Minutes Operational Directors meeting on Kossovo crisis

Brussels, 21 June 1999

Present: Jean-Hervé Bradol, Thierry Durand, Wouter Kok, Javier Gabaldon, Vincent Janssens, Marie-Christine Ferré

1. Short update of activities

MSF H: Kossovo: people are returning to Prizren in relatively high numbers. It is difficult to identify emergency needs at this stage. People first try to move in their own houses. There is no camp forming for the moment. Water seems to be a major problem. Mines apparently is a minor problem in the Prizren area.

Problems encountered: there is a vacuum on coordination level, of who is in charge of the area. UNHCR is not very present. It is not clear what kind of health structure is foreseen.

The Prizren hospital is functioning well; no direct needs are to be addressed. MSF H is planning to provide shelter in case people cannot return to their homes.

Good collaboration between the teams of the different sections present. Christopher Stokes is seen as the overall representation of MSF.

Macedonia: from the two major camps people start to return smoothly and so work in the camps is decreasing.

MSF B: Albania: movements are speeded up. In the south: as result of the peace agreement the flux from north to south has stopped.

In Fier: the camp with a planned capacity of 1000 people has hosted only 200 people. The further establishment of the camp has been stopped. Nevertheless, MSF B decided not to close the camp yet. There is put pressure to the people in the collective centres to move.

As we were facing with insecurity and UNHCR did not much to protect refugees, MSF B made an agreement with a local private security company to protect the refugees in the collective centres. Tension in the south is increasing.

In the north: people are leaving very fast: up to 17,000 people are crossing the border every day. The MSF camp is empty and closed. A decision has to be taken what to do with the camp: as it is empty it is not guarded and thus looting of what is left are taking place. At the other hand MSF B doesn’t want to put it down yet as people are expected to come from the south.

Pristina: MSF has no clear space in Pristina hospital. There is work to do but there are some difficulties with the authorities.

MSF B aims to move up North and to the West. Mining (booby traps) is a major problem. MSF is planning to have a press conference in order to alert the people on that problem.
Apparently, there are no vital needs on health care at this stage.
Possibilities: set up mobile medical structure and watsan activities.
Team: 12 people in Pristina

**MSF E**: the UNHCR's evacuation plan has been cancelled. Medical activities are diminishing.

- **Dures**: people start to move. The OPD could serve as way-station, but people are continuing their way.
- **Kosovo**: the Dakovica hospital is functioning well. MSF provided the hospital with medical material. Now MSF is taking care of two OPD's.
  Team: 4-5 people

**MSF F**: Montenegro: people can not go back to Kosovo yet; the Montenegro authorities keep the border closed. The tension between Montenegro and Yugoslav authorities is still high. +/- 13,000 Serbian civilians arrived in Montenegro. There are 15,000 Kossovar displaced in Montenegro. MSF F will continue a programme in Montenegro (not directly linked with refugees).
  60 doctors and nurses are found ready to go back to work in Kosovo.
  **Pec area**: 1 surgeon and 2 nurses are still working in Pec hospital. As it is situated outside the city, the hospital is not touched by the bombings, but the city is completely destroyed.
  MSF restarted the consultations in Pec. MSF is planning to go up north to assess needs of Serbian population. There are reports that a Serbian village has been attacked by UCK. To be verified.

2. **Access to Serbia**
All attempts to obtain access to Serbia has still not brought in much.
MSF presence in Serbia is important/necessary and MSF should continue to try to get access although an official authorisation is indispensable in order to ensure the security of the MSF staff (risk to be accused of espionage).
Efforts to get into Serbia will be continued through the formal way.
Besides that MSF will present its intentions to Moscow and Romanian authorities and each section will try from its side through the Orthodox Church.

3. **Future operations in Kosovo**
This first week after the signing of the peace agreement shows less vital needs than expected.
At this stage it is too early to decide on future operations. Each section has to decide how far it will go in its commitments. In any case MSF should not get involved in large rehabilitation programmes.
Does MSF want to address needs regarding shelter, heating, distribution of non-food items?
It has to be taken into account that private business will be involved in shelter and heating, but the refugees won't have much money left to pay private business.
On the other hand, if a big bilateral programme comes up, it will take some time before it is in place. Therefore, MSF should be ready to bridge the period from now till the start of the big rehabilitation programme. MSF should be prepared to address the non-medical needs.

Conclusions
For the coming two/three weeks
- continue assessments
- explore north
- explore non-medical needs
then, within a few weeks, decide on the future activities.

4. Structure
All teams seem to be satisfied with the overall representation through MSF B’s HOM. Vincent thinks that the difference between an information officer and a press officer has to be clear and mixing the two could cause some difficulties. The other DO’s don’t think so; two separated functions will have to be justified by taking into account the workload.

Conclusions:
- one MSF representative towards external contacts who has the global picture of all MSF activities; all DO’s agree with MSF B’s HOM continuing to play this role. It will be proposed as such to the field. If the workload doesn’t permit to combine HOM and representation, another representative has to be found asap.
- one senior logistician (new function) as reference person for non-medical issues/assessment.
- one PR-officer who does as well the function of information officer unless the workload appears to heavy.
- each section has its own financial responsibility.

5. Finances
The DO’s confirm (cf. last meeting DO meeting) that at their side there is no longer an obstacle to get institutional funding. Nevertheless, priority should be given to private earmarked funds.

6. Geographic distribution
MSF B: Pristina area - triangle Pristina-Klina-Mitrovica; more north of Mitrovica will be assessed from Pristina, eventually with support from Prizren if necessary. East Pristina is no priority now.
MSF F: Pec + assess Istok from Pec
MSF H: Prizren
MSF CH: join MSF B
MSF E: Dakovica

7. Emergency preparedness
There is enough presence and stock to start up way stations if it appears necessary.

8. MSF Greece
Should all sections dissociate from MSF Greece in Kossovo?
Wouter thinks that until MSF Greece is not attempting anything against the decision of the GD nothing has to be undertaken.
Jean-Hervé thinks that the statement of MSF Greece - that no ethical problems were to be reported in Pristina - has to be verified; not to judge over MSF Greece but in order to ensure total impartiality and MSF has the obligation as medical humanitarian organisation. In order to get the picture, Serbian as well as Albanian staff and patients should be interviewed.

Conclusion
All DO's agree not to launch a specific statement on the MSF Greece issue, but to draft a picture on MSF activities in Kossovo and include in that paper the dissociation from MSF Greece activities.

9. Communication - MSF position
MSF should communicate on the non-access to Serbia.
Serbs are fleeing Kossovo into Montenegro. Rumours speak about UCK having attacked a village to chase the Serbs. This has to be verified and if necessary speak out.

10. Teleconferences
The daily DO's teleconferences will be stopped.
DO's will have a teleconference on Friday 25 June at 1 pm.
The desks will be asked to set up their system.

11. Bosnia
Bosnia will be managed separately from the Kossovo context.

12. Next DO meeting
Friday 9 July in Paris