MSF Press Release

MSF says civilian control of refugee resettlement in Kosovo is crucial

Skopje, 4 June 1999: The international medical aid agency Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) is calling upon all actors in the Balkans conflict to ensure that humanitarian assistance and the resettlement of refugees be under civilian - and not under military - authority. This should be clearly stated in all agreements regarding repatriation of Kosovar refugees.

MSF sees four roles for an international military force in the event that Kosovar refugees return home. "They should take responsibility for general security and the clearing of mines and booby traps," says Timothy Pitt, the MSF Head of Mission in Macedonia. "They may also be asked to support humanitarian organisations with heavy logistics and airlifts of supplies and people, though coordination of these tasks remains the responsibility of the UN High Commissioner of Refugees," Mr Pitt adds.

According to MSF, such clarity should be reflected in all written agreements and rigidly adhered to. Assistance to refugees and the resident population of the Former Yugoslav Republic should be based on the principles of providing aid to those most at risk, neutrality and impartiality. Interference from political or military agendas in humanitarian aid has to be avoided.

Mr Pitt adds that MSF wants to go back into Kosovo and Serbia as soon as possible. "We know that the needs of internally displaced and the resident population are paramount," he says.

Currently, MSF assists refugees and residents in Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro and Bosnia. The organisation has over 100 expatriate staff in the region and employs hundreds of locally recruited staff. For its work in the Balkans, MSF has thus far declined any funding from governments who have a military involvement in the conflict, so to maintain its neutrality.