Press Release

MEDECINS SANS FRONTEIRAS WINS SEOUL PEACE PRIZE
- Award for international medical volunteer organization -

Seoul, September 11: Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders), the international volunteer group of doctors, nurses and medical personnel, has been chosen as the recipient of The 3rd Seoul Peace Prize.

The decision by the Seoul Peace Prize Cultural Foundation was announced today by the foundation’s chairman Lee Chul-Seung following a final review meeting at the Korea Press Center.

Chairman Lee said: “Médecins Sans Frontières’ 2,900 volunteers often risk their lives to travel and work in countries and regions beset by natural or man-made disasters or in the midst of armed conflict. We are delighted to honor MSF for carrying out humanitarian work that contributes to global unity and world peace.”

MSF President Philippe Biberson will come to Korea for the Seoul Peace Prize awarding ceremony, to be held at the Dynasty Hall, Hotel Shilla on October 11. The Seoul Peace Prize laureate carries with it a cash donation of US$200,000, an award certificate and commemorative plaque.

The Seoul Peace Prize was established following the 1988 Seoul Olympics to commemorate the contribution the Olympiad in Korea made to world peace and to the thawing of the Cold War. The Seoul Olympics broke the cycle of boycotts seen at the 1980 Moscow Olympics and the 1984 Los Angeles Games.

Previous recipients of the award have been IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch and former US Secretary of State George Shultz.

Chairman Lee said that Médecins Sans Frontières was selected after nine screenings of nominees for the 1996 prize. Nominations were received from around the world for a total of 34 individuals and 17 organizations.

The Seoul Peace Prize laureate coincides with the 25th anniversary of the founding of MSF. It is the largest humanitarian international medical relief organization in the world and is completely independent from political, economic and religious influence.
Since 1971, the Paris-based private organization has sent its volunteers to assist in medical emergencies in some 70 countries. The organization can deploy its members anywhere in the world within 24 hours and is currently working in 35 countries.

In addition to its Paris headquarters, MSF has 6 operational centers in Europe and delegate offices in 13 countries. In Asia, its offices are in Japan and Hong Kong.

MSF also operates five logistical centers including one in Amsterdam. From these centers, MSF is capable of loading and dispatching a plane to any emergency zone in the world within a 24-hour period. Rapid response is possible because the independent nature of MSF means it does not need to obtain authorization from government bodies or other authorities before taking action.

MSF's recent work has included dispatching medical teams to armed conflicts in Rwanda, Burundi, Afghanistan, Bosnia and Chechnya. It has sent missions to help the victims of natural disasters in Japan, China and North Korea, where, from October to December last year, a team of doctors and support staff from France, Belgium and the Netherlands provided medical assistance following devastating floods.

MSF was the only organization to send volunteers to regions hit by Iraqi chemical weapons during the Gulf War. During the Gulf War, MSF deployed 60 planes and set up 7 camps to assist 70,000 refugees.

MSF also dispatched life-saving teams to Zaire during the Ebola epidemic. MSF also intervened to help 3,500 Liberian refugees drifting off the west coast of Africa on a cargo freight in May this year; thanks to MSF efforts Ghana accepted the refugees. MSF has also been working in refugee camps in Thailand for the past decade.

MSF's volunteers come from 45 countries. The organization is funded by 2.6 million individual donors, 20 governments and international organizations including the European Union and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Its annual budget is $200 million, 86 percent of which is used to provide medical assistance.