

# MSF AND THE WAR IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA 1991 - 2003

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**Produced by the Médecins Sans Frontières International Movement.**

**MSF Australia is in charge of the design, running, update, and promotion strategy of the website <http://speakingout.msf.org>**

# FOREWORD

This publication is part of the “Médecins Sans Frontières Speaking Out” case studies series prepared in response to the MSF International Council’s wish to provide the movement with literature on MSF *témoignage* (advocacy).

The idea was to create a reference document that would be straightforward and accessible to all and help volunteers understand and adopt the organization’s culture of speaking out.

It was not to be an ideological manual or a set of guidelines. *Témoignage* cannot be reduced to a mechanical application of rules and procedures as it involves an understanding of the dilemmas inherent in every instance of humanitarian action.

The International Council assigned the project to a director of studies, who in turn works with an editorial committee composed of MSF representatives chosen by the International Board for their experience and expertise. They serve in their capacity as individuals and do not represent their national sections.

Faced with the difficulty of defining the term *témoignage*, the editorial committee decided to focus the series on case studies in which speaking out posed a dilemma for MSF and thus meant taking a risk.

Key information sources -MSF volunteers’ written and oral recollections — are reconstructed by highlighting documents from the period concerned and interviewing the main actors.

The individuals interviewed are chosen from lists prepared by the operational sections involved in each case. Speaking in the language they choose, these individuals offer both their account of events and their assessment of MSF’s response. The interviews are recorded and transcribed.

Document searches are conducted in the operational sections’ archives and, as far as possible, press archives.

The research is constrained by practical and financial issues, including locating interviewees and securing their agreement and determining the existence, quality and quantity of archived materials.

The methodology aims at establishing the facts and setting out a chronological presentation of the positions adopted at the time. It enables the reconstruction of debates and dilemmas without pre-judging the quality of the decisions made.

The main text describes events in chronological order. It includes excerpts from documents and interviews, linked by brief introductions and transitional passages. We rely on document extracts to establish the facts as MSF described and perceived them at the time. When documentation is missing, interviews sometimes fill the gaps. These accounts also provide a human perspective on the events and insight into the key players’ analyses.

Preceding the main texts collected, the reader will find a map, a list of abbreviations and an introduction that lays out the context of MSF’s public statements and the key dilemmas they sought to address.

In addition, a detailed chronology reconstructs MSF’s actions and public statements in regional and international news reports of the period.

Each case study was written in French and translated into English and is available in both languages.<sup>1</sup>

These case studies were essentially designed as an educational tool for associative members of the organisation. With the hope of broadening their educational scope the studies are now being made available to the public for free, on the website [www.speakingout.msf.org](http://www.speakingout.msf.org), the various English and French-language websites of individual sections of Médecins Sans Frontières, and on Google Book.

We hope you find them useful.

The Editorial Committee.

September 2013

# CONTENTS

<b>People interviewed and their position at the time of the events</b> .....	6
<b>Personalities in political and military positions at the time of the events</b> .....	7
<b>Acronyms</b> .....	9
<b>Map</b> .....	10
<b>Introduction</b> .....	11
<b>MSF and the war in the former Yugoslavia 1991-2003</b> .....	15
Vukovar: humanitarian intervention in the eye of conflict.....	20
Condemnation of ‘the humanitarian alibi’ and ‘call to arms’.....	41
Denouncing ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.....	51
Srebrenica: entering the enclave.....	65
Gorazde under fire.....	85
Working like prison doctors.....	100
Abandonment and fall of Srebrenica.....	108
Final territorial reorganisation before a status quo is established by the peace agreements.....	126
Croatian-bosnian counter-offensive.....	127
Do not abandon Gorazde.....	133
The ‘dissident’ Muslim refugees of Kupljensko.....	140
1999-2003 Parliamentary inquiries into the Srebrenica tragedy.....	151
MSF appeal to establish the French responsibilities in the Srebrenica events.....	152
Critical support to the French parliamentary fact-finding mission.....	157
Reaction to the reports on Dutch responsibilities.....	167
Epilogue.....	173

**NB:** This case study does not cover the Kosovo war (1998-1999) and partially covers the events of Srebrenica. For more details, please see these two studies:

<http://speakingout.msf.org/en/violence-against-kosovar-albanians-nato-intervention>

<http://speakingout.msf.org/en/srebrenica>

# PEOPLE INTERVIEWED AND THEIR POSITION AT THE TIME OF THE EVENTS

<b>Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier,</b>	MSF Legal Advisor
<b>Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol,</b>	MSF France President, 2000 - 2007
<b>Dr Rony Brauman,</b>	MSF France President, 1982 - 1994, MSF France Foundation Research Director from 1994
<b>Dr Eric Dachy,</b>	MSF general coordinator in Belgrad, October 1991 - August 1993
<b>Dr Georges Dallemagne,</b>	MSF Belgium Director of Operations
<b>Dr Alain Destexhe,</b>	MSF International Secretary General until May 1995
<b>Dr Graciela Diap,</b>	MSF Belgium/France Medical Coordinator in the former Yugoslavia, October 1993 - April 1995
<b>Fabien Dubuet,</b>	MSF France Deputy Legal Advisor, 1995 - 2005
<b>Dr Marc Gastellu-Etchegorry,</b>	MSF France Deputy Director of Operations, 1992 - 1997
<b>Graziella Godain,</b>	MSF France/Belgium Field Coordinator in Srebrenica, October 1993 - April 1994
<b>Michiel Hofman,</b>	MSF Holland Coordinator in Croatia, August 1995 - July 1996
<b>Wouter Kok,</b>	MSF Holland Medical Coordinator in Sarajevo, Bosnia, December 1991 - September 1992, then various positions in MSF- Holland Bosnia desk, September 1992 - 1996
<b>Dr Jacques de Milliano,</b>	MSF Holland General Director, 1985 - 1996
<b>Stephan Oberreit,</b>	MSF Belgium/France General Coordinator in the former Yugoslavia, May - November 1995, MSF France Communications Director 2000 - 2006
<b>Pierre Salignon,</b>	MSF France Deputy Programme Manager, in charge of programmes in the former Yugoslavia, 1992-1996
<b>Eric Stobbaerts,</b>	MSF Belgium/France General Coordinator in the former Yugoslavia, December 1993 - April 1995
<b>Dr Renaud Tockert,</b>	MSF Belgium Programme Manager for the former Yugoslavia 1993 - 1995
<b>Wilna van Aartzen,</b>	MSF Holland Coordinator in the former Yugoslavia, 1991 - 1993, then Emergency Desk, then Director of Operations
<b>Dr Brigitte Vasset</b>	MSF France Director of Operations

# PERSONALITIES IN POLITICAL AND MILITARY POSITIONS AT THE TIME OF THE EVENTS

<b>Kofi Annan,</b>	Deputy UN Secretary-General in charge of Peace Keeping Operations from March 1993 to December 1996, UN Secretary General from January 1997 to December 2006
<b>Yasushi Akashi,</b>	UN Secretary-General's Personal Representative for the war in the former Yugoslavia
<b>Boutros Boutros-Ghali,</b>	UN Secretary General from January 1992 to December 1996
<b>Lord Peter Carrington,</b>	EC negotiator from 1991 to 1992 and former British Foreign Secretary
<b>Jacques Chirac,</b>	President of the French Republic from May 1995 to June 2007
<b>Warren Christopher,</b>	US Secretary of State from January 1993 to January 1997
<b>William Claes,</b>	Secretary General of NATO from 1994 to 1995
<b>Bill Clinton,</b>	President of the United States from 1993 to 2001
<b>Muhamed Filipovic,</b>	Leader of the Bosnian Muslim Organisation
<b>Major Robert Franken,</b>	Deputy Commander of the UNPROFOR Dutch battalion in Srebrenica
<b>Alija Izetbegovic,</b>	President of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina from October 1990 to October 1996
<b>General Bernard Janvier,</b>	Commander of UNPROFOR in the former Yugoslavia from March 1995 to January 1996
<b>Alain Juppé,</b>	French Minister of Foreign Affairs from March 1993 to May 1995, Prime Minister from May 1995 to June 1997
<b>Dragan Kalinic,</b>	Minister of Health of Republika Srpska
<b>Radovan Karadzic,</b>	President of Republika Srpska from December 1992 to July 1996
<b>Helmut Kohl,</b>	German Chancellor from 1982 to 1998
<b>Nikola Koljevic,</b>	Vice-president of Republika Srpska in Bosnia-Herzegovina
<b>Radislav Krstic,</b>	Chief of Staff of the Republika Srpska's army in Bosnia-Herzegovina
<b>Lt-Colonel Tom Karremans,</b>	Commander of the UNPROFOR Dutch battalion in Srebrenica
<b>François Léotard,</b>	French Minister of Defence from March 1993 to May 1995
<b>François Loncle,</b>	President of the French Parliamentary Fact-Finding Commission on Srebrenica

<b>Ante Markovic,</b>	Prime Minister of Yugoslavia from March 1989 to December 1991
<b>Tadeusz Mazowiecki,</b>	Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Former Yugoslavia
<b>Jean-Bernard MÉRIMÉE,</b>	French Ambassador to the UN from 1991 to 1995
<b>Hans van Mierlo,</b>	Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs from August 1994 to May 1998
<b>Slobodan Milosevic,</b>	President of the Republika Srpska in in Bosnia-Herzegovina from 1989 to 2000
<b>François Mitterrand,</b>	President of the French Republic from May 1981 to May 1995
<b>David Owen,</b>	Co-president of the Conference on the former Yugoslavia
<b>General Ratko Mladic,</b>	Commander-in-Chief of the army of the Republika Srpska in Bosnia-Herzegovina
<b>General Philippe Morillon,</b>	Commander of UNPROFOR in Bosnia-Herzegovina from September 1992 to July 1993
<b>General de Lapresle,</b>	Commander of UNPROFOR in the Former Yugoslavia from March 1995 to February 1995
<b>Jan Pronk,</b>	Dutch Minister of Cooperation for Development from November 1989 to May 1998
<b>Paul Quilès,</b>	President of the National Defence and armed forces Commission of the National Assembly from 1997 to 2002
<b>Malcolm Rifkind,</b>	British Secretary of Defence from 1992 to 1995 then Foreign Secretary from 1995 to 1997
<b>Lt-General Michael Rose,</b>	British Commander of UNPROFOR in Bosnia-Herzegovina from 1994 to 1995
<b>Muhamed Sacirbey,</b>	Bosnian Ambassador to the UN from 1992 to 1995
<b>Zvonimir Separovic,</b>	Croatian Minister of Foreign Affairs from July 1991 to May 1992
<b>Lt-General Rupert Smith,</b>	British Commander of UNPROFOR in Bosnia-Herzegovina from January 1995 to 1996
<b>Franjo Tudjman,</b>	President of the Republic of Croatia from May 1990 to December 1999
<b>Joris Voorhoeve,</b>	Dutch Minister of Defence from August 1994 to May 1998



# ACRONYMS

<b>AFP</b>	Agence France Presse
<b>AP</b>	Associated Press
<b>BBC</b>	British Broadcasting Corporation
<b>BiH</b>	Bosna i Hercegovina
<b>BRT</b>	Vlaamse Radio en Televisieomroeporganisatie (Flemish Radio and Television Broadcasting Organization)
<b>BSA</b>	Bosnian Serb Army
<b>CNN</b>	Cable News Network
<b>DAS</b>	Delegation for Strategic Affairs (French Ministry of Defence)
<b>DGSE</b>	General Directorate for External Security (French Ministry of Defence)
<b>DPKO</b>	Department for Peacekeeping Operations (United Nations)
<b>DRM</b>	Department of Military Intelligence (French Ministry of Defence)
<b>Dutchbat</b>	Dutch battalion (UNPROFOR)
<b>EC</b>	European community
<b>HVO</b>	Hrvatsko vijeće obrane - Croatian Defence Council
<b>ICRC</b>	International Committee of the Red Cross
<b>IFOR</b>	Implementation Force (NATO Force in Bosnia-Herzegovina)
<b>JNA</b>	Jugoslovenska narodna armija - Yugoslavian National Army
<b>MDM</b>	Médecins du Monde (Doctors of the World)
<b>MSF B</b>	Médecins Sans Frontières Belgium
<b>MSF F</b>	Médecins Sans Frontières France
<b>MSF H</b>	Médecins Sans Frontières Holland
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
<b>NBC</b>	National Broadcasting Company (US)
<b>NIOD</b>	Dutch Institute for War, Holocaust, and Genocide Studies
<b>Oxfam</b>	Oxford Committee for Famine Relief
<b>PSF</b>	Pharmaciens Sans Frontières - Pharmacists Without Borders
<b>RS</b>	Serbian Republic of Bosnia
<b>SAS</b>	Special Air Service (British special forces)
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNMO</b>	United Nations Military Observer
<b>UNCRO</b>	United Nations peacekeeping operation in Croatia from March 1995 to January 1996
<b>UNPROFOR</b>	United Nations Protection Force for the Former Yugoslavia
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organisation (UN)




Extract from MSF archives or press clippings.



Extract from interviews conducted in 2000 and 2015 MSF people who participated and/or witnessed the events.



 Médecins Sans Frontières Missions

● 'Safe Areas' under UN protection

# INTRODUCTION

After the dismantling of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, the Federal Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia<sup>1</sup> experienced separatist tensions of its own.

These tensions were exacerbated by the regime of Slobodan Milosevic, President of the Republic of Serbia, who sought to create a “Greater Serbia” encompassing all regions populated by Serbian minorities. The Federal Army fell under the control of Serbia and supported pro-Serbian militias operating in the Croatian region of Krajina and Eastern Bosnia<sup>2</sup>. In March and April 1992, the Republic of Serbian Krajina and the Republic of Bosnian Serbs (Republika Srpska), respectively, declared independence without any constitutional basis.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Bosnian Serb militias conducted a policy they qualified as ethnic cleansing by using terror to expel all non-Serbian minorities from the new republic. This policy affected Bosnian Muslims in particular, who took refuge in Muslim-majority cities in eastern Bosnia. These cities became de facto enclaves that were overcrowded, besieged, and regularly bombed by Bosnian Serb forces.

In September 1991, the European Community (EC) dispatched civilian ‘White Helmets’, powerless observers of multiple ceasefires that were regularly broken. Then, refusing to forcefully impose a political solution, the EC instead focused on mass distributions of humanitarian aid to victims of the war.

Beginning in February 1992, an international peacekeeping force called UNPROFOR was deployed first to Croatia and then to Bosnia. Its mandate, however, restricted the use of force to defending UN troops (blue helmets) and protecting humanitarian aid convoys.

In May 1992, The UN Security Council placed an embargo on arms deliveries to the belligerents. This had the practical effect of giving an advantage to the Serbian forces, which had inherited the weapons from the Yugoslavian Federal Army.

In August 1992, journalists revealed that Bosniak prisoners were being held in concentration camps in inhumane conditions by the Bosnian Serbian forces. Under international pressure, the prisoners were finally released on condition they left Bosnia for western Europe.

In late 1992, fighting also broke out between Bosnian and Bosnian Croat forces, which lasted until a ceasefire went into effect in February 1994. This was followed by the creation of the Muslim-Croat Federation, which brought together the Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia, founded by the Bosnian Croats and the territory controlled by the army of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

In March 1993, Bosnian Serb forces attacked the Srebrenica Muslim enclave. General Morillon, Commander-in-Chief of UNPROFOR, promised that the UN would not abandon the population. Srebrenica remained under siege, but was declared a UN-protected safe area as well as Bihac, Gorazde, Sarajevo, Tuzla, and Zepa.

In March-April 1994, Bosnian Serb Forces attacked the Gorazde enclave. NATO air strikes, in support of UNPROFOR, prevented its seizure. However, the enclaves supposed to be under UN protection remained besieged.

1. The Federal Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia was composed of six republics (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia) and two autonomous provinces attached to Serbia (Kosovo and Voivodina).  
 2. Bosnia-Herzegovina is made up of three ethnic groups: Bosnian Serbs, Bosnian Croats and Bosnians or Bosniaks, who are Slavs who converted to Islam under the Ottoman Empire.

In July 1995, Srebrenica finally fell to Bosnian Serb forces despite the presence of a battalion of Dutch peacekeepers and NATO air strikes, which came too late, were insufficient, and ineffective. Eight thousand men over 16 years of age were separated and massacred during a forced evacuation of the population.

During each of these episodes, Bosnian Serb forces took blue helmet peacekeepers hostage in attempts to dissuade NATO from conducting air strikes. In late August 1995 in response to renewed Bosnian Serb bombing of Sarajevo, these air strikes were finally conducted more consistently and efficiently. The NATO strikes put a stop to the Bosnian Serb forces' seizure of territory after more than two years of laying siege to the enclaves of eastern Bosnia.

In the aftermath, the Croatian forces from Croatia and Bosnia, and Bosniak forces recaptured Croatia's Serbian territories, including the Krajina region. Tens of thousands of Serbians were then driven out of their homes and expelled to Serbian Bosnia while the Bosnian Serbs continued ethnic cleansing operations.

On 14 December 1995, the Dayton Accords, negotiated under the leadership of the United States, brought the war to an end and led to the creation of the State of Bosnia-Herzegovina, comprising the Muslim-Croat Federation and the Serbian Republic of Bosnia.

Around the same time, the media released information suggesting that shortly before the fall of Srebrenica, UNPROFOR and Bosnian Serb leaders had agreed to free the UN hostages in exchange for cessation of NATO air strikes.

On 15 November 1999, a UN report on the Srebrenica events recognised the organisation's "errors in judgment" and asked the implicated member states to conduct investigations regarding their own responsibilities for the events.

From 2000-2003, investigations were carried out in France and the Netherlands and concluded that the international community acting in the region bore responsibility for the tragedy in Srebrenica.

## **MSF ACTIONS IN THE CRISIS**

At first, Médecins sans Frontières struggled to set up operations in an environment where needs were still being met by health facilities and health workers remaining from the former Yugoslavia.

Resolving to provide aid during the conflict, MSF organised a convoy on 18 October 1991 to evacuate 109 wounded patients from Vukovar, a Croatian city besieged by Serb forces. On their return, a mine exploded under the wheels of a truck and seriously wounded two MSF nurses. MSF publicly condemned the mine attack and soon learned that this event was instrumentalized by the same Croatian and Serbian belligerents that authorized the convoy: the Serbs allowed the convoy to pass through in exchange for the release of a contingent of the Yugoslav army being held by the Croats. The Croats hoped to get injured combatants out of Vukovar.

From 1992, MSF sections based in Europe, where public opinion was very sensitive about the events occurring in the former Yugoslavia, partnered with other organisations to urge political leaders to intervene.

The MSF Belgian and Dutch sections decided to focus on distributing medicines, medical supplies, and first aid materials throughout Bosnia and to refugees in the neighbouring republics. The European Community was the primary donor for these projects.

For its part, MSF France chose not to develop such operations, believing they supported the policy of "humanitarian alibi" pursued by the European Community. In effect, the MSF France President, actively present in the media, advocated that the international community's policy of mass distribution of humanitarian aid could not compensate for their reluctance and weakness to take the necessary political and

military measures to end the conflict. In June 1992, he publicly summoned the need for military force against the Serbian artillery surrounding Sarajevo. During the following weeks, the secretary-general of MSF international and the general director of MSF Holland also came out publicly in favour of force.

In late 1992, the French section of MSF set up a project to support former Bosnian Muslims concentration camp prisoners who had taken refuge in France and documented their personal accounts of events. In December, MSF published a report based on these accounts. The report described the ethnic cleansing process carried out by Bosnian Serb forces in Eastern Bosnia, as "crimes against humanity." The report was accompanied by a series of video clips that were unfortunately released at the same time as a Médecins du Monde poster campaign comparing Milosevic to Hitler.

In March 1993, a team from the Belgian section managed to enter the Srebrenica enclave with the UNPROFOR convoy. MSF teams reported to the press the desperate living conditions in the enclave and demanded that this population be protected.

MSF set up a medical and health project that would be jointly managed with the French section, like the one opened in July 1993 in the Bosnian Muslims enclave of Gorazde. For MSF France, bringing humanitarian aid in these enclaves would definitely meet basic needs and save lives.

For two years, MSF teams engaged in a constant arm wrestle with the besiegers in an attempt to get authorisation to supply the enclaves, which some considered open-air prisons, where populations asphyxiated by the siege were barely kept alive. MSF regularly denounced the Bosnian Serb authorities for the hindrance of supplies entering Gorazde and Srebrenica.

During the attacks against Gorazde in 1994 and Srebrenica in 1995, MSF expatriate volunteers remained in the enclaves, helped local teams treat the wounded, witnessed the situation in real time, and made continual appeals for protection of the population.

In Tuzla, another MSF team supported Srebrenica survivors and collected their accounts, which were widely distributed to the media.

In August 1995, MSF teams helped Serbian refugees fleeing Croatian Bosniak offensive in the Krajinas and publicly reported their situation. MSF also condemned Bosnian Serb forces for expanding their ethnic cleansing operations to the remaining Muslims of Banja Luka.

In late August 1995, MSF expressed its concern about the lack of protection for the Gorazde population as the Ukrainian and British Blue Helmets were withdrawing from the enclave. Then, MSF drew attention to the plight of a group of Bosnian Muslims dissident refugees, allied with the Serbians and rejected by all sides, found by the side of the road in dire conditions from the Kupljensko camp.

In December 1995, after the Dayton Peace Accords were signed, MSF released a public statement questioning whether the desire for peace would interfere with justice and a determination of responsibility for the events in Srebrenica.

In February 1996, MSF published a report containing personal accounts of the evacuation of Srebrenica and of 22 members of MSF's local staff and medical personnel that went missing during the events of July 1995. MSF launched an appeal for information about their fate.

In July 2000, MSF France appealed to the French parliament to establish a commission of inquiry regarding France's responsibility for the events in Srebrenica. The parliament set up a fact-finding mission, to which MSF lent critical support, suggesting questions to ask and documents to research. Transcripts of the hearings were made available on a MSF dedicated website.

Upon the publication of the fact-finding report in November 2001, MSF France released a public statement

stressing that while the report recognised France's military responsibility for the events, it failed to mention the government's political responsibility.

For its part, MSF Holland released public statements in 2002 and 2003 on the various reports published at the request of Dutch authorities, insisting on the need to learn lessons for the future protection of civilians from war-related violence.

In January 1993, MSF France and MSF Hollande publicly asked the United States and United Kingdom to conduct investigations regarding their responsibility for the events in Srebrenica.

## MSF DILEMMAS AND QUESTIONS

Throughout this period, MSF faced a variety of questions and dilemmas:

- To what extent, such as in Vukovar, should MSF risk the lives of its staff in order to operate in conflict zones?
- Should MSF condemn obstacles set up to limit the access to populations in the enclaves of Eastern Bosnia, if it means no longer having any access at all?
- Could MSF, as a humanitarian medical organization, denounce the fact that humanitarian aid was presented by international political leaders as the only solution to the conflict and then call for military force, an action that would lead to loss of human life?
- By agreeing to provide a minimally acceptable level of relief to a besieged population, wasn't MSF contributing to the strategy of the besieging troops while concurrently softening their image? Could MSF call for the evacuation of civilians who wished to leave, thereby risking abetting the ethnic cleansing policy of the besieging army?
- Could MSF, as in Gorazde, raise alarm about the seriousness of the crisis by disseminating a balance sheet of the wounded and dead that is difficult to verify, at the risk of being instrumentalized by the source of the numbers?
- Having trusted the UN Protection Force's commitment to protect the enclave and its population, must MSF accept partial culpability or complicity in the UN's abandonment of the enclave and the ensuing massacre of the population? Did MSF give the population the false impression that they were safe as long as the team was present?
- Is it the role of a humanitarian medical organisation to issue an appeal for an investigative parliamentary commission then, once it is established, to actively monitor and criticise? Contrarily, how can MSF not try to understand the circumstances and responsibilities, which, at the global level, led to the abandonment and massacre of a population that MSF teams had supported with relief? Can MSF call for a parliamentary investigation without ensuring that sensitive questions are asked that will give clear answers regarding the events?
- By failing to also explore the shadowy areas of agreements signed between the Bosnian Serbs and Bosniaks, doesn't MSF risk acting as a prosecutor of only the UN and member state practices and not other actors?
- Should Srebrenica be viewed as an accident of history or as a clear-cut example of the impossibility of protecting populations under international mandates established by the UN?

## MSF AND THE WAR IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA 1991-2003

In the early 1990s, after the break-up of the Soviet Union, tensions were rising in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia where most of the republics were demanding greater autonomy if not independence.

The republic of Serbia, which wielded a great deal of power in the Federation and particularly in the army, tried for several months to keep the Yugoslav Federation intact. The Serbian regime of the time, led by Slobodan Milosevic, advocated the creation of a 'Greater Serbia' which would include all the regions where the Serb minorities lived. He supported the armed pro-Serbian militias which were being formed in these regions.

Those regions of Croatia which were home to large Serb minorities (including the plains of Krajina) had been subject to armed rebellion by separatist Serb militia since August 1990. Supported by the Yugoslav federal army, this militia finally took control of the region. The 'Republic of Serbian Krajina', covering a third of Croatia's territory, was proclaimed on 16 March 1991. It illegally became a constituent part of Serbia on 1 April 1991.



'YUGOSLAVIA: located in the south of Croatia, the region of Krajina has declared its incorporation into the Republic of Serbia', *Le Monde* (France), 3 April 1991 (in French).

### Extract:

The decision taken on Monday 1 April by the leaders of the autonomous region of Krajina – populated by the Serb minority in Croatia – to become part of the Republic of Serbia does not bode at all well. Milan Babic, president of the autonomous region, has stated that Krajina is "a definitive part of the territory of the Serbian state" and that "the constitution and laws of the Republic of Serbia would now be applied". He then ordered the mobilisation of Krajina's population and the formation of voluntary detachments "to defend the freedom and territorial integrity of the region". Finally, he asked the government of Serbia that the equipment and forces of the Serbian ministry of the interior be made available to the Krajina authorities.

Based on the results of a referendum, Croatia and Slovenia officially proclaimed their 'dissociation' from the Yugoslav Federation on 25 June 1991, which was refused by the federal government.

Conflict then arose between the people of Slovenia and the federal army of Yugoslavia which ended in mid-July after the signing of the Brioni Agreement, under the aegis of the European Community. The EC sent a 'troika' of foreign ministers who suggested that European observers be sent to monitor compliance with the ceasefire agreement.

In the meantime, violence escalated between militias consisting of the Serb minority supported by the federal army (described as 'irregulars' by the official armed forces), and the Croatian army and its own 'irregulars'.

Tension was also rising in Bosnia-Herzegovina in which three peoples were living together: the Bosnian Muslims or Bosniaks<sup>1</sup>, the Bosnian Serbs and the Bosnian Croats as well as other ethnic minorities.



'Yugoslavia: two republics declare their independence,' *Le Monde* (France), 27 June 1991 (in French).

### Extract:

On the night of Tuesday 25/Wednesday 26 June, the federal government rejected the declarations of independence made by Slovenia and Croatia. In a communiqué from prime minister Ante Markovic, the federal authorities declared that these "unilateral" acts, adopted "without consulting the other constituent parts of Yugoslavia", were "illegal and unlawful". According to the text, they were therefore "null and void".

That evening, the federal parliament also adopted a series of 'conclusions' under which the government, army and police were requested to prevent "the carve-up of Yugoslavia and any changes to its borders". Mr Markovic's government believes that "without further delay and in the spirit of

1. The Bosnian Muslims are Slavs who were converted to Islam at the time of the Ottoman Empire. They were called Muslim in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The Bosnian Serbs are Serbs from Bosnia. The Bosnian Croats are Croats from Bosnia.

democracy, it is essential" that discussions on resolving the constitutional crisis and the country's future political organisation resume, and asks "all citizens" to remain calm and refrain from any acts of violence. According to the official Tanjug news agency, units of the federal army stationed in Slovenia have been put on alert and have prevented Slovenian customs officials from displaying the symbols of this republic.



'While the Federal Presidency adopts the Brioni Agreement, the Yugoslav government is concerned that the crisis is worsening,' *Le Monde* (France), 14 July 1991 (in French).

#### Extract:

On the night of Friday 12/Saturday 13 July in Belgrade, the federal government adopted the Brioni Agreement drawn up on 7 July under the aegis of the EEC. It also adopted a memorandum submitted by the EEC's 'troika' regarding procedures for the organisation and operation of the group of European observers responsible for monitoring compliance with [the Agreement]...

In a communiqué released on Friday, the government thought that both the republics and the Federation were beginning to 'lose control' of the situation, and stated that political parties were organising their militias on ethnic or political grounds. The communiqué expressed concern that the crisis was deepening, particularly in Croatia, and threatening to turn into a "large-scale armed conflict". A warning was issued to Slovenia and both the warring parties in Croatia: the Croat majority which had stepped up the mobilisation of its forces; and the Serb minority which had formed militias. The mobilisation of reservists in western Bosnia (majority Serb) without the knowledge of this republic's government was also deemed to be "arbitrary" by the government.

On Friday, the leaders of the republic's main parties stated that Bosnia-Herzegovina was "seriously threatened with disintegration" and advocated that the European Community send observers. They accused Serbia and its president, Slobodan Milosevic, of "putting Bosnia-Herzegovina under extreme pressure and provocation with the aim of breaking it up". On Friday, Muhamed Filipovic, leader of the Muslim Bosniak Organisation (MBO), reported troop movements on the republic's territory and the mobilisation of a large number of national defence reservists and police.



'Between war and peace,' *Le Monde* (France), 24 July 1991 (in French).

#### Extract:

Fighting on Monday 22 July in the eastern Croatian 'mixed' region of Slavonia (20% Serb and 65% Croat) left twenty people dead in just one day. This already brings the number of victims of ethnic clashes in the Federation's second-largest republic which, like Slovenia, declared independence on 25 June, to 40 in one week... Following this sudden but foreseeable worsening in the situation, Franjo Tudjman, president of

the Republic of Croatia, asked his people to "be ready for all-out war". He added: "Croatia is under threat – we shall do everything to save her. Unlike some, we do not want a Greater Serbia or a Yugoslavia".

Unlike the ethnically homogenous Slovenia, Croatia has a population of 4.7 million, 12.2% of whom are Serbs, according to last April's census. This population is concentrated on the southern and eastern edges of the republic and refuses to become part of an independent Croatia. It has even declared itself an autonomous region under the name of Krajina and proclaimed its attachment to the mother republic of Serbia. Tension has continued to rise in these regions which have a lot of mixed blood in their veins. The risk of this tension boiling over could drag the entire country into a spiral of violence capable of destroying what little goodwill remains among the various actors in the Yugoslav drama. President Tudjman is unequivocal: there is no question of giving up one inch of ground. He repeated his No to Serbian expansionism and the dark intentions of the new-style communists in power in Belgrade.

**In August and September 1991, the conflict worsened and tens of thousands of refugees were forced on the move, whilst European attempts to mediate met with intransigence by the belligerents.**

**On 7 September, the 'Standing Conference on the former Yugoslavia' was established and the 'white helmets', European peace-agreement observers, were deployed.**



'The worsening crisis in Yugoslavia - Serbia thwarts European mediation,' *Le Monde* (France), 8 August 1991 (in French).

#### Extract:

"Yugoslavia is heading for tragedy and catastrophe. Our mission has failed. We have done everything we can to help the country move forward, to stop the killing and to renew the dialogue about the country's future". Speaking in Belgrade on Sunday 4 August, this is how the Dutch minister for foreign affairs summarised the European 'troika's' fourth visit to Yugoslavia. "The only thing we can do now is appeal for reason", said Hans van den Broek. The acting president of the EEC specified that the European mission had put forward a certain number of measures so that the ceasefire ordered by the Yugoslav presidency overnight on Friday/Saturday last week could become effective. The memorandum, which must be submitted for signature by Yugoslav leaders, proposed that the ceasefire-monitoring mission be mixed and composed of representatives of the federal army and the Croatian and Croatian Serb authorities, and work together with the European observers whose mandate is thought to have been extended to Croatia. "One of the parties was opposed to this and the debate has stalled" stressed the Dutch minister. "We offered technical assistance whilst not wanting to get involved in the country's domestic affairs. We wanted to be objective partners and sug-



gest impartial collaboration.... But we are not in a position to make decisions on their behalf – they must take responsibility for themselves”, explained Mr Van den Broek. Stressing the lack of political will to restore peace, he added: “We pity those who have such leaders. All we can do now is wait and see how the current situation develops... and hope that the parties concerned will prevent an escalation of armed conflict”.



‘Yugoslavia, a delicate mission,’ *Le Monde* (France), 5 September 1991 (in French).

**Extract:**

A highly delicate mission awaits former UK Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington, who has been appointed by the Twelve to chair the Peace Conference on Yugoslavia that is due to open in The Hague on Saturday 7 September. Prior to entering into these negotiations, the EEC had first stipulated that all hostilities must cease in Croatia, but the ceasefire agreement signed by all the parties concerned in Belgrade earlier in the week has not been respected.

The fighting continues in Slavonia; some towns have been partially destroyed and people are fleeing the affected areas in their thousands and seeking refuge, mainly in Hungary. Europe has therefore decided to ‘forget’ about this at the moment, and to speed up its attempts at mediation.

In the current tragedy, where the two main protagonists - Serbia and Croatia - are also waging a violent propaganda war, it is only the foreign observers who are able to provide a more or less impartial report of the situation. The first contingent of ‘white helmets’ is on its way, but its mission risks being a complicated one. It will notably have to deal with the federal army which in recent days has ostensibly been supporting Serb separatists in their offensives, which are, effectively, land seizures at a time when borders are being redrawn and a Greater Serbia is being created.

**In August 1991, the Belgian and Dutch sections of MSF carried out a joint preliminary exploratory mission on Yugoslav Federation territory. Noting that medical needs were being covered by local structures and staff, they decided to maintain contact so as to monitor the situation.**

**Nonetheless, on 12 September, a press release announced that MSF would be mounting an EEC-funded intervention in the former Yugoslavia. The French section, which had not yet intervened on Yugoslav territory, passed this information on.**



*Minutes* of the meeting of the executive committee of MSF France, 8 August 1991 (in French).

**Extract:**

Yugoslavia: MSF B and H have submitted a report of their fact-finding mission. Medical needs are currently being cov-

ered by local structures. They would like to maintain a presence so as to monitor developments. If there are any major clashes, it has been decided that each section will intervene in a defined zone.



“Médecins Sans Frontières” intervenes in the former Yugoslavia; **Press release**, MSF France, 12 September 1991 (in French).

Following appeals from various Yugoslav hospitals short of equipment and drugs to treat victims of the fighting, Médecins Sans Frontières has decided to send equipment and teams to Zagreb.

A lorry carrying 5 tonnes of surgical and medical equipment has left Brussels and should be delivering supplies mainly to the central hospital in Osijek in the next few days.

Furthermore, two two-man teams that have left Belgium and the Netherlands for Yugoslavia will provide a further assessment of medical needs in situ and monitor the living conditions of those displaced by the conflict.

This operation is funded by the European Economic Community’s Emergency Fund which has granted 140,000 ecus to Médecins Sans Frontières for this intervention with the civilian victims of the conflict between Croats and Serb separatists.



*MSF was built on the notion of North-South solidarity, even if that ran counter to the third world movements.*

*So, when we had to go to work in the countries of the East, there was a movement strongly opposed to that. They said we had no business there. When the crisis began in Bosnia, those voices were very strong within operations and I think they were even stronger in Paris than in Brussels. When we finally started paying attention to what was going on there, first, the situation worsened sharply and then we didn’t have direct access. In fact, we didn’t know what should be done in those countries, how we could integrate ourselves there, which programmes were needed. The first teams I sent did not do a good job in terms of operations. They opened a kind of medical department store in Split, a sort of central purchasing unit. The other small NGOs working in the villages would come to Split and stock up on medical supplies and drugs from MSF. It was completely upside down! The problem is that we could not find anyone of a certain calibre who was ready to go into the field and commit for a sustained period. And so we had to change our entire approach in order to understand the situation and then connect what we were saying to what we were actually doing on the ground. As long as we remained in our central purchasing units, we had no credibility.*

Dr Georges Dallemagne, MSF Belgium Director of Operations, interviewed in 2000 (in French).



*We held back compared to the other sections, with the notion that this violence was clearly moving in the direction of a real war but that things were still in check. We also thought that the local facilities in Yugoslavia had what they needed to meet the needs. We weren't particularly interested in standing at the arm of a Yugoslav surgeon just to try to find our niche.*

Dr. Rony Brauman, MSF France President, 1982-1994, MSF France Foundation Research Director from 1994, interviewed in 2000 and 2015 (in French).



*We used to go for a drink at the local cafe every evening. We'd say: "it's not possible that this is happening here where we live and that we can't do anything. What good are we doing here? They ought to shut MSF down. I meant it."*

Brigitte Vasset, MSF France Director of Operations, interviewed in 2015 (in French).

**With the Serbian offensive in Croatia escalating, the European Community and the UN Security Council were still divided about the suitability of an intervention to end the conflict.**

**Nonetheless, on 25 September 1991, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 713 imposing a total embargo on the supply of arms to Yugoslavia.**



'Yugoslavia – the Twelve's rejection of immediate military intervention is a failure for France and Germany', *Le Monde* (France), 21 September 1991 (in French).

**Extract:**

In this inauspicious atmosphere, the Twelve, reined in by the UK, have adopted a minimalist declaration. It is no longer a matter of deploying a powerful interposition force of several thousand men on the borders of Serbia and Croatia, as per the text of the Dutch presidency or the text published that same morning by President Mitterrand and Chancellor Kohl, but of the much more modest dispatch of several units to protect the EEC's observers and allow them to accomplish their mission.

...Meeting once again to assess the situation in Yugoslavia, the Twelve's aim was to stimulate if not revive the peace process forty-eight hours after Lord Carrington, chairman of the conference in The Hague, had secured a 'last chance' but scorned ceasefire agreement. They failed.

The failure of the Dutch presidency of the EEC, which advocated sending an interposition force under the banner of the WEU, is all too clear. The signs were there in the days leading up to the foreign ministers' meeting, but it is now plain for

all to see. The term 'peace-keeping force' itself does not appear in the Twelve's final declaration, which simply refers to "peace-keeping efforts". Paris and Bonn have also suffered a major diplomatic setback. ...More than a failure for any one country, the failure at The Hague is the collective failure of a Community which maintained its unity by finding the lowest common denominator between the resolve of some and the restraint of others. The result is a paradoxical compromise, in that the Twelve met as a matter of urgency but reached a decision that plays for time.

Thus taking the risk of appearing to slow down or even reach a stalemate in its diplomatic action, Europe is giving the impression of holding back on its efforts and wanting to adapt to the pace fixed by the Yugoslavs themselves....

...During the conference's second plenary session, Slovenia and especially Croatia considered it futile to continue talking whilst weapons were still being fired. Serbia also recognised that "the success of the conference depends on the situation in Croatia". Acknowledging this consensus, Lord Carrington decided to grant the parties to the conflict a five- to seven-day deadline in which to apply the ceasefire signed earlier in the week at Igalo.

**On 3 October, Serbia and Montenegro seized federal power in the belief that the Yugoslav Federation was "facing the imminent threat of war".**

**On 8 October, the Croatian parliament voted to sever all ties with the Yugoslav Federation.**

**On 15 October, the Sarajevo parliament adopted a declaration of sovereignty for Bosnia-Herzegovina.**

**On 22 October, the Federation's 'Serbian bloc', citing the "right of peoples to self-determination", rejected the latest European peace plan which proposed a "loose union of sovereign states" and which had been accepted by the other republics. The Yugoslav army became the de facto army of the self-proclaimed 'new Yugoslavia' consisting of Serbia and Montenegro.**



'Yugoslavia: "times of war,"' *Le Monde* (France), 5 October 1991 (in French).

**Extract:**

In the absence, therefore, of Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the 'Serbian bloc' has decided that the imminent threat of war which had been "evoked" on 1 October during the most recent session of the Yugoslav presidency, requires this collegiate presidency to exercise the powers which, in such circumstances, are devolved to it by the Constitution and by a presidential decree approved in November 1984 – which, until now, had never been made public or applied....

The Yugoslav presidency will therefore assume certain powers

from the federal parliament. It then decided to deny Slovenia the right to command Yugoslav armed forces, a right enjoyed collectively by all members of the government. ...The presidency also ratified all measures taken by the military high command, with particular regard to implementation of the ceasefire in Croatia, and mobilisation. The 'Serbian bloc' has therefore de facto legalised the partial mobilisation of the federal army's reserve forces which had begun on 1 July in Serbia and which had intensified in recent weeks, spreading to Bosnia and Montenegro.



'The Croatian parliament has voted to sever all ties with the Federation,' **Le Monde** (France), 8 October 1991 (in French).

#### Extract:

On Tuesday 8 October, Croatia's parliament voted in favour of the republic severing all ties with the Yugoslav Federation. This decision marks the implementation of the declaration of independence that Croatia adopted on 25 June and which had been suspended for 3 months on 7 July at the request of the European Community in an effort to find a negotiated solution to the crisis.

...On Tuesday, Slovenia, which also proclaimed its independence on 25 June and accepted the moratorium, adopted the first measures to ensure the creation of an independent state.



'Following the Sarajevo parliament's adoption of a declaration of sovereignty, the Serbs denounce Bosnia-Herzegovina's attempt to "secede";' **Le Monde** (France), 17 October 1991 (in French).

#### Extract:

The split that has appeared in Bosnia-Herzegovina's parliament risks accelerating the break-up of this tri-national republic where, according to the April 1991 census, 44% of the population are Muslim, 31.5% Serb and 17% Croat. Although the Muslim party (the Party of Democratic Action, or SDA) and the Croat Party (the Croatian Democratic Union, or HDZ) expressed their support for a "sovereign, neutral and indivisible" Bosnia overnight on Monday 14/Tuesday 15 October, the Serb party (the Serb Democratic Party, or SDS) opposed what it called an "attempt to secede" and reaffirmed its desire to "stay in Yugoslavia", even if this Yugoslavia was being reduced to Serbia. "Civil war is knocking at the door of Bosnia-Herzegovina", wrote several daily Yugoslav newspapers on the eve of the conclusion of what they called a "dramatic" parliamentary session in Sarajevo.

The proclamation of this republic's sovereignty (*Le Monde*, 16 October) by Croat and Muslim members of parliament was immediately condemned by the Bosnian Serbs. Radovan Karadzic, leader of the SDS, said that the decision was "illegal and unconstitutional" in that representatives of one of the three constituent peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina (i.e. the Serbs) had not taken part in the vote. He accused the Croats and Muslims of forming an alliance to render Serbia a minority

and of attempting to form an association of four Yugoslav republics (Bosnia, Macedonia, Croatia and Slovenia) with the aim of isolating Serbia and Montenegro.



'Categorically rejecting the European peace plan, the federal army is showing its true face,' **Le Monde** (France), 8 October 1991 (in French).

#### Extract:

The military high command and the Yugoslav presidency's representatives from Serbia and Montenegro have therefore decided to implement, as quickly as possible, a process allowing the peoples who so desire it to save the Yugoslav state. At the same time, the Yugoslav army will become the 'armed forces' of this 'new Yugoslavia'.

...the army is threatening Croatia with reprisals if, according to Belgrade, Croatian forces continue to flout the latest ceasefire agreement reached on Friday in The Hague; decisive actions and offensive operations will be taken "as long as the blockade of federal barracks in Croatia is not lifted and a political solution not found to guarantee the security of the Serb people in Croatia".

**On 9 October, the Belgian and French sections of MSF informed the press that, again with the financial support of the European Community, they would be sending a ship with medical equipment and drugs, and medical, surgical and logistics staff to support the hospitals in Dubrovnik (the Croatian town under siege by Serbian forces) and evacuate the wounded to Split.**



'Yugoslavia: a joint MSF/EC relief operation "A SHIP FOR DUBROVNIK";' **Press release** from MSF Belgium/France, 8 October 1991 (in French).

Tomorrow, Wednesday 9 October, a ferry will leave the port-town of Crikvenica in the Rijeka region of northern Croatia, for Dubrovnik. This southern Croatian town is currently under siege and being shelled by the Yugoslav army.

The situation in the hospitals is tragic and people are starting to run out of food. The roads have been cut.

Sending the ship is a joint initiative by the European Community and Médecins Sans Frontières. On board there will be a surgical team which left Paris yesterday, and an MSF medical and logistics team based in Zagreb.

The ship will also be carrying 10 tonnes of food aid (preserved meats, pasta etc) and eight tonnes of medico-surgical equipment for the hospitals of Dubrovnik. This aid left Brussels by road yesterday for Crikvenica near Rijeka.

The ship will also evacuate some of Dubrovnik's wounded to the hospital in Split, half-way between Dubrovnik and Rijeka.



*We resupplied Dubrovnik by boat. We left on a large Croatian ship which went down the coast. We brought supplies and we left at night. We didn't see anything. It was just a small operation – two days there and back.*

Dr. Alain Destexhe, MSF International Secretary General until May 1995, Interviewed in 2000 (in French).

## VUKOVAR: HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION IN THE EYE OF CONFLICT

**On 14 October, after three days of blockades and negotiations, an aid convoy was prevented from crossing the frontlines and forced to turn round. It was funded by the EEC to provide aid to the people in Vukovar (a Croatian town besieged by Serb forces), and among those on board were MSF International's Secretary General and an MSF anaesthetist.**

**MSF publicly blamed the mission's failure on the parties to the conflict, who sought to exploit the humanitarian operation. The Serbs refused to allow the convoy through because they feared Croat combatants would commandeer its food and other supplies. The Croat forces, on their hand, were loath to let a convoy through which would effectively open up their defence wall.**

**MSF's Secretary General also denounced the presence of soldiers in vehicles bearing the Red Cross symbol.**



'Vukovar convoy doomed from start' says aid official; **The Independent** (UK), 16 October 1991 (in English).

### Extract

Describing scenes of hopeless confusion and mistrust, Alain Destexhe, Secretary General of the medical charity Médecins Sans Frontières, accused all sides in the fighting of deliberately preventing the convoy from reaching its goal. "It was a total mess" Dr Destexhe said on his arrival at Brussels airport. "It soon became clear that no one, not even the Croat whose convoy it really was, wanted us to make it. It became a political affair and not a humanitarian one at all."

Recounting how the convoy got within one mile of entering Vukovar, Dr Destexhe said the town had clearly been utterly destroyed. "Every single house has been hit by a bomb and

most have been destroyed. The town is completely encircled, like something out of the Middle Ages" It is estimated that up to 15,000 people are trapped in the town, with 300 thought to be wounded, 100 of them seriously.

Médecins Sans Frontières has proposed to the EC a second convoy, but with more limited goals on condition that political guarantees for its safety are given by the leaders of Serbia and Croatia. Under the EC flag, it would take only drugs and would attempt to evacuate the wounded and perhaps the women and children.

This week's convoy was hopelessly misconceived, Dr Destexhe says. Its 45 trucks were full of supplies donated by towns around Croatia. "Most of the material was completely useless" he said "they needed drugs but were going to get nappies" Dr Destexhe insisted, however, that the four EC monitors who led the convoy were above criticism. At one point a Croatian general attempted to arrest for treason a federal army officer attached to the convoy. An EC monitor intervened and said the general would have to kill him first.

The first problem for the convoy was that even with the cooperation of the Croatian and federal armies, neither side had any control over freelance irregulars fighting on both sides. Consequently the safety of the team could never be guaranteed. Moreover, the Croatian drivers wanted to abandon the convoy at the first sign of trouble, Dr Destexhe said.

But once the convoy was at last within striking distance, the federal and Croatian forces no longer wanted to co-operate – with both sides striving to lay blame for the difficulties on the other. On the one hand, the Serbian army did not want the convoy to supply food to a town it was trying to crush by siege, while the Croats feared that opening a passage for the convoy would provide a fatal opening in the city's defences. Dr Destexhe also accused both sides of ignoring all the normal conventions of human rights in war. "I saw ambulances with the red cross markings full of soldiers with their weapons. I have never seen anything like that before" he said.



Operation Vukovar - **Meeting** at MSF Belgium on 23th October 1991 (in English).

### Extract:

With Alain Devaux, Alain Destexhe, Stéphane Devaux, Pierrot Harzé, Georges Dallemagne - and Jean-Pierre Luxen, near the end.

### Previous EC convoys

**Alain Destexhe:** The EC made three attempts to reach Vukovar, with a convoy including 45 Croatian vehicles, a few doctors and scores of useless medicines, diuretics etc. The convoy was more a solidarity operation than a humanitarian one. Each town in Croatia had gathered bits and pieces for the occasion. The EC monitors were either diplomats or servicemen. The first convoy, which did not go further than Nustar in a day, was led by a diplomat. The second one was a Croatian-only operation, of course doomed from the start. The third convoy, in which Marianne Fleury and I took part almost by chance, stopped 1 Km short of Vukovar. It was led by Cdt Michel Robert, who was to lead the MSF operation. The EC convoy was obviously part of a political deal: Borongaj

barracks in Zagreb were being evacuated at the time of the convoy. The operation was stopped after half of the barracks had been emptied. By the way, the ICRC also tried to evacuate a psychiatric hospital in a Serbian-controlled area with a strong military escort. It was attacked.

**On 14 October, when the EEC convoy returned, the Secretary General of MSF International recommended that MSF organise its own convoy, to be used for strictly medical purposes only for evacuating the injured from Vukovar's hospital.**

**On 16 October, the operation, which was also announced to the press, was agreed by all the sections and the Secretary General was appointed to organise the convoy with a quick turnaround.**

**The convoy would be escorted by military observers from the EEC and the parties to the conflict accepted a ceasefire for the duration of its journey from the evening of Friday 17 to the evening of Sunday 19 October.**



**Letter** from MSF International to the Ambassador of the European Community Mission in The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, 14 October 1995 (in English).

A team of two doctors has accompanied the humanitarian convoy to Vukovar. Médecins Sans Frontières is very concerned with the situation of the wounded people in the hospital of Vukovar and with the children and the women of the town; they need to be evacuated as soon as possible. Unfortunately this convoy [is] stranded not far from Vukovar, all the efforts in vain. The humanitarian [mission] has not attained its end, due to the political atmosphere. The fightings were still going on and a ceasefire had not been respected. In such context the aim of the convoy, which is partly to supply food and medicines is a political gesture which prevents a humanitarian action to succeed. Médecins Sans Frontières, as a neutral organisation with broad experience in conflictual areas, proposes to the EC its help on a strict humanitarian rescue action based on the evacuation of the wounded people, the children and the women of Vukovar. The convoy has to be composed only of ambulances and buses marked with EC and MSF colours and that of any other international neutral organization, which is willing to take part in this humanitarian action. We would stress the urgency of meeting you as soon as possible.



**'Yugoslavia: MSF requests access to Vukovar to evacuate the injured,' Press release, MSF, 14 October 1995 (in French).**

Owing to extreme tensions in the region, the EEC's humanitarian convoy that achieved the impossible by reaching

Vukovar has been forced to turn back after making it to within one kilometre of the town.

An MSF team travelling with the convoy has reported witnessing heavy bombardments and huge destruction. According to information collected, 300 injured, including one hundred in a serious condition, have to be evacuated from the town; where anywhere between 10,000 and 15,000 civilians are also being held captive.

In such a tense climate, humanitarian and logistical aid is likely to be seen as an opportunity for distraction and rescue and is therefore a sticking point between the parties. This is why, in response to the urgency of the situation, MSF has immediately asked the parties to the conflict to allow a medical convoy through to evacuate the injured. MSF has agreed to carry out this evacuation mission working with the EEC.



**Operation Vukovar – Meeting** at MSF Belgium on 23 October 1991 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

Alain Destexhe: My reason for launching another type of operation was that Vukovar had been besieged and completely surrounded for two weeks: between 10,000 and 15,000 people were thought to be trapped in Vukovar, and according to the hospital staff, there were around 300 severely wounded people in the wards. I really thought that an operation limited to the evacuation of the wounded, and carried out by an independent organization such as MSF, stood a better chance of success. Nevertheless, even with all possible political guarantees, I stated that the situation in the field was very dangerous. In a teleconference on Wednesday 15th, we decided to set up the operation.

#### The risks

Alain Destexhe: Of course [the] risks were enormous. We knew there were "freelance" groups and I stressed that headquarters briefed their staff about it. The staff was briefed on that before they took their decision. I think that the Yugoslav team did not really have the choice whether to embark or not on that risky operation, which was a pity. In the teleconference, we discussed the possibility of doing it on our own or with EC monitoring and decided to do it with the EC – although they are pro Croatian, they are still accepted by both sides. The other condition was to have the convoy headed by Michel Robert, which was made possible by some pressure from MSF-France on the French Ministry of Defence. Today I think we could have handled it without the EC support, but in the field the help provided by experienced servicemen proved vital. Martin Mossinkoff negotiated with Gen Aseta, the federal army top official in Zagreb, and Col Agotic for the Croatian side. For MSF, there was a global local agreement to give responsibility for the operations and logistics to Alain Robyns and the "diplomatic" aspect to Martin Mossinkoff.

Alain Destexhe: On Wednesday 16th, Holland, Belgium and France asked me to take over the general coordination. Martin started negotiating on a better route than the one the previous EC convoy had taken: more roads with asphalt, though secondary. – the operation should take place on Saturday – a

ceasefire from Friday at 5pm to Sunday midnight – a procedure for the convoy to go through frontlines – the federal army guaranteed that the irregular Serbs north of the town would respect the ceasefire. For Croats this was regarded as an official recognition from the army of its control of Serbian crazies.

**Alain Devaux:** Alain Robyns said he would have preferred to delay the operation, but he gave up the idea because of the agreement.

**Alain Destexhe:** I think we could not wait for many reasons: in Yugoslavia everything changes very quickly. You have to use the guarantees you have as quickly as possible. The ceasefire was more likely to be respected on the first day than the second; we had to react quickly to the failure of the EC convoy; – politically, we had to implement on Saturday the agreement we had just reached. Here is the timetable: The agreement was reached at 10.30 pm. The convoy left Zagreb around midday. Arrived late in Dakovo. First meeting with the team at 11 pm. Loaded ambulances and trucks, put up stickers, fixed radio equipment and so on until 2am. Got up at 4am. From a logistic point of view the operation was not very well prepared. For example, there was a lack of communication between vehicles. Everybody is now trying to avoid responsibility for those problems. I think that MSF, other people and I did not realise sufficiently the importance of organizing such a convoy. Our safety was not put in jeopardy so much by logistic problems as military ones. It remains that those problems contributed to give a sense of insecurity to the team.

**Alain Destexhe:** We had an optimistic timing: two journeys were scheduled. But we thought that in case we could not make it the same day we would negotiate to do another one on Sunday.



*It so happened that I was in Zagreb with an anaesthetist from MSF France, Marianne, and I heard about an EEC convoy that was being sent to Vukovar. Right away we both said that's where we had to go. We joined the convoy that was never allowed through. Then we thought, if it's not allowed through, we'll negotiate on behalf of MSF. We'll attempt to enter Vukovar with a convoy. Since I was Secretary General of MSF International, I kind of forced all the sections to sit around the table and agree to organise this convoy together. The aim was to evacuate the injured from Vukovar hospital.*

*In fact, in the EEC convoy, there was food, blankets. We assessed what had happened and we said: a convoy of supplies didn't get through even with the EEC's 'credibility' so we won't take anything with us; we'll just get the wounded out. We held negotiations in Zagreb for several days and finally they agreed."*

Dr. Alain Destexhe, MSF International Secretary General until May 1995, Interviewed in 2000 (in French).

**On 18 October, MSF broadcast an announcement on the local Yugoslav radio stations asking the parties to the**

**conflict to allow unrestricted access to its convoy. Composed of volunteers from MSF Belgium, MSF France and MSF Holland, the convoy would be escorted by military observers from the European Community. MSF insisted that the media present the operation as being MSF's own and not one sent by the EC, as the previous one was.**



"Ref: Neutral Humanitarian convoy for evacuation of wounded," **Letter** from Dr. Christopher Besse, MSF to Dr Vesna Bosanac, Medicisnki Center, Vukovar, 17 October 1991 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

Dear Dr. Bosanac

I am aware of the extreme difficulties which you are facing in the light of this crisis. I would like you to calmly read this letter carefully – as it is essential to the success of the mission. We propose to perform an evacuation operation of your seriously ill patients by road, by means of a NEUTRAL CONVOY which will be entirely staffed by members of our organization. As you know, a previous attempt has failed. This was due, in part, to lack of preparation with respect to security, in particular that the contents and aims of the convoy were unacceptable to the relevant security forces. We now believe that these mistakes have been corrected. You will understand that we have had to compromise substantially in our aims, to guarantee safe passage to and from your hospital. For this reason, you may, at first, be disappointed, but you must believe that we are making all possible efforts on your behalf. [...] We have been following your helpful reports on the situation in the hospital. We are therefore well informed of the severe crisis which confronts you. With this in mind, we would be grateful for as much cooperation and calmness as possible. It is hoped that, following the success of this mission, we will be able to perform further humanitarian journeys to the hospital of Vukovar, perhaps to relieve your severely overworked staff and replenish your stocks of medicines while the conflict continues. Please understand that we are completely devoted to your cause and hope your courage can continue to be so strong.



**Message** from the MSF coordinator of the Vukovar operation to the programme managers at MSF Belgium, France and Holland, 18 October 1991 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

Second from last point:

It seems that the Yugoslav army will give its go-ahead and guarantee to "control Serb irregular forces" (which they said regarding the previous convoy, but let's wait and see!)

We have a very tight window if we want to get into Vukovar twice in one day – otherwise it will have to be one trip only. We have to spell it out everywhere that this is an MSF operation (this morning the local press only mentioned the army escort and the EEC!)

I sent the draft press release and a statement that we are going to have read out on the local radio stations in Croatian to Alain Devaux. They need to be sent urgently to Stéphane Devaux so he can do the same thing in Zagreb (N.B. the Serb and Croat languages are very slightly different).



Médecins Sans Frontières **Statement**, 18 October 1991 (in English).

Médecins Sans Frontières would like to make a solemn appeal to the warring forces. The MSF rescue operation to Vukovar is strictly neutral and humanitarian. Its objective is clearly limited to the evacuation of wounded people from Vukovar. Neither food nor any other kind of supply will be brought into the city. Médecins Sans Frontières is a 20-year-old humanitarian organization with a proven track record in emergency medical aid mainly in war zones. MSF is an independent and neutral international organization. It offers assistance to populations in distress without discrimination as to race, religion, creed or political affiliation. MSF observes strict neutrality and impartiality in the name of universal medical ethics and the right to humanitarian assistance. It demands full and unhindered freedom in the exercise of the function. Médecins Sans Frontières is calling on all parties involved in the present conflict to let their operation go ahead. It will not affect the conduct of war. MSF is also calling on the various forces in the field to commit themselves to guarantee the safety of the medical team and the people they will rescue.



‘Médecins Sans Frontières undertakes evacuation of the injured from Vukovar,’ **MSF press release**, 18 October 1991 (in French).

On Saturday 19 October, Médecins Sans Frontières is set to begin an important mission to evacuate the most seriously injured from Vukovar, the town which has been completely under siege for the past three weeks.

Twelve doctors and nurses and six logisticians travelling in four ambulances, eight trucks and two cars will attempt to cross the front lines with the aim of evacuating 160 seriously injured people.

According to the director of Vukovar hospital, who we were able to speak with directly, over 250 individuals are in a critical condition while 54 are in a serious but stable condition. To these figures, we need to add the 56 patients admitted to hospital the night of 16 October following violent bombings.

Médecins Sans Frontières was given the green light for the operation after lengthy negotiations with the federal Yugoslav army and Croatian authorities. These negotiations proved particularly tough in light of the previous failed convoys, the neutrality of which was called into question.

The evacuation of the injured, now to be organised by Médecins Sans Frontières, is a strictly humanitarian operation, led conjointly by all of MSF’s European sections. EEC observers will escort the convoy.

**On 19 October, with the authorisation of both parties to the conflict, who also promised to control “irregular forces”, the MSF convoy travelled to Vukovar, escorted by European observers. A few kilometres from the town, blockaded by Croat “irregular forces”, they were forced to change direction.**

**At Vukovar hospital, MSF volunteers evacuated 109 patients, mostly men who were seriously injured but in a stable enough condition to be transported.**



‘Relief Convoy Finally Breaches Seven-Week Siege of Battered Town of Vukovar’ by Ed Vulliamy in Dakovo, Croatia, **The Guardian** (UK), 21 October 1991 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

After first light yesterday, the patients, fighters, and doctors described the desperation of the ravaged town. “Vukovar does not exist,” said one driver. “Every house has had a direct hit.” One Croatian fighter, Trago Skoko, his right arm amputated, said: “The city is living underground in cellars. Their system is this: to send in a lot of rockets. Then they stop for half an hour and people come on to the streets because the cellars are wet and stinking. Then they send in more rockets while they are outside, and that is how most of the civilians are killed or wounded. The usual quota is about 3,000 projectiles a day.” The city has been without electricity, water, or significant food supplies for six weeks. At the medical field station south of Dakovo yesterday – a converted school, in which one elderly patient had died of burns during the night – doctors treated the wounded who described the wretchedness in the town. “I do think the fighters have to lift or break the blockade if they are to save the lives of these 12-15,000 people,” said Dr Ante Corosic. “There is no epidemic yet, but the situation is deteriorating fast. There has been no milk for two months, there is no fruit or juice. There is flour but no yeast and they have to slaughter the animals for meat. They are malnourished and resistance to disease, especially among the children, is very low.



Operation Vukovar – **Meeting** at MSF Belgium on 23 October 1991 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

The operation First no man’s land: sirens on to warn troops, slow crossing. Before Marinci, brief search by JNA. After Marinci, no man’s land, which had not been agreed on before, actually a minefield, with six or seven unburied bodies. Convoy goes through to destroyed Bogdanovci, held by irregular Croats: Asterix-like type of situation, they had put up a small bar in the rubble. Then they refused to allow us to continue the agreed route.

Stéphane: did you ever think of cancelling the operation altogether?

Alain Destexhe: Considering how smoothly the convoy had

proceeded so far and how the ceasefire was broadly respected, our only thought was to go on and enter the town. In addition we had Vukovar hospital on the line and the Croats guaranteed the road was safe. Michel Robert and I decided to take over responsibility for the change of route. From Bogdanovci we then took a narrow road through the cornfields. We entered Vukovar before ten: very moving moments, tears and flowers, applause, it reminded us of Romania. Inside the hospital I made a mistake: I did not ask anybody to assess the situation at the hospital and in town. Alain Robyns was responsible for vehicles, Christopher Besse for screening the wounded and I coordinated the loading. We picked up 109 wounded in 1h 30. There were at least 300 patients, some of them were fighting to get on the convoy. The hospital includes two blocks, one of which was completely destroyed. The remaining block was full to the brim with wounded. I think Christopher selected many civilians but the screening system stopped working at one stage: Wim who was jointly responsible for screening, was needed to load people on to the trucks. So many people avoided MSF's screening and got on the convoy. It remains that all the patients on stretchers had very serious injuries. On the whole, bandages were OK, there was quite a lot of medical staff, although there were few doctors.

Pierrot [Harzé]: The fact that there were no kids proves that families have sent them away.

Alain Devaux: Anyway, I think the difference between a fighter and a civilian in this type of war, where every man carries a gun, is very thin indeed.

Alain Destexhe: I promised we would be back the day after, I was pretty sure we would make it.

**Late morning, on the way back, after the ceasefire had just been violated, the convoy returned to the road taken to get there but was stopped by the Yugoslav army and forced to take the route originally planned. Several kilometres along, one of the trucks was hit by a landmine.**

**Two nurses were seriously injured. Three others received minor injuries. The wounded were transported by federal forces to Belgrade hospital. The rest of the convoy continued on its way across the front line through muddy fields to avoid minefields. It was diverted from its route several times by Croat forces. The expedition ended the following day in Dakovo for the injured from Vukovar and later in Zagreb for the MSF team. [V1](#) [V2](#)**



'Relief Convoy Finally Breaches Seven-Week Siege of Battered Town of Vukovar' by Ed Vulliamy in Dakovo, Croatia, *The Guardian* (UK), 21 October 1991 (in English).

#### Extract:

Ten [error: two] nurses from Luxembourg [and Switzerland] were blasted through the windscreen. The team had to empty

an ambulance and take them to an armoured car which delivered them to an army helicopter for transfer to Belgrade. The convoy was again diverted southwards through the Serbian village of Petrovci, as Croatian defenders from the town of Visci declined to allow the army to the gate of their town for a transfer. For eight hours, the convoy skidded and ploughed along mud tracks and fields. After joining tarmac roads through Serbia, the bedraggled caravan crossed into Croatia, and was inexplicably redirected again and again by Croatian authorities and finally split between the field centre and hospital.



Operation Vukovar – **Meeting** at MSF Belgium on 23 October 1991 (in English).

#### Extract:

##### The way back

Alain Destexhe: At the very moment we left the hospital (11.20 am), heavy fighting started – planes, tanks, etc.

Stéphane: It might have been muscle flexing from the federal army.

Alain Destexhe: We took the same road as on our way in: In a bend outside Vukovar, the convoy – led by a Croatian car, an EC car and then mine – stopped in front of JNA tanks. The Croatian car headed for the ditch and the driver escaped. Michel Robert, the drivers and I jumped out of our cars and threw ourselves into the ditches. I crawled to the back of the convoy to alert the rest of the team, who were not aware of anything – corn was three-metre high in that bend. 25 minutes of absolute confusion: our Croatian escort had left us and the JNA soldiers were afraid of being attacked by Croats from behind the convoy.

Stéphane: the army HQ in Belgrade were informed of the situation minute by minute. Alain: We found an antipersonnel mine and its wire close to a truck. Fortunately the thread was loose. We found many more mines around us in the ditches. Michel Robert used his EC T-shirt as a white flag; the tank came even closer. Six Serbian soldiers, all very aggressive, approached us. Top ranking officers Theo told us we had to go back on the agreed route. 12.30: journalists from A2, ITN and two Serbian television crews are waiting for us on the road.

Stéphane: Belgrade seemed to be very much in control of the media. But in a long telephone conversation the journalist from A2 told me that nothing had been prepared in advance: as he was waiting for the convoy on the agreed route, a JNA group and Serbian journalists passed along. In a way he was just given a lift.

Alain Destexhe: What was described as a JNA-controlled area on our map was actually a no man's land. That's where the sixth vehicle of the convoy hit the mine. The road was asphalted, in a very good condition. Nobody in the vehicles which proceeded first had seen anything dubious on the asphalt.[...] They were unconscious, we really thought it was extremely serious. The driver turned out to be severely wounded as well. Florence and Dominique were at the back of the truck before, but they were slightly protected from the blast by tarpaulin. We had a JNA tank pull the truck into the ditch and squeezed all patients in already crowded vehicles.



From there we could see Bogdanovci and the road we had taken safely in the morning. The JNA left us to choose: Michel did not want to go further on what might have been a mine-field, he favoured the road to Petrovci, considered to be safer to check the road but I fell in with his opinion - I thought that as a soldier he knew better. We took a dirt track round the First World War-like Serbian frontline to the south of Vukovar. Going to Petrovci, a Serbian stronghold, terrorised the patients. It took us 6 hours to cover 4km: we got stuck in the mud and without JNA tanks pulling us we would never have made it. The second problem was a steep slope, where JNA tanks prevented trucks and ambulances from toppling. The team went through difficult times: at one stage trucks were a few miles ahead of the convoy, without radio communication - all radios were in ambulances. They had to wait for the rest of the convoy for several hours in the dark. In Petrovci we decided to go further into Serbian territory, just to take the motorway to head back for Mikanovci and Dakovo, where Croatian doctors were waiting for us. We arrived in Mikanovci at 2am. The two nurses had been in a military hospital in Belgrade by 8pm.



**'Report on the Vukovar mission,'** Dominique Martin, doctor and member of the evacuation convoy team, 25 October 1991 (in French).

#### Extract:

Very quickly we passed through villages destroyed by violent fighting involving tanks and light artillery. Almost all the facades were riddled with bullet holes, the roads strewn with all sorts of debris, burnt-out cars... The impact marks around the windows were a sad souvenir of the people who must have stood behind them, making the war suddenly seem very real.

We passed a series of Croat and Serb lines, which were interwoven. While it wasn't relaxed, neither was the atmosphere as tense as we were expecting: several Serbian soldiers made friendly gestures at us while some rather unpleasant militiamen just looked at us with contempt. Going through no man's land was the most fascinating part of the journey. Crossing the second bit was particularly macabre because of the rotting bodies we saw beside a vehicle on the road that was blown up by a mine, an image that came back to haunt me later.

Before crossing the first Serb lines, we had to cover up our vehicle licence plates and any distinctly Croat marks [...]

After some issues caused by uneven terrain, we finally made it to Vukovar. We were welcomed by people in tears cheering our arrival. One old guy gave us some flowers while some strapping Croatian guy was repairing his roof, three-quarters destroyed, and another swept outside his door, the only civilised behaviour in this place in utter shambles.

The town was surprisingly less damaged than the villages we'd just passed through. However, along the road leading to the hospital, not a single building was spared.

The upper part of the hospital was destroyed so only the lower floors and the semi-basement were being used, protected by sandbags. The sick (300, maybe more?) were

crammed in together, but everything seemed well organised and the patients had been well cared for, which explained their relative good condition despite often serious injuries.

It was totally chaotic but we loaded the people in very quickly: 109 individuals in 90 minutes. The most severely injured were put in first and then the walking wounded last. To be honest I have no idea who made the decision on who to take... We did a quick check that nobody was carrying a weapon or threatening object.

The whole scene was filmed by men in white coats and supervised by soldiers. [...]

We left as fast as we'd come with the intention of coming back later the following day. Despite, everything, leaving was heart-breaking.

We got back on the same road: "Hill 102 again!"

Soon after, the convoy stopped, we heard sirens. Obeying instructions, we didn't move a muscle, we waited for Fabienne, sat in the cabin of the truck behind us, who said she could see a tank. A few minutes later, Alain, still really upset, told us about the first problems: we were being obstructed by tanks and there were landmines everywhere, including under the wheels of our trucks!

At the same time as intense artillery fire hailed down, three events happened in quick succession: the deafening sound of the launch, the sinister whistle of the shell and the sudden and violent explosion of a missile. At least one of the shots (probably more) would reach Vukovar. [...]

At last we got back on the tarmacked road and the convoy continued on its way. Finally the hassle was over!

And then boom! While we were merrily chatting away with Florence, we received a big slap in the face. After passing out for a moment, I found myself lying among the patients. Florence asked me if her face was okay (typical girl!). I said she was fine - with what little blood she had, she couldn't have been seriously injured. As for me, however, it took me a few seconds to realise I was completely deaf (total silence!). When I finally lifted up the tarpaulin, I saw the blown up truck, bodies on the ground, people moving about, I went to see, I was sure they were dead, I asked, I couldn't hear the replies

I thought I saw the TV, it must have been a mistake.

I went back to the truck. Florence was as white as a sheet spotted with blood. Two patients also sustained mild injuries to their face. [...]

Finally after getting back onto the road with some tanks the army beckoned us through the middle of its lines.

After Vukovar/Beirut, it was like Verdun!

Dozens of tanks were lined up in the mud and grey/green/brown/dirty soldiers tried to warm us up with braziers around their rat holes. Louis-Ferdinand Céline once said that the most annoying thing about the war is that it takes place in the countryside, and I get what he meant.

We spent hours wading through the mud. We were all really concerned for the girls stuck in an ambulance that was powerless to get off this patch of land churned up by tanks.

Suddenly one of the injured I was sat next to started gesturing: he'd recognised some mates from the federal army and wanted to join them. Stupidly I told him that we had to get him to hospital first, but finally he called them over and fell into the arms of his comrades. I gave up trying to stop him.

They walked off arm in arm. I had a fleeting moment of doubt about what we'd done and then finally I realised he was right, if he hadn't have gone I'd have handed him over to the Croat health authorities without giving a second thought and the poor guy would have ended up in prison. This little episode seriously damaged the relations between the driver and the people around and I had to order him to clear off as he was heckled by the soldiers riled up by their rather ungrateful mate.

Finally the trucks and cars were extricated by Serb tanks and we carried on along a slightly more passable track.

We arrived in Petrovski, a Serb garrison town where we stayed several hours without being able to get out of the tucks, not knowing what was happening, not being able to see anything and completely chilled to the bone.

The driver tore off his MSF T-shirt and wanted to leg it, so I had to have a go at him.

He and the patients were terrified at being in Serbia, convinced we were going to hand them over to their worst enemy.

At last Alain announced to everybody that we were going to get back on a motorway by passing behind the frontline and that we'd do the exchange over there between Serbia and Croatia. The rest of the journey went without any hitch until we got to the transit centre where the Croat military unloaded the trucks in record time. Some of the patients were transported to Djakovo, the reception centre only big enough to hold 80 people. [...]

Personally, I had no qualms about the purpose of this mission, there was nothing more humanitarian than what we did and is what MSF is all about. I took part voluntarily, with willingness and enthusiasm, and I have no regrets.

That said, this operation received a great deal of criticism: The organisation was barely adequate. But we need to be clear on one thing: the accident itself had nothing to do with the organisation (with the negotiations, yes probably!) and at the end of the day, everything went well elsewhere (with a lot of luck!), and the poor organisation didn't have any serious consequences on the operation's overall performance. [...]

**The MSF team in Zagreb assisting the operation realised that they were probably being manipulated by both parties to the conflict. The Serb military authorities agreed to the ceasefire to allow the convoy to pass through in exchange for the release of a contingent of the Yugoslav army being held in barracks in Zagreb. Meanwhile, the Croats hoped to get injured combatants out of the besieged town.**

**While it could never be proven for certain, it is highly likely that the mine which exploded under the convoy was a deliberate attack by Serb irregular forces intended to hold the MSF convoy 'hostage' until the federal forces released from the barracks had passed the frontlines and reached their final destination in the area occupied by federal forces.**



'Relief Convoy Finally Breaches Seven-Week Siege of Battered Town of Vukovar ' by Ed Vulliamy in Dakovo, Croatia, *The Guardian* (UK) 21 October 1991 (in English).

#### Extract:

The convoy was itself mined by Serbian guerrillas on its return journey, seriously wounding two nurses, and it was used by the army for its strategic purposes in what one EC soldier, Birt Nauta, called "a set-up, a charade".[...] According to the EC team leader, Commander Michel Robert, as the convoy approached the Croat-held village of Bogdaovci, it was rerouted by the Yugoslav army up a tarmac road laid with Croatian mines. "They knew they were there. They did nothing," he said. But witnesses also claim that Serbian irregulars pulled a jump-mine into the convoy's path with a piece of string. Either way, said one Dutch driver: "The eighth car blew up. I was driving the ninth."



Operation Vukovar – **Meeting** at MSF Belgium on 23 October 1991 (in English).

#### Extract:

Alain Destexhe: I promised we would be back the day after, I was pretty sure we would make it. We think it is a deliberate attempt to kill because: Fabienne and the driver say something was pulled from the ditch on to the road;- [and] we found another mine on the other side of the road after the incident. According to Michel Robert, this is a classical military trick: in a single movement from a ditch it is possible to move two mines by pulling a thread through the handles. We were attacked either by: Croats, in order to put the blame on the federal Army; [or] Serbian crazies, the JNA, which forced us to take that particular road, and whose top officers disappeared even after the mine exploded. It also happened 100 metres away from their lines. They might have planned the attack to delay our convoy to allow time for federal army soldiers from Borongaj barracks in Zagreb to reach Serbia. Having said that, they might also have used other means to delay us, such as thorough searches, etc. wounded Croats, with the soldiers from Borongaj still in Croatia, imagine the kind of opportunity the Croats would have had to stop the military convoy.

Stéphane: The JNA obviously did its best to orchestrate the operation: they evacuated the two nurses as quickly as possible, journalists were directly informed by the army, the JNA held a press conference at the hospital ...

Alain Destexhe: A few details point to the JNA: - because they FORCED us to use that road - we were very close to Serbian-controlled ground - top officers did not even stay with us after the girls were wounded. [...]

#### The deal

Alain Destexhe: We were hostages of a kind but I cannot help thinking that a deal involving a division of armed soldiers against a relief convoy is unbalanced.

Georges [Dallemagne]: We need to contact the EC about their possible involvement in a deal.

Alain Destexhe: Ambassador Van Houten told us that both

factions had said to the EC: "Leave that 'deal' business to us." The EC then assumed that the question had been settled by the parties involved. We were aware of a possible deal but we focused on the evacuation. We can never prevent other parties from using our operations for political purposes. It takes place everywhere we work. We must try and avoid it as much as possible. For us the main concern was to evacuate the wounded. Without MSF's initiative there would not have been any evacuation.

**Pierrot [Harzé]:** In this case WE initiated the operation. We were not invited by the Croats to go and pick up their wounded. The operation would not have taken place without MSF.

**Georges and Jean-Pierre [Luxens]:** We should nonetheless contact the EC to find out more about what they knew of the deal.

**Pierrot:** In Croatia I was once asked if we would pick up wounded in Croatian villages with the assent of Serbia. I said yes. I think it is part of our job to go for it even if there is a deal being brokered behind our back.

**Jean-Pierre:** The conclusion must be that if the deal had been known publicly we should have had to say no.



'Report on the Vukovar mission in Yugoslavia, October 1991,' Alain Robyns, MSF Belgium, 14 November 1991 (in French).

#### Extract:

##### B.5. The Croats

The Croats didn't hold back on applying pressure on the MSF team to speed up the Vukovar mission. From what they were saying, the hospital had been completely destroyed and the injured, women and children, all sheltering in the cellars, were in a desperate situation.

In fact, once we'd got there, we saw that while the hospital may have been hit, it was still in a relatively good condition or at any rate it had fared better than the hospital in Osijek. The Vukovar mission finally resulted in the evacuation of fewer than 10 women, no children, one 60-year-old man and the rest (90%) men aged between 20 and 50, none of whom were in a critical condition (with the exception of one who died in hospital) but who could be re-enlisted to continue the fighting.

We realised we had been completely manipulated by the Croats and they had taken advantage of our goodwill for their own ends.

##### B.6. The Serbs

After the event, we realised that the MSF mission had been used as a bargaining chip for the Serbs to evacuate their own men from the barracks in Zagreb.

In actual fact, it emerged that a military plan had been drawn up to damage the convoy without putting any human life in danger and prevent it reaching Vukovar.

In the end it was the Croats who prevented this by making last minute changes to the final leg of the planned route (in the field?).

On the way back, the federal army deliberately diverted the

convoy back onto the original route which resulted in a truck exploding on a mine.

We realised that the Serbs had used the mission to free hostages and the usual stakes associated with this kind of mission had become even greater than before.



*On the way back, a mine was placed along the convoy route. I was in the front car ahead of all the trucks. There was a guy in a ditch with a bunch of wires that he triggered to explode anti-tank mines in the middle of the road and it was the fourth lorry that was hit.*

Dr. Alain Destexhe, MSF International Secretary General until May 1995, Interviewed in 2000 (in French).



*We had a lucky escape. From an operational perspective, it would have been a total catastrophe. People hadn't received the slightest instruction. There were landmines everywhere and they were driving through muddy fields. Right then, I was in Oviedo, in Spain, with Jose Vargas, President of MSF Spain, to receive the Prince of Asturias Award. At 11 in the evening, Rony Brauman called me to tell me there was a problem in Vukovar: a mine had exploded under a truck. The teams had left with the trucks and the injured and were driving through the countryside. They asked me if I could get to Vukovar. I took a cab from Oviedo to Madrid at midnight and got there at seven in the morning. From there I caught a flight to Austria then took a small plane to Slovenia and an MSF car to Zagreb. When I got to Zagreb, the convoy was blockaded. We'd heard that negotiations had taken place. The Serbs said "Okay, we'll let the convoy through if the soldiers imprisoned in Zagreb were released". That was the deal.*

Dr Jacques de Milliano, MSF Holland General Director, 1985-1996, interviewed in 2000 and 2015 (in French).



*The Yugoslav generals and the Croats who were there, sitting around a table – I was sat opposite them and some of them were as cold as ice – were "negotiating" and representatives of the European Community were there to "facilitate". Most of the time, we were outside the negotiation room. We were allowed in just at certain points of the proceedings. I said to Destexhe: "We're not in a great position because we don't have any control over what we're negotiating. Something else is going on and the European Community has something else to negotiate but we don't know what that is."*

*Plus I didn't agree with the route we'd discussed! On the way there, the route forced us over a fair few frontlines. I had issue with the fact we had no say over the route.*

*This was the time of the Battle of the Barracks, the aim of which was to secure arms and ammunition. Each camp was attempting to get hold of war material and the Yugoslav federal army were going to need it. Police were attacking the barracks to try and take material. So, the Serbs negotiated to allow our convoy*

through in exchange for the release of a contingent of federal forces [who were majority Serb] and war material stored at the barracks in Zagreb. But the contingent was blockaded en route to Belgrade. And while it wasn't said in so many words, they kind of kept us hostage.

We were truly caught in an ultra-political deal, in a negotiation that we'd had no say in. We were the pawn in a negotiation with more at stake than the passage of a convoy.

Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF legal advisor,  
interviewed in 2015 (in French).

**Because the accident had occurred in full view of journalists travelling with the federal forces, the images were broadcast that very evening on Serb and European TV channels.**

**A press release reporting the events and calling on the parties to the conflict to guarantee the safety of the team was released the same day.**

**On 21 October, another press release announced the launch of an inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the presence of a mine on the route taken by the convoy.**

**All these events were widely covered by the media. Some reports commented that by escorting the MSF convoy after the mine had exploded, the federal army turned the situation to its advantage by closing off certain routes into Vukovar as it passed through.**



“Médecins sans Frontières forced to change routes on its way back from Vukovar” MSF Zagreb **Press release**, 19 October 1991, 4pm (in English).

For security reasons Médecins Sans Frontières' evacuation convoy to Vukovar was forced to change its initial route to head south from Bogdanovci in the direction of Petrovci, on its way back from Vukovar. The medical team had evacuated 109 severely wounded people from the besieged town's hospital, on board [...] 7 trucks and 4 ambulances. The ceasefire which had been agreed on the day before was violated on several occasions from 11 am throughout the day. From Bogdanovci, 7 km west of Vukovar, the convoy was then escorted by the Yugoslav People's Army. Two nurses of our team were injured as a truck hit a landmine. The more severely wounded is already in hospital. Médecins Sans Frontières is calling on all parties involved in the present conflict to guarantee the safety of our team and the patients they have rescued.



MSF Zagreb **Press release**, 21 October 1991 (in English).

Médecins Sans Frontières deplores the mine attack against its rescue convoy to Vukovar in which two MSF nurses were injured. The circumstances in which the mine was put on to the route of the convoy, which carried 114 wounded people, are being investigated. Médecins Sans Frontières does not plan to organize a similar convoy in the near future but will continue its medical mission in the country as usual. Having succeeded in entering the besieged town and carrying out its evacuation mission, Médecins Sans Frontières hopes that a small space for negotiations has been created between warring factions in a conflict where basic humanitarian principles are widely ignored.



'Relief Convoy Finally Breaches Seven-Week Siege of Battered Town of Vukovar' by Ed Vulliamy in Dakovo, Croatia, **The Guardian** (UK) 21 October 1991 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

The convoy of doctors and nurses – accompanied by a military team from the European Community – told of utter devastation in the town which is strewn with human and animal corpses, and of flagrant abuses of the conventions of war by the army and air force who pound civilian targets.

Among these targets is the destroyed hospital of Vukovar, now operating underground, which has been hit by 250kg bombs during air attacks. [...] The convoy finally reached its destination of Dakovo Hospital and a medical field station nearby, in driving sleet and bitter cold early yesterday morning.

Although some of the seriously injured had travelled by ambulance, most arrived in tarpaulin-covered goods trucks. It was like a scene from an apocalyptic medieval painting: aboard the trucks was a mess of bloodied, bandaged, wounded humanity, packed four deep, some lying in two inches of icy water that had soaked through the canvas. The wounded wore strange expressions of bewildered relief as hospital orderlies tried to unload them on to stretchers without hurting them further. “I've arrived in heaven,” said one man, his body ripped by shrapnel wounds.

The MSF doctors explained they had moved only those stable enough to face the journey, leaving the critically wounded behind in Vukovar along with about 12,000 besieged citizens and the fighters defending the town. About half of those evacuated were combatants.

The convoy entered Vukovar, passing from Croatian to army lines and then to the Croatian defenders. On the way, said one Dutch doctor, destroyed tanks, corpses and the debris of war littered the roadsides. The convoy was not allowed to take medicine or supplies. On the way out, carrying its pathetic load, the convoy crossed a track cut through a cornfield sometimes used by Croatian guerrillas at night to penetrate Vukovar, but which was now closed by the army escort behind the convoy, taking full military advantage of the evacuation.



**Evaluation** rescue operation to Vukovar 19/10/91, Martin Mossinkof, MSF coordinator in Zagreb, 29 October 1991 (in English).

### Extract:

#### Press approach

I'm glad we requested a press officer on Thursday 17/10, although at that moment I never could have foreseen the "madhouse" our office became the following days. Anne Marie [Huby, MSF International Press Officer] is born for this kind of work. Her attentive approach contributed to the fact that MSF entered the spotlights of the world media; two phones [rang] all Saturday and a crowd of local and intl. press barricaded the office. [...] More alarming is the fact that it seemed to me that Alain D. gave more priority to the press than to the operation. Friday 18/10 he insisted [on giving] a press conference himself, instead of delegating this and to focus/control the operational side of the convoy. Moreover we agreed that the field would not approach the media during the rescue operation. However a press talk was made to an unforeseen TV crew on the way back from Vukovar. (The presence of the TV was against the agreement with JNA).



"Swiss Médecins Sans Frontières nurse injured near Vukovar repatriated," **Press release**, MSF Switzerland, 30 October 1991 (in French).

On Tuesday 29 October, the Swiss nurse working for Médecins Sans Frontières, Ghislaine Jacquier, whose truck was hit by a landmine near Vukovar has been repatriated from Belgrade to Geneva. She sustained injuries to both ears, fractures in her feet and one leg, and lung damage.

Ghislaine Jacquier was injured on 19 October while she was helping to evacuate 109 patients from the town of Vukovar. The aid convoy formed of four ambulances, eight trucks and two cars was accompanied by 18 members of Médecins Sans Frontières.

The truck carrying Ghislaine Jacquier was blown up by a landmine after leaving the town of Vukovar. A nurse from Luxembourg was also hurt in the explosion. The driver of the truck and the injured being transported in the vehicle were unharmed.

Both nurses were transported to the hospital in Belgrade that same evening where they received surgery.

**In the following days and weeks, the operation in Vukovar was discussed and assessed by each section and internationally. While nobody contested that the mission had merit, its poor organisation was widely criticised.**

**Some challenged the wisdom of the operation because of the danger it placed the aid workers in, while others questioned the fact that most of the patients evacuated were combatants.**



Operation Vukovar – **Meeting** at MSF Belgium on 23th October 1991 (in English).

### Extract:

#### 2) *The patients*

Alain Destexhe: Although we discussed that point we had no precise directives as to what kind of patients we were to choose.

Georges [Dallempagne]: The most serious thing is that it was not discussed in negotiations in Zagreb.

Alain Destexhe: Most were men, but we did not pick up only soldiers. The screening system stopped working properly and, as we thought we would come back the day after, we focused on numbers and not the type of people we were to take.

Georges: In the future we need a strict protocol.

#### 3) *Operations*

Alain Destexhe: The main problems happened in radio communications and vehicles. Martin, Alain Robyns and myself, and probably also the headquarters, are jointly responsible for what went wrong.

Alain Devaux: To put those problems into perspective you must take into account the time limits in which Alain Robyns had to work.

Georges: Another thing which did not help is that Martin and Alain Robyns did not stop bickering. And for the next operation of this kind, we need to set up a new kind of operational procedure.

#### 4) *The ICRC*

Stéphane: They were preparing a similar convoy at the time.

#### 5) *The EEC*

Georges: We should try and alleviate EC's qualms about that kind of risky operations.

#### 6) *The attack*

Pierrot [Harzé]: If we are to issue a press statement, it has to be done in a professional way, with the nurse's testimony, and all practical details.

Georges: Even if it is not newsworthy anymore, I think we should make our position clear.

#### 7) *The future of our mission*

Alain Destexhe: Our mission in Yugoslavia, although useful, is very much a "Chemists Without Borders" type of mission. As for those of the team who had the most negative feeling after the mission I have the impression that most of them came from the permanent team in Yugoslavia. Apparently they were not prepared psychologically for this type of operation. Those who came from the headquarters went back fairly shaken, but more positive. In the field, this was a great team, which proved very coherent and experienced. Considering the complex nature of the Yugoslav conflict, I think we should find a single coordinator for all missions.

Conclusion: [...] Let's not forget that there are still 160 wounded people in Vukovar. There might be an opportunity to get them out through a single frontline, even a Serbian one.

Georges: That would mean investing a lot of energy and resources from all sections.



**Minutes** of the MSF Belgium board meeting, 5 November 1991 (in French).

**Extract:**

Yugoslavia (Alain Devaux, Alain Destexhe)

MSF's mission in Vukovar came about following discussions between the field and the executive boards of the French, Dutch and Belgian sections and negotiations with the local authorities. The entire operation had been meticulously planned, aside from the unforeseeable.

The convoy was made up exclusively of empty trucks and staff whose job was to evacuate the injured from the besieged town of Vukovar. Everything was fine on the way there, aside from when the convoy was diverted north. A total of 109 seriously injured were carried out.

Heading back, the convoy was forced to take the route initially planned which was when the explosion occurred, the eighth truck being hit by a landmine after the seventh truck had passed through. Those responsible might have been either Serbs or Croats or even the army itself. Once again, added Alain Devaux, humanitarian aid was thwarted by an unacceptable act.

While the operation could be described as successful given that people were evacuated, a sense of failure nevertheless hangs over us because there were MSF victims.

Does this impugn this type of operation or rather the role of MSF? We might well ask the question.

Status on the MSF victims:

Fabienne Schmidt: sprained ankle and eardrum trouble (making good recovery).

Ghislaine Jacquier: serious fractures in both feet, mild pneumothorax and problems with both eardrums.

Dominique Martin: fractured radial bone and hearing problems which might leave residual symptoms.

A first comment from Réginald Moreels was that so long as MSF continues to take on risky operations, we will remain "MSF".

There is the idea of "going there" which is crucial. The second comment was that cruelty is universal.

Jean-Pierre Luxen asked us to think about two things:

- More and more often, we're seeing MSF in situations that are too complex even for MSF. In the medium term, we need to gauge the general capacity of our resources.
- We merrily slap on the EEC stickers when the community is starting to adopt a political persuasion. Shouldn't we review this approach?

Alain Devaux replied that nobody in Yugoslavia knew who we were and given the little respect shown to aid organisations, it was important to have the EEC beside us.[...]

We'd tended more and more to carry out operations conjointly with other MSF sections, said Jacques Pinel. This might have consequences in terms of the accountability of decisions and this shouldn't be underestimated.

