Dear all,

As a few of you have just come back from N Korea, it would be good if we had some sort of an agreed verbal position. Doesn’t have to be fixed in stone, but just so that it is clear what line we are taking with the press. The famine questions is an ongoing issue, which will last for a while, so the basic points MSF wants to make need to be clear for the network!

BASIC VERBAL POSITION - Pierre is completing his end of trip report, but it would be useful to have a couple of paragraphs "guidelines" on what our basic line is from all sections, not to be given out in writing, but just to give direction to any interviews being done either in the field or by the desks/directors.

As with all countries we are working in, we have to be able to answer basic questions and give out simple public information about what we are doing, the basic problems/positive things we are facing up to etc, but it would be best if this was clear to all.

Meanwhile, the teams are answering press calls to occasional calling journalists as they see fit. It is also perfectly normal and expected that when a director/president returns from a trip to North Korea (be it Eric Goemaere a couple of months ago, Biberson now or Pim), that they be contacted by their local press upon their return (as they are being) and that they be expected to answer simple questions, as they are doing.

For this reason, it would make sense if the desks could clarify what our priority as a message is even if it is just in verbal interviews.

RE STATEMENTS ALREADY MADE - FYI, there have already been a variety of articles over the past few weeks, quoting MSF as having reservations about the severity of the famine - Eric Goemaere said so in press conferences, William Claus has said so in articles and so has Biberson today in the Liberation article (which apart from the title was actually a relatively fair and neutral article), so at least on that it seems the sections agree and it is a starting point!

SUGGESTED BRIEFING LINE - In keeping with what we have already said publicly before, this could be along the lines of:

- There is no medical/nutritional proof in N Korea about how widespread or serious the famine is or is not - as up until now it has been very difficult to do household surveys (access etc).
- There is a lot of political interest from outside and from within the country to prove or disprove the famine. Aid agencies and others working in the relief sector are often in the middle, and risk being manipulated.
- There are pockets of serious malnutrition eg in certain orphanages, but there is no proof on the rest of the country. Other data given out by other organisations cannot prove or disprove a famine as MSF and ...... have the largest medical/nutritional presence in the country,
OTHER COMMENTS - as long as we say that there is political pressure from all sides and that we run the risk as do others of being manipulated, we are not being particularly controversial and are protecting ourselves in advance from being attacked at a later stage of being manipulated.

It would seem that for some time now, various journalists and World Vision etc are saying that in any case MSF and Red Cross are manipulated as we can't get around the country. (MSF H source) By admitting that we may be manipulated, we are being honest about the situation and not accusing anyone in particular.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As far as I can gather from your various responses, the initial idea of putting out a press release asking for access was scrapped. MSF is going to go ahead with the nutritional survey as much as possible, and then see if we can definitively confirm with MSF data or not the "famine". Meanwhile we need some sort of ongoing position as we cannot stop the press calling and as it is normal and expected to give out basic info.

Maybe there could be a conference call tomorrow between the relevant desks, to clarify what our position is - with comm, so that we can inform the rest of the network.

Also, please could the field advise how many interview requests they are doing.

thanks

kind regards

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