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Date: 27 November 1992

MSF INTERNAL POSITION PAPER ON MILITARY INTERVENTION IN SOMALIA

The US announcement - overnight - to be in favour to send troops to Somalia and their willingness to contribute 30,000 'boys' to this military intervention puts once again the position of MSF concerning this issue on the agenda. In the light of the human tragedy going on in Somalia, we have to take into account the following arguments.

The first thing to deal with is if we can have a firm position for a military intervention, being a humanitarian organisation taking into account the longer term 'humanitarian cause'. Defending humanitarian principles is part of our mission. Are we - if we would take a favourable position - not creating a precedent, a monster, in humanitarian practice: a monster out of control? There are some arguments for this. At the other hand, if violence and madness has become the standard, may be extraordinary measures as a military intervention should not be excluded. The weight of the arguments differ for the moment between the MSF sections. But, we are all extremely worried. But we do not have at the moment on basis of these considerations a consensus on approving or condemning the military action.

Secondly, there are the immediate military and political considerations. Will the deployment of those forces be fast and in sufficient number to control the whole country and will they stay long enough to stop violence? Also, will this military action been accompanied by sufficient political action - which until now has not been the case - to reach pacification and to restore in the end civil administration? There are reasons to have serious doubts; at the other hand there is the benefit of the doubt because apparently no realistic alternative is available. Here also we are not in the position for the moment to have a firm common position. But again we are all extremely worried, without approving or condemning the military action.

Thirdly, the security situation of the teams in the field - in the short run - should be taken into account. There is consensus that a 'high profile' positive position on military intervention by MSF would - in the actual emotional context - definitely increase the insecurity. This argument urges us to refrain from taking a public position to be in favour of a military action.

The conclusion of all this is that, while the internal debate is going on, MSF takes NO POSITION ON THE APPROPRIATENESS OF MILITARY INTERVENTION. We only will express our legitimate worries - see above - as humanitarian organisation and our analysis that, if military intervention takes place now, it could probably haven been prevented by more diplomatic effort in the past. In principle, negotiations should be the instrument to resolve conflicts.