Anne Krings had the feeling that the risks have escalated in recent years and that MSF is going into risky situations more frequently. Alain Devaux thought that this operation was no more dangerous than the mission in Liberia not so long ago. Alain Destexhe added that this had opened up a humanitarian space that didn't exist before.

Johan Verheyen said that although we will never be able to reduce to zero the risk of a mission such as this one, which

was an MSF mission par excellence, we nevertheless need to do our utmost to guarantee the safety of our men and women. Jean-Marie Kindermans agreed with Anne Krings and also feels that the risk is increasingly being trivialised and that we are currently carrying out operations that we would never have dreamed of a few years ago. We have a tendency to go where we're sure we're going to be talked about when we could be carrying out just as important work in the side-lines. It would be interesting to carry out a retrospective study on safety. Réginald Moreels and Jean-Marie Kindermans are going to meet to discuss this. [...]

Eric Goemaere wondered what our position was with regard to Vukovar, which is still under siege. Alain Devaux replied that we were exploring the possibility of breaking the blockade and performing a rescue operation via Serbia.

In future, MSF will also handle the supply of medical and surgical equipment and displaced persons inside and outside the region.



**'Report** on the Vukovar mission, Yugoslavia, October 1991,' Alain Robyns, MSF Belgium, 14 November 1991 (in French).

**Extract:**

- a) The preliminary study of the geopolitical situation in Yugoslavia was not done sufficiently well by certain individuals, the consequence of which was greater risks in the field.
- b) For multiple reasons, the logistical organisation was underprepared: lack of time, teams sent out too late, conflicts between sections, etc.
- c) Instead of sending out a logistics specialist, "we" sent a press attaché... which shows how important it was for MSF to turn the Vukovar mission into a "media scoop."
- d) On the ground, the security problem was overshadowed by the "go-getting approach" of the Belgians, by the "administrative aspect" of the Dutch since a protocol had been signed and by the "reassuring" presence of Commander Michel for whom the war represented the be all and end all.
- e) There was no coordination or climate of trust between MSF Belgium and MSF Holland.
- f) MSF acted as a requester to the EC and not as the leader of an international organisation, which in the Yugoslav context where MSF has no real recognition is a negative factor.



**Minutes** of the MSF France board meeting, 15 November 1991 (in French).

**Extract:**

A strictly humanitarian operation destined to evacuate the injured was subsequently organised subject to three conditions:

- A political agreement with the Serb and Croat generals to guarantee the convoy crossing the various front lines en route,
- Announcements in the Serb and Croat media to announce the operation's humanitarian dimension,

- MSF to have full operational control.

The operation, which managed to evacuate 109 patients, was extremely difficult. The return was particularly disastrous when several vehicles were forced to cross a minefield when the convoy's path was obstructed by tanks. When the convoy was reassembled, one vehicle hit an explosive placed on its path. Four people were injured, one seriously, and evacuated to Belgrade. It was impossible to get a clear idea of who was responsible, but there is a high probability that this was a deliberate attack.

The circumstances of this operation open up a number of questions:

- Was it opportune to carry out this kind of operation and is this the role of MSF?
- A convoy of this kind calls for painstaking organisation, which could not be done since we only had three days of negotiations and planning.
- Seven sections took part without any of them assigned a clear coordinating role.
- Was it necessary to use the EEC as a shield in the negotiations?
- It appears that the operation was manipulated by the parties, contrary to the humanitarian action of the mission.

A discussion on the matter ensued, Rony concluding that the mission was not a complete failure: patients were evacuated and an aid convoy crossed frontlines for the first time.



*It's clear that the convoy evacuated essentially only soldiers, guys that were going to get massacred by the Serbs. Just like they were effectively massacring the Serbians. But it prevented them from getting executed. It's not a crime to avoid getting shot. In any case, we didn't make a decision based on humanitarian criteria. They were singled out by other people who, for X reasons, be they military, strategic or political, had 109 injured evacuated, full stop. Including some with mild injuries but who might have had good reason to get out.*

Dr Eric Dachy, MSF general coordinator in Belgrad, October 1991 - August 1993, Interviewed in 2000, 2015, (in French)

**The Secretary General of MSF International was criticised by some for having prioritised the scope for media attention afforded by the operation at the expense of planning and monitoring.**

**Over this criticism hangs the question regarding the operational effectiveness of MSF's international office, for which this would be the first and last operational experience.**



**'Observation** concerning the MSF mission in Yugoslavia and Vukovar, Patricia Morkoss, doctor for Croatia, 26 October 1991 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

2. Emergency mission in Vukovar

B. It was a mistake to send in a general coordinator not directly involved in the Yugoslav programme. A mistake sending in a general coordinator who lacked the ability to assume the responsibility of the post, he being more concerned with his own self-image and status than the objective of guaranteeing security for the mission and overly obsessed with media attention (doesn't the media do more harm than good in this kind of mission?).



**Evaluation** rescue operation to Vukovar 19/10/91, Martin Mossinkov, coordinator in Zagreb to negotiate guarantees for safe passing, 29 October 1991 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

Organisational structure/responsibilities The imposed change of responsibilities, that occurred at the last moment, by appointing a new general coordinator, created a disordered organisational structure. Moreover the appointed coordinator was not suitable for this job. This led to uncontrolled delegation of tasks. [...]

Press approach As a result of this operation, MSF had entered the spotlights of the world Medias. The coverage had been properly taken care of by the team in Zagreb. The general coordinator gave preference to cover the media more than to coordinate the operation. [...]



**'Report** on the Vukovar mission in Yugoslavia, October 1991' Alain Robyns, MSF Belgium, 14 November 1991 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

##### B.4 M.S.F. International

Recently created, this organisation seems to have defined its mission (amongst others) as promoting MSF's image and action.

The representative of MSF International went to Yugoslavia as an observer of the Dubrovnik mission.

He was then appointed initiator and coordinator of the Vukovar mission while he was in the wrong job for this kind of role.

He was particularly keen to raise MSF's media profile...

If there was any doubt regarding the right choice of the person from MSF International delegated to the field, we should remember that after the explosion of the mine, this doctor participating in an aid mission decided to leave one of the injured there and gave very little consideration to the opinions of the team before or after the operation... [...]

## B.7 The media

Throughout this whole affair, the media played their usual role. Although we mustn't forget that it was MSF who called on them.

We might nevertheless question how the media was used by MSF and by certain managers with a personal agenda that jeopardised the operation...

*The media talked a lot about the MSF convoy. A crew from Antenne 2 was there. It was taken along with the convoy by the federal forces who no doubt wanted to show how kind they were being. Fifty metres after the journalists joined us we went over the mine. They filmed everything and in the news that day our convoy in Vukovar was the opening item... just after the Formula 1 Grand Prix. At that time, everything was focused on Dubrovnik, the media weren't paying any attention to Vukovar, they couldn't go there, and no-one was speaking about it. So MSF helped get people talking about Vukovar because it was really only in the last few weeks, especially after the convoy, that the media started to talk about Vukovar and the terrible events there while the town had already been under siege for three months.*

*But at MSF we were all in shock internally because two nurses had been seriously wounded and two other people sustained mild injuries. So afterwards the main feeling was a sense of shock. We decided to drop our major communication campaign. We did announce that bombing a town in that way was inexcusable. I wrote a few articles, gave several interviews. But we were all kind of traumatised by the fact that the operation had ended in disaster. We were left with the impression that the humanitarian space had been taken from us now that they were attacking us with landmines. MSF wasn't accustomed to this. Into whatever conflict we'd sent teams to work before, in Salvador, in Nicaragua, in Africa, there had still been a degree of respect shown to aid workers.*

Dr. Alain Destexhe, MSF International Secretary General until May 1995, Interviewed in 2000 (in French).

*You might criticise Destexhe on how he did things but not what he did. He judged the situation well. Vukovar was no longer accessible. Alain forced the truck into Vukovar in his inimitable way. He took a huge amount of risk. It became almost a personal mission for him. The organisation was pretty shambolic, but history has shown that if MSF hadn't evacuated a proportion of the patients from the hospital, they would have been killed like the others who were left behind. Alain was put under pressure with this operation because he might have taken too many risks but he should have been congratulated for rescuing 120 people. People need to learn to accept that in the context of war there's no such thing as the ideal intervention.*

Dr Jacques de Milliano, MSF Holland General Director, 1985-1996, interviewed in 2000 and 2015 (in French).

*We organised the convoy to Vukovar and it ended badly with an ambush on the way out. There's disagreement amongst us about who attacked us but in any case we don't have any proof. In the end we directed our accusations – which I wouldn't say were unfounded although there wasn't any formal evidence, but it's highly likely – at the Serb militia who we believe carried out the attack. I was convinced because of the method and the circumstances: they had booby-trapped the road the moment our convoy was passing through. But I don't have anything but my own intuition to go by.*

*So not only was it a case of snatching captive patients from the killers' clutches – and ensuing events told us that if they hadn't been evacuated, they would have died – but also to condemn the attack on the convoy by the militia.*

*So Vukovar was a symbolic operation kind of used for the purposes of 'témoignage' [speaking out, or public advocacy]. There was a massacre that was happening in Europe, we get the injured out, we're a little bit entitled to talk about this massacre. The massacre itself had got a lot of media coverage. It wasn't a covert massacre so we didn't add much. I don't think that made a great deal of noise, but from our point of view it was very decisive.*

Dr. Rony Brauman, MSF France President, 1982-1994, MSF France Foundation Research Director from 1994, interviewed in 2000 and 2015 (in French).

*At MSF Belgium that gave rise for critics close to Alain Destexhe to practically lynch him. Since then I've pieced things together so I can't tell you if it's the absolute truth, but the authorisation he had to evacuate the hospital in Vukovar was granted by the Serbs. It was used as a bargaining chip with the Croat authorities who authorised at the same time as the convoy the evacuation of Serb barracks (well, of the federal Yugoslav army), of barracks in Zagreb. And the problem was that it wasn't a humanitarian operation accepted and respected by the parties to the conflict, but a negotiation during which any move was allowed. But everything happened so quickly that Alain couldn't have known otherwise.*

Dr Eric Dachy, MSF general coordinator in Belgrad, October 1991 - August 1993, Interviewed in 2000, 2015, (in French)

*I found it a little too easy and a bit frustrating that a single individual had got so much flack for an operation that, at the end of the day, had been given the go-ahead and for which the people in the field had been given the flexibility to adapt to the events as they unfolded. It was a good idea to send this operation to Vukovar because MSF was suffering from a sort of paralysis. Maybe this experience provided an opportunity to get things moving in some way.*

Dr. Marc Gastellu-Etchegorry, Deputy Director of operations for MSF France, interviewed in 2015 (in French).





*Proposing an evacuation of patients in a place under siege where there was going to be yet more injured because the war was on-going, in a hospital which is itself inundated, is provided for by international humanitarian law, it makes sense and it can be negotiated.*

*And it happened like that, in an opportunistic way. Operations are always a trade-off between what is needed and who's there to handle things.*

*If Anne-Marie [Huby, head of communications at MSF International] was there, it's because Destexhe wanted to turn the evacuation into a media opportunity. It was also a chance to tell people we were there, that it was possible to run this kind of operation and to finally highlight the brutality of the violence against a town under siege.*

*Everyone was happy to undertake the operation. But since there was fallout, Destexhe was accused of being a bad operations leader. They said he wanted to shine a spotlight on himself while taking risks. I don't think he was a worse operations leader than any other. I think that any section could have taken the risk to organise an operation over which they had absolutely no control over any part of the negotiations. In the early '90s, MSF still didn't have much experience and rarely found itself in the eye of conflicts crossing the frontline.*

*In fact, there were two scapegoats: Destexhe and the international office. The conclusion drawn was that only the operational centres could manage and take responsibility for operations. The international office with a brilliant guy who was trying to unite all that with the media, that didn't go down well at all.*

*Vukovar nipped the experience of international operations coordinated by the international bureau in the bud. We had evidence that we could take the risk of going into an incident all together, but that we couldn't hold ourselves accountable for it together after the fact. If this attack had never happened, MSF's future would have been completely different.*

Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF legal advisor,  
interviewed in 2000 (in French).

**While the media generally praised MSF for saving the lives of the patients evacuated from Vukovar, some reports echoed the criticism made by some aid organisations which felt that MSF had a tendency to prioritise operations offering media opportunities. The organisation was also presented, wrongly, as having knowingly accepted the negotiations that took place between the Croat and federal armies with regard to the convoy.**



*'Convoy's high profile in firing line,' **Scotland on Sunday** (UK) 27 October 1991 (in English).*

#### **Extract:**

Many attempts have been made to reach the crippled city, including three efforts by the EC. All failed. Then, last Saturday, a convoy by Médecins sans Frontières (MSF), a pri-

vate humanitarian organisation got through. One hundred and nine wounded civilians were brought out for treatment: MSF became the heroes of the hour.

Since Saturday however, a new question has been raised. Traditionally, this type of mission has been the specialty of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the world's largest charitable relief organisation. Does this derring-do action, mean the young, fast-reacting, MSF is taking over where the more cumbersome Red Cross is failing?

Central to the issue is a fundamental difference of philosophy. Both organisations are committed to independence and neutrality but war forces choices, even compromise. And however noble their intentions all humanitarian agencies have an Achilles' heel. The MSF convoy went into Vukovar with the agreement of both sides, to bring out Croatian casualties. It arrived at about 10am on Saturday, and at noon heard that the Croats had, in turn, released a Serbian garrison that they had held in the Borongaj barracks in Zagreb. In other words, the Serbs and the Croats had apparently negotiated a quid pro quo: 109 Croatian casualties for a garrison of Serbian soldiers.

The ICRC called this "political blackmail". Francis Amar, the Geneva-based director of its Yugoslav operation, says: "We wouldn't be happy to be part of any deal of this sort, where lives are balanced against each other. If you started negotiating in this way, where would it end?"

MSF on the other hand says it is naïve to suppose humanitarian agencies aren't vulnerable to exploitation of this kind. "Our role in Vukovar was strictly humanitarian – we didn't make any deals with anybody, and we didn't know about the deal until after it had happened." said Anne Marie Huby, a spokeswoman for MSF.

What is clear is that humanitarian agencies involved in casualty management in war zones have to make a choice: take action and risk it being hijacked for political purposes: or resolutely avoid being used as a pawn but risk achieving nothing.

MSF has brought a dramatic new style to the field of emergency relief. It has not always been popular, but few deny its member have courage. "I don't think MSF should have been the ones to go into Vukovar" said Marcus Thompson. Oxfam's director of emergencies. "But thank God, somebody did." [...]



*'A cavalier way with charity – Medecins Sans Frontières,' Felicity Lawrence, **The Independent** (UK) 6 November 1991 (in English).*

#### **Extract:**

If Jesus were to return today, he would be a Medecins sans Frontières doctor, or so readers of a French magazine believe. The ideal husband, according to teenage girls in France, is also an MSF doctor. Whenever a disaster hits the news, MSF workers are likely to be there and, as often as not, in the news themselves for being there first and for acts of derring-do. Last month, accompanied by TV cameras, a medical convoy organised by MSF broke through to the besieged Croatian town of Vukovar to evacuate some of the wounded.

In the next few days, MSF plans to send a team into the beleaguered city of Dubrovnik.

MSF doctors possess undeniable courage, often accompanied by an irresistible sense of style. In Peshawar, Pakistan, where the organisation's Afghanistan programme was based, the French team lived in "The White House", ran a bar, rigged up a sound system, and kept horses so that their people could learn how to ride across the mountainous border. "We are les chevaliers blancs," said MSF France's director of public relations, Francois Dumaine, explaining their attraction. "We are les aventuriers."

But "aventuriers" roughly translates as cowboys, according to some British aid agencies, which do not approve of the way MSF rushes to the scene of disasters. "If you send a plane off to an emergency in three hours, you are bound to get it wrong," says Marcus Thompson, head of Oxfam's Emergencies Unit. Oxfam, Save the Children Fund and other British organisations insist that an assessment must first be made.[...]



'The ICRC refuses to bargain,' Mathieu van Berchem, *La Tribune de Genève* (Switzerland), 26-27 October 1995 (in French).

#### Extract:

The ICRC is struggling in former Yugoslavia because it has no intention of "bargaining", as Médecins Sans Frontières did, over its humanitarian operations. Last Saturday, the aid organisation *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF) entered Vukovar, a town in the region of Slavonia under siege for the past month. Its convoy managed to evacuate 109 injured, although not without difficulty: on its return, one of the seven MSF trucks exploded on an anti-tank mine, injuring two nurses. The International Committee of the Red Cross, meanwhile, has still not succeeded in getting into the town, nor Dubrovnik on the other side of Croatia. Its own failure, and MSF's partial success, is cause for concern for the ICRC.

"We had made five attempts to enter the town," explains Francis Amar, Director General of the ICRC for Europe, "but the security conditions have still not been met. A few weeks ago, a nurse was injured during an ambush staged by armed forces, who fired for over an hour on the vehicle bearing the Red Cross emblem.

"This episode traumatised our people," explained Amar, visibly saddened by the brutality of the conflict. "In the heart of Europe and 128 years after the Red Cross was founded, we are unable to remove the wounded from the battlefield."

*Médecins Sans Frontières* has managed to. After unfortunate attempts by the European Community, MSF took up the torch and led the EC convoy after scaling it down. While Francis Amar acknowledges the courage demonstrated by the French organisation, he does not approve of its policy. "The operation was used as a bargaining chip. The evacuation of the injured was allowed in exchange of opening the doors of the federal barracks," explains Amar. "We were asked to team up for this convoy, but we refused. Humanitarian action cannot be subject to political negotiations."

"What's more, today MSF is in the same situation as us," says the Director General. "Its aid workers don't want to go back

there." The mine, which exploded one of their trucks, was no doubt laid during the operation.

"On both sides, the generals give guarantees of safety but these are blatantly ignored," Amar criticises. "Apparently they have lost control of their troops."

For the representative of the ICRC, this part humanitarian, part political "bargain" is frankly not reprehensible for an organisation like MSF which is not related to the General Conventions. But it doesn't serve the cause of the injured nor of the ICRC. Getting the local authorities to accept humanitarian action without a payoff is only becoming more difficult.



**Right of reply** from Médecins Sans Frontières to *La Tribune de Genève* by Françoise Saulnier, legal advisor at Médecins Sans Frontières, and Jacques De Milliano, President of Médecins Sans Frontières International, 30 October 1991 (in French).

Its actions challenged in your article of 27 October 1991 on the humanitarian negotiations in Yugoslavia, Médecins Sans Frontières objects that such serious and flippant accusations can serve as the basis for an assessment of the complex and tragic crisis in the country.

Médecins Sans Frontières has, like the ICRC, been very affected by the brutality of the conflict and by the paralysis of its relief operations.

Having noted the impasse reached by the humanitarian/political trade-off that the EC's mission had attempted on several occasions with regard to the besieged town of Vukovar, Médecins Sans Frontières had focused the entire negotiations with the authorities on the strictly humanitarian and impartial nature of a mission intended to evacuate injured patients from the hospital there. The fact of the matter is that this allegedly impossible mission was a success and 109 of the injured were evacuated. It then became blatantly apparent that the Serb and Croat authorities had used the agreement we made with them with regard to the injured as us vouching for the authorisation that they had given to each other to lift the blockade of the barracks in Zagreb.

This is a clear indication of the extreme breakdown of relations between the different powers in this country. But the incident involving our convoy which injured two of our nurses is a testament to the price that MSF has paid to uphold in this country a promise, a commitment, a humanitarian space. We can only hope that, at the very least, the severity of what is happening in Yugoslavia inspires in the aid organisations concerned the confidence and solidarity necessary to rise to challenges such as these.

Médecins Sans Frontières is a private international organisation that for 20 years has provided humanitarian relief in locations at peace or in conflict. Over 1,000 people in the French, Belgian, Dutch, Swiss, Luxembourgish, Spanish and Greek sections roll out humanitarian assistance in line with Médecins Sans Frontières' mandate and by applying all the relevant provisions of international law and the Geneva Conventions.

**In the field, volunteers noted that MSF's image had diminished among Croats who believed that the organisation's operation in Vukovar contributed to paralysing the movements of its troops around the town.**



'MSF Belgium/France in Croatia' **Memo** from Stefaan De Wolf, MSF Belgium, interim mission in Croatia, 9 December 1991 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

Apart from the unimportant neutrality we want and have to keep up to, MSF is badly [perceived] in Zagreb. The former general coordinator who refuses to toast with the Minister of Health; the coordinator of the Vukovar convoy who doesn't show up at a final meeting with the Ministry of Health and a newspaper article claiming that Vukovar would still be in Croatian hands if it wasn't for the MSF-EC convoy that paralysed all strategic and military movements on this side of the front, are but [a] few examples of the poor image we have. All this makes MSF rather tolerated than appreciated in Zagreb, and this perception is definitely not going to give us the so important security guarantees we need to enter the regions of direct military confrontations.

**On 18 November, the town was seized by federal forces. Over 460 people were rounded up at the hospital and executed.**

**The same day, an MSF convoy arrived in Borovo, 10 kilometres from Vukovar to tend to the injured evacuees.**



'Médecins Sans Frontières has set up an emergency health unit outside Vukovar,' **MSF Press release**, 18 November 1991 (in French).

This afternoon, Monday 18 November, a first convoy left to set up an emergency health and surgical unit in Borovo, a town located 10 km from Vukovar, to treat the injured evacuated from the town.

In addition to the MSF team, the convoy will transport medical and surgical equipment, blankets, beds, food and hygiene products.

As soon as conditions allow, the convoy will enter Vukovar and go straight to the hospital where almost 500 patients are awaiting treatment.

Médecins Sans Frontières received the go-ahead from the various authorities to travel to Vukovar.

Médecins Sans Frontières had already organised an evacuation operation, which took place on 19 October, to rescue 109 injured person from the besieged town of Vukovar.



'Civil war in Yugoslavia where the streets are strewn with bodies' **Le Monde/Reuter** (France-UK), 21 November, 1991 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

Bodies of civilians were rotting on Tuesday 19 November in the streets of Vukovar, where the Yugoslav army was "clearing out" the last pockets of Croat resistance. Until mid-afternoon, sporadic shots could still be heard in the north of the town.

On Liberation Square, a building was up in flames. In a nearby street, the bodies of two men and an old woman were left rotting on the ground, for several days by the look of them. Similar scenes were playing out all over the town.

Vukovar, which previously had a population of 50,000 inhabitants, Serbs and Croats, is nothing but rubble after three months of fighting. "I don't think the Serb and Croat leaders truly realise what they've done," announced a representative of the Croat government, Marin Vidic. "Someone will have to deal with all this destruction. Anyone who makes it to Vukovar will understand that this war is madness," he says. "We need to sit down and talk."

Marin Vidic is helping with the evacuation of civilians and patients held in the hospital, which is severely damaged. According to its director, Dr Vesna Bosanac, there are 420 sick and injured, including 100 children, in the institution. In the corridors, you pass patients with legs in casts and bandaged heads. Around 400 civilians have sought refuge in the hospital, located in a district where the last Croat resistance fighters are hiding. The evacuation was supposed to begin on Wednesday. [...]



'On the Vukovar siege and the war in Croatia,' Dr Vesna Bosanac interviewed by Edouard Van Velthem, **Le Soir** (Belgium), 21 and 22 December 1991 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

During the 86-day siege of Vukovar, you ran the hospital in the battered town [...]

It was unbelievably traumatic. The hospital was being bombarded every day by heavy artillery – between 100 and 200 rockets daily – and on two occasions it was even hit by air raids. On top of this military pressure, we also had to treat patients without water, without electricity, without drugs. But we managed thanks to the superhuman efforts of the 266 members of medical and technical personnel: the surgical teams were working up to 20 hours a day in make-shift rooms in the hospital's basement; the nurses were working around the clock, resting whenever they could. On average, we were admitting around fifty patients a day – a dozen when there was a lull, up to 100 when the fighting intensified.

[...]

From 25 August to 20 November, the hospital was run in the underground areas and in its own nuclear shelters. Médecins Sans Frontières also brought aid by organising the convoy which arrived on 18 October to bring fresh supplies: this relief was all the more crucial since it was the only help we

got and we owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the whole MSF team who took such risks to bring help. Other organisations wanted to do the same on several occasions, but they were prevented from doing so by the federal army.

Do you have precise numbers regarding the human toll of the Battle of Vukovar?

During the period of the entire siege, 1,850 patients were admitted to the hospital, 70% of whom were civilian. Over 500 people, 520 to be exact, were also brought to us when they were already dead. But, near the end, the fighting was so intense that it was impossible to go and help all the victims. And, according to the most reliable statistics, the figures I've just given you should be marked up by about 30%. However, except those of its members we treated in accordance with the respect of humanitarian principles, of course I don't know the loss of life in the federal army.

How did you feel the first time you came into contact with soldiers from the federal army?

Beside the terrifying destruction of the town, 95% of which was razed to the ground, the army behaved as the aggressor on entering the town. After the arrests made at the hospital, the officers "sorted" the prisoners. The 15,000 inhabitants who had survived hell were also divided into two categories: those who wanted to go back to Serbia, about 5,000 people, were released immediately; the others, however, who wanted to go to Croatia, were sent to prisons or concentration camps. Right now, some 5,000 of them must still be there. The others, including myself, have been released in the meantime.



*Ultimately the operation wasn't entirely in vain since when Vukovar was captured, all the other patients at the hospital were executed. So we saved the two hundred wounded we got out of there.*

Dr. Alain Destexhe, MSF International Secretary General until May 1995, Interviewed in 2000 (in French).



*I was there the day Vukovar fell on 19 November. We got to the hospital with the ICRC. It was horrible, squalid, disgusting. It was all rubble. We drove along an avenue between the centre of Vukovar and a suburb. The two traffic lanes on either side were completely covered in cases and shells. Our tyre burst on the cases... The trees were all burnt! It was post-apocalyptic.*

*My Serb interpreter told me: "The people are scared because the Serbs have taken away all the men. They've taken them to a village called Ovcara and executed them."*

*Afterwards, I realised that pretty much nobody had any idea of what was happening in Vukovar.*

*Vukovar was a town full of civilians without any troops. They'd razed it completely to the ground. We talked about the time of the fighting and the fall, but you really had to have gone there and seen for yourself what 15,000 deaths in the town looked like. A five minute report on what was left of the town following the 'liberation' by the Serbs would have sent a chill through you,*

*but the journalists weren't allowed in and the emotional impact was very minimal and instantly watered down. It was horrendous, it really haunted me.*

Dr Eric Dachy, MSF general coordinator in Belgrad, October 1991 - August 1993, Interviewed in 2000, 2015, (in French)

**The events in Vukovar were one of the first manifestations of the ethnic cleansing strategy and violence that would be carried out by the Serb forces throughout the war.**



*After what happened in Vukovar, we couldn't credit the Serbs with being a relatively innocent party or give them the benefit of the doubt since they had just completely destroyed a town. And yet there were people who were asking me: "Is it true the Serbs are daring to deport people?" I'd reply: "Are you joking? They've completely destroyed a town, the kind of destruction done in Ancient times. You could practically drive a plough through the place!"*

*Why would the Serbs go on to do better or worse in Bosnia than in Croatia? It was the same people, it was Milosevic, the same extremists, the same lunatics, the same military resources, the same programme, the same political ambition: all the Serbs in the same State. Afterwards, all the media kind of managed to forget what had just happened, saying: "My god, look what the Serbs are doing, shouldn't we start feeling outraged?" In fact, the outrage should have really started at the time of the siege of Vukovar in 1991.*

Dr Eric Dachy, MSF general coordinator in Belgrad, October 1991 - August 1993, Interviewed in 2000, 2015, (in French)



*Vukovar was really the first time where we witnessed the programme of ethnic cleansing in action: they besiege a town, they bombard it, again and again and again, first with artillery then they let insurgents, rebels and militia attack it. And then the final stage: they massacre as many people as they can and deport anyone left.*

*It really is a very particular method of war. Civilians were the main target but not in the sense of the military target since they weren't trying to necessarily kill them all. But they were absolutely intent on getting rid of their presence from this area, similar to what was happening with the population exchanges in the Balkans after the First World War, which was done in the name of the peace agreements. These population exchanges and the massacres went hand in hand. And it is because the massacre of Vukovar was what it was that later on the decision was made to create enclaves, protected zones. Otherwise the history of the massacre and the cleansing would have been totally different. It was really important for MSF to shed light*

*on the level of violence against civilians, on a town in the centre of Europe, besieged and bombarded.*

Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF legal advisor,  
interviewed in 2015 (in French).

**After planning and then abandoning for security reasons, a second mission to evacuate the wounded from Vukovar, MSF entered into negotiations to evacuate wounded patients from the hospital in Osijek, a town that was also under siege by Serb forces.**

**On 5 December, MSF announced to the press that an agreement regarding this matter had been signed with the authorities.**

**Finally, on 30 December, the ICRC signed an agreement with the Serb and Croat authorities: it is in charge of the zone around Osijek hospital, which is declared a protected zone under the principles of the Geneva Conventions.**



**Minutes** of MSF Belgium's board meeting, 2 December 1991 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

The Board wishes to obtain fuller information on the situation in Yugoslavia and asks Alain Devaux, who's just returned from there, to give a presentation on what is going on there presently.

The purpose of his visit to Yugoslavia was, on the one hand, to study the humanitarian space available to MSF in this country at war and, on the other hand, to explore the possibility of planning a second evacuation from Vukovar.

The town is constantly being bombarded; we believe that 5,000 people have already been killed. It's very difficult to get near it as it is surrounded by extremist factions and held captive by its own national guard.

MSF had contemplated putting teams in place to establish a system of 'témoignage' [public advocacy] and protection but did not go through with it out of fear for the lives of its staff. Indeed, there is absolutely no respect for humanitarian action in Yugoslavia.

The political situation is extremely unstable, exceptionally difficult, and we are seeing far-right and neo-Nazi groups emerging.

From a security perspective, nowhere is safe and each action needs to be well thought through and we should not think twice about raising questions at the slightest sign of problem. Alain Devaux has faith in our teams in the field who, while young, are very cautious and have a good overall vision of the situation. They will not initiate action until the necessary guarantees for safety are assured.

We are also negotiating the possibility of evacuating the wounded, women and children from Osijek, another besieged

town. We have included the ICRC with this evacuation mission so as to neutralise the convoy.

The United Nations have also been contacted [...].

Georges Dallemagne believes that MSF is the best party for this mission because:

- This is a dangerous war where the security problems are huge.
- Aid problems are limited and international assistance is considerable.
- The humanitarian space is very limited.

Also we are entitled to ask if this is really the place for MSF. Aren't we pushing the role of 'humanitarian guardian' too far when our experience in this type of situation is limited?

Alain Devaux thinks we should stay in Yugoslavia as our presence is important. We are witnesses to what is happening there and our action is becoming more concrete day by day and we are providing real services [...]

The fundamental difference between an operation like this one and the previous ones, said Pierre Harzé, is that in Yugoslavia we had two of our people injured. The real question to ask is this: are we prepared to have another experience like this one?

Georges Dallemagne thinks that it's difficult to establish a scale in conflicts and recommended a vigilance committee be set up. He added that decisions regarding security must be taken by the people at head office and not those in the field.

Alain Devaux disagreed with the last statement and believes that decisions must be taken conjointly between head office and the field. His recent visit to the field supports this opinion; you can't really understand the situation unless you are there.

Anne Krings added that if the initiative must effectively come from the field, the responsibility of what happened should fall on head office and the board who are in a more objective position and who might perhaps not have been cautious enough. We are currently seeing a process of delegation that is taking away individual accountability. The number of individuals involved in making security decisions must be reduced.



'Signature in Zagreb of Médecins Sans Frontières's proposition for evacuation of the wounded in Osijek hospital,' MSF **Press release**, 5 December 1991 (in English/in French).

Both military and health authorities in Zagreb, who had already pronounced themselves favourable to the evacuation of the wounded in the Osijek hospital, have signed today, 2 December 1991, the agreement proposal drawn up by the organisation. Médecins Sans Frontières is thus instantly pursuing negotiations with the military and health authorities in order to be able to launch the operation, which concerns the 250 to 300 wounded patients in the Osijek hospital, as rapidly as possible. Médecins Sans Frontières, an independent and impartial humanitarian, medical organisation, has been present in Belgrade and in Zagreb since the beginning of September, and its teams, whatever their geographical position, are endeavouring to afford medical and humanitarian assistance to the victims of this conflict.



'Yugoslavia: the ICRC obtains neutralisation of a protected zone in Osijek,' **Press release** from the ICRC, 31 December 1991 (in French).

Friday, 27 December, 1991, in Pecs (Hungary), representatives of the Federal Executive Council of Yugoslavia, the Republic of Croatia, the Republic of Serbia and the Federal Secretary of People's Defence met under the auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). On 30 December, they signed an agreement declaring Osijek hospital and its perimeter a protected area pursuant to the principles of Article 24 of the Geneva Convention (I) of 1949 and Articles 14 and 15 of the Geneva Convention (IV).

This protected zone will be placed under the supervision of the ICRC with the consent of all the parties to the conflict and will provide special protection to the civilian and military wounded and sick, persons over the age of 65, children under 15, pregnant women, the mothers of children under seven and the hospital's medical and administrative staff. Other non-combatants may be admitted into this zone subject to the discretion of the ICRC.

This agreement entered into force on 3 January at midnight local time.

**On 21 February, the UN decided to send a 'protection force' to the former Yugoslav federation.**



'Yugoslavia News Bulletin: high risk.' **Le Monde** (France), 23 February 1992 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

The international community has taken the plunge. After spending several long months watching Serbs and Croats kill each other on the plains of Slavonia and in the mountains of the Dalmatian countryside, demonstrating greater concern for the "world's heritage" than human blood; after displaying deep divisions and a guilty helplessness in the face of a war straight out of the past, the UN decided, on Friday, 21 February, to send a "protection force" to the former Yugoslav Federation. At the same time, it showed its displeasure at the financial cost of the operation.

**In March 1992, the situation in Bosnia deteriorated – and in Sarajevo in particular – after the Bosnian Serbs refused to accept Bosnia's declaration of independence and the peace plan drawn up by the European Community.**



'After the referendum in favour of the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the grip of ethnic violence,' **Le Monde** (France), 3 March 1992 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

On Saturday and Sunday the Serb community (32%) who opposes the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina, wishing to "remain in Yugoslavia", followed its party's directives and boycotted the ballot. Conversely, the Muslim community (44%) and a majority of Croats (17%) went to the ballot boxes to vote, for the majority, in favour of independence. Initial estimations on the participation rate were considered accurate enough to think, by Sunday, that the "yes" vote would win.

But come Sunday evening, Sarajevo was not celebrating independence. Instead of cheers of victory the air was filled with the sound of artillery, and fatal shots fired between ethnic communities. Once a haven of peaceful coexistence between three communities, Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, took up arms and witnessed its first inter-ethnic troubles. [...]

In this partition, the leaders of the Serb community have reclaimed one-third of the capital which will be attached to the neighbouring commune of Pale, where they are the majority, then to all the other territories in Bosnia where they are – or were before the war – in the majority. In total, two-thirds of the present Bosnia and Herzegovina were today counting on celebrating independence by maintaining its territorial integrity. In the mountains, along the road that connects Pale to Sarajevo's old town, further barricades have been erected to prevent Muslims and Croats from "entering Serb territory." [...]

The tension that accompanied the independence referendum spiked suddenly on Sunday in the middle of the afternoon when a Serb was killed in the eastern district of old Sarajevo, with its small stores and many mosques. The incident was sparked when a group of youths, in all likelihood of Islamic origin, tore down and burnt a Serb flag bearing a religious symbol that was being carried in a funeral procession. [...]

A few hours later, gun shots rang out in the night. The Serbs had put up their barricades and old Sarajevo theirs. "There's a war on, you can't go any further." At the entry into Bascarsija, on the road leading to Pale, in "Serb territory", the local police "protects the people from the neighbourhood, who fear retaliation from the Serbs". [...]

During the 12 hours of the referendum, the number of barricades multiplied all over Bosnia and Herzegovina and notably on the main roads taken by the Bosniak expats, who travelled in vast numbers to the country to vote for independence. Dispersed, these incidents did not hinder the ballot, but clearly highlight the mistrust and rivalries that now exist between the three communities.

The desecration of sacred places, bomb attacks at polling stations or at the party head office, Serb barricades outside Muslim or Croat villages or barricades against the Yugoslav army and its factions raise concerns of a rapid Lebanisation in this Bosniak powder keg where everyone is now armed to the teeth.



'The Bosnian Serbs reject the agreement proposed by the EC,' *Le Monde* (France) 14 March 1992 (in French).

On Wednesday 11 March, the Bosnian Serbs rejected plans proposed by the EC in a bid to settle the crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where multiple incidents have maintained high tensions between the three communities co-habiting in the country, namely Muslims, Croats and Serbs. The latter refuse to live in an independent Bosnia. They have created a Serb Republic and have proclaimed their desire to remain in a Yugoslav community with Serbia and Montenegro. The Brussels document, which envisaged the creation of a federal state in Bosnia where several constituent units would share power with a central authority, was approved albeit with reservations from the Muslim and Croat parties.

**On 6 April 1992, the federal forces launched a large-scale attack on Sarajevo, which had already found itself continually besieged and under attack. The conflict then spread to the whole of Bosnia.**

**On 7 April, the 12 Member States of the European Community recognised the independence of Bosnia. On 25 April, Serbia and Montenegro created a federation which they declared was the successor to the former Yugoslav federation<sup>2</sup>.**



'Meeting in Luxembourg, the EC Twelve recognise the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina and have deferred their decision regarding Macedonia,' *Le Monde* (France) 8 April 1992 (in French).

And so, little by little, in counterpoint to the fighting but also to the arrival of UN forces in the field, with more or less effective aid from the West, the new face of the former Yugoslavia is taking shape. Just a few weeks earlier, during his visit to Brussels, James Baker, US Secretary of State, expressed his desire to see a coordinated recognition of the new Republics of the former Federation. On Monday in Luxembourg, we were therefore expecting – Joao de Deus Pinheiro, the Portuguese minister of foreign affairs, presiding over the council, alluded to it in his statements to the press – that the United States recognised, after all that's happened, Slovenia, Croatia (they didn't take the plunge in January, having arrived at a different conclusion from the EC's) and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The fresh outbreak of clashes in Bosnia and Herzegovina has therefore not discouraged the EC Twelve. On the contrary, they have shown concern, as encouraged by Lord Carrington, President of the conference on Yugoslavia organised by the Community, to totally disregard the most activist elements.



'As fighting continues in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro are creating a federation,' *Le Monde* (France) 25 April 1992 (in French).

Fighting continued, on Friday 24 April, at several spots in Bosnia and Herzegovina, contravening the ceasefire agreement signed the day before in Sarajevo by the Bosnian, Muslim and Serb communities in the presence of Lord Carrington, President of the Peace Conference on Yugoslavia. For its part, Serbia has announced that, with Montenegro, on 27 April, it will declare the establishment of the Federal Republic of Yugoslav, the only successor, according to Belgrade, to the former State.

**MSF Belgium and MSF Holland, affected by the Vukovar events which highlighted the problems of intervening in the eye of the conflict, were focusing on the development of relief operations and the distribution of drugs and medical supplies to local people and those displaced by the war in Bosnia (and to a lesser extent in Croatia). These activities were mostly financed by European Community funds.**

**MSF Holland, which had worked out a detailed plan of the needs of every hospital in Bosnia, was intervening in Sarajevo, and MSF Belgium in Belgrade in zones held by the Serbs.**



**Message** from the General Coordinator of MSF Belgium in former Yugoslavia to the managers of *Contact*, MSF Belgium's internal newsletter, 8 March 1992 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

While Yugoslavia, or what's left of it, may have disappeared from our TV screens, the situation there is no less tense, recent events in Bosnia raising concerns of an outbreak of conflict or, at least, fresh outbursts of violence. In practice, since the ceasefire, installed on 3 January and proving less and less effective, everyone is awaiting the arrival of the blue helmets that, it is hoped, will mitigate the situation and stop hostilities, even if it cannot bring a political or diplomatic solution to the war.

In Serbia, the economic and infrastructure crisis is increasingly serious; a political crisis is looming increasingly heavily despite the extremely authoritarian attitude of the government.

MSF Belgium's programme: supplies of drugs and medical equipment to hospitals; distribution of food, hygiene and first aid equipment to refugee centres.

A friendly team from MSF France is currently on mission in Serbia and in Montenegro to assess the medical system in times of crisis and how this might evolve (total disorganisation).

MSF B is starting a sustained assessment in Kosovo with the serious hope this time of obtaining the authorisation to

2. Serbia including the territories of Voivodine and Kosovo.

create a mission there, the medical situation there looking catastrophic.

In Bosnia, MSF Holland is running a large-scale and ambitious programme supplying essential drugs to all primary health centres in the Republic (4.3 million inhabitants) and is now preparing to cope with the emergency.

In Croatia, where massive international aid and the effective organisation of the health authorities are helping to mitigate the situation, the MSF B team is running a relief programme in several institutions for children with disabilities and mental health issues (traumatised by the war) who are living in atrocious conditions (i.e. have absolutely nothing).



**Press release** MSF Holland, 19 April 1992 (in English).

As a result of current difficulties of transporting drugs supplies by land to the victims of the conflict in BiH [Bosnia and Herzegovina], MSF Holland in coordination with IRC and OFDA (Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance), arranged an air-lift of 24 tons of medical supplies which arrived in Sarajevo on 19 April 1992. The medical supplies has been donated by OFDA. These drugs will be distributed to the areas of conflict within the next ten days to be able to sustain emergency surgical operations for the victims of this conflict. Before the conflict MSF-Holland supplied all the 19 Hospitals of BiH. But due to the outbreak of fighting on a wide scale, MSF Holland supplies was critically low and not sufficient to respond to these needs.



*Between December 1991 and April 1992, we were still able to travel around Bosnia, and we made an inventory of the health system in the whole of Bosnia. Bosnia existed out of 404 or 406 Opstina (City councils). Our ambition was to visit every Opstina, so we had two teams, one was visiting the Serbian side and the other team was visiting the South, which was more Croatian. It was limited to Bosnia and Croatia. We had a beautiful map. I learned so much from that. In the map every Opstina was defined by its ethnic composition, based on the latest census a couple of years before. We could exactly see in each Opstina you had for instance 40% Serbs, 30% Croats and 30% Bosnians. So we could also predict where the ethnic cleansing was going to happen, where the fighting was going to happen and where there would be relative calm. In places with 80% or 90% Croats there was no fighting to be expected. So at the moment the war really started we had a beautiful knowledge of where the war was going to be, where the medical shortages were going to be. I think there was nobody in Bosnia who understood the health system as good as we did at that moment.*

*The referendum in the end of January when Bosnia voted in favour of independence was quite an event because the capital, Sarajevo, was disconnected from the outside world for two or three days by Serbians siege around the city. That was an omen of things to come. It was an act of aggression but also a form of protest from the Serbian side: "we are not going to allow the*

*outcome of this referendum to take place". So tensions rose, and on 5 April was the declaration and on the 6th the fighting begun. Another lucky fact was we had ordered the first supply of medicines to come and arrived in Sarajevo in early April, just before the siege. So at the moment the siege started there was only one organisation with a bit of supplies and it was MSF. We were working together with the Institute of Public Health where we were given a warehouse and lots of staff. Within the health system, there were too many doctors, so [there were] a lot of unemployed doctors and it was very easy for us to hire them and to build up. We had a Serbian one, a Croatian one, a Bosnian one. So we could cover also all these areas.*

Wouter Kok, MSF Holland medical coordinator in Sarajevo, Bosnia, December 1991 - September 1992, then various positions in MSF Holland Bosnia desk, September 1992-1996, Interviewed in 2015, (in English).



*We had a strong feeling that things weren't over, that things were going to flare up in Bosnia again. In fact, around February/March '92, trouble was already brewing. So we started to hang around the region. We passed checkpoints controlled by Bosniaks armed with old guns or by Serb militia. It reeked of trouble, things were deteriorating; we were getting word of massacres here and there. It was difficult getting information because Bosnia is a big country.*

Dr Eric Dachy, MSF general coordinator in Belgrad, October 1991 - August 1993, Interviewed in 2000, 2015, (in French)



*When I went to Sarajevo in 1992, to check out MSF Holland's mission, what I saw was a situation of hopelessness, rebellion, but no medical distress. The Dutch were delivering drugs, which later we referred to as a "pizza delivery service". What they were doing was quite good because they were working in collaboration with local committees of Muslims, Jews, Christians. Everything seemed to be working quite well, people were getting along, without any problems, were talking, were coordinating together. So there was contact with Sarajevo's multicultural community which was really reassuring, very uplifting. But the practical use of all of this was still rather debatable. Nobody in Paris was questioning this type of programme, but we were really pleased somebody was doing it because we thought we had better things to be getting on with.*

Dr. Rony Brauman, MSF France President, 1982-1994, MSF France Foundation Research Director from 1994, interviewed in 2000 and 2015 (in French).

**On 19 May 1992, a rocket hit and destroyed an ICRC convoy heading to Sarajevo hospital. Delegate Frédéric Maurice was killed and two other passengers wounded. Despite**



wanting to stay in Sarajevo, on 27 May, the ICRC – in the wake of the tragedy and escalating violence – resolved to remove its delegates. The following week, the European Community withdrew its observers and most journalists left Sarajevo following the death of a photographer hit by sniper fire.

These tragic events served as a wake-up call to the humanitarian organisations in terms of the unreliability of the safety guarantees they could hope to expect from the warring parties.

The MSF Holland team also left Sarajevo and set up operations for several months in Kiseljak, at the border with Croatia, where they resumed their supply programme.



'The ICRC withdraws from Bosnia and Herzegovina,' *Le Monde* (France) 29 May 1992 (in French).

In spite of the death of Frédéric Maurice (aged 38), one of the ICRC's most competent delegates, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) decided to continue its mission in the Bosnian capital for as long as it is able. Frédéric Maurice, who was escorting a convoy transporting 15 tonnes of emergency supplies to the civilian hospital in Sarajevo, was killed by rocket fire targeted at the convoy. Two other delegates sustained mild injuries.

On 22 May, the representatives of the parties to conflict agreed, in Geneva, to respect the humanitarian conventions set down by the Red Cross but, unfortunately, the ICRC has only seen, as it described in a press release issued on the evening of 27 May, that "the horrifying escalation of violence that brought such bloodshed to this Republic has not diminished. In such circumstances, where the most fundamental rights of victims and the most vulnerable people are constantly and blatantly violated, the ICRC is no longer able to continue its humanitarian action and is therefore obliged to temporarily withdraw its delegates from Bosnia and Herzegovina."

This does not mean that the ICRC has washed its hands of providing help to victims. It has decided to convene, again in Geneva, on 30 May, the representatives of the Bosnian government and of the Croat, Muslim and Serb parties, with the intention of negotiating, in detail, an action plan that will allow its delegates to return to Sarajevo. It is important that it receives assurances that the terms of the agreement signed on 22 May will be respected.



*I was supposed to be the international coordinator. There were French in my team. But it was impossible to coordinate the Dutch. They didn't want me to be in charge, they didn't even want my supervision.*

*When the frontlines were organised, I made a suggestion to them: "I'll work with the Serbs and you work with the authorities you're able to be dealing with." They didn't like that at all because the scope of my coordination responsibilities got bigger*

*when the Serbs invaded! They couldn't even go over to the other side anymore. But there was still Sarajevo which made it worthwhile. However, I could have got into Sarajevo too. I went there when they had the evacuation and there was nobody left but the local team. I brought them dialysis fluid for the hospital's dialysis machines, surgical equipment. Afterwards, the Dutch recovered their supply line from Kiseljak which was the gateway into Croatia and which worked, except when the Croat-Bosniak alliance suffered a blow.*

Dr Eric Dachy, MSF general coordinator in Belgrad, October 1991 - August 1993, Interviewed in 2000, 2015, (in French)

## CONDEMNATION OF 'THE HUMANITARIAN ALIBI' AND 'CALL TO ARMS'

**MSF's French section had still not initiated operations in the former Yugoslavia. But its president, Rony Brauman, was nonetheless very present in the media, in which he condemned the escalating violence.**

**He also criticised the humanitarian alibi brandished by the Western states which were flooding the former Yugoslavia with humanitarian aid to conceal their reluctance to impose a political solution to the conflict.**

**On 29 May, invited to RTL radio, he condemned the "cowardice of the European Community" and declared that "what is needed is military intervention". He widely broadcast this message in the French press, which was also echoed in the Belgian press by Alain Destexhe, General Secretary of MSF International. [V3](#)**



**Interview** with Rony Brauman, President of MSF France, by Philippe Caloni, RTL (Luxembourg, Belgium, France), 29 May 1992 (in French).

**Philippe Caloni:** Rony Brauman, hello.

**Rony Brauman:** Hello.

**Philippe Caloni:** So Sarajevo, reading the press headlines, gives more or less this: after two months in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 5,000 dead or missing, while elsewhere it's practically the same thing: 20,000 injured and, if nothing else, 1,200,000 Bosnians forced into exodus. What should we do in cases such as these? You're president of Médecins Sans Frontières, even though I know full well you're not just presi-

dent of Médecins Sans Frontières, but what should be done in cases such as these?

Rony Brauman: Well, in cases such as these we don't do anything.

Philippe Caloni: What is it? Sarajevo is what? An hour and a half by air from Paris?

Rony Brauman: A one-and-a-half-hour flight and a few hours by car and something horrific is happening. For months, humanitarian organisations, MSF, the International Red Cross and others have been trying to intervene, send in aid workers, and get shot at. Yesterday or the day before that, there was one killed and two injured in a deliberate attack when a rocket was fired at their vehicle which was, in theory, supposed to be under Red Cross protection.

Philippe Caloni: Because they knew they were there?

Rony Brauman: Of course they knew they were there, of course they knew, because they were completely pointed out, their convoy had been advertised to the various parties present, and despite all that, they were still attacked. Just like the Médecins Sans Frontières convoy a few months ago when they were rescuing the injured from the town of Vukovar, which was also attacked. And with these multiple, repeated attacks, what we're seeing from the international community is absolutely nothing, zilch, indifference, they're looking the other way. And what I want to say to the people who are calling Médecins Sans Frontières to find out what they can do, how they can take action, what...

Philippe Caloni: ... There's Médecins Sans Frontières and the others too... I mean, everybody else.

Rony Brauman: ... There are the others... And everybody, the public needs to know because it's been going on for a while, we've all been reduced to a state of complete powerlessness. Even when we do have volunteers in the field, when they're supplying drugs, blankets, clothing, food, they are supplying them to places where they're not needed and the places where they're desperately needed they can't manage to get to, and why can't they get there? Because we stop them. They're prepared to take risks but they're not willing to commit total suicide and we stop them.

Philippe Caloni: So Rony Brauman, what needs to be done? Who's being accused? Who's not doing what they should be?

Rony Brauman: The countries of Europe. I believe there's a resignation, a failing, cowardice on the part of the European Community that is verging on atrocity. A few years ago, we declared that war was practically unlawful in Europe and here we are discussing Maastricht, the European single currency...

Philippe Caloni: ... And the common agricultural policy, that's important...

Rony Brauman: ...And the common agricultural policy. Of course, we need that, it's important. But please can they stop nattering on about cereal, bolts, wine, pigeon shooting, when just next door there are people dying and we're not even able to carry out the slightest act of solidarity, to show we're interested in what happens to them. When all this is so dreadfully hypocritical and that's what I came here to say today.

Philippe Caloni: So Rony Brauman, in concrete terms, what do you have to say as president of Médecins Sans Frontières to those who are listening, because there are people who do

listen to RTL in the morning.

Rony Brauman: I want to say that as president of a humanitarian organisation, I want to say that the humanitarian sector has no say in this affair, I want to say that now it's not just a matter of sending in doctors...

Philippe Caloni: ... Ah, you're going over there...

Rony Brauman: ... Of sending drugs. We're stopping, it's over, we can't go on, our people left Sarajevo a few days ago with the European Community, but now we need to go the extra mile if we want to be able to look at ourselves in the mirror tomorrow without burning red from shame, if we want this Europe that claims to uphold human rights, democracy, solidarity, and I entirely agree with this entreaty. If we want this Europe to have the right and dignity to exist, well it needs to stand up, it needs to intervene! Troops need to intervene in Sarajevo so that the hospitals, markets, old people, kids, women, who are systematically targeted now! People need to know that it's them who are being targeted. Just yesterday, the army fired, deliberately, at a market during a truce, leaving several dozen dead, hundreds injured, more horror. So are we going to put up with this at some point in the future in Paris? Are we going to be able to say for much longer that we're in the process of building Europe, that we're building peace, that we're creating a centre of democracy while letting this carnage take place without even batting an eyelid? It's no longer an option.

Philippe Caloni: But Rony Brauman, what are you doing? What are you trying to say? What are you trying to say to President Mitterrand, to Jacques Delors? What needs to be done now in practical terms?

Rony Brauman: That the false pretence of humanitarian and legal action has lasted long enough and that it's military intervention that is needed over there, that we absolutely need to go and protect, by any means we have at our disposal, after all we have arms, we have resources. When Iraq invaded Kuwait, we managed to find the resources necessary...

Philippe Caloni: ... But that was the UN with the US. It won't have escaped you that the United States, the Secretary of State James Baker is extremely concerned by what is happening over there, but apparently not enough to send anyone out there.

Rony Brauman: Listen, I'm telling you that if today we're not capable of reacting, then we have to say goodbye to all these virtuous declarations on the new international order, the right to interfere, the duty to assist, political morality, the establishment of new relations at the global level. It's over. We won't have the right to say anything anymore, because we're presently in the process of standing back and watching carnage, but carnage that isn't a confrontation between opposite tribes...

Philippe Caloni: ... It's the Kurdish problem all over again?

Rony Brauman: Yes, it's the Kurdish problem all over again, because at the end of the day when the Kurds were massacred in 1988 by Saddam Hussein's chemical attacks, when they were then massacred by Saddam Hussein's helicopters, nobody did anything, but when the Kurds crossed over their borders, when they arrived in Turkey and Iran, that's when the international community started to react. Now I want to make an appeal, one that's slightly inflammatory, I want to

say to the Bosniaks and the Croats to leave their borders, to come and invade Italy, Austria, France and Switzerland, to flood our frontiers, and it won't be until then that we can guarantee a properly coordinated international reaction. But so long as, apparently, so long as they don't threaten us directly, we're going to let this massacre continue and I find that totally inexcusable and I think that Europe is in the process of discrediting itself to the rest of the world by letting this carnage persist when it has the material and physical means to stop it.

Philippe Caloni: You sound pretty miserable.

Rony Brauman: Yes, I'm totally outraged, outraged as the head of a humanitarian organisation, outraged as a French citizen and even more outraged as a citizen of Europe.



'Rony Brauman (MSF) launches an appeal for European troops to intervene in Sarajevo,' **Agence France Presse**, 29 May 1992 (in French).

The president of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Dr. Rony Brauman, launched an appeal on Friday asking "Europe to take intervention in Sarajevo by sending troops."

"It cannot go on", cried Dr Brauman on RTL, "we are going to stop because there is a failing and cowardice on the part of the European Community that is verging on atrocity."

"The humanitarian and legal false pretence has lasted long enough and what we need now is military intervention there, because before all these dead and injured, what we're seeing on behalf of the international community is absolutely nothing, zilch, indifference, and they're looking the other way," he said.

"Europe is in the process of discrediting itself to the rest of the world by letting this carnage persist, it's goodbye to our virtuous declarations on the new international order, the right to interfere and the duty to assist," concluded Dr Brauman.



'Carnage on our doorstep.' Rony Brauman interviewed by René Backman, **Le Nouvel Observateur** (France) 4 June 1992 (in French).

For the first time since Médecins sans Frontières was founded twenty years ago, we have decided to withdraw one of our teams from a town at war. The town in question is Sarajevo. We have done so because our work in Sarajevo had become not just difficult and dangerous like in Sri Lanka or Mogadishu, but impossible.

We are up against a deliberate policy of attacks on aid workers, a strategy of terror designed to force witnesses – whether doctors or journalists – to flee. The militia, as we've just seen in the bombing of Sarajevo market, is systematically targeting civilians. It is even opening fire on hospitals as our teams in Split can confirm: the paediatric department there was hit by a salvo of very carefully adjusted mortar shells. Not even the most basic rules of humanity are being respected in this war, especially by the Serbian militia –

responsible for most of the atrocities. Given the conditions, we had no choice but to withdraw.

In fact, humanitarian aid teams have been working in ambiguous conditions in former Yugoslavia for quite some time. They have not been allowed to go where the needs are greatest, only where the needs are minor [...] this is not a third-world country. It is a developed country with properly-equipped hospitals and qualified doctors. So our activity has been mainly symbolic, eventually becoming nothing more than a sort of smoke screen hiding reality, and possibly providing false reassurance to international public opinion and resulting in less vigilance.

Will the embargo that the United Nations has just decided to put in place address provide a response to these problems? We need to wait and see how it is applied before answering that question. But I'm sceptical. Firstly, because experience has taught us that it is always the most vulnerable and destitute who are hardest hit by embargoes and, secondly, because it is likely to generate a surge of cohesion among the population which will make later negotiations more difficult. And lastly, because this decision has come too late and falls far short of the response we might have expected from the international community to such a barbaric conflict. If it had been taken a few months ago, this resolution, combined with a sea blockade to prevent more weapons and munitions from being brought in, might have been effective. It might have saved thousands of lives.

Today, we need to acknowledge the savagery of this war and react accordingly; to stop engaging in empty talk with aid envoys who serve no useful purpose and put measures in place that will provide the civilian population with real protection. In other words, an interposition force sufficiently powerful to be dissuasive and force the fighting to stop, thereby avoiding a Lebanese-style stalemate. It is certainly paradoxical for the head of a humanitarian organisation to be making this kind of proposal. But we have to accept the reality of the situation. And the reality is that humanitarian action has failed in Former Yugoslavia and that Europe has hidden its shameful abdication behind a veil of worthy sentiments. There is such a thing as the geography or the geopolitics of responsibility. We have more responsibility towards what happens on our doorstep than towards what happens on the other side of the world. If we do nothing for Former Yugoslavia, we are even guiltier of failure to assist persons in danger than in Burma, Somalia or Kashmir. Europe proclaims itself to be the universal hub of human rights, democracy and solidarity. It has declared war to be unlawful on its soil. It invokes the right to intervene and talks about humanitarian diplomacy. These virtuous stances will become totally and definitively meaningless if it is incapable of putting an end to the carnage happening on its own doorstep. If Europe intends to limit its actions to regulating dove hunting, the ingredients of camembert and the grading of nuts and bolts, it should stop telling us that this is the dawn of "a new era". Today, I'm tempted to tell the Bosnians to draw lessons from what happened in Iraq and inundate the Italian, Austrian, Hungarian and Greek borders. When the Kurds were massacred in Saddam Hussein's chemical attacks in 1988, and again in the wake of the Gulf war in 1991, no-one took the slightest interest in their plight while they stayed within Iraq's borders.

It is only when they began flooding in their hundreds of thousands into Turkey and Iran, threatening the regional equilibrium, that the world sat up and took notice, finally launching an unprecedented foreign intervention. Today, Europe remains indifferent to the tragedy taking place in Bosnia, as what is happening in Sarajevo is not threatening its equilibrium or disrupting its habits. We are reliving Munich 1938, but this time the sacrifice is human rights and solidarity.



'Impotence' Rony Brauman, President of MSF France, *Le Figaro* (France) 17 June 1992 (in French).

"Shame must be made more shameful by publicising it", according to Karl Marx, and this, albeit with a slightly different objective, is what we are reduced to in the face of the carnage in Former Yugoslavia.

Yet the pictures we received today from Sarajevo and Mostar, or yesterday from Vukovar or Osijek, and that will arrive tomorrow from Kosovo are apparently still not enough to shake Europe out of its stupor. While busily reassessing our compensatory amounts, grading our nuts and bolts and repeating that war is no longer possible on the old continent; our Euro-strategists invoke the ruins of the past and the economy of the future as if they are attempting to distract us from the present.

Yet the present is the ethnic cleansing, to quote the Serbian militia, happening as we speak in the towns and villages of Bosnia-Herzegovina; it is the deliberate bombing of humanitarian convoys and markets and the massacres of civilians. The present is the longest and most intense conflict, the most massive exodus that Europe has known since the end of the Second World War. It is the siege of a town of 400,000 inhabitants on which missiles have rained down every three seconds for weeks now; it is the shelling of hospitals, the powerlessness of European observers turned targets in this killing game.

And lastly, the present is an admission of the failure of humanitarian aid. This failure is not due to the aid workers – the number of victims among them is proof enough of their engagement. Nor is it due to a lack of means – the public, governments and the EEC have all been extremely generous. This failure – and everyone should be made aware of this – is the result of the pitiless brutality of the Serbian militia, acting with total impunity, equipped, trained and informed by the 'Federal Yugoslavian' army. And whereas the open condemnation of this ethnic folly does honour to the numerous Serbs who have risen up against it, the limpness of Europe's reactions, understandable at the start of the conflict, has today become intolerable. It is both the recognition of this failure and the desire to wake Europe from its torpor that have prompted the author of these few lines to remove the white coat of the doctor and don the garments of a citizen. Since the beginning of the war, various embargo measures that do not differentiate between the attackers and the attacked, the victims and the tormentors, have been taken alongside decisions to send in humanitarian aid: another way of sitting on a fence from where everyone is viewed as a

victim of a bloody confrontation between hate-filled tribes. Week after week, while the mass graves on our doorsteps fill up and the war advances, we piously deplore these terrible acts of violence, recall our ambassadors and then rapidly move on to more serious occupations. "How dreadful!" we exclaim distractedly at the sight of bombed out hospitals in Zadar or Sarajevo. But it is not the free handout of a few medicines – in any case stuck on the wrong side of a blockade for weeks now – that the Bosnians and Croats expect of us. It is a sad but true fact that humanitarian aid in Former Yugoslavia is nothing more than a mask for disguising impotence, a mantel for hiding abdication, however brave the actors, with ethics replaced by the aesthetics of physical performance. And grandiose statements about a future "right to intervene" only serve to dissimulate a huge and this time clearly visible step backwards in terms of assuming political responsibility: Europe may not be able to end the civil war in Sri Lanka or Somalia, but it is morally and practically obligated to find the means – all and every means – to loosen the deadly grip in which Bosnia is being held.



'Bosnia: It's not too late to intervene,' Alain Destexhe, General Secretary of MSF international, speaking in a private capacity, *La libre Belgique*, 29 June 1992 (in French).

#### Extract:

Each day brings further death and suffering to Sarajevo and the other Bosnian towns being relentlessly bombed by the Serbian militia.

Until now, the European Community and UN have refused to use force, confident that economic sanctions will be enough to make the militia listen to reason. However, it is clear that over the last three weeks the population's plight has only worsened and there is no sign, other perhaps than the progress of the Serbs, of a negotiated solution, not even for the limited opening of a humanitarian corridor worthy of the name.

From Willy Claes to Jacques Delors, many have said that there is nothing more we can do. Last year, in the wake of the Gulf War, some people were noisily celebrating the new world order and the right of intervention: two concepts buried in the ruins of Sarajevo. Yet Europe has both political and moral responsibility in the Bosnian tragedy.

1. In a way, Bosnia is the European Union's creation. Let's not forget that it was the European Community, on the recommendation of the Badinter Commission, which encouraged the leaders of this republic, where the communities had until then been co-habiting reasonably well, to hold a referendum for self-determination. The results of this referendum (more than 90% of yes votes among Croatian and Muslim voters and a boycott by the Serbs) led to the declaration of independence...and, shortly afterwards, to the declaration of war. We must assume the consequences of our actions. After encouraging independence, the Community can't simply ignore the aggression it has caused.


2. Current humanitarian action, despite the courage and merit of those undertaking it, is largely symbolic and is a derisory response to the fate of the 300,000 inhabitants

trapped in Sarajevo, not to mention Mostar and the other Bosnian towns. For a number of weeks, there has been no real humanitarian space in Bosnia. One of the strengths of humanitarian aid is to recognise its own limits and point up the responsibility of political leaders: in Sarajevo this means protecting hundreds of thousands of people from the bombings by Serbian militia. Humanitarian aid must not serve as a pretext for politicians to wash their hands of Bosnia.

3. 'Military arguments' are essentially a ploy to disguise a total lack of political will. The relief and the number of militia are said to make a military operation impossible. Apparently this would inevitably result in a stalemate. But there is a difference between operations like 'Desert Storm' and one-off actions. Contrary to popular belief, the 'Yugoslavian' army is not conducting partisan warfare. Its method – as seen yesterday in Vukovar and today in Sarajevo – is remote artillery shelling. We heard enough about the merits and accuracy of certain weapons during the Gulf War. There is nothing to say that these 'apprentice Rambo's' who fire on civilians from afar won't crumble at the first sign of resistance. The worst doesn't always happen. We predicted thousands of allied deaths in the sands of Kuwait, if you remember. Of course there are risks, but maybe it's the price to pay for saving lives.

4. Lastly, Europe's honour is at stake. The Maastricht Treaty is essentially founded on the premise that war in Europe is impossible. This idea of European solidarity is dying in the ruins of Sarajevo. With the great Community debate underway, the Yugoslavian tragedy places the notion of European construction under the most critical of spotlights. How will we explain to our children without feeling ashamed that we did nothing to stop the massacres taking place before our very eyes? We can't pretend we didn't know!

Some people may be surprised to hear a member of a charitable organisation speaking like this. But sometimes the 'aid worker' must take a back seat to the European citizen who cannot remain indifferent to this slaughter and silent in the face of political inaction.

 I said to myself: "All this humanitarian aid being put in place, it's a sham, a smoke screen, a means of hiding Europe's political indecision; it is passive and dulcorated acceptance of carnage on European territory. Anyway, why is carnage in Europe less possible than carnage elsewhere?"

I used to be on friendly terms with Philippe Caloni who worked for RTL. I rang him up and said I wanted to talk to him about Yugoslavia, the siege of Sarajevo. I told him: "this humanitarian masquerade can't go on. People are under siege, there's a blockade, they are hostages, and it's not by distributing pizzas to hostages that we'll resolve the problem of hostage-taking". He invited me onto his programme and that's how, spurred by a sort of anger and not sure how to position myself, I found myself saying quite violently: "This isn't the doctor talking; it's the citizen of France, of Europe. We can't allow this blockade – the bombardment of a capital city just down the road – to continue. It's a political problem, not something that can be settled with humanitarian aid. Military forces should be bombing and neutralising the Serbian batteries that are keeping Sarajevo under siege. Then there won't be a need for assistance."

*Assistance is playing into the hands of the assailants. We're witnessing a fascistic attack, a wave of fascism in the heart of Europe and this is intolerable". That's more or less what I think I said. It's probably worth checking...*

*I think this reaction justifies criticism, because I was playing it both ways, in fact. I turn up in the studio with my white coat because I'm president of MSF, but then I take it off in the middle of the interview saying: "That's enough of this masquerade - this is not the president of MSF speaking it is citizen Brauman." I'm not even sure that's exactly what I said – distancing myself like that from humanitarian aid – because I never forget that it's because I'm in humanitarian aid that I'm given the opportunity to speak out in public ! But the fact remains that I exchanged my aid worker's garb for that of the politician, the citizen, the activist. I'm not claiming this was a commendable attitude to take!*

*Today [in 2015], I'm much less enthusiastic about the idea of intervention. Now I see the miracle of a military liberation as much harder to achieve. But at the time, this stance had something judicious about it, and denouncing the European/UN strategy wasn't stupid in itself.*

Dr. Rony Brauman, MSF France President, 1982-1994,  
MSF France Foundation Research Director from 1994,  
interviewed in 2000 and 2015 (in French).

**This 'call to arms' made without prior consultation sparked controversy among the managers of MSF's Belgian and Dutch sections and within the international Council where the debate on the form and substance of 'testimony' was in full swing.**

**Meanwhile, a proposal was made to launch a wide-scale media campaign to mobilise public opinion. In the end, it was never implemented.**



**Minutes** of MSF Belgium's Board of Directors meeting, 9 June 1992 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

The Security Council has voted to deploy UN peacekeepers at Sarajevo airport, but there are still no plans for humanitarian corridors to facilitate access to the hospitals. So far, all we have managed to do is send equipment to Sarajevo hospital via the peacekeepers.

Reginald Moreels tells the board that the International Council had considered issuing a press release on the subject. Some people thought this would just be repeating what others had already said and so unfortunately it came to nothing.

We are in a situation where humanitarian aid is totally powerless.

It is very difficult for aid to achieve anything with all the populations involved in the conflict living in such close proximity to each other.

Anne Krings asks for an opportunity to discuss Rony Brauman's comments on the subject. Reginald Moreels informs her that it is on the agenda of the next meeting and that mention will be made of the fact that one president must not adopt such a clear-cut position when other sections are in the field. This is a code of conduct that must be respected. Two questions are raised all the same: Is it legitimate for a humanitarian aid organisation to call for a military intervention to enable it to provide care? Can humanitarian aid be under military protection? Karim Laouabdia-Sellami points out that only Rony Brauman's comments on an armed intervention were reported in the media, but these comments should be put back in the general context which was not reported.



**Minutes** of MSF Belgium's Board of Directors meeting, 23 June 1992 (in French).

**Extract:**

With regard to the events currently taking place in Former Yugoslavia, Alain Destexhe wishes to make the following proposal to MSF-B: To conduct a wide-scale media campaign to draw attention to the tragedy taking place in Bosnia and Europe's responsibility in the matter. He suggests putting up a large digital billboard in a place where lots of people will see it (e.g. Grand Place in Brussels) with a counter showing the number of deaths and a slogan such as "What's Europe doing?", signed MSF.

Although the idea is tempting, Jean-Pierre Luxen feels that we have no legitimacy with regard to Yugoslavia as we haven't managed to carry out any concrete actions whereas convoys belonging to other organisations have got through. Philippe Autier reminds the Board that two of our people have been injured in Croatia. Alain Destexhe adds that we have been in Croatia since the start of the crisis and are still getting relief through.

For Georges Dallemagne, the crisis is causing a major political problem in Europe. One of MSF's objectives could be to bring an end to the war by mobilising public opinion and putting pressure on the politicians.

Anne Krings ask why we shouldn't do the same thing for Somalia. If it's good for the goose, why not for the gander? Alain Destexhe replies that as citizens our responsibility is different. It's within our power to stop the massacre in Yugoslavia; this is not true for Somalia.

Jan Van Erps considers that it is not MSF's role to call for an armed intervention in Yugoslavia. Alain Destexhe replies that we are not calling for a military intervention; we are urging politicians to face up to their responsibilities.

Pierre Harzé points out that 25 July will be the anniversary of the start of the conflict.

Conclusion: The Board of Directors votes on Alain Destexhe's proposal

For: 3 votes – Against: 2 votes - Abstentions: 3 votes

The Board of Directors tasks the executive with implementing this decision.



**Minutes** of the International Council meeting of 26 June 1992 (in French).

**Extract:**

Yugoslavia:

The Council is informed that the car in which Reginald, Alain, Eric and Gérard were travelling was the target of a deliberate attack and that Reginald has written a letter asking that "this situation be denounced."

Discussion on the comments made by Rony which have caused reactions within the Swiss Board of Directors.

Rony believes that governments are instrumentalising humanitarian aid by using it as a pretext for doing nothing and a cover for the deep cynicism with which European countries view what is happening in Yugoslavia.

For Rony, his stance was a matter of individual conscience, a question of fundamentals and principle.

The international community looked set to take a decision that would be both reassuring and frustrating and a necessarily mediocre consensus.

Operating as a group has its limitations. Sometimes individual initiatives by members of the IC should be allowed to take precedence over institutional positioning.

On the whole, reactions have been positive. Humanitarian aid is rarely criticised. It is important for aid operators to be able to criticise their own action.

Jacques [de Milliano, MSF H GD]: Making pronouncements without consensus must remain exceptional.

Josep [Vargas, president of MSF Spain]: We should adopt a clear position and denounce governments' inaction and hypocrisy.

Doris [Schopper, president, MSF Switzerland]: If we start calling for war, where do we stop?

It's a subject for debate.

For Josep, there is a need to differentiate between personal reactions and an MSF mandate.



**Minutes** of MSF Belgium's Board of Directors meeting, 17 August 1992 (in French).

**Extract:**

3) Alain Destexhe's position on his article on former Yugoslavia

Alain Destexhe explains to the Board of Directors why he published his article.



'Testimony, yes! Politisation du discours de MSF, non !' Politicising MSF's message, no!' **Memo** from Jean-Pierre Luxens, General Director of MSF Belgium, to his Board of Directors, 17 August 1992 (in French).

**Extract:**

As I am not able to attend the debate on 'new témoignage [advocacy]' that I myself asked to be opened, I am requesting that my point of view on this subject be examined.

MSF and témoignage [advocacy], an old debate, and yet... Although we have been (and still are) frustrated by the lack of action taken on Yugoslavia for many reasons independent of MSF, we have been overwhelmed by the wealth and diversity of the pronouncements made by certain MSF sections on this conflict.

But the writers of these texts have mostly pleased themselves. For my part, as a co-opted member of MSF-B and reader of the Belgian and foreign press (including Contact), I feel like I'm witnessing the slow but sure slide of 'humanitarian testimony' towards positioning that is more like political analysis, and this in the name of Médecins Sans Frontières. I refuse to stand by and watch. My remarks are intended to ensure respect for the essential values to which hundreds of co-opted members and thousands of donors adhere.

Political témoignage [advocacy] [...] is a habit that must be dropped for a variety of reasons (even if the media are happy to encourage us in this):

A) I consider it to be very dangerous for the security of field staff, MSF's teams (often the last to be informed, if they ever are!).

Strong positioning always generates a caricature of the conflict environment, with its corollary, the goodies and the baddies!

Without implying that our Charter is the favourite bed-time reading of all parties to all conflicts, I still believe that MSF is perceived as neutral because of two values and symbols, the aid worker and the doctor, who until recent conflicts have always been respected. Our 'interlocuters' will see any comments attempting to analyse a conflict as an infringement of our neutrality and feel cheated.

B) General Assemblies may well be conservative bodies, but they reflect the will of an association's members. It was clear at MSF-B's last General Assembly that, without wishing to over-simplify things, our members want our behaviour in Belgian society (including témoignage [advocacy] and other forms of communication) to reflect our values and concern for the impact of our actions. This message is clear and should be heard once and for all. The will of a General Assembly must be respected. It is the price and the value of a democracy.

Within MSF-B we have accepted the advantages and inconveniences of having a multitude of tendencies and opinions. This wealth (?) of democracy, or at least of associations, makes it difficult to adopt bold political stances without offending one majority or another. So let's take this into account and try to broaden the internal debate before rushing to take a public stance.

C) Perhaps being perceived as 'intellectual' could be considered a way of promoting MSF within Belgian society, but:

- To some people, our comments must seem pretentious: 'Lo and behold', the doctors are not only experts in diplomacy, but in military strategy too! We will have to be extremely receptive and tolerant when EEC or NATO staff start giving us directives on vaccination, the choice of medicines, etc.

- Our legitimacy resides in our action's credibility and in our expertise in our own field of activity. By extending our testimony beyond this, we run the risk of diluting our message.

- If we want MSF to go down in history, this can only be achieved on two conditions by:

- 1) Staying in tune with the field actors who fuel our message and give it its credibility;

- 2) Acknowledging that the effectiveness of our actions is creditable only because we have total mastery of our own albeit limited field. Such is the price of recognition for ICRC and Amnesty International. Of course, we're not looking to resemble either of these, but all the same!

- Our own domain is broad enough and far from fully explored. Why must we have a position on diplomatic and military interventions in Sarajevo, when we haven't even expressed an opinion on the EPI?

D) And then, between you and me, isn't this aspiration a sort of fashion, no doubt right for Parisian society, but not at all suited to Belgium? Does this 'new MSF school of thought' really meet a need at MSF?

MSF is a long-term enterprise. The individuals and the positions they hold are short-term – as is fashion. The danger of wanting to keep up with fashion is that MSF will have to have a point of view on absolutely everything. We'll soon be writing editorials for *La Libre Belgique* on every 'man-bites-dog story' ...

Extract from *Mélancolie Démocratique* by Pascal Bruckner: A modern-day foible; " .... variant: making much intellectual ado about nothing.

Leaping on the slightest incident to give an opinion; having to have one's say on everything, from the top 50 to the weather forecast; becoming a newshound; being less a moral compass than a verbal one.

Difficulties in reconciling the fact of being a member of a humanitarian aid organisation and an individual citizen of a democracy do not justify making pronouncements that are a departure from MSF's positioning.

When we speak out, it is because we are MSF (which is why we are listened to), so we have to respect the rules of the game.

The need to resolve one's own problems of conscience as a citizen does not justify adopting a political stance.

Wanting at all costs to play a moral role will oblige us to gradually adopt a more 'institutionalised' approach so that we can sit at the 'big table' with the influential players. I think that we should be doing just the opposite. We should be working on a more subversive message that raises questions, a message that is less intellectual, but more refreshing and candid, based on real experience (less than 48 hours, if possible, and without replacing AUTHENTIC reactions with well-turned phrases). Bearing witness to particular situations (from places where nobody else goes!) will attract more interest than making pronouncements alongside Bernard Henry Levy and the other 'stars'.

For me, MSF's strength has always been in expressing the cries of the victims. Why stop now?




What I said was: "The hills around Sarajevo should be bombed, war should be declared on the Serb nationalists". We had neither the time nor the inclination to organise a

media campaign. And I'm not at all sure I could have convinced people to organise a press conference. I think that if we had started discussing it between ourselves and then with the other sections, the upshot would have been to say nothing. Saying nothing is not necessarily a bad thing, but at the time there was a sort of need to speak out. There were lots of people asking "how, why?" People were really shocked by that war.

So I employed what I have to admit was my own method: I didn't call many people beforehand. I often wrote my own press-releases to avoid endless discussions, or with just the help of the communication director. In Paris, some people thought I was going a bit too far, but it was generally accepted that when I had something to say, I said it.


For the other sections, so I wouldn't have to go back on my word, I preferred to shock them a bit. There were problems with the Dutch and the Belgians. It was the first time an aid organisation had adopted this kind of stance. It was taken up by the Dutch papers: "MSF's president calls for war to be declared on the Serbs" or something like that. That really stirred things up in Holland because Jacques de Miliano was woken up at home at six in the morning and ordered to explain himself! Jacques, with whom I had a strong but somewhat stormy relationship, was of course furious to find himself in the slightly ridiculous situation of having to answer for a position taken in Paris that had appeared in the Dutch press before he knew anything about it. I would have been furious too in his position.

Dr. Rony Brauman, MSF France President, 1982 - 1994, MSF France Foundation Research Director from 1994, interviewed in 2000 and 2015 (in French).

 I don't blame Rony – during that phase it was almost impossible to do otherwise. A debate was underway inside the movement on whether we were credible to speak out in public when we were not present in the field.


For a lot of people at MSF Holland and MSF Belgium, the answer was no. MSF Holland's Board was OK with the situation. There was a lot of discussion, but they never got to the stage of saying that MSF France should keep quiet or of distancing themselves from MSF France's action. But it is true that MSF France used the fact that other sections were present to voice its own opinions. In other words, it was thanks to MSF Holland's presence in Sarajevo that the French section was able to speak out. Tensions within the movement at the time meant we weren't communicating well between us. The international line was not sufficiently clear, otherwise we would have said: "we carry out the operations, so we do the communication."

Dr Jacques de Milliano, MSF Holland General Director, 1985-1996, interviewed in 2000 and 2015 (in French).

 When Rony was in favour of a military intervention, I agreed with him 100%! But at the different head offices, some people were screaming, "Look out, he's going to disrupt the work of the teams in the field!" On the other hand, it served no useful purpose whatsoever for Rony to say what he did. None

at all. He did it for his own benefit. That's my opinion, even if I shared his views.

Dr Eric Dachy, MSF general coordinator in Belgrad, October 1991 - August 1993, interviewed in 2000, 2015, (in French)

 Rony caused a big international crisis by saying there was no humanitarian solution, that the only solution was military and that there had to be a military intervention. He even advised the refugees to come here, saying: "Yugoslavians, if you stay in Yugoslavia, Europe will keep ignoring you. You need to come here to get a reaction out of Europe ... then we'll start to take you seriously." [He] did that without warning anybody, and he was right to do so. If he had informed the other managers, they would never have authorised it. I agreed with him completely. I never had any problems with this way of doing things. But I remember it caused total uproar in all the sections.

They may well have agreed in theory, but their view was that this wasn't MSF's mandate. MSF should never call for a military intervention. That was the role of other organisations, not ours.

Dr Alain Destexhe, Secretary General of MSF International until 1995, interviewed in 2000 (in French).

**At the end of May, after the UN's departure from Sarajevo, the Secretary General of MSF International suggested a "political" visit to the besieged town by MSF volunteers to demonstrate the movement's refusal to allow this population to be abandoned.**

**In June, the president of MSF Belgium, accompanied by three other MSF volunteers, made a lightening visit during which their car was attacked by snipers. Back in Belgium he told the press that this attack had been intended to force MSF out and put a stop to all humanitarian aid to Sarajevo.**



'Yugoslavia/Sarajevo/Urgent' **Message** from Alain Destexhe, Secretary General of MSF International to the directors of operations of MSF Belgium, France and Holland, 18 May 1992 (in French).

Following the evacuation of most of the UN forces, and after a conversation with Pim de Graaf [MSFH] and the ICRC's Yugoslavia programme manager, here's what I can tell you:

Since the departure of the UN contingent, fighting seems to have started up again in Sarajevo. As you know, the Secretary General's decision to withdraw has been criticised by the Security Council. In any event, resolution 752 adopted on Friday is unlikely to



curb the fighting or, more importantly, the Serbs' ardour. In short, the resolution says that "the International Community should not resign itself and stand ready to intervene as soon as the situation improves". No measures were adopted against Serbia.

When Vukovar happened, it was impossible to intervene because Yugoslavia was a sovereign state. Now Bosnia is recognised as an independent state, but an intervention or tough sanctions on the aggressor (or one of the aggressors) are still not on the agenda. The Gulf war has become a distant memory. The UN's withdrawal is likely to have disastrous consequences for two reasons: there is no superior body to take up the torch (if you remember, it took seven months for the UN to intervene after the failure of the European Community), and the UN's departure is likely to set a precedent for all budding combatants; if the UN does nothing when we attack a state, the way is clear for us to do whatever we want.

Another thing, ICRC is keeping a team of 10 people on site. According to ICRC, one of their teams managed to get from Belgrade to Sarajevo today.

I understand why MSF's teams have pulled out. It's impossible to conduct a distribution programme in these kinds of conditions. But I still think we need to maintain a presence in Sarajevo to show that we refuse to accept a situation whereby the UN and the rest of the world abandon the civilian population of Sarajevo. Obviously there are not many courses of action open to us. However, I propose sending a 'political mission' out for a few days (the situation is likely to change rapidly), made up of volunteers from our head offices who will try and get to Sarajevo.



'Reginald Moreels on his lightning mission to Sarajevo,' Eddy Surmont, *Le Soir* (Belgium) 30 June 1992 (in French).

You are president of Médecins Sans Frontières and you're just back from a lightning trip to Sarajevo. Is it true that Serbian snipers laid in wait until MSF's vehicle was leaving the walls of the Bosnian capital and then deliberately fired on it?

- It was a well-planned attack by the Serbs. We had just driven past Sarajevo airport with a column of vehicles headed by General McKenzie, commander of the UN peacekeepers. On one side of the road there were snipers and on the other a machine-gun nest. The shooting started on both sides at once.

You and your companions were unharmed...

- Not quite. General McKenzie had lent me his bullet-proof vest. I had hung it up against the right-hand side window of our jeep which was a right-hand drive vehicle left over from an MSF mission in Iraq. Our attackers didn't know this and so they first aimed for the man in the front left seat, presuming he was the driver. Our French colleague, François Guyaux, was grazed by a bullet. The next target was our driver, Gérard Vandriessche. He was shot in the hand and fell forward onto his steering wheel in shock. I thought he was dead. Miraculously, our coordinator in Belgrade, Eric Dachy, and I were not injured.

Why did the Serbs attack MSF?

- By killing [Frédéric Maurice] a short while ago, they managed to get the Red Cross to pull out. By trying to kill us, they were trying to do two things: get MSF to pull out too and put a stop to all humanitarian aid in Sarajevo.

Are we still getting supplies through to Sarajevo?

- General McKenzie promised me that medical materials intended for MSF's teams in Sarajevo would be taken through once a week in one of the armoured peacekeeping vehicles. With the same method, food supplies provided by the High Commission for Refugees should also get through. There is no way of organising convoys to the Bosnian capital at the moment.

What kind of conditions are MSF's teams working in inside the besieged city of Sarajevo? Are there enough personnel and medical materials?

- Our teams in Sarajevo are made up of young Serbian, Bosnian and Muslim idealists. They work together in perfect harmony. Sarajevo has a magnificent hospital with highly-qualified personnel. But the three-month siege and the daily arrival of large numbers of people seriously injured in the intensive bombardment mean we will soon be completely out of medical materials and medicines.

Is the civilian population of Sarajevo suffering from famine? Is there a danger of epidemics?

- We can't call it famine, as such. More like an excessive imbalance in nutrition. People are living off their natural reserves and mainly eat bread and onions. This clearly can't go on much longer. To my great surprise, there are no epidemics in the city.

What do you see as the solution to all this? (Editor's note: This interview was carried out before the intervention by the French president.)

- I hope that diplomacy at the highest possible level will able – without concessions – to put an end to this ethnic hatred which is already completely out of hand and getting stronger by the day.



*I can still see Reginald Moraels, the president of MSF Belgium, coming back from Sarajevo and refusing to call for a military intervention. He was addressing the whole media because he had just got back, and all he said was, "It's just not right what's happening over there, it's scandalous, it's not possible. We have to help those people." A 'neither one thing nor the other' type message, a bit insipid, which I didn't think was clear at the time and still don't today.*

Dr Alain Destexhe, Secretary General of MSF International until 1995, interviewed in 2000 (in French).

**On 28 June, the French president, François Mitterrand, paid a surprise visit to the besieged city of Sarajevo, accompanied by the Secretary of State for Humanitarian Action, Bernard Kouchner<sup>3</sup>, who had organised the operation. In a press conference, the president emphasised the purely humanitarian nature of his visit.**



'Mr Mitterrand visits Sarajevo,' *Le Monde* (France), 30 June 1992 (in French).

#### Extract:

It's all in the timing: an anniversary – seventy-eight years to the day since the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand – and a crucial moment in the siege of the Bosnian city. On Sunday 28 June, Sarajevo had no electricity and was preparing to share out the last of its bread supply. Imprisoned by its mountains and *its maquis*, under threat of famine and epidemics, the city had given up praying for a miracle, its last hope of a humanitarian corridor fading as Serbian armed forces continued to shell Sarajevo airport day after day.

It's all in the timing. Twenty-four hours after the European summit in Lisbon, twenty-four hours after the Security Council met in New York and voted in favour of using military force to protect Sarajevo airport, forty-eight hours since the expiry of the UN's ultimatum to Belgrade, François Mitterrand announced that he simply wanted to "open a door", "to see, listen, bear witness", in the true humanitarian tradition and in one of those spectacular displays of gall in which Bernard Kouchner had encouraged him [...].

"The people of Sarajevo are truly prisoners, victims of murderous attacks. I feel an overpowering sense of solidarity with them", said François Mitterrand, during a press conference. "I believe in the power of symbolic action", he emphasised, adding that he hoped to "spur the world's conscience to come to the aid this population in danger. [...] What is happening here is not acceptable. It has gone too far. I hope that an amicable agreement will be reached to allow humanitarian aid to transit through the airport, and I'm calling on all the parties involved to make this possible", continued the president [...] before adding, "We are not declaring war on anyone. France is not the enemy of any of the Republics in this region." As the sixth convoy sent out by Médecins du Monde and Pharmaciens sans Frontières – five lorries loaded with tonnes of foodstuffs and medicines – arrived in Sarajevo on Sunday, President Mitterrand announced that two military cargo planes had just taken off from Paris en route for the Bosnian capital [...]. Wearing a bullet-proof vest, the head of state was forced to switch to a military helicopter, the only one still intact, and fly to Split, as the wing of the presidential jet, a Falcon 900, was damaged as it taxied into position by a Serbian vehicle that was deliberately driven into it.

**In July, with 70% of Bosnia under the control of the Bosnian Serbs, MSF Holland and MSF Belgium publically announced that they would be flying aid into the Bosnian capital, despite the bombings.**

**In an article published in late July in the Dutch press, Jacques de Milliano, then general director of MSF Holland, characterised the use of humanitarian aid as a smoke-screen for the lack of political action and advocated the use of force to get the belligerents in the former Yugoslavia to agree to a ceasefire.**



'Médecins Sans Frontières charts three planes for Sarajevo,' **Press release** MSF B/F/H, 2 July 1992 (in French).

Médecins Sans Frontières is sending three planes to Sarajevo. The first is leaving from Amsterdam today, loaded with 1.5 tonnes of medicines and surgical supplies, and will make an overnight stop in Zagreb. The second will leave tomorrow at 9am and fly straight to Sarajevo, carrying 2.7 tonnes of supplies. The third plane, transporting 2.7 tonnes, will leave on Monday.

United Nations forces will provide protection for these supplies between the airport and Sarajevo hospital.

35 tonnes of medical and surgical equipment are currently being stored in a warehouse at Amsterdam airport, waiting to be flown to Sarajevo as soon as we find more planes.

Médecins Sans Frontières' team at Sarajevo's civilian hospital has evaluated the medical needs and requested the supplies transported in these planes. They will be used to provide care and treatment for the very large numbers of wounded in the hospitals.

Médecins Sans Frontières has been working in Sarajevo since January this year, but was forced to evacuate its expatriate staff in May.



'Médecins sans Frontières sends more aid to Sarajevo,' **MSF press release**, 17 July 1992 (in French).

The Belgian government is funding Médecins Sans Frontières to transport emergency supplies to the besieged population of Sarajevo. Three C130 planes will ensure flights between Brussels and the Bosnian capital.

MSF's team on site has identified the needs with the managers of the central hospital, Bosnia-Herzegovina's Ministry of Health and HCR. The supplies will be made up exclusively of medicines and surgical equipment.

MSF's team will distribute the supplies directly at Sarajevo's central hospital, in close collaboration with UNPROFOR and HCR representatives to make sure the donations reach the beneficiaries safely.

The first plane will leave Brussels (Melsbroek) for Sarajevo at 8am, carrying 15 tonnes of supplies. This C130 will then provide an air bridge between Zagreb and Sarajevo until 30 July.

3. Co-founder of Médecins Sans Frontières, Bernard Kouchner left the organisation in 1979

The second plane is scheduled to leave on 25 July. MSF has been working in Sarajevo since January 1992. Two other support teams are based in Zagreb and Belgrade respectively.

The organisation has already sent several planes to Former Yugoslavia.



“Peace must be achieved by force” - de Milliano fears thousands of Yugoslavians will die’ by Hanneke de Witt, *Parool* (The Netherlands) 31 July 1992 (in Dutch).

