North Korea Working Group Meeting
Washington DC
April 23, 1998

Foreword:
Dear All,
I am sorry to report so lately about that North Korean meeting I attended on April 23 in Washington DC. The meeting was set up by InterAction (US PVOs coordination body).

Morning
Care/Mercy Corps/CRS/World Vision/World Vision and couple of others were at the meeting. MSF USA is part of InterAction.
UNICEF was represented by Dr. Omawale, UNICEF Director - Pyongyang
WFP was represented by Judith Cheng-Hopkins, Asia and Pacific Director - Rome
European Union by Paul Webber, EC Food Security and Food Aid - Brussels

Afternoon
Meeting with a delegation of the Flood Damage Rehabilitation Committee (FDRC) of North Korea (NK)
Later in the afternoon
Reception at the Congress - The Congressional Hunger Center

Minutes:
InterAction Meeting:
MSF USA has been requested to provide information regarding the testimonies collected among the refugees at the Chinese-North Korean border. I clarified our position and the concern we have about the situation in the country.
Then I provided some information on MSF activity in North Korea and the conclusions of the latest visit of the desk and the President.
As comments, some US organizations expressed their wishes to operate in NK and are not favorable on speaking out about the difficulties the NGOs are facing in term of monitoring their activities.
The US organizations have been questioning MSF in term of financial independence in NK. Some of the rep. expressed strongly that MSF may have a need now to re-assess its activities knowing that European Union wishes to reduce it support to the International NGOs involved in NK. (I wasn’t aware of the EU NGO financing policy in NK. I stated that MSF has enough financial independence to run program with or without the support of any donors...)
InterAction and Mercy Corps expressed their concern on the lack of coordination among International NGOs, specifically when concerns expressed on the operational difficulties. “MSF is free to re-assess its program but should coordinate with the others, should associate its efforts to the others”

WFP Rep.
The Rome WFP rep. provided some figures and relevant data on the distribution so far done in NK. She asserted that the nutritional status of the children in the country has improved
Monitoring remains a problem but: 60 over the 210 counties of NK are covered by food distribution (in population it does represent only 15 to 20% of the general population)
“We can't pretend so far that WFP has a nationwide program"
A survey has been requested to the authorities. WFP is associated with UNICEF and EU and a nutritional survey should be done this month or next month in NK. WFP is expecting to get a full approval to run this nutritional survey under the regular WFP guide lines.
No comments, nor answer if the survey is not approved. No official answer has been yet given.

European Union / Food Unit
The representative of the European Union responded strongly, asserting that the food distributed by the EU has been reaching the population in need and we can’t give any credit to any kind of rumors regarding misuse of the distribution.

Paul Webber insisted on the fact that no food aid diversion was so far acknowledged. "We have the best monitors on the ground."

UNICEF

Dr. Omawale described the different activities UNICEF is involved into the country of the last years.

II/ In the afternoon, a meeting was set up with a delegation of the FDRC.

Former Ambassador Kim Su Man, now at head of the FDRC delegation visiting the US was the most clear and precise in his answers.

He was with Representatives of the NK missions at the UN - New York.

Mr. Kim Su Man gave a speech on how bad the situation is in his country due to natural catastrophes and expressed his support to see more NGOs coming in to provide relief.

US NGOs are welcome but they should understand that some requirements have to be fulfilled and maintained:

- Priority is giving to major programs, providing food, fertilizers, health care and drugs in substantive amounts. We don’t need small NGOs not providing an enough support. “We are judging according the amount of sincerity of the NGO contribution”. “NGOs should not asked to much...”

Regarding the WFP/UNICEF/EU nutritional survey he made it clear : FDRC is in favor of such survey, but who knows what may be the response and the conditions of the NK Authorities...

III/ Reception at the Congress Hunger Center:

Congressman Tony Hall organized a welcome drink for the FDRC delegation. It was a chance to raise some concerns to a Congressman on the negative effects of large uncontrolled unmonitored food aid to NK. Some further contact will be developed with this congressmen.

IV/ Questions and Suggestions:

Briefly, I would like to share with you some points:

1. What is MSF position towards the nutritional assessment which should take place in the coming weeks by WFP/UNICEF and EU?
2. How far MSF is independent financially from ECHO, is there any plan of action to diverse our funds?
3. Should we rely on Gov. funds for such a country, due to the heavily interests of the major donors?
4. Did we developed a strong advocacy to the different UN agencies involved in NK as UNICEF and WFP? If yes, can I get any feed backs of such meetings in Europe or in NK.
5. NK is an extremely sensitive issue among my US NGO colleagues, can I get some quick feed backs from our field team members on their perception of the US NGOs work in NK.
6. Any advocacy campaign develop in the States at different levels of the Administration and the Congress should be coupled to similar work in Europe. Refugees International is pleased to address a letter of concern to Tony Hall, who can easily address to Madeleine Albright. But it will be more significant if we can have some similar actions taken in Europe (Letter to Ema Bonino, to WFP etc...).
7. I don’t share at all the view of my US Colleagues that the North Korean authorities have no Western Culture, therefore they can’t fulfill and understand the requirements of the International NGOs as MSF. Believe me or not. Ambassador Kim Su Man of FDRC has a better understanding of the American Policy and culture that many of us at MSF. We should not cultivate the naïve idea, which is shared among US NGO rep. and some UN agency rep. that we should give the time to the North Korean authorities to understand the Western requirements of action for implementing relief program for the NK population. It is amazing that FDRC which the negotiating body for the NGOs is pretending having not control of the North Korean decision making process...It reminds me when I was in Khartoum (Sudan) and we had to swing between the different Sudanese relief governmental departments and
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