To: Jean-Marie Kindermans
    Philippe Biberson

From: Médecins Sans Frontières in Sweden

Date: 1996.10.02

Dear Jean-Marie and Philippe,

Thank you very much for your letter with suggestions for a new and enlarged international council. From our perspective, the mere fact that the IC is opening this discussion is kind of a revolution. You have both been here (Philippe on two occasions as member of our CA and Jean-Marie on our invitation last weekend) to discuss with us, and you know what importance we attach to the development of MSF into a truly international movement. This is why we welcome the proposal to set up an enlarged IC, although we realise that this in itself will not be a solution but rather a good opportunity for future development.

If the setting up of a new IC is to be meaningful and successful everybody involved have to be pragmatic and realistic rather than dogmatic in the approach. Whatever the purpose we cannot neglect the MSF history of totally independent and powerful sections and the fact that sections and DOs are not equal. Also, we share common values and whatever the form chosen for our common work, it has to be based on mutual trust and confidence rather than on rules and regulations. This statement just as a starting point for the comments (based on discussions held by the Swedish board and office staff) given below.

Authority: It is crucial that the authority - areas of decision making and responsibilities - of the new IC is carefully elaborated. Decisions taken by the IC should of course be binding to all sections and DOs. The current veto situation has to be formally abolished but will in practice only disappear if the decision making is limited to areas which can reasonably be expected to be respected by all sections and DOs. The IC should be the owner of the MSF name and logo and thus have the power to exclude sections and DOs. As far as we can see the possibility of exclusion is the only possible sanction, although such a measure would probably be more of a basis for pressure than a measure actually carried out (just look on other NGOs).

Executive committee: The enlarged IC should meet once a year but 19 persons are too many to form an efficient group. The IC should therefore elect an executive committee (maybe 7 or 9 people) among its members. Although an election is supposed to be free we believe it is crucial to ensure that the three big operational sections are among those represented in the executive committee. This should not be a formal rule but hopefully the result of an election with realism.

Associative aspects: The 19 bodies (sections and DOs) referred to in you letter are different in character and new bodies may emerge in the years to come. We suggest that a future
criteria for the right to be represented at the IC should be based on the associative life of each MSF body. People in the IC should be members of a national MSF-association and elected by other members rather than hired staff. However, for the time being we agree that the actually existing sections and DOs (whether with associative life or not) are the ones to be represented in the new IC. However, in the next few years these bodies should develop an associative life to remain in the IC.

These were our comments for now but I also take the chance to enclose a copy of a document on Delegate Offices (dated 1996.04.24) which I wrote for the CA in Brussels. It may contain some ideas of relevance for your discussions at the IC the 3-4 October. We are looking forward to see the results.

Best regards

Johan von Schreeb
President, MSF-Sweden

PS. A copy of this letter is sent directly to all members of the current IC.