

THE HUNTING AND KILLING  
OF RWANDAN REFUGEES IN  
ZAIRE-CONGO: 1996-1997

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# 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

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# ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ACF</b>	Action contre la faim (Action Against Hunger)	<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children Fund
<b>ADFL</b>	Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire	<b>USCR</b>	United States Committee for Refugees
<b>AFP</b>	Agence France Presse	<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>AI</b>	Amnesty International	<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organisation
<b>BBC</b>	British Broadcast Corporation	<b>WFP</b>	World Food Program
<b>BUDA</b>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands	<b>ZRC</b>	Zairian Red Cross
<b>DRC</b>	Democratic Republic of Congo		
<b>EEC</b>	European Economic Community	<b>MSF B</b>	MSF Belgium
<b>EU</b>	European Union	<b>MSF CH</b>	MSF Switzerland
<b>DPKO</b>	United Nations Department of Peace Keeping Operations	<b>MSF E</b>	MSF Spain
<b>ECHO</b>	European Community Humanitarian Office	<b>MSF F</b>	MSF France
<b>FAR</b>	Forces Armées Rwandaises (Rwandan Armed Forces)	<b>MSF H</b>	MSF Holland
<b>FAZ</b>	Forces armées zairoises (Zairian Armed Forces)	<b>MSF UK</b>	MSF United Kingdom
<b>HAD</b>	Humanitarian Affairs Department (MSF Holland)	<b>MSF USA</b>	MSF United States of America
<b>HRWA</b>	Human Rights Watch Africa	<b>Back up</b>	Section in charge of the international emergency team (ET) management
<b>ICRC</b>	International Committee of the Red Cross	<b>CA</b>	(conseil d'administration): board of directors
<b>IOM</b>	International Office of Migrations	<b>ET</b>	Emergency Team composed of Volunteers from operational sections.
<b>IRC</b>	International Rescue Committee	<b>IC</b>	International Council (Presidents of all MSF sections).
<b>MDM</b>	Médecins du Monde (Doctors of the World)	<b>Desk</b>	Group of people based in MSF operational headquarters in charge of managing programs in one or several countries.
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental organisation	<b>Sitrep</b>	Situation report, from the field team to the desk, or from the desk to other sections' desks or to headquarters' management teams.
<b>OAU</b>	Organisation of African Unity	<b>Task force</b>	Multidisciplinary working group for an emergency operation (Headquarters).
<b>PHR</b>	Physicians for Human Rights		
<b>RPA</b>	Rwandan Patriotic Army		
<b>RPF</b>	Rwandan Patriotic Front		
<b>SCF</b>	Save the Children Fund		
<b>UN</b>	United Nations		
<b>(UN)DHA</b>	United Nations Humanitarian Affairs Department		
<b>(UN)HCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees		



Extract from MSF archives or press clippings.



Extract from interviews conducted in 2000, 2001, 2002, and in 2003 with people who participated in and/or witnessed the events.

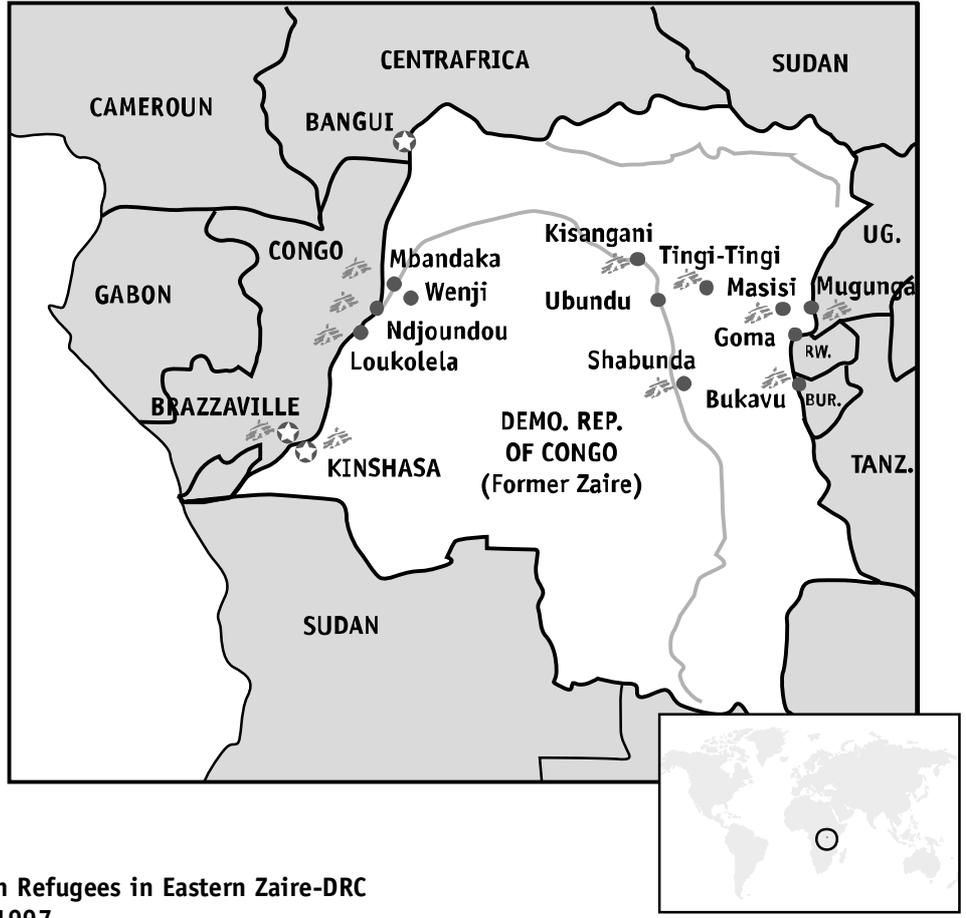


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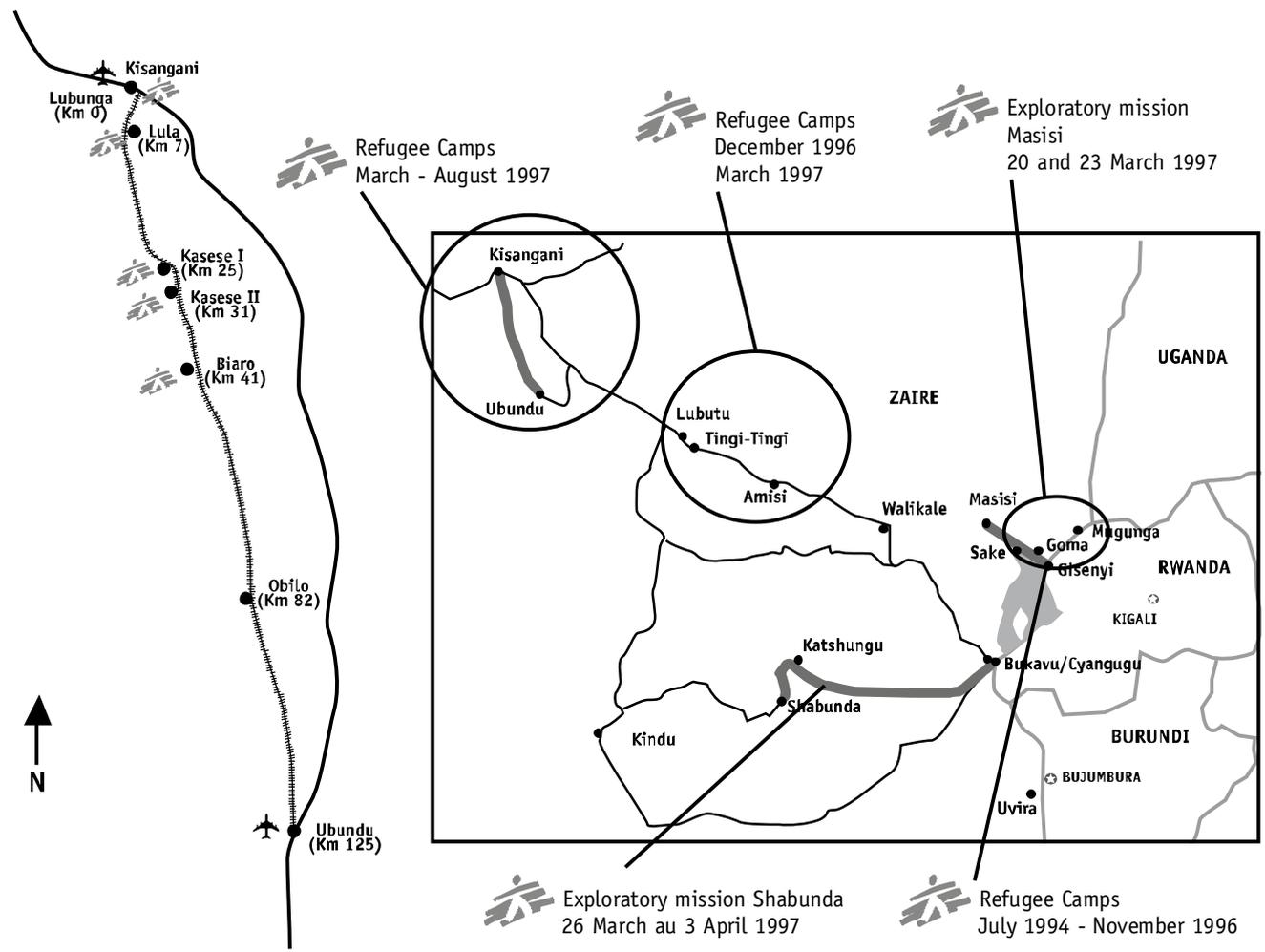


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the video.

**MSF Programmes for Rwandan Refugees in Zaire-DRC and Congo Brazzaville, 1996-1997**



**MSF Activities for Rwandan Refugees in Eastern Zaire-DRC November 1996 - August 1997**



# INTRODUCTION

On 6 April 1994, the plane carrying the Rwandan President was shot down as it approached Kigali. The slaughter of the Tutsi minority commenced in the days that followed. Simultaneously, leaders of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), an opposition movement organised by Tutsi exiles in Uganda, launched a military offensive in Rwanda and seized power in Kigali in early July.

From April to July 1994, between 500,000 and one million Rwandan Tutsi were systematically exterminated by militiamen under Rwandan Armed Forces (FAR in French) control. The genocide was the outcome of long-standing strategies implemented by politico-military extremists who roused ethnic resentments against the Tutsi minority. The extremists also killed many Rwandan Hutu who opposed the massacres.

During the summer of 1994, more than one million Rwandans fled their country, driven out as a result of threats by the former authorities and as a result of fear of civilian massacres related to the RPF's military advance. From 1994 to 1996, militiamen and former soldiers, as well as military and political leaders involved in the genocide and armed acts against Rwanda, blended into the population of the Zairian camps along the Rwandan border. Despite warnings, specifically from humanitarian organisations, no international action was taken to separate the refugees from the criminals.

The situation was complicated by the presence in eastern Congo of significant Rwandan-speaking minorities (Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge), some of whom had lived in North and South Kivu for many years. Confrontations between Hutu and Tutsi worsened among the Rwandan-speaking population, while militias organised by local politicians carried out violent attacks against Rwandan groups that, in turn, organised counter-attacks. In 1993, this violence was responsible for 7,000 - 14,000 deaths. In 1994, attacks resumed against the Tutsi Banyarwanda in Kivu.

At the same time, the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL), group opposing President Mobutu's regime which included young Banyarwanda, joined forces in eastern Zaïre under Laurent-Désiré Kabila. In October 1996, the Rwandan and Burundian armies, as well as the AFDL's united forces, attacked refugee camps in Kivu. Over the course of several weeks, hundreds of thousands of refugees were targeted in armed attacks. Humanitarian organisations and the press were denied access to them.

MSF called for an international military operation to establish safety zones. Although this operation was envisaged at one point during the crisis, it never occurred.

MSF then released a second public statement, which stated MSF's estimate that more than 10,000 people were likely to die if humanitarian organisations did not gain access to the conflict zones.

Starting on November 15, the RPA authorised the return of the refugees to Rwanda. Between 400,000 and 700,000 went back home. The international press accused humanitarian organisations, including MSF, of having exaggerated the gravity of the situation to enhance their fundraising.

In the months that followed, rebels and the RPA hunted down several hundred thousand additional refugees inside Zaïre. During that time, the rebels, Rwandan authorities, and for a certain period the international community, denied that those refugees even existed. During the hunt, the pursuers killed many Rwandan Hutu.

At each phase of the exodus, MSF tried to provide aid to both refugees and local populations caught in the fighting. These teams came face to face with the AFDL's and the Rwandan army's bloody methods, which included using humanitarian organisations as a lure to draw out and then kill the refugees.

Throughout 1997, MSF used press releases and reports that documented accounts and witness statements to publicly condemn the killings and the human rights violations that were known to MSF's field teams:

- On 25 April 1997, the Shabunda report condemned the killings committed by the AFDL and the RPA along the Bukavu-Shabunda corridor and the use of humanitarian organisations as a lure to encourage refugees out of hiding.
- On 19 May 1997, the report, Forced Flight used refugee statements to describe their flight across Zaire and the violence the refugees had to endure.
- In October 1997, a retrospective mortality epidemiological study of a group of refugees that reached Njundu in Congo (Brazzaville) in July confirmed the extent of the killings of refugees during that flight.

On several occasions from April to September 1997, MSF condemned the forced repatriation of Rwandan refugees with medical needs. This group had no guarantees of medical treatment or security when they reached their home communities.

These public statements were sometimes slow in coming and followed internal debates over the key dilemmas that the situation raised:

- Could MSF extrapolate from the little known conditions of these refugees and their health needs to speak out about their presumed current plight, despite the fact that it had no access to them?
- Given that MSF was being used to lure refugees from hiding, should the organisation cease activities in the area or pursue them, condemning manipulation in the hope of preventing massacres – but at the risk of endangering its teams and other operations in the region?
- Should MSF call for the refugees to remain in eastern Zaire, with its deadly dangers, or participate in their forced repatriation to Rwanda, where their security was not guaranteed either?

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

## INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED IN 2000 AND 2002

<b>Dr. José-Antonio Bastos</b>	MSF ET (Emergency inter-sections Team) Coordinator in South Kivu
<b>Dr. Philippe Biberson</b>	MSF France President
<b>Samantha Bolton</b>	MSF USA Communication Director, MSF Press Officer for the Great Lakes November-December 1996
<b>Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier</b>	MSF Legal Advisor
<b>Dr. Dominique Boutriau</b>	MSF Belgium programme manager
<b>Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol</b>	MSF France programme manager then Communication Director
<b>Brigitte Doppler</b>	MSF France Medical Coordinator, Tingi Tingi
<b>James Fraser</b>	MSF Holland Shabunda explo team, 26 March to 3 April 1997
<b>Antoine Gérard</b>	MSF USA Head of Programmes Department
<b>Dr. Éric Goemaere</b>	MSF Belgium General Director
<b>Dr. [...]</b>	MSF Belgium Operational Director
<b>Anne Guibert</b>	MSF France Press Officer
<b>Pim De Graaf</b>	MSF Holland Operational Director
<b>Anne-Marie Huby</b>	MSF UK Executive Director
<b>Ruud Hurman</b>	MSF Holland Press Officer
<b>Rachel Kiddell-Monroe</b>	MSF Holland Field Coordinator, Kivu (Zaire) from February to September 1996
<b>Leslie Lefkow</b>	MSF Holland Human Rights Officer, on Mission in Goma from 18 March to 2 April 1997, then MSF Holland HAD officer
<b>Dr. Jacques de Milliano</b>	MSF Holland General Director and MSF International vice-président
<b>Hanna Nolan</b>	MSF Holland Humanitarian Affairs Department (HAD) officer
<b>Alex Parisel</b>	MSF Belgium, Human Resources Director
<b>Dr. Bernard Pécoul</b>	MSF France Executive Director
<b>Jim Rupper</b>	Washington Post East Africa correspondent 1996-1997
<b>Joëlle Tanguy</b>	MSF USA Executive Director
<b>Wilna Van Artzen</b>	MSF Holland Emergency Desk Officer
<b>Wouter Van Empelen</b>	MSF Holland Programme manager until 31 October 1996
<b>Marcel Van Soest</b>	MSF Holland Field Coordinator, Goma, January to March 1997
<b>Rafa Vilasanjuan</b>	MSF Spain Communications Director
<b>Lex Winkler</b>	MSF Holland Executive Director and Operational Director 1996-1997

### MSF reports mentioned in this document:

- "Ethnic Cleansing Rears Its Head in Zaire - Population in Masisi Suffers Untold Hardship" - MSF Holland - November 1996 (in English). [D11](#)
- "Bukavu-Shabunda report - MSF - 16 April 1996 (in English). [D136](#)
- "Forced Flight, a brutal strategy of elimination in East Zaire" MSF - 16 May 1997 (in English). [D65](#)
- "History of the Rwandan Refugees who Fled the Kivu Camps in Zaire, September 1996 to June 1997 - Results of an Investigation Conducted among the Survivors of the Njundu Camp in the Congo" Epicentre MSF - September 1997 (in English). [D290](#)

## THE HUNTING AND KILLING OF RWANDAN REFUGEES IN ZAIRE-CONGO 1996 - 1997

From April to July 1994, between 500,000 and one million Rwandan Tutsi were systematically exterminated by militiamen under Rwandan Armed Forces (FAR in French) control. The genocide was the outcome of long-standing strategies implemented by politico-military extremists who roused ethnic resentments against the Tutsi minority. The extremists also killed many Rwandan Hutu who opposed the massacres. Simultaneously, leaders of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), an opposition movement organised by Tutsi exiles in Uganda, launched a military offensive in Rwanda and seized power in Kigali in early July.

During the summer of 1994, more than one million Rwandans fled their country, driven out as a result of threats by the former authorities and as a result of fear of civilian massacres related to the RPF's military advance. From 1994 to 1996, militiamen and former soldiers, as well as military and political leaders involved in the genocide and armed acts against Rwanda, blended into the population of the Zairian camps along the Rwandan border.

Despite warnings from humanitarian organisations, no international action was taken to separate the refugees from the perpetrators. The situation was complicated by the presence in eastern Congo of significant numbers of Rwandan-speaking minorities (Banyarwanda), some of whom had lived in North and South Kivu for many years. Conflict between Hutu and Tutsi was increasing amongst this population, while militias organised by local politicians carried out violent attacks against Rwandan groups, which in turn, organised counterattacks. In 1993, this reciprocal violence was responsible for 7,000 - 14,000 deaths. In 1994, attacks against the Tutsi Banyarwanda in the Kivus resumed.

Prior to its activities in the Rwandan refugee camps (July 1994 - early 1996), MSF Holland had set up health assistance programmes for people living in the Kivu region since 1993. MSF's presence allowed the teams to observe the resumption of the civil war.

 When I arrived at the project in February 1996, we were getting rid of everything because we would leave the camps and everything. A few of the team members said that there were all of these killings going on in Masisi: "Why are we running the project down, it seems that there is so much to do?" I said, "Ok, let's have a look at it and get some information." Indeed, there did seem to be a lot happening. There seemed to be a lot of security problems to get out and as we investigated it more we found out that there was a very active war going on between the Bahutu and the Batutsi. People from the refugee camps had been going out into the Masisi area recruiting. The Hutu had been recruiting the Bahutu to help them with this takeover of Kivu, to basically become an extension of Rwanda. So, these splits were starting to form in the Zairian society in Masisi and so there were big fights and battles going on between them with a lot of killings and hostage taking and there were a lot of displaced people moving around in the Masisi area.

We started to move more around in the area and to support health centres to give drugs and to give training and things. Then a lot of people who were coming in showed physical signs of being shot or having machete wounds. We started to hear more and more about places that we shouldn't go to because this or that was happening and also groups of displaced people were coming in. There were many churches or parishes where groups of Tutsi were in hiding, being protected by the local priests. You could see the front lines between the Bahundi, the Bahutu, and the Tutsi. They all had their areas marked out and they were fighting over territory. It was a very classic civil war going on in this small scale. Many times when we were just about to go to a place, we would be turned away, the driver would find something out along the way. What they often did was put signs along the road, they would put a log across the road, which meant that basically, you shouldn't go there.

There was one village that we worked in (5,000 people) that was totally surrounded by Hutu. Even when people went out in their fields they were killed. They no longer were able to get food and they were completely closed in. Apart from the church we were the only group that went in regularly, bringing food and supplies. With the Hutu groups who surrounded them, we had a lot of work to explain who we were and

that we were just going there because there were people in need. If they had wounded people, we would also look after their wounded: we would look after anybody. They would let through but if there were fights going on, they would leave signs on the road so that we would know not to go. We also had radio contacts in different places because we had been doing a project for many years in Zaire (a drug distribution programme) and we had contacts in 350 health centres throughout North Kivu. So, often we could phone to them and find out what was going on. We also had relations with the church posts so we could find out what was going on.

Rachel Kiddell-Monroe, MSF Holland Field Coordinator, Kivu (Zaire) from February to September 1996 (in English).

**From the beginning of November 1995, the MSF Holland team attempted to bring the international community's attention to this tragic situation and specifically to the fate of the Masisi's Tutsi population, who were being pursued and persecuted. Since January 1996, several thousand had taken refuge inside the Mokoto monastery and in the village of Kitchanga, which was also the site of an MSF-supported clinic.**



'Response on the Reaction of UN/ICRC to MSF in Geneva- Background', **Message** from Rachel (Kiddell-Monroe), Coordinator in Goma to Wouter (Van Empelen), programme manager in Amsterdam, 27 May 1996 (in English). [D1](#)

#### Extract:

For over 4 months, MSF Goma has been particularly concerned about the plight of displaced Tutsi in the villages of Kitchanga and the Mokoto monastery (displaced Tutsi have been present in Mokoto since late January 1996). Prior to and since the arrival of the present country manager in early April 1996, the concern for these people has been raised over and over by the teams working in the field. As a result of this concern, discussions have been held between various organisations in Goma, initiated by MSF and ICRC, to try to get something done to protect these people.

[...] On 2 May 1996, a meeting was called at the IOM offices in Goma held between IOM, ICRC, MSF, UNHCR, ECHO, OXFAM, WFP and Caritas. At that meeting, both MSF and ICRC jointly raised their serious concerns over the situation of the Tutsi at Mokoto and Kitchanga, stressing that in our view these people needed to be evacuated.



For the previous five months we had been doing a lot of advocacy work. For example, going to see

anyone who passed through Goma, we talked to them about Masisi and we were contacting embassies and other organisations. In Rwanda, we were doing a lot of work on a regional level and trying to have Amsterdam get in touch with different organisations and talk about what was going on and what was happening but it was much more about silent diplomacy.

It didn't get on to the agenda. I remember an EU representative coming through. I was talking to him about Masisi and I asked him, "How can the EU just sit by and watch this go on? There is no funding for this, there is no interest in this there is no coverage of this. You only come here to talk about the camps. There is a war going on and there are all these people dying..." He said, "Young lady, you have your job, I have mine. You have to look after the poor starving ones, I have to deal with regional politics." For me, it was a very disillusioning moment because I realized that the politics of the Great Lakes was far greater than we were.

Rachel Kiddell-Monroe, MSF Holland Field Coordinator, Kivu (Zaire) from February to September 1996 (in English).

**On 12 May, the Mokoto monastery was attacked and some of the Tutsi hiding in the church were killed. Survivors fled to the Kitchanga commune, where 15,000 people displaced by the civil war were trying to live alongside the residents. The MSF team set up a surgical team immediately to care for the wounded. In the face of UNHCR's indecision over evacuating the Tutsi in danger in the area, the team evacuated some of the 3,000 displaced people on its own.**



Rink de Lange and Leanne Olson, 'The Success and Disappointment of Advocacy in Masisi,' **Ins and Outs**, MSF Holland internal magazine, June 1996 (in English).

#### Extract:

On Sunday 12 May 1996, the monastery was attacked. At the time, the monks had brought a thousand Tutsi to safety in the church. The monks then had to flee and some hundred Tutsi were butchered. The rest managed to escape to Kitchanga, a Hunde enclave where some 15,000 displaced persons had already been added to the original population of 10,000. People suffered from a serious food shortage and were frequently attacked.

MSF and ICRC were the first on the spot, three days after the massacre. What we found was monstrous. Two burnt corpses were lying on the road, dismembered and disemboweled. They had clearly been left behind as a warning. In and around the church we found more bodies. As we continued our gruesome tour through the monastery, the Hutu fighters, responsible for these horrid deeds, continued to loot, apparently heedless of our presence. The rooms were strewn with the personal effects of hundreds

of people. Everything that could be destroyed had been destroyed.

Clearly the five thousand other Tutsi in the area were in grave peril. MSF's first response was the dispatch of a surgical team to care for the wounded. In addition, attempts were made in Goma to talk UNHCR into taking responsibility for the evacuation of the remaining 5,900 Tutsi.

 *There was a group of Tutsi who were hiding in a church, very near the town of Masisi. A priest ran it and we gave drugs every couple of weeks so that they could carry on treatment and training. Just before we got there, people came and stopped the car and said, "They're all being massacred, and they're all being killed. Everyone is dead and the rest have fled." So the team decided to go on to the place to witness what happened and they saw the results of the massacre. All the other people had fled quite a long way away and the priest had fled with them. The team came back and we decided that since we now had so much evidence of things, we had to do something about this. We had been working a lot with ICRC and UNHCR. UNHCR would just not acknowledge that there was a problem in Masisi. They were just too involved with the camps and said, "This is not our job—this is displaced people and first, we don't work with displaced people—we work with refugees." So I went into the manuals of UNHCR and found out that of course they work with displaced people. They have to do something about it. I had a very good relationship with the head of ICRC. We had actually split tasks between ICRC and MSF. He was doing all this diplomatic work but I felt that it was going too slowly and things were not happening. At the same time, we had located the other people who hadn't been killed and we had to get them out because we knew that they were going to be killed. So we worked with ICRC to try to get an evacuation of these people. But we couldn't get anyone to do it. The ICRC wouldn't evacuate them; UNHCR wouldn't evacuate them—no one would touch them. We said that we were going to evacuate them and so we did. Wouter gave me \$10,000 and we got a truck, came back to the village, got the people into the truck, and took them to Rwanda where they went to a camp on the border. They were mainly women and children. Many of the men had fled to take up arms and fight.*

Rachel Kiddell-Monroe, MSF Holland Field Coordinator, Kivu (Zaire) from February to September 1996 (in English).

**Despite the local authorities' agreement, evacuation of the other displaced people who remained in danger was delayed because of an obstacle at UNCHR headquarters in Geneva.**



'Response on the Reaction of UN/ICRC to MSF in Geneva- Attempts to help the Tutsi,' **Message** from Rachel Kiddell-Monroe, Coordinator in Goma to Wouter [Van Empelen], programme manager in Amsterdam, 27 May 1996 (in English). **D1** 

**Extract :**

The local authorities at this point had agreed to the evacuation of the Tutsi from Kitchanga and Mokoto and had designated a site for them near Rutshuru. ... The mission to evaluate the site had found it to be inadequate for many reasons including security and access to water. UNHCR and IOM agreed to go to Kitchanga and Mokoto to register and interview all the displaced Tutsi and to organise their evacuation from the area. ...The mission was due to go to the area on 16 May. At the last minute UNHCR appears to have pulled out and only IOM went as agreed. On 17 May IOM hired 8 trucks with drivers and arranged the necessary military escorts to evacuate the Tutsi. While in Kitchanga, IOM promised the Tutsi that they would be evacuated on Tuesday 21 May. ... UNHCR informed us that UNHCR in Geneva was reluctant to be involved. However the representative gave the impression that this decision was still negotiable. On Monday 20 May IOM stated that they were ready to evacuate the Tutsi on 21 May, they simply awaited the go-ahead from UNHCR. They told us that all the Tutsi interviewed wanted to go to Rwanda as Zairian refugees. The UNHCR (representative in Goma) was pessimistic about UNHCR (headquarters) approval for the evacuation.

**On 21 May, the MSF team in Goma wrote and distributed a press release. The versions distributed by MSF's Belgian and British sections highlighted respectively, the conflict's ethnic aspect and UNHCR's limited involvement in the evacuation. The Goma team had carefully avoided mentioning this in its original press statement. In the following weeks, more than 3,000 Tutsi were finally evacuated thanks to mobilisation by local and international organisations. UNHCR and the United Nations began to develop an interest in the issue.**



'3,000 People Threatened in the Masisi Region – MSF Calls for Their Immediate Evacuation,' **MSF Belgium Press Release**, 21 May 1996 (in French). **D2** 

**Extract:**

At least 3,000 ethnic Tutsi living in the Masisi region are currently surrounded in the villages of Kitchanga and

Nyamitaba, some three hours from Goma. Armed groups, primarily Hutu Banyarwanda, control the access roads to the villages. These 3,000 people face death unless they are evacuated and protected immediately.

Although Zairian authorities are aware of the situation, they are not taking necessary measures. Despite Médecins Sans Frontières' repeated calls for protection of minorities in the Masisi region, the United Nations continues to neglect this problem. Today, evacuation appears to be the only solution that could still save this population.

MSF urges Zairian authorities and the United Nations to evacuate them to a safe location.

Since 1993, MSF has been working in this area on both the Rwandan and Zairian sides of the border. In recent weeks, violence increased sharply in the Masisi region. Last week, an MSF surgical team was dispatched to Kitchanga and operated on some thirty wounded people. In the Gisenyi region of Rwanda, MSF is helping to aid 8,500 Tutsi who fled their villages in Masisi.



'Zaire: 3,000 Under Threat in Masisi Region - MSF Calls for Immediate Evacuation,' **Press Release** MSF UK, 21 May 1996 (in English). **D3** [↗](#)

#### Extract:

Goma, 21 May 1996: At least 3,000 Tutsi located in several pockets in the Masisi region of North Kivu, eastern Zaire, are in immediate danger. They should be protected since they are caught up between the armed groups fighting the civil war, which is currently engulfing North Kivu. Presently, they are surrounded in the villages of Kitchanga and Nyamitaba, three hours drive north of Goma. Unless these people are evacuated to a safe place within the coming days, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) believes that these people are extremely likely to be killed.

Although the Zairian authorities have acknowledged the situation, they are unable to address it. Despite extensive lobbying by MSF and other organisations in the past week, the United Nations and international community have not yet come up with appropriate measures to save the lives of these people. It is even more striking that in the case of Masisi, the situation was discussed by relevant UN bodies; yet no action was taken.

In view of the prevailing situation, MSF believes that the evacuation of these people is the only viable solution to save their lives. Therefore MSF calls on the competent bodies in the region, particularly the UN and partners present in the region to start an urgent evacuation.

The Masisi conflict is spiraling out of control. On 12 May, an estimated 100 displaced Tutsi were massacred in the parish of Mokoto where they were seeking refuge. The survivors managed to flee to the village of Kitchanga.

Since November 1995, 250,000 people have become dis-

placed. During the escalation in fighting, MSF has been providing emergency medical care to the population. However, the local health structures have totally collapsed in the region. Access to the area is increasingly restricted with the security situation deteriorating daily. Few other international humanitarian organisations are working with the population at risk.

Since 1993, MSF has been working with both sides of the conflict in North Kivu.



'Response on the Reaction of UN/ICRC to MSF in Geneva- Attempts to Help the Tutsi,' **Message** from Rachel Kiddell-Monroe, Coordinator in Goma to Wouter (Van Empelen), programme manager in Amsterdam, 27 May 1996 (in English). **D1** [↗](#)

#### Extract:

After a discussion with the desk in Amsterdam on 21 May, it was decided to lobby directly to Geneva (UNHCR) and to consider a press statement to witness the situation of the Tutsi. After a discussion with a responsible in Geneva, (MSF Holland) HQ was told that UNHCR had refused to intervene to evacuate the Tutsi. The responsible (of UNHCR) was told that MSF was considering a press statement. Off the record, approval was given.

A press statement was prepared in Goma with some team members most involved with the issue. The idea was to WITNESS not to DENOUNCE, hence why any reference to UNHCR or IOM or ICRC or too much focused on the role of the Zairian authorities was studiously avoided. This draft was sent to Amsterdam where it was discussed with humanitarian affairs and PR. The final version was then sent out to other MSF sections, delegate offices and press. On that day, ICRC came to see MSF about the issue. They were told we had decided to make a press statement expressing concern about the Tutsi and calling on the relevant UN bodies to evacuate them. ICRC agreed with the action.



Rink de Lange and Leanne Olson 'The Success and Disappointment of Advocacy in Masisi,' **Ins and Outs**, MSF Holland internal magazine, June 1996 (in English).

#### Extract:

Other sections felt free to adjust our press statement at their own discretion. As a result, UNHCR felt unfairly challenged. An emergency meeting in Geneva followed. Owing to a lack of communication between head office and the international desk in Brussels, the MSF deputies hardly knew what was going on and, as a result, were unable to defend our explanation. A very disappointing experience for our team in Goma, particularly because they had lost

the opportunity to have UNHCR take responsibility for the displaced persons once and for all...

Notwithstanding or possibly owing to the resulting outcry, the local response was as we had hoped. Within a few weeks, local initiatives, backed financially by a couple of international organisations, resulted in the evacuation of more than three thousand Tutsi. In addition, the United Nations dispatched representatives to Goma to evaluate the situation and advise the Security Council...

Matters were straightened out in a subsequent meeting with UNHCR, which had a more satisfactory result. UNHCR is now involved in the evacuation of the Tutsi. At last the UN is aware of the gravity of the situation, which hopefully will lead to a resolution by the UN Security Council that puts the Zairian government under pressure to find a permanent political solution to the conflict.

 *The massacre was the final straw. Up until then, there hadn't been something solid. So we decided to make a statement about it. Basically we knew that it had been Bahutu who attacked the Tutsi but we didn't want to say it. Because we had so many problems working in that area and there was already such a politicization of that whole conflict going on. People can make their own conclusions, but what we are going to say is that there is a group of displaced people in that church that were attacked and massacred in this place in Masisi, and it is linked with the whole conflict inside the camps.*

*So we made this statement and it was agreed with MSF Holland and then we distributed it to all the sections. So, we did it according to the usual rules of communication. We produced the statement and said that you have a few hours to comment on it and then we will go ahead with it. The next day a press release was produced and went out publicly. All the team agreed to it and we'd be very careful with the wording. Then each section took it and made it how it would appeal to their press. Mainly that was fine except in Belgium where they changed it and said Hutu attacked Tutsi and massacred them. We had made an allusion to the fact that UNHCR hadn't done anything, and called on UNHCR to react to this situation and to deal with the displaced persons problems, etc... In fact MSF-UK put on the bottom of it, this point: "UNHCR has done absolutely nothing and or given any support to these people." On the local level, I had given my version of the press release, the one that we had agreed on to ICRC and UNHCR beforehand. They said, "We think that it's wrong that you've done this, but we understand it." I said, "This is MSF this is the point where we are at and this is what the team believes." They said, "Ok, we'll stand by you and we'll support." But then the press release that went out wasn't the one that I had shown them. The telephone rang constantly for 24-hours with all the time differences. We got a lot of coverage—it was in all the press. At the same time, we got these people out, so they were not in danger anymore. That was important. The next day, I was urgently called to a meeting at UNHCR. I found out that I had been invited to this meeting an hour later than*

*everyone else. There was a large group of people and they all had been discussing what we had done as MSF for about an hour and they had decided on sanctions against MSF.*

Rachel Kiddell-Monroe, MSF Holland Field Coordinator, Kivu (Zaire) from February to September 1996 (in English).

**The Rwandan government intended to eliminate the threat posed by extremists in the Rwandan refugee camps in Zaire. Supported by Burundi and Uganda, it trained and armed young Banyamulenge men from throughout the Kivu region who were recruited into Laurent-Désiré Kabila's Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL), an armed movement opposing Zaire's President Mobutu. In June 1996, during a trip to the USA, Paul Kagame, Rwanda's Vice-President and Minister of Defence, suggested to American political leaders that Rwanda assumes the task of eliminating the threat the Zairian camps posed, which the international community had refused to do. This information was not made public until August 1997.**



Mahmood Mamdani, 'Why Rwanda Admitted to its Role in Zaire' *Weekly Mail and Guardian* (South Africa), 8 August 1997 (in English).  
D4 

#### Extract:

The day before I took the Air Rwanda flight from Entebbe to Kigali on July 11 (1997), both major dailies in Kampala had carried reports of the Washington Post interview with Rwandan Vice-President and Minister of Defence Major General Paul Kagame, also carried in the Mail & Guardian.

The Rwandan army, he had confirmed, had played the major role in the six-month rebellion that deposed President Mobutu Sese Seko in neighboring Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of Congo...

When I met Kagame the next day at his residence in Kigali, I put the same question to him: "why make admissions?" ... "I wanted to tell the truth. I did not always want to be in a position of lying, of denying things" he said ... "I would share information with UN commanders, about thousands of militia being trained in the eastern part, and machetes and arms being imported. They would check, verify and nothing. "I was not going to do that again. I was not going to make the same mistake. I returned from the United States last July, briefed my colleagues and said, either we solve it or face another catastrophe. What happened in the US? I delivered a veiled warning: the failure of the international community to take action would mean Rwanda would take action...My purpose in my

June trip was to make sure they would not be taken by surprise. Their response was really no response. And yet I was not disheartened by it.”

**In a press release on 23 July, MSF Belgium condemned the Burundian authorities for the forced repatriation of Rwandan refugees. The repatriation begun three days earlier and had led to the death of three refugees and caused thousands of others to flee. These Rwandans had taken refuge in Burundi during the 1994 Rwandan Tutsi genocide.**



‘Three Deaths During Forced Repatriation to Rwanda – Thousands of People Seek Refuge in the Burundian Hills,’ MSF Belgium **Press Release**, 23 July 1996 (in French). **D5**

#### **Extract:**

During the forced repatriation that began on Friday, three Rwandan refugees died yesterday on arrival at the Butare transit centre. An elderly person and a baby suffocated in the trucks.

Last Friday, an extensive forced repatriation effort was initiated in the Rwandan refugee camps in Kibenzi and Ruvumu in northern Burundi. The refugees were transported in container trucks like cattle. These unacceptable repatriation conditions led to the death of three people.

Around 13,000 people who were turned back had already arrived in Rwanda, where MSF teams received them at a Butare transit centre. First aid and water were provided there.

In Burundi, nearly 5,000 people fleeing the forced return to Rwanda arrived in the Magara camp, while several thousand refugees were scattered in the hills around the town of Ngozi.

MSF is concerned about the fate of these people, who are without protection. They have been hiding in the hills without food or water since Friday.

MSF condemns these forced repatriations and the unacceptable conditions in which they have been carried out and calls for the refugees in the hills to be protected.

**In September and October, the Zairian army and Banyamulenge groups were in violent combat in the Uvira region of southern Kivu near the Burundian border. Rwandan refugees living in the camps in the region were caught in the fighting and began to flee. Three of those turned back and were wounded, and one died at the hospital.**



‘Minutes of International Meeting of Operations Directors’ Amsterdam, 20 September, 1996 (in English). **D6**

#### **Extract:**

Uvira:

A lot of residents (Banyamulenge) in the Ruzizi and Uvira area are intimidated and violated by the Zairian troops. These Banyamulenge are of Rwandan and Tutsi origin and have lived in this area since the 18th century. Last week 150 people were pushed over the border to Cibitoke province. It is unknown what happened to them. There is a strong feeling that Nyangona (a Hutu leader) plays a role in it. It is expected that this trend will continue. They got no media attention. More news will come when Jacques will come back from Uvira. For MSF it is important to discuss the matter. Our position on the Ruzizi Plain depends on the Zairian government.



Jean Hélène, ‘Conflict Threatens Eastern Zaire at Rwandan and Burundian Borders,’ **Le Monde** (France), 16 October 1996 (in French). **D7**

#### **Extract:**

Four people died on 13 October and 20,000 were displaced during an attack on a Hutu refugee camp. On 8 October, a raid on a hospital in a neighboring village is reported to have caused 46 deaths. Fighting between regular Zairian forces and Banyamulenge rebels is reported to occur almost daily. The situation in South Kivu province, at the Rwandan and Burundian borders, has deteriorated dramatically in a month...

The problems began in early September south of Uvira when Zairian soldiers, alerted by the population, stopped a group of armed Banyamulenge, who defended themselves. Quickly moving beyond the stage of hurling diplomatic insults, the situation worsened quickly and humanitarian organisations have already been forced to evacuate half their staff from Uvira. However, 200,000 Burundian and Rwandan Hutu refugees remain in the regions’ camps. According to their spokesperson, the Banyamulenge are fighting to obtain Zairian citizenship. This tribe of Tutsi shepherds, originally from Rwanda, immigrated to Zaire in the 19th century to settle on the uninhabited high plateaus of the Mulenge region.

The ongoing debate over the question of Zairian citizenship resurfaced during the 1990 Rwandan civil war. Many Banyamulenge (including Zairian soldiers) enrolled in the Rwandan Tutsi guerrilla forces and after their victory in July 1994, many chose to immigrate to Rwanda with their families, where the new regime was quick to offer them citizenship. This dual allegiance attracted the suspicion of the Zairian population, already jealous of the immigrant and relatively prosperous tribe. Local politicians seeking

a scapegoat to bolster their power took advantage of the population's misgivings.

Observers in the region acknowledge that the Banyamulenge receive reinforcements from Rwanda. They reported that on 20 and 21 September, between 500 and 1,000 armed men were transported at night from Rwanda (via Burundi) to a frontier station near Uvira but wondered why the Rwandans were providing this support. Was Kigali aiding the Banyamulenge out of ethnic solidarity?

Was it to destabilise eastern Zaire, which would – or could -- serve as a rear base for Rwandan and Burundian Hutu fighters? Or was it to force UNHCR to move Hutu refugee camps away from the border, where they could act as guerilla recruitment centres?

The Burundian Hutu rebellion expects that “the worst is yet to come,” since “3,000 Rwandan and Burundian soldiers [majority Tutsi] are preparing to storm the Hutu refugee camps” and “also to seize South Kivu.” The UN human rights reporter in Zaire on mission in the region, noted that, “emergency diplomatic action is required.”

**In mid-October, the MSF Holland mission in Uvira was transformed into an international emergency mission (Emergency Team/ET) coordinated by MSF Holland.**



Jean-Marie Kindermans and Myriam Henkens, ‘**Evaluation** of ET Intervention in the Great Lakes’, April 1997 (in English). **D8**

**Extract:**

October 16 (summary of Newsflash): decision in Paris that Uvira will become an ET mission if things get worse, with MSFH as BUS (Back Up Section). Should the situation in Eastern Zaire as a whole decrease, then MSFH will also be the central desk, and other sections will carry out their projects on the basis of a modular system.

**On 20 October, more than 100,000 Rwandan refugees who had fled fighting and settled in the Uvira region left for Bukavu. Refugees living Concurrently, north of Goma, the rebels attacked the outskirts of Katala camp.**



‘110,000 Hutu Refugees Flee Fighting Between the Army and Tutsi in Eastern Zaire,’ **Le Monde** (France), 22 October 1996 (in French). **D9**

**Extract:**

Military reinforcements arrive regularly in the Uvira region, which the Zairian army considers to be in a “state of war.” From Geneva, UNHCR confirmed that some 110,000 refugees are fleeing... Humanitarian sources in Uvira report that many refugees are heading north toward Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu province.

In early September, fighting between the Zairian army and the Banyamulenge raged in the mountains above Uvira, near the Burundian frontier. The Banyamulenge are demanding Zairian citizenship, which the Kinshasa government is unwilling to provide. Zaire regularly accuses Rwanda of having enlisted and equipped around 3,000 Banyamulenge who then infiltrated the Uvira region via Burundi. Kigali and Bujumbura have always rejected those accusations.



Stephen Smith, ‘Planned War in Eastern Zaire – Last Hutu Exodus Emerges as Rwanda’s Defensive Strategy,’ **Libération** (France), 22 October 1996 (in French).

**Extract:**

Sunday’s carefully-planned and executed attack north of Goma, in which armed men opened fire in the area around the Katala camp (the largest refugee camp, housing 200,000 people), revealed the ultimate goal: to prompt some 600,000 Hutu to leave in a panic. They have gathered in the region over the last two years. “Given the failure of humanitarian efforts to resolve conflicts in Africa’s Great Lakes region, we must return immediately to an approach based on realpolitik, which does not demand that one side be labeled as good and the other as evil,” a UN official said yesterday. “Rwanda is defending its national interests, but its recent military initiative is akin to striking a match in a warehouse full of dynamite.”

**On 22 October, the Zairian government accused the Rwandan and Burundian armies of supporting the Banyamulenge rebels. Authorities in both countries denied the charge.**



'The Conflict in Eastern Zaire Threatens to Expand – Washington and UN Are Worried,' FC, **Le Monde** (France), 25 October 1996 (in French). [D10](#)

#### Extract:

[...] Fighting began in September between Zairian armed forces and the Banyamulenge, but on Tuesday night, the Zairian government for the first time, formally accused the Rwandan and Burundian armies (dominated by Tutsi) of attacking its territory in North Kivu and South Kivu provinces. The Zairians accuse them of invading the Uvira plain and confirm that fighting between the Zairian and Rwandan armies is underway near the town of Goma, north of Bukavu. Officials in Kigali and Bujumbura have denied any involvement in the conflicts.

**On 25 October, the Zairian government declared a state of emergency in the provinces of North and South Kivu. The Banyamulenge had nearly captured the town of Uvira and confirmed that members of the Zairian opposition had allied with them to win control of Kivu.**

**During the weekend of 26 October, the camps in North Kivu, Kibumba and Katale were attacked. Hundreds of thousands of refugees fled and gathered in other camps. Humanitarian organisations evacuated some of their staff.**



Stephen Smith, 'Zaire: 500,000 Refugees Take to the Roads – Two More Hutu Camps Attacked This Weekend from Rwanda,' **Libération**, (France), 28 October 1996 (in French).

#### Extract:

[...] On Friday night, the Kibumba camp, which housed close to 200,000 Hutu refugees north of Goma, was attacked by 'armed men' and came under artillery fire from Rwanda, only several hundred metres away. According to an official of a humanitarian organisation who asked not to be identified, "the operation was led by the 7th battalion of the Rwandan Army, usually based in Kigali." ... The next night, the Katale camp, the region's largest refugee camp located 60 kilometres north of Goma and housing more than 200,000 people, was also attacked and came under artillery fire. Last night, the number of Hutu who fled the camp had not yet been determined, but since the morning, thousands of exhausted refugees had arrived on foot in Goma in torrential rains. Around twenty expatriates were evacuated yesterday, reducing the number of humanitarian aid workers to around 100 in Goma where, under military pressure in the north, "the Tutsi witch hunt" resumed.

**In late October, the MSF Holland Coordinator completed a report on part played by the Rwandan refugee camps in eastern Zaire spread the Masisi wars throughout the region. By then, however, current events upstaged the report. The report was nonetheless sent to various human rights organisations, the UN and journalists.**



'Ethnic Cleansing Rears its Head in Zaire – Population in Masisi Suffers Untold Hardship,' MSF Holland **Report**, 1 November 1996 (in English). [D11](#)

#### Extract:

##### Report conclusions:

**The population of Masisi is in grave danger** due to the armed conflict in the region. The number of both internally displaced and people living in enclaves, many of whom are inaccessible, is alarming in the extreme.

**The population of Masisi is denied access to medical care and other humanitarian assistance.** The lack of access to health care facilities is alarming and the health problems in the region are increasing while access is diminishing. Humanitarian access will only continue to decrease as the war continues to spiral.

**Humanitarian access to the populations in danger is being denied** due to the lack of security and the actions of warring parties. MSF is frequently forced to withdraw its assistance from areas (usually temporarily) due to the risks to humanitarian personnel, particularly Zairian and international medical personnel.

*The Zairian authorities in cooperation with the international community must act immediately to alleviate the humanitarian suffering in Masisi and surrounding areas. Humanitarian access is a prerequisite to provide assistance. Therefore, humanitarian organisations should be facilitated in their work and their working principles should be respected.*

##### **The importance of the Masisi conflict in the Great Lakes Crisis must be acknowledged.**

The Zairian authorities and the international community must take responsibility for the situation in Masisi and North Kivu in order for there to be any hope of finding lasting solutions to the Great Lakes and its Masisi Crisis. The situation has been left to fester and it is now further out of control. Institutional mandates can no longer be allowed to prevent international responses to protect the people of Masisi.

**The root causes of the conflict are political and need political solutions.** Only through the introduction of a genuine process of correct and informed political action can enable lasting peace for the region. In finding political solutions, the nationality issue and local land disputes need to be resolved.

**The future of Masisi and North Kivu is inextricably linked to solutions to the regional refugee crisis.** Without a solution to the Rwandan refugee crisis, peace

cannot come to Masisi. The relocation of the Hutu refugees in Masisi and North Kivu would be a disaster for the region, both locally and for the Great Lakes region.

**Movement outside the Goma camps by the refugees, particularly referring to Masisi, must be prevented.**

The presence of armed groups from the camps present in Masisi, fuelling and taking part in the conflict for their own ends, cannot be denied or ignored any longer. The threat of a 'Hutuland' created by the extremist elements from the camps is imminent.

**The situation of the people at the Petite Barriere/ Umbano camp in Rwanda must be addressed.**

The camp being located less than 1 kilometre from the border puts them at risk. In addition, conditions in the camp are poor. The rights of these people must be protected.

MSF calls upon the Secretary General of the United Nations to implement urgently the UNDHA recommendations and make an official response on the situation in Masisi. A special UN representative should be appointed immediately and mandated to undertake discussions with the Zairian authorities in order to find enduring solutions to the political problems in the whole of Kivu, including Masisi. In addressing the problems in Masisi, the problems of the refugee camps, i.e. the continued impunity of the alleged perpetrators of the genocide, the presence of the former Rwandan military and interahamwe, the re-armament and the movement out of the camps should be dealt with.

 *I finished my time in Goma at the end of September '96... So, we decided to write this report to give the story of Masisi and to draw the links between what was happening in Masisi, in the refugee camps, and MSF's experience with it. I did an analysis of the context of Masisi and tried to explain the different groups that we were working with there and the whole link between Masisi and Rwanda. I did interviews with all the local staff, other organisations and lots of people from the area on what the impact of the camps were on them. The point that we were trying to make was that these camps were creating war in Masisi and that this is going to become a regional war. It's not just when everyone goes back to Rwanda that they are all going to live happily ever after—it's a much bigger story. There were all these stories about this greater Rwanda and Kivu being annexed into Rwanda but you don't know what's true and what isn't. In the end we did some recommendations about the camps. I did that with Ed Schenkenberg and Wouter. It was very much the three of us who did it. Then on the day that we did the final copy, it had been agreed on by the field and everything, basically the war broke out. It was like we had presaged it—it was what we had said in the report but we were too slow with it. It was hard luck... The idea was basically to use it as a lobbying document to the UN, to governments and to whomever with their support, to say, "This is what we believe," and to do a press*

*release with it. But basically, we never got further than binding the report. We gave it and said, "It's out of date already but please use it in whatever way that you can. You might find it useful for your work in the area." It was quite a good background. It wasn't an operational report as such. Some of it was more academic in trying to understand the context but also what was the reality of what was happening in Masisi. I don't think that it was ever released to the press. Or if it was, it wouldn't have had much impact. I think they used it as an information document. We felt that no one knew what was going on in Masisi. It was so extremely complicated.*

Rachel Kiddell-Monroe, MSF Holland Field Coordinator, Kivu (Zaire) from February to September 1996 (in English).

**On 28 October more than 500,000 refugees lacking shelter, water or food, were roaming in the rain across the entire Kivu region. During a press conference that day, the Rwandan president asserted that eastern Zaire had previously belonged to Rwanda.**



'Eastern Zaire Faces A Desperate Humanitarian Situation,' *Le Monde* (France), 30 October 1996 (in French). [D12](#)

**Extract:**

With more than half a million men, women and children forced to take to the roads and flee, the situation is desperate. They have nowhere to go and must fend for themselves, without resources. At the same time, the rainy season heightens the risk of malnutrition and epidemics. On Monday, 28 October, UNHCR spokesperson Francis Kpatindé said, "a humanitarian catastrophe of greater dimensions than the one in 1994 could occur in the Great Lakes region."

No one paid attention to UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata's call on Sunday for "humanitarian corridors" to enable refugees and civilians who fled to receive a minimum of aid. In the Green Lake and Mugunga camps, which lack even the most basic health facilities, UNHCR's food supplies are limited to a few days worth. On the night of 25 October, the World Food Programme's (WFP) warehouse was looted. Humanitarian organisations fear epidemics more serious than the 1994 cholera outbreak ... Organisations in the field have exhausted their resources. In northern Kivu, around 100,000 Rwandan Hutu refugees fleeing Kibumba camp tried to reach Goma, where nearly 100,000 other refugees from the same camp have already arrived. Following Wednesday's attack by the Rwandan Army, Kibumba is now deserted. On Monday in South Kivu, around 220,000 people were observed on the roads in the Uvira region headed toward Bukavu and

nearly 200,000 others in the Bukavu sector were walking toward Sake, near Goma.

The exodus appears to be following the two main axes, from the north-east toward Goma and from the south-east toward Goma. That city seems to be the point of convergence for most of the 527,000 Rwandan (according to UNHCR) and Burundian refugees who had dispersed before recent events in the camps in the two Kivu provinces. That human tide may be added to the 717,000 refugees who have already settled, with difficulty, in Goma and the region. In addition to the refugees, tens of thousands of Zairians fleeing advancing Tutsi troops are converging on Goma. Humanitarian organisations seem unable to deal with them. In addition, several agencies have already begun to pull back. On Monday, WFP decided to disburse all its food supplies in the Goma region, distributing them to 680,000 refugees.

In South Kivu, the advance of the Banyamulenge rebels (Rwandan Tutsi, long-time inhabitants of Zaire) on Bukavu, the region's capital, has been confirmed. On Monday, chaos reigned in Bukavu, where Zairian soldiers looted the town. Residents and humanitarian organisations have left, while fighting continues in outlying districts. ... The humanitarian impasse is coupled with a political one and the tenor of the exchange between Zaire and Rwanda has sharpened. For the first time, the Rwandan president clearly referred to his intentions regarding the Zairian region where the Banyamulenge live.

"If Zaire wants to send the Banyamulenge to Rwanda, let him send us their land, too," said President Pastor Bizimungu, denying again that his country is playing a role in the conflict. During a press conference, using maps to support his remarks, he explained that the region of eastern Zaire, where the Banyamulenge live, previously belonged to Rwanda. For its part, Zaire continues to assert its intention to defend the integrity of its territory "at any price," said Zairian Prime Minister Kendo Wa Dondo.

**MSF teams helped to treat refugees in the Mugunga camp, where hundreds of thousands of people who were forced to flee attacks in other camps had gathered.**



'Médecins Sans Frontières **Press Release**, – Zaire-Kivu,' MSF France, 29 October 1996 (in French). [D13](#)

**Extract:  
Zaire-Kivu:**

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is helping to set up emergency clinics and health facilities in the Mugunga camp west of Goma. Since Saturday, tens of thousands of people fleeing the Kibumba camp further north came to take

refuge at the site, which already shelters nearly 200,000 Rwandan refugees.

Last night, the most vulnerable populations – women, children, the elderly and the ill and wounded – were still arriving in Mugunga.

From the outset, Rwandan refugees who reached the camp earlier have refused to allow the new arrivals to settle at the site. The Kibumba refugees thus have limited access to food and drinking water.

Zairian families have also fled their villages and are headed toward Kibumba and Mugunga. Others have headed further west toward Sake, where MSF operates nutritional and medical programmes in a camp for displaced Zairians.

**Rwanda:**

Yesterday, close to 4,000 people (the majority Zairian) fleeing the village of Buhumba and surrounding areas crossed the Rwandan border. An MSF team is providing them medical care in the Mudende camp. The wounded were transferred to the Gisenyi hospital.

**Burundi:**

More than 6,000 refugees have arrived in Gatumba from the Uvira region. An MSF team has begun delivering water from Bujumbura.

**On 29 October, after a chaotic week, the town of Bukavu (South Kivu) was in the hands of the Banyamulenge. International organisations were worried about the risk of a major food and health crisis across the Kivus.** [V1](#)



'Violence Resumes on the Zairian-Rwandan Border,' *Le Monde* (France), 1 November 1996 (in French). [D14](#)

**Extract:**

Until Wednesday, the Zairian town of Bukavu was the scene of especially deadly violence ... In all, "around 100 civilians were killed" in one week, said a Red Cross official ... The city was in a state of "chaos and terror" for nearly a week, the official noted. ... However, according to members of humanitarian organisations in Cyangugu, a Rwandan town located across the border from Bukavu, the Banyamulenge rebels (Zairian Tutsi) seized nearly half the town of Bukavu, where an uncertain peace has held since Wednesday. The ICRC estimates that nearly 800,000 people require emergency aid, specifically medical, in the Bukavu region. Before these latest problems developed, some 300,000 refugees were living in the region. They were joined by around 100,000 more who fled fighting in Uvira, further south.

