Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in the KOSOVO Region

FACT SHEET: APRIL 8, 1999

"It's terrible. It's really hard to describe. You can see in the eyes of the refugees...they are extremely overstressed, they are tired, afraid. ... Some people were able to grab a few things when they left Pristina ... most had no time to take anything. They had to pass checkpoints on the way to Macedonia, where they were stripped of their belongings, so they have no passports or papers." - Martin Tekulve, Doctors Without Borders, Macedonia, April 1, 1999

- Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has been providing medical aid throughout the former Yugoslavia since 1991. Our extensive projects throughout the region have ranged from emergency surgery, to rehabilitation of hospitals, to mental health care.

- Doctors Without Borders has worked in Kosovo, a province of Yugoslavia's Republic of Serbia, since 1993. Until the recent fighting began, our teams were responsible for supplying medicines to health clinics, upgrading water and sanitation systems, and conducting a major vaccination campaign for children.

- When attacks on ethnic Albanian villages began occurring in the summer of 1998, the Kosovo medical team turned its attention to aiding tens of thousands of people who had been internally displaced within Kosovo—many of whom sought shelter in rugged forests throughout the winter.

- After NATO strikes began, Doctors Without Borders, along with the International Committee of the Red Cross, was the last aid organization to evacuate from Pristina, the capital of Kosovo. The evacuation took place on March 30, 1999, when insecurity rose...
and the team could no longer gain access to villages under attack.

- As refugees began spilling out of Kosovo and into Macedonia, Albania, and Montenegro, Doctors Without Borders prepared for a major emergency. Medical and nonmedical staff rushed to the two neighboring countries and Montenegro, and on April 1, 1999, the organization sent its first cargo flights of emergency supplies—water pumps and sanitation equipment, medical supplies and emergency food, blankets, electric generators and tents and plastic sheeting—to Macedonia and Albania.

- There are 85 Doctors Without Borders international volunteers working on the refugee effort. Doctors Without Borders has now sent eight cargo flights to the region.

- Doctors Without Borders was able to begin work immediately in Albania, focusing on refugees gathered in the towns of Krume and Lataj in the north and Vier in the south. Many refugees are passing through the northern villages on the way to other locations; Doctors Without Borders is providing first aid and mental health care. In the southern region, where the number of refugees is increasing daily, Doctors Without Borders is setting up urgently needed water and sanitation structures, establishing health posts, and conducting epidemiological surveillance. Refugees are mainly suffering from exhaustion, respiratory infections, diarrhea, and traumatic stress.

- In Macedonia, Doctors Without Borders, along with a number of other aid agencies, faced difficulties receiving authorization to begin working and to retrieve our medical supplies. Doctors Without Borders issued a press release on April 5, 1999, demanding full access to the refugees and the ability to work. We are now providing assistance in some of the refugee encampments and have provided supplies to other agencies, including the Macedonian Red Cross. As of this writing, large numbers of refugees are being relocated both within Macedonia and to other nations by the Macedonian government; the situation is changing by the minute.

- In Montenegro, Doctors Without Borders is preparing to launch a medical program in Ulcinje and Rozaje.

- There are currently five American Doctors Without Borders volunteers in the region. They include a nurse, psychologist, logistician, doctor, and public health specialist.

- Doctors Without Borders is extremely concerned about the protection of those Kosovars still within Kosovo and those who appear to have been involuntarily relocated. We call on the international community to ensure the enforcement of international humanitarian law with regard to their registration, relocation, and eventual repatriation.

To make a donation to Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) for
Doctors Without Borders is the world's largest independent international medical relief agency aiding victims of armed conflict, epidemics, and natural and manmade disasters, and others who lack health care due to geographic remoteness or ethnic marginalization. Each year the organization sends more than 2,000 doctors, nurses, other medical professionals, and logisticians to provide medical aid in more than 83 countries.