To: Jean Benoît Burrian / MSF-B
    Philippe Biberson / MSF-F
    Bernard Pécool / MSF-F
    Dick van Geldere / MSF-H
    Jacques de Milliano / MSF-H
    Carlo Faber / MSF-Lux
    Béchara Ziadé / MSF-Lux
    Doris Schopper / MSF-CH
    Benoit Tullien / MSF-CH
    Bernad Fernandez / MSF-Spain
    Josep Vargas / MSF-Spain
    Bé Meijer / MSF-Germany
    Stefan Peterson / MSF-Sweden
    Sotiris Papaspyropoulos / MSF-Greece
    Joëlle Tanguy / MSF-USA

    Annedien Plantenga / MSF-Int.

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From: Johan von Schreeb and Eric Gomaere

Date: Tuesday 2 May 1995

ATT: International Council
    International Working Group

Enclosed is a letter from Johan von Schreeb and Eric Gomaere regarding Membership Policy
for Delegate Offices to the forthcoming CI and Working Group-meeting in Geneva.

With kind regards

Göran Svedin
MSF delegate office in Stockholm
To: International Working Group
   International Council

Date: 1995.05.02

Re. Membership policy for Delegate Offices

Dear friends,

Sweden has a long and strong tradition of popular movements with a broad membership and one of the first questions you will meet when introducing an organisation be it to an individual or an institution is: *How many members do you have?* The higher the number of members, the stronger the voice of an organisation and a high number of members will often (rightly or wrongly) be considered equal to a high degree of democracy within the organisation. A high number of members will equally be of importance for authorities when decisions on funding are being taken. Over the last two years the Swedish government contributed a 50.000.000 SEK (equivalent to 5.000.000 ECU) to MSF projects, and in 1994, the first year of public fund raising efforts for MSF in Sweden, the general public contributed a 4.000.000 SEK (equivalent to 400.000 ECU). It will not be possible to keep or increase this level of contributions unless MSF-Sweden is perceived to be a Swedish organisation.

You may or you may not agree with the logic of this Swedish tradition but recent cases show that we all have to take this tradition into consideration. Greenpeace, for instance, have faced real difficulties in explaining their restricted membership policy to the general public in Sweden and is consequently losing impact in Sweden. However, there are almost no legal requirements linked to the setting up of an NGO in Sweden.

The opening of the MSF delegate office in Stockholm in 1993 was of course linked to a lot of discussions on membership policy and operability but an agreement on how to proceed with these issues were reached. The option of giving MSF in Sweden the legal form of a foundation was discussed but not considered to be a real alternative as foundations are seen by the general public to be anonymous and a bit suspicious, because they are not seen to be democratically controlled.

In 1993 draft statutes of MSF-Sweden were worked out by MSF-Belgium and Sweden following the guidelines set up by the International Council. These were later confirmed by Françoise Saulnier on behalf of the International Council and finally adopted by an extra General Assembly of MSF-Sweden in December 1993. According to the statutes any person can become support member by paying a yearly fee. Support members have no democratic rights and is merely a way for people to express their support of MSF's work. According to the statutes only persons who have participated in MSF's work in Sweden or abroad and in line with the MSF charter can apply and be granted full membership with democratic rights, i.e. voting right at the general assembly and eligibility to the board).
Although MSF-Sweden is allowed through its statutes to accept members with full voting rights, the statutes at all time guarantee that the board in essential decisions remains under the control of the International Council through their two appointed members. It was clear at the time of decision on the statutes that a criterion would have to be set up on how to apply this article of the statutes. At the first board meeting in March 1994 in which Jean Pierre Luxen and Xavier Emmanuelli participated on behalf of the International Council it was decided that MSF-Sweden would adhere to the established membership policy of MSF, and that applications would be dealt with once people started to return to Sweden from MSF-missions in the field.

Since then the number one question (How many members do you have?) has been answered as follows: "MSF Sweden will adhere to MSF's international standards with a strong field perspective among its members, and will thus not look like a traditional popular movement with masses of members. Only those who have been working in the field for a certain time can be members and those sent on mission have not yet returned. So, be patient." It is not possible to go on answering like this any longer without loosing credibility.

We know that delegate offices were not intended to be part of the associative life of MSF but that they were rather to be seen as functions for fund raising, recruitment etc. However, if MSF-Sweden is to fulfil these functions there has to be a minimum of democracy. The board has to be elected by some other members than the three board members themselves, the board has to be accountable to a General Assembly consisting of some more members than the three board members themselves etc. According to the statutes board decisions are valid when three board members are present. This means that when one board member is on mission or otherwise absent formal board decisions cannot be taken. The actual situation cannot be defended any longer and unless a change is made the MSF movement will not be able to benefit from the potential the creation of an delegate office in Stockholm offers.

With this letter we stress the need for discussions within the Working Group and prompt decisions within the International Council opening up for members within the Delegate Offices. Please note that this will not have any practical implications as the statutes continue to give full control to the International Council on issues of operationality and other important questions, i.e. through the CI-appointed members and the requirement of a unanimous board vote on these issues.

Here, we have only focused on the practical and functional aspects of the issue of membership and we have intentionally avoided to discuss the more general associative aspects of it. The reason for doing so is that it might help to decide on a pragmatic approach, i.e. opening up the possibility of membership for the delegate offices with NGO status although it might not be necessary to do so for delegate offices set up as foundations.

Criteria which can be applied objectively has to be developed, either by the CI for all of the delegate offices or by the board of each delegate office. In the meantime we suggest to use the criteria applied by MSF-Belgium.

Thank you for your attention and with kind regards

Johan von Schreeb
President of MSF-Sweden

Eric Gomaere
General Director MSF-Belgium