... UNICEF issued an alarm regarding the Goma region,

where the food situation could become very serious for the 600,000 Rwandan refugees, “half of whom are children under fifteen.”

The World Health Organisation announced Wednesday that it would send specialists on an emergency basis to eastern Zaire to assess the epidemic risk and the measures needed to protect the hundreds of thousands of people without aid. ... The WHO is particularly worried that cholera, dysentery, malaria and meningitis could strike refugees lacking medical care, shelter, food and drinking water after being forced to leave the camps. They are at even greater risk now that the rainy season has begun.

**On 30 October, the Rwandan government acknowledged that it had engaged its troops in Zaire to neutralise a firing position. The Kahindo camp was attacked.**



‘Violence Resumes on the Zairian-Rwandan Border,’ **Le Monde** (France), 1 November 1996 (in French). [D14](#)

**Extract:**

[...] In Kigali, General Paul Kagame, Vice President and Minister of Defence, was the first to announce on Monday morning that the Rwandan army had responded to fire from Zaire and would resume if necessary.

“If it’s necessary to fight a war, I will do so,” declared General Kagame, the Rwandan regime’s strongman, stating that contrary to Zaire’s repeated accusations, Rwandan troops had never fought alongside the Banyamulenge. However, he did not exclude such a possibility. “Depending on how the situation develops, I do not know if it (the Rwandan army) will become involved (in eastern Zaire),” he added.

**As direct conflict began between the Rwandan and Zairian armies, several nations proposed diplomatic initiatives to resolve the crisis.**



‘Timid Diplomatic Initiatives in the Face of the Zairian Tragedy,’ **Le Monde** (France), 31 October 1996 (in French). [D15](#)

**Extract:**

On Tuesday, 29 October, additional meetings were held in an effort to address the increasingly tragic crisis raging in eastern Zaire. The international community is currently considering only diplomatic solutions. French President Jacques Chirac has proposed a summit meeting among

the nations of the region. Both Washington and UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who sent a temporary emissary until a permanent mission is established, approve of the idea.

The refugees’ situation is worsening by the hour and some fear the spread of epidemics, specifically cholera. For the first time since the beginning of the crisis, the Rwandan and Zairian armies clashed directly. On Tuesday night and Wednesday morning, Cyangugu, a Rwandan town on the Zairian border across from Bukavu, came under artillery fire for several hours.

**On 31 October, MSF called for a protected assistance zone for the Rwandan refugees and Zairian civilians caught in the conflict and denounced the international community’s passivity.**



‘Médecins Sans Frontières Accuses Western Nations of Non-Assistance to Populations in Danger,’ MSF France **Press Release**, 31 October 1996 (in French). [D16](#)

**Extract:**

While Goma remains the only area where humanitarian aid can still be provided, all organisations in the field may have to evacuate the town because of fighting. In Goma, Bukavu and Uvira, where aid operations can no longer be conducted, more than 2 million people – refugees and Zairians – now face death, malnutrition and epidemics.

Since the start of the Rwandan conflict in 1990, population movements have always been accompanied by unbelievably high mortality (Goma and Bukavu in 1994 - 50,000 deaths).

For the first time since 1990, faced with massive population movements, there is no possibility that humanitarian organisations will be able to receive refugees and displaced persons in a protected zone where aid can be provided. As a result, the conditions suggest that this new phase of the conflict could result in more deaths than those that occurred during prior exoduses.

The international community should focus on creating a safe space where civilians would have access to aid. However, the only measures underway concern the arrival of a special UN envoy in the region. After the US elections ... A regional conference should also be held, but a date has not yet been set. In the past, diplomatic manoeuvres were only pretexts for inaction in the field, which led to 1 million deaths in 1994. Will Clinton, Chirac and Major be as irresponsible and ineffective as Clinton, Mitterrand and Major were at the time of the 1994 genocide? Every day lost results in thousands of deaths.



'MSF Calls for Safe Assistance Zone for Zaire's Rwandan Refugees,' *AFP* (France), 31 October 1996 (in French).

**Extract:**

[...] For the first time since 1990, "humanitarian organisations have no prospect of receiving refugees and displaced persons in a protected zone where aid can be provided," said Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF's Communications Director, returning from a two-month stay in Burundi.

Facing possible malnutrition, dysentery and cholera epidemics, Dr. Bradol said that "All that the Western nations have to offer is an international conference and, following the US elections, the arrival of a special UN envoy" He accuses those countries of "lacking the will to tackle the problem seriously."

"If a zone protected by an international force were created in Rwanda at a reasonable distance from the conflict area, the refugees would come there and humanitarian organisations could take care of them," he explained.

"Every day lost results in thousands of deaths," he added.

**Following violent shelling that same day, the last MSF team left the Mugunga camp and took refuge with other humanitarian aid workers in the compound of UNHCR in Goma. The Gisenyi team managed to evacuate all the children from the Nyundao camp's nutrition centre near the border. MSF teams also evacuated projects around Uvira and Bukavu and gathered at the Cyangugu missions. On 1 November, the Rwandan army entered Goma, where the humanitarian teams remained trapped. The Mugunga camp population continued to increase with the arrival of thousands of refugees fleeing conflict around other camps. Tutsi from Kinshasa, Zaire's capital, were hunted down. The UN called for a summit, but Rwanda and Zaire immediately dismissed the proposal.**

**MSF called on combatants to guarantee safe passage for populations fleeing the violence and for humanitarian aid workers, and for aidworkers to have access to the population.**



'Médecins Sans Frontières Call Upon Warring Parties for Safe Passage – Aid Workers Still Stuck in Goma,' **Press Release**, MSF Goma/Amsterdam, 1 November 1996 (in English). **D17**

**Extract:**

Goma/Amsterdam, 1 November 1996. About one hundred international aid workers, among them six working for

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), are still unable to evacuate from Goma. They are stuck in the compound of UNHCR and other buildings. For the second consecutive day they have been unable to escape to a safer area. The road to Gisenyi through the city, passing Goma airport, and from there across the border in Rwanda, is no longer safe to travel. This road was considered the only option for evacuation from Goma by land.

One week ago MSF brought its Goma team back from fourteen staff to eight, after they had been unable to work in the camps for several days. From last Monday till Wednesday, the remaining MSF staff were able to work in Mugunga camp, giving assistance to the 220,000 refugees who were already there and some 200,000 newly arrived refugees. Early Thursday morning heavy fighting started and soon UNHCR advised all foreign aid workers to collect at two locations, one of them being the MSF compound. Yesterday nine aid workers were able to reach the MSF house at the lakeside. This morning all fifteen crossed the city from the MSF compound to the main UNHCR site.

Heavy fighting continues in and around Goma. Gisenyi, in Rwanda, is now under fire as well. The population of Gisenyi is fleeing towards Ruhenger, away from the border area. MSF staff in Gisenyi have been able to evacuate all children from their nutritional centre in the Umubano camp at the Goma border. This extremely vulnerable group of children was transported by truck to Nyundo college camp, where the supplementary feeding programme can be continued.

Médecins Sans Frontières most urgently calls upon all the warring parties to guarantee safe passage for aid workers in the area as well as the populations fleeing the violence of war. MSF also asks for safe access of humanitarian organisations to the victims of this conflict to be restored as soon as possible.



Chris Mac Greal, Richard Norton-Taylor and Victoria Brittain, 'Ghosts of Africa Walk to oblivion- Witch Hunts Spread to Capital as Rwandan Troops Pour over Border,' *The Guardian* (United Kingdom), 2 November 1996 (in English). **D18**

**Extract:**

Rwandan government troops in uniform last night entered the eastern Zairian town of Goma, dramatically escalating the political crisis in the region where more than 1 million refugees are on the move. Calls for a cease-fire and a regional summit by the UN, the European Union and aid agencies working among the refugees were dismissed by the main players, Zaire and Rwanda, yesterday. [...] Ethnic hatred spread west as far as the Zairian capital, Kinshasa, yesterday with a witch hunt against prominent Tutsi in the business community. Dozens fled to neighbouring countries... Last night Tutsi rebels were battling for control

of Goma's airport and the Médecins Sans Frontières aid charity said 100 aid workers, including six of its staff, had been stranded by the fighting.



Stephen Smith, 'Rwandan Army Enters Goma—Kinshasa's Political Crisis and the Refugee Tragedy Worsens,' *Libération*, (France), 2 and 3 November 1996 (in French).

#### Extract:

After a day of back-and-forth artillery fire across the Rwanda-Zaire border, the fate of Goma, the capital of eastern Zaire, appeared to be sealed Friday night. According to eyewitnesses, Rwandan soldiers were observed in certain areas of the city, where residents and humanitarian aid workers waiting to be evacuated, were deep in hiding.

"I'm 110 percent sure that Rwandan soldiers are in Goma," confirmed a diplomat quoted by the Reuters news agency, an expatriate in the city who reported seeing "Rwandan army barges crossing Lake Kivu late in the afternoon." Until then, the Zairian army had defended the town while looting and committing violence, even summary executions, alongside gangs of youth and militiamen searching for "Tutsi infiltrators." The International Federation of the Red Cross was sacked, its employees' lives saved thanks only to the intervention of UNHCR's protection force. The bishop's palace, the cathedral and the Saint-Esprit church were also destroyed because a significant share of the Catholic clergy was ethnic Tutsi. Although the decision was made on Thursday to evacuate around 100 UN expatriates and various NGOs because of the troubled situation, as of yesterday evening they had not yet left.

Nearly fifty vehicles belonging to humanitarian organisations were 'requisitioned' by Zairian soldiers or militiamen. "It has become completely impossible to work," said an official reached by cell phone. "We can't even go out anymore without risking our lives." The fate of 200,000 refugees from the Katale camp, 45 kilometres north of Goma, remained unknown yesterday. According to humanitarian aid sources, they were still in the camp, while others reported that they had made a "desperate flight, caught in the cross fire," to the Mugunga camp.

## CALL FOR AN INTERNATIONAL MILITARY INTERVENTION TO SET UP SAFE ZONES

On 2 November, the MSF team was evacuated from Goma. On 3 and 4 November, through a series of teleconferences and fax exchanges, MSF's operational sections debated launch whether to an appeal for armed international intervention in eastern Zaire. On 4 November, Jacques de Milliano, President of MSF Holland, gave a press conference in Gisenyi. Speaking on behalf of the entire MSF movement, he called for international armed intervention to create zones to protect the populations in danger and ensure the provision of aid.



'Médecins Sans Frontières Contacts: Zaire Emergency,' **Press Release**, MSF France, 2 November 1996 (in French). **D19**

#### Extract:

This morning, the Médecins Sans Frontières team working in the camps housing Rwandan refugees and displaced Zairians evacuated along with other members of humanitarian organisations in Goma. The team is expected to arrive in Kigali.



'MSF Positioning Kivu Crisis,' **Fax** from Jacques de Milliano to Presidents and General Directors MSF sections, 3 November, 1996 (in English). **D20**

#### Extract:

Dear colleagues,

It is important and urgent for MSF to formulate a strong message on the fate of the populations in the Kivus and the urgent action to be taken by the international community to protect them. The MSF expats returning from Goma yesterday were very clear in their wordings, "The last eyes and ears of the international community have left and given the Kivu context, the actual broader Zairian context, and the regional Great Lakes context this crisis will develop into a massive bloodbath for the civilian population. International action is needed now."

So, the central question is - if we are going to be the followers of those predictable massacres and to send in humanitarian aid in when the parties on the ground have done their bloody work or do we choose to contribute to prevent the massacres of the civilian populations by raising our voice to influence public opinion and mobilising political will in this crucial phase where ministers are

meeting to take decisions on this crisis? Moreover, this week is for MSF, the week of Populations in Danger in which we will emphasize the need for better protection and effective political action from the international community. Today we are confronted in Zaire with populations in extreme danger.

It should be clear that this type of decision is a real one in which we have to measure and accept certain downsides of it. The fact that taking a strong position may not lead to the wished result is not a reason not to try, given the imminent catastrophe. Also, the fact that there could be potential downsides of taking a strong position should not, a priori, [be] reason to be silent or to have a weak message, without impact on the political community. We have to see how we are going to deal with those.

So, MSF should ask for safe zones where:

1. The civilian population can be protected and assisted,
2. And, where conditions will be created for a long-term solution.

We ask for two types of actions in parallel:

1. Immediate effective action to guarantee the immediate safety of the refugee population and the Zairian civil population and to guarantee access for humanitarian aid.

2. In parallel, actions which create conditions in those safe zones to foster normalization by returning the refugees to Rwanda in an organised way.

So, in those safe zones conditions should be created to prevent them from becoming again 'safe places' for military action and 'safe places' for the perpetrators of the genocide as was the case in the past two years in the camps along the border with Zaire. Therefore, Interahamwe and Ex-FAR should be disarmed. The criminal elites responsible for the genocide in 1994 should be isolated and eventually judged. The power of the leaders (former majors and others) who are spreading extremism and intimidating the Hutu population not to return should be broken.

[...] Diplomacy on its own is too late and will not be effective in this context. Urgent international military action is needed now to create protected zones to protect the civilian population and limit the bloodbath, to guarantee access for humanitarian aid, and to create conditions for solving the refugee problem in a human way.

[...] This is the moment to call for action because of the diplomatic initiatives between powerful countries: European Community, France and the USA. We have to influence them now.



'Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders Calls for an International Military Intervention to Set Up Safe Zones within Zaire to Prevent Further Human Catastrophe,' **Press release** MSF Gisenyi (New-York), 4 November, 1996 (in English). [D21](#)

#### Extract:

Today the international emergency relief agency Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders called for an immediate international/UN military intervention to set up safe zones in Kivu, Zaire.

Since the last of the international aid workers were evacuated 48 hours ago from Goma, 1.2 million Rwandan and Burundian refugees and countless Zairians have been left without assistance and most importantly protection.

Dr. Jacques De Milliano, Vice President of MSF International said, "How many pictures of massacres and dying babies will it take before the Heads of State and UN react? The insecurity and chaos in Zaire is so bad that there is nothing doctors and bandages or any other humanitarian assistance can do. I fear that precious time and lives are being lost to diplomacy and international hesitation. If no urgent political and military action is taken the international community will face a repetition of the 1994 catastrophe when a delayed humanitarian action replaced effective protection of the population."

The UN safe zones must: ensure protection for refugees and Zairians; ensure access for relief agencies; disarm all warring parties and criminal elements within the zone; and bring an end to impunity by isolating and bringing to justice those responsible for the Rwandan 1994 genocide. By calling for international intervention Médecins Sans Frontières does not call for a repeat of Operation Turquoise which was politically biased and inadequate.

Médecins Sans Frontières also warns, as it did for the past two years, against recreating semi-permanent camps, whose refugees were intimidated and manipulated by the perpetrators of the genocide. The camps cost 1 million \$ US per day to run and were used as military and political bases.

The safe zones must also focus assistance and protection on the Zairian population who are suffering from this conflict.

The repatriation of the refugees had virtually ground to a halt over the past year - Médecins Sans Frontières stresses that the creation of safe zones should be linked to an effective relaunch of the repatriation process with increased guarantees of security for refugees returning to Rwanda.



'Médecins Sans Frontières Calls for Armed International Intervention to Create Safe Zones,' **Press release**, MSF France, 4 November 1996 (in French). [D22](#)

#### Extract :

Médecins Sans Frontières calls for safe zones to be created to protect populations in danger in Zaire and to ensure that aid can be provided. In the current environment, only an armed international force can set up such zones. An international force must guarantee the security of Zairians who want to take refuge in neighbouring countries and for Burundians and Rwandans who wish to return home.

Since the last humanitarian aid agency workers left Goma 24 hours ago, more than 1.2 million Rwandan and Burundian refugees and hundreds of thousands of displaced Zairians have been left without assistance and protection.

"How many massacres must we witness before heads of state and the United Nations react?" said MSF Vice-President Jacques de Milliano. "The insecurity and chaos in Zaire are such that providing humanitarian aid is impossible. I am afraid that precious time and many lives will be lost if we limit ourselves to diplomatic initiatives."

The safe zones should allow refugees and displaced Zairians to be protected and guarantee delivery of aid. Parties to the conflict and criminal elements must be disarmed inside the zone, ending the impunity that the organisers of the 1994 genocide enjoy. These zones must not again become sanctuaries for those who led the 1994 Rwandan genocide.



Jacques [de Milliano, MSF Holland President and MSF international vice-president], Graziella Godin [Head of ET mission] and I organised the press conference. We were in Kigali and the pressure was incredible. We had no information about anything. It went on all night until 3 a.m. All the headquarters were calling each other. Jacques was talking to the Executive Directors and I was talking to the Desks. I tried to write a press release. Faxes left Kigali at night going back and forth to all the headquarters. I don't remember anymore who held what position, but everyone agreed that we had to say something. Ideas were circulating and the discussions were somewhat technical and military, related to legal issues. Jacques was pushing hard for us to call for an armed intervention. I don't remember what the other sections said, but I know that in the end, there was a real struggle over the question of whether to call for a humanitarian corridor. How do we explain this demand? I was the person writing. I couldn't take any more. We'd all been exhausted for ages.

Samantha Bolton, MSF USA Communication Director, MSF Press Officer for the Great Lakes November-December 1996 (in French).



During the day we had an international meeting and wrote a draft that we sent to the directors of the sections. We had a telephone call; we came to an agreement. So that was very concise. We worked it out and that very morning in Gisenyi, we did a press conference. It was first, that we wanted access and second, that we asked for a military intervention with the focus to organise the return of the Rwandanese refugees back to Rwanda because we knew that it was not a solution to stay. People should go home in a protected way and the Hutu should be disarmed. Our request was precise, we asked for military intervention for those two purposes and we said it very clearly."

Dr. Jacques de Milliano, MSF Holland General Director and MSF International vice-président (in English).



The discussion focused on the question of whether to call for an intervention. That's what De Milliano wanted. Given the experience with past military interventions, the others already knew that there wouldn't be one, or if there was, in a situation like Goma, the Congo, etc. they'd send soldiers who'd known the area for a long time and things would spiral downward.

I don't think that was a major point of conflict within MSF. At MSF Belgium, we didn't agree. But Eric Goemaere, the Director, didn't take a position at that time. Nor did MSF France either, I think. MSF Holland was in Goma. But in the end, even Jacques was bypassed by the other organisations present on site. The press didn't really pick up that message.

Dr.[...], MSF Belgium Operational Director (in French).



There were several NGOs, there were several MSFs and roughly speaking, the idea was that we couldn't just stand by and do nothing. The international community had to ensure protection. I think we asked for that. We issued a press release in which we were careful when talking about armed intervention but we danced around the words. We said, "They are under the protection of the international community, they are being attacked, the camps are dismantled, people are being pursued and the international community must respond by force if necessary." We used euphemisms because it stuck in our throats to call for armed intervention again. It was possible that the Canadians would do it. A Canadian High Commander had been in the area on an evaluation mission, etc. Let's remember that even if there was an intervention, there would be many side effects that we would certainly regret afterwards ... But morally we couldn't just stand by.

Dr. Philippe Biberson, MSF France President (in French).

Before the press conference, Jacques de Milliano gave an exclusive interview to a UK radio station BBC International, during which he called for armed intervention. The interview had barely been broadcast when the Banyamulenge rebels announced a three-week unilateral ceasefire. The following morning on Radio Rwanda, the Rwandan president called on all refugees to return home. [V2](#) 



'Zaire Rebels Declare unilateral Cease-Fire,' *International Herald Tribune* (Europe) Kigali, 5 November 1996 (in English).

#### Extract:

A rebel leader declared a unilateral three-week cease-fire Monday in the war between Tutsi guerrillas and the Zairian Army, raising hopes that international efforts to reach a million Hutu refugees cut off by the fighting from food and clean water might have a chance.

The cease-fire came as United Nations officials worked to muster support for a plan to set up safe corridors for the refugees to come home to Rwanda, and as several European nations called for an international intervention to prevent a catastrophic outbreak of disease or famine.



'MSF International **Sitrep** Rwanda 007,' 5-6 November 1996 (in English). [D23](#) 

#### Extract:

Gisenyi: MSF press conference well covered on international and national media. Certain part of press group pro-RPA. Media coverage of MSF's call for international military intervention and safe zones then eclipsed by Banyamulenge's call for 3 weeks unilateral cease-fire. Reports are that a Banyamulenge leader called BBC Gisenyi at noon to announce implementation at 15h00h GMT, a ceasefire to allow Rwandan refugees to come back to Rwanda. Aid should only be given in Rwanda, the Banyamulenge will allow safe transportation of refugees to Rwanda. Journalists asked tough political questions to us following our call for military intervention. Major Kagame on Radio Rwanda: 3 November 20:00: welcome call for Rwandan refugees to return. President Bizimungu on Radio Rwanda 08:15h, 4 November: appeal to all refugees to return, security needed for them to return. He said come home to Rwanda, don't suffer in Zaire. Appeal to observe ceasefire. Asked for international assistance to join Rwandan government in repatriation and resettlement of refugees. 3 fundamental issues:

1) Legal and political problem of Zaire, internal problem, should be sorted out by Zaire. Zaire has to stop denying citizenship to nationals.

2) Former Rwandan government army and militia who

are armed and fighting alongside Zairian armies, must be denied refugee status.

3) Humanitarian catastrophe, international aid workers are denied access due to fighting, refugees are scattered and there are armed elements shooting rebels, provoking catastrophe in refugee camps. Also said repatriation should be voluntary, those that are willing to come, come, those that don't want to should be moved a distance from border.



'Proposal Ceasefire Banyamulenge,' **Sitrep** from Jacques de Milliano to all delegates and programme managers, Urgent via MSF Amsterdam, 4 November 1996 (in English). [D24](#) 

#### Extract:

Banyamulenge leader in Uvira, South Kivu announced in a call to the BBC in Gisenyi that they were starting a ceasefire today at 15:00 -unilaterally- for a period of 3 weeks. Refugees are allowed to go back to their country and they will not allow supplies to come into Zaire.

#### Our reaction:

- This new element could be a step in the right direction for South Kivu.
- For South Kivu we will only believe it when we see it. The situation is too serious to give them the benefit of the doubt.
- But this is not a solution for Goma, North Kivu where the Banyamulenge are not in control.
- 750,000 refugees are in North Kivu and 450,000 refugees in South Kivu.
- Also most of the refugees in South Kivu/Uvira are Burundian and can't go back.
- Already Buja team reported that 10-12,000 refugees have been forced back and up to Cibitoke, which is completely unsafe since 29/10 (reports - off the record of men separated from the others and killed). MSF is concerned that this initiative will boost forced repatriation to unsafe areas.
- If the Banyamulenge do go ahead with the ceasefire and repatriation there needs to be guaranteed security at night and en route - also assistance and protection needed until moved.
- So, military intervention remains a necessity (stress the non-Turquoise character).
- International military intervention remains a necessity to protect and assist them and to protect the Zairian population on the move.



*First interview was BBC, to be sure that the BBC was the first to put it on the air and that our wording was the right one. In a press conference people can change things. When the press conference is finished, on the*

minute, the BBC put it on the air. 20 minutes later the BBC got a call. From Kabila! He said that he was going to organise a humanitarian corridor... and the BBC journalist, who was quite new, come to us and said: "You are putting pressure internationally now" - "Ils éclipse le message" (they blocked our message with their own). That's the news: "Rebels agree to a ceasefire, no international intervention needed anymore". So you see how Kagame is behind the scene. Because how can Kabila respond so fast directly to the BBC with a satellite phone? Amazing !"

Dr. Jacques de Milliano, MSF Holland General Director and MSF International vice-président (in English).

**Between 2 and 5 November, the rebels organised several 'guided tours' of Bukavu and later, of Goma, for the international press. The journalists appeared to be convinced by this public relations operation.**



'Update on Crisis,' **Sitre** by Samantha Bolton, MSF International Information Officer in the Great Lakes, 5 November 1996 (in English). **D25**

**Extract:**

- [...] B) Journalists, etc. – Info Update
- As you know Banyamulenge spokesperson declared a ceasefire from Bukavu, South Kivu yesterday at 15:00h. Also said no aid agencies would be allowed in but that they would bring refugees out for us. Goma border was supposed to be open this a.m. but not.
- Yesterday at 20:00 Goma (N Kivu) border opened for journalists and guided tour of town (ITN). The same press people/soldiers who took journalists on tour of Bukavu on Sunday. This means there is clear cooperation between North and South at least on PR front.
- Last night journalists met & driven through Goma on controlled PR tour of town in dark so pictures only showed deserted town. Journalists who went in very skeptical because the PR guides' clothing was freshly ironed and had definitely had a good nights sleep. Journalists believe they are transiting out of Rwanda. Journalists also reminded of highly organised RPF tours during advance of RPA through Rwanda during genocide.



'Goma—Open City for More than One Hundred Journalists,' **AFP** (France), Goma, 5 November 1996 (in French).

**Extract:**

On Tuesday, the city of Goma (eastern Zaire) was opened

to more than one hundred foreign journalists who crossed the border from Rwanda. A rebel coalition has taken at least half the city.

Several reporters had managed to reach the North Kivu capital last Saturday while fighting continued. That same day, others were evacuated from Goma along with close to 100 expatriate humanitarian aid workers.

Monday night, the rebels escorted a handful of other journalists by car through the city streets.

But Tuesday morning, groups of reporters from around the world waited for the authorities' green light to leave Gisenyi, the key frontier post (north-west Rwanda), for Zaire.

A Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) commander authorised the journalists to cross while a young Zairian officer on the other side was surprised to see so many people. "Who are you?" he asked. "What do you want?"

After the officer hesitated several times, the press managed to sweep down the long avenue leading to the centre of Goma. The region's roads were still closed to civilian traffic.



*Kigali had organised everything. They said to the journalists, 'We're going to show you how we have reorganised the army. That's the topic you should cover today.' They knew that the journalists had to turn in their stories and cassettes twice daily, at breakfast and at around 5 p.m., so the visit began at 10 a.m. That afternoon, they took them to see the soldiers who were wearing new uniforms. There were these young Zairians who posed and said, "I understand that everything is very good now. They are paying me. I have a uniform. This is the first time I've had a new pair of boots." That was more or less the script. I remember that Christiane Amanpour from CNN and all the others were there. They were delighted to see that level of organisation, which was quite extraordinary for Zaire.*

*We misinterpreted the attitude. I arrived from New York and felt that the journalists were very hard-line, very much in support of the Kigali government... In East Africa, there had been a first wave of journalists who had covered events in Somalia. Then a second wave started working in the region right at the time of the 1993 Burundi coup d'état. But after the genocide, these journalists were completely exhausted, both emotionally and physically. Between September and December 1994, a third wave arrived. They were there when the situation hardened in the camps, when several NGOs withdrew and, particularly, when the Interahamwe carried out horrible exactions and abuses. All the journalists in this new group were influenced by the Rwandan government's propaganda, thanks to the press trips the government organised. In general, journalists find*

*Africa annoying. There is always something that doesn't work and there's corruption. But in Rwanda, everything is well organised. They really know how to manage the press. Kagame is excellent; he's brilliant. We met very intelligent, very nice people. And then the journalists were a little ashamed of not having covered the genocide in depth. I was aware of that but I didn't know just how serious it was.*

Samantha Bolton, MSF USA Communication Director,  
MSF Press Officer for the Great Lakes November-  
December 1996 (in French).

**On 4 November, MSF USA announced to the press that the organisation was preparing for a medical disaster in Zaire.**



'Doctors Without Borders Prepares for Medical Disaster as Crisis Grows in Zaire,' **Press Release**  
MSF USA, 4 November 1996 (in English).  
**D26**

**Extract:**

Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières has begun to prepare for a crisis of massive proportions in Zaire. Early analysis indicates that, despite difficulties facing aid agencies already in reaching the refugee populations, at least one million people are at risk.

"Populations movements of this scale are recipes for disaster," said Joelle Tanguy, Executive Director of Doctors Without Borders in New York City. "Our teams are now preparing for the combined effects of war wounds, malnutrition, cholera, diarrhoeal diseases, meningitis, and the dramatic impact of a period without access to medical aid."

Doctors Without Borders is recruiting personnel from its 19 offices throughout the world, including the USA office based in New York City, with a focus on experienced emergency medical staff. Today, two aeroplanes each loaded with 40 tonnes of material landed in Kampala, Uganda, to reinforce material stocks for the crisis. These supplies included medical kits, tents and plastic sheeting, sanitary materials, and vehicles.

Recognizing that the current situation in Zaire stems from inadequate responses to past violence against civilian populations in the region, Doctors Without Borders this morning, called on the international community to ensure protection and security for civilians and to devise new political options for a solution to the crisis in the region.

Specifically, Doctors Without Borders called on international/UN military intervention to set up safe zones in Kivu, Zaire to: 1) ensure protection for refugees and Zairians; 2) ensure access for relief agencies; 3) disarm all warring parties and criminal elements within the zone

and bring an end to impunity by isolating and bringing to justice those responsible for the Rwandan 1994 genocide. The safe zones must also focus assistance and protection on the Zairian population who are suffering from this conflict.

**On 5 November, ICRC and UNHCR publicly raised the possibility of armed force; however unlike MSF they didn't issue an explicit call for intervention.**



'Three Major Humanitarian Groups Raise the Prospect of Military Action,' **AFP** (France)  
Geneva, 5 November 1996 (in French).

**Extract:**

On Tuesday in Geneva, three major humanitarian groups raised the prospect of some form of international military action to save more than one million refugees threatened by hunger and cholera in eastern Zaire. The UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the non-governmental organization. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) raised the notion of outside intervention as a last resort.

"Those of us in the field have a stronger sense that such an action is of urgent concern - not just humanitarian action, but political and military action as well," said Sadako Ogata, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, in an interview with the daily *International Herald Tribune* newspaper. "It should have been done a long time ago," she said. "I would like to see an international peacekeeping force deployed the length of the (Zairian-Rwandan) border between Bukavu and Goma."

[...] Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) issued the clearest call for outside intervention. For the first time since its founding twenty-five years ago, the organisation called for the international community to pursue "immediate military intervention," with or without the UN, to establish safe zones in eastern Zaire.

The ICRC did not exclude recourse to armed force either. "It's time to act," said ICRC spokesperson Rolin Wavre. "We have long called on the international community to take action. We know that this may involve military action." While not going as far as MSF, ICRC said that although the organisation did not want armed intervention, it had no objection in principle.

According to Thierry Durand, Director of Operations for MSF Switzerland, the immediate goal of military involvement would be to disarm Hutu extremists using refugee camps as rear bases against Rwanda.

Having predicted the catastrophe, the humanitarian

organisations say they are especially frustrated by the current impasse and the international community's failure to do anything to prevent the disaster.

"Aid has only fed the beast," said Doris Schopper, President of MSF Switzerland. "This is a disaster foretold."

Beyond emergency aid to refugees, MSF and UNHCR say that the solution will involve the refugees' voluntary return, with the cooperation of the international community and local armed forces. To convince the refugees to return, UNHCR proposed creating humanitarian corridors between Zaire and Rwanda.

**MSF France announced that two cargo planes were leaving for Zaire and called for an armed international force to establish safe zones for refugees and displaced persons.**



'Two Cargo Planes Leave for Zaire,' MSF France Press Release, 5 November 1996 (in French). **D27**

**Extract:**

Two cargo planes, each loaded with 40 tonnes of material, left Europe today for Kampala, Uganda to reinforce the supplies available to respond to the crisis in Zaire. The planes are carrying medical kits, shelters (tents and rolls of plastic sheeting), sanitation supplies and vehicles.

Médecins Sans Frontières already has supplies pre-positioned in Kampala and Kigali to treat the population and to launch epidemic and malnutrition prevention efforts. These supplies will also allow 500,000 people to receive drinking water (based on a minimum daily requirement of 5 litres /person/day).

Several evaluation missions are currently underway, departing from Lake Tanganyika and Lubumbashi, Zaire for the Uvira and Bukavu areas. The teams are trying to identify groups of refugees and displaced persons who have been without assistance for two weeks. Other volunteers are trying to reach the Goma area from the west. Based on information gathered on these missions, planes could leave Europe quickly. Fifty Médecins Sans Frontières volunteers in Kigali, Kinshasa and Europe are ready to respond.

Médecins Sans Frontières called today for an international armed force to create safe zones to guarantee the security of refugees and displaced persons and to permit aid operations to move forward.

**That same day, representatives of countries in the Great Lakes area (Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, Zambia, Eritrea and Cameroon) met in Nairobi and called on the UN Security Council to deploy a neutral force in Zaire to establish humanitarian corridors and temporary sanctuaries for the refugees.**

**Goma was under rebel forces' control. According to information broadcast on local radio, the force was made up of an "Alliance" of four political parties, including Zairian Tutsi originally from Rwanda. RPA soldiers were also observed in Goma.**



'Three Hundred Deaths in Goma, Under Rebel Control,' **AFP** (France), Goma 5 November 1996 (in French).

**Extract:**

Zairian volunteers confirmed that they gathered nearly 300 bodies over four days in the city of Goma (eastern Zaire), which was under rebel control on Tuesday, according to AFP reports.

... "We are currently limited to the downtown area because military authorities have not yet opened the roads heading north and west," said one of the volunteers, who estimated that "many more bodies remained" outside the city. These roads lead to the Rwandan Hutu refugee camps set up in the region more than two years ago and appear to have been emptied following fighting between rebel forces and the Zairian army.

The camps' occupants, numbering around 700,000, are scattered throughout the region where humanitarian organisations are considering creating 'humanitarian corridors' so that refugees can gain access to aid and return to Rwanda.

For most residents, the precise nature of the 'civilian and military authorities' in charge in Goma was still unknown on Tuesday. A local radio station broadcast a message from the 'Alliance,' a coalition of four political parties including Zairian Tutsi originally from Rwanda. The alliance's stated goal is to end the regime of Zairian President Mobutu Sese Seko. On Tuesday, it clarified its intention of "freeing all Zairians from the Mobutu dictatorship." [...]

Soldiers who, to all appearances, resembled members of the Rwandan Patriotic Army had been observed late last week in Goma. But the RPA denied that these men played any part in the Goma battle or in those that took place in Uvira and Bukavu (South Kivu), which also fell after several days of fighting.

**On 6 November, the UN announced that Zaire had agreed to the dispatch of an international force. Kigali stated that it did not want a 'neutral force' on its territory.**



'UN. Says Zaire Agrees to a Multinational Force,' **AFP** (France), Goma, 6 November 1995 (in French).

**Extract:**

UN Special Emissary Raymond Chrétien announced Wednesday that Zaire has agreed to the dispatching of a multinational force to the Great Lakes region and the eastern part of its territory.

"Mr Mobutu was very clear during our conversation," Chrétien said during a press conference after the meeting, which took place in Roquebrune Cap-Martin (south-east France), "The president agrees that a neutral international force should be sent."

This green light comes as Tutsi rebels in eastern Zaire announced their intention to pursue their offensive in the region, as stated by their leader Laurent Désiré Kabila. However, Kabila confirmed that a three-week ceasefire had been declared.

"We hope to make progress," said Kabila, President of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire, during a press conference. "The offensive we led is a tiny one compared to the one we intend to pursue."

[...] Boguo Makeli, Zairian Information Minister and government spokesperson, told the AFP that "since Rwanda has announced it is prepared to accept its refugees and since the camps and the border are only 300 metres to one kilometre apart, let refugee aid go directly to Rwanda."

Zaire, glaringly absent from the Nairobi summit on Tuesday, had not yet responded to its neighbors' decision to call for a neutral force to be sent to the Kivu region. The eight countries of the Great Lakes region and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) had asked the UN to establish humanitarian corridors and temporary sanctuaries for the refugees.



'Kigali Does Not Want a Neutral Force on its Territory,' **AFP** (France), Kigali, 6 November 1996 (in French).

**Extract:**

Despite the Nairobi summit's call for a neutral military force to aid refugees in eastern Zaire, Rwanda announced on Wednesday that it would not permit the force to enter its territory.

"I do not think it will be necessary for the force to have a presence on Rwandan territory, even if it involves only a logistical presence at the Rwandan-Zairian border," Joseph Videri, the President's spokesperson, told AFP in answer to questions regarding Rwanda's availability to serve as a rear base. "The problem is not in Rwanda but in Zaire... As a neutral force, it is supposed to go where the problem is."

**That same day, the Executive Directors and Operations: a Directors of various MSF sections met in Amsterdam and confirmed their agreement to call for armed intervention. They decided that the international Emergency Team, coordinated by the Dutch section, would lead the operations. An agreement between the UNHCR and the Rwandan government gave MSF responsibility for setting up most of the temporary health stations in case of a massive influx of refugees.**



'Clarification and Elaboration of MSF's Position,' **MSF Position paper** (internal document), written after 6 November 1996 at a meeting of General and Operational Directors (in English).

**D28**

**Extract:**

Both the field (Samantha Bolton and Jacques de Milliano) and the 6 November meeting of General and Operational Directors of MSF have reiterated MSF's position. It has been repeatedly stressed that the measures MSF has called for, form an integral package.

1. Creation of safe zones
2. Installed by a multinational intervention force
3. So as to prepare the repatriation of Rwandan refugees, under the conditions of:
  - disarmament
  - separation of the refugee leaders, many of whom have instigated the genocide, who are intimidating and preventing the refugees from returning arrest, detention and prosecution of genocideurs
4. To create the conditions in Rwanda allowing for and facilitating a voluntary return with direct and practical measures:
  - transit camps
  - reinforcement of human rights monitoring measures which MSF has called for continuously to be in place in Rwanda
  - safe environment for returnees
  - operational judicial system
  - prison conditions
  - effective health care
  - solutions for the land issue

In order to have a consistent MSF position, which is equally clear on all MSF levels (field, sections and delegate offices), it is necessary to clarify or elaborate on some of the concepts in more detail.

**Safe Zones**

Clearly marked areas in which the refugees can reside safely. The civilian character of the zones is essential. The following conditions have to be met:

- ban on presence of arms and armed activities
- identification and separation of persons not eligible to be protected in those zones (military, militias, war criminals and genocideurs). Legal basis: 1949 Fourth Geneva

Convention and Exclusion Clause 151 Convention relating to the status of refugees article 1(F).

- international military and human rights monitoring
- temporary character

For the moment, it appears that the concept of safe zones is intermingled with the concept of **humanitarian** corridors. Humanitarian corridors, however, supposedly have been understood as protected routes for transport of relief goods. In this case, the concept is also used as a route which people can use to return to Rwanda. In practice, a combination of the concepts of safe zones and humanitarian corridors means that we are aiming at clearly marked areas with guarded entry and exit points and protected routes for those who want to return and for the humanitarian organisations to have access to the zones.

#### Multinational Intervention Force

MSF has called for a multinational force mandated to establish the safe zones. Presently, developments within the international community taught us that a peacekeeping force may be deployed which will be composed by African troops (with perhaps some contingents of western states) and support of western states. At this stage, MSF should consider formulating its position on this force, since it may be the case that the mandate of this force is considerably different from what MSF asked.

Two considerations are of utmost importance if the force will be deployed:

- with the consent of the receiving state, i.e. Zaire
- without the consent

With the first case, the force can be a peacekeeping force; in the second case, it must have a peace-enforcement (Chapter VII of the UN Charter) mandate. However, if we look at the tasks of the force as MSF sees them as necessary (i.e. installation and safe-guarding of the zones, separation and detention of the leaders, disarmament and military monitoring), it can be said that those tasks require the use of armed force. This use of armed force goes beyond the mandate of a peacekeeping force, which can only use force in self-defence. For instance, armed force would be required simply because of the fact that the leaders probably will not cooperate with their separation. As a result, a peace-enforcement mandate is a prerequisite for the chances of the force to succeed in their tasks.

Only the UN Security Council can provide the legal basis of this multinational intervention force, regardless its composition (OAU troops, other African troops). Legally speaking, there is no obstacle to deploy a peace-enforcement force. The UN Charter requires a threat or breach of international peace and security. This breach is proven by the fact that the so-called territorial integrity of Zaire has been violated. In such a case, the Council can decide to take measures to restore international peace and security. Moreover, as additional justification for an international armed intervention, the Security Council has in the recent past also indicated that massive and gross violations of

human rights can amount to a threat or breach of the international peace and security.

In summary, MSF should consider to indicate the shortcomings of a peacekeeping mandate in relation to the measures to be taken by this force.

#### Repatriation

MSF has always stressed that the repatriation of the Rwandan refugees will be the most viable option. In addition, it has also always stressed the voluntary character of repatriation. In line with this position, MSF has spoken out against attempts to forcibly repatriate refugees. As MSF has stressed that the creation of safe zones should be seen in the light of the eventual repatriation, questions have raised about MSF agrees to repatriation, which is 'less than voluntary'.

In reply, if all the conditions are in place on the side of Zaire (and Tanzania), voluntary repatriation will become a real option. MSF should continue to stress that a voluntary return is based on a free choice to return, based on a fundamental change of circumstances and with a tripartite agreement (host country, country of origin and UNHCR) in place.

Practical arrangements such as transport capacity, transit camps, reception centres and adequate international monitoring during the whole process need to be in place as well. The second wave of repatriation of the Rwandan refugees in July 1996 proved that the latter arrangements were totally insufficient. Concerning the more long-term factors (human rights situation in Rwanda, judicial system, prison conditions and solutions for land issues, etc.), there is insufficient information which proves that the necessary improvements have materialized. At the same time, however, the reception of the Rwandan returnees from Burundi has caused less problems than could have been expected. Detention rates were acceptable, also due to the fact that detention stopped because of the overcrowded prisons. MSF should try to collect recent information on the current situation concerning the 'long-term' factors.



**Minutes** of the 8 November 1996 meeting of the MSF Belgium Board of Directors (in French).  
**D29**

#### **Extract:**

On Wednesday, November 6, a meeting was held in Amsterdam regarding MSF International's position on the Kivu crisis.

Board members agreed on the following points:

The only way to avoid a bloodbath is to create safe zones so that displaced persons and refugees can obtain access to humanitarian aid while under protection.

Repatriation of Rwandan refugees under acceptable conditions is the only long-term solution.

Repatriation cannot proceed unless the militias are disarmed. This entails neutral, international military intervention.

Regarding activity in the field, four or five sections are interested in responding to this tragedy. Because there are four or five intervention locations, coordination and communication are critical. The Board decided that MSF Holland would be the back-up section (coordinating section in the ET framework). MSF Holland will assign tasks to the other sections. All evaluation missions are currently under MSF Holland coordination. The Executive Directors and Operations Directors are in contact weekly to ensure regular communication and resolve any disputes. A discrepancy remains at the planning level. MSF Belgium is calling for operations tasks to be divided up because the context is too broad.

\* Introduction to the situation (Dominique Boutriau) and discussion.

There are around 1.2 million Rwandan refugees. The camps are concentrated primarily along the lake but we are currently prohibited from gaining access to them. In Cibitoke, Burundian authorities do not want more camps set up in their territory because the refugees are Hutu and the region is principally under Tutsi authority. We had an opportunity to reach the refugees in a UNHCR armoured convoy. The situation there is tragic. If we decide to take action, the risk is that the authorities will try to steer us towards a particular course. The warring parties have understood how to manipulate international aid.

We believe we must go and continue to serve as witnesses while maintaining security. We are calling on the international community to establish protected zones and humanitarian corridors.

**On 7 November, humanitarian organisations had still not gained access to the refugees, whose living conditions had become appalling. Five MSF evaluation teams were blocked at the Rwandan, Burundian, Ugandan and Zairian borders. UNCHR was trying to negotiate for humanitarian corridors.**



'In Vain, NGOs Try to Enter Eastern Zaire,' *AFP* (France), 7 November 1996 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

Five Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) evaluation teams are blocked at Zaire's borders with Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi. Carole Cornelis, director of MSF's mission in Kigali, announced that the one team currently responsible

for assessing the situation in the field was also being held by the Zairian army (FAZ) in Kalémié, on the banks of Lake Tanganyika, south of the area of conflict between the FAZ and Tutsi rebels.

Wednesday night, rebels holding the capital of the Zairian province of North Kivu turned back the MSF team in Gisenyi, a Rwandan city bordering Goma. "We were able to pass the border crossing, but the rebels stopped us from entering Goma," Cornelis said.

The rebels had announced a unilateral ceasefire but nonetheless called on the humanitarian organisations to return to Kivu. Nonetheless, on Saturday, the last expatriate humanitarian aid workers evacuated due to insecurity. Around 700,000 Rwandan refugees have moved into the area around Goma.

"There is a unilateral ceasefire, but we don't know what the Zairian authorities' intentions are," explained the MSF Head of Mission, annoyed by the "extreme political, diplomatic vagueness... It's still extraordinary that a million people can disappear like that."

[...] Faced with procrastination on the part of international diplomats in establishing a military-humanitarian force and humanitarian corridors, as well as sluggish action on the part of UN agencies, NGOs appear increasingly determined to act on their own. "We'll go in without delay at the first opportunity," emphasized Anacleti Odhiambo, Oxfam's Rwanda representative. The Oxfam teams, like MSF's, have been blocked at the Rwandan-Zairian border. "We don't know what's going on on the other side," Odhiambo added.

CARE "is still waiting" until the end of the week for UNHCR to create corridors, said Rudy Ramp, CARE's Head of Mission in Kigali. UNHCR coordinates the NGOs' refugee activities, but as a UN agency, negotiating with the rebels is a "delicate matter" because such discussions offer them a certain international recognition, Ramp noted. "If UNHCR has failed to obtain corridors by the end of the week, we will send our own evaluation teams on site," he added. Like the other NGOs, CARE is nonetheless subject to security problems and the good will of the fighters and soldiers holding the region.

But an official of another large NGO in Rwanda, whose teams are also waiting, noted that it is difficult to take action without UNHCR's go-ahead. "We are dependent on UNHCR," said the official, who asked not to be identified. "They determine the needs and assign the work. It's also a major funding source for NGOs, as it is for ECHO (the EU's aid agency) and USAID. Undertaking a humanitarian response on this scale requires huge budgets," the official added.

**ICRC and UNHCR joined the European Union in calling on the UN Security Council to authorise an emergency intervention in eastern Zaire.**



'Enough Talk - It's Time to Act.' Humanitarian Organisations Grow Impatient,' *AFP*, (France), Geneva, 7 November 1996 (in French).

**Extract:**

On Thursday, impatient humanitarian organisations called on the international community to stop equivocating and organise emergency intervention in eastern Zaire, where hundreds of thousands of refugees deprived of aid, some for two weeks, started "dying like flies," according to witnesses.

"At some point, you've got to stop talking," said ICRC spokesperson Rolin Wavre. "You've got to act. We've got to move if we're going to avoid a catastrophe for 1.2 million Rwandan and Burundian refugees and tens of thousands of Zairian civilians threatened by hunger and cholera, some for two weeks."

[...]

"We're totally frustrated here," complained Piero Calvi-Pariseti, Head of the Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies for the Great Lakes region. "We're a few kilometres from the refugees and we don't have access." As an organisation, the Red Cross cannot call for military intervention but "we do not oppose the idea of a multi-lateral intervention," he added.

Officials at UNHCR headquarters in Geneva are said to be impatient too, while the organisation's spokesperson in Nairobi cited reports from refugees, arriving in Rwanda from Goma, that "the refugees have begun dying like flies."

Refugees who moved into the area near the North Kivu capital, which fell into Tutsi rebel hands at the end of last week, tried to flee to the west, towards the interior of Zaire, but gave up because of hunger and thirst, said spokesperson Peter Kessler.

[...] On Thursday, the High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadako Ogata, other officials of UN agencies, and the Red Cross attended a meeting with ministers of the European Union in Brussels to speed the delivery of aid to civilians. The meeting resulted in a call to the UN Security Council to authorise an emergency intervention. The divided Security Council could not reach a decision on Wednesday and differences split France and Great Britain in Brussels.

In an interview with the Herald Tribune on Tuesday, Commissioner Ogata spoke out in favor of humanitarian, but also political and military action.

On Thursday, the humanitarian organisations came face to face yet again with their impotence when they were unable to reach refugees in the Uvira and Bukavu regions from Kinshasa, the Zairian capital located more than 2,000 kilometres to the west.

**MSF called on the leaders of the western nations to issue a mandate to the international force to neutralise the conflict and bring to trial those responsible for the 1994 genocide.**



**Letter** from Philippe Biberson, MSF France President, to Jacques Chirac, President of France, 7 November 1996 (in French). **D30**

**Extract:**

Dear Mr President,

Because we cannot gain access to the Kivu region of Zaire, humanitarian organisations remain powerless to respond to the breadth of the tragedy currently unfolding in the Great Lakes region.

With countries in the region closing their borders and Zairian authorities refusing to grant access to the area, we are effectively prevented from providing aid to displaced persons and refugees. Authorities in Zaire and Rwanda have blocked Médecins Sans Frontières' teams from circulating for a week and for three days, respectively.

We believe that the international community, and particularly France, must help humanitarian organisations gain access to these populations at risk of death by:

- Pressuring the bordering countries of Zaire, Rwanda and Burundi to accept the principle of unfettered circulation for humanitarian aid teams; and
- Protecting populations in danger and their access to humanitarian aid by sending international intervention troops.

We are counting on France's determination to do everything in its power to bring a quick end to this new tragedy.

With my sincere personal regards.

**Through the medical press, MSF France, Médecins du Monde and the Conseil de l'Ordre des Médecins Français appealed to French doctors to call on the French government to act, so that humanitarian organisations could respond and care for populations in Zaire.**



'Appeal to French Doctors to Save 1,000,000 Refugees in Zaire,' Médecins Sans Frontières, Médecins du Monde, *Impact Médecin*, (France), 7 November 1996 (in French).

**Extract:**

More than one million Rwandan, Burundian and Zairian refugees are in danger of dying. Facing famine and epidemics, they are hostages to the war raging in the African Great Lakes region.

As doctors, we are issuing an appeal to allow all humanitarian organisations to respond and treat these populations. We ask the French government to do everything possible to obtain guarantees from international bodies so that humanitarian action can be pursued and protection provided to these populations in danger.

**On 8 November, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, UN Secretary General, recommended to the Security Council that an international intervention force be deployed in eastern Zaire. ICRC president Cornelio Sommaruga also announced that he viewed intervention favourably.**



Boutros Boutros-Ghali, 'Emergency Action Needed to Avoid Thousands of Deaths,' *AFP*, (France), UN New York, 8 November 1996 (in French).

**Extract:**

UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali recommended to the Security Council that it authorise deployment on an urgent basis of a multinational force in eastern Zaire, without which "tens of thousands" of civilians face death.

[...] In a letter, Boutros-Ghali presented the Council with three options:

1. creation of an ad hoc multinational force by a 'group of member states,' which would seek 'the authorisation necessary' to intervene (French proposal);
2. deployment of a UN peacekeeping force;
3. deployment of an African regional force.

However, the Secretary General noted, "there is not a minute to lose" and the best way to confront the current crisis would be to adopt the first option. The member states "possessing the necessary resources" would thus take the initiative to assemble a multinational force "in consultation with the Secretary General of the Organisation of African Unity and the relevant nations of the region."



'ICRC Favorable to Armed Intervention in Zaire,' *AFP* (France), Geneva, 8 November 1996 (in French).

**Extract:**

[...]

Expressing his "indignation" and "distress" over the current tragedy, ICRC president Cornelio Sommaruga said that governments should decide whether to intervene within the framework of the UN Security Council. He emphasized, however, that the Red Cross would not call for such an intervention but during a press conference at ICRC headquarters in Geneva, he noted that, "nothing in international humanitarian law prevents the UN Security Council from deciding to initiate an operation to restore law and order."

**The Rwandan government announced that it was prepared to accept an African-European force, without the participation of France. He called for the return of Rwandan refugees and said that villages would be organised to receive them.**



'Rwandan Government Ready to Accept an African-European Force,' *AFP* (France), Bonn, 8 November 1996 (in French).

**Extract:**

On Wednesday, Rwandan Foreign Affairs Minister Anastase Gasana announced in Bonn that his government was prepared to accept the deployment of an African-European force to aid more than one million refugees blocked in eastern Zaire.

But during a press conference in Bonn, he demanded that such a force be 'absolutely neutral' and made it clear that his country did not support France's participation. He said that the Kigali government was opposed to an 'adventure' like the French-led Operation Turquoise, when Rwanda was plunged into civil war in 1994. The goal of the French operation had been to create safety zones in the south-west of the country.

(In Kigali, Rwandan President Pasteur Bizimungu announced Friday that France "should refrain from contributing" to an international military force in eastern Zaire.)

[...] The Rwandan government will support "any humanitarian action that has no hidden agenda," Rwanda's chief diplomat confirmed. "Any positive action will be welcome, whether from African or mixed forces – but we insist that they be neutral, absolutely neutral... We don't

want another adventure like the one we lived through in Rwanda.”

Mr Gasana confirmed that the Rwandan border with Zaire was open and that the Rwandan government was making its infrastructure available for refugee aid operations. He also called for the return of Rwandan Hutu who went to eastern Zaire, fearing possible reprisals after the Tutsi massacres in 1994. Provisions have been made to receive them in every village, with a human rights delegate assigned to each. But, he charged that Rwandan refugees in Zaire were ‘prisoners’ and ‘hostages’ of those who committed the 1994 genocide, who were using them as ‘human shields.’ He also accused Zairian authorities of having taken them hostage to serve their political interests.

Gasana views the tragedy as not only a humanitarian one, but also a political one and said that a political solution would include recognition of the rights of the Banyamulenge (Tutsi of Rwandan origin who have lived in Zaire for many years and whose expulsion provoked the current crisis) to be considered as Zairians.

**In an 8 November press release, MSF extrapolated the number of deaths likely to occur if humanitarian organisations did not gain access to the camps. The calculation was based on the number of refugees and displaced Zairians in danger (1.2 million people) and on previous similar experiences. MSF renewed its call for safe zones and international military intervention.**



‘Are 13,600 Deaths Insignificant?’ MSF France Press Release, 8 November 1996 (in French). [D31](#)

**Extract:**

For three days, MSF teams based in Gisenyi and Cyangugu, Rwanda have tried to cross the border to launch aid operations on behalf of hundreds of thousands of Rwandans and Zairians who lack assistance. Each time, MSF representatives have been turned back. To date, the only visits allowed into the Goma region have been guided trips.

Since the last teams were forced to evacuate Goma on 2 November, aid organisations have not been able to reach the populations in danger. This means that:

- the 200,000 Rwandan and Burundian refugees in the Uvira region have been deprived of aid for three weeks;
- the 300,000 refugees in Bukavu and the displaced Zairians have not received assistance for two weeks;
- the 700,000 people who were living in the Goma camps and the inhabitants of neighboring villages have been left on their own for a week.

We know from experience that in similar situations, 10 out

of every 10,000 displaced people deprived of aid die every day. We can thus estimate that more than 13,600 people have died since the crisis began 21 days ago (not including deaths from killings), confirming the urgent need to create an international force to set up safe zones.



*We were trying to get the message out again. Journalists were calling, saying, “We can’t get to the other side, we’d like to know what’s going on, what kind of state people are in.” We were answering that we didn’t know, that we didn’t have access. Then we said to ourselves, we can extrapolate from our experience with this kind of population in this kind of situation. Working with the medical department, we researched situations most similar to this one and identified the corresponding mortality rates. We chose situations in which a population of hundreds of thousands had had access to aid in a camp for some period of time and were then cut off for three weeks to a month. We applied the Goma mortality rates, projecting them over a week and a month. You can’t fault the method in and of itself. We were very careful to say that these were projections. But as soon as the AFP got hold of them, our carefully chosen words became the following: “Here are the mortality rates predicted by MSF...” All our caveats disappeared ... In addition, we couldn’t foresee that people were leaving with food and water and in good health.*

Anne Guibert, MSF France Press Officer (in French).



*We were trying to get people to talk about this and we had the idea to issue a press release. We extrapolated from the population and the potential mortality among a population that was not receiving aid. We took fairly conservative figures, talking about 10 per 10,000/day, which corresponds to mortality within a population that is not receiving assistance. It’s unusual to know in advance if a press release will be picked up. This one was and it made a big splash. It was a combination of circumstances. It could have gone completely unnoticed. It was written in Paris and de Milliano and Goemaere were surely notified. That was a time when things worked like that a lot, via direct contact. We were widely criticised for that kind of short cut.*

Dr. Bernard Pécoul, MSF France Executive Director (in French).

**Interviewed by CNN, the director of MSF USA also mentioned the estimate in the press release, which was turned into a confirmation and was then widely distributed by the press.**



'MSF Says More Than 13,600 Dead in Eastern Zaire,' **AFP** (France), Paris, 8 November 1996 (in French).

