn-out ordeal Erkel built up a reasonable rapport with his captors, but never sympathized with them or their demands, Cornish said. He was occasionally given books and was informed of world events such as the US-led invasion of Iraq. At one point, he told his captors that if he had to die, he requested that he be killed with one bullet to the forehead, Dutch news agency AMP reported.

Erkel was reunited with his family in Zeeland, the Netherlands, on Monday, after being flown from Dagestan to Moscow on Sunday and then to Rotterdam. MSF officials said it took a long time for the security services to respond to their requests for action. "Initially we had difficulty in meeting the authorities in general," Cornish said. "It was only in spring 2003 that MSF was granted high-level audiences with FSB officials in Moscow," he said. "It was only from then on that we began to have regular, but cordial, meetings with very high-ranking FSB officials in their offices on Lubyanka," Cornish said. "During the meetings they mostly took the information we had collected while reassuring us that everything was being done to secure Arjan's release." But MSF officials maintain that the promises never materialized. They were dismayed to find out last November that the FSB investigation had been given a lower priority and handed over to the local Interior Ministry in Dagestan. "We were shocked," Cornish said. "It's something we don't understand to this day."

MSF's luck first began to change in July 2003, when a friend of the Erkel family, a skating coach, put Erkel's father Dick in touch with Russian speed skater Vadim Sayutin, whose next-door neighbor was a member of the Veterans of Foreign Intelligence. After meeting with Velichko, MSF signed an information-gathering contract with the group. After several meetings in the veterans' offices and cafes in Moscow, Cornish had convincing information that the veterans might be able to crack the case. "It was not only about the contract," Cornish said, of why Velichko was ready to help the aid organization. "They had a human interest

toward Holland, they wanted to do the best by us because they were ashamed that this kidnapping happened in their own country to a person who had come to help." Velichko's connections to the Netherlands date back to the communist period, when he worked as a Soviet trade representative. The post was actually a cover for his real job, which was to spy on the movements of NATO ships in Dutch waters. He was eventually declared *persona non grata* and expelled in 1989, the Dutch daily *Telegraaf* reported Tuesday.

Many of the details of Velichko's investigation were never given to MSF, said Mark Walsh, a spokesman for the organization in Moscow, "in order to protect us. Clearly some aspects of the investigation may be too dangerous for us to know. We probably don't want to know." The veterans showed throughout, that they knew where Erkel was and had the situation under control, while information available to law enforcement agencies was not being acted upon, MSF officials said. "We were informed that there were corrupt officials and servicemen involved who were preventing the situation from being resolved," Cornish said. Last December, MSF and the veterans had high hopes of securing a release when the mission to free Erkel was dealt a further blow. A Dagestani Interior Ministry official in charge of the investigation, Timur Bulatov, was arrested in connection with another kidnapping case. "In October, the FSB began telling us that Arjan's release was a matter of immunity from prosecution, not money," Cornish said. He suggested that Bulatov's arrest might have made Erkel's kidnappers think immunity was not a possibility and further delayed his release.

It took a further four months before MSF officials received a phone call from Velichko early on the morning of Easter Sunday, telling them Erkel was freed. Erkel was driven blindfolded to the outskirts of Makhachkala and handed over to Velichko and his men, according to Velichko. "A window of opportunity had opened," Walsh said. But questions remained this week about what had led to the breakthrough in efforts to free the aid worker. MSF's version of events was at variance with statements made by Russian law enforcement agencies - and also by the Dutch government, which took credit for helping organizing Erkel's release. "We did not like the fact that MSF, all of a sudden, without notifying us, changed to loud diplomacy," Dutch Foreign Minister Bernard Bot told Dutch radio Tuesday, after thanking the Russian government for its help in freeing Erkel. "We said then that we preferred to continue with our own strategy, and I think that strategy eventually gave a better result."

