

# WHO ARE THE MEDECINS SANS FRONTIERES

## I THE PRINCIPLES

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) was founded to contribute to the protection of life and the alleviation of suffering out of respect for human dignity.

MSF brings care to people in precarious situations and works towards helping them regain control over their future.

### 1. MEDICAL ACTION FIRST

The actions of MSF are first and foremost medical. This primarily consists of providing curative and preventive care to people in danger, wherever they may be. In cases where this is not enough to ensure the survival of a population - as in some extreme emergencies - other means may be developed, including the provision of water, sanitation, food, shelter, etc.

This action is mainly carried out in crisis periods when a system is suddenly destabilised and the very survival of the population is threatened.

### 2. TEMOIGNAGE (WITNESSING) - AN INTEGRAL COMPLEMENT

*Temoignage* is done with the intention of improving the situation for populations in danger. It is expressed through:

- the presence of volunteers with people in danger as they provide medical care which implies being near and listening
- a duty to raise public awareness about these people
- the possibility to openly criticise or denounce breaches of international conventions. This is a last resort used when MSF volunteers witness mass violations of human rights, including forced displacement of populations, *refoulement* or forced return of refugees, genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

In exceptional cases, it may be in the best interests of the victims for MSF volunteers to provide assistance without speaking out publicly or to denounce without providing assistance, for example when humanitarian aid is “manipulated”.

### **3. RESPECT FOR MEDICAL ETHICS**

MSF missions are carried out in respect of the rules of medical ethics, in particular, the duty to provide care without causing harm to either individuals or groups. Each person in danger will be assisted with humanity, impartiality and in respect of medical confidentiality.

In other respects, this ethical consideration provides that no one will be punished for carrying out medical activities in accordance with the professional code of ethics, regardless of the circumstances or the beneficiary of the action.

Finally, no person carrying out a medical activity can be forced to perform acts or operations in contradiction to the professional code of ethics or the rules of international law.

### **4. DEFENCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS**

Médecins Sans Frontières ascribes to the principles of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law. This includes the recognition of:

- the duty to respect the fundamental rights and freedoms of each individual, including the right to physical and mental integrity and the freedom of thought and movement, as outlined in the 1949 Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- the right of victims to receive assistance, as well as the right of humanitarian organisations to provide assistance. The following conditions should also be assured: free evaluation of needs, free access to victims, control over the distribution of humanitarian aid and the respect for humanitarian immunity.

### **5. CONCERN FOR INDEPENDENCE**

The independence of MSF is characterised above all by an independence of spirit which is a condition for independent analysis and action, namely the freedom of choice in its operations, and the duration and means in carrying them out.

This independence is displayed at both the level of the organisation and of each volunteer.

- MSF strives for strict independence from all structures or powers, whether political, religious, economic or other. MSF refuses to serve or be used as an instrument of foreign policy by any government.

The concern for independence is also financial. MSF endeavours to ensure a maximum of private resources, to diversify its institutional donors, and, sometimes, to refuse financing that may affect its independence.

- From their side, MSF volunteers are expected to be discrete and will abstain from linking or implicating MSF politically, institutionally or otherwise through personal acts or opinions.

## **6. A FOUNDING PRINCIPLE: IMPARTIALITY**

Impartiality is fundamental to the mission of MSF and is inextricably linked to the independence of action. Impartiality is defined by the principles of non-discrimination and proportionality:

- non-discrimination in regard to politics, race, religion, sex or any other similar criteria.
- proportionality of assistance as it relates to the degree of needs - those in the most serious and immediate danger will receive priority.

## **7. A SPIRIT OF NEUTRALITY**

MSF does not take sides in armed conflicts and in this sense adheres to the principle of neutrality.

However, in extreme cases where volunteers are witness to mass violations of Human Rights, MSF may resort to denunciation as a last available means in helping the populations it assists. In these cases, simple assistance is rendered in vain when violations persist. For this reason, MSF will drop its strict observance of the principle of neutrality and will speak out to mobilise concern in an attempt to stop the exactions and improve the situation for these populations.

## **8. ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY**

Faced with populations in distress, MSF has an obligation to mobilise and develop its resources.

Aiming at maximum quality and effectiveness, MSF is committed to optimising its means and abilities, to directly controlling the distribution of its aid, and to regularly evaluating the effects.

In a clear and open manner, MSF assumes the responsibility to account for its actions to its beneficiaries as well as to its donors.

## **9. AN ORGANISATION OF VOLUNTEERS**

MSF is an organisation based on volunteerism. This notion principally implies:

- an individual commitment to people in precarious situations. The responsibility of the organisation is based on the responsibility taken by each volunteer;
- disinterest, attested to by the non-lucrative commitment of volunteers.

Volunteerism is a determining factor in maintaining a spirit of resistance against compromise, routine and institutionalisation.

## **10. OPERATING AS AN ASSOCIATION**

The commitment of each volunteer to the MSF movement goes beyond completing a mission; it also assumes an active participation in the associative life of the organisation and an adherence to the Charter and Principles of MSF.

Within the different representative structures of MSF, the effective participation of volunteers is based on an equal voice for each member, guaranteeing the associative character of the organisation.

MSF also endeavours to constantly integrate new volunteers to maintain spontaneity and a spirit of innovation.

Linked to the idea of volunteerism, the associative character of MSF permits an openness towards our societies and a capacity for questioning ourselves.

## **II. PRACTICAL RULES FOR OPERATING**

### **1. Organisation and decision-making**

MSF is made up of 19 national sections, with overall coherence ensured by an International Council.

The majority of members are volunteers who work or have worked for MSF. They constitute the General Assemblies of each section, and they elect a Board of Directors whose members are mainly doctors or medical professionals. Almost all are unsalaried.

The Board of Directors names the executive team. The Board guarantees respect for the MSF Principles, ensures that decisions taken at the General Assembly are executed, and controls the management of the organisation.

### **2. Non-profit**

Each section is founded on the not-for-profit principle.

The principle of disinterest is part of the commitment of all MSF personnel. In their work for MSF, staff are not entitled to additional remuneration from the organisation, its satellites, suppliers, or any other individuals or legal entities with whom the organisation has relations, other than salaries or allowances. By choice, the proportion of salaried positions remains limited. Management staff salary levels are lower than those in comparable sectors of the employment market. All salaries are public.

The financial reserves of MSF are intended to ensure the smooth functioning of the organisation and to allow the organisation to rapidly react to emergencies and periodic shortfalls. In no case will they constitute a means for perpetuation. For this reason, the reserves, including property holdings, never exceed the annual operational expenses.

### **3. Management of Resources**

At least half of the global resources of MSF must come from private funding.

MSF directly carries out its operations for populations in danger, so 80% of the resources of the organisation are exclusively dedicated to operations.

MSF retains continuous and direct control over the management and delivery of its aid.

Funds received by MSF are allocated as the organisation considers them most useful, in conformity with its principles. However, if a donor wishes his or her donation to be used in a specific mission, MSF will respect this request.

#### **4. Financial Control and Transparency**

The use of MSF funds is regularly controlled. In addition, each section makes public its audited financial reports.

Different categories of expenses are clearly identified in the accounts, clearly showing the disbursement of funds. It is therefore easy to distinguish the expenses for operations, administration, communications or fund-raising.

The accounts are then published and provided to all donors through different newsletters and communications support materials produced by MSF. The accounts are also available to anyone upon request.