**Extract:**

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) announced that more than 13,600 people have died in eastern Zaire over the last three weeks.

"We know from experience that, on average in this kind of situation, among a displaced population lacking all assistance, 10 people out of 10,000 die every day," said Dr Bernard Pécoul, MSF Executive Director, in a press release. The figure does not take into account deaths from killings, he noted.

According to MSF 200,000 Rwandan and Burundian refugees in the Uvira region have received no aid for three weeks, 300,000 refugees from Bukavu and the displaced Zairians have been without aid for two weeks and the 700,000 people who were living in the Goma camps and residents of neighboring villages were left on their own a week ago.

MSF teams based in Gisenyi and Cyangugu, Rwanda have been trying to cross the border for three days to begin aid operations on behalf of hundreds of thousands of Rwandans and Zairians who lack assistance. Each time, MSF representatives have been turned back and to date, the only visits allowed into the Goma region have been guided visits.

"Every day of hesitation results in the death of thousands of civilians," MSF stated, calling again for international military intervention to create emergency safety zones.



'Abandoned, Nearly One Million Refugees from Kivu Risk Death,' **Le Monde** (France), 9 November 1996 (in French). [D32](#)

**Extract:**

The cameras and satellite telephones belonging to the world's reporters are useless here. Seven hundred thousand, one million people – maybe more – are dying silently. No one knows where – somewhere in a low spot near the lake, or further off in the forest – but they are dying.

At least that is the firm conviction of representatives of humanitarian organisations blocked at the Zairian-Rwandan border station at the entrance to Goma. Since the Banyamulenge (Tutsi rebels from Zaire) took the city of Goma, Hutu refugees and part of Goma's Zairian population have headed onto the roads. Perhaps they are near Saké, thirty kilometres away, behind the combat lines.

The maths is simple. In 1994, when 800,000 Hutu fleeing Rwanda reached Goma, the city was at peace and humanitarian aid was immediate and massive. Forty thousand people died of cholera then. Today, in a war situation, without food and medical aid, in the midst of the rainy season, "cholera is there," says Jacques de Milliano, Vice-President of Médecins Sans Frontières International. "The disease appears here in one week, as soon as health conditions decline." He looks at the lake and the volcano. The catastrophe is playing out there, under heavy clouds, without witnesses, without aid – without anything.



*I'd sent a message to the network saying, "please be careful with the figures. Don't make any assumptions based on the figures." And then Joëlle Tanguy, (Director of MSF USA) gave an interview to CNN in New York. She was trapped and the report came out saying, "MSF says that there are so many deaths per day." The information came out of CNN in New York. It was picked up by the news agencies as "MSF said that..."*

*I had been endlessly fighting off journalists on this whole question of statistics for days. I told them that we didn't have any numbers to give them; that we didn't know. All of a sudden someone looks at his laptop and says to me, "MSF says in a story that there are so many people dying." What should I do? I said to Jacques, "We've got a problem here. They're saying that according to MSF, thousands of people are dying every day." We went back over the entire story. I tried to do damage control with the reporters. "Listen, this press release is based on a study in which we say that if this, if that, if the other thing... It's an extrapolation." Obviously the journalists didn't understand. "You're saying one thing but your Director in New York is saying another." We really had a big problem!*

Samantha Bolton, MSF USA Communication Director,  
MSF Press Officer for the Great Lakes November-  
December 1996 (in French).



*After a delay, Paris came with their analysis and diffused it in their media. We were not aware of the MSF France thing, it was not a dramatic thing. With Samantha we had agreed not to use precise figures ... But then MSF France gave exact figures and they asked us, "Do you agree?" I said, "We have to, we can't not agree." But I am not putting the blame on France because if we would have been against it, we would have said it. In this situation it is not wrong, if you want to make your case hard even to forward a figure. We were not very happy with it but we said, "Ok, we accept it."*

Dr. Jacques de Milliano, MSF Holland General Director  
and MSF International vice-président (in English).

**MSF USA joined with around 20 other US NGOs under the auspices of Inter Action to distribute a press release calling on the USA to take immediate action to save thousands of people in danger in eastern Zaire.**

**Together with Oxfam, MSF UK published a press release and open letter in donated space in *The Times* calling on the British government to take leadership and mobilise an international intervention.**



'US Relief Agencies Call For US Action on Zaire,' Inter Action **Press Release**, 8 November (in English). [D33](#)

**Extract:**

Eighteen prominent US relief agencies today issued a statement calling on the US government to take immediate action before tens of thousands of people die in eastern Zaire. Here is the full text of the statement and the agencies that support it. All agencies are members of Inter Action, a coalition of US relief and refugee-assistance agencies.

Alarmed by the probability that tens of thousands of refugees in eastern Zaire will die within days unless urgent action is undertaken, the undersigned agencies call on the United States Government to take the following immediate steps:

1. Establish at an airfield in the region a logistics facility, which can assist with the arrival and onward transport of personnel and supplies needed to meet the immediate needs of starving and sick refugees.
2. Agree without further delay to work with African and European governments to field an international military force capable of providing sufficient security to permit refugees to be assisted in Zaire pending their repatriation to Rwanda or eventual resettlement. The military force also would insure that combatants do not receive aid intended exclusively for the civilian population.
3. Exercise leadership within the United Nations Security Council to see that the Council makes clear to the governments of the region that any interference with humanitarian relief operations will alienate them from their friends in the international community.

This crisis in the Great Lakes region has erupted due to the failure for over two years of the international community to muster the political will necessary to address the underlying causes of instability in the region. As the most powerful and influential member of the international community, the United States government must commit itself to playing a leadership role in the resolution of this crisis, as it takes immediate steps to limit loss of life.

*Africare Church, World Service, Doctors of the World Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières, Food for the*

*Hungry International, International Aid, International Rescue Committee, International Medical Corps, Lutheran World Relief,*

*Map International, Operation USA, Mercy Corps International, Refugees International, Save the Children, United Methodist Committee on Relief, World Concern Development Organization, World Relief, World Vision, Interaction, a membership association of more than 150 US non-profit organizations, is the nation's leading advocate for international humanitarian efforts including relief, development, refugee assistance, environment, population, and global education.*



'OXFAM and Médecins Sans Frontières Joint Statement on Anglo-French Summit - Military Intervention Now to Save Lives and Secure Long-Term Peace and Justice,' MSF UK **Press Release**, 8 November 1996 (in English). [D34](#)

**Extract:**

Two of the world's largest aid agencies, Oxfam and Médecins Sans Frontières, joined today in a call for immediate deployment of troops into Zaire to save the lives of Rwandan refugees and Zairian displaced people.

The agencies described the British Government's hesitation in the face of an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Zaire as morally bankrupt. They called on the British Government to throw its full political, diplomatic and military weight behind the call for a UN mandated intervention force and to persuade forcefully UN member states to commit troops and funds.

"Children are dying now and if they were visible on our TV screens there would be no place for this kind of caution and complacency the British Government is showing. Up to a million lives of both Rwandan refugees and Zairian displaced people hang in the balance. They are only a few miles away from aid stocks over the border. We still have a chance to help but only if an intervention force is on the ground to protect lives and to allow the aid through. John Major's fine words won't help - only decisive action, and action now will have any effect," said Stewart Wallis, Deputy Director, Oxfam UK and Ireland.

"For the past three weeks many have been on the move without food aid or any kind of assistance. The first to die will be infants and the elderly. Hunger, thirst, exhaustion, exposure to the elements and disease will soon have a devastating effect on young lives," added Anne-Marie Huby, Executive Director, MSF-UK.

The agencies warned that military intervention would only work if it was part of wider package which dealt with the long-term political crisis of the Central African region. Any force would have to deal with the crucial issue of disarming the former Rwandan government army, the Interahamwe militia, and allow a dignified and voluntary return of refugees.



'Dead Refugees Cannot be Saved,' **Open letter**, MSF UK/OXFAM, *The Times* (United Kingdom) 9 November 1996 (in English). [D35](#)

#### Extract:

Dear Prime Minister,

Over one million refugees and local people face death in war-torn eastern Zaire, a mere ten miles from aid supplies. The first to die are infants and the elderly. Meanwhile, the European Union vacillates and shows shameful disunity in the face of massive loss of human life. We are pleading for the British government to show the moral strength and leadership necessary to mobilise an international intervention on the ground.

Time is running out. Despite the announcement of a cease-fire, aid organisations are still actively prevented from reaching the people in need. The refugees need safe areas, where security and aid can be provided, and from where they can return home safely and in dignity. Only a neutral force can successfully disarm the former Rwandan army, the Interahamwe militia, and help bring those responsible for the 1994 genocide to justice.

Unless security is restored on the ground in a matter of days, the refugee question of Central Africa will have found its final solution. There simply will not be any refugees left alive.



*We had free space in The Times that we didn't want to use to raise money. We had this public space and we said to ourselves, 'we're going to use it.' The rationale was ridiculous. We never should have followed it. We used the space to publish a joint letter with Oxfam. To my knowledge, it's the only one in the history of the organisation. It was really outdated and I take full responsibility. The Oxfam director should also share that responsibility. I called him and said, "We have two columns out of seven, or something like that, so let's fill them up." We did. I remember calling Jean-Hervé (Bradol, Communications Director for MSF France) and I read him the text. He said, "It's very good" I remember that very well.*

*It didn't get a lot of press coverage but it led to a lot of discussion. MSF and Oxfam together – that was pretty unusual. It was a short text. We called for humanitarian organisations to obtain access; otherwise so many people risked dying of hunger. One of the premises of the message was 'we're doctors and we have to make pessimistic projections because that's how it's done.' Oxfam said, "We know where all the water faucets are in the Goma area so we know that the Rwandan army has access to faucet no. 1." Again on this subject of 'pessimistic projections,' we said to ourselves, "If the water is cut off - which is the most effective way to cordon off the area - then there's a real danger for public health and also of obvious violence." Oxfam was completely cool about it. We made this appeal, which was, typically,*

*a little irresponsible ... but that's another story! You can debate endlessly whether this kind of thing is useful. But we publicly stated what we believed – more than the other organisations. While the others were saying, "On the one hand... on the other ...," we said, "we believe there are people in danger" and we demanded access.*

Anne-Marie Huby, MSF UK Executive Director  
(in French).

**In a press release, MSF Holland and MSF USA lauded the Rwandan government's decision to accept the creation of humanitarian corridors and announced that MSF was sending 25 tonnes of aid supplies.**



'Médecins Sans Frontières Sends Cargo - Rwanda Allows Humanitarian Aid into Goma,' MSF Holland **Press Release**, 8 November 1996 (in English). [D36](#)



'Doctors Without Borders Prepares to Enter Zaire early Saturday - Rwanda Allows Humanitarian Aid into Goma,' MSF USA **Press Release**, 8 November 1996 (in English). [D37](#)

#### Extract:

The Rwandan government has permitted ten international aid organisations, among them Médecins Sans Frontières, to start up humanitarian aid to the refugees in Goma, Zaire. The plan of the Rwandan government is to create corridors between Zaire and Rwanda through which refugees can return to Rwanda. Although the government does not guarantee that the rebels in East Zaire agree on this decision, it expects the rebels to cooperate with the repatriation on the basis of the recent ceasefire.

According to Médecins Sans Frontières the decision is a first step to enable humanitarian aid to [reach] the refugees and the population of eastern Zaire. It is well known that most refugees, during the past few weeks, have moved further west into the interior of Zaire, which is controlled by the army. Rwanda alone cannot guarantee access to these affected populations.

It is not yet clear who will protect the humanitarian corridors. Rwanda is said to have agreed with an intervention of a neutral UN force in eastern Zaire.

MSF called earlier this week for an international military intervention and for the set up of safe zones within Zaire to prevent further human catastrophe. Tonight an MSF cargo plane with 25 tonnes of relief goods consisting of drugs, medical materials, high protein bis-

cuits and blankets will leave the Amsterdam airport. On board there will also be 13 MSF aid workers. The aeroplane will land in Kigali early Saturday morning. The team and the cargo will immediately be loaded on trucks and transported to the border.

In Goma, MSF will start up medical relief to two hospitals and provide basic health care to the population in and around Goma. Furthermore exploratory MSF missions will keep trying to reach the area west and south of Goma to locate the whereabouts of over 1 million refugees and displaced.

**On 9 November, after two days of discussions, the UN Security Council adopted an interim resolution accepting the principle of a multinational force 'for humanitarian purposes' but delayed the intervention decision. The USA expressed doubts regarding the French proposal and said that it would not consider sending its troops.**

**That same day, MSF France drew attention again to the continued lack of assistance to refugees and displaced persons from Kivu and announced an increase in its aid. MSF France further criticised the horrible conditions under which Burundian refugees in the Cibitoke conflict region were being repatriated forcibly, having fled Burundi taken refuge in the Kivus.**



'Each Day of Non-Assistance to Refugees Could Lead to the Deaths of 1,200 People,' MSF France **Press Release**, 9 November 1996 (in French). **D38**

**Extract:**

The refugees and displaced persons in the Kivu region of Zaire remain without assistance today. From experience, Médecins Sans Frontières knows that mortality rates in such a situation (displaced populations without aid) can reach 10 deaths per 10,000 people per day. The number of Rwandan and Burundian refugees in that region of Zaire is estimated at 1.2 million. Thus 1,200 people could die every day. This hypothesis does not include the victims of fighting or the Zairian populations, who are also seriously affected by problems in the region.

An MSF cargo plane arrived in Kigali this morning carrying medical supplies as well as aid teams. Those teams will try to cross the Rwandan border into Zaire. As of now, all access has been denied.

Médecins Sans Frontières renews its call for an international military force to create safe zones so that the refugee and displaced populations may benefit from protection and safe access to aid.



'Repatriation of Burundians to Conflict Zones Underway Without Protection or Medical Aid,' MSF France **Press Release**, 9 November 1996 (in French). **D39**

**Extract:**

Médecins Sans Frontières is very concerned about the repatriation of Burundians from the Kivu region in Zaire to their home districts. They are being repatriated to areas where UNHCR, normally responsible for protecting refugees, has no access.

Médecins Sans Frontières has notified Burundian authorities and UNHCR of its concern about these repatriations, which place risk vulnerable populations at risk by sending them back to war zones where neither protection nor medical aid can be guaranteed.

[...] Médecins Sans Frontières calls on UNHCR and Burundian authorities to find an alternative solution and halt repatriations to areas where conditions are unhealthy and conflict is underway.

**In press interviews, MSF emphasised the need to provide an international force with a mandate allowing it to use force (Known as Chapter VII).**



Michela Wrong, 'Refugees Trapped in a Deadly Maze' *The Financial Times* (UK), 11 November 1996 (in English).

**Extract :**

The medical charity Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) says any international force sent with a UN mandate weaker than Chapter Seven - the mandate, which allowed troops to launch a manhunt for Somalia's warlord Mohamad Farah Aïdeed - would be worse than useless. "We have to secure the area, not defend aid workers," says Miss Samantha Bolton, MSF spokeswoman. "Separating the extremists from the refugees is not going to be done by defending a food convoy."

**During a 10 November press conference, Laurent-Désiré Kabila, leader of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire, rejected France's participation in an international intervention force and proposed that a humanitarian corridor be set up. He also presented his conditions for granting humanitarian groups access to the Mugunga camp, where 400,000 refugees were trapped between the rebels and**

the Zairian Armed Forces (FAZ), the former Rwandan Armed Forces (ex-FAR), and militia from the former Rwandan regime. Visiting Kinshasa, Emma Bonino, the European Union's Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs, described the Security Council's slow response as an "international scandal."

On 11 November, humanitarian organisations finally obtained access to the town of Goma but not to the camps, specifically the Mugunga camp, where hundreds of thousands of refugees were still gathered. Indeed, the rebels assembled aid workers in a stadium and ordered them to leave their supplies, foodstuffs and medicines. Everything took place within view of the international press' cameras. Reporters had been invited to observe the rebels' high level of organisation. The MSF team managed to distribute its aid directly to Goma hospitals.



'Tutsi Rebels Present Their Conditions for Humanitarian Intervention,' *Le Monde* (France), 12 November 1996 (in French). [D40](#)

#### Extract:

If all conditions are met, "we can expect that humanitarian aid will be available in the Mugunga camp tomorrow," Laurent-Désiré Kabila said; confirming that his movement was prepared to open a humanitarian corridor leading to the camp, located around fifteen kilometres from Goma, and which houses hundreds of thousands of Rwandan Hutu refugees and Zairian displaced persons. However, he demanded that the corridor be protected by "absolutely impartial forces that have never colonized the country nor intervened in its political affairs," he added, noting that France would be better off aiding those fighting "the men (of President Mobutu) who have plunged the country into misery."

[...] "To reach Mugunga, we want the humanitarian organisations to go through here," he continued. "We want them to write to us ... the problem is that the NGOs do not want to recognize our authority," adding that his movement "must also determine whether these organisations are impartial."

[...] On the diplomatic front, the UN Security Council's slow reaction has also provoked criticism. In Kinshasa yesterday, Emma Bonino, European Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs, described it as "an international scandal."



'Marie-Laure Colson, 'Goma: Open City Under High Surveillance,' *Libération* (France), 12 November 1996 (in French).

#### Extract :

Yesterday, for the first time since the city fell into rebel

hands, humanitarian groups returned to Goma. The presence of Laurent-Désiré Kabila, leader of the Alliance of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire, obviously carries weight. The convoy of vehicles was a major display intended to show the world that the leader of the Kivu rebellion is someone to be reckoned with. Reporters who had been expelled the night before were called back at the opportune moment to accompany the convoy. The day before, Kabila had set the tone, repeating his invitation to humanitarian aid workers on the condition that they work through 'the region's officials,' in other words, him and his group. In Kigali, Rwandan authorities had notified some select NGOs of the meeting.

[...] Yesterday however, Dr. Joseph Karemera, the Rwandan Health Minister, who welcomed the convoy on the Rwandan side, denied having any 'influence' over the new authorities in Goma. "Rwanda will not participate in the operation unless it has a Security Council mandate. Rwanda only wants the NGOs to give the minimum required for the refugees to be able to walk to Rwanda." But the minister, like the rebels, and Goma's population, were still waiting for something more than several tonnes of beans, biscuits, blankets and medicines.

The humanitarian groups were prudent after several days of procrastination and their caution spoiled the 'Goma -Open City' event slightly. "We are allowed to see what is happening in the town, but we know that we will not have access to the camps," explained the MSF Holland Project Manager. "The danger of this operation is that it gives the impression that aid is getting through, without the means to reach all those who need it." If the Goma airport is opened and a minimum of security is provided, Marc Gastellu Etchecorry (MSF F) estimates that it will take two weeks to reach and aid the 700,000 Rwandan refugees and the thousands of displaced Zairians in the region.

[...] "While the organisations' representatives were waiting to meet with Laurent-Désiré Kabila, he was in full dress uniform receiving reporters and sharing his disappointment with them. "Boxes of biscuits and blankets? Is that because the NGOs are being manipulated by the UN or because they only came to see Goma?"

The rebel leader again called on the international community to send troops to neutralise the Mugunga camp, located some fifteen kilometres away, which is held by armed forces of the former Rwandan regime. He stated again that his appeal was addressed only to countries he considers 'neutral,' like Sweden, Mali, or even South Africa.

[...] Humanitarian aid workers, who had to leave the city at night, were fairly pessimistic yesterday; "We're here, but it's not a victory. Nothing is moving." More than one million refugees are still wandering, empty-handed, in the Kivu region. Another uncertainty also affects the entire operation. Kabila announced that shells fired from Mugunga had killed two more people outside Goma the

day before and warned yesterday that his patience had its limits. "If the international community does not intervene before it is too late, we will have no choice," he said, suggesting that he could end the rebels' three-week ceasefire announced last Monday.



'Emergency On the Side of the Road,' Interview with Marc Gastellu, MSF France Emergency Desk Manager, **Messages** (MSF France internal publication), January 1997 (in French). **D41**

#### Extract:

The rebels really wanted to show the world that they were opening the area. For ten days, until around 11 November, we watched the reporters go by while we were blocked by the same rebels.

During the first convoy we organised for the city of Goma, the Health Minister, a Rwandan, scolded us because according to him, the television cameras couldn't see the convoy well enough. The city didn't need a lot of medicines because the rebels had taken UNHCR's stocks, estimated to meet the needs of 600,000 people over several weeks. So the minister's distress had more to do with public relations concerns. Using televised images, he was trying to show that aid was indeed reaching Kivu and that an international military intervention was pointless.



*When they opened the border they said, "Today, everyone is invited to the stadium." It was the soccer stadium where the first cholera cases had been placed when the refugees arrived in Goma in 1994. "All the NGOs are going to come to the stadium and we will organise you. We will tell you what you can do. You will all come in a convoy at the same time. The reporters are going to come with you and we'll show everyone how we are rebuilding Zaire." They told us to drive the cars inside. The MSF team parked its car a little off to the side and escaped at the last moment. All the NGOs and the reporters were brought into the stadium as if it were a huge circus. They were told to unload their supplies. "Thank you very much. Now you can go home. We are going to distribute them. You see, we don't need the NGOs anymore. They have to be brought under control and disciplined. They can't be allowed to be on television. They have to be part of the system. We've got a good system. We're planting flowers along the roads. Everything is well-organised in Goma now because Kigali is in charge."*

Samantha Bolton, MSF USA Communication Director, MSF Press Officer for the Great Lakes November-December 1996 (in French).

**On 13 November, the US President approved the participation of 1,000 US soldiers in an international security force under Canadian command that would deliver aid to the refugees and repatriate them to Rwanda. The UN Security Council was to authorise its deployment before the end of the week. V3**



'US to Join Zaire Operation' **Associated Press** (USA), Washington, 13 November 1996 (in English).

#### Extract:

The United States is willing to send about 1,000 troops to war-torn Zaire to participate in 'a limited fashion' with a Canadian-led international operation trying to avert a human catastrophe, the White House said today. With thousands dying of starvation and disease, press secretary Mike McCurry said, "Our interests here are largely humanitarian, to save lives". While a final decision is pending, President Clinton agreed "in principle" to a mission lasting at least four months and involving fewer than 5,000 US troops - about 1,000 of which would be deployed in Zaire, McCurry said. The remainder would be based elsewhere in the region in support roles.

**MSF Sweden put out a call to operational sections for volunteers from partner sections to be sent to eastern Zaire. Each section should be communicating on the crisis in their home countries.**



'Appeal to MSF Operational Sections,' Göran Svedin, Director of MSF Sweden, 13 November 1996 (in English). **D42**

#### Extract:

For more than a week MSF-Sweden has had people on stand-by to participate in MSF's actions in Zaire. We are probably just as frustrated as everybody else within MSF but there is one big difference between the sections and the Delegate Offices (DOs). The operational sections have at least some frustrated people on the spot who can report to their national media, give information and an impression of action and thereby keep up the pressure on the people who could finally do something to change the situation - the politicians. As a delegate office we are once again marginalized from the main actions of MSF.

If claiming to be an international organisation, MSF has to act in an international manner from the very beginning of an operation in a situation like the one in Zaire. All sections and DOs together represent an enormous potential for building of public opinion and pressure. This potential is not being used properly. How come there is not at least one expat from each DO present on the spot?

Without a Swede on the spot, the public in Sweden will soon consider MSF as an empty shell, making a lot of noise but no action. This is just as true for DOs as it is for the sections - no section would ever accept to stand outside of this operation even if there might not be an immediate operational need for their people.

**On the Bukavu side (South Kivu), the humanitarian organisations were blocked at the border and were still unable to gain access to the refugees.**



'The Rebel to the MSF Doctor: "We're Not in the Medicine Business", *AFP* (France), Bukavu, 13 November 1996 (in French).

#### Extract:

"Go back to Rwanda," the rebel at the Bukavu border station said. "Get out of here." "Can we at least leave these medicines for the hospital?" asked José Bastos of Médecins Sans Frontières. "We're not in the medicine business," the rebel responded. "Leave!"

On Wednesday, all effort at dialogue between humanitarian aid workers and the Zairian rebels holding Bukavu, capital of the South Kivu province (eastern Zaire) proved pointless.

Tired of waiting for the outcome of UN agencies' efforts to contact the rebel leadership so that aid could be brought into Bukavu, Médecins Sans Frontières decided to send a car with a three-person emergency team and medications to the Zairian side. An AFP reporter also rode in the vehicle. Around noon, the car crossed the bridge marking the Zairian-Rwandan border in Cyangugu (Rwanda) and then climbed the hill leading to the entrance of Bukavu. A barrier blocked the road at the end of the no man's land. A small group of rebels, mostly in civilian clothes, was seated under the awning of the border post, sheltered by trees that hid them.

The team cautiously got out of the car, careful to make no sudden movements. No one stirred at the border post. Several minutes passed. Finally, a uniformed rebel wearing a green beret and black plastic boots got up, a Kalashnikov in his hand.

"I'm a doctor," said José Bastos in French, showing his MSF T-shirt.

"Go back to Rwanda," the rebel said. "You can't enter."

"We just want to go to the hospital to deliver medicine," the doctor explained.

"No, you can't enter," the uniformed man replied. "Leave. You'll have to wait for the leaders' orders tomorrow or the day after."

"Your leaders in Goma said that aid could get through," said Fred Urlep, the MSF Team Coordinator.

"The leaders here aren't the same ones as in Goma," the

rebel ordered, beginning to get tense. "Get going - now." He went back to his place under the awning.

The team decided to try again. They remained in front of the car with the motor off. More long minutes passed. Suddenly, the sound of rifles being cocked could be heard from beneath the awning. The uniformed rebel came back, escorted by another man in civilian clothing. The second man was armed with an American M-16 assault rifle. Speaking curtly, he said, "Leave."

"OK, we're going," the doctor said. "But can we at least leave the medicines here for the hospital?"

"We're not in the medicine business," the uniformed rebel answered. "Get out."

"These medicines are for your people," José Bastos said in a final effort.

"We're not doctors, get out of here," said the rebel, unmoved.

After a half-hour of pointless efforts at dialogue, everyone got back in the car, which made a U-turn and returned to Cyangugu. "We've got to pressure the rebels, otherwise we'll never get anywhere," Fred Urlep said. "We'll try again tomorrow."

"The other NGOs and reporters need to come with us or nothing will happen," said José Bastos. "We're not going to wait here for days for the UN."

Late last week, a delegation of UN aid agencies established contact with the rebel leadership in Bukavu. Monday night, the rebels formally agreed to begin negotiations on Tuesday morning. Since then, they have not been in contact with the delegation.



*We reached the border and were systematically stopped every day for 23 days, with, in theory, permission to come back. In fact, we faced administrative obstacles. Clearly, there was a façade for the international community. "International aid is welcome." But there were clear instructions. ... It was really a very small thing compared to Goma and the massive repatriation. This was insignificant. We had two or three pickup trucks and in the end, we decided to load up a truck with blankets, BP5 [high-protein biscuits] and some things to donate to the hospital and to show pressure at the border. You've got to push, push. So there we were with our truck. Every morning the Rwandan authorities threatened us. "This is not good, etc. etc" ... The Rwandans are very good at that - obstructing things systematically and finding different bureaucratic excuses every day...*

*The game at the border was that one day the Rwandans would authorise our return but the next day the Zairians wouldn't let us cross. One day, we heard that the Zairians had opened the border and the next day the Rwandans wouldn't let us cross. We went back and forth talking from one to the other. There were rules for departure visas. I kept*

a passport with all the stamps. For three weeks, every day we'd get across half the border on the other side. One day we had a one-way visa. The guy said, "This multi-entry visa is more than 14 days old, so if you leave Rwanda you won't be able to come back." We said, "We're going to do that but you need to tell your friend that we're going to cross Bukavu, we have work to do, we've got medicines, we're doctors, etc." The guy smiled and said, "You can try but you won't succeed."... we had a big discussion with the MSF team and decided to pack several sleeping bags in the trucks and organise a two or three-person team of expatriates. They would stay in the no man's land, telling everyone that we were waiting for permission to go treat the wounded. That was the day of the massive repatriation. I remember sending a message over the mini-m [telecommunications system] to my boss in Kigali, "I'm going to do this, it's a Greenpeace-style action, it's symbolic, we know we'll get permission to go over. We'll have a five-person team stay between the Rwandan and Zairian border, which has been blocked for a week or two, until something gives. We want Samantha Bolton to come here and work with the reporters." On the phone, Jacques told me, "Fifty to one hundred thousand refugees are crossing the border from Goma to Rwanda." I said, "Let's go! We can't wait!" ... Afterwards, it was totally bizarre. The reporters were allowed to enter. They wrote stories about the wounded and dead in the streets. We had surgical kits and a great team of Spanish expatriates with a surgeon and nurse anesthetist so we were ready to go to Bukavu and get to work from the first day. But, we were systematically rejected. The reporters were permitted to go in but not the humanitarian organisations. It was very, very strange. Kabila gave a lot of interviews with very clear, politicized anti-Mobutu positions but not a word on the problem of hundreds of refugees who everyone very quickly identified as genocideurs.

Dr. José-Antonio Bastos, MSF ET (Emergency intersections Team) Coordinator in South Kivu (in French).

**On 14 November, in a declaration sent to representatives of the Security Council's member states, members of the US administration involved in the armed intervention decision, and to NGOs, MSF applauded Washington's recent proposals but restated its concerns regarding the international force's weak mandate.**



'Médecins Sans Frontières Urges Action as 1,000 Die Every Day in Eastern Zaire, Warning Against 'Band-Aid' Solutions in the Region,' **Statement to the Press** on the mandate of planned intervention, MSF USA, 14 November 1996 (in English). **D43**

**Extract:**

Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders has

been attempting since early November to provide assistance to over 1,000,000 refugees trapped in the violence in eastern Zaire. With over 200 volunteers in Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, and Zaire, and some 50 volunteers on stand-by elsewhere, Doctors Without Borders Emergency Teams are on the alert and already assisting refugees who have crossed the borders on foot or by boat. The first Doctors Without Borders supply planes, loaded with 80 tonnes of material, landed in the region on 4 November, 1996.

Unfortunately, most of the refugees remain inaccessible as most civil and military authorities, and rebel groups in the region are keeping refugees hostage, blocking access to relief teams. Violence continues and most of the refugee population has no access to food, water or medical care. In the most conservative scenario, Doctors Without Borders estimates that mortality rates are reaching 10 people per 10,000 each day, bringing the daily toll to 1,000.

In early November, following the dramatic deterioration of the situation in eastern Zaire, Doctors Without Borders called on the international community to field immediately a multinational force in the region that would ensure the protection of the refugees caught in a violent trap.

Doctors Without Borders applauded the recent announcements in Washington, Ottawa and New York regarding this issue, but is also very concerned about the possibility that the planned intervention force's mandate may be limited to the protection of the humanitarian convoys and teams.

Doctors Without Borders is today calling on the Security Council to adopt a wider mandate that would enable a durable solution to the problems in the region, insisting on the necessity to provide for:

- the protection of civilians, the disarmament of militias, and the arrest of criminals
- the establishment of appropriate conditions for voluntary repatriation

[...] Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders argues that the intervention of an international military force is necessary to rescue over 1,000,000 people trapped in the violence. But without a strong mandate, the operation will only provide a short-term solution. Such a short-term solution is a mere band-aid at best, and a recipe for disaster at worst.

**On 14 November, the field teams and the desks prepared an update of MSF's position on the intervention initiative, which they distributed to the press. Because the international force was to be placed under Canadian command, MSF Canada transmitted its information and comments to the other sections.**



'First Contact Group Meeting with GOC Foreign Affairs/ Defense/CIDA, MSF, Red Cross, Care, UNHCR,' **Fax** from Timothy Pitt, MSF Canada to MSF programme managers, Kigali, Goma, Bujumbura, and Nairobi teams, 15 November 1996 (in English). [D44](#)

**Extract:**

## Comments

4.1 MSF found itself in the company of World Vision and UNHCR in attacking a mandate that does not include separation and disarmament. Red Cross and Care advanced the position that this is the mandate that we will get, so let's find a way to do the best one can with it.

4.2 MSF drew striking parallels between the assumptions and design flaws of the UNITAF mission in Somalia in December 1992 and what you read in the current annex. The parallels were recognized but ignored either because a decision was made higher up the chain of command or interestingly enough, in preparation for this mission, the Cdn Gen Romeo Dallaire, the UNAMIR commander at the time of the April 1994 genocide has been counseling Baril to avoid the mistake he made; trying to do too much with too little resources. This returned this mission's planning to the (naïve) narrow mandate of humanitarian assistance alone.

4.3 A significant portion of the Cdn military is already in motion and en route to the theatre. MSF pushed the military to identify when the forces will be at full strength in theatre. Note that for the Persian Gulf War it took six months, UNITAF in Somalia took 3.5 months. They have no idea...because they have yet to confirm who will bring what to the theatre.

4.4 Criticism was made of the military for not contributing according to their strengths: security and logistics but rather they seem to be coming to do aid themselves!!!

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Fasten your seatbelt, it's going to be a bumpy ride
2. With the military: contact but not obligatory/dependent cooperation (i.e. escorts)
3. Keep expectations of substantial help from the military very low
4. Grin and bear it. We are not getting the intervention that will help us or deal with the political causes of the conflict. It will be their own dog and pony show.



'Today's Position,' **Message** from MSF Kigali Team to all Directors of Operational Sections, 14 November 1996 (in English). [D45](#)

**Extract:**

These are initial reactions and positions from the field – please could headquarters also prepare position. Catherine in New York and headquarters – please could you send us more details about the conditions of the intervention -

what mandate will they be under, will it be the same for Canada and for the USA?

Also, please could humanitarian departments elaborate a bit on conditions for temporary safe zones so we can be a bit more concrete. As you know yesterday, the US agreed to send in 1,000 troops to secure the airport and corridors – said will not disarm or separate criminal elements but will be able to defend themselves – that getting to the refugees etc ... will be up to the Canadians. MSF position is that we are pleased the military intervention is happening but that we are disappointed that it is not at this point going to separate the criminals – no lessons learned from past experience – it will not be Chapter 7 as we wanted. MSF does not want to have weapons to defend aid convoys but to secure and protect the population. Re-corridors – talk is of corridors for repatriation ASAP – most NGOs are also preparing to do way stations and corridor type activities – MSF wants to ensure that there will be some form of security or means of working where the refugees are – temporary safe zones – so that we can access them and make sure they are healthy enough to come home.



**Message** from Dominique Boutriau, MSF Belgium Great Lakes programme manager to programme managers and Operations Directors, 14 November 1996 (in English). [D46](#)

**Extract:**

We have a lot of interviews cc reaction of the US decision yesterday;

MSF continues to push for the need of a military intervention to:

- render access possible to the Rwandans, Burundians and Zairian populations in need
- render possible the repatriation (we do not speak about voluntary... as it is not the agenda)
- the repatriation of Burundian refugees is a very sensitive issue as Burundi is a war-torn country with acts of violence and massacres; most of the provinces are out of reach for humanitarian organisations; the UN should consider setting up temporary areas and sites, protected to host these refugees or repatriated populations; in case these protected areas are inside Burundi they should not be limited to the repatriated as the local population is victim to violence on a daily basis.
- Repatriation should be closely supported/monitored in Rwanda as the responsables for the 1994 genocide are still free...
- MSF stresses that the ex-FAR and Interahamwe should be separated from the civilian refugees, disarm those responsible for the genocide, and bring them to justice. If this military operation is not taking this aspect into account, the crisis will continue in the Great Lakes region.
- Although MSF has been in Goma, it is still totally impossible to reach the most vulnerable in Kivu; therefore MSF still asking for military intervention

- Concern and caution that the thousands of Zairians that have fled Kivu will be forgotten; security is deteriorating in Zaire and these IDPs cannot be accessed for humanitarian assistance.

**On 15 November, rebels attacked the Mugunga camp near Goma, causing hundreds of thousands of refugees to flee. Around 500,000 of them headed for Rwanda, where the authorities had re-opened the border. Most observers, not MSF, predicted that all the Rwandan refugees would soon go back home, believing that the proposal for an armed international intervention had precipitated their return. On the night of 15 November, the UN Security Council formalised the proposal, passing a resolution authorising deployment of the force. The Rwandan ambassador to the UN announced that an intervention was no longer necessary because, according to him, all the refugees would return by the end of the weekend.**

**However, several hundred thousand refugees continued to roam around eastern Zaire, still trapped between the gunfire of the rebels, the former FAR, the militias and the FAZ. MSF issued another call in the press for an armed international intervention to protect civilians, not just aid operations. V4 **



'Half-Measures Bring Heavy Consequences,' MSF France **Press Release**, 15 November 1996 (in French). D47 

**Extract:**

In early November, Médecins Sans Frontières called on the international community to send an armed force on an emergency basis to protect populations in danger. The recent announcement of an international intervention is good news, but Médecins Sans Frontières fears that the force's mandate will be limited to protecting aid operations. MSF calls on the Security Council to adopt a broader mandate. This is the only way to provide a lasting solution to the crisis. Médecins Sans Frontières strongly believes that:

- Civilians must be protected and those who committed the 1994 genocide must be disarmed and arrested.
- Conditions for a truly voluntary repatriation to Rwanda must be established.

1. Protection of civilians and the disarming and arrest of those who committed the 1994 genocide

- By refusing to include disarmament of former Rwandan army soldiers and Interahamwe militias in the force mandate, the international community cannot guarantee that civilians will be protected. An aid operation is, of course necessary, but it is inadequate to resolve the crisis, as we have seen several times since 1994.
- If the force cannot disarm the militias and soldiers, the international community risks re-creating zones under

the control of Interahamwe militias and former Rwandan army forces, and of encouraging new cycles of attacks and reprisals between Rwanda and Zaire.

- There is considerable risk that aid will not reach those in need in areas where active soldiers and militias remain.
- The international tribunal is currently struggling to organize the first trials against those who committed the 1994 genocide. Can the international troops afford to let them travel freely in the region? Can the signatory nations to the 1949 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide avoid fulfilling their obligations?

2. The refugees' return

- The international force's second mandate would be to encourage the Rwandan refugees to return. However, as of now, few have chosen to do so. The number of human rights observers is not nearly adequate to monitor conditions of the repatriated persons' return to and resettlement in the villages. If the international community is to encourage the refugees' repatriation, it must also have the means to ensure their protection in Rwanda.
- Repatriation is unlikely to be viable for Burundian refugees, whose country is in the midst of a civil war. However, thousands of them were sent recently to the Cibitoke region, one of the most dangerous areas.
- There is an urgent need for an armed international force to intervene on behalf of more than one million people. But without a strong mandate, the force will be able to provide only short-term solutions and will obscure the political problems destabilising the region. At best, an intervention will result only in establishing emergency aid operations. At worst, it will set the stage for a new, and foretold catastrophe.

Beginning in early November, MSF volunteers tried to provide assistance to more than one million civilians trapped by violence in eastern Zaire and to refugees fleeing neighboring countries. More than 50 volunteers were working in the field. By 4 November, five cargo planes with 200 tonnes of material had arrived in the region.

However, the MSF teams still had access to less than five percent of the population at risk of death in Zaire. Most civilians remained inaccessible, held hostage by the region's authorities who refused to provide access to humanitarian organisations.



'Call for Immediate Dispatch of an Armed Intervention Force to Protect Civilians,' MSF France **Press Release** picked up by MSF Holland, 15 November 1996 (in French and English). D48 

**Extract:**

**PROTECTION AND ACCESS NEEDED FOR FLEEING THOUSANDS**  
Urgent call for immediate dispatch of multinational military force

15 November 1996, Gisenyi /Amsterdam: This morning, heavy shooting and mortar shelling at the Mugunga refugee camp forced thousands of people to flee to Rwanda. Refugees report that many wounded have been left behind. Humanitarian organisations cannot reach most of the victims.

At 12:15 (CET), 2,000 refugees had crossed the Rwandan border at Gisenyi. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Dr. Lisette Luykx reports, "These people are in relatively good health, but it is the fittest who are crossing. Some of them say they have been hiding in the forest for a week, eating leaves. They say that they are prepared to try their luck in Rwanda, rather than face hunger or death in Zaire." The transit centre at Gisenyi can accommodate between 10,000 and 30,000 people every 24 hours.

MSF teams in Zaire have seen 20 bodies at Mugunga Camp. They count 300 persons every 100 metres -this would translate into approximately 90,000 people fleeing along the 28km road to Rwanda. The humanitarian priorities are water, food and mobile first aid stations. Emergency supplies of dressing kits, high-protein biscuits, jery cans and bladder tanks are en route to the border - there is no guarantee that they will be allowed to cross.

Médecins Sans Frontières - urgently appeals to the international community to deploy a multinational military force, which would allow protection, safe zones and humanitarian access for the population.



Dominique Le Guilledoux , 'Massive Return of Hutu Refugees in Zaire Camps to Rwanda – Prompted by Decision to Deploy a Multinational Force,' *Le Monde* (France), 17 and 18 November 1996 (in French). [D49](#)

#### Extract:

Tens of thousands of Rwandan Hutu refugees living in eastern Zaire for the last two years have begun returning home. The massive movement, which began on Friday, 15 November, continued on Saturday. According to the UN High Commission for Refugees, around 50,000 refugees have already reached the Rwandan town of Gisenyi, across from the Zairian border city of Goma. However, UNHCR expects that this is only the first wave of a tide of more than 700,000 men, women and children leaving the grim Mugunga refugee camp, the largest in the world. [...] Simultaneously, on Friday night the UN Security Council voted unanimously in favor of Resolution 1080, authorising deployment of the multinational force in Zaire intended to aid the refugees. The force of 10,000-15,000 men was given a predictable and strictly humanitarian mandate - the delivery of aid. The mission is to last four months. The core of the forces committed includes: US, British, Canadian, Spanish, French, Italian, Dutch and Senegalese troops, who will be under Canadian command.

The multinational force should be assembled and ready to go in a few days, but it has already achieved one of its objectives, the refugees' return. It appears that the reassuring prospect of the force's arrival and the Tutsi's military pressure on Hutu extremists prompted the camp population to set off towards Rwanda. The Hutu extremists, known as the 'Interahamwe' militias, were holding the refugee population hostage, but have now dispersed into the thick Kivu forests.



Afsané Bassir Pour, 'Unanimous UN Vote to Dispatch Multinational Force,' *Le Monde* (France), 17 and 18 November 1996 (in French). [D50](#)

#### Extract:

In a speech in English, Rwandan Ambassador Gidéon Kavianamura continued his effort, initiated the day before, to prevent a multinational force from being sent to the border between Zaire and his country. "Between today and Monday, most of the refugees will have returned home," he maintained. "Therefore, the force is unnecessary." He asked "at least" for a change in its mandate so that the force mission would also included disarming Hutu militias hidden in the camps and who had led the genocide against the Tutsi. His message was ignored.



*At MSF, we never believed that the Rwandan army had conducted a humanitarian operation to liberate the camps. We tried to prove that it wasn't true. We came up against extremely well organised revisionism there, too, clearly supported by the Rwandan government. It had its own interests. The West, specifically the US, also supported it. They were delighted that the problem of the refugee camps was being resolved, putting images of these 'liberated people' returning to the "promised land" on display for public consumption. It was the end of the nightmare. At MSF, we didn't believe it. We were sure that these people were dead or still in danger and that in both cases, they needed assistance. If they were dead, that meant that those who had returned were also in danger of dying because if the AFDL and the Rwandan forces were capable of killing as many as possible on one side of the frontier, that meant they had a pretty unpleasant fate in mind for those who returned.*

Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF Legal Advisor  
(in French).

**With support from elements of the Rwandan forces, rebels continued to block journalists and humanitarian organisations from gaining access to Goma.**



Laurent Bijard, 'Zaire: Hunger Will Do the Job...' *Le Nouvel Observateur* (France), 14 to 20 November 1996 (in French).

#### Extract:

Kigali sent in 'experts' in all kinds of disinformation to Goma. Radio-Star, the local FM station, can create chaos in the city by broadcasting alarming messages whenever they want to turn up the heat. One day, the station reported an imminent food distribution at the border. The next day, it announced that a convoy was heading north, where Goma residents could obtain vegetables.

[...] But, Goma's new rulers seem quite tense. After the giddiness of victory, they have to confront a counter-offensive launched by Hutu forces gathered in Mugunga. Zairian forces were "completely out of it," said a disillusioned young Zairian. Perhaps propelled by fear, their humiliating route had driven them to Kisangani, some 500 kilometres from Goma. While the Goma Zairians may be witnessing a new war at home, it is entirely a Rwandan internal affair and certainly has little good in store for the hundreds of thousands of refugees stuck at one end of Lake Kivu. They are hostage to a conflict that Kigali's strategists intend to resolve in their own way and to their own advantage.

Obviously, Rwandan military leaders have a plan they are implementing. It appears to have US endorsement. At least that's what diplomats visiting the area imply. Their objective is to resolve, once and for all, the problems that hundreds of thousands of Hutu refugees, controlled by Interahamwe militiamen and ex-FAR, pose at the Rwandan border.

[...] "You get the impression that they're counting on disease to resolve the military problem which the hard core Hutu gathered between Mugunga and Saké constitutes," a Médecins Sans Frontières official said angrily. After noting that Rwandan authorities are particularly skilled at using time to their advantage, a diplomat referred to the policy as one of "deadly" benign neglect, allowing epidemics to decimate the most militant Hutu and then directing the survivors' return to Rwanda.

In any case, it appears that Rwandan military officials have decided to keep their hand on the spigot of humanitarian aid, which should, one day, reach the approximately 700,000 Hutu lost somewhere in the reaches of the Kivu's forests, savannahs and lava flows. Kigali has even pressed its advantage, preventing witnesses, reporters, or NGO members from gaining access. By keeping the cameras from focusing on events, Rwandan authorities, who fully understand modern media's impact - 'the CNN effect' - know that "without images, there is no humanitarian catastrophe," and thus, "no need for a foreign intervention" that could have been disruptive. Foreign reporters are sometimes prevented from gaining a close-up view of

the tragedy, while travel passes are sometimes distributed to a few to avoid a swell of journalists. Humanitarian organisations are subject to the same cold shoulder treatment. The large western nations' procrastination, especially on the part of the US, suits Kigali just fine.

**On 16 and 17 November, MSF announced to the press that it was reinforcing its teams in Rwanda. It demanded that Goma airport be opened to flights bringing aid and that restrictions on access be limited, particularly around the cities of Bukavu and Uvira, where 500,000 people were without assistance.**



'Médecins Sans Frontières Demands that Goma Airport be Opened Immediately,' **Press Release** MSF Holland, 16 November 1996 (in English). **D51**

#### Extract:

Hundreds of thousands of people are on the road leading from Goma to Gisenyi. 120,000 people have already arrived in Rwanda. In the Mugunga Camp in Zaire, three clinically suspected cases of cholera have been seen by Dr. Marc Gastellu of Médecins Sans Frontières. Laboratory analysis is underway to obtain formal confirmation of the diagnosis.

Teams from Médecins Sans Frontières, Merlin, Trocair and two Zairian organisations have established two dispensaries (Mugunga Camp and Goma town). Drinking water and first aid stations have been set up every 4km along the road between Mugunga and Goma.

To address the urgent needs of this emergency medical situation, Médecins Sans Frontières calls for:

- a lifting of the restrictions imposed by the authorities on the entrance to Goma of medical personnel, cholera kits, and water and sanitation equipment.
- the immediate opening of the Goma airport for humanitarian aid flights.

Médecins Sans Frontières also directs urgent attention to the lack of access at Bukavu and Uvira, where Zairian rebels have still not given the organisation permission to cross their border. Around these two towns, there is absolutely no news about the more than 500,000 former refugees and the displaced persons who have received no international assistance.

**Speaking to the international press, Rwandan Vice-President and Defence Minister Paul Kagame took responsibility for supporting the rebels and said that**

**humanitarian organisations should aid Rwandans who had returned home, rather than those in refugee camps outside the country.**



'General Kagame Speaks Out On the Kivu Crisis,' *La Croix* (France), 16 November 1996 (in French).

**Extract:**

To what extent are you supporting the Kivu rebels?

- I support the rebels' cause because they are relieving our country of attacks by the ex-FAR and the militias. I'm interested in results. If Mobutu had succeeded in changing the situation in the Kivu, I would've applauded him.

If the Zairian army were to counter-attack, with or without support from a foreign power, what would be Rwanda's position?

-You wouldn't want us to just stand there praying or sleeping through it, would you? If this counter-offensive were hostile to Rwanda, we would react directly or indirectly. We would have to take charge of the situation, and if we can help the rebels in any way, we will do so. I support a regional solution that does not create problems for Rwanda. Let me repeat that it's also up to the Zairians to decide. I want a stable Zaire. That's in our interest.

[...] Rather than spending money on maintaining expensive camps, why won't the humanitarian organisations spend it in Rwanda feeding refugees after they've returned home? That would be less expensive for the international community.

**UNHCR and ICRC were pleased about the refugees' return on 18 November, but announced their continuing support for an armed international intervention, emphasising the fate of refugees in the Bukavu region. While several nations, including the USA, expected to re-examine their participation in such a force, France maintained that it was still necessary. The rebels announced that a humanitarian corridor would open to allow the Bukavu refugees to return to Rwanda.**



Frédéric Fritscher, 'Tutsi Victory But Uncertain Days Ahead,' *Le Monde* (France), 20 November 1996 (in French). [D52](#)

**Extract:**

The massive return of refugees to Rwanda has prompted several countries scheduled to participate in the international military-humanitarian mission in eastern Zaire (passed by the UN Security Council on Friday) to re-examine their participation. The US, which was already showing some unwillingness, is increasingly reticent while Rwanda reiterated its fierce opposition to sending an international force under Canadian command. Like Zaire, France believes

the international mission is still necessary because nearly a half a million refugees continue to roam in the hills.

In a vigorous effort to defuse that argument, the Banyamulenge announced Monday evening that they would open a humanitarian corridor to allow refugees in South Kivu to return home by crossing the border between Bukavu and Cyangugu. This tactical decision came at a particularly opportune moment, fostering US procrastination and suspicions some have toward the French government, which is suspected of seeking to intervene to strengthen the regime of Zairian president Mobutu Sese Seko.



'Humanitarian Organisations Support Sending a Multinational Force,' *AFP* (France), Geneva, 18 November 1996 (in French).

**Extract:**

On Monday, the major humanitarian organisations still supported sending a neutral multinational force to eastern Zaire to save a half-million refugees in South Kivu. There has been no news of them, despite the massive scale of the return further north.

The UN High Commission for Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross were pleased that hundreds of thousands of Rwandan refugees in the Goma region in North Kivu, had returned. But humanitarian organisations have been unable to gain access to 500,000 people in the Bukavu and Uvira regions in South Kivu, who were evacuated last month after Tutsi rebels won the area from Zairian soldiers, representatives from those groups announced.

"The need is there," said Christian Berthiaume, a UNHCR spokesperson. "I don't think we should give up. It is premature to say that a multinational force will not be sent." "We can't say that the problem has been resolved," added ICRC spokesperson Rolin Wavre, "Bukavu is now the priority."

The humanitarian organisations emphasised that refugees in the Bukavu region are undoubtedly worse off than those in the north because they have been without aid for a longer period of time. Some have been left without aid or resources, in difficult conditions, for close to one month.

**In Rwanda, the refugees' return was entirely under the authorities' control. On 19 November, Rwandan authorities closed one of the way stations that MSF had set up on the road from Gisenyi to Ruhengeri to aid returning refugees.** [V5](#)



'Philippe Broussard 'Rwanda: Hutu Refugees Return Under Strict Control,' *Le Monde* (France), 26 November 1996 (in French). [D53](#)

#### Extract:

...They crossed the border at Gisenyi, 160 kilometres north-west, more than a week ago, and finally reached Kigali after an exhausting journey on foot or by truck. Their numbers are growing daily, especially on the outskirts. In the area, in every outlying district or community, families can be seen, here and there, on the return road. ... These population movements may appear random, dictated only by a wandering crowd's survival instincts, but all evidence suggests that these massive migrations are the result of a carefully thought-out strategy. Rwanda will allow no one else to manage this crisis in its name. Nothing that has occurred here over the last few days appears to have escaped the highly politicized control of the party in power, the predominantly Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front.

Like the many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the field, the UN High Commission for Refugees must face facts: even if the Rwandan government needs logistical and financial aid, it is still in charge of the situation. "This is a first in the history of humanitarian aid," said Jacky Mamou, President of Médecins du Monde. "It will make a mark." Other observers already see it as a 'real lesson' to the international community. In Kigali, the authorities' primary concern is to encourage refugees to return home as quickly as possible. They are to spend the minimum amount of time on the road and the typical camp shelters will not be allowed. They rest in transit centres for a few hours before being transported by bus or truck to the next stop on their journey. This transport system is so dependent on the Rwandan army that UNHCR, theoretically responsible for these operations, no longer controls all its vehicles. Soldiers of the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) have taken charge, loading 100 people into buses built to hold 50.

#### ARRESTS

The transit centres have only limited supplies. The NGOs have permission from local authorities to work there but are not authorised to provide food to the refugees. Only those in the most severe state are directed to area hospitals. The others cannot expect to stay very long and are strongly discouraged from settling. ... The RPF has developed an extremely efficient network through which government directives are relayed to the field via prefects, who are in continuing contact with NGOs and UNHCR's representatives. That way, nothing escapes the Rwandans' notice. They claim they are prepared to take in the exiles. To all appearances, they are still counting on an 'explosion' of groups coming from Zaire. The dispersal of refugees should limit the risks of infiltration by militiamen and Hutu soldiers, leaders of the 1994 genocide. Even if some manage to come back, they are quickly spotted. Suspected of having participated in the Tutsi massacres,

they are quickly taken in for questioning. On Saturday and Sunday, several arrests were reported in the capital. Some refugees turned themselves in to the police. "The 'genocideurs' prefer to submit to the legal system rather than risk the survivors' vengeance," an international observer noted.



Claire Gillard Berthod, 'A Way Station Closes,' **Statement** MSF nurse, November 1996 (in French). [D54](#)

#### Extract:

Early in the afternoon, two civilian representatives from the refugee ministry visited while we were distributing BP5 biscuits to the children and the most vulnerable. They told us we were not to give them out. An hour later at 14:00 around a dozen Rwandan soldiers arrived and gave us four hours to clear out. They told us we had to take everything down immediately because we had created a mini-camp, a rest station. They didn't want people to stop even for a half-day, regardless of their health. We had 20 diarrhoea patients, six of whom could not be moved. The local MSF staff told me that while I had been talking to some of the soldiers, others had roughed them up, struck them and threatened to stab them in the belly. I called the Medical Coordinator, who couldn't do anything. The soldiers gave us four hours to clear out and returned every hour to confirm that we were packing our bags. While we were disassembling everything with the help of the six local staff who had stayed, the refugees and local residents looted our stocks of BP5 biscuits. It took only 30 seconds. We were in the process of evacuating the patients. The last looters even took the mattresses full of vibrio cholerae. Ours was the first way station to be closed.

**Both the local population and the refugees felt the impact of fighting among the rebels, the ex-FAR and Zairian forces, prompting them to take to the roads of western Zaire. On 19 and 20 November, MSF teams set up a medical screening centre in Kisangani, a large city north-west of Kivu, where MSF also provided support to the general hospital as well as to those in Walikale and Lubutu. MSF's team in Kigali and headquarters worked on revising MSF's position regarding armed international intervention and on proposals regarding the conditions of the refugees' safe return to Rwanda.**



'MSF Position on Military Intervention,' **Message** from Samantha Bolton, MSF Press Officer for Great Lakes to programme managers and Delegate Offices, 19 November 1996 (in English). **D55**

#### Extract:

MSF position

- here in the field it is clearer and clearer that there will be no military action worth mentioning -for any of the security we want but more likely to be vacuous public relations glory for Americans coming in for end of show or French coming in for own political and military reasons in Kisangani
- however many feel we will be discredited if we suddenly do an about face and say no more military intervention
- MSF has to clarify position as we are seen as naive and unrealistic seems we should say that in Goma it is too late and maybe we should focus all energy on access and security in Bukavu - on the fact that there are still over 200,000 missing in Goma region - though run risk of standing up for retreating FARS and Interahamwe
- also clear that UNHCR and human rights need to deploy international staff in communes for returnees - there are 114 communes in Rwanda - so far UNHCR says will appoint one UNHCR for each commune -seems like will be local which is not security guarantee for returnees
- NGOs are being blamed for being inactive and unprepared and making money off disaster - we are being blamed for no food distribution - journalists all commenting on what a bad job we are doing - one of the hardest and most hardened press corps attitudes have ever had to deal with - vis a vis humanitarian aid and refugees - this is the antithesis of the Bob Geldof era - the humanitarian aid holiday is over -know all journalists personally and even then it is very difficult - in UNHCR press briefs Ray Wilkinson the spokesperson is as cynical as journalists and whole attitude is that everyone just wants the story to be over so that all can go home and that in any case these bloody refugees have what was coming to them. sick atmosphere



'Adjustments of MSF Position on the Great Lakes Region in View of Recent Developments,' **Draft/Internal**, by MSF Holland as BUS section 20 November 1996 (in English). **D56**

#### Extract:

Questions have been raised on the relevance of MSF's call for a military intervention in view of the changed circumstances in the Great Lakes region. In order to maintain a credible position, MSF has to give out a consistent message. The position as set out in the paper 'Zaire: Action Rather Than Apathy' is still valid. Please note that it is MSF's role to alert; the burden of proof regarding providing evidence of what is going on in areas that MSF cannot

access, rests not with MSF. The statements MSF has made regarding number of casualties and outbreak of epidemics have been done on the basis of experience.