Last month MSF stepped up their media campaign for Erkel's release, accusing the Russian authorities of complicity in the case and calling on the international community to put pressure on them to resolve it. Thomas Nierle, the Head of MSF's Swiss section, and Kenneth Gluck, the Head of its Dutch section, who was himself kidnapped in Chechnya in January 2001 and freed 25 days later, told Ekho Moskvyy radio on March 18, how security services had failed repeatedly to follow up leads that could have seen Erkel freed much

earlier. Nierle said MSF had "very, very strong suspicions that the Russian authorities are at least co-responsible for the prolonged detention of Erkel," and Gluck accused the authorities of "inaction and indifference." Erkel's release came less than a month after the radio interview, during which time his case had been raised with President Vladimir Putin by various organizations and statesmen, including French President Jacques Chirac and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.



**'Arjan: Line for Immediate Comm,' Email exchange** between Nicolas de Torrente, MSF USA Executive Director, Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France President, MSF Belgium, France, Holland, Switzerland, International Presidents, Executive Directors, Communication Directors, 13 April 2004 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

##### Nicolas:

After reflection and experience here today, we feel uncomfortable about the 'reactive' communication line that was decided during your teleconf Monday. We already received many questions today from different interlocutors (USG, UN, some journalists) and this will no doubt happen on Tuesday in Europe as people come back from the Easter holiday. The best way to have a clear MSF message (across the network...) is to have a good press statement ASAP with some general perspective about the case without waiting to have all the details. In addition, statements were already made by some officials about the resolution of the case (Annan, Dutch govmt, Dagestan MVD). These statements were very positive about the role of the Russian, Dutch, and Dagestani authorities on the resolution of the case. More statements will probably be made in the coming days. Without contradicting these authorities (who of course want to claim credit), if we don't have a pro-active communication approach about our perspective and concerns now, this will be what remains about the case in the public, and we will appear not only reactive, but also passive, with a possibility of divergent messages in different interviews in different countries etc [...].

The general message of our public statement should be: yes we are happy that Arjan was released, he is in good health, etc, but we should also be able to say that the liberation came with a very heavy price (19 months of captivity for Arjan and his family, governments not taking their responsibilities for months, MSF having to hire these ex-FSB and pay them money to negotiate the release, etc., see below), because of that price we are very concerned about the future of humanitarian assistance in the region, that we are still raising questions about the real commitment of the Russian Federation and the international community to ensure the security and safety of humanitarian aid workers (of course we should also thank all individuals (people who signed the petition) as well as officials who supported the efforts in the past months of raising the profile of this case and

generating pressure towards the Russian authorities). The fate of the Chechen civilians and the future of humanitarian aid and MSF's presence in the region in light of Arjan's capture/release is really missing in the fact sheet so far, it is the key question people are asking today ('he's released, so everything is Ok, right??') and the most important one for us today. It is not a question of 'settling accounts' (we are happy and grateful for everyone's efforts of course...) but of putting Arjan's release into perspective.

Jean-Hervé:

Hi Nico,

I agree with your proposal but one remark. It isn't true that MSF remained silent about other issues related to civilians and humanitarian aid while Arjan was detained. For instance we had regularly communicated on repatriation, insecurity for civilians being forcibly sent back home...

Friendly, JH



*'Arjan Crisis Ended – Thanks to All,' Email* from Thomas Linde, MSF Switzerland Executive Director to MSF Belgium, France, Holland, Switzerland, USA, International Presidents, Executive Directors, Communication Directors, 13 April 2004 (in English).

**Extract:**

Thomas:

[...] It will take some time to put together the facts and establish some consistent theories on what finally made it happen. We will do our best to know. But most probably, as in earlier kidnapping cases, we never will know exactly who was behind the kidnapping and its end. Of course, Arjan's release was not completely unexpected. Throughout the 20 months, the crisis team was doing an admirable job of maintaining contacts, working on communications strategies, formulating our concern and indignation, undertaking diplomatic initiatives, organizing briefings, contracting partners, opening up new tracks, negotiating scenarios for a solution. But how all these efforts added up, and what finally worked - we may never know with certainty. One thing we know however, is that throughout, we were all behind Arjan. The movement kept going together. Once in a while, we were at the end of our nerves. We were sometimes cruel in our criticisms and doubts with each another. But what is important is that, at no point, we split apart. The movement kept acting together even when desperate.

