

Brussels, 11th of October 1995

Chantilly spirit

On the 5th, 6th and 7th of October 1995, more than 120 MSF participated in an international meeting which presented two main objectives :

1) to analyse the possibility of agreement on the identity of MSF : it concerns the mission of MSF (its objective), the action means (assistance, presence, witnessing, ...), the principles (independancy, impartiality, neutrality, medical ethics, human rights, voluntary work, associative, ...) as well as their concrete implications (priorities, codes, ...);

2) if the first objective is reached, to propose mechanisms of international cohesion, in order to keep a common identity.

It is not easy for 100 people to agree on 6-pages text proposal on the identity : a common definition and interpretation of each word are often necessary.

But it was noticed during the debates that the majority of the remarks and objections did not basically question the proposal. Indeed, the text spirit was globally approved : that was formally decided during an International Council the last day's eve.

The text will have to be revised and precised on some topics (medical aid, crisis definition, ...), but that should be finalized next month.

A final version will then be dispatched internally, while a second one, for external distribution, will be prepared.

After we came to an agreement concerning the identity, we debated in various working groups the cohesion mechanisms to be implemented. Among the suggested measures, here are the main ones :

- * to internationalize the training and to exchange the people; specifically, to internationalize the preparation of the existing courses and their implementation (in '96), to set up international trainings for the future coordinators (in '97), to increase the personnel exchange between the headquarters;

- * to improve the internal communication, to write daily or monthly SITREP (according to the needs) common to all sections in the field, from next month on; to install an electronic mail network for everybody (in progress) and to start up a common internal newspaper by the beginning of next year; to organize international mini AG in the field and international coordinators'days from next year on;

- * to maximize the operations means : to decrease the number of sections when they are more than 3 per country; the plan is to start this measure in 3 countries, next year, to rationalize the means everywhere, and to suppress the national reference in order to call ourselves "MSF" (delegation of powers to the other sections, common technical posts, ...);

* to set up an emergency pool : it would comprise MSF people, who would be chosen according to their skills and their international profile; they will represent the movement as a whole, and won't be linked to any section. The group will be responsible for responding to emergencies; it will decide on which programs to set up and will choose the section which will support it according to the situation. It will have at its disposal international emergency funds, provided by all MSF entities.

That ambitious project still needs to be worked out, but the Operations Directors think it can start on 01/01/96.

An important step was undeniably made in the process of the internationalization of MSF. The spirit was very positive in all debates.

It belongs to the International Council to make sure that the commitments are honoured and to follow-up the various projects.

An international coordinators' day in May '96, at the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of MSF, will also be a good occasion to analyse the progress.

For now, we can only rejoice and wish that you will enjoy Chantilly spirit.

Doris Schopper, President of the International Council
Jean Marie Kindermans, Director of International Office