[...] The main focus of the multinational military force should be on humanitarian access to the North Kivu population and the protection of the population in South Kivu.

In order to create conditions for a safe return to Rwanda, MSF stated that the following conditions are imperative:

- the registration and screening of returnees
- increasing the human rights monitoring, especially in the returnees' home communes
- the arrest and detention of the perpetrators of the genocide
- the strengthening of an adequate mechanism to deal with property claims of returnees
- the improvement of the living and medical conditions for those in Rwandan prisons.

... MSF has started to draft a paper outlining its concerns regarding the conditions for a safe return to Rwanda.

**On 21 November, the World Food Programme announced that a catastrophe would occur if food were not delivered to Bukavu and Goma. Zairian troops threatened the humanitarian agencies they were supposed to be escorting.**



'Aid Agencies Fear Zaire Catastrophe - Refugees Descending on Bukavu Face Severe Food Shortages,' **International Herald Tribune/Reuters** (UK) 24 November 1996 (in English).

#### Extract:

BUKAVU, Zaire - Aid agencies warned Wednesday of catastrophe facing hundreds of thousands of people in eastern Zaire, as refugees and others fled fighting. Aid workers said that unless food arrived within days in the town of Bukavu, hundreds of thousands of Rwandan and Burundian refugees and displaced Zairian civilians would go hungry.

"We are definitely facing a looming catastrophe if food supplies cannot arrive in Bukavu," said a UN World Food Programme spokeswoman, Brenda Barton. "We need food there immediately to go ahead for the distribution scheduled for Nov. 3." She said the programme's food supply to Goma, north of Bukavu, was cut when Zaire closed its borders with Uganda, strand-ing 2,500 tonnes of food in 68 trucks for camps in Zaire on the frontier.

... Aid workers said Wednesday that Zairians, armed with spears and machetes, have tried to block their evacuation

from eastern Zaire. They said it was impossible for aid agencies to work in the town of Uvira because nervous Zairian soldiers were looting agency vehicles. "I wasn't really afraid of the Banyamulenge," an aid worker said. "I was more afraid of defeated soldiers." ... Zairian troops escorting the aid workers opened fire, mostly in the air, although one person in the crowd was killed, they added.

**That same day, MSF Belgium officials reminded the press of the obstacles to providing assistance to refugees on the move and their concern for the fate of those who had returned to Rwanda.**



'After the Calm, A New Humanitarian Storm,' *Le Soir* (Belgium), 21 November 1996 (in French). [D57](#)

#### Extract:

Disenchantment set in today, especially among the ranks of humanitarian agencies. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) did not mince words, dashing cold water on those who celebrated the camps' liberation. "It is still impossible to provide appropriate humanitarian assistance," warned Eric Goemare, MSF Belgium's Executive Director who just returned from Kisangani (north-western Zaire). On the one hand, Rwandan and Burundian refugees and displaced local populations in Zaire, north and south of Goma, remain inaccessible and trapped. They are scattered among Zairian armed forces in disarray, advancing Tutsi rebels, retreating FAR and Interahamwe and swarms of uncontrolled factions along the entire border between Zaire and neighbouring Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania. Indiscriminate looting is occurring. In short, Goemare said, "We are prevented from gaining access to those populations, with grenades placed under wheels to back up the threat."

#### Populations On The Move:

On the other hand, in Rwanda, "the throngs of people don't spend much time in the transit camps. The Kigali authorities force them to set off again towards their hills." Once more, the strongest go on foot and the weakest by truck or bus.

There are problems, first, from the humanitarian aid perspective. "These populations are constantly on the move," explains Dominique Boutriau, Zaire/Rwanda Desk Manager. "Helping them is like walking a tightrope. It's stressful and we're seeing increasing discontent among them." Epidemiologists are concerned: "Cholera is endemic in the region," says Marleen Van Boelaert, the organisation's President. "Masses of people, without medical care, without rehydration, weakened – that's a significant risk for a rapid rise in mortality rates. Don't forget what happened in July 1994 around Goma."

Then there are issues of democratic control. "Once they are sent back home, the refugees are registered by the chief magistrate," Goemare says. "He's the one who distributes the aid." The only other monitoring is provided by 90 human rights observers, including the exclusively administrative staff. They are responsible for 300 communes and hundreds of thousands of people.

Is there a firmer count? MSF estimates the number of returnees at between 350,000 and 500,000 out of a total of 1.2 million (Rwandans and Burundians). There are at least 700,000 refugees still in Zaire and more than 800,000 displaced Zairians. They need an international force to reach, protect, and aid them. Its mandate has to reflect the new situation, and the next flare-up. "Otherwise, we'll never manage."

The celebration was premature.

**MSF Holland's Director of Communications and Fundraising asked all sections' Operation all Directors to coordinate their public statements and to 'close ranks' in the face of media attacks on humanitarian organisations.**



'Coordination' Message from Marcel Vos, MSF Holland Communication and Fund Raising Director to MSF Directors of Operation, 21 November 1996 (in English). [D58](#)

#### Extract:

It should be noted that the attitude from the media towards NGOs and towards MSF is dramatically becoming more negative.

In various countries MSF is now facing increasing criticism from the media. We suppose that you are well aware of the chaos regarding numbers of the 'dance with the figures' as well as the role of the NGOs.[...] We think that the above is very alarming and more than ever we should realize that we have to close ranks.

**The UN Secretary General announced that he feared a confrontation between Rwanda and Zaire, while other UN officials were concerned about the threat of an emergency they believed to be as serious as that of the 1994 genocide and refugee exodus.**



'Aid Agencies Fear Zaire Catastrophe - Refugees Descending on Bukavu Face Severe Food Shortages,' *International Herald Tribune/Reuters* (UK) 24 November 1996 (in English).

#### Extract:

The UN secretary-general, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, said Tuesday that he feared the fighting between the army and ethnic Tutsi would deteriorate further and that there would be a confrontation between Zaire and Rwanda.

... UN officials say they fear an emergency similar to the 1994 Rwanda genocide and refugee exodus, and are concerned about the possibility of regional conflict involving Rwanda and Burundi.

**On 22 and 23 November, US satellite images of the Kivu region analysed by Canadian forces were presented to the press and NGOs at the US embassy in Kigali. The numbers of refugees cited were smaller than those provided the day before to UNHCR. That gap of several hundred thousand refugees continued to feed the controversy over the existence and number of refugees who had not returned to Rwanda and were victims of fighting in eastern Zaire, as well as over the need to provide them aid, and the dangers of encouraging their repatriation to Rwanda.**



'Proposed Position,' **Message** from Samantha Bolton, MSF Great Lakes Press Officer to MSF Goma/Gisenyi/Bukavu, MSF Amsterdam, 22 November 1996 (in English). [D59](#)

#### Extract:

Dear all,

As you may have heard, after much pressure, the Americans finally agreed to release the results of their reconnaissance. Please see Arian's update (Vanessa circulate it please).

Basically they over flew in a 100 km radius around lake Kivu but not far enough west into Zaire. Also please see the Federation of the Red Cross over flight AFP announcement of 21 November which has also been distributed (Vanessa please make sure they all get it).

According to the USA here, one group of 159-175,000 to west of Lake Kivu of normal refugees (the ones who were stuck halfway up the lake) heading towards Walikale and another 100,000 or so believed to be Interahamwe heading towards Masisi and Walikale – however, it seems that USA intelligence yesterday, gave larger figures to UNHCR (similar to Red Cross assessments).

The idiotic General Smith, who gave the briefing this

morning to us and then to journalists, informed the journalists only of the 150,000 or so on the west of the lake and not of the 100,000 or so which he called FARs and their families.

We are getting questions about our reaction to the American statement: journalists are saying - so no intervention needed, etc. ... We don't want to focus on the figure business but on the complete picture being presented to us and on the fact that there is now no excuse to not provide assistance and we demand access/secure passage. Our reaction from the field is that:

- We are pleased the Americans have finally released the figures

- However, we are concerned that there are still conflicting figures and General Smith, the head of the military assessment team, told NGOs that they only assessed 100 km radius around the lake

- We would like details and the Americans to survey west of the 100 km radius of Bukavu, Uvira, Baraka, and Fizi, in particular the areas around Katchungu, Shabunda, and Kingulube to the west of Bukavu, where we hear from missionaries there are 100-250,000 (see Red Cross also). Also, they should continue gathering information about the refugee and displaced populations in the region (especially of the Burundians of whom there is no news)

- We demand access to these people. We need security to give humanitarian assistance

- At this time humanitarian agencies are blocked on the roads from going much further than Mugunga in rebel-held areas and the international community continues to delay military intervention, to secure airports, or safe passage anywhere in eastern Zaire

- Now that we know where these people are there is no excuse. We demand to do our job

(Headquarters: can we say whether it is the rebels who provide security and access by road from Goma as they don't want military intervention and we are more and more blocked - yesterday and today could barely get to Mugunga or Saké and today had to take back road to Mugunga to avoid road block)?

- Or whether it is international military force who now have no excuse to say they can't do anything - if they don't want to deal with the Interahamwe and military then they should at least secure access to an airstrip in Walikale or direction of west of lake refugee group (possible the refugees will veer north towards Goma).

Samantha



'700,000 Refugees Still Roaming in Eastern Zaire,' *Le Monde* (France) 23 November 1996 (in French). [D60](#)

#### Extract:

On Thursday, Emma Bonino, the European Union's Commissioner of Humanitarian Affairs, again accused the community of indifference and even disguised racism towards refugees in eastern Zaire. There has been no

news of them. "I am disgusted by this shameful dance of meetings and counter-meetings," she said, speaking to the European Parliament. "Everyone knows that innocent people have been suffering and dying for weeks."

[...] Since last week, around 500,000 refugees have returned en masse to Rwanda from the Goma region, but the fate of 700,000 others remains unknown. On Thursday, refugees scattered throughout eastern Zaire were spotted for the first time in weeks, thanks to satellite photos and information provided by western countries' over flights. Some 50,000 refugees were located in an area west of the Masisi region, near Goma, and another 100,000 north of that town. Around 200,000 were located about 75 kilometres north of Bukavu and another 250,000 in the opposite direction, around 75 kilometres south. In addition, the numbers of refugees who have traveled deeper into Zaire and are now in the Fizi region, 100 kilometres south of Uvira, are estimated at 100,000. For the first time since the crisis began more than a month ago, planes provided by the western powers have been able to conduct over flights of the region over the last few days and take photographs. On Wednesday, after a US plane was targeted but not hit, the US suspended all flights.

This information contradicts the Rwandan government's statements, which say that only a few refugees are still on the road to Kivu. Most of eastern Zaire has fallen into the hands of Tutsi rebels supported by Rwanda. That number is "infinitesimal," Laurent Kabila, the rebellion's spokesperson, said on Thursday night.

 I clearly remember that in Benaco in 1994, when the refugees crossed the border, UNHCR aerial photos from US satellites provided information on mass movements of refugees. The information was always available immediately. So in November 1996, I said to myself, "What's going on? This is ridiculous! It's been three weeks and we have no information regarding several hundreds of thousands of people."

Dr. José-Antonio Bastos, MSF ET (Emergency intersections Team) Coordinator in South Kivu (in French).

 There were soldiers based in Kigali who conducted over flights. We asked them how they could over fly this jungle and not give us any answers. In my daily interviews with the press, I said, "This is nuts. When we were young, all throughout the Cold War, we always heard that the Americans had this amazing spy gear and could read someone's personal diary from a plane flying twelve stories high, and now they can't manage to see 250,000 people on the run!"

We participated in the briefing by the US embassy. Someone asked whether there were still refugees out there and what had happened to the Interahamwe who had fled. MSF said, "There are 250,000 people - you can't have lost them." They answered, "It's very difficult. You can't see anything because of the jungle and the trees." Even UNHCR were pressuring them for information. They were doing over flights but weren't providing any information. They said, "We don't want to give any information out because the Rwandans could use it to find the refugees." But we suspected that they had given them the information because they were very close to Kigali, and the British and US ambassadors were completely in Kagame's pocket. When we went to the briefing, they treated us like idiots. First, they held a briefing for NGOs and then another one for reporters. They said one thing to us and then a half-hour later, they said completely the opposite to the reporters, taking out the information. The Washington Post called saying, "There are no refugees? What's that about?" I said, "No way! Your diplomat gave you a different briefing than the one we got. You need to get the information from the US embassy." I went to the hotel immediately to find the reporters to tell them, "They're talking nonsense, they told us one thing a half-hour earlier and you another. What's going on here?" They all left for the embassy to find out why there were two different stories. Every day during the interviews at the hotel where all the reporters were, I would say very openly, "there's a problem with the Americans. They're conducting over flights. We don't know what they're doing with the information and who they're giving it to". One day, the press attaché came out and started yelling at me in front of the journalists saying, "You people at MSF are angry because the refugees are coming back healthy. Listen to the tone of your voice when you talk about the US, it's disgusting how you're talking about the United States." I said to the Christian Science Monitor reporter who was interviewing me, "This is your ambassador. Does it seem like he's neutral in this whole thing? Does he seem very diplomatic to you?" I yelled at the attaché, "You're a really great diplomat! Can't you hear the tone of your own voice?"

The story of the embassy putting out two different versions interested the journalists, who are always eager to sniff out a scandal that involves a government hiding something. They didn't understand why the information hadn't been made available. I said to them, "If there are no refugees missing, why wouldn't they show the photos?" We recovered a little credibility because they saw that something was being kept from them. It was really an information battle with UNHCR, the Americans and Kigali who were saying that everyone had come back except groups of soldiers, the Interahamwe, etc.

Samantha Bolton, MSF USA Communication Director,  
MSF Press Officer for the Great Lakes November-  
December 1996 (in French).

**On 23 November, UNHCR reconfirmed that 700,000 Rwandans were still roaming around eastern Zaire and renewed its request to be able to reach them and provide aid. Paul Kagame told *The Economist* (UK) that there was a connection between the refugees' return and the preparation of the multinational force.**



'Ogata Emphasises the Situation of Refugees Still Dispersed in Zaire,' *AFP* (France), Geneva, 23 November 1996 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees confirmed Saturday in Geneva that in addition to the 500,000 Rwandan refugees who recently returned to their country, there are still "hundreds of thousands of Rwandans lost in the wilds in Zaire."

...Ms Ogata's statement instantly broadened the debate and underscored that without security guarantees humanitarian agencies could no longer work in eastern Zaire.

In her remarks, Ogata again referred to a total of 700,000 refugees and displaced persons still dispersed in eastern Zaire. The US and Rwanda challenge that figure.

"They must be in a desperate situation, but without aid we cannot reach them to simultaneously provide emergency aid and enable them to return safely," she said. "Many lives are at stake. My request is that we are given the means to reach them and help them as soon as possible."



'The Great Escape' *The Economist* (UK) 23 November 1996 (in English).

#### **Extract:**

In the nick of time, the armies of the West have been saved from another messy African war. As a multinational force was preparing to enter eastern Zaire to help feed Rwandan refugees, Zairean rebels did what nobody else had done for the past two years: sent more than 500,000 home. Coincidence? "I think there is a bit of relationship," says Paul Kagame, the general who in practice if not name rules Rwanda. "But I don't know the details," he adds quickly.

**Donor nations and international organisations asked governments to take action to enable humanitarian organisations to gain access to the refugees. The Rwandan government asked for \$700 million in aid for the refugees' return.**



'Meeting in Geneva on Rwandan Refugees Calls for Quick Action,' *AFP* (France), Geneva, 23 November 1996 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

At Saturday's meeting in Geneva addressing the Rwandan refugee situation, participants called on governments "to commit to quick action" so that humanitarian organisations can gain access to refugees and displaced persons in Zaire.

In a press release, donor nations and international organisations "issued an urgent call to governments to take immediate action to enable humanitarian organisations and their implementing partners to gain access [to refugees and displaced persons in Zaire] to ease their suffering and facilitate their rapid return."

Many delegations emphasised that in addition to those who have already returned to Rwanda, "hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced persons elsewhere in the region continue to experience tragic circumstances."



'Kigali Demands \$700 Million for Its Refugees' Return – Dispatch of International Force Still Under Discussion in Stuttgart,' *AFP* (France), Geneva, 23 November 1996 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

On Saturday, Rwanda demanded \$700 million to reintegrate the Hutu refugees who have already returned or those expected to return from Zaire, while discussions continued regarding possible options for sending a multinational force to eastern Zaire.

Charles Murigande, Rwanda's Transportation and Communications Minister, delivered Kigali's demand to the international community during a meeting in Geneva of ministers and representatives of the major donor nations, UN agencies, the International Red Cross and the Rwandan government. Zaire was present as an observer.

"The Rwandan plan is a good one," said Sadako Ogata, UN High Commissioner for Refugees. "Financial commitments will not be made at this meeting, but all indications point toward a willingness to provide substantial financing."

## THE "FIGURES CRISIS"

**While the international community was dragging its feet about whether to deploy an armed international force, Rwanda announced that it would not authorise**

the force to operate inside its borders. MSF's coordinator in Kigali confirmed the need for the force to gain access to the refugees.

MSF organised a response to press criticisms that humanitarian organisations had exaggerated the number of refugees and the seriousness of their health status.



'Com/info Proposal for Coming Weeks,' Fax from Samantha Bolton, MSF Press Officer for Great Lakes to ET, programme managers and Communication Departments, 26 November 1996 (in English). **D61**

**Extract:**

- MSF can expect lots of criticism from journalists about over-exaggerated death and refugee numbers left in Zaire
  - MSF needs to closely monitor situation in Zaire
  - Possible will have to update NBO correspondents in a couple of weeks on situation in Zaire - but only if we have reliable medical / field data
  - We will be slaughtered alive if anything else we say is based on guesstimates and not on hard facts - especially field medical
  - Most of the serious damage control all sections are going to be faced with is trying to re-establish credibility after 13,000 dead and 1 person every so many minutes dead figures
  - From now on all sections should keep low profile on political supposition and stick to facts - only way to do damage control
  - From what we are hearing from established journalists (Kurt Lindyer and NY Times) etc - journalists are now doing two year analysis of the crisis - to see what went wrong - journalists coverage - international aid agencies
    - - rebels - we can expect major shit
- 4) URGENT - URGENT - if another charter is coming out could you please urgently fill it with:
- 75 copies of breaking the cycle
  - 75 of deadlock in the refugee crisis and
  - 75 on the Masisi report
  - 75 of the Gitarama prisons report
  - we need to urgently distribute these to all journalists and diplomats to remind them and to recuperate from our numbers fiasco - if there is no charter could you please send next expat with these - it is better we have the professional versions as opposed to photocopied Kigali versions



Simon Jenkins, 'NGOs Come to the Aid of Neo-Imperialism,' *The Times* (UK), 21 to 27 November 1996 (in English). **D62**

**Extract:**

In the last century merchant adventurers stirred the media to badger politicians over national pride. Gunboats and troop carriers were duly sent. The merchant adventurers of modern Africa are the aid agencies, often feuding with each other and the United Nations. They are the biggest power-brokers on the continent. They can move large quantities of money and supplies. They influence the outcome of wars, as in Ethiopia. They occupy territory, wreck fragile market economies, encourage rural depopulation and are obsessed with self-publicity. I accept the sincerity of their purpose and the fact that they can save lives in the short term. The jury is out on how many they cost in the long term. These charities once made much of their pacifism, as the International Committee of the Red Cross still does. They refused ever to work under the shadow of the gun. But since Somalia and Bosnia, aid agencies have risen to the sound of the fife and drum. With a jeer at the UN and a stage-managed CNN soundbite, they can now embarrass statesmen into sending armies round the globe. Accountable to none, they call in the moral B-52s for surgical strikes at targets selected for accessibility to television news. (There is no fundraising for starving Azeris or Chechens.) In Zaire it has been the turn of CARE and Save the Children to have their logos emblazoned over CNN reports brazenly calling for troops. Under the exaggerated slogan "a million dead by Christmas", a fund-raising drive is under way. Pity the needy of Sudan, Liberia, Angola. Zaire is in play.

Even at some short-term humanitarian cost, the hundreds of thousands pouring into Zaire had to be left to go home. Instead, for two years Goma became a city sustained by aid and policed by warlords, waiting for the Tutsi counter-attack. It has duly come. The mercy is that it came, and has proved effective, before Western soldiers arrived on the scene. The latter would have been drawn into a civil war in which they would inevitably have taken sides. Battle lines would have hardened. There would have been less, not more, chance of yesterday's mass return to Rwanda.



Interview of Alex De Waal, *BBC* (UK), 27 November 1996 (in English). **D63**

**Extract:**

So why did the United Nations, Médecins Sans Frontières and Oxfam get it so badly wrong? We need to look at how disaster relief agencies work.

They grow if they are good at raising funds, from the public and from governments.

Many agencies cannot survive unless they have regular high-profile appeals, and competition is getting sharper.

These messages raise money. A more honest line would be: "people are having a hard time and some will die, and your money can help them a bit, probably." But it doesn't bring in the funds. Aid appeals exaggerate and simplify. [...] It is the Zairian rebels who are doing the job no UN force will ever do: defeating the extremist militias on the battlefield. If the agencies had got their way and western troops had gone in, the situation would be worse. More people would have died.

So let's be frank. Aid has a role, but it can be dangerous. Médecins sans Frontières and Oxfam should have the honesty to admit they were wrong. If they don't, we will all be looking at their appeals with a much more skeptical eye next time round.



Colette Braeckman, 'When A Scalpel - Not A Band-Aid - Is Required,' *Le Soir* (Belgium), 28 November 1996 (in French). [D64](#)

#### Extract:

"They are dying like flies. If we don't intervene, 12,500 will die every day. That means 1 million dead by Christmas. It will be a hidden genocide. Cholera will decimate them all."

The failed history of what has been presented as "the greatest humanitarian disaster of all time" remains to be written. Instead, the massive and peaceful return of Hutu refugees from Zaire confounded politicians' warning cries and caught most humanitarian organisations off guard. Contrary to all predictions, Rwandan authorities demonstrated that they indeed wanted the exiles to return, despite the material and psychological problems that would follow. But most importantly, the refugees' statements, as well as the physical condition of the majority, confirms everything that had been said about them.

Most of the refugees were indeed taken hostage by extremist leaders, who readily killed those who acted as if they wanted to escape from the camps. Statements from repatriated refugees also emphasised the reality of the 'war tax' imposed on civilians and illustrated the diversion of food aid, which was resold with the complicity of certain Zairian generals. The profits were used to purchase arms. The reality of the camps was that for 2<sup>1/2</sup> years, humanitarian aid strengthened the grip of the political and military officials responsible for genocide over a people held hostage. That should have led those organisations, whose naïveté, blindness and even complicity contributed to perpetuating the problem, to take a more moderate stand. But the opposite occurred. Those who had not witnessed the violence and duress in the camps were the ones who issued the strongest criticisms, referring to 'virtual genocide,' when the camps were dismantled, thereby easing the executioners' grip on their hostages.

Today's realities are more comforting. Of course, the weakest died on the road from illness or exhaustion and the final death count will never be known. And the last groups to return from Bukavu, crossing the border at Goma today after weeks of walking, cannot be as strong and healthy as those who arrived first. However, observers are relieved to note that most are in better shape than feared. They received international aid over many months. Although they may have suffered during their flight, they are not in a state of advanced malnutrition.

[...] Prefed, an NGO working on development in the three countries of the region, notes bitterly that, "In retrospect, it appears that the media mobilisation and the alarmist cries were intended to rebuild the humanitarian groups' bank accounts and enable them to continue working in the Zaire camps, which would have contributed to continuing instability in the sub-region."

[...] Of course, the violence that occurred when the Zaire camps were emptied – refugees suddenly separated from their oppressors, the limitations on NGOs that would have liked to provide the weakest and the sick a few days' rest, the closure of MSF's way stations, the decision to authorise only the distribution of high-protein biscuits – does conflict with a strictly humanitarian approach. But the final result shows that in the end, faced with an abscess, the scalpel may work better than the band-aid.



'Humanitarian Organisations Make Their Best Guesses – Statistics and Conclusions from the Field Are Often Contradictory,' *Libération* (France), 18 November 1996 (in French).

#### Extract:

The refugee problem has disrupted the Great Lakes region for two years. During that time, in the eyes of the public, humanitarian aid organisations have been in that perennially awkward position of announcing a catastrophe that has not occurred, but when and if it comes to pass, the evidence suggests that aid will arrive too late. To understand the situation, one needs to recognize that providing aid and developing aid strategies, in unstable regions, is not an exact science. The Great Lakes region is particularly difficult, with massive population movements occurring in record-breaking time. This poses serious problems for coordinating aid logistics.

What makes these operations truly ambiguous is the uneasy relationship between humanitarian organisations and international military interventions like Blue Helmet operations. In 1994 in Goma, 'the French doctors' first refused to provide aid because Operations Turquoise's 'French troops' had created buffer zones in the Rwandan conflict. Many organisations raised ethical objections, based on concrete and honest arguments, to providing backing for an operation they viewed as politically motivated, at least when it was launched. Two years later, in late October, humanitarian organisations were the ones calling for an 'international force,' saying intervention was

the only way to guarantee the safety of their mission. But this time, it's the aid that is running late.

 *If people lack food and water, the situation deteriorates very quickly. That's what the past has shown. The Kurds were very healthy before their migration but in the space of a few days in the mountains, without supplies, they found themselves in an extremely precarious situation. All large population movements very quickly lead to the decline of the health of the people involved.*

Dr. Bernard Pécoul, MSF France Executive Director (in French)

 *In medicine, treatment effects are measured in a range. The treatment may have an effect on one population and not on another simply for genetic reasons, because people don't all have the same enzymology, etc. In the human sciences and in medicine, statistics are presented in ranges, orders of magnitude and estimates. The issue isn't providing precise statistics but explaining, clearly and transparently, the methodology you used to reach your orders of magnitude or estimates.*

Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France programme manager then Communication Director (in French).

 *Our analysis was this: if the media can enter and humanitarian organisations cannot enter in the context where camps are completely dependant on food and water from the outside, we have to speak in terms of the worst case. That's my experience. I said that also after several times because we were criticised. I remember in such a type of situation, when we were optimistic in the past ten years, we always were wrong. Optimism in such a situation is not efficient... is even a crime to be optimistic when you have Tutsi which have a reason to kill Hutu because those guys killed them.*

Dr. Jacques de Milliano, MSF Holland General Director and MSF International vice-président (in English).

 *When people left the camps, plump and well fed, and returned to Rwanda, that was really a slap in the face for the humanitarian agencies and especially those that had spoken out vigorously. I think that was the most interesting year because we had to defend ourselves, which had never happened to us. We had always*

*been these great people, these good-looking doctors (another myth)! We did a huge amount of work with the press and television networks and we held public discussions on the obligation to make pessimistic projections and why it was necessary to make them. We found ourselves in a very useful position because that allowed us to explain the complexities of that kind of analysis, etc. I think we came out of it fine but it was very uncomfortable.*

Anne-Marie Huby, MSF UK Executive Director (in French).

 *After all this agitation, the story was over for the reporters. They were convinced that Africa had organised things perfectly well on its own and that we, the NGOs, were uncomfortable because Kagame had taken care of everything in Kigali and didn't need us any more. There was nothing for us to do but keep quiet. ... We were like little children being scolded for making arithmetic errors. It was hard but we held on. We said the same things every day. Some French reporters quoted us but you could still see that they didn't believe us.*

Samantha Bolton, MSF USA Communication Director, MSF Press Officer for the Great Lakes November-December 1996 (in French).

**In the Bukavu region, there were increasing reports about groups of fleeing refugees and displaced Zairians threatened by AFDL soldiers. On 23 November, aid organisations (OXFAM, Save the Children, Concern and the IRC) gained access to villages located within 30 kilometres of Bukavu. Teams composed of members of different agencies went out to assess the authorised areas. They were accompanied by 'facilitators,' who were political representatives assigned by the Alliance. Every foreign organisation was required to consult them about its local activities and contacts. On several occasions, the teams were refused access to places in the forest where they had encountered refugees the day before. The MSF ET Coordinator in the Bukavu region notified the MSF coordination team in Kigali.**



'Forced Flight a Brutal Strategy of Elimination in Eastern Zaire,' **MSF Report**, 16 May 1997 (in English). [D65](#)

**Extract:**

From mid-November 1996 onwards, MSF tried to obtain permission to enter Bukavu. Repeated attempts to get there were frustrated by the AFDL. On the 23rd of November, 1996, a convoy of NGOs was given permission

to assess the surroundings of Bukavu on the following day. However, movements were restricted to a 30 km zone around Bukavu. One team managed to get to Walungu (40 km from Bukavu). On 25 November 1996, the Bukavu team was reminded of the 30 km limit and the obligatory presence of a AFDL 'facilitator' was imposed. One day later, a MSF team carried out an exploratory mission 40 km north of Bukavu. On the 3rd of December, 1996, a joint UN-NGO assessment team traveled south to Uvira.

These limitations of access (restriction to 30 km zones around Bukavu, the imposed presence of 'facilitators', areas being declared off-limits, teams stopped at military checkpoints on the roads) might, to some extent, have happened because of ongoing conflict, but in several cases, restrictions were imposed after groups of refugees had been spotted by NGOs or UN agencies. These groups subsequently disappeared or dispersed into the forest. In addition, during the period from late 1996 into early 1997, agencies were asked by the AFDL to indicate places where refugees were expected and to seek permission beforehand to go there. In December 1996, humanitarian organisations began receiving reports that the AFDL military was capturing refugees in areas where NGOs were present. Initially, such reports were thought to consist of sporadic incidents carried out by small bands of AFDL soldiers. However, more and more information emerged which suggested a systematic practice of military operations directed against ex-FAR and Interahamwe, with the aim of eliminating the combatants and accompanying refugees.

 *We had these 'facilitators.' Every NGO conducting an assessment had a young Banyamulenge who made notes about everything and wrote down the names of everyone who was being paid a salary. I remember saying on the radio in Kigali, "This is going too far. We've got to leave. This is unacceptable." From the beginning, we suspected that these informers were going to report everything. When we went to look for refugees who were hiding to repatriate them or bring them aid, this 'facilitator' would pass on the information. We talked a lot about this and tried to get around them here and there. We conducted an evaluation in Muenga without the 'facilitators' and a French expatriate was accused of spying. We were going to places where we had heard there were refugees. The first day, we saw refugees and on the second, there were security problems and we couldn't get there anymore. That happened to us three or four times.*

Dr. José-Antonio Bastos, MSF ET (Emergency inter-sections Team) Coordinator in South Kivu (in French).

 *The ICRC's Great Lakes Manager in Geneva told me that when he went to talk with UNHCR representatives, he realized that UNHCR provided its facilitators, officially called 'liaison officers', with a car and radio but that they also received a salary of around \$500/month. He was shocked but not to the point of airing the whole thing in public.*

Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France programme manager then Communication Director (in French).

**On 26 November, after receiving information from Reuter's reporters, the MSF Emergency Team (ET) in the Bukavu region discovered mass graves and a dozen wounded survivors from an AFDL massacre committed on 17 November at the site of a former displaced persons' camp in Chimanga. The Reuters agency distributed its team's report and the BBC radio service mentioned the killings. Amnesty International also distributed the information to the press.**



'500 Rwandan Refugees Massacred by a Group of Armed Tutsi,' **AFP** (France), London, 26 November 1996 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

Amnesty International reported Tuesday that around 500 Rwandan refugees and displaced Zairians were killed last week by members of a predominantly Tutsi armed group in eastern Zaire at the Chimanga camp, 60 kilometres south of Bukavu.

In a press release published in London, the human rights organisation said that on around 18 November, members of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL) separated the men, women and children and then opened fire on the men, killing them all. Only the Catholic priest, Jean-Claude Buhendwa, of neighboring Burhale province, was spared when he protested, Amnesty said.

According to Amnesty, witnesses said the victims' bodies were buried in mass graves. The women and children are reported to have fled west to Zaire's interior, Amnesty added. The organisation noted that hundreds of Rwandan refugees and Zairians have gathered around the Chimanga camp, hoping to obtain help to cross the border to Rwanda.

 Chimanga is the only case in which we were able to get slightly harder information from the reporters who discovered the spot. They identified the wounded and survivors of the massacres and came to tell us. This was at least a week or ten days after we had come back to Bukavu, nearly three weeks after the massacre. We found mass graves and 11 survivors. Three hours later, an MSF-ICRC convoy set off and met a Save the Children car. They were picking up the abandoned children. Together we picked up 11 wounded people who were hidden in the surrounding forest. The villagers had been taking care of them and feeding them. The villagers said, "There's another one! Over here!" I remember the people I personally picked up and to whom I gave first aid. There was a woman, a man, three children and an old woman. They had survived for 13 days, and their wounds were horribly, horribly rotten! They were infected. They all had bullets in their arms and legs...

I talked to the refugees who spoke French, so this is a first-hand report. The full story is that some of the refugees who fled had decided to stay because they wanted to return to Rwanda. They had freed themselves from the control of the Interahamwe and the others. At Chimanga, a refugee camp where MSF France had worked, they waited until the fighting had passed and they left saying, "We want to go back." Most were women, children and elderly people. The soldiers said, "Fine, we'll repatriate you. Get in line and we'll take your names." They began taking down names and a half-hour later, launched grenades at them and machine-gunned them. For those who know the history, it's exactly the same scenario as the Kibeho massacre. Afterwards, they went to the villagers' houses and drafted about 50 of them to dig the ditch and clean the ground. The Zairian villagers told me all this. They were traumatised and had no idea why it had happened. It's not true that the Hutu refugees had terrorized the Zairians. The typical Zairian civilian clearly understood the difference between the Rwandans, the Interahamwe and the others. At that time, it was easy to stop your car along the road and talk to a family. "How's everything going? Do you know anyone who is sick around here? Are there mines? Was the fighting violent?" After a few minutes, people would say, "We heard that in the village there, at Chimanga, the soldiers killed lots of people. There was fighting here among the soldiers, against the soldiers but there they killed women and children." It was very clear.

The situation became difficult when the soldiers showed up and said, "Who told you that? Who's supposed to be wounded?" I think they were Rwandan soldiers. The villagers panicked when they saw them. ... The Reuters cameraman who came with us took responsibility for speaking to the soldiers. He handled himself very well. The soldiers were pointing their guns at him. "What happened? Who told you that?" He answered, "I'm a reporter. I've been here for a week with the authorities' permission. I found these wounded people so I called the humanitarian organisations." I think he saved the villagers. Afterwards the authorities questioned him but he didn't back down. Since then, every time

I talk about the press in a PSP (Populations in Precarious Situations, an MSF training session), I say that reporters aren't always jerks. He put down the camera and started carrying stretchers. He was really moved by the whole thing and he worked hard.

Dr. José-Antonio Bastos, MSF ET (Emergency inter-sections Team) Coordinator in South Kivu (in French).

**On 27 November, Canada proposed to airdrop supplies for refugees roaming in eastern Zaire. The European Commissioner for Humanitarian Action described the proposal as disgraceful and reaffirmed that the risks of a humanitarian disaster had not been overestimated. UNHCR and ICRC maintained that a presence on the ground was necessary.**



'Canada Announces Food Airdrop to Zaire Soon,' **AFP** (France), Ottawa, 28 November 1996 (in French).

#### Extract:

Supported by more than 15 nations, Canada announced Thursday that an international mission to airdrop food to refugees in Zaire would be launched soon, despite Kinshasa's opposition.

On the ground in Goma, North Kivu, Canadian General Maurice Baril, Head of the multinational force that may intervene in eastern Zaire, raised the possibility on Thursday of "coordinating" with the Zairian Tutsi rebels on a "non-military humanitarian action" on behalf of Rwandan refugees.

The Zairian government responded quickly to the announcements, vigorously protesting both the western plan to parachute food to refugees and displaced persons and General Baril's visit to Goma, accompanied by Tutsi rebels.

[...] By Thursday, after days of negotiations conducted by the Canadians, who took the lead among countries supporting intervention in the African Great Lakes region, the operation seemed to be taking shape. Mr. Axworthy could then announce that the headquarters would be set up in Entebbe, Uganda, where around 500 US, Canadian, and British soldiers are already conducting a reconnaissance mission. He said that the intervention would only take place "in cooperation" with humanitarian organisations in the field. In that regard, he referred to Rwanda's 10-day authorisation to create a "corridor" for the organisations, without providing specifics.

[...] Thursday, UNHCR and ICRC had said that the food drop was a "last resort" and that a presence on the ground

was still required to ensure that aid was distributed fairly to civilians and protecting against “hijacking by those who have weapons.”



'Food Airdrops: "Really Shameful", Says European Commissioner Emma Bonino,' **AFP** (France), 30 November 1996 (in French).

#### Extract:

The commissioner rejected the claim that the dangers of a humanitarian disaster had been overestimated. "I believe it was our duty to sound the alarm as we did," she said. "Yes, 400,000 to 500,000 thousand refugees have returned (to Rwanda). That's great, but where are the others? Now it looks like we've found them."

#### On 28 and 29 November, the MSF sections again discussed MSF's position on armed intervention.



'MSF position **Update** regarding recent developments in the Great Lakes Region,' **Internal**, 28 November 1996 (in English). **D66**

#### Extract:

##### General:

This is an update to the 20 November update on the position taken in the paper 'Zaire: Action Rather than Apathy' (12 November 1996). First a reiteration of some general communication rules in order to maintain the taken position and the credibility of MSF's statements:

Due to the critical media attention MSF received regarding earlier statements, it was decided to be more cautious with external communications, because criticising NGOs will only distract attention from the humanitarian needs/situation in the Great Lakes Region. Therefore:

- MSF will abstain from using numbers of refugees and IDPs in its external communications, unless we have actually witnessed these people ourselves;
- MSF will not report on reports of (unconfirmed) human rights abuses in its external communications, unless these abuses or their results are witnessed by MSF or have been confirmed (double checked);
- Emphasis in external communications will lie on (new) facts, but only after they have been confirmed by reliable sources.

Possible questions (and some 'nice' answers for you) from journalists regarding our Position:

Has MSF's position towards military intervention changed?

No, MSF sticks to its earlier call for a multinational force. However, ongoing discussions and hesitation have shown that in reality the force will be inadequately mandated

to be a first step in bringing about a durable solution to the crisis in the Great lakes Region; since the force will probably not have authority to separate and disarm the militia and will not arrest and detain the perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide, impunity for human rights abuses will remain unaddressed.

#### What does MSF think of the ongoing delay in deployment of the multinational Force?

MSF is very disappointed/outraged by the lack of decisive action by the international community. More than two weeks after the UN Security Council authorised such a force (on 15 November), still no action has been taken.

#### Does MSF still think that a multinational force will become reality?

No, MSF fears that the continued inaction of the international community to deploy the UN-authorized multinational force will eventually lead to no action at all, or only to humanitarian action, distracting the attention from the political problems underlying the crisis in the Great Lakes region.

#### What does MSF think of the proposed air drops of food in eastern Zaire?

Dropping food from the air into eastern Zaire is again a humanitarian approach towards the crisis in the Great Lakes region, rather than a political one. Therefore food drops are likely to distract the attention from the political causes of the crisis.

Moreover, food drops are likely to be ineffective for a number of reasons. First of all, it is still unclear where the refugees and displaced populations are located. Secondly, even if they are located, MSF fears that such a form of unmonitored food distribution will result in additional violence. Both in Bosnia and Liberia unmonitored food distribution resulted in the killing of refugees and displaced persons by fighters. Thirdly, food drops might kill refugees or displaced when hit by food packages (Northern Iraq). Fourthly, medical assistance cannot be airdropped.

#### What does MSF think should happen?

MSF maintains that safe humanitarian access and effective protection of the refugees and displaced population is of paramount importance. Moreover, impunity or past (genocide) and present human rights abuses needs to be addressed if the crisis in the Great Lakes region is to be solved.



'Major shift in thinking about the Kivu,' **Email** from Eric Goemare, Executive Director, MSF Belgium, to other sections' Executive Directors, 29 November 1996 (in French). **D67**

#### Extract:

Dear Friends,

I believe it is urgent for us to clarify again our position regarding international military intervention in the Kivu as airdrops could begin this weekend.

1. To refresh your memory, we called for an intervention to:

- Gain access to refugees and displaced persons
- Protect civilian refugees.

2. Gaining access:

Today it appears that our teams have gone all the way around Lake Kivu and we have access to around 75% of the refugees. (These numbers are, of course, only approximate.)

Where are the others?

[...] In short, it no longer makes sense to call for an international force today, except for the Burundians, on condition that it can be shown that they are still somewhere in Zaire and want to stay there and are not in transit for Tanzania.

3. Protection:

This involved protecting civilian refugees against abuses. But committed by whom?

Based on our teams' statements and also on press reports, it appears that the FAR/Interahamwe are killing their own 'hostages' and not the Banyamulenge, as had been thought. If this is confirmed, it won't be the Banyamulenge military advance that provides the quickest protection, just as in 1994, it wasn't Operation Turquoise, but the RPF that stopped the genocide.

I assume it's obvious to us all today that none of the 20 Stuttgart signatories anticipated putting a single person at risk to fight rabid ex-genocideurs.

So shouldn't we admit that with the exception of the disappeared Burundians, the best thing that could happen would be for the Banyamulenge to free the refugees?

What is left for an international force to do?

At best:

A 'logistics drop' operation that will probably target only those visible, thus those who are already accessible to our teams by road. Even if the Banyamulenge supervise the drops, they could kill many people as the items fall.

At worst:

The drops will also re-supply the armed groups (FAR) fleeing toward Walikale or Shabunda, providing assistance to the genocideurs once again.

In Conclusion:

We think that the message should now change radically.

Talk ONLY about facts regarding those refugees or displaced persons we encounter directly (number, health status, history) and what WE ARE DOING for them.

PLEASE NOTE: we do not have specific information on MSF's activities in Kivu! Can Amsterdam take care of that ASAP?

If and only if we are questioned on the military drop operation, clarify that we had called for something entirely different:

- A protection force, not an assistance force
- The airdrop is too late because we will have access to the majority of people in the coming days
- The force we called for three weeks ago is no longer required to deal with access.

The only mandate we think is still relevant is:

- Disarming the FAR/Interahamwe who invaded the back country and are going to inflame the situation there by attacking and looting civilians: Reinforce the idea that, as we had said, these men have proven capable of the worst atrocities.

Protect the returning refugees? Wouldn't it be better to extend the UN human rights mandate? In practice, the Rwandans who want to go back will do so before any decision is made.

The problem of the Burundians remains... first we'd need to know where they are, how many they are and what they want.

**On 30 November the ICRC's President denounced the international community's inaction.**



'ICRC President Criticises the International Community's "Inaction," *AFP* (France), Bern, 30 November 1996 (in French).

**Extract:**

On Saturday, Cornelio Sommaruga, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, described the position of the international community in the conflict in eastern Zaire as one of 'intolerable inaction.'

[...] "This intolerable inaction will forever remain a shameful page in the history of humanity," the ICRC president said.

As with the prior conflicts in Bosnia and Rwanda, the community was unwilling to acknowledge the danger in Zaire. However, humanitarian organisations had warned other countries well in advance, Sommaruga added.

[...] The international community's credibility is at stake more than ever, he noted.

**On the same day, the international force was formally constituted.**



'International Force Formally Constituted,' **AFP** (France), Ottawa, 30 November 1996 (in French).

**Extract:**

Organised at Canada's initiative, the international force with a humanitarian mission was formally constituted on Friday in Ottawa and the multilateral mechanism proposed Thursday to provide aid to central Africa, was approved.

During a 2½ hour meeting at the Canadian Foreign Affairs Ministry, chaired by Assistant Deputy Foreign Minister Paul Heinbecker, a 14-member steering committee agreed to set up the international force headquarters in Entebbe, Uganda, under the command of Canadian General Maurice Baril. The headquarters should be in place in the coming days.

**On 1 December, teams from MSF Holland, ICRC and UNHCR in Bukavu prepared to denounce the use of aid organisations as bait, and to highlight the refugees' plight. But with the appearance of a new group of 5,000 refugees, the groups withdrew their decision in order to address the new arrivals' needs.**



*Along with UNHCR and ICRC, we reached the conclusion that we'd obviously been used as bait. On 1 December, during a meeting of MSF, ICRC and UNHCR, the ICRC representative said, "It's not ICRC's tradition, but if we are going to continue working together ... we can't treat refugees and later learn from villagers that they were shot after we'd left. There are problems here. We've got to do something." The UNHCR delegate was an Italian, very technically minded, but had sent fairly strong reports to Geneva. The Banyamulenge authorities found out about them. We said to ourselves, "Maybe we (UNCHR, MSF and ICRC) should withdraw and announce to the world that this is not acceptable. They're killing people five kilometres away from our base and we can't do anything about it." Just as we were making that decision, in the middle of our meeting, the Alliance liaison officers opened the meeting room door and said, "You want refugees? There are 5,000 on the road! Get to work!" On a micro level, what happened to us in Bukavu was identical to the massive return of refugees driven from Goma to Gisenyi that took place on the day that the threat of military intervention was announced. In our discussions with the authorities, it seemed clear that they were increasingly uncomfortable about the killings. They knew that we were preparing to react and take a posi-*

*tion against them. So they opened the floodgates and shoved 5,000 refugees in our direction as a bone to gnaw on. At that moment, we thought that these 5,000 were the first wave of 200,000 refugees whose whereabouts no one knew and for whom we had to prepare, and they had already left for Tingi Tingi ...!*

*We said, "We want to work," and that's what we did. We had still lots of problems, -- pressure for authorisation for the trucks to circulate, but that changed our strategy entirely. It was only later, when things had calmed down a bit, that we began witnessing the same events. We said to ourselves, "we're in the same situation as two or three months ago. Why did we stop paying attention?" ... I had on my conscience the fact that my actions and decisions had helped the AFDL group and the Rwandan army to kill 10,000 or 15,000 refugees. It's difficult to say that. We tried to set up our little clinic here, our little operation there, and that's exactly where they disappeared. Afterwards, when we thought about it, we realized that we had indeed been used as bait. We didn't even manage to reach and treat many of them because they always crossed very quickly into Rwanda.*

Dr. José-Antonio Bastos, MSF ET (Emergency inter-sections Team) Coordinator in South Kivu (in French).

**The same day, José-Antonio Bastos, Coordinator of the MSF Emergency team in Bukavu, sent statements from Chimanga massacre survivors to the MSF Holland headquarters. On 2 December, MSF Holland's Humanitarian Affairs Department (HAD) transmitted the report to Amnesty International and asked that MSF not be cited as the source. Also on that day, the desk and the HAD reminded teams in the Great Lakes region that all information regarding human rights was not to be distributed without authorisation from headquarters.**



'Massacre of Chimanga' **Report** from Dr Jose Antonio Bastos, coordinator of the MSF Emergency team in Bukavu, 1 December 1996 (in English). **D68**

**Extract:**

**1. Background:**

Chimanga camp was created in June 1994 after the influx of Rwandan refugees into Zaire. It was located some 75 km south-west of Bukavu and had a population of around 30,000 refugees. Seemingly a group of 'hard line' Interahamwe lived in the camp, but integration with local Zairian villagers from Chimanga village was good.

**2. Sources:**

- Journalists (Reuters, French cameraman Emmanuel, and white Zimbabwean, Japanese, and German TV teams) allowed to move freely within the rebel Alliance controlled area around Bukavu, found the Chimanga camp

being burnt around 20.11.96. They were told by villagers about the massacre, and they found one survivor hiding in the bush.

- During first day of NGO assessments in Bukavu, NGO team (MSF, Concern, IRC, SCF) going along south-west axis, received reports from Zairian villagers from 3 different points about the existence of a massacre in Chimanga, all of them very similar, differing only in the number of victims (from 300 to 750).
- Once survivors (8) from the massacre have been rescued, their reports confirmed the previous indirect information.

### 3. The events:

According to all the mentioned sources, the facts were seemingly as follows:

- In the first days of November, Bukavu is taken by the Banyamulenge rebels, the refugees flee the camps. In Chimanga, 3,000 refugees stay, hoping to return to Rwanda.
- 17.11.96: rebel soldiers reach the camp and call remaining refugees for a meeting. They are told to give their names for the list for repatriation, and to stay together in a place. They are shot at with automatic weapons and some hand-grenades are thrown at them. Many dispersed. The villagers are told by the soldiers to dig a grave and bury the bodies (320 according to most accurate sources). They were threatened to be killed if they provided any assistance to the wounded that escaped or to inform anybody.
- Around 80 refugees, some of them wounded, stayed hidden around the Chimanga village, helped by the local population (food and basic medical care).
- 26.11.96 MSF is informed by Reuters about the location of wounded. MSF reports to UNHCR and to ICRC.
- 29.11.96 third day without any action from UNHCR or ICRC, the Reuters journalists approach MSF asking to organise the rescue of the wounded survivors of the massacre.
- 30.11.96 MSF is guided by Reuters to the places where the wounded are hiding. One Zairian Red Cross (ZRC) vehicle met on the road, and joined the convoy. The first wounded is found (...) hiding among reeds, MSF performs cleaning and dressing of wounds, ZRC evacuates from hiding place to vehicles and at that moment ICRC (1 expat, 2 vehicles) arrived.

A few minutes after, rebel militaries show up, asking about the source of information of the location of wounded. Reuters say they have found the wounded. Militaries claim the area is not secured and everybody should leave, aid workers and journalists insist other wounded still to be picked up.

A second wounded (...) found in abandoned shelter and evacuated.

SCF (1 expat, 1 vehicle) shows up from nearby health centre where other survivors are hidden (3 wounded: (...)) and 3 not wounded: (...)).

All vehicles with the rescued survivors leave the place. The survivors are transferred to Bukavu General Hospital, where they are admitted between 18:30 and 20:30.

- 01.12.96: the survivors stay in the Bukavu General hospital.

### 4. the survivors:

- 1- [...], female, around 30, bullet wound in left forearm, shrapnel wound in left knee. From: Gitama Commune, Gikongoro Prefecture.
- 2- [...]: male, around 30, bullet wound in left leg. From: Gishoma Commune, Cyangugu Prefecture.
- 3- [...]: female, 35, bullet wound in left thigh. From: Kamembe Commune, Cyangugu Prefecture.
- 4- [...]: male, bullet wound in right leg. From: Kavama Commune, Gikongoro Prefecture.
- 5- [...]: female, 6, bullet wound in right hip. From: Gishoma Commune, Cyangugu Prefecture.
- 6- [...]: male, 4. Son of A M. From: Kamembe Commune, Cyangugu Prefecture.
- 7- [...]: female, 2. Daughter of 3.(...). From: Kamembe Commune, Cyangugu Prefecture.
- 8- [...]: From: Gafunzo Commune, Cyangugu Prefecture.

### 5. summary:

Most of the Rwandan refugees from Chimanga camp (75 km south-west of Bukavu, eastern Zaire) fled following the fall of Bukavu to the Banyamulenge rebels. The nearly 3,000 that remained in the camp were called on 17 November by rebel soldiers for a meeting to organise their repatriation. Once they all were together, they were shot and hand-grenades were thrown at them. Local Zairian villagers were forced to bury 320 bodies. Some survivors remained hidden around the village. Journalists had access to Chimanga and found some of the survivors. On 30 November, directed by Reuters journalists, MSF, ZRC and ICRC rescued 8 survivors, 4 of them with automatic weapon and shrapnel wounds. They have been transferred to Bukavu General Hospital.

Dr. Jose A. Bastos,  
MSF Head of Mission in Bukavu  
Bukavu, 1 December 1996



**Letter** from Theo Wijngaard, MSF Holland HAD to Achmed Motala, Legal Advisor Crisis Team, Amnesty International, 2 December 1996 (in English). **D69**

### Extract:

Dear Achmed,

Please find attached the situation report of the MSF Bukavu team regarding the Chimanga massacre. As you can see the sitrep contains names of survivors, but I don't know if these people were informed about their names being used/forwarded to you. I hope this information is of any help to you. For reasons of (still) having difficulty in getting access to the area, we (MSF) do not want to be mentioned as the source of this information.

From the internal meeting with the Desk on the crisis in

eastern Zaire on further cooperation with Amnesty regarding a more systematic exchange of information, it became clear that such a cooperation is very much supported. I will therefore regularly send you information which might be useful to Amnesty.

However, nothing can 'beat' actual field research on human rights violations. Our teams in the field often lack the time and the experience to do so. Moreover, they are constrained in doing human rights field research due to operational considerations (access). Since we expect that human rights violations in eastern Zaire (such as the Chimanga massacre) and in the rest of the region will not be of an incidental character, we strongly hope that you will continue/follow up your field missions, which are highly valued by our staff in the field.

Meanwhile, we will maintain contact at HQ level, for which I, or my colleague Ed Schenkenberg, will be the contact person.

Many regards,  
Theo Wijngaard



'Eastern Zaire Crisis - Information on Human Right Violations,' **Message** from Wilna Van Artzen (ET) and Theo Wijngaard (HAD) to MSF Nairobi, Kigali, and Ruhengeri teams, 2 December 1996 (in English). [D70](#)

#### Extract:

Dear All,

On request by the desk for the crisis in eastern Zaire, the Humanitarian Affairs Department (HAD) contacted Amnesty International regarding testimonies and other information on human rights violations in eastern Zaire. This request followed a detailed report from the Bukavu MSF team who evacuated and interviewed survivors of a massacre that recently took place near Bukavu. The team requested assistance from the BUS section to forward the information to human rights organisations. Apart from doing so by the HAD, it was also stressed by MSF to Amnesty International that it should continue/follow up its field mission that it recently conducted in the region (Zaire, Rwanda, Tanzania).

Since public advocacy on the atrocities near Bukavu are likely to further complicate access to the region, MSF decided in this case that the information gathered should be passed on to human rights organisations, such as Amnesty International. On a case by case basis, it will be assessed if information on human rights violations is used for external communications.

Since the information gathered in general is of a sensitive nature to both witnesses, victims themselves, and MSF, several guidelines will follow to avoid unnecessary security risks:

- In principal any information on human rights violations is confidential and NOT for external distribution, before consulting MSF-H (BUS section)
- To avoid unnecessary and confusing communication problems, the Humanitarian Affairs Department will be

the only one communicating with Amnesty International on this matter in close consultation with the MSF-H Emergency Desk for eastern Zaire

- Preferably, information on human rights violations is gathered by the Information Officers in the field or, if this is not possible, by senior/experienced MSF staff
- Any additional action undertaken or suggestions are welcome and should be addressed to the MSF-H Emergency Team or the HAD
- The BUS section will inform all other section on further steps taken.

Thanks for your cooperation. Many regards,

Wilna Van Artzen - Emergency Team

Theo Wijngaard - Humanitarian Affairs Department



*I did a preliminary summary on Chimanga for Amsterdam. They responded, "This isn't very solid. We need a report." So I wrote my report, drawing a bit from Amnesty's reports. It was more substantial. I waited for reactions but they never came. I wanted to say, "We're going to make a public statement," but the BBC had already put the information out.*

Dr. José-Antonio Bastos, MSF ET (Emergency inter-sections Team) Coordinator in South Kivu (in French).

**On 4 December, the Zairian doctor from the Walikale hospital notified the MSF team that several thousand refugees were streaming along the Walikale-Kisangani road.**



'Information Bulletin 244,' MSF France **Internal document**, 5 December 1996 (in French). [D71](#)

#### Extract:

The Walikale head physician notified us that a considerable number of people (no figures) had passed through the town walking towards Lubutu. In particular, he observed malaria cases and a few diarrhoea cases. The Lubutu doctor said that increasing numbers of displaced persons were arriving and that he lacked medicines.

**On 5 December, the Canadian Government's Defence Minister questioned the relevance of an armed international intervention, given that 600,000 refugees had returned to Rwanda.**

**On 6 December, the Canadian Commander of the force**

**that was still being organised announced that 165,000 refugees had been spotted roaming in eastern Zaire. MSF's Head of Mission in Kisangani said that they were in very poor health.**

**Like the ICRC's representative, Doris Schopper, President of MSF's International Board, told the press that humanitarian organisations were calling for solutions adapted to the new situation, favouring dialogue, without eliminating the possibility of armed intervention. UNHCR revealed its frustration in the face of the international community's inaction.**



"Future Uncertain for International Force and Refugees,' **AFP** (France), 6 December 1996 (in French).

