

PRESS STATEMENT

ALLEGATIONS BY MEDECINS SANS FRONTIERS (MSF—FRANCE) THAT THE RRC HAD REFUSED TO PERMIT IT TO OPEN A FEEDING CENTRE FOR 5,000 MALNOURISHED CHILDREN IN WELLO REGION HAVE BEEN WIDELY DISSEMINATED BY FRENCH AND OTHER WESTERN MEDIA. THE RRC HAS MADE ITS POSITION ON THE ISSUE CLEAR IN PUBLIC STATEMENTS REFUTING THE CHARGES MADE BY MSF REPRESENTATIVES. FOLLOWING IS A SUMMARY OF THE RRC'S RESPONSE FOR YOUR INFORMATION:—

THE ALLEGATION MADE BY MSF THAT THE RRC HAS REFUSED TO ALLOW IT TO OPEN A FEEDING CENTRE NEAR KELALA IN WELLO ADMINISTRATIVE REGION IS BOTH BASELESS AND ABSURD. IT IS BASELESS BECAUSE MSF HAS MADE NEITHER A VERBAL NOR A WRITTEN REQUEST TO THE COMMISSION FOR OPENING A FEEDING CENTRE FOR MALNOURISHED CHILDREN THERE OR ELSEWHERE IN THE COUNTRY. SECONDLY, IT IS ABSURD BECAUSE THE RRC'S POLICY HAS ALWAYS BEEN AND CONTINUES TO BE TO ENCOURAGE ALL THOSE ENGAGED IN RELIEF AND REHABILITATION ACTIVITIES IN ETHIOPIA TO EXPAND THE SCOPE OF THEIR OPERATIONS TO THE EXTENT THEIR RESOURCES PERMIT SO AS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF AS MANY FAMILIES AS POSSIBLE IN THE DROUGHT AFFECTED AREAS OF THE COUNTRY. IT IS THEREFORE CONTRARY TO LOGIC THAT THE RRC IS ACCUSED OF ACTING TO DEFEAT ITS OWN ENDS—THAT OF MITIGATING THE SUFFERING OF MILLIONS OF FAMINE VICTIMS WHO ARE IN DIRE NEED OF EMERGENCY RELIEF ASSISTANCE.

MSF IS ONE OF THE SMALLEST OF THE 47 PRIVATE CHARITY ORGANISATIONS IN ETHIOPIA AND HAS MADE A USEFUL BUT MARGINAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE OVERALL GIGANTIC NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RELIEF EFFORT WITH RELATIVELY LESS EXPERIENCED AND YOUNGER FIELD WORKERS.

AS A RESULT, MSF HAS ALWAYS FELT THAT ITS RELIEF WORK IS OVERSHADOWED BY THOSE OF LARGER AND MORE EXPERIENCED CHARITIES AND, THEREFORE, SOUGHT TO MAKE ITS PRESENCE FELT BY MAKING MORE NOISE THAN "MIRACLES". THE THREAT BY MSF TO PULL OUT OF ETHIOPIA IF IT IS NOT PERMITTED TO OPEN A FEEDING CENTRE (FOR WHICH IT HAS NOT APPLIED IN THE FIRST PLACE) IS JUST ANOTHER CLAMOUR FOR MEDIA ATTENTION THROUGH WHICH IT HOPES TO GAIN CREDIT THAT IS NOT DUE.

UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES THE RRC "WILL ACCEPT ITS SELF-IMPOSED RESIGNATION, OF COURSE, WITH RELUCTANCE, BUT WITHOUT QUESTION. MSF WAS NOT FORCED TO COME IN THE FIRST PLACE AND CANNOT BE FORCED TO STAY AGAINST ITS WILL". ITS THREAT OF WITHDRAWAL IS, AT BEST, A SEARCH FOR A "CAUSE CELEBRE" FOR ABANDONING RESPONSIBILITIES IT HAD ASSUMED OF ITS OWN VOLITION. AND AT WORST, A MALICIOUS ATTEMPT TO DISCREDIT THE RRC.

IT IS REGRETTABLE THAT MSF IS WAGING A DELIBERATE CAMPAIGN OF MISINFORMATION THAT WOULD UNDERMINE AN INTERNATIONAL RELIEF EFFORT WHICH IS WIDELY ACKNOWLEDGED TO BE "THE BEST RECORDED IN HUMAN HISTORY." BY JEOPARDISING THE MASSIVE HUMANITARIAN UNDERTAKING IN THIS MANNER, MSF IS DOING MORE DAMAGE THAN GOOD AND, IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, GAINING LESS FOR THE COMPARATIVELY SMALL CONTRIBUTION IT HAS MADE TO THE OVERALL RELIEF EFFORT.

24 OCTOBER 1985  
ADDIS ABABA