**Extract:**

“Force must be used to pressure the warring parties in Yugoslavia to cease the fighting. This war must end before winter sets in, otherwise thousands will die from the cold.” Jacques de Milliano, Director of MSF Holland, returned yesterday from Geneva, where he had attended the UN Conference on Yugoslavian Refugees. He was surprised that the participating nations had translated their collective indignation into aid and not – as he had hoped – into political decisiveness. During the conference, the participating nations pledged over 230 million guilders to the High Commissioner for Refugees. “That may sound good enough,” De Milliano says, “but the provision of aid may never serve as an alibi for shunning political responsibility. The provision of aid must not be detached from the obligation to send a clear signal to the warring parties that military action will be taken if they do not end their war.”

To illustrate ‘how it should not be done’, De Milliano refers to Somalia where, he says, a lightly armed UN peacekeeping force should have been stationed eighteen months ago.

“Then the conflict would not have been able to macerate the entire country the way it has, and the thousands of people who have since died would still be alive.”

“It is absurd,” he continues, “that aid workers there need to recruit armed men – who themselves are involved in the conflict – because they would otherwise be unable to do their work! Surely that is the responsibility of the UN; what is otherwise the authority of the organisation?”

In Somalia, aid workers risk being shot, in Bosnia-Herzegovina they are snipers’ direct targets. “They intentionally fire at Red Cross ambulances and our organisation’s equipment,” says De Milliano, who was in Sarajevo last week.

“Doctors in Sarajevo can tell from the injuries suffered by the snipers’ victims exactly where in the city they were hit. Particular snipers always aim for the spine, others always aim for the head – that’s a given.”

De Milliano describes it as a “very strange experience to live in a city where, on the one hand you run the risk of more or less accidentally being hit by grenades while at the same time snipers have you directly targeted.”

“People live in air-raid shelters, but they can’t stay there continuously. Children need to go outside sometimes – and then that kiddie on his bike gets killed by sniper fire.”

The UN force in Sarajevo and other cities have given the war a more ‘human face’ – if you can call it that. Food and medicines can be distributed now.

“But we must not let that appease our conscience,” says De Milliano. “The hospital I slept in was hit by grenades three times on Saturday. The destruction continues, and unless the UN and European nations impose clear demands and corresponding deadlines, city after city will be destroyed.”

De Milliano believes it paramount that aid given to refugees from former Yugoslavia must be provided on a ‘temporary’ basis. “What is needed is not permanent support but emergency aid for a period during which the war is ended under pressure from the international community.”

During that short period, De Milliano explains, countries should open their borders very liberally. The pressure of refugees will convince governments even more of the need to exert pressure on the parties concerned to lay down their arms.

With the exception of Germany the nations participating in the UN conference chose for the alternative – to place refugees in safe zones in their country as far as possible. De Milliano does not agree. “People get forgotten once you put them in camps. Look at the Palestinians, who have been living in camps for 45 years now.”

Neither does De Milliano share the view that – because the situation is so complicated – a widespread UN force would be unable to enforce peace in former Yugoslavia. “If there is something you do not want to do no matter what, you will always be able to find an excuse. What the international community should say is: this is unacceptable – this ethnic cleansing of regions, this murdering, this destruction of cities.”

## DENOUNCING ETHNIC CLEANSING AND CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

**The ethnic cleansing campaign conducted by Bosnian-Serbian militia in Muslim towns and villages in the east of Bosnia intensified.**

**On 12 July, despite numerous demands by western governments for a cease-fire, the Gorazde enclave, to which MSF had attempted in vain to gain access, was still besieged and under attack.**



‘Serbs assaulting Last Stronghold in Bosnia’s East,’ John. F. Burns, *The New York Times* (USA) 12 July 1992 (in English).

**Extract:**

Four days after the leaders of seven major industrial democracies demanded an end to Serbian military offensives in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbian nationalist forces today began a

major assault on the last big Muslim-controlled town in eastern Bosnia....

With the capture of Gorazde, where 50,000 people are under siege, Serbian forces would be free to concentrate attacks here on Sarajevo, the capital. Bosnian forces here are being weakened daily by diminishing supplies of ammunition in their attempt to withstand shelling and the Serbian siege. [...]

Except for Sarajevo, no Bosnian town has faced as bleak a situation as Gorazde, where 50,000 people – most Muslims, 23,000 of them refugees from previous Serbian attacks elsewhere in eastern Bosnia – have been surrounded and cut off from supplies for more than three months.

Amateur radio operators who have been the only link with the outside world say that Gorazde's people have been eating grass, that 15 children a day are dying of malnutrition and other diseases and that surgery has been carried out without anesthesia. Maj. Sefer Halilovic, the Government's military commander, said the Serbian forces moved columns of heavy armor toward Gorazde over a 48-hour period and attacked at dawn today from three sides. An amateur radio operator's report quoted in a Sarajevo broadcast called the situation after a six-hour bombardment "hellish," with much of the town burning from shells, and heavy casualties taken by the town's defenders. Top Government officials said they doubted that the defenders could last more than a day or two before Gorazde, like every other Muslim town in eastern Bosnia, fell to the Serbs. [...]

Major Halilovic, the army commander, said the Serbian units that had converged on Gorazde included armored reinforcements from a Yugoslav Army corps based at Uzice, in south-western Serbia. Uzice has been a staging post by the Serbian paramilitary groups that have been responsible for many attacks in the Drina River valley. Major Halilovic said intelligence reports from the Gorazde area indicated that the paramilitary forces, including a widely feared group, the White Eagles, had been involved there.[...] Accounts from witnesses have told of the paramilitary groups' torturing and killing thousands of Muslims in the drive to "cleanse" the region for exclusive Serbian habitation.

At dusk tonight, Gorazde was said to be facing 40 Serbian tanks, 40 mobile anti-aircraft guns and an array of multiple-rocket launchers, as well as thousands of fighters. It now seems likely to fall like all the other Muslim towns in a 125-mile-long stretch of eastern Bosnia bordering Serbia.

Captured county centers like Zvornik, Bratunac, Vlasenica, Srebrenica, Visegrad, Rogatica, Cajnice and Foca are mostly ghost towns now, with their Muslim populations either dead, in one of the detention camps where 100,000 Muslims are said to be held, or among the tide of refugees. Many of the refugees reach Sarajevo, bringing with them accounts of fresh atrocities. Last month, two trucks from the French group Doctors Without Borders tried to reach Gorazde. They were turned back by Serbian commanders.

**For months, information had been circulating about the existence of concentration camps where Bosnian**

**prisoners were starved and tortured. On 2 August, this information was confirmed by the journalist, Roy Gutman, in several US media outlets.**



'Freed prisoners tell of Serbian concentration camps' Roy Gutman, *Newsday*; *New York Times service*; *Los Angeles Times service*; *AP*, (USA) 2 August 1992 ( in English).

#### **Extract:**

The Serb conquerors of northern Bosnia have established two concentration camps in which more than 1,000 civilians have been executed or starved and thousands more are being held until they die, according to two recently released prisoners. The testimony of the two survivors appeared to be the first eyewitness accounts of what international human rights agencies fear may be systematic slaughter conducted on a huge scale.

Bosnian Muslims and Croats say that the Serb nationalists battling the independent Bosnian government run 45 concentration camps holding at least 70,000 people. Serbs say about 40,000 of their people are currently jailed in Muslim and Croat camps.

An Associated Press visit to the Manjaca camp near Banja Luka earlier this month found the 2,300 prisoners in reasonably good condition. But neither the Red Cross nor journalists have been permitted to visit most of the camps. In one concentration camp, a former iron-mining complex at Omarska in northwest Bosnia, more than 1,000 Muslim and Croat civilians were held in metal cages, without sanitation, adequate food, exercise or access to the outside world, according to a former prisoner who asked to be identified only as "Meho."

The prisoners at the camp, he said, include the entire political and cultural elite of the city of Prijedor. Armed Serbian guards executed prisoners in groups of 10 to 15 every few days, he said. "They would take them to a nearby lake. You'd hear a volley of rifles. And they'd never come back," said Meho.

"I think if these places are not death camps, we might have access to them," said Pierre Andre Conod, head of the International Committee of the Red Cross delegation in Zagreb, which oversees conditions in northern Bosnia. "They'd have reason to show them to us if the conditions are acceptable."

The Red Cross has gained access twice to what Bosnian Serbs have called a prisoner-of-war camp in Manjaca. Serbs, who claim the Bosnian region as their own, describe the policy of expelling Muslims and Roman Catholic Croats as ethnic cleansing; reports by the two survivors suggest that this is a euphemism for a campaign of atrocity and brutal deportation at best. What is involved is nothing less than the expulsion of non-Serbs from regions of Bosnia that are contiguous to Serbia and Serbian-occupied areas of Croatia.

The testimony to the practice is widespread and poignant. In some places, refugees say, posters urged non-Serbs to leave. In other places attacks came with no warning – just raids, arson and executions. In cities like Sarajevo, Tuzla, Gorazde, Bihac and Mostar, the Serb forces laid siege with mortar and artillery shelling. With such tactics they were able to drive

out 90,000 of Mostar's 120,000 people. In smaller communities, the terror has reportedly been less technological but equally brutal, with men shot and maimed, houses and barns burned.

According to local officials and United Nations observers, the Serbs have made their aim clear: They want to relocate 300,000 Muslim Bosnians who compose more than 80 percent of the population of northwestern Bosnia – an area known as the Bosanska Krajina – and replace them with Serbs. "They are very straightforward about it," said Major Helge Ringdal, the Norwegian head of the area's U.N. observer force. "They simply introduced us to it as their goal. They said they want to clear the Muslims out of the Bosanska Krajina, move them to an area around Sarajevo, and move 150,000 Serbs from that area up here." [...] Last week, the U.N. high commissioner for refugees issued a report quoting a guard at Omarska as telling a U.N. monitor that the authorities planned to kill the prisoners at Omarska by exposing them to the elements. "We won't waste our bullets on them. They have no roof. There is sun and rain, cold nights, and beatings two times a day. We give them no food and no water. They will starve like animals," the commission said in an emergency report published last week in Geneva in conjunction with a special conference on Bosnian refugees.

**On 13 August, the United Nations Security Council adopted the resolution n°770 authorising the use of force if necessary to secure the safe delivery of foodstuffs and medicines within Bosnia and demanded access for humanitarian aid organisations to the detention camps.**



'Conflict in the Balkans; U.N council votes to support force in assisting Bosnia' by Paul Lewis, *The New York Times* (USA), 14 August 1992 (in English).

#### Extract:

The United Nations Security Council voted overwhelmingly today to allow the use of military force if necessary to insure that supplies of food and medicine reach civilians in Sarajevo and other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The resolution, supported by 12 of the Council's 15 members, with China, India and Zimbabwe abstaining, says countries may now take "all necessary measures" to assure that relief supplies get through – a phrase similar to that used to authorize the Persian Gulf war and which is understood to include military action. The resolution does not say which countries may take such military action, although it makes clear that any force must be aimed at speeding up delivery of aid "in coordination with the United Nations" and not at ending the civil war under way in the former Yugoslav republic.

So far, the United States and its European allies have not announced any plans to make use of the Security Council's authorization to send military forces into Bosnia and Herzegovina, although officials say contingency planning is

under way. And all these countries have made clear that they are reluctant to commit ground forces to what many experts warn could prove a difficult and dangerous operation.

The dangers became ever more apparent today when snipers firing on a convoy carrying Prime Minister Milan Panic of Yugoslavia killed a producer for ABC News. The new resolution says countries may take such military action either "nationally or through regional agencies and arrangements" – language that would allow the formation of an American-led coalition similar to that which fought the Gulf War, or alternatively to permit joint action by the NATO powers or members of the Western European Union.

And it demands that the International Committee of the Red Cross and other aid organizations immediately be given "unimpeded and continuous access" to all prison camps and detention centers in Bosnia and Herzegovina and that inmates receive "adequate food, shelter and medical care."

**On late August, an international MSF team, including two members of MSF France's Board of Directors, visited Bosnia to assess the situation in these camps and identify potential interventions. However, MSF France decided not to work in the camps which were, at that time, open, because the "medical potential [was] comparable to [that found in western countries] despite the destruction."**

Within the MSF movement, the debate about the humanitarian alibi dilemma continued. MSF questioned its own operations and what some people saw as the risk of unintentionally playing into the hands of the Bosnian Serb regime and its ethnic cleansing policy.

**In the public debate, Rony Brauman, president of MSF France, fiercely criticised the French president's 'humanitarian visit' to Sarajevo in June: "We witnessed a head of state go into Sarajevo and a president of the Red Cross come out."**



*Minutes* of MSF France's board meeting on 28 August 1992 (in French).

#### Extract:

Guy [Hermet] and Esmeralda [Luciulli] didn't actually go to the camps where the poor treatment was said by the press to be taking place. They felt that their visit could add nothing to what was already known, especially as some of these camps are now open to journalists and aid organisations.

Esmeralda thinks that by working in these camps, MSF would run the risk of being instrumentalised.

Questions are raised about the ethical risks of being seen to endorse ethnic cleansing and the serious security problems that this kind of intervention in Bosnia would cause.

In response to a question from the assembly on the evaluation carried out by WHO, Esmeralda explains that the people do not present any specific pathologies calling for a medical

intervention, but they're beginning to get fed up with being the subject of exploratory missions that can't tell us any more than we already know.

Frédéric Laffont doesn't understand why MSF has kept silent about the situation in Yugoslavia over the last few months and on the humanitarian aid issue in general.

Rony Brauman feels that, with the Yugoslavian crisis, humanitarian aid has met its limits. In this particular case, he sees remaining silent as being the right approach as it leaves us time for serious reflection into the events and stops us falling into the trap of using humanitarian aid for partisan purposes.



'Former Yugoslavia: the waste,' Guy Hermet, member of the Board of Directors Esmeralda Luciolli, programme manager for MSF France, **Mes-sages** (MSF France's in-house newsletter, also distributed to 100 journalists) n°53 September 1992 (in French).

#### Extract:

We did another exploratory mission in Yugoslavia to see how the general situation had developed, identify any problems with the management of refugees and gather information on the detention camps. This mission, conducted jointly with a member of MSF Holland's Board of Directors and the field teams, took us to Croatia and Serbia. We met a lot of managers (HCR, UNPROFOR and health managers), refugees and journalists and visited some refugee camps. As far as the reception of the refugees is concerned, both Croatia and Serbia have healthcare provision capabilities similar to our own. More than 95% of refugees are living with host families. The rare camps are well organised and provide perfectly satisfactory basic services. The only problem is the lack of financial resources, especially for providing accommodation over the winter. This type of aid does not fall within the remit of NGOs.

Refugees and other sources in the camps confirm the existence of places of detention which, although not extermination camps as has been claimed, is still unacceptable. Summary executions, ill-treatment and the arbitrary detention of civilians are common practice at all stages of ethnic cleansing.

From a humanitarian point of view, the dilemma is whether to provide assistance to a country with medical potential comparable to our own, despite the destruction.

And it is also whether to serve as a smoke screen for the political cowardice of European governments, take part in new tourist trips of horror in the camps, put ourselves in serious physical danger in order merely to preside over uncontrollable distributions of medicines or protect injured people at risk of dying by becoming a health service for torturers and executioners. But at the same time, the risks we run elsewhere are even more formidable and the humanitaro-political cocktail is equally worrying. "Former Yugoslavia" also fascinates 'donors' here, yet MSF France pulled out five months ago, leaving the Dutch and Belgian teams in the field. Ignoring the albeit selective emotion is a problem. But

returning to Former Yugoslavia means being willing to maintain a continuous presence – and not just when it is in the media spotlight - and carrying out the sort of interventions we don't usually implement.



'The aid worker, I tell you, or the suitcase, the coffin and the ambulance,' Rony Brauman, president of MSF France, **Télérama** (France), 9 September 1992 (in French).

Born in 1989, in the ruins of the Berlin wall, the New World Order will have lived and died like roses in the spring, blossoming in the mountains of Kurdistan and cut down by Serbian artillery in Vukovar, Ossijek and Sarajevo, in plain sight of an international community mesmerised but otherwise untroubled by the contrast between its virtuous statements of yesterday and its cynicism of today.

For the invaded Kuwait and its oil wells, the aggressor was struck down by the Sword of Justice. But for dismembered Bosnia and its picturesque mosques, there has only been a "Biscuits and IV Storm". For one, the strong arm of justice, for the other, pity and humanitarian aid.

Well, we will say, systems change, the world moves on, but war and lies remain. There's nothing very new about that, except for those who had been naïve enough to believe that the end of the cold war meant that war of any kind would be relegated to the history books. And after all, we will add, humanitarian aid is the daughter of violence, flowering on its ruins. So let's just swallow our indignation of circumstance and carry on. Which is exactly what Médecins Sans Frontières is doing: carrying on with its action in the field.

Except that there is, in fact, something new under the sun of old Europe, and it concerns not only humanitarian 'activists', but the citizens we all are – or should be. I'm referring to the role played by the 'humanitarian of state' in dealing with conflicts. When President François Mitterrand entered a bombed-out Sarajevo, many of us hailed the head of state's panache and courage, both physical and political. At last an end to the strategy of hiding under the covers, we heard folks say, especially in humanitarian organisations, after months of procrastinating and faint-hearted legalism. The state of Bosnia-Herzegovina, already recognised by the Twelve, thus entered *de facto* into international political life thanks to this visit by one elected president to another elected president. A nation under attack was at last going to receive the support of another nation, whose tradition, if not its history, aligns it more readily with the besieged than the attackers.

But those who hoped that the purpose of this trip was to loosen the lethal grip on the population of Sarajevo were rapidly disillusioned. The real agenda was to get the humanitarian machinery working again by reopening the capital's airport to allow foodstuffs and medicines to be brought in. There was of course no doubt about the usefulness of this given the deadly siege underway, but questions about the organised crime planned by the government in Belgrade and executed by the so-called Yugoslavia army, the business of terror and systematic destruction conducted by the Serbian militia, were evidently unwelcome – and unrelated to the

reasons for this visit. We witnessed a head of state go into Sarajevo and a president of the Red Cross come out. While the corridors were being built, the slaughter would be allowed to continue.

And so the curtains went up on the third act of this conflict or, more precisely, its performance on the French stage. Let's recap.

Act one: in the eyes of the press and public opinion, there are only fratricidal battles, undifferentiated slaughter and the brutality of another age. We refuse to name an aggressor, we reaffirm the existence of historic alliances and we brandish the spectre of the First World War to discourage any interventionist leanings. This is the infra-political phase.

Act two: public opinion turns, suddenly becoming aware of the existence of an aggressor and the victims of aggression. The turning point is the bombing of Sarajevo market and the unbearable pictures of civilians, women and children, deliberately massacred. We then learn that an ethnic cleansing campaign is underway. Politics return to centre stage. However, we should take note of the fact that, among our leaders, only Bernard Kouchner has the courage to speak out. Act three: humanitarian aid becomes the main character, the focus of everybody's attention. Again no distinctions are made in the violence and the situation is reduced to a face-to-face between humanitarian convoys and militia of all kinds, united by the same relentless determination to self-destruct.

Under the bombs and snipers' bullets, the entire population of Sarajevo will either die or leave, but never will it be said that we lacked a single IV bottle.

Thus politics barely put in an appearance before being hurried off the stage and replaced by an enterprise which, in this Olympic year, is quite rightly endowed with the virtues of performance and courage – the delivering of relief. And, as if to consolidate the position further, we discover that the Bosnians are far from little angels, that they take hostages, engage in torture and, let's face it, even if they haven't opened any concentration camps yet, they might well do so tomorrow... And finally, we remark that the besieged population is engaging in a sort of 'ends justify the means' strategy, seeking to prompt an international intervention by firing on the convoys that are bringing them supplies. In conditions such as these, it is hard not to find ourselves back at the starting position of ethnic hatred, tribal massacres and everyone being tarred with the same brush.

Indeed, this is what we can see taking shape as the still-born republic of Bosnia is cut to pieces. As the ideal of Good cannot be divided up, a share-out is only possible between victims of all kinds – and tormentors – of all parties. And if the balance is not reached eloquently enough, we are quick to use History as a witness for the prosecution.

But in this case, before adopting resolution 688 in the wake of the Gulf War and setting the gigantic and life-saving 'Provide Comfort' machinery into motion, we should have reminded the Kurds, under fire from Saddam Hussein, of their role in the Armenian genocide. Similarly, before dashing off to patrol the skies of Iraq, we should have asked the Shi'ites, crushed under the repression of Baghdad for a year and a half, what their intentions were on matters of Human Rights.

Too long blinded by the slogan of "just struggles", the senti-

ment of justice has been lost, to be gradually replaced by the more ambiguous sentiment of compassion. The messianic ideologies have disappeared, which is no bad thing. But politics are fading along with them, replaced by a vision that is both metaphysical: rejecting the forces of Evil, and technocratic: the reign of the "experts", depriving us of opportunities for public debate and collective initiative. It is the first of these two registers that was used to support the Gulf War, whereas immoderate use of the second explains the rejection – hopefully temporary – of Maastricht's Europe. The fact remains that the emergence at the very heart of Europe of a state founded on racial supremacy, and the clear renouncement of any attempt to contain the situation reflect a distressing image of ourselves: that of cowardice disguised as charitable activism and draped in the mantle of political realism. A sad picture for anyone with a different vision of politics and humanitarian aid.



'Humanitarianism, the modern word for cowardice,' Rony Brauman, President of MSF France, *Rebonds, Libération* (France) 9 September 1992 (in French).

François Mitterrand's journey to Sarajevo was a breath of fresh air to everyone who was outraged by Europe's impotence faced with the carnage in Bosnia. We believed that political determination would chase away the temptation of maintaining the status quo, we imagined that first France and then, perhaps, Europe, would finally put a stop to a process of territorial conquest based on a strategy of racial hegemony. But we quickly became disenchanted. The people of Sarajevo, full of hope, had cheered the arrival of a head of state. The man they saw leave was more akin to the head of a humanitarian organisation. They were waiting to be freed from the stranglehold that was slowly killing them, and instead were promised that bandages were on their way. As promised, help duly arrived even as the bombardments continued, and it was useful.

But humanitarian policy has its limits, as we saw simultaneously in the Sarajevo basin and on the heights of Mount Lebanon. Let's recall what happened.

In 1989, when Syria entered the final stage of its conquest of Lebanon by shelling Christian neighbourhoods in Beirut, France decided to remind the world of its special relationship with its historical godchild: as a result, it sent in a number of gunboats, hastily changed into hospital ships, and brought back around 100 patients – 50% Christians and 50% Muslims. Three years later, encouraged by France and the EEC and in the shadow of the Syrian tanks, 'elections' were held and made Lebanon's absorption by its neighbour official – in practice, a process of annexation, now foiled by the Lebanese, which did not seem to trouble the high priests of the New World Order. For a time, the morality of emergency action was politically motivated: the injured were of no interest except in relation to their ideological significance. Transformed by states into the politics of the ambulance, it has become the screen behind which people modestly hide impotence or abandonment.

While the Balkans were "not worth the bones of a single

Pomeranian grenadier” for Bismarck, for François, George, John and the others, peace at home was certainly worth the few first-aid workers who worked courageously to fulfil their mission. But nothing more. Meanwhile, in the background, the first racial state in Europe since the 3rd Reich was being built on our stacks of medicines and humanitarian convoys, now that the process of ethnic cleansing – planned, announced and then implemented with no real opposition from a European community that had nonetheless been created, as Alain Finkelkraut tirelessly reminded people, on rejecting such practices – was almost complete.

The apprentice Führers and budding caudillos could already learn a first lesson from Lebanon and Bosnia: it was open season and, provided the prey did not have any hidden oil reserves or other strategic resources in its possession, no holds were barred... as long as the humanitarian convoys, the new stimulants administered via the television, were allowed to get through. And if they fancied the idea of camps and ghettos reappearing in Europe, they would not face any major problems provided they just let us get on with filling up the medicine cabinet and the pantry.

Hannah Arendt has shown how, in always wanting to soften the blow, in always seeking moderation and compromise, political prudence – even if it calls itself realism – ultimately comes down to cowardice. It is easy to understand what a sad observation this is for all those who still have a different view of humanitarianism and politics: humanitarianism is gradually becoming the modern word for cowardice or abandonment.



*It was Rony who invented the term ‘alibi’ but it has been interpreted in several different ways. It meant several completely different things. At MSF France, it meant ‘States use humanitarian action as an alibi to hide the fact that they’re not doing anything else’. And when people spoke about MSF Belgium, they said, “They are abandoning humanitarian principles by using the obligation to be there and do something as an alibi”. The humanitarian alibi was put forward to hide the fact that they were dependent on the state and that they were just going to do what the Serbs allowed them to do. And then there was a third meaning. MSF France said that to be able to engage in public humanitarian discourse, there would have to be a programme on the ground, which would serve as an alibi for our position: “We, as humanitarians, are going to take actions to justify our words. They will be alibi operations.” People at home were uncomfortable. They were worried about what an “alibi operation” was. The Belgians were uncomfortable too, but they no longer spoke out.*

Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF legal advisor,  
interviewed in 2015 (in French).



*I played a significant part in spreading this idea and later I kicked myself for doing so, when I analysed things in more detail and when I said to myself, “It’s a new kind of humanitarian naivety to think that humanitarian action is noth-*

*ing more than concealing cowardice or an absence of political responsibility. It’s more political than that, so it’s more underhand than that, it’s done to hide something else.” In the beginning I was talking about humanitarian action as giving up, as a way of disguising indecision or a lack of responsibility. Later, I gradually became more and more convinced that humanitarian action wasn’t about giving up, but a roundabout way of pursuing a policy that couldn’t speak its name. Humanitarian action was being used to reverse the image of a policy of support for the Serbs so that it looked like support for the Bosnians. Humanitarian action, particularly military humanitarian action, with armoured vehicles and armed men who don’t use their weapons and only use their armoured vehicles to protect themselves, helped people believe that they were coming to help the Bosnians – whom we had put in this situation by recognising their state – when in reality they were giving the Serbs free rein. That’s when I came across this neat expression from Ovid: “governing is about making people believe”. So gradually, I said to myself, “no, this idea of humanitarian action as an alibi, it’s just another example of naivety. The politicians know exactly what they’re doing: their refusal to adopt a position is a position in itself.”*

*For me, MSF’s stance throughout the conflict, up to Srebrenica, was entirely focused on the deceitful role that humanitarian action was playing at that point.*

*The idea I had in my head all the time was that it was by questioning humanitarian action and its role that it became possible to think about responsibility, to pinpoint our responsibilities and those of other people.*

Dr. Rony Brauman, MSF France President, 1982 - 1994,  
MSF France Foundation Research Director from 1994,  
interviewed in 2000 and 2015 (in French).



*The MSF movement took some time to adopt the notion of the humanitarian alibi. But after a while, it was universally accepted. It became a recurring theme, which was picked up in the media and used in all situations. So it was no longer a problem. I breathed a sigh of relief the day it was accepted: it’s important to understand that at the time, each section’s communications were targeted at the media in its own country. In France, for example, they overestimated the overall impact of the first-hand account, assuming that if it was picked up by France Inter or on the Antenne 2 news programme, then the whole world would know about it. I hired Anne-Marie Huby, a remarkable woman, as the press officer for the international office, to focus solely on the English-speaking media. So once we had a more or less coherent message, we could jump in and take advantage of it, we could go for it. But first, we had to establish a basic core of coherent messages within the MSF movement.*

Dr Alain Destexhe, General Secretary of MSF  
International from 1991 to 1994, interviewed in 2000  
(in French).



**In September, the Serbian authorities finally agreed to release the Bosnian prisoners from the camps, provided they would be taken in by western states. The latter, however, were slow to welcome them. France, in particular, demanded that the refugees present a certificate of accommodation from French residents before they would let them enter the country. MSF France and other associations requested that this should not be applied. There was discussion about a proposal that every salaried member of MSF staff in Europe should provide one of the certificates required.**



**'Urgent! Urgent!' Message** from Alain Destexhe, MSF International Secretary General to MSF All Sections GD and Dircoms, 30 September 1992 (in English).

Following my fax this morning, Françoise Saulnier [has] now proposed that MSF declares that we are ready to welcome those 5,000 refugees in our countries. This would be a strong pressure to oblige our governments to welcome people from former Yugoslavia. Please discuss the matter urgently in your section!!! Thanks for attending a teleconference on that topic.



**'Urgent! Urgent!' Message** from Michel Fizbin, MSF France Director of Communications to GDs, Operations Departments and Communications Departments of other sections, 26 October 1992 (in French).

Following the fax from Alain Destexhe concerning the non-release of 5,000 detainees in Yugoslavia because there are no host countries willing to take them in, there will be a teleconference for all sections today at 16:00. France [the French section of MSF], for its part, is currently discussing Françoise Saulnier's proposal that salaried staff in all European sections of MSF should produce 5,000 certificates of accommodation to allow the detainees to get visas so they can enter any European countries where MSF has a presence. In doing this, MSF is denouncing the cowardice and irresponsibility of European governments, which are incapable of accepting the consequences of their refusal to oppose the policy of ethnic cleansing, and is offering a tangible humanitarian solution, backed by the logistical resources needed to bring it to fruition. If everyone could discuss the proposal in detail before the teleconference, we could take a decision.



**Minutes** of the MSF France board meeting, 30 October 1992 (in French).

**Extract:**

François Jean [MSF France Foundation] raised the unacceptable and absurd situation of several thousand civilians being interned in camps: although the ICRC had negotiated their release, they were still being held because no countries were willing to take them in, although western countries had unanimously shown their indignation about the existence of such camps during the summer.

MSF had put out two press releases, one in its own name and the other in association with other NGOs, to denounce the position of European countries and ask that governments shoulder their responsibilities. The French government had agreed to take 300 people.

The question of MSF being actively involved was raised, for example by mobilising public opinion and organising accommodation for the refugees.

A discussion ensued on how such action would be implemented, what its implications might be and what responsibilities the organisation would have for the future of these people and their integration. Another question was raised over whether such action represented participation in ethnic cleansing.

The issues would be explored further during the week following the board meeting so that a decision could be taken quickly.



*Although the Yugoslavian authorities were under political pressure from western states, which were scandalised by the existence of such camps in the heart of Europe, they toyed with them, saying, "We don't want them: if you, as European countries, are shocked by that, then you take them!" According to their logic, these were transit camps, where conditions were poor because of overcrowding, caused by the fact that people were unable to leave. Because these people were Muslims, they needed to return to Turkey. This was a new power struggle, driven by the Serbs to undermine the European community. I said to myself "We need to force European countries to respond to their blackmail by welcoming people who have been imprisoned." We knew full well it was blackmail and it was vile, but Europe needs to stand on the side of human values and so does MSF. Of course, I said to myself that as soon as we had access to even a limited number of people, they would be able to tell us what they had endured, because we really knew very little. It was an appalling dilemma, but the most appalling thing would have been not to give in to the blackmail. When you're faced with authorities who are saying, "We have people in prison, we're torturing them, we're starving them because we don't want them to stay, but we'll agree to let them go if they come to you," what can you do? We needed to set things in motion to see things more clearly by hearing people's stories and understanding what had happened.*

*We couldn't spend our time criticising European states for their humanitarian alibis without backing them into a corner. So we said to them, "Instead of engaging in humanitarian action over there, you can save the lives of people who are dying in prison*

by taking them in, so why would you say no?" It was really about re-establishing a tension between the states' policies and the obligation to think about people as human beings.

So I came up with the idea of accommodation certificates. First, I had to get the proposal accepted by the board, explaining that it was scandalous and that we needed to do something about it. We discussed what it would mean in political terms, what these prisoners represented. On the whole, the board was enthusiastic. And in the end, everyone agreed.

Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF legal advisor,  
interviewed in 2015 (in French).

**On 21 November, Rony Brauman, President of MSF France, took part in a demonstration denouncing the "war of aggression by the Serbian regime against Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina" and calling on the French government to use all means "including the use of force" to stop the war.**



'Former Yugoslavia - A call to demonstrate in Paris  
"We won't be able to say that we didn't know"  
**Le Monde** (France) 19 November 1992 (in French).

#### Extract:

A demonstration is being organised in Paris on Saturday 21 November (at 14:00, Place du Panthéon) by a number of organisations, including the CFDT, and figures including Cardinal Decourtray, Mr Rony Brauman (President of Médecins Sans Frontières), members of parliament and intellectuals.

The intention is to hold the demonstration in silence and carry just two banners: "We won't be able to say that we didn't know" and "1991: Vukovar. 1992: Sarajevo. 1993: ?". In the text calling on people to demonstrate, the organisers denounce the "war of aggression by the Serbian regime against Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina" and express their solidarity with the victims of the war, "of hunger and cold, and above all a policy of ethnic cleansing we thought could no longer happen in Europe". Challenging any policy that "ratifies what has taken place", they are also calling on the French government and the European Community to "use all means, including the use of force if necessary, to bring an end to the war, maintain the integrity of internationally recognised states, ensure respect for human rights and thus limit the risks of the conflict spreading".

**In the end, the French government agreed to accept 5,000 Bosnian asylum seekers.**

**At the end of November, MSF France sent a team of doctors and psychologists to provide health care for former Bosnian prisoners and their families, who had been given shelter in centres in Saint-Etienne. Interviews with these**

**people about their experiences and an epidemiological study showed that they had survived a planned process of eliminating Muslims from Bosnia.**

**MSF therefore decided to compile their accounts in a report and to publish it, denouncing the crimes against humanity that had been perpetrated against them.**



'Former prisoners' **Message** from the Director of Operations and head of mission for former Yugoslavia at MSF France to MSF Belgium and MSF Holland, 3 December 1992 (in French).

#### Extract:

During August 1992, the Western press revealed the existence of detention camps in Bosnia, which were described in ways that recalled a sinister past: that of the Nazi camps. The concept of ethnic cleansing entered the public arena, associated with human rights violations that people believed had been consigned to history in Europe.

The ICRC quickly gained access to some of the camps, mostly in areas under Serbian control but also in areas under Bosnian and Croatian control.

The total number of prisoners was estimated at between 7,000 and 10,000. As well as bringing food and blankets, the ICRC embarked on negotiations with the various parties to free the prisoners. UNHCR was able to set up a transit camp for 1,600 people in Karlovac in Croatia, which took in Bosnian Muslims until it was full. In addition, it has made several appeals to the international community for other countries to take in the former prisoners. States have been slow to respond and the quotas most of them proposed are relatively low, which has considerably slowed down the evacuation process.

By 26 November, 5,309 places had been found in host countries, with a further 1,291 still needed. The reception procedures are very slow: by the same date, just 831 former prisoners and their families had been able to be transferred abroad from Croatia.

Negotiations between the ICRC and the Serbian authorities have been deadlocked for several days and transfers from Bosnia to Croatia are at a standstill. The camp in Karlovac has gradually emptied and the detainees who had attracted the attention of the whole world for a while are still in prison, to widespread indifference.

The total of around 6,600 people, mainly civilians who have become undesirables in their own country, is based purely on the count carried out by the ICRC since the start of its intervention. There is a risk that this number will rise quickly for several reasons including the fact that the ICRC has not yet had access to all the camps and has therefore not been able to count all the prisoners. Moreover, some camps administered by the Serbs, whose detainees had been evacuated by the ICRC, are alleged to be filling up again.

Other factors may also bring the figure down: detention conditions remain precarious, in spite of the ICRC's intervention, and there is a significant risk that the onset of winter will increase mortality in the camps. Moreover, negotiations are

currently very difficult and the various parties want to reserve a number of prisoners for themselves, to use as a bargaining chip with their adversaries.

The French government has decided to take in 300 men and their families, a meagre contingent when you consider the capacity the country has available and its claims to defend human rights.

MSF France has decided to take action in the form of media pressure to tackle the indifference shown by politicians to the emergency. The aim must be to help evacuate more people who are facing death and bring them to France. In recent days, we have been able to discuss the fate of the Bosnian Muslims in interviews with various political figures and in the national press, around the theme of 'Populations in Danger'. On 16 November, an initial contingent of 266 people including 76 former prisoners, were welcomed by the French authorities to a centre in Saint Etienne. We have sent a team of three doctors, including one psychiatrist, accompanied by Bosnian interpreters. The aim of the mission was to evaluate the psychological consequences suffered by these men during their detention. In addition, we have gathered first-hand accounts from 60 families on their experience during the war, separation and detention, using interviews guided by an epidemiological questionnaire.

The welcome they offered us and their willingness to participate exceeded our expectations. Our approach was their last hope: the chance to bear witness to the atrocities they had seen or suffered. As their tongues loosened, the team felt a growing sense of unease. These families could only be described as the survivors of a methodical, planned process of eliminating Muslims from Bosnia. The term 'ethnic cleansing' is now commonplace in the media, but is inadequate to characterise all the human rights violations carried out in Bosnia as they were described to us: from the systematic destruction of villages and cultural monuments, to the executions of entire groups of civilians, organised rapes, torture, deportation and psychological terror.

We wanted to know and they hid nothing from us. These accounts carry a significant weight: we have a moral obligation and a duty to bear witness to an intolerable situation with all the gravity it deserves.

A report of all these accounts is currently being produced; it will be disseminated next week to various key figures in France and Europe and then made public at a press conference.

We hope that it will resonate sufficiently to influence the course of events in Bosnia. Let us hope that it does not become just one more report about human rights violations and that others will share our indignation.

We would now like to know your views on our approach. We cannot, of course, assess all the consequences and in this respect we have also discussed the possible repercussions for the security of MSF teams on the ground, and on the progress of negotiations with the ICRC and the Serb authorities concerning the release of detainees.

We would be grateful for your response on the dissemination of the report as soon as possible.

Thank you in advance



*We didn't need the accommodation certificates since France had decided to accept 500 migrants.*

*We suggested to the French authorities that we should take care of their immediate medical and psychological needs: these people were going to arrive straight from concentration camps. We didn't know what state they would be in: the situation was potentially explosive in epidemiological, psychological and other terms. With the help of psychiatrists we played a little terror ...*

*We organised teams of psychiatrists, doctors and translators, who got into the centres without any great problems, and carried out an evaluation of all the refugees. We told them that if they had been tortured, they would meet the criteria for universal jurisdiction and could file a claim in France. They knew nothing about their refugee status, so it was important to give them clear information about their rights in France.*

*It was the first time we had done a psychological debrief of people coming out of detention and talking about what had happened to them. So we briefed all the former prisoners.*

*And that was when we realised that the men and women had been separated in the camps when the villages were attacked. Each of them had lived a different adventure and all these bits of separate stories could be put together. We could recreate the whole thing from the fragments they shared. We could tell the whole story of the region from what we heard from people who had escaped from the camps in Omarska, Keraterm and Trnopolje. So we took all the separate pieces of the jigsaw and instead of leaving them scattered, we put them all together and constructed a collective narrative from their individual stories. This wasn't about humanitarian pathos or political waffle; we had actually successfully described the industrial machinery of ethnic cleansing. It was very simple and very clear: they sent in militias, they sowed chaos, they massacred and then the army arrived on the pretext of re-establishing peace and said, "You can't stay here, so get into two lines, you over here, you over there and there you have it, we need to clean up." This was an industrial process, a division of labour and a set of methods used to terrorise and convince people to leave without knowing where they were going to be put, which reminded me of the logic of terror during the Second World War: you deport before you exterminate. But where were the Bosnian prisoners going to be deported to and what were they going to do to them?*

*Rony said "We need to do it" and we held a press conference to make the report public. It had a huge impact.*

Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF legal advisor,  
interviewed in 2000 (in French).



*We sit down in the reception centres with the psychologist and listen to the families tell us their stories. We aren't intrusive: we just give them blank sheets of paper and they fill them. With some of them, we have more open discussions. There is a psychological aspect and a collection of stories, which we will gradually put together to produce a number of reports. We have been able to piece events together in a more or less chronological fashion. The other aspect is the feedback we give to the public authorities, the state and the regions on how they are treated when they arrive and what needs to be*

done. So the reports operate on two levels: one is about their accounts and the other about advising how they should be treated in France.

Pierre Salignon, Deputy Programme Manager, MSF France, in charge of programmes in the former Yugoslavia, 1992-1996, Interviewed in 2015 (in French).

**On 8 December, after it had been presented to the French and European authorities, the report was made public at a press conference, during which MSF denounced a crime against humanity and demanded that the ICRC should be given access to all the camps, that the camps themselves should be closed and that the detainees should be freed and given asylum in European countries.**



'Ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina: A crime against humanity,' **Press conference** and presentation of a report by Médecins Sans Frontières on Tuesday 8 December at 11:00, MSF France, 6 December 1992 (in French).

Dr Marie-Rosaire Bériot, lead investigator, Françoise Saulnier, lawyer at MSF's International Secretariat and François Callas, coordinator for MSF's mission on the Bosnian detainees will present a report based on interviews with 60 former prisoners and their families, who have been given shelter in Saint-Etienne. Their accounts help to recreate in detail the almost industrial process of ethnic cleansing that took place in the Kozarac region starting on 24 May 1992, as well as the conditions in which people were held in the Serbian camps. The survivors tell of mass executions and abuse suffered by civilian populations throughout this period.



'Ethnic cleansing in the Kozarac region' Investigation based on information from 60 Bosnian ex-detainees and their families now in France (Saint Etienne), MSF France **report**, 7 December 1992 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

#### **Ethnic Cleansing In Bosnia: Serbian Leaders guilty of a crime against humanity**

This report, compiled by Médecins Sans Frontières from interviews with Bosnian ex-detainees from Serbian internment camps who are now in France, reveals that the violence committed by Bosnian Serbs does not amount to a long series of human rights violations or war crimes but rather to a crime against humanity. A crime against humanity is defined by assassination, extermination, slavery, deportation and any other inhuman act committed against a civilian population. This investigation not only completes and confirms the overwhelming evidence collected by Amnesty International, the

United Nations and the Council of Europe. For the first time, it demonstrates the working out of a systematic plan of extermination in a specific region. This report compiles minute and continuous information on ethnic cleansing as it was applied, from 24 May to 1 October, in the town of Kozarac and the surrounding villages (with a former population of 25,000), as well as in four detention camps in the region. For the first time this investigation presents more than a collection of first-hand witness reports. MSF has checked and double-checked this evidence which now clearly points to a calculated crime against humanity. The most striking elements in all this are the following: systematic killing of the educated classes; deportation and detention of other groups of people under inhuman conditions; summary executions and indiscriminate massacres in detention camps; violence against and deportation of women, children and old people under horrific conditions. Two months after the principle of the release of prisoners was secured, only a very small number of them have actually left the camps as offers of asylum by western countries are insufficient and too slow to come forward. Moreover there remain a large number of unidentified camps, which the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has not been able to visit. Ethnic cleansing truly puts the human conscience on trial. It must be stopped at any cost. Three measures must be taken urgently:

- The detainees whose release has been secured or could be soon should be given immediate asylum in a third European country;
- The ICRC must be granted immediate access to camps which have not yet been visited or registered;
- All the camps must be closed down and detainees be freed immediately.



'The president of MSF points out the ambiguity of humanitarian action in Bosnia and denounces the Serbian crime against humanity,' **Agence France Presse**, 8 December 1992 (in French).

"Humanitarian action is the contemporary form of the Munich spirit", said Dr Rony Brauman, president of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and one of the leading architects of charitable action on Tuesday, at the same time denouncing what he sees as a crime against humanity committed by the Serbs in Bosnia.

The MSF president, who has condemned the "ambiguity" of humanitarian action in the former Yugoslavia, was presenting a report from his organisation at a press conference in Paris, which aimed to show that the "barbaric acts committed by the Serbs in Bosnia represented not only mass violations of human rights or war crimes, but a crime against humanity."

"We are reaching out to people whose fate has already been sealed. Our actions are taking place against the backdrop of a process of annihilation of a group of human beings," added Brauman, describing the impotence and limitations of humanitarian action while condemning "the cowardice of Europe" and its "monstrous abandonment".

The MSF report is the result of an investigation carried out by three of its doctors, including one psychiatrist, with 60

former Bosnian prisoners now being given shelter in Saint-Etienne, who witnessed at first hand the process of ethnic cleansing that took place from 24 May to 1 October in the Kozarac region to the north-west of Sarajevo, which was conquered by the Serbs.

Their accounts, some of which were shown to the press in a short film, are damning for the Serbian authorities, and include stories of systematic assassinations of key local figures (teachers, lawyers and political leaders), deportation and detention in inhumane conditions for other sections of the population, torture, rapes, summary executions and indiscriminate massacres in the detention camps, and deportations in cattle wagons of women, children and elderly people.

For MSF, this succession of horrors falls under the definition of a crime against humanity established at the Nuremberg trials, namely “murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, and other inhumane acts committed against civilian populations”.

Believing that “this process of ethnic cleansing is a real challenge to the human conscience and that everything must be done to put an end to it,” MSF points out that three measures must be implemented as a minimum, “even if they are derisory in comparison with the horror of the challenge”. Prisoners who have been or can be released need to be given asylum in European countries; the ICRC must be able to access all the camps that are either inaccessible or have not yet been identified; and all the camps must be closed and the people held there released.



*The two of us held a press conference for the release of the report Françoise had headed up, which focused entirely not on ethnic cleansing but on describing what constituted a crime against humanity. To an extent, the ethnic cleansing was a given. There was nothing more we needed to know about it: the Serbs themselves were claiming it as a fundamental strategic project. The only problem with ethnic cleansing was using the expression without inverted commas. It was a rather complex philosophical problem. It was one of the criticisms I made of the report, which referred to ethnic cleansing as though it was something real, as if there was such a thing as ethnic purity. When you say ‘ethnic cleansing’ you need to put in inverted commas; if not, you endorse the existence of ethnic cleansing as a fact. And at that point, you need to decide if you are on the side of purity or impurity. It’s a ridiculous problem, and it’s essential not to get tied up in it. It is not a matter of being against ethnic cleansing but against the concept of ethnic cleansing, against the idea itself. So we denounced the fact that crimes against humanity had been committed, i.e. that there were people who had been attacked, deported, killed and raped for what they were. We supported the idea that when a crime against humanity occurs in Europe, humanitarian action makes sense. But if Europe’s response is humanitarian action, then the whole notion of humanitarianism becomes corrupted and devoid of content.*

Dr. Rony Brauman, MSF France President, 1982 - 1994,  
MSF France Foundation Research Director from 1994,  
interviewed in 2000 and 2015 (in French).

**The day the report was published (8 December), the Dutch newspaper, *Trouw*, announced that Dutch aid organisations, including MSF, were launching an appeal for contributions for the displaced persons of Bosnia. The paper noted that, according to most of the organisations, without a military intervention creating safe areas for the displaced persons, aid could not be provided to those who needed it. Jacques de Milliano, Director-general of MSF Holland, called instead for a large-scale intervention to avoid losing time during negotiations over safe areas.**



‘Aid organisations: Intervention in Bosnia is necessary otherwise aid will not reach those who need it,’ *Trouw* (The Netherlands), 8 December 1992 (in Dutch).

#### **Extract:**

On the eve of their national appeal for Yugoslavia and Somalia, Dutch aid organisations have again called for further military intervention in former Yugoslavia. [...]

Aid workers will only be able to provide much-needed aid in the affected areas if the international community is prepared to use military force to create safe havens for refugees in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This was the key message of their appeal yesterday. [...]

The national appeal in aid of the estimated 800,000 displaced persons in Bosnia is being set up by the Netherlands Red Cross, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Memisa, Mensen in Nood, Stichting Oecumenische Hulp, Unicef, Stichting Vluchteling and Terres des Hommes. [...]

The participating organisations do not all agree on the degree of force that could benefit the aid effort, however. Most aid workers take the same line as the Red Cross: military protection of safe neutral zones in northern and central Bosnia makes sense, provided agreements are made in advance with the warring parties concerned.

“Otherwise it will not really help aid workers much at all. Local leaders need to contain or regain control of the many out-of-control battle groups in their region. Aid can become effective with the approval of the local authorities,” Cense explains.

Some organisations already consider the current cry for armed support a step too far. A spokesperson for *Stichting Oecumenische Hulp* (‘Inter-Faith Aid Foundation’) said that churches have established, “with regret,” that other means are no longer effective and that use of the military instrument is inevitable.

By contrast, MSF favours far-reaching armed operations. Director J. de Milliano believes large-scale military intervention to be the only effective means of ensuring aid reaches the places where it is needed. He feels further negotiations on armed protection of safe havens would take too long.

“Winter is fast approaching and would be here and gone again by the time any agreement is reached. We’d be here again in six months’ time.” MSF believes ‘holding a knife to the throats of Serbians’ to be the only way of getting aid to the Muslim population of Bosnia.

The MSF position does not indicate a major difference of opinion within the club of aid organisations, Cense hastens to explain. “Médecins Sans Frontières simply doesn’t have the long experience as the Red Cross in settling such long-term problems.”

**Following the press conference, MSF France launched a campaign to raise awareness among the French public. Video clips telling the stories of the former prisoners were produced, accompanied by a message describing what had happened to them as a crime against humanity. Unfortunately, they were shown just after the Christmas and New Year festivities and not often enough to leave a lasting impression.**

**Above all, they were shown at the same time as Médecins du Monde France launched a campaign comparing the Serbian leader Milosevic to Hitler.**

**The perception of both campaigns got confused, and MSF’s relationships in the field with the Serbian authorities deteriorated.** [V4](#) [V5](#) [V6](#)

**Within the MSF movement, the French section was criticised for the stance it had taken, particularly for the lack of communication beforehand with the other sections concerned. Some even commented that the French section was less worried about endangering the teams in the field because it had no operations in the former Yugoslavia. Similarly, there were questions about the ease of carrying out the investigations in France rather than where it had actually happened.**

**More generally, questions were raised about whether it was legitimate for MSF to gather this kind of evidence, as an area of activity that belonged more naturally to human rights organisations.**

**MSF France argued that publishing the report was part of operational activity, based in France, concerning the former Yugoslavia.**



**Letter** sent to French television channels by the Communications Director of MSF France, 31 December 1992 (in French). [V7](#)

Dear Sir or Madam,  
Following the publication of a report outlining the investigation carried out with former Bosnian prisoners who have been

given refuge in France, Médecins Sans Frontières has decided to launch a public awareness campaign about the crime against humanity currently being committed in Bosnia. The campaign consists of a series of seven TV and radio ads and a print ad, featuring the stories of former prisoners held in the concentration camps with a single message: “Today, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Serbs are committing a crime against humanity. Now, we won’t be able to say that we didn’t know.”

We are confident that you understand the urgency and importance of this campaign and are therefore asking you to broadcast the ads on your radio network.

Thank you in advance for your valued cooperation. Yours faithfully,

Michel Fiszbin

Director of Communications



**Forum:** the humanitarian mandate and accusatory accounts **Contact** no.9 (MSF Belgium internal newsletter) April 1993 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

This text is taken from the minutes of 8 February 1993, to which some French colleagues (from MSF France) were invited in order to take part in a discussion on the question of first-hand accounts, looking at the case of the recent events in Yugoslavia, whose historical context is explained in the same text. What do you think?

Rony Brauman, President of MSF France, shares his views on accusatory accounts following the campaign that denounced ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia.

The aim of the meeting was to give MSF France the opportunity to explain the process it had gone through in preparing the report.

Rony began by emphasising that MSF France’s position in relation to other sections always had to be interpreted through the specific lens of French politics, through Kouchner and through their “outburst”.

In Rony’s opinion, there were three kinds of accounts:

1/ Accounts used for raising awareness on a purely humanitarian basis, as in Somalia.

2/ Detailed accounts of certain more complex problems, such as the position of UN peacekeepers in Somalia. This type of work generally did not cause any problems for the teams.

3/ Accusatory accounts, as in the former Yugoslavia or Sudan. These denounced the crimes against humanity committed by certain parties. By definition, a first-hand account is one-sided. It comes about through choice, reflecting an analysis of the gravity of the situation.

This is the case in the former Yugoslavia

First, Rony commented that the campaign was not a call for military intervention.

Secondly, it was important to put accounts of this kind into context:

There had been numerous articles in October denouncing the humanitarian alibi in the former Yugoslavia. Slightly later, the ICRC had published its statements on the refugees from

Banja Luka to launch a campaign to support the right to asylum.

When the first contingent of refugees arrived, a medical team was sent in to talk to them and carry out a welfare assessment. The accounts that came out of it were staggering, to the point where MSF could not keep them a secret. It was time to denounce crimes against humanity (not to be confused with war crimes).

MSF France had therefore launched a public information programme in the form of a report. It had presented the report in Brussels and Amsterdam; perhaps there had been a misunderstanding between sections at that point...

But it had been important to act quickly. Furthermore, the presentation of the report coincided with the Marines being sent into Somalia, so at no point had they believed it would create a media storm.

And yet it did. Since MSF France had not seen any red flags from other sections, they believed they had general agreement. It was not until January that they learned all was not well.

The report also needed to be seen in the French context of refugees coming to France and the fact that MSF France was not operationally involved in the former Yugoslavia.

The long discussion that followed was guided by questions from board members and the public. These focused primarily on why action had been taken unilaterally, on MSF's role in relation to gathering the accounts, on the lack of communication between sections and on the relevance of such actions. It seemed that MSF was becoming increasingly involved in gathering people's stories and in human rights campaigns. But was that really our mandate? If it was where we wanted to go in future, we needed to equip ourselves appropriately. Didn't we think that if Serbian refugees had come to our country, we could have gathered the same accounts? Wasn't it easier for people to express themselves and carry out this kind of interview in France than in Bosnia? Wasn't it a bit too media-focused? Weren't we reaching the limits of what we could do?

It was difficult to go backwards. Everyone agreed, however, that there was a risk of this kind of situation recurring and it would therefore be useful to establish some clear rules.

*I didn't have anything against it as a statement of principle. But it created some unbelievable headaches, because it coincided with the MDM campaign comparing Milosevic with Hitler. The Serbs weren't at all happy. From their point of view, MDM and MSF were one and the same. So we had to deal with that for a few months. Every time we introduced ourselves, we said, "We're MSF, not MÉDECINS DU MONDE. What we do is distribute supplies." I even arranged things so that people driving cars into Bosnia and even Serbia could present photocopies of receipts of distribution to hospitals and they could say, "Guys, we're not here to spy, we're just distributing supplies". It went down very well. The guys at the checkpoints used to say, "OK, my cousin works at that hospital, I'm going to call him and see if you're telling the truth". And because we were, we always got a positive response. The campaign had relatively little impact on MSF, not only*

*because it was eclipsed by the MDM one but also because the ads were only broadcast once or twice on one or two French channels.*

Dr Eric Dachy, MSF general coordinator in Belgrad, October 1991 - August 1993, Interviewed in 2000, 2015, (in French)

*We had some fairly hard-hitting discussions and negotiations. The Belgians were saying, "There you go, the French have come up with another thing to get people talking about them and annoy us." Our response to them was, "We didn't make this up. This is serious: it's based on what the refugees told us." And then, we claimed the fact that it wasn't a 'human rights' story but an account of a real operation: the reception process, the debrief, the medical screening, the psychological support, the information about their rights... actually real humanitarian action. There wasn't much argument about that. And we said to ourselves, "At the end of the day, we can carry out campaigns about a country even if we're outside it." So that gives us permission to speak in that country.*

*The Belgians, who were in Belgrade, were afraid for the security of their teams. The Serbs weren't going to be happy. Obviously, but "not happy" in what way? If it meant delaying a lorry carrying powdered milk for a few hours, that wasn't all that serious: it wasn't going to go off! Similarly if it meant holding up the arrival of a convoy for three days. You have to weigh things up and measure how serious they are.*

Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF legal advisor, interviewed in 2015 (in French).

*All of this, to an extent through inertia but also in a very clear way, aligned with the anti-totalitarian ideas I had invested so much of myself in throughout the 1980s. In the 1990s, there was no longer a cold war, but you don't just change your mental framework overnight. But from that to comparing Milosevic with Hitler was a symbolic threshold that MSF didn't want to cross. So we were caught in a contradiction that MDM had created and condensed into a kind of caricature by comparing Milosevic and Hitler, with the photo of a starving man who was apparently leaving a camp. In fact he wasn't starving, he had tuberculosis. In short, this whole counter-propaganda campaign sounded rather like a call to order. Because you really couldn't deny that the path MSF had opened up led exactly the same way as MDM's. We were all caught up in a process of outdoing each other. The underlying politics or political ideology were the same. We still had a common foundation of a kind of 'bistro' anti-totalitarianism.*

*And in France, at the time, there were committees against ethnic cleansing and a really significant level of social and political mobilisation, which was based on a theme of 'ethnic cleansing is the antechamber to genocide, so it's only a step from Milosevic to Hitler.'*

*I was obviously questioned about this. I didn't want to make a*

*bad blow to MDM, but rather keep my distance from them. It was enough to say, "No, that's not what we do, we wouldn't have put up posters of Hitler in Paris."*

Dr. Rony Brauman, MSF France President, 1982 - 1994,  
MSF France Foundation Research Director from 1994,  
interviewed in 2000 and 2015 (in French).

**Meanwhile, MSF Belgium continued to communicate about its assistance programmes for refugees and displaced persons, funded by the European Community.**



'Important actions by MSF,' *Le Soir/BELGA* (Belgium) 15 January 1993 (in French).

Médecins Sans Frontières has embarked on its largest programme of logistical and medical assistance since the exodus of the Iraqi Kurds in 1991 to support refugees from the former Yugoslavia, organising a series of operations costing a total of 346 million Belgian francs [8.6 million euros].

The main focus of the operation is getting emergency aid to displaced persons and refugees from Bosnia. The cost of 5.9 million ecus [idem in euros] is being funded by the European Community.

MSF plans to supply Bosnian towns that have been besieged (Tuzla, Srebrenica and Gorazde) with medicines and other basic necessities as soon as the security conditions allow. Funding for the operation has been provided by Sweden, to the amount of approximately 17.5 million Belgian francs [421 420 euros].

Over 1,000 tonnes of goods (food, blankets, sleeping bags, hygiene products and medical equipment) have already been sent to Bosnia by lorry or boat, via Split and Metkovic (in Croatia) and Belgrade. Several dozen more lorries are set to head off in the coming weeks.

MSF will build a camp of prefabricated houses for refugees fleeing from conflict zones, at the request of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. The camp in Livno (in south-western Bosnia) will be able to house 2,500 people. The European Community will fund the entire cost of building 125 houses, providing 1.6 million ecus (around 64 million Belgian francs).

In addition, the humanitarian organisation will soon be launching an operation in Kosovo (costing 32 million Belgian francs [793 000 euros]) with the aim of reorganising official and alternative health systems to make hospitals accessible to people of Albanian extraction (90%) by establishing a permanent base with five members.



'The UN decides to create an international criminal tribunal to judge those responsible for war crimes in the former Yugoslavia - Security Council Resolution 808,' *Le Monde* (France) 24 February 1993 (in French).

**Extract:**

The Security Council, "Recalling paragraph 10 of its resolution 764 (1992) of 13 July 1992, in which it reaffirmed that all parties are bound to comply with the obligations under international humanitarian law and in particular the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and that persons who commit or order the commission of grave breaches of the Conventions are individually responsible in respect of such breaches, Recalling also its resolution 771 (1992) of 13 August 1992, in which, inter alia, it demanded that all parties and others concerned in the former Yugoslavia, and all military forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina, immediately cease and desist from all breaches of international humanitarian law, Recalling further its resolution 780 (1992) of 6 October 1992, in which it requested the Secretary-General to establish, as a matter of urgency, an impartial Commission of Experts to examine and analyse the information submitted pursuant to resolutions 771 (1992) and 780 (1992), together with such further information as the Commission of Experts may obtain, with a view to providing the Secretary-General with its conclusions on the evidence of grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions and other violations of international humanitarian law committed in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, Expressing once again its grave alarm at continuing reports of widespread violations of international humanitarian law occurring within the territory of the former Yugoslavia, including reports of mass killings and the continuance of the practice of ethnic cleansing,

"Determining that this situation constitutes a threat to international peace and security,

"1. Decides that an international tribunal shall be established for the prosecution of persons responsible for serious violations of international humanitarian law committed in the territory of the former Yugoslavia since 1991. "

"2. Requests the Secretary-General to submit for consideration by the Council at the earliest possible date, and if possible no later than 60 days after the adoption of the present resolution, a report on all aspects of this matter, including specific proposals and where appropriate options for the effective and expeditious implementation of the decision."

**On 22 February 1993, the United Nations Security Council created the International Tribunal responsible for investigating war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the territory of the former Yugoslavia.**



## SREBRENICA: ENTERING THE ENCLAVE<sup>4</sup>

The precarious living conditions in the towns in eastern Bosnia, where the Muslim victims of ethnic cleansing carried out by the Bosnian Serbs had taken refuge, worsened as the blockade was strengthened. The MSF team regularly tried to provide help which, however, only arrived sporadically. On 7 December, following a long negotiation, a team from MSF Belgium was finally able to bring a convoy of medicines and medical equipment into the enclave of Srebrenica, although it was only able to stay a few hours.



'MSF action in Srebrenica' **Contact** no. 20 (MSF Belgium internal newsletter) June 1993 (in French).

### Extract:

A first convoy reached Srebrenica after seven months of isolation. The team from Belgrade and Jean-Pierre Luxen entered for the first time, for a few hours, on 7 December 1992, bringing medicines and medical equipment.



*The city was under siege. It was an active front line. It wasn't a matter of turning up in the Jeep and handing over a piece of paper. Getting a convoy through a bit at a time has to be negotiated well in advance. The ICRC couldn't get in, the UN couldn't get in, no-one could get in. So I said, "We need to try it our way". I wrote to Radovan Karadzic [the leader of the Bosnian Serbs], addressing him as "Dear Mr President", which made him very happy, since the UN couldn't do it and he had decided to stop reading letters from them since they weren't addressed to "Mr President". I said, "As a doctor<sup>5</sup>, I am absolutely confident that you are aware of your people's distress." I piled it on and he was happy. He agreed to see me and said "It's difficult", but he said "yes". But the military, they wanted the vehicles' number plates, the names of the volunteers, the complete list of equipment two weeks in advance. I said, "It isn't possible. If you say yes, we can give you the names 48 hours in advance and then we'll bring the convoy in, you can search it and then let it through." I went there, and the Ukrainian blue helmets said, "Can we come in with you?" I agreed. The Serbs were completely cool with the Ukrainians because they are all Slavs. All at once, the atmosphere was quite relaxed. But they refused to let MSF in: "No, no humanitarians". I said, "Listen, guys, we've got authorisation from Karadzic."*

*In the end, Karadzic came in a helicopter. He recognised me and said, regally, "Of course you can come in, no problem." He did his little three-minute speech, "Dear colleague, it's always a pleasure to see you, even though it would undoubtedly be pleasanter in other circumstances." And I said, "I couldn't agree more, dear colleague!" On the other hand, he pestered the UN to death before he would let them in. But we went in with a jeep full of surgical equipment. That's when we discovered the city was under siege, the crowd panicking and the people dirty and starving.*

Dr Eric Dachy, MSF general coordinator in Belgrad, October 1991 - August 1993, Interviewed in 2000, 2015, (in French)

**From 18 to 21 February 1993, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, admitting its ineffectiveness in getting relief aid into Bosnia-Herzegovina, suspended all operations in the region. For its part, MSF Belgium managed to supply essential equipment to displaced people in Zenica, but was unable to send supplies into Tuzla and Srebrenica. MSF informed the media.**



'International Aid Suspended in Bosnia. Decision Made by the High Commissioner for Refugees,' **Le Monde** (France), 19 February 1993 (in French).

### Extract:

At the UNHCR headquarters, they have been forced to lay down arms. The High Commissioner, Sadako Ogata, announced on Wednesday 17 July that she had taken, albeit reluctantly, a series of measures that would result in depriving Bosnia-Herzegovina of essential international humanitarian aid. The measures are as follows: the recall to base of relief convoys sent by the UNHCR and blocked in Eastern Bosnia, and the immediate suspension of all aid in regions under Serbian control; the suspension of all UNHCR operations in Sarajevo and the withdrawal of the majority of its personnel, maintaining a minimal presence in this besieged town of 380,000 inhabitants; the suspension of humanitarian convoys and airlifts to Sarajevo; and UNHCR operations in Bosnian regions maintained at a reduced level where activity is still possible. [...] "While we were focusing all our efforts on helping victims, the parties were confusing humanitarian aid and political interests," Ogata announced, adding, "Our humanitarian efforts have become the laughingstock of political leaders, and I deeply regret that their management has forced me to take such a decision."

4. For a more detailed study on MSF Speaking Out about Srebrenica, please read MSF Speaking Out Case Studies "MSF and Srebrenica 1993-2003" by Laurence Binet-MSF International - <http://speakingout.msf.org/eng/srebrenica>

5. Radovan Karadzic is a doctor and psychiatrist.



'Médecins Sans Frontières Continues its Distribution Programmes in Bosnia,' **Press Release**, MSF Belgium, 19 February 1993 (in French).

Médecins Sans Frontières will continue to distribute emergency aid in Bosnia from its logistical bases in the former Yugoslavia. In doing so, MSF is ignoring the call, declared on Wednesday by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, to stop all humanitarian operations in Bosnia. Although not deliberately distancing itself from the best intentions of the UNHCR's announcement, which was made in recognition of the total disregard for human rights by the various parties to the conflict, Médecins Sans Frontières believes that mass efforts to aid the Bosnian civilian population are more necessary than ever. Above all, it is the inhabitants of the sealed-off towns in northern and central Bosnia that are suffering from the blockade forced upon them by Serbian, Croatian, and Muslim forces. The towns of Tuzla and Srebrenica in particular, have been deprived of regular supplies of food, basic drugs, and fuel for the past several months. For the last fortnight, MSF's Belgian section has managed to supply 400 tonnes of essential items (food, blankets, etc.) to warehouses in Zenica (Central Bosnia). From Zenica the supplies are distributed among Bosnian refugees and the displaced. Even today, an 80,000-tonne convoy carrying emergency relief will reach the population of Tuzla, a Bosnian town surrounded by Serbian forces.

**In late February 1993, while the Bosnian-Serbian forces were launching an attack, an exploratory team from MSF Belgium made another attempt to obtain authorisation from Serbian authorities in Bosnia-Herzegovina to enter Srebrenica. On several occasions, it was blocked by Bosnian-Serbian forces, which confiscated its medical supplies.**

**General Morillon, commander of the United Nations Protection Forces (UNPROFOR) in Bosnia-Herzegovina, tasked with protecting the UNHCR's humanitarian aid convoys, travelled to the enclave at the head of a convoy that was also blocked by Bosnian-Serbian forces on several occasions.**

**After a dozen days of negotiations and waiting, the MSF team finally decided to join the UNPROFOR convoy. On 11 March, it was authorised by Bosnian-Serbian forces to enter Srebrenica. MSF Belgium announced the news in a press release.**



'Former Yugoslavia – Convoys Finally Make it Through,' **Press Release**, MSF Belgium, 11 March 1993 (in French).

According to the most recent information collected on the ground, relief convoys sent by the UNHCR and the UNPROFOR,

accompanied by MSF-B teams, have finally received authorisation to move into the Muslim enclave of Srebrenica and the town of Konjevic Polje in northeast Bosnia. An MSF team has been present in Srebrenica since 13:00 GMT to administer first aid to the besieged inhabitants and the town's refugee population. At the Serb checkpoints, the team was allowed to bring in most of the medical equipment and drugs intended for the relief operation. Indeed, at midday today, two MSF-B [volunteers] reached the town of Konjevic Polje, where they attempted to set up an aid operation.



'The First Humanitarian Aid for the Srebrenica Enclave,' **Le Soir** (Belgium), 12 March 1993 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

Yesterday, a team from Médecins Sans Frontières was successful in entering the Muslim enclave of Srebrenica, but had to abandon most of the drugs and medical equipment they were transporting at Serb checkpoints, according to a press release issued by the organisation in Brussels.

The MSF team's arrival gives some hope that a UN convoy traveling to this same enclave could cross Serb lines. This would make it the first one to make it there since 10 December, although the besieged town did receive supplies from American airdrops.

The convoy transporting 80 tonnes of relief left Belgrade in the morning and crossed the border in the afternoon. It was General Morillon himself, commander of UNPROFOR in Bosnia, who obtained authorisation from the Serb authorities for two light convoys to pass through, the first led by himself to the Muslim enclave of Srebrenica, and the second destined to evacuate injured people from the neighbouring besieged enclave of Konjevic Polje.



*We were under full attack from Serb and pro-Serbian forces in the region. We had tried to get back into Srebrenica for 10 days or so. We were blockaded in a small town, on the other side of the bridges that stretch over the Drina [river]. Every morning, we went to try and negotiate with the Serbs and see how we could get in, among other things. And, then Morillon arrived and said, 'Okay, I'm going to get into Srebrenica whatever it takes.'*

*We were in a hotel and the atmosphere was pretty unusual. Every evening the European observers, UN forces, UNHCR personnel, and humanitarian agencies would come for dinner and there were Serb soldiers, too. All these people were mixing in our hotel. So every evening we'd try to make friends with them and to negotiate our entry into Srebrenica the next day.*

*At the end of 10 days or so, we were allowed in, taking considerable risks. In fact, the Serbs sent us down tiny snowy mountain tracks, claiming that the bridges over the normal road were mined. We ended up arriving in no man's land between the pro-Serbian forces and the Bosnian forces at around five in the evening. It was already really dark. In the convoy, there was a small tank transporting Morillon, an MSF car, a UNHCR car, a car*

carrying soldiers from the UN, which included Americans with satellite equipment, and a Belgian truck from the UNPROFOR carrying sugar and drugs.

Several vehicles got stuck in the snow. I had to get out and push the MSF car on foot and was overtaken by the Belgian truck. They drove without stopping so they didn't get stuck and I jumped onto the footboard as they passed. However, I was too heavy because I was wearing my bulletproof vest. So, I had to jump off. Ten metres further, the truck exploded on an anti-tank mine, and the footboard I had been standing on had completely disappeared. The wheel closest to the footboard had rolled over the anti-tank mine!

Eric Dachy, who was in the vehicle that had already gone past, came back with the emergency kit, thinking he was going to find me in bits and pieces! The Belgian soldiers didn't have a scratch on them, because it was the only UNPROFOR truck covered in Kevlar sheets. We carried on by foot and caught up with Morillon's tank, which had calmly carried on without waiting for us. They let us get on board. Then, in the middle of the night, we met some Bosnian supporters. The whole journey was quite unforgettable.

Dr Georges Dallemagne, MSF Belgium Director of Operations, Interviewed in July 2000 (in French.)



We thought it was great when Georges Dallemagne got in with Morillon's convoy. Then, when the general left, the MSF teams stayed behind and that was the start of a mission. That wasn't merely a coup, but a real starting point, so we were 100% behind them. We were actually a bit envious of them, because it was something we would have liked to do ourselves. It played out well and we were proud of our Belgian friends.

Dr Rony Brauman, MSF France President, 1982 - 1994, MSF France Foundation Research Director from 1994, interviewed in 2000 and 2015 (in French).

**Arriving at the enclave on the night of 11 March, the MSF team discovered that dozens of inhabitants were dying every day from starvation and lack of medical attention. Many of the people injured during the bombings by the Bosnian-Serbian forces flooded into the hospital.**



I'll always have horrible memories of that town. It essentially comprised women and children who arrived in the night, fleeing bombing of neighbouring villages. They came in their pyjamas, in jumpers, some barefoot. They only had time to get out of their houses to save themselves. You could hear people shouting, crying. The wounded were being carried in wheelbarrows. It was dreadfully cold and for fuel they were burning Coke [Coca Cola] boxes on street corners. There were small fires like that all through the night, and thousands and

thousands of people crowded the town. We went to the hospital. The situation was like something out of Dante's Inferno; an absolute nightmare with people bleeding everywhere. The staff members were completely overwhelmed. There were two little girls with broken legs on the floor, moaning, and I went to find Morillon, saying to him, "come and see the war." I'll always remember that Morillon came to the hospital, gave a little speech, and then turned away. He was incapable of going to see these children bathed in their own blood. At the end of the day, he was incapable of 'seeing the war.' Most of those people died from lack of treatment, because there was nothing to treat them with. Eric and I are doctors, not surgeons, but we still tried to operate, treat, give transfusions (using our own blood), and more. We might have saved one or two people. It was an exploratory mission and we didn't know what was going to happen or what we were going to find.

Dr Georges Dallemagne, MSF Belgium Director of Operations, Interviewed in July 2000 (in French.)

**On 12 March, the inhabitants of Srebrenica refused to let the MSF team leave the enclave. They felt that their presence would act as a potential guarantee against further violence. Clinging to the same hope, they also stopped General Morillon and his team. On 13 March, from the balcony of the post office building, the General addressed them: "Don't worry. I'll stay with you." He demanded the end of the Serb offensive, the application of ceasefires, the establishment of relief corridors to Srebrenica, and the deployment of observers from the UN. [V8](#)**



'Text of U.N. General's Speech From Besieged Srebrenica,' **Reuters** (UK) Sarajevo, 13 March 1993 (in English).

**Extract:**

General Morillon speaking from Srebrenica. "When I was appointed Commander of Bosnia-Herzegovina Command I decided to base myself in Sarajevo because that was the place where the population was most at risk. I placed myself there for symbolic reasons to reduce their danger. [...]

Last week it became clear the Serbs were not stopping their offensive in eastern Bosnia Herzegovina; not so much because they needed to capture territory, but because they had become outraged at the discovery of the mass graves at Kamenica. I have tried to make them understand that justice for all war crimes should be dispensed once the fighting has ceased and peace has been established. But they did not want to listen. They had decided to take justice into their own hands.

Fully conscious that a major tragedy was about to take place in Srebrenica, I deliberately came here and I have now decided to stay here in Srebrenica in order to calm the anguish of the population and in order to save them, or try to save them.

I demand, first, an immediate halt to the Serb offensive as was promised me in Pale. Two, the immediate and complete implementation of all ceasefires agreed. Three, the immediate and permanent deployment of the necessary U.N. military observers. Four, the opening of a road corridor from Srebrenica to Bratunac, to Konjevic Polje to Zvornik. UNPROFOR engineers will repair the small bridge blown up between Srebrenica and Bratunac. Five, the opening of an air corridor to Srebrenica to evacuate the hundreds of seriously injured. Six, the immediate release of the convoys, this time for Srebrenica, which is at present stuck in Zvornik. To the population in Srebrenica, I say: (a long pause and then the same voice in faltering Serbo-Croat, which translated says) don't be afraid, I will stay with you.



*We said to the Serbs that we were coming back the next day, but then when we wanted to leave the next day, the people told us, "No, you're staying with us." As doctors, we were moving quite easily around the enclave; we were warmly welcomed, and people were sharing what little they had to eat with us. The soldiers who'd accompanied us stayed with them. They were very scared of being taken hostage. At around two or three in the morning, Morillon woke us up and told us, "I'm leaving. My camp leader will take care of the rest of the operation." He hung about in the enclave the whole night and then, when he clearly wasn't able to get out, he came back. The next day, when he woke up around midday after his attempt to abscond, he'd changed his mind and his strategy, announcing, "I'll stay in Srebrenica, set up my headquarters and protect this enclave." It was at that moment that official UN protection was established, and thus this immense responsibility from the international community as regards the future and destiny of the enclave. We all stayed another day to help in the hospital, and then we left. In any case, we weren't the right people. They needed a surgical team with supplies, a large MSF team to get the hospital back in order.*

Dr Georges Dallemagne, MSF Belgium Director of Operations, Interviewed in July 2000 (in French).

**The MSF exploratory team left Srebrenica on 14 March. On their return to Brussels, they spoke to the media about the desperate situation in the enclave and the challenge posed by General Morillon's strategy. A press conference was held on 16 March.**



'A Terrifying Testimonial on the Bosnian Ordeal,' Edouard Van Velthem, *Le Soir* (Belgium), 16 March 1993 (in French).

**Extract:**

His voice is low, tired. Back from a four-day trip to the besieged enclave of Srebrenica in eastern Bosnia Herzegovina,

via Belgrade, Dr Georges Dallemagne, Director of Operations at Médecins Sans Frontières Belgium, remains in shock at the harsh realities. And his testimonial is edifying: the town that a mixed UN and MSF delegation entered last Friday is half destroyed and deliberately starved. In the convoy, in addition to the vehicle of the UNPROFOR Commander in Bosnia, General Philippe Morillon, who is still there, is a car from the High Commissioner of Refugees, a truck full of medical equipment and a light-armoured vehicle.

There are still some 30,000 people there, of which half are refugees from Konjevic Polje. Many of them hadn't eaten for five or six days; others are eating berries or acorns picked off the ground. Many are homeless, so they are forced to stay outside in the glacial wind. Children die from the cold like this every night, but the influx of the desperate and displaced shows no sign of slowing down: more and more arrive each day, through the neighbouring mountains, after walking for seven or eight hours in the snow. They don't have anything but the clothes on their backs. [...]

With a maximum capacity of 96 beds, the hospital has taken in 150 injured, three-quarters of whom are men, and 80% of all injuries are from bombings – predominately pieces of shrapnel. And this doesn't include the victims crammed together in neighbouring homes.

The five doctors working there are exhausted and out of supplies and equipment. Operations are performed in torchlight, sterilisations without electricity. The hospitals I've visited in Africa are often in better shape. In this context of precarious survival, the American airdrops are, of course, an inadequate stopgap [measure]: contrary to what was said at the start, the drops are now extremely precise. The parcels land two or three kilometres maximum from the town, but only the sturdiest from among the populace can manage to fetch them [...] There are riots; people fighting each other for a ration. [...]

Heading off with all the authorisations required to force their way through the various roadblocks, the expedition that Dr Dallemagne was accompanying also had to deal with additional difficulties: multiple thorough checks by Serb soldiers; a bridge in tatters over the main road; being forced to take narrow, icy mountain roads; and the subdued welcome from the Muslim population. [...]

As we attempted to depart, they prevented us from leaving, in dread of being killed the moment our backs were turned. There was one moment of high tension and, if truth be told, we were held against our will. Yet, General Morillon turned things around: he made a speech, raised the UN flag, and promised to stay there until all of the injured, and not just the women and children – since men aged 16 to 60 were considered potential war criminals by the Serbs – could be evacuated. [...] The people were comforted, and we ourselves were able to go without any trouble the following day. Hats off to General Morillon: he accomplished the only humanly possible action.

Today, the emergency issue for MSF's "frontline brigade" involves getting a surgical team in place in Srebrenica with all the necessary equipment. [...] However, authorisations are being delayed, promises are being broken and the situation is at a standstill. [...] A fragile hope for the injured and refugees in Srebrenica appeared yesterday evening with the Serb and

Bosnian Chiefs of Staff, General Mladic and Commander Halilevic, yielding to the entreaties of Philippe Morillon, authorised the passage of the UN relief convoy on Tuesday, and agreed to respect the temporary ceasefire. However, what is intolerable is that the local military leaders misled us for weeks. The green light that we received from Belgrade switched immediately to red in Pale, the Bosnian Serb stronghold.



*When we got back to Brussels, we organised a press conference that had a huge impact, because very few people had come back from Srebrenica and very few of them had given first-hand accounts. My testimonial was quite brutal because I told them everything I'd seen. I had been extremely shocked and I think my account brought what was happening in Srebrenica to public attention - and maybe temporarily stopped the offensive that was underway and stabilised the front lines at that moment; for how long, I have no idea.*

Dr Georges Dallemagne, MSF Belgium Director of Operations, Interviewed in July 2000 (in French).

**The media and western public opinion commended General Morillon's action. The President of MSF France, Rony Brauman, was one of the few to publicly point out its limits and the harmful consequences.**



'Delayed Photos,' *Le Monde* (France), 19 March 1993, (in French).

#### Extract:

We found the general at the beginning of the 'march of the century.' Cavada [Jean Marie, journalist]: "Hold on, general, I'll pass you over to Bernard Kouchner, and also Mr Mendiluce, Correspondent for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the former Yugoslavia." "We're ready to join you," said Kouchner, admiringly. In return, surrounded by snow, mud, and death, the general doled out a few kind words to Bernard Kouchner. Should we be sorry that the general is with us in this almost permanent link-up, at the end of this ham radio set that connects him to the rest of the world? That he poked his nose into the mill that transforms everything, from the sublime to the tragic, into vague, indifferent entertainment? Included is the soap opera of the convoy destined for Srebrenica: Will it get through or not? Answer, tomorrow, maybe. The President of Médecins Sans Frontières, Rony Brauman, with Mr Cavada, showed honourable reluctance in the face of the humanitarian spectacle. "It's when children die that it's obscene," Kouchner replied to him, with, for him, the brutal force of evidence. If we didn't hear General Morillon every evening, wouldn't we already have forgotten about him? Wouldn't he have been buried beneath the daily media flotsam, the terrorism in Algeria, Rocard's most recent gaffe? The mother in the snow with her baby, wouldn't she have

been chased off by another mother, a sailor's wife, marching through the streets of a French town? Two days of attention in a row: that's a lot to ask for!



'A General on the Balcony,' Rony Brauman, *Le Monde* (France), 3 April 1993 (in French).

#### Extract:

General Morillon, in charge of a so-called protection force, has never gone out of his way to condemn the violence done to those trying to defend themselves, and yet he has always shown great understanding for the attackers. During a trip to Sarajevo, I heard him giving the Bosnian army a stern rebuke to arouse anger amongst the Serbs by fighting artillery fire with more fire. In short, he is the type of person who has the gall to claim to resist while we know better. We are ready, if their enemies give us the green light, to bring them something to eat from the communal graves to the far interior of the detention camps.

As for 'Doctor [Radovan] Karadzic,' one of the most visible war criminals in this region, he is credited here for letting a relief convoy through, with a desire for peace recognised by everyone and serving as an accessible representative. While words once carried meaning, the United Nations Protection Force should be rechristened Ethnic Cleaning Observation Force. Daladier never hid his shame over Munich, or Blum his fury for being unable to intervene in Spain.

We exhibit the undeniable physical courage of a soldier – that is, after all the job – to cover-up the incessant powerlessness and the cowardice of our behaviour. Yet, with a single gesture of bravura, provided it is shown on TV, our pitiful resignations are wiped away. My reluctance in the face of the humanitarian spectacle comes from this, and my conviction that the 'indecent death of a child' does not warrant any other indecent act. When are we going to notice that, once again most of the carnage took place when the allied troops landed, and similarly, in Mogadishu? When are we going to remember that, even when they are dying of hunger, Somalis are not animals to whom we can throw, without any qualms, a few life-saving but measly scraps under the burning sun? What I dread deeply with regard to the growth of the humanitarian spectacle in Bosnia and in Somalia is that mechanised, mediatised, and sterilised humanitarian action makes us insidiously inhuman.



*It was a response to Daniel Schneidermann who in his 'media' column in Le Monde, launched into a diatribe on Morillon. Me, I thought that Morillon was a doer and that Schneidermann's enthusiasm about him was completely misplaced. So I wrote this letter, which he published, quite elegantly. I didn't want to do it in an 'I protest and I have a right to respond' way, because I have no standing to do so. However, MSF was on the ground, so in the best position to speak with him. And then, there was this heroic general aspect. Dallemagne and the others were ten times more inflated than he was; he wasn't risking anything, since the Serbs weren't going to bring down a French general. Our Belgian and Dutch*

colleagues found it quite funny that I was digging into Morillon. He wasn't held in great esteem. I was the only one to say it, but there weren't any reactions.

Dr. Rony Brauman, MSF France President, 1982 - 1994,  
MSF France Foundation Research Director from 1994,  
interviewed in 2000 and 2015 (in French).

**On 20 March, a surgeon from MSF Belgium entered Srebrenica. A week later, an anaesthetist, a doctor, and a health logistician joined him. On 24 March, an UNPROFOR mission to evacuate the wounded was interrupted by bombing from Bosnian-Serbian forces. The team was working with a terrorised population in utter destitution, despite the arrival of two convoys of supplies on 28 and 30 March, which in turn, evacuated over 5,000 women and children. The MSF surgeon, who stayed 10 days in the bombarded enclave, gave his first-hand account in the French daily *Le Monde*.**



'Bosnia-Herzegovina: Testimonial on the Ordeal of the Inhabitants of Srebrenica from a Member of Médecins Sans Frontières.' *Le Monde* (France) 1 April 1993 (in French).

#### Extract:

Thierry Pontus is in shock. He's looking for the right words. He's having trouble expressing what he's just lived through. A member of MSF (Doctors Without Borders), the Belgian surgeon, who made it back to Belgrade on Tuesday 30 March, is the first foreign doctor to have spent 10 days in the Muslim enclave of Srebrenica. He did his best during these days to bring aid to the people of this town in Western Bosnia, which has been cut off from the world for 11 months of war.

Thierry Pontus entered Srebrenica in General Philippe Morillon's jeep, without his two assistants, an anaesthetist and a nurse, who were denied safe passage by the Serb besiegers. He was forced to confront a true humanitarian crisis alone. At the hospital in Srebrenica, where he spent the majority of his stay, five general practitioners, without any surgical experience, had battled day and night for months to save the injured and sick, whom they operated on by torchlight in an operating theatre that "doesn't deserve the name." While Dr Pontus took it upon himself to teach them the rudiments of surgery when he arrived, "even for amputations, when they'd already performed almost 400,"

[...]

He explains that the most serious problem was infection due to the lack of sterilisation equipment and washing facilities, since Srebrenica's water is not safe.

The town, which had a population of 9,000 before the war, has seen an influx of tens of thousands of refugees [displaced] from neighbouring Muslim pockets that have fallen into Serb hands. In Srebrenica's school, "as big as a sec-

ondary school back at home," the refugees are piled in, 80-100 per classroom, in catastrophic health conditions.

One of the most tragic images that the doctor can't forget is a baby with its stomach torn open by a shell; it died in the arms of one of the Canadian "blue berets." The infant was injured on Wednesday 24 March at the time when the blue berets were carrying out an evacuation of inhabitants by helicopter, an operation that had to be cancelled since the Serbs were targeting the landing strip.

MSF, which over the next few days is sending out a new surgeon, an anaesthetist, and a logistician, intends to continue its activities in Srebrenica, even if those in charge of organising the relief mission are under no illusions. The UN observers that have been moved into the enclave have, in fact, admitted in front of Dr Pontus that, "with the support of the regular army units (Yugoslav) deployed on the Bosnian side, the Serbs can cross the line whenever they want." While the situation has just deteriorated, "we're worried that the MSF and UNPROFOR teams will be kept as safeguards by the Muslims," stresses the doctor, concluding that, "the relief workers are very uneasy because if the women and children are evacuated, only the men remain, and then we won't be able to do anything more to save the town."



When we got back to Belgrade, I said "We push, we carry on". It took Morillon and our team's incredible energy to get back into Srebrenica again. I caught up with Morillon on a road and I had to cut in front of him to get him to stop. I spoke to him as if he were General de Gaulle! "General Morillon, excuse me, I was with you down there. I have a surgeon and a logistics expert here. That counts down there, as you know, they need them." "Ah yes, I recognise you". "You need to take them with you". "OK, they can get in the back and let's hope the Serbs..." And the team got through. It was hanging by a thread. Anything could happen at any time and there was no shortage of medical work to do. We had to prioritise.

Dr Eric Dachy, MSF general coordinator in Belgrad,  
October 1991 - August 1993, Interviewed in 2000, 2015,  
(in French)

**On 6 April, the UN's High Commissioner for Refugees announced they wanted to evacuate 10-15,000 civilians from Srebrenica. Many observers perceived this move as a risk that could encourage the ethnic cleansing practised by the Serbian forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Meanwhile, the United States was threatening to remove the embargo on arms deliveries to Muslim Bosnians.**



'Besieged by the Serbs in Western Bosnia, the Muslim Enclave of Srebrenica Will Be Partially Evacuated. Rescue or Purge?' *Le Monde* (France), 7 April 1993 (in French).

#### Extract:

Indeed, an HR [Human Rights] representative in Sarajevo, John McMillan, strongly denied that the UN's specialised organisation was participating in ethnic cleansing. Yet each departure of white trucks from Srebrenica has led to bloody scrambles causing several deaths and giving some idea of the terror under which these people are living and the terrible fate that awaits them if they remain exposed to Serb attack. To be sure, the Bosnian President, Alija Izetbegovic, gave the green light for this mass evacuation. Many Muslims remain in opposition to a practice that, in the name of humanism is at most, basic and risks offering a further victory on a silver platter to the Serbian forces while clearing a new region of its original population. For it's certainly not by chance that the Serbs have, until now, opposed the sending in of additional "blue berets" to Srebrenica. It is, in fact, one further sign that Belgrade and its local allies still have the firm intention of reducing [the population of] this enclave, which represents a breach, a sort of "anomaly" in the territories they have conquered. However, once those who are clearly not fighters – the injured, the sick, women, children, and the elderly – are evacuated, the only ones remaining in the town will be fit males of an age to bear arms that will therefore be quickly assimilated into the fighting forces. And the war, in which the international community does not want to get involved, will take its course. Given the imbalance of power, it's easy to imagine the fate of Srebrenica. And even if John McMillan were right, if the UN has not engaged in condemnable practices, this evacuation is one further act of failure to put on the UN's slate. The organisation is acting, in this case, as if it had given up defending Srebrenica, as if it had decided once and for all not to obstruct the Serb advance. In this case, it does have the duty to save as many human lives as possible.

**On 7 April, MSF publicly asked for reinforcements for the various United Nations international relief teams in besieged Srebrenica in order to meet the needs of the population as well as to avoid large-scale abuses, should the town be taken.**



'Médecins Sans Frontières Requests Reinforcement of International Presence in Besieged Srebrenica,' **Press Release**, MSF, 7 April 1993 (in French).

Médecins Sans Frontières has launched an appeal to reinforce international presence in an effort to bring relief to the population of Srebrenica. The number of personnel from international organisations is presently insufficient, and they lack the necessary resources to meet the needs of the population. Only one representative from the UN High Commissioner for

Refugees, five United Nations observers, seven members of the UNPROFOR and two members of Médecins Sans Frontières are present in the besieged enclave, which is on the point of collapse. Wholly effective action is only possible if the relief teams are reinforced. This greater presence might have a dissuasive effect and prevent wide-scale abuse if the town does fall. Even if evacuation missions are moving forward, 30,000 defenseless civilians will remain at the mercy of the aggressors. International humanitarian law, as defined by the Geneva Conventions, provides for the protection of civilians in war zones, but also engages the signatory States to respect, and to ensure that others respect, its application, regardless of the circumstances. Médecins Sans Frontières is assembling additional medical teams to deal with any new emergency interventions in Srebrenica.

**On 12 April, bombardments over Srebrenica intensified. Some 100 seriously injured people arrived at the hospital and were treated by local staff, supported by the MSF team.**

**On 15 April, due to intensified bombardments, some of the team left the enclave with an UNHCR convoy, which was leaving empty. The Bosnian Muslim authorities refused to allow any refugees to leave until their soldiers, who were seriously injured in combat against Bosnian-Serbian forces to hold onto the enclave, were evacuated. The MSF volunteers spoke to the media about the population's desperate situation.**



'Médecins Sans Frontières' Testimonial on the Besieged Town – The Refugees in Srebrenica are Terrorised,' *Agence France Presse/Le Soir* (Belgium), 16 April 1993 (in French).