**Extract:**

In a declaration on the situation in the Great Lakes, participants in the 19th France-Africa Summit called on "the UN and the Organisation of African Unity to do everything possible to ensure that the international force is deployed," emphasising that they were "deeply troubled by the humanitarian implications of the situation."

But on Thursday, Canada reversed course and said that the force, created formally a week ago but currently reduced to fewer than 700 men, no longer had a purpose. Defence Minister Doug Young said that military intervention no longer seemed necessary "at this stage" because simply announcing that the force would be created "had served a catalyzing role," prompting 600,000 Rwandan refugees to return home.

This point of view is obviously shared by Rwanda. Rwandan Prime Minister Pierre-Célestin Rwigema criticised the Ougadougou Declaration.

The commander of the multinational force, Canadian General Maurice Baril, was in Nairobi on Friday. Echoing the Canadian government's announcements, he announced his latest estimates of the refugee population in eastern Zaire. According to Baril, there are fewer than 165,000 Rwandan Hutu wandering in the region.

However, General Baril clarified that the multinational force – composed of 350 Canadians, 350 Americans and fewer than 50 British soldiers who are currently in Kampala – was continuing to make preparations, particularly in case food drops should be necessary.

According to the Canadian officer, the operation could begin by Sunday if necessary, while the headquarters will be "totally operational" within a week. He identified a "large group" of around 150,000 people headed north-west of Saké, north of Lake Kivu. He said that two other small groups had been observed north of Masisi, between Bukavu and Kindu (south of Lake Kivu).

But based on statements taken in Kisangani (400 kilometres west of Goma), humanitarian sources reported that "100,000 to 400,000" Rwandan Hutu were converging on the capital of Upper Zaire, the country's third-largest city. Some are in very poor health. Nicolas Louis, an MSF offi-

cial in Kisangani, said that both malaria and diarrhoea are having a significant impact on this population, which has been deprived of food and drinking water.

Under these conditions, the humanitarian organisations are divided on the need to deploy the long-awaited force. Some, like MSF, had called for it and now say they are ready to adapt to the changed circumstances. On Friday, however, the UN High Commission for Refugees emphasised that help was needed to gain access to the refugees. Commissioner Sadako Ogata expressed her "frustration" over the international community's inaction.



'Humanitarian Organisations Divided Over the Urgency of an International Intervention', **AFP** (France), 6 December 1996 (in French).

**Extract:**

The ICRC acknowledged that the problem of gaining access to a large number of people continues, but noted that while military-humanitarian intervention seemed relevant just a few weeks ago, other means are more appropriate today. "We are not angry about the changed situation", said spokesperson Rolin Wavre.

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) also said that international organisations must adapt.

The situation has changed as a result of the unexpected return of more than a half-million people to Rwanda and, at least according to current information, the absence of the predicted humanitarian catastrophe.

"We are very frustrated by how things happened over the last few weeks, but we are not exasperated by the current situation," the MSF official said. "That's different. You've got to be able to change your position."

Last month, MSF was the first to call for military intervention to save 1.2 million civilians deprived of all food and medical aid after fighting forced humanitarian organisations to abandon the refugee camps they had managed in eastern Zaire.

**The international press reported the discovery of several mass graves dating from the mid-November attacks on the camps and statements of survivors, who told how the rebels hunted them down in the forest to kill them.**



'Several Mass Graves Containing Bodies of Hutu Refugees Discovered in Eastern Zaire,' *Le Monde* (France), 8 and 9 December 1996 (in French).  
**D72**

**Extract:**

In late November, Amnesty International had denounced the "executions" committed by rebels and elements of the Zairian army. Specifically, the humanitarian organisation noted that in the Chimanga camp south of Bukavu, witnesses stated that a Tutsi-dominated armed group had killed some 500 refugees who were buried in mass graves.



Florence Aubenas, 'Zaire: Mass Graves and Dying Refugees in the Virunga Forest,' *Libération* (France), 7 and 8 December 1996 (in French).

**Extract:**

"We managed to cross the forest in two weeks," said a man named Prospéritas, surrounded by his three wives and five children. "We thought we were lucky because we were among the first ones going to Goma and only one baby in the family died. But then we came under fire from the soldiers again."

The refugees are following a road that leads to the outskirts of another camp, Mugunga, 9 kilometres south of Goma. Three weeks ago, just as residents of Katala and Kahindo emerged from the forest, Zairian rebels evacuated the site. Their patrols were posted at the entry to the road. The trap snapped shut on both sides of the forest, guarded by scores of dead bodies.

Repatriation: Immediately afterwards, only a few kilometres away, UNCHR had stationed vans to assist with repatriation. Only 100 refugees arrive every day. At that pace, the officials of humanitarian organisations estimate that it will take more than three years to evacuate all the refugees hidden in the Virunga forest. As of yesterday, the Zairian rebels, who deny committing any civilian massacres, agreed to allow observers into the zone they control to assess whether human rights violations have been committed.

Prospéritas left with his wife and children, heading the opposite direction into the forest "so that the planes can't see us anymore." They flee every time they hear footsteps and they walk at night. "In the camps, with my own eyes I saw soldiers trained by our former army," Prospéritas said. "I said to myself, 'they're going to attack Rwanda. We're better off staying here. We'll go back home when the time is right, after the fighting.' But in the end, the war came to Zaire."

On 9 December, the Director of MSF UK prepared a response to Alex De Waal's criticism of MSF and OXFAM that was broadcast on 27 November on the BBC (see above). She advised all MSF's Communications Directors to handle all information, especially statistics, with caution. MSF's different sections continued to speak in the press on the 'numbers battle'.



'Negative Publicity,' Message from Anne-Marie Huby, MSF UK Executive Director to all Directors of Communications, copy to Press Officers in delegate offices, 9 December 1996 (in English).  
**D73**

**Extract:**

Dear all,

For your info, I am sending you an extract of a BBC TV script (by Alex de Waal yet again, about aid agencies and the Kivu crisis) to which we are going to reply.

Alex is a bit of a one-man band, but his criticism has definitely had an (probably long-lasting) impact in media land, particularly in the UK. **IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT WE DO NOT DROP OUR GUARD.** I have read on CCmail [MSF Intranet] that Nicolas Louis has been quoted as saying that hundreds of thousands of people are about to flood into Kisangani (or was it another town?). Once again, we are venturing figures that may turn out to be totally exaggerated. You may not be in the firing line in your country, but we are here, and the UK media is very influential in Europe and the US. We just cannot take a parochial view of this problem.

**I am urging you to brief your teams in the field to ensure that they do not describe rumour and estimates as fact.** I know that all the mass graves of eastern Zaire are not open yet, and that access is still not possible, but the attitude of the media **HAS CHANGED**, and we cannot go on as if nothing had happened. There are going to be lots of 1996 retrospectives in the media over the next few weeks, and the issue of the responsibility and accountability of aid agencies will be raised again.

Please let us know what you can do.

Best wishes to all,

Anne-Marie



'Deadly Controversy,' Opinion-editorial by Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France programme manager, *La Croix* (France), 1 and 2 December 1996 (in French).

**Extract:**

Did we exaggerate the risk facing more than 1 million people displaced by the war in the Zairian province of Kivu? Many commentators seem to think so. Additional information is in order here. It's useful to take a quick retrospective look at mortality following similar episodes.

In October 1993, when 350,000 Burundian refugees fled to Rwanda, 9,000 people died in two months, for a mortality rate of 2.5 percent. However, this is not an example of an extreme situation, as the Burundian refugees reached Rwanda in several days, where the logistics of a major aid operation were relatively simple.

In 1994 in Goma, Zaire, around 50,000 refugees out of a total of 900,000 died in two months, for a rate of 5.5 percent. Similar mortality data exists in Thailand (1979), the Ogaden (1980) and Ethiopia (1984).

On 9 November, Médecins Sans Frontières announced that in the Great Lakes region, cutting off food and drinking water supplies could – and the hypothetical was used in the press release – quickly result in the deaths of more than 14,000 refugees in the Kivu, for a rate of 1.2 percent.

#### Who exaggerated?

For just once in this region, hundreds of thousands of people reached Rwanda on 17 November in good health. The impact of the images of this massive repatriation led some to question, sometimes harshly, aid organisations' mortality predictions.

This requires a response. By definition, people who can walk for tens of kilometres are those who are healthy enough to do so. But the commentators obviously do not share that simple, common sense observation. Usually, the dead and the seriously ill do not walk. Televised news reports showed interviews with heads of Rwandan families in which a father or mother often mentioned that one of the children had died in recent weeks. This did not seem to factor into the commentators' thinking either. However, the average Rwanda refugee family includes seven people. Who counted the bodies and graves in the still inaccessible hills of South Kivu?

The Great Lakes region has accustomed us to nameless dead. In three years, some one million human beings have died. Must we now become accustomed to unknown numbers of dead? So far, 500,000 people have returned to Rwanda, but there are 700,000 more and we don't know what has happened to them.

In November 1994, we decided that when the emergency phase ended, we would close our programmes in the Zairian refugee camps. The aid system enabled those who committed genocide to rebuild their forces at the international community's expense. For two years, they launched attacks from these camps. Those same attacks are the cause of the current conflict. The situation was unacceptable and constituted a serious threat for the region's population. Many observers criticised us after we decided to close the programmes in the Kivu camps.

Perhaps we were wrong for being prematurely right. Even if we have to treat our projections with care, medical practice requires that we make them. It is an absolute precondition for implementing a prevention policy.



Denis Etienne, 'Do Humanitarian Aid Organisations Have the Right to Exaggerate?' *L'Hebdo* (Switzerland), 12 December 1996 (in French). [D74](#)

#### Extract:

Since the emergence of the 'charity-as-business venture' phenomenon, humanitarian organisations are now almost automatically suspected of rushing to the frontlines of disasters to win the funding race. Denis Inkei, MSF Switzerland's Communications Director, responds to that accusation as if someone had punched him in the stomach.

It was inevitable. On 15 November, a fundraising appeal from the group's President included an internal estimate. It read, "20,000 people have already died from famine and epidemics." "We have never tried to inflate the numbers," Inkei said. "Our evaluations are based on concrete information drawn from comparable situations." He cited examples including the 50,000 Rwandan refugees (out of 900,000 who flooded into Goma) who died in 1994. This time, in mid-November, events followed a different sequence and moved at an unexpected speed.

MSF makes a good argument. "To accuse us of profiting from this situation would be to forget that in 1994, we withdrew completely from the region to alert the international community," says MSF president Philippe Biberson. "We did that to show that humanitarian aid was feeding the war economy."

[...] Still, the system for making projections has its risks and other organisations have already made mistakes, as in Bosnia. Without assuming blame, Inkei acknowledged that the effort to produce a precise estimate was an error, particularly because of the effect it produced. "The figures didn't make people respond to the right issues," he says. "In fact, the numbers distracted from the real problems." Turning the tables, he said, "Caught up in the media rush, the western press felt frustrated at not having the images they were promised. So the commentators turned on the people who, in a way, misled them."



Ramon Lobo, 'Zaire Crisis Highlights the Flaws in NGO Activities,' *El País* (Spain), 19 December 1996 (in French). [D75](#)

#### Extract:

The non-governmental organisation Médecins Sans Frontières Belgium came to Gisenyi, near Goma at the Rwanda-Zaire border, with a plan to repatriate 700,000 Hutu refugees. Worthy of the Pharaohs, the plan was estimated to cost \$12 million and the project was to last one month. "This exorbitant sum represents half our government's budget," said Célestin Kayitare, key advisor to the Rwandan Health Minister.

The refugee crisis in eastern Zaire and the parallel crisis in Rwanda – cause and effect of the prior one – have highlighted the serious flaws in humanitarian organisations' work. "The facts show that the refugees returned home in only four days instead of a month and that the operation took place with support from many people, not just MSF Belgium," Kayitare said. "So what are they going to do with all that money? Of course, they haven't given us any."

Milagros Font, MSF's Financial Manager in Rwanda, noted that, "When funds remain from a specific project and that money comes from a large donor (a government, an institution, or the European Union), we suggest alternative uses," Font said. "If they refuse, we return the donation." ...One year ago, the Rwandan government expelled 37 NGOs. MSF France was among them, accused of acting as a messenger for Hutu extremists in the different camps. ... "Thirty percent of the NGOs do good work and 70 percent are a disaster," Kagiyate said. ... "There is a problem with the medicines. Many are already expired when they arrive."

MSF's Font says this is due to the inexperience of some NGOs. "We apply very strict controls," she says. "We are subject to extensive bureaucratic procedures, particularly at the local level. That is why we use products that are good for more than a year..."

"Also, people give money for that little black child they saw on television at noon," an MSF doctor said. "But they're not interested in development programmes because those are less visible. And that's the media's fault. With the one-half percent of income taxes devoted to 'other issues of social concern,' there should be a list of reliable NGOs to which citizens could direct their money and then demand an accounting and results."

**On 11 December, desks from the various MSF sections noted the deadlock within the international ET. Each section in eastern Zaire reclaimed operational independence.**



'Last communication **update** Zaire Crisis' MSF, PR Amsterdam, 11 December 1996 (in English).  
**D76**

#### Extract:

[...]

2/ Yesterday's desk meeting in Brussels has brought the ET-cooperation of MSF sections in the Zaire Crisis into a deadlock. MSF Amsterdam does not want to be the BUS anymore, because it finds various sections do not respect the rules and ways of working in ET operations that all sections agreed upon months ago. Amsterdam feels it is pushed in a rather ceremonial role (providing general overviews) instead of a coordinating role, and does not want to play this role anymore. That is why

Amsterdam as from last midnight declared herself not to be the BUS anymore. The other sections represented in yesterday's meeting however, think it is important to keep a BUS in place. They do not want to take over the BUS duties and think that Amsterdam should remain the BUS in the Kivu Crisis. Further inter-desks negotiating is going on today and the upcoming days to find solutions that will terminate this deadlock. We will keep you all updated on that.

3/ The termination of the BUS for the Zaire Crisis also has consequences for inter PR-communication. MSF Amsterdam will no longer provide you with general updates on the whole region. For information we want to refer each of you to the PR colleagues of the section involved in each separate module.

- MSF Belgium (Rwanda:) Gisenyi, Butare, explo Kibungo
- MSF Spain (Tanzania:) Kigoma, Ujiji, Kasulu, explo Ngara, (Rwanda) Cyangugu
- MSF France (Zaire:) Kinshasa, Kisangani, (Uganda:) Kisoro/Kasese
- MSF Holland (Zaire:) Goma, Bukavu, (Rwanda:) Ruhengeri, Kibuye

**On 12 December, in honour of its 25th birthday, MSF France organised a symposium on the topic of 'humanitarian responsibility', which included a discussion on the position of NGOs in the Great Lakes crisis. The discussion was covered in the press.**

**On 13 December, following rumours about an intervention of Rwandan forces to repatriate them by force, 300,000 Rwandan refugees fled camps in Tanzania for Kenya.**



'Humanitarian Aid Movement in Disarray,' *Le Monde* (France), 21 December 1996 (in French).  
**D77**

#### Extract:

What lessons can be drawn from this series of failures? Must we resign ourselves to impotent medical power? Is withdrawing the only way to show opposition? Or should we stay to care for the most deprived, in spite of everything? How far should warlords be allowed to go in diverting aid to their own coffers? And above all, what position should we take faced with a political power also in disarray, but one still capable of manipulation? How can we elude its traps and avoid becoming the tool of its hidden strategies? How can we end the confusion of roles between humanitarian aid providers and politicians, when the former are used – to excess – to disguise the inaction of the latter?

These are some of the questions raised during a recent symposium organised by Médecins Sans Frontières in Paris

on the topic of humanitarian responsibility in honour of the group's 25th birthday.

Over the years, as the humanitarian movement has become more professional and media-savvy, its role has changed. The initial goal of easing individual suffering has given way to a new ambition: controlling collective destinies. The humanitarian aid movement has been assigned the responsibility of protecting populations in danger, a collective security task previously assumed by national governments.

[...] Jean-Christophe Rufin and Alain Destexhe also note that in the recent Kivu crisis, humanitarian aid "was manipulated" in the service of "a French policy aimed at aiding former Rwandan genociders and supporting the Mobutu regime." And, they added, "the NGOs made ridiculous claims. By predicting a humanitarian catastrophe that would result in a million deaths before Christmas – one that proved to be a figment of the imagination – they dangerously overstated the case."

That is still no reason "to swallow Rwanda's pretty story," responded Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF's Communications director. The government tried to convince people that it was delighted by the massive repatriation of Hutu refugees. He is still bitter that humanitarian organisations had to accept 'severe constraints' on their work in Rwanda and Burundi and, in particular, that they were unable to aid people wandering in the Kivu, lost in the oblivion of a deadly 'non-event.'



'Tanzania: Refugees Flee for Their Lives,' *Libération* (France), 13 December 1996 (in French).

#### Extract:

As on every other morning, food rations were being weighed, hauled and distributed at the Lumasi camp in northwestern Tanzania, where nearly 50,000 Rwandan refugees had assembled after the 1994 war, divided among nine sites close to the border. Suddenly, a Rwandan employee near the scales stopped serving food. Then another. All at once, everyone froze. Someone screamed. In a split second, the mood turned ugly. On the other side of the fence, the crowd waiting for food jostled and threatened. The Tanzanian workers recruited by the World Food Programme, (WFP) retreated toward the warehouses. One after another, the bags of food disappeared. A few minutes later, some of the Lumasi refugees gathered their belongings and left the camp for good, without a word or a glance, to flee towards the Tanzanian interior.

[...] By the end of the day yesterday, more than 300,000 refugees had taken to the road through the brush.

[...] An Unanticipated Exodus: After the crises in Burundi this summer and in Zaire in November, the movement of Rwandan refugees took the entire world by surprise

- again. The refugees had been expected to stay, but they left in a flash. And they headed in the opposite direction than expected. Ten days ago, the Tanzanian government issued an ultimatum to those who had taken exile there more than two years ago, fleeing the impacts of the genocide against the Tutsi and the victory of the Rwandan Patriotic Front. Everyone was to return home by 31 December.

But with only several hundred people volunteering to leave each day, repatriation quickly got bogged down.

**The steering committee of the international force that was to intervene in eastern Zaire announced that the force was being dissolved.**



'The Zaire Multinational Intervention Force to Dissolve Without Taking Action,' *Le Monde* (France), 16 December 1996 (in French). [D78](#)

#### Extract:

At the end of the month, the multinational force that was to conduct a humanitarian intervention in eastern Zaire will cease to exist, diplomats said on Friday, 13 December, at the conclusion of a meeting of the force steering committee, composed of representatives of fourteen countries, including Great Britain, France and the US. The Canadian Commander, General Maurice Baril, will soon notify UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali of the decision to send the soldiers home. Most are Canadian. The force had remained at the preliminary stage, with only a few hundred men, most of whom were stationed in Uganda. On Saturday, a Canadian army spokesperson said that its troops had already received the order to pack their bags.

**During the first half of December, tens of thousands of refugees reappeared near Shabunda, in western Kivu. The ICRC asked MSF to help care for them. On 17 December, 70,000 refugees arrived at the Tingi Tingi site near Lubutu. An MSF team provided aid.**

**At Shabunda, the number of displaced persons increased. On Thursday evening, there were 13,000 and by Friday mid-day, their number had reached 23,000. The ICRC took charge of food and asked MSF for help because the numbers threatened to rise above 23,000.**



'Information Bulletin 249,' **Internal document**, MSF France, 17 December 1996 (in French). **D79**

**Extract:**

The team conducting an evaluation mission in Lubutu found between 40,000 and 50,000 refugees in Tingi Tingi, a village 9 kilometres from Lubutu in a swampy area. MSF gave priority to setting up first-aid medical facilities and a sanitation programme. The teams on site believed that the Zairian authorities did not want the refugees to stay in the area and were preparing to push them towards Walikale. In three days, we will reinforce our teams in Walikale and Lubutu.

Thirty-eight thousand refugees (10 percent of whom are Burundian) arrived in Shabunda. The ICRC has asked MSF to respond.



Frédéric Fritscher, '100,000 People Abandoned Deep in the Zairian Forest,' **Le Monde** (France), 17 December 1996 (in French). **D80**

**Extract:**

Contrary to the authoritative statements issued by some humanitarian organisations, not all the Rwandan refugees who had been living in eastern Zaire for two years returned home in November. Dislodged from the Bukavu and Goma camps by the Banyamulenge, 100,000 of them -- Zairian rebels of Tutsi origin -- arrived in Tingi Tingi, a hamlet located 7 kilometres east of Lubutu, a large town half-way between Kisangani and Walikale. They had walked for more than a month, fleeing the advance of 'rebels' supported by the Burundian or Rwandan armies.

[...] UNICEF and MSF teams have been working in Tingi Tingi for several days. The fleet of small aeroplanes has not yet been able to meet the camp's needs but the humanitarian organisations' presence is reassuring. They may also ultimately be able to encourage UNHCR's international bureaucrats to take an interest in the fate of refugees under their protection in the Goma and Bukavu camps. As of now, no UNHCR staff person has visited Tingi Tingi or Shabunda, near Kindu, where 100,000 more refugees have just been located and aided by the ICRC.

**MSF France set up a rear base in the town of Kisangani, where a team was already providing support to the general hospital and managing a medical transit centre for the Zairian population.**



**Minutes** of the 24 January 1997 Meeting of the MSF France Board of Directors (in French). **D81**

**Extract:**

The MSF team went to Kisangani and observed the needs of the displaced and resident Zairian population, victims of looting, rape, and acts of destruction by Zairian armed forces (FAZ) in disarray. The team decided to provide support to the Kisangani general hospital by resuming patient visits and setting up a medical transit centre (to receive the displaced persons, perform medical screening, vaccinate children against measles, identify and treat epidemic illnesses, etc.), which will enable people to be registered and later, possibly benefit from aid or accommodation.

These activities were necessary with respect to the authorities. Kisangani is a large city (around 400,000 people), governed by several authorities that do not necessarily have the same interests. Those include parish priests (La Procure), the army, the governor and businessmen. The city was completely destabilised by the arrival of the FAZ in full flight". Given that situation, the various authorities had a common desire to arrest and limit the actions of 'rogue' FAZ forces.

**In Tingi Tingi, the humanitarian organisations determined that the refugees were still under the control of their armed leaders, who had captured the aid, provided by the rebels between two mortar attacks. In a press release, MSF France stated that it was aware of this and clarified that it would work to avoid reestablishing permanent refugee camps. The organisation noted that several hundreds of thousands of people were still missing in eastern Zaire.**



'Information Bulletin on Kivu and Upper Zaire,' MSF France **Press Release**, 18 December 1996 (in French). **D82**

**Extract:**

In Tingi Tingi (7 kilometres south of Lubutu), an estimated 70,000 refugees are gathered along the landing strip. The team's preliminary medical evaluation revealed many cases of malaria, diarrhoea with suspicion of dysentery, severe anemia, infected skin disorders, foot wounds and malnutrition among children.

For now, cases of malnutrition have been detected but we expect a major food crisis. Some refugees have even been reduced to eating leaves and roots. The population density at the Tingi Tingi site is very high. The camp's space planning is anarchic although the administrative structure is

well organised (by prefecture of origin and by commune). The site is in a swampy area. Several small surface streams are being contaminated by human waste. Médecins Sans Frontières has begun an urgent water purification and sanitation programme to prevent likely contamination of refugees.

On 17 December, a second evaluation by an MSF medical team put the number of refugees at 70,000. With UNICEF, MSF set up six clinics at the Tingi Tingi site. A nutritional centre was established to treat malnourished children.

There are currently hundreds of thousands of people in eastern Zaire whose fate is unknown.

[...] Médecins Sans Frontières is aware that armed ex-FAR and Interahamwe groups, leaders of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, are almost certainly present among the populations we are aiding. To avoid creating permanent refugee camps in Zaire, we are responding under a framework of limited assistance.

**MSF France's Communications Officer went to Tingi Tingi to collect statements from refugees about their journey since they left the camps.**



**Fax** from Anne Guibert, MSF France communications officer, 30 December 1996 (in French).  
**D83**

**Extract:**

Here is everything I was able to gather during a 1<sup>1/2</sup> day visit to Lubutu. There are quite a few things to verify and round out but it's difficult to find precise numbers and reliable information. Maybe when Brigitte and Pierre get back?

In the beginning, I found that the refugees spoke more freely than in Goma. For example, two girls asked me to help them return to Rwanda and one guy criticised the fact that we were using people recruited by the camp leaders. That would have been unimaginable in Goma and Bukavu. But even if things were slightly different and if people could speak freely about Rwanda, it was still hard to get them to talk and obtaining precise information is a complicated task.

Tell me if this can be of any use. I'll have two more displaced persons' statements when I find my notes.



*I went there around 20 December to write a report on the massacres. The idea was to produce a retrospective mortality study to find out how many peo-*

*ple had died in the forest. We'd be thinking about that since mid-December. It was still a bit vague. It was a priority for some people at MSF, but not for others or for the field team. ... It was clear that we hadn't really spoken out about the massacres. We had wanted to, but had not done so.*

Anne Guibert, MSF France Press Officer (in French), interviewed by Anne Fouchard-Brown (summer 1997).

**Last december, statements from MSF Holland Fundraising Director were misquoted in a Dutch magazine. The quote gave the impression that MSF had exaggerated its predictions of the refugees' condition to increase fundraising. It was a big story in Holland. For several months, the credibility crisis vis-à-vis the Dutch media chilled any notion MSF Holland might have had about speaking out publicly.**



*That whole numbers thing had a very powerful impact in Holland. There was an internal document written about the statistics. What was missing during that whole period was a sense of perspective and distance. The things that were said were taken out of context. In the end, the context was restored somewhat but at the time, it was a major crisis. I had the impression that afterwards, there was a certain fear of speaking out. And, there was also team security to consider.*

Dr. Jacques de Milliano, MSF Holland General Director and MSF International vice-président (in English).



*In an interview in a fund raising magazine the Head of Fundraising at the time at least was quoted as saying, "Well of course there has been big playing with figures in that whole crisis on what was going on." And that was linked to statements about using figures in order to get more fund raising. We have never seen the transcript of the interview. This was released by that particular magazine as a press release, so in fact what became the headline in the Netherlands was: "MSF exaggerated in order to get funds".*

*And the effect has been that for at least a week the media were really totally fools. Every little, nasty, stupid, newspaper copied that stuff and it was all negative, negative, negative. For days, we didn't manage really to reverse the story. Particularly because it was referring to quotes, it was like as if we had said, "Yes of course we exaggerated, it was for fundraising reasons." It was quoted that we said that. So it was extremely hard to get back to the reality. Actually, still, no one knows exactly what he said in the interview. There were five fund raisers of big NGOs in the Netherlands*

in that interview. Someone said something like, "Well, you know, of course sometimes we have to exaggerate a little bit to get the attention." Our fundraiser said that he felt that it was not appropriate, that you couldn't do that for fund raising reasons, that you have to be reliable. That was his position. And then he says indeed, "You know there was a lot of playing with figures about this whole crisis at the time." And if I believe him, then what he meant to express was like: "Well, you know, there have been so many figures going on and going around about how many refugees. The Americans were denying etc..." "So it's possible that he was just referring to that and that it was poorly interpreted by the journalist. And then, they wrongly brought into connection with these other statements made by someone, like, "Yes of course we sometimes must exaggerate." So, factually, even by reading the text, it was not correct as it was presented in the media. But it was the time for media attacks on MSF, they really were so keen on getting us down that we couldn't escape it anymore.

It has undoubtedly led to confusion here. We really had to think also in retrospect about how correct we were, what did we do wrong and how should we do better. There was a lot of self-investigating going on. That was one process that happened somewhere in that same period, which undoubtedly made us less keen on being very active on media stuff.

Ruud Huurman, MSF Holland Press Officer  
(in English).

 It was pretty difficult. I don't believe that this was a deliberate policy of MSF Holland. I think that they really slipped up because they said to themselves, "We sounded like we were contradicting ourselves so we'd be better off not to say anything." They should have said, "He's talking nonsense. He's a good guy but he's not the Communications Director, he's the Fundraising Director. We're really sorry." They weren't brave enough to say, "He made a mistake." Luckily, there was no impact here in the UK It stayed in Holland."

Anne-Marie Huby, MSF UK Executive Director  
(in French).

**During the same period, the coordinator of the MSF Holland team in Bukavu reported to the Head of Mission and the Executive Director about the massacres around Bukavu and suggested that MSF withdraw.**

 I suggested three or four times that we leave and close the mission. I remember talking to Lex (Winkler, MSF Holland Executive Director) in Kigali

around Christmas. I presented my arguments. My information on the massacres around Chimanga, statements from the people who'd escaped, the fact that we'd been used as bait... I have a very clear recollection of their questions and their thoughts. "Did you hear the killers? Are you sure this was a massacre? You had stories from villagers saying they arrived two days later and killed people but you don't have any eyewitness statements." After the problem with the figures, they were very, very cautious. Things were completely paralyzed!

Dr. José-Antonio Bastos, MSF ET (Emergency inter-sections Team) Coordinator in South Kivu (in French).

**In his 11 January 1997 sitrep, the MSF Holland Head of Mission visiting Bukavu announced the team's decision to change their approach toward refugees so that the rebels could no longer use them as bait. The sitrep was transmitted to all operational MSF sections in Zaire and Rwanda.**



**Sitrep** Kivu , from MSF Kigali, Ton Berg, (temporarily in Bukavu) to MSF Amsterdam, MSF Goma, MSF Bukavu, MSF Kigali and Kivu support team, forwarded to other sections, 11 January 1997 ( in English). [D84](#)

#### Extract:

In the Bukavu area, information on ethnic cleansing did not only become stronger and stronger, it might even have a relation with the work of the humanitarian organisations. UNHCR-ICRC-MSF are working closely together to assist larger groups of refugees who are on the move. When larger groups are found the authorities are aware of this as they monitor our movements very closely. Several times when we wanted to assist a group the area was sealed off for a military operation in order to make the area safe enough for us to go in. When returning there after permission of the authorities, no refugees were found any more. The dilemma, expressed in the last sitrep about our fear that our presence is not improving the chances of the refugees to survive is now even stronger. Are we becoming a risk for the refugees ?

It is decided to change our intervention approach towards these groups of refugees. We will encourage people to come to the main roads and spread the news that they will get assistance on the road. This way we are sure that our assistance is helping the refugees and the last two days, when concentrating on the road activities this fear is almost over. Both in North and South Kivu we know that the humanitarian situation is bad and we hear more and more from refugees that men and boys do disappear from refugees groups, taken by the Alliance, the Interahamwe, etc...

## “20 PEOPLE ON AVERAGE DIE EVERY DAY IN THE TINGI TINGI CAMP”

**On 14 January, during a joint press conference in Paris, MSF France and UNICEF emphasised that the health situation in Tingi Tingi was deteriorating because of limited general food distributions and logistical difficulties preventing access to the 60,000 refugees in Shabunda. There was no discussion about the information that had begun to circulate on the massacres.**



‘Twenty People on Average Die Every Day in the Tingi Tingi Camp in Upper Zaire,’ **Press Release**, MSF France, MSF Belgium, 14 January 1996 (in French). [D85](#)

### Extract:

More than 100,000 Rwandan refugees face catastrophe in Tingi Tingi and Amissi, near Lubutu, 200 kilometres from Kisangani in Upper Zaire. The refugees arrived after walking for weeks following the Banyamulenge rebel attacks on the Kivu camps in October.

“The refugees began arriving 1,5 months ago,” said Dr Brigitte Vasset, of Médecins Sans Frontières, who just returned from Lubutu. “Given their fatigue and the lack of food, we have observed an extremely rapid deterioration in their health status. We are facing a real emergency today.”

All health indicators confirm that deterioration. Since the beginning of the month, mortality has increased at an alarming rate. Between 18 December and 11 January, 380 people died in the Tingi Tingi camp. Last week, more than 20 people were dying every day. More than half the deaths recorded were among children under 5, with most due to malnutrition. While adults are also suffering from malnutrition, the primary cause of adult mortality is malaria.

Feeding centres are overwhelmed. The UNICEF and MSF therapeutic feeding centre is treating 193 severely malnourished children. Another 1,800 particularly vulnerable individuals (pregnant women, the elderly, and children) are receiving supplementary food rations. Since the refugees’ arrival in Tingi Tingi, only two general food distributions have been conducted, the equivalent of less than two days’ rations per person. The quantity of food delivered to the camp cannot meet all the needs. While nearly 70 tonnes should be distributed per day, fewer than 30 tonnes get through daily to Tingi Tingi and Amissi. Logistical problems with delivery as well as lack of political will on the part of international actors are responsible for these shortages. The civilian population is paying the price today of the aid actors’ slow response.

The leaders and militiamen are not the ones penalized by

delays in distributions and the lack of commitment on the part of the international community but civilian populations, who have been taken hostage again. Their situation continues to worsen and we see no easy solutions. “The distribution system which has been organised is extremely precarious,” Dr. Vasset said.

As in the Kivu region, the camps near Lubutu are organised and controlled by former Rwandan authorities and militias. New procedures must be put in place quickly so that aid passes directly to heads of families and the militias are prevented from controlling the camp. UNHCR protection is also needed urgently to guarantee the safety of refugees who wish to return to Rwanda.

MSF, UNICEF and WFP are the only agencies operating in Tingi Tingi today. The MSF and UNICEF teams are handling medical and sanitary needs in the camp. UNICEF is also working in the Amissi camp.



‘Mortality Rises Sharply in Rwandan Refugee Camps in Upper Zaire – Serious Food Shortages and Unfair Distribution Cause 20 Deaths Daily in Tingi Tingi Refugee Camp,’ **Press Release**, MSF UK, 14 January 1997 (in English). [D86](#)

### Extract:

The health situation has deteriorated sharply for the 100,000 Rwandan refugees in the Tingi Tingi and Amissi camps, 200km from Kisangani, near Lubutu, in Upper Zaire.

All health indicators show the deterioration has increased over the last couple of weeks. From 18th December to 11th January 380 people died in the camp at Tingi Tingi; last week more than 20 people were dying every day. More than half the deaths are children under the age of 5 with most of their deaths due to malnutrition. Whilst adults are also suffering from malnutrition, the main cause of adult mortality is malaria. Aid agencies’ feeding centres are overwhelmed; in the Therapeutic Feeding Centre run by MSF and UNICEF there are already 193 severely malnourished children. Another 1,800 particularly vulnerable individuals (pregnant women, the elderly, children) are receiving supplementary food rations.

The refugees arrived at Tingi Tingi over a month and a half ago, most having walked for weeks following the Banyamulenge rebel attacks on the Kivu refugee camps in October. Since they arrived there have been only two general food distributions, equal to less than two days of food rations per person. The refugees need almost 72 tonnes of food a day yet less than 30 tonnes get through. These camps are still organised and under the control of the former Rwandan authorities and militias. A new system must quickly be put in place so that aid passes directly to the heads of families to prevent the militias from controlling the camps. It is also urgent for the UNHCR to assure the protection of refugees who want to return to Rwanda. “We are facing a real emergency here and the distribution that we have managed to put in place is extremely precarious. The rainy season is about to start and the problems

are only going to get worse,” explains Dr Brigitte Vasset, who has just returned from the region. “It is not the leaders or militias who are being penalized for the delay in assistance, but the civilian population who have once again been taken hostage. Their situation is getting worse and we see no easy solutions.”

Today, MSF, UNICEF, and WFP are the only agencies working in these camps. MSF also works in Goma, Bukavu and Kisangani.



‘In Zaire, Rwandan Refugees’ Suffering Continues – Some 300,000 People in Terrible Health,’ *Libération* (France), 15 January 1997 (in French).

#### Extract:

Two months after more than 500,000 refugees returned to Rwanda, those deep in the forest inside Zaire continue to suffer. Driven out of the Goma, Bukavu and Uvira camps by South Kivu rebels and exhausted by weeks of walking, they are now near Kisangani, in the north-west, and Kindu, in the west, virtually deprived of all humanitarian aid. Their health status, and particularly that of children, is catastrophic, according to witnesses from UNICEF and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), who returned from a month-long mission in the two camps set up near Lubutu, 170 kilometres from Kisangani.

In Tingi Tingi, 120,000 people are packed along the roads, in the forest and in the swamps. They are stealing crops from farmers in the region to survive and the situation between the refugees and the local population is extremely tense.

In this camp, “20 to 30 people are dying every day and that’s among those who are registered,” says UNICEF’s Patrice Duamelle. “Half of them are children under 5.” The causes of mortality are malaria, diarrhoea, respiratory infections, and malnutrition. On 25 December 1996, a UNICEF feeding centre registered 60 children suffering from extreme malnutrition. By 12 January, that number had risen to 193. MSF confirms that “mortality is increasing at an alarming pace. Between 18 October and 11 January, 380 people died in the Tingi Tingi camp. Last week, more than 20 people were dying every day.”

[...] The situation is even worse further south in Shabunda, where 60,000 people are gathered, accessible only by canoe. No one has been there since 26 December. An interagency mission is supposed to leave today for that location.

The key problem facing efforts to save the refugees - who are reported to total between 200,000 and 300,000 - is logistical. Success depends on the good will of the international community.

[...] “As in the Kivu, the camps near Lubutu are organised and run by former Rwandan authorities and militias,” MSF says. The group is calling for new systems to be established that work directly through heads of families.



‘Comments on the Press Release,’ **Email** from Denis Inkei, communications director, MSF Switzerland, to the MSF International Press Officer, 14 January 1997 (in French). **D87**

#### Extract:

In the follow-up to our telephone call, I am responding to the items in the ‘Tingi Tingi’ press release that we think are inappropriate.

- 1) The title, ‘Twenty People are Dying Every Day,’ is too similar to, ‘Are 13,600 Deaths Insignificant?’ Although the number appears to be confirmed this time, we should avoid using the tone that caused us a lot of damage in the international press.
- 2) The first paragraph mentions, “attacked by the Banyamulenge rebels...” This is the only faction named, which could suggest a political accusation and thus, a bias. And what about the ex-FAR, the former genocisseurs, and the FAZ who also participated in the fighting? All right, that makes sense.
- 3) The entire final section of the press release falls into the category of commentary. It may be a little soon to draw conclusions and point fingers at the international actors. In the phrase, “lack of political will on the part of international actors” and “paying the price of the aid actors’ slow response,” we are accusing UNHCR, the ICRC, etc. Even if they are not named, they will know who we mean. In this situation, it is unwise to make accusations against our partners.
- 4) Once again, we’re teaching UNHCR a lesson. I thought that as well. It’s rather easy to demand this and to urge that, and to criticise in a vacuum. That’s why we too barred the comments on UNHCR. “UNHCR must also urgently guarantee the protection of refugees who wish to return to Rwanda.” After a meeting with UNHCR at the end of the year, we were convinced that they were really concerned about the situation. Last week, they sent 18 people to the region. Are we sure that those people aren’t doing anything? Have we tried talking with UNHCR before telling them what they should be doing? It didn’t take long to see the results. This morning, an MSF Switzerland staff member was at a meeting at UNHCR. Someone made it very clear that the attitude gaining ground there is: “We’ve had it with MSF!” Quite understandable, of course.

It’s too bad that after the COM discussion in Amsterdam, we didn’t have more consultation before distributing press releases across countries.

Still, this press release is well done and the text dealing with the events and the health studies carried out in the camp deserve wide distribution. That is why we distributed it, removing the parts referred to above.

I hope that we will be able to talk about this next Thursday.



'Response to Denis Inkei's Comments on the Press Release,' **Email** from MSF France Communications Director to Communications Directors in other sections, 17 January, 1997 (in French). [D88](#)

### Extract:

There is a famine underway in Tingi Tingi. Children are dying of hunger. When the press release was distributed, WFP had distributed 300 grams per person over three weeks. The leaders had been given the food, not the heads of family. UNHCR wasn't doing much and Brigitte Vasset said that they were extremely cynical. The public relations effect of sending the 18 staff members is clear but for now, the reality is something else. Mme Pertuis, UNHCR's spokesperson in France, attended the press conference and was interviewed to clarify the UNHCR's position. It all occurred in a completely non-aggressive setting. Everyone, including the reporters, felt lousy given the picture of the health situation that UNICEF and MSF doctors presented. Reporters didn't ask any hard questions even though the audience included several journalists who had shown some hostility towards aid organisations in the prior months.

Specifically regarding UNHCR, there were also staff members – pretty high level – from UNHCR Geneva who were particularly shocked by the agency's lack of response. A week before the press conference, we talked to them on the phone. The repatriation of the Rwandan refugees was accompanied by particularly high mortality: 6,300 bodies in Goma (the region where the crisis was resolved the most favorably); at least 200,000 refugees left without real assistance (Tingi Tingi, Shabunda and Amissi) and dying of hunger, not including those still roaming in the area; 10,000 returnees to Rwanda from Bukavu a week ago. Thousands of Burundian refugees were repatriated to war zones, several hundred of whom have been killed since they arrived.

In the face of this pretty serious assessment, the reaction of the leadership of the UN agency responsible for protecting refugees is, at best, out of step given the tragic situation of some of the Rwandan and Burundian refugees. We thought it was a good idea to describe the refugees as hostages; we must note that many hostages were sacrificed in this operation. In that context, it is only logical that there would be friction between us and UNHCR.

Regarding the 'political balance' of the press release, we state clearly that the camp is controlled by those who carried out the genocide and that several refugees with whom the MSF team met want to return to Rwanda. Because UNICEF refused to address that question in writing, we decided not to issue a joint release.

Regarding the title, Denis Inkei is right. It's a little awkward given the context.



*We held a press conference with UNICEF at the foreign press correspondents' club. Our Director of Operations had just come back from the field and briefed the reporters publicly. Her comments were those of a doctor in the field. She said things like, "It's going very poorly there." At that time, we already had a fair amount of information on the abuses. We knew that the Rwandan army was carrying out massacres, that people were being pursued, that WFP didn't want to help them, that the UNHCR was 'selling' them to the Rwandans, etc.*

Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France programme manager then Communication Director (in French).



*We were focused on the people in Tingi Tingi. Our communications didn't discuss protection and attacks because at that moment, it seemed completely unrealistic to talk about it, but it did talk about the lack of political will on the part of the international community. So it was primarily a very factual communication. We joined up with UNICEF for a press conference, which given the context, created a huge stir. For two months, the French press had been following things closely, but since we had gotten hammered and felt that the journalists were saturated, we thought there wouldn't be many people. However, more than 40 showed up at this press conference. We'd hardly ever had so many reporters, especially given that our message wasn't especially unusual. UNICEF made sure that it was all factual and that no one pointed fingers about responsibilities, specifically those of UN agencies. It was out of the question to complain that UNHCR had still not arrived on site after two months of procrastination or that WFP didn't have enough money to provide food. They'd also vetoed any discussion of the 'mercenaries' who were still in the camps.*

Anne Guibert, MSF France Press Officer (in French), interviewed by Anne Fouchard-Brown (September 1997).

**Beginning in early January, expatriates in Rwanda were targeted with violence. On the night of 19 January, three Médecins du Monde volunteers were killed in their house in Ruhengeri. The killers had previously gone to the home of the MSF team, who did not let them enter. MSF issued a public call to Rwandan authorities to investigate the killings and ensure security for humanitarian organisations.**



'Rwanda: MSF Condemns Deadly Strategy,' **Press Release**, MSF Belgium, 22 January 1997 (in French). **D89**

**Extract:**

(Brussels) On Saturday night, three international organisations – Médecins du Monde, Save the Children Fund and Médecins Sans Frontières – were attacked by armed gangs. Three MDM volunteers were killed and a fourth was seriously wounded.

The likely purpose of these attacks was to discourage any international presence in the field. In the last two weeks, acts of intimidation targeted at international organisations and civilian populations, particularly in Kabaya and Gisenyi, underscore a growing climate of insecurity.

Médecins Sans Frontières vigorously condemns this deadly strategy targeting international organisations and aid beneficiaries.

Médecins Sans Frontières believes that certain Rwandan provinces lack a minimal level of security.

Médecins Sans Frontières calls on Rwandan authorities to investigate these murders and promptly ensure a minimum level of security for humanitarian teams and the civilian population.

Médecins Sans Frontières will decide its future involvement in health programmes on the basis of forthcoming security measures.

Although the teams have been reduced, MSF has, for now, decided to maintain its current programmes in Gisenyi, Cyangungu, Butare and Kigali. MSF is providing support to four hospitals, 35 health centres, 3 camps for Zairian and Burundian refugees and is caring for 350 unaccompanied children across the country.



**Minutes** of the 24 January 1997 Meeting of the MSF France Board of Directors (in French). **D81**

**Extract:**Rwanda

Three members of MDM Spain were killed in Ruhengeri. Last Saturday night, the MSF compound was attacked and items were stolen, but the attackers were not allowed to enter the house.

The MDM Spain compound was also attacked but it's not clear what happened, beyond that three people were shot to death and another was seriously wounded. Supplies (and money?) were stolen and then the army drove off the attackers.

The team is traumatised and considering what to do. Should teams be reduced or withdrawn, allowing local teams to take over the activities? We have not yet made any decisions.

The NGOs met in Kigali but did not take any overall position. The tendency (though not on MSF's part) was even to minimize the event. No one knows the killers' identity.

There are many other attacks, with threats and simulated executions. These attacks are of an anti-white and anti-NGO nature. The record is turning grim. Rwanda is 'Burundi-izing' and the idea of a 'prohibited zone' is emerging.

**On 21 January, around 15 reporters went to the Tingi Tingi camp. The MSF Press officer provided them the refugee statements that she had been able to collect. The press presence created tension as the refugees were waiting for a delayed food distribution. The MSF teams had to evacuate temporarily.**



'Information Bulletin 256,' MSF France **Internal document**, 23 January 1997 (in French). **D90**

**Extract:**Zaire:-Tingi-Tingi :

The arrival of some 15 reporters the day before yesterday provoked sharp tension in the camp. People were waiting for food that had still not arrived. Groups of men were massed around the WFP warehouse. The threatening atmosphere led the MSF team to withdraw from the camp for the rest of the day. WFP began distributing the 120 tonnes of food in the warehouse. Three MSF volunteers work in the camp (doctor, nurse and logistician). A fourth may join them in the next few days.



Stephen Smith, 'Escapees from the Zairian Jungle,' **Libération** (France), 22 January 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

"It's a scandal," says an official of a medical organisation. He says that "under US pressure, the World Food Programme (WFP) did not do its job" and that the UN High Commissioner for Refugees "is making a mockery of its statutory protection mandate." ... A member of a humanitarian organisation adds that "in southern Kivu where our teams are prohibited from travelling, Laurent-Désiré Kabila's rebels are also decimating the Rwandans heading home, especially the intellectuals."



'**Interview** with Brigitte Doppler', MSF Coordinator, broadcast on the television network TF1 (France), 24 January 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

People are arriving late and in very bad shape ... they've

walked a tremendous distance and have lots of wounds... 55 percent of the deaths are among children under five. ...We're getting ready for a possible epidemic explosion in the camp.



*I brought all the reporters into the nutrition centre and the cholera camp. I've known them all since Somalia so we've talked a lot.*

*People were coming out of the forest in terrible shape! There was no food. We weren't able to feed them. Tingi Tingi was in the deep forest. There was only one cargo plane and not enough food was arriving. And Kabila was advancing very quickly. With Pierre Nabeth (MSF physician-epidemiologist), we started to set up a system to gather mortality data. The refugees were in an absolutely intolerable situation – a refugee camp, escapees in the forest, deep forest... Tingi only lasted 1,5 months. It was horrible, especially if you know the population's history. You always think you've seen the worst but that's not true. ... I wasn't worried about speaking out. I was convinced that that's what had to be done. Otherwise, all you're doing is providing palliative care and in the end, everyone dies.*

Brigitte Doppler, MSF France Medical Coordinator, Tingi Tingi (in French).



*It's obvious that we hadn't really spoken out about the massacres. We had wanted to, but hadn't done so. In mid-January, I came back with ten statements. That's not very many. Among those ten, five were from 'bad guys,' so they weren't very representative, even if what they were saying was obviously true. But I couldn't stay in Tingi Tingi for more than 1 1/2 days because I had to be evacuated. So I wasn't very comfortable. We couldn't carry out the retrospective mortality survey. Since there were only three or four people on the team, Pierre (Nabeth, physician-epidemiologist) had to work as a doctor instead of carrying out the survey. ... We distributed the statements, as the need arose, to CNN, the Nouvel Observateur (French weekly) ... When the French government sent planes to the camp with reporters, we briefed some of them informally on the massacres before they left - AFP, CNN, France 3. But the message didn't get out in their articles because just before, the emphasis had been on food and logistical problems. So that was the priority we focused on.*

Anne Guibert, MSF France Press Officer (in French), interviewed by Anne Fouchard-Brown (summer 1997).

**On 23 January, MSF warned the press again about the deteriorating situation in Tingi Tingi.**



'Situation Still Critical in Tingi Tingi, Upper Zaire,' MSF France, **Press Release**, 23 January 1997 (in French). [D91](#)

**Extract:**

The situation remains critical for more than 100,000 Rwandan and hundreds of Burundian refugees at the Tingi Tingi site in Upper Zaire.

The day before yesterday, 22 refugees died, including 16 children under 5 years old. Since 18 December, 526 people have died, including 287 children under 5.

The lack of food remains the major problem for the refugees. In nearly two months, they have received barely more than 2,000 grams of food, the equivalent of four days ration. The number of seriously malnourished children at the feeding centre continues to grow, with more than 250 today compared to 50 on 25 December. Malnutrition is increasingly affecting people above 15, further indication that the situation is deteriorating.

A new food distribution is underway, but food stocks on site are too limited to allow a full distribution. While the general situation continues to worsen, aid agencies still do not have access to cargo planes required to deliver food supplies.

Over the last 10 days, 120 cholera cases have been treated in the camp but for now, simple diarrhoea remains the most deadly illness, 1,200 diarrhoea cases have been treated and 170 patients are hospitalized in isolation tents.



'Refugees Face Health Catastrophe in Tingi Tingi, Zaire - 526 Refugees Deaths Reported in the Past Month,' MSF USA, **Press Release**, 23 January 1997 (in English). [D92](#)

**Extract:**

January 23, 1997 - New York, NY: Since the 18th of December, 526 people, including 287 children, have died in a refugee camp in Tingi Tingi in north-eastern Zaire. The situation is deteriorating rapidly, according to the 3-member Doctors Without Borders team providing health care to the population. Twenty-two refugees died on January 21, including 16 children under the age of 5. Most of the children's deaths have been due to malnutrition, and most of the adult deaths have been from malaria. More than 100,000 Rwandan and 100 Burundian refugees arrived in Tingi Tingi in late November, having fled on foot from the evacuated refugee camps on the Rwandan border. A severe food shortage is responsible for many of the deaths.

Since their arrival nearly two months ago, the refugees have each received fewer than 1,000 grams of food - a 4-day supply. The number of severely malnourished chil-

dren in the Doctors Without Borders feeding centres has increased from 50 to 250 since December 25. Malnutrition has also begun to affect more and more refugees over age 15 - a further sign that the situation is worsening. Although some food distribution has begun, there are insufficient stocks to feed everyone in the camp. United Nations and humanitarian agencies have not been able to bring cargo planes to the isolated camps. During the past 10 days, Doctors Without Borders has also identified 120 cases of cholera, hospitalized 170 patients in cholera isolation tents, and treated 1,200 cases of diarrhoea.

**In late January, MSF teams in Rwanda, as well as the desks and managers at headquarters, reviewed the goals of MSF's presence in the Great Lakes region and specifically in Rwanda, where security incidents were multiplying.**



**Letter** from Bernard Pecoul, MSF France General Director, to all coordinators in the Great Lake Region, all programme managers of the Great Lake Region and all Directors of Operations, 28 January 1997 (in English). [D93](#)

**Extract:**

Dear friends,  
On behalf of all General Directors I address you this message.  
Due to the recent developments in the Great lakes region (Rwanda, Zaire, Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda), we would like to ask you to draw up a common analysis of the situation as soon as possible.

This analysis should conclude with:

- 1) a common definition of MSF's short term objectives in the region: why is MSF present today in Rwanda, Burundi, Tingi Tingi, etc. ?
- 2) a common definition on a 'modus operandi', a way to coordinate, the adaptations that have to be made: the how-aspect.

We would like a proposal from the coordinators and desks concerned as quickly as possible. This proposal should be based upon a hopefully strong agreement.

As soon as we receive the proposal a conference call will be organised with the operational and general directors. During this telephone meeting the proposal will be either approved, if the proposal seems coherent, or reviewed and submitted to further discussion.



**Message** from MSF Belgium to Kigali to MSF Belgium, Spain and Holland officials, 28 January 1997 (in French). [D94](#)

**Extract:**

Events:

- 3 security incidents in 3 weeks targeting MSF at 3 different locations.
- In the Cyangugu and Kabaya cases, only MSF was targeted.
- All 3 incidents were carried out by armed individuals.

Conclusions – hasty?

- Intimidation or a "polite invitation" to get out of town. Conclusions strengthened by the impression that the Kabaya and Cyangugu incidents were staged. In Kabaya, the apparent motive of the attack was the need for medicines/looting of the pharmacy. Upon investigation, no medicines were found to be missing...

[...] The prospects of staying:

- Without being paranoid, it seems to us that the coincidences involved in these incidents directed at MSF suggests that one or another party to the conflict is not interested in seeing us stay/work/assist/advocate. Question about the MDM's killers, so no protection requested from authorities.
- The populations being aided are no longer providing protection.
- In addition: medical staff files refused, difficulties never before experienced in obtaining visas and work permits and administrative controls imposed on NGOs. Undeniable lack of coordination and difference of opinions among different ministries.
- Furthermore: no support from the UN and little solidarity among the NGOs (death of the 3 MDMs seen as a simple robbery gone bad).

[...] Proposal:

- Close all programmes considered non-essential. Only (++) projects remain for a period of three months, i.e. Burate if the situation is stable, and unobtrusive emergency preparedness
- Reduce and replace teams (physically and psychologically impossible to keep too many inexperienced volunteers on standby).
- Announce to the government and partners that we will withdraw in 3 months (except ++ projects) and final withdrawal if no positive changes
- Keep supplies to the bare minimum, donations, transfers
- Possible departure of sections?
- Low profile
- Strengthen security measures (already underway).



**Message** from the MSF Belgium Rwanda programme manager to the MSF Belgium team in Kigali, copy to other sections' programme managers. 28 January 1997 (in French). **D95**

#### Extract:

MSF can perform its medical assistance role in Rwanda (even if currently constrained in certain at-risk areas) but the advocacy role is very limited – on the one hand, by the presence of human rights observers, who are professionals in this area (but whose access to at-risk communities is limited just as MSF's, - on the other, because MSF does not have confirmed first-hand information. However, it is still possible to speak out about the general situation in Rwanda, the humanitarian needs and the insecurity that hampers aid from reaching the populations. However, it is not possible to make critical or condemnatory statements (but MSF does not have its own objective information to present so such advocacy would not be justified).

[...] Recommended measures

- Low profile and maximum security measures
- Streamline teams, vehicles (don't be too visible, watch out for the pattern of the white 4X4 seen everywhere), available resources
- Suspend (not close) non-essential programmes
- Reorganize essential programmes, particularly in terms of human resources
- Support coordination (Alex arrives, Muriel on R&R, Javier departure as planned, Gloria from 8 March). Visit from Brussels mid-Feb if necessary.
- Link with prefecture authorities (prefecture head, Mediresa (local health authority) , military leader) and open discussion on MSF activities inside the prefecture and on authorities' perception of MSF! These relationships must be established right away in Gisenyi and Cyangugu if we keep teams there.
- Concerning official attitude: I don't really agree with presenting the Governor with a temporary official halt to our activities. I think it would be better to speak to the people involved (Biruta, Jerome) in person and take an appropriate position later.

#### Comments:

For Steffi: I can assure you that MSF Belgium's interest in the Great Lakes region is unrelated to the Belgian government! And even less so to money!!! MSF B rejects such an assertion and I expect that the other sections would agree!!! MSF B is prepared to continue its operations in the Great Lakes region because a major crisis is underway there. The populations are in a precarious situation, it is a post-genocide situation and the conflict continues. Our duty of assistance and advocacy is to be close to this kind of population, even if assistance and advocacy don't always work hand in glove ... In difficult circumstances, aggravated by the security situation, it is up to us to find a way to carry out our mission. I think the other MSF sections share this view.

