Dear Philippe and Jean-Marie,

Thank you very much for your letter (6 September 1996) regarding a proposal for a new decision-making structure within MSF. Unfortunately your letter could not be discussed within our board before the International Council meeting. The views expressed hereafter are thus my own. However, the board of MSF Switzerland had a discussion on the process of internationalisation of MSF during its last meeting on 6.9.96 and made a concrete recommendation along the following lines:

The meeting of the International Council in December 1996 should define and vote on a structure that is truly representative of the entire MSF movement, including its objectives and its functioning. At a minimum proposals for this new structure should be discussed by all national boards of MSF (sections and delegate offices), at best the boards of MSF should be present at the enlarged IC meeting and should participate in the vote. This would ensure that any delegation of authority from national boards to the IC would be truly respected thereafter.

In my view we should first ask ourselves *why* we want to change the current structure of the IC. I see three main reasons:
1. The current structure is no longer representative of the entire MSF movement. A new IC would ensure that all MSF entities have a "droit de parole" and can participate in global decision-making.
2. The current IC lacks authority and its decisions are not truly binding. A new IC should ensure a more efficient decision-making process, including clarification of the respective roles of the national boards and the IC.
3. The overall goal of a new IC is to ensure greater cohesion within MSF.

**But why should we change the IC NOW?** One could argue that it would be better to first decide about our vision for the future and what that implies in terms of overall restructuring before changing the current decision-making structure. I would argue that the current IC is no longer a legitimate body to decide about fundamental change within the organisation. I would thus propose a kind of transitional International Council that will lead the process of change throughout the next 12 to 18 months, not precluding a more drastic change in the future. This transitional IC should be formally constituted at our next meeting in January, along the following principles:

- In order to enable the DOs to participate in the process of change, they should be represented in the IC. Including a representative from each DO would be unwieldy and would not necessarily ensure an "equal" representation of all MSF entities. I would rather suggest that 4-5 representatives of the DOs be chosen. The size of the DO in terms of number of nationals having gone to the field in the past year and in terms of financial volume could be criteria for selection. The DOs who become full members of the IC would have the responsibility to inform, discuss and represent the views of the other DOs (i.e. by geographical proximity).
- It must be acknowledged that the process of internationalisation can only be implemented if the existing sections participate fully at all levels (board and office). In this process all sections will loose power and autonomy. To accept this loss will be difficult and will need the active commitment of the presidents and directors of each section. It thus seems obvious that the *current* members of the IC have to remain. Of course this means that all entities of MSF will not be represented in the same way and with the same strength during this process of change. Although this is a far cry from Swiss style democracy, it seems more realistic and acceptable; at least as a first step.
- There has been much debate, with often quite emotional overtones, about the veto right. Although the Swiss section never had a veto right, I have always taken the position that it was a good thing as it allowed the sections to work along the lines of consensus and being equal partners in decision making although our relative weight in the organisation is obviously quite different. I much prefer a veto right to a proportional voting system! As you know the veto right has been used only once in the history of the IC. It has thus clearly not lead to any abuse of power. On the contrary I would argue that it has been a useful "last resort" that often helped us to push towards a consensus. I would thus propose
that we leave it as it is until we have reached agreement on a new and "final" decision-making structure for MSF.

The main task of the new IC, besides dealing with urgent matters that always occur, should be to develop a proposal for a new decision-making structure within MSF, including a redefinition of the respective roles of the national boards and the IC; addressing the representativity of the different MSF entities and their relative weights in decision-making and voting; and, creating a system which would make decisions of the IC binding and give it the power to ensure their implementation.

Beyond the question about a new structure for the IC, we need to tackle several other issues which I just want to mention briefly.

1. **Operationality**: beyond the current moratoria, we have to take a fresh look at the reasons for the current situation, ask ourselves if change is desirable, and if yes, which change. We could accept the historical evolution and decide that it stopped some time in the nineties and will remain for ever as the status quo of MSF. There would be no other justification than history for this decision. We could also examine what the magical number of operational centres would be if we want to retain diversity, but at the same time increase cohesion. We should also examine what would be most efficient in the field. We have to be realistic and acknowledge that dismantling of existing structure would be a very painful process. On the other hand this should not prevent us from having an open debate about the "best" solution and then decide *all together* what would be best given the existing structures.

2. **International cohesion**: the international projects that were agreed upon during the two Chantilly meetings should be pursued at full speed as they will teach us many lessons that will be very useful in guiding us through the change process, and as their main goal, namely creating a common culture and a better understanding, remains very valid.

3. **L'associatif**: the delegate offices should be encouraged to develop their national base and to create national boards. If this is an important part of what MSF is about, it holds for all MSF! It may then become clear that some DOs are actually not leading to an associative movement, but that their main "raison d'être" is fund-raising. This may lead us in the future to a different type of categorisation.

4. **MSF language**: we continue to speak in a language which makes life for the delegate offices difficult and which is no longer useful. We should find ONE name for any MSF entity (MSF office?) that is doing communication, fund-raising, and sends a substantial number of nationals to the field. This would get rid of sections and delegate offices. We would then also have operational centres and perhaps, in the future, some type of "fund-raising branch office" (Abu Dabi, Hongkong?). These are just some suggestions, acknowledging that the language we currently use is no longer appropriate.