#### Extract:

The refugees in Srebrenica are terrorised, Hans Ullens explains soberly. He heads up the Médecins Sans Frontières Holland humanitarian organisation's team. Contacted Thursday evening by radio in Tuzla, his voice crackles through the speakers of the amateur radio, which endeavours to improve the sound quality of this link with the Muslim enclave in Western Bosnia, besieged for weeks by Bosnian-Serbian forces. Ullens had his three medical colleagues, two surgeons, and one anaesthetist, leave on Thursday. For the time being, the situation is difficult. "It's too dangerous," he explains in French. A specialist in drinking water, he decided to stay. His colleagues took advantage of the [outbound] convoy from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), of which five trucks were given permission by the Bosnian Serbian forces to pass. The convoy left emptyhanded, with the local authorities refusing to allow any refugees to depart, while 500 seriously wounded were unable to be evacuated by helicopter. Only five elderly people were allowed to mount a truck with the five doctors. They arrived on Thursday evening in Tuzla, and from there the MSF doctors traveled to Belgrade.

Since Monday's bombardments, explains Hans Ullens, "we've spent most of the time in our building. We can't go out unless we have an armoured vehicle, and even then only for a short while. Before these bombardments, which the UN reported 57 deaths and 100 injured, all the refugees were sleeping in the streets. Since then, everyone has been trying to find shelter wherever they can, most often in the basements of houses. The population is terrorised," he underscored. [...] The bombings are less intense than last Monday, but continue. "The Bosnian Serbian forces are some two kilometres from the town and, in theory, nothing stands in their way of capturing the town," adds Ullens, whose voice occasionally trails off on the radio. On his arrival to Srebrenica three weeks ago, he noted the refugees' deteriorating situation. While the food supplied by the UNHCR is just about sufficient, albeit not very varied, stocks are diminishing. Before Monday's bombardments, there were enough drugs, to the extent that the team asked on Friday for a stop on sending more. Since then, stocks have significantly depleted.

**The French and Belgian sections of MSF reflected on mass ways of mobilising public opinion on the situation in Bosnia, so that people would put pressure on political leaders.**



'Dramatic situation in central Bosnia – Urgent appeal for surgeons to join our teams' **Press conference invitation** MSF Belgium, 20 April 1993 (in French).

Based on the account of Dr Georges Dallemagne (Operations Director for MSF Belgium), who has just returned from Zenica and Maglaj in central Bosnia, Médecins Sans Frontières wishes to express its concern on the scale of the humanitarian crisis in Bosnia.

A press conference will be organised on Tuesday 20 April at 15:00 at Médecins Sans Frontières' head office at 24 rue Deschampheler, 1080 Brussels.

Médecins Sans Frontières is launching an urgent appeal to surgeons to join its teams already operating in eastern Bosnia (Srebrenica, Tuzla, Zepa and Gorazde) and central Bosnia (Zenica).



**Message** from the General Director of MSF Belgium to the presidents of other sections of MSF, 20 April 1993 (in French).

From the outset, the context in former Yugoslavia has been a series of massacres, atrocities, torture and inhumane acts. We are stunned, not only by the physical violence of the crimes being committed, but by the terrible hatred and hostility they express.

The last few hours in Srebrenica only confirm the tragedy

these people are facing.

MSF has been present since the start of the conflict. It has witnessed the slow and deliberate progress of the policy of ethnic cleansing pursued by the Serbs and the atrocities committed by the

Croats, and played the sadly strategic role of a humanitarian actor limited to actions that are heroic but also of very limited impact.

We have raised our voices on several occasions to bear witness to the horror we have encountered, but also to give it the legal force of a crime against humanity but, like others, we have not been heard: realpolitik prevails.

Today, Médecins Sans Frontières is standing alongside Srebrenica as it dies.

Action on the ground needs to continue.

But it is unimaginable without large-scale action at the European level. Speaking for myself as an individual and for MSF in light of its moral and ethical obligations, we have a responsibility and a duty to try to stop the war by all the means available to us.

As citizens, united around the same ideal, everything is prompting us to prevent this conflict from developing in the way it is likely to. First, the irresponsibility of our respective governments, who appear to have accepted from the outset that our fellow human beings should simply be sacrificed, and then the inertia and lack of courage shown by our people, who allegedly support democratic values and human rights. There are two challenges to tackle: first, stopping the war for the people who are still alive, and then reminding our fellow citizens that the fate of humanity is also, to an extent, in their hands.

We hope to be able to bring these two aspects together by organising a large-scale demonstration, in which MSF would be prepared to invest all its energy. Obviously, this will only be successful and its consequences positive if enough people come and take part, so the movement will need to use all its powers to mobilise people to attend.

Proposed actions

1. organise a march for peace in all the capital cities where we have head offices (Brussels, Paris, Amsterdam, Barcelona, Geneva and Luxembourg).

2. secure the resources to get people out on the streets

\* contact our loyal donors with a personalised letter, make personalised phone calls, set half the list as the target for attendance

\* messages on radio, television, in the newspapers, etc.

3. a special edition of our public newsletters

Here in Brussels we are ready to give it our all... on 8/05/93.

We hope to see 200,000 people out on the streets. You may say it's a dream... we'll see!



'Operation Bosnia' **Draft** MSF France Communications Department, 6 May 1993 (in French).

**Extract:**

MSF is committing a significant level of resource and dropping its "reserve", using its moral authority and operational credibility to publicise the situation in Bosnia to various



European audiences.

### 1) What operation?

Leaving aside the idea of a street demonstration, which strikes us as difficult to achieve in both practical and political terms, we are thinking more of an operation that:

- increases in intensity over a week (or other period of time)
- uses the idea of an hourglass: each grain of sand is one of the two million Bosnians who need to be rescued urgently, mobilising people around the idea of urgency.
- mobilises the whole of the European "MSF movement": the members we rely on to relay the operation locally and persuade our regional branches in their area, and our donors, whom we will ask to send us a letter for our political bodies.
- uses various high-impact and symbolic communications tools to strengthen the effect of mobilising people, including press conferences announcing the operation and repeated press contacts, daily press releases to update people on the actions taken and the number of Bosnians who still need to be saved; handing out a four-page publication in the street based on a simple message, outlining the atrocities already identified, the impotence of humanitarian action and what can still be done (see below).

### 2) What are the objectives?

- Inform the public by "revealing" intolerable acts: this is the minimum objective if the operation does not resonate to the extent we would like
- Mobilise the MSF movement and rely on a snowball effect in public opinion, by getting the people to ask politicians to account for their actions. This is the maximum impact we want. If the mobilisation is strong, we can count on pressure being put on the politicians.

### 3) What's the message?

- The atrocities of ethnic cleansing are not yet over; there are still two million Bosnians in an unacceptable situation, who need emergency help.
- Can it be humanitarian help? As a humanitarian organisation operating in the field, we say no. Humanitarian action is a sedative that people view as a remedy.

Because the solution(s) to the human problems we are seeing today need to be provided by political bodies. As a European citizen, you need to hold your politicians to account.

- How? By writing to your member of parliament and asking that those who represent you speak out about tangible actions to be taken.

All actions must reflect the values that have governed our democracies since the end of the Second World War.

We are also asking the people we mobilise to demand a special meeting within 15 days at the National Assembly (or equivalent) so that the politicians can explain their rescue plan for the Bosnians. The political alternative is not simply allied military intervention, but a blockade, jamming television from Belgrade in Bosnia, support for the elected government in Bosnia, etc.

People should also demand that the reports of the EEC's observers be made public.

**Reaping the benefits of media coverage of the flash visit of a UN delegation to the enclave, On 25 April, MSF reminded the press that Srebrenica is in the process of becoming a "health bomb."**



'U.N. Delegation Visits Srebrenica, 161 Wounded Flown Out,' *Agence France Presse*, 25 April 1993 (in English).

### Extract:

The U.N. mission spent the day Sunday inspecting and talking to residents of Srebrenica, a mostly Moslem town, which has swollen by at least 30,000 refugees [displaced] since Serb fighters mounted an offensive here last year. But a year of fighting and living in overcrowded conditions has taken its toll, international doctors are reporting that the health of Srebrenica's swarming population is deteriorating rapidly. Water is dirty, scarce, and barely safe to drink. Each person is rationed to three litres (6 pints) of water a day, instead of the minimum 20 litres needed daily to avoid an epidemic, doctors said. "Srebrenica has become a health bomb," said Jacques de Milliano, an official with the Dutch branch of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF, or Doctors without Borders). The lack of water is a factor behind the spread of diarrhoea, especially among children, he said. The illness can become fatal within 48 hours if not treated, de Milliano warned. However, to his knowledge no one had yet died of the sickness, he said.

**On 16 April 1993, UN Resolution n° 819 demanded that Srebrenica be treated as a safe area and called for an immediate increase in UNPROFOR forces in the enclave. A ceasefire and demilitarisation agreement was signed between the Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Muslim forces, stipulating that any paramilitary units, with the exception of UNPROFOR forces, must leave the town at the end of the operation. For many analysts, this was interpreted as an organised surrender of the Muslim forces. [V9](#)**

**On 17 April, Resolution n°820 reinforced the embargo against Serbia.**

**On 6 May, Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) declared an economic embargo against the Serbs of Bosnia-Herzegovina in order to force them to accept the peace plan.**

**The same day, Resolution n°824, adopted by the United Nations Security Council, added the enclaves of Sarajevo, Tuzla, Zepa, Gorazde, and Bihac to the list of "safe zones under UNPROFOR protection."**

**On 8 May, a ceasefire agreement allowed for the deployment of UN forces in the place of soldiers. In Srebrenica, the demilitarised zone was enlarged.**



'The Security Council Declares Five More Bosnian Towns as Safe Areas,' *Le Monde* (France), 8 May 1993 (in French).

#### Extract:

This resolution authorises the reinforcement of the UNPROFOR in Bosnia by 50 military observers, i.e. five observers in each safe area. "This presence will be purely symbolic," explains a diplomat. The goal is in fact to increase the political cost of the aggression, the message being that any attacks on protected areas are tantamount to attacks on the UN. "The western members of the council who opposed adopting this text believe that declaring 'safe areas' without really protecting the populations living there is 'quite a cynical approach.'" And to cite the example of Srebrenica, declared a protected area three weeks ago, the town is facing particularly huge problems with its water supply. All that remains is the threat of resolution 824 to take "any additional measures" in the event that none of the parties comply.

**On 4 June, Resolution n° 836, adopted by the UN Security Council, allowed the UNPROFOR to retaliate in the event of aggression against any of the six Muslim enclaves declared 'protected areas' and the Member states, acting nationally or through regional organizations to use air power to support UNPROFOR.**



'The UN Missions in Yugoslavia: Evasions,' *Le Monde* (France), 25 September 1993 (in French).

#### Extract:

The UN has become a place where failing political action is a substitute for humanitarian action. The guiding rule of this humanitarian intervention was to operate only when the consent of all the warring parties was obtained. The resolution of the Security Council authorising the use of force to guarantee the safe passage of relief to the people went practically unheeded, and time and time again, we have seen soldiers obstructing convoys despite their UN armoured vehicle protection. Moreover, this humanitarian action was not politically neutral. The most striking episode in this respect was Srebrenica, in April 1993, where we saw General Morillon, commander of the 'blue berets' in Bosnia, save the small Muslim enclave besieged by the Serbs in return for its surrender and the disarmament of Muslim fighters by the UNPROFOR forces themselves. The permanent members of the Security Council have also been discredited, notably in the eyes of non-aligned and Muslim countries, by adopting a series of resolutions intended to show their firmness but which were never applied, or applied much later. In May 1992, Resolution 757 declared an embargo against Serbia, which everyone knew would be nothing more than a sieve, which it was until April 1993. At this time, the council transformed the pseudo-embargo into a far more impenetrable blockade, the effect of which would be very quickly gauged on the regime in

Belgrade: they had lost a year. In October 1992, the council declared Bosnia a no-fly zone for the Serb air force, but without reprisals. It was violated hundreds of times with impunity until, in March 1993, under pressure from the Americans, the Council put NATO in charge of ensuring the ban was respected. This first point of conflict between the Americans and Europeans had highlighted another ambiguity regarding the presence of 'blue berets' in Bosnia: hostages, the designated target of reprisals, obstructed any military air intervention. Not wishing to engage in a showdown in former Yugoslavia, Europeans and Americans (whatever they say) each benefited. The "international community" lost all credibility over it. While on the subject of resolutions without any repercussions, we might also mention the safe areas intended to protect Sarajevo and five Muslim enclaves, which never came into being, due to lack of 'blue beret' reinforcements, and the international court intended to try war criminals who nobody arrested and with whom the UNPROFOR is continuing to negotiate on the ground. Lastly, the other UN intervention in the former Yugoslavia – the drafting of peace plans – is perplexing to say the least. The Cyrus Vance plan for Croatia, adopted in February 1992 and which 14,000 'blue berets' are supposed to enforce has still not been applied: the Serb militia in Krajina are still armed to the teeth and less prepared than ever to give up their secessionist warfare. In Bosnia, the UN first supported a Vance-Owen plan which didn't have, far from it, only strengths and which, above all, played a role in starting the second Bosnian war: the one that pitted Croats and Muslims against each other. Then, this was abandoned before it was even rejected by Bosnian Serbs. It now supports an Owen-Stoltenberg plan that, if accepted, will establish the splitting of Bosnia. Bowing to force, the United Nations, breaking one of the fundamental precepts of its charter, will thus accept the disintegration of a state that it had recognised as a member in May 1993.

**On 15 May, in his annual report to the general assembly, the president of MSF France spoke of the organisation's malaise in the face of the use of humanitarian aid as an alibi for political inertia in Bosnia-Herzegovina. He nevertheless underscored that MSF had fulfilled its role in Srebrenica. A debate ensued on the necessity for the French section to develop programmes in former Yugoslavia. In the press release published following the general assembly meeting, MSF France reiterated its concerns about the use of humanitarian aid in Bosnia- Herzegovina to compensate for political inertia. V10**



**Annual Report** from the President of MSF France at the 22nd General Assembly of MSF France, 15 May 1993 (in French).

#### Extract:

All through the year, we have dilly dallied regarding our engagement in Bosnia. Such dithering is due both to the

significant, effective presence of MSF's Dutch and Belgian sections, in both Croatia and Serbia, as well as, and we mustn't hide it, to the malaise that we have experienced with regard to the use of humanitarian action in Bosnia. [...] I simply want to mention that, at this very moment, a Belgian team of five MSF workers is knuckling down to work in Srebrenica, and we hope that other missions are underway. If MSF is in Srebrenica, regardless of the judgment we cast on the use of humanitarian action in Bosnia, it is indisputable that MSF fulfils its role, that this is our mission and that we need to accomplish it.



'Médecins Sans Frontières' General Assembly is Concerned About the Growing Problems of Intervening in Certain Populations in Distress, and Takes Exception to the Use of Humanitarian Action in Bosnia,' MSF France **Press Release**, 18 May 1993 (in French).

#### Extract:

Debates at the General Assembly on the relationship between humanitarian action and politics have highlighted the indignation of all regarding the use of humanitarian action in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Refusing to outlaw ethnic cleansing and its attendant woes when there was still time, the European nations have merely contented themselves with accompanying relief convoys. While reiterating how essential the aid is due to the deteriorating situation on the ground, the MSF General Assembly firmly condemned the humanitarian reasons given for the political renunciation in Bosnia.

**In June, an agreement was made between the Belgian and French sections to now jointly manage the programmes in the enclaves of Srebrenica and Gorazde.**

**MSF France also launched a programme in the Bosnian refugee camp at Karlovac in Croatia. The team continued to gather accounts of the atrocities the displaced people who had spent time in the detention camps had suffered.**



**Minutes** from MSF France's Board Meeting on June 1993 (in French).

#### Extract:

Former Yugoslavia - Marc Gastellu (Deputy Director of Operations)

At the last General Assembly, there were discussions on the question of whether interventions in the former Yugoslavia were necessary or not. Marc Gastellu hence visited the region to observe the actions of the Belgian and Dutch sections, comprehend the difficulties encountered, and identify areas for further reflection. [...] In the enclaves of Gorazde and Srebrenica, where the town was experiencing considerable

problems with hygiene, a supply of drinking water was established and a surgical programme was developed. In addition to medical support, these actions are hugely positive in terms of presence and solidarity. To compensate for the problems in recruiting personnel for these missions, MSF France will team up with the Belgians. [...] Marc Gastellu noted the difficulties the teams had in differentiating themselves from the UNPROFOR, their only contacts. This lack of perspective prevents them, in his opinion, from being able to [objectively] assess the local position. He also saw the continual wearing of bulletproof vests as an escalation of the usual forms of protection adopted by MSF [...] The presence of MSF in Karlovac has helped to show how the situation has evolved. MSF France often has a bad reputation there, and is frequently confused with MDM [Médecins Du Monde] and its poster campaign.<sup>3</sup> Plus there is huge operational complexity and real danger resulting from the eyewitness accounts being rendered public.<sup>4</sup> All these reasons led Marc Gastellu to conclude that MSF France should not work this region. Its intervention in the field should be restricted to giving support to the other sections in the Gorazde and Srebrenica enclaves. A disclosure by any interested section whatsoever could put teams on the ground at risk, so any public pronouncements should be given as a joint message from all three sections.



"Former Bosnian prisoners: mission assessment and prospects" by lawyer Pierre Salignon and psychologist Yves Gozlans, MSF France heads of mission, **Messages** (MSF France internal newsletter, also distributed to 100 journalists) no. 61 June 1993 (in French).

#### Extract:

- Psychological support for victims [...]
- Gathering first-hand accounts

This is about collecting information to determine the true nature of the atrocities committed in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and then making the link between individual accounts and the collective narrative. The information gathered during the surveys we have carried out in France with several hundred refugees (representative sample) mean we now have a better understanding of the events that occurred between March 1992 and February 1993 in all the "cleansed" areas of Bosnia-Herzegovina

(Kozarac, Banja-Luca, Dobo. Kljuc, Zvornik, etc.). [...]

Promoting similar approaches in neighbouring countries by: [...]

- continuing the work done in France in Croatia, in the transit camp in Karlovac. Launching a mission, scheduled for 1 June 1993. [...]

An MSF mission is beginning in the camp in Karlovac in Croatia, where 2,400 Croatian and Bosnian refugees formerly held in the camps are being housed. A team made up of a psychologist, psychiatrist and specialist educator will lead work to provide medical and psychological support.



“What presence in former Yugoslavia?” Marc-Gastellu Etchegorry, Deputy Operations Director, MSF France, **Messages** (MSF France internal newsletter, also distributed to 100 journalists) no. 62, July-August 1993.

### Extract:

So much has been said about the Yugoslav conflict that everything is now commonplace and confused; apart from the general feeling of horror and cowardice, who knows how to react anymore?

Traumatized by the “accident” of Vukovar and split between its operational role and gathering accounts, MSF France has struggled in this conflict and not found a clear or unanimous position. The differences between sections have not made the task any easier. And there is no shortage of questions about gathering people’s accounts or what to do next.

What actions can be taken without endorsing Serbian ethnic cleansing and without endangering the teams working in the field? How can we be effective, and effective in what way, we might ask ourselves? How can we do what MSF really does and in the European era, what does “doing what MSF really does” actually mean?

And what about gathering accounts? Will it endanger the teams working in the field? What is the real point of it?

Everything has already been said, or almost? Everyone knows that humanitarian action will not save the Bosnians. It is clear that the international community is willing, with a cruel degree of cowardice, to abandon its fundamental principles and sacrifice an entire population to the hope of an uncertain peace that will calm good western consciences. Although our words may not appear to carry much weight in these circumstances, the ability to bear witness in relation to our actions is still a concern.

The questions must not make us forget the nature of our work and responsibilities: providing humanitarian assistance to people in precarious situations.

The Serbs’ ethnic cleansing has made violence omnipresent, obliging even the most moderate people to claim a nationality that previously represented little more than a sense of tradition.

The great carving up of Bosnia is coming to an end. Serbs and Croats have divided the territory between them, promising the (majority) Muslim population a few crumbs.

The enclaves (Sarajevo, Tuzla, Zepa, Srebrenica, Gorazde, Bihac) are under siege by Serbian forces. These regions and cities are effectively prisons, subjected to indiscriminate shellfire and the madness of the snipers, cities that they are trying to destroy through a campaign of continual fear and the lack of water and supplies.

The health situation varies, depending on the degree of violence and the extent to which they are accessible. Yet all these places are suffering from the same isolation and abandonment. Most of the time, medical needs can be met by Yugoslavian doctors but they often lack equipment. MSF Belgium and MSF Holland are trying to supply the enclaves with medicines and basic equipment. Their actions, which are governed by the medical context and level of insecurity, are allowing MSF to reach the civilian populations who are victims of the fighting.

As a result, MSF Holland is operating in Sarajevo, Bihac and Tuzla. MSF Belgium is working jointly with MSF France in the enclave of Srebrenica. This type of action needs to continue and be developed further, in parallel with the assistance being given to Bosnian refugees in Croatia by MSF France.

We always need to weigh up the price that has to be paid, and it is a heavy one in terms of compromise. Insecurity, bullet-proof jackets, helmets... – and the importance of our presence. We need to be ready to adapt and to question these operations.

But for the moment, at least, our presence in the enclaves does reflect what MSF really does.



*At this time, there was a lot of criticism about the Belgian intervention in Serbia, since MSF was bringing in medicines although Serbia was one of the largest exporters of medicines in the world. MSF was taking part in a European programme that was clearly political in nature, but we went along with it without asking ourselves too many questions. The Belgians were clearly keen for us to go, no doubt due to the question of resources, but also to give us a piece of the action. They opened the door for us. In Serbia, we didn’t have much to do, I knew it. In Croatia, there would have been things to do but it wasn’t where a humanitarian positioning had reason to be. In Bosnia, the Dutch had the ground covered and there was no point duplicating their efforts. My conclusion was therefore that the position we needed was in the enclaves, i.e. Srebrenica, Gorazde, and Zepa. Everyone agreed on this. It was typically the kind of place we should have been in, because it was a situation where we finally had the chance to do what we knew how to do: medical activities and witnessing.*

Dr. Marc Gastellu-Etchegorry, MSF France Deputy Director of Operations, 1992-1997, Interviewed in 2015  
(in French)



*Some months after the publication of the prisoners’ accounts at the end of 1992, I said we should go and see what was happening in Karlovac. There were people going for the first time and saying there was nothing we could do there. And then, after the AGM in June 1993, Rony said to me, “If you want to go, then go.” So I spent some time in Karlovac in Croatia in a refugee camp with some former prisoners, on a kind of front line that was going to see more action at certain times. We were at a stage of getting to grips with the context again. That’s how the French section works. Even though things were happening and the Belgians and Dutch were in position, there was still what Rony had said, namely that we weren’t going to hand out blankets to be used as shrouds. But we were gradually going to get involved at an operational level again, in a joint Belgian and French operation. We were going to help them work in the enclaves in eastern Bosnia from an HR point of view.*

*None of this was done in an exactly linear fashion, but in small areas. Gradually we would go into an area and then take control. We were willing to be a key player, even if it meant tension with*

*Brussels. But they left us plenty of room. And then we played our part and the people on the ground gained the legitimacy they got from the reality of being in the field.*

Pierre Salignon, Deputy Programme Manager, MSF France, in charge of programmes in the former Yugoslavia, 1992-1996, Interviewed in 2015 (in French).

**In mid-July 1993, MSF finally managed to open a programme in the enclave of Gorazde. It was managed jointly by the Belgian and French sections. As with the other enclaves in the region, sending in supplies was a random process because of the siege and living conditions deteriorated for the people in them.**

**MSF publicly denounced the situation and asked for more access to the enclaves, sometimes in conjunction with other organisations.**



'Twelve humanitarian agencies ask the United Nations to put an end to the blockade in Tuzla' **Press release**, MSF, 28 July 1993 (in French).

**Extract:**

The agencies that signed the appeal were as follows: Architectes et Ingénieurs du Monde (France), CARE International, Komitee Cap Aramur (Germany), Handicap International (France), International Rescue Committee (USA), Médecins Sans Frontières, Norwegian Refugee Council, OXFAM (Great Britain), Scottish European Aid (Great Britain), SwedeAid/Sida (Sweden), Solidarité (France), Swiss Disaster Relief.

**JOINT INTERNATIONAL APPEAL TO THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL TO END THE BLOCKADE IN TUZLA.**

**1. Background**

The Bosnian region of Tuzla is under siege. Although there are numerous conflicts, the region is the last place in Bosnia where people of all ethnic origins continue to live together in peace. Without immediate action by the United Nations Security Council, however, it is clear that this island of tolerance will not survive. All commercial traffic travelling through central Bosnia is blocked and the work of international humanitarian agencies is seriously threatened by political and military manoeuvres. The situation in Tuzla is rapidly becoming desperate.

**2. Problem**

The fundamental problem is the difficulty of access because of the war. The effects are as follows:

**a) Food shortages**

In spite of sustained efforts by UNHCR, just 60% of the food target for June reached the Tuzla region, even though the target itself only represented a third of the population. The lack of food prompted two riots in the last two weeks and the UNHCR warehouse was looted.

**b) Fuel shortages**

The lack of diesel has caused a serious energy crisis. Unless an adequate quantity of diesel reaches Tuzla soon, there is a very strong likelihood that the entire power grid will cease to function. The water supply depends on electricity. Without water, this industrial city will undoubtedly face a wave of epidemics.

The shortage of diesel is also affecting wheat production, thus increasing future needs for food aid.

**c) Medical care**

The health system is cruelly lacking in basic equipment, including gauze and antibiotics. One of the final convoys bringing these items in was looted in central Bosnia. The medical centre has been forced to stop everything except emergency surgery.

**d) Shelters**

There is a massive need for temporary and permanent housing for the 220,000 displaced persons in the region. Efforts to resolve these problems are being seriously hindered by the lack of building materials and fuel.

**3. Measures needed**

As professional humanitarian organisations, we are facing problems that are beyond our capacity to deal with them. At the same time, we are convinced that if the Tuzla region were opened up to the outside world, it could be self-sufficient.

We are therefore issuing a joint appeal to the United Nations Security Council

to take the necessary measures to:

a) Force the warring parties to guarantee that the Tuzla region has free access to the outside world and to respond to this demand by creating a "blue route"-type secure road.

b) As a minimum, implement United Nations Security Council resolutions 824 and 836,

which declare that Tuzla should be treated as a safe area. This would include freedom for international humanitarian organisations to act. One possibility in this respect would be to open Tuzla airport.

c) Make the necessary funds available to UNHCR to meet the increasing humanitarian needs.

It is clear to all the professional humanitarian organisations working in Tuzla that a human catastrophe of this kind can only be resolved by the most determined humanitarian efforts.

The blockade must end and the Tuzla region must have access to the outside world. Helping a region that serves as a model of tolerance is well worth the efforts of the United Nations. Implementing an action of this kind will need urgent and courageous political decisions.



**Press release** from MSF Holland, 28 July 1993 (in Dutch).

In light of the debate about Bosnia tomorrow involving three parliamentary committees, MSF is today sending a letter to the committee members. In this letter, the aid organisation expresses its grave concern about the humanitarian situation in Bosnia. MSF refers to reports from its emergency response teams, which are working throughout the country. It makes it clear that the implementation of so-called "safe areas" based

on UN resolutions as so far come to nothing. Against this background, MSF explains the consequences of the siege of the town of Tuzla in eastern Bosnia. The town is suffering alarming shortages of medicines, food and fuel. There are not enough shelters for the approximately 200,000 refugees. Unless free passage for humanitarian aid improves quickly, the situation will be the same as in Sarajevo, Srebrenica and Gorazde.

MSF believes that in this situation, humanitarian assistance is rapidly transformed into a kind of palliative care. "UNPROFOR's role is limited to the part of spectator (...). With these false promises, the international community is abandoning the people of Bosnia to their fate". MSF is asking the committee to start a debate on protecting both humanitarian convoys and people in "safe areas" and seeking a commitment from the European Community. It also emphasises the necessity of ongoing financial support for humanitarian aid in Bosnia.

MSF, along with 11 other organisations operating in Tuzla, is writing to the United Nations Security Council today to secure free passage for humanitarian aid to the "safe area" as a matter of urgency.

**In the Bosnian enclaves, the MSF team focused on water supply and sanitation, and on rehabilitating buildings in preparation for winter. However, the Bosnian Serb forces maintaining the siege, only allowed inadequate amounts of aid through, and only erratically. The long waits for UN Sanctions Committee approval exacerbated the situation. The team wondered about the reality of the protection supposedly ensured by the peacekeepers' presence.**



'Blockade of MSF Programmes in the Enclaves,' **Letter** from MSF General Coordinator in the former Yugoslavia to the UNHCR Special Envoy, 6 September 1993 (in English).

**Extract:**

The tension and anxiety of the population are growing. Their survival is entirely dependent on the timely arrival of international aid. This aid is dependent on the good will of the Serbian authorities in Pale, and the Sanctions Committee in New York. After two weeks of negotiations with the Pale authorities, MSF is facing a complete refusal to bring any material other than medical supplies into the enclaves. Because of this continuing series of delays and refusals from the Pale authorities, the MSF program in Srebrenica, as well as in Gorazde, is blocked. The necessary materials for the first phase of our rehabilitation project for 2,000 refugees in Srebrenica have been purchased and are currently stored in Belgrade. The Pale authorities (MOH as well as the Commission Board for Humanitarian Aid) request an equivalent MSF program on the Serbian side, in the so-called "Serbian enclaves."

MSF is pursuing a balanced program based on needs. We are distributing basic drugs and surgical materials to the Serbian hospitals in Eastern Bosnia, and we are conducting exploratory missions in Trnovo, Sokolac, and Petrovac as the Pale authorities have requested. However, we do not envision a large shelter program in the Serb areas. As the single implementing partner of UNHCR that is active in the enclaves, I urgently request your support in our negotiations in Pale. [...] Because promises of shelters were expressed, because convoys are not bringing an adequate food ration to the refugees, because children did not receive shoes or clothes in sufficient quantity before the winter, because new shipments of medical supplies have yet not arrived, the Srebrenica population is doubtful the international aid community will fulfill their mandate. Security of our representatives, MSF as well as UNHCR and ICRC, may be threatened, if progress is not made soon.



'Report on the Deteriorating Situation of the Population of Srebrenica,' Hans Ullens, MSF Field Coordinator in Srebrenica to MSF Paris, 16 September 1993 (in English).

**Extract:**

5. Conclusion. The population of Srebrenica is completely isolated from the outside world and is forced into self-sufficiency. However it is impossible to provide the structure for self-sufficiency in the short-term and even in the long-term as long as the Bosnian Serbs are ruling the area. There are no local resources and there is no energy source, there are no institutions, and there are no people and material to start up these institutions: e.g. the hospital, the first institution which was organised, (before it was only a dispensary) is completely depending on drugs and high qualified medical staff from Médecins Sans Frontières. There are no local people to replace the surgeon, the anaesthetist, and the stomatologist. None of them are able or has the power to get drugs from outside into the area. The hospital is only one example of the numerous social, and legal institutions, which need to be created. They all face the same problems. There are no qualified persons available to run these institutions and they will not come from Sarajevo or Tuzla. The idea of a self-sufficient enclave surrounded by a hostile population is a complete illusion. The UN declared Srebrenica as a safe haven but in fact sold it to the Bosnian Serbs who are turning it slowly into a legal extermination camp. They are deciding on [which] materials to come in so they are the managers of all relief programmes. The UN and the humanitarian organisations only function as a cheap labour force for them. They run a farm of 45,000 people with a Serbian manager who is only interested in getting rid of his animals. [...] When UNPROFOR arrived in March, people thought it was the end of the nightmare and there was a general optimism. This optimism turns into bitterness now. Everybody realises that the tragedy is not far off. The only solution is an immediate corridor for material to Srebrenica controlled by UN without any control or interference from the Bosnian Serb authorities in Pale and a massive aid programme. [...] The nightmare from early this

year is coming back with one little difference: it is still orchestrated by the Bosnian Serbs but completely implemented by the UN and the humanitarian organisations. To die of mortar shells is finally more humane than to die of cold and misery. If the free passage of relief material is not possible, we prefer the retreat of all protection and assistance than to witness the latter.



'MSF calls for help for Bosnia,' Edouard van Elthem, *Le Soir* (Belgium) 25 September 1993 (in French).

#### Extract:

So far, the so-called UN safe areas are practically unprotected. [...] At the other end of the phone line, Geneviève Bekoyan catches her breath. Head of Mission at Médecins Sans Frontières, she coordinates three different activity programmes from Belgrade: for the Serbian Serbs and Kosovar Albanians; for the eastern Bosnian Serbs from Trebinje in the south to Brcko in the north; and lastly, for the Muslims in besieged enclaves. [...] The slowness and complexity of the negotiations, the conditions imposed by the Serbian military authorities, which demand the equivalent of each convoy to the Muslim population for their own community, and the especially the bureaucracy of the Sanctions Committee all hamper the activities of the humanitarian organisations. The situation at the infamous Serbian checkpoints seems to have improved since last Wednesday's discussion with the Pale authorities on access to the besieged regions. On the other hand, everything has been brought to a halt by the UN Sanctions Committee's inertia and nitpicking. Not just for us, an NGO, which sometimes has to wait two months for the green light to import drugs, but even for UN agencies like the HCR, have to wait up to three weeks for equipment orders. [...]



*MSF was the only source of care in Srebrenica, there was no one else. We managed to bring in a large supply of drugs in 1993, and we survived on that. Then the supply ran out. In eight months, we managed to bring in only one order of drugs in March 1994, just a month before I left. We were living on leftovers, on what the Canadian peacekeepers were giving us. The ICRC also managed to get us some drugs despite the fact that officially they provided only non-medical aid. We could only get absurdly small quantities via official channels. At that point, we took whatever we could get! We had to negotiate constantly with the Bosnian Serb military. I would go talk to the captain at the entrance to the enclave about every two or three days. He would say to us, 'what are you doing here, anyway? What good does it do? We're going to get this place back, in any case!' Then he would add, 'the Muslims stink!' We would negotiate a pass. Then the next day, when we'd get to the checkpoint, they would fire at us. The captain would say, 'there's nothing I can do about it, I don't control the snipers up there.' It was a constant showdown. We had the sense that those guys were determined, that they'd do anything, they'd never let go. They were like bulldogs holding onto a piece of meat. You*

*could hurt them, do anything to them, but they'd never open their jaws.*

Graziella Godain, MSF France/Belgium Field Coordinator in Srebrenica, October 1993 - April 1994 (in French) interviewed in 2000



*There was also a whole battle over reinstalling water in Srebrenica, which was just mad! The water treatment plant had been destroyed. Hans Ullens, René Caraviellhe and others found the old plant. They told themselves it was better than nothing and they restored it. It was a lot of work, but it met 80% of the town's water needs.*

Dr Eric Dachy, MSF general coordinator in Belgrad, October 1991 - August 1993, Interviewed in 2000, 2015, (in French)

**In December 1993, the MSF coordinator in Srebrenica complained to UNHCR about the obstacles being created to any humanitarian activity that the Bosnian Muslim authorities running the enclave did not control.**



'Message from Hans Ullens, Médecins Sans Frontières Coordinator in Srebrenica to UNHCR Representative in Belgrade,' 17 December 1993 (in English).

#### Extract:

Before, the cooperation between the local authorities and humanitarian organisations was more or less good. Now, this cooperation has been exchanged for a continuous sabotage of all relief activity, which is not completely under their control. The local authorities do not seem to accept that humanitarian organisations are recruiting their own personnel. They want to force them always to pass through their channels. They want all relief material that arrives in Srebrenica to be exclusively distributed by people they appoint. Although a lot of things went wrong in their own distributions, every person involved in these distributions organised by the humanitarian organisations is the victim of a continuous disinformation campaign from the local authorities. We have the impression that the humanitarian aid is becoming more and more the subject of an internal political power struggle and its real objectives are of secondary importance to it. Médecins sans Frontières is a humanitarian relief organisation, which provides assistance to all people in distress. However, we are a non-political organisation and therefore cannot accept any political manipulation of any of our actions.



*The enclave phenomenon crystallised the danger to the population held hostage not just by the Serbs, but also by its own extremists, the Bosniak militias. They symbolised a certain unacceptable resistance to the Serbs. There were radicals on both sides. There weren't only nice Bosniaks inside. I spent eight months around them, and they weren't joking. They were organising commando operations. They would all shoot morphine before heading up to the mountains in the middle of the night to kill Serbs. You really had to be a bit high to do that. You could call it self-defence, but only to a point. The Serbs took advantage of that to say, 'you said it was a demilitarised zone, and they're shooting at us.' And they used that as an excuse to fire on civilians. It automatically entitled them to that type of reprisal. I talked about it with the Bosniak commander. I told him, 'every time you have one of those operations, the next day there's shooting from all sides and a child gets shot.'*

Graziella Godain, MSF France/Belgium Field Coordinator in Srebrenica, October 1993 - April 1994  
(in French) interviewed in 2000



*The Canadian peacekeepers were making an enormous effort. They were taking care of the population. The Canadian doctor was doing mobile consultations with us on the weekends in the clinics scattered around the town. Via their base, Visoko, they were getting drug supplies in and then giving us donations because we couldn't get anything in. A lot of things came through the Canadians; they were a huge help to us. There was a renewed feeling of security in March 1994, because the Dutch arrived with many more resources than the Canadians. They moved the peacekeepers' base into the Podgorica factory. There weren't a lot more of them, but they retooled everything. It was impressive. By way of medical equipment, the Canadians had only one tiny, very sparsely equipped room. The Dutch came with an ultrasound unit and cutting edge equipment. They set up two operating rooms, while the Canadians had none. We got the impression that there was a determination to reinforce, to provide resources, and to stay for a while.*

Graziella Godain, MSF France/Belgium Field Coordinator in Srebrenica, October 1993 - April 1994  
(in French) interviewed in 2000

**In late 1993, under pressure from the Serbs, UNPROFOR temporarily decided not to deploy the Dutch contingent (Dutchbat) scheduled to replace the Canadian battalion in the Srebrenica and Zepa enclaves. The handover did not happen until March 1994. The Dutch peacekeepers set up their base at Potocari near the Podgorica factory within the enclave, but outside the town of Srebrenica. The means they were deploying there suggested to the MSF team that security was getting beefed up.**



'UNPROFOR Decides not to Deploy Blue Helmets in Two Muslim Enclaves,' *Le Monde* (France), 25 December 1993 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

Under pressure from Serbian forces in Bosnia, UNPROFOR has temporarily decided not to protect the Muslim-populated 'safe areas' of Zepa and Srebrenica, in the eastern part of the country. The mission was to have fallen to the Dutch Air Mobile Brigade, whose commander confirmed in a radio interview on Wednesday, 22 December that its departure had been postponed indefinitely. The decision came down from UNPROFOR headquarters, following the recent refusal by the Serbian military to allow a reconnaissance patrol brigade into the two protection areas. The 1,100 Dutch soldiers who were supposed to be deployed there starting 18 January belong to a combat unit that was to have been heavily equipped, and whose involvement would have displeased Ratko Mladic, Commander-in-Chief of the Bosnian Serb army. Though Dutch Foreign Minister Pieter Kooijmans considered it "unacceptable" that the Serbs dictate the placement of UN forces, the Defence Secretary had already announced that the Dutch detachment would be given a new assignment, most likely protecting humanitarian transports in central Bosnia.

**Opinions within MSF varied as to what position to take regarding the haggling by the Bosnian Serb authorities, which demanded that the organisation provide the same level of aid in Serbian parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina in exchange for letting MSF teams and equipment into the enclaves. In the field, the teams were helping the most vulnerable populations of Serbia and Serbian held Bosnia-Herzegovina. The MSF teams sometimes relayed outlandish, unacceptable demands from the authorities, for example, expatriate surgeons should work by themselves in several of the region's hospitals.**



*Minutes* from the 12 January 1994 MSF France Board of Directors Meeting, (in French).

#### **Extract:**

2) Yugoslavia - Pierre Salignon summarises MSF-France activities in the former Yugoslavia. MSF continues to work with ex-prisoners in Croatia and in refugee camps in Macedonia. A joint programme is being conducted in Belgrade under Belgian coordination in Gorazde, Srebrenica, and Zepa enclaves, and priority is given to the 'enclave' mission, where the work is necessary but faces multiple obstacles. These include the lack of goodwill of the Serbian militias and Pale authorities, the difficulty getting access to the victims, and the confiscation of material. MSF should distance itself from the UN to get access to the enclaves. Rony Brauman raises the problem of political orientation and finding a balance. Considering the size of the budgets and what we have to pay to get where we're needed and that the teams have to deal with security problems, people are getting tired in a difficult context. Without MSF, the Srebrenica hospital couldn't func-



tion. Rehabilitation and sanitation are also done mainly by MSF teams. MSF's presence is essential in Gorazde, as well. We would have to provide humanitarian assistance in Serbian Bosnia (an evaluation is in progress), knowing that that represents a real danger. We are also keeping a close eye on the budgetary surge, given as Karim pointed out, the fact that MSF France got involved in Yugoslavia very late and had to devise coordination schemes with the Brussels/Belgrade programme, onto which MSF grafted itself, and which had been running for a year.



**Letter** from Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF Legal Advisor to the MSF Coordination Team in the former Yugoslavia, 15 January 1994 (in French).

#### Extract:

You submitted, in particular, requests to us for three general surgeon positions in the Orvar, Brcko, and Nevesinje hospitals from the Health Minister, Mr Kalinic. Let me remind you that MSF's humanitarian action policy in the former Yugoslavia obeys precise rules. MSF's general security policy for countries in conflict opposes individuals working alone. MSF deploys teams. This makes the action more effective, and each individual knows his mission [role] very well. It enables MSF to ensure the safety of individuals. As there are already sufficient numbers of very competent doctors and other medical personnel (nationals) in the former Yugoslavia, MSF's policy since the start of the conflict has been primarily focused on supply. Regarding your question to me, please note the following: 1/ Humanitarian law ties freedom of movement for humanitarian relief in conflicts to the impartiality of humanitarian organisations (Article 18 of Additional Protocol II of the Geneva Conventions). MSF gives its guarantee as an impartial humanitarian organisation for the distribution of aid to civilian populations throughout the former Yugoslavia. 2/ In relief activities, humanitarian law always distinguishes between what must be undertaken by the national authorities, on one hand, and what can only be implemented via an impartial humanitarian organisation, on the other (Articles 7, 9, 10, 11, 14 and 18 of that same protocol). Hence, MSF has also offered its impartiality, in order to have the right to enter and leave the enclaves, in accordance with humanitarian law. The decision to deploy surgical teams in these sites is based on two specific factors: - The lack of any local surgical capacity, despite the need for a large number of operations each day; - The inability of the health and civil authorities concerned to provide for those needs, due to the military blockade of those areas. 3/ MSF endeavours to assure the international community that the only criterion for distributing aid is the urgency of the needs. Hence, MSF is always obligated to assess the needs as accurately as possible, adapting its operational constraints to the greatest possible extent.



'Humanitarian action in suspense', Pierre Salignon, deputy programme managers at MSF France, **Messages** no. 67 (MSF France internal newsletter, also distributed to 100 journalists) February 1994 (in French).

#### Extract:

Enclaves: *Every day, the programmes in the besieged towns of Gorazde and Srebrenica are more dependent on the goodwill of the Serbian authorities...*

As the only international medical organisation operating in the enclaves in eastern Bosnia, Médecins Sans Frontières has been working in Srebrenica and Gorazde for almost ten months. The administrative procedures with which all humanitarian organisations are obliged to comply to secure access authorisations are long, complicated and dependent on the mood of the Serbian authorities.

Civilians are the first victims of aid blockades.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which refuses to work without the support of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) is often forced to cancel its convoys because it does not have authorisation. And, when a convoy does finally get approval from the Serbs to enter the enclaves, all the traps on the road hinder or make it completely impossible to get the aid through. Civilians under siege are the first victims of these blockades.

The problem is particularly acute in Gorazde. In spite of its status as a "safe area", the enclave has never been demilitarised – unlike Srebrenica, where a UNPROFOR contingent has been stationed for several months – and remains a strategic issue for the Serbian and Muslim forces. The Serbian bombardments and fighting on the front line are regular and could complicate access to the area significantly in future.

The humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate in spite of the parachute drops organised by the United Nations: just a third of requirements (flour, medicines, etc.) were able to be met in December 1993.

MSF has even got to the point of sending lists of medicines and medical equipment to the United Nations authorities responsible for the parachute drops so that urgent needs, at least, are met.

Since the United Nations (UNHCR and UNPROFOR) can no longer provide protection or guarantee safe passage, MSF is trying to demarcate itself and make its own arrangements for access and supplying medicines to the enclave. The dangers of an initiative of this kind for the teams are real but MSF's presence in Gorazde is essential and the risks are worth taking. The situation is not very different in Srebrenica, but a few UNHCR convoys are still getting through. That city too is becoming increasingly dependent on United Nations parachute drops. Unlike in Gorazde,

MSF has been going in and out of the enclave without UNPROFOR protection for several months.

Without MSF, the hospital in Srebrenica would not function. Somehow, the programme is continuing, despite the precarious security and living conditions.

MSF is the only international medical organisation present in Gorazde and Srebrenica. Continuing the assistance programmes is therefore essential. Without MSF, for example, the hospital in Srebrenica would not function. For a population

that feels it has, in many respects, been abandoned by the international community, there is also a psychological dimension to our presence. Finally, MSF has launched programmes to supply medicines to hospitals in Serbian Bosnia and Yugoslavia – Serbia and Montenegro.

The main aim of our activities on the Serbian side, which were decided after actual needs had been assessed and identified, was to soften the Serbian authorities' policy towards use and gain easier access to the enclaves.

Humanitarian action in former Yugoslavia is clearly an issue for the various warring parties. This is why MSF's programmes, particularly those begun in Serbian Bosnia, need to be reassessed regularly and constant thought needs to be given to the association's political positioning, as implied by its activities.

It would be dangerous to accept MSF becoming a service provider, ready for anything and at any price.

Yet the fact remains that the announced – and expected – resumption of fighting between Serbs and Muslims risks making any humanitarian action completely impossible. To be continued...



*All we knew was that in order to get medicines into the enclaves we had to do a distribution in Republika Srpska.*

*But there are ways, and then there are ways. There was an in-depth discussion on the project, which everyone considered a pretext project. When I got there, I said, 'we shouldn't do an alibi project. I'm going to conduct a visit.' Sometimes we do projects simply because it is very important that we be there with the population. But that wasn't the case there. After a year of doing the project, we found shampoo bottles and packages of compresses with MSF labels in the shops in Serbian hospitals. I was shocked. In the Republika Srpska hospitals, near the border, the Serbs wouldn't let us treat civilians because it was a military zone. Those hospitals, for military only, were very well stocked, not just by MSF, but also by other organisations, funded by the European Union. And, it seemed unforgivable to me that MSF didn't decide to stop sooner, knowing that the Ministry of Defence had enough money to supply those hospitals. Then we did evaluations in the small health care facilities that no one had ever taken the time to visit. It was as clear as day that those facilities had been completely overlooked because the people that used them, the elderly and women, were absolutely not the authorities' priority. So we reprogrammed the project to target those health care facilities. Our impact was nothing special, but we were able to go see what was happening in the villages far from the front line. The consultations enabled us to see that the treatment of the civilian population, especially the old people and the patients in the mental health care facilities, was truly shameful. Life was extremely difficult for the people living in Republika Srpska, though the situation wasn't as serious as it was in the enclaves. Information was being manipulated, and the soldiers were given priority. It was important to MSF to know all that, even if it wasn't so much from a witness account perspective.*

Dr Graciela Diap, MSF Belgium/France Medical Coordinator in the former Yugoslavia, October 1993 - April 1995, Interviewed in 2000, (in French).



*It was obvious that the Serbs were deriving some political benefit from our presence in Srebrenica. There was some disagreement about the situation analysis with MSF Belgium, who thought they should buy their presence in Srebrenica, in a sense, with distributions to the Serbs. We [MSF France], on the other hand, felt that our presence in Srebrenica suited the Serbs because there was a deal that wasn't exactly clear with the Bosniaks, and concern about their public image. That's why UNPROFOR was there, as well as UNHCR and ICRC, but it was more matter of form, since they only visited once a week, whereas we had a substantial and ongoing presence. That formality was not immaterial; it was important to everyone, and had political significance. In the spring of 1994, I went with an MSF Belgium delegation to negotiate continuous access to the enclaves in exchange for the distribution of hygiene and cleaning products in Serb villages. The problem was that some of the Serb villages were Serbianised Bosniak villages. We arrived in Pale, where – since it was a ski resort – the Republika Srpska government had taken up residence in a hotel. Instead of being taken to an office, we were taken to the hotel dining room, where we were surprised to find twenty or so people sitting around a big square table and Republika Srpska TV cameras. We realised that it was all a propaganda set-up, but it wasn't a big deal. Seated on my left was Mrs Karadzic, who introduced herself to me as 'Madame Karadzic, Freudian psychoanalyst.' That was the little cherry on top that I still get a kick out of today! The discussion began before dinner, with some clear and slightly heavy, but very diplomatic, allusions to 'people who took positions hostile to Serbian rights.' None of us reacted. Everyone played his or her cards fairly discreetly, fairly elegantly. Next came the information about the plan to exterminate Bosnian Serb children, the UN-organised genocide. We had never heard of it! Several people – well-trained public health doctors from the Ministry, including the former head of the epidemiology department at the Yugoslav Ministry of Health and the head of the surgery department, sounding not very convinced – repeated the crazy accusation that the measles vaccinations sent by UNICEF were poisoned. So they were basically being invited to inject their children with lethal doses. As a precaution, they had one of the samples tested for verification at an English laboratory, which gave the thing some credibility. They couldn't believe their eyes when they saw the result saying that the vial contained poison, and had it checked in Germany. At the time, the Serbs considered Germany Satan's helper, their enemy's ally, along with the Vatican and Al-Azhar University. The Germano-Christian-Islamic plot – that was their big story! In Germany, they received sad confirmation that the poisoning was real, and halted the vaccination campaign at the last minute; otherwise, the 300,000 children they were about to immunise would have been assassinated. Because it was directed against children, it had jeopardised the future of the Bosnian Serbs, and hence was genocide. In any case it was part of a global conspiracy to get rid of the Serbian people, and so perfectly consistent with the rest. It was fairly disconcerting. There was also a disconnect between the enormity of the accusation and their apparent calm, the slightly mechanical aspect of what they were saying. When your children are threatened in that way, wouldn't you normally tend to dramatise things a bit, be a bit more emotional with your words? I told them we had been unaware of the whole story, but that it was good they told*

us about it because such an important matter could not just stop there. I assured them that all MSF means would be placed at their disposal, provided the information was verified. All they had to do was give us the vials so that we could analyze them, and we would conduct a campaign against the people responsible and sound the alarm. That seemed to completely satisfy everyone, and almost immediately the subject changed from the genocide to their order for toilet paper, cotton wool, and sanitary napkins. It was a household shopping list, having absolutely nothing to do with the war, population displacement, or accusations of genocide. There were almost no drugs on the list of needs they gave us. Since we never received the samples to analyze, the story ended there. It remains, however, a great moment of victim kitsch!

Dr. Rony Brauman, MSF France President, 1982 - 1994,  
MSF France Foundation Research Director from 1994,  
interviewed in 2000 and 2015 (in French).

**In Early 1994, MSF France has joined forces with AICF, OHI, MDM and PSF to send members of the French and European members of parliament a greetings card, hoping that they were “determined not to accept the strategy of the fait accompli”.**

**On 12 February, MSF Belgium joined forces with Amnesty and Causes Communes to hold a public demonstration on the Grand’ Place in Brussels, to signal its outrage over the violence in Bosnia.**



**Press release** from Action Internationale contre la Faim, Handicap International, Médecins du Monde, Médecins Sans Frontières and Pharmaciens sans Frontières, 6 January 1994 (in French).

The main French humanitarian organisations working daily in the countries of former Yugoslavia have decided on an exceptional, public, joint initiative to coincide with the period of sending New Year cards.

Every political leader and decision-maker in Europe and its 12 Member States, in both parliament and government, has received the attached card, as have the main leaders of the United Nations.

In doing this, our associations wish to express their bitterness and anger, not only at the inexorable worsening of the tragedy faced by people in former Yugoslavia, but also the fact that the very foundations of humanitarian action are being distorted for political ends.

We want to contribute to the pressing discussions among citizens in a Europe that is still developing, but above all, call on our political leaders to finally accept their responsibilities in order to restore the principles of pluralism and tolerance on which the idea of the European Union itself is based, in seeking a solution to the conflicts in former Yugoslavia. It is not too late.



**‘Bosnia Appeal’ Messages** (MSF France internal newsletter, also distributed to 100 journalists) no. 66, January 1994 (in French).

“A new year of war is beginning for the people of Bosnia and the four million refugees and displaced persons in the countries of former Yugoslavia. The way they look evokes more sombre times, not so long ago in European history. In memory of those times, these men and women are once more entitled to expect more lucidity and determination from a democratic Europe. Our organisations are helping to distribute humanitarian aid, largely funded by Europe and the United Nations. This aid is essential but still, unfortunately, derisory. As the new year begins, we wanted to state publicly that we will continue our work alongside those who are most disadvantaged. But with bitterness and anger. Because from “humanitarian” to diplomatic and now cultural corridors, Europe has failed to preserve the one essential element: tolerance, the primary prerequisite for lasting peace. Ethnic cleansing is a utopia condemned by history; modern-day Europe was built on rejecting it. Humanitarian organisations do not want to contribute to the suppression of conscience, to European citizens acquiescing in plans to divide people along ethnic and religious lines.

We wish you the determination to stand firm against the strategy of the fait accompli. And that you will find the political will to finally bring an end to a situation that every European citizen finds unacceptable.



**Contact** (MSF Belgium internal newsletter) no. 27, March 1994 (in Flemish).

On Saturday 12 February, several thousand people joined Causes Communes, Amnesty International, Médecins Sans Frontières and the ASSEZ Committee in a gathering on the Grand’ Place in Brussels. Their presence signified both determination and willingness: a rejection of the war in former Yugoslavia and citizens’ resolve to help find solutions that would lead to a lasting peace [...].

The full text read out by Causes Communes on 12 February is below: [V11](#)

*“Last Saturday, at 12:32 precisely, a shell destroyed 68 lives and shattered several dozen others in a marketplace in Sarajevo. Today, we are gathering in the Grand’ Place in Brussels in order to remember and show our respect for the victims, of course, but also hoping that our presence expresses both determination and willingness. The determination and willingness of citizens who are aware of the fact that today we must be more resolute than the United Nations resolutions have been so far. This determination depends only on ourselves, for we control our own indifference. And what we have to say is simple: today, we are making a commitment that the 68 people who died in the marketplace shall be the last victims of our lack of respect, our lack of interest and our lack of concern.*

*Why are we making this commitment?*

*Because for Médecins Sans Frontières. humanitarian action is no substitute for politics, because the doctors on the front in*

Bosnia are themselves sick of seeing people with severe injuries and others who are close to death dying on their operating tables;

Because for Amnesty International, such scorn for people's rights, recorded daily and rigorously documented, will continue as long as there is no end to the gunfire; and we, Causes Communes, as an association that promotes solidarity between municipalities and between citizens, we are telling you that we are truly afraid that this war was born not of citizenship but of subjection and servitude. We are making this commitment together. It's a first. It is not often that we overcome the barriers between organisations. We have been joined by and welcome other organisations as well, such as the student committee "Assez" which has backed our rally.

That's who we are.

Now, how can we make this commitment?

What are we going to do to ensure that our resources match our determination?

First, by repeating a few simple things: our rejection of ethnic cleansing, nationalism and intolerance. And also by saying that for us, there can be no Europe without Sarajevo. We must say it once more: Sarajevo is Europe, i.e. that melting pot of cultures and the place in which we cultivate and nurture values such as human rights, the demand for democracy or the creation of solidarity as a social practice.

What is going to change from this Saturday is that we are now committed to maintaining the pressure on our political representatives.

In a crisis situation such as the one we are currently experiencing, indecision and hesitation are our worst enemies.

We have been saying it for two years.

Today, decisions appear to have been taken. We are therefore telling our political representatives that they can rely on our determination to actually secure peace. A kind of peace, in which human rights humanitarian rights and democratic rights are truly meaningful.

At a time when ways of resolving the situation are beginning to emerge, we must also say that we do not have any ready-made solutions to offer.

We have not said – and we are not saying – that we will automatically agree with the solutions we are being offered and will be offered.

We need to remember, here and now, that Sarajevo is not all of Bosnia and that a possible ceasefire does not sound the death knell of a war. And that once the weapons have fallen silent – as we assume – there is still a need to agree on a political solution. It isn't over. The war isn't over. And if the war were coming to an end,

are we sure we know how to begin the peace? Whether or not a ceasefire comes in the next few days, must we not now all support the voices that continue to plead for tolerance, diversity and ethics in Bosnia and elsewhere? That is our role as citizens.

Today, on this Grand' Place, leading figures, moral authorities and ordinary citizens are holding placards bearing the names of the innocent victims of the war in Sarajevo this week.

There are 80 placards. This Grand' Place will be where we remember those who have died. If necessary, we will come back every Saturday, passing the baton between associations, committees and citizens. A memorial plaque will list the names of

the victims though let us hope it remains as empty as possible.

We invite you to come and light a candle at it. We have at least two reasons for doing so: memory and hope.

We, as associations that are concerned about people, believe that it is one of those acts that is more of a duty. And it is that duty we thank you for sharing with us."

**On 12 January 1994, NATO recalled its determination to launch air strikes in order to prevent parts of Bosnia that were being threatened by the Serbs from being caught in a stranglehold.**

**At MSF's international council, the sections agreed not to accept the use of force to protect humanitarian convoys.**



"NATO renews its threat of air strikes in Bosnia" *Le Monde* (France), 12 January 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

On Tuesday 11 January, NATO confirmed its determination "under the authority of the United Nations Security Council" to launch "air strikes to prevent the strangulation of Sarajevo, the safe areas and other threatened areas in Bosnia-Herzegovina". In the final communiqué published following a two-day summit, NATO urged "the UNPROFOR authorities to draw up urgently plans to ensure that the blocked rotation of the UNPROFOR contingent in Srebrenica can take place and to examine how the airport at Tuzla can be opened for humanitarian relief purposes".

In their declaration, the 16 member states reaffirmed that "the conflict in Bosnia must be settled at the negotiating table and not on the battlefield. Only the parties can bring peace to the former Yugoslavia. Only they can agree to lay down their arms and end the violence which for these many months has only served to demonstrate that no side can prevail in its pursuit of military victory."



*Minutes* of the International Council meeting, 13 and 14 January 1994 (in French).

**Extract:**

Following the recent threats to use force to secure safe passage for humanitarian convoys, MSF's basic message is as follows:

MSF is opposed to the use of military force to achieve humanitarian objectives. Selective use of force in specific places (Srebrenica, Tuzla, the corridor to Mostar or Sarajevo, etc.) risks further complicating or entirely endangering the programme of humanitarian action throughout Bosnia. However, MSF is neutral on the use of armed forces to achieve political or military objectives.

**On the 1 April 1994, UNPROFOR's mandate in the former Yugoslavia was extended by six months. The size of the force was increased by 3,500 troops, rather than the 10,000 troops that the UN requested, which the United States rejected for financial reasons.**



'United Nations Authorises Sending 3,500 Additional Blue Helmets,' *Le Monde* (France), 2 April 1994 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

On Thursday, 31 March, the UN Security Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) for the former Yugoslavia by an additional six months. Because of the United States, however, reinforcement of the mission was limited to 3,500 troops, rather than the 10,000 requested by the Secretary-General. France and Great Britain did succeed in getting the Security Council to declare that this was only a "first step," and that it would consider the question of reinforcements again one month later "with a view to providing UNPROFOR with the means necessary for implementation of its mandate." [...] On Wednesday, the United States refused to agree to the total number of troops requested by UNPROFOR commanders in the field and by Mr. Boutros-Ghali, for "financial reasons."

## **GORAZDE UNDER FIRE**

**In January 1994, the MSF team withdrew from Gorazde for several weeks following the bombardments.**

**At the end of March 1994, the enclave suffered a violent offensive by the Serbian forces and found itself under siege. A team of two MSF expatriate volunteers is still blocked there and is rapidly becoming the main source of media information on the situation.**

**The organisation issues a press release almost every day. It reports the number of dead and wounded and calls for the bombardments to stop. It is asking for the protection for civilians promised in the UN Security Council resolutions that made the enclave a safe area. And it is also claiming access to the enclave for a new expatriate surgical team, but in vain.**



**Contact** (MSF Belgium internal newsletter) no. 31, January 1995 (in French and English).

Gorazde was bombed in January... the team emerged quite shocked and decided only to return to the enclave if there were clear guarantees of support. Although MSF managed to return in mid-February with equipment, the security guidelines were draconian and radio communications contact strengthened.



'Gorazde: civilian victims' **Press release** from MSF, 30 March 1994.

For the last two days, the town of Gorazde has been the scene of a violent offensive and subjected to intense bombardments.

Yesterday, six children were injured and today, two people in the town were killed (one child and one adult). The emergency room in the hospital is overwhelmed, according to the Médecins Sans Frontières team.

Moreover, according to local residents, the violence of the attack was comparable to what the town witnessed in May/June 1993.

The apparent calm around the city of Sarajevo should not allow us to forget the permanent threat that still hangs over enclaves such as Gorazde.



'Dramatic situation in Gorazde: Médecins Sans Frontières asks for real protection for the 60,000 people living in the enclave' **Press release** from Médecins Sans Frontières, 5 April 1994 (in French, English and Dutch).

For the last week, the enclave of Gorazde, where 60,000 people have been besieged for the last year and a half, has been subjected to a violent offensive, in breach of the United Nations Security Council resolutions making the enclave a safe area. Just four United Nations Military Observers (UNMO) are currently present in the enclave. Serbian troops have broken through the front line to the north and east of the enclave and as of yesterday, Monday 4 April, they were just 3.5 kilometres from the town of Gorazde.

According to information gathered there by our team, the villages on the left bank of the Drina are on fire and the population is fleeing to find refuge in Gorazde.

There are thought to have been 49 civilians killed and 220 injured in the last week. On Monday 4 April, the hospital where the Médecins Sans Frontières is working admitted 19 injured people, one of whom died, as emergency cases. Many other people who had been injured, however, were unable to get to the hospital because of the fighting or the almost complete lack of transport. The medical teams are continuing to work, in difficult conditions, to provide care for the injured. Médecins Sans Frontières has decided to strengthen its staff in the enclave by sending in a new surgical team.

As the situation deteriorates, Médecins Sans Frontières is very

concerned for the future of the 60,000 people living in the enclave, including 30,000 in the town.

MSF is asking the United Nations to ensure the enclave is protected as provided for in the Security Council resolutions. It is also asking that the right of access to victims be respected and reminding them that the security and neutrality of hospitals and humanitarian medical teams are guaranteed under international conventions. Seven expatriate members of international humanitarian organisations (ICRC, UNHCR and MSF) are present in Gorazde.

Médecins Sans Frontières has been working in former Yugoslavia for the last two years in accordance with the principles of neutrality and impartiality that guide its actions, and will continue to support all victims of the war, regardless of whether they are in Serbia, Croatia or Bosnia.



'64 dead and 301 injured in Gorazde since the start of the latest Serbian offensive' **Agence France Presse**, 6 April 1994 (in French).

#### Extract:

64 people have been killed and 301 injured in the Muslim enclave of Gorazde, in eastern Bosnia, since the start of the latest Serbian offensive, according to a press release issued by Médecins Sans Frontières in Paris on Friday.

In the town of Gorazde itself, where an MSF anaesthetist and logistics expert are currently working, seven more injured people arrived at the hospital on Wednesday, bringing to 197 the number wounded since the start of the offensive, ten days ago, against the Muslim enclave, which is home to around 60,000 people. "Many other people who had been injured were unable to get to the hospital because of the fighting or the almost complete lack of transport" according to the humanitarian organisation.

General Michael Rose, commander-in-chief of the Blue Helmets in Bosnia-Herzegovina, was unable to enter the enclave on Wednesday as he had planned, for "security reasons" cited by the Bosnian Serbs.

Eight UNPROFOR liaison officers and military observers who were accompanying him were, however, able to continue.

The problem of the enclave was discussed in Pale, the fiefdom of the self-proclaimed Bosnian Serb Republic, between its leader Radovan Karadzic, the UN's special representative in former Yugoslavia, Yasushi Akashi, and the French general Bertrand de Lapresle, commander of the Blue Helmets in former Yugoslavia.

According to General Rose, the three men "seriously" examined the possibility of bringing peace to Gorazde based on the model used in Sarajevo, namely withdrawing heavy artillery to 20 km and monitoring of the front lines by the Blue Helmets.

In the spring of 1993, the enclave of Gorazde was declared a "safe area" by the UN Security Council, which has decided, in principle, to deploy around 800 UN peacekeepers from Ukraine in the next 15 days.



**Minutes** of the MSF Belgium board meeting, 6 April 1994 (in French).

#### Extract:

Although the situation in Gorazde is worrying, it seems that there is a determination by the UN not to focus on the enclave and not to communicate any information.

Our MSF press releases have been lost in the mass of information sent to the media.

It is important, however, to note the presence of Olivier van Bunnem, an administrator in Gorazde, in numerous media; the media are expecting us to provide direct, real and emotional accounts as well as fresh factual information (such as the results of nutritional surveys) and not just institutional messages.

It is important for us to be able to combine different messages, but also to make concrete proposals.



"Médecins Sans Frontières criticises the lack of protection for civilians living in the Gorazde enclave" **Press release** from Médecins Sans Frontières, 7 April 1994 (in French).

#### Extract:

Médecins Sans Frontières is concerned about the developing situation in the enclave of Gorazde in eastern Bosnia.

After 11 days of violent combat, civilians are the main victims of the current offensive by Serbian forces: 403 have been wounded and 92 have died to date. The emergency teams in the hospital in Gorazde are overwhelmed and the lack of medicines and medical equipment is becoming alarming.

The violence of the fighting has forced several thousand inhabitants of the enclave to flee their burning villages.

The new advance of attackers on Mount Gradina has prompted fears that the population of the town (some 30,000 people) will become a direct target for the Serbian forces.

Médecins Sans Frontières is again asking for guaranteed protection for the 65,000 people living in the enclave, which has been declared a "safe area" by the United Nations Security Council.

Médecins Sans Frontières is also asking that the right of access to civilian victims be respected. A surgical team is waiting for the necessary authorisations to travel to the besieged enclave with medicines and medical equipment. Under the current circumstances, its presence in the hospital is vital to strengthen the emergency teams already in place.




"Médecins Sans Frontières has decided to strengthen its medical team in Croatia" **Press release** from Médecins Sans Frontières, 7 April 1994 (in French).

MSF is making plans to strengthen its medical team in Croatia to provide assistance to the Muslim and Croatian victims of the ethnic cleansing operation in western Bosnia. As soon as

the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been given authorisation, 6,000 to 9,000 non-Serbians will be evacuated to transit centres in Croatia and will swell the number of refugees already being housed there (280,000 in total).

This new episode in the policy of ethnic cleansing has led MSF to remind people that the atrocities perpetrated against Muslim and Croatian civilian populations in western Bosnia have continued since the start of the war in former Yugoslavia. In December 1992, following a survey carried out in France with 300 former prisoners released from the detention camps in Bosnia-Herzegovina, MSF drew attention to a series of terrible atrocities perpetrated against the Muslim and Croatian population in the region. From March 1993 onwards, one of our teams was providing assistance to these people on arrival in Croatia, first in the transit camp in Karlovac (50 km from Zagreb) and later in the refugee camp in Gasinzi. Since January 1994, the MSF team has seen 60 or 80 people arrive in the camp each week, expelled from Banja-Luka or Prijedor. They are mainly women, children and elderly people, the majority of whom have been direct victims of violence and terrible atrocities (shooting, rape, etc.) or have witnessed the summary execution of one or more members of their families. Some bear the traces of the atrocities they have been subjected to or are suffering from significant psychiatric problems. They have been placed under UNHCR protection until they can be resettled abroad.

MSF has been working in former Yugoslavia for the last two years in accordance with the principles of neutrality and impartiality that guide its actions, and will continue to support all civilian victims of the war, regardless of whether they are in Croatia, Bosnia or Serbia.

**On 9 April, Eric Stobbaerts, MSF's coordinator in Belgrade, told the press that contrary to the statements made by the UN, there was a real risk of Gorazde falling. The replacement medical team had still not been given authorisation to enter the enclave. [V12](#) **



'MSF is extremely concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gorazde.' **Statement** Médecins Sans Frontières Belgrade, 9 April 1994 (in English).

MSF is extremely concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the mostly Muslim enclave of Gorazde where 60,000 people have been under siege for the past 18 months. The number of casualties is increasing by the day: 403 wounded and 92 dead civilians since the start of the fighting. Gorazde's hospital, where 2 MSF aid workers are working around the clock is overflowed with the wounded that are arriving every day, placing a tremendous burden on the very basic medical resources available. There is a lack of some very basic medical items such as pain killers. The destruction of villages has led to a new extremely vulnerable

group of displaced people within the enclave. There is a very real danger of the city being overrun, in contrary to the UN assessment of the situation. MSF is extremely concerned by the UN inaction after 11 days of heavy fighting. MSF urges the UN to ensure an effective protection of the civilian population of Gorazde and to close the gap between its declarations and an actual solution for ending the fighting. MSF requests full access to the victims. A backup surgical team is ready to go and reinforce the MSF team working presently in Gorazde. Their support to the hospital is of vital importance. Urgent medical supplies are also waiting to be allowed to enter the pocket. MSF has been working in Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia from the last two years. There are currently expatriate staff members all over former Yugoslavia.



'Gorazde could "fall in the next few hours", according to MSF' **Agence France Presse**, Belgrade, 10 April 1994 (in French).

The town of Gorazde (in eastern Bosnia) could "fall in the next few hours" as bombings have intensified in the city centre, according to a spokesman for Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Eric Stobbaerts, in Belgrade.

"Our team on the ground has the impression that the town could fall in a few hours," Mr Stobbaerts told AFP.

"We are taking this threat very seriously and we are concerned for the safety of our expatriate staff," he added.

The bombings, which started again on Sunday morning at 09:00, had first decreased and then increased in intensity, at around 14:00, according to MSF. These were "the most violent bombings" since 29 March, the start of the Serbian offensive against the Muslim enclave, which has been declared a UN "safe area".

"At the moment, it's truly horrific," said Mr Stobbaerts, explaining that the MSF team, which spent the morning in the International Red Cross (ICRC) shelter, was trying to take refuge in the hospital.

Refugees were flooding into the town centre, with panic widespread among the people there.

Some 1,500 people fleeing the Serbian advance to the south of the city had arrived in the night, following the destruction of a major bridge linking the two banks of the Drina.

The Bosnian Serb agency that had announced the fall of the villages of Zupcici and Dindici, to the south of the enclave, stated that during the morning, the Serbian forces had captured Mount Uhotic, one of the last Muslim bastions to the south of Gorazde, in the Oglecevo region.

According to SRNA [Novinska Agencija Republika Spske, Press agency of the Republic of the Bosnian Serbs], Serbian forces have taken control of part of the right bank of the Drina between Vitkovic and Djindici.



The UNHCR team was on a supervision visit and found itself cornered. They had to hide in the basement of their office. The two members of the ICRC applied ICRC policy in the strict sense of the term: you take the bombs lying down and you

don't speak. We, however, opted for a very different strategy. We tried hard to get media coverage of what was happening in Gorazde. Because at the time, the media weren't particularly interested in the fighting in Yugoslavia as long as there weren't too many dead or injured. We and the head offices therefore adopted a strategy of open communication, from the head offices and from Belgrade. We communicated night and day. In the end, it did alert all of the international press. There was extraordinary coverage of what was happening, and real outrage. It put a huge amount of pressure on the United Nations and their mandate, because people were recording the number of dead and injured, the civilian sites that had been affected, the hospital in particular and all the problems there were in terms of medicines and equipment, which were obviously being exhausted at top speed, the team being cornered and the lack of access.

Eric Stobbaerts, MSF Belgium-France General Coordinator in the former Yugoslavia, December 1993 - April 1995 (in French) interviewed in 2000

**On 10 April, Rony Brauman, the President of MSF France, declared that "real carnage was on the way" and accused UNPROFOR of "implementing a policy of systematic disinformation."**



'Fighting has broken out in the town of Gorazde, according to the president of MSF-France' **Agence France Presse**, Paris, 10 April 1994 (in French).

Fighting between Serbian and Bosnian forces has broken out in the town of Gorazde (eastern Bosnia), causing panic to spread through the population, stated the president of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF-France), Rony Brauman, late on Sunday afternoon.

"All the information tallies," explained Mr Brauman, suggesting that "catastrophe could strike at any moment".


"Thousands of people are trying to flee" the Serbian advance, according to the head of MSF. Some 30,000 people have taken refuge in the town.

The hospital in Gorazde is "subject to intense shelling," added Rony Brauman. An MSF anaesthetist and logistics expert are working at the hospital round the clock, but "they are completely overwhelmed," he added.

"There is real carnage on the way," stated Rony Brauman, pointing out that "dozens of villages (around Gorazde) have been destroyed, burned and looted."

The MSF President accused the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) of "implementing a policy of systematic disinformation" on the situation in Gorazde. "It's essential to remind UNPROFOR of its mission (to provide protection); otherwise, it should leave."

**On 11 April, while the enclave was almost in the hands of the bosnian-serb forces, NATO launched air strikes on Gorazde.**

**MSF volunteers in the enclave told of the NATO air strikes and ongoing bombardments by the Bosnian-Serb forces.** **V13** 



'Serbian bombardments of Gorazde continued after the NATO raid, according to MSF' **Agence France Presse**, Belgrade, 11 April 1994 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

Serbian bombardments of the Muslim enclave of Gorazde (eastern Bosnia) have continued following the latest raid by NATO aircraft against Serbian positions, AFP has been told by a spokesperson for the humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in Belgrade, referring to a radio conversation with MSF personnel in Gorazde.

"The bombing started at 14:00; it was very, very loud and lasted half an hour. You could hear it clearly from the town. The bombing of Gorazde carried on at the same time," according to Eric Stobbaerts.

"The planes have left now but the bombing of Gorazde is continuing, slightly less intensely than yesterday," he added. An initial raid had taken place on Sunday afternoon, involving two US NATO F-16s against Bosnian Serb positions in Gorazde.



'Bitterness Tinged with Satisfaction in Sarajevo after NATO Air Raid on Serbian Forces Surrounding Gorazde,' **Le Monde** (France), 12 April 1984 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

During a mid-afternoon radio link on Sunday, Olivier van Bull, a Belgian doctor with Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), confirmed the alarming information from Bosniak authorities. By his account, the right bank of the Drina – where the hospital is located – could come under Serbian control "within the next few hours." "The population is in state of panic; thousands are fleeing to the western bank. The situation is critical, and we have no way to evacuate the hospital, which shelters 250 wounded," he said, adding that since morning, the town had been under "constant bombardment." [...] At 16:30 hours on Sunday, General Rose was informed of the worsening situation by his observers on the ground and finally asked his Commander - in- Chief, General Lapresle, for "close air support" as "civilians, UN military observers, and humanitarian personnel are in danger." General Lapresle referred the matter to Japanese diplomat Yasushi Akashi, the Secretary-General's Representative, who decided to request NATO action.





**Minutes** of the MSF France operations meeting, 12 April 1994 (in French).

#### Extract:

Gorazde [...]

- MSF communications during the weekend focused on the lack of UN action in Gorazde and its possible consequences on other enclaves, protection of the civilian population in Gorazde and getting humanitarian convoys and medical/surgical teams through to work in the hospital in Gorazde.



'Intermittent fire in Gorazde according to MSF and UNHCR' **Agence France Presse**, Belgrade, 12 April 1994 (in French).

Intermittent fire was recorded in Gorazde on Tuesday morning, the day after the second NATO air raid against the Serbian positions besieging the Muslim enclave in eastern Bosnia, according to humanitarian organisations with teams on the ground there.

"The situation this morning is relatively calm. But seven shells fell on the town early this morning and we are hearing low-intensity fire from light weapons on a regular basis," said Lyndall Sachs, spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Belgrade, reporting on a conversation that had taken place with UNHCR personnel in Gorazde at 08:00.

"The situation this morning was calm, but with isolated fire heard in the town itself," stated Eric Stobbaerts, spokesperson for the humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in Belgrade, referring to a radio conversation with its team on the ground at 03:30 on Tuesday morning.

"During the night from Monday to Tuesday, another 34 wounded were brought into the hospital in Gorazde, four of whom died as a result of their injuries," he added.



*We had a radio connection with the Gorazde team and we urged them to update the press regularly from the enclave to keep the pressure on the Serb attackers. We gambled that as long as MSF volunteers were speaking out, they would prevent the Serbs from mounting the final assault.*

*This was an example of resistance by the media, using them as a tool in response to a very pressing threat.*

Dr. Rony Brauman, MSF France President, 1982 - 1994,  
MSF France Foundation Research Director from 1994,  
interviewed in 2000 and 2015 (in French).

**To dissuade NATO from striking it again, the Bosnian Serb forces took some UN peacekeepers hostage. That dynamic, with the Bosnian Serb forces pressuring UNPROFOR, would repeat itself on a regular basis thereafter**



'In Response to the NATO Air Strikes, Bosnian Serbs Use Intimidation Against UN Peacekeepers.' **Le Monde** (France), 14 April 1994 (in French).

#### Extract:

After air strikes against their positions in Gorazde on Sunday and Monday, Bosnian Serb forces announced that they were breaking off all relations with UNPROFOR, and ordered that no UN personnel be allowed past Serbian checkpoints. Result: several thousand UN peacekeepers deployed in Sarajevo found themselves practically confined to the besieged city, where the only way out that did not cross Serbian lines was a back door route leading to the capital's airport, a route upon which snipers quickly trained their sights on Tuesday. However, a more serious situation faced the peacekeepers deployed in Serbian-held territory: they became hostages, trapped in hostile territory, separated from their command post and in most cases, denied freedom of movement. [...] According to Major Roy Thomas, Head of the UN Military Observers (UNMOs), forty observers had been placed under house arrest in Serbian-controlled areas of Bosnia, and another one had simply disappeared, with his interpreter, after leaving the Muslim enclave of Zepa (in eastern Bosnia, northwest of Gorazde) while entering Serbian territory. As Serbian forces had broken off relations with UNPROFOR, efforts to locate the Dutch observer were futile. The forty military observers confined since Monday had been threatened with arrest if they left their homes, which had been under surveillance by Serbian soldiers and police patrols ever since. [...] Elsewhere, a number of Blue Helmets remained trapped on Tuesday in the hangars being used to store Serbian heavy weapons removed from the hills around Sarajevo since a 20-kilometer exclusion zone was created around the Bosnian capital in February. To deter them from leaving, the Serbian militiamen had placed strings of mines in front of the buildings' entrances. Serbian forces also used mines to block several companies of Blue Helmets deployed on the hills overlooking Sarajevo. Those men were charged with monitoring the ceasefire, which was for the most part, respected since being signed in February, but was weakened in recent days by mounting tensions. Similarly, elements from the Scandinavian UNPROFOR battalion have been held with their convoy since Sunday afternoon at the Serbs' Kobiljaca checkpoints, between Kiseljak and Sarajevo. Blocked by mines the Swedish peacekeepers were forced to sleep in their lorries and survive on nothing but the bottled water brought them by their "captors." [...] Humanitarian personnel, for their part, were barred on Tuesday from leaving Serbian territory without authorisation. That was confirmed, during the day, by the UNHCR spokesman in Sarajevo, Chris Janowski, who explained that shipments of humanitarian aid to Banja-Luka, Tuzla, Gorazde, Zepa, and Srebrenica had been suspended due to the closure of Serbian checkpoints. He added that if the shipment of supplies to populations in need did not resume within ten days, the situation would become "critical."

On 16 April, the hospital in Gorazde on the south bank of the Drina, was bombed twice. The local anaesthetist was injured. The MSF team was forced to evacuate and move, along with the ICRC and UNHCR teams, to a rural health centre on the north bank of the Drina River.

The hospital was bombed again on 18 and 19 April and MSF reported that part of it was destroyed. The organisation demanded an immediate ceasefire so that the wounded could be evacuated to the health centre.

The President of MSF France demanded the resignation of the UN's representative in the former Yugoslavia, Yasushi Akashi, accusing him of lying and capitulation. MSF also condemned the departure of the UN's military representatives including British SAS [Special Air Service] officers tasked with guiding NATO strikes on the ground. Finally, the MSF President demanded that 200 wounded from the hospital in Gorazde be evacuated to Sarajevo. [V14](#) [V15](#) [V16](#)



**Press Release** from Médecins Sans Frontières, 16 April 1994 (in French).

The bombing of the town of Gorazde continued unabated this afternoon. The hospital was hit twice and the Bosnian anaesthetist, who was in the hospital's courtyard, was wounded along with another man and a woman. The only anaesthetist left in town is the one from Médecins Sans Frontières. He continues to operate with the local surgical team.



'Shelling of the Hospital in Gorazde, which is now a Bunker,' according to MSF Belgium, **Agence France Presse**, Brussels, 18 April 1994 (in French).

#### Extract:

The hospital in Gorazde was hit by shells several times on Monday and has been turned into a bunker, with doctors and other personnel taking up arms to defend it, announced the Director of the humanitarian organisation, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Belgium, George Dallemagne. "Five shells fell in the hospital courtyard on Monday and another hit the roof," according to two members of the MSF team in Gorazde in a conversation by radio-telephone with Brussels. The situation in the hospital, on the south bank of the Drina, is "dramatic" according to MSF. Almost 1,000 injured people have been taken to hospital, most of them in the last three days, said MSF. The hospital has also recorded 300 deaths since the start of the Serbian offensive. "There is one Bosnian surgeon and there are injured people everywhere," explained the MSF team, which has been forced to leave the hospital and set up a health centre on the north bank.

On Monday, MSF accused UN leaders of being guilty of "disinformation" regarding the situation in the enclave of Gorazde (in eastern Bosnia) and demanded the resignation of the UN's

special representative in former Yugoslavia, Yasushi Akashi. "The UN's blue helmets allowed Gorazde to fall by secretly leaving the town by helicopter during the night from Sunday to Monday," said George Dallemagne. MSF is "demanding an immediate ceasefire to evacuate people with serious injuries," he added. "Perhaps it is too late for Gorazde, but there are still other unprotected enclaves in central Bosnia that are under threat," explained Mr Dallemagne. "We need to alert people to what is currently going on in the town," he added. The enclave of Gorazde is one of the six safe areas placed under United Nations protection since May 1993. It is home to 65,000 people, almost half of whom, are mostly Muslim refugees.



'Gorazde Hospital Partly Destroyed by Bombardments,' **Press release** from Médecins Sans Frontières France, 19 April 1994 (in French).

Intense bombing of the town of Gorazde continues. The hospital was hit several times this morning and the roof was destroyed. Fortunately, the patients had been moved to the building's basement yesterday evening. The violence of the fighting means it is currently impossible to evacuate them to the new makeshift health centre set up by Médecins Sans Frontières and the ICRC on the left bank of the Drina. Médecins Sans Frontières' anaesthetist, assisted by a Bosnian doctor and nurse, are caring for numerous injured people at the centre. The lack of personnel and surgical equipment, however, means necessary complex surgeries are impossible.



'Urgent - Médecins Sans Frontières Gorazde Press Conference,' **Invitation and press pack**, 18 April 1994 (in French).

#### Extract:

As the town of Gorazde is on the brink of falling into the hands of Serbian forces, the latest news this morning from our team in the enclave, reports a tragic and desperate situation [...].

#### Médecins Sans Frontières: The Last Helping Hand in Gorazde

As Gorazde slowly dies under Serbian artillery fire, the team from Médecins Sans Frontières is working alongside surgeons in the hospital as they take turns operating. Médecins Sans Frontières is the only international medical organisation still working in this Muslim enclave in eastern Bosnia, the target of the Serbian offensive. MSF's presence is essential and must be maintained, come what may. Bosnian surgeons in the hospital in Gorazde, assisted by the team from Médecins Sans Frontières, are carrying out up to 40 operations a day. Since the start of the offensive in late March, they have already cared for over 700 injured people, including 80 children and 164 women and elderly people. Once again, innocent civilians are the victims of the ethnic cleansing taking place in eastern Bosnia. After two years of resistance, Gorazde is again being bombed. Yet on 6 May 1993, this strategic

enclave close to the Serbian border, was declared a safe area by United Nations forces, but never disarmed. A team from Médecins Sans Frontières has been operating in the town for six months to support this besieged population, whose only supplies are coming from United Nations parachute drops.

In addition to MSF's work in the hospital, they helped set up reception centres for refugees. These people fled the ethnic cleansing operations taking place in the region to seek shelter in the enclave, and now find themselves trapped and bombed. The Serbs have already destroyed around 30 villages, whose survivors are roaming the streets of Gorazde at the mercy of the snipers. For the injured to get to the hospital, they have to dodge both artillery fire and the snipers' bullets, since the building is very close to the front line. The hospital has been overwhelmed by the number of injured people arriving in the last ten days and has had to increase its number of beds from 80 to 250. The stocks of food and medicines that Médecins Sans Frontières was able to build up during the few weeks of truce that followed the UN's ultimatum on Sarajevo are almost exhausted. The doctors who are operating day and night are overwhelmed and need reinforcements. A 'fresh' surgical team from Médecins Sans Frontières is waiting in Sarajevo, ready to take up its post in Gorazde, as soon as possible. This is the final hope for the people of Gorazde, who feel they have been completely abandoned.



'Fear Reigns in Gorazde, where the Bombings Continue, According to MSF' *Agence France Presse*, Brussels, 18 April 1994 (in French).

Fear reigns in Gorazde, a town in Bosnia-Herzegovina declared a safe area by the UN, because of the ongoing Bosnian Serb bombardments, according to a statement on Monday evening by the humanitarian organisation, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), which was able to make contact with its representatives on the ground at 18:00 (Paris time).

"Fear and terror reign in the town. The streets are empty. People are taking refuge in the buildings that are still standing," AFP was told by MSF spokesperson Pierre Salignon, who reported intense bombardments and isolated gunfire, particularly on the right bank of the Drina where the hospital is located. Two MSF doctors are working in the hospital in Gorazde in extremely difficult conditions. They set up a health centre with representatives from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). "Our team has also managed to open the health centre on the left bank of the Drina, i.e. in the town centre where the ICRC office is, to avoid people being targeted by snipers lying-in-wait when they go to the hospital; three people, including two civilians, have already come in by the end of the afternoon," he said.



'MSF Demands the "Immediate Resignation" of Mr Akashi,' *Agence France Presse*, Paris, 18 April 1994 (in French and English).

The humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is demanding the "immediate resignation" of the UN's Special Representative in former Yugoslavia, M. Yasushi Akashi, said MSF France President Rony Brauman at a press conference in Paris on Monday. Mr Brauman described UN leaders, including Mr. Akashi, as "deceitful," accusing them of "systematic lying" and "shameful capitulation" faced with the Serbian offensive on the enclave of Gorazde. "Even as Gorazde was coming under heavy fire, we were told that a ceasefire agreement was being reached on the ground, that progress was being made towards a peaceful settlement and that everything was fine. This was revisionism in real time," stated Mr Brauman. "The fate of the other so-called safe areas is at stake. Why not Tuzla, Srebrenica, etc.?" he added.

The MSF President also demanded, "the evacuation to Sarajevo of some 200 injured people," which could not be cared for in the hospital in Gorazde. Mr Brauman also condemned the "evacuation on the sly" from Gorazde of the UN's military representatives, including seven liaison officers responsible for guiding NATO aircraft from the ground for close air support operations. "We have made a commitment to the people that we would never leave in such a cowardly fashion," declared Mr Brauman.



"'Anger" Images, Television Section,' *Le Monde* (France), 20 April 1994 (in French).

**Extract:**

Then there was the epic fury of Médecins Sans Frontières President Rony Brauman, who took it upon himself to give the award for second most hypocritical international role to the enigmatic Mr Akashi, the Japanese Emissary of the UN Secretary General in Bosnia, describing him as "deceitful" and a "liar", demanding that he resign, and accusing him of "revisionism in real time" for having, in his view, concealed the truth of the situation in Gorazde. It was the last-ditch stand of a peace activist thinking of his companions in the local hospital, providing care as the bombs fell.



'Terror and Mayhem in Gorazde,' Ian Traynor in Vienna and Chris Stephen in Sarajevo. *The Guardian* (UK), 19 April 1994 (in English).

**Extract:**

MSF and the hospital staff say 302 people have been killed and 1,075 wounded in the Serbian onslaught that started at the end of last month. More than 30 outlying villages have been captured, many of them torched. The casualty toll yesterday was not clear, but 37 were killed on Sunday and 73 wounded. The overall dead include 41 children and 105 women and elderly people. Early yesterday, General Rose

ordered the evacuation of eight SAS men, sent in 10 days ago to pinpoint targets for NATO air strikes. According to Kris Janowski, a UNHCR spokesman, the SAS team beat a stealthy retreat, leaving their UNHCR colleagues without saying a word. They then hiked into the mountains where a UN helicopter took them to Sarajevo.

Locals reacted angrily to the SAS disappearance, with some reports yesterday saying that international relief workers were now being held hostage to prevent their departure. Mr Kessler said the UNHCR workers were not being held hostage, but were being “watched more carefully” by locals who were “surprised” at the SAS evacuation. In addition to the death, maiming, and terror inflicted by the shelling, relief officials are warning of an imminent food, medical and sanitary emergency. [...]

The water plant has been hit and is no longer operating. Until a few days ago, locals fetched water from the Drina, but this is now impossible because of Serbian sniping. The food situation is also critical. [...] Gorazde is at the mercy of the Serbs, but it is unlikely they will seize the north bank immediately while 60,000 people are trapped there. On past form, they are more likely to let the humanitarian emergency simmer to boiling point and then allow an international evacuation of civilians that willy-nilly aids and abets the Serbian ethnic cleansing aim. [...]



*There was Olivier the administrator and Pablo, a brilliant but completely mad Argentinean paediatrician and anaesthetist who broke all the safety rules, to my complete despair. But I couldn't help admiring him, because he had decided to remain in the hospital even though it was being bombed. After the crisis, they showed us the films they had made. You can see Pablo intubating patients in the basement in the midst of an emergency. He worked like a madman. On one side of the Drina, the river that divides Gorazde in two, there was the hospital and on the other, Olivier and the team from the ICRC in the little makeshift health centre, which became a morgue in the end. They gathered up the dead, who were accumulating on the ground floor. They did some crazy things. Right in the midst of the bombing, they tried to cross the bridge to go and get equipment to try to offer at least a minimum level of care, because the civilians who were on the right bank didn't dare cross the bridge to get to the hospital.*

Eric Stobbaerts, MSF Belgium/France General Coordinator in the former Yugoslavia, December 1993 - April 1995 (in French) interviewed in 2000

**On 20 April, MSF informed the media that the hospital had been struck again and was no longer functioning. Four health care workers were wounded.**

**The MSF and ICRC teams in Gorazde chose to remain silent**

**in protest against the situation, which left them powerless to help the victims.**



**'Gorazde Hospital no longer Functioning - Medical Staff Injured or Shell-shocked, 37 Die in Hospital in 24 hours,' MSF International Press Release, 20 April 1994 (in English).**

Médecins sans Frontières' two-person team in Gorazde filed the most horrific reports of the offensive today, after two major rockets attacks against civilian targets killed at least fourteen people this afternoon. A first rocket hit the main ward of the hospital at 13:45 (local time), leaving four members of staff severely injured. Another seven civilians were also wounded. Sterilisation equipment was entirely destroyed by another shell. “This is the end of surgery in Gorazde,” the MSF anaesthetist said.