**On 30 January and 1 February, the MSF Holland team finally obtained authorisation to conduct an evaluation mission in the Saké region where the local population was facing a catastrophic food situation. But because of security problems, the team was still unable to travel further into the Masisi.**



*That was very difficult to enter Masisi. I think in February we tried already once, we got a green light in Sake to enter the road in direction of Masisi.*

*We came half way and then there was a radio contact saying that there were troubles in Sake. So then we said, We cannot continue. We should try and see if that road became secure." It was all time very insecure. But I was mainly talking with the authorities about access.*

Marcel Van Soest, MSF Holland Field Coordinator, Goma, January to March 1997 (in English).

**On 31 January, MSF renewed its warning regarding the situation in Tingi Tingi.**



Over Two Months, Tingi Tingi Refugees Have Received Less Than One-Third of Their Basic Food Needs,' **Press Release**, MSF France and MSF Belgium, 31 January 1997 (in French). **D96**



'Another 175 Die in Zairian Refugee Camp - 2-Month Food Shortage Claims 719 Lives' **Press Release** MSF USA, 31 January 1997 (in English). **D97**

#### Extract:

Last week, 175 people, including 98 children, died of disease and starvation in the refugee camps near Tingi-Tingi and Amisi, Zaire. The 100,000 refugees in the camps, who fled the fighting in eastern Zaire, have received at most one-third of the food considered necessary for survival since their arrival two months ago. The food shortage has also increased tensions between the refugees and nearby local populations, who are also suffering from lack of food. On January 26 alone, there were 36 deaths, including 19 children under 5.

Food distribution has been hampered by both logistical and political constraints: Humanitarian aid cargo flights, which depend on small and sometimes unreliable planes, have been infrequent. Insufficient quantities of food have been transported. And the road to the refuge camp from Kisangani, where food stocks are housed, is in bad condi-

tion. To complicate matters, concern has been raised that the camps are again coming under the control of militias and soldiers from the former Rwandan army, which could hamper the deployment of assistance.

“The constraints are real, but so far the action taken by nations and aid agencies has not been convincing,” says Dr. Brigitte Vasset, Head of Operation for Doctors Without Borders. “Our volunteers in the field, who are struggling to provide assistance, do not believe that all the ways to deliver aid have been exhausted.” She adds that the number and frequency of planes and trucks capable of bringing food could be increased, and the road from Kisangani repaired. “Governments have indicated that they could mount an aid operation in this complex context if there were a real political will,” says Dr. Vasset. “It’s important to act.”

In recent weeks, Doctors Without Borders medical volunteers have admitted 259 severely malnourished refugees to a therapeutic feeding center, and more than 1,800 refugees have been given supplementary feeding rations. Since December 18, 719 people have died, 55% of them under age five.

Dr. Vasset says she hopes this weekend’s planned visit of Emma Bonino, European Commissioner, will lead to greater attention to this growing catastrophe.

**The MSF Holland team in Goma sent headquarters its comments regarding the dilemma of advocacy versus assistance to populations. It specifically criticised MSF for having halted its advocacy on violence in the Masisi in order to devote itself to provision of assistance to the refugees.**



‘Contribution to the Advocacy Debate,’ Message from Amanda Harvey and Marcel Van Soest, MSF Holland Goma to the HQ, HAD and MSF Holland Kigali, 31 January 1997 (in English). [D98](#)

#### Extract:

We write this article merely to stimulate debate on the tremendous decisions that face MSF in the Great Lakes region in Africa regarding advocacy and the continuation of our medical programmes. We are aware that speaking out about human rights abuses can deny MSF’s obligation to provide medical assistance to those in need. This is particularly a consideration in emergency response. However, increasingly in this region, the division between advocacy and the Hippocratic oath cannot be ignored.

It is bizarre that MSF France, who delivered a tremendously strong advocacy message on the refugee politics much earlier than MSF Holland, now supports camps for

these people. Medics could argue that they have a moral obligation to deliver aid to whoever needs it. There are women and children involved. But it is known that all ages and sexes participated in the Rwandan genocide. In this region, if the family leader is Interahamwe, his whole family is Interahamwe. That is the reality of the culture. To impose our cultural conceptions on this situation is misplaced and self-deceiving. The Interahamwe have never relinquished their determination to exterminate the Tutsi. Would we give aid to the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia? Or the Shining Path in Peru?

[...] Fortunately, there were amongst the emergency team, a few members who had worked in the former Masisi project for the displaced Zairians. Thanks to them, this programme restarted (which says a great deal for a demand-driven organisation). But, there are no refugees left around Goma, so the international community, press and most aid workers have lost interest. What a wasted opportunity not to use the press presence in November to bring attention to the plight of Masisi. What a waste of our previous advocacy report.

[...] The Interahamwe-led refugees in the interior of Zaire are in very poor shape. The critical humanitarian conflict arises again: the moral and medical obligation to assist, regardless of political affiliations and past crimes, versus the use of NGOs as pawns on a political chess board. It is hard to turn our back on suffering, so always search for middle ground - where we continue our work and use advocacy to put pressure on the international community to act. However, in this region, the additional problems of disintegrating security for expats and freedom of access will make a compromise difficult. MSF should recognise the worth of its own advocacy and speak out about what it sees, even if this means we have to leave. If we continue to work in a country where we are forbidden to mourn the murder of the three expats, and we voice no protest, need we bother with advocacy at all?

**During an early February visit to Zaire, Emma Bonino, European Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs, denounced the international community’s policy of distributing only a trickle of aid and specifically singled out the USA.**



Philippe Lemaître, ‘500,000 Refugees Suffering from Hunger in Eastern Zaire,’ *Le Monde* (France), 4 February 1997 (in French). [D99](#)

#### Extract:

She was in Tingi Tingi on Sunday. “Here we are, facing a group of individuals who do not exist and who go undetected by the radar of the most powerful armies in the

world [an obvious reference to the U.S.],” Bonino said. “In December, we were told that there was no point in coming since almost all the Hutu refugees had returned home to Rwanda. We were accused of seeing things. The international community must acknowledge that it was mistaken. This matter has to be re-opened.”

Bonino intends to ask the UN Security Council and the European Union’s Council of Ministers to formally acknowledge that Rwandan and Ugandan troops carried out attacks in Zaire. Although the European Union calls for the integrity of borders, Belgium is the only country to yet oppose the presence of Rwandan and Ugandan armies in Zaire. During the last EU meeting in January, France’s silence was noted when the Great Lakes issue came under discussion.

[...]  
 Bonino acknowledges that she is not sure she will achieve her goals. Neither Hutu refugees nor Zaire and its exhausted regime are major concerns in Washington. Sources close to Ms Bonino say that the Americans have powerful intermediaries within the EU who are prepared, in an act of total cynicism and without hesitation, to block action on the fate of hundreds of thousands of individuals. [...] It is also true that the US recently invested \$500 million in mines in north-western Zaire.

The trickle of international aid has not yet benefited the refugees and displaced persons, let alone the affected Zairian population. “European humanitarian aid will be provided without discrimination,” Ms Bonino stated, providing her interlocutors with additional grounds for satisfaction.

[...] She is counting on an open competition among Zairian authorities, but is also directing her efforts toward UN agencies, hoping to mobilize them to send more food to the camps. Several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are criticizing them for carrying out a “minimal assistance” policy to avoid the camps’ consolidation. In Kisangani on Saturday, the Médecins Sans Frontières coordinator made serious charges of that nature, saying that this “drop-by-drop aid distribution policy” was the result of U.S. pressure. Ms. Bonino appeared convinced that U.N. agencies had not displayed the greatest possible determination. “I am not pleased with the supply situation,” she said in Tingi Tingi. “The lack of food is the primary cause of death. “This breakdown is obviously not the result solely of problems with gaining access to the refugees.”

 Emma Bonino said things that we hadn’t been able to get across. It’s certainly true that when she shows up in Tingi Tingi with a plane full of reporters, she gets a lot more attention than we do, in the short term. She said unbelievable things in a typically ‘NGO’ style. The real problem is that she speaks in NGO language but we – MSF

- can’t. If we had “big talkers’ in the field and if we’d yelled loud enough, we’d have gotten that kind of press coverage.

Anne Guibert, MSF France Press Officer (in French), interviewed by Anne Fouchard-Brown (summer 1997).

**On 3 February, the Rwandan ambassador to the UN announced that there were no more Rwandan refugees in Zaire.**



‘No More Refugees in Zaire, Says Rwandan Representative to the UN, **AFP** (France), 3 February 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

“There are no more refugees inside Zaire except for 40,000 soldiers (Hutu) and their families” who refused to return to Rwanda, said Gidéon Kayinamura during a press conference Monday in New York.

The soldiers are Hutu who fled Rwanda after the 1994 genocide and civil war that brought the Tutsi to power, Kayinamura said.

He made his statement on the same day that Emma Bonino, European Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs, returning from a four-day trip to Zaire, said that at least 200,000 and as many as 400,000 Hutu remain in Zaire.

“We know that the real refugees have gone home,” Kayinamura said. “We do not think it is appropriate for humanitarian organisations to extend the status of refugee to an army of criminals remaining in Zaire and who are keeping a small number of refugees hostage, including their own families.”

The diplomat again rejected Zairian and Belgian authorities’ charges regarding the presence of Rwandan troops alongside rebels in eastern Zaire.

[...] Belgian foreign affairs ministry spokesperson André Querton told AFP on Monday in New York that his government estimated the number of refugees still in eastern Zaire at 380,000. He also said that on Tuesday, Erik Derycke, Belgium’s lead diplomat, would ask UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to institute an aid programme on the refugees’ behalf.

**That same day, a joint MSF/ICRC team, was notified that a group of refugees hidden in the forest wanted to return to Rwanda. MSF/ICRC left for the Walikale-Bukavu road and went to find them. The day after**

**the team had passed through the area, the refugees disappeared. MSF and ICRC called off the search and assistance operations.**



*The first place we tried to enter was Walikale. I think it was on the 3rd of February. The ICRC, us, and others were on the road. We knew from people in Walikale that the refugees wanted to return to Rwanda, but we did not see them on the road. Then we took the small roads to look for them and help them. And it was clear that once we found people, the next day they were gone and killed probably. It was clear that we were used as a lure and then we stopped immediately to get all off the main roads. Then there was a lot of lobbying, internally with ICRC, toward UNHCR and authorities. But again because you don't get the fact that they were really killed and by who, you couldn't do much more. The only thing was stopping, just using the main road and not looking for the refugees in the bush. We changed our strategy getting the message verbally into the jungle that MSF is on the main road... if they want support ... there were a few temporary points where we were that they could come to, they would be taken care of, waiting for the truck to come to be repatriated to Rwanda. It was in cooperation with ICRC and UNHCR. Not a huge number, but some people did it. ... But it was all very difficult. It was a real nightmare. And the whole area is so big, so dangerous, so horrible things were happening. It is all the time keeping your head clear in order that your strategy doesn't have so much negative impact.*

Marcel Van Soest, MSF Holland Field Coordinator,  
Goma, January to March 1997 (in English).

**On 4 February, driven by a rumor that the rebels had taken the neighboring town, the 40,000 refugees in the Shabunda camp again fled into the Kivu forest. That same day in Rwanda, four UN human rights observers were killed.**



'40,000 Rwandan Refugees from Shabunda Flee Advancing Rebels,' **AFP** (France), Geneva, 5 February 1997 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

The approximately 40,000 Rwandan refugees at Shabunda, eastern Zaire, abandoned their camp after receiving information that the rebel offensive had taken a nearby town, UNHCR said Wednesday.

"All the Shabunda sites are empty," said Dillah Dumaye, UNHCR's regional deputy in the region, quoted by a spokesperson in Geneva.

Local Zairian authorities reported that the Hutu refugees, accompanied by 7,000 Zairians from the area, had evacuated their makeshift encampments after hearing that Katshunga, 45 kilometres northeast of Shabunda, had fallen into rebel hands.

UNHCR added that independent confirmation of this report was impossible.

[...]

Preparations had been made to evacuate the 40,000 refugees and their departure was orderly, the UNHCR representative on site noted. "The refugees packed up, took the plastic sheeting they used to make shelters and left," Doumaye said.

The UN agency does not know where they have gone. Preliminary aerial reconnaissance did not reveal their whereabouts. Additional search missions are expected on Thursday.

The fleeing refugees are said to be headed west, perhaps to Kalima and Kindu. They abandoned their camp the day after four days' worth of food was distributed.

The UNHCR was the only humanitarian agency remaining in Shabunda after other international organisations withdrew in mid-December because of insecurity and resupply problems.

**MSF notified UNHCR and ambassadors of western nations in Zaire of the gravity of the situation in Kivu, the urgent need to provide food to the Tingi Tingi refugees and to develop logistical means to reach them and protect them.**



'Situation in the Great Lakes Region,' **Letter** from Robert Muller, MSF officer for MSF-UN relations in Geneva, to MSF Operations Directors, 4 February 1997 (in French). **D100**

#### **Extract:**

This morning I met with Sergio Vieira de Mello, Executive Director of UNHCR. I passed on your recent observations regarding the situation in the countries in the Great Lakes region. He promised to bring the information on the various issues to Ms Ogata's attention: i.e. the tragic situation of the refugees in eastern Zaire where mortality is increasing, security problems in Rwanda and the lax attitude of the international organizations, the tragic impacts of population displacements in Burundi, problems resulting from the continuous arrival of refugees in Tanzania, and UNHCR's lack of adequate response.

[...]

Vieira de Mello told me that UNHCR was facing currently insurmountable political problems, combined with a situation that made logistics extremely complicated and costly. However, he assured me that UNHCR overall was aware of all the NGOs' problems and that he would instruct the

staff to improve communications between NGO teams and UNHCR.

**On 6 February, following the killing of the UN observers, MSF Belgium announced that it would withdraw its teams from the Rwandan prefectures of Cyangugu and Kibuye.**

**On 7 February, the MSF teams announced that they would halt their activities at Tingi Tingi because of insecurity related to the site's proximity to fighting. UNHCR called for safe passage zones to be opened so that refugees could be repatriated to Rwanda.**



Isabelle Vichniac, 'Calls For Opening of Humanitarian Corridors,' **Le Monde** (France) 7 February 1997 (in French). [D101](#)

**Extract:**

"Contrary to criticism from those who are at a safe distance and have no responsibilities in this matter, UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF and the NGOs are doing what they can, given nightmarish conditions and chronic insecurity," said Sergio Vieira de Mello. He noted that Ms Ogata's trip had three specific objectives. First, to ensure that refugees receive at least a basic minimum of aid. And, second, to create humanitarian corridors, primarily for the Rwandans. UNHCR repeated that while it supports the Rwandans' return home, it is not encouraging the Burundians to do the same as their country is gripped by civil war.

The safe passage zones should make it easier to repatriate 120,000 refugees from Tingi Tingi, 40,000 from Amisi and 40,000 more who fled Shabunda and who have yet to be found (see above). The task then will be to separate refugees from armed extremists who are putting severe pressure on them.

[...]

In addition, it is very difficult to organize plane flights to take the at-risk populations groups home (the ill, wounded, invalids, women, children and the elderly) because of insecurity on the ground.



*At Tingi Tingi, we knew and they knew, implicitly, that it couldn't stop there. The fighting was 15 kilometres away. We tried to get them back on their feet so they could leave. Some did, because we met up with them later in Congo.*

Brigitte Doppler, MSF France Medical Coordinator, Tingi Tingi (in French).

**On 8 February, the Amisi camp was in the rebels' hands. The refugees fled to Tingi Tingi. While visiting eastern Zaire, Sadako Ogata, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, called on Rwandan refugees in Zaire to return home, stating that Rwanda was relatively safe. Five hundred of them asked that she resign.**



'Refugees Must Return Home, Sadako Ogata Says,' **AFP** (France), Nairobi, 10 February 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

On Monday, Sadako Ogata, the U.N High Commissioner for Refugees, called on Rwandan refugees threatened by fighting in Zaire to return home.

Speaking during a press conference in Nairobi, Ms Ogata stated that Rwanda was "relatively safe," while acknowledging that some refugees might not want to go back.

On Saturday, the official visited the large Tingi Tingi camp in eastern Zaire. She accused Hutu extremists of preventing those refugees who wished to return home from leaving. "Given that, I think there are many people who may not wish to return," she acknowledged.



'Tingi Tingi Refugees Call on Sadako Ogata to Resign,' **AFP** (France), Kisangani, 10 February 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

In an open letter to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 500 refugees from the Tingi Tingi camp stated that since July 1994, UNHCR "has continuously abandoned its primary mission of assisting and protecting refugees and call on her to resign."

The letter was presented to Ogata during her visit to the camp on Saturday. A journalist who collected the signatures told AFP that around 500 intellectuals from Tingi Tingi had signed it.

"Sadly, UNHCR has failed," the letter read, recommending that Ms Ogata resign "for having allowed hundreds of thousands of people to die by weapons and from hunger and illness."

**On 10 and 11 February, after a discussion about the Rwandan situation, the Operational Directors from various MSF sections decided that the organisation should maintain its presence.**



**Minutes** of Directors of operations Meeting , 10  
-11 February 1997 (in English). **D102**

**Extract:**

Rwanda: Weighing up the reasons whether to stay in this country or not, it has been decided that MSF will maintain its presence there for the time being.

The reasons to be in Rwanda now are:

- There are many needs in the country. These needs are increasing.
- The new arrivals produce an additional strain on the health system.
- The latest arrivals are in a particularly poor health condition.
- The local human resources are decreasing because many of these doctors and health professionals are in jail and/or have disappeared.
- With the current security situation there are probably no other NGOs willing to supply the needs until the situation is evidently calm (exception, maybe ICRC after 10 days of activity freezing).
- There are places in Rwanda that could be considered safer than others, for the time being.

-It fits perfectly in our charter and thus it is the reason why we exist.

The reasons for not to remain there the time being are:

- Security risks in many areas, and maybe in the whole country is very, VERY high. Today it seems to play with fire to be in places like Ruhengeri, Gisenyi, Kibuye, Cyangugu and maybe Kigali rural and north of Kibungo.
- There is an increase of the individual probabilities of risk for those who remain.
- Independently of the risks, there is a tendency to consider as normal the life taking risks and this is not the case. But people don't know it because there is no visible reaction. Not to react is in fact to accept this high risk (in general, not only in Rwanda) linked specifically to be an expat in an NGO, as a normal duty.

The discussion has turned around the following points:

- \* Consequences of the humanitarian aid evacuation have been evaluated. It is evident that this evacuation would imply a great difference in human lives.
- \* Understanding the current decision of reducing teams, it is decided to keep only the essential activities to save lives in those places where security conditions allows to do so.
- \* Security conditions, although they are not easily measurable, do not force us to stop all activities today. This does not mean that situation may change for the better or for the worse.
- \* If MSF was a direct target, there would be no doubt about leaving the country. But we have no clear elements that make us think this way. However, we know that we are part of the international aid community, and any member could be a target at a given moment.

\* MSF will remain to implement curative activities, to save lives, and to having a close contact with the population. If we knew who is the responsible of the latest killings, we could then change our interpretation and our position. But we have no certitude.

\* The current security situation does not justify emergency preparedness activities, neither the management of the ET stock.

\* MSF does not want any kind of armed escort or armed guards. This will limit the type of activities we can carry out.

Therefore, conclusions have been the following:

1. We will continue in Rwanda
2. We will reinforce the security and we will reduce activities to those considered essential to save lives.
3. We will keep one common coordination
4. We will keep separate desks.
5. We will not work with armed escorts or armed guards. This could be reevaluated in the future.
6. We will clearly inform departing volunteers about the vital risk of working in this context.

**On 12 February, a delegation representing CARE, Oxfam, ICRC and MSF<sup>1</sup> testified before the UN Security Council on the Great Lakes situation and reminded the Council that humanitarian action cannot substitute for political initiatives.**



**'Briefing** Security Council on the Great Lakes Crisis,' Jacques de Milliano , President MSF H and MSF International, 12 February 1997 (in English). **D103**

**Extract:**

On behalf of Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders, I would like to express our sincere thanks for the opportunity to address you directly as a representative of an organisation that has been deeply involved in and committed to the Great Lakes region and its populations, which has been so profoundly affected by the ongoing crisis. MSF is extremely worried about the current developments in the Great Lakes and is hopeful for your willingness to use your leadership and political influence to put a halt to the dramatic events occurring in the region.

For the last several years, the UN has failed systematically in this part of the world to act in a timely and political coherent way. In April 1994, when the genocide broke out in Rwanda, the sole act of the UN was to withdraw most of its own troops from the region. After more than 1,000,000

1. Composed of Jacques de Milliano, Pierre Salignon, Congo desk manager and, for the last two months, Head of Mission in Kisangani and Annick Hamel, Head of Mission in Burundi.

refugees poured into Zaire, no measures were taken in the 2 following years to prevent the camps in Zaire from becoming strongholds of the Interahamwe militia and the former Rwandan army. Instead, humanitarian aid was left to be misused by the extremist leaders to enhance their grip on the camp population and to further destabilise the region. In November 1996, despite initial gestures to the contrary, the UN was unable to implement a military intervention to disarm and separate the ex-FAR military and the Interahamwe militia from the population, to organize a safe return of the refugees back to Rwanda, and to set up safe zones for the Burundi refugees who could not return because of the lack of security in Burundi.

Now we again face the consequences of the absence of a comprehensive political approach. Soon the tail could wag the dog again. Rwanda seems unable to cope with the massive return of refugees and appears to be heading toward civil war. In the last month, violent incidents have multiplied. [...]

In Kivu - in Zaire - the existence of hundreds of thousands of trapped refugees was denied internationally for several months. Now that large groups of refugees have been identified, those that are accessible are continuing to suffer from lack of food, and many remain beyond the reach of humanitarian assistance, caught in the midst of a war.

#### 1. RWANDA.

Rwanda is almost on the verge of civil war.

- At the end of last year in a period of 6 weeks, about one million refugees from Burundi and Zaire returned to Rwanda. This massive influx has caused a severe problem of integration, involving issues such as the return of homes, land, and employment.
- An effective justice system is not yet in place, and prisons are severely overpopulated.
- A return of ex-FAR soldiers and Interahamwe militia has resulted in a spiral of insecurity in Rwanda. An increase in rebel activity has led to violent search operations by the Rwandan army. Mid-January has been a turning point with the assassination of 3 NGO workers and 5 UN staff members, signaling that international presence has become a target.

What are the implications?

A pattern of increased insecurity, reduced access of aid and aid workers to the populations in need, and diminished protection of the population are the immediate consequences of recent events. For example, MSF has put on hold the majority of its projects by reducing the presence of foreign workers from 47 to about 15 in the last 2 weeks, significantly reducing our ability to provide assistance to up to one million civilians in hospitals, communal health centres, programmes for traumatized victims of violence, and unaccompanied children.

We recommend:

The UN must acknowledge the downward spiral of the humanitarian and political situation in Rwanda. As the international body entrusted with ensuring peace and

security in the global community, it must take the initiative to guarantee the protection of the population, the security of international agencies, and access to populations in need of aid. These initiatives should be part of a broader, longer term agenda that addresses the acute need for reconciliation in the region.

[...] 3. ZAIRE.

In Zaire from the humanitarian point of view there are several types of problems:

- Kivu:
  - On the rebel side (and mainly in South Kivu). MSF has had very limited access to both internally displaced Zairians and refugees in need;
  - There has been a lack of protection of the local population and the refugees and no "lead" UN agency has been given overall responsibility for protection.
- The other side of the front-line (Kisangani, Tingi Tingi, ...): - where a sizable group of refugees fled from the fighting in and around Kivu.
- The main humanitarian issue is a lack of assistance for the most vulnerable refugees in Tingi Tingi (about 120,000 people). Since late December, MSF doctors providing medical assistance in the Tingi Tingi camp have recorded 20 to 30 deaths every day, the majority children under 5 years old, mostly from the direct and indirect effects of malnutrition. Up until now, the problem has primarily been a lack of food and logistical constraints. Over the past week, these problems have been compounded by the advance of the front line. The refugees at Tingi Tingi, including a new influx from recently emptied nearby camps, now constitute a buffer zone between the two sides. The current crisis cannot be solved unless the most vulnerable refugees are separated from the ex-FAR soldiers and Interahamwe militias among them and moved away from the front-line. If this problem is not solved quickly the whole vulnerable population is going to die.

We recommend:

- the UN should move urgently the vulnerable refugee population of Tingi Tingi to a safer area away from the frontline.
- the UN should put pressure on the rebels in South Kivu to allow aid agencies to have access to the populations in need.
- the UN should mandate an international agency to protect and assist the Zairian displaced population. The UN should also stress the protection mandate of UNHCR -concerning the Rwandan and Burundian refugees.

#### CONCLUSION.

-From our vantage point, the situation in the Great Lakes can be summarized as a destabilization process that has resulted in a failure of protection of the populations in danger and very limited access to the populations in need. The destabilization process started long ago and, due to missed opportunities, is spreading in the region.

It is up to the Security Council to act on several levels simultaneously to turn the tide:

- to assure that the existing conventions dealing with immediate protection and assistance of the population are respected (refugee conventions and Geneva Conventions);
- to work - at the same time - toward a durable solution for the region that addresses the structural causes of the conflict.

The UN has a variety of instruments - political, economic, humanitarian, and military - at its disposal. We believe that it is the responsibility of this most highly esteemed body to mobilize the political will and to select the appropriate instruments.



'NGOs Call on Security Council to Take Measures in the Great Lakes Region,' **Press Release**, MSF Belgium, 12 February 1997 (in French). **D104**

#### Extract:

This morning Oxfam, CARE, and Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders were invited for the first time to brief the UN Security Council. The NGOs (non-governmental organisations) welcomed this historic opportunity to make a presentation to the members on the worsening humanitarian situation in central Africa's Great Lakes region, but warned that humanitarian assistance must no longer be used as a substitute for political action.

Since the beginning of the genocide in 1994 in Rwanda, the Security Council has consistently failed to abide by the Geneva Conventions and to take action to address the underlying causes of the conflict and to help find political solutions in the region. Humanitarian action has been used as a substitute for political action.

Today, NGOs gave first-hand accounts to the Security Council of the deteriorating situation in Rwanda, Burundi, and Zaire. They particularly highlighted three issues: the tremendous problems aid agencies have had getting access to deliver aid to populations in need; the growing risks to the lives of both civilians and aid workers; and the spread of conflict into other countries in the region.

In eastern Zaire the war is spreading. Last week 40,000 refugees fled Shabunda camp, and aid agencies were forced to evacuate from Tingi Tingi - a camp of 120,000. In the past three weeks in Rwanda, over 300 Rwandans and 8 international aid and human rights workers have been killed. In Burundi, the government has forcibly regrouped over 150,000 people in what appears to be a policy of forced "villagization." Entire provinces are off limits to aid agencies, leaving hundreds of thousands of civilians without adequate protection or assistance.

Aid agencies cannot solve these problems with biscuits, vaccines and water. People will continue to die and the

war will continue to spread throughout the region unless the UN Security Council, member states and regional leaders take decisive action.

The NGOs called on the UN Security Council to:

- 1- Make the Great Lakes crisis their first priority in international diplomacy, in particular by putting full political and diplomatic resources behind the search for a regional political settlement, which builds on previous initiatives in the region. The recent appointment of Mr Sahnoun, the new representative of the Secretary General to the Great Lakes region is an opportunity to make real progress toward a regional political settlement. High-level diplomatic and financial support from the members of the Security Council is now needed.

- 2- Immediately give full assistance to the UN agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and NGOs working in the region to gain access to affected populations, both to protect and to assist them.

- 3- Follow through on earlier commitments made on behalf of reconstruction and reconciliation in Rwanda.

The three agencies said today, "the international community has tended to offer short-term responses to each successive chapter of this crisis. It is time to realize the scale of the spreading conflict and the long-term danger it poses to the region. We are asking the Security Council to take action on the Great Lakes, to make it their highest priority issue."



'Security Council Hears from Médecins Sans Frontières, OXFAM and CARE on the Great Lakes Crisis,' **Press Release**, MSF France, 13 February 1997 (in French). **D105**

#### Extract:

Last night, several NGOs - Oxfam, CARE and Médecins Sans Frontières - were invited to speak for the first time to members of the UN Security Council in New York on the issue of the Great Lakes region. Grasping the opportunity to share their concerns, the NGOs reminded listeners that humanitarian assistance cannot substitute for political initiatives.

Since the Rwandan genocide began in 1994, the Security Council has failed to adopt any of the measures necessary to guarantee protection and assistance to the region's civilian populations. Humanitarian action as often served as a substitute for political action.

Regarding eastern Zaire, where hundreds of thousands of people are currently threatened by fighting and lack assistance, MSF asked that diplomatic pressure be brought to bear immediately to:

- Ensure the safety of the families of refugees and displaced persons trapped between the warring parties.

- Transfer refugees from Tingi Tingi and Amisi to a site that is safer and more accessible to aid operations, ensuring that the most vulnerable are transported. This transfer should enable families and others who wish to return to Rwanda to be registered.
- Separate militiamen and soldiers from civilians.
- Ensure that food reaches families that really need it. For over two months, the absence of political will and delays in aid operations have rapidly worsened the situation for remaining refugees in Zaire. Only real political will can avoid new human tragedies and endless population displacement.

**That same day, MSF France joined with the French NGOs Médecins du Monde and Action Contre la Faim to demand that international humanitarian law be observed in eastern Zaire.**



'Action Contre la Faim, Médecins du Monde and Médecins Sans Frontières Urge That Humanitarian Law Be Observed,' MSF France, ACF and MDM **Press Release**, 12 February 1997 (in French). [D106](#)

**Extract:**

Given the serious nature of this situation, the cynicism of nations and the inability of non-governmental organisations to ensure that civilian populations receive aid, Action Contre la Faim, Médecins du Monde and Médecins Sans Frontières urge that humanitarian law be observed:

- Access to refugees and displaced persons must be guaranteed by all parties and the UN should make the necessary political decisions to establish genuine refugee protection programmes.
- The most vulnerable populations should be settled at a site further from the combat zone.

**In mid-February, the ICRC delegate announced to UNHCR officials and MSF Holland that it was ending its aid operations because they were being used to harm refugees. It called on the two other organisations to do the same. However, none of the three organisation took a public position on the issue. MSF Holland did not notify the other sections of the matter.**



*An ICRC official told me that in mid-February 1997 the ICRC had informed UNHCR and MSF Holland that it (ICRC) was stopping this type of operation because they were being used [to harm refugees]. So in*

*mid-February, ICRC came to a radical, firm, and final conclusion and - if we're to believe this official - in a fairly authoritarian fashion told UNHCR and MSF Holland to do the same saying, "It's a serious problem for humanitarian activity." But the two groups decided not to go public with it. During our annual meeting in 1998, we [MSF France] criticized ICRC for doing that. I was pretty strong in my attack, saying, "You should have launched a public debate."*

Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France programme manager then Communication Director (in French).

**The 40,000 refugees who had gathered since mid-December around the town of Shabunda, 170 kilometres west of Bukavu, fled again after AFDL attacks. Around 30,000 were spotted heading toward Angola. The others tried to survive in the forest around Shabunda, harassed by Alliance forces. Aid organisations did not have access to that region for weeks.**

**On 17 February, the Zairian government announced that its planes had bombed rebel-held eastern cities. The MSF team in Goma announced that the bombing in Bukavu had killed at least nine people and wounded 37.**

**The same day, MSF France announced that a reduced team was returning to work in the Tingi Tingi camp.**

**On 18 February, the UN Security Council voted on resolution 1097 which included the five-point peace plan proposed by the special UN representative for the Great Lakes.**

**Later in February, the first-hand testimony of a priest in Kivu at the beginning of the war, began circulating in press circles and among international organisations. It described the large-scale massacres committed by Alliance forces in eastern Zaire. The statement was delivered to Amnesty International, members of the UN Security Council and Reginald Moreels, the Belgian Cooperation Minister and former President of MSF Belgium.**



'Hutu Refugees Massacred in Eastern Zaire,' **Le Monde** (France), 26 February 1997 (in French). [D107](#)

**Extract:**

Contrary to the statements of the UN High Commission on Refugees and those of Rwandan authorities, a document delivered to the members of the UN Security Council, Amnesty International and the Belgian government states that the majority of Rwandan refugees in Zaire have not returned to Rwanda. Written by a western witness who

returned from the Kivu after four years, the document emphasizes the "Tutsi rebels' systematic desire to finish off the Hutu refugees." The witness, who requested anonymity for security reasons, stated that, "several hundred thousand refugees have already died. Most were killed or died of starvation, exhaustion or illness." After the refugees' flight, he visited the camps again, which he knew well. Guided by refugees who had escaped, he observed several mass graves there. He also reported many refugees' statements denouncing massacres committed by 'the rebels.'

"Most of the Rwandan refugees in Zaire have not returned to Rwanda," says a westerner returned from Kivu in a witness statement delivered to Amnesty International, representatives of the UN Security Council's members, and Reginald Moreels, Belgian Secretary for Cooperation and Development. "Out of a total of 1,103,000, at most 450,000 have returned to their country." This reliable witness, who spent four years in South and North Kivu and speaks the local language, said that, "653,000 Rwandan refugees are still in Zaire."

Considering that 200,000 to 250,000 of them reached the Tingi -Tingi, Shabunda and Amisi camps – before those two were abandoned again – he questioned the status of "at least 400,000 missing refugees," emphasizing that he was not including "the 117,000 Burundian refugees" whose whereabouts are also unknown.

Referring to statements from UN High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) and Rwandan authorities that all Rwandan refugees have returned home, the document delivered to *Le Monde* emphasises that this "battle of numbers is a strategic one" in that "its goal is to prevent all international intervention on behalf of the remaining refugees and to attract the maximum reconstruction aid to Rwanda." The document's author, who witnessed refugees returning to Rwanda in mid-November 1996, based his argument on first-hand observations in Goma on 15, 16, and 17 November.

If the issue were only one of fighting between Zairian rebels and the government army, "the Rwandan refugees would have no more reason to flee than the local population. But the Rwandan Hutu refugees are fleeing massacres that Tutsi rebels are carrying out against them. They constitute a military objective." The rebels' argue that the refugees who have not returned are all "genocideurs," he notes, "while UNHCR says that overall, 7 percent of refugees participated in the 1994 killings" killing more than 500,000 Tutsi and Hutu opposed to President Juvénal Habyarimana's regime.

"In the eyes of the rebels and of world opinion, calling every Hutu refugee a 'genocideur' legitimises the use of force and even eliminates, these refugees," the document's author said, explaining that "the many mass graves attest to the systematic desire to do away with the refugees. These mass graves are everywhere, still hidden

and very difficult to reach," he added. It is dangerous to be surprised by rebels in this area. They'll execute you immediately."



'Zaire: Questions About the 'Second Genocide:' Despite Knowledge of Massacres, It's Impossible to Count the Dead,' *Libération* (France), 27 February 1997 (in French).

#### Extract:

Amnesty International was able to document large-scale killings with precision. But travel restrictions imposed by the rebels – for security reasons – in this war zone, make it impossible to conduct an overall assessment. At Tingi Tingi, the largest Rwandan refugee camp 250 kilometres east of Kisangani, Hutu refugees state that "many are dead," accusing Laurent-Désiré Kabila's supporters and units of the Rwandan army of opening fire on them "without warning, indiscriminately, every time they had the chance." Because the refugees were initially widely dispersed, and then wandered for several months through the dense equatorial forest, no one can attempt to count them all. Furthermore, given the presence of extremist elements in the camp, witnesses tend to speak cautiously.

[...] This weekend in his interview with the Flemish newspaper *Het Laatste Nieuws*, Reginald Moreels referred to a "direct witness statement and several indirect [second-hand] confirmations" supporting his claim of 'genocide.' The statement he referred to was sent to the Belgian government as well as to the UN Security Council, Amnesty International, and several newspapers, which published extracts. The report's author, who requested anonymity for fear of reprisals, is a priest who spent four years in Kivu, a Zairian province bordering Rwanda, and speaks the local language. The statements he gathered on site and the mass graves identified supplement information from Amnesty International and other sources (cf. *Libération*, 7 December) but contrary to the writer's statement, do not prove "the Tutsi rebels' systematic desire to do away with the Hutu refugees." Considering that many missionaries in open conflict with the rebels have been expelled or have fled, the Catholic Church's impartiality may also be open to challenge.

[...] Over the last five months, statements offered as authoritative have been based on uncertain calculations. Late last year, contrary to all evidence, the Rwandan government and US diplomats tried to bolster the notion that after 70,000 refugees returned home en masse in November, there were "no more refugees in eastern Zaire." Starting from the 1.2 million Hutu refugees counted in early 1995 in the eastern Zaire camps, the exiled Rwandan opposition concluded that since only 200,000 – 250,000 refugees had arrived in the new camps inside Zaire, "at least 400,000 were missing." However, this comment mentioned in the missionary witness statement, combines the dispersed Hutu who have not yet come out of the jungle

or who died there of hunger, illness or exhaustion and the civilians executed by the rebels. They are all “missing.” But the former are victims of the international community’s non-assistance while the latter are victims of abuses whose scale is not yet known.

**On 20 February in a message to headquarters, the MSF France Administrator in Kisangani was surprised by MSF’s insistence that the FAR were controlling the Tingi Tingi refugees and spoke out against UNHCR’s weaknesses.**



‘After Three Months in Kisangani, Strong Feelings and Several Questions,’ **Message** from Dominique Bracq, MSF France Administrator in Kisangani, to Headquarters, 20 February 1997, (in French). **D108**

**Extract:**

Why do you insist on repeating in every press release that the FAR are controlling the camp? How has this helped our work???

We knew before going in where these refugees came from, who they were and that they were certainly the armed groups that had participated in the genocide. We agreed to provide assistance in spite of that because there were women and children among them.

I don’t think that after ICRC visits criminal prisoners they start denouncing the killers they’ve seen. We’ve got to agree that we made a choice here.

These press releases have benefited UNHCR above all. From the beginning, they’ve done everything possible to avoid taking action and carrying out their mandate.

**Unanswered questions:**

The Tingi Tingi camp is sandwiched between the FAZ and the rebels. In the coming weeks, this camp is likely to be attacked. Many of the vulnerable in this population will try to flee but will die quickly from exhaustion and hunger.

What do we do when the only agency mandated to take charge of refugee repatriation – UNHCR – doesn’t want to do its job?

How can we force UNHCR, after three months, to start counting the refugees who want to return to Rwanda?

How can we tell UNHCR that it must urgently remove the vulnerable population (women and children) from the camp by seeking an agreement with the Zairian authorities?

UNICEF has counted 3,000-4,000 unaccompanied children in the camp. How can we explain to UNHCR that these children are not FAR?

Where do we draw the line on the millions of dollars UNHCR received from the European Community for the Great Lakes crisis, money they squandered on paying

incompetents and slackers who go from meeting to meeting without making any decisions? All they really do is live high off this misery and off those who are trying to fight it! ! !

Thanks again to all those who believe in ideas.

Dominique Bracq, Kisangani Administrator

**On 28 February, the UN Secretary-General proposed reactivating the multinational force. MSF called for the most vulnerable Tingi Tingi refugees to be evacuated immediately to a site far from the combat zones.**



‘MSF Calls for Immediate Transfer of Vulnerable Groups,’ **Press Release**, MSF France, 28 February 1997 (in French). **D109**

**Extract:**

On the occasion of the visit to Paris of the UN Secretary-General and his Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region, Médecins Sans Frontières asks that all diplomatic means be brought to bear to end the famine in the refugee camps near the city of Lubutu.

Rwandan refugees in the Tingi Tingi camp are dying of hunger.

Of 80,000 people in the camp, 1,575 have died between early December 1996 and late February 1997. Half of the dead were children under 5.

Of 11,000 children under 5 in this camp:

- 800 have died;
- 600 are hospitalized in intensive feeding centres;
- 2,000 are receiving food supplements on an outpatient basis.

In the last three months, the Rwandan and Burundian refugees have received less than one-third of their basic food needs. Because of the military instability, the presence of soldiers and former Rwandan Armed Forces in the camps and inadequate mobilization of aid agencies, the situation is worsening every week.

Our teams can no longer maintain a permanent presence in the camp because fighting is so close. We can only conduct short visits.

The most vulnerable – women, children, the ill, and elderly – should be evacuated on a selective basis to a site removed from the combat zone while such action is still possible. Later, these refugees should be repatriated to Rwanda on a voluntary basis under the auspices of UNHCR.

**On 1 March, all aid organisations including MSF evacuated from Kisangani. On 2 March, Laurent-Désiré Kabila**

announced that his troops had taken the Tingi Tingi camp, which the remaining refugees had abandoned. He promised to create security corridors to repatriate them to Rwanda.



'120,000 Tingi Tingi Refugees Abandoned Again,' **Press Release**, MSF France, 1 March 1997 (in French). **D110**

#### Extract:

The Médecins Sans Frontières team in Kisangani and Tingi Tingi decided to temporarily withdraw from the Upper Zaire capital on Saturday morning. This decision was based on the worsening situation in eastern Zaire, the increasing tension around Kisangani and in the Kindu region, and the impossibility of providing aid to Rwandan and Burundian refugees in the Tingi Tingi camp. On 7 February, the front line had already moved closer to the Tingi Tingi camp and MSF and the other humanitarian organisations had reduced their presence on site.

In the Tingi Tingi camp, nearly 120,000 refugees were preparing yesterday to flee into the nearby forest, fearing that fighting would draw close. A MSF doctor who managed to reach the camp yesterday said that the population was beginning to flee, making it impossible, once again, to provide them with aid.

The situation facing this population has worsened since last November. Between 16 December and 20 February, more than 1,500 people died in the Tingi Tingi camp. More than half the deaths were among children under 5.

The nations involved in the region have been procrastinating for more than three months. International mobilization to aid the refugees has never amounted to more than a public relations gesture. However, the most vulnerable groups in the adult population and children are the first victims of this failure to take responsibility. Caught in a vice between the warring parties, they must flee yet again, without assistance. In recent weeks, another 30,000 refugees have already fled the advancing rebels, heading for Shabunda and Kalima. No one knows what has become of them.

Médecins Sans Frontières again condemns the UN member states' inertia and again asks that all measures be taken to ensure that the tens of thousands of refugees in distress in eastern Zaire, as well as Zairian resident and displaced populations, who are also victims of current events, are protected.

The debate over the 'numbers battle' continued among the MSF sections.



'The International MSF Position Towards Misusing Info for Fundraising Purposes,' **Messages** MSF Belgium and MSF Holland Press Officer, 2 March 1997 (in English). **D111**

#### Extract :

[...]

-the letter Anne-Marie Huby wrote to Alex de Waal contains unchecked information. To my knowledge MSF and other agencies consider that the amount of Rwandan refugees who returned to Rwanda during the Zaire crisis at the end of last year was approx. 800,000. At least that is what Fiona Terry stated when she returned from Kigali being an information officer.

-the 1.2 million refugees were UNHCR counts of the Goma, Bukavu, and Uvira camps, although the Uvira refugee population had also be counted by the MSF-H team present. Probably the total amount was too high because the estimations of the Goma camp population (UNHCR could not do a census) we have used this figure, because it's the only indication of the amount.

-MSF Holland did not do any fundraising campaigns during for the refugees in Zaire. I am sure that there have been more countries where MSF is present and did not do fundraising campaigns. These countries can have the same clarification method as we expressed in yesterday's press release.

Hello Everyone,

I would like to insist to MSF Holland and to other offices that we do not consider the lack of fundraising campaigns for Zaire during that period as problematic. We in Belgium, for instance, did a huge end of the year campaign. Even though it had been planned months in advance, an image in our campaign referred to the crisis in Central Africa. So, even if it was not done on purpose the public has interpreted our campaign as being linked to the current situation in Kivu, something that did not really bother us, by the way. I think we're not the only one office that had end of the year appeal's or anything else of that sort. So please refrain from using this argument. Belgian journalists have already held it against us and asked us to explain why WE DID DO a campaign whereas our colleagues did not.

Thanks, Anouk

On 3 March, the UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region encouraged MSF to 'keep the pressure up' to gain access to refugees.



'Information Bulletin 273,' MSF France, 3 March 1997 (in French). [D112](#)

**Extract:**

Meeting this morning at MSF Paris headquarters with Mohammed Sahnoun and his advisor. He is trying to obtain a ceasefire in the region but recognizes that this will be very difficult as long as the Security Council members hold opposing views. He encouraged MSF to keep the pressure up to obtain access to refugees and for their protection.

**On 4 March, in the French daily *La Croix* the MSF France Coordinator in Kisangani criticized the inaction of the international community regarding the Tingi Tingi refugees.**



Julia Ficatier, 'The International Community Did Nothing to Save Tingi Tingi,' *La Croix* (France), 4 March 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

"For three months we have been saying repeatedly that the Tingi Tingi camp and its 160,000 refugees had no future," said a bitter Pascal Vignier, Médecins Sans Frontières' coordinator in Kisangani. On Saturday, he was evacuated to Kinshasa along with the other humanitarian aid workers. "The end was inevitable. But the international community allowed the situation to deteriorate. On Sunday, the rebels announced that they had taken the Tingi Tingi camp, which had been threatened from the beginning. The camp was completely dependent on outside aid. At the same time, it was along the route of the rebel advance. That was the route they had to follow to take Kisangani." "... There were 30,000 people in our hospital and feeding facilities, mostly women and children, who couldn't survive the walk. What has become of them? First, on Friday, the camp was emptied of its refugees. Today the rebels announced that the refugees have come back. Just what is going on? There must be surveillance flights over Tingi Tingi. Given that the camp is located along the frontlines, the refugees are also on the frontlines of the fighting. We know that the refugees were planning to leave the camp in small groups so that they could find food more easily and be less visible. According to an unconfirmed source, some are said to have headed south, towards the town of Ubundu."

[...] MSF is clear, "If we have solid guarantees – the refugees must choose voluntarily to return to Rwanda, and we must be able to accompany them on the way back – then yes, we support the humanitarian corridors in cooperation of course, with UNHCR. We have an MSF team in the rebel zone in Goma. That team can take responsibility for that."

**In a message that day to the Operational Directors, the MSF-USA Communications Director questioned the relevance of a press conference in Nairobi on the Tingi Tingi refugees and insisted that MSF only respond to journalists, without making political statements, relying solely on medical data.**



'Press Conference on Tingi Tingi,' Message from Samantha Bolton, MSF New York to Operation Directors, 4 March 1997 (in English). [D113](#)

**Extract:**

From what I am hearing from correspondents in the region, the story is now "political and military." Everyone is waiting to hear if the rebels take control of Kisangani and then that means they have Kinshasa.

Events are moving so quickly, the story is so political and military. News is changing daily. Our teams have seen nothing new and have no new news from MSF eye-witnesses since Saturday. If MSF has anything to say it is only about the medical condition of refugees when we left and about the fact that we are concerned about their present health and about the lack of access as the refugees have fled into the forest.

If we talk about the medical condition of the victims (half of the people), we also have to talk about the fact that 50% were well fed and were militia (like we did at the UN). We must stay clear of any political statements which could imply anything which could be interpreted as a call for military intervention, or we will be playing into the hands of the French government and certain elements in Kinshasa.

[...] I think this might be one time when MSF is better off just keeping quiet on any political front and only talking to journalists when asked -at least in the field- and also only on medical data.

Re: The main problem is that we have had such a scandal -thanks to Marcel Vos - about numbers and these refugees. First of all the press corps in Nairobi and in Africa in general is very hardened against MSF, so they will be very aggressive. Secondly, the information we have will be over a week, so there will be nothing new worth saying. [...] Spoke to two MSFers who have just come back from long-term projects in Kinshasa. They say that as usual, Zairians are only interested in economic survival - that on a whole the rebels are being widely welcomed everywhere - that the rebels are seen as possibly bringing a level of hope and stability for new investment and short-term profit - just as Mobutu did in his first 10 years of reign. MSF is already seen as French -anything we say about the refugees and protection will be taken in the light of our "anti-rebel" stand and pro-French government stand (that is already why some of the Johannesburg correspondents called me in NY).

CAREFUL WITH THE FRENCH PRESS -Please also note Lisette's sitrep from Goma in which she states that the

French press is sloppily using words like genocide - we should be very careful - even with what you do and say with your guy from the field once he reaches Paris.

Bonne chance et bisnes - I really do not think Nairobi is a good idea - we will be lacerated - and there is no one there who is up to speed and able to organize damage control and a press release - please also be careful in Paris with playing into the national anti-rebel feelings - thanks et bisnes.

**On 6 March, during a meeting with reporters, MSF France issued a new warning about the fate of the refugees and the obstacles to providing aid.**



"Tingi-Tingi press release" **Message** from MSF France communication officer to MSF communication officers, 7 March 1997 (in English). **D114**

**Extract:**

Yesterday, we had a meeting with some journalists on refugees in Zaire. A TV channel, 3 radio channels, 2 weekly newspapers were present. They raised questions on: -expulsion in Zaire (for the moment we are not expelled) -accusations from the Zairian government (who accused NGOs of being responsible for - the death of 25 000 people when leaving Kisangani), we answered that we obviously are not responsible for the defeat of the Zairian soldiers, we were not there to freeze the frontline.

Journalists also asked questions on the other side (Goma, Bukavu, can we easily work here? Are there massacres? Did we witness massacres?...). We explained that we would try to have access to the area of Tingi Tingi through the rebel zone in the coming days.



'Zaire: MSF Says Thousands of Refugees Will Die in A New Exodus,' **AFP** (France), Paris, 6 March 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

Several thousand refugees, primarily children and people at risk, will die from malnutrition during their latest exodus in eastern Zaire, the humanitarian organisation Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) said in Paris on Friday. Until last week, 650 children under 5 were being treated in MSF's intensive feeding centre in the Tingi Tingi camp, 250 kilometres southeast of Kisangani. Hutu Rwandan refugees left the camp on Saturday, fleeing the advance of Laurent-Désiré Kabila's rebel troops. MSF is also particularly concerned about the 2,500 other children who were being cared for in feeding centres and the 25,000 at-risk individuals fed in Caritas' kitchens.

"Wherever they go, many will not make it alive," said Dr Jean-Clément Cabrol, who has just returned from Zaire. Since December, the refugees' health status "has continued to deteriorate because of lack of food, in spite of the aid provided," he said. "Recently, the mortality rate exceeded 4 people/10,000 per day," he explained, challenging the "international community's slowness to take any action."

According to Bernard Pécou, MSF's Executive Director, some of the 160,000 Rwandan and Burundian refugees from Tingi Tingi have headed west, fleeing the rebels' advance, while others remained in the area or went towards Rwanda.

"We have teams in Goma and Bukavu (North and South Kivu) that want to find the refugees in the zone held by Kabila's forces, but we're not allowed to go there," Pécou added, noting that in Kivu, "the refugees lack both aid and protection."

In response to the Zairian government's charges against humanitarian organisations, Dr. Cabrol said, "An NGO can't possibly move the front line," adding that, "The problem is not whether humanitarian organisations are expelled, but the failure to assist people in need."

**On 7 March, in a joint statement with Action Contre la Faim and Médecins du Monde, MSF France called for the refugees' protection to be guaranteed.**



'Action Contre la Faim, Médecins du Monde and Médecins Sans Frontières Issue Urgent Call for Guaranteed Protection of Rwandan Refugees in Eastern Zaire,' **Press Release**, ACF, MDM, MSF France, 7 March 1997 (in French). **D115**

**Extract:**

Action Contre la Faim, Médecins du Monde, and Médecins Sans Frontières, which have all been working in the Tingi Tingi and Amisi camps since December 1996, are again calling for immediate measures guaranteeing the protection of refugees who wish to return to Rwanda and for those people that continue to flee the fighting. This is a life-or-death question for the most vulnerable among them.

The three non-government organisations thus call for:

- Zones to be placed under UN responsibility and honoured by the warring parties in which fleeing civilian populations may be aided and protected;
- The warring parties to facilitate access to refugees and displaced persons in war zones;
- Immediate access to the Tingi Tingi camp, near where the refugees who are unable to travel have remained.

**The same day, in the French daily newspaper *La Croix*, the MSF France Zaire programme manager, returned from Kisangani, published an opinion piece condemning international indifference in the face of the tragedy of the Rwandan refugees in eastern Zaire.**



“Pierre Salignon, MSF France programme manager, ‘International Indifference is deadly,’ *La Croix* (France), 7 March 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

Hundreds of thousands of Hutu refugees, both Rwandan and Burundian, have faced a tragedy for more than two months and are fleeing fighting in eastern Zaire. The international community’s unwillingness to provide aid is only making the situation worse.

[...] ... These technical limitations are real. But at other times and in other places (including Kurdistan and South Sudan), western nations have shown that when the political will was present, they were able to mount aid operations in complex contexts. That will is not present in this crisis. No nation has been eager to deal with the ‘Hutu’ refugees in eastern Zaire, particularly because they include militiamen and soldiers from the former Rwandan armed forces, the same people who organised the 1994 genocide of more than 500,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu in Rwanda. For several months, the international community has been unable to separate the extremists from the refugees and has since refused to intervene.

[...] UNHCR, whose mandate is nonetheless to ensure refugee protection, has been present in eastern Zaire only since January and was unable to respond to the refugees who expressed their desire to be repatriated. The nations involved in the region have been procrastinating for more than three months and the international mobilization to provide aid to the refugees has never been more than a public relations gesture. They are guilty of non-assistance to a population in danger.

What are they waiting for?

[...]

The inertia of the United Nations’ members is simply unacceptable. All measures must be taken urgently to ensure the protection of tens of thousands of refugees in distress in eastern Zaire, as well as Zairian residents who are victims of current events. This is a life-or-death question for the weakest among them. More than ever, their future is at the mercy of the international community’s will to see them survive – or its willingness to let them die without the least concern.

**The UN Security Council demanded that the parties to the fighting in eastern Zaire accept the UN peace plan and allow aid organisations to obtain access to the refugees. A mission of four UN agencies and the ICRC was dispatched to eastern Zaire to inquire about**

**human rights violations but did not obtain access to the areas where abuses were occurring.**

**On 10 March, tens of thousands of refugees fleeing the rebels’ advance arrived in Ubundu, a town linked to Kisangani by 150 kilometres of railroad tracks.**



‘Tens of Thousands of Refugees Flood into Ubundu,’ *AFP* (France), Nairobi, 10 March 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

Tens of thousands of refugees fleeing advancing rebels flooded humanitarian aid staff over the weekend in Ubundu, UN spokesperson Brenda Barton announced on Monday.

“Many of these refugees are in very poor shape,” the World Food Programme’s regional spokesperson said. “WFP staff tried to distribute food but they were overwhelmed.”

Barton noted that 65 tonnes of food had been delivered to Ubundu Saturday by train from Kisangani, which is under Zairian government control, and that 120 additional tonnes are expected on Monday.

But the train station is on the western side of the Zaire River, while the refugee camps are on the eastern side. “We need extra motorboats to cross the 300 metres between the two sides,” Barton said. “The refugees also need drinking water and medicines, which must be delivered by ferry.”

A small Andover airplane, loaded with four of high-protein biscuits, was ready to leave from Kisangani on Monday but could not take off because of heavy rain, Barton said. She also noted that the WFP staff set up a landing strip in Ubundu and will continue to work there, but the strip is also on the west side.

In Ubundu, the refugees are among some 160,000 people who fled Tingi Tingi, the largest of the camps in eastern Zaire.

Employees of charitable organisations place the total number of Rwandan Hutu and Burundian refugees in eastern Zaire at 400,000 and believe that most of them have taken refuge in the forests.

**The French daily newspaper, *Libération*, published nearly the entire report on the killings in eastern Zaire that a western witness delivered in February to the UN Security Council and Amnesty International.**



'Massacres in Zaire: The Words that Woke Up the West,' *Libération* (France), 10 March 1997 (in French).

#### Extract:

Libération is publishing the entire statement of a western witness regarding massacres of Hutu refugees in eastern Zaire at the hands of Tutsi fighters. For safety reasons, the witness has requested anonymity. The document describes summary executions and hidden mass graves. Determined to be very reliable by Western embassies, it was made available to the UN Security Council, which has just sent an inquiry commission into the field. [...] Who is the person who managed to set the UN machinery in motion after three months of vacillation? Libération held a long interview with him in the capital of a European country. A few years ago, this man chose to go to Africa and ended up, by chance, on the shores of Lake Kivu, on the Zairian border with Rwanda. [...] While his statement has launched him onto the international stage, he clings to anonymity, "for obvious reasons of security." Not just his safety but that of those close to him and of other witnesses. He saved Tutsi and then in turn, Hutu. "There was a kind of absurd routine with runaways and escapees coming and going perpetually, 'cleansing' operations, people dying for unknown reasons and in unknown numbers. Everyone became a victim." One week before the rebels' victorious arrival, the man hid Tutsi, who were being persecuted and wanted to help them cross the border. "I took them, hidden in a car, to UNHCR to ask for an escort. "It's impossible", they told me. "These people aren't refugees". I explained, "but they'll be refugees within an hour as soon as they get to Rwanda. It was no use... "What about the breadth of killing he witnessed? "The massacres were systematic. I called it a new genocide. But I quickly realized that the debate was focusing on the word. No one talks about the killings or about how to stop them, but about whether or not to use that term. Personally, I don't use it any more. I'd even say that I don't give a damn, that I find all that pathetic. The situation is unbearable. For me, that's all that counts."

