To: all board members of the 19 MSF sections  
From: Doris Schopper, president of the International Council 
26 January 1998

Regarding: election of the next international president

Dear you all,

As follow-up to the decisions taken during the last meeting of the International Council on 20 September and as requested by the members of the restricted committee, I should ensure that the procedure for selecting the next international president gets underway. Let me remind you of the decisions taken (minutes of IC meeting 19-20.9.97):

8) International Presidency

No candidate was prepared to commit for two years. This provoked two reactions and proposals:

1) There is a need for a President who can be very present, working at least three days a week, and who might be looked for from outside the current IC.

2) At the moment, the President should be someone from the IC, whose principal task would simply be to organise meetings or events for discussions.

A discussion followed and a vote was taken in favour of the first solution. There were 11 members in favour and three against (France, Greece and Hong Kong) and one abstention (Italy).

Doris Schopper was then unanimously elected as President until the next General Assemblies. Her task over the next few months will be to carry out research into possible candidates for the Presidency. Each Board will be able to propose a candidate in line with the following criteria:

- a medical doctor;
- a minimum of four years experience within MSF;
- bilingual English/French;
- available at least three days a week.

I would like to add that it was clear from the discussions within the IC, that this was an exceptional decision under exceptional circumstances. MSF at this stage needs a locomotive to lead the IC. To many of us it seemed more important to find the right person at the right time, than to adhere strictly to the current rules which imply that the international president should be one of the national presidents. We also acknowledged that the IC itself is in transition since the decision in January 1997 to include all 19 sections of MSF as members of the IC. As many of the ex-delegate offices have not yet had the opportunity to develop as associative structures with full-fledged national boards and elected presidents, we decided that over a two-year transition phase, the director of a “new” section could be member of the IC, instead of the president, if this was more appropriate. This, however, also means that at the current moment only few people serving on the IC are potential candidates for the international presidency (four years experience with MSF and president of a national board and enough availability).

In this unique situation, it was decided that for the next term of the presidency (mid-1998 until mid-2000) any person making him/herself available for this task and fulfilling the above criteria...
could be a candidate. Thereafter, MSF’s structure and functioning will have hopefully changed, the role and job profile of the international president will have been redefined and new mechanisms for selecting him/her will be in place.

This issue was further discussed at our last restricted committee meeting in Geneva (16-17 January 1998) and I was asked to actively launch the search for names of possible candidates by writing this letter to all boards. In addition, it was decided that all boards should discuss the terms of reference of the International President as proposed by the commission on jurisdictions (see annex). A list of names and the terms of reference should be discussed at the next meeting of the International Council in March. Consequently, suitable candidates who are willing to take up the challenge will be invited to present their ideas and programme for the international presidency at an extraordinary IC meeting in May (around the General Assemblies, when most of us are in Europe anyway). The next president would be elected (by two-thirds majority) at that same meeting.

Based on these discussions and decisions of the international council, I would like to propose the following procedure:

1. Each board of the 19 MSF sections proposes one or two candidates for the international presidency. The candidate must at least fulfil the above mentioned criteria. In addition, we should strive towards proposing candidates who have the legitimacy and natural authority to fulfil this position within MSF. Each board also revises the terms of reference of the International President as proposed by the commission on jurisdictions (see annex).

2. The IC member of each section has the responsibility to forward the name of the potential candidate to myself (by e-mail) at the latest by 15 March 1998.

3. During its meeting in March, the IC will revise the list of proposed candidates and finalise the terms of reference of the International President based on the comments of the boards.

4. The IC then invites suitable candidates to an oral presentation at an extraordinary IC meeting in May and elects the next international president to take up his/her position in June or July 1998.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need any further clarification. I am very much looking forward to your proposals.

With warm regards,
Doris
The Role of the President of the International Council

1. The President of the International Council has the duty to monitor, and to remedy in times of concern, the activity of sections within their countries and the activities of the operational centres in the field in their adherence to the MSF Charter, the core principles and values.

2. The IC President independently or on the advise of members of the IC or at the request of senior field management may call the Executive Committee to account for severe functional complications of MSF activities in the field.

3. For both 1. and 2. the President shall seek the advice of the Restricted Committee before taking substantial action.

4. The President shall show no favour to any one office and function according to international ideals of the organization. The President will be present regularly at Board Meetings of the sections.

5. The President will represent the international movement to the outside world.
   Especially during acute emergencies, the IC President shall speak for all MSF to international large scale media. During such a time the IC President shall be facilitated by and shall supervise directly the International Communications Coordinator and team.
   The President shall direct the international MSF campaign(s) on long-term testimonial issues as established by the IC. The President shall represent MSF on these issues publically. (ie: Ottawa Conference on Landmines ) ( The President shall be supported by the International Secretariat, the International Communications Team, the International Medical Department. Please note there is no international humanitarian affairs department. )

6. The President shall inspire the international development of MSF. The President shall also be responsible for internal cohesion within MSF, and to proactively remedy fractures in cohesion.

7. As the Chairman of both the International Council and the Restricted Committee, the President will have the right and duty to take initiatives within the mandate of the IC and the RC. The President specifically as chair of the RC shall be end responsible for the timely and substantial completion of the international Commissions undertaken within the jurisdiction of the IC. The president shall prepare the agenda of the International Council meetings.

8. The President shall be financially compensated by the IC and is expected to spend at least three days per week working for MSF.