Ten civilians were reported killed in a separate attack in an apartment block nearby in mid-afternoon. Later, another shell landed on a nearby building, which serves as a makeshift hospital, killing four patients and injuring one. The hospital basement, where most patients were transferred yesterday to escape the shelling is now overflowing with the wounded. Over the past 24 hours, 107 patients were admitted to hospital, 38 of who later died. MSF is extremely concerned for the safety of its own personnel, as they report that indiscriminate shelling could hit their makeshift dispensary north of the river at any time. The risk is greater now that the basement is full of wounded and the MSF staff has to treat people on the ground floor.


Note to editors: Earlier this week, Médecins sans Frontières called for the resignation of Mr. Yasushi Akashi, following the United Nations' failure to protect the safe area of Gorazde.



**'ICRC and MSF Representatives in Gorazde Protest by their Silence,' Agence France Presse, Geneva, 20 April 1994 (in French).**

**Extract:**

The ICRC's two Swiss delegates and the two MSF doctors who are with the local staff, issued a joint press release sent to Sarajevo announcing “their intention to remain silent for 24 hours to protest the tragic events and their inability to provide aide,” said Paul-Henri Morard, ICRC's spokesperson in Geneva. The ICRC noted that it “understood the initiative” taken by its delegates, who are “sickened by their inability to bring in the wounded and assist the victims from all the parties.” ICRC representatives rarely take such an initiative. The organisation, which maintains neutrality, is based in Switzerland and aids victims of war, regardless of their camp. With the four representatives of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the ICRC and MSF representatives in the Muslim enclave they are the outside world's only source of information on the Bosnian Serb offensive.

**On 21 April, MSF and the UNHCR issued a call for a humanitarian truce. An MSF delegation visited French President François Mitterrand to ask him to act in support. V17** 



'MSF asks President Mitterrand to Intervene on Behalf of a Humanitarian Truce in Gorazde,' *Agence France Presse*, Paris, 21 April 1994 (in French).

#### Extract:

"Above all, I wanted to convey the exceptional seriousness of the situation in Gorazde," [Rony Brauman] said on leaving the President's office. "Every day seems like the worst but the next day proves that wrong – more people die, more people are wounded, hospitals are bombed again, wounded people die. [...] I wanted to make this tragedy and carnage real to him to encourage him to forward our call for a humanitarian truce. This would involve a temporary halt in fighting, not even a cease-fire, and would simply allow aid convoys with their teams to enter and bring out the wounded and the medical teams currently on site." [...]

What is absolutely critical today, beyond the ceasefire, the political difficulties, and any subsequent negotiations is to save lives; save those who are still alive, evacuate the wounded and the humanitarian aid teams. They are completely exhausted and unable to work because they have nothing left to give. There is no more water, no more food, no more medicine," Brauman explained, emphasizing the challenges that the medical teams are facing. "There's just a rain, a hail of shells, bullets and violence. They are working in a state of complete confusion and there is a feeling of terrifying panic all around them. They are exhausted, both emotionally and physically. No one can hold on for very long at that kind of pace."

The President's spokesperson noted that Mr. Mitterrand fully approved and supported MSF's call for a humanitarian truce in Gorazde.



'Joint call by UNHCR and MSF for a "Humanitarian Truce" in Gorazde,' *Agence France Presse*, Paris, 22 April 1994 (in French and English).

#### Extract:

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the medical humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) launched an "urgent call" for a "humanitarian truce" in Gorazde in order to deliver aid and humanitarian teams and evacuate the wounded, MSF announced on Friday. On Thursday, MSF President Rony Brauman asked French President François Mitterrand to intervene on behalf of a humanitarian truce in Gorazde. Mitterrand's spokesperson indicated that the President approved and supported the initiative. In a press release, the humanitarian organisation noted that "the situation has worsened tragically in the town of Gorazde

in recent days" and that "most of the wounded are dying for lack of care, the hospital is partially destroyed, water and electricity have been cut and food supplies have been bombed. The majority of the 1,324 wounded registered by the UNHCR since 29 June are civilians; women, children and the elderly," MSF reported.

**That same day, the Ministry of Health of the self-proclaimed Serb Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina stated publicly that MSF representatives in Gorazde were betraying their humanitarian mission by issuing situation reports with a political undertone.**

**MSF responded with a letter stating their reports on the situation in Gorazde strictly addressed humanitarian concerns, as authorized by the Geneva Conventions. The programme managers encouraged the volunteers remaining in the enclave to continue to speak out.**

**MSF also announced that bombing had resumed and that the clinic's supplies of drugs and medical materiel were dwindling. The UNHCR announced that the hospital's emergency room had been struck. The two organisations provided figures on the number of dead and wounded.**



'Health Minister Accuses Charity of Political Reporting from Gorazde,' *BBC Monitoring Service: Central Europe & Balkans*, 22 April 1994 (in English).

Health Minister of the Bosnian Serb state Dragan Kalinic on Wednesday [20th April] warned that representatives of the Médecins Sans Frontières [MSF] organisation were misusing their humanitarian mission by giving political connotations to their reports. In a letter addressed to Eric Stobbaerts, MSF's mission chief in Belgrade, Kalinic said he was astonished at the statements by the organisation's representatives in Gorazde, the Muslim enclave in southeastern Bosnia-Herzegovina and by its central office in Paris, which contained negative political connotations for the leadership of the Serb state in that former Yugoslav republic. Kalinic asked MSF to keep to the activities within the framework of its mandate, recalling that the Serb authorities had highly appreciated the cooperation with this organisation in the past, the Bosnian Serb news agency *SRNA* reports. The statements by the MSF members have for some time been rife with anti-Serb stances, particularly those made by its representatives now in the Gorazde enclave, where the fighting escalated at the end of March after Muslims - as confirmed by UN representatives - started attacking the neighbouring Serb territories. Nevertheless, the MSF representatives in Gorazde keep pointing out in their reports that Serbs are attacking that safe area, even though it was being used for military actions against the Serbs. [...]



**Summary Update**, Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF Legal Advisor, 20 April 1994 (in French).

We must respond to three questions simultaneously: Security, communications, operations.

#### Our security

We must respond to Kalinic's letter

1. We must be clear. They – the Serbs – are the ones who are attacking and bombing hospitals and humanitarian aid facilities today (ICRC and UNHCR buildings). They are also the ones responsible for the physical security of our expatriates tomorrow. We must claim protection under humanitarian law for the humanitarian teams and point out to them that at this time, they are failing to respect the humanitarian immunity of the buildings (ICRC and UNHCR hospitals and buildings). Their current actions are creating the greatest threat we could possibly face. We must give them official notification of our team's presence (direct MSF/Karadzic relationship, possibly the location) and tell them that they are responsible for our security.
2. We must refute the charge that our press release addresses any issues that do not relate strictly to humanitarian concerns (number of dead and wounded civilians, level of civilian supplies, situation of the refugees arriving in the town and other humanitarian needs that are not being met). I can provide the legal references to the Geneva Conventions that authorize us to speak in this way. The letter should come from Rony, addressed to Kalinic, with a copy to Karadzic and Mladic.

#### Watch out for the Vukovar syndrome (repetition)

1. Current rumour has it that Mladic is "out of control;" that is, that he no longer answers to Karadzic. It's not naïveté, this is an easy and hackneyed formula in Yugo[slavia] to protect politicians from the weight of certain military actions that are difficult to bear. The YPA commander in Vukovar was later sanctioned by Belgrade.
2. In Vukovar, propaganda and cross-propaganda accused the Croats of not wanting to allow the wounded to be evacuated and using them as human shields to protect the town. In Gorazde, humanitarian workers are the ones at risk of being portrayed by Serb propaganda as the Bosnians' human shields (in the final phase), as part of a collective suicide. Our staff would thus truly be hostages (with the Serbs stating that they have no responsibility for our security and our evacuation). Nothing would prevent [them] from portraying our team as a victim of the Bosnians' suicidal madness if things turned out badly for them. We have to anticipate the arguments to the extent possible and prepare for them. [...]
3. In Vukovar, there were to be no witnesses and there were none. [...] That's the real danger for us today if we do not obtain a response about the future of the civilian population and the wounded. In fact, there is no plan at this point for what will happen to this population. Evacuation seems unlikely or improbable, contrary to what is being said about the population of Srebrenica. So I'm looking back at the lessons from the Vukovar experience in thinking about security.

#### Our communication

We agreed on a message the first day and since then we've simply tried to make the information powerful, without a specific goal. It's certainly a way to get people talking about Gorazde and protect our team. But, we have to be more strategic in taking the initiative about communication in terms of protecting the team. We have to define our message by making sure that it serves security and operations front and centre.

#### Our operations

Today we need to evacuate the team on the ground. The issue of their replacement is secondary. In any event, the team is ready, so [...] even if we could get into Gorazde, we shouldn't go, given the current situation. The urgency is to evacuate. Evacuation is possible from an operational standpoint only if the wounded are evacuated, too. This could be a test for defining a coherent policy. Evacuation of the civilian population is, of course, urgent, but it is an overly ambitious position and not connected closely enough to our operations to focus on it at our level. We'd be wasting our time, without taking away any valid lessons about our lack of manoeuvre. It depends more on the ICRC and UNHCR approaches.



**Message** from MSF Belgium and MSF France Program Managers to two MSF Volunteers in the Gorazde Enclave, 21 April 1994 (in French).

Dear Olivier and Pablo,

Before I go further, I want to say that you are always in our thoughts and that our concerns continue to grow. It's easy to say, but please be very careful. We believe that we have to keep the pressure on, via the media, in terms of what is happening if the future of the people who can still be saved in Gorazde is to be even slightly less dire. Nothing good ever happens in a void. MSF is now the only reliable source of information in Gorazde. To put it plainly, you are the only link between your hell and the outside world.

We would like to continue to provide factual information as you send it to us, being extremely careful, of course, about the differences, considered to be political, that may exist in the various statements. Beyond the more diplomatic initiatives that we are pursuing in Europe, the US and Belgrade, we can stir up public opinion a bit more here by organizing a dialogue between you and several journalists we can rely on. They are very familiar with the issues and very professional, which means that they are quite sensitive to the risks. The content would, of course, be limited to medical- and humanitarian-related information (number of clinic admissions, hospital situation, lack of water, deaths, wounded, lack of electricity, etc.). If they ask other kinds of questions, please remember – as you always have – that MSF is a medical humanitarian organisation. Information coming directly from Gorazde can make the tragedy there feel unbearable, even from far, far away.

We look forward to your thoughts on this proposal. Of course we will understand if you refuse. You're the ones living in that hell. With much love – hoping that it warms your heart a bit.



'Two More Rockets Hit Gorazde Hospital Killing Twenty – 1,467 Wounded and 436 Dead Since the Beginning of the Offensive,' **MSF Press Release**, 21 April 1994 (in English).

#### Extract:

Médecins Sans Frontières reports that the conditions inside Gorazde are rapidly deteriorating. At 06:00 this morning, the offensive had already resumed. At 14:30 today, two more rockets hit the hospital annex, which serves as a makeshift ward for twenty patients and visitors. Since the offensive began, 1,467 people have been wounded, of which 31 are children and 87 women and elderly people. 436 have died, of which 79 are children and 175 women and elderly people. Dozens of wounded people are being treated every day at a dispensary on the left bank of the River Drina, where MSF and the ICRC are working. Medical reserves in the dispensary are, however, are running so low that the Bosnian doctor is having to send neighbourhood children from house to house in order to look for medicine. In the light of this tragedy, MSF renews its call for an immediate humanitarian truce, in order to allow both medical relief to enter Gorazde and the seriously wounded to be evacuated.



'MSF Reports Violent Bombing and Fighting in Gorazde on Thursday Morning,' **Agence France Presse**, Paris, 21 April 1994 (in French).

#### Extract:

The humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières reported that violent bombing and fighting resumed Thursday morning around 06:00 (Paris time) in Gorazde, based on contact with its representatives on the ground. "According to our anaesthesiologist, our clinic, located on the left bank of the Drina River (city centre), which operates in cooperation with the ICRC, has only two days' of medical supplies available," an MSF spokesperson told the AFP, noting that those supplies were adequate to treat approximately 50 wounded persons.

"On Tuesday and Wednesday, 24 people with bullet wounds or injuries from the bombing were treated at the clinic, including seven women and five children. Four of them died," he said. A total of 16 operations were performed at the clinic. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of 16:00, the provisional toll from Wednesday's bombings of the Muslim enclave of Gorazde stood at 44 deaths, including 15 children, and 137 wounded, including 26 children. UNHCR representatives noted that the attackers had used rockets. One of the projectiles struck the emergency room of the hospital on the right bank of the Drina, killing 14 people and wounding at least 12. Eleven doctors were also wounded, four seriously.



*We realized that the communications from headquarters and the capital were no longer adequate. We asked the team if they would agree to speak from the enclave. We warned*

*them: "This could put the hospital at risk of bombing and could create problems for your security and ability to leave later. We'll have to evacuate you by helicopter to Sarajevo. It will be impossible to return via Belgrade." They agreed and went all out. In the meantime, the Serbs were advancing, but the pressure on the international community was increasing, too. Each time, the lack of action became even more shameful. Given the risk we took in having the team speak out, we approached the major media players - CNN and the BBC. CNN behaved very badly. They immediately asked questions about the military situation, although we had asked them not to. We briefed Olivier a bit, but he was so worn out that at the end, he said, "Yes, the Serbs are advancing." I was so outraged that I called Atlanta<sup>6</sup> and threatened to sue. I also called their correspondent in Sarajevo and said, "As long as I am the coordinator, CNN won't get any more information from us." They withdrew the interview after an hour. The BBC journalists behaved impeccably and were very professional. It really helped to turn up the heat and bring the crisis to the public's attention.*

Eric Stobbaerts, MSF Belgium/France General Coordinator in the former Yugoslavia, December 1993 - April 1995 (in French) interviewed in 2000

**On 25 April, when the bombing finally stopped, a new surgical expatriate team managed to enter the enclave and take over from the two volunteers who had been unable to leave since the start of the offensive. When they returned to Paris, the two held a press conference and spoke to the media at length.**



'Voices from Gorazde, Under the Last Bombs,' **Libération** (France), 25 April 1994 (in French).

#### Extract:

A new Médecins Sans Frontières team reached the hospital in Gorazde yesterday. Despite the ultimatum, shooting continued over the weekend. *Libération* is publishing the latest messages from the besieged city.

#### Gorazde, Saturday, 23 April, noon.

Shooting continued last night well past midnight. They had worked very late so did not get back to work until 09:00 this morning. Bombing continues despite the ultimatum and has been increasing since dawn. It has now reached yesterday's intensity. At 11:45, a shell fell near the ICRC delegation. The snipers are also relentless. This morning, a bullet struck a nine year-old girl in the head, killing her. It is "easier" to understand how a soldier can kill children in a bombing because he can't see them. But how can someone fire intentionally on a little girl? [...]

We've had to increase our clinic's capacity. We now have three operating tables and can work on three wounded patients

6. CNN Headquarters are located in Atlanta (USA)

simultaneously. 15 beds (all occupied), plus patients seated on chairs. Logistics are becoming increasingly difficult - food for everyone, bathroom plumbing, toilets [...] But we are managing [...]

#### Gorazde, Saturday, 23 April, 13:30

I just received this information from the hospital. The director reported two shells fired on the hospital today. Toll: 3 patients killed. A midwife seriously wounded.

#### Gorazde, Saturday, 23 April, 17:00.

Shooting began today around 09:00, with snipers using anti-aircraft weapons (AAW) and small-calibre automatic rifles. Bombing took over a little later (10:00) and increased in intensity until about an hour ago. There were two incidents this morning: an AAW bullet entered a room on the first floor, occupied by one of MSF's translators. No one was struck. A shell fell near the delegation at 11:45. Also this morning, two shells struck the hospital. Two people were killed and a midwife was seriously wounded.

This afternoon, we could still hear sporadic firing coming from town. The sound of explosions decreased at the end of the day. It took five hours for things to calm down. Today was much calmer, but you can hardly call it a ceasefire. The population's morale is improved today and everyone hopes that peace will come tomorrow [...]

#### Gorazde, Saturday, 24 April, 11:00

Today is very calm, compared to those preceding. However, sniper fire continued this morning in town. At the clinic on the left bank of the Drina, we treated a patient wounded by a sniper. We were told about a second wounded person, but he has not yet arrived at the clinic. We can still hear bombing, but it is much further away. It must be coming from outside the city. A Norwegian medical group is preparing the medical evacuation by helicopter of 150 wounded patients this afternoon. We would like to transfer all the patients from our clinic to the hospital but we have to wait until the medical evacuation frees up the space we need. Impossible to obtain an armoured vehicle to go anywhere (hospital, stadium where the Norwegians are, etc). All the UN men are very busy. We'll have to be patient until the pressure eases.

Saturday, 23 April MSF/ICRC hospital: 14 wounded, including 7 children and 4 women and elderly people. Two of them died, including one child.

#### Sunday, 24 April 11:00, New team in Gorazde (General Practitioner and Anaesthesiologist):

One wounded. Provisional toll: 94 wounded, including 17 children and 31 women and elderly people. The death toll stands at 12, including 4 children and 2 women and elderly people. We reached Gorazde safe and sound, with all these wonderful people. Little by little, we are finding what we need. We will organize the distribution of supplies and provisions (a truck from Sarajevo came with us). We will be able to perform anaesthesia at the hospital. We haven't seen the hospital yet but will head over there this afternoon. Everyone did incredible work. We will go see what they need from us

and let Olivier and Pablo get some rest. We'll be in touch soon.



'Invitation to MSF France Press Conference,' MSF Team Returned from Gorazde, 26 April 1994 (in French).

After three months working in the enclave of Gorazde, Olivier Van Bungen (logistician) and Pablo Nuozzi (doctor/anaesthesiologist) will speak about the suffering of the residents of this Muslim enclave.



*We had to evacuate Olivier and Pablo by helicopter because they had spoken out. The Bosnians cheered them in Sarajevo. They were the heroes of Gorazde, the only international voices who spoke from Gorazde. I think that MSF helped to protect people there by sounding the alarm within the international community and urging it to assume its responsibilities. It took three weeks but we were able to do it because we were right there with the people.*

Eric Stobbaerts, MSF Belgium/France General Coordinator in the former Yugoslavia, December 1993 - April 1995 (in French) interviewed in 2000

**In late April, a controversy arose regarding the statistics of the dead and wounded issued by the UNHCR and distributed by groups including MSF and the ICRC. As it turned out, the figures provided by the Bosnian armed forces were overestimated. The humanitarian teams were hiding in basements and unable to travel freely, so they relied on those figures because they could not provide more precise ones.**



'Controversial Count of Gorazde's Victims,' Marc Semo, *Libération* (France), 27 April 1994 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

Humanitarian aid organisations believe that the figures provided by the High Commissioner for Refugees – 715 deaths and 1,970 wounded – are greatly in excess of the actual numbers. The number of victims of the Serb bombings of the Gorazde enclave is believed to be an overestimate, particularly the figures from the last days of the offensive mounted against the besieged town. The High Commissioner for Refugees put the number over the last three weeks at 715 dead and approximately 1,970 wounded (including 600 seriously wounded). UNHCR spokesperson Peter Kessler confirmed that toll, which was published in *Libération*. But many of the humanitarian organisations' staff members have



openly expressed doubts. No one challenges the breadth and fury of the Serb artillery's shelling of the town and its hospital, but the figures should probably be "cut in half," still at around 200 or 300 dead and 1,000 wounded.

The bombing was so violent that during recent days, humanitarian aid workers in Gorazde barely left their shelters except to provide a radio update at the hospital, as did MSF representative Olivier Van Bullen. The facility is located on the right bank of the Drina, where the Serbs concentrated most of their shooting. "Statements on the situation at the hospital were correct but apparently partial," confirmed a representative of a humanitarian organisation, who did not hide his irritation. "For the rest, I'm afraid they reported what had been reported to them." In other words, the NGOs' main sources were Bosnians.

In the last week of the siege, UNHCR representatives and UN observers apparently accepted the daily figures of deaths and injuries reported by local authorities, but did not acknowledge them as such. By definition, such figures should be treated cautiously as the Bosnian authorities were trying to dramatise the situation to the extent possible to encourage the international community to intervene. "We are in a situation of war and, in war, all camps use propaganda," acknowledged UNHCR Spokesperson Peter Kessler.



'The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Serbs Withdraw from Gorazde, Humanitarian Organizations Question the Actual Number of Wounded, Without Minimizing the Extent of the Bombing, UNHCR Officials Say the Reported Toll is Exaggerated,' *Le Monde* (France) 28 April 1994 (in French).

#### Extract:

Without minimizing the horror of the Serb bombings, doctors and officials representing the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on Tuesday questioned the accuracy of the figures (715 dead and nearly 2,000 wounded) that the UN humanitarian agency and NGOs on the ground, including Médecins Sans Frontières, had accepted. "These figures must be revised downward," the UNHCR stated on Tuesday in Sarajevo, after learning that the number of wounded patients requiring urgent evacuation was less than half of the 600 initially reported. Indeed, after three days' of work shifts, the UNHCR, which managed to repatriate 299 people to Sarajevo hospitals, decided to halt the medical evacuation for lack of patients. "We are not finding wounded people," UNHCR representatives reported. "We scoured the town (Gorazde) but the only people left are amputees who had surgery six months ago."

In recent days, UNHCR doctors were surprised by the high number of slightly injured and disabled people who were evacuated and whose scars indicated wounds suffered several months and, even more than a year, ago. Only approximately 30 of them, 20 of whom arrived Sunday, bore new wounds. "We were expecting more seriously-wounded patients with more

recent injuries," said Dr Geneviève Begkoyian. "There were only some 20 the first day and a few other cases over the next two days." Seeking an explanation, Dr. Begkoyian wondered whether "the badly-wounded are all dead, which would be serious," or whether, on the contrary, "there never were any."

Her Bosnian colleagues responsible for assigning the patients to Sarajevo's hospitals shared her reaction. One of them acknowledged, "If the city was bombed for 20 days, there should be more wounded people. I don't understand." The director of the Kosovo hospital, who was also surprised, added, "We emptied the hospital and prepared 500 beds for the wounded from Gorazde. The Ministry of Health had alerted us that there were 1,200 wounded and so we took the necessary steps." The UNHCR now acknowledges that it created an evacuation process "based clearly on erroneous information."

Intensified bombing in the downtown area prevented humanitarian aid workers and UN observers on the ground from carrying out their work over the last week of the Serb offensive and they had to remain in the basements of their buildings in Gorazde. As of that point, they no longer had "direct" information and accepted the figures provided by local authorities, but could not verify them. Peter Kessler, the UNHCR spokesperson in Sarajevo, acknowledged as much. "We must remember that many wounded people died for lack of treatment," he added, specifying that nearly 40% of the wounded had died of their injuries. "No one who suffered an injury to the skull, abdomen or thorax had any chance of survival," confirmed an UNPROFOR doctor who came to help with the arrival of the wounded from Gorazde.

But many mysteries surround Gorazde. One involves the number of women and children wounded during the bombings. "We should have seen many more women and children," said UNHCR staff. Ninety percent of the people evacuated were men, clearly fighters, most between 20 and 30 years of age. Humanitarian aid workers are not dupes. They know that the Gorazde authorities gave priority to evacuating men, hoping that they would return to the front after being treated.

This "favouritism" also allowed several local leaders to leave the besieged town. One obtained medical evacuation on Monday, 25 April, complaining of chronic sinusitis. According to a Western doctor on the ground, an elderly man, and two women, all seriously wounded by shelling during the recent days of fighting and in urgent need of treatment, had to wait until Tuesday to be evacuated.

Was the UNHCR manipulated? Were the figures an overestimate? "We will need time to determine what really happened and conduct an accurate count of the dead," Kessler concluded. At UNPROFOR, officers noted on Tuesday that exaggerating such tolls was often "the Bosnians' only weapon."



Several months later, I was invited, as MSF France's former President, to a meeting organized by the French Secretary-General for National Defence. Participants included journalists and soldiers who were there to discuss how the Gorazde situation had been handled. As it turned out, the figures that we had all quoted, UNHCR, AFP, Reuters, MSF, were complete propaganda. The Bosnian soldiers in Gorazde had significantly inflated the toll of dead and injured in the bombing of the enclave from the Serb positions in order to bring on air strikes. It was 'good war' propaganda. But our volunteers, like the ICRC's, were underground, sheltered, but completely blind. They didn't treat many wounded people, but the thinking was that the area was being pounded so hard that people just could not go outside and seek treatment. We let ourselves be brain-washed by the Bosnian propaganda – to the point of meeting with Mitterrand to ask him to call for a humanitarian truce.

Dr. Rony Brauman, MSF France President, 1982 - 1994, MSF France Foundation Research Director from 1994, interviewed in 2000 and 2015 (in French).



You can't protect yourself against that. We'll always be a target for propaganda in wars. If we had it to do over again, I think we ought to [do the same]. It's a flaw that you develop quickly, estimating the number of people who are dead or wounded, cross-checking the information two or three times and then establishing a figure that is given out. But we'll never count the dead one by one in the midst of bombing and when there are threats. It's up to us to be smart and alert enough to make sure that the information we disseminate is as close as possible to the reality we imagine. Yes, of course, the Bosnians manipulated us sometimes, but that manipulation bothered me much less than what Pale put out.

Dr Renaud Tockert, MSF Belgium Programme Manager for the former Yugoslavia, 1993-1995, Interviewed in 2000 and 2015 (in French).

**In the end, MSF concluded that its public statements generated a response from the international community, which made it possible to prevent the fall of Gorazde. However, the enclave, where living space continued to shrink, remained besieged. [V18](#)**



'I am Writing to You from the Depths of Hell [...]': Médecins Sans Frontières Speaks Out on Gorazde's Suffering,' *Le Nouvel Observateur* (France), 28 April - 4 May 1994 (in French).

#### Extract:

Their names are Pablo and Olivier. Pablo is an anaesthesiologist and Olivier is a logistician/coordinator. They were the Médecins Sans Frontières team in Gorazde. Together with the

delegates from the International Committee of the Red Cross, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the UN military observers, the two were the only foreign witnesses to the tragedy of Gorazde. They transmitted reports daily on the changing situation to MSF headquarters by radio or 'capsat' (telex over satellite system) throughout the Serb offensive. René Backmann has selected excerpts from their statements, which helped to break the silence on this massacre that took place behind closed doors and thwart those who sought to minimize the horror. We publish them here.



'Annual Report May 1993-April 1994,' of the MSF France President to the MSF France General Assembly, May 1994 (in French).

#### Extract:

Each time, we were able to hold press conferences inside the Palace of Nations, the UN building in New York, and we got good coverage from the UN-accredited press and the English-language press in general. The last of these press conferences was Friday, a week ago, when we sounded the alarm on the situation in Gorazde. Yes, Gorazde, where we are watching a live demonstration of what the UN considers to be a safe area. The presence of humanitarian teams was, obviously, critical. And not just for the work they performed, even if it was particularly intense during the first 15-20 days of the siege. The Bosnian medical-surgical team handled a huge workload and we were there to back them up. But this back up was important for two reasons: first, it helped to ease slightly, though certainly not eliminate, the sense of total abandonment that the population of Gorazde rightly felt. Second, by being there we were able to relay a significant amount of information and, thus, to create awareness and mobilize people.

There, alongside the UNHCR, MSF, which played an extremely important role in transmitting information, even if the number of wounded and of victims was overestimated, created awareness, provided a continuous flow of information, and was decisive in terms of the international reaction to Gorazde. That reaction was slow in coming and you know what it involved. The Gorazde pocket, where some living space remained, became a tiny area measuring 3 km x 3 km, with 60,000 inhabitants. And now our "friend," Mr. Akashi, the UN Special Representative, says, yet again, that the catastrophe could have been prevented, that this was all a success. This "success" suggests what will become of the enclaves referred to – in an extraordinary irony – as safe areas.

**On 1 March 1994, the Bosnian Muslim and Croatian authorities decided to create a Bosniak-Croat Federation, which would be put in place in the coming months. On 26 April 1994, the Contact Group on Bosnia-Herzegovina, including the United States, Russia, Germany, France, and**

**the United Kingdom, was created to obtain a ceasefire and revive diplomatic efforts toward sustainable peace.**

**On 5 July 1994, the Contact Group proposed a new division of Bosnia-Herzegovina, giving 51% of the territory to the Bosniak-Croatian Federation and 49% to the Bosnian Serbs, who rejected it.**

**In mid-September 1994, the Bosnian Serb forces tightened the siege of Srebrenica, letting through only a quarter of the humanitarian convoys. UN Resolution n°943 complicated the situation by keeping logistical and sanitation materials on the list of embargoed goods, despite the fact that these were vital to preparing the enclaves for winter. MSF expressed its concerns to the UN Security Council and prepared a statement for the press.**



**Message** from Eric Stobbaerts, MSF Coordinator in the former Yugoslavia to the MSF Belgrade team, 29 September 1994 (in French).

**Extract:**

Prepare a text in Brussels with the following content: 1) MSF condemns the lack of access to Serbian-held Bosnia and the Muslim enclaves for more than two weeks (date of the last convoy). MSF is asking the competent authorities for the right of access and free movement for these humanitarian convoys for the civilian populations of Bosnia, as defined in the Geneva Conventions. [...] b) In the field, the sanitary and medical situation remains urgent in the Muslim enclaves of Gorazde and Srebrenica. These populations have been imprisoned for more than two years. MSF is concerned about this new blockade, which is worsening what is already an extremely precarious situation for these civilian populations. MSF underlines the lack of essential medicines in these places [...], as well as deliveries of food, hygiene products and supplies needed to prepare for winter, jeopardising the survival of these populations left to their own devices. [...] c) In the morning, wait to see whether there is any movement in Pale toward a meeting during the day; contact the ICRC and UNHCR to get their assessment of the situation. Then: If nothing concrete by noon, send the press release. If the meeting takes place but little or no satisfactory content, send a press release in the same style but with new information added (something like “again in a week” or “with absurd conditions”).



**Message** from Eric Stobbaerts, MSF Coordinator in the former Yugoslavia, to Pierre Salignon, Deputy Programme Manager at MSF France, 8 October 1993 (in French).

**Extract:**

1) No MSF convoys in the eastern Bosnian enclaves for more than a month. For the past two weeks, systematic refusal by the military authorities to allow MSF convoys through, not to mention the ban on delivery of logistical materials needed to

prepare for winter. No movement of our volunteers for the past two weeks, though that seems to have improved in the last few days. Permission was given to travel this weekend of October 10, 1994, and the beginning of next week. But we still have no authorisation for the medicines, which are now running out. No more oxygen in Srebrenica. [...] Winter is here early. It snowed this weekend in Gorazde and Srebrenica. There are still families without shelter since no more logistical materials are getting into these pockets.

2) [...] Security Council Resolution number 943 [...] addresses the issue of the embargo imposed on Serbian-held Bosnia by the government of Serbia, in the context of acceptance of the latest Bosnia peace plan. [...] It approved the Belgrade government’s measures against its neighbour, which consist of a ban on all commercial and military transit, except goods essential for all humanitarian needs: clothing, food, and medicines. Those definitions cannot be adequate, given the rehabilitation and sanitation programmes and the winterisation programmes in Muslim enclaves (and in Republika Srpska). That’s where there’s a problem. By approving the measures already instituted by Belgrade, it upholds the Belgrade government’s limits on international humanitarian action. The resolution is even consistent with the restrictions that the Pale authorities imposed two months ago on humanitarian agencies (MSF, ICRC and UNHCR) convoys of logistical materials headed for eastern Bosnia’s Muslim enclaves. We need to ask that the resolution be revised.

3) That ban affects only MSF convoys. Indeed, there was an agreement in Sarajevo last week between the Bosnian Serb and Muslim authorities regarding a prisoner of war exchange (ICRC and unofficial UNHCR presence in Sarajevo). The exchange took place on 6 October. The agreement provides for the exchange of Serbian prisoners [...] in exchange for a delivery of humanitarian aid to the enclaves (mainly food) by UNHCR convoys! Since then twenty-seven lorries have entered, but none from MSF. [...] My suggested action strategy for this week: Audience with the vice-president of the Serbian Republic to get authorisation for our convoys. If refused or impossible or promised in a few days, then an MSF media response (press conference) along the lines of the draft sent a week ago. Also, at the same time, go to the Security Council to get the resolution revised.



*Once we managed to get a lorry or team in, the position would gradually begin to harden. It could take one or two or three months, and then it would escalate again. We defended access to the enclaves in several steps, ending with public statements. We did that several times, either from Belgrade, or from Brussels, or Paris. First we would appeal to the UN peacekeepers, then to the government, then to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and then we would take a position in the press. We put out press releases on a regular basis, sometimes just from Belgrade, simply to remind the authorities that we were there.*

Dr. Renaud Tockert, MSF Belgium Programme Manager for the former Yugoslavia, 1993 - 1995, interviewed in 2000 and 2015 (in French).



*There were public statements, especially from Belgrade, but no press releases. It was more a response to journalists' questions. We were extremely cautious. We were really doing everything in little steps: getting access, negotiating to get a foothold from the Belgrade side. And then we were getting to Srebrenica via Belgrade and the border at the edge of Macedonia and the Serbian area, and so everything had to be negotiated. We had to be in the enclaves, so we were trying to stay there. We were backed into a corner, but we weren't giving up. We tried to be creative, to get medicines through, to maintain ties with the ICRC and the UNHCR. But we were very frustrated, very worried, by the deteriorating situation. And then there were bombings, wounded – in a word, life in a captive territory.*

Pierre Salignon, MSF France Deputy Programme Manager, in Charge of Programmes in the former Yugoslavia 1992-1996, Interviewed in 2015 (in French).

## WORKING LIKE PRISON DOCTORS

**In the months that followed, MSF continued to criticize the lack of access to the enclaves and the continued policy of ethnic cleansing. It questioned the role of "social service agency of the occupying forces," which the humanitarian organisations were at risk of playing.**



'Bosnian Winter,' Pierre Salignon, MSF France Programme Manager, *Libération* (France), 20 October 1994 (in French).

### Extract:

The noose tightens a bit more every day around Gorazde, Srebrenica and Zepa, the three Muslim enclaves in eastern Bosnia under siege for more than two years by Bosnian Serb forces. For the third consecutive year, 100,000 residents, most of them women, children and the elderly, are preparing for another winter of siege under inhuman conditions. In these "open-air prisons" - otherwise known as "safe areas" by the United Nations - the law of the aggressor always triumphs and UN forces, unfortunately, ensure compliance with it. Initially, of course, the UN Blue Helmets' deployment did help to freeze the situation militarily and prevent massacres. But it also played into the Serbs' hands by reducing the Bosnians to victims living under a suspended sentence, receiving infusions of external aid.

Their survival thus depends exclusively on the goodwill of the Serb militias, which, at best, prohibit or impose conditions on the delivery of international aid and, at worst, confiscate

the contents of the humanitarian convoys. But that's not all. Last month, after international sanctions against the authorities in Pale were strengthened and an "economic and political" embargo was established by their "brothers" in Serbia to force them to accept the Contact Group's new proposed peace plan, Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic decided to implement a strategy to strangle the enclaves. "They will receive no aid whatsoever until the Serbs can use their natural transportation and communications routes."

To complicate matters further, UN Resolution No. 943, adopted on 22 September 1994 by the Security Council, limits aid to the Serbian Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (and, thus, to Srebrenica, Gorazde and Zepa) to the delivery of "food, clothing, and medicine." This prohibits all the humanitarian organisations present (MSF, ICRC and UNHCR) from transporting the "logistics and sanitation equipment and material" that is critical to prepare for winter in the besieged enclaves. The warring parties' ceasefire violations increase daily.

The people who live there want only one thing: "To leave this hell at any price."

The future of the 100,000 prisoners of Gorazde, Srebrenica and Zepa is subject today, more than ever, to the "international community's commitment to their survival." The international humanitarian agencies still working in the enclaves are totally powerless in the face of the tragedy occurring in front of them. Aiding the victims is subject increasingly to political-diplomatic haggling that is beyond them. They are thus reduced to serving as the occupying forces' social service agency - unless circumstances force them to leave.



'Ethnic Cleansing' Pierre Salignon, MSF France Head of Mission for the former Yugoslavia, *Messages* No. 73 (MSF France internal publication) October 1994 (in French).

### Extract:

Since mid-July 1994, the ethnic cleansing operations carried out by Radovan Karadzic's Serb militias are now expanding in towns "where, however, the Serbian authorities seemed prepared to accept Muslims and Croats who remained," according to the UNHCR. This is the case in the Bijeljina region, where more than 7,000 civilians had to flee within a few weeks and cross the front line to take refuge in territory held by the Sarajevo government. Of 80,000 non-Serbs in 1991, the UNHCR reports that only a few hundred remain.

**In December 1994, the situation continued to deteriorate in Srebrenica, where the MSF team was kept at a virtual standstill for over two months, without any supplies. On 12 December, MSF's general coordinator in the former Yugoslavia who had expressed his concerns**

to the Agence France Presse a few weeks earlier, asked headquarters to consider a communication campaign. In a press release sent to the western correspondents, in Belgrade on 16 December, he reported that another wave of Muslims, victims of ethnic cleansing, had arrived in Tuzla. In retaliation, Bosnian Serb forces refused to let any convoys carrying medicines enter the enclaves for four months, until March 1995.



'Moslem Enclaves are "Prisons," Say Charity Doctors,' **Agence France Presse**, 24 November 1994, (in English).

**Extract:**

Eric Stobbaerts, who worked for a year in the enclaves of Gorazde and Srebrenica, said the estimated 100,000 people living in the enclaves "have been cut off from the outside world for three years." Speaking to journalists Thursday, Stobbaerts, who is the MSF coordinator in ex-Yugoslavia, said that in addition to economic hardship, the population was under enormous psychological pressure to stay put in what he called "prisons open to the sky. The pressure comes from the Serbian army on the outside and from the inside to discourage people from leaving the Bosnian enclaves," Stobbaerts said. "If the enclaves were opened, the people would leave the region," Stobbaerts said adding: "there is a risk people will give up and go despite having a right to live in this region. What is more, to leave the region everyone has to pay about 2,000 German marks to the Serbian army." With the approach of winter, Stobbaerts said the situation of the enclave inhabitants had become critical.

Before the war, Srebrenica housed 6,000 people. There were now 23,000 people trying to survive in the enclave, 80 per cent of them refugees from other villages taken over by the Serbs, he said. In the towns, the people depend entirely on food handouts and MSF medical aid. But the Serbs have allowed only a minimum of supplies to get through. Stobbaerts said Serb forces only let the odd supply lorry into the enclave when the situation became really desperate.



**Message** from Eric Stobbaerts, MSF General Coordinator in the former Yugoslavia, to the MSF Belgium Operations Director, 12 December 1994 (in French).

**Extract:**

There needs to be a media campaign; a cry of alarm for the civilian populations of the enclaves in eastern Bosnia. The situation is becoming ever more tragic. As you know, we've been at a total standstill for almost two months, with no possibility of a convoy or even expatriate movement. This is longest I've seen since I got here. Again, today the authorisations for the week were refused with no explanation. On Saturday, an MSF Jeep was confiscated as it left Srebrenica. We are still trying to get it back. The teams are like hostages,

since they can no longer leave or enter, with no fuel for continuing our programmes and soon no more food. Soon we'll have to think about surviving and perhaps abandoning these populations in danger. For MSF, no logistics convoys since August. What can be done for the people who still don't have shelter for the winter? So the pressure is enormous. I should add the general insecurity; the sporadic shelling and sniper fire are getting worse each day, and confiscations. [...]

Pale's objective is obvious: to push MSF to leave. The ICRC is in the same boat. Only the UNHCR can still manage to get a few pathetic tons of food in, to prevent a famine. This morning, UNPROFOR announced that it doesn't want to escort any more UN humanitarian convoys in eastern Bosnia, because there are too many risks. What underhanded game is in the process of playing out? At what level? We resent an obvious abandonment by these people [UNPROFOR] and little possible recourse from the international community. Can you check with communications in Brussels and Paris to see what can be done? (NB: thanks for coordinating with the field for the security of the teams).



'16 December 1994: Ethnic Cleansing Continues,' **Press Release** from the MSF Coordinator in the former Yugoslavia sent to **Agence France Presse, Reuters, BBC** and **Le Figaro** correspondents in Belgrade, 16 December 1994 (in French).

**Extract:**

Once again, on Friday 16 December, a hundred people (to be exact: 39 women, 40 men, and 17 children, added to the 17 other people who have arrived since the beginning of the week) washed up, survivors from an unexpected shipwreck in the Tuzla region. Lost and abandoned by those who were once their neighbours and brothers. We expect another wave this week. They all come from the Bijeljina region, some of the men from a detention camp. After threats and evictions from their own people, they were finally forced to leave. The system is organised and methodical; they pay and then are stripped of their possessions. From the front line, where they are taken and dropped, it is a long walk to the first Muslim village; it can take up to twelve hours. There, the international agencies await them and give them shelter. Many find relatives or friends who take them in under very meagre conditions. Terrified by their new lot and the unknown fate that awaits them, they are apathetic, in shock. They need comfort.



'MSF is Extremely Preoccupied About the Humanitarian Situation in the Enclaves of Eastern Bosnia, which is Gradually Deteriorating as the Winter Advances,' **Press Release**, MSF Belgrade, 19 December 1994 (in English).

In the month of November, the amount of food allowed to enter the enclaves was equivalent to 905 kg/calories per person per day in Srebrenica and 875 kg/cal in Gorazde (reg-

ular amount of calories necessary for a person every day should be roughly 2,500 Kg/cal per person per day). The very few fertile fields are now totally sterile, especially in this season. There is no other input from the outside world. This situation may turn dramatic very soon. MSF is extremely worried and requests access for the humanitarian convoys in order to reach an acceptable standard of life for the enclave population of Eastern Bosnia. MSF also requests access for the winter and rehabilitation materials for the enclaves as a few hundred families are still with no proper shelter and are therefore risking sickness and possible death by cold.



*Bijeljina was a Serbian stronghold in Republika Srpska. They forced Bosnian Muslims still living in the area to take in displaced Bosnian Serbs. The Serbs literally took control of the house, preventing the Muslims from burning the furniture for heat or picking vegetables from the garden. Living together was so difficult that eventually the Muslims would want to leave. At that point, they were told, 'if you want to leave, you have to pay.' I think at the time it was 200 Deutsche Marks. They were told, 'there is a charter that will facilitate your transport to the border.' On the other side of the border was Tuzla. Once they had paid they were told, "you can't take all your belongings with you, but you can take your valuables and cross the border.' As they crossed, not the border, but the front line, there was a checkpoint where all their property was taken from them. Some people even arrived without shoes. Eric Stobbaerts, the General Coordinator, happened to be in Tuzla. He saw the wave of deportees arrive, and we put out a press release, not realising what the consequences would be. For the next four months, we couldn't get a single authorisation to get medicines into the enclaves.*

Dr Graciela Diap, MSF Belgium/France Medical Coordinator in the former Yugoslavia, October 1993 - April 1995, Interviewed in 2000, (in French).

**In January and February 1995, the Bosnian Serb authorities further increased their demands in terms of what MSF had to provide in Bosnian Serb territory in exchange for being allowed to get relief supplies into the enclaves. MSF continued to refuse to dispense aid without assessing the needs beforehand. Every international leader, who might possibly put pressure on the Bosnian Serb authorities, was informed of these difficulties.**



**Message** from MSF General Coordinator in the former Yugoslavia to MSF Brussels & Paris, 24 February 1995 (in English).

**Extract:**

To summarize - Now it is clear for me: this issue is not MSF. All the negotiation about a document, political aspect of our

declaration, the plan of distribution for the middle of March is just a trick to gain time; the only tool that the civilian authorities can officially use. This issue is military. The real threat of a BiH [Bosnia and Herzegovina] offensive before the end of the ceasefire is the reason. Militarily speaking, you better cut the supply of medical items rather than food to weaken an army. Medicines will therefore be refused for all agencies. This is why for example, UNHCR refused unlabelled MSF medicines, and why the Dutchbat convoy with PSF/MSF-H from Tuzla was refused, and ICRC clearance refused. [...] So let's stop being paranoid and let's prepare for an emergency. We discussed the need for airdrops, maybe (because BSA [Bosnian Serb Army] hates airdrops) just as a tool to force some convoys in. It is the only solution left. I will be in contact with Karen to forward necessary information. Movements of expatriate staff will be a tough part too (because it is medical staff) but should be solved. I have put all efforts to get this matter solved for tomorrow. Let's see the results.



*We brought the list of medicines we wanted to distribute to the Bosnian Serb leaders, and they told us, 'OK, we're going to do it 70/30 - 70% for the Serbs and 30% for the Bosniaks.' We replied that we didn't talk about percentages but about needs. We told them what situation we found in Republika Srpska and what supplies we planned on providing. Then we told them what the situation was on the other side, and gave them the list of medicines we felt we needed to deliver. Then began the 'clearance' procedure - total bureaucracy! We needed a 'clearance' for the lorry, and one for the driver, and one for the person accompanying the delivery, one for the medicines we were transporting and one for the date. Most of the time, we would have everything ready and the 'clearances' would be denied. Once, the person in charge was in the process of signing the infamous 'clearance' when I saw a mushroom cloud erupt, through the window behind him. It was the first NATO air strike. The guy turned around, picked up the paper, and ripped it to shreds. I felt like crying. One fine morning we would receive the authorisation and take off. Then we might find ourselves waiting at a checkpoint, sometimes until the next day. And sometimes there were anti-tank mines along the way, and the soldiers would taunt us saying, 'we can't move them, but you're welcome to get out and remove them yourselves.' The situation in the enclaves was so critical that when we came alone, we would just leave the drugs from our own emergency kits.*

Dr Graciela Diap, MSF Belgium/France Medical Coordinator in the former Yugoslavia, October 1993 - April 1995, Interviewed in 2000, (in French).

**While fighting broke out pretty much everywhere in Bosnia-Herzegovina, questions were again being raised at MSF about the organisation's role in the enclaves. For months, MSF's general coordinator in the former Yugoslavia observed that most of the foreign military**

leaders, diplomats, and journalists in the former Yugoslavia resigned themselves to the idea that the enclaves were obstacles to the peace process. In the April issue of *Contact*, MSF Belgium's in-house newsletter, he wondered whether MSF wasn't acting as doctor-jailer in the enclaves, and shouldn't speak out on behalf of those who wanted to leave.



**Minutes** from MSF-France Board of Directors Meeting, 24 February 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

The situation in the enclaves is becoming increasingly difficult. The teams have been running out of medical supplies (for two months) and logistical supplies (for five months). We've stepped up every possible type of pressure for getting supplies in, and are thinking that if we don't succeed, we may have to pull the teams out, because once they have nothing left, it will become extremely dangerous for them. That is a painful possibility. The new teams arrived, and found themselves ill prepared for the situation. They have nevertheless, found enough to do medical work, and the morale is a bit better. Generally speaking, the situation is getting worse, and we have been very tough in insisting on not paying the Serbs compensation in exchange for what goes into the enclaves. Other humanitarian actors are less demanding. As an example, we estimate that 30% of what the UN WHO sends goes to the Serbs. There is supposedly an evacuation programme for the wounded that has never functioned, except in exchange for prisoners or convoys going to the Serbian-held areas. We pulled out of that system and took a lot of grief for it from the UNHCR and the ICRC (and from NGOs in general). We are very isolated, because there's haggling going on everywhere. The enclaves are now a strategic, rather than military, issue. We have no good solution for now.



**Infomatin**, MSF Belgium's in-house Morning Update, 22 March 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

The war context is felt everywhere; the US has rearmed the Bosnian Muslims. In the enclaves, the situation is desperate. The people really are imprisoned, and have lost all hope; dying means nothing to them anymore. They themselves say they are condemned to death. Though there is still enough (but limited) food and medicine, the Serbian strategy is to let supplies dribble in slowly, the better to paralyze the population. MSF should change its strategy, and do more to give the lives of these confined, desperate people some meaning. In Pale (Bosnian Serb HQ), eight MSFers spent five days negotiating with the authorities. They reached an agreement for transporting aid to the enclaves; it requires the NGOs to report, month by month, the materials to be brought in. A first convoy made it into Srebrenica and Gorazde, which allowed a rotation in teams and a few tons of provisions and medicines to enter. In conclusion, we absolutely must start

talking about the enclaves again, and be more aggressive in our public statements (a meeting on Bosnia will be scheduled very soon).



'On MSF's Role in the Eastern Bosnian Enclaves,' Eric Stobbaerts, MSF General Coordinator in the former Yugoslavia, Sarajevo, Pale, February 1995, published in *Contact*, MSF Belgium's in-house Newsletter, April 1995 (in French).

The tone and the author may surprise some of you. It is the result of enormous frustration while awaiting the outcome of endless negotiations to resume our activities in eastern Bosnia at a more sustained pace. It is certainly not a cry of surrender; after all, our paper's motto is 'A luta continua!' Having come to the end of a more than fifteen-month mission that grabbed me and tore my insides out, into which I threw myself, body and soul, an unexpected thought suddenly came to me from somewhere deep inside: What role are we led to play in our intervention in eastern Bosnia? [...] What does the future hold? Ultimately, as everyone knows, these enclaves have no future. Everyone has surrendered, even that hypocrite, the international community, which was so strongly opposed to dividing the communities at the start of the conflict. Now it is the one proposing the division, and in very meticulous fashions. The besieged population does not believe in it either. Roughly 70% wanted to leave. The fact is that while these populations are under siege by the Serbian Army, they are now also under siege by the authorities in the enclaves. So it is a double-siege.

Should we continue to remain silent about the fact that this summer, for example, the Gorazde enclave authorities killed a grandmother and granddaughter as they tried to cross the Serbian frontline? The political and diplomatic stakes that these enclaves represent are obvious both for Pale and Sarajevo. What part are we playing? On one hand, we are serving Pale's interests by ensuring the stability of (not improving) the health status of the populations- cum-bargaining chips, thus sparing the torturer a humanitarian scandal that would attract too much attention. On the other hand, we are a part of Sarajevo's (yet unclear) political designs, by complying with their expeditious methods and neglecting the essential: above all, this population wants its freedom.

Should MSF play the role of jailer/prison doctor, in the service of two parties in conflict? Shouldn't we speak out on behalf of those who want to leave, those who want to be free again, those who are being imprisoned against their will for an ideal they no longer believe in? What has happened to Bosnia, that multi-ethnic ideal that is being gradually chipped away at by ethnic cleansing on both sides – an ideal now reduced to the shape and size of downtown Sarajevo, and in such a state?! Isn't it time to start thinking differently, thinking objectively, by going back to the principles that brought us here, and by grasping the suffering of these populations? Shouldn't we think that the fate of 100,000 refugees on peaceful, uni-

fied soil is more beneficial (in human terms) – soil where they can enjoy their freedom and their right to be human? What is the fate of 100,000 people doomed to live in a half-human, half-animal state, drained of their substance, that is, their wholeness? Shouldn't we be appalled at the comment from a 19-year-old woman, a refugee [displaced] in Srebrenica who said, "having to wait another one year or ten years, what does it matter?" Maybe it's premature to go deeper into that thought or make it our own, but on the eve of the new offensive everyone is 'expecting' this spring, it is justified. What is the price for defending an ideal? Will history thank us for it? We owe it to ourselves to think about that, at any rate, if only to reaffirm the basis of our involvement in these end-of-millennium ghettos.



*Since 1994, the people have understood that given its encirclement, its geographic location, too close to and too anchored in the Republika Srpska, and close to the Yugoslav border, Srebrenica was going to be an issue, a bargaining chip, and would fall into Serbian hands in a political deal for a peace agreement. The people understood that if they could not stay, that they would leave. When I left the enclave [in April 1994], I was convinced that it wouldn't hold, that they wouldn't keep Srebrenica and the region for themselves. However, like the people themselves, we were naïve enough to think that they would ensure the population's safety and protection.*

Graziella Godain, MSF France/Belgium Field Coordinator in Srebrenica, October 1993 - April 1994 (in French) interviewed in 2000



*I was in regular contact with the United Nations, journalists, UNPROFOR leaders, diplomats, etc. To all those people, as the months went by (and it became very clear in the winter of '94 and early '95), Srebrenica and the other enclaves had become an obstacle to the peace process. Obviously they never said it in writing or at an official meeting, but everyone had given up on the possibility of a multi-ethnic Bosnia. In that sense, the Serbs had won. In January 1995, no convoys were getting in. We reached the point of thinking that there would have to be airdrops. MSF had always criticised that, but we were in such a predicament – we didn't even have any aspirin in the pharmacy – we decided to ask the United Nations to parachute medicines into Srebrenica. I went to see General Smith, the Head of UNPROFOR, who basically told me that the international community wasn't ready to risk a third world war to get aspirin into Srebrenica.*

*In 1993, the population in Srebrenica was made up of rural IDPs [internally displaced people]. They had the strength, the will to be there. Beyond suffering the inhumane situation they were in, they understood the reason for the enclave's existence, and that being there was a way to fight for recognition of a multi-ethnic Bosnia. However, as month after terrible month of dreadful life went by, the situation changed. During my last visit to Srebrenica before I left (in April 1995), things were a bit more formal because I was leaving, people were saying to me, 'thank*

*you MSF for everything you are doing, but what we really want is to leave, we want to go back to our people.' In the meantime, a state was created in Bosnia-Herzegovina, based on an agreement between the Croats and the Muslims. There was a kind of stabilisation in central Bosnia, and the people of Srebrenica were talking differently. I made a kind of empirical synthesis between what the diplomats were saying and what the people of Srebrenica were saying, and I told myself that ultimately, at MSF, we were becoming doctors for Serbian prisons. I don't think we realised that in time.*

*To me, MSF's job was to be attuned the population, and in the case of Srebrenica we were not attuned enough. During my debriefing at headquarters, I suggested that we recommend moving the population and that we ask that the people of Srebrenica be allowed to rejoin their people, since that's what they were asking for. I was met with a chorus of disapproval. I was told, "That is not MSF's mandate, and it would be playing into the Serbs' hands." I'm angry at myself for having left at that moment. The person who was supposed to replace me wasn't available, so they split my position in two. They temporarily put one coordinator in Belgrade and another in Split, and beefed up their job description. So Srebrenica was being coordinated from Belgrade. Yet, a lot of the contacts for Srebrenica were in Sarajevo and Zagreb, not Belgrade. Aside from the managers at headquarters, no one had a good overall view of the situation anymore. They didn't travel to the field every week to gather information. That reorganisation lost us information.*

Eric Stobbaerts, MSF Belgium/France General Coordinator in the former Yugoslavia, December 1993 - April 1995 (in French) interviewed in 2000



*It's a good thing that MSF went to the enclave with Morillon, stayed there, developed all these medical activities, fought to bring in doctors and live there, close to the people. I really think the most important factor was our presence there. But I think our presence may also have had a negative effect by giving the impression that everything was going well. The people of Srebrenica didn't want to stay; they wanted to go to Tuzla. MSF was aware of this but didn't share the information. Why not? Because we felt it was important for the population to be respected and maybe also because of MSF's arrogance, i.e. it was pleased with itself for being in the enclave, 'the place where it should be,' without really analysing the people's suffering. And it's important to acknowledge that.*

Dr Graciela Diap, MSF Belgium/France Medical Coordinator in the former Yugoslavia, October 1993 - April 1995, Interviewed in 2000, (in French).



*The enclave issue came up many times during meetings of the MSF board of directors, of which I was a member. The vice president at the time raised the question, 'Isn't MSF like the condemned person's last meal?' That's exactly how he put it. We talked about requesting the evacuation of the popula-*



tion, but we ruled out that idea because we realised it was completely unrealistic and impractical. There was no political agreement on the matter and discussing it publicly would prevent us from entering the enclaves in the short term and result in a loss of contact.

Dr. Renaud Tockert, MSF Belgium Programme Manager for the former Yugoslavia, 1993 - 1995, interviewed in 2000 and 2015 (in French).

*I don't remember discussing evacuations. It wasn't something the national political leaders involved in this issue were even willing to consider. I often saw the [UN]HCR representative. We discussed the situation of the people stuck in these enclaves. They were completely dependent and living in a sort of little Warsaw Ghetto reminiscent of the worst period and wondering what was going to happen next. But everyone was blocked by the political deal and balance of power, which was evolving along with military operations, such as air strikes and troop deployments that froze certain positions. And no one talked about the political deal even though everyone knew it was a real disgrace and a solution had to be found.*

Pierre Salignon, Deputy Programme Manager, MSF France, in charge of programmes in the former Yugoslavia, 1992-1996, Interviewed in 2015 (in French).

*Knowing the end of the story and with hindsight, which is always 20/20, I think MSF had to be in Srebrenica. Not being there didn't make any sense, but we needed to be there to encourage people to leave. The reasoning that leads to the questions, 'Encourage them to leave - but to go where?' does favor order over chaos. Without making the kind of analogy that I consider condemnable, it's the same problem that occurred in Budapest in 1944. At Eichmann's trial, people criticized the Jewish Council for failing to warn that Eichmann intended to send everyone to Auschwitz, a warning that would have led people to flee. The man from the Jewish Council at the trial said, 'Flee - but where? There was nowhere to go.' And the people who accused him said, 'Yes, but you knew, and you were able to save your families.' That's what led Hannah Arendt to say that only 50%, not 90%, of Hungarian Jews would have been killed if chaos and disorder had been chosen over that deadly sense of order.*

Dr. Rony Brauman, MSF France President, 1982 - 1994, MSF France Foundation Research Director from 1994, interviewed in 2000 and 2015 (in French).

**At the same time, the relationship between the MSF Srebrenica's team and Opstina, the Bosnian Muslim civil authority that governed the city, was put under the spotlight over the selection of local staff employed by**

**MSF. The Bosnian municipal authorities were demanding the resignation of the logistician, an employee who was essential for organising operations and who had resisted corruption. He was summoned to join the Bosnian army under threat of imprisonment. This dispute had gradually extended to other members of the MSF staff.**



**Message** from the MSF Coordinator in Srebrenica to the MSF General Coordinator in the former Yugoslavia, 9 March 1995 (in English).

**Extract:**

CC MEETING They want: 1/ [to] remove our logistician; he received a letter saying that he has to be present on [9/3 at 08:00 at the school otherwise prison; He is the one with the most responsibilities in the MSF mission. 2 / rotation of all MSF staff; a list of our staff with the quantity and qualifications of the staff we need in the future has to be given to them. Deadline: in 2 to 3 days; in 15 days all staff will be changed. 3/ it is not an attack against MSF but it is cc [d to] local staff of all organisations. WHY? (Our conclusion) They want to show their power; they want to have their persons in the key positions of the organisations, and so controlling everything; Ask [for] some taxes on the salaries.



*We had serious problems with the Opstina, or municipality, which was very vindictive. The majority of the population was depressed while Bosnian soldiers were on edge. The Opstina started to forcibly conscript men and we began to have trouble keeping our male staff. We had to resist when they wanted to enlist our employees to carry out their commando raids on Serbian positions. Most of them didn't want to participate in these operations and we also needed them for our work. Providing medical care for 45,000 people was a huge undertaking and there were only four to six expatriates.*

Graziella Godain, MSF France/Belgium Field Coordinator in Srebrenica, October 1993 - April 1994 (in French) interviewed in 2000

**From 15 April, the Bosnian Serb authorities again began to reject any rotation of MSF expatriate teams working in the enclaves of Gorazde and Srebrenica. The Pale authorities tried to make staff rotation contingent on the organisation putting them in touch with French political leaders. MSF refused. In Belgrade, in early June, MSF released information to the press on the deteriorating situation in the enclave, which was again under bombardment.**



'The Humanitarian Situation is Worsening in the Enclaves,' *Agence France Presse*, Belgrade, 5 June 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

Bosnian Serb intransigence coupled with increased fighting in eastern Bosnia-Herzegovina have led to a sharp deterioration in the humanitarian situation of Bosnian Muslim safe havens there, an aid official said here Monday. The last food convoy to reach the Srebrenica enclave did so six weeks ago, and stocks are running out also in Gorazde, Stephane Oberreit the chief aid coordinator in Belgrade for Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF, Doctors without Borders) said. Oberreit said fighting in eastern Bosnia was playing havoc with MSF's programme, while the Bosnian Serbs were making it increasingly difficult for MSF to coordinate an effective staff rotation plan. The Bosnian Serb authorities "are not delivering the necessary authorisations to enable the planned personnel replacements," Oberreit said adding that this was making it "impossible at the moment to rotate (MSF) teams."



Message from MSF Pale to MSF Srebrenica, 20 June 1995 (in English).

**Extract:**

Their proposition was that MSF B/F asks the French government to contact [...] Pale to [exert] pressure [...] to have the rotation. This contact will give him the opportunity to have contact with the representatives of French diplomats. They hope that it will open new channels of negotiation and contacts. Imagine our surprise to hear this speech even if we understand that there is a crisis between civilian and military authorities in RS [Republika Srpska]. To be clear, they are trying to involve us in political matter[s] out[side] of our [jurisdiction]. The whole thing is touchy as you can imagine. We must have new meetings with them tomorrow. After discussions with HQs, we are thinking that this blackmail is hardly acceptable. [...] There are two ways of solving this. First, the unacceptable one, which is to put our teams in the enclaves, that's you, as a kind of merchandise between Serbs negotiators and French "occidental" diplomatic intervention over which we have no control at all, knowing that the Serbs will play this game very professionally as they did with the blue helmets, and even more, putting an additional constraint on all future activities in the enclaves, as they can use this manipulation every time they want... for any event they want. Second, a difficult one, which is to refuse this burglar type of bargain and say that we stick to our position: ask for access, a normal team rotation and continuation of all humanitarian activities knowing that... this could very quickly have a boomerang effect on different levels: in and out clearance for enclave and Pale teams, not probable but possible security constraints, maybe [staff would be] taken as temporary hostages, maybe even expulsion from the enclaves and Serb Republic, you just name it.

posal, then we might have to take other measures, which we will not discuss here and now, but which we are already preparing. We want to defend the second proposal tomorrow and keep you updated on any new development, which follows during the day. This implies that we would also ask you to play this business though, as we are doing here, and that there is no [deviation from] the official message. We know this is quite a hard bottom line for you all, we know that you are tired, fed up [...], but can you still hold on for a week or more? We will do everything that lies in our power to back you up as much as possible.



*"When MSF entered the enclaves in 1993, there must have been five staff members in Srebrenica and three in Gorazde. In May 1995, we were only allowed three staff positions in Srebrenica and two in Gorazde. And we had to wait for volunteers to receive authorisation to enter so that the others could leave. After a while, those in the enclave under bombardment began to fall apart. They were in tears when we spoke to them by radio. I sang them songs to keep their spirits up and make them laugh... I spent three weeks trying to receive the authorisations necessary for rotating personnel and bringing in supplies. These negotiations were a bit surreal. We met Serbs living in chalets surrounded by huge bodyguards. Our contact person was Nikola Koliievic, Vice President of Republika Srpska and a professor of English literature. He asked us to put him in contact with French President Jacques Chirac and give him his phone number. I refused, explaining that MSF was a non-governmental organisation. After a while, I realised that I had to give something up so I told him that we couldn't go below two volunteers in Srebrenica. He answered "Very good, that's an argument that will help me." Once the rotation took place, I called him to let him know and thank him and he told me he was very happy and was coming to celebrate with us! He came carrying bottles of alcohol even though he was already completely drunk. I asked his armed bodyguard to stay outside. So we spent the evening with Koliievic, who sang French songs to us and told us his life story. It was completely surreal."*

Stephan Oberreit, MSF Belgium/France General Coordinator in the former Yugoslavia, May - November 1995, MSF France Communications Director 2000 - 2006, Interviewed in 2015 (in French).



*When Stephan and I were in Pale in June 1995, we saw a great number of things. We saw UN cars and we heard that a certain UN official had visited the White House, the small chalet that housed the Bosnian Serb parliament. We had no idea what they discussed because we weren't there. But Koliievic told us that 'they were negotiating. The war is almost over and we're going to get practically everything we want... Yes, there's a deal on Srebrenica.' He didn't tell us, 'we signed this in exchange for that' but he did give us phone and fax numbers while saying, 'here, give this to Mr Chirac.' It was completely*

*muddled and very manipulative – just to see how far we were willing to go.*

Pierre Salignon, MSF France Deputy Programme Manager, in Charge of Programmes in the former Yugoslavia, 1992-1996, Interviewed in 2015 (in French).

**On 24 May, Bosnian Serbs bombed Sarajevo again. Disagreement and indecision held sway at the UN about whether to retaliate with air strikes. The United States which did not have troops on the ground, pushed for air operations. The Member States with contingents in UNPROFOR feared for their soldiers' lives.**

**On 25 May, NATO finally conducted air strikes. Bosnian Serb forces responded by bombing the safe areas of Tuzla, Srebrenica, Gorazde and Bihac and by taking hundreds of UN peacekeepers hostage, whom they used as human shields to discourage further strikes.**



'Where and Who are the Hostages?' *Le Monde* (France), 28 May 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

To stop the NATO air raids, which struck targets near their Pale stronghold on Thursday and Friday 25-26 May, the Bosnian Serbs have turned UN soldiers into human shields. According to the UN, 145 peacekeepers, including 103 French soldiers and 22 UN military observers, were still held captive by Bosnian Serb militias on Saturday morning, totaling 167 hostages. They were held at weapons collection points located at 12 different sites around Sarajevo, but some were taken to an "unknown destination."

**The last group of peacekeepers held hostage by the Bosnian Serb forces were freed on 18 June. In its 23 June edition, *The New York Times* reported that, according to western officials, France secretly negotiated their release in return for four of their prisoners and for assurances to the Bosnian Serbs that NATO would not carry out further air strikes.**



'Pale Releases UN Troops' *Agence France Presse*, 19 June 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

The case involving the UN peacekeepers and observers taken hostage by Bosnian Serbs is now over. A final group of 26 soldiers arrived early yesterday evening in Serbia. The group, made up of 15 observers from different countries, including

one from Belgium (Commander Guy Schandeler), and 11 Canadian peacekeepers, were handed over in Pale to Jovica Stanisic, Serbian President Milosevic's special envoy. [...] The first group of 120 prisoners had been released on 2 June and 111 others five days later. In Sarajevo, UNPROFOR announced that most of the peacekeepers that had been surrounded since 25 May in several positions located in Serbian controlled areas had left these positions.



'France Held Secret Talks with Serbs' Roger Cohen, *The New York Times* (USA) 23 June 1995 (in English).

**Extract:**

France negotiated for the release of United Nations soldiers taken hostage by the Bosnian Serbs even as the United Nations and Western governments were insisting that their release must be unconditional, Western officials said today. In return for the release of the United Nations soldiers, which included many French troops, the Bosnian Serbs apparently received assurances that NATO warplanes would not make further air strikes on Serb positions. Another part of the deal seems to have opened the way for long-stalled deliveries of food to besieged Muslim enclaves, the officials said. The officials said General Bernard Janvier, the French commander of United Nations forces in the former Yugoslavia, twice met secretly with Gen. Ratko Mladic, the commander of the Bosnian Serbs, during the hostage crisis. The meetings took place on June 4 in Zvornik, on Bosnia's border with Serbia, and on June 17 in the Bosnian Serbs' headquarters at Pale, near Sarajevo. In addition, the officials said, Gen. Bertrand de Lapresle, the former commander of United Nations forces, was sent from Paris to Bosnia, where he held a meeting with Bosnian Serb leaders about the release of the hostages.

The Bosnian Serbs had seized the troops after NATO air raids on a Serbian ammunition depot. Throughout this period, France was among the governments publicly insisting that no private deals would be made with the Serbs. "The French took the leading role in securing the hostages' release," one official said. "The deal that freed them was done in the meetings with General Janvier and General de Lapresle." The idea of holding secret talks with the Bosnian Serbs was firmly resisted by Lieut. Gen. Rupert Smith, the British commander of United Nations forces in Bosnia. The officials said the British officer was invited to the meeting on June 4 in Zvornik but refused to go. Tensions have been growing between General Smith's headquarters in Sarajevo and those of General Janvier in Zagreb, Croatia. The terms of the deal hammered out by the French generals are now clear. The meeting on June 4 in Zvornik, which took place just over a week after the hostages were seized, was followed by a statement on June 9 in which the United Nations abruptly declared it would strictly abide by peacekeeping principles – a firm signal that no more NATO air strikes would occur. This was the first demand of General Mladic and Radovan Karadzic, the leader of the Bosnian Serbs. The officials said the French role in negotiating this guarantee was underscored this week when President Boris N.

Yeltsin of Russia said, he had been assured by President Jacques Chirac of France that air strikes in Bosnia were over.

The officials said the meeting on June 17 in Pale between General Janvier and General Mladic established the final details. It allowed the last hostages to be released the next day in exchange for four Serbs captured by French soldiers during a battle for a United Nations position in Sarajevo on May 27. Two French soldiers were killed in that battle. The officials said that in exchange for his flexible attitude, General Janvier received a promise from General Mladic that he would allow United Nations food convoys to travel into Muslim enclaves.



'French Deny Seeking 'Bargain' with Serbs *The New York Times* (USA) 24 June 1995 (in English).

#### Extract:

France said today that it had met with all warring sides in Bosnia to press for the release of United Nations peacekeepers held hostage by Serbs but that it had not negotiated or bargained for their freedom. The comments were made in response to an article on Friday in *The New York Times* that said French officials had negotiated with Bosnian Serbs to free more than 320 peacekeepers seized in May. [...] Yves Doutriaux, a Foreign Affairs Ministry spokesman, said today in Paris that Gen. Bernard Janvier, the United Nations commander for the former Yugoslavia, and Gen. Bertrand de Lapresle, his predecessor, "transmitted by various means France's message of firmness: the immediate and unconditional liberation of all the hostages. There were neither negotiations, nor bargaining," Mr. Doutriaux added.

**In early June, at France's initiative, a 1,000-troop Rapid Reaction Force independent of UNPROFOR was created. Its mission was to defend UN peacekeepers.**



'West Takes Action in Bosnia' *Le Monde* (France), 6 June 1995 (in French).

#### Extract:

In view of UNPROFOR's paralysis, the West, mainly the European countries, had little choice. Either they accepted the defeatism of UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who was willing to appease the Serbs by limiting UNPROFOR to a miniscule humanitarian role while ignoring its mission to protect the Bosnian civilian population, or they would work outside the UN framework to create an independent armed force, similar to the United States' effort in Haiti, to make the Serbs see reason, without being bound by the cumbersome UN system.

Meeting on Saturday 3 June in Paris at France's initiative, defence ministers of the countries participating in UNPROFOR chose an intermediate solution. They set up a respectable force of several thousand troops that they called a 'Rapid Reaction Force' (RRF). Its objectives are to defend the UN peacekeepers, prevent them from being humiliated or taken hostage again, and allow them to carry out their mission. These troops will not operate under the banner of the United Nations but will be wearing the uniforms of their own country's armed forces. The RRF will continue to work with the UN, however. Technically, the RRF is at the disposal of French General Bernard Janvier, Head of UN Peacekeepers in the former Yugoslavia, and the UK's Rupert Smith, UNPROFOR commander in Bosnia.

## ABANDONMENT AND FALL OF SREBRENICA<sup>7</sup>

**On 24 June, a two-person medical team comprised of a nurse and field manager Christina Schmitz and doctor Daniel O'Brien was finally authorised to enter Srebrenica to replace the previous team, who left the enclave. Another team entered Gorazde on 2 July.**



*The team was stopped at each roadblock. I spotted Kolievic at an [UN]HCR meeting and called him each time there was a roadblock; he said he would take care of it. One of the last times I called him, he told me he was going to come and bring his own M16 to shoot the soldiers who were blocking our way! I told him it was probably not necessary to go that far, that he just had to tell them to let the team pass.*

Stephan Oberreit, MSF Belgium/France General Coordinator in the former Yugoslavia, May - November 1995, MSF France Communications Director 2000 - 2006, Interviewed in 2015 (in French)



*We were worried. Karadzic had stated that 'in any case, the Muslims are attacking us; they're burning the villages around the enclave.' So, all the elements were in place for the Serbs to attack. But we told ourselves that UNPROFOR was there to protect them. We were dependent on people's ability to enter and leave. We had come to the point of sending four out while*

7. For a more detailed study on MSF Speaking Out about Srebrenica, please read MSF Speaking Out Case Studies "MSF and Srebrenica 1993-2003" by Laurence Binet-MSF International - <http://speakingout.msf.org/eng/srebrenica>

only bringing in two. We didn't even have a surgeon. But I take responsibility for this decision. We told ourselves, 'we know that's going to happen. We want to be inside because our presence will limit the effects of the violence, because they wouldn't dare.' Did we really put it like that? That's at least how I remember it now.

Pierre Salignon, MSF France Deputy Programme Manager, in Charge of Programmes in the former Yugoslavia, 1992-1996, Interviewed in 2015 (in French).

**In early July, movements by the armed forces in and around the enclave gave the MSF team the impression that fighting was about to resume.**



**Sitrep** Srebrenica 1 to 7 July 1995, MSF Srebrenica, 9 July 1995 (in English).

**Extract:**

During the first half of the week, it became obvious that both warring sides were preparing for the present scenario. BiH [Bosnia-Herzegovina army] was occupying all their posts, BSA [Bosnian Serb Army] deployed soldiers all around the enclave, and movements of tanks and heavy artillery have been observed. On the 2nd one woman got killed at OP Quebec (northeast).

**On 6 July 1995, Bosnian Serb forces attacked Bosnian army positions to the southeast and north of Srebrenica. The enclave was under constant bombardment and the MSF team took shelter. Thirteen wounded patients arrived at the hospital.**



**Sitrep** Srebrenica-Potocari, 6 to 22 July 1995 The MSF Srebrenica team **logbook**, 24 July 1995 (in English).

**Extract:**

00:30 6 rockets fall in the UN compound, of which 2 explode. Between 04:30 and- 07:00 heavy shelling in and around Slapovici. We wake up from the noise, dismantle the HF [high frequency] radio and move to the shelter. From today on we are on dark orange/red alert and it doesn't change until the 12th. [...] UNMO counted 150 tank bombs, artillery and mortar bombs. Between 08:30 and 09:00 AM 10 shells fall in town. [...] Final toll of the day is 13 wounded and 4 killed, although the number of dead people will be most probably much higher since they don't arrive at the hospital. One collective centre (Containers) half way to Potocari got shelled - the inhabitants fled.

**On 8 July 1995, the Bosnian Serb forces continued to seize UNPROFOR observation posts, killing a UN peacekeeper and taking 20 others prisoner. They also continued to bomb the enclave. During the night of 8 July, they entered the city of Srebrenica.**

**On 9 July 1995, peacekeepers based at UN observation posts were trapped between Bosnian Serb forces and the Bosnian army. Those based in the city centre withdrew to the UNPROFOR base in Potocari without informing the MSF team.**

**The media announced that General Janvier, the UNPROFOR Commander requested air support from NATO.**



**Sitrep** Srebrenica-Potocari, 6 to 22 July 1995, The MSF Srebrenica team **logbook**, 24 July 1995 (in English).

**Extract:**

Saturday 8 July: Few shells during the night. [...], the surgeon [we trained] is on the edge of a breakdown so we urgently need our new [expat] surgeon. The morning was quiet; heavy shelling again since lunchtime (sometimes more than one shell per minute). BSA has taken OP [Observation post] Foxtrot (near the former OP Echo) and blew it up. One Dutch blue helmet [...] got killed. [...] APCs [Armoured Personal Carriers] are moving hectically up and down the road. 2 Bih with minor wounds come walking from the front-line. We hear planes flying - NATO? ICRC has been waiting [...] at Yellow Bridge and had finally to return. [...] Local authorities have given interviews for Radio Tuzla and Sarajevo and are stating that they are happy with MSF in Srebrenica.



'UNPROFOR Requests Air Support After Serbian Offensive in eastern Bosnia,' **Le Monde** (France), 11 July 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

General Janvier, Commander of UN forces in the former Yugoslavia requested NATO air support on Sunday 9 July in response to the offensive by Bosnian Serbs against the Muslim enclave of Srebrenica in the eastern part of the country. This support could lead to air strikes if the Serbian forces resume their advance, which they seem to have ended Monday morning. In addition, UNPROFOR is hoping to gain the release of some 30 Dutch UN peacekeepers that were taken hostage in the enclave Saturday and Sunday by Bosnian Serbs; some of the hostages were taken to the neighbouring town of Bratunac, located near the border with Serbia. They were taken prisoner while manning observation posts on the perimeter of the safe area. [...] According to French government sources, if the Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) had been operational, it would have intervened in Srebrenica to stop the offensive against this region, which is one of the six safe areas designated by the United Nations, with the same status

as Sarajevo, Zepa, Gorazde, Tuzla and Bihac. But the RRF cannot yet be used due to delays in bringing in its equipment. The unit should be partially operational by mid-July and fully operational a month later.

**On 10 July, Bosnian Serb forces delivered an ultimatum to the peacekeepers, ordering them to start evacuating the population from the enclave the following morning. The United Nations and Dutch officials threatened them with a NATO air strike. Several shells fell near the hospital, which had been receiving an influx of injured patients. The surgeons were overwhelmed. MSF issued a press release calling for medical facilities and personnel to be spared during the fighting.**



'Voorhoeve: "NATO Air Support in Bosnia is Inevitable' *NRC Handelsblad* (The Netherlands) The Hague, 11 July 1995 (in Dutch).

**Extract:**

NATO air support for the Dutch military in Srebrenica is inevitable, according to the Minister of Defence Voorhoeve. Yesterday evening he called the deployment of NATO warplanes "risky for the Dutch troops and the 30 hostages," but he is of the opinion that with the use of aerial attacks, the advancing Bosnian Serb tanks can be stopped. Also Bosnian Serb artillery positions could be target of attacks by NATO warplanes. "The attack on Monday evening gives reason for concern as to what the Bosnian Serbs are up to in the coming days," said Voorhoeve. Colonel Dedden of the Ministry of Defence's crisis committee in The Hague yesterday declared that the situation in Srebrenica had returned to "within control." The Bosnian Serbs had achieved their objective to gain control over a strategic road towards two mines. In the event of the Bosnian Serbs attempting to capture the enclave, NATO air support would be called in, and in any case the Bosnian government troops would not allow such an attempt (by the Serbs) according to Dedden. There has been contact between the commander of the Dutch troops in Srebrenica and the 30 hostages on Monday, and under the circumstances, they are OK, declared Dedden.



'Bosnian Serbs Demand Withdrawal of Peacekeepers from Srebrenica' *Le Monde* (France), 12 July 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

The local Serbian commander delivered an ultimatum to the commander of 450 Dutch peacekeepers deployed in Srebrenica, strongly urging him to begin evacuating the enclave at dawn on Tuesday [11 July]. The Serbian forces not only demand that the 44,000 residents leave but that the peacekeepers do so as well. They want them to evacuate

within 48 hours and abandon their weapons. [...] During a trip to Athens on Monday [10 July], UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said "the United Nations will, if necessary, call in NATO air strikes to protect the Muslim enclaves if the Serbs attack." [...] Yesterday evening, Dutch Defence Minister Joris Voorhoeve said that NATO raids were "inevitable" after the Serbian attack against the Dutch peacekeepers and that a NATO operation was "under discussion."



'Srebrenica Hospital Overwhelmed with Casualties' MSF B/F/H/UK **Press release**, 10 July 1995 (in English).

**Extract:**

Médecins Sans Frontières calls for respect of vulnerable civilian and medical installations The heavy shelling which began last Thursday resumed this morning, once again targeting the town centre of Srebrenica. In the local hospital, 50 wounded have been checked in over the past few days, 10 of who have since died of their wounds. "The hospital is particularly vulnerable to shelling because it was never given the protection to resist an attack of this kind; after all, Srebrenica is a safe area." Dr Stefan Oberreit, MSF's Belgrade-based Coordinator. The MSF team (one doctor and one nurse) went to the hospital early this morning where they are working with the local medical team (two doctors, a surgeon and a gynaecologist).

In one hour, from 2.30 - 3.30 pm (BST) today, seven further wounded patients were brought into the hospital, five of which were seriously wounded – three needed urgent amputations. Said Dr Oberreit: 'The local staff is working ceaselessly and efficiently with the patients, most of whom have shrapnel wounds, and are coping tremendously well in this difficult situation.' The 100-bed hospital is completely full, while the shelling gets nearer. Already, several windows of the hospital have been hit. Despite its status as a 'safe zone', the Srebrenica enclave, which has a population of 40,000, is once again the target of a deadly offensive. The shelling is indiscriminate, and civilian as well as military installations, are being hit. After three years of war, the long-suffering inhabitants of Srebrenica find themselves under attack once again. Médecins Sans Frontières today called for all civilian and medical installations to be spared.

**For security and operational reasons, the MSF Srebrenica team was not in direct contact with the press. Instead, it debriefed the Belgrade team, which was handling relations with journalists. It was agreed that the French daily newspaper *Libération* would publish extracts of radio messages sent by the team to the coordination staff in Belgrade.**



'Bosnia: UN Threatens Serbs with Air Strikes. Offensive Continues in Srebrenica Enclave.' *Libération* (France), 11 July 1995 (in French).

#### Extract:

According to a Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) official in Belgrade, which has a team in Srebrenica, the hospital took in 30 wounded patients yesterday, equivalent to the number admitted over the previous three days. About 10 patients admitted to the hospital over the past four days died from their injuries. MSF declined to give an overall death toll, providing it only for patients brought to the hospital.



'The World Here Has Collapsed.' Médecins Sans Frontières Staff Bear Witness from Srebrenica, *Libération* (France), 14 July 1995 (in French).

#### Extract:

Here are extracts of radio messages sent by the MSF team in Srebrenica to its Belgrade central office, providing an account of the situation in a city that the Serbs had almost emptied of its population.



*The press took an interest from the time the attack began. We decided that Christina would not deal directly with reporters. She had to be protected and needed to continue working. She already had a full plate, so she'd never manage if she had to do interviews as well. She debriefed me so I was the one who dealt with them from the Belgrade office. The other option would've been to bring the reporters into our radio room to interview her. But that wasn't a good idea because it would've put her in greater danger and taken up her time. But I kept asking myself, 'If she had been able to directly describe the situation from the inside, would that have changed anything?' It would certainly have been more effective and had more of an impact. I kept wondering if we had made a mistake. But we decided we hadn't."*

Stephan Oberreit, MSF Belgium/France General Coordinator in the former Yugoslavia, May - November 1995, MSF France Communications Director 2000 - 2006, Interviewed in 2015 (in French).

**In the early afternoon of 11 July 1995, NATO warplanes conducted two air operations that struck Bosnian Serb tanks. Authorisation was requested for a third strike. The population fled towards the north of the enclave, and the MSF team decided to follow and evacuate the patients. The patients were transferred to a field hospital on the UNPROFOR base located in the abandoned Podgorica factory in Potocari. Some 20,000 people set up a makeshift camp around the base under extremely precarious hygiene**

**and security conditions. UNPROFOR agreed to shelter 5,000 displaced persons inside the base, which enjoyed better conditions. The MSF team worked well with the Dutch peacekeepers. In Belgrade, the MSF coordination team considered two options: call for the establishment of a humanitarian corridor in order to evacuate patients or request access to the enclave by additional medical staff and supplies.**



**Sitrep** Srebrenica-Potocari, 6 to 22 July 1995, The MSF Srebrenica team **logbook**, 24 July 1995 (in English, edited).

#### Extract:

Tuesday 11 July: We again experience people fleeing in small numbers to Potocari. The UNPROFOR liaison team and the three British soldiers who are directing the air strikes are coming out of the PTT [Post Office] building and people start to run, fearing air strikes. [...] The local doctors insist on evacuating [the 80 patients] to Potocari this morning in trucks. They mention [...] [what happened in] Vukovar and fear the same, BSA entering the hospital and killing everybody. We prefer to keep the patients in the hospital due to its neutrality, but we accept the determination of the local doctors. They will organise it with two trucks. The town is very busy and tense, high presence of armed soldiers in the hospital compound. Our constant appeal to keep the hospital neutral by not allowing uniforms and arms on the compound doesn't have any impact. Until noon, it is relatively quiet. [...] Then the shelling in the centre starts again. There are no casualties so we can stay in the shelter. We hear planes flying and can only guess about the bombs falling briefly after. We are informed that the patients have left to [go to] Bravo Company (the Dutchbat compound approximately 500m further away), but then a shell falls in this compound. [...]

Around 15:00, we hear planes and see them performing air strikes. Shortly after we run to the hospital [...]. We see a long stream of people fleeing towards the north (Potocari). After a quick discussion with the capital [the MSF team in Belgrade] we decide to follow the population. [...] Daniel leaves for Bravo Company with one car, the local staff, and the luggage, while we try to fit the patients in the [other] two cars. There are about 20 [patients] left. We drive down to Bravo Company, dropping the patients, and I go back with a pick-up. In the meantime more patients show up and I have to leave six old people behind since the UN APC [armoured personnel carrier] has already passed the hospital. What a mess and chaos! People run in panic, carrying screaming children and their small bags, blue helmets walk with the fleeing population, shelling continues from the mountains, it is very hot, the road very overcrowded and dusty. A truck in front of us is stuck in the mud; blue helmets move it manually. Then a truck stops and people are allowed to climb on it. We are just behind the truck and witness how the people almost kill each other in order to get a lift for the 4 km ahead. Finally we arrive in the UNPROFOR compound. The blue helmets have already set up a makeshift hospital in a dark corridor. Fifty-

five patients have arrived here, mostly war wounded. We have no medical supplies with us. Daniel makes a list for Dutchbat of the most needed drugs. In the meantime we request medical supplies from Belgrade, knowing that they will not arrive. After having had contact with Belgrade on the car radio, I visit the camp outside with [local staff]. Approx. 20,000 people are seeking shelter around some destroyed buildings, trying to escape from the continuing shelling, [they are] shivering from the noise.

DCO Franken [Deputy Commander of Dutchbat] is trying to arrange a trip into town with BSA in order to pick up medical supplies from our stock however [General Ratko] Mladic tells us that everything is empty. Mladic requests UN buses for the evacuation of the displaced, and offers food and medicine. UNPROFOR accepts more than 5,000 women and children inside the compound in the factory. There, the water and food situation is a bit better - UNPROFOR can provide 7,000 litres of water per day and can offer a daily food ration. Also the shelter makes a difference; they are inside, protected from the sun and the shells and they are out of the view of BSA. We are distributing towels, blankets, soap, and buckets from our store in Potocari to the patients, and plastic sheeting for the DP [displaced population] inside. UNPROFOR is trying to declare Potocari as a safe haven again. MSF Belgrade gets ready for two scenarios: a humanitarian corridor into central Bosnia-Herzegovina, which we follow, or request [...] clearance for expatriates to come and assist with medical and logistical material. Shelling continues until approximately 22:00 pm.



'Peacekeepers Withdraw, Thousands of Civilians Flee North. Besieged Enclave of Srebrenica Falls to Serbian Troops,' H  l  ne Despic-Popovic, *Lib  ration* (France), 12 July 1995 (in French).

#### Extract:

"A mass departure of the population had already begun during the air strikes," reports Stephan Oberreit, a Belgrade-based official of M  decins Sans Fronti  res (MSF). Speaking by telephone, Oberreit relayed information he received from an MSF doctor and nurse working in Srebrenica. "At 15:30, the time of our last radio contact, the team had just evacuated the hospital with the last 15 patients. The others had left earlier with local doctors. The staff had to make several trips because they only have two cars. When telling us they had just made their last trip, they said the Serbs had just entered the city. The city is in a state of panic and has been emptying out since early morning. A crowd of frightened and exhausted people started walking to Potocari, which has a UN base, in search of safety."

**A new press release issued by MSF Belgium/France described the situation in the enclave, condemned the UN's inability to protect the civilians of Srebrenica and called for a cease-fire. The organisation also denounced**

**the violation of the safe area by Bosnian Serb troops. MSF Holland's relief operations were based in Tuzla and Zenica, towns close to Srebrenica that were likely to be the destination for the 15,000 people who fled the enclave on foot through the forest and mountains.**



'M  decins sans Fronti  res Calls for Immediate Cease-Fire to Protect Srebrenica Population' **Press release**, MSF Belgium/France, 11 July 1995 (in French).

#### Extract:

As the Serb forces enter the city of Srebrenica, all personnel and huge numbers of civilians and hospital patients are taking refuge in the vicinity of UNPROFOR camps in the northern part of the enclave. Tens of thousands of people are demanding to leave the enclave out of fear of being massacred. Gripped with panic, small groups of people are also heading toward the outskirts of the city and the surrounding woods. The city centre has been emptied of its population. At 13:00, lorries left the hospital with 65 patients accompanied by medical staff, heading toward the northern section of the enclave. The evacuation of the hospital continued in the afternoon with the transfer of the last 10 patients. The MSF team had to make several return trips to continue evacuating patients to UNPROFOR camps. As of today, the Srebrenica safe area no longer exists and some 40,000 people are trapped. M  decins Sans Fronti  res condemns the Bosnian Serb troops' non-compliance with the safe area as well as the United Nations' inability to protect the civilian population. MSF calls for an immediate cease-fire and guaranteed protection for the Srebrenica population.

**During the evening of 11 July, a third air strike was cancelled at the request of the Dutch defence minister to protect the lives of the peacekeepers being held hostage. In the Netherlands, public opinion was concerned for the soldiers' safety.**



'Netherlands Opposes a Third NATO Air Strike' *Le Monde* (France), 13 July 1995 (in French).

#### Extract:

The Netherlands supplies 2,400 troops to UN forces in the former Yugoslavia. About 30 of them are being held hostage by the Serbs while 410 others tried Wednesday to negotiate their release as well as the evacuation of thousands of civilians from the Srebrenica enclave. The Hague, with the support of France in particular, called for an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council. On Tuesday evening [11 July], Defence Minister Joris Voorhoeve called the violation of the safe haven a "large-scale disaster" while his colleague, Foreign Affairs Minister Hans Van Mierlo, said that the UN



peacekeepers in the former Yugoslavia were reaching a “major turning point” with significant political consequences. Voorhoeve also said that he had asked NATO to suspend its third air strike “following terrorist threats” made by Bosnian Serbs against their hostages. The two ministers, however, rejected calling for a complete withdrawal of UN forces, which is not on the cards for the time being, according to their advisers. “Despite everything, the peacekeepers have saved lives and will continue to do so and that in itself justifies their mission.”