**On 11 March, the USA and UK rejected the UN Secretary General's 28 February proposal to reactivate the multinational force for eastern Zaire, initiated in November 1996. The proposal had French support.**

**The same day, as AFDL forces approached Kisangani, the French president called on the international community to undertake a 'humanitarian' intervention in eastern Zaire. Other nations ignored the call because they suspected France of being motivated primarily by a desire to block the rebels' advance. When he returned from Zaire, Xavier Emmanuelli, French Secretary of State for Emergency Humanitarian Action and former MSF Vice-President, said that he had not seen**

**humanitarian organisations working with refugees and announced that France's humanitarian emergency unit would provide support.**



'Humanitarian Pressure for Zaire,' *Libération* (France), 12 March 1997 (in French).

#### Extract:

I saw the Rwandan refugees in the Ubundu camp (ed. note: 75,000, according to the World Food Programme) and the displaced Zairians at the "H site" in Kisangani, a camp for people without family members. I also went to Kisangani. It did not look good to me. I didn't see any UN aid agencies or NGOs in the field. In terms of humanitarian presence, only the Zairian Red Cross and one person from Caritas was there, Father Jeffrey, at the Kisangani church office. I saw the others only in Kinshasa. I was very surprised because this is a tense situation. It's pretty unbelievable. There are refugees in distress in the forest, fleeing in precarious conditions, but I didn't see the aid organisations.

[...] I'm going to speed up aid shipments. I'm going to rely on the NGOs that do want to respond, particularly the Zairian Red Cross, and if there were others, that would be great.

[...] Something unbelievable is going on... It's a silence, or a half-silence; the media is putting out low-key information in its reports on this catastrophe. The international organisations are annoyed too, because these are Hutu. What I'm worried about is – bluntly, since this has to be said clearly – that these are not considered 'good' refugees. We thought the 'good' refugees had returned to Rwanda (ed. note: last November) and that the others, the ones who didn't go back, must have had reasons not to return, that they'd been involved in the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi minority. The result is that, yes, we help them, but reluctantly.

[...] There have been similar situations in the past, like at the Thai frontier. Masses of refugees coming and going, pushed in all directions, it's classic. From a technical point of view, this is nothing new. I'm not fighting a last-ditch humanitarian battle here. The difference is more political than technical. I've had a consistent position since the crisis began. Since the beginning, I've said – in Geneva, Brussels, everywhere – that we had to provide aid and security, too. What's odd for me, as a professional in the field of humanitarian emergencies, is that the warning threshold for the international organisations and the NGOs was set so high. It's true that the security conditions aren't the best. It's all very precarious. But I have the impression that the response is somewhat automatic and that the specifics of the problem are not being considered. We manage by saying, "Well, after all, they're only getting what they deserve."

**Reports on the fate of refugees hunted down in eastern Zaire increased in the international press.**



'Hutu Refugees Trapped in Zaire Between Tutsi and the Crocodiles (Ubundu)', *The New York Times* (USA), 12 March 1997 (in English). [D116](#)

**Extract:**

The campaign against the Hutu refugees has been especially unforgiving, foreign diplomats and Zairian human rights experts say, because many of Mr Kabila's fighters pushing westward toward Kisangani are Tutsi volunteers from Rwanda bent on avenging the deaths of relatives at the hands of the Hutu.

For weeks before Mr Kabila's men made their push on Tingi Tingi, then home to more than 150,000 Hutu, Zaire's constantly retreating army supplied the refugee camp with weapons, hoping that once properly armed, the former Hutu soldiers would block the rebellion's advance. Under international pressure for a cease-fire, Mr Kabila pledged he would not attack the Tingi Tingi camp, only to have his men overrun it a few days later. Refugees here who traveled for more than a week through dense forest tell of being chased for days with the sound of gunfire and mortars seemingly never more than a bend in the footpath away.

"We walked all day and all night because there was no way to rest," said Dr Camille Kabakira, who has still not seen several of her family members since the attack. "So many people got lost and left behind in the terror. There was a panic and people scattered as best they could."

In this respect, Zaire's civil war has meant the pursuit of Rwanda's ethnic conflict clear across a neighboring country. Since there appears to be no end to the blood animosity between Hutu and Tutsi, the only answer many Hutu here see for themselves is to beg for international protection or keep pushing westward.

**Beginning on 12 March, an MSF team was granted several hours' access per week to the 2,000 refugees remaining at the Tingi Tingi and Amisi sites. The various obstacles the rebels imposed prevented the team from providing the treatment that the refugees' appalling state required.**



'Forced flight: a Brutal Strategy of Elimination in Eastern Zaire,' **MSF Report**, 16 May 1997 (in English). [D65](#)

**Extract:**

MSF was allowed to return to Tingi Tingi and Amisi on the 12 March 1997. In co-ordination with the UN and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), MSF attempted to provide medical care to approximately 2,000 refugees in the vicinity, as well as obtain access to the large numbers thought to be scattered in other areas. The refugees arriving at Tingi Tingi were in a dire medical state requiring immediate emergency intervention. Many suffered from severe dehydration, malaria, diarrhoea and leg wounds. The majority of the refugees were severely malnourished. Mortality was extremely high, with an average of 10 refugees dying every day. For two weeks, MSF was granted access only for a few hours a day, a few days per week. Access to Amisi was continuously hampered by late departures from Goma airport and cancellations of flights. Permission to land in Tingi Tingi, where the refugees were in the most vulnerable medical state, was constantly denied on security grounds. Medical teams were forced to travel by road from Amisi, resulting in confined working time which were absurdly short and irregular. Efforts to maintain a constant medical presence by stationing teams in the vicinity were also constrained by a delayed authorization from the AFDL. In addition, expatriate staff were not permitted to stay overnight in the camp. With access limitations it was impossible to deliver adequate assistance.

**On 15 March, Alliance forces took Kisangani, eastern Zaire's economic capital, gaining control over the entire region. On 18 March, Laurent-Désiré Kabila authorized aid organisations to travel to within 20 kilometres of Kisangani. Having had no access to Masisi since December, the MSF team conducted nutritional surveys in northern Goma, during which it tried to obtain information on the massacres. MSF headquarters sent a press officer to help document human rights violations.**



*My title was Public Health Information Officer for Kivu. It was more or less a cover because the job profile was written up in December 1996/January 1997. They were looking for somebody with human rights background and humanitarian experience to help the teams document what was happening with the refugees... There was a project in Bukavu (this was before I arrived) but they were basically uncertain as to what they were doing at that time. They were trying to identify the project. Jose-Antonio*

*Bastos was leaving when I arrived. He was project coordinator in Bukavu for MSF Holland. His reports and what was happening in Bukavu were one of the first indications that something might be going on because he had witnessed some of the incidents around Bukavu. It was largely because of that the idea of sending someone in to support the teams came about...The clearest indications that something was happening was coming from Bukavu. Around Goma, it wasn't so clear. You had a sense that there were two situations taking place. You had the situation in Bukavu with the attacks on the refugees, which then spread to the rest of Kivu, and then you had the situation in Masisi. In November, MSF Holland had done a report on Masisi, which was a situation in itself. It was related to the refugee situation but it was also its own context. It was a long history. My position was to look at both issues and at the time that I arrived, it wasn't clear if the Masisi situation was connected to what was happening to the refugees or not. But it was a parallel issue to be following.*

*We were denied access to Masisi – we had been denied since December. MSF Holland had always worked in Masisi and Masisi was very much a project that was close to a lot of peoples' hearts. From Goma, there was a lot more concentration on Masisi in some ways from Bukavu, where the focus was more on the refugees. When refugees started coming out from the Goma area and Masisi, everything became clear. So in the first two months, February and March, the attention was on trying to get access to Masisi and following the repatriation of the refugees... Because we didn't have access to Masisi, we were working in areas north of Goma doing nutritional surveys with the population and trying to find out a bit more about what was happening to the local population - not just the refugees - to find out if they were being targeted by the rebels, by the Rwandans, and the Kabila troops that had come in. There was a lot of tension between the Rwandans and the Congolese. We were hearing stories of villages being burned down, people being killed. So we were doing surveys and trying to get more information but people were very sensitive.*

Leslie Lefkow, MSF Holland Human Rights Officer, on Mission in Goma from 18 March to 2 April 1997, then MSF Holland HAD officer (in English).

**Beginning on 20 March, the refugees who arrived in Ubundu continued for the forest, pursued by villagers and the approaching Rwandan rebel forces.**



Florence Aubenas, 'Refugees Wander Blindly Through Zaire,' *Libération* (France), 27 March 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

They're fleeing again. Those who escaped the storm have set up a new camp in Ubundu, on the other side of the

river, 150 kilometres from Kisangani. There are fewer of them. By now, no one knows how many. And the story begins again. They settle in a bit, and then flee again. This time, residents of the neighboring village organised the drive, fearing that their fields would be looted. "And then they got scared when they saw some refugees suddenly collapse on the ground, as if struck by an illness that no one recognized," a humanitarian aid official who managed to get to the site on Monday said. In Zaire, representatives of the World Health Organisation (WHO) anticipate "unknown infectious epidemics, comparable to the Ebola virus, which may be due to a prolonged stay in the forest."

## MASISI AND SHABUNDA: HUMANITARIAN BAIT

**On 20 March, two volunteers from the MSF Holland team in Goma conducted an evaluation mission in Masisi with AFDL's authorisation. They found that all the villages leading to Masisi past the Alliance checkpoint had been burned and abandoned by their inhabitants.**



*At the end of March '97, we got permission to go into Masisi town and that was the first time in three months. So a team of a nurse and a logistician went in. They went through a checkpoint called Mashaki checkpoint which was set up mostly by Rwandans but also some Zairian members of the rebel group for the AFDL had participated. The team went up the road to Masisi town and they discovered that it was abandoned. All these villages had been burned down and were abandoned. At one point, some boy gave them a letter-because MSF had been working in this area for quite a long time so they were well known to the local population-and the letter said that the people were being targeted by the AFDL and that they wanted help and so on. The team reported this to the team in Goma and said that they wanted to go back in again and wanted me to go back with them to help to try and document what was going on there and to try to find out more about what was going on.*

Leslie Lefkow, MSF Holland Human Rights Officer, on Mission in Goma from 18 March to 2 April 1997, then MSF Holland HAD officer (in English).

**On 23 March, the team went back the same way, accompanied by Leslie Lefkow from MSF Holland Humanitarian Affairs Department. This time, team members took a different road than the one indicated at the AFDL checkpoint and went to a village where MSF had previously worked. The village and the health had been looted. The population indicated that there had been massacres in the nearby hills.**

 *When we got to this checkpoint, we said that we were going direct to Masisi town but in fact, we didn't-we went off the road. We went to a village off the road where MSF used to work. We arrived in the village and it looked as though nobody was there-you could see people running from their fields into the bushes-so cars were not welcomed. So we got to the village and nobody was there. Then, bit-by-bit, people came out and we met the local health assistant. The whole place had been looted. The health centre had been completely looted. A lot of people said that there had been killings around in the hills and that there were graves in different places. They asked us if we wanted to see them and we said no-we were there to see what the local health situation was and we would like to come back.*

Leslie Lefkow, MSF Holland Human Rights Officer, on Mission in Goma from 18 March to 2 April 1997, then MSF Holland HAD officer (in English).

**Armed men forced them to go to another village, where they pointed out several mass graves. The village chief told them that the rebels had attacked them.**

 *As we were getting ready to leave, one of the drivers said that we can't go yet. They say that there are armed guys along the road and they are going to shoot us if we leave. There was one guy, we called him Scarface, he was one of those people that you meet and say, this person is evil. He would have slit our throats in a minute -but what we found out was that he wasn't in charge. He said, "You can't leave-we want to show you these mass graves. So we started to march the four of us for 24 hours across the hills to this tiny village. They insisted in showing us these graves. We took photos. The bodies in the graves were decomposed. I saw a child's sandal-I don't think that they were soldiers. Then they took us to the head chief. The logistician thought that this guy was an ex-FAZ he might have been a commander-someone who was very well educated. He spoke to us for about an hour and kept saying that he wanted us to tell the world about what was happening, etc. Then he let us*

go. We felt later that we were the first international group that had gone in there. It was clear that the AFDL had been doing raids into this area and this was an armed group resisting the AFDL. So Scarface had basically taken us to his leader to check out what to do, and this guy had decided that it was in their best interest to let us go.

Leslie Lefkow, MSF Holland Human Rights Officer, on Mission in Goma from 18 March to 2 April 1997, then MSF Holland HAD officer (in English).

**Returning to the first village, the team was asked to take care of a young wounded man. Just as they were leaving, a man jumped into the car and explained that the armed men were Interahamwe and ex-FAR and were holding the village hostage.**

 *They let us go but they also made us take a wounded guy with us, -they wanted him to get back to Goma. Which, in itself was reasonable, but the problem it created was that we left the village with this wounded soldier and his girlfriend in the car. As we were leaving, another guy who was a teacher hopped into the car and wanted to talk. So we took him with us for a ways and he was saying that this armed group in the village was holding the population hostage, living off of them and keeping them as a shield from the AFDL and of course, this provoked attacks from the AFDL. He showed us several bodies of women and young people who had been recently killed. Then he left.*

Leslie Lefkow, MSF Holland Human Rights Officer, on Mission in Goma from 18 March to 2 April 1997, then MSF Holland HAD officer (in English).

**On the road back to Bukavu, AFDL soldiers held the MSF volunteers at the checkpoint all night. They had learned about the team's detour off the main road. In the following days, AFDL officials in Goma demanded a written summary of their visit.**

 *We got back to the checkpoint at 6pm and it was dark and the curfew was 5:30 to be back in Goma. Plus, the military at the checkpoint had asked another car if they had seen us. It was reported that they hadn't and we had this wounded guy in the car. Before we got to the checkpoint, we decided that we had to come up with some story because we didn't want to tell them that we*

had been to this village, because they would then go to the village and wipe everyone out. So we were going to say that we picked this guy up on the side of the road. But they knew that something was funny because we were so late and this other car had reported that they hadn't seen us. So they kept us there overnight. They never looked into the cars. We were worried about that because there were probably 20 or 30 military at the checkpoint and they were up in the hills all night getting drunk on banana beer and we were locked in the vehicles. We were afraid that if they would look at the wounded guy's wound, they would see that it was a bullet wound and that he was young and healthy. We were also worried because he was local and some of the troops were Zairian Tutsi from Masisi and these Tutsi had joined the Zairian forces after having been cleansed from Masisi. This guy recognized one of them at the checkpoint, but the soldier didn't recognize him.

They didn't hurt anyone. We all got out of it all right. But they were completely suspicious, they knew something was up. In the next days after in Goma, they kept asking us for a report of the trip and then putting restrictions on us getting access to Masisi again.

Leslie Lefkow, MSF Holland Human Rights Officer, on Mission in Goma from 18 March to 2 April 1997, then MSF Holland HAD officer (in English).

**Some members of the MSF Holland team in Goma thought they should publicise the information that the evaluation missions gathered in the Masisi. Others feared that this would endanger the villagers and MSF's programmes in the region. Some said that the team could weaken MSF's credibility by having lied to the AFDL about the goal of its mission.**

 We had huge conversations and discussions with the whole team before we left for Amsterdam. I'll never forget that-there were 12 of us-discussing what we should do. It came down to a split in the group with half of us saying we need to speak out about this, we need to try and do something and others saying that we can't jeopardize the operations we have running. I think there were a number of reasons. The point we had was that doing a nutritional survey in Shabunda-well fuck that- that's hardly life saving operations (and was thus not a strong enough programme to worry about being put in jeopardy)! The tricky point that some people felt although I'm not sure that I agree with them, is that because we lied, because we weren't transparent, that's why people treated the Masisi trip and the report differently from that from Shabunda. We didn't have permission to go into those areas. From my point of view, I didn't see that as a strong argument. Maybe there were other politics going on in the organisation that

I didn't know about. We had this big discussion and I said: "Are we sentencing those people in the village to death? Is the AFDL going to screen all the villages in the area to see where we went and is that poor schoolteacher going to suffer for it?" Maybe it was more that because we hadn't been transparent and hadn't had permission. Maybe there was also a guilty conscience that we brought these people into danger unwittingly. On the other hand, that was the first time in three months that we had any idea about what was going on in the area-and it was bad. I was very much in favor of doing something much stronger and in public with that information. But the team decided no. In terms of fighting for it-I guess there was a good argument that maybe having just come out of it, I wasn't being rational... We were very fearful that if people found out the name of the village, that it would cause a reprisal. We didn't say it, we used the K word when describing the village. We wouldn't name the village. That was an issue for the logistician that affected [his opinion about] doing a public statement. But to be honest, my memory of that meeting is not very clear on the positions that people took at the meeting. In the end, I felt that those that supported speaking out were not strong enough. It ended up coming away that we were not going to do anything-and that was just too much.

Leslie Lefkow, MSF Holland Human Rights Officer, on Mission in Goma from 18 March to 2 April 1997, then MSF Holland HAD officer (in English).

 Already before that, in February, we had a lot of discussions about advocacy, témoignage. Because we could not do so much work, we also debated a lot about the fact that we needed an advocacy strategy; What do you do if you do witness violation of human rights? What is our role as a humanitarian organisation?...blah blah blah.... Then this happened in Masisi and they had all these things witnessed. So what to do with all that information? First of all with the whole team we had huge debates and of course a lot of discussion with Amsterdam. So we decided then that for sure something had to be done with the information, but because we were not supposed to be there, we still had not explained what we really have done and experienced. The main worry was what we really had found. We were very concerned that the Kabila troops would go to that village and kill the people. So, to prevent that, we said that we were not going public; we were not going to tell the authorities what we had seen. But we had to do something with that information. So, we brought the team outside the country and with the support of a very good specialist on human rights, they prepared that whole document. Then it was mainly the strategy to use that document through human rights groups and not to go public with it. It was mainly because we were not transparent actually, and our activities there would risk the safety of the population and that would also risk our access again in the future. That was a clear message to the team when they were taken and shown the mass graves. They were very much told, "We

cannot release you because if we release you, you will tell everybody what you have seen and you have seen us here and they will come after us." So that was the whole negotiation between the team and the people to really try to calm them down: "this is MSF, we don't pass on all the information, we try to protect etc ..." So with these strong negotiations it was also very much that a warning against going public because if something happens no matter if it's through us or not, these people will all be killed because MSF would have given the information. So there was another reason, a kind of 'don't betray the people' in that sense. So that's why we did not go public.

Marcel Van Soest, MSF Holland Field Coordinator, Goma, January to March 1997 (in English).

**On 26 March, José Antonio Bastos, former MSF Emergency team Coordinator in Bukavu, went to London to inform the Amnesty International official for Central Africa about the violence committed in Masisi which he learned about during his mission.**



**'Proposal** for Plan of Action for Witnessed Masisi Events CONFIDENTIAL from Ed Schenkenberg, HAD to Goma programme manager, Masisi Explo Team, PS Network, HAD, HOM Goma , 2 April 1997 (in English). **D117**

**Extract:**

Amnesty International  
MSF and Amnesty International have recently intensified their contacts. Former project coordinator for Bukavu José-Antonio Bastos debriefed Amnesty's researcher for central Africa on 26 March. For the moment, the AI agenda is aimed at the creation of an independent Commission of Inquiry. On the advice of Mohammed Sahnoun, AI has sent a Memorandum to the UN Security Council on 24 March, to request a Commission of Inquiry that should investigate reports of atrocities in eastern Zaire. AI has indicated that in the (near) future it might be interested to use MSF's information, possibly with the view to support the work of the commission.



*I returned to Amsterdam and did a debriefing. Ed Schenkenberg from the humanitarian affairs department said to me, "That's very, very interesting. You have to debrief Amnesty International in London. You have to do it because you have information and some very important details. Since it happened six months ago, it's old and we can't do much now."*

So MSF Holland sent me to debrief the fellow in London who

was responsible for Rwanda. The information I gave him went into Amnesty's report. That was a little comforting, to see that the information didn't just disappear. We witnessed the events first-hand but couldn't speak out directly in the press. But later, for our population at least that information wasn't lost. I'm convinced that some facts that must be recorded and saved because they could be important in the future. To me, this was an obvious one. All the details and information I kept were used. I'm sure that it got into the hands of the UN Human Rights Commission and into Garreton's hands, and that some of my information went into the compiled materials that established that this occurred. And personally, I found that a little comforting.

Dr. José-Antonio Bastos, MSF ET (Emergency inter-sections Team) Coordinator in South Kivu (in French).

**On 26 March, UNHCR reported that 18,000 refugees were in Lula, 7 kilometres from Kisangani. They were prohibited from entering the village. 1000 refugees were still at the Tingi Tingi site, in a desperate condition. Unable to maintain an on-going presence the MSF volunteers could provide only inadequate aid.**



**'Information Bulletin 285'**, MSF France, 26 March 1997 (in French). **D118**

**Extract:**

The situation in Tingi Tingi is tragic for the 1,000 - 1,500 refugees who were unable to flee. During the week of 14-22 March, 179 people died, for a mortality rate of 12 - 18 % in one week. If nothing is done, they will all die in fewer than two months. MSF teams tried to bring aid, but it was so minimal that all they could do was watch the refugees die. The plane can land only at Amisi and then the team continues on via the road between Amisi and Tingi Tingi. No meaningful aid can reach them.

We plan to call for their repatriation to Rwanda, but under appropriate conditions and voluntarily, ensuring that they will receive care which is not a certainty. The other solution is to treat them in the health facilities in Goma, which requires negotiating directly with Kabila. To be continued...

UNHCR noted that around 18,000 refugees arrived some 7 kilometres from Kisangani. Only reporters were authorized to meet them yesterday. The HCR did not obtain this authorization. The refugees are blocked and are prohibited from entering Kisangani.

Update: UNHCR announced tonight that it was able to deliver a truckload of biscuits, milk and medicines to them today. The refugees have settled into a makeshift camp in Lula.

The same day, Marcel Van Soest, MSF Holland's Coordinator in Goma, and Marie-Christine Férir, from MSF Belgium Emergency cell, went to Kisangani, which the MSF France team had evacuated on 1 March. They found the local staff in good health. The site and supplies had not been looted. Because the region's new authorities did not welcome French organisations, the reopened mission was registered officially under the auspices of MSF Holland. The Belgian section coordinated the team, which included volunteers from the Belgian, French and Dutch sections and Zairian staff.



'An Incredible Experience' **Update** from Marcel Van Soest, MSF Holland coordinator, 27 March 1997 (in English). **D119**

#### Extract:

An incredible experience:

Arrived in Kisangani, hired a taxi and went to MSF house and office. Everything there-plus the staff plus the car-incredible. Just before, I heard from other agencies how difficult it is to find an appropriate house in Kisangani. MSF prepared their evacuation very well, thanks. Also just in time as militaries just visited day before the compound and chose it as their own, but understood our wish to keep it. Incredible...

MSF is considered very welcome, programme should be balanced between local pop[ulation] plus IDPs and the refugees. French nationalities seems to be OK here as long as it is not for a French . Goma is asked today (via hcr Kis-Goma) to ask Kamp to send all 4 expats standby for MSFB tomorrow to Goma. And with this message I want to ask Goma to arrange 4 seats in the plane Goma-Kis on Friday. As MSF is welcome and needed and if we immediately show support to Kis and pop[ulation] then this is the opportunity to bring in French nationalities. Completely different atmosphere here than in Goma programme. MSF presence here is considered as MSF H and coordination will continue under MSF Goma till MSF B is registered to work in east Zaire. General hospital visited, very poor and bad state. See report Marie Christine coming day(s).

**From 26 March to 3 April, two MSF Holland volunteers (James Fraser, a logistician-administrator and Maryse Bonnel, a nurse) participated in a UNHCR mission, authorised by the AFDL, to travel from Bukavu to Shabunda via Kigulube to identify and prepare to set up transit points for the refugees. Maryse stopped in Kigulube, halfway between Bukavu and Shabunda, to set up health stations, while James continued on to Shabunda with the rest of the group. The trip took nine days over a difficult road and under precarious security conditions. A 'facilitator' required by the AFDL went along with the team.**



James Fraser '**Exploratory Mission Report - Kigulube - Catchungu - Shabunda,**' beginning of April 1997 (in English). **D120**

#### Extract:

26 March-slept 39.5 km - Kiseku - departed Kigulube 9:50h arrived 17:45h- total travel time 7 hours 55 minutes. 27 March -slept 115.3 km - Catchungu- departed Kiseku 6:05h arrived 18:30h- total travel time 12 hours 55 minutes. 28 March -slept 151.0 km - Keisha- departed Catchungu 8:15h arrived 17:45h- total travel time 9 hours 30 minutes. 29 March -slept 172.0 km - Shabunda- departed Keisha 6:35h arrived 10:10h- total travel time 3 hours 45 minutes

Detailed notes on movements were only taken on way there as the main purpose was to come up with a detailed route description. On the return trip, our notes were hidden along with notebooks so as not to create problems when we met the military because our facilitator was always present and giving detailed reports to military personal along the route. The return trip took one extra day however between Catchungu and Kigulube due to the difficult road conditions. The trip took 9 days in total...

#### Participants:

MSF- 1 expat, 1 driver, 1 local staff nurse  
UNHCR: 1 expat, 1 driver, 1 local staff assistant  
Care: 1 local staff  
Alliance: 1 facilitator  
Total 8 participants -2 vehicles

#### Objective:

Exploratory mission to assess the feasibility and possible locations for transit stations along the western axis from Kigulube to Shabunda.



*The project coordinator took us aside before we were going to Kigulube and explained to us our mission: to try to go as far west as we can and to look for transit camp sites about every 25 kilometres so that when the refugees started to come back we could provide shelter, a place for medical services, and food. Then the refugees coming back would have a place to stop, rest, then keep going. The MSF team had heard of things happening west of Kigulube. They did not know what was going on, but it could be dangerous. "If you are comfortable in going then you can go." I said okay because I had no idea of really what I was getting myself into... Maryse had received a good briefing on the areas we were in. She knew that in Nzovu and in the forest there were people. She gave me as much information as she had and told me my mission was to go far to the west to Shabunda to find out what is going on. There were two objectives: one to figure out where our transit camps would be in the west; another would be to figure out what was happening... The 'facilitator' was a spy, he was sent to*

watch us. He was like the cousin of the head ADFL person in charge in Bukavu. He wasn't too smart-, we could trick him-, and he was really lazy, if he was very scared of the ADFL. We saved him twice because we stood up for him. The Rwandans and the people in Shabunda were actually reporting to the general in Goma. Our contact was with the general in Bukavu and there was a power struggle going on between the two of them. So this guy represented the Bukavu people and everyone in the field hated him and even threatened him. He was the humanitarian affairs guy for the ADFL, he was supposed to go to Goma, and they told him if he was going to land they were going to shoot him out of the sky. That is how bad relations were between them..

James Fraser, MSF Holland Shabunda explo team,  
26 March to 3 Avril 1997 (in English).

**In Kigulube, a priest told the team that ADFL soldiers had carried out massacres. In the villages where the team stopped, peasants - always warned in advance of the team's visit by ADFL soldiers - said that those soldiers had been killing refugees and these who helped the refugees. Posted along the Kigulube road all the way to Shabunda, they kept watch on the forest and terrorised the population. James quickly concluded that the mission should focus primarily on gathering information on the violence.**



James Fraser, 'Exploratory Mission Report - Kigalube - Catchungu - Shabunda,' beginning of April 1997 (in English). [D120](#)

**Extract:**

- 23.5 km - village Gnakasana
- 2 sick refugees present in village, part of a larger group which are found around village in the forest. Unable to get estimate of numbers in the forest.
- First clear description by local population of the pressure the military are putting on those who are helping the refugees. Population who help refugees will be eliminated by military.
- Told us that there have been incidents of military killing refugees but were unwilling to specify any incidents. Many of those who were speaking to us were reluctant to give us clear information as they were afraid to speak to us. It was clear however, that they were trying to indicate to us what was occurring.
- [...] 27km - village Kabungungue
- [...]villager -the military are killing the refugees in the forest.
- [...] 93.5 km- village Kilalou
- there are many refugees in the forest
- there were two sick refugees in the village
- there were 40 refugees killed in this village, the story

confirmed by another villager at the other end of the village on the return trip saying that 43 refugees had been killed

- there was a woman in this village which had come through with a group of 400. She was too ill to continue and remained behind. This woman was terrified because those four hundred seemed to have disappeared. She stated that they always know were the group they travel with ends up. They always get word about some people in the group. She had not heard anything about anyone which was part of the group. Also there was not a group that size which came through Kigulube since we have had a presence there.
- Refugee teen from Burundi was beaten up after speaking to us. We found this out on return trip from Shabunda. [...]As we drove from village to village, it was clear that the villagers and refugees alike were terrified of the military. In practically every village we stopped in we heard stories or insinuations about what the military was doing to the refugees. The stories ranged from incidents to precise descriptions with locations and numbers of refugees getting killed. In addition, the deadline for helping and sensitisation efforts of the military terrified the local population. On our way to Shabunda we often heard that the military had preceded us in order to tell villagers that we were coming. Also, a little more disturbing, we heard from both the local population and refugees alike that the military followed us. When we pass through, refugees hear that we are in the area, feel safe, and emerge from the forest. The military who are following us then eliminate the refugees who have emerged from the forest.



One day this priest came up to us, "They are Nazis, they are killing everybody. You have to tell the international community." He was going crazy... To me, it was clear as soon as I found out what was happening around us, the goal was to get as much information as possible and get the info out. Use the info. I still looked for the transit camp sites, but I used that more as an excuse to find and look for information and speak to the locals.

James Fraser, MSF Holland Shabunda explo team,  
26 March to 3 Avril 1997 (in English).

**In response to villagers' questions about how to help the refugees, the team thought it best to advise them to take a path leading to MSF's health station in Nzovu, a few kilometres north of Kigulube. When the team came back to Kigulube a few days later, no refugees had come to the health station by that road. However, five ADFL soldiers were observed along the same path.**



James Fraser, 'Exploratory Mission Report - Kigalube - Catchungu - Shabunda,' beginning of April 1997 (in English). [D120](#)

#### Extract:

18.3km - village Kisuku

- refugees in this village
- told that there was a path from Kisuku to Nzovu (22km north of Kigulube) through the forest which will allow the refugees to bypass the military presence just west of Kigulube.
- From this point on when asked by the local population how to help the refugees, since the military had told them that they were no longer allowed to help refugees, we began to instruct them to take this path to Nzovu. These instructions were against my better judgment, yet we had no alternative. To me it is clear that the Alliance received this information. When we returned to Kigulube, I was informed by Maryse that on 2 April approximately fifty soldiers passed through Kigulube heading for Nzovu. There have been no refugees coming to Kigulube from that direction since.



*The Zairian population were coming out and saying, "The Tutsis' said we can only help the refugees until Easter, after that they are going to kill us if we help them. What do we do? Help us." At that point we did not know what was happening. We knew what the priest said, but it all still did not make sense. So what we did was that we told them to send the refugees through the forest to Nzolu, because then they would be in the loop. By this point we did not know that there were spies in every village. After this, you would see the regular villagers and then always two guys who were dressed very well. So we told the refugees to go there. Two days later there were ADFL soldiers that came there and went north and there were no more refugees coming from Nzolu.*

James Fraser, MSF Holland Shabunda explo team,  
26 March to 3 April 1997 (in English).

**The team discovered mass graves in several locations and noticed clothing scattered or strewn in trees. According to the UNHCR representative, these were signs left by survivors to indicate to other refugees that massacres had occurred.**



James Fraser, 'Exploratory Mission Report - Kigalube - Catchungu - Shabunda,' beginning of April 1997 (in English). [D120](#)

#### Extract:

7.2 km - road leading to mass grave (UNHCR list of sites to be inspected). We were unable to inspect many of the sites due to the presence of a facilitator or local Alliance representatives present in every village.

- reported that at least 240 bodies recently (no exact date given) buried in this grave
- report confirmed by the Catchungu missionary
- from 0km to 12.3 km a pair of soldiers were stationed every km and kept us moving
- when we arrived in Mpwe at 12.3km, third in command of Kigulube military asks facilitator where and if we had stopped. Relieved to find out that we did not stop.

12.3 km - village Mpwe

- heavy presence of soldiers - minimum five
- this village is outer limit from Kigulube of heavy military presence
- mass grave site on right hand side while traveling west behind house with metal roof. On UNHCR lists to be inspected. Inspection impossible. I did not see this grave. Reports from UNHCR said that this grave was large and to hide it, the ground was prepared to look like a second house was going to be built.
- Numbers of victims in grave unknown.
- Dates of when grave was filled is unknown.

17 km [west of Kigulube] - clothing on side of the road

- unable to stop on the way there, but on the return trip, vehicles were stuck in mud, giving me the opportunity to inspect
- men's and women's clothing
- headbands
- pink plastic bowl
- all items strewn across the ground
- clothing hanging in tree. This has been identified (UNHCR sources) as an indication that killings occurred at this site. Refugees will do this to warn other refugees of incidents in areas.

- Followed path to small stream approximately 250 metres away, could not find any more evidence.

[...] 38.7 km- village Kuseku 1

- refugees are spread out in the forest
- military threatens those who help refugees
- no mention of military harming local populations
- there are refugees hiding in every village
- refugees afraid to continue to Kigulube as the military are there
- confirmation by local population of 240 killed in mass grave of 7.2 km west of Kigulube

 The UNHCR protection officer brought me to the side, told me that she knew that there were mass graves, and she needed my help to try and distract the spies in the village, as well as the ADFL guy in the car with us. So we came up with a plan how to distract people, so we could look around and get information. She told me that at Mquang there was a mass grave and that is why the soldiers were there. She had a list of other ones. In the village of Kisigu, there were more graves by the river. As we went along, one of the first villages, the ADFL guy did not want to get out of the car because he was too hot. So the UNHCR protection officer and her assistant came out of the car with me. The assistant went towards the river and the two spies in this village followed him. He got them in conversation; so then we had the chance to look around. We found graves just over this hill on the side of the village, pretty big, of freshly dug soil, interned with little crosses in it. So then we took pictures.

One interesting thing is that in the beginning there was no sign of anything and then as you drove along the road you started to see these graves, these big overturned fields on the side of the road. As we got closer and closer to one of these towns, Kishiawutu, I asked, "What does G stand for? Oh G is for grave!" There were seven alleged mass graves and there were crosses. When I was coming back we had a boy who had died in our car. He had malaria and he died. Then we went with our driver and some people from the village to the cemetery of that village and we had to walk a long way. They had raised the soil with stones and they did a nice job. So I started to ask them about burial rituals. Apparently they would never bury them inside the village unless they were burying an important person. So all these other graves we saw in the village that were huge, did not jive with what the locals were telling me about the ritual and how they usually did things.

James Fraser, MSF Holland Shabunda explo team,  
26 March to 3 Avril 1997 (in English).

**Village leaders reported that during an 'ideological' session, Alliance representatives ordered them to stop providing any support to refugees and help the soldiers remove all signs of massacres along the roads. Just before reaching Shabunda, the team came upon a group of soldiers 'cleaning' bodies.**

 As you got farther along the way, things got messier and messier. At this bridge at Shabunda, one side was really clean and the other side they hadn't had a chance yet to clean and there was lots of material: clothing; a license; eating utensils. So they were trying to clean

ahead of us and they were trying to delay us. They kept telling us we did not have permission to go, you need permission for access. There were places you would go and you would see a huge square. There would be grass this high compared to the other grass this high and I can't say for sure that they were mass graves. But the fact that there was freshly overturned soil, everybody told us that people were cleaning up ahead of us. Just before we got to Shabunda we actually came across ADFL soldiers and Zairians and they were surprised. One colonel, named Colonel Jackson came out and started yelling at me in Kinyarwanda. It was the UNHCR protection officer who knew it was Kinyarwanda. She is the one who was identifying the soldiers as Tutsi who were running up and down the road cleaning. So this person was screaming at us and then I told him I only understood French. He started speaking to me in French and at the same time I could see behind him there were Zairians throwing shovels into a truck. They were putting shovels away really quickly. As soon as they were done putting the shovels in the truck, he got into the truck, stopped yelling and he said, "Do you have any diesel for us" and then we said, "no" and then he left.

James Fraser, MSF Holland Shabunda explo team,  
26 March to 3 Avril 1997 (in English).

**In Shabunda, representatives of the Alliance Intelligence agency (SNR) held the team overnight, after making veiled death threats.**

 It was scary. We got to Shabunda and they kind of took us as prisoners and they told us how they were going to kill us and how they were going to get away with it. They brought us to this monastery and pointed to us and told us "You go to this room, you go to that room." I remembered when I left my last mission, two people were murdered. They came at night and killed them.

So we were there and we were in our rooms. I went out to talk to the UNHCR protection officer and I looked everywhere. I found a key to lock one room. We all pretended to go to bed, and then we waited until it was dark and we snuck out and locked ourselves in that one room. At four in the morning these people came and started walking the hallway. They did not do anything but this was the only time I thought, "The party is over." And nothing happened. The next day we got up and demanded our passports back and they would say no and we would say yes and we would not take no for an answer. They finally gave them to us. [...] ... In Shabunda, on the ground in the dark I could hear my heart getting louder and louder. I was thinking, "Oh my god, I am never going to see my mom again". But after that I wouldn't act scared. There was this Carl Lewis, named after this American runner who won two gold medals in the Olympics. They had these code names so they

wouldn't have their real names. He was sort of in charge of us. He was really pushy and trying to scare me. The next day he would ask you, "Were you scared last night?" I would say, "Of course not, we had you protecting us." He would get mad.

James Fraser, MSF Holland Shabunda explo team,  
26 March to 3 April 1997 (in English).

**Members of the intelligence agency openly confirmed their strategy, which aid agencies had determined several months earlier: humanitarian organisations were being used as lures to convince the refugees to come out of the forest.**



*They were basically in control of Shabunda. There were representatives from the ADFL, they were both Tutsi and Zairians, they were a committee. They told us straight "We can't reach the enemy in the forest, it is good to use the NGO's to pull the refugees out of the forest."*

James Fraser, MSF Holland Shabunda explo team,  
26 March to 3 April 1997 (in English).

**On the road back, the team stopped at the home of a missionary who had hidden and protected refugees and confirmed that thousands of refugees had been killed in the region. Just after the humanitarian team left, ADFL soldiers killed several people at the mission and under threat, forced the missionary to draw out refugees from the forest onto the main road.**



James Fraser, 'Exploratory Mission Report - Kigulube - Catchungu - Shabunda' beginning of April 1997 (in English). [D120](#)

**Extract:**

112.8 km [...]

- The first night we stayed in Catchungu March 27, 5 refugees were killed by knife at the bridge and thrown into the river, killings confirmed by the priest's local staff
- The night we spent in Catchungu on the return trip March 31, 3 refugees were executed just outside Catchungu by automatic weapons. The fire woke us up and killings confirmed next day by [...] local staff. The executions were likely done by Commander Jackson and his men as they were in the village getting their vehicle repaired at [...the] mission.

- On the return trip Commander Jackson put up a show of his power in Catchungu by rounding up approximately 100 men. When we drove past to leave the village he was sitting in the middle of them smiling and waving at us
- After we left they went into Jim's compound and killed two of his local staff and a number of refugees. The only way the priest was able to stop them was by agreeing to get refugees moving out of the area down the road towards Kigulube. This information was originally given to me by the priest over the radio, later confirmed by M. of Save the Children in Bukavu.
- The priest states that there is a large mass grave just north on the road to Lulingu
- This road to Lulingu is littered with bodies according to reports from Jim and local staff
- We were told that on our way to Shabunda we would come across many bones, decomposing bodies, skulls, etc.. This was told to us by [the priest] and his local staff
- Alliance beginning to go into forest to find refugees, have a difficult time to find them, they are using us to bring them out of the forest.



*There was a minister and his presence was a protection for the refugees, because the ADFL would not kill the refugees until after he had left. He was the guy who called the radio who said I have got to get out of here. He got out but I have never spoken to him again. On our way back to Catchungu, that was the night we were sleeping and stayed at the mission. I heard the gunshots and the next day there were reports of refugees killed in the forests and we were like, "Okay we have to go". We told the minister to come with us but he said, "No because if I leave they will loot." So he stayed and when we were leaving we went by his place. There was Colonel Jackson and this little Zairian guy. They had a lot of men from the village basically standing behind them, basically playing a show of power. I don't know what it was. He put his chair in the middle of the road, with all of these men with guns just standing there. We weren't sure what that meant, but we were leaving. After we left, according to the priest over the radio, they went in the compound, in the missionary's compound and started killing the refugees. That was when he said he had to go. He was protecting the refugees and he had to tell them to start walking down the road or they would start killing everyone in the compound. So he was being forced to send the refugees away and as they were walking down the road they were being killed. That guy had been there for like 17 years! And he said it was always peaceful. They didn't always have much but it was nothing like the bloodshed they had seen in the last few years.*

James Fraser, MSF Holland Shabunda explo team,  
26 March to 3 April 1997 (in English).

**Certain team members also compromised team security. In addition to the ‘facilitator,’ who served as the AFDL’s eyes and ears, the MSF Zairian nurse had inappropriate contact with soldiers, drew up lists of refugees, and used the radio clandestinely.**



James Fraser, ‘**Exploratory Mission Report** - Kigalube - Catchungu - Shabunda,’ beginning of April 1997 (in English). [D120](#)

**Extract:**

Not only did we have to be extremely careful because of the Alliance facilitator’s presence, but as the trip wore on, it became increasingly clear where the loyalties of some of local staff were. By the end of the trip we discovered that one of our local nurses was an informant for the Alliance. The night the UNHCR delegate and I were placed under de facto house arrest, our local staff ate and fraternized with the Alliance soldiers and commanders all night. As a result we had no buffer between ourselves and the Alliance which we might have needed to manoeuvre. It was clear that information was being passed, that excuses were being given and attempts to mislead us were coming from certain members of the local staff present on the trip. On the return leg of the trip, while we were in Catchungu, the nurse tried to secure a list of names from the priest’s secretary. This list was of names of the local population which were helping refugees in the area. Polydor also continued during the trip to secure lists of refugees, even after he was explicitly instructed that we were not to collect names on this mission. One morning I caught the nurse using the vehicle code name at approximately 05:45 while the rest of us were sleeping. When asked who he was speaking to, he stated that it was he who received a call from the local wat-san in Kigulube. When I tried to confirm his story with the wat-san upon my return to Kigulube, the story was untrue as the wat-san only made contact with the local nurse once, at approximately 09:00 in the presence of Maryse, the expat nurse.

**James Fraser suspected the UNHCR representative of hiding information from the rest of the team and her mission’s objectives remained unclear.**



James Fraser, ‘**Exploratory Mission Report** - Kigalube - Catchungu - Shabunda,’ beginning of April 1997 (in English). [D120](#)

**Extract:**

It appears to me that the UNHCR representative withheld information from me at least twice. The times that this was clear to me were both incidents which had to do with the killing of local population. This may or may not have been a coincidence.



*Sometimes she would tell me her strategy. You have to give people a little information to make it seem like you are exchanging and then get them. She would give me a bunch of tricks. We had some pretty tough times like on the way back and I found out that she had lied to me. At a party, we talked for ten minutes. She offered me a job, on the spot. You can work at UNHCR. It was too odd to be sincere, more to shut me up. That was my feeling at the time... I cannot remember which village it was now, but we were coming through and all of a sudden these people came running at us and kind of surrounding us. They were talking to the protection officer and so I radio’ed and she said they killed those people that we talked to. Then I was like, “What?” She said it very clearly and then she said, “Oh nothing.” She realized she had told me. Then she slipped up later when we were talking with someone from Save the Children. She said it again in front of me to someone else and I caught her in the lie. The first time I tried to ask her again and then she lied. She just did not want to talk about it. In Bukavu, she was talking with friends and she said in front of me that people were killed for talking with us and I caught her lying. I was telling someone else and I said but I thought you said this and she was like, “Oh!” She was trying to cover up the information from me.*

James Fraser, MSF Holland Shabunda explo team, 26 March to 3 April 1997 (in English).

**Finally, gaps in the radio communications system compromised not only the team’s security, but also that of the refugees the team was in contact with.**



James Fraser, ‘**Exploratory Mission Report** - Kigalube - Catchungu - Shabunda,’ beginning of April 1997 (in English). [D120](#)

**Extract:**

When Maryse and I arrived and were sent into the field we were given a list of frequencies and cell-call numbers for HF [high frequency]. All the frequencies and cell-calls were wrong. [...] Security in the area west of Kigulube is precarious. This has mostly to do with the lack of transparency of our communications systems. The insecurity which exists due to inadequate communications is true for the expats, local staff, as well as for refugees. It is clear that the Alliance possess enough HF radios to be able to cover most of Zaire. MSF alone lost 60 vehicles many of which were equipped with HF radios. HF material was stored at the Shabunda Catholic Mission. While we were in the field, communications in Swahili and other local dialects were heard on our frequencies, some of which have been identified as military. Another problem with security is the misuse of and disrespect towards radio codes, by local

staff and expats alike. Codes of locations are revealed by switching back and forth between them and real names of locations within the same transmission. It is clear that there is no security in the use of codes in that region. I suggest that codes should be changed regularly and their use should be adhered to. If not locations of expats, local staff and refugees will continue to be monitored.

Another problem is the fact that MSF is giving refugee numbers and movements over the radio. This means that anyone listening can figure out where paths which refugees may use through the forest are [situated], or regions where heavy concentrations of refugees may be. In this context where the militaries' prime objective seems to be the elimination of the refugees, we are only facilitating their work.

 *I was really pissed off. One time we were going here and getting all this info and they (MSF coordination team) were demanding that we pass the information over the radio. They kept demanding that we do it! This was happening - all these people were being killed - we had a pretty clear idea that this was happening, and they were still providing intake information of how many refugees were coming in at what time over the radio. Then it was like everywhere, the info the medical coordinator needed to know. We were telling everyone where the refugees were coming from, how many, which town. Wherever we were in Kivu we were supposed to send in the information on the refugees. So you could probably tell the concentration of refugees, where they were coming from, all those kind of things. The military was listening - I can't imagine they weren't. I told the coordination team I could not tell them now. I could not tell them anything. I guess they could have been unaware, I just thought it was a very stupid thing to do. I tried to tell them things, but our codes were not very effective. If you say "200 strawberry", everyone knows where you are. They know how many people they'd just killed; they are going to know what you are talking about.*

James Fraser, MSF Holland Shabunda explo team,  
26 March to 3 Avril 1997 (in English).

**During the second half of March, at around 80 kilometres from Kisangani, some of the refugees in the group of ex-FAR and community leaders split off into the forest. The other refugees, mostly women, children and elderly, continued toward Kisangani.**



'Refugees Wander Blindly Through Zaire,'  
*Libération* (France), 27 March 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

Excerpts: A Split in the Road

The long line of people headed back onto the road again. The road splits at the 82 kilometre marker. The right fork leads to Kisangani, today under rebel control. On the left, it leads into the forest, still under Zairian army authority. Without a word, the crowd divides, knowing it would not come back together. "For the first time in all these years, everyone thought about his own fate without listening to what the others said," said Antonin, a farmer. "I didn't commit genocide. I chose to go to the city, where I might have a chance to be repatriated." According to UNHCR, which conducted an overflight of the area on Monday, several tens of thousands of people made that same choice. The first have already arrived in Lula. Seeing them, a villager said, with surprise, "But I thought you were all dead already."

According to many witnesses, the group of ex-FAR soldiers and the exiled leaders took the road to the left. One young man stayed at the split for a long time, calling his father, whom he saw disappear into the bush. "He came back and spit in my face. Then he said, 'Look carefully, you're watching the departure of the last living specimens of the Hutu race.' "

 *At 84 kilometres, there was a choice. Some said, "We're going on, we don't want to be captured, we don't want to go on and end up in Congo Brazzaville." Everyone was so panicked, there was such confusion, all the control structures the genocideurs set up simply fell apart. It didn't work any more. People couldn't take any more. There were too many deaths, even on their side. There was probably an over-representation of radicals and genocideurs who left for Congo Brazzaville. But the ones who went to Kisangani held the white flag. They knew that by going to Kisangani, they were entering RPF-controlled territory because the city had been taken. As you got closer to that miserable place and approached the 42- marker, you'd see people in a horrifying state. In the beginning, it was first things first there. It was a catastrophe. We set up feeding centres and tried to save as many people as possible.*

Dr. Éric Goemaere, MSF Belgium General Director  
(in French).

## UBUNDU KISANGANI: THE RAILWAY LINES OF DEATH

On 27 March, a train was finally authorised to travel the 150 kilometres between Kisangani and Ubundu. MSF Holland's Marcel Van Soest was on the train. He found around 100,000 refugees near exhaustion after having walked hundreds of kilometres, surviving on leaves and roots. [V6](#) 

 On the day that I was supposed to fly to Goma, I was dropping Marie-Christine (Ferir MSF Belgium emergency team) at the train to see if that day it will leave. But then she forgot something and she said, "I have to get it and probably we won't leave anyway". So she went back to the house. Exactly then the train was leaving and MSF had to be in, so I jumped. I was off, I really had to be in Goma and Bukavu ... but in the end that was very good because then we were there with the first group. That was an unbelievable trip that was amazing.

There were a lot of journalists, mainly the French journalists like a journalist from Libération, a journalist from Reuters, a television crew from France 2, and there was a video camera from WFP, a journalist free-lancer; he was there on assignment for WFP. WFP was on the train, with local staff and a lot of food and there was one expat from UNHCR, and there was me, and that was it.

There was nobody else, no NGOs, nothing, local Red Cross, local WFP, one expat of MSF and then journalists. So it was a bit of a strange trip. The train went very slowly. It was very hot. It was the first time the train was used after I don't know how many years. So there were all the trees. They were all grown. It was just one green town.

At the end, suddenly Kabila had said, "Yes, this train can go now, with WFP we went down as far as possible. Biaro was the first place and then we went down to Kasese as well and there was the last one, the end point that we went. We didn't go all the way to Ubundu, because Ubundu was already reported to be empty. But from Ubundu up to Kisangani, we found the first transit camp which was always one after where we found the all the dead bodies and where all the fighting had taken place. That's probably why Kabila said all the time "no" the previous days, because there were still a lot of fighting against the refugees, because it was still the Interahamwe who were together... And the rest was just a skeleton march, it was incredible, a lot of dead bodies. Everything was wrong. And they were all along the railroad, just some were walking and the strongest arrived to Biaro. The third that went south, was the most vulnerable, the old, the women, etc... All very sick. We stopped at several places and it was clear that UNHCR knew that Kabila was not allowing them to enter Kisangani town. So they had to do their own plan, what to do with the refugees, because

Kabila wanted to push them back completely to Ubundu. UNHCR was fighting for them to stay at least where they were now, first negotiate what needs to be done for the people. So he was mentioning to people, "Please stay here, we are negotiating for your departure back to Rwanda, don't go anywhere else. We try to provide you with assistance." They wanted to go back to Rwanda, because they were completely finished. They didn't mind, they wanted to get out of the jungle, away from the fighting and the hunting and they were just desperate, "Please could you bring me back to Rwanda and that's it.". I have never seen that in my life. They were completely exhausted. No hope, nothing, just "Bring me back." That was very clear. They did not want to return for sure, they did not want to go further into Zaire. They looked horrible, all the feet with big wounds. A lot of shot wounds because there was still a lot of fighting some days before. I was alone and I had nothing to treat them. Nothing! That was horrible. UNHCR had a satellite phone, so that evening, I reported to Marie-Christine how serious it was. They were preparing everything. So that was good and there was a confirmation from somebody in UNHCR about how the situation was."

Marcel Van Soest, MSF Holland Field Coordinator,  
Goma, January to March 1997 (in English).

 The refugees were spread out along a little railroad track between Kisangani and a mining area. It was about 90 kilometres long. That's why the camps were named after the distance (in kilometres) along the train track where people had stopped. The trail ran along the tracks in the forest, thick with bamboo, and the column of people was as packed in there. It was like a comet, with a head and a tail – that's the best image we could come up with - with the RPF pursuing them. Gradually, the ones at the end, the weakest, died, abandoning their children. There was a huge number of children abandoned in the forest because they were ill and couldn't keep up. The strategy of harassment was awful. Every night, just when people managed to fall asleep for a bit, they began firing. You had to leave again, pack up, get on the road again. They didn't need to use bullets. The weakest died at the end of the line. Gradually, the comet lost the elderly first and then the sick and the abandoned children. At the front, when we came back from Kisangani, the column was stopped at kilometre 11, by a camp of Congolese-Rwandan soldiers. But the Rwandans took control quickly and prohibited the column from moving ahead.

Dr. Éric Goemaere, MSF Belgium General Director  
(in French).

The same day, the MSF Holland team in Goma met Roberto Garretton, the UN's Special Reporter for human

rights in eastern Zaire. He was gathering information in support of a commission of inquiry into the massacres. The team did not pass on the information on the mass graves gathering during the mission in the Masisi.



'Proposal for Plan of Action for Witnessed Masisi Events, Confidential', from Ed Shenkenberg to Zaire programme manager, HAD and MSF Goma Coordinator, 2 April 1997 (in English). [D117](#)

#### Extract:

UN Special Reporter on human rights situation in Zaire:

On Friday 27 March, MSF met the UN Special Reporter on the human rights situation in Zaire, Roberto Garreton in Goma. His mission was to collect evidence of continuing allegations of massacres in eastern Zaire with the aim to submit a proposal to the Commission on Human Rights (which is currently holding its annual session in Geneva) to establish a commission of inquiry. MSF did not disclose the information on the mass graves in Masisi, since it felt unsure of how Garreton would use this information. Garreton from his side however pointed out that he had sufficient information to build his argument for the Commission to adopt a resolution authorising a Commission of Inquiry. This means that MSF's information can be best submitted to such a Commission of Inquiry.



*Garreton—the Special Reporter for Kivu— arrived with his assistant who we knew because he used to work for MSF. They arrived in Goma a few days after we got back from Masisi and so we met with them, Lisette (MSF H Medical Coordinator in Goma) and I. They kept asking us if anyone on the team had witnessed mass graves and could we confirm allegations of different sites and massacres, etc. Lisette was not very comfortable about being open with them. So we were quite guarded on what we told at the time.*

Leslie Lefkow, MSF Holland Human Rights Officer, on Mission in Goma from 18 March to 2 April 1997, then MSF Holland HAD officer (in English).

**When the train returned to Kisangani on 28 March, aid was organised at the sites where survivors had gathered: Kasese 1 and Kasese 2 at kilometre 29, Biaro at kilometre 41 and Obilo at kilometre 82. The MSF team was strengthened and staff set up two field hospitals and clinics.**



'Newsflash n°48,' MSF Amsterdam, 2 April 1997 (in English). [D121](#)

#### Extract:

RE-INFORCEMENT ZAIRE TEAMS:

16 expats sent by MSF-B arrived in Kampala. They are on their way to reinforce the Kisangani team. Next to this a charter carrying 30 tonnes of relief goods, 4 expats and a press officer, is on its way to Kampala. The charter will continue to Goma. The load as well as the expats are also meant for Kisangani.

About 100,000 (UNHCR figure) Rwandan refugees are still camping along the railroad Kisangani-Ubundu. The health situation of the group located at Biaro (approx. 30,000/UNHCR) is worse. Infected bullet wounds, diarrhoea, malnutrition, malaria, exhaustion and dehydration are the main health problems. Biaro does not have clean drinking water.

MSF started up dispensaries for this group last Monday. We are trying to step up medical support for this group as well as for groups further south, but humanitarian agencies do not have adequate access to all refugees along the railroad yet. Earlier, MSF had already set up medical facilities for groups closer to Kisangani. All together MSF now runs 3 OPDs, 1 IPD, 1 therapeutic and 3 supplementary feeding centres and several dispensaries along the railroad. Because of lack of input by other organisations, in some locations MSF also carried out biscuits and water distribution. Several medical structures had to be moved over the past two days, together with about 25,000 refugees (UNHCR figure) that were closest to Kisangani, in Lula. The military forced this group to move further south, because they considered it to be too close to a military camp.

Over 15,000 (UNHCR) Rwandan refugees have gathered in Karuba, a village West of Goma at the edge of the Masisi. More still come in. The refugees walked to this village following an ADFL offensive last week. The refugees are poor but in much better health than the ones near Kisangani. Their goal is to return to Rwanda. UNHCR is looking into the possibility of trucking these refugees to Gisenyi, Rwanda.