Just a week ago, some Dutch government officials told MSF that they will no longer exchange information and coordinate with MSF on the case of Arjan. MSF's aggressive communications had too much irritated the Russian, Dutch, and other governments. We answered: so be it but we, on our side, will continue to talk to you, even if with criticism, and share information with you! - Funny to see these fine diplomats go silent, while MSF sticks to rule number one in diplomacy: Let's keep talking! It is a good strategy even if we will not always know why and how it works. Thanks

to all of you from MSF-Switzerland and the crisis team in Geneva, Amsterdam and Moscow!



*'MSF Expresses Relief at Release of Kidnapped Aid Worker Arjan Erkel,' MSF Switzerland* **Press release**, 15 April 2004 (in English).

**Extract:**

The international medical humanitarian organization Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) expressed great relief at the release of MSF aid worker Arjan Erkel on Sunday, April 11, 2004, after 20 months as a hostage in the Northern Caucasus. At the same time, MSF emphasized the heavy toll that Arjan's prolonged detention exacted on the ability to provide aid to war-affected civilians in the region. Erkel, Head of Mission of in Dagestan, was abducted there on August 12, 2002, in the Republic of Dagestan (Russian Federation) while managing one of MSF's medical relief programs aimed at alleviating the suffering of civilian Chechens and Dagestanis affected by the conflict in Chechnya.

"MSF is extremely happy that Arjan is finally back home," said Dr. Rowan Gillies, President of MSF's International Council, "But it must be remembered that a huge price was paid not only by Arjan but countless others as well. Arjan's kidnapping led to drastic reductions of aid programs to displaced and war affected people throughout the region. It reinforced the climate of intimidation that has existed for years."

The fact that Erkel was kept in prolonged detention for 20 months, and the need for MSF to hire a private Russian security company to arrange for his release, highlight the continued acceptance, by the government of the Russia Federation as well as its allies and partners, of a climate of violence in the region. Acts of violence and threats directed against humanitarian organisations have been an ongoing phenomenon in the region over the past decade. Since 1995, more than 50 international humanitarian aid workers have been abducted. Today, the violence continues and humanitarian assistance remains crippled. "This cannot drag on any longer. It is the responsibility of the host country to redress this situation now," said Dr. Gillies.

Dr. Gillies expressed MSF's appreciation for the mobilization around Arjan's case. "MSF is extremely grateful to everyone who has shown solidarity with Arjan, from the hundreds of thousands of people in Russia, Dagestan, and around the world who signed our petition, to the many representatives of national and international organizations and government officials who have shown their support."



*Both public pressure in Russia and international pressure began to increase. The Russians began to*

*feel uneasy; they had to make some sort of gesture. That's how I saw the end resolution of this affair. For me, it was not the success of communication activities, rather it was an opportune moment for the Russians to let go. This moment was when the public was putting a certain amount of pressure on them and we had received information on their position.*

Dr Thomas Nierle, MSF Switzerland, Head of Emergencies then Director of Operations 2000-2004, (in French) interviewed in 2009 .

**On 20 April 2004, MSF posted a report describing the steps of Arjan's release on the international website.**



'Arjan Erkel Kidnapping: How the Puzzle was Solved,' Posted on **MSF International Website** on 20 April 2004 (in English).

**Extract:**

In the early hours of Sunday April 11, MSF received word of Arjan's release via a telephone call from the Russian organization, Veterans of Foreign Intelligence (VFA) telling us that Arjan was free. The VFA is one of the groups that MSF had hired to assist in the search for Arjan and so the contact was from someone whose relationship to MSF was already established. The VFA have been assisting MSF for the past nine months, and were hired following recommendations by the Erkel family and the information was correct and true. Arjan was found in Dagestan where he would wait for the MSF team to arrive. We understand that, at least for the past few months, Arjan has been held in Dagestan. The family was immediately contacted and told the good news.

