MSF resumes aid operations in Kosovo

Skopje, 18 June 1999 - Teams of the international medical aid agency Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) have resumed relief operations in Pec, Djakovica, Prizren and Pristina. MSF teams report that Djakovica and Pec have suffered some of the most damage, with up to half of the buildings and infrastructure destroyed. Teams have described Pec as "a ghosttown, with only a few hundreds of Serb families left. They are not sure whether to pack their belongings and leave or seek protection from K-for troops. The situation is tense as the other residents are slowly reappearing".

In Djakovica, people emerging from three months of forced confinement are reporting past incidents of physical abuse and threats. Residents have said that the local health facilities ran out of medicines and equipment and that they did not dare to leave their houses - so the wounded and sick were left untreated.

In both Djakovica and Pec, MSF has begun supplying medicines and equipment to the local health facilities, helping with rehabilitation, and opening new clinics.

On Wednesday, MSF teams launched their first assessment missions outside the towns to identify the medical needs of isolated communities. At this stage, the teams did not find large numbers of displaced in need. They have given emergency treatment to wounded people and to five mine victims before referring them to a surgical facility in Pristina.

Tense security conditions continue to hamper relief operations. However MSF managed to bring medical supplies to several villages to date, including Srbica in Zone 3, the last zone to be cleared by K-for troops.

MSF also expects that mental health will soon become a major concern.

"As most of the people have suffered a great deal of stress, we will be dealing with severe mental health consequences", said an MSF aid worker in Djakovica.

MSF has 30 international staff in Kosovo at present. The organisation continues to provide assistance to Kosovar refugees in Albania, Montenegro and Macedonia. Over the last two days, 140 metric tonnes of relief goods (including medicines, emergency and surgical kits, food, blankets and sanitation equipment) have been flown into Macedonia for use in Kosovo.