cc: Mail for:  

Subject: Kosovo: MSF tries to enter Racak and surroundings  
Forwarded: Grazziana GODAIN 18/01/99, 16:39  
To:  

Dear all,  

Below is an account of MSF’s actions here yesterday. It is written to inform you, but you can edit it for external purposes.

Regards,  
Bas  

MSF tries to enter Racak and surroundings  

Pristina - 18 January. A small MSF-convoy of two trucks and two Landcruisers with relief set out yesterday at 9.45 to assess the situation and distribute relief around Racak, the village in which 45 Albanians were massacred on Friday. The convoy was stopped by UNHCR at the outskirts of the town of Stimlje, where already a relief-convoy of the Danish Refugee Council was waiting. The security-officer of UNHCR informed the MSF-team that the situation was far too dangerous to continue, but that OSCE was negotiating to calm the situation.  

From about 10.30 on, vehicles of the special police set out from the police-base in Stimlje in the direction of Racak. Small groups of civilians started coming towards Stimlje along the road and through the fields from the houses just outside the town. At 11.00 the negotiations between the OSCE-general and the Serb commander broke up, and after five minutes, shooting started in the hills. Policemen could be seen searching houses and buildings. The UNHCR-security-officer told the MSF-team he was going to wait until 13.00 to see how the situation would be then, and make a decision about his own convoy, that was somewhere near in the area.  

The MSF-team also decided to wait, and got in touch with Pristina via the radio of a UNHCR-car, to call for a medical team. Meanwhile, the police brought in more reinforcements and occasional shelling could be heard.  

The medical team decided to invite a team of International Medical Corps to come along (IMC is the medical agency responsible for the Stimlje-municipality), and arrived with three vehicles (two MSF, one IMC) at around 14.00. The relief-trucks were sent back to Pristina, as there was no possibility to do any distribution, but the MSF and IMC medical teams stayed in Stimlje. Via the local branch of the Kosovan aid-organisation Mother Theresa, the teams got information about possible places where IDP could have fled to, and at around 15.00, the teams went on assessment, together with a UNHCR-car. Near Dramnjak, villagers told the teams about several hundred people in the hills, but that the road leading to them was very bad. The teams decided that MSF would try to continue, while IMC would stay behind to distribute some relief. The UNHCR-car radioed to Pristina and had to return.  

The road proved to be very bad indeed, and just outside Dramnjak, it became clear that it was useless to continue, also since it was already 16.00.  

Today, an MSF-truck together with a medical team in a Landcruiser is doing an assessment in the same region. The truck is not carrying relief, but has to go to the biggest city there, Uroisevac/Perizaj, to get a new canopy. IMC is trying to reach the IDP’s with a medical team, and ICRC is doing a relief-distribution and is sending a surgical team.