The VFA has worked in close coordination with MSF, the Dutch Government - particularly its representatives in Moscow. The coordination has constantly been done in close coordination with the authorities. The involvement of outside security agencies was a direct reflection on the lack of movement in the case by Russian and Dagestani authorities. The costs of the outside agency were paid by MSF. As far as MSF knows, there has been no ransom paid. The organisation believes the release has come from the contacts the VFA has with law enforcement agencies in Dagestan.

Three people made up the team assembled to go to Dagestan and get Arjan. Representing MSF was Steve Cornish the acting Head of Mission and an MSF doctor from Moscow were en route, along with the Second Secretary for the Dutch Embassy in Moscow. They flew to Dagestan at approximately 9:00 a.m. on Sunday morning and arrived just around 12:30 p.m. Meanwhile, the Dutch military had dispatched a flight to bring Arjan back to Holland. Arjan's father, Dick Erkel, was on this flight to be with his son. [...] The MSF team responsible for Arjan's release has numbered between five

and ten persons, based in Russia, Dagestan, and Europe. The team has consistently followed any lead brought to the team from a variety of sources. There were a number of groups hired by MSF to assist in Arjan's release.

Arjan's case has been raised both publicly and behind the scenes on political levels within the international community. At the base strategic level, MSF has considered that keeping Arjan's case visible has been essential in advancing the case with the Russian Government and bringing about his rescue. There are clear risks in any strategy. Understanding when to go public and when to remain silent, in order to permit authorities to advance the case, was a constant concern. Public campaigns were taken on only when it was considered helpful, and always with a consideration of the risks involved. There is no indication as to which strategy or event has brought about Arjan's release and this may never be known. Regardless, the organization is very happy with the end result. It has been a terrible 20 months with enormous fears, pressures and stresses, especially for the Erkel family.

Recently there have been some visible strains between the family, the Dutch Government, and the MSF organisation. This is not unusual for a stressful event that has lasted so long and with such possible consequences. The sole concern for all parties has always been how to bring about Arjan's safe return. We believe we did everything possible to bring about his release. To date, MSF does not know the identity of the kidnappers and Arjan is unaware of who was responsible. The matter now rests with Dagestani authorities and MSF shall await the outcome of the ongoing investigation. At that time, MSF shall analyze the information and, if necessary, speak out at that time. It is clear that the Russian authorities were instrumental in resolving this case and MSF considers it unfortunate that external security agencies had to be involved in order to bring about advances in the case.

Arjan Erkel is a humanitarian volunteer whose work consists entirely in helping alleviate the suffering of civilian populations. Unfortunately, his kidnapping was not an isolated event. For months, the humanitarian community has been the target of threats, violence, and abductions in the Northern Caucasus making our work all but impossible. However, there has been immense public support for Arjan, for which, the movement is grateful. The United Nations, European Parliament, and the humanitarian community have all offered their public and constant support. In addition, over 450,000 people worldwide signed a petition calling for Arjan's release. MSF would like to thank all of the groups and individuals who have cared about Arjan over these long 20 months.



*I don't think there's any evidence of any link between our public statements and the kidnappings we experienced. It's a very different question. It doesn't mean that before speaking out, we didn't believe that there*

was some risk involved. The risk is a probability statement; it doesn't mean that A leads to B. We couldn't predict what the reaction would be, and we couldn't predict whether any reaction would happen, but we felt that there was some risk.

Austen Davies, MSF Holland Executive Director, 1999 to 2004, (in English) interviewed in 2009.