However, public opinion could eventually turn against the peacekeeping mission despite all its sympathy for the Bosnian side. The army’s Crisis Centre is being inundated with calls from Dutch citizens worried about the safety of the troops on the ground. According to recent polls, the population is increasingly questioning the need for a Dutch presence in Bosnia. On Tuesday evening, Voorhoeve recalled the acts of violence recently committed against the Bosnian Muslims and added a note of concern about Srebrenica, “Forty thousand Muslims are vulnerable to ethnic cleansing. I fear a recurrence of the types of events we have previously observed in similar situations.”



*Voorhoeve, the Minister of Defence, is a very decent man. But he was also impotent in the sense that he couldn’t do anything. I remember him coming up for the press conference directly on the day after the fall and he said literally “something gruesome happened today.” So at least he was not in the “our guys did well” camp. His focus was on the population. I still remember him standing there, obviously suffering, and making that statement.*

Wouter Kok, MSF Holland medical coordinator in Sarajevo, Bosnia, December 1991 - September 1992, then various positions in MSF Holland Bosnia desk, September 1992-1996, Interviewed in 2015, (in English).

**On the morning of 12 July, Bosnian Serb forces threatened to bomb civilians fleeing the enclave if NATO conducted further air strikes, and demanded that Bosnian forces turn in all their weapons.**



“Serbs Threaten to Bomb Refugees Fleeing Srebrenica “Safe Area,”” *Le Monde* (France), 13 July 1995 (in French).

#### Extract:

The Serbs threatened on Wednesday morning to bomb the columns of fleeing refugees if NATO conducted further air raids, a threat that UN peacekeeping officials say they are “taking seriously.” Humanitarian organisations report a lack of water, food, and medical supplies. The Srebrenica hospital

has been evacuated. On Wednesday 12 July in New York, the Security Council adopted a resolution calling for Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to use “every means available” to “restore the status of the safe haven” of Srebrenica. Western leaders, however, had little to say about a military operation, with the exception of Jacques Chirac, who said on Tuesday evening that he was ready to intervene and urged the Security Council to fulfill its responsibilities. France cannot act on its own, explained the French president while attending the French- German summit in Strasbourg.

**During the day of 12 July, the Potocari base was captured without any resistance from the UNPROFOR contingent. Thousands of women, children, and elderly people were loaded into buses and dropped off near the front line, where they were forced to walk nearly eight kilometres to reach the village of Kladanj. Others were transported to Tuzla. Most of the men were held separately in a building guarded by soldiers and dogs.**

**General Mladic, the Bosnian Serb Commander, told Bosnian Serb television that civilians were being well treated, while political leader Radovan Karadzic said the safe area would not be re-established.**

**The MSF team opposed, in vain, the evacuation of some of the patients to Bratunac, a neighbouring village. V19 V20 V21**



**Sitre** Srebrenica-Potocari, 6 to 22 July 1995, The MSF Srebrenica Team **Logbook**, 24 July 1995 (in English, edited).

#### Extract:

Wednesday 12 July: BSA announces a ceasefire until 10:00. They demand all BiH weapons in exchange for the security of the displaced people. UN has no contact with BiH. We use the lull to ask some blue helmets to set up our three tents outside for either a small clinic, performing triage or as kind of rehydration tent. The displaced are very weak and apathetic after their night outside. However, I am not able to offer assistance because at 09:45 shelling starts again. 3 - 4 fall in the next 15 minutes. BSA tries to enter the enclave with tanks at Yellow Bridge. UNPROFOR tries to set up a human blockade. Situation in Daniel’s hospital remains fragile in terms of necessary medicines; fluids, antibiotics, analgesics, and dressing material are scarce. It is not until later in the morning that Dutchbat decides to switch to the non-combat situation and offer all medical facilities and drugs they have. From that moment we no longer lack any necessary drugs.

The medical local staff is very difficult to motivate because their families are still outside. [...] Then we are informed that BSA/Mladic will start the evacuation of the wounded to Bratunac Football station, followed by the civilians. I try to

talk to Mladic and to protest against the planned evacuation, but he just tells me to do my job and walks away. The MSF convoy of 30 tonnes of medical and logistical material and Barbara, Guy, and Eric is on its way from Belgrade in order to join us in this crisis. [...] The headquarters has spoken to Boutros-Boutros Ghali's deputy, who said that the UN wants the assurance that the whole population, including the men, will be taken to Tuzla. This is easy to say since no figures exist that would let us monitor it. At approximately 15:00 BSA starts to evacuate the displaced people by buses and trucks with incredible speed. Most of the men are being separated and taken to a house being guarded by many BSA with German dogs. Around this house we hear a lot of small arms fire. A few hours later, at 18:00 the UN starts up its first medical convoy. It is very chaotic; everybody wants to take a chance. People just jump on the trucks. Relatives have to leave their family members. After that I am able to return to the camp outside. Mladic accepts that I want to pick up wounded and sick people. There are two water trucks offering drinking water for the displaced population, who are forced to spend their second night outside.



'Serbs Start Moving Muslims Out Of Captured Territory,' Chris Hedges, *The New York Times* (USA) 13 July 1995 (in English).

#### Extract:

The air was filled with anguished cries as the Bosnian Serbs loaded the first 3,000 women, children and elderly refugees onto buses at Potocari, the United Nations base overrun today outside Srebrenica, which was captured on Tuesday. The refugees were dropped off outside Kladanj, about 25 miles away, where they were forced to walk the last six miles across the front lines to the Government-held town and aid. "It was quite a horrifying scene," said Stephan Oberreit of Doctors Without Borders, who spoke by radio from Belgrade with colleagues in Srebrenica. "There was screaming and crying and panic. They didn't know where they were being taken to." The Associated Press reported that the first 1,500 refugees arrived in Bosnian Government buses late tonight at a United Nations base outside Tuzla, where they were expected to end their journey. One refugee said she had seen the Bosnian Serbs kill a woman and child, but there was no independent confirmation of her account.

Today, 1,500 Bosnian Serb troops backed by tanks advanced at midday into Potocari. They overran the United Nations base with no resistance after they threatened to shell the refugees and kill some Dutch peacekeepers they are holding hostage if NATO warplanes intervened. The Dutch peacekeepers had allowed dozens of wounded people into their compound at Potocari on Tuesday night, but most of the 40,000 refugees "spent the night with nothing, on the field surrounding the camp," said Ron Redmond, a spokesman for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Geneva. [...] Bosnian Serb television today showed tens of thousands of refugees milling around the camp and women and children being escorted onto buses. The television

footage showed no scenes of panic, but many of the refugees looked tired, dazed, and frightened. Gen. Ratko Mladic, the Bosnian Serb commander, was there, surrounded by bodyguards, to supervise the herding of the refugees onto buses and trucks. "You don't have to be afraid of anything," he told the refugees in the brief broadcast. "Slowly, please let the women and children in front of you." The general said, "In this first round we will evacuate women, children and elderly and all those who want to leave this combat area, without forcing them." He told the television, "Srebrenica is free now," but added, "There are still small groups trying to put up resistance." The Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadzic, was even more confident. Although he promised that the captured civilians and peacekeepers were "completely safe and secure," he said there was no chance that the safe area would be reconstituted, something the Security Council demanded today. "Srebrenica is our country," he said from Pale, the Bosnian Serb headquarters near Sarajevo.



*We immediately suspected they were going to attack military-age men. The first alert came from Christina, who wondered if executions were taking place around Potocari. And then Potocari emptied very quickly, with the Serbs deporting people. The central Bosnian teams started seeing buses arrive. I asked them if there were men on the buses and they said there were. But there weren't very many because they had been killed in Potocari or had fled through the fields. This [system] didn't work very well. In retrospect, I think we could've sounded the alert more widely.*

Stephan Oberreit, MSF Belgium/France General Coordinator in the former Yugoslavia, May - November 1995, MSF France Communications Director 2000 - 2006, Interviewed in 2015 (in French).

#### The commander of the Dutch peacekeeping contingent negotiated a cease-fire with General Mladic, Commander of the Bosnian Serb forces.



'Bosnia: UN in a State of Shock After Fall of Srebrenica,' *Le Soir* (Belgium), 12 July 1995 (in French).

#### Extract:

The several hundred Dutch peacekeepers, outnumbered 20 to 1 according to UNPROFOR officers in Sarajevo, could not hold out very long and had to retreat to their headquarters at Potocari, with thousands of terrified refugees following in their wake. The contingent's commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Tom Karremans, negotiated a temporary cease-fire this morning [12 July] with the Bosnian Serbs, whose political leader, Radovan Karadzic, has already ruled out withdrawing from the enclave. Lacking any means of defence, Srebrenica

quickly emptied of its 40,000 residents, signaling yet another mass displacement with tragic humanitarian consequences. No one remains in the city; the entire population is on the road fleeing the Serbian advance, said Stephan Oberreit, Belgrade representative for the Médecins Sans Frontières organisation.

**During a press conference in Brussels, MSF Belgium provided a first-hand account of the capture of Potocari by the Bosnian Serb forces and the dramatic situation prevailing there.**



**'Potocari Enclave Collapses – Srebrenica Population in Hands of Bosnian Serb Forces – MSF Belgium Press conference', 12 July 1995 (in French).**

**Extract:**

Bosnian Serb forces have just taken complete control of the Muslim enclave of Srebrenica. They infiltrated the UNPROFOR peacekeeping compound and captured the population of Srebrenica that had taken refuge there. The Serbs plan to evacuate the population through Bratunac, beginning with women and children. MSF is deeply shocked by the fall of Srebrenica and is currently trying to protect and care for those we can help. During the press conference, MSF will describe the situation as it now stands.



**'MSF Calls for Immediate Access of Humanitarian Aid to Srebrenica Population,' Press release, MSF Belgium, 12 July 1995 (in French).**

**Extract:**

Part of the population remained outside the camp, finding shelter in partially destroyed buildings or forming groups along the side of the road. Within the camp itself, more than 7,000 people, mainly women and children, have access to less than one litre [of water] per day per person. The most urgent needs are for food and water. The Médecins Sans Frontières team set up shelters for the displaced persons and distributed blankets and containers. Tents were set up in the camp to shelter women and children, to protect them from the heat and to prevent dehydration problems among this vulnerable population. Some of the wounded have already been treated, but we need to identify those who still need medical care. Stocks of drugs are extremely limited and we are beginning to have shortages of essential medicines. Médecins sans Frontières teams in Belgrade are standing ready to respond with all the supplies necessary. They are only waiting for the required authorisations. A decision must be taken during the day regarding the delivery of emergency material assistance to tens of thousands of displaced persons. The presence of international agencies, such as [UN]HCR and ICRC, is absolutely necessary to protect the population.

**In Resolution 1004, the UN Security Council called for the Bosnian Serb forces to end their offensive and for all parties to give aid organisations free access to the safe area. It also urged the Secretary-General to use all available resources for re-establishing the Srebrenica safe haven. Comments by UN observers and political leaders of the various States involved, however, suggested that the fate of the enclave was no longer under consideration. Some were even talking about withdrawing UNPROFOR troops.**



**'UN "Demands" Serb Withdrawal Without Any Intention of Using Force,' *Le Monde* (France), 14 July 1995 (in French).**

**Extract:**

On Wednesday 12 July, the United Nations Security Council adopted a resolution calling for the Secretary-General to use all available resources to re-establish the status of the Srebrenica safe area in compliance with the UNPROFOR mandate and demanding that the Serbs "immediately withdraw" from the city. But in reality, the terms of this resolution, adopted unanimously, have no real significance: nothing will happen in Srebrenica. On Wednesday the Security Council resumed a cherished practice that has become all too common during the war in Bosnia: passing resolutions they have no intention of applying. [...] In their formal statements during the Security Council meeting, no country other than France made any reference to the use of force, reports our New York correspondent, Afsané Bassir Pour. French UN Ambassador Jean-Bernard Mérimée, while stating that France cannot "accept any challenge whatsoever to the status of the enclaves," nevertheless added that Paris "is not, of course, imposing any obligation to use one particular means over another". "We are simply saying," he said, "that we are prepared, if deemed possible by the UN civilian and military authorities, to make our forces available for such operations as they consider useful and feasible."

Diplomats at the UN do not rule out the fall of other enclaves. "There's nothing we can do if the Serbs decide to take Zepa," says a diplomat. Going even further, he adds, "Abandoning the eastern enclaves near Serbia to the Bosnian Serbs could be the long-term solution for stability in the country. The alternative would be a war between the UN and the Serbs. Who's going to fight it?" Even though no officials will openly acknowledge it, the United Nations has abandoned the idea of a "safe area" for Srebrenica and possibly for the other enclaves as well. On Wednesday, Bosnian Foreign Minister Muhamed Sacirbey rejected the proposal made by the British to seek a Serb withdrawal in exchange for demilitarising Srebrenica. "We have to stop talking nonsense," said Sacirbey, asking whom, in such a scenario, would guarantee the enclave's security.

In the Senate on Wednesday, French President Jacques Chirac again said that UNPROFOR should leave Bosnia if it proved incapable of fulfilling its mission. "If the international community does not respond, we have to ask what UNPROFOR is

doing in Bosnia and draw the necessary conclusions," he said. "If the enclaves are violated and the Srebrenica safe area is not re-established, the entire UNPROFOR mission is in question." The statement released Wednesday by the French prime minister's office following a small ministerial meeting on the Bosnia issue makes no mention, however, of a troop withdrawal. UK Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind said he believes it will take "several days" before determining whether the Srebrenica events will have "serious repercussions for the UN's presence in Bosnia." [...] In Washington, a White House spokesperson reiterated that Bill Clinton considers it "desirable and important" for the UN to remain in Bosnia.

**In the Netherlands, Jacques de Milliano, General Director of MSF Holland, had been trying in vain to convince members of parliament, obsessed with the fate of the Dutch contingent, to take an interest in the protection of Srebrenica's civilian population.**



*On Wednesday 12 July, I received a phone call from Bernard Pécoul and Eric Goemaere [General Directors of MSF France and MSF Belgium], who told me that MSF volunteers on site had seen people being put in buses and that they had a bad feeling about it. I wondered what we could do. It was 10:00 and I knew that a small parliamentary meeting on the fall of Srebrenica was scheduled for noon in The Hague. I called The Hague to speak to members of parliament and asked them to put the protection of civilians on their agenda. It was 11:00 and the legislators had already gone to the chamber. I took a taxi and reached The Hague 45 minutes later. When I arrived, the minister had already finished his briefing. It hadn't even lasted half an hour. I asked the MP's what they had talked about and they said, 'We talked about the situation of the Dutch troops.' I then asked, 'Did you discuss the protection of the civilian population?' They told me, 'we didn't want to mention that problem because there were family members of soldiers in the room. That may have given the impression that we didn't care about the Dutch soldiers over there.' At that time in the Netherlands, it was impossible to talk about it. It was a total blackout, complete paralysis."*

Dr Jacques de Milliano, MSF Holland General Director, 1985-1996, interviewed in 2000 and 2015 (in French).

**On 13 and 14 July, UNPROFOR's camp and base were gradually being emptied of most of the refugees, who were violently loaded into buses by Bosnian Serb soldiers. The patients who could walk and the nursing staff were also being evacuated.**

**The men continued to be held separately. The MSF team heard gunshots coming from the building where they were**

**being held and a rumour went around that there were dead bodies nearby. A man gave his child to the MSF coordinator before being taken away by the soldiers. V22**

**The MSF team learned that certain patients from the 12 July convoy to Bratunac were separated when Bosnian Serb soldiers noticed they were not wounded. For the next evacuation convoy, they planned to keep the male medical staff with them.**

**UN officials condemned what they called "odious acts" and "ethnic cleansing."**



**Capsat message** from MSF Srebrenica to MSF Belgrade, 13 July 1995, 11:41 UTC Time (in English, edited).

**Extract:**

I am just copying the info of UNMO [...] The UN medical convoy with our patients is moving now to Tuzla with a special escort of BSA personnel with personal instructions from Mladic for security [...] I had one horrible experience, one BSA came with a man and his baby. The man had nobody to take care of the baby. So I had to separate the baby from the crying father while the BSA took the father with him. There are rumours that at the back of the camp there are dead bodies. BSA [is ok if I] [...] go with UNMO, but they don't want to give [me] any guarantee of security. Anyway I don't think I should go, [it's] too risky, not confirmed, not clear where the dead bodies are. What is your opinion?



**Sitrep** Srebrenica-Potocari, 6 to 22 July 1995, The MSF Srebrenica Team **Logbook**, 24 July 1995 (in English, edited).

**Extract:**

Thursday 13 July: [...] At 07:00 the evacuation of the displaced people is continuing from the camp outside. Blue helmets are controlling the desperate crowd. Everybody who could have stopped this mass exodus should be forced to feel the panic and desperation of the people, leaving even their belongings behind [that] they managed to bring to Potocari. Everybody should see the violence on the faces of BSA, directing the people like animals to the buses. Children are screaming in the arms of their mothers, everybody runs for his/her life into an uncertain future. BSA refuses [to allow] our convoy in because they argue that BiH is still in the area and might shoot at the convoy [...].

In the morning I mainly move between the makeshift camp outside and the UN compound, transporting sick, old and hysterical people to our hospital, where Daniel takes them, together with the local nurses in charge. In the afternoon the number of patients gets too much and the UN assists with a truck for transport. UN doctors are doing a kind of triage in the camp outside. A sun shelter with our plastic sheeting is

being set up. The UN is bringing a water truck, which is later looted by BSA. Rumours arise that behind the factory (where many people are seeking shelter) there are dead bodies. MSF is asked if we would go there, but we refuse due to the touchy situation [...] Breastfeeding mothers develop problems with their milk production due to the stress. One old man dies during the evening; 7 deliveries (one stillbirth) happened in the last 24 hours, most of them in these incredible conditions, without any privacy, everybody watching, without hygiene on a dirty stretcher, in a dark, muddy and wet corridor. All in all, 22 new patients got admitted today. Today the conditions for the displaced inside the UN compound deteriorate in terms of sanitation - not enough latrines, the sewage of the existing toilets is overflowing. [...]

At approximately 16:00 the camp is empty and after 30 minutes BSA starts to evacuate the displaced people from the UN compound until 19:00. The blue helmets assist them to the gate and there they are put on the waiting buses/trucks. All nursing staff and most patients who were able to walk also left with this convoy. Rumours say that some of the males were separated. Having emptied both places from human beings, BSA wanted to inspect the UN compound. They spent 10 minutes in the camp, being disgusted by the living conditions and the smell, asked the patients and our female translator some questions, received a list of the patients and left again. [...] I take [advantage of] the occasion and request a BSA escort in order to go back into Srebrenica. Together with an UNMO and the escort we drive quickly to the hospital, where we find 3 elderly patients sitting at the same place where I left them two days ago. They are in good condition. Passing by our social centre I see one person sitting outside so we stop there as well and discover three more elderly inhabitants. BSA is quite nervous, expecting BiH in the rooms of the hospital or social centre. So we hurry up, but of course Joseph and I have to carry the patients alone to the pick-up. What a strange feeling, going back into a town, which I had started to love, now empty. Many BSA present, looting is starting. [...] The UNHCR convoy with food, etc. arrives in the evening in Bratunac and is allowed to come in. How cynical, just in time for all the people who have left.



'Serbs Continue Ethnic Cleansing of Enclave,' *Le Monde* (France), 13 July 1995 (in French).

#### Extract:

Colonel Karremans, Commander of the Dutch peacekeepers operating in the 'safe area,' "decided to remain until the last refugee leaves, thus acting like the captain of a sinking ship," said the Netherlands' Defence Minister. According to corroborating sources, Dutch peacekeepers still present in the area were pressured by Serbian forces to leave their base at Potocari. Moreover, 55 Dutch soldiers were still being detained by the Serbs as of Friday morning. [...] Loaded on buses and lorries without any supervision by the peacekeepers, the 14,000 women, children and elderly people expelled from the city were driven to the front lines, which they had to walk across alone for several kilometres without

any assistance. Thirty-three seriously injured people who could not cross the no man's land on foot were taken away by the Serbian forces, said UNPROFOR spokesman Alexander Ivanko. Their fate is unknown. Only a few men of fighting age were released, on Thursday, by Serbian militias. The others were taken to Bratunac, a Serb-controlled town north of Srebrenica, where they are apparently herded onto football fields.

"The international community is justifiably disgusted by the odious attack and ethnic cleansing committed against a UN safe area," said Yasushi Akashi, UN Special Envoy to the former Yugoslavia. Sadaka Ogata, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, condemned "in the most vigorous terms" what she called a "striking example of ethnic cleansing." [...] According to a statement released by the Pale authorities, Serbian forces continued on Thursday to 'neutralise' Bosnian soldiers in Srebrenica because they "refused to lay down their arms." Radovan Karadzic, the Bosnian Serb leader, threatened on Thursday to inflict the same treatment on five other UN-designated safe areas. According to the UN, Serbian forces bombed the Zepa enclave on Thursday morning.

**MSF and the UN were openly expressing concern in the media about the fate of the enclave's men, particularly the fate of 700 of them locked up in a stadium in Bratunac.**

**With its convoy still blocked at the border, MSF renewed its plea to be allowed to bring in additional staff and medical supplies.**

**The organisation also issued an appeal for food and water for the 20,000 refugees who had arrived in Tuzla, where its teams were doing everything possible to provide relief. It mentioned that some of the women bore "visible signs of abuse" and called for authorisation for the ICRC to monitor the transfer of refugees.**



'Conditions Deteriorating by the Hour for Srebrenica Refugees, MSF Repeats its Plea for Access to the Enclave,' MSF **Press Release**, 13 July 1995 (in English).

#### Extract:

Thousands of terrified civilians still remain around the UN compound in Potocari, north of Srebrenica, while the expulsions of women and children to central Bosnia continue. The sanitary conditions for those who remain in the vicinity of Potocari are deplorable and MSF fears for an outbreak of epidemics. MSF renewed its plea to the Bosnian Serb authorities to allow access to the enclave for humanitarian agencies. According to the MSF team in Potocari, food and medical stocks are running out. From Srebrenica, MSF's Dr Daniel O'Brien described the situation as deteriorating by the hour." Dr O'Brien said that many wounded remained inside the

enclave in urgent need of assistance. It will take several days for all the refugees to be moved out of Srebrenica. The MSF medical convoy, with two doctors and two logisticians on board, needs to be allowed in, to care for the thousands of refugees remaining. However, the convoy remains at the border post of Zvrnik, a few kilometres from Srebrenica. About 4,000 refugees have already been taken by bus to Kladanj, to the west of the enclave, 2,500 of these have already crossed into Tuzla. The MSF team of five in Tuzla which set up a makeshift refugee camp for the refugees throughout the night, described the conditions there as alarming. The refugees are gathered on a stretch of road near the airport, with no access to sanitary facilities. MSF is concerned about the absence of international monitoring of the current forced population movements. The agency renewed its call for the International Committee of the Red Cross to be allowed to monitor the transfer of refugees.



'Srebrenica Becomes Latest Victim of Ethnic Cleansing,' *Le Monde* (France), 14 July 1995 (in French).

#### Extract:

A number of witnesses report that the Serbs subjected the population to a "selection process" before expelling them. Médecins Sans Frontières, for example, explains that the men were taken separately to offices, where they had to identify themselves. Some of them have already been transported by truck to unknown destinations. "The scenes of them being loaded on the buses were terrifying. People were screaming and panicking," reported the on-site MSF representatives. The UN says that General Mladic ordered a "selection" of all men over the age of 16, who were then assembled in the football stadium in the small town of Bratunac along the border with Serbia. [...] According to Alexander Ivanko, a United Nations spokesman, the Serbs were apparently planning to interrogate the men to determine whether these civilians were guilty of "war crimes." In the minds of Serbs, who view all Muslims as "terrorists," anyone who had carried a weapon is considered a "war criminal." Zena Hasanovic, a young resident of Srebrenica expelled Wednesday and sent to Tuzla, says she saw Serbian soldiers kill a woman and 10-year-old boy. [...] The mass exodus of refugees continued on Wednesday. More than 1,500 people arrived in Tuzla in the evening, where they were taken under the wing of United Nations staff. [...] The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) believes that "nearly the entire population of Srebrenica [which had a population of 44,000 before the offensive] has probably fled the city." [...] According to Médecins sans Frontières, which has a team on site, the most urgent needs are food and water. "It's an extremely vulnerable population; many people have had practically nothing to eat for weeks and have been living in deplorable hygienic conditions," says an MSF representative. The humanitarian organisation and UNHCR were trying on Wednesday, to obtain approval from the Serbian authorities to bring supplies and medicine into the enclave. Two convoys were blocked by General Mladic's forces.



'MSF: Women Refugees in Potocari Bear "Visible Signs of Abuse"' *Agence France Presse* (France), 14 July 1995 (in French).

#### Extract:

Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) has "grave concerns" about the fate of displaced persons in Bosnia. "Muslim women have been arriving in Potocari with visible signs of abuse," reports the humanitarian organisation, which was interviewed by *AFP* on Friday. Three hundred refugees, 650 of whom have injuries, are still in Potocari, 2 km north of Srebrenica, with two members of an MSF team; they came from the former UN safe area in Srebrenica, which the Bosnian Serb army now controls. On Thursday, an MSF nurse and a UN observer were able to go to the Srebrenica hospital, where they found three elderly patients; they managed to bring them back to Potocari, which serves as the base for the UNPROFOR Dutch battalion. According to MSF, 700 refugees, mostly men, and just a few women are in Bratunac, a Serb-controlled town east of Srebrenica. Their fate is unknown. As a result, MSF has not received any news regarding an initial convoy of 33 wounded that was supposed to leave the Bratunac stadium. Bosnian Serb soldiers are not allowing entry to the site by either MSF or six observers from the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), who are responsible for supervising aid distribution in the field. MSF and UNHCR officials have been negotiating since Thursday evening for authorisation to enter the stadium. The humanitarian organisation stresses that most of the refugee population in Potocari comes from south of the Srebrenica enclaves. Nothing is known about the populations from the neighbouring villages, who fled to unknown destinations, says MSF.



'20,000 Refugees from Srebrenica in Makeshift Shelters at Tuzla Airport,' *MSF Press Release*, 13 July 1995 (in English).

#### Extract:

20,000 newly arrived refugees from the Srebrenica enclave are grouped together on an airstrip at Tuzla airport. The UN, MSF, and other organisations are taking care of medical needs, shelter, food, and water. An MSF cargo flight with 12 tons of relief goods including tents, blankets and plastic sheeting is being flown into Tuzla and Kladanj, via Split, with two extra staff members on board. MSF presently has five volunteers in Kladanj and three in Tuzla.



**Message** from MSF Belgium/France Project Managers to the MSF Team in Srebrenica, 13 July 1995 (in English, edited).

#### Extract:

We just want to say that we are proud of you both. We are thinking of you all the time and each word you write stays in our minds for a long time. As you asked us to, we are telling the tragedy to the 'outside world.' It's our way to be with you

and the population. What you are doing in Srebrenica is really fantastic. Sometimes it's difficult to believe that there's only Christina and Daniel in the place. We really want to be with you. All the pressure we have applied, saying that international aid is urgently requested in Potocari, is [...] [in order to] send you a new MSF team and at least support you physically. Thanks for all that you are able to do. We love you and do know that you will be soon with us. Take care. Lots of kisses Pierre, Pierre Pascal, and all your fan club.



**Update** on Bosnia-Herzegovina, from MSF International to MSF Press Departments, 13 July 1995, 12:00 (in English).

#### Extract:

Interviews and briefings from Belgrade. Our team in Belgrade is unable to cope with the present interest from your national journalists. We would suggest that from now on you allow either Anouk or Michel at MSF Belgium and Anne Guibert at MSF France to organise interviews for you. Stephan and Barbara will still do the interviews. It is just that we need to find a more organised system. There will certainly be a press release later stressing the fact that there are needs to be met both in central Bosnia and in Srebrenica itself.

**The MSF team in Potocari was busy organising a proper evacuation of the last remaining patients as well as its own departure from the enclave. The operation was complicated due to the involvement of a wide range of players and the Bosnian Serbs' insistence on checking for Bosnian fighters among the patients.**



**Sitrep** Srebrenica-Potocari, 6 to 22 July 1995, The MSF Srebrenica Team **Logbook**, 24 July 1995 (in English, edited).

#### Extract:

**Friday 14:** [...] The patients are being moved into the medical bunker of Dutchbat, which offers more light and space and hygienic conditions. [...] ICRC informs us in the evening that they plan to evacuate the patients to Kladanj, but don't yet have the clearance. Our own evacuation and [that of] the local staff would be a separate issue. UNHCR is trying to evacuate all the patients by helicopter to Sarajevo. UNHCR Tuzla also plays the game and is planning to evacuate the patients by convoy to Tuzla. [...] A convoy of UNPROFOR arrives in the evening with new drugs, food, and 35,000 litres of diesel (BSA confiscates the 30,000L!). [...] Question of the day: Why is the evacuation of the patients being blocked? [...] We think along the same lines as Franken, that it is most likely due to the fact that there are among the patients in Bratunac a few BiH soldiers with a "good" record from their past. Of course, BSA could just remove them, but since the

whole world is informed about the figures, they might like to avoid negative press statements. Difficult to believe though...

**Saturday 15:** Early in the morning the [whole] UN medical team (20) is able to leave the enclave...[...] Mr Pronk, Dutch Minister for Humanitarian business, is in Tuzla, trying to organise the evacuation (who isn't?). Medical situation is well under control. Together with the nurses and paramedics of the UN, assistance is being offered to the patients. [...] We get the information that four of the patients in Bratunac require urgent surgery otherwise they will have to be included in the mortality rate. [...] Finally Franken organises a UN ambulance with a BSA escort and a UN nurse, but they return without patients since apparently they were all young men (BiH?) [...] According to Franken some men do arrive in Kladanj, but of course nobody can follow up any figures. Rumour of today is that a group of men (700-1000) are in the stadium of Bratunac [having been] captured on their way to Tuzla. [...] This is the day of lists [...] Together with UNHCR we are preparing a list of all patients with diagnosis. We are making a list of all local staff and of their family members and will distribute it to UN, BSA etc.

**Sunday 16:** NORMED, the medical department of NORBATT [UN Norwegian battalion], who seems to specialise in medevacs, takes responsibility for the evacuation of the patients and leaves [Tuzla] at 13:30. Then two different [sets of] information and you can guess which one was right: the [MSF] convoy has passed Zvornik and is on its way to Bratunac. (Info from authorities in Bratunac) The convoy has been shot at in the surroundings of Zvornik and had to return (Info from the UN in Tuzla). [...] Another meeting takes place with BSA concerning the evacuation of the patients. Very cynical to have to discuss culture and art while outside a stream of Serbs is looting Srebrenica. [...] ICRC is also trying again to organise the evacuation and will ask only for the clearance for patients.

Today they were with a small delegation in Bratunac to check the POW's [prisoners of war]. According to Franken there are 7,000, but we cannot confirm it. MSF Belgrade is asking for our clearances in order to be able to leave with the convoy tomorrow. On 16 July, several thousand people who had fled Srebrenica on foot through the woods and had been reported dead, arrived in Tuzla where an MSF Holland team was working with the refugees.

**On 16 July, several thousand people who had fled Srebrenica on foot through the woods and had been reported dead arrived in Tuzla where an MSF team was working with the refugees.**

**MSF programme managers expressed concern about the safety of MSF staff in the Srebrenica enclave, particularly the safety of local personnel, if the Dutch contingent has to withdraw quickly. The MSF Holland team openly expressed this concern to the Dutch minister visiting Tuzla.**

**In Potocari, the last patients for whom MSF and the Dutch battalion were responsible were finally evacuated by the ICRC during the evening of 17 July. MSF announced the evacuation in a press release. Reporters tried to reach the MSF team directly on the UNPROFOR battalion's phone line.**



**Message** by MSF Belgrade to MSF Belgium and France Programme Managers, 16 July 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

Breaking news: a large influx (said to be around 4,000) of refugees (quite a few with light injuries) is en route via Kalesia. Apparently BiH opened a corridor allowing some of the 'disappeared' to enter the Tuzla area. We will confirm tomorrow morning. For the time being, we have no access to this region; the local medical team is providing care and transport.



'Médecins Sans Frontières Conducts Relief Operation' MSF Belgium **Press release**, 15 July 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

A Médecins Sans Frontières team made up of 13 expatriates is currently at work in the displaced persons camps in and around Tuzla airport to provide aid to 20,000 refugees from Srebrenica. All efforts are focused on supplying food and drinking water as well as setting up several clinics. MSF also opened a reception centre for refugees still arriving in Kladanj. MSF has already sent 24 tonnes of relief supplies to the camps, mainly consisting of tents, blankets, water containers, and powdered milk.



**Message** from Pierre-Pascal Vandini, MSF France Programme Manager, to the MSF Coordination Team in Belgrade, 16 July 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

Our entire staff (six men and one female translator) is theoretically protected by conventions safeguarding relief personnel in conflict situations. For identification purposes, they must wear either the MSF emblem or the good old Red Cross. We must keep in mind that both drivers and logisticians play a role in monitoring and caring for patients. They carry stretchers, drive ambulances, and serve as hospital workers and nursing aids – you name it. For that reason, we suggest that they accompany the wounded and families (the staff's children and wives, in particular). While we cannot negotiate the actual evacuation conditions, we can convey our position regarding their role in accompanying patients and families [...]. I believe that our fears have been passed on to Franken, which is essential. It's not good for morale to keep ruminating

about what's going to happen because nobody can predict the future. Is there anything we can do from Paris, Brussels, and Amsterdam? We reiterated our concerns about the populations of Potocari and Bratunac. In our message, do we have to specifically mention the presence of local staff and request immunity for them? We're not sure that journalists will cover this issue. And could it also make them a little too visible? [...]

The Dutch government is insisting on a rapid withdrawal of Dutchbat. Major pressure from the Dutch population. The fear is that it [the Dutch government] will accept an evacuation with minimal guarantees of protection on condition that it is quickly carried out. Second fear: will they [the Dutchbat] remain after the wounded leave and the ICRC pulls out? The Dutch team in Tuzla made contact with their minister, who is visiting the area. They expressed strong concerns about the fate of the refugees remaining in Potocari and Bratunac and stressed that their protection relies on Dutchbat's presence. The minister said he completely understood their concerns but questioned whether he would have much influence in view of other national and international political factors.



**Message** from Pierre-Pascal Vandini, MSF France programme manager, to the MSF coordination team in Belgrade, 16 July 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

1) MSF staff in Srebrenica. We cannot do any more than we have already done to protect the MSF personnel in Srebrenica. If the wounded are evacuated and the Serbian army refuses to allow some or all of the Bosnian MSF staff to accompany them, Daniel and Christina will still have to leave. Remaining would only delay their departure without providing any more likelihood of success. The ICRC, rather than MSF, would be responsible for protecting all male prisoners remaining in Potocari and Bratunac. If Daniel and Christina wish to remain after the wounded leave, the capital or head offices could reject this proposal. 2) Communications - We must ask Christina for her opinion when we give the press information about her personal reactions. We made a mistake regarding the *Libération* 8 article. - The information provided to the press by Paris is screened on the basis of potential risks for the field team. - I don't think that communications about Srebrenica currently have any impact whatsoever on the Gorazde team's safety or influence our requests to the Pale authorities. The Serbs are determined to do as they wish. - Communications after the departure of Christina and Daniel: Christina and Daniel should not be expected to participate in any communications efforts in Paris unless they wish to do so of their own volition.



**MSF press release**, 17 July 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

The medical evacuation of 59 wounded and patients from



Bratunac and 43 from Potocari, requested since last Thursday, is now underway. The ICRC arrived in Potocari late in the morning. MSF insists that the evacuation must include all wounded and patients as well as local relief staff and their families. MSF personnel still present in Potocari are likely to accompany the wounded. MSF is calling for ICRC access to prisoners remaining in Potocari and Bratunac to ensure their treatment complies with the Geneva Conventions.

**Organising the evacuation of the MSF team, and the 15 people it was responsible for, took four additional days because of multiple administrative, political, and security obstacles, particularly involving the fate of the evacuated Bosnian Muslims. MSF issued a press release in an effort to break the deadlock. On July 21, the MSF team, composed of two expatriates and eight local staff members, their families, and two elderly people were finally evacuated from the enclave with the last convoy of UN Blue Helmets.**



'MSF Asks Pale and Belgrade Authorities to Issue the Authorisations for the Evacuation of its Team and 15 Civilians from Potocari,' MSF Belgium/France **Press release**, 19 July 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

8 days after the fall of Srebrenica, the Médecins Sans Frontières team is still unable to leave Potocari. According to the organisation's doctor and nurse, the group also includes 15 civilians, including three children, two elderly people, and MSF's Bosnian staff members. However, MSF has not been able to obtain all the authorisations required for their evacuation. We ask that all necessary steps be taken to allow them to be evacuated quickly and under proper security conditions.



'A Fourth Plane for Tuzla,' MSF **Press release**, 19 July 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

The Médecins Sans Frontières team in Potocari hopes to be able to evacuate this afternoon, taking with them 13 local staff members and the last two wounded patients, a woman of 80 and a man of 81. Two MSF staff members remain in Kladanj and are ready to treat other refugees from Srebrenica.



**Sitrep** Srebrenica-Potocari, 6 to 22 July 1995, The MSF Srebrenica Team **Logbook**, 24 July 1995 (in English, edited).

**Extract:**

Tuesday 18 July: Although having the clearance for Tuzla, we are hesitating, mostly due to the fact that security cannot be

guaranteed, that we don't know the road at all, that we cannot have a UN escort, or an escort from BSA further than Lubovija and that we fear getting into trouble [over] our local male staff. [...] Then during the morning Franken receives the information that all our local passengers will be arrested in Serbia and/or Croatia if they try to enter. Finally UNPROFOR in Sarajevo [...] issues a letter to Renaud [Tokert, MSF Project Manager] stating that UNPROFOR will take responsibility to move the 13 Muslim civilians from Serbia back to BiH territory. However we don't achieve anything today and there is still the last surprise of the day: BSA finds two old people in the south of Srebrenica and brings them to us. [...] We will have to take them [under our]... charge since UNPROFOR is not able to take them under their responsibility and the local staff of UNHCR is out of order [unable to help].

Wednesday 19 July

[...] In a meeting at 22:00 with UNHCR and DCO Franken we are informed that, as result of the meeting between Rupert Smith and Mladic, everybody living in the UN compound will be able to leave with the Dutch convoy on Friday 21 July at 12:00. However until tomorrow night we are not allowed to inform Belgrade or others in order not to endanger the convoy. All telephones have been removed already. This is not very easy – how to get the message to Belgrade, that they can stop the requests for our independent clearance in Pale, without them thinking that we are not mentally well any more.

Friday 21 July: At eleven o'clock we are getting ready to leave; the eight local staff members plus their 5 family members plus the two old lucky refugees find their place in the cars, the radios are on stand-by and the tanks are full. Two minutes past twelve the convoy starts to leave Potocari. Our three cars together with UNMO and UNHCR are within the first part of the convoy, which altogether consists to 163 vehicles. [...] Mladic together with a big delegation including Serbian press and Commander Karramans, Head of UNPROFOR in Srebrenica, are awaiting us at the Bosnian side of Iron Bridge. Guy, the Technical Coordinator for MSF Belgrade is finally able to [...] join [...] the convoy until the Croatian border. The convoy goes very smoothly until the Croatian border. [...] we are not able to continue with UNPROFOR, but we have to go on our own with a Croatian police escort; however we manage to negotiate an UNCRO military police escort. [...] The two and half hours spent at this border are very unpleasant; the immigration officer interviews our local staff about events that happened in Srebrenica including military information, dares to shout at me and blames UNPROFOR for not having protected the civilians.



'MSF Team Evacuates Potocari,' MSF **Press release**, 21 July 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

The Médecins Sans Frontières doctor and nurse left Potocari this morning along with 15 civilians, including the group's Bosnian employees, three children, and two elderly people.

After transiting through the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, they arrived in Zagreb, Croatia. MSF was the only humanitarian organisation to maintain a foreign presence in the enclave from April 1993, providing medical, surgical, and logistical assistance to nearly 40,000 people. Throughout the offensive, the doctor and nurse, along with the Bosnian staff, treated several dozen people who were wounded during the bombing and aided the civilians who took refuge in Potocari. An MSF team (a nurse and an anaesthetist) is still working in Gorazde. Some 20 volunteers are treating the displaced persons from Srebrenica in Tuzla, Zenica, and Kladanj.



*The Serbians told us that our team could leave, but the group around them also includes 17 other people – staff members with their families and acquaintances. I explained to Christina that she and Daniel could leave. She said that she wanted to leave with all the others. So we resumed the hellish negotiations until the Serbians agreed. Seventeen people crammed into three MSF vehicles as part of the evacuation of the Dutch battalion. It was an epic undertaking. When they arrived in Croatia, the MSF Holland team had a hard time convincing the Croatians to let them enter. Then they took the highway to Zagreb. I went to see the UNHCR guy in Zagreb right away to tell him that I would have work for him when they arrived. They were supposed to get to the hotel around midnight. Those three vehicles were like something out of *The Raft of the Medusa*, the painting of desperate survivors clinging to a barely seaworthy structure. One man who was evacuated told me that he was requesting refugee status. So I called the [UN]HCR guy again to tell him that he needed to come to a meeting the next morning. Cars came to pick up the people who were ready to return to central Bosnia. Others asked for protection and some obtained it.*

Stephan Oberreit, MSF Belgium/France General Coordinator in the former Yugoslavia, May - November 1995, MSF France Communications Director 2000 - 2006, Interviewed in 2015 (in French).

**The MSF teams increased their assistance to the thousands of displaced persons from Srebrenica who had settled at and around the Tuzla airport.**



'A Fourth Plane for Tuzla,' MSF **press release**, 19 July 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

At 06:00 this morning, a fourth cargo plane chartered by Médecins Sans Frontières took off from Amsterdam heading to Split. It was loaded with 11 tons of supplies (medical kits, sanitation supplies, and water). [...] The MSF teams in the Tuzla region, composed of 22 expatriates and local staff members, distributed food and water. In coordination with local authorities and other NGOs, MSF is also providing med-

ical care to the 200,000 refugees in the region, who have taken refuge in the camp at Tuzla airport and at various community centres and schools in the area. The latter facilities are located in the towns of Zivinice, Srebrenik, Banovici, Gracanica, and Lukavac. [...]

**On 18 July 1995, Jacques de Milliano, Executive Director of MSF Holland, who had returned from Tuzla, gave a press conference in The Hague, at which he criticised the lack of protection for Srebrenica's population. His comments were not well received by the public, which strongly supported the Dutch contingent, as did most of MSF's donors. Only Jan Pronk, the Minister for Development Cooperation, shared MSF's view.**



'Dutch Support was Too Limited,' *NRC Handelsblad* (The Netherlands), 19 July 1996 (in Dutch).

**Extract:**

The question of whether or not the Dutch blue helmets did everything within their capacity to protect the 25,000 refugees is obviously a difficult one to answer for J. De Milliano. Having just returned from a visit to Tuzla and the surrounding areas in Eastern Bosnia, he chooses his words very carefully. "After all that I have seen and heard over there, I see no reason for an investigation into the attitude of the Dutch blue helmets. But in terms of countering the rumours that they haven't done enough, it would be good if the government would come up with a very coherent narrative about what exactly did happen regarding relations between Serbs, refugees and the Dutch blue helmets." An 'investigation' is not the right word according to de Milliano. "That has negative connotations, as if someone is accused of something." In consultation with his staff, he would label it as a "reconstruction of facts." The "facts," de Milliano refers to are the multiple testimonials from refugees about rapes of women and executions of Muslim men by Bosnian Serbs in the immediate vicinity of Dutch military staff in the Muslim-enclave of Srebrenica. Or, as de Milliano put it earlier during a short press conference at the airport: "horrendous cruel acts have been committed: children have been taken away from their mothers, women were raped, and young men were shot in front of their mothers."

These are authentic accounts, too precise and detailed to be just stories. It was not a mass psychosis. There are enough victims who are able to tell their stories with a convincing level of detail." These cruelties would, according multiple sources, have taken place "within eye-sight of the Dutch blue helmets. Yes, but what does that mean? That the blue helmets saw these things with their own eyes? That they were present in the area? Or perhaps something else. The margins of interpretation of these types of observations and declarations should be investigated before a judgment about the behaviour of the blue helmets can be made. The fact is that the refugees

who arrive in Tuzla say that many of the cruelties happened in Potocari, where they (the refugees) expected to be protected by the Dutch blue helmets. It is also a fact that the protection by the blue helmets of the buses that transported the Muslims from the area, but from which many people were subsequently taken by the Serbs, was extremely limited. You can look at the same situation from two different perspectives: that of the (Dutch) Minister of Defence Voorhoeve who claims, "The Serbs were in full control, the UN staff was powerless [versus] that of the refugees, [who say] the Dutch protected us insufficiently. Which of those two perspectives is yours? Mine is mostly that the UN as an instrument for humanitarian protection has failed. Not only the cruelties committed by the Serbs need to be investigated, but also the decisions taken within the UN that have led to the Dutch military ending up in such tricky situation. Who decided at such a late – a too late – stage to allow two air strikes by NATO to be carried out over Srebrenica? These types of questions need answering. You freely use, like Minister Pronk, the words of genocide and cruelties by the Serbs, while the returning military is instructed to avoid such terminology in order not to endanger the soldiers that remain in the area. Why do you do that? For me, genocide is the destruction of a people, and that is exactly what is happening at this moment in Bosnia. We use these words to show that humanitarian assistance fails completely in the absence of military protection against systemic and brutal violations of human rights, be it in Rwanda or in Bosnia."



"Dutchbat did not Fulfill its Promise Sufficiently," *Trouw* (The Netherlands) 21 July 1995 (in Dutch).

#### Extract:

The Dutch UN staff in Srebrenica insufficiently fulfilled their promise to accompany the Muslims from the enclave. MSF Director Jacques de Milliano blames the Dutchbat leadership for this. "If you cannot fulfill your promise of protection, then you have to be open about this," he said yesterday. "I do not doubt the good intentions, but they did give the refugees a false sense of protection." De Milliano says that he is frustrated by the events. After the fall of the enclave, the Ministry of Defence claimed that the Dutch would only depart at the moment that all wounded and refugees of Srebrenica had been brought into safety. "Dutchbat Commander Karremans gave the impression that his troops would accompany the civilians into safety during the transport to Tuzla" stated de Milliano. "This was stated in a robust and solid manner. I am under the impression that this robustness was only words, not deeds. Karremans and the Bosnian Serbs agreed that Dutchbat staff would travel along with the buses in which the Muslims were transported. De Milliano, however, says that he heard this Dutch presence had been very limited.



*There was nothing in the media on Thursday. My vacation started on Friday. I was supposed to go to the south with my wife and children and I said to myself, it's not possible. I woke up in the middle of the night and made a plane reserva-*

*tion. On Saturday morning, I left for Brussels to take a plane to Split, where I got on a UN helicopter heading from Split to Tuzla. When I got there, I spoke with the women who were arriving. Their stories completely confirmed each other. I went back to Holland and held a press conference, saying that the situation was a catastrophe and the response was, "You are accusing the Dutch soldiers, you're saying that they're cowards." And I said, "No, it's that the people did not receive the protection they should have had. The Minister of Defence is saying that everything is OK, but there is a serious problem." People tried to get me to say that I was against Dutchbat, but that wasn't true. I gave a long interview on another topic and I said to the reporter, "Let's talk about Tuzla now because it was impossible to have that conversation with the other reporters." I spoke at length about my views on what was going on there. It was as if I had set off a bomb inside MSF and with the donors. I was the only person in Holland who held those views. Everyone thought I had lost it. It was a difficult week for me because I held fast against everyone else. Some people at MSF understood – particularly the desks – but others were really anxious because 90% of the donors supported the Dutchbat.*

Dr Jacques de Milliano, MSF Holland General Director, 1985-1996, interviewed in 2000 and 2015 (in French).



*We had a press release on our 'Dutch boys', as the newspapers which were defending them would say. We gave a counter voice and everybody fell over on MSF. The Dutch felt that 'our boys' were doing a good job, they had good intentions. They felt that our boys were going there to take care. The Dutch society was not prepared to consider that Dutchbat could have done more. It was difficult because by thinking that, you seem to disrespect the nation. But in Srebrenica, the Dutch soldiers at certain moments were fed up with the war, fed up with Muslims. That was shocking. The Dutch were not used to what they consider as underdeveloped people, to women with scarves etc. It was not an urban population and they really looked down on them. That's not of course the reason everything went wrong in Srebrenica, but it didn't help that they did not look at the population from a more humanitarian point of view. These people are in real danger and one cannot disregard their beliefs, their background: we have to medically and non-medically assist them.*

Wilna van Aartzen, MSF Holland Coordinator in the former Yugoslavia 1991-1993 then Emergency Desk, then Director of Operations, Interviewed in 2015 (in English)



*For the Dutch population the issue was that 'our poor boys were there, and those bad Serbs are making their lives difficult.' The story was about the Dutch soldiers and not the population. Once they were allowed out, they arrived in Zagreb and the crown prince and the Prime Minister went over. They had a sort of a party with beer and they were cheering, celebrating at the same time a population was massacred. Only Jan Pronk, the Minister of Development and Cooperation said 'there is no reason to celebrate; people are being massacred as*

*we speak, we don't know where the male population is, and we have to assume that terrible things are happening.' Jacques de Milliano went to Tuzla, and also tried to advocate on, 'We have to go there, we have to send international representation to escort them to safety.' It was Pronk and de Milliano, a sort of tandem, who was trying to reverse the public opinion. This public opinion was still saying: 'Oh it is beautiful, our heroes are now safe' and nobody was talking about the population of the enclave.*

Wouter Kok, MSF Holland Medical Coordinator in Sarajevo, Bosnia, from December 1991 to September 1992, then various positions in MSF-Holland Bosnia desk from September 1992 to 1996, Interviewed in 2015 (in English).

**On 21 July, in London, the ministers of foreign affairs and defence and defence chiefs from the 16 countries involved in peacekeeping in Bosnia (including the US and Russia), together with representatives of the UN, NATO, and the European Union, issued a warning to the Bosnian Serb leaders, threatening a "substantial and decisive" response to any attack on the besieged enclave of Gorazde. However, observers raised questions regarding how these threats would be carried out.**



'Conference on Bosnia Issues the Serbians a Limited Warning,' Patrice de Beer, *Le Monde* (France), London, 23 July 1995 (in French).

#### Extract:

The French wanted to send troops into the field, the British dithered, and the White House, anxious to avoid losses and facing a threat by Congress to lift the embargo on supplying weapons to the Bosnians, offered only aerial bombing as an alternative. After a day of heated discussions at Lancaster House, on an equally hot day, the participants reached a compromise that, although it seems to have offended only the Russians, who oppose any 'escalation,' has already led to various interpretations. [...] Based on the documents, the West's warning to Radovan Karadzic, leader of the Serbian militias, appears to be no stronger than the one issued on February 28, 1992, during a prior conference that was also held in London. And it is not nearly as forceful as the French wanted. The British text is written in general terms that require, at the very least, some critical explanation. However, the group says that it will be delivered, in the firmest of terms, to the men in Pale, the Bosnian Serb stronghold. [...] Who will decide whether to launch air strikes? NATO, at the request of the local UNPROFOR commander? Or will the decision still fall to the creaky UN machine (the 'double key'), headed up by its representative, Asushi Akashi of Japan, who tends to keep the brakes on? And where will the strikes take place?

**The same day, Dutch Minister of Defence, Joris Voorhoeve said that he "feared that serious war crimes were committed when Srebrenica was taken." On 23 July, he reported that the Dutch Blue Helmets saw Bosnian Serbs shooting a dozen men. Some of the UN peacekeepers reported scenes of extreme violence. In Tuzla, a survivor told two reporters how he had escaped a massacre.**



'Serious War Crimes in Srebrenica?' *Le Monde* (France), 23 July 1995 (in French).

#### Extract:

On Friday, July 21, Dutch Minister of Defense, Joris Voorhoeve said that he feared that "serious war crimes were committed" when the Serbians took the Muslim enclave of Srebrenica on July 11 and that "hundreds, if not thousands, of people were killed." "An investigation must be launched on behalf of the international tribunal responsible for trying those responsible for crimes in the former Yugoslavia," he said, quoted by Agence France Presse. The minister's statements corroborate those of the refugees, who have said that they saw many bodies after the Serbians captured thousands of men in Srebrenica.



'A Sea of Bodies in Srebrenica,' *Le Monde* (France), 25 July 1995 (in French).

#### Extract:

Ten days after the fall of Srebrenica on July 11, the statement of a Bosnian survivor from the Muslim enclave substantiated the theory that the Serbians carried out massacres when this enclave in eastern Bosnia fell. Still suffering from shock, M.O., aged 24, who escaped from Srebrenica with two other Bosnians, told two French reporters from *AFP* and *Libération* how he survived the massacre. "I owe my life to my cousin," he said. "I was holding his hand and when he was hit by the first round of gunfire, I fell along with him before a single bullet hit me." As the slaughter continued, he remained on the ground without moving, lying in the victims' blood. When he got up around midnight, he began to scream when he saw "a sea of bodies." Before leaving, M.O. saw a pit near the execution site. [...] In Zagreb on Sunday, July 23, Dutch Defence Minister Joris Voorhoeve also said that Dutch Blue Helmets saw Bosnian Serbs beating a dozen men in the Muslim enclave of Srebrenica. "But what they saw does not address the disappearance of thousands of people," the Minister said. General Hans Couzy, Commander-in-Chief of the Dutch Army, reported summary executions in Srebrenica, while other Dutch soldiers said they saw beatings and mutilations.

**On 24 July, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Special Rapporteur of the UN Commission on Human Rights announced that he**

**had no information concerning 7,000 people, and that acts of barbarism had been committed in Srebrenica.**



'Tadeusz Mazowiecki: We Can Apply the Word "Barbarity" to Srebrenica' *Le Monde* (France), 26 July 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

He went to Tuzla, where 29,000 refugees arrived after the 'safe area' fell. "I met with several dozen people," he said during a telephone call on Monday night, July 24. "It took them between six and 12 days to reach Tuzla, by bus or through the forest, under horrible conditions, crossing the front lines. I specifically talked to people who were victims of violence. According to the former Polish prime minister, "We do not have any information about the status of 7,000 residents of the enclave. We are sure that the Serbians summarily executed some. We fear the worst for the others. The problem is that our delegation was not authorised to go on site to conduct an investigation. Neither was the International Committee of the Red Cross. The tragedy is clearly not over. Speaking unequivocally, he said, "We can apply the word 'barbarity' here. The witnesses we spoke to were clearly believable. One refugee told us that he saw a Serbian militiaman walking through a village in the enclave carrying a woman's head and limbs. There are many other horrible statements. We will send all of them to the International War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague."

**On 23 July, during a press conference in Zagreb, Colonel Karremans, the Commander of the Dutch UNPROFOR contingent in Srebrenica went so far as to compliment General Mladic, Commander of the Bosnian Serb forces. The Dutch Prime Minister and Crown Prince celebrated the efforts of the Dutch contingent, congratulating them on "doing everything possible to protect the population." The reporters then turned to MSF Holland's executive director, expecting him to lay the blame at the door of the Dutch contingent.**



'When the Dutch 'Blue Helmets' Clinked Glasses with the Serbians in Srebrenica...' *Le Monde* (France), 2 September 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

During a press conference in Zagreb, also on July 23, Lieutenant Colonel Karremans declared, despite the information in his possession, that there are "neither good guys nor bad guys" in Bosnia. One of the highest-ranking officers serving in Srebrenica also complimented the behaviour of General Mladic, with whom he had clinked glasses in front of Serbian cameras several days earlier. The Lieutenant Colonel even peddled the story, which all observers consider to be

Serbian propaganda, of 192 Serbian villages around the enclave that had been leveled by Bosnian Muslims. According to Lieutenant Colonel Evarts, the battalion was driven by anti-Muslim sentiment. "No one could stand the people on whose behalf we were there, any longer – the enclave's Bosnian Muslims."



*On Saturday, I went back to Zagreb, where the Prime Minister had come, with the Prince, to celebrate Dutchbat. I saw it live on TV. I watched Karremans, who started saying outrageous things, like "The Serbians did everything properly," and so on. At that point I said to myself, 'he is going to be unmasked, he didn't understand anything.' And all of a sudden, waves of reporters came to talk to me. I said to them, "It's too late, I don't have anything to say anymore." I was disgusted. Suddenly they were all against Karremans. But my point was not to be for or against. It was to protect the population – and now they had all been slaughtered!*

Dr Jacques de Milliano, MSF Holland General Director from 1984 to 1997, interviewed in 2000 (in French).

**On 25 July, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia issued indictments against the Bosnian Serb leaders Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic.**



'Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic Prosecuted for Genocide,' *Le Monde* (France), 27 July 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

The Tribunal's 18-page document sets out the charges against Karadzic and Mladic: genocide and crimes against humanity, war crimes, serious violations of the Geneva Convention, organisation of a sniper campaign to kill civilians (in Sarajevo), hostage taking, and the use of human shields. "Since April 1992, Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic have committed genocide through their actions and failures to act in the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina," the prosecutor wrote.

**On 26 July, MSF held a press conference in Brussels, together with Amnesty International and two other Belgian organisations. They issued an appeal to save Gorazde, the last enclave under attack by Bosnian Serb forces. A symbolic refugee camp was erected at the Place de la Monnaie.**



'Remember Srebrenica – Save Gorazde and Sarajevo – Indignation is No Longer Enough,' **Press release** issued by Amnesty International, MSF, Causes Communes, and Balkaneactie, 20 July 1995 (in French). [V23](#) ▶

**Extract:**

Yesterday Srebrenica, today Zepa, tomorrow Gorazde. Indignation is no longer enough. It has become an admission of our helplessness. That is why our organisations strongly urge that all necessary steps be taken to save Gorazde, the next challenge, and Sarajevo. *To lose Gorazde would mean losing Europe.* In remembrance of the thousands of refugees from Srebrenica, we will erect a symbolic refugee camp at the Place de la Monnaie in Brussels from Wednesday, 26 July to Sunday, 30 July. We wish that it will become a gathering place for everyone who believes that we must save Gorazde. Witness accounts, conferences, discussions, and other concrete actions will be organised over the five days. A press conference will be held on Wednesday, 26 July at 11:00, Place de la Monnaie, 1000 Brussels.



'Four Days' of Solidarity in the Centre of Brussels,' **Le Soir** (Belgium), Agnès Gorissen and Jean Wouters, 27 July 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

A refugee camp stands in the Place de la Monnaie, at the very centre of Brussels. Five tents will remain there for four days, until Saturday. The public may visit to share stories and concerns and reject Europe's shameful failure to respond to the conflict in Bosnia, as Dr. Dallemagne, from Médecins Sans Frontières of Belgium, stated. Under the banner, "Remember Srebrenica, Save Gorazde and Sarajevo," MSF, Amnesty International, Causes Communes, and Balkanactie der Gemeenten have launched this solidarity and organising action. [...] The situation became particularly real to the audience when Christina Schmitz, an MSF nurse who has returned from Srebrenica, described, choking back tears, the civilians' suffering when the city fell, including little girls being raped, babies snatched from their mothers, and deaths from bombing.

**On 28 August, 1995, the Bosnian Serb forces' bombing of Sarajevo led to the first large-scale artillery and air-bourne offensive by NATO and the Rapid Reaction Force.**



'Overwhelming Western Response to the Carnage in Sarajevo,' **Agence France Presse**, 30 August 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

NATO fighter planes, which had coordinated with the Rapid

Reaction Force (RRF) artillery from the start, continued their raids on Serb positions throughout the day. Willy Claes, Secretary General of the Atlantic Alliance, acknowledged that the shelling constituted "more than a counter-attack" to the Bosnian Serb carnage in Sarajevo, which left 37 people dead and 87 wounded. "If the Bosnian Serbs do not show that they are ready to comply with the rules of the game this time and, thus, accept the decisions of the UN Security Council, we are ready to continue and even strengthen military action," he threatened. Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic called for the bombing to "stop immediately," otherwise the "escalation of the war will be inevitable and the bombs will destroy the peace process." Previously, he had said, "We are prepared to do whatever is necessary to defend ourselves," but also, "to participate in the [peace] negotiations." Despite the Western operation, US negotiator Richard Holbrooke also went to Belgrade to pursue his peace mission. As he was meeting with Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic, the Yugoslav government condemned the operations against the Bosnian Serbs. Bosnian president Alija Izetbegovic stated that "the situation has fundamentally changed" and that "the road to peace is open," thanks to the bombing. The NATO and RRF cooperation was a first and made use of the complementary relationship of aircraft and artillery. [V24](#) ▶

[V25](#) ▶

## FINAL TERRITORIAL REORGANISATION BEFORE A STATUS QUO IS ESTABLISHED BY THE PEACE AGREEMENTS

**In April 1994, the USA, Great Britain, Germany, and France directed the Contact Group to develop a peace plan for Bosnia-Herzegovina. Those talks had been underway for several months. The parties to the conflict intensified their efforts to win territory so that they would be in the strongest possible position when the peace accords froze the territorial arrangements.**

**In August, the Croatian Army managed to 'reconquer' the Krajina region. In September, the Croatian and Bosnian armies launched an offensive in central and eastern Bosnia.**

**Although the sudden demonstration of NATO force slowed the Serb forces, the Serbs accelerated their ethnic cleansing in eastern Bosnia and continued the siege of Gorazde.**

## Croatian-Bosnian counter-offensive

**Seeking refuge in areas of Bosnia-Herzegovina controlled by the Bosnian-Serb army, particularly Banja Luka, 150,000–200,000 Serbs led by the Bosnian Serb army fled the Croatian offensive.**

**MSF sought to aid these populations, informing the media regularly. One or two press releases were published daily on the situation and also mentioned the aid provided to the populations still under siege in the Bihac and Gorazde enclaves.**

**The organisation also criticized the blockades set up by authorities of both parties to the conflict to prevent supplies from travelling by road.**



**'Médecins Sans Frontières is Prepared to Receive the Flow of Refugees from Krajina,' MSF Belgium Press release, 4 August 1995 (in French).**

Médecins Sans Frontières is prepared to receive the flow of refugees from Krajina. The organisation anticipates that half of the region's 200,000 residents are fleeing the Croatian offensive. A mobile team will leave Zagreb to assess the needs in Krajina. At this time, MSF teams are working in Banja Luka, Bihac, Sarajevo, Zenica, Tuzla, Mostar, and Split, among other locations.

Today, 4,300 refugees arrived in Banja Luka. They gathered in a sports centre, schools, and other buildings. The total number of people who fled after Croat forces took the towns of Glarnoc and Grahovo is estimated at 13,000-20,000. Most of the Serb refugees are peasants who have brought as many of their possessions with them as possible on tractors and in vehicles, sometimes including livestock. Médecins Sans Frontières has already assessed the needs in many reception centres and working with the ICRC, will distribute medicine and medical supplies and install sanitation facilities. Humanitarian convoys are continually blocked at the checkpoints, which has sharply hampered efforts to supply basic needs.

In Bihac, the refugees, who are estimated to number 10,000, need food, water, and sanitation facilities. MSF has distributed its emergency supplies already on the ground in order to meet basic needs. Other humanitarian aid organisations also have limited supplies. Future humanitarian aid deliveries must take the only possible access route, currently held by Bosnian rebels led by Fikret Abdic. To prepare for new refugee flows, the Médecins Sans Frontières team in Zagreb has obtained additional emergency supplies.



**'Inadequate Care for 80,000 Refugees Heading to Banja Luka – a Humanitarian Catastrophe in the Making,' MSF Holland Press release, 6 August 1995 (in Dutch).**

At this moment, 80,000 Serb-led refugees from Krajina are fleeing and have received little aid. Médecins Sans Frontières calls on the warring parties to allow humanitarian aid convoys to travel to Banja Luka.

The UN's refugee agency, the UNHCR, anticipates that 150,000 refugees will arrive in Banja Luka in the coming days. In addition to Médecins Sans Frontières, the ICRC and the UNHCR are also working in this area.

According to MSF's four-person team in Banja Luka, local authorities and organisations are prepared to care only for those refugees who have already arrived. A new inflow will lead to shortages of food, drinking water, shelter, and medicine.

Until now, the warring parties have been very hesitant to authorize aid convoys to Banja Luka. In recent weeks, it has been difficult to find field personnel and aid in both Zagreb and Belgrade. Médecins Sans Frontières hopes that negotiations between the UN and the warring parties over air transport to Banja Luka will be successful. This air bridge is critical to prevent a humanitarian disaster. The contrast between the situation in Banja Luka and that in Tuzla, where more than 30 organisations are helping refugees from enclaves in eastern Bosnia, is striking.

MSF will try to send convoys from Belgrade and Zagreb to Banja Luka tomorrow. A cargo plane in Holland is ready to head there as well, as soon as the negotiations conclude. MSF teams are working in Banja Luka, Bihac, Sarajevo, Zenica, Tuzla, and Split.



**'Humanitarian Tragedy after Krajina is Taken – MSF Speeds 55 Tonnes of Emergency Aid to Banja Luka,' MSF Belgium Press release, 7 August 1995 (in French).**

### **Extract:**

#### **Banja Luka**

Approximately 40,000 refugees from Krajina are now in Banja Luka. A Médecins Sans Frontières team has been working in the town since Friday to provide basic care to the refugees, who are exhausted after their gruelling journey. Two other teams are currently en route to follow the populations heading east. A mobile team will also leave from Brussels on Wednesday. Two trucks carrying 30 tonnes of medical and sanitation supplies and medicine left Belgrade early this morning to supply our teams in Banja Luka. A second convoy will leave from Brussels on Wednesday by air, with 25 tonnes of materiel (medical kits, emergency bags, sanitation supplies, blankets, 10 tonnes of high-protein biscuits and tents).

## Knin

A team from the MSF logistics base in Split is currently en route to Knin to assess the population's situation there.

## Bosnian-Serbian border

Since yesterday, 600-1,000 refugees from Krajina have crossed the Bosnian-Serbian border every hour after transiting via Banja Luka, creating large population concentrations at the border stations. The MSF teams are monitoring the populations heading for the border and are ready to step in.



'600-1000 Serbs Crossing the Border Every Hour - MSF Dispatches 55 tonnes of Emergency Supplies to Banja Luka, MSF International **Press release**, 7 August 1995 (in English).

In Banja Luka, approximately 40,000 refugees have arrived from the Krajina. A team from Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has been providing assistance to the refugees since Friday. Two additional MSF teams are headed east to join the fleeing refugees. Two trucks loaded with 30 tonnes of medical supplies, sanitation equipment, and medicines left Belgrade early this morning to supply the teams in Banja Luka. Since yesterday, 600-1000 Serbian refugees per hour have been crossing the border between Bosnia and Serbia. Most of the refugees are passing through the transit centres at Banja Luka. MSF is behind the refugees and stands ready to intervene. On Wednesday, an additional mobile team will be sent out from Brussels with a 25 tonnes shipment of medical kits, emergency kits, sanitary equipment, blankets, tents, and 10 tonnes of high-energy biscuits. For Knin, an MSF exploratory team has been dispatched from our logistical base in Split to evaluate the situation.



'Former Yugoslavia,' MSF France **Press release**, 7 August 1995 (in French).

Tens of thousands of people are fleeing Krajina, heading for Banja Luka in the Serbian Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Some of them then continue on to Serbia via the Brcko corridor. Our teams saw thousands of civilians fleeing along the last kilometres before reaching the Serbian border.

Médecins Sans Frontières volunteers already working in Banja Luka are helping to treat the refugees. A new team providing additional support (doctor, nurse, and logistician) is travelling with a convoy carrying 30 tonnes of medical and logistical materiel that left Belgrade this morning to provide assistance to the displaced persons. Another team will go to Knin tomorrow to assess medical needs. A second team is leaving from Zagreb, headed to northern Krajina to assess the extent of the population movements and set up an aid system.

Other MSF workers are continuing their activities in Bihac and Gorazde. The MSF coordinator for the former Yugoslavia man-

aged to reach the enclave this week, where the situation facing the civilian population remains tragic. Aid activities continue in Sarajevo and central Bosnia (Tuzla, Kladanj and Zenica). More than 40 MSF volunteers are working in the former Yugoslavia.



'The Exodus Swells,' Médecins Sans Frontières **Press release**, 8 August 1995 (in French).

The exodus of refugees from Krajina is swelling, creating an enormous population movement heading towards Serbia. The roads are jammed from Banja Luka to Bijeljina. Two trucks left Belgrade for Banja Luka yesterday, carrying an MSF team composed of a medical coordinator, logistician, and nurse. The MSF team spotted some 10 towns where health posts have been set up. A second team left from Belgrade with a truck carrying five tons of medical and hygiene supplies for those posts. Teams are stationed along the Serbian-Bosnia border at the refugees' crossing points at Raca and Zvornik to provide them with basic supplies.

In Banja Luka itself, 60,000 refugees are currently assembled at different collective centres supplied by the MSF team. MSF is also trying to obtain the necessary authorizations from the Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina to go to Banja Luka and Krajina and assess the situation. One charter will leave on Thursday, carrying 25 tonnes of sanitation material, shelters, and an additional three-person MSF team.



'Médecins Sans Frontières Supplies Reach Banja Luka - Future Humanitarian Supplies Uncertain, MSF International **Press Release**, 9 August 1995 (in English & French).

A Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) convoy carrying 30 tonnes of medical and sanitary supplies and additional medical workers has made it to Banja Luka from Belgrade. Despite the arrival of fresh supplies, transportation of future supplies remains a critical problem. MSF is extremely concerned about the rapid depletion of stocks for the approximately 150,000 Serbian refugees. The road from Belgrade to Banja Luka is the only access route for humanitarian convoys. The problem is that the route is long, unsafe, and crowded with fleeing refugees. Officials have refused to give permission to use the road from Zagreb to Banja Luka or the Banja Luka Airport.

Humanitarian organisations in Banja Luka (MSF, ICRC, UNHCR) are calling for free passage for humanitarian convoys. Cargo flights loaded with emergency relief supplies are sitting in Brussels and Amsterdam waiting for official clearance. MSF teams report that the refugees are tense and confused - they want only one thing, to be safe. Most refugees are only stopping briefly in Banja Luka before moving east towards Serbia. MSF teams estimate 500-7,000 refugees are crossing into Serbia every hour. In Banja Luka, there are 30,000-40,000 refugees. MSF has a team of 15 supplying col-



lection centres and health posts along the major roads. An MSF mobile team is assessing the needs in the Krajina region. They are supplied with first aid kits, medicine, biscuits, and baby food. Today, the team was given permission to visit Petrinja, Glina, and Topusko where 30,000-50,000 Krajina Serbs have been detained by the Croatian army.


An MSF exploratory team has gone in to assess the situation in Velika Kladusa and northern Krajina. In Gorazde, the population is still under siege by Serbian forces. An MSF team continues to provide medical support. In central Bosnia (Mostar, Zenica, Tuzla, and Maglaj), MSF teams have been reinforced since the displacement of civilians from Srebrenica and Zepa.



*Half a million Serbs were chased away by the Croats in a very desolate manner and at a huge cost of human lives.*

*Knin, the capital of Krajina was partly burnt. I made a trip to Krajina, just after, and the houses were still burning, on a beautiful Sunday morning and all these depressing villages were half burnt or destroyed. It was very apocalyptic. The Serbs were brought to the negotiation table and they could not defend Krajina. I think there were 250,000 people living there, the Croats had been looking for an opportunity to grab it anyway and because the Serbs were weakened they could do it. They took revenge for everything bad that had happened by the Serbs. For the first time in war, they had the chance to do the same.*

Wouter Kok, MSF Holland medical coordinator in Sarajevo, Bosnia, December 1991 - September 1992, then various positions in MSF Holland Bosnia desk, September 1992-1996, Interviewed in 2015, (in English).

**On 11 August, MSF announced that a cargo plane loaded with logistics and emergency medical supplies had landed in Banja Luka, despite the obstacles created by the warring parties and the UN, which had prohibited overflights in the area. The MSF France press release again called attention to the fate of the non-Serbian communities living in the region and of Gorazde's inhabitants. V26** 



'First Humanitarian Flight to Banja Luka – Médecins Sans Frontières Supplies Banja Luka by Air,' MSF Zagreb **Press release**, 11 August 1995 (in French and English).

Médecins Sans Frontières has received the authorisations required to supply Banja Luka by air. A cargo plane left Amsterdam for Banja Luka at 16:25 today with 30 tonnes of material and a three-person team. MSF hopes to establish an air bridge to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid in northern Bosnia. Until yesterday, it was very difficult to reach Banja Luka, even as the supplies of humanitarian organisations there were dwindling rapidly, creating concern about

the alarming situation facing the 150,000 Serbs from Krajina who have fled towards the Banja Luka region.

This cargo plane will supply the MSF team with emergency supplies, including sanitary and hygiene materials such as water pumps, jerry cans, and soap. Although medical supplies are sufficient for now, medicines will be delivered in the coming days. Thanks to these additional supplies, the team will also be able to build latrines in the collection centres and health posts along the road. Jerry cans of water will also be distributed from the posts. The MSF team in Banja Luka is composed of 18 people (10 expatriates and eight local staff).

MSF distributes hygiene supplies and medicines to the collection centres in Banja Luka, which house 50,000 refugees. It is also supplying the collection centres in Prijedor (northwest of Banja Luka) and health posts along the roads. MSF has set up a medical centre in Bijeljina, the main town on the Bosnia-Serbia border.

Of the 150,000 refugees travelling across northern Bosnia (Srpska Republic), 45,000 have already crossed the border into Serbia. Most pass through Banja Luka. "I counted around 2,000 vehicles between Bijeljina and Banja Luka," said Barbara Kerstiëns, a member of the MSF team. "It's an endless, snaking line, 220 kilometres long, with cars, trucks, and tractors fleeing to Serbia." Kerstiëns is a Belgian doctor working for MSF who arrived on Tuesday with an MSF convoy from Belgrade. "The refugees are very tense, frightened, and lost, especially those who were bombed on the road to Banja Luka, near Petrovac. In general, they seem to be in good health. But they have had very difficult times. Those who arrive in Banja Luka have already travelled several days. Most are elderly and exhausted."

"The refugees stay in Banja Luka for about two days, in collection centres. That's enough time to eat and sleep a little and get their strength back. They don't know which way to go. All they want is to get to Serbia for safety. Those who remain longer in the collection centres have no means of transport. They have lost all their strength and don't know what to do. But they all continue on as soon as they can. They are desperate."

Médecins Sans Frontières is developing medical assistance programs in the former Yugoslav towns of Banja Luka, Sarajevo, Bihac, Tuzla, Zenica, and others.



'Former Yugoslavia: A Médecins Sans Frontières Plane en route to Banja Luka,' MSF France **Press release**, 11 August 1995 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

The MSF team in Banja Luka also remains very concerned about the fate of the non-Serbian communities still in the region that are victims of expulsions and intimidation. [...] Last, MSF notes that the situation remains tragic for the Muslim population of Gorazde, which has been under siege by

Serb forces for more than three years. Three MSF volunteers are in the enclave.



'Aid Airlift for Serb Refugees Amid New Peace Drive,' **Reuters (UK)**, 12 August 1995 (in English).

#### Extract:

"It is a degrading situation and getting worse day by day. Our greatest priority is to bring in food, water, shelter and medical supplies," MSF director Jacques de Milliano told Reuters by telephone. "We have plans for a small air bridge and we think in the coming week we will have three or four more planes landing." MSF, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and other relief organisations decided to try to airlift supplies to Banja Luka because Bosnian roads were jammed with vehicles packed with refugees.



*It was a no-fly zone, which was controlled by NATO, from a base in Italy. For this plane to land in Banja Luka we needed to have the permission from NATO. So I had a phone call with the NATO general in charge of all flights. And this conversation went as follows, 'Hello General, I am Michiel Hofman from MSF. You might have heard of the emergency crisis in Banja Luka ...' and before I finished my sentence he screamed, 'yeah! You are Doctors Without Borders, I know you guys! You are doing great work, it's fantastic.' 'Ok that's great,' I said! 'We have a cargo plane of life-saving medical, water and sanitation, and shelter supplies to help these people, so I need authorisation from you to land in Banja Luka.' He said, 'Oh no! If you fly to Banja Luka, I'll have to shoot you down.' So, Ok... again, 'we are MSF, we are neutral, blabla...' 'Yeah, I know all about you guys, you are so great! You have to help out ...' I replied, 'Ok this is why I need to discuss with you about a plane that we want to fly, full of supplies to Banja Luka.' He repeats, 'Oh you want to fly to Banja Luka? Then I'll have to shoot you down!' So I thought let's be creative, 'can you provide me an authorisation code to land a plane of relief supplies in Banja Luka?' He said, 'Oh! You want an authorisation code? I can give you an authorization code. If you have an authorization code, I don't have to shoot you down.' When you talk to a military person, you have to be very precise.*

Michiel Hofman, MSF Holland Coordinator in Croatia, August 1995 - July 1996, Interviewed in 2015, (in English).



*The United Nations declared the Banja Luka airport inaccessible - a no-fly zone. We knew that if we tried to negotiate with the UN, we would never obtain authorization. The ICRC hadn't gotten it. We didn't have authorisation from the Croatians either. Nonetheless, we left with that plane, which we had to insure ourselves because no insurance company would. We had to cross over Serbia and then take a corridor. We started*

*negotiating on the plane. We were in contact with a NATO AWAC, which was over flying the area and told us that we couldn't land. We said that if they didn't let the plane land, we would report that they were blocking humanitarian aid for the Serbians. That was a very sensitive point for them. We needed authorisation from Belgrade, which told us that we had to land there. We insisted on going to Banja Luka. In the end, we got their green light for Banja Luka. The only authorisation we lacked was the Croatians'. Finally, the AWACS commander told our pilot to 'fly as high as possible.' When we landed, the ICRC told us that they thought it was their plane arriving! It had been blocked in Belgrade for two days. 'How did you do that?,' they asked.*

Dr Jacques de Milliano, MSF Holland General Director, 1985-1996, interviewed in 2000 and 2015 (in French).

**MSF's managers again faced the dilemma of choosing between aiding refugees at the risk of participating in ethnic cleansing or avoiding that risk at the cost of abandoning those populations.**

**Jacques de Milliano, Director-General of MSF Holland, believed that the process was winding down. He supported saving those who could still be saved and denouncing the situation in the media. In the end, he convinced the Bosnian Serb authorities, which sensed the winds of history changing, to shelter a new wave of refugees that they were preparing to expel.**



'Concerning: minorities Banja Luka,' **Message** from Jacques de Milliano, MSF Holland General Director to Wouter Kok, MSF-Holland Bosnia Desk, 14 August 1995 (in English).

After talks with ICRC, UNHCR, the bishop of Banja Luka, a talk of several hours with Koljevic (the vice-president of the Republika Srpska) and other sources I would like to raise the increasingly dramatic situation of the minorities, the change in policy of ICRC and UNHCR, and the need for a clear position of MSF.

1. The minorities in the Serb part of Bosnia-Herzegovina are, since the fall of Western Slavonia and especially after the influx of the Krajina refugees, in a worse position concerning safety than before. Hundreds of families have been thrown out of their houses and are seeking refuge in apartments of relatives. Then those are thrown out of their houses and so on until people found themselves on the streets or hiding in the woods. An unbearable situation. People feel extremely insecure and thank god that 'they have still their heads on the shoulders'. A few physical atrocities have been reported. A widespread explosion of violence against the minorities can occur any moment; the human suffering will be enormous.

Background: since more than 2 years ethnic cleansing occurred in this area. 75% of the population has been

cleansed. At this moment, a figure of 30,000 Croats and 25,000 Muslims living in this area, of which most in Banja Luka town (12,000 Croats), is circulating. An example: at this very moment a blind Croatian woman is seeking help at our office. Yesterday evening a Serbian family knocked at her door and urged her to leave. She had the time to pack three bags and they told her 'she should cross by foot the wooden bridge to Croatia.'

UNHCR and ICRC are saying that they are, since a few days, overloaded with people being thrown out of their houses and seeking assistance and protection. In the past 18 months, they were able to deal with protection on individual bases. Now they are overloaded with hundreds of new cases and they expressed that they cannot anymore 'guarantee' a decent level of protection, given the numbers and the tense and violent atmosphere of vengeance. So, they are looking into changing their protection policy by:

- FIRST STEP - setting up collective centers, which can be protected (or that they need assurance from the authorities)
- SECOND STEP - facilitating transport to Croatia under certain conditions: free choice, security guarantees and together with (male) family members (a lot of men are mobilized for forced labour).

3. The civilian side of the government had made clear that they are not able to protect the minorities, [saying] 'Too many uncontrolled armed Krajina soldiers in Banja Luka. A weak police force because of the general mobilisation towards the frontline.' Yesterday, they said to me that they are going to make lists of those willing to leave and to ask the humanitarian organisations to help and facilitate the departure. Croatia apparently has agreed to accept a Croatian minority group (see ICRC). The ethnic cleansing machine is running at full speed and covered up by an official humanitarian sauce.

The Bishop of Banja Luka, under house arrest, is desperate. He accuses the Serbian authorities here of a cynical game in which they create a new tragedy under the umbrella of the actual refugee crisis. He does not want to accept the departure of his population toward Croatia. He accuses the international community of guilt and cynical impotence. He urges the international community, politicians, and humanitarian organisations to protect the minorities here and to resist at the destructive policy of the devil. 'He has the right to live in Banja Luka and he will fight until the end.' Apparently, his followers are under the actual circumstances, more and more choosing for the option to leave.

Conclusion: Humanitarian organisations are confronted with a serious dilemma. Either they refuse to participate in the evacuation of civilians to resist ethnic cleansing on principle. The result will be a violent human tragedy with many casualties. Or, they facilitate the transit of the minority population out of the area to limit further suffering and become unintentionally part of the ethnic cleansing machine. My personal opinion is that this is the final stage in the ethnic cleansing of the area and that it is unrealistic in this stage to reverse events. So, we have to save those who still can be saved. And

we have to raise our voice and express our indignation. A sad story, with a sad conclusion.



'Médecins Sans Frontières is Very Concerned about the Conditions of Non-Serbian Minorities in the Banja Luka Region,' MSF France **Press release**, 15 August 1995 (in French).

Some 30,000 Croats and 20,000 Muslims have been driven from their homes and evacuated to Dvor, Croatia. Médecins Sans Frontières reaffirms its opposition on ethnic cleansing and calls urgently for these minority populations to be protected. Hundreds of Croats and Muslims were expelled from Banja Luka and surrounding areas in recent days and many are still victims of violence. MSF calls on local authorities to immediately halt the human rights violations underway.

Médecins Sans Frontières will not participate in the displacement and transfer of Banja Luka's minority populations. We will provide our medical and humanitarian aid only at the request of organisations mandated to transfer and protect these populations; that is, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Médecins Sans Frontières has been assisting the populations in the Banja Luka region, including the Croatian and Muslim minorities, for two years. Today we call attention to the fate of these minorities and demand their protection.



'Aid Agency says Bosnia Ethnic Expulsions Inhuman,' **Reuters (UK)**, 16 August 1995 (in English).

**Extract:**

Conditions for minorities gathering in Banja Luka to be bussed to Croatia were chaotic and worsening said Jacques Milliano, President of the Dutch branch of Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders). "The transport of cattle is done better than this," said Milliano by telephone from the northern town of Banja Luka. "We urgently appeal to the local authorities that if they are to indulge in ethnic cleansing, which we strongly disagree with, at least they do it with a little dignity."

Bosnian Serbs have begun to round up thousands of non-Serbs, mainly Croats, in a programme of systematic expulsions that aid agencies say will finally give the area the ethnic purity the Serbs want. Hundreds have already been forced to leave their homes, been bused to the Sava River, Bosnia's border with Croatia, put into rowboats, and sent into exile. Milliano said dispossessed Croats were being forced to assemble in a field beside a barracks to the north of Banja Luka, the biggest Serb-held town in Bosnia. Hundreds who could not board buses by the end of the day had to spend the night in the open. A rainstorm on Tuesday evening turned the field into an unsanitary sea of mud, de Milliano said. "These people have left their villages and abandoned their homes

and cannot return. The authorities are not doing anything to provide the essentials to care for them," he added.

De Milliano urged Serb officials to move the collection centre for the mass expulsion, which he estimated would continue for two weeks to clear the last of the Croats, to a building where aid organisations could care for those leaving. Croats and Muslims have suffered beatings, murder and threats from a huge influx of Krajina Serbs seeking homes and revenge for being expelled from their rebel enclave by conquering Croatian forces. Many are desperate to leave. De Milliano said the situation for nearly 40,000 Muslims in the region was even worse than that of the Croats. The Croatian authorities had cut a deal to take in their ethnic kin but no such arrangement yet existed for Muslims, he said. "Apparently there are some buses going to (Bosnian government-held) central Bosnia with Muslims but it is not yet as organised as with the Croats, he said.



*When I arrived in Banja Luka, I found a terrified MSF team. 'Be careful what you say ... the Serbs...' Kolievic, Vice-President of the Republika Srpska, held a meeting and said, 'I'm going to evacuate the Croats and the Muslims. I am not going to ensure their security any longer.' He was talking about ethnic cleansing but he called it 'evacuation.' All the organisations were there to hear him. And I got mad. I said to him, 'Mr. Kolievic, what you call assistance, I call ethnic cleansing. That's what we call it.' The room went completely silent. I'd had enough of the organisations not reacting. I wrote an MSF position paper just in terms of strategy and I sent it to all the sections, saying, 'I want to say this and that.' We reached an agreement in a half-hour. Afterwards, I called the BBC in Belgrade and told them what was happening, that it was ethnic cleansing. The next morning, Kolievic was there to see me. We talked. Things were coming to an end, the Dayton negotiations were starting, and he was afraid of the tribunal. I had one more interview to do and I didn't let up. I continued my condemnation.*

*Kolievic came back to see me later at the airport and asked me, 'Are you going to continue talking about this?' I said, 'Yes, I'm going to continue talking about this in Europe because refugees were still arriving yesterday, they are in a stadium in the rain...' He said, 'OK, come with me, we are going to get a shelter set up for them.' A school was requisitioned and the shelter was set up. The lesson from this episode is that when you take a clear position in a situation like that, you create respect for humanitarian aid. I came back to Europe and I told the Kolievic story everywhere I went. Two months later, I learned that he had committed suicide. He was very frightened.*

Dr Jacques de Milliano, MSF Holland General Director, 1985-1996, interviewed in 2000 and 2015 (in French).

**In September, writing in MSF France's internal publication (which is also distributed to some 100 journalists), the Deputy Programme Manager for the former Yugoslavia,**

**Pierre Salignon, challenged the UN's analogy likening the ethnic cleansing carried out by the Serbian and Bosnian-Serb regimes to the Croats' effort to 'reconquer' territory and its impact on civilian populations. He also expressed concern for Gorazde, whose fate seemed tied to the peace agreements, then being negotiated in Dayton, Ohio, under the auspices of the United States.**



'Croats and Bosnians Counter-attack,' Pierre Salignon, MSF France Deputy Programme Manager, **Messages** no. 81 (MSF internal publication, distributed to approximately 100 journalists) September 1995 (in French).

The facts of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia have changed in two months. While Croatian and Bosnian forces are retaliating and NATO has finally intervened, ethnic cleansing continued with the fall of Srebrenica and Zepa. Yasushi Akashi, UN Special Representative for the former Yugoslavia, then denounced "ethnic cleansing" in the Krajina region, placing equal blame on all "belligerents" to the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. According to Akashi, the Croats and Bosnians are guilty today of the same crimes that the Serbs committed yesterday.

International journalists and observers in Croatia emphasize that the Croats' objective is clearly to ensure that the Serbian population never returns to the "reconquered" territories. However, they note that the methods used to achieve that objective are completely different from the operations that Radovan Karadzic's soldiers have conducted since 1991 to achieve ethnic cleansing in the territory under their control. Witnesses reported summary executions of civilians and bombings of columns of refugees during the Croatian offense, but the Serbs themselves organized the residents' flight (how can you agree to return to live with the same people who drove you out yesterday?) Most of who fled well in advance of the Croatian soldiers' arrival. Those who could not leave in time managed to take the corridors opened later towards Bosnia and Serbia, once all the men were disarmed and no mass executions were reported.

These latest population displacements, this time, of Serbians, thus seem to be the consequence of the war of ethnic cleansing that began in Croatia in 1991 and then extended into Bosnia-Herzegovina. The international community remained passive for too long in the face of that war, accepting the *fait accompli* policy. Remember Vukovar, which fell into the Serbs' hands on 18 November 1991, after a horrific 96-day long siege? 'The pearl of the Danube,' razed. While the world watched, live.

The Croatian residents fled occupied Slavonia and Krajina by the hundreds of thousands (300,000). Ten thousand more died under the bombs of Milosevic's soldiers.

Next, remember the ethnic cleansing carried out by Radovan Karadzic's militias in Bosnia-Herzegovina, supported by Serbia? That occurred in the summer of 1992, in the Kozarac

region, but also in Foca, Visegrad, Srebrenica, Zvornik, Bijeljina, Jajce, and Sanski Most. Hundreds of Bosnian towns and villages were systematically burned and destroyed. Tens of thousands of civilians were held, mistreated, and massacred in concentration camps in Omarska, Manjaca, Trnopolje, and Keraterm (47 detention centres were recorded). Tens of thousands dead, nearly three million displaced or besieged, thousands disappeared.

In his last report published in July, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Special Rapporteur for the UN Commission on Human Rights, emphasized, that "the ethnic cleansing carried out by the Serbs in their territory is almost over." He has since resigned from his position, accusing the international community of responsibility in the face of the magnitude of the atrocities committed in Bosnia-Herzegovina. All these crimes were committed before some 40,000 UN soldiers charged with peacekeeping and implementing a succession of more than 70 resolutions approved by the UN Security Council.

Remember Srebrenica, the first Bosnian enclave to be 'protected' by the UN in 1993. It was the first to disappear in early July 1995, followed several weeks later by Zepa. This happened because of a lack of resources and real will on the part of Western governments. A total of 40,000 civilians were deported and had to flee through the forest, alone and destitute, ahead of their pursuers. We have no news of 8,000 others, taken prisoner or killed summarily as they fled. The UN has allowed crimes to be committed before our eyes.

After a new massacre of innocent civilians on 28 August (37 dead and 80 wounded), NATO launched a military operation in Sarajevo in reprisal against Serb artillery and managed to open up the besieged capital. But, will NATO agree, tomorrow, to protect the enclave of Gorazde, from which all the Blue Helmets withdrew at the end of August? Or would it rather sacrifice Gorazde, as the United States proposes, on the altar of 'ethnic purity'? We fear the worst as the 'ethnic division' of Bosnia-Herzegovina is being negotiated in Geneva and New York. According to the diplomats, this is "the price that must be paid on the road that leads to peace." We have our doubts.