**Meanwhile, the pressure on displaced Chechens in Ingushetia was maintained and the forced repatriations continued until the majority of the camps in Ingushetia were emptied. MSF continued to publicly condemn the fate reserved for these displaced persons, on the basis of medical data and personal accounts.**



*'The Trauma of Ongoing War in Chechnya,'*  
**Quantitative Assessment** of Living Conditions, and Psychosocial and General Health Status among War Displaced in Chechnya and Ingushetia,' Kaz de Jong, Saskia van der Kam, Nathan Ford, Sally Hargreaves, Richard van Oosten, Debbie Cunningham, Gerry Boots, and Elodie Andrault, MSF Holland, August 2004 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

##### Executive summary

This report presents the findings of two quantitative surveys conducted by MSF among the displaced populations in Ingushetia and Chechnya to gain information on living conditions and health status. (The main findings are presented in the table below). People interviewed had been displaced for at least five years. We found a population living in unacceptable conditions, traumatized by conflict, and in fear of their safety. Physical and mental health needs were significant, but access to appropriate services is at best problematic. The authorities are currently undertaking a policy of moving people, against their will, from Ingushetia to Chechnya, but conditions in both locations are unacceptable and this will do nothing to improve the plight of this vulnerable population. The authorities must ensure protection and appropriate living circumstances for this displaced population. This will require greater attention from the international community to this conflict that has been largely ignored for the last decade. [...]

##### Epilogue

Recent developments in the Caucasus have overtaken the situation surveyed in early 2004, with the authorities rapidly closing the spontaneous settlements in Ingushetia and sending the IDPs back to the Chechen Temporary Accommodation Centres. However, the recent events are part of a longer chain of events. This assessment is merely a snapshot of a long-standing situation as indicated by previous reports. The current situation of the IDPs needs to take into account past events as well as future trends. The

waves of displacement correlate directly with the history of the conflict in Chechnya. The first wave of displacement resulted from the beginning of the conflict in 1994 - the 'first' war-; the second wave of 1999 was connected to the beginning of the 'second' war. As the conflict continues, so does the cycle of displacement. The return process is obviously connected to the progress of the war, but is also connected to political considerations. This situation has resulted in a cycle of displacement, return, displacement, return. Each family has its own story to tell of how many times they have fled and returned, and how many times and where they have been displaced to while outside of Chechnya. Therefore, the history of displacement is not a simple matter of one group of displaced waiting for the conflict to end before returning. Factors influencing an IDPs' decision to return or not, typically have revolved around security and housing issues. Security relates to memories of trauma already suffered as well as uncertainty about the contemporary security situation back in Chechnya. Housing issues relate to what has been lost and perceived opportunities to regain a viable life. And, of course security and opportunity commingle in the process of decision-making.



**Email** from the MSF deputy legal advisor, to the North Caucasus programme manager and MSF France's Communication Director, 7 October 2004 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

As I informed you last July, the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly is currently holding its plenary session and is debating the Chechnya situation this afternoon. Three reports by the Political Affairs, Refugees and Human Rights Commissions have been written and published for the occasion. The report on the humanitarian situation of displaced persons is quite full (poor humanitarian situation, closure of camps, all kinds of pressure on displaced persons, absence of humanitarian space, increasing violence against civilians in Ingushetia). The report on the human rights situation is uncompromising, accurate and damning for Russia.

We'll see what happens when the resolutions/recommendations are put to the vote in plenary, but when added to recent statements by the European Commissioner for human rights, Gil Robles, we have reason to hope for some (slight) reaction... Especially as this PACE session is probably one of the last opportunities to apply official public pressure on Russia in 2004. That said, the real problem lies with the Council of Europe's executive (Council of Ministers) which has shown the most incredible spirit of appeasement towards Russia since the beginning of the second conflict in the North Caucasus; and has constantly refused to sanction it (by a referral to the European court of human rights or suspension from the Council of Europe, for example). However, PACE is the only international body to be debating the Chechnya situation, and we have to have something to cling on to,

given the absence of international diplomatic pressure on Russia from elsewhere.



'Putin: The War in Chechnya Was Over Three Years Ago,' **AFP** (France), Schleswig (Germany) 21 December 2004 (in French).

#### Extract:

The Russian President, Vladimir Putin, affirmed in Schleswig (north of Germany) on Tuesday that "the war in Chechnya was over three years ago." Questioned about the Chechen conflict at a press conference with the German chancellor, Gerhard Schroeder, the Russian President replied: "there's no longer a war in Chechnya. You can enjoy a peaceful Christmas," added Vladimir Putin drily.