## Do not abandon Gorazde

**in late August, the Blue Helmet contingent deployed in Gorazde withdrew from the enclave. The British contingent was also about to leave. MSF, which still had a team in the enclave, expressed its concerns publicly about this new abandonment of an area supposedly secured by international peacekeeping forces.**

**The press release drafted by the communications team in the field in Zagreb and distributed in MSF's name created internal controversy. According to programme managers and the teams in the field, the information was not shared in a timely fashion. They particularly objected to being quoted without having been consulted.**

**In the end, the MSF International press release condemned the withdrawal of the Blue Helmets from Gorazde, while the MSF France press release called for guarantees to protect the enclave's population.**



**Message** from Vincent Cassard, MSF Communications Officer in Zagreb, to the MSF Coordinators in the former Yugoslavia and Programme Managers, 21 August 1995 (in French).

### Extract:

Hello managers and coordinators,  
At the risk of repeating myself (sorry, Alex), I would like to update you on the withdrawal of UN forces from Gorazde because I am convinced that we must do more than wait and assess. I think it is very important that we acknowledge this event and speak out. In terms of communication, and without taking a political position, MSF could express the residents' strong concerns for their security, publicly ask whether this action will protect the lives of the 60,000 people living in the pocket, and reaffirm that our presence is not connected to that of the UNPROFOR troops.

I would also like to link this communication to the population's feelings, but we should be able to obtain that information quickly because we are on the ground. I imagine that people feel abandoned and that this departure is the final blow. I consider this process to be critical because: There are no journalists in the enclave and we have a responsibility for the population, which cannot speak out. This could prompt people to ask questions in the face of what I believe, is a huge fraud and a nasty piece of work. And last, we would have support from MSF-H, which is ready to speak out on this issue with us.

### The air strikes argument does not hold up:

Journalists [...] have said, time and time again, that the withdrawal of the Blue Helmets will prevent hostage taking and make it easier for NATO to conduct air strikes. The air strikes are currently under NATO authority and are subject to the procedure developed on 1 August 1995. Unfortunately, I don't have the documents from the London conf[erence] here. But in summary, the UN's official position is that NATO will use this strike only in the event of a massive attack on the enclave. This notion can be interpreted any which way. In practice, this means that the Serbs can bomb a few schools and markets with no problem. It also means that they can encroach on the pocket with no problem, as that's what happened in Srebrenica. Two days after the offensive began, and after a part of the enclave's territory was taken, UNPROFOR experts in Zagreb all agreed that this was an attack intended to intimidate, not a massive attack. Last, the effectiveness of air strikes without support from action on the ground is very controversial.

### This departure is extremely precipitous:

Several days ago, British officers in Sarajevo told me that the BRITBAT was not to depart. The news was announced on Friday at the Sarajevo press briefing. That same day, in Zagreb

we were talking about a few weeks for the BRITBAT since their mandate was to wrap up at the end of September. This morning (Monday the 21st) we talked about a BRITBAT withdrawal to the UNPROFOR security point in a week. I really think they are trying to do this quickly and discretely. Won't this prompt the Bosnian Serbs to take the enclave? It's impossible not to think about this departure in the context of the US peace plan, which calls for exchanging Gorazde for the Serbian part of Sarajevo. Gorazde is a safe area protected by UNPROFOR. The London conference in July strengthened the notion of this UN protection. Clearly, this departure does not improve protection of the zone. The decision thus totally contradicts the Blue Helmets' mandate and the recent commitment of the 'international community' at the London conference. We're familiar with that. The problem is that it risks encouraging the BSA to retake the pocket, which would be the worst possible scenario for the 70,000 residents of Gorazde. The enclave is solidly armed and fighting will be violent (MSF can't do anything about that). Having lost ground on other fronts, the BSA could very easily interpret this withdrawal as a sign opening the way to them. When you know what happened in Srebrenica, and MSF certainly does, you have to challenge a decision that could put these populations in the same situation. There you have it, it's just a suggestion. As you may have guessed, this story gets my back up a bit. However, I am very gentle with the journalists, just suggesting that they look closely at this situation, which worries us a lot. I hope I have convinced you; I look forward to hearing from you. Vincent



**Message** from Vincent Cassard, MSF Communications Officer in Zagreb to MSF Communications Managers, 22 August 1995, 10:08 (in French).

Hello, communications – Zagreb communications here.  
Content of the message:

1. After the London statements, which drew a line in the sand at Gorazde, MSF strongly objects to the UN forces' abandonment of the last enclave in eastern Bosnia. This withdrawal flagrantly contradicts the firm promises of protection made by the governments that met in London. [...]
2. MSF, the only hum[anitarian] organization that has maintained an uninterrupted presence since \*\*\*\* 1993, is concerned about the consequences of this precipitous withdrawal for the population of the besieged enclave. MSF fears that this decision will facilitate a new attack on Gorazde, which would have tragic consequences for the security of the civilian population.
3. The departure of the Blue Helmets effectively terminates the principle of the international community's protection of 60,000 civilians, who depend entirely on humanitarian aid. This withdrawal also eliminates any opportunity to observe and assist in the event of a sudden evacuation of the civilian population. (insert MSF quote "after having been a direct witness to the violence against the populations during the fall of Srebrenica, we are very worried that the same fate could befall the people of Gorazde. The promises regarding Gorazde must be kept").

#### 4. Practical details and testimony about life in the enclave Timing:

We have missed the boat twice so far:

- Friday, when the withdrawal was announced,
- Sunday, when the UN announced that the death of three children in the enclave was the result of an attack against a legitimate military target (press conference 21.08).
- React as of the first withdrawal of the British contingent. The Ukrainians have been trying to leave for five days but they are unarmed, so negligible quantity. The departure of the Brit[ish]. Will receive much more coverage from the inter[national] press, which give us a greater opportunity to deliver the message.
- As you suggested, the message should be based on experience in the field. Consequently, communications should also emanate from the field and not just from the headquarters.
- Given the importance of the message, we should organise briefings or press conferences wherever the journalists are – Zagreb, Sarajevo, Bel[grade], and the headquarters. I think that many journalists would be receptive given the cynicism of this decision and general approval surrounding it. I look forward to your proposal.



'The Blue Helmets' Withdrawal has Begun,' *Agence France Presse*, Sarajevo, 24 August 1995 (in French).

#### Extract:

The 72 Ukrainian soldiers left Gorazde, a UN "safe area," on Wednesday night, heading to Belgrade. Only two officers remain in the Muslim enclave to resolve administrative problems. The UN justified its withdrawal, asserting that the situation had become "militarily unbearable." Most of the Ukrainians' material and supplies have been stolen and they are no longer receiving supplies regularly.

In the coming days, 170 men from the British contingent will also depart, a UN official said. The Bosnian Serbs have authorized the first British supply convoys to leave the enclave. Discussions are still underway with the Bosnian government. UNPROFOR is expected to complete its withdrawal from eastern Bosnia by early September, leaving only some 20 observers in Gorazde. The latter will be formally responsible to notify the UN in the event of Serb threats or attacks against the enclave.

Gorazde's entire defence now rests on the western countries' threat, made in late July, to Serb forces of massive NATO air strikes in the event of an attack on the enclave. The population of Gorazde has not believed in this "guarantee" for a long time. "People are very worried and demoralized because they feel they've been abandoned yet again," said Pierre-Pascal Vandini, Programme Manager for the medical humanitarian organisation, Médecins sans Frontières, on Thursday. "The stress has been building for three years," he said. "They think they can die at any moment." The west's threats have not stopped the Serbs from harassing the town. "There has been sniper fire for the last few days," he said. "Before, there

was bombing, too.” The MSF team performs between one and 20 major surgeries weekly; 10-20% of the patients are women and children. Access to Gorazde has been a bit easier in recent days. MSF managed to bring in a convoy of drugs and the food situation has improved slightly. “It’s better, but it’s still very serious,” the MSF manager observed.

[...] According to the United Nations, the Blue Helmets’ withdrawal from Gorazde will allow UNPROFOR to better defend the enclave by limiting the risks of reprisals against the Blue Helmets in the event of air strikes. But for the Bosnians, it means that the international community has abandoned the enclave. The threats of air strikes against Serb forces seem intended primarily to freeze the situation before possible negotiations.



**‘Gorazde Left Unprotected - Médecins Sans Frontières Fears Renewed Attacks Against Civilians,’ Press release** MSF International, Zagreb, Brussels 24 August 1995 (in English).

As the UN Peacekeeping Forces begin their final withdrawal for Gorazde, the international medical relief organization, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) condemns the removal of all effective ground protection for the civilian population in the besieged enclave in eastern Bosnia. The failure to maintain an international peacekeeping presence in Gorazde is in blatant contradiction with the various international commitments to protect the enclave, issued by governments at the London Conference in July. According to Stephan Oberreit, the MSF Coordinator in Belgrade, “the decision to withdraw from the so-called safe haven contrasts with the very firm promises of protection made only a month ago. In the absence of a credible alternative plan for their protection, the 60,000 people of Gorazde will be more vulnerable than ever.” In the case of renewed attacks against the enclave, no international protection will be available to the civilian population. The absence of a deterrent force on the ground also removes all possibilities of a safe evacuation.

Since 1993, MSF has been the only aid agency to maintain an uninterrupted presence in the enclaves of eastern Bosnia (Srebrenica and Gorazde). In July, MSF’s medical team witnessed the fall of Srebrenica in which approximately 40,000 people were subjected to widespread violence and then forced to flee. Although there has been reduced military activity during the past few days, the situation remains desperate for the people of Gorazde. Over the past week alone, the MSF team (1 nurse, 1 anaesthetist, 1 engineer) reported 21 major surgical operations, 14 involving war wounds. MSF works independently from the United Nations in the former Yugoslavia and will maintain its presence in Gorazde as long as security permits.



**‘Withdrawal of the Blue Helmets: What Does this Mean for the Future of Gorazde’s Residents?,’ MSF France Press release**, 24 August 1995 (in French).

As the United Nations’ so-called protection forces begin the final phase of their withdrawal from Gorazde, Médecins Sans Frontières calls for the community of States to clearly set forth the guarantees, and follow them up with action, to ensure the protection of the 57,000 residents of the enclave, which the UN declared a “safe area” in 1993.

After witnessing the tragedy of Srebrenica’s residents first-hand and providing assistance to the population of Zepa, Médecins Sans Frontières, the only non-governmental organisation to have maintained an uninterrupted presence in Srebrenica and Gorazde since 1993, fears that the precipitous departure of the UNPROFOR soldiers signals a new disengagement by the international community. The member States of the Contact Group are responsible for the fate of the besieged civilians, whom they committed to protect at the 29 July meeting in London.

The situation inside the enclave of Gorazde is still tragic. Last week, which was calmer than those preceding, the emergency department that Médecins Sans Frontières treated five seriously wounded patients, while three children aged 3, 5, and 7 years died as they played in the centre of town. The medical teams performed 21 operations, including 14 on war-wounded patients. Last week, 10 wounded persons were admitted to the hospital. Seven were struck during bombing as they enjoyed a sunny afternoon on the banks of the Drina. Since the start of the year, the enclave has been subject to incessant attacks from Serb forces. The three Médecins Sans Frontières volunteers working with the civilians report that the population of Gorazde has felt abandoned for months, despite the international community’s promises. So did the residents of Srebrenica and Zepa.



**Fax-message** from Anne-Marie Huby, MSF International Communication Advisor, Redistributed to all MSF Press Officers, 24 August 1995, 17:37 (in English).

**Extract:**

Dear all, After this morning’s mini-panic over the Gorazde release (the statement was approved by HQs and released with a 6am embargo in Zagreb, then rejected by Stephan in Belgrade ... ), MSF France has issued a slightly different version of the statement for French consumption, and organised interviews for the French media with Stephan. Anyway, the ball was already rolling early this morning, at least on the wires. The results have not been great so far, as Goma8 seems to keep foreign editors busy, and the journalists based here, although very sympathetic, still need an opportunity (inter-

8. Crisis of the Rwandan refugees in Goma (Zaire). See MSF Speaking Out Case Study, “Rwandan Refugee Camps in Zaire and Tanzania 1994-1995,” by Laurence Binet, MSF International. <http://speakingout.msf.org/en/rwandan-refugee-camps-in-zaire-and-tanzania/>

views with UK soldiers for instance) to talk about Gorazde at greater length. Will keep pushing.



**Message** from MSF Gorazde to MSF Belgrade, 25 August 1995 (in French).

Dear Stephan,

I know that you had nothing to do with this statement to the press, the abandonment of Gorazde by some, but I would really appreciate it if you would explain just what was said, did the press misunderstand? Were the statements made before consulting you? By whom? In any event, the news came at the right time here ...

I am really furious! The Brits asked to meet with us, I may be able to take advantage of it to ask them to clean out the mines, and give us their drugs and a computer while we're at it. Really, Stephan, I think a mistake was made somewhere and I would like to know where to focus my anger. Is it standard to issue that kind of news without talking about it with the people in the field? Maybe we don't have the right to speak out, we just have the right to get hit with bombs and send reports. Hello, dialogue, and democracy. If that's the way we work at MSF, I'm afraid I chose the wrong organisation. I know that you are not responsible and thanks for starting the discussion yesterday even if it didn't do any good, apparently. I'll wait to hear from you before I send a capsat to the headquarters. Thanks and XOXO (but really only to you), Sofia



**Message** from Luc Nicolas, MSF Belgium Programme Manager, to Anne-Marie Huby, MSF International Communications Manager and Pierre-Pascal Vandini, MSF France Programme Manager, 25 August 1995 14:04 (in French).

Hi Anne-Marie,

I think clarification is needed after the distribution of the Gorazde press release in Zagreb on Wednesday night.

1) It is entirely unacceptable, regardless of any sense of 'vagueness' that the various participants may have left, that this press release was distributed without giving the field a chance to respond. We had been very clear on this point. [...]

2) Without questioning Zagreb's role as information central on this matter, I think it is totally inappropriate for Zagreb to draft the content of a press release on Gorazde for the following reasons:

- The Gorazde context is extremely sensitive: The team is constantly on tenterhooks and each word has singular importance.
- The ideas expressed by people at the headquarters and people in the field sometimes diverge significantly.
- A press release that is not understood or accepted by the field is untenable because Stephan will not be able to defend it to the journalists.
- The "Zagreb-BX [Brussels] – Gorazde" link in the Belgrade context sends a very bad message [...]

3) As the context remains fluid, I propose the following:

- In the coming days, the headquarters hold an in-depth discussion on their vision for Gorazde: Purely humanitarian approach or more political positioning.
- Any new press release must be addressed in a Headquarters-Field discussion (Paris/BX[Brussels] – Stéphane/Alex). Communications in BX [Brussels] will develop a first draft. It will then be distributed to communications in Paris/Zagreb/Belgrade for a more open discussion on the final form and wording.



**Message** from Pierre-Pascal Vandini, MSF France Programme Manager, to Luc Nicolas, MSF Belgium Programme Manager, 25 August 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

- 1) OP Paris + OP Brussels meeting next week. The press release problem will be addressed but this will also be an opportunity to provide an update on the B/F Programme (areas of activities, finances). [...]
- 2) Suspend criticism and recommendations until we have clarification. At the end of the meeting, the communications procedures will be reviewed and additional recommendations may be drafted and distributed.
- 3) Remain mindful when communicating on the situation in Gorazde. [...]

Approach:

- Concern about the withdrawal of the Blue Helmets - rapid, precipitous withdrawal
- No alternative guarantees for protecting Gorazde; clearly expressed: we are awaiting the position of the UN, the EC, the Contact Group countries, the Bosnian and Bosnian Serb authorities
- Fears exist because we have seen Srebrenica, because the two warring parties will be left face-to-face, because purges are common policy implemented by the groups in the former Yugoslavia, because Gorazde has been suffering for three years.
- The risk of violent clashes, +/- total blockade, fall, and end without anyone to witness, massive new violations of human rights and conventions, ethnic cleansing.
- The population's situation: Calm over the last few days in terms of bombings, sniping and mines still a problem. 10-20 major surgeries/week (MSF figures), of which 10-15% women. Surgery peaks at other times (May). Recent arrival of MSF convoys = medicine + logisticians, other=food). Population exhausted by the siege, initial reactions to Blue Helmets' departure = abandoned yet again. They also experienced the fall of Srebrenica and still feel that distress.
- Specific problems: access, evacuation of the wounded, management of supplies depend on road demining.

I insist that communication continues calmly because fears over Gorazde remain and the press is moving slowly: The UNMOs may be only four, not 20. So how to clearly identify the objectives for guiding NATO strikes. The UN continues to change its position: Reduction of UNCROs, abandonment of certain observation stations near Tuzla and Sarajevo. With



resumption of the Croatian offensive the fronts are multiplying and everything could blow up. The diplomatic offensive with the Americans at the forefront, the French are repositioning and the others: if some win, so much the better, but what if they fight amongst themselves? And, Karadzic's last stand, given his problems with international recognition, Mladic's challenge, Belgrade's game.

Let's continue to gather information on the situation of the Gorazde population and distribute a regular letter to the press with factual content, adding other information as appropriate.



'On MSF's Ambiguous Position vis-à-vis Gorazde's Future, in Particular, and the War in the Former Yugoslavia, in General,' **Memo** from Stephan Oberreit, MSF Coordinator in the Former Yugoslavia, 26 August 1995 (in French).

### Extract:

#### The saga of a press release.

It took days (and exhausting ones at that) of endless negotiations among all the participants at Brussels and Paris headquarters and the coordination and press relations team based in Zagreb before this press release could be distributed on 25 August. In the end, MSF will nonetheless have managed the amazing feat of issuing three different versions of a press release on the same topic and, of course, in totally scattered fashion. But wait – there's more. The Gorazde team learned from the Bosnians and the BRITBAT that MSF had made a statement condemning the UNPROFOR withdrawal. Great, right?

This failed communications has caused considerable annoyance, grinding of teeth and abuse. Abuse, particularly in having managed to fail to consult (not to mention failing to try to reach an agreement on the content of the message) the field and the capital when the press release was being developed. Further abuse in Zagreb's distributing a press release when the capital, finally informed that something was underway and after calling for the various texts, vetoed any random distribution of texts considered unreasonable. And further abuse in having invented and published a quote without confirming it with the person who was supposed to have made the comment. In short, a fine case of 'you can forget my code of ethics and the ethics will follow,' at headquarters and among the 'professionals,' we know better than the field. All this time lost, all these telephone units used and all this frustration, and in the end, very little impact on the media. That's too bad. But all this carrying on was virtually inevitable and that's what's troubling.

#### Why is this so difficult?!?

This recent "aaaargh!" experience had at least two benefits; one in terms of form and other of content. One the one hand, this experience demonstrates, again, the weakness of our approach to dealing with external communications. But, I think that we are all more than aware of this and that the necessary efforts will be made. It's up to us, together.

Second, the circumstances revealed certain inconsistencies in our statements. I don't think that we are clear enough in terms of the 'enclave' problem. This inability to take a well-developed, consistent position does not seem to be a new problem. The causes are multiple and easily understandable, given the context. Concepts and principles overlap and blur, each person's experiences and positions collide, and magnificently idealistic hopes clash with coldly realistic perceptions. [...]

So much injustice, brutality, cowardice, horror, and cynicism! Too many things that are unacceptable and a dizzying lack of concrete, achievable (particularly with winter arriving in six weeks), and morally acceptable solutions. On the other hand, there are a host of horrifying, at the very least, scenarios that could play out in a more or less distant future. So, what is MSF doing and what will we do in terms of the situation we are witnessing and in which we play a humanitarian role? [...] Well, of course, we can speak out daily, produce 'humanitarian' communications, limiting ourselves to talking about the populations' suffering and living conditions and the work of the MSF team.

But is that enough? It would be difficult to ignore the political aspects and considerations. But it is not enough to decide to speak out on a political level. We also have to know what we want to say about the enclaves and, above all, what we think is desirable. But then we have to ask, desirable compared to what? For example, do the populations' fate and the conditions in which they are living (surviving) take precedence over moral principles, such as our total condemnation of ethnic cleansing?

Many questions remain about Gorazde's future. To simplify, there are three possible outcomes for Gorazde at this point. I will address them quickly, moving from the least realistic to the most likely. The first is that Gorazde would be opened up in some way, whether by military means or following negotiations. The population would finally be able to resume a life that bears a semblance of normalcy, there would be no ethnic cleansing, with its horrific scenes of deportation and its' likely multiple horrors, ignored, and forgotten by history and our judicial institutions. This solution is not being considered under the current negotiations. The Serbs are inflexible on this issue and will probably remain so. The balance of power between the forces would have to be different if it were to be achieved by military means, which brings us to the debate over the embargo on arms shipments. What is MSF's position? What does a medical association have to say about this?

The other solution to open up the enclave would involve large numbers of the allies' troops in this mess. And, MSF would then have to call for an armed intervention with full knowledge of all that entails (does that ring a bell?), and the painful sacrifices in human life that the international community does not seem ready to face. Yes, but that international community has made grand promises, it has made commitments. So? Maybe it should have kept its damn mouth shut instead of pretending to play the strong man. But again, what do we have to say on this issue? It's a difficult dilemma for a humanitarian association.



**Message** from Anne-Marie Huby, MSF International Communications Manager, to Pierre-Pascal Vardini, MSF Programme Manager, 28 August 1995 (in French).

Hi Pierre-Pascal,

As agreed, here is a summary of the Gorazde press release 'affair' from Zagreb. I hope this will be helpful for your meeting tomorrow.

1. **UNCERTAINTY:** with his clarification sent Friday, Luc Nicolas objected to my having distributed the press release in Zagreb despite the persistent 'uncertainty' about the content. On the contrary, Vincent Cassard and I were certain that all concerned had had plenty of time to think about this much-discussed content, given that our first draft of the message had been sent to everyone on Monday the 21st. When it appeared that Paris and Brussels had differences of opinion (dealing primarily with the notion of ethnic cleaning for Brussels and the request for security guarantees for Paris), we made the necessary changes and produced a 'compromise' version. You approved the English version of the press release twice. When Stephan's first objection reached me late at night (AFTER the embargoed press release had been sent) and I called you at home, you weren't particularly worried. It seemed to be just a question of 'nuance' and Stephan could provide more detail during interviews. The content of the message did not seem to be an issue.
2. **TIMING:** The communications departments in both Paris and Zagreb were under pressure to provide a statement – given the time lost since the withdrawal was announced nearly a week earlier. I tried to find another hook (the start of the Brits' actual withdrawal), which would have allowed us to wait until the end of the week and, in particular, Stephan's return to Belgrade so that he could handle the follow-up to the press release. These suggestions were not well received – in short, this required fast action.
3. **CONSULTATION WITH THE FIELD:** We all knew that Stephan was in Pale, not in Belgrade, when the press release was drafted. However, we were all convinced, given the very generous timeline that the field had had a chance to speak up about the content. I understand the team's anger and I am very sorry to have contributed to creating a problem in the field, but my intention was never to get a jump on them.
4. **ISSUANCE OF THE PRESS RELEASE IN ZAGREB** I faxed the press release to the Zagreb-based press that night with an embargo until the 24th for 'logistical' reasons, many of the journalists head out early in the morning so you have to send this kind of thing the night before to make sure that they use it first thing. It was clearly not my intention – which was Luc Nicholas' concern – to issue it only to Zagreb or to do anything to ensure that Zagreb would be the first ones to get the press release, which would only reduce its impact. It was distributed here with the certainty that Belgrade, the headquarters, and all the other offices of the MSF network would do likewise at the same time.
5. **SPEAKING OUT ON GORAZDE?** Despite the anger in the field and all their comments on the content, I think that this

press release had the benefit of publicly emphasizing our concerns (in contrast with the emphatically forceful statements from the London conference and the lack of security guarantees for the population). From that perspective, it was effective and none of the journalists seemed to see any fundamental differences within MSF. It would be particularly unfortunate if this chaotic episode caused the members of the team who are leaving the enclave soon to stay silent. And in the meantime, the headquarters are so annoyed that it seems we have nothing more to say about Gorazde.

In conclusion, if you need to shift the responsibility for this blunder onto Zagreb, go ahead but please do it in such a way that the team, and MSF in general, wants to speak out again – and quickly. After all, that's what's most important.

**In the months that followed, MSF, which kept a team in Gorazde, continued to speak out on the situation in the enclave. The area's fate was linked to the territorial exchanges to be negotiated as part of the upcoming peace agreements. V27**



'Sophie Baquet Discusses the Fate of the Last Muslim Enclave in Eastern Bosnia,' Edouard Van Velthem *Le Soir* (Belgium), 9 September 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

You were in Gorazde for MSF, a UN safe area, from early January until the end of last month as a nurse responsible for coordination in the field. What is the humanitarian situation on the ground today?

[...] The situation has hardly changed in three years. Sometimes the convoys arrive; sometimes they don't, because they require authorization from the Serbs in Pale. As soon as tensions mount, things are blocked and people must live practically without food and medicine. We would sometimes go for long periods without even an aspirin. And this chaotic re-supply situation makes working conditions even more difficult [...].

Do the Serb forces that have laid siege to the town have a visible presence often?

- The town itself is right on the front line and is thus the ideal target for bombing or sniper fire. The ceasefire was observed, overall, from January to the end of April, but June was hell, with 300 or 400 shells every day. The quantity was bad enough, but the relentless psychological pressure they created really wore people out. They shoot blindly, the bombs fall anywhere, any time. And, it's very difficult for parents to keep their children shut up in basements or shelters for days at a time [...].

How did the population respond to the fall of the neighbouring enclaves of Srebrenica and Zepa?

- Very badly. It was a very hard blow for people. We kept them up-to-date because we also had a team in Srebrenica and they were really devastated by the information we provided. Now they are all alone. They feel that the international community has completely abandoned them. Perhaps that will change with the NATO raids but when I left, the mood had shifted considerably. The population had lost all confidence. They were all convinced that the world has forgotten them.

And the precipitous departure of the Blue Helmets didn't help matters...

- There was no reaction to the withdrawal of the Ukrainians. People didn't like them much and were somewhat relieved to see them go. As for the departure of the British, there were no signs of panic because everyone pretty much expected that to happen. It was an additional drop in their ocean of bitterness. The British soldiers were well liked but they were powerless and would have been incapable of doing anything, just like their colleagues in Srebrenica.

Do you think that the Bosnian Army can defend the town on its own?

- It already has for three years over the course of successive attacks. I am a humanitarian aid worker, not a soldier, but it's true that the situation is different from Srebrenica. People are armed, prepared, and, above all, determined to fight. They have decided to defend themselves, to preserve their land and their houses, not to abandon their property. And above all, they dread the prospect of seeing Srebrenica's tragic scenario play out again.

And the US peace plan, which proposes territorial exchanges – specifically, Gorazde – is not likely to calm the fears...

- You can't force people to move. This is their home. And we can't forget them just because they are all alone. The solution that involves an exchange of territory and populations is unacceptable. The vast majority of them want to stay and are not asking for anything more. Personally, I would rather see access opened to Gorazde, just as the UN and NATO are doing now around Sarajevo. Thousands of people there have been living in prison for three years. They are tired of war, siege, and confinement. It's intolerable. And simple decency would require helping them to free themselves.



'Days of War in Gorazde,' **Account** of Daily Life in Gorazde Sent to the Media by MSF, 10 September 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

While international attention focuses on Sarajevo and opening a road to the city, Gorazde's future is still in limbo. The enclave's residents are preparing for a fourth winter of war and isolation. NATO strikes on Serb positions have given the enclave's population new hope. They see the international community's (delayed) awakening as the end of their suffering, the end of three years' of bombing, fear, and deprivation. The operating rooms that were moved underground because of the bombings have been set up above ground again.

However, Gorazde is still an enclave. Although the situation is much calmer than in prior months, the population is still subject to sporadic bombing. Convoys carrying food and medicine have not been able to enter since the NATO air strikes began. There is no more cooking oil, sugar, or salt. The hospital where the Médecins Sans Frontières team works admitted eight wounded patients in one week. Four were struck during the bombings and four were hit by sniper fire.

The document below was sent by anaesthesiologist Annick Anderens. No journalists or photographers have had access to the enclave of Gorazde. We are sending this statement so that that you can relay it to the public, if you wish.



'Gorazde, Still Hemmed In,' MSF France **Press release**, 2 October 1995 (in French).

A Médecins Sans Frontières convoy will try to reach Gorazde today with 30 tonnes of medicine and logistics material via the recently opened Sarajevo-Gorazde road. Over the last three years, Médecins Sans Frontières has sent many convoys from Belgrade, but their entry has always been subject to the arbitrary approval and good will of the Serb forces besieging the town, which provide those authorisations only sparingly. The opening of the "Blue Road" between Sarajevo and Gorazde thus constitutes progress for humanitarian organisations seeking access to the enclave. However, it does not mean that Gorazde has been opened up, as it remains an open-air prison, or that its 57,000 residents have recovered their freedom. They are still living in a state of siege and the Serbs have not loosened the noose. They remain completely dependent on humanitarian aid and are not free to move about.

While the situation inside the enclave has improved since the ceasefire was signed, the situation is still fragile. Between 9-15 October, six wounded patients were treated in the hospital's emergency room. One person was wounded by a mine, three were struck during bombings, and two were hit by sniper fire. A seventh person was killed by a sniper. The prior week, seven wounded patients were treated (one hit by a mine, three by bombs and three by sniper fire) and three people died (two from bombs and one by sniper).

Médecins Sans Frontières has been working in Gorazde on a permanent basis since 1993. Three volunteers (an anaesthetist, nurse, and logistician) provide surgical and medical assistance in the town hospital, providing consultations in clinics and participating in sanitation activities and rebuilding refugee centres.



'MSF Gathers 10,000 Toys for Gorazde,' **Le Soir** (Belgium) 13 December 1995 (in French).

Two days after the signing of the peace accords for the former Yugoslavia, on Tuesday Médecins Sans Frontières launched its

“Objective 10,000” operation. The humanitarian organization’s goal is to gather 10,000 toys in Belgium for children in the martyred town of Gorazde and provide a concrete response to the hopes aroused by the Dayton agreements. “The children need ways to express their fears through drawing, painting, puzzles and, even, music,” explains Dr. Annick Anderens, an anaesthesiologist who returned from Gorazde after working there for nine months.

The main toy pick-up will be held on 16 and 17 December, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Place de La Monnaie, Brussels. Other collection points have been set up. The following contributions are welcome: stuffed animals, paper, crayons, watercolours, small musical instruments, and sheet music. MSF asks that the toys operate without batteries or electricity and that they be in excellent condition.

## The ‘dissident’ Muslim refugees of Kupljensko

**in August, the 5th Corps of the Bosnian Army, benefiting from the Croatian military advance, broke through the encirclement of the Bihac enclave, which was besieged by Serb forces since 1991 and 30,000 partisans of dissident Muslim leader Fikret Abdic, allied with the Serbs since 1993.**

**The latter, established in Velika Kladusa [an enclave within the Bihac enclave] fled and were trapped in the region of Vojnic, encircled by Croatian-Bosnian forces.**

**They were blocked in a 5-kilometre strip of land along the road between Vojnic and Velika Kladusa in the improvised camp of Kupljensko, where precarious living conditions worsened as winter approached.**

**MSF’s teams sought to provide aid despite the obstacles put by the Croatian authorities and denounced the situation several times.**



**Fax-message** from Anne-Marie Huby, MSF International Communication Advisor, Redistributed to all MSF Press Officers, 24 August 1995, 17:37 (in English).

### Extract:

MSF Zagreb issued a press update on Banja Luka today (which you should have received via Vanessa) on the Croatian authorities blocking entry for Banja Luka Muslim refugees. Soon after the copy was released (and used by AFP, among others) the Croats allowed about 700 Muslims and Croats across the river. However, it seems that it is just a temporary respite, and we should continue to draw media attention to the Croats’ lack of enthusiasm to grant asylum to Muslim refu-

gees. Some UK papers are interested in looking further into the problem [...] The Banja Luka story was a good opportunity to liaise with the local media (or at least the reasonably unbiased media in town, almost a contradiction in terms).



**‘Muslim Refugees Stranded in Banja Luka, Médecins Sans Frontières Calls on Croatian Authorities to Allow Muslim Refugees into Croatia,’ MSF Holland Press release, Zagreb, 24 August 1995 (in English).**

Médecins Sans Frontières urges the Croatian authorities to ease the restrictions on admitting Muslim refugees from the Banja Luka region. Local authorities at Davor have announced that from today onwards, they would admit only those Muslim refugees who carry the necessary travel documents and have family members waiting for them at the border crossing. Yesterday, only 140 Muslims were allowed to cross the Sava River to Davor, along with 494 Croatians.

Since the latest launch of evictions of ethnic minorities from the Banja Luka region last week, only 2,000 Muslims have found refuge in Croatia and 350 in central Bosnia. By contrast, an estimated 10,500 of the 30,000 refugees from the Banja Luka region have already been transported to Croatia. The region’s remaining Muslim community numbers at about 20,000. Many Muslims in the Banja Luka region have been left homeless, as their houses have been requisitioned to make room for Serbian refugees from the Krajina region. At least 800 Muslims, including sick, disabled, and elderly people, have gathered in and around a transit centre situated in an old concrete schoolyard. Other refugees are staying in a nearby muddy football field. Some have found refuge with friends and relatives in the area. MSF and other aid agencies are providing basic relief to the refugees.

As the latest campaign of ethnic cleansing shows no sign of abating, the MSF team on the ground fears that the situation of the refugees now trapped in Banja Luka will soon become untenable. According to Michiel Hofman, the MSF representative in Zagreb, “This selective closure of the border will make the already appalling living conditions of the Muslim minority even worse. MSF strongly opposes ethnic cleansing. Something must be done to allow those now being driven from their homes to reach a place of safety.” MSF has run an emergency aid programme in Banja Luka for more than 2 years. Medical aid has been provided to Muslim and Croatian victims.



**‘The President of MSF Belgium is Shocked by the Inhuman Conditions of the 2,500 Vojnic Refugees,’ MSF Belgium Press release, 4 September 1995 (in French).**

Dr Marleen Boelaert, President of Médecins Sans Frontières Belgium, has just returned from a visit to Vojnic, Croatia. The

22,500 people who fled the village of Velika Kladusa near Bihac, Bosnia, have been living along the road for nearly a month, without any hope of improvement. Most are sleeping in cars or trucks because there are no shelters. Others have moved into abandoned houses or built huts using cornstalks, branches, and boards. The fields bordering the road are swampy and steep and the authorities have denied the refugees the right to take shelter there.

The Médecins Sans Frontières teams are providing care to the sick and wounded who are living in deplorable conditions. At least 127 wounded patients need intensive care. Lacking appropriate facilities, 22 of the wounded were placed in a truck and 57 are sleeping on the ground in a ruined house. The others are in tents or huts. Dr Boelaert says that a solution for these refugees must be found immediately, before autumn, which is a particularly cold and rainy season in this area. "Despite their precarious humanitarian situation, these refugees categorically refuse to return home," she says. If a humanitarian solution is not identified, their situation could quickly turn tragic.



'The Forgotten of Vojnic,' Françoise Wallemacq, **Contact** (MSF Belgium Internal Newsletter) No. 37, September 1995 (in French).

#### Extract:

Between 25,000 and 30,000 people have been languishing in Vojnic a pit of a place in a muddy valley since 4 August. Sixty percent of the men are of fighting age. They are loyal followers of dissident leader Fikret Abdic, motivated during the joint offensive led by the Croatian Army and the Bosnian 5th Corps. These Bosnian fighters have been abandoned to defeat, both by their leader, who is trying to re-establish his reputation in Croatia, and by the rest of the world. They chose the wrong side, they lost, and today they are paying the price. As strategic allies of the Serbs, they laid siege to the Bihac enclave for a year, starving their own compatriots.

The Croats' lightning offensive forced them to pull back and leave their stronghold in Velika Kladusa. Some 15 kilometres from Velika, they were caught at the junction between the Bosnian 5th Corps, which was defending Bihac, and the Croatian Army. Abdic's lost fighters thus stopped there, along the road, with their women and children. They have been camping on the shoulder since 4 August, in their cars or wagons pulled by their tractors. This improvised camp extends for 4.5 kilometres. There is a Croatian checkpoint at both ends of this stretch. A strange encampment has been set up between the two points: a tangle of makeshift shelters built of rummaged items, sometimes woven of branches and cornstalks, covered with plastic tarps and housing both humans and animals. [...]

The last few weeks' incessant rains have transformed this spot into a vast quagmire, where everyone flounders in the mud. Dozens of men limp through the area, leaning on their crutches. Some wear external fixators, with pins attached

directly to the flesh - signs of recent bullet wounds. Many are amputees. Some 100 cases of serious injuries have been recorded. The Red Cross and Médecins Sans Frontières have turned a former bar into a hospital. Fifty-seven wounded patients lie on the ground, in stifling, crowded conditions. Cooking odours blend with the sickly-sweet, nauseating smell of soiled dressings. An additional 20 wounded patients are in a tent and 22 others are laid out in a truck like sardines, but sheltered from the rain. Croatian military doctors come every day, but there are certainly doctors and nurses among these 25,000 refugees. They are divided among the bar-hospital, the truck, and the tent health centres that MSF has set up along the road.

The ICRC is responsible for treating the water pumped from a blackish stream so that it is potable. It is then redistributed to different locations in the camp. Garbage is piled everywhere, increasing the risk of epidemic. The first cases of bloody diarrhoea have already appeared, along with scabies and skin infections. People have already died and others have been born in the Vojnic camp. The new-borns are delivered in a tent and the dead are buried on site. The military leaders are considered war criminals. They are apparently Abdic's lieutenants, who manipulated their own men, leading them to believe that death awaits them in Velika Kladusa.

In fact, the Vojnic refugees are hostage to their own leaders. Indeed, when it fled, Abdic's army abandoned all the archives of the dissident leader's administration. The Sarajevo authorities thus know who served in the army or the special police. According to a diplomat, approximately 400 families (around 1,500 people) could face questioning by the Bosnian justice system.

The other refugees are thus trapped, barely tolerated in this bit of territory recently 'liberated' by the Croatian Army. Seen as plague-ridden pariahs by Zagreb and traitors by Sarajevo, they remain in this precarious no-man's land, waiting for someone to find them a safe haven. The large humanitarian agencies hesitate to help them, fearful of arousing Zagreb's displeasure and threatening their programmes in Croatia. The UNHCR has just given them refugee status, but awaits the fateful date of 15 September before actually intervening.

After that date, the US Congress could overturn President Bill Clinton's veto and lift the Bosnian arms embargo if the American peace plan fails. But winter does not wait for diplomats to finish their work. Left to themselves, without any real coordination of international humanitarian aid, Vojnic's 25,000 undesirable refugees confront mud, rain, and the first cold snap in the face of widespread indifference.



'Situation Blocked for Bosnian Refugees in Croatia - MSF Calls on Croatian Authorities to Provide Assistance and Protection,' MSF Belgium **Press release**, 6 October 1995 (in French).

Since 7 August, approximately 22,000 refugees have been

stranded along the road leading to the village of Velika Kladusa in the enclave of Bihac, in the town of Vojnic, Croatia. As they wait, hoping to obtain refugee status from the Croatian government, they have set up encampments along a 5-kilometre stretch of road. They include partisans of Muslim dissident Fikret Abdic, who laid down his weapons on 7 August following a counter-offensive by the Bosnian Army. At that time, entire families left their stronghold in Velika Kladusa in the enclave of Bihac and neighbouring villages to seek asylum in Croatia. The Croatian minorities still refuse to grant them refugee status, although they are eligible under international conventions. In addition, the refugees refuse to be repatriated out of fear of reprisals. In late September, barely 600 had returned home voluntarily.

With winter approaching, the weakest among them are at particular risk. Children, the elderly, pregnant, and single women and the wounded will be among the first affected by the difficult living conditions. The precarious sanitary conditions pose a significant threat of epidemics. There is not enough potable water as the adjacent stream is polluted. The first cases of dysentery have already been noted. Houses and shelters are crowded. The refugees depend on humanitarian organisations for food.

Although late September was the deadline to find a solution, none has been identified. Médecins Sans Frontières calls on the Croatian authorities to grant them refugee status. We also call on the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, as the coordinating body, to take all necessary steps to ensure that the refugees have acceptable conditions for the winter.

A seven-person MSF team is working in the Kupljensko camp, providing medical care.



*They were on the border, basically a no-man's land where they were forced to stay, and they were stuck, it was winter, and it was cold. These people had no status. They couldn't cross the border but they also couldn't go back. And because there was no alternative they settled down on the road. We made some statements, we even lobbied at the office of president Tudjman [of Croatia] to get local solutions to improve the living conditions.*

Wouter Kok, MSF Holland medical coordinator in Sarajevo, Bosnia, December 1991 - September 1992, then various positions in MSF Holland Bosnia desk, September 1992-1996, Interviewed in 2015, (in English).

**In November 1995, MSF published an open letter calling on Croatian authorities to halt the forced repatriation of Bosnians from the Kupljensko camp and to grant them asylum.**

**this open letter and the press release that accompanied it. They also disagreed with the public distribution of their 'confidential' internal report on ethnic cleansing and the forced repatriation, in Bosnia, of the last non-Serbian 'ethnic minorities' by Bosnian-Serb forces and militias.**

**This controversy revealed a basic difference in approach at that time among MSF sections about the timing of the production and distribution of the advocacy reports, particularly those that included statements about violence against the populations. The Belgian and French sections favoured quick public condemnation in an effort to speed action to halt violence. In contrast, the Dutch section preferred a slower approach to confirm information and what it referred to as 'silent advocacy,' rather than public dissemination. In the years that followed, this controversy arose several times, particularly around the 1996-1997 crisis in the Great Lakes of Central Africa.<sup>9</sup>**



'MSF Demands an End to Repatriation of Muslim Refugees by Croat Government,' MSF Press release, 10 November 1995 (in English, French, and Dutch).

In an open letter to the Croatian government, Médecins Sans Frontières expressed its very deep concern regarding the plight of Bosnian refugees in the Kupljensko camp, near the Croatian village of Vojnic. The situation in the camp had seriously deteriorated over the past several weeks. Thirty-two Bosnians had been arrested on Tuesday, 7 November following a brawl at the camp. The police took them to Vojnic, and then from there sent them to Velika Kladuša (Bosnia), where they were imprisoned. That expulsion was a complete contravention of the 1951 Geneva Conventions regarding the rights of refugees. That same day, a refugee was shot while cutting wood inside the camp. He was seriously injured, and so MSF referred him to the Vojnic hospital. The Croatian authorities banned the delivery of wood to the camp, along with other materials needed to prepare for winter. Those incidents, the Croatian government's refusal to let refugees leave and re-enter the camp at will and the cordoning off of the site by the Croatian Special Police threatened to exacerbate tensions. Médecins Sans Frontières feared a clash between the police and the refugees. That is why Médecins Sans Frontières asked the Croatian government to:

- immediately cease the forced repatriation of refugees, especially in the Velika Kladuša region, where their safety was not assured;
- recognise the refugee status of the 25,000 Bosnians from Kupljensko;
- allow the refugees to enter and leave the camp at will;
- provide protection for the refugees inside and outside the camp;
- facilitate all measures aimed at preparing for winter, like wood delivery for the refugees.

9. See 'The Hunting and Killing of the Rwandan Refugees in Zaïre/Congo 1996-1997' MSF Speaking Out Case Studies by Laurence Binet. <http://www.speakingout.msf.org>

The 25,000 Bosnians in the Kupljensko camp, loyal to dissident Muslim leader Fikret Abdi, had fled the Velika Kladuša region for Croatia the previous August. They settled in a swampy valley and lived in very precarious conditions. They had become undesirables in Bosnia for allying themselves with the Bosnian Serb forces. Médecins Sans Frontières, which was working in Kupljensko, gave medical and logistical aid to the refugees.



**'Ethnic Cleansing and Forced repatriation in Bosnia-Herzegovina,' MSF Holland Confidential Report, November 1995 (in English).**

Introduction: Ethnic cleansing in the Banja Luka area appears to have entered its last phase. After years of violence and intimidation against the non-Serb minority population in the area, which has been described by refugees as a living nightmare, the Bosnian Serb Army (BSA) and police assisted by paramilitary militia are 'sweeping up' the last of the remaining minorities. Since the start of the latest wave of ethnic cleansing on 14 August 1995, the situation of the minority population in the Banja Luka area worsened daily. Although the cleansing process was interrupted by NATO's bombing campaign and the subsequent influx of Serbian displaced persons from the northwest part of Bosnia-Herzegovina, it soon resumed with the help of autonomous paramilitary forces who came to the BSA's aid. This second phase was even more violent and resulted in killings, rape, death threats, and the disappearance of hundreds of men.

However, people of minority populations who safely reached Croatia and Central Bosnia soon warned that they were still not safe. Several thousands of refugees and displaced persons were soon resettled in the 'newly liberated areas' resulting from the joint Bosnian (BiH) and Croatian Army's offensive. Sometimes, refugees would find themselves in towns only miles away from their former homes they had fled several days before. Evidence indicates that these resettlements amount to forced repatriation. With this report, Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) wants to give an account of the events that took place during the latest wave of ethnic cleansing against the Croat and Muslim minority population. The report is based on written reports and on testimonies of the minority population received by MSF staff during the course of their relief work in the: North part of Bosnia-Herzegovina. [...]

Conclusions: Though the latest wave of ethnic cleansing against the minority population in the Banja Luka area has ended, their nightmare is far from over. After having faced gross human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law perpetrated with impunity, thousands of refugees who thought to have reached a safe haven in Croatia and Central Bosnia again find themselves in an insecure situation after having been forcibly repatriated by the Croatian and Bosnian authorities to unsafe areas.

MSF strongly opposes ethnic cleansing and forced repatriation and therefore urges the following:

- The authorities in charge should ensure that gross human rights violations and grave breaches of international humanitarian law against the civilian minority population are brought to a halt.
- The rights of the civilian minority population should be respected by all parties to the conflict in the former Yugoslavia in accordance with the principles of international human rights and humanitarian law.
- The fate of the 2,000-3,000 missing men from the Banja Luka area should be investigated and their whereabouts revealed.
- Possible detention camps for the civilian population should be closed immediately and its population unconditionally released.
- All perpetrators of gross human rights violations and grave breaches of international humanitarian law should be brought to justice.
- The Bosnian-Serb authorities should grant immediate and unrestricted access to all humanitarian organizations to provide protection and assistance to the civilian population in need of such protection and assistance.
- The Croatian and Bosnian authorities should stop the forced repatriation of refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina to unsafe areas, which form a direct threat to their lives.

Moreover, measure need to be taken to ensure the safety of the already returned Bosnian refugees: Refugees who have recently been forced to return to 'the newly liberated areas' in Bosnian-Herzegovina by the Bosnian and Croatian authorities, should be free to leave these areas again if they wish to do so.



**'Memo of Concern Regarding Recent Advocacy Activities on the Former Yugoslavia,' Theo Wijngaard, MSF Holland Humanitarian Affairs Department, 17 November 1995 (in English).**

**Extract:**

11. What did become clear, however, was once again the different approaches of the sections. Where MSF-Holland uses several channels and tools to communicate its advocacy message, MSF-Belgium and to a lesser extent MSF-France only seem to know one: the uncontrollable use of press releases. As Luc Nicolas (MSF-Belgium) stated during the meeting: "we want our teams to speak from their hearts." But, during the meeting it became clear that maybe [what was] even more important is the argument that MSF should react more rapidly, even when this would be at the expense of the quality of the message. As Alex Parisel noted, "MSF is slow and intersection oppositions make it impossible to work correctly on these issues. MSF is most of the time the first on the field to deal with these issues, but is wiped away by UNHCR and ICRC when it comes to communication. Why do they dare to communicate and why do they communicate better than we are doing?" In this way it seems that issuing press releases is not just one of many advocacy tools, but becomes (and in my opinion often already has become) an end in itself.

12. Apart from the fact that the more you issue press releases the less impact your messages will have, past and present (see the Vojnic crisis) experiences have shown that most of the press releases issued by the Belgian Bosnia Desk are badly if at all researched. Call it a difference of culture, the fact remains that this approach does not positively add to the professionalism of MSF in general, and its advocacy approach in particular.

13. The (what I call) unprofessional and even dangerous attitude of MSF-Belgium was illustrated by the fact that MSF-Belgium indicated that the 'sensitive' report on ethnic cleansing in Banja Luka should be issued to the press, regardless of its content and of the present fragile security situation in Banja Luka. Dominique Boutriau (Bosnia Desk MSF Belgium), "We too sometimes have teams that object to publication, but in the end nothing ever happened [regarding their security]...". Even when we stressed the danger of going public with the report, MSF-Belgium did not seem convinced of our arguments. The report does not contain (new) information that has not gone public via the media. Cases similar to those in the report have already frequently appeared in the media. Moreover, at this time a power struggle is taking place between military and civilian authorities as a result of military coming from the front and the continuing presence of paramilitary forces. The civilian authorities do not seem to be able to protect staff members of international agencies as is illustrated by the hijacking of cars and physical attacks against expats. These circumstances, together with the wish of both the team and the Bosnia Desk of MSF-Holland to continue the operations in Banja Luka, clearly advocate against going public with the report.

14. I want to express my gravest concern about this attitude of the Bosnia Desk of MSF-Belgium. At this point I have very strong personal objections against providing them with a copy of the report; I do not want that people get killed over a report that is released without thinking, as the Belgium Desk has shown in the past. Even when it is the desks who are finally responsible I feel morally responsible that the safety of the team is not endangered by this report.

#### The 'Vojnic crisis'

15. During the Desk meeting Olivier Antonin (Project Coordinator in Vojnic) called to MSF-Belgium and reported three incidents concerning the Kupljensko camp which required an urgent response: the apparent forced repatriation of 32 male refugees, military reinforcements, and a refugee who was shot by the security police. Immediately all sections agreed upon issuing a press release on the incidents. When I stressed the importance of finding out more facts before issuing the press release, I was accused by MSF-Belgium of taking a bureaucratic approach. Eventually all sections agreed that MSF Belgium would prepare a press release and a letter to inform Dr. Lang, the Special Advisor on Humanitarian Affairs to President Tudjman of Croatia. At that time, he was in charge of the Kupljensko refugee camp. The letter and press release would be sent to the other sections for comments.

16. On 9 November, I received a letter meant to precede the agreed press release. I never received a copy of the draft press release. In sum, the letter would make a fool of MSF as an organization: a part from the badly written letter, both with respect to its structure as to its grammar, the letter contained unbalanced, emotional statements and reference to a "forced repatriation procedure" which is "against all principles ruling refugee movements and against the principles of the [non-existent!] Washington Convention." When I tried to convince Luc Nicolas over the phone that without considerable corrections this letter could not be sent to Dr. Lang in this form, MSF Holland was accused of always delaying the whole process. Moreover, I would be responsible if people would be killed before MSF could warn the world.

17. The letter in its initial form was very likely to damage the lobby relationship between MSF and the Croatian authorities concerning the Kupljensko refugee camp. This relationship was established by Curtis Doebbler from 10-18 September, who as a consultant for MSF-Holland, visited the Kupljensko camp and the responsible authorities in Zagreb and in Vojnic. Since the beginning of October an Information Officer (James Derieg) follows up Curtis' activities. At the time the letter was drafted, James was a week on holiday and Michiel was still in the Netherlands.

18. After a long telephone discussion, the letter eventually was delayed until next morning (10 November) 09:00. Before that time, the MSF-Holland PR department and the HAD would respectively produce an alternative press statement and a letter. The letter was written after consulting James for better information and an assessment of the impact of the letter.

19. The result of the letter and the press release were minor and the emergency seemed to have mainly played a role of importance in the head offices ... Although the letter was given to Dr. Lang in person, the press release only appeared in one local newspaper and only Het Parool called for information, but apparently decided not to print it. No positive change of the situation in the camp was reported. [...]



*It was a 3-mile part of the road. There was no water. There was no space to build latrines, to put their shelters. In winter, the situation was quite desperate. Generally in Chechnya or in Bosnia, it was completely different from Africa. Because of the climate, people were sheltered in buildings or temporary structures. But here, it was like if you had a piece of Congo transported to the middle of Europe. They had makeshift shelters with pieces of plastic that they found on the ground. In November, it is minus 12. They actually could not survive in this kind of makeshift shelter because they would freeze to death. Nobody could move out of the camp and it was very difficult to get into. There would be daily battles about getting in firewood, food, blankets. It was a headache to get from the authorities the permission to have people get out of the camp and refer them to the hospital. Every day you wouldn't know if you will be able to reach the clinic, if you would be able to refer*



*the patients, if you will be able to get the water in to the camp. And, then they started to put people in buses to drive them back to Velika Kladusa where they were not very welcome, being submitted to harassment, violence. That created an atmosphere that everything you say you weigh the possibility that this would lead to a denial of access.*

*The daily tension for me was very hard, to maintain this access to the camp, to be able to get the life-saving items like firewood into the camps. It was a daily reality. So if it was about to make a press release with the message of your access being denied, we wanted to make pretty sure that it was really necessary to do that. Because the price the people would pay could be the Croatian army decided to close the camp for a week or so. This was very high. MSF Holland wanted to make sure that if we said anything we would be able to prove it, that we could say, 'it is based on a really good research with a survey, interview of people stating they don't want to go back to Velika Kladusa. Therefore we denounce...' The Belgian side was more [like], 'forced repatriation is wrong. Full stop. We need to denounce it even though it leads to a struggle to have access.' Coming from Goma<sup>10</sup>, I was already part of this MSF debate, 'let's denounce first or let's do a hundred page report first.' I would do a little bit more investigation, but to have a three month research with a massive analysis and a hundred page report, I found it was a bit too slow, too tactical an approach to deal with this reality.*

Michiel Hofman, MSF Holland Coordinator in Croatia, August 1995 - July 1996, Interviewed in 2015, (in English).

**In the meantime, on 10 October, a general ceasefire agreement took effect in Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, forced population displacements continued and MSF, which was trying to assist the populations, continued to speak out in the press.**



'Luc Nicolas (MSF): The Refugees Cannot Take Anymore,' *Le Peuple* (Belgium), 12 October 1995 (in French).

Thousands of refugees (Bosnian Muslims living in the Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, originally from Prijedor, Sanski Most, Bosanski Nova and Banja Luka) have crossed the front lines since last Friday, ending up in Zenica. The Serbian authorities 'escorted these refugees back to the border.' They are in a pitiful condition, exhausted by forced marches, in shock, and wounded.

The town of Zenica is completely overwhelmed and MSF's four mobile teams are criss-crossing the territory between Tesanj,

Travnik, and Zenica to supply the 16 centres where the refugees have gathered. "The collective centres in the Zenica region are relatively full, but others may be found. It appears that the Bosnian authorities want to resettle people by force as quickly as possible in the newly-conquered territories, near Bosanski Petrovac. We are working to stop that, along with the ICRC and the UNHCR." MSF's members are thus trying to prevent Bosnian soldiers from sending the refugees who have barely arrived back to areas where all basic infrastructure has been destroyed. "Our teams are sleeping on site. We have a mobile team in Donji Valkuf, which has been there for 48 hours and is providing basic medical care and organising humanitarian aid on the ground. The team is also staying there so that it can speak out about the fact that people are being sent back, by force and against their will, to regions where they no longer want to go... Keeping a team there at night has prevented an initial forced evacuation. The military trucks arrived and people began to panic. A riot was about to break out, so the soldiers didn't want to overreact. Here, the authorities claim that they are going to tread lightly. But it seems that they are stopping all the bulkier humanitarian aid supplies – mattresses, blankets ... this means that they intend to continue regardless."

One can imagine the distress of these displaced persons, as our contact explains, "Many of these people, who have only just arrived, have been travelling for more than 15 days. The trip was extremely arduous, both physically and psychologically, because they did not know if they would be able to make it. And men were carried off at various places." According to some statements, 160 out of a total of 800 men are believed to be held at the front line. "It's the same scene all over again – according to the initial statements, most of the men between 12 and 45 are arrested just before the front line and are sent to dig trenches and serve as shields in the event of an offensive." [...]



'More than 120,000 Refugees Arrive in Banja Luka in 10 days,' *Agence France Presse*, Banja Luka, 19 October 1995 (in French).

The humanitarian group Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) announced on Thursday that more than 120,000 Serbian refugees have arrived in the region of Banja Luka (northern Bosnia) in the last 10 days, citing figures from the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR). The total number of Serbs who have fled the Croatian and Bosnian forces' offensives in western and northwestern Bosnia since August and have taken refuge in Banja Luka and neighbouring communes now stands at 285,000, noted MSF spokesperson Françoise Wallemacq.

Approximately 70% of these refugees have found shelter in private houses, but some 50,000 remain in the reception centres and an undetermined number along the roads, according to Ms. Wallemacq. "For MSF, the main problems right now are the refugees' lack of hygiene and the approaching winter, when they will all need heat and clothing," she added.

10. See MSF Speaking Out Case Studies, "Rwandan Refugee Camps in Zaïre and Tanzania 1994-1995" by Laurence Binet, MSF International. <http://speakingout.msf.org/en/rwandan-refugee-camps-in-zaire-and-tanzania/>

Corinne Adam, ICRC spokesperson in Banja Luka, said there is a “humanitarian emergency” in the region. The ICRC has delivered more than 1,300 tonnes of aid to Banja Luka, primarily food and hygiene supplies, as well as blankets, since mid-September. “Our greatest need now is for stoves, blankets, mattresses, and shoes,” the ICRC spokesperson noted.

**On 26 October, MSF held a press conference to discuss the humanitarian issues in the former Yugoslavia: the precarious situation facing the displaced populations, given the approaching winter, and the forced displacements they face under the territorial exchanges associated with the peace negotiations.**



**Message** from MSF Belgium Programme Manager Dominique Boutriau to MSF Programme Managers Pierre Salignon and Pierre-Pascal Vandini, 10 October 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

- Concerning communications: Following our communication director’s (Gerda) visit to the field we propose to hold a three-way press conference on the humanitarian issues in the former Yugoslavia on the eve of the peace plan and as winter arrives. You will probably receive the proposal from our communications department today.
- Concerning communications in the former Yugoslavia via local media: After discussions with the team in the field, it seems that it would also be a good idea to carry out some communications using the local media. Initially, the thought is to present certain messages concerning our activities via independent Serbian journalists; the type of message should link our activities both in Gorazde and in the RS (Republika Srpska). THE GOAL: Facilitate our activities in RS/Gorazde by improving our brand image a bit. Obviously ++++ risk of manipulation by local politics, etc, which is why we are thinking of talking with independent journalists first. Your opinion?



**‘MSF on Bosnia,’ MSF International Internal Update**, 12 October 1995, 15:30 (in English).

There is a will to communicate as an international organization.

- 1) Many people feel strongly about communicating, others want to ensure that we have a clear, strong message if we speak out.
- 2) If there is a clear message, we then need to decide the best way to communicate: press conference, statement, editorial letter/article, etc.
- 3) Key points:
  - MSF has been active and a witness in the former-Yugoslavia since 1991.

- Will humanitarian issues be solved by the peace plan?
- Civilians have no voice in the discussions.
- Land partition is being based on ethnic cleansing.
- The status of Gorazde.
- Will the access corridor be opened?
- What will be decided at the negotiation table?
- Fate of the missing persons from Srebrenica/Zepa?
- Why and how did the intl. community allow Srebrenica/Zepa to fall?
- Deplorable conditions in Banja Luka (overcrowded, unsanitary, winter coming).
- Unwanted refugees (Krajina, Vojnic). Refugees being used as human shields (Doboj, Brcko). Bosnian refugees arriving in Maglaj/Travnik (Health & conditions of deportation).
- 4) What we NOT want:
  - Repeating what others have already said. (i.e. UNHCR, ICRC)
  - Using inaccurate facts/figures/statistics.
  - Asking for things that are already being done.
  - Repeating what’s already in the press.
  - Chasing journalists just to appear in the press.
  - Getting involved in speculation.
  - Getting entangled in the politics of the peace plan.
- 5) What we DO want:
  - Protection and medical care for the people of Bosnia.
  - Establishment of MSF as a credible source and an effective organization.
  - A field-based message
- 6) What is the message?
  - What does MSF have to say that is different?
  - From what we’ve been able to distil, the strongest message relates to Srebrenica & Gorazde: We were in Srebrenica when it fell; we’ve been in Gorazde since the beginning. An inquiry has to be held into the fall of Srebrenica and the fate of the missing persons. Everything possible has to be done to ensure that Gorazde does not suffer a similar fate. MSF continues to stand in solidarity with population in danger.

Do people feel this message could be a strong basis for communicating?



**‘Comments on the Press Release from the Press Conference on the Former Yugoslavia,’ Message from MSF France Deputy Programme Manager Pierre Salignon to MSF Belgium and MSF Holland Programme Managers, October 1995 (in French).**

**Extract:**

OK on the decision to update the humanitarian issues in the former Yugoslavia when the ceasefire takes effect. Several situations need to be watched carefully, however, to put everything in historical perspective because you can’t compare what is not comparable.

1 – The Muslim enclaves

A. Srebrenica and Zepa

Still no news, since they fell last July, about several thousand people who were separated from their families or reported

missing. No independent international organization has yet been able to determine what really happened in these two enclaves. There are only strong presumptions that large numbers of civilians were massacred. The international community has the duty to establish the truth in this matter. By remaining silent in the face of such crimes, it has become an accomplice. Justice must be rendered and the guilty held to account.

#### B. Gorazde

Last Muslim enclave in eastern Bosnia besieged for more than three years. 57,000 inhabitants, whose survival depends on the will of the international community and the negotiations undertaken among warring parties. While it has been reported in recent weeks that corridors to the enclave will be opened soon the civilians' future remains uncertain.

The international community has the duty to guarantee the security of the civilian population. To prevent what happened in Srebrenica and Zepa from happening again and to ensure that the pocket is opened up unless the warring parties decide on an exchange of territory and population, a solution involving the use of force [...]

Remember to emphasize that the fall of Srebrenica/Zepa is the result of a strategy to carry out ethnic cleansing that the Serbs launched in 1993 in eastern Bosnia and that ended with the deportation of more than 50,000 people, several thousand of whom are reported missing.

#### C. Sarajevo

See MSF Holland

#### D) Vojnic

Emphasize the tragic humanitarian and human situation facing this population, but remember that they are the partisans of the dissident leader Abdic who, with the Serbs, held the Muslim enclave in Bihac under siege from 1993 to 1995.

### 2 - Banja Luka Territories under Bosnian Serb control

Ethnic cleansing of the non-Serbs. It was brutal and marks the final point of the Serbs' ethnic cleansing policy launched in 1992 in the Kozarac region. Remember the concentration camps ...

Serbian refugees of Krajina

As winter approaches, their humanitarian situation is troubling for those who stayed in the region of bl [Banja Luka]. But we must emphasize that the displaced people have suffered as the result of a four year-long war of ethnic cleansing, launched by the Serbs in 1991, and that the international community has remained silent. By accepting the redefinition, by force, of the populated areas in Bosnia so as to make them ethnically pure, the international community has accepted the "fait accompli" policy and is thus responsible today for Bosnia's ethnic division, which is occurring before our eyes. The civilian populations are its first victims. However, also remember that starting in 1991, the Yugoslav Army cleansed the Krajina region – 50% Serb and 50% non-Serb in that year – of its entire non-Serb population.

We are now witnessing Bosnia's repopulation on an ethnic basis; sadly, this is occurring in the middle of Europe, laying the foundation for future conflicts in the Balkans.

### 3 – Central Bosnia and Croatia

The arrival of the Bosnian refugees today, driven out of the Serb territories, towards Maglaj and Travnik. Health status on arrival, deportation conditions. [...]

Conclusion:

Be careful not to compare what is not comparable, individual acts against civilians committed on all sides are all reprehensible. But, we should remember that since 1991, we have witnessed the results of the ethnic cleansing pursued by the Serbs (international crime that led to the creation of an international tribunal at The Hague). Today, the acts committed by the Croats and Bosnians during their 'reconquest' operations are resulting in massive displacements of the Serb population. The acts of violence committed on this occasion are unacceptable.



**Contact** n°38 (MSF Belgium Internal Newsletter), October 1995 (in French and English).

**Extract:**

A press conference has been organised at MSF Belgium on 26 October 1995. Alex Parisel, Renaud Tockert, and Mario Goethals have been talking about the following aspects in former Yugoslavia: the fall of Srebrenica and its consequences three months later, the situation in Gorazde, of its inhabitants and of the importance of needs here, the lot of the refugees and displaced persons, and the forgotten refugees of Vojnic

**On 16 November 1995, the tribunal indicted the Bosnian Serb leaders Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic for direct and personal responsibility for the atrocities perpetrated during the fall of Srebrenica.**



'The International Tribunal Charges Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic with the Genocide in Srebrenica,' Alain Franco, **Le Monde** (France), 18 November 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

The charge of genocide and crimes against humanity, made on Thursday 16 November against the Bosnian Serb political leader Radovan Karadzic and his military commander Ratko Mladic, for their participation in the "genocide that followed the capture of Srebrenica" on 11 July, relates to "one of the bloodiest actions in the Yugoslav conflict." The indictment comes in addition to the one on 25 July, when the ICTY [International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia] accused the two Bosnian Serb leaders of genocide and crimes against humanity for their policy of assassinating civilians in Sarajevo and for "taking hostages and creating human shields." [...] The file, based on "witnessed statements from

refugees and survivors of summary executions, confirmed and corroborated by other sources," in particular the Dutch Blue Helmets deployed in Srebrenica, describes three places where the atrocities took place.

The first was the column of escapees on the road to Tuzla, which was bombarded by Serbian artillery. "Hundreds of Muslims were killed, and more wounded. Many lost their minds under the repeated attacks. Witness statements describe how dozens of people committed suicide to avoid being captured." Those who were captured, even the wounded, were executed immediately. Hundreds were buried in mass graves, some of them while they were still alive." [...] Mass executions also took place around 14 July in the area around Karakaj on the way out of Zvornik. [...]

**Talks between the Presidents of Serbia (Slobodan Milošević), Croatia (Franjo Tuđman) and Bosnia (Alija Izetbegović), led by the United States, were held in Dayton (Ohio) from 1 to 21 November.**

**The so-called Dayton Accords were signed in Paris on 14 December. They called for the creation of a State of Bosnia-Herzegovina, home to the Croatian-Muslim federation (with a corridor linking it to the Gorazde enclave) and Republika Srpska. A peacekeeping force under NATO command, IFOR, would replace UNPROFOR. V28 ▶**



'Main Points and Military Steps,' *Le Monde* (France), 23 November 1995 (in French).

#### Extract:

Here are the main points of the Bosnian peace agreement entered into on Tuesday, 21 November, in Dayton, following three weeks' of negotiations. It includes a main document, 11 appendices, and 102 maps. The territory of Bosnia will be divided between the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (51%) and Republika Srpska (49%), both within the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina, confirmed within its borders and governed by a federal constitution. Sarajevo will be the reunified capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, unblocking the city and thus removing all the obstacles. Bosnia's institutions will include a central bank, a single currency, a Constitutional Court, and a presidency. The Parliament will have two chambers and elections will be held in 1996. No war criminal will be allowed to hold public office. Displaced persons and refugees will be able to return home and move about freely. A corridor will link the Muslim enclave of Gorazde, in eastern Bosnia, to the rest of the Federation. The Posavina corridor, in the north-east, which links the territories under Serbian control in eastern and western Bosnia, will be five kilometres wide. The future status of Brcko, the main city along the corridor, will be subject to international arbitration.

(IFOR, or Implementation Force), under NATO command and led by a US general, will be deployed in Bosnia-Herzegovina to replace the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR). IFOR will monitor compliance with the ceasefire and separation of forces. It will be equipped to defend itself vigorously in all circumstances [...]. IFOR will have complete freedom of movement throughout the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

All non-Bosnian forces (Croats and Serbs) will withdraw from Bosnia-Herzegovina within 30 days. [...] The parties must withdraw their forces behind the lines agreed during the ceasefire. Two kilometre-wide demilitarised zones will be established on both sides of the ceasefire line. IFOR will have complete freedom of movement throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina. The parties must withdraw their heavy weapons and confine their troops to barracks within four months. All prisoners of war, civilian and military, must be freed immediately. The parties will not import any weapons for 90 days and will not import any heavy weapons (including airplanes and helicopters) for 180 days. In six months, a weapons control mechanism will impose a limit on the number of tanks, fighter planes, helicopters, and armoured vehicles for the 'New Yugoslavia' (Serbia and Montenegro), Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The limits imposed will take effect if the parties do not reach an agreement.

**The Dayton Accords, signed on 14 December, also provided for lifting the economic embargo imposed on Serbia.**

**Richard Goldstone, prosecutor at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, was concerned that this lifting could threaten the deliverance of criminals to the court. He threatened to resign if a deal was struck that traded peace for the impunity of the Serbian leaders. MSF France's Board of Directors had the same fears. It was suggested that the signature of the peace agreements in Paris could be used as an opportunity to air the issue in public.**

**In a column published in the French daily *Le Monde* on 16 December, MSF's Legal Advisor Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier asked that European governments commit to a guarantee that concluding the peace agreements would not take precedence over justice.**



'The Prosecutor at the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague Threatens to Resign,' Alain Franco, *Le Monde* (France), The Hague, 17 November 1995 (in French).

#### Extract:

Mr Goldstone also allowed uncertainty to persist over his threat to resign in the eventuality, often referred to during the discussions between the warring parties in Dayton, of a deal between the United States and Serbian president

Slobodan Milosevic, trading peace for the impunity of the Serbian leaders Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, who have been indicted for genocide by the ICTY, "If a member of the Security Council or the international community were to be part of such a deal, I truly believe that all members of the tribunal would seriously ask themselves the question: is it worth continuing under these conditions?"



**Minutes** of MSF France's Board Meeting, 24 November 1995 (in French).

#### Extract:

The international tribunal threatened by the Dayton Accords on the former Yugoslavia.

Frédéric Laffont: [...] The peace agreements signed in Dayton represent a threat to the fate of the tribunal, insofar as there is a risk that the criminals in the former Yugoslavia will not be prosecuted. Delivery of the criminals was linked to the lifting of the embargo. Now that the Dayton agreement has lifted the embargo, the criminals are no longer a bargaining chip. Is MSF going to request that what the Security Council achieved by creating the International Tribunal should not be withdrawn? Dayton indicates that states can become criminals with impunity. Are we going to stand back and watch it happen? Are we going to ask the Security Council not to dismiss the International Tribunal at the stroke of a pen?

Pierre Salignon: Peace guarantees the ethnic division of Bosnia. But peace cannot exist unless justice is done. As a witness, MSF must ask for explanations and keep on asking for them. We must not fail to grasp the opportunity represented by the signature of the peace agreement in Paris. It is just as important as the actions we take in the field. In response to a remark by Odile on the projects proposed by other groups in this area, Pierre recalled that we are generally seen as distinct from other organisations, and their activities would not prevent separate action by MSF. We could also meet with Goldstone to discuss how to react. If states wanted it, the Tribunal would be disbanded, not only for the former Yugoslavia but also for Rwanda.



'Let's Not Sacrifice the Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia,' Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, Legal Advisor of MSF, *Le Monde* (France), 16 December 1995 (in French).

#### Extract:

The peace agreement on the former Yugoslavia signed in Dayton marks a new period of significant risk in the history of a conflict that is very close to home. The invention of the new expression ethnic cleansing has made the atrocities committed on the ground intellectually tolerable but without enhancing our understanding. The war, which was started in the name of defending racial purity and conquering territory, was racist. "Serbia is where the Serbians are." This political slogan pinpointed the entire logic of the war within the former Yugoslav Federation. Subsequently, this same contagious logic

led each of the parties in the conflict to define itself by reference to its race. The war was not a political accident, but the result of a deliberate determination by the state to impose a racial doctrine. The European community has not been able to face up to the danger because it has neither a common foreign policy nor a common defence policy.

Various European governments have, therefore concentrated on open competition between small ideas and symbolic gestures. Only humanitarian action has been integrated within a European framework. Brussels has had to rely on humanitarian relief to manage a war that specifically denies the equal dignity of human beings. Incapable of waging war on the racial policy of negating human beings, the European community promised to impose justice on the crimes against humanity committed in the former Yugoslavia. The international tribunal was established first without material resources and then with no certainty that it would still exist in the future, and be able to keep the promise that had been made. Remember Vukovar, Gorazde, and Srebrenica. The capture of civilians, the massacre of the sick, the selections, and extermination. Then silence.

The peace will perhaps be American. Justice may still be European. But justice does not stop the war. Three years after the start of the conflict, the persistent threat at the heart of Europe has led the Americans to once again exercise their role as protectors of our continent. A peace agreement has finally been signed under their leadership. But it does not lay claim to the use of force to impose justice. In practice, it enshrines a new application of the doctrine already used in the Balkans in 1918, by US president Woodrow Wilson. At that time, the policy of "one nation = one state" had led to the first great ethnic cleansing in the region, with several million people displaced across new borders. An international tribunal was supposed to counterbalance the potential racial drift by punishing the perpetrators of the Armenian genocide. But in 1923, the final peace agreement granted an amnesty for all the crimes committed. If war has a price, so do some kinds of peace.

Today, the international tribunal for the former Yugoslavia finds itself in the same dilemma. States have not gone to war to obtain a just peace. Will they endanger a peace agreement for justice to prevail? What is happening on the ground, as our volunteers have witnessed, does not answer even the simplest questions: where will people live if they do not consider themselves ethnically pure? On what basis and where will the two million refugees and people displaced by the war be relocated? What role will the war criminals play in the future? This American peace concerns us as both human beings and European citizens. Who is now setting the price of our lives and our humanity? The peace will perhaps be American; justice may still be European. Governments within the European Union need to take a stand to ensure that the international tribunal will not disappear with the signature of the peace agreement, and that justice has not been traded for the release of the French pilots<sup>11</sup>.

11. Two French pilots were detained after their aircraft was downed by Bosnian Serb forces on 30 August 1995. They were released on 12 December 1995.

**On 1 December 1995, the Secretary General of the United Nations presented an initial report on the fall of Srebrenica, which set out “indisputable evidence” of a consistent method of summary executions and General Mladic’s presence at the sites where they took place.**

**On 21 December, the United Nations Security Council demanded a more detailed investigation into the atrocities committed by the Serbs in Srebrenica.**



‘The UN Wants the Truth About Srebrenica,’ *Agence France Presse*, 22 December 1995 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

The Security Council is demanding an investigation into the atrocities committed by Bosnian Serbs in the city last July. In addition to immediate access for international investigators to the Muslim enclave in eastern Bosnia, the UN Security Council also demanded, in a resolution adopted on Thursday evening, that Bosnian Serbs should refrain from any action intended to destroy, alter, conceal, or damage any items of evidence in Srebrenica. [...] In a report to the Security Council, UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali had indicated that according to the best available estimates, between 3,500 and 5,500 people were still reported as missing since the fall of Srebrenica. The Security Council noted that the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) had indicted the Bosnian Serb leaders Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic for their direct and individual responsibility for the atrocities committed in July against the Bosnian Muslim population in Srebrenica. The Security Council also took note of the “solid evidence” referred to in Mr Boutros-Ghali’s report, according to which an unknown but significant number of men in the Srebrenica area were summarily executed by the Bosnian Serb forces and paramilitary elements.

**In February 1996, MSF published a report containing witnesses’ statements on the evacuation of Srebrenica and the fate of members of the local team. A request for information was issued on the fate of the staff reported missing.**



‘Srebrenica Hospital Personnel and Local MSF Staff. Eyewitness Accounts of the Evacuation from Srebrenica and the Fate of Missing Colleagues,’ **MSF Report**, February 1996 (in English).

The object of this report is to draw the attention to the fate of the hospital personnel and the local MSF staff and pay homage to their work during the difficult years of war and suffering in the enclave. It is also intended as an appeal to the organisations and institutions trying to implement the civilian side of

the peace agreement to continue their search for evidence and provide justice for those thousands of people who are missing or killed. MSF urges any individuals or organisations holding information on the staff members reported missing to provide us with this information. There were 13 local MSF staff in Srebrenica and the hospital had a staff of 128. This report is based on the eyewitness accounts of 37 hospital staff and six local MSF staff collected between 27 November and 14 December 1995. Of the 128 hospital staff, 21 are reported missing; three were killed in the period prior to the fall of Srebrenica. Of the 13 MSF national staff, 1 is reported missing. Furthermore, MSF is still trying to obtain more information on the actual situation of 50 other hospital staff members.



*In this report on the fall [of Srebrenica] and on the members of hospital staff and MSF staff killed or reported missing, we make particular reference to the person responsible for civil protection, who was also part of the MSF team and who was to be found several years later, in a mass grave. This particular report is central. It is an account that is important to everyone, and which goes beyond the act of publishing a report. It is a way of saying, “we were not only witnesses to a massacre, but also directly involved, because our patients and colleagues from the hospital were killed and even MSF staff went missing.*

Pierre Salignon, MSF France Deputy Programme Manager, in Charge of Programmes in the Former Yugoslavia, 1992-1996, Interviewed in 2015 (in French).

**In September 1996, Rony Brauman, former President of MSF France, writing in the French daily *Libération*, reviewed the consequences of the humanitarian treatment of the war in Bosnia and asked, “Who will answer for UNPROFOR’s deliberate, planned abandonment of thousands of Bosnians, which disarmed them while promising to protect them?”**



‘Deadly Illusions – Bosnia: The War of the Intellectuals,’ Rony Brauman, President of MSF France from 1982-1994, *Libération* (France), 14 September 1996 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

According to a November 1995 CSA poll, 68% of French people trust humanitarian organisations, ahead of NATO, the European Union, and their own government, to prevent conflicts in Europe. Regardless of what one may think about the manipulative nature of opinion polls, this result speaks to the political confusion and moral deception that the humanitarian treatment of the war in Bosnia represented. It reveals the effectiveness (which one hopes can be reversed) of the highest expression of indifference and renunciation: humanitarian

cynicism, or the politics of good intentions, which, in fact, relieves us of any intentions by substituting fleeting emotions that are quickly buried beneath a flood of soothing images.

The tone was set, and with panache, after Mitterrand went to Sarajevo on 28 June 1992. An air bridge would save the population in the Bosnian capital and the Serb blockade would not remain unanswered. But the chorus of praise that followed this feat conveniently obscured the question raised by Zlatko Dizdarevic, Editor-in-chief of the independent daily, *Oslobodjenje*. What is the point, he asked, of transporting these sacks of flour and tins of tuna at huge cost, when harvests rot all around the city "because of a couple of hundred bearded guys posted behind the barricades?" The response was simple. In keeping with proper humanitarian reasoning, attackers and attacked were dismissed as if they shared equal responsibility and the balance between the "parties to the conflict" was preserved.

The dream of a pluralistic, multicultural Bosnia, symbolized by Sarajevo, died that day, signalled when the states pulled back and confined themselves to charity events. Just a few months after Belgrade's troops and Serbian militias massacred the population of Vukovar, the road was opened to transform Milosevic, the warmonger, into the guardian of the future peace accords. The tour de force at work here was that the approval granted to Belgrade's policy and the Serb militias appeared to be, rather, a firm opposition - which is why it took many months for a strange shift to occur within the humanitarian organizations. As states took up their new role as conveyors of biscuits and blankets, those organizations began to denounce Europe's political abdication. They did not relinquish their primary mission of alleviating suffering and saving those who could be saved, but recognized that they were becoming the handmaidens of this strategy of lies and sought to make their voices heard and emphasize their principles. This process was not without demagogy and excess. The counterpart to the States' bustling humanitarian activity was a kind of venality within the private humanitarian sector. Bosnia was not only the place where a conquering fascism made its reappearance. It was also a lucrative market. European Community funds streamed in and, seeking ephemeral media glory, action deteriorated into activism and humanitarian ethics transformed into performance aesthetics.

For the first time, however, the humanitarian sector joined forces with intellectuals in a shared, sustained protest that provided the former with a framework for analysis and the latter with a base. The hardening, real but quite late, of the French and European positions in the face of this war, affected this convergence. It [the convergence] did not prevent the ethnic partition of Bosnia that ultimately prevailed, although that would have been too much to ask. Nor, obviously, did it prevent the logic of extremists on all sides, as in Mostar, from imposing sham democratic elections.

The Blue Helmets in Srebrenica and General Mladic's murderous militias did, however, teach Srebrenica that a safe area transformed into a slaughterhouse. One lesson: sending armed Blue Helmets to carry out the "international commu-

nity's" solemn charge to ensure the safety of persons is a deadly illusion. How many of those who perished in Srebrenica could have escaped in time if they had not placed their faith in UNPROFOR's promises? Yes, the founding of the International Tribunal at The Hague, which means that impunity for war criminals is no longer the rule, represents progress, even if paltry. But who will be called to answer for the deliberate, planned abandonment of thousands of Bosnians by UNPROFOR, which disarmed them while promising to protect them? "We will not abandon you," they said.

## 1999-2003 PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRIES INTO THE SREBRENICA TRAGEDY<sup>12</sup>

**On 30 November 1998, resolution 53/35 at the United Nations General Assembly called for a "detailed report including an evaluation of events in the Srebrenica security zone in ex-Yugoslavia." On 15 November 1999, Kofi Annan, the new United Nations Secretary General and the under-Secretary General charged with the UN's peace keeping operations during the events of July 1995, made the UN's report on the fall of Srebrenica public. The report recognised the "errors of judgment" made by the United Nations. It called for the member States involved to conduct inquiries at national level into their own responsibilities.**



'Kofi Annan's "Mea Maxima Culpa" for the Srebrenica Massacre,' *Le Monde* (France) 17 November 1999 (in French).

### Extract:

An "inappropriate" principled position of "impartiality" from UN leaders in New York, their "inability" to recognise the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina as a "moral cause", their "erroneous" evaluation of Serbian objectives, their refusal of aerial bombardments against the Serbians, their "appeasing" of Serbians in Bosnia, but also the lack of political will from the major powers to curtail the exactions by force, all led to the Srebrenica "tragedy" in July 1995, its fall to the Serbians and the massacre of the thousands of civilians refuged there. These are the terms used by the United Nations Secretary General in a report that explains the events which led to the fall of

12. For a more detailed study on MSF Speaking Out about Srebrenica, please read MSF Speaking Out Case Studies "MSF and Srebrenica 1993-2003" by Laurence Binet-MSF International - <http://speakingout.msf.org/eng/srebrenica>

Srebrenica, where 2,500 bodies were found in a mass grave and where, according to the Red Cross, over 7,000 people are reported missing. The Srebrenica tragedy is horrifying for two reasons, writes Kofi Annan: the scale of the crimes and the fact that civilians thought they were safe due to the presence of the UN's Blue Helmets. Too little too late, some will say. Nonetheless, the joint mea maxima culpa expressed by Mr. Annan is unprecedented in the United Nations' history: "Through our serious errors of judgment and our inability to recognise the scope of the evil confronting us, we failed to do our part to save the people of Srebrenica from the Serbian campaign of mass murder" wrote the Ghanaian diplomat.

Drawn up from interviews with international leaders, civil and military observers, journalists and the UN's confidential archives, this 150-page report should be presented to the Security Council early in the week. The "failings" committed by the Secretariat, and so by Mr. Annan who was charged with peace keeping operations at the time, we read, "were rooted in our [UN] philosophy of neutrality and nonviolence wholly unsuited to the conflict in Bosnia." Mr. Annan specified that this should not let other "more fundamental" errors be overlooked, such as the Security Council's creation of "security zones" without the military means to protect them, and the international community's decision to respond to Bosnia-Herzegovina "not by decisive military action," but by "an embargo on arms, with humanitarian aid and the deployment of Blue Helmets." This attitude, he considers, "stripped the Bosnians of their right to legitimate defence." [...] In a country where the Serbians had decided to create ethnically cleansed zones and the international community did not use force to oppose them, "humanitarian action could never have been the answer." Thus, he admits that to end the war in Bosnia, the international community should have lifted the arms embargo for Muslims and used aerial bombardments against the Serbians. [...] "We were wrong to declare publicly and often our refusal to bomb the Serbians and accept the daily bombing of security zones by the Serbian forces." As for the 150 Dutch Blue Helmets, who could not have opposed "2,000 Serbians with armoured vehicles," they should have reported the atrocities they were witnessing much faster.

## MSF appeal to establish the french responsibilities in the Srebrenica events

**On 19 November 1999, MSF France's Board of Directors decided to push for a parliamentary inquiry commission on France's role during Srebrenica's fall.**



**Minutes** of MSF France's Board of Directors Meeting, 19 November 1999 (in French).

### Extract:

Françoise [Bouchet-] Saulnier relayed a call to the Board from the Citizens Group for Bosnia. This group wants to call for the creation of a Parliamentary Inquiry Commission (along the lines of Rwanda's) to throw light on the management of the Srebrenica enclave by politico-governmental bodies. The Group is asking for MSF's support and participation so as to bolster this call. Françoise Saulnier considers that MSF can become involved as a matter of principle and above all, for the future (and not only to remember what happened). She reminded the Board that MSF had already testified before the ICC (International Criminal Court) and the Dutch commission. The board members asked questions so as to evaluate and understand.

Virginie Raisson: Do you see any reason why we shouldn't do this?

Françoise [Bouchet-] Saulnier: No, but the main point is that this would be a joint undertaking so as to avoid the call coming uniquely from people scarred for life by their experiences over there.

Christian Losson: Could you specify what this Group aims to achieve? Françoise Saulnier: First of all it is rejecting the policy of 'fait accompli' before any effort towards transparency has been made. The Rwandan commission did end up concluding that Parliamentary control was needed over military decisions and I think we can focus on this critical point for Srebrenica.

Marc Le Pape: But France didn't have the United Nations command, so can the creation of an inquiry commission be justified?

Karim [Laouabdia]: A BBC documentary clearly showed how Srebrenica fell and pinpointed General Janvier's responsibilities (a Frenchman). What's the chain of command in this set up? Françoise Saulnier: We have to bear in mind that a French soldier, even when under UN command, always keeps his national reference points. This collusion is reinforced by a – two-pronged secrecy over defence – one at the French level, the other at the UN's.

Philippe Biberson: Holding an inquiry on Srebrenica means bringing to light all the mechanisms that paradoxically claim to protect populations while actually diluting responsibility and dispersing power. If we want to support this group, it seems to me primordial to ensure the call is valid, formulating it properly so it doesn't get dismissed.

Françoise [Bouchet-] Saulnier: We're just asking a question... We're writing a letter, we don't need to provide proof...that will be Parliament's job. We just need agreement from 25 or 40 parliamentary figures to get the commission put together, and we've already got some support...

Karim [Laouabdia]: It's legitimate that we ask the question because we were in Srebrenica from start to finish.

Bruno Corbé: You could even say that we were fooled by the enclaves set up. We were told, "Go ahead, we're protecting them" and then they were massacred.

Christian Losson: It's a political gesture in the broad sense of the term, a logical follow up to steps taken for Rwanda, and it's about demanding explanations.



Decision: To engage with the Group of Citizens for Bosnia in its call for the creation of a Parliamentary Inquiry Commission on Srebrenica.



*The most important moment was when the United Nations Secretary General's report came out on Srebrenica. There was a whole context around it. So Françoise proposed launching an appeal. It happened very quickly and naturally. I don't remember there being long discussions about doing it.*

Fabien Dubuet, MSF France Deputy Legal Advisor, 1995-2005, Interviewed in 2015 (in French).

**On 10 December 1999, MSF raised the Srebrenica events in its Nobel Peace Prize reception speech, emphasising the need to reform United Nations peacekeeping operations.**



'MSF Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance **Speech**,' by Dr James Orbinski, MSF International President, 10 December 1999 (in English).

**Extract:**

If UN military operations are to protect civilian populations in the future, they must go beyond the *mea culpa* excuses of the Secretary General over Srebrenica and Rwanda. There must be a reform of peacekeeping operations in the UN. Member States of the Security Council should be held publicly accountable for the decisions that they do or do not vote for.

**On 20 March 2000, MSF's legal director presented an internal context memo to the association's management concerning the latter's call for a parliamentary inquiry commission on Srebrenica. This initiative was aligned with MSF's call in 1998 for the creation of a parliamentary information mission on Rwanda and the hearings of one its members therein. It was part of a drive to evaluate the level of protection actually provided to populations by peacekeeping operations.**



An Inquiry Commission on France's Role During the Srebrenica Enclave's Fall,' Françoise Saulnier and Fabien Dubuet, Legal Advisors for MSF France, **Context memo**, 20 March 2000 (in French).

**Extract:**

The calls for an inquiry commission on Rwanda and today on Srebrenica demonstrate the coherent application of MSF's

policy on evaluating the level of protection these operations can offer to populations (or not), thereby better positioning our field work and speaking out publicly. It bears noting that after the fall of Srebrenica, some people in MSF denounced the fact that our presence in the enclave and the impression of security this presence gave to those living there at the time, ratified the international community's lie regarding the protection of this security zone.

MSF's call for an inquiry is important because of its interface with a particular international and national context concerning external operations (peacekeeping or imposition operations):

- 1) A relative transparency on military and military-humanitarian interventions, which reflect specific policy objectives
  - a. At international levels
    - i. United Nations reports on the Rwandan genocide and the fall of Srebrenica [...]
    - ii. The OAU [Organisation of African Unity] report on the Rwandan genocide (to be issued in March)
  - b. At national levels
    - i. In France the report on the Rwandan information mission and the National Assembly defence commission's report on the NATO intervention in Kosovo [...]
    - ii. In the Netherlands, the debriefing report on the Blue Helmets deployed in Srebrenica published in November 1999 and the inquiry entrusted by the Dutch government to the National Institute of War Research (NIOD) [...]

2) An adaptation of the military tool designed to respond to the transition from a confrontation strategy associated with the Cold War era to crisis management strategies specific to cold war contexts [...]

In summary, this movement could be considered as a return of military-humanitarianism and/or a new wave of manipulation of humanitarian action [...] Given the possible reinforcement of a military presence in conflicts, a clarification of the roles and responsibilities of each party would seem essential so that confusion between the different players does not prejudice populations or independent humanitarian action. [...]

Two pitfalls to avoid [...]

1. Presenting the call for an inquiry as an anti-military, anti-Bernard Janvier crusade. On the contrary, we should explain the positive points [...] the commission must draw out lessons to be learned so as to avoid the future deployment of military forces whose hands and feet are tied in the face of criminal policies.
2. Presenting the call as a step towards a judgment against French political and military figures for complicity in crimes against humanity. [...]



*The fall of Srebrenica hit us extremely hard. There were several concerns regarding responsibilities, and we found it absolutely appalling that the UN (as a community of nations,) had abandoned these people. I think that even if we didn't view the organisation as a miracle solution for the world, after the*

UN abandoned them, it was even worse. We wanted to put the spotlight on the chasm between a certain narrative that said the UN was going to sort everything out and what actually happened. These commissions of inquiry, whether Srebrenica or Rwanda, were our way of saying: "You didn't deliver on your promises."

Dr. Marc Gastellu-Etchegorry, MSF France Deputy Director of Operations, 1992-1997, Interviewed in 2015 (in French)



France had a special role in the UN machine [with its permanent seat on the Security Council], but the country's role in creating the security zone and the promise of protection that had been given was even bigger. France constantly raised these issues at the Security Council. General Morillon was on the ground; UNPROFOR was commanded by a French general and the DPKO by another. So we were aware that France had special responsibilities. And, at that time, there was extensive re-organisation of the military in Europe, within NATO, and a shift towards external peacekeeping operations. So the context and the way things were going made us think that this was something that needed to be done.