*I think the Russian strategy was to de-stabilize the country... Creating this chaos, was a very effective way of doing it. It wasn't about stopping us from speaking out. They weren't worried about what we were going to say, they wanted to create an unmanageable situation. And it worked. In '97, the Chechens were not worried about the kidnapping of foreigners. That was not top on their minds. The hospitals didn't work, the electricity stopped working, the phones stopped working, the buses stopped working, and they were kidnapped-- a crime for Chechens. I think it was a much cruder strategy. But the rebels also were ideologically out of control, some of them flirting with extreme Islam, some of them just going into business, kidnapping, robbery, smuggling, big drug business coming in. I don't think the Russians planned it, but I think they saw the chaos, and they probably encouraged it. The difficulty is to find out when they were encouraging it as a strategy coming from the State, and when it was an out-of-control colonel saying 'Oh, they're making money, why don't I make some money?' And I think that's extremely hard, to discern the difference.*

Kenny Gluck, MSF Holland General Coordinator and Regional Advisor in North Caucasus, (November 1999-January 2001), Director of Operations (2001-2005), (in English) interviewed in 2009.



*We all had images of the first Chechen war in mind, i.e. wide-scale bombing, brutal activity conducted by an ultra-violent army that violated the Geneva conventions. In 2000 – 2001, military operations dropped off significantly, and things changed from a military situation to selective political repression conducted by a puppet government, with the secret services, etc. They replaced the SS with the Gestapo. It was more about violations of human*

*rights than humanitarian law, far more about individual disappearances and torture than tanks bombing a village. It was much harder to identify occasions to speak out. But we still made a lot of noise to denounce the "normalisation" message that Moscow insisted upon. We often said "no, things aren't normalised at all". And then, the Russians "provided" us with other occasions, such as forced displacements. We said to ourselves: "OK, generally speaking, it's a lost cause. The Russians are going to crush the Chechens. But there's still the odd battle we should be fighting by speaking out. To start with, there's hanging on to international NGO presence and space in this context, and continuing assistance to the Chechens." I also think that if we'd wanted to speak out more, we'd have needed more expatriate presence. Without expatriates in the field, it wasn't just a lack of first hand information that posed a problem. It was also the lack of "first hand indignation". Yet this emotion drives MSF's communications. It's implicit in MSF's culture that if we don't have someone who's seen things for himself, and then talks about it once he's back at the capital office or headquarters, nothing happens.*

Dr. Jose-Antonio Bastos, MSF Holland Director of Operations in charge of programmes in North Caucasus, 2001 to 2003 (in French), interviews in 2009



*During the first war as well as in the end of 1999, in 2000 and 2001, how the population perceived the international organisations has to do with how Europeans and Europe was perceived in general. If there was a surrounding of a settlement or a village and it shelled and bombed, people had this feeling that if an international organisation was to appear somewhere around, that they were somehow protected: 'This will be known in Europe and this impunity, the arbitrariness, and such will be stopped.' Up to then, they were putting a lot of hope in these organizations. In 2004 and 2005, this illusion has gone away. And now the attitude of the population towards the international humanitarian organisations is different. Still, to my view this advocacy is necessary.*

B, MSF North Caucasus staff (in Russian, translated into English by MSF) interviewed in 2008.



*I believe Chechnya is a real example of 'responsibility-driven' political communication and lobbying. In other words, we always hoped that by communicating and doing advocacy work we were going to influence certain things, such as the violence and violations of IHL, the behaviour of justice ministries, and the international community, or things at operations level, by defending a working space on the ground. But what we did was really done out of a sense of*

*responsibility. We knew perfectly well that, with the power Russia has, nothing would change, that it had carte blanche to quash the Chechen rebellion and send a significant proportion of the Chechen population off into oblivion. But that didn't make us give up. We were well aware we wouldn't be able to change all that, but we considered it our responsibility to try.*

[...] MSF deputy legal advisor, 1995-2005, (in French)  
interviewed in 2008.