Fabien Dubuet, MSF France Deputy Legal Advisor, 1995-2005, Interviewed in 2015 (in French).



We had had experience with France's parliamentary inquiry into Rwanda. So we had some confidence in our ability to participate in this kind of process, to contribute to it and challenge it. Well, the word confidence might be putting it bit strongly! But we didn't feel it was insurmountable. We'd already had experience with it, so it wasn't totally weird and it wasn't outside our comfort zone.

Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France President, 2000-2007, Interviewed in 2015 (in French).

**On 12 April 2000 MSF testified at the Security Council for the first report on the protection of populations in conflict situations by the UN Secretary-General. Drawing on, among others, the example of the events in Srebrenica, the organisation challenged the UN's decision-making processes, which had led to the abandoning of Srebrenica and other places and leaving people without protection.**



**MSF Briefing** to the UN Security Council, by Dr James Orbinsky, President of MSF International and Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF Legal Advisor, 12 April 2000 (in English).

**Extract:**

The Security Council made clear that adequate security would require 34,000 troops to effectively deter attacks on the safe areas. Instead, the Security Council authorized only a light option of 7,600 troops for Bosnia. In the end, the fall of Srebrenica and the massacres of civilians resulted. [...] In the case of Srebrenica, the fate of civilians was effectively sealed with the decision to deploy a light option of some 7,000 troops. [...] In each of these cases, the hazard lies at the decision-making level where states can act at the same time on behalf of their own national interests and in the name of the international community interests without any possibility of clarifying or distinguishing the two. The lesson learned shows that the right solution was available in a timely manner within the UN structure. The question remains about the ability of the Security Council to commit to results and not simply to good intentions.

**During a press conference on 13 July 2000 and in an opinion piece by its president in French daily newspaper *Le Monde*, MSF France launched a public appeal calling for the setting up of a French parliamentary inquiry into the events in Srebrenica. In addition to the appeal, a kit distributed to the press included extracts from the UN report, the logbook of the MSF team present in Srebrenica during the events, witness statements taken from survivors in Tuzla, and MSF's call for reform of peacekeeping operations made during the December 1999 Nobel Peace Prize ceremony.**



'Call for a Commission of Inquiry on Srebrenica!' Jean-Hervé Bradol, President of MSF France, *Le Monde* (France), 13 July 2000 (in French) / 'Médecins sans Frontières Calls for the Creation of a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into France's Responsibility in the Fall of Srebrenica,' **Press release issued by MSF France**, 13 July 2000 (in French).

**Extract:**

Five years on, the Srebrenica massacre remains a dark moment in European history. Today, MSF is requesting the establishment of a parliamentary investigation to shed light on France's role in this tragedy. On 11 July 1995, Srebrenica fell to the Bosnian Serb forces. The Dutch UN contingent stationed in the area failed to defend the population gathered together in the so-called 'safe area.' The fall of Srebrenica resulted in the deportation of 40,000 people and the killing of some 7,000 others.

Médecins Sans Frontières entered the Srebrenica enclave in 1993, at the same time as General Morillon. For two years, the organisation provided medical and logistical support to the besieged population, officially under the protection of the UN peacekeepers. The population had been assured that it would not be abandoned. This 'guarantee' was among the reasons the population remained in the enclave rather than fleeing from the threat posed by the Bosnian Serbian forces. The continuous presence of MSF among these people helped maintain the illusion of international protection in the area. However, the MSF team could only stand by powerless and watch as the population was separated into groups, including the sick and the wounded, as the men were separated from the women, and as groups in convoys departed to unknown destinations. They also witnessed the inertia of the Dutch UNPROFOR battalion. Several dozen wounded and sick people under MSF's care were at first 'evacuated' from the enclave by the Bosnian Serbs 'under Dutch escort,' then forced off the buses and killed by Serbian forces.

At least three Bosnian nurses from MSF, who were escorting the patients, were also made to get off the bus and have never been seen since. In command of UNPROFOR at the time, France played a major decision-making role. For this reason, we are calling for the creation of a parliamentary commission of inquiry to establish France's political and military responsibility for the paralysis of the UN and NATO in response to requests for air strikes from the Dutch contingent. The conclusions of the UN report on the Srebrenica massacre explicitly request that each member state involved, conduct a national inquiry into the events. In the Netherlands, the debriefing report on the UN peacekeepers deployed in Srebrenica was published in November 1999 and the Dutch government has ordered an investigation by the National Institute for War Documentation (NIOD). In France, although parliamentary oversight of military operations has already been carried out for Rwanda and Kosovo, there has been paralysis over Srebrenica. Given the visible intensification of peacekeeping operations, in which France plays a key role, greater transparency is required regarding the effectiveness of the systems that purport to protect victims. We hope that the work of this parliamentary inquiry will enable us to learn lessons from the past so that in the future, the military are not deceptively deployed with their hands tied in the face of iniquitous policies.



'MSF Condemns the Blocking in France of Any Inquiry into Srebrenica,' **Agence France Presse**, 15 July 2000 (in French).

#### Extract:

The French authorities are blocking any inquiry into their role in the tragedy of Srebrenica, an enclave under UN protection overrun by Bosnian Serbs on 11 July 1995, deplored the leaders of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) on Thursday. The humanitarian organisation is asking the French National Assembly to create a parliamentary investigation commission, but the likelihood of success "is zero," acknowledged

Françoise Saulnier, Head of MSF's Legal Department, at a press conference with the President of MSF, Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol. "There's a lot of political resistance," she explained. "The MPs we contacted told us it was a very sensitive matter," she added.

In 1995, a French officer, General Bernard Janvier, commanded the entire UN Protection Forces (UNPROFOR) in Bosnia and had the authority to request air strikes from NATO, which he failed to do. [...] "Perhaps this blocking of action is due to the relationship between General Janvier and President Chirac," emphasised Jean-Hervé Bradol. "We are asking for accountability," he explained as justification for MSF's approach. At the time, the organisation had a team in Srebrenica, declared a 'safe area' by the UN. [...] "The gravity of the situation is known, but the series of abdications of responsibilities has never been completely examined," he commented. [...] "Who told Janvier not to give the order? What arguments were put forward?" asks Dr Bradol.

"An investigation is underway in the Netherlands. The United Nations has published a report. Yet nothing has been done in France," bemoans Françoise Saulnier. "The United Nations doesn't keep archives on anything that could be damaging to its member states. Any traces of telegrams or requests for air strikes are kept in the national archives. In France, only parliament has the ability to conduct an inquiry into these matters," she explained. "We hope that the parliamentary investigation will help us learn lessons from the past so that in the future, the military are not deceptively deployed with their hands tied in the face of iniquitous policies," emphasised Jean-Hervé Bradol.



'A Parliamentary Inquiry into the Events at Srebrenica Seems Possible, According to Mr Quilès,' **Le Monde** (France), 13 July 2000 (in French).

#### Extract:

For Jean-Hervé Bradol, President of MSF, anniversaries and the 'duty of remembrance' are not enough, and neither are the cries of *mea culpa*, such as the one made on behalf of the UN by its current Secretary General, Kofi Annan in his 1999 report into this tragedy. With "an increase in the number of situations in which nation states and the UN are claiming to protect civilian populations, as was the case in Srebrenica," and with France intending to play a leading role in peacekeeping operations, it is imperative that the dysfunctions, resignations, and decisions that led to passivity from the international community in July 1995 are brought to light, said MSF. "We are appalled by the levity with which the victims of Srebrenica have been overlooked in favour of profit and loss," said Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, a lawyer at MSF, lamenting the fact that after this drama the state and the army did not "assess the efficiency of their actions in terms of protecting civilians in conflict situations."

Kofi Annan's report left many questions unanswered, and MSF's leaders criticise it for being written in terms that are

too “diplomatic.” Incidentally, the UN Secretary General had invited the nation states themselves to work on bringing these dysfunctions to light. In 1995, the UN force in Bosnia (UNPROFOR) was commanded by a Frenchman, General Bernard Janvier, which is the reason why France has since been the target of “rumours” imputing it for the refusal to deploy NATO air power against Serbian forces to halt their offensive in Srebrenica. Albeit rejected at state level, these insinuations have never been the subject of systematic public denial.

The idea of a parliamentary investigation similar to that held by the French National Assembly into France’s 1994 role in Rwanda has never found favour, despite the efforts in recent years of various organisations. “The message we’re hearing from members of parliament we contacted is that this is a delicate matter,” said Françoise Boucher-Saulnier on Thursday. In November 1999, after publication of Kofi Annan’s report, Pierre Brana, socialist Member of Parliament and member of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Assembly, tried to mobilise parliament. He drew up a motion for a resolution requesting the establishment of a commission of inquiry and tried to have it endorsed by the socialist group in the Assembly. It was blocked at this stage by socialist members.

Paul Quilès, Chairman of the Assembly’s Defence Committee, and previous Chair the Inquiry Commission on Rwanda, is now saying, however, that when parliament resumes he is “ready to discuss” the possibility of organising a similar investigation on Srebrenica. “But on condition that we make no mistake about what we are looking for,” he said. He reproaches MSF for expressing certain accusatory prejudices, and takes issue with the tendency to blame France purely for releasing troops for UN peacekeeping operations. Mr Quilès, who incidentally, chairs a focus group on UN reform, recognises that a detailed examination of the way in which the international community reacted to the events of Srebrenica would indeed be useful: “I’m not against it, but if we do it there will be no preconditions,” he said.

*We wanted to understand how, in an area that was internationally protected, and that France, to a large extent, was involved in protecting, the massacre of the population, our colleagues, and our patients, was allowed to happen. There was also a second motive among some at MSF, which I did not share simply because I wasn’t involved at the time the enclave fell. But, people who were involved, such as Pierre, Françoise, and others, wanted to make sure the politicians and members of the military were brought to testify (and this was implicit throughout the undertaking), and to admit that a cynical deal had been struck to abandon the enclaves, and that no efforts were ever made to rescue the population. And so, if my memory serves me, there was a dual agenda: a fairly straightforward agenda demanding accountability because we had lost members of our team, and a second agenda focusing on the abandonment of the population. This political dimension, “they abandoned the population to strike a deal,” seemed legitimate*

*to us, since this issue of ‘humanitarian safe areas’ had already come up in Rwanda with Kibeho.*

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France President, 2000-2007, Interviewed in 2015 (in French).

*The call for the creation of a parliamentary commission of inquiry is not a political or militant act. It’s a decision that is solely and intimately linked to our reflections on our operational responsibility. It is directly related to what MSF experienced as a humanitarian actor in ex-Yugoslavia. I believe that we are accountable, as a humanitarian organisation, to understand how our own responsibility is interconnected with the responsibilities of the other actors involved in the situation. The purpose is not to condemn, but rather to understand how humanitarian and military responsibilities became intertwined, leading to this massacre, and also based on what rationales and failings. In what ways did the UN military system for protecting safe areas succeed and in what ways did it fail? What should we have understood about the international military system and what should we or could we have done differently in terms of our own operations and communications?*

*1993-94 marks the beginning of the so-called international military-humanitarian operations and of UN mandates to protect civilian populations. And for 10 years now, regarding Srebrenica, we still don’t know what actually happened along the different international chains of command: UN, NATO, France, Netherlands, contact groups, etc. It was not until 2002, after nearly 10 years of efforts, that we were able to obtain an inquiry into the system. During all of that time, it was impossible to clearly delineate the responsibilities of the UN soldiers, those of the national contingents, or our own responsibilities as a humanitarian organisation.*

*We find ourselves in this completely nonsensical political and legal situation that started off with a denial of the number of deaths, after which everybody provided technical explanations that didn’t hold water, that placed the blame on others and that were contradictory, under the notion that nobody would be capable of lining up all the facts. The UN speaks with the UN, the Dutch with the Dutch, the French with the French, the Brits with the Brits, and it all ends with “7,000 deaths! Are you sure? Really? I didn’t know that I was supposed to... Someone used the wrong form, the fax machine was down, I did everything I could but the others didn’t...” In short, everyone supports the theory of a major historical misunderstanding, using technical arguments and affirmations of political good faith. But at the end of the day, 7,000 people are dead, ‘protected’ by UN forces, and nobody knows why it happened!*

Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF Legal Advisor, Interviewed in 2015 (in French).

*We distanced ourselves from other organisations and individuals using an accusatory angle aimed at finding the*

culprits, so that those accountable could be punished and disciplined. That's why we didn't partner up with those organisations. At the time, parliamentary control over external operations was practically zero in France. The Rwanda exercise was revolutionary for the 5th Republic, a large mouthful for the Quai d'Orsay, the Elysée Palace and the Ministry of Defence to swallow. There had been a report on Kosovo, but with no investigation whatsoever by members of parliament. And there was certainly no parliamentary initiative on Srebrenica. It is because MSF asked for one and made its request public that something has been done.

Fabien Dubuet, MSF France Deputy Legal Advisor, 1995-2005, Interviewed in 2015 (in French).

## Critical support to the French parliamentary fact-finding mission

**on 15 November 2000, the National Assembly's Foreign Affairs and Defence committee at last decided to set up a Fact-Finding Commission to investigate the July 1995 events in Srebrenica.**



'A Fact-Finding Commission on the Srebrenica Massacres,' *Le Monde* (France), 17 November 2000 (in French).

### Extract:

The National Assembly's Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee decided on Wednesday 15 November to set up a Fact-Finding Commission to investigate the events of July 1995 in Srebrenica (Bosnia). The Commission includes ten members of parliament and two rapporteurs, François Léotard (UDF), Minister of Defence from March 1993 to May 1995, and François Lamy (PS), Vice-President of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Friendship Group. The various political groups will appoint the ten members who will represent all the Assembly's parties. [...] After Médecins Sans Frontières issued a press release criticising the appointment of Mr Léotard, who they view as both 'judge and jury' (*Le Monde*, 12 and 13 November), President of the Defence Commission, Paul Quilès, said, "Members of Parliament appoint their rapporteurs, not NGOs."



*I knew we wouldn't get a Commission of inquiry, because we hadn't managed to get one in 1998 for Rwanda. But our demand was above all, our way of making it clear that we wanted a real inquiry, with members of parliament willing to challenge the government, rather than just a semblance of democratic oversight. French democracy has never had a tradition of parliamentary oversight of external operations. While the French parliament does oversee the use of the military in conflict situations, this does not extend to UN international interven-*

*tions. Back then; Member of parliament and former Minister Paul Quilès presided over a think-tank on UN reform. His concern for parliamentary oversight of external operations was partially in line with MSF's, but it was crucial that we keep our distance and not let ourselves be manipulated by France's political agendas.*

*In 1998, MSF succeeded in obtaining the setting up of an Inquiry Commission on Rwanda but made no critical review of its findings, which had concluded with a press conference. In short, the message was: "France does not need to feel shame about what happened in Rwanda." We didn't want a repeat experience with Srebrenica, nor did we want to look like the useful idiots who, after a long struggle, had managed to get the inquiry and then let it be taken away from them by people who, up until then, had shown no real interest and had their own agendas. It was our credibility and humanitarian professionalism that were at stake. I remember the threats made by a member of parliament who told me that, if we went on that way, countries would no longer be willing to participate in international military operations. He also tried to drive us apart as he said that a man's word and honour are better guarantees than due process and the law. It was an obviously populist and cunning way to oppose MSF's 'political' and 'legal' teams. Fortunately, we stuck together.*

*Everything happens behind closed doors during a commission of inquiry and people testify under oath. Internal to the National Assembly, it's a quasi-legal process that confronts parliament and the executive. If a commission of inquiry had been chosen, members of parliament could have ordered the declassification and transmission of documents – which the Fact-Finding Commission never actually had access to. But neither the government nor parliament really wanted to challenge external operations that involved the army, the government, and the President, particularly at a time when two opposing political parties were governing in coalition. So it would have been pointless. But I pressed for it anyway, to show that we weren't concerned with the politics but that we wanted answers to the facts – a large-scale massacre right at the heart of Europe – that went way beyond politics. Well, in the end, what we got was a fact finding commission, which enabled us, MSF, to attend the proceedings in real-time and have a major role in monitoring them.*

Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF Legal Advisor, Interviewed in 2015 (in French).



*Commission of inquiry... fact-finding commission. I find this kind of inflation to be a useless exercise. In the case of the Rwanda Fact-Finding Commission, while some people criticised the downgrading of our demand for a Commission of Inquiry to a fact-finding commission, with its much weaker legal scope and reduced powers, I didn't consider it decisive because I considered that the level at which we were to intervene, in spite of everything, had been accomplished.*

Dr. Rony Brauman, MSF France President, 1982 - 1994, MSF France Foundation Research Director from 1994, interviewed in 2000 and 2015 (in French).

**The same day, MSF France publicly called for the President of France and the government to facilitate the members of parliament's investigation into the fall of Srebrenica by affording them access to documents and interviewing all those involved, in order to shed light on the responsibilities. The organisation also called for the results of the investigation to be published.**



'Médecins Sans Frontières Calls on the President and the Government to Facilitate Members' of Parliament Investigation into the Fall of Srebrenica,' MSF France **Press release**, 15 November 2000 (in French).

**Extract:**

Médecins Sans Frontières welcomes today's decision by the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee to set up a parliamentary inquiry commission into the Srebrenica tragedy. The mission has been extended to include ten members of parliament. MSF has until now contested the decision to entrust to François Leotard, former Minister of Defence during the Bosnian emergency, and another member of parliament, the drafting of a simple information report. In the light of today's decision, MSF no longer has issue with the participation of François Léotard in a fact-finding commission that is now to include ten members of parliament. MSF will, however, remain vigilant regarding the final choice of these members. The decision to set up a fact-finding commission rather than a commission of inquiry limits the members of parliament's investigative capacities and their investigation is contingent on the goodwill of the executive. This is why MSF is calling on the president and the government to facilitate as far as possible the commission's task, by enabling them to:

- Access all documents relative to their investigation, including those classified as national defence and foreign affairs secret information.
- Interview all those involved and all relevant witnesses to shed light on France's political and military responsibilities.
- Publish their findings and working documents.

**The MSF France team, led by the deputy legal director put together a critical review of the fact-finding commission's investigations. The aim was to provide members of parliament with relevant information that would allow them to ask the questions that need to be answered to shed light on the events in Srebrenica. Reports and all information and elements of analysis were made available on a dedicated website to help in the formulation of the questions whose answers could help to elucidate where responsibilities lie.**



**Message** from the Deputy Legal Adviser to the President and Communication Department of MSF France, December 2000 (in French).

**Extract:**

MSF and the Commission:


We have three working meetings next week; media coverage of Srebrenica will begin with the start of the hearings. The major newspapers have all appointed someone to follow the work of the commission. [...]

The challenge for next week is for us to find somewhere to make our voice heard, so that we can 1) immediately and publicly reposition MSF as a keen eye keeping a close watch on the work of Parliament and 2) publicly submit precise questions to which we want precise answers and in the light of which we will assess the work done. The risk of the commission is that the MPs use Srebrenica to promote a certain number of political objectives (however worthy) such as UN reform or parliamentary oversight of foreign operations and that they fail to address or only partially answer outstanding questions about Srebrenica. We will therefore have to organise the media push: When do we start?, Who will be doing it? And what will we say?

Monitoring of the work of the commission: alongside Françoise, we have two interns at our disposal with backgrounds in political science and law. They already have field and lobbying experience and we know them personally. [...] They will be working for us one or two days a week. We will ask them: 1) to follow and produce transcripts of the hearings, which could be transferred to our website (to be discussed together); 2) to work on technical questions which could arise during the parliamentary work and to which we may need to react; 3) to select the MSF documents that could be sent to the commission. The idea is that these interns will enable us all to remain calm and focused on the 'political' control of the lobbying and public speaking by MSF, while acquiring solid knowledge of the technical aspects.


MSF hearing:

According to our friendly sources, what is important is that our hearing will enable the most active and transparent MPs to oblige the commission to get to the bottom of things or point it in the right direction. In concrete terms, during our hearing, we must ask the questions we believe the commission has to answer, and subtly and indirectly mention the names of those who could be called before the hearings [...] Position of the UN Secretary General In New York: Catherine Harper [MSF liaison with the UN in New York] tried to obtain a meeting with Kofi [Annan, UN Secretary General]'s office and with that of Guéhenno [the new Deputy Secretary General in charge of peacekeeping operations]. The idea is to present the basis of our approach and ask the UN SG [Secretary General] to facilitate the work of the French MPs. Polite refusal by Guéhenno and a very diplomatic reply from Kofi's office: 'we have nothing more to add to the content of the UN report on Srebrenica; we have no opinion concerning the procedure under way in France; the NGOs are better placed than the UN SG to try to hold the member states accountable.'

 I went to all of the sessions, along with the two interns and my deputy. We transcribed the debates from the entire session in real time. Everything was put online, on the special website we'd created, by the next morning. So everyone could read what was said, the questions and responses of each person who appeared, and get an idea of the quality of the witnesses and the effectiveness of the questions by the deputies involved. In a way, MSF was taking the minutes for the sessions. From that we could analyse, from week to week, what had been said, whether it confirmed or contradicted what other witnesses had said, and fine-tune the content of the questions that the next witnesses would then have to be asked. It was of no use questioning someone about generalities, and a hearing could very quickly turn into a long, hazy monologue.

The deputies know the life of their regions and their constituencies very well, but for an eastern Bosnian enclave...it took a collective effort to get from generalities to precise facts about what really happened in Srebrenica. I found the journalists and deputies very receptive to MSF's efforts to spur the commission's work on. A public mirror was needed to help prevent the Commission from being used as just a platform for witnesses to come tell their story for an hour-and-a-half, without anyone being able to challenge anything. With the Rwanda Commission, we trusted them and let things take their course and the result was disappointing. So for the Srebrenica Commission, MSF had to get involved in monitoring the process and mobilising the press throughout the entire commission process. Otherwise, it would have served no purpose again...other than to clear the French government.

Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF Legal Advisor,  
Interviewed in 2015 (in French).

 The journalists liked MSF, because they understood our process. Many of those who covered the commission had been war correspondents posted in Bosnia. They had seen the horrors and had the same questions and doubts about the reasons for the fall of the enclaves and the failure to keep the promise to protect them. They too were determined to get a clearer picture.

Fabien Dubuet, MSF France Deputy Legal Advisor,  
1995-2005, Interviewed in 2015 (in French).

**On 14 December 2000, as the parliamentary fact-finding commission on Srebrenica began its work; MSF issued a series of questions it felt essential that the commission should answer.**



'Médecins Sans Frontières Expects the Parliamentary Fact-Finding Commission on Srebrenica to Answer Several Important Questions,' MSF France **Press release**, 14 December 2000 (in French).

On 11 July 1995, Srebrenica fell into the hands of Bosnian Serb forces. The fall of Srebrenica led to the deportation of 40,000 people and the execution of some 7,000 others. Several dozen of the wounded and sick being treated by MSF were executed by Serbian forces. Twenty-two members of MSF's local staff were also executed. As the parliamentary fact-finding commission on Srebrenica begins its first hearings today, Médecins Sans Frontières hopes that the deputies get answers to several important questions, to shed light on the political and military dysfunctions that led to this tragedy:

- Was France aware of the fact that the Bosnian-Serb army was getting ready to leave Srebrenica? If so, why wasn't that information transmitted to the United Nations, so that arrangements could be made to protect or evacuate the residents of Srebrenica?
- Why didn't General Janvier authorise NATO air strikes on Srebrenica in July 1995, even though:
  - There were no legal obstacles to using force?
  - The battalion of Dutch peacekeepers in Srebrenica had requested them multiple times, even though they understood the physical risk that such an action would mean for them?
  - Air strikes had been launched on several occasions in 1994 to defend the Gorazde and Bihac safe areas, despite a much more complex decision chain than during the Srebrenica tragedy? At the time of the attack on Srebrenica, General Janvier had held the authority since 9 July 1995 to single-handedly authorise the use of air power.
- Did France try, as part of or outside the UN chain of command, to delay or minimise NATO air strikes during the Serbian offensive against Srebrenica? If so, was the initiative taken in concert with other members of the Contact Group (United States, Russia, Great Britain and Germany)?
- In June 1995, did France negotiate, as part of or outside the United Nations, the release of UN peacekeeper hostages in exchange for a definitive halt to air strikes? If so, was the initiative taken in concert with other members of the Contact Group?
- At each stage and in all scenarios, what guarantees were negotiated to protect or safely evacuate residents of the protected Srebrenica enclave...?



'France to Investigate its Srebrenica Role,' Marlise Simons, *The New York Times* (USA), 11 December 2000 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

This week, after more than two years of lobbying by the organization Doctors Without Borders, the French Parliament will begin hearings on whether, if only indirectly, France blocked airstrikes on Bosnian Serb troops as they moved on Srebrenica. [...] "We are horrified by the off-hand way in which the vic-

tims of Srebrenica have been dismissed,” said Françoise Saulnier, Legal Director of the doctors’ organization. “The failure of the peacekeepers has to be properly clarified, and the government and the military must be accountable to our democratic institutions.” She noted that it had taken years to get this week started. “We were told all the time that the issue was very sensitive,” she said. [...]

Doctors Without Borders, which was created by the French but is now an international group, has a special stake in the inquiry. The group went to work in Srebrenica in 1993, soon after it was declared a United Nations safe area following a visit by another French general, Philippe Morillon, who bowed to demands from the Muslim inhabitants to save them from besieging Serbian forces. The doctors’ group cared for refugees and war wounded in Srebrenica for two years. After the fall of the town, the group said, several dozen sick or wounded people under its care were at first evacuated under escort of the Dutch peacekeepers, then forced off buses and killed. Twenty-two people who worked for the doctors were presumably killed. The bodies of only two have been found. The medical group and others supporting the inquiry say they want answers to a number of questions and assertions raised in newspapers and film documentaries outside France about meetings that General Janvier held in the late spring and early summer of 1995 with the Bosnian Serb Commander Gen. Ratko Mladic, who has been indicted for war crimes, and about suggestions that President Jacques Chirac of France ordered General Janvier to hold off on airstrikes. [...] Members of the medical group insist that they are not on any kind of crusade against the French military or General Janvier. “We need to learn the lessons from this bloody failure so that in future the military are not sent out to protect people with their hands tied,” said Dr. Jean-Herve Bradol, the Director of the group.




*Throughout the years following the fall of Srebrenica, we have asked ourselves constantly why things turned out as they did. There was an enquiry in the Netherlands on the operation of the Dutch battalion in Srebrenica, at which MSF gave evidence. There was also a United Nations investigation. Journalists from various countries had also published the results of their own investigations. I was also in contact with the investigators at the ICTY, since MSF had sent the Tribunal the list of the wounded, patients, and staff who had disappeared. From time to time they would contact us, to tell us they had identified corpses who matched our wounded or our staff. When you work diligently over time, you compare pieces of information and find that some elements confirm and some contradict each other. Some people among the victims, but also people in the United Nations, and others sent us information or documents because they trusted MSF. That’s how we obtained copies of internal United Nations documents.*

*Amongst others, there were messages exchanged between UNPROFOR command in the former Yugoslavia and the United Nations in New York. Each time, we gained a better understanding of the context and saw that it’s monotonous but persistent work. Prosecutors often state the well-known warning ‘anything*

*you say from now on may be used against you.’ And indeed, over the course of all the ‘inquiries’ and interviews, the main international protagonists justify their position by offering explanations and information that will gradually be denied by others and sometimes by themselves. So we knew the arguments used by the United Nations to defend itself. Then, the United Nations and the French accused the Dutch Blue Helmets, and they in turn defended themselves. So it is our legitimacy in the field that has allowed us to continue to ask questions and gain access to this information. It is because we had a copy of certain UN communications that we have been able to show that such documents existed. When we had a fax that was an ‘incoming’ one it meant there was a ‘return’ fax somewhere, and vice versa. This is what allowed us to submit documents and questions to the inquiry commission, so that it could ask for certain clearly identified documents to be declassified. But, it did not get access to them.*

Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF Legal Advisor,  
Interviewed in 2015 (in French).

**On 29 March 2001, Christina Schmitz and Daniel O’Brien, the two MSF volunteers present in Srebrenica when the city fell, testified before the French Parliamentary Fact-Finding Commission. It was decided that they would focus on narrating what they saw on the ground, while the analysis would be provided at the upcoming testimony of the programme coordinator.**

**Furthermore, none of the MPs paid attention to the testimony of the two volunteers regarding the presence in the enclave, on the day of the NATO air attack, of an advance team of NATO military air controllers. Yet this piece of information contradicted the official justification given by the French authorities for the lack of timely air strikes, according to which, the absence of such a team prevented the continuation of the air strikes. [V29](#) **



**‘Testimony** of Christina Schmitz and Daniel O’Brien, MSF Volunteers in Srebrenica, Before the French Parliamentary Fact-Finding Commission on Events in Srebrenica, 29 March 2001 (in English).

**Extract:**

**F. Loncle:** [...] Since you stated several times that the attack and massacres were foreseeable, why then didn’t MSF evacuate or attempt to evacuate its Bosnian staff?

**C. Schmitz:** That is, first and foremost, a question for everybody here today. Were these massacres foreseeable? Did anybody know about them? Did you know that this was happening? We didn’t know at the time, even though, looking back, it may have seemed foreseeable. As to why we didn’t evacuate our local staff, we wanted to remain with the population, despite the events unfolding. Had we evacuated our local and international staff prior to or during the fall of the enclave, who would have stayed with the population at that



moment? We didn't know, I assure you, we didn't know that the enclave would fall. And on 11 July, as I've already stated, we thought that we would be able to go back in. That it was just a temporary displacement of the population. [...]

**C. Schmitz:** We had a vague notion that the men had been separated, we knew there were problems. But I could never say, today, that we were aware of what was going on exactly. Not at all. Otherwise, had we known, we would have been much firmer in terms of the information we relayed to the outside world via our team in Belgrade. But all we had were vague notions. For example, the house where the men were held captive. You must understand that everything happened very quickly. There were only two of us. Things happened very fast. One event followed the other. It isn't as though we were somewhere, watching the events unfold from afar, without having anything to do whatsoever. Not at all. We were very much engaged. So, I must say that we were not aware of the breadth of the events occurring, nor were we on 22 July when we arrived in Zagreb. The awareness that something bad had happened didn't come until later, very gradually. [...]

**D. O'Brien:** [...] I believe there were certainly concerns regarding this matter because the local population and staff spoke with us. People knew that the men were being separated and that they were being killed. There is no doubt about that. So specific concerns were emerging around us. But at times like that, you need to decide for yourself what to think and, personally, I couldn't conceive, and I still can't conceive, that when you have thousands of people, individuals who know, who are surrounded by UN soldiers, the world [doesn't] know what's going on. I couldn't imagine that these people, who lived together, would be separated from the others and executed. No, I couldn't believe it at the time, despite the fears expressed by the local population. I suppose my faith in humanity was strong enough to believe that it simply couldn't happen. Sadly, such was not the case. In hindsight, we were naïve, but the locals, they knew. [...]

**F. Loncle:** [...] Your responses denote the entire issue of the foreseeable vs. unforeseeable nature of the situation. It's difficult to confirm anything, although you have attempted to during your narrative on this particular point. This is one of the issues we have been struggling with throughout the hearings. Your conclusion, however, is a tough indictment of what you initially referred to as "the responsibility of the international community." [...] For my part, I would ask you to be more specific, and you have been, to a certain extent, but please go further, regarding the responsibilities, people, countries, soldiers, civilians, political leaders, responsibilities that you wish to evoke, with greater precision, in this tragic case. If I may, the expression 'international community' is not specific enough.

**C. Schmitz:** [...] The question you are asking is the same one we have been asking ourselves and that's ultimately the reason we are here today. We would like you to tell us, for the international community to tell us, who was actually accountable and for what. It is not the role of NGOs to say: "It was this person, it was that country, it was this nationality." We ask the same question and it is the same one asked by the population of Srebrenica: Who was responsible? Because even today, we still don't know. [...]

**On 26 April 2001, MSF published two confidential documents on its Srebrenica site that purportedly proved the existence of a non-intervention agreement between General Mladic and UNPROFOR as well as disagreements within UNPROFOR regarding the air strikes.**



'Srebrenica: MSF Publishes Confidential Documents Challenging General Janvier,' *Agence France Presse*, 26 April 2001 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

According to the humanitarian organisation, whose main office is in Paris, General Janvier's based his report on his first meeting with Bosnian Serb General Ratko Mladic on June 4, 1995. This meeting was the subject of a June 15, 1995 confidential fax between UN Special Envoy Yasushi Akashi and the Chief of Peacekeeping Operations at that time, Kofi Annan. The fax "confirms the information stating that General Mladic had prepared an agreement that tied the freeing of the hostages to the non-use of air force against the Serbians." On 1 June, the Bosnian Serbs had taken 377 UN hostages, whom they were freeing in small groups. The last hostages, at least 26 people, were only freed on June 18, before the July 11 Srebrenica offensive. The UN fax stated that General Janvier did not notify the Secretary-General about this meeting until 11 days after it took place and only after "the Secretariat's express request."

A second confidential document revealed by MSF, a 9 June 1995 report from a meeting between General Janvier, British General Rupert Smith, Commander of the UN forces in Bosnia (UNPROFOR), and Mr. Akashi confirmed the issues on which French General Janvier was challenged by General Cees Nicolai, the Dutch UNPROFOR Chief in Bosnia, and Thom Karremans, Commander of the Dutch Blue Helmets deployed in Srebrenica, when they testified last Thursday before the French National Assembly's Fact-Finding Commission investigating the disappearance of 7,000 people from Srebrenica. The two Dutch officers maintained that "if massive air support had been implemented quickly, as of the first day of the Serbian offensive in Bosnia, this tragedy might have been avoided." General Nicolai emphasised the disagreement between General Janvier and General Smith on the use of air force. Two strikes were launched on the afternoon of July 11, but it was too late. The Bosnian Serbs then carried out a massive deportation of the Muslim population and approximately 7,000 people, mostly men, disappeared.

**On 17 May 2001, Pierre Salignon, MSF France Deputy Programme Manager, in charge of programmes in the former Yugoslavia at the time of the events, gave testimony raising specific questions and highlighting the contradictions in the existing information. V30**



**Testimony** Presented by [Pierre Salignon] MSF During the French Parliamentary Fact-Finding Commission Hearings on the Srebrenica Tragedy, 16 May 2001 (in French).

**Extract:**

Conclusion: In order to reply to your questions I feel it important to underline my convictions once again on the tragedy of Srebrenica. The fall as well as the massacres of Srebrenica, were foreseeable. The promise of protection made to the inhabitants of Srebrenica was not kept and the lack of political will to defend them contributed to leading them to the massacre. They were abandoned. This is why all possible light should be shed on French responsibility in this tragedy.



'Deputies' Timid Inquiry into Srebrenica,' Claire Tréan, *Le Monde* (France), 20 May 2001 (in French).

**Extract:**

Hasn't everything already been said in multiple settings, particularly before the French deputies who have been taking weekly testimony since autumn from witnesses, and political and military leaders from that period? "No," says Médecins Sans Frontières, which was behind the creation of this parliamentary fact-finding commission and which strongly emphasised its expectations for the process when Pierre Salignon, MSF France Deputy Programme Manager, in charge of programmes in the former Yugoslavia in 1995, testified on Thursday 17 May. He had visited Srebrenica several times before July 1995 and tried to obtain access to the enclaves from Bosnian Serb authorities in Pale for MSF's new teams. On Thursday, he asserted, contrary to most of the individuals who testified previously, that "the killings were foreseeable." In June, "the volunteers in the field knew that there would be an attack on the enclave, "which should have been even clearer to western military observers," he said, referring to the military preparations of the Bosnian Serbs and the threats made to him, by their Vice-President, Nicola Koljevic.

However, beyond his testimony, the MSF representative clearly sought to refocus the investigation conducted by the French deputies on the very subject of this proceeding: How could the international community have failed so grievously in its duty to protect civilians, which it had promised to take on? He also sought to focus attention on several questions that the deputies have not yet addressed. "I do not have the expertise to determine whether it was possible to carry out NATO strikes to defend Srebrenica," he told the deputies, "but what jumps out is that the arguments presented to you to justify the lack of strikes contradict the facts. Because in Bosnia, when they wanted to strike, they did." He said that the testimony the mission had gathered to date had not yet vanquished the "rumor" according to which French authorities had promised General Mladic that they would oppose any air intervention in exchange for freeing the Blue Helmets taken hostage in May. "I hope your work will enable you to determine what actually happened."

Another question, with Srebrenica having fallen, in military terms, how was it that, afterwards, "the UN leadership, then in the hands of two French generals, General Janvier in Zagreb and General Gobillard in Sarajevo, did not appear to have a concrete action plan to protect the civilian population?" Salignon also asked whether "the interest in facilitating the peace negotiations among Serbians, Muslims, and Croats contributed to a decision, by the Contact Group, to abandon the Srebrenica and Zepa enclaves." He offered his own answer. "The facts are there. They show that the disappearance of the two enclaves indeed facilitated the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords" two months later. [...] One may well challenge that answer, along with some of his analyses, his indiscriminate accusations of "cynicism" on the part of western governments, or his criticism of "the" policy of France, deliberately overlooking the fact that there were two, radically opposed policies, Mitterrand's and Chirac's. The offhand manner with which he referred to the earlier abuses committed in the region's Serbian villages by Srebrenica's Bosnian forces led by Nasser Oric, was also unjustified. But, while many of the points in MSF's assertions may be questionable, the organisation at least raises questions, seeks documents, and needles the deputies, who are little concerned with accuracy. Thursday's hearing was a signal, if it goes no further, the French Parliament's commission on Srebrenica will have been a waste of time.



*The Le Monde reporter said that my testimony was unbalanced in terms of the Bosnian resistance. I reread it recently and I would not change my point of view. The balance of power was not equal. It's time to stop thinking that resistance existed within the enclave. It did not. The Blue Helmets arrived, they stabilised a piece of territory, and that's it. In these cases, you evacuate, you organise, you don't stabilise. But at the time, the warring parties were incapable of doing so. It was also a political choice.*

Pierre Salignon, MSF France Deputy Programme Manager, in charge of programmes in the former Yugoslavia, 1992-1996, Interviewed in 2015 (in French).



*The most cautious will say that we remained completely impartial. I think that in the context of Bosnia and the enclaves, we took the side of Bosnia's Muslim populations. We defended them because the context was not that of a traditional war. We were in a war of ethnic cleansing.*

Dr. Renaud Tockert, MSF Belgium Programme Manager for the former Yugoslavia, 1993 - 1995, interviewed in 2000 and 2015 (in French).

**In late November 2001, before the French Parliamentary Fact-Finding Commission's report on Srebrenica was**

made public, MSF published an analysis presenting the questions it believed the commission should address. The report also included the list of documents critical for the commission to perform its work. The goal was to avoid the situation, in which journalists received a three-volume document and a glowing report, drafted in advance, by the commission, as happened during the Rwandan Fact-Finding Commission. This analysis was also distributed to the British and Dutch media.



'Parliamentary Fact-Finding Commission on Srebrenica: Arguments, Gaps, and Contradictions in the Hearings,' Médecins Sans Frontières' France **Briefing Document**, November 2001, (in French).

**Extract:**

Srebrenica - Pending questions on the eve of the publication of the report of the parliamentary fact-finding commission and without prejudging the conclusions of that work, Médecins Sans Frontières decided to prepare a summary document restating the questions and information that will help readers study and understand the commission's work. This document is not a counter-investigation. It notes the main questions - still unanswered after six years - regarding the political and military responsibilities of the main actors involved in the Srebrenica tragedy. The 1999 UN investigative report on this tragedy acknowledges that the organisation could not determine the specific responsibilities of the Member States, which remained diluted within the UN's overall responsibility. Consequently, the report asked the States to conduct their own investigations at the national level. Thus, the main purpose of the fact-finding mission must be, above all, to explain why the UN did not honor its commitment, made at France's instigation, to protect the population of Srebrenica. The report must avoid the twin traps of technical arguments and general responsibility and indicate clearly whether leaving the fate and evacuation of Srebrenica's population to General Mladic, whose war methods were clearly known to all, constitutes misconduct by the political and military leaders concerned.

In the interest of improving the protection of populations in future peacekeeping missions, MSF has listed and provided the parliamentary commission with a set of questions addressing the major 'gray' areas of this tragedy. Médecins Sans Frontières' questions: 1) Was Srebrenica's fall and the killings of its residents foreseeable? Did France know that the Bosnian Serb Army was preparing to attack Srebrenica? 2) In June 1995, did France enter into an unauthorised agreement, outside the auspices of the United Nations, to free the Blue Helmets held hostage in exchange for the permanent cessation of air strikes? 3) Why didn't General Janvier authorise air strikes in July 1995 to defend Srebrenica and protect its population? 4) Did France and the Contract Group decide to abandon the Srebrenica 'safe area' to facilitate the political settlement of the crisis? 5) Why didn't these countries organise the safe evacuation of Srebrenica's residents, in accordance with the promise of protection in Security Council Resolutions 819, 824, and 836?

This summary document presents the following for each of these five critical questions:

- The arguments made by the political and military leaders who testified
- The contradictions and gaps in these arguments, which became visible over the course of the testimony and a review of the available documents.

The parliamentary commission's report should provide specific, documented answers to these questions. MSF hopes that the commission was able to obtain certain key documents and that they will be listed in the report's appendix.



'Médecins Sans Frontières Five Key Questions,' **Le Monde** (France), 29 November 2001 (in French).

**Extract:**

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) played a significant role in the creation of the parliamentary fact-finding commission. The group lobbied for that outcome "in the interest of improving the protection of populations in future peacekeeping operations." It followed the hearings closely (and filmed them in their entirety), sent the committee its suggestions regarding the investigation, and testified twice. Indeed, MSF was the only western non-governmental organisation (NGO) working in Srebrenica for two years when the Serbian offensive occurred. Twenty-two members of its local staff died in the enclave in July 1995 or disappeared. "The MSF team was an impotent witness to the screening of the population [by Serbian forces] of the sick and wounded, the separation of men and women, and the departure of groups in convoys to unknown destinations, as well as to the lack of action on the part of the Dutch UNPROFOR battalion. Several dozen of MSF's wounded and ill patients who were 'evacuated' by the Bosnian Serbs and 'under Dutch escort' were also taken off buses and executed by Serbian forces," the organisation notes today [...]."



*The goal was to make sure that the journalists already had a question when the report came out in order to get things going again. We recalled that at the final press conference of the Rwandan Fact-Finding Commission, Paul Quilès [Chair of the Commission] simply placed the report on the table and the journalists simply summarised what he had told them: 'France has nothing to be ashamed of in terms of its actions in Rwanda.' Obviously no one had time to read that 3,000-page report! The Srebrenica fact-finding commission did not try to 'manage' the key media message so closely when the report came out. We used the passing lane to overtake them. But that's how communication works. We aren't required to be unprofessional idiots.*

Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF France Legal Advisor, Interviewed in 2015 (in French).

**The French parliament’s investigative report on Srebrenica was published 29 November 2001. It found that the responsibility for the tragedy was shared by the entire international community and specifically criticised the Dutch Blue Helmet battalion for failing to put up any resistance to the Serbians. It acknowledged General Janvier’s “errors of assessment,” but stated that his claims that he entered into an agreement with General Mladic were false.**

**Two deputies refused to support the final conclusions, believing that no proof had been provided allowing any conclusion to be reached.**



‘Srebrenica Massacres: Deputies Find that France Failed,’ Claire Tréan, **Le Monde** (France), 29 November 2001 (in French).

**Extract:**

Established through the efforts of MSF, the Parliamentary Fact-Finding Commission on Srebrenica published its report on Thursday, November 29. [...] The members found that the Srebrenica tragedy “was also a failure on the part of France.” They point to “the lack of clear political will in France, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Bosnian authorities in Sarajevo themselves to intervene in Srebrenica.” They moderate only slightly the criticism often directed at General Janvier, then-Commander of UN forces in the former Yugoslavia, for having opposed NATO air intervention when there was still time to act. The report describes him, among others, as “a link in the UN chain.” It challenges the accusation against General Janvier made by journalists and NGOs of having promised Serbian military leader Ratko Mladic to halt air strikes in Bosnia in exchange for freeing the Blue Helmets held hostage. “Most of the commission’s members are convinced that General Janvier did not agree to Mladic’s demands,” the report states.

The commission unanimously adopted the document. However, the members had to work on the conclusions twice. Some of the ten deputies challenged the first version of the conclusions, which totaled only one page out of a 1,000-page report. The new version did not produce a consensus, either. Two deputies, François Léotard and René André, expressed their reservations in a letter published in an appendix to the report. They challenged the following statements incriminating France: “France is no less responsible than others for the tragic fall of Srebrenica, France lacked all the resources necessary to carry out its mission in the field,” etc. They also challenged, as François Léotard writes, “the constant mention in the conclusion of General Janvier’s responsibility, which fails to convey a much more complex reality.” Green Deputy Marie- Hélène Aubert and Socialist Deputy Pierre Brana also took a different position from their colleagues on rumors of a deal between France and the Serbians to free the hostages, stating that suspicions remained [...]

The publication of the transcript of General Janvier’s two hearings is the newest piece of information in the report. The

former UNPROFOR Commander is one of the officers who had always been prohibited, by the Ministry of Defence, from speaking publicly and whom the deputies were able to question only in a closed-door session. The general mounted a vigorous defence against those accusations in the hearing. He referred to disagreements both with Yakushi Akashi, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative, who supported a minimalist approach to the Blue Helmets’ mission in Bosnia, and Rupert Smith, the British General who commanded UNPROFOR in Sarajevo. The latter supported engaging militarily against Serbian forces (he refused to testify). General Janvier stated that he received only one request for air support in Srebrenica, on July 9, and the commission’s report does not explain how the previous demands were lost. The former UNPROFOR Head appeared as both a strict enforcer of the UN’s limited mandate to the Blue Helmets and as a frustrated soldier, who roundly blamed the Dutch battalion in Srebrenica. He ended by asserting, as a heartfelt cry, that if the French had been in their place, they would have fought “and everything would have been different.” A diplomatic incident with The Hague placed in perspective.



‘Conclusions that Skirt Several Critical Moments,’ **Le Monde** (France), 29 November 2001 (in French).

**Extract:**

You must be willing to overlook a lot if you want to subscribe to the conclusions that the deputies produced today. We will spare them any specific reference to the ignorance of the facts, which became glaring during the hearings, their absence, or their pathetic efforts in dealing with MSF to determine the questions to ask at the next hearing.

**In the following days, MSF France’s officials emphasised publicly that while the report acknowledges the military responsibilities, it ignores the political ones and treats General Janvier as a scapegoat. They pointed to the lack of specificity in the responses to the five key questions the organisation raised. V31**



‘MSF and the Srebrenica Report: Political Responsibilities Overlooked,’ **Agence France Presse**, 29 November 2001 (in French).

**Extract:**

“One piece is very strong – the acknowledgement of the military’s responsibility, in the person of French General Bernard Janvier, Commander of UN Forces in the former Yugoslavia,” Pierre Salignon, MSF Programme Manager, specifically in Bosnia between 1993 and 1995, told AFP. “My impression is that he was assigned the easy role of the scapegoat, who hides responsibilities that are much more political in nature.” [...] “The report touches on some responsibilities in France,

which is very good, but I think that we can go much further. After all, these are ministers who made decisions,” he added, interviewed in connection with this investigation. “While the process is courageous and interesting in terms of democracy and transparency, I am disappointed by the lack of clear answers to the five key questions we listed and, particularly, the political will to protect the population,” he continued. MSF, which won the 1999 Nobel Peace prize, was working in the Muslim enclave of Srebrenica during the Serbian offensive that left 7,000 people dead has advocated strongly for a parliamentary fact-finding commission into the massacre. The organisation lost staff members in the offensive.



‘France Asks Questions About its Role in Srebrenica,’ Isabelle Lasserre, **Le Figaro** (France), 30 November 2001 (in French).

**Extract:**

Most of the questions raised by Médecins Sans Frontières, which lobbied to establish the parliamentary commission, have not yet been answered in clear and definitive fashion. Why did General Janvier refuse to launch air strikes? Did France and the Contact Group abandon Srebrenica to facilitate the political settlement of the crisis? Why weren’t the populations evacuated after the enclave fell? “It seems like there is a double standard at work here,” says Jean-Hervé Bradol, President of MSF.



“‘One Might Wonder Whether You Are Using Janvier to Exonerate Yourself and Avoid Determining Political Responsibility.’ Soldiers – Scapegoats,’ Marc Semo, **Libération** (France), 30 November, 2001 (in French).

**Extract:**

This report, which follows the UN’s and while awaiting the results of the investigation by a committee of Dutch historians, nonetheless represents a new phase in the search for truth. “The questions we asked about France’s responsibilities seemed like blasphemy then,” says Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, Legal Advisor at Médecins Sans Frontières, which was on the front lines of the struggle to hold such an inquiry. The result satisfies her only partially, particularly “because it overlooks political responsibilities.” Still, the debate has now been joined. “Unlike what happened with the fact-finding missions on the Rwandan genocide, it won’t be enough to say that France has nothing to be ashamed of in terms of its actions.”



‘Three Questions for Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, Médecins Sans Frontières’ Legal Advisor,’ **Le Point** (France), 7 December 2001 (in French).

**Extract:**

**Le Point:** The report challenges the “errors of assessment” of

General Janvier, Commander of the Blue Helmets. Does that satisfy you?

**Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier:** The official French version, which attributes the entire responsibility to the Dutch contingent has now been dismantled. We know that the Dutch indeed called for air strikes, which General Janvier ignored. The lie has retreated but we are still far from the truth.

**Le Point:** Why?

**Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier:** Because the mission was careful not to seek out those who had the political responsibility. Many unanswered questions remain. Was Srebrenica traded for the freedom of the Blue Helmets held hostage at the time? Why weren’t Srebrenica residents evacuated after the enclave fell? The commission could not answer those questions because the government, which did not provide key documents, did not cooperate.



*We are satisfied because there was still a kind of official parliamentary recognition that mistakes were made and that populations were sacrificed. But we are frustrated, too, because despite the incisive questioning during the hearings, people like Léotard continue to deny that there was a deal. The military has acknowledged that it did not come to the aid of Srebrenica’s population. We finally understand how they abandoned Srebrenica, that’s been established – but we don’t know why. The question that remains unanswered is this, were their operations inadequate or was this calculated? From that perspective, the parliamentary fact-finding commission brought out additional information, in an official context, showing that people were, indeed, abandoned. The soldiers who defended themselves raised the restrictions on their operations, in which ‘they could not do everything.’ But we learned nothing about why they abandoned them aside from incompetence, lack of resources, or planes.*

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France President, 2000-2007, Interviewed in 2015 (in French).

**While no one within MSF France was formally opposed to monitoring the parliamentary fact-finding commission, questions arose later about the legitimacy of involving the organisation in such a process: where would it lead and how would it operate? Shouldn’t MSF have been satisfied simply that the mission was created? Does a non-elected, non-profit organisation have the legitimacy to play a role in the work of the Members of Parliament? Was MSF positioning itself only as a prosecutor of the UN and Member States’ practices by failing to examine the gray areas of the agreements entered into between Bosnian Serbs and Bosnians?**



*I was really involved in the heart of this work and I have no regrets about what we did. In France, I think we*

participated in a movement, a small democratic and institutional revolution that made it possible for the parliament to assert itself in terms of the oversight of external operations, diplomacy, and defense. That's quite an achievement. Yet, over time, it raises a problem for me. Is it an NGO's role to contribute to that kind of institutional change? We have no democratic legitimacy; we're not elected. In a democracy, legitimacy comes from elections. So there are limits to the role of counter-power that an NGO can play. Others say that that's the natural role of NGOs. So you can say anything – and the contrary!

Fabien Dubuet, MSF France Deputy Legal Advisor, 1995-2005, Interviewed in 2015 (in French).



*I was a little uncomfortable because this moved into the political realm, slightly removed from humanitarian action. It is hard to assess if the methods states want to use to end wars, and their need to sometimes rely on secret agreements, are valid. Some of the military aspects were completely outside our area of expertise. Could the planes [air strikes] have done it or not? Did they have the right planes and the right bombs? We were pushing the boundaries of our knowledge and our legitimacy. I was a little defensive. There were times when I thought that Pierre and Françoise were going a bit too far. But, there was that argument about the safe humanitarian areas, which they had on their side. It was a solid argument and a real one for the future, because proposals for corridors and safe areas kept coming up all the time.*

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France President, 2000-2007, Interviewed in 2015 (in French).



*I thought there was what I described then, and still describe, as a certain relentlessness. There was a level of legal sophistication and investigation of France's role that went too far. We didn't have to pursue the legal investigation to the very end, but simply speak out as to what we believed we had seen, testifying in the visual sense of the word. This role of mentor and moral conscience is problematic. It's good that we put all our weight behind obtaining an investigation that, without it, might not have been conducted. Given our involvement in these events, it makes sense. However, insisting on the 'right' questions that should be asked, the way in which certain points of the report be highlighted, accusing France or another government, to me that seemed to cross the line of legitimacy, both as a humanitarian organisation and as an organisation involved in the matter. I remember discussing this with Pierre and Françoise because they were pushing hard on that. And it's not as if we are the UN's inspectors. I think it's an unhealthy position. Overall, our positions vis-à-vis the UN are based on a sort of ideal vision that we have about it, but I don't share that, personally. That vision leads to critiques that I think are unfounded or, at least, unfair. Last, it involved working in hidden areas, the shadowy areas of deals among the parties. There are hidden areas that aren't necessarily France's responsibility; for example, the deal between Izetbegovic and Karadzic*

*to abandon Srebrenica. We can't entirely eliminate UNPROFOR in Bosnia from the deals that the Bosnians made among themselves. The Janvier/Milosevic deal intersected the Izetbegovic/Mladic and Karadzic/Izetbegovic deals. Izetbegovic abandoned Srebrenica just as the others did, in the name of a 'realpolitik' that tried to make everything seem religiously homogenised because it can never be stressed enough that what was happening in eastern Bosnia was a war of religion. If you start to work in the gray areas, you can't stop half way.*

Dr. Rony Brauman, MSF France President, 1982 - 1994, MSF France Foundation Research Director from 1994, interviewed in 2000 and 2015 (in French).



*Some people said, 'our role was to be in Srebrenica. But now that we've succeeded in creating this fact-finding mission, we can move on. It's for others to take care of that. It's not MSF's role.' There really wasn't a discussion within MSF at the time, but it bothered me later on. To say, 'this isn't our responsibility, we can move on,' shocked me for two reasons. From the moment when you ask for something, you've got to follow through, otherwise, why ask? The United Nations report acknowledged the limits of its fact-finding abilities and expressly called on troop-contributing states to carry out their own investigation in their own country because the United Nations does not have that power and does not have access to the countries' internal archives. The French investigation was critical because the diplomats and the French army played a leading role in the former Yugoslavia. We didn't call for this investigation for moral or political reasons. We wanted to understand and highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the international response in the face of mass crimes and the protection of populations in danger.*

*We can't forget that this was the start of the international interventions intended to restore peace, facilitate humanitarian action, and protect populations. The militarisation of humanitarian aid was underway in the name of protecting populations. We knew that states have multiple agendas and that the international community is only a disparate collection of state interests. Yet, we had to try to understand whether the taking of the enclave was the result of a military accident or a political agreement and, in that case, why the agreement did not include guarantees to evacuate and protect the population. It's normal to have to negotiate in conflict situations, including in order to achieve a peace agreement, but it is important for humanitarian organisations to know how much emphasis is given to protecting populations under all of these agendas. I found the answer to that question when the UN High Representative in the Former Yugoslavia acknowledged, before the French Parliament, that he had not ordered the air strikes because that would have endangered the peace process.*

*Our work on the parliamentary fact-finding commission on Srebrenica then contributed to MSF's operational positions in other crises because we continue to face international operations that include mandates to protect populations. These mandates have changed, as shown in the examples of the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, and Central African*

Republic. They have made it possible to avoid certain mass killings. They must continue to lead us to question our role and our interactions with the international system, as we were required to do, too late, in Srebrenica.

Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF France Legal Advisor,  
Interviewed in 2015 (in French).



*We were all so involved with somewhat vengeful attitudes, that at certain moments I did wonder, 'is this really intellectually sound? Or was there an element of the old Bosnia hands at MSF who were trying to settle scores?' In any event, the president was for and the executive director was for. As for the director of operations, it wasn't particularly his thing. But I don't remember having to fight. There was not a strong opposition. There were discussions and, indeed, groaning in the corridors, 'what's the point of this?' 'This isn't MSF's role,' and so on. In the end, there were tensions between Jean-Hervé and Françoise about an interview that she gave. He didn't know about it. He learned about it after it was published. He was quibbling over wording. He thought that Françoise was pointing the needle towards the law, while he wanted to move it in the other direction [more political]. I didn't have any problem talking about international humanitarian law. However, some doctors had a different perspective. This was the start of an atmosphere in which the 'not-100%-medical' approach was challenged. It was a critique of methods, 'that's not what we do,' or a critique of legitimacy, 'that could endanger operations and blur our image.' In the end, I thought it made sense to do that. We showed that we could also work on an in-depth issue for several years. Our presence at the hearings and Christina's and Daniel's testimony gave meaning to all that.*

Stephan Oberreit, MSF Belgium/France General  
Coordinator in the former Yugoslavia, May-November  
1995, MSF France Communications Director 2000 - 2006,  
Interviewed in 2015 (in French).

## Reaction to the reports on Dutch responsibilities

**in March 2002, MSF Holland set up a working group to prepare a document analysing the Srebrenica report that the Dutch Institute for War Documentation (NIOD) was about to publish, which was an investigation requested by the Dutch Parliament in 1996. On April 9, 2002, on the eve of the official publication of the report, MSF Holland issued a press release and a document titled, "Questions for the Future," that raised three questions about the foreseeability of the events of July 1995 in Srebrenica, which the organisation believed the report should have answered. An op-ed piece was also published in the Dutch daily newspaper, *Trouw*.**



'Srebrenica, Questions for the Future,' Memo  
MSF Holland, 4 April 2002 (in Dutch, in  
English).

### Extract:

Open and honest debate needed for survivors and Dutch society. [...] The NIOD enquiry was not the first enquiry that was carried out; a number of reports have been written about Srebrenica. The discussions have revolved around the role and mandate of the UN, but the specific role and mandate of the Netherlands remains a sensitive issue and a taboo until now. MSF Holland applauds the release of the NIOD report and looks forward to an open and honest debate about the lessons that can be learned from the Srebrenica massacre and the international failure to prevent such horrors. However, MSF Holland is disheartened that it has taken more than five years to produce this independent report. The lessons learned from Srebrenica would have been useful for the Netherlands and the international community that have been involved in various military interventions since Srebrenica. Moreover, the survivors of Srebrenica are still struggling to piece together their lives and their country. It is essential to gather all info about the events preceding the fall of the enclave so that the survivors can cope with the aftermath.

In the interest of the survivors, MSF-Holland would like to know if the NIOD has had access to all relevant sources of information and if these sources have been used in the investigation. Was everyone who played a role in this tragedy questioned, including members of the Bosnian society and survivors of the mass murder! [...] 'Why is MSF speaking out now?' In March 1993, Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) started working in the enclave of Srebrenica. In July 1995, two international staff workers, Christine Schmitz and Daniel O'Brien, were present with national staff in the enclave at the time of the fall, the deportations, and the executions. As the only international aid organisation with international staff in Srebrenica at that time, MSF witnessed the panic and fear of death amongst the population during the fall of the enclave and the days that followed. MSF witnessed the international community's failure to act, which resulted in the deaths of many thousands of people. The fact of our presence, bearing witness to events, provides us with the responsibility to demand total disclosure of the facts. This openness is required to ensure that no population is ever left to face such a destiny, to guarantee that our soldiers never face such unfeasible responsibilities and failure, and to ensure that civilians are never again lulled into believing they are safe, a belief that may have influenced their decision not to flee while they still could.

That is why the NIOD report and the subsequent parliamentary debate are crucial. And, even if the Serbian forces are ultimately responsible for the massacres, the survivors of Srebrenica deserve an open and honest explanation of the failure of the UN forces in Bosnia to meet their promise of protection. Prior to the publication of the NIOD report, MSF would like to raise a few important questions for which responsibility now needs to be taken. MSF is in part, so involved because the organisation worked closely with the hospital staff in Srebrenica. Of the 128 employees, 22 never

arrived in Tuzla. MSF succeeded in evacuating 13 of its Bosnian colleagues. Meho Bosnjakovic chose to stay with his family and is one of the many thousands that were murdered.

The Dutch involvement in the Srebrenica tragedy can be divided into four stages:

1. The first stage was the run-up, the decision-making process that led to the dispatch of a battalion of the Air-Mobile Brigade to the enclave of Srebrenica.
2. The second stage was the presence of Dutchbat in Srebrenica from February 1994 to the beginning of July 1995.
3. The third stage was the seizure of Srebrenica and the subsequent reactions of Dutchbat and the United Nations.
4. The final stage was the period after the fall in which the mass murders were carried out.

There is one question that is central to all four stages: Was the population offered protection, and if so, how was this protection realised in practice? [...]

The NIOD report must provide an answer to the following questions:

Question 1 Was the concept of 'safe area' credible and tenable?

Question 2 Could the fall of the enclave have been foreseen?

Question 3 Could it have been foreseen that so many people would be killed after the enclave had fallen?



'Srebrenica,' **Email** from MSF Holland Press Officer to MSF Communication Departments, 5 April 2002 (in English, edited).

Please find attached a report that we produced. You can use it for web/or other purposes. As you may recall in 1996, the Dutch government assigned the Dutch Institute for War Documentation (NIOD) to do a comprehensive study about the fall of Srebrenica and the Dutch involvement. In fact, the research assignment was rather broad: the decision making process, the context in Bosnia, the fall of the enclave and the killings. The government assigned the [enquiry to] NIOD, after several attempts to 'close' this black chapter in Dutch history. The attempts failed, as new facts and information kept popping up, which then challenged the previously presented picture of the events. There was a great sense of suspicion in the public in Holland, that the government was covering up all sorts of details, and that they didn't face their responsibility.

The NIOD research has proven to be an effective way to avoid a political confrontation about Srebrenica. Referring repeatedly to the NIOD report blocked debates: we are waiting for the report [...] As you know, the French parliament has conducted an inquiry in the fall and massacres of Srebrenica last year. MSF France had been pushing for this inquiry and has influenced [it] through lobbying and posing specific questions. One of the strong foci of the investigation was the role of General Janvier, who had allegedly blocked air strikes. These air strikes might have prevented the fall of the enclave. It was stated that he did so, in return for a deal with Mladic to release the UN hostages. The outcome of the French report was disappointing, as

no clear political responsibilities were identified. The story about General Janvier was not resolved (no proof, but also no proof against it.) The French commission criticised the attitude of Dutchbat, the Dutch UN battalion in Srebrenica, as they had not done anything to resist the Serbian attack. Had a French battalion been in Srebrenica [...]

Dutch politicians reacted furiously on these statements. This is where MSF Holland came in. We sent out a statement to call for a serious, open, and honest discussion in Holland and dismissed the defensive responses on the French report. Next Wednesday, 10 April, the NIOD report will be presented: 3,000 pages, + 2,000 pages annexes. MSF Holland has been preparing itself and see how we could contribute to the debate, more specifically: how we could push for clarity regarding the issue of failed protection in Srebrenica and protection in future international interventions. We have produced a 'brochure,' or report if you want, in which we present some questions, which we hope the NIOD report will answer and clarify satisfactorily, and which should be leading questions in the political debate that will follow the presentation of the report. Next Tuesday, we will publish an opinion article in the newspaper that will underline our concerns that Holland and the international community in general will only draw a cynical conclusion from Srebrenica: we can't and don't want anymore responsibility for the protection of civilians in war zones. [...] We had a discussion yesterday evening with some journalists, a peace organisation here, and someone from a Research Institute for International Affairs about the NIOD report and strategies to try and get a sensible discussion ongoing in Holland, and we will engage in interviews and public debates.



'The Lessons of Srebrenica: Take Protection of Local Populations Seriously,' MSF Holland **Press Release**, 9 April 2002 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

Médecins sans Frontières warns the Netherlands and the international community against drawing the wrong conclusions from the failure of Dutchbat in Srebrenica. The fact that a mass murder could be perpetrated on Bosnian males, despite the presence of UN troops must lead to a profound analysis of the mistakes that were made. These mistakes must be avoided in future missions. The basic question is how to offer real protection to populations threatened with war violence? Médecins sans Frontières is however, afraid that the Dutch government and the international community may already have drawn a cynical conclusion, namely, that it is best to remain uninvolved.

Since Srebrenica, they have clearly avoided protecting populations threatened with war violence. For example, protection was explicitly ruled out during the peace mission in Ethiopia/Eritrea. The primary focus of attention was the safety of the troops. If violence erupted, the Dutch UNMEE [UN Mission in Ethiopia/Eritrea] troops would be evacuated. The pending publication of the NIOD investigative report has rekindled the debate on Srebrenica in the Netherlands and on the inter-



national stage. Up to now, this debate has been scarcely possible due to political sensitivity in the Netherlands, and has been characterised mainly by shifting the responsibility. It is shocking that seven years after the mass murders, which took place in the presence of a UN force, so little is known about what actually happened in Srebrenica. The NIOD report will have to make a significant contribution towards satisfying this need for clarity. We therefore call upon the Dutch government to hold an open debate unhampered by personal or political sensitivity. This debate must lead to a clear statement on how and under which conditions the Dutch government intends to realise the actual protection of threatened civilians in crisis zones.



'Draw the Right Conclusions from Srebrenica,' MSF Holland **Letter to the Editor, Trouw** (The Netherlands), 9 April 2002 (in Dutch).

Even before the long-awaited publication of the NIOD report on Srebrenica, revelations are coming thick and fast. The expectations for the report are extremely high and will probably be followed by a tough political fight. However, hardly any attention has been paid to the cardinal question surrounding Srebrenica, what lessons are being learned from the fall of the enclave regarding the protection of civilians threatened by the violence of war? Since Srebrenica, the Netherlands has adopted a highly restrained position with regard to peace missions. This is understandable in view of the traumatic experiences. But the lessons learned by the Netherlands are clearly reflected in its most important mission since Srebrenica, the UNMEE mission in Ethiopia/Eritrea.

The Netherlands is now taking part in low-risk peace missions whereby its own safety comes first. UNMEE explicitly had no responsibility for the protection of the local population. The agreement was that UNMEE would leave immediately as soon as violence broke out between the warring parties. However, one lesson of Srebrenica is that when the UN and the Netherlands have troops stationed in an area, they assume a moral responsibility towards the population. The local civilians count on the UN troops for protection. After all, who else can they turn to? More and more often civilians in war zones are being deliberately threatened and murdered. Médecins sans Frontières works in many of these regions. Our team in Srebrenica witnessed the tragedy that unfolded there. Our personnel tended to the wounded and saw the mortal fear that took control of the people when the Bosnian Serbs advanced.

No matter how essential humanitarian aid is to survival in these areas, as a humanitarian organisation, we can only shield the civilian population from violence to a very limited degree. If we are not to turn our backs in total indifference, then the international community will have to assume responsibility and act. It will then also have to accept the inevitable obligation to actually protect the people. The true circumstances of the fall of Srebrenica and the mass murders that followed must come to light. Inevitably, we must recognise the mistakes that were made. This is crucial in order to ensure that

people are never again left to fate in such a way. Moreover, no troops must ever again be confronted with such impossible responsibilities and such tragic failure. Finally, never again must a civilian population be given an illusion of safety, which leads them to mistakenly decide not to flee on time. It is only through meticulous analysis and an open debate on the events that the right conclusions can be drawn for the future.

It would be too cynical if the conclusion from Srebrenica were that we should never again protect civilians. The lessons of Srebrenica must address the question of why the mission failed so tragically and how real protection should be provided. We hope that the NIOD report will offer a clear analysis of the failure of the Srebrenica mission and we call upon the Dutch Government to institute an open debate. The results of this debate ought to be that the Netherlands makes clear how and under which circumstances it intends to provide real protection for threatened civilians in crisis zones.



*We managed to get some insight, through a report from a Dutch organisation, Pax Christi that came out before the NIOD report. I coordinated the group working on the MSF report, trying to get it out. This was not easy. It was so hard to get an agreement here. Emotions were still strong. And I think this report didn't have much resonance.*

Wilna van Aartzen, MSF Holland in the former Yugoslavia, 1991-1993, then Head of the Emergency Desk, then Director of Operations, Interviewed in 2015 (in English).



*That is a political trick: if you don't know, you install a commission. They will be busy for two years, and by then something else will be more important. To be honest, we at MSF do the same. The choice of NIOD - that was politics. The NIOD was appointed because the NIOD is about history and had nothing to do with politics. This choice was already a de-politisation of the issue. We put it in the hands of historians that are known for being very slow and then it ran to 2002 and they could take responsibilities with no consequences. It was like a balloon that was empty. And by that time, there was recognition of the fact that the Dutchbat had failed. But in 1995 and 1996 it was not possible. That is why I think it was courageous from Pronk, De Milliano, Christina, and MSF to say that the king was naked.*

Wouter Kok, MSF Holland Medical Coordinator in Sarajevo, Bosnia, December 1991 – September 1992, then various positions in the MSF-Holland Bosnia desk September 1992 – 1996, interviewed in 2015 (in English).



*What I do remember is that in Amsterdam, the Dutch fluctuated, depending on the year and their leaders, in terms of their willingness to place blame on the Dutch soldiers. As early as July 1995, there was Jacques de Milliano [MSF*

Holland General Director], who has always been in favour of speaking out publicly, and then the rest of the desk, whose line of thinking was more like: "This is less important to us, it isn't really our business, let's stand back, no loud incriminations by MSF of the Dutch Army".

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France President, 2000-2007, Interviewed in 2015 (in French)



There are historically significant events that only gain meaning if we continue to examine them. And Srebrenica was like Halabja<sup>13</sup> – crucial times in our history. Why didn't the parliamentary commission raise the issue of protection with Voorhoeve? MSF could have asked that it be raised. We had pretty specific information about that issue. It's most likely due to our lack of information about the workings of a parliamentary system. If we want a proper investigation, we need to brief legislators. And then there are always people who say 'let's go' and bring along others. If we ask people who were involved in the events to participate, they generally agree and suggest the right questions to ask. But I myself was never consulted. It may also be due to the MSF system. In 2002, it was already seven years after the events so we were dealing with other operational issues. And it's not really like MSF to go back over events that occurred seven years before. Or maybe we thought that everything had already been said.

Dr Jacques de Milliano, MSF Holland General Director, 1985-1996, interviewed in 2000 and 2015 (in French).

**On April 10, 2002, the Dutch NIOD report on the fall of the Srebrenica enclave was published. It found that all the actors in the international community, particularly the UN, shared responsibility. While it accused General Janvier of not authorising air strikes in time, it rejected the notion of a hostage deal with Bosnian-Serb forces. On 8 May 2002, a detailed document analysing the NIOD report was distributed within MSF Holland but was not made public.**



'Srebrenica: A Report Diffuses the Responsibility of the Dutch Soldiers,' **Agence France Presse**, 10 April 2002 (in French).

#### Extract:

The report titled, 'Srebrenica, a Safe Area - Reconstruction,

13. From 16-19 March 1988, the regime of Saddam Hussein massacred the population in the Kurdish village of Halabja with chemical weapons. Five thousand people lost their lives. Dr Jacques de Milliano, then General Director of MSF Holland, and Dr Reginald Moreels, then President of MSF Belgium, immediately went to the site to examine the victims. During a press conference in Teheran on 26 March, they said that according to their clinical examination, the victims were killed by a "highly toxic, fast-acting chemical gas."

Background, Consequences and Analyses of the fall of a Safe Area,' details the events that led to the mass killings and analyses the responsibilities and sources of the tragedy. Written by the Dutch Institute for War Documentation (NIOD) at the request of the country's government, it concludes after five years of research that, "humanitarian considerations and political ambitions led the Netherlands to participate in an ill-considered and, in practical terms, unachievable peace-keeping mission. Many who supported this policy bear a heavy responsibility" out of negligence, the report states, referring to Dutch political leaders and the military hierarchy. NIOD also points the finger at the media, which it criticises for suggesting that the Dutch soldiers were indifferent to the fate of the Muslim population. It specifically blames the soldiers' UN mandate, which contributed to the mission becoming trapped in a "quagmire" and indirectly caused the mass killings. The authors conclude that by virtue of their limited number, 200 poorly-armed men caught in the crossfire who were required to remain impartial and prohibited from responding unless targeted directly. Their vision was blurred by the "illusion of the safe area," the Dutch soldiers could not maneuver freely. They reject any accusation of "collaboration" (according to a term used by a Dutch Blue Helmet) with the Serbian assailants. Acknowledging that General Ratko Mladic, military leader of the Bosnian Serbs, had decided to take the entire enclave "given the lack of armed resistance," offered by the Dutch Blue Helmets, the writers believe, however, that the Dutch could not have taken any action to defend Srebrenica because that would have been "contrary to UN instructions." To counter the Serbians, the battalion was counting on air intervention, which the UNPROFOR leaders had rejected. NIOD rejects the notion that General Bernard Janvier, head of UNPROFOR, had entered into an agreement with General Mladic to refrain from air strikes in exchange for the freeing of Dutch hostages held by the Bosnian Serbs. NIOD finds that General Mladic's forces bear primary responsibility for the massacre. It notes that it did not find information suggesting that Belgrade ordered or supported the killings. With regard to the "screening" of the population in which the Dutch soldiers participated, the NIOD describes it as "taken for granted," even if it constituted participation in "ethnic cleansing," given the "threat of epidemic and the Muslims' own desire to leave as quickly as possible." In addition, "the battalion commander could not have realised that this would lead to mass killings, even if he was aware that these men's future was uncertain," the authors state. The Hague's lack of political initiative at the time of the mass killing is attributed to poor communication with the Dutch military hierarchy. According to the authors, Dutch headquarters minimised the seriousness of the events so as not to tarnish the army's image.



'First Reactions Srebrenica Report in Holland,' **Email** from MSF Holland Information Officer to MSF Communication Departments, 10 April 2002 (in English, edited).

#### Extract:

What is remarkable in the summary given today is that the

judgment about Dutchbat is quite mild. They have acted within their mandate, have followed instructions. It is only suggested, that there is a question as to what would have happened if Dutchbat had taken a stronger stand against the Serbians – would this have resulted in a different course of the events ??? According to today's presentation, Dutchbat chose to facilitate a quick evacuation of the population, as they feared a big humanitarian disaster in and around the compound as there were shortages of food and water and very poor sanitary conditions. In fact, NIOD says, they have given priority to the evacuation of the women and children and, in a way, accepted that they couldn't really help the men. At this point in the presentation of the women of Srebrenica, the ex-UN translator, Hassan Nuhanovic stood up and left the room, he found this an appalling statement.

As for responses to the media: We unfortunately must insist that we need some time to really digest the report and judge in light of our questions. These questions in short: Was the mission at all feasible? Was the fall of the enclave foreseeable? And was the genocide foreseeable? After these questions, follows the crucial question, what was done to ensure proper protection of the population? Given the very tragic events in Srebrenica, it is clear that the protection failed. Now it is important to see why it failed. We will read the report to see if it provides a full and credible analysis to answer these questions. Next step is that the politicians discuss these issues and come up with a clear position about Srebrenica, and very important for MSF, draw clear conclusions with respect to protection of populations in future crises. We can reiterate our position as presented in the opinion letter of yesterday, in which we focus on that issue of protection. We fear that only cynical lessons will be learned from Srebrenica, meaning that we won't even assume responsibility anymore for protection of populations in crises. The line of the presentation today even reinforced this worry; it focused so much on the circumstances, as if the events were unavoidable.

So again, we will particularly try and find the lessons that can be learned from Srebrenica. Was everything considered that could be done to really protect the population, even if the mandate was poor, even if the circumstances were complex? Here in Holland we might be asked whether we want a parliamentary enquiry. We are not going to actively advocate for this, but we might come to that conclusion. The importance of such an enquiry can be that: - it is public, so those responsible will have to account for their actions and decisions publicly, accountability. An enquiry should focus on conclusions towards future interventions: How can we provide protection to population?



'MSF H Internal Report: Médecins Sans Frontières and the NIOD Report on Srebrenica,' Malou Nozeman, MSF Holland, 8 May 2002 (in Dutch, in English).

#### Extract:

Main conclusions of the report and the Appendix:

- The mass murder of 7,500 Muslim men was planned only after the fall of the enclave (i.e. after 11 June). The NIOD found no evidence that the mass murder was planned well in advance (p. 2,573).
- The attempt by thousands of Muslim men to escape the enclave was the unintended trigger for the mass executions (p. 3,154). The researchers claim that this came as a complete surprise to Mladic. The response to this flight was exceptionally violent, fuelled by hatred and revenge.
- No evidence was found of "political or military cooperation" between the Bosnian-Serb army and the Milosevic regime in Belgrade with regard to the mass murder (p. 2,575).
- It is "unclear" whether Karadzic was involved in the order for the executions.
- The NIOD report points to General Mladic of the Bosnian-Serb army as the main perpetrator of the mass murder.
- The report contests repeated assertions since 1995 that the murder of Muslim men from Srebrenica took place in front of Dutchbat.

**On 5 June 2002, the Dutch Parliament created an Inquiry Commission to investigate the fall of Srebrenica. The commission's report was published on January 27, 2003. The next day, MSF Holland issued a press release noting that the commission had failed to answer the key questions regarding responsibility for the mass killings. The organisation called on the US and Great Britain to conduct an investigation on their own responsibility for the events in Srebrenica.**



'Introduction by the Chairman/Summary [of the] Most Important Conclusions,' Email from Wouter Kok, MSF Holland to MSF Communication Directors, 28 January 2003 (in English).

#### Extract:

1. The report was received with a feeling that it is a meager duplication of the much more thorough NIOD report (that led to the fall of the cabinet last year), that little or no new facts were found. The whole enquiry is seen more as a tool for all (Dutch) players in the drama to come forward with sort of public show of accountability. To express in front of the public who did what, what went wrong. The two facts that stand out (compared to NIOD):

- Janvier still does not want to testify; therefore, we still do not know why close air support was refused, why the enclave was not defended. But, it is clear that this was a UN decision, and that "our boys" were not guilty, they couldn't do a thing [wrong] (I am talking about the perception here, not my opinion).

- General Couzy is straightforwardly accused of deliberately withholding crucial information from the political leadership. Knowledge of the massacre he undoubtedly had was not shared with the minister. He is pensioned already, so I do not know what follow up it will get.

2. Internal MSF Holland: We think that the maximum attention for the Srebrenica situation was raised through the NIOD and the parliamentary enquiry. Neither within the Dutch society, nor within MSF Holland do we have the feeling that much more can be achieved. I am afraid the major importance of the Srebrenica situation will be looking at the future: we expect it will be used mainly for future reference to get a maximum mandate for other missions, in which protection of civilians will be the cornerstone to judge these mandates. It will, as such, probably have a positive effect on the Dutch contributions toward peace missions. One would hope for less naiveté and more realism, during the design of missions. I realise that it is the population of Srebrenica that had to pay the price, nobody else. What's the attention in France aiming at? We will check what sort and if translations are foreseen, and let you know.



'Vital Questions Unanswered by Dutch Inquiry into Srebrenica Massacre- Médecins Sans Frontières Calls for the United States and Britain to Carry Out Their Own Investigations,' **MSF B/F/H Press Release**, 29 January 2003 (in English, in French).

#### Extract:

Reacting to the report published by the Dutch Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into the fall of Srebrenica, Médecins Sans Frontières calls for the remaining, unanswered questions to be taken up in further, with national inquiries in Britain and the United States. Eight years after the fall of the enclave and the massacre of more than 7,000 people, who were supposedly protected by the UN, crucial issues have still not been resolved in inquiries by the UN, France, and now the Netherlands.

MSF, who had a medical team working in the enclave, believes that the UN's failure has not been adequately explained. Most significantly, the reasons, which led General Janvier, UNPROFOR's Commander, to refuse NATO air strikes, remain obscure. These strikes were requested by the Dutch UN battalion in July 1995, in order to halt the Serbian offensive against the Srebrenica enclave and to protect the civilian population. The Dutch report does clear up some of the ambiguities, which remained after the French Parliamentary Fact-Finding Commission. Notably, the report reaffirms that all the conditions were met for an air strike and concludes that the decision to not use air power is the responsibility of General Janvier. However, the report does not furnish any explanation of what led to the decision. The Dutch parliamentarians restricted themselves to commenting that "uncertainty remains concerning the motivations of General Janvier" and that "his decision was met with incomprehension from his team." MSF also regrets that General Janvier was not allowed by the French authorities to be interviewed by the Dutch parliamentary commission.

Questions remain about what negotiations could have led to the decision by the UN to abandon Srebrenica. Was there an agreement on the liberation of UN soldiers held hostage, or was it part of a deal in the peace negotiations being conducted by the Contact Group? In accordance with the UN report on the fall of Srebrenica, which requested that all concerned member

states carry out national inquiries, MSF calls on the United States and Great Britain, who played a major role in the military and diplomatic management of the Bosnian conflict, carry out open, public investigations. MSF states that these inquiries must lead to increased protection for civilians. The failure in Srebrenica, where the deployment of military forces with a purely humanitarian mandate made them incapable of opposing criminal policies against civilians, must never be repeated.



*Why did NATO planes conduct sorties over the site but not drop bombs? With this question, we reached a new level in the decision chain and an epilogue to the history of these events. Yasushi Akashi [UN Special Representative for Yugoslavia] had already revealed it: 'An agreement is worth more than lives.' And everyone should know this from experience. The most dangerous time in war is when peace is announced. That's when all the 'dirty tricks' are played. Every actor should know that at the moment when it enters into a peace process, it must watch for the vulnerable populations, those who are minorities in majority areas, and who will be the subject of trade-offs. I strongly believe that if there had been something specific at Dayton about protecting and evacuating the enclaves, this would not have happened. People who work on these issues professionally have enough information today to know what to watch out for, and distrust, in peacekeeping operations and peace processes.*

Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF Legal Advisor,  
Interviewed in 2015 (in French).


**Meanwhile, the Brahimi report, named for its author, Lakhdar Brahimi, was published in 2000. The report highlighted the ways in which the UN peacekeeping operations had failed to protect the population. Over the following years, the doctrine governing intervention by the peacekeeping forces was revised. It now has a mandate for "protecting civilians from the threat of imminent physical violence." This mandate goes well beyond the authority previously granted to the peacekeepers. However, its implementation depends on the political will of the UN's Member States.**



*This has led us to an a priori hostility towards this policy, which involves creating humanitarian areas close to conflict areas so that people do not cross borders and conflicts do not extend beyond their national framework. The crisis in the former Yugoslavia seemed to us to be the apogee of this strategy of containment, which did not work. Between Kibeho and Srebrenica, the protected areas fell each time and several thousand people were killed. This further convinced us that when political or military leaders want to conduct humanitarian activities outside the traditional system that involves refuge in another country, it was difficult to believe that they would keep their word. For us, it was a very practical question. Under these*

circumstances, do we say to people, 'yes, you should go to that area, we're going there, too?' In the years that followed, this strengthened our mistrust of military-humanitarian operations. MSF's leaders had an almost automatic reaction, right, 'humanitarian area,' 'humanitarian corridor' – it always ends with people who thought they were protected being killed and states that shirk their responsibilities.'

Dr Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France President, 2000-2007, Interviewed in 2015 (in French).

 In terms of protecting civilian populations, this had a much greater impact than anyone let on. It later factored into certain discussions, decisions, and thinking on the part of the UN and its Peacekeeping Department. These tragedies also had considerable consequences for the UN in terms of peacekeeping. First, is the fact that western states no longer want to send their soldiers as Blue Helmets. There is no longer any western contribution to peacekeeping operations today – or it is only symbolic. Now there is a real reticence on the part of the UN and the Security Council to create areas such as 'safe areas' where victims can be moved.

MSF can exercise considerable influence on the political decisions concerning the protection of civilians. This is an important role, which falls clearly within the remit of a humanitarian medical organisation, but we have a tendency to underestimate it. It's a fight we have to make, but I feel we aren't ready for it, that we're still traumatised by our experiences in the 90s in Rwanda and Bosnia. There's still suspicion and lack of confidence on our part, as well as a degree of lucidity on the reality of civilian protection mechanisms. That's the lesson we drew from the 1990s, but we're going to have to re-engage on this subject. That would involve making concrete proposals, as we did in the 1990s. However, since then we do less and less, sometimes for good reasons, but sometimes for bad reasons.

Fabien Dubuet, MSF France Deputy Legal Advisor, 1995-2005, Interviewed in 2015 (in French).

## EPILOGUE

**In 1999, the NATO bombing of Belgrade ended the campaign of violence against and deportation of the Kosovar Albanians carried out by the Serbian forces of Slobodan Milosevic's regime<sup>14</sup>. He was overthrown in 2000 and arrested in 2001.**

14. See MSF Speaking Out Case Studies, "Violence against Kosovar Albanians, NATO's Intervention 1998-1999," Laurence Binet, MSF International. <http://speakingout.msf.org/en/violence-against-kosovar-albanians-nato-intervention>.

**Starting in February 2002, Milosevic appeared before the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia on charges of war crimes, crimes against humanity in Kosovo and Croatia, and genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina. He died in 2006, before his trial concluded.**



'Slobodan Milosevic Charged with Genocide,' Marc Semon, *Libération* (France), 24 November 2001 (in French).

### Extract:

"Genocide and complicity in genocide:" for the first time in Europe's history, a former head of state has been accused of the most serious crime under an international justice system that is taking shape. Already on trial for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Kosovo and Croatia at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICT), former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic, who is being held at The Hague, must now also answer to this major charge for his role in the war in Bosnia, between 1992 and 1995.

The word inevitably invokes the Holocaust. To prevent a recurrence, in 1948, three years after the Nazi leaders were tried at Nuremberg for crimes against humanity, the United Nations sought to define genocide; that is, acts committed "with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group."

The ICTY, the first international criminal tribunal created in 1993 by the UN Security Council to judge the most serious crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia, has taken up this definition. One year later, a similar court was established for Rwanda. Under international law, genocide is defined as murder, forced transfers, rape, and similar acts that reveal a clear intent to eliminate a population or a population group.

Systematic crimes. It is not easy to prove that specific intent. Bosnian Serb political and military leaders, including, respectively, Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, have already been charged with such a crime but are still at large and the ICTY has rejected trials in absentia. General Radislav Krstic, Commander of the Serbian troops who seized the Muslim enclave of Srebrenica in July 1995 and killed more than 7,000 civilians, was convicted of genocide in August. The court held that by "deciding to kill all men of combat age, they decided to make it impossible for the Bosnian Muslim population in Srebrenica to survive." Nonetheless, this verdict left some lawyers sceptical.

However, indicting Slobodan Milosevic for genocide and 28 other charges is quite different. According to the indictment [...] he is accused of having with others, "planned, ordered, and carried out [...] a collective criminal enterprise" intended to "remove, by force and on a permanent basis, the majority of the non-Serbian population, primarily Muslim Bosnians and Croatian Bosnians, from large areas of Bosnia-Herzegovina." This was the context in which the "effort to destroy, in whole

or in part, the Muslim Bosnians and Croatian Bosnians” was carried out and was the basis for the charge of genocide, which was not taken up for Croatia or Kosovo. The systematic nature of the crimes committed by the Serbian forces in Bosnia, specifically in Srebrenica, left no doubt in that regard.

**In an appeal verdict on 19 April 2004, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia sentenced General Radislav Krstic, one of the leading Bosnian Serb perpetrators of the Srebrenica massacres, to 35 years imprisonment for genocide, aiding and abetting genocide, and war crimes. The Tribunal definitively ruled that the Bosnian Serb forces committed genocide in Srebrenica.**



‘ICT: Srebrenica Massacre was “Genocide,’ *Le Monde* (France), 21 April 2004 (in French).

#### Extract:

The appeal chamber of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) confirmed on Monday 19 April, “the Bosnian Serb forces committed genocide against the Muslims of Srebrenica,” concluding the debate on whether the events effectively constituted “genocide.” “Elderly, female, and very young Bosnian Muslims were driven out of the enclave, and between seven and eight thousand male Bosnian Muslims were killed in systematic fashion” in July 1995, the five judges declare in their summing-up of the Krstic case. General Radislav Krstic, Commander of the Drina Corps, whose soldiers carried out the executions, was initially sentenced to 46 years imprisonment. On Monday, his sentence was commuted to 35 years, as, in the view of the magistrates, he was not the direct author of the genocide but merely an accomplice. In their estimation, the moral authority lays elsewhere, with the military chief of the Bosnian Serbs, Ratko Mladic, who has been on the run for the last nine years.

**On 22 July 2008, the Serbian authorities arrested the Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and handed him over to international justice.**



‘The Serbian Authorities Put an End to the Long Escape of Radovan Karadzic,’ *Agence France Presse*, 22 July 2008 (in French).

#### Extract:

Radovan Karadzic, the former political leader of the Bosnian Serbs, indicted for war crimes and genocide by the international justice authorities, was arrested by Serbian secret services on Monday, after a 13-year manhunt. Radovan Karadzic was wanted by the international justice authorities as the insti-

gator, together with the former chief of the Bosnian Serb Army, General Ratko Mladic, of the genocide of Srebrenica in eastern Bosnia, where nearly 8,000 Muslim men were killed in July 1995, the worst massacre in Europe since the Second World War.

**On 31 March 2010, the Serbian Parliament passed a resolution for a public apology for the massacre of 8,000 Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica in 1995. V32**



‘Serbian Parliament Apologizes for the Srebrenica Massacre,’ *Le Monde* (France), 31 March 2010 (in French).

#### Extract:

On Wednesday 31 March, the Serbian Parliament passed a resolution offering a public apology for the massacre of eight thousand Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica in 1995. The country remains profoundly divided concerning this chapter in its history. The resolution is part of an attempt by Belgrade to move closer to the European Union and exorcise the demons of the wars of the 1990s. The text of the resolution, which was adopted after thirteen hours of televised debate, expresses sympathy for the victims and regret for not taking sufficient action to prevent the massacre, committed by the Bosnian Serb forces and the Serbian paramilitary militias. It does not describe the events as ‘genocide.’ “We have passed a civilised measure by politically-responsible people, founded on political conviction on the war crimes committed in Srebrenica,” declared Branko Ruzik, whose socialist party was led by Slobodan Milosevic in the 1990s.

**On 26 May 2011, Ratko Mladic, Commander of the Bosnian Serb forces was arrested and handed over to international justice.**



‘Serbia Says Jailed Mladic Will Face War Crimes Trial,’ Dan Bilefsky and Doreen Carvajal, *The New York Times* (USA), 26 May 2011 (in English).

#### Extract:

Ratko Mladic, the former Bosnian Serb General held responsible for the massacre of some 8,000 Muslim men and boys at Srebrenica in 1995, was arrested on Thursday, signaling Serbia’s intention of finally escaping the isolation it brought on itself during the Balkan wars, the bloodiest in Europe since World War II. The capture of the former general removes a major obstacle to Serbia’s becoming a member of the European Union, which had insisted that Mr. Mladic be apprehended and turned over for trial in an international court before the country could get on track to join the 27-nation union.