'Zaire', Press Release: MSF France, 4 April 1997 (in French). [D122](#)

#### Extract:

A Médecins Sans Frontières cargo plane arrived in Kisangani, eastern Zaire, today with 30 tons of medical and emergency food supplies intended to improve treatment of Rwandan refugees and displaced Zairians. Doctors, nurses and logisticians are also coming to reinforce the team already on site. A total of 21 MSF volunteers are in Kisangani. A new cargo plane transporting medical supplies and biscuits is scheduled to leave in the next few days for the same destination.

“The places where Rwandan refugees have set up south of Kisangani are real death sites,” said D. Marc Gastellu, of Médecins Sans Frontières. “It’s a disaster. It’s urgent that the situation be stabilized if we’re to save those who can still be saved.”

In the last five days, the MSF team has set up clinics and intensive feeding centres on an emergency basis for the tens of thousands of people who have come to the gathering sites. Resupply stations with biscuits and water have also been organised.

At the Kasese 1 site, where 30,000 people have gathered, medical staff conducted nearly 1,400 patient visits during the first two days. The primary illnesses are malaria, diarrhoea and malnutrition. Seven hundred severely malnourished children were also identified at Kasese 1 yesterday.

**On 28 March, MSF Holland notified the other sections that it was initiating a ‘lobbying’ effort to gain unlimited access to the refugees in eastern Zaire and authorization to treat the sick and wounded before their repatriation to Rwanda. Initially, this was to be a ‘silent’ campaign, intended to convince decision makers, particularly those in the AFDL. If that failed, MSF Holland would consider speaking out publicly.**



‘Zaire Communication **Update,**’ PR Amsterdam, 28 March 1997 (in English). **D123**

**Extract:**

MSF Activities

Advocacy campaign

- As we mentioned yesterday in an e-mail, MSF started an advocacy campaign. The campaign consists of SILENT diplomacy in this stage. We might decide to go public halfway next week.
- The goal of the campaign is to get unlimited access to the refugees in eastern Zaire and to get permission to treat the sick, weak and wounded before they will be repatriated to Rwanda. A policy paper has been written in the last few days, agreed upon by the international MFS desks, yesterday afternoon, and corrected this morning.
- The policy paper will be sent to you by cc:mail tonight at about 18:00h. Take it home for the weekend, read it carefully and call MSF A’dam in case of confusion or questions. **THE POLICY PAPER IS AN INTERNAL DOCUMENT** for the moment.
- A high level MSF delegation (operational and general directors) is trying to meet with the leaders of the military and political parties involved over in east Zaire (Kabila, Shahnoun, etc). The policy paper plus accompanying letter will be handed over to the leaders involved. By diplomacy MSF tries to get access to the refugees and permission to treat the refugees before they will be repatriated. The

diplomacy is also meant to be fully transparent in our policy.

- MSF may go public if the silent diplomacy does not work. However all efforts will be used to get the MSF message to mister Kabila before going public. You surely will be the first ones to be informed on this decision, because it means work for you all.

[...] PR Guidelines

- Press policy: re-active
- Be careful when mentioning numbers of refugees. There is no cumulative numbers of refugees available from the Bukavu region. UNHCR guesses there are about 300,000 refugees still in the eastern area.
- Do not give mortality rates (only mention number of dead/wounded if reported by MSF)
- Many journalists (mostly French) are in Kisangani (also on Ubundu train)

**On 29 March, the MSF Holland programme manager and the HAD decided to recall from Zaire the team that conducted the evaluation mission and continue to monitor the issue from Amsterdam, while distributing information ‘silently’ under conditions of ‘strict confidentiality.’ The Head of Mission agreed.**



**Letter** from MSF Holland Zaire programme manager to MSF Holland Coordinator in Goma, 29 March 1997 (in English). **D124**

**Extract:**

1. re Masisi team:

We have been talking over the matter in depth here and feel strongly that we should handle the matter quite completely for the sake of the individuals, the opportunity to witness and to reduce the pressure from AFDL to silence us. We propose the following:

- a. the Masisi explo team be withdrawn from Zaire and brought together here in A’dam for correct debriefing.
- b. a presentation be made to Amnesty by the team with support of HAD here. Ed feels more comfortable with disclosure to AI than directly to Geneva.
- c. Ed goes to Geneva this Monday to meet Human Rights reporter Garreton to tell him the general outline of what we saw.

[...] Rationale for this plan:

- a. MSF supports the Masisi explo team as thoroughly as we can by debriefing away from Zaire and give them the opportunity to do something substantial with what they saw.
  - b. MSF witnesses adequately so as to encourage a proper investigation.
  - c. MSF enables the Goma operation to continue by reducing the immediate tension between the AFDL and ourselves by having our witnesses out of the picture.
2. re: PS support for the entire Zaire team:

in light of the intense experience of the Masisi team and the overall stress for the team in the last 3 months I would say, what do you say we send a PS support team to Goma.



**'Proposal** for Plan of Action for Witnessed Masisi Events,' CONFIDENTIAL from Ed Schenkenberg, HAD to Goma Desk, Masisi Explo Team, Psycho-social Network, HAD, HOM Goma, 2 April 1997 (in English). **D117**

#### Extract:

Over the Easter weekend, options have been discussed of what steps MSF should take in view of the witnessed events in the area of Masisi on 20 and 24 March. The desk and HoM decided in consultation with HAD, that there should be an appropriate follow-up of the events witnessed by MSF. Any follow-up, however, should be done outside Zaire for obvious security reasons. Therefore, the Masisi explo team has been (temporarily) called back to Amsterdam in order to continue this process and give input to the discussion of the next steps to take. In order to 'steer' this discussion, some points of attention and a plan of action is herewith submitted.

#### Objective of advocacy

The aim of the follow-up of the obtained information is in this case not only to reveal the information 'silently', it should also contribute to any international efforts to investigate reports of atrocities in eastern Zaire. It should however be clear from the outset that MSF wishes to give out the information only on the basis of strict confidentiality.

**On 30 March, the AFDL still refused to allow the refugees to transit via Kisangani and called on UNHCR to make those in Lula turn back. UNHCR developed a Rwanda repatriation plan that would take two to three months.**



**'UNHCR and Rebels Differ on Rwandan Refugees,' AFP (France), Goma, 30 March 1997 (in French).**

#### Extract:

An on-going disagreement divides the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Zairian rebellion regarding repatriation of around 100,000 Rwandan Hutu refugees, UNHCR said on Sunday in Goma (east).

Filippo Grandi, UNHCR manager for eastern Zaire, told the AFP, "The 'rebel' Alliance wants to push the refugees (those near Kisangani) back to Ubundu (150 kilometres south) before they receive assistance."

"I responded that we had a different proposal." He said, "We would rather aid them on site because they cannot walk, given the state of their health."

[...] The rebels asked that the 25,000 refugees in Lula, 7 kilometres from Kisangani, be moved back and still refused to allow them to transit through the Upper Zaire capital, under rebel control since 15 March, before being repatriated to Rwanda.

"We agreed to send the refugees back to kilometre 14 because they were very close to a (rebel) military station, but we will not participate in any forced movement," the UNHCR official confirmed.

The UNHCR plan called for repatriating the weakest refugees by plane from Kisangani. The others would get to Rwanda by truck or on foot. "With five planes, we can send between 1,000 – 1,500 vulnerable people," he noted. "We will transport [the others] by truck across Kisangani, without stopping there, and then on to kilometre 60 on the Lubutu road," he said. "The road is impassable there. It would take six months to fix it.

"The refugees will then have to walk 40 kilometres and the trucks will pick them up again and take them to Walikale. But just north of Hombo, the road becomes impassable again. They'll have to walk another 80 kilometres before we take them by truck to Bukavu.

"Given that journey, we can repatriate 1,000 people per day. So the operation should last, at best, between two and three months. But the Alliance hasn't approved the plan yet."

**On 31 March, MSF Belgium asked for access to all refugees requiring aid in the region and for the opportunity to treat them before their repatriation – on a strictly voluntary basis – to Rwanda. MSF France spoke less directly about the future of the repatriations. The volunteers who came back from the field described the horrible situation of the populations spread out along the railroad tracks.**



**'Exhausted and Underfed: Rwandan Refugees Face a Tragic Situation. MSF Sends Reinforcements to Kisangani.' Press Release, MSF Belgium, 31 March 1997 (in French).** **D125**

#### Extract:

Brussels, 31 March 1997. Médecins Sans Frontières has decided to strengthen its Kisangani team, currently composed of six individuals, to assist around 100,000 refugees south of Kisangani. Tonight, 15 volunteers will leave for Kampala, Uganda and then head to the city of Kisangani.

A charter plane is scheduled to leave on Tuesday afternoon with 30 tonnes of aid supplies.

The refugees, currently spread out along the railroad tracks between Kisangani and Ubundu, are in a tragic situation. "As we head further south, their situation worsens," the MSF team on site reported. "People are just sitting there, completely worn out and demoralized. They're completely exhausted from malaria, diarrhoea and a lack of drinking water and food. Some of the refugees farther back are dying."

Most of these refugees come from the Tingi Tingi and Amisi camps. Having fled fighting, they headed north across the forest, hoping to find aid in Kisangani.

The issue now is to provide the necessary aid as quickly as possible. The MSF team in Kisangani is organising medical care in cooperation with the Zairian non-governmental organisation, Omnis. Health centres and a feeding center have been set up at several spots along the way between kilometre 7 and kilometre 25 from Kisangani.

Finally, so that aid operations can be carried out properly, it is critical that:

- Access must be guaranteed to all refugees who need aid in the region and aid must be delivered directly to Kisangani;
- Refugees must receive necessary treatment and recover their strength before UNHCR repatriates them, voluntarily, to Rwanda.

Indeed, according to Marie-Christine Féir, who directs operations from Kisangani, "at least 25 percent of refugees are still too weak to travel."



'Zaire Emergency: Rwandan Refugees in Eastern Zaire are Exhausted and Starving: Médecins Sans Frontières Strengthens Teams in Kisangani,' **Press Release**, MSF France, 1 April 1997 (in French). **D126**

#### **Extract:**

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is strengthening its team in Kisangani, where 15 volunteers arrived last night, bringing the number of team members on site to 21.

For three days, the MSF team has been providing medical aid to around 45,000 refugees in camps located between 7 and 25 kilometres from Kisangani. The team is working in a clinic, four health stations and four feeding centres. In the coming days, the organisation will try to provide assistance to two camps located further south.

The health status of the refugees scattered along the Kisangani-Ubundu railroad line is very serious. Marcel Van Soest, an MSF epidemiologist who has returned from an evaluation mission in the area, reports, "It was awful. The further south we went, the worse the refugees' health was. They were sitting down, exhausted. They're completely

weakened by malaria, diarrhoea, malnutrition and the lack of drinking water have completely worn them out completely."

Given the extent of assistance that must be provided, it is critical that volunteers gain access to the refugees between Kisangani and Ubundu and to be able to transport unobstructed humanitarian supplies from Kisangani.

According to the coordinator of the MSF team, one-quarter of the refugees are too weak to travel. It is thus essential to treat them before thinking about repatriating them.

**On 2 April, MSF Holland's programme manager and coordinator for Zaire, together with the Humanitarian Affairs Department, proposed an action plan for using the information that MSF had gathered in Masisi. A report would be written on all the events that had occurred over the course of the mission. MSF would not distribute the information publicly but through more 'silent' channels.**



'Proposal for Plan of Action for Witnessed Masisi Events,' Confidential, from Ed Shenkenberg to Zaire programme manager, HAD, and MSF Goma Coordinator, 2 April 1997 (in English). **D117**

#### **Extract:**

II How to get full information

A reconstruction should be done with the whole team involved. A former experienced UN human rights monitor (Karen Kenny) is willing to do this. She would also report the information in a way so that is of use to an 'end-user.' This exercise is to take place on Monday 7 April.

III End-use of the information

For obvious reasons MSF cannot go public with the information. It has been decided to pursue more 'silent' channels and to give the information to a 'third party.' Yet, there are several options as to who is the best third party for MSF; although there may be other channels to choose, the most relevant ones - for the time being - are outlined below.

- Amnesty International

MSF and Amnesty International have recently intensified their contacts. Former Project Coordinator for Bukavu Jose-Antonio Bastos debriefed Amnesty's researcher for central Africa on 26 March. For the moment, the AI agenda is aimed at the creation of an independent commission of inquiry. On the advice of Mohammed Sahnoun, AI has sent a Memorandum to the UN Security Council on 24 March, to request a Commission of Inquiry that should investigate reports of atrocities in eastern Zaire. AI has

indicated that in the (near) future it might be interested to use MSF's information, possibly with the view to support the work of the commission.

- Commission of inquiry

A Commission of Inquiry is an ad hoc, composed commission to investigate human rights abuses. Previous commissions were established by the UN for the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and Burundi. However with various aims, various compositions and with various degrees of success... Whatever route leads to the creation, it can be assumed that a commission will approach MSF for information, eventually.

- Advice

It can be recommended to pursue the latest channel as soon as it becomes available. It is preferred that MSF has the information ready for 'end-use', before it is approached. Any contacts with members of the commission should take place outside Zaire.

**On 3 April, the US Department of State called on Laurent-Désiré Kabila to facilitate the Rwandan refugees' repatriation. The UN Secretary General called on him to halt the "slaughter" of refugees and "allow aid organisations to do their work."**

**The Masisi exploratory team returned to Amsterdam and on 3 and 4 April, debriefed programme manager and the HAD. The group suggested ways to respond to AFDL requirements regarding access to the refugees and proposed a series of advocacy activities.**



'Operations and Advocacy Follow Up,' Message from Masisi Explo debriefing meeting to Goma programme manager, Masisi Explo Team, HAD, Context Unit, HOM Goma, 4 April 1997 (in English). **D127**

**Extract:**

From the meetings, a number of points for follow-up emerged, that are presented here both in terms of potential operational implications and suggested advocacy activities. On the advocacy side, it was mentioned that advocacy efforts always tend to be portrayed as short-term, high-profile media events that may be harmful to MSF's capacity to operate. However, it was also stated that advocacy, if carried out properly, can increase humanitarian access on the long run. It was stressed that the Amsterdam office should be transparent to the field as to what advocacy initiatives are undertaken. The field's role is vital in order to have a proper advocacy campaign.

Operational Implications

Both in the field and in the office it has been debated

as to what should be MSF's reaction to the requests of the Alliance in terms of permitting access to the Masisi region. These requests are:

- Trip report of Masisi explo [exploration mission] of 24 March for the future.

- Letter to the alliance asking for permission to obtain access to a place that MSF wants to visit, two-days in advance.

- A (suggested) facilitator of the Alliance to accompany MSF teams.

The meeting participants suggested that MSF should:

- Explain the MSF mission to ADFL, including the basic premises upon which MSF works, i.e. right of free access, independent assessment of needs, independent assessment of security situation.

- Try to avoid that the level of access that MSF has obtained so far will be even further reduced. E.g. MSF has been able to travel to Masisi town without a two days in advance notice to the Alliance. MSF might transmit such a notice if it can be expected that MSF receives permission to get access to places that so far have been out of reach.

- Not to comply with the request to accept a facilitator on missions into the area

- Reorganise meetings with the humanitarian organisations active in the Masisi region, i.e. ICRC, Asrames and Cemubac in order to try to present a common response or at least similar responses to the Alliance's requests (question: do the other agencies have the same problems?).

- Discuss explicit conditions under which MSF is willing to remain if access does not improve (e.g. time frame, geographic area and restrictions).

Suggested advocacy activities

[...] 1. Relevant political actors

International political actors may be interested to use humanitarian access as a mean to level their (hidden) support for the AFDL in order to have a more gradual change of power in Zaire. Increasingly, countries such as the US, call upon Kabila to allow humanitarian access in order to repatriate the refugees to their home countries. MSF should link its present advocacy campaign calling for access to these demands. Governments to lobby: US, France (?), UK, Netherlands, Uganda (?), South Africa (?). Political bodies: UNSG Special Envoy, Sahnoun.

In addition to lobbying the US, the US Committee for Refugees (USCR will undertake a one month field visit in the near future to raise the profile of the fate of the Zairian (displaced) population among decision-makers in the US. MSF should facilitate the USCR mission and try to link its advocacy points with the USCR's recommendations. The USCR consultant who will carry out the field mission is a former MSF information officer...

2. Relevant human rights actors

In the proposed follow-up of the witnessed events in the Masisi area, the most relevant human rights actors have been indicated: UN Special Reporter for Zaire, Commission of Inquiry (to be established). If there is increased pressure on the Alliance to allow independent human rights

investigation and monitoring, it can be expected that certain areas may open up. MSF should closely follow all the developments in this field, also in view of the follow-up of the Masisi events.

## THE SHABUNDA REPORT

**The Masisi report took several weeks to write because the Goma team had to supply additional information, but. The final document was never published.**



'Reaction to MSF Brussels Comments on the Reconstruction Report Bukavu-Shabunda,' **Memo** from MSF Holland, 22 April 1997 (in English). [D128](#)

### Extract:

The report which was requested for 'several weeks' is therefore mistaken with the Reconstruction Report on Masisi which is not yet finished, because more additional info from the field was needed to complete the reconstruction. Therefore no other organisations or persons have gotten any information on Masisi.



*We did a shortened briefing with everybody and then much more extensive one with Karen and Wilna.*

*Karen Kenny is an external human rights person who was brought in—she also did the debriefing for the Shabunda mission. So the Masisi debriefing was sort of a trial where they did this for the first time—a debriefing with a human rights person. I had written a trip report right after I had returned and I had sent it to Amsterdam. Then we sort of did a reconstruction of the trip. Then we produced and adapted a report based on that so that the information was as accurate as possible. The trip report was the first raw document describing the trip and the reconstruction report was meant to be something that could be used.*

*It was distributed in a very limited way later. After the reconstruction and the full debriefing, I went back and rewrote the trip report into an external report.*

*Basically, there was a decision taken at one level or both or multi level not to do a major advocacy effort on the Masisi trip itself. And then Shabunda came up and then Masisi got overtaken by Shabunda.*

*The way I look back at the reports and the advocacy is like a chain. Maybe that's just my perspective. Masisi was the first*

*indicator of what was happening—or Bukavu was the first indicator and Masisi was the first confirmation that something larger is going on. Shabunda was like an eye-opener into the scale and the complexity of what was happening and the way that humanitarian agencies were being used in the whole scheme.*

Leslie Lefkow, MSF Holland Human Rights Officer, on Mission in Goma from 18 March to 2 April 1997, then MSF Holland HAD officer (in English).

**When the Shabunda Exploratory Team members returned to Bukavu, the team discussed using the information they had gathered with the MSF Holland teams in eastern Zaire with a representative from headquarters. The Exploratory Team wanted to make the information public, while the rest of the teams and headquarters felt that the information should be transmitted confidentially.**



'Humanitarian Information – MSF's Role and Position – Bukavu-team-meeting,' **Note to the file – Confidential**, 6 April 1997 (in English). [D129](#)

### Extract:

Noting the grave humanitarian situation in Zaire following the ADFL take-over of the eastern third of the country, MSF-Holland held a series of team meetings to help decide on its course of action. The Bukavu meeting included a discussion of specific events from the recent Shabunda exploratory mission. It was reported that MSF was being used by ADFL military to lure refugees out of the forest. The refugees were then killed, as were any local population who supported either the refugees or MSF operations. Evidence was found of systematic humanitarian abuses and mass graves. The point was clearly made by a member of the Shabunda mission that, in his opinion, MSF is placing the refugee and local populations at risk and should suspend its refugee operations until the situation changes.

The broader interest of MSF-Holland not simply to respond to current events, but to remember the long-term needs of the Zairian population was noted. A lengthy discussion of team members' individual opinions on whether MSF was being used as a humanitarian smokescreen for military operations, the possibilities for MSF to press for changes in the current situation, and the needs of non-refugee populations led to a consensus on future actions.

 We said, “oh we have to speak out this is wrong.” There was another camp saying, “10,000 refugees come through and maybe we shouldn’t speak up because we are helping this sizable number and we might get kicked out.” The third camp was people from Zaire who had been working for some time, not related to emergency project and put a lot of energy in their projects and they did not want to give up their programme and they saw it as separate. So they didn’t want to leave. So there was this dynamic of these three camps. We were about 20, enough people. Max Glaser, from the Context Unit in Amsterdam came to organise these discussions. He tried to put it into a framework and organise the discussion and the ideas to come up with a decision with what we wanted to do. The main point at the end was, “Yes we want to use the information. But we don’t want to go public with it.” We wanted to use the info and go to embassies and talk to governments to put pressure on UNHCR to do their job. So that what was decided. Then we went to Goma and had this same discussion at the country management level. And again same dilemma, and outcome. Those were the recommendations Max took back with him.

James Fraser, MSF Holland Shabunda explo team,  
26 March to 3 April 1997 (in English).

 I think that apart from the weakness in the organisation, there was also an idea that we could not use the Shabunda report publicly because we prefer to continue our operations even if we have very limited access—not a lot. So it was not an unconscious thing—it was a conscious decision that was taken by a few people and not actually discussed here.

Pim de Graaf, Director of Operations, MSF Holland

 The motivation is very straight forward: if there are serious human rights violations occurring in our project, according to our own statements, in our témoignage part of our mission, we have an obligation that these violations are not going unnoticed. So in this case, witnessing, we interpret as being there, documenting what you have seen, seeing what you can do with this information in the international arena. We thought that in such a case with such sensitive information, our operation running, and our people on the ground, we had to handle this in a very confidential way. So we had our actions in the UN and we wanted to give the information to them for follow up so that the name MSF would not be attached to this. That is the motivation. The decision to keep it confidential—the field asked the desk or the OD at the time—and we would be advised that the field was very concerned so we only got

the information on the condition that we would not go public with it—otherwise, they wouldn’t have even told us. If we had said that we were going to go public with this, the field would have said, no way. That trust was broken afterwards. It was extremely damaging for the field.

Hanna Nolan, MSF Holland Humanitarian Affairs  
Department (HAD) officer (in English).

**On 6 April, the MSF Medical Coordinator in Kisangani announced to the press that the refugees’ state of health would prevent them from being repatriated for several weeks. On 7 April, Laurent-Désiré Kabila agreed to the repatriation of 100,000 refugees south of Kisangani.**



‘MSF Warns Against Repatriating The Weakest Refugees Too Quickly,’ **AFP** (France), 6 April 1997 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

Interviewed by phone in Nairobi, Pierre Rijkmans, MSF Medical Coordinator in Kisangani (eastern Zaire), said that at least 20,000 of a total 80,000 refugees, dispersed between Kisangani and Ubundu, 150 kilometres south of Kisangani, “cannot be sent back to Rwanda right away” (some estimates place that total at 80,000-100,000).

“These people will need between three weeks and a month to return to a somewhat normal state of health and to be able to return to Rwanda,” he added, noting that he hoped refugee ‘selection’ for repatriation would be conducted on the basis of ‘medical criteria.’

“The medical criterion is the only valid one,” he said, expressing grave concern that the refugees not be selected on the basis of commune or prefecture without consideration of their health status.

On Sunday, following Laurent-Désiré Kabila’s agreement on Saturday, UNHCR began developing a logistical procedure to enable refugees in Kisangani-Ubundu to be repatriated by plane.

According to the MSF Medical Coordinator, most of the refugees’ medical problems result from serious malnutrition and wounds. Malaria is also a concern and the rainy season that has just begun may also lead to various respiratory illnesses.



'Information Bulletin 290,' MSF France, 7 April 1997 (in French). [D130](#)

**Extract:**

Zaire:

Kabila has agreed to the repatriation of around 100,000 Rwandan refugees from south of Kisangani. UNHCR expects to spread the returns out over two to three months, for a rate of about 1,500-2,000 people per day. The first destination (Goma or Kigali) remains to be determined with the Rwandan authorities. The list of persons to be repatriated will be drafted after discussions with medical organisations, including MSF. We believe that at least 20,000 of them cannot tolerate immediate repatriation. They require emergency care, particularly nutrition. A team of 21 MSF volunteers is in Kisangani. Anne-Marie Huby is in Goma today and will be in Kisangani tomorrow to handle press relations.

**Because of the region's isolation, obstacles to access imposed by the rebels and the news media's exclusive focus on the rebels' progress, the international press did not give much coverage to the issue of refugees in the Kisangani area.**



*I was hoping very much that with all the journalists and media, it will be huge news. So when we returned it took ages, they were not big players, so people were not really interested. And it took them quite a while to go back to Nairobi and for people to see pictures and things. Finally, it was two weeks later; it took a long time before it headed the news... And then it was the starting up phase of operations with MSF and everybody was there trying to cut the trees, to set up feeding centres, health centres, distributing sheets and then I think that already CNN was there etc... But, that was only -for sure- a week later. It was not big open news. It was only CNN who finally came. The story was over. It was amazing.*

Marcel Van Soest, MSF Holland Field Coordinator, Goma, January to March 1997 (in English).

**On 8 April, the AFDL agreed to allow the Kisangani airport to be used for refugee repatriation. In the Kasese and Biaro camps, the daily death toll began to decline.**



'HCR Says Kisangani Refugees' Medical Condition Is Improving,' *AFP* (France), Nairobi, 9 April 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

On Wednesday, UNHCR reported that the medical situation is improving in the Rwandan Hutu refugee camps south of Kisangani (eastern Zaire), where some 60 people died Tuesday compared to 180 on Sunday.

... Several reasons explain the improvement, the agency noted. UNHCR specifically mentioned that the humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has been able to send teams to the different sites. In addition, a food distribution system has gradually been put in place, allowing the World Food Programme (WFP) to increase both the quality and quantity of food rations.

Many of the refugees in Kasese and Biaro (between 30-40 kilometres from Kisangani), as well as those further south at Kilometre 82, were in very poor physical condition, suffering from malnutrition, diarrhoea, malaria, and injuries.

The humanitarian organisations obtained permission from the Alliance, which controls Kisangani, to treat and stabilise the refugees before their repatriation. On Saturday, the Alliance also agreed to the use of the Kisangani airport for repatriation, which could begin in around one week.

**On 9 April, the train carrying provisions to refugees sites remained blocked in Kisangani. 100 people died during the night at Obilo. AFDL forces only allowed aid workers to spend a few hours each day in the camps.**  
[V7](#) [V7bis](#)



'You Don't Move a Slaughterhouse,' *Contact* (MSF Belgium internal publication) May 1997 (in French). [D131](#)

**Extract:**

The UN food distribution chain has been interrupted again. The train on the single track following the road has not left and a high tide prevents food trucks from taking the ferry linking Kisangani and the road to the camps. At the Biaro hospital, Katia, a doctor, fumes "These delays will cost dozens of lives today. What good is it to treat the ill if they can't even eat?" The next morning's death toll was at least 100.

**The same day, during a press conference in Brussels, MSF Belgium's Executive Director, Eric Goemaere, recounted the refugees' struggle based on his recent trip to Kisangani.**



Véronique Kiesel, 'The Suffering of 80,000 'Non-Existent' Refugees: "I Saw Adults Crawl For a Biscuit," *Le Soir* (Belgium), 9 April 1997 (in French). [D132](#)

#### Extract:

Eric Goemaere, MSF Belgium's Executive Director, has seen a lot in his humanitarian aid career, but when he soberly recounts the suffering of Rwandan refugees crowding the outskirts of Kisangani as their repatriation begins after five months of suffering, you cannot listen to him without shuddering.

[...] "These refugees are in a state of total exhaustion," explains MSF Belgium's Executive Director. "Since fleeing Tingi Tingi several weeks ago, they have received no food. The Zairians are very hostile and chase them away so they won't loot their fields. They eat leaves, their feet are swollen with edema and the smallest scratch turns into a deep wound reaching to the bone. When high-protein biscuits are distributed, the strongest fight over them. I saw dozens of exhausted adults crawl to try to reach a distribution site in hope of obtaining the biscuit that would keep them alive for another day. You could see death in their eyes. Few managed to get a biscuit because there was no more organization [allowed to consistently operate]. If a child under 10 were left alone there, without an adult to care for him, he would die.

[...] How did we get to this point? "In November, when the camps in eastern Zaire were emptied and many refugees returned to Rwanda, MSF sounded the alarm, emphasizing that not all had gone back – far from it," the MSF official recalled. "We said that an intervention was required to bring them aid. But some responded that everyone had gone back, saying that the problem had been resolved, that it wasn't necessary to respond and that these refugees didn't exist. Those people are responsible for the death of tens of thousands who were perfectly healthy at that point! The ones who've survived until now are in a terrible state. Their suffering was not a matter of fate. They were knowingly neglected in the interest of a political theory."

How do we save them? "Some were afraid to return to Rwanda while others were driven to flee," Dr Goemaere noted. "But now, after this horrible, nightmarish wandering, they all want to return to Rwanda, just to survive. There are certainly genocideurs among them, but responsibility is individual, not collective. The guilty must be brought to justice, but if we condemn the others collectively, we will only remain in this absurd ethnic mindset that condemns first one group and then the other."

**The MSF-USA Communications Director advised the MSF network to adopt a cautious pressure strategy on the issue of human rights violations in eastern Zaire.**



'Urgent Comments on Zaire PR,' p.2,3,4,5 Samantha Bolton to programme managers and Communication departments, 9 April 1997 (in English). [D133](#)

#### Extract:

I am very concerned about the comment "if we speak out we should go all the way." As Anne Marie (Huby, MSF UK Executive director) and others have repeatedly stressed, we have to distinguish between what we can say with medical evidence and what we have to find another way of saying with strategy.

#### Comments on human rights abuses/mass graves

- 1) MSF has no visual first-hand evidence of people being killed and dumped in the graves.
- 2) Seeing 'mass graves' is proof of nothing . We are not forensic scientists and the mass graves could be from starvation.
- 3) MSF field workers or MSF as an organisation reporting on what "refugees tell us" is not evidence of anything. Rwandans come from the land of 1,000 hills and rumours. Refugees are known for exaggeration and MSF is not Amnesty. We are not there to pass on what refugees say - other organisations are there for this.
- 4) The only proof MSF can give with any credibility is MEDICAL especially in view of our numbers crisis and credibility deficit post-Kivu crisis, Sept-Dec 96.
- 5) Medical evidence from MSF is only credible if it includes recorded systematic medical evidence or abuse or violation (e.g. bruises and burns from torture/bearings). What patients tell us in a medical tent is not proof without the doctors' opinion/medical records.
- 6) On 'serious violations/mass graves' we are better off 'tipping off' a couple of senior journalists to go and do the research themselves on condition that MSF is absolutely not mentioned as a source - let them do the hard work - the aim is to get the news out, not for us to be linked at this point.
- 7) Compared to the rebels, we are PR amateurs and the only way we can safeguard our teams is to do a diplomatic campaign with selected press pressure as described above...
- 8) Proposed strategy
  - I) get proper debrief/advice from A.M. Huby and field coordos [coordinators] BEFORE going public in any form.
  - II) Target high-level trustworthy journos to do the work Washington Post (Steve Buckley in Nairobi) and NY Times (Koert Linquist) brief should be verbal. MSF should not be sourced on paper.
  - III) Contact NGOs who can do forensic work; Physicians for Human Rights + inform Amnesty and Human Rights Watch to do the work.

- IV) Inform donors/work out strategy with relevant MSF liaison officers.
- V) Write up report of what teams saw.
- VI) Getting good solid report together ASAP is very important, but meanwhile others capable of investigation should be tipped off.
- VII) ACT NOW: Carol, Jerome and James are in contact and can get to work on this ASAP.

**On 10 April, the first cases of cholera were detected among refugees in the Kisangani camps.**



'Cholera Appears in Kisangani Camps,' **AFP** (France) Nairobi, 10 April 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

A humanitarian agency source reports that three confirmed cholera cases appeared in recent days and around 80 are suspected in the Rwandan refugee camps south of Kisangani (eastern Zaire).

[...] On Tuesday, the number of deaths was 64, which led UNHCR to believe that the refugees' medical condition was improving.

But Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), which is on the frontline treating cholera cases and the refugees' other illnesses, was less optimistic, noting that its teams were returning 'discouraged' every night in the face of the breadth of the task.



Thomas Sotinel, 'Near Kisangani, Rwandan Refugees in the Depths of Hell,' **Le Monde** (France), 12 April 1997 (in French). **D134**

**Extract:**

People are dying by the minute in the refugee hospitals that Médecins Sans Frontières has set up at the Kasese and Biaro camps, not far from Kisangani. On 9 April, 108 people died, the day before the death toll was 64, on Monday it was 96 and on Sunday, 180. They are dying of malaria, dysentery, and probably of cholera.

"According to our criteria, one-third of the population should be hospitalized," said Anne-Marie Huby of MSF.

**MSF Holland developed a "plan for protecting the populations and obtaining access for humanitarian workers in Kivu" and for its implementation within the MSF movement. The plan called for direct contact with actors in the region (including the AFDL) and confidential contacts with western governments, donors, the UN Security Council, UN agencies and other aid organisations. The information was to be transmitted**

**on a strictly confidential basis to human rights organisations and 'targeted high-quality' newspapers.**



'Confidential Advocacy **Plan** for Protection of the Population and Humanitarian Access in Kivu, Eastern Zaire,' MSF Holland around 10 April 1997 (in English). **D135**

**Extract:**

Co-ordination:

MSF Amsterdam has the central co-ordination role so as to ensure consistent action and to allow for political sensitivities in the region.

Maximum involvement of all MSF sections and delegate offices will be aimed at. Field teams will be consulted closely at each stage.

Main Objective:

To ensure Protection of people at risk and to improve operational access so as to reduce their mortality due to both disease and killings in Kivu.

Specific Objectives:

- To influence ADFL leadership, govts of Rwanda and Uganda to control human rights abuses in Kivu and Rwanda.
- To have western govts influence the regional political leaders to ensure adequate protection of both refugees and the resident population. Humane treatment during repatriation and control of reprisal killings are specific issues. UNHCR protection activities re-vitalised.
- To maintain humanitarian issues on the political agenda, regionally and internationally.
- To retain operational access for MSF medical work while adequately witnessing against the killings in Kivu and Rwanda.

Activities:

- Direct contact with ADFL leadership concerning HR abuses observed on the western axis out of Bukavu: ( MSF explo to Shabunda was an ADFL approved trip).
- Confidential contacts with western govts to tell our eyewitness account of both operational access the killings and push for diplomatic action from them to Kigali, Kampala, and Goma political leadership:
- USA State Dept
- UK
- EU via Dutch presidency.
- Canada etc.
- Contacts with major donor representatives: ECHO, OFDA, ODA, CIDA, etc.
- Contacts with INGOs (Oxfam, SCF) and ICRC.
- Contacts with United Nations Security Council and agencies (UNHCR, UNICEF, DHA etc).
- Confidential contacts with select, quality press. BBC World Service, New York Times, Washington Post, Guardian Newspaper (UK), ...others.

- Confidential contacts with HR organisations, Amnesty International etc...
- Formal reconstruction reports compiled with MSF field teams for presentation to above.

#### Who does what:

- Amsterdam - Overall coordination
- Contact with EU presidency
- Circulation of position papers and reports
- Briefing of New York and London offices
- Coordination with other INGOs.
- New York - Organise meetings with US Government departments and UN agencies.
- London - Organise meetings with UK government departments.
- Toronto-Arranges reconstruction of Shabunda report with MSF-Canada team
- Goma- Contacts with ADFL
- Contacts with Media and any visiting representatives of Donors



*I can tell you the idea behind silent diplomacy. It is that: if you talk to the right people in the (US) Congress or Senate they can raise questions and that is one way to put pressure. But also in terms of giving them the information, they know that you know and they know who you are giving the information to. If everyone knows like the British know, the Canadians know, the Dutch know, then they don't act on it. There is an increased chance that they can be called on it later. Or they can be pressured into doing it now. In MSF Holland, they did not want to close their programmes in the field. They were afraid if they did CNN, or any media, there was a big chance they would get kicked out.*

*The idea was to go to people who they have relationships [with] in the press and who they trust and explain to them what is happening and then have them go and investigate what is happening themselves. One thing was that the report was shown to some journalists and then taken back. They were not given the report.*

*It was really based on people in the field and the discussions taken at that level. Maybe some of the people in the field were naïve, thinking that if they did some form of diplomacy everything would be okay. I remember the intensity in the headquarters. It was the emergency desk and they were the ones coming up with the plan. And it was just so intense, a lot of people were scared. Perhaps the people who were making decisions did not have the experience necessary in terms of advocacy. I could be wrong, but I am not sure they had so much input into how it would be applied. They came up with the report, but operations people, I think, were really in charge of how it was to go.*

James Fraser, MSF Holland Shabunda explo team,  
26 March to 3 April 1997 (in English).

**On his return to Amsterdam, from April 11-14 James Fraser did a debriefing and wrote on a report on the exploratory mission he had conducted to Shabunda. The first version was then presented as a revised, full report.**



'Reconstruction **report**: Bukavu-Shabunda (South Kivu, Zaire),' Confidential, MSF Holland, 16 April 1997 (in English). **D136**

#### **Extract:**

##### Conclusions:

On the basis of the findings of the exploratory mission, as described above, our organisation believes that there are strong reasons to conclude that:

1. Large-scale killings of refugees have been taking place in the Bukavu-Shabunda region during the recent past. These killings do not take place in the context of combat. All refugees are considered to be enemies and therefore targeted, including women and children. As a result, refugees in the area are not safe.
2. Such killings continue to occur.
3. Refugees in this context do not receive the protection granted to them under the provisions of international law.
4. The local population is being intimidated and threatened not to help the refugees but rather help the military in their attempts to track down refugees and kill them. Methods used by the military include beatings and killings of local population.
5. The military is using the presence of international organisations (governmental as well as non-governmental) as bait in order to attract refugees out of the forest and onto the road, thus facilitating their elimination. Similarly, the repatriation process, as currently envisaged, fits the strategy of the military, as it too encourages refugees to appear from the forest.
6. Responsibility for violations of international humanitarian and human rights law lies with the ADFL in areas under their control. Many sources indicate the orders to eliminate refugees emanate from Rwanda.



'Reaction to MSF Brussels Comments on the Reconstruction Report Bukavu-Shabunda,' **Memo** from MSF Holland, 22 April 1997 (in English). **D128**

#### **Extract:**

The report was written on the basis of an operational and human rights debriefing of the two expats involved. The first debriefing was done by the desk, the latter by an external human rights lawyer with working experience in conducting a human rights debriefing and the subsequent writing of a report on the basis of this. Moreover, during both the operational and human rights debriefing a member of the humanitarian affairs department and the psycho-social team were present.

The purpose of the report was to reflect what the MSF expats had seen and heard and to provide a testimony of this with as much accuracy as possible. Already during the exploratory mission information on what was seen and heard was carefully written down and also whether it was possible to get confirmation for these visual and oral reports. Information which was too vague or could not be confirmed has been left out of the report. Most information in the report is based on at least two different sources. However, because of the seriousness of the allegations received during the trip (systematic mass killings) and the urgency of action to stop any further abuses, also less 'strong' (i.e. confirmed) information was put into the report when the allegation was very serious and similar to information that could be confirmed.

During the whole of the process of the writing of the report the expats involved, as well as several other people, gave their feedback on drafts of the report to avoid mistakes and to carefully select the words in which this sensitive report would be written. This report does not discuss the decision making process between the desks.



*We worked very hard, we came out and, worked three days straight to get it finished. There was discussion about how to do the report. They didn't want to just do it like a story, because they said a lot of it wasn't just fact, a lot of it was hearsay. Then they redid it and constructed the report in subdivisions: refugee presence, etc. Some of it they dropped out. I think it was just a reorganisation of the points.*

*They separated between fact and then substantiated hearsay. None of these points have evidence. They are like deduction or hearsay. I mean I didn't dig up a grave. Based on other clues, this is what we came up with. In the short report they did remove some information. They were going to use it as a press release. They were going to show it to some press people and then take it back. It had to do with not recognizing it, being MSF that gave the information.*

James Fraser, MSF Holland Shabunda explo team,  
26 March to 3 April 1997 (in English).

**On 14 April, the MSF Coordinator in Kisangani told the press that 30-40 new cholera cases were being recorded daily and that the disease could spread because of the refugees' health status.**

While repatriation was being presented to the press as the best solution and the refugees' precarious state of health was receiving little coverage, the MSF UK Director, acting as MSF's temporary spokesperson in Kisangani, raised questions regarding the message that MSF should transmit to the media.



**'Message** from Anne-Marie Huby, MSF UK Executive Director,' MSF spoke-person in Kisangani to all PR directors and press officers, 12 April 1997 (in English). **D137**

#### **Extract:**

The whole repatriation operation is likely to be a pretty distasteful affair, a showcase 'solution' to the refugee problem (the last thing on UNHCR's mind is to protect refugees, and the relief aspect is likely to suffer while repatriation goes on) given that in-fighting among aid agencies is increasingly frowned upon by the media here, we are going to have to think very hard about what exactly we want to achieve by sending a spokesperson (which, by definition, increases media demands on us). Do we want feel-good stories about our work, or coverage of the humanitarian and human rights shortcomings of the operation? With the large number of jourmos expected to turn up, anything a press person will say will have impact, so we had better get our act together.

[...] Epidemiologist Pierre Ryckmans says: only a third of the people who die do so in hospital, a small proportion in a refugee camp. It means that the vast majority of vulnerable people are still dying in the "blindés." [plastic sheeting huts] They probably die of hunger, dehydration, disease or a combination of all these, but what is certain is that too many people still are beyond our reach.

MSF's outreach teams will step up the distribution of ORS (oral rehydration salts) solution and start distributing high-energy biscuits to the weak and malnourished in the "blindés" from next week (no idea of quantities used yet). Ryckmans adds: if the people are too weak to reach our hospital, we are having to bring the aid to them - a basic version of home care.

From early next week, MSF will also increase the rations of children in therapeutic feeding centres, from 3 to 5 meals of high energy biscuits (15 per child per average) and high-energy milk each day.

That's all for now. I will be at MSF B in nbo [Nairobi] tonight if need to reach me.

**On 14 April, Wilna Van Artzen of MSF Holland's emergency cell went to Goma and Bukavu to talk with the teams. According to her, they agreed to public distribution of the Shabunda report.**



*I discussed with the team in Goma the outcome of Shabunda—what we thought and I was in favor of publishing it. There were people in the office who didn't want it released for security reasons. I had been sitting with the teams in Goma for some days and one evening. The team as well said we have to release it. I thought, this*

*is what we needed. They had all talked with James. I was happy and I was proud—the whole team thought that we had to do this. It was very genuine feeling.*

Wilna Van Artzen, MSF Holland Emergency Desk  
Officer (in English).

**From 16 to 18 April, Marcel Van Soest, the MSF Holland Coordinator in Goma, met with representatives of the UN Security Council and with ambassadors from various UN member nations in New York. He told them about MSF's concerns regarding lack of access to populations, the lack of protection, and the use of aid organisations as bait to lure refugees. Several journalists were informed on a confidential basis about the content of the report but it was not distributed to them and they were specifically told that MSF should not be cited as a source.**



'Confidential Advocacy Plan for Protection of the Population and Humanitarian Access in Kivu, Eastern Zaire,' MSF Holland around 10 April 1997 (in English). Actions so far: Strictly **Internal document** – MSF Holland , 14 April 1997 (in English). **D135**

**Extract:**

b. Specific. Objective 2: Western Govt contacts.

1. made in Washington with US govt agencies for Marcel van Soest who has travelled to USA yesterday. US Regional Ambassador Hodeck, State dept. BHR, USAID will be met in the coming week (New York Office to arrange).
2. US govt officials contacted on the weekend concerning our evidence on the west axis ex-Bukavu and Masisi. (Further contact, Monday to Adam and perhaps the New York office).
3. UK govt official contacted last week. ODA has been informed by SCF and OXFAM already and wants to hear from MSF (MSF-UK and Adam will be contacting ODA today).
4. Dutch Presidency of EU contacted last Friday 11-04 via Foreign Ministry (BUZA). They are now informed and contact will continue this week.
5. MSF-Canada has been contacted with a view to inclusion in the lobby plan due to the Canadian govt's involvement in the Intervention Force idea of last year.

c. Spec. Obj. 3 UNHCR protection activities re-vitalised

1. UNHCR Great Lakes desk contacted last Tuesday 08-04 in Geneva. Refer to Wilna's notes. Disappointing response to the issue except when news of MSF suspension of activities on the Bukavu western axis was given (contact will be made at a higher level in Geneva this week by MSF-Adam).
2. MSF understands that the UK govt donor ODA is to meet with UNHCR commissioner Ms. Ogata soon on the protection issue.

d. Spec. Obj 4. Humanitarian issues maintained on the political agenda.

1. Press contacts, so far have been BBC World Service, New York Times and Collette Braekman. Particular journalists have been contacted on a strictly confidential basis with the suggestion to go to East Kivu and to investigate for themselves.



'For Protection of the Population and Humanitarian Access in Zaire,' **Note** from MSF USA to the Canadian Embassy, 14 April 1997 (in English). **D138**

**Extract:**

Since November 1996, MSF has had only erratic and brief humanitarian access to the populations in danger in Zaire, i.e. Rwandan and Burundian refugees and displaced Zairians and affected Zairian residents. While access is being allowed on the railway line South of Kisangani, it is being systematically denied to other areas such as Masisi and West of Bukavu.

[...]With so many people at immediate risk of disease, MSF urgently recommends that:

1. That the Zairian authorities and leaders of the Alliance for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire immediately permit access to the populations in danger in Zaire, wherever they are located, so that medical teams can make accurate needs assessments and provide urgently needed assistance.
2. That the refugees who choose to return to their home countries are free to do so when their health status has been stabilised.
3. That if repatriation is contemplated, it is imperative that medical assessments and stabilisation of health are implemented prior to the repatriation of refugees.
4. That refugees who are ill or sick, can only return if their health and nutritional status does not decline during the repatriation process. If it is determined necessary, patients should be medically referred to a location that is easy to access for humanitarian and medical aid. Any medical determination should be respected in conformity with internationally recognised medical ethics.
5. That if refugees choose for repatriation, it should be ensured that they can do so in a humane manner, in safety and dignity. It should be compatible with the health and nutritional status of the individual. Families should remain intact.
6. That Burundi is not a safe country for return.
7. That proper medical treatment of returnees in transit should be allowed without any restriction.
8. That international monitoring of Rwandan returnees should be ensured.
9. That the international community should be committed to protect and assist the displaced Zairians and affected residents. Therefore, an international human rights monitoring presence should be deployed in Zaire.



'Zaire and Advocacy,' Visit of Marcel Van Soest in New York, 16 April 1997, **Message** from Catherine Harper to Zaire programme managers, directors of operations, directors of communications, 16 April 1997 (in English). **D139**

**Extract:**

1. Following MSF Holland's confidential advocacy plan and request, we made some contacts for Marcel and myself in New York.

[...] 4. We first distributed on Monday night, MSF's position paper to all 15 MS [members] of the Security Council and made most appointments yesterday.

5. We met today with Ambassadors of Chile, Canada, USA, the Deputy Permanent Rep. of Portugal (President of SC), and France. We also met with Sahnoun's representative/office in New York, together with DHA, DPKO. The meetings took place non-stop (with short break for lunch... poor Marcel!!!) from 10:00 to 19:45 (I hope at Marcel got his plane to Washington).

6. In my introduction of each meeting, I first raised MSF's concerns that could be resumed in five main points:

- Lack of access to population (displaced, refugees, local pop.) in Zaire;
- Lack of protection of these populations, both in Zaire but also for the returnees in Rwanda (no HR observers in communes);
- Use of humanitarian aid as "bait" by ADFL;
- Need for pressure from MS on Kabila, Kigali, and others in the region to stop the killings and to allow access to population;

- and last, but not least, to make sure that the Commission of Inquiry regarding HR abuses (Garreton's report) be established and sent to the field as soon as possible.

7. Marcel then explained the situation and gave very detailed information of our teams' observations in the last 3 months, especially in the last weeks - with visits to Masisi, Shabunda, etc.

8. In each of our meetings, our interlocutors have good questions and comments and they all admitted to get new information that they did not have (the US in particular, insisted about it). Some of them have heard 'rumours' or echoes, but nothing as specific and detailed.

[...] The US Amb. [Ambassador] seemed a bit disturbed (if not shocked) by Marcel's info, and said that our visit and témoignage confirmed what they have heard before on HR abuses and said that the US recognised that those were taking place. He mentioned that he just returned from Angola and spoke to Dos Santos about Zaire; the President said that Angola will do anything it could to help... He

agreed that Kabila and Kigali should be pressed on these matters. We also mentioned Marcel and Antoine's meetings tomorrow and Friday in Washington.

[...] In the meeting with Sahnoun's rep., Mr. Yussef Mahmoud, DPKO (a French colonel) asked us if we had the possibility to take pictures of mass graves. He also said that the problems of refugees have officially been resolved by MS in January when they decided not to send a multinational force to the region. Mr Mahmoud said that our criticism of UNHCR is the same one that ICRC's. On the Commission of Inquiry, he said that this was mainly a MONEY issue and advised us strongly to insist on donors to give money for the creation and implementation of such an inquiry .THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT INFO. for your contacts and advocacy. Please TAKE NOTE OF this point... We insisted on the need for Mr. Sahnoun himself to pass the message to Kabila and mentioned the frustration of some MS that we met today on Sahnoun's role and negotiations. Mr. Mahmoud took a lot of notes and PROMISED US to inform SAHNOUN immediately (sending him a report this evening). Sahnoun is supposed to meet Kabila tomorrow in Cape Town. Mr. Mahmoud also spoke about MSF's impact during our February debriefing to the SC (in the field as well as in NY or capitals) and suggested to push for such a meeting again. DHA made reference to difficulty of the situation because the lack of unity among the international community (some still have problems with numbers and figures!!)!. We agreed that different signals were sent by different countries to the regional actors.



'Meeting Report, Advocacy Campaign for Protection of the Population and Humanitarian Access in Eastern Zaire,' Antoine Gérard , Programme Development Officer, MSF USA, April 17 & 18, 1997 (in English). **D140**

**Extract:**

1/ Preliminaries

Following the request by Phil Doherty to organize Washington appointments with western and US Governments, I set up some meetings for Marcel van Soest with some reliable persons at the White House and the Department of State. On the other hand, we have been also in contact with two major American organizations developing special advocacy campaigns on the Eastern Zaire crisis. Thirdly, preliminary contacts been taken with the staffers of some Congressmen, of the House of Representative Committee of Foreign Affairs, African Subcommittee, but no further meeting has been arranged. The different persons we met received prior to the meeting the Position Paper 'Protection of the Population and Humanitarian Access in Zaire.' Every time, as an introduction word, I stressed on the confidentiality on our adv that no quote should mentioned MSF as a source.

I am also very concerned about the security of our teams in eastern Zaire and therefore in all the region, I shared

this issue with Phil Doherty last Monday when he required to launch this advocacy campaign in US. Therefore, I always mentioned to the persons we met, that we have a big concern for security of our expatriates and also our national staff in the area. I also stressed on the fact that MSF is a humanitarian organization which is worried about the lack of protection given to the refugees in eastern Zaire. Our 'témoignage' based on MSF team presence in the area has the objective to maintain humanitarian and human rights issues on the political agenda of the major governments involved and be active in the resolution of the eastern Zaire conflict. Last but not least, no report has been given to any of the persons we met.

**On 16 April, the AFDL formally agreed to the repatriation of Rwandan refugees. James Fraser presented the Shabunda report to the British Foreign Affairs Ministry and then to the Canadian government. In preparation for that meeting, he received a briefing from MSF Holland's HAD.**



'James Fraser, logistician - administration-Shabunda Briefing,' April 1997 (in English). **D141**

#### Extract:

-In light of the extreme delicacy of this issue for volunteers in the field, due to the fact that MSF is not a human rights organisation, but considering the importance of the subject in line with MSF's charter:

-Focus on what you saw with your own eyes; patterns indicated from several independent sources; always remind journalists MSF is a medical humanitarian organisation that operates under international human rights and humanitarian law; and that we encourage specialists to continue pursuit of the topic of massacres/human rights abuses immediately.

#### FACTS

-Exploratory mission indicated patterns; clear congruent patterns  
 -You cross-referenced as best as possible, corroborated by several other people along the road  
 -This is not a formal or classic human rights investigation, it is based on repeated testimonies  
 -From Oct/Nov 1996 onwards, MSF doctors/nurses in Zaire treated machete and bullet wounds in adults and children

**MSF HAS NO VISUAL FIRST-HAND WITNESSING OF KILLINGS OR MASS GRAVES**

**CONFIRMING MASS GRAVES/KILLINGS NEEDS TO BE THE WORK OF SPECIALISTS AND WE ENCOURAGE THAT INVESTIGATIVE TEAMS BE ALLOWED TO DO THEIR WORK,**

that JOURNALISTS and human rights organisations continue to pursue the truth.

MSF concerns:

- That refugees in the war fled and died/suffered from dehydration, malnutrition, gunshot and machete wounds, cholera, diarrhoea, exposure
- Lack of access to give/receive medical assistance
- Use of humanitarian aid used as bait; lack of respect for neutrality, medical ethics
- Lack of protection/rights (*non-refoulement*) for refugees
- Need for international community to provide (financial) assistance for UNHCR to accomplish their mandate of protection.

It is very important that you steer totally clear from making definite statements based on second and thirdhand reports.

- "Did the AFDL systematically massacre refugees?"

*"That is a very good question I encourage you to pursue. It is a question to ask human rights specialists, but as medical humanitarians, we are very concerned about the patterns indicating human rights violations which continue to be present to us.*

- "Did you see mass graves?"

*"I am not a forensic scientist, and only specialists can confirm the many reports we had of mass graves. But, those I did meet were many scared villagers during my exploratory mission from Bukavu to Shabunda, military personnel who were told to treat all refugees as the enemy and to eliminate them, and I saw freshly dug graves.*

- "Did Kabila order his army to kill all refugees?"

*"As an administrator with MSF, that is not a question for me to answer. What I do know is that our right to access to people in distress was repeatedly denied, I was personally intimidated from doing my work, refugees did not have the protection afforded to them by international humanitarian law, MSF was and remains very concerned about the absence of protection for refugees and displaced people, for security of people and aid workers.*

**The Belgian section challenged the form and certain portions of the content of the Shabunda report and vetoed the report's distribution to journalists. The French section was surprised that the information in the Shabunda report had not already been made public.**



'Zaire Communication Update 18,' MSF Holland, 18 April 1997 (in English). **D142**

#### Extract:

3. Communications

The media part of the lobby campaign for Shabunda has

been postponed due to objections by MSF B (security for the team in Kigali might be at stake). More news on Monday. So: NO JOURNALISTS WILL BE BRIEFED, NOR GIVEN THE REPORT.

REPATRIATION: there are rumours that MSF is opposing the repatriation because of the cholera outbreak.

Position of the team is: We are not opposing the repatriation as long as it is done in a humane way and not for those who have cholera. Considering the conditions both with the health of the people, the severe rain and heat, and the terrain, it is preferable that people who are in a reasonable condition will be repatriated. The actual situation is not good for the people...

 I found the report to be pretty lightweight. I'm not saying that they were wrong, just that I would have had a hard time using it as the basis of an advocacy effort. We were convinced that these events had taken place, but we found the report skimpy. You can't speak out every time you have this kind of information just because the event is known to have occurred. If they had had other information (and they did), they should have presented it. They had photos taken by a Dutch journalist. They didn't produce them because the journalist said, "I don't want to make them public because then they won't let me back into Zaire." In Goma, I saw people from the mission who had lived through this. They were disgusted, shocked, and traumatised so I think they were right to speak. That's why I'm saying, "Speak out, yes, but with hard information." I don't think the information in this report was solid: "We saw newly turned earth, we saw a car leaving in the distance, we saw them quickly put shovels in the car."

Maybe it's the way it was written, maybe it's way the data was assembled—I don't know. I think they were right, they should have spoken out. But I found the form pretty weak. I don't know how many times the report was rewritten. It was very poorly thought out.

... It took forever to come out and then at the last minute, we didn't agree on the form. I remember calling Anne-Marie Huby, the MSF UK Executive Director—she was in the corridor—and I said to her, "I don't want this report to be distributed because it's really poorly written. We can't give this out." The result was that since it was poorly done, or some people said it wasn't good enough, there were several people who didn't get the message. That's the problem. At some point, people in the sections had had it. They said, "We can't get behind this message." That's what happened with Shabunda and the report that followed.

Dr.[...], MSF Belgium Operational Director  
(in French).

 We went to London and I was about to go to the Foreign Office and we got a call from Brussels say-

ing, "No, don't go! You cannot go!". They were trying to give us an order, arguing: "We are worried about our people in the field." We were there at the door and we had the appointment in five minutes. So Phil (Doherty, MSF Holland Desk) made the decision to go ahead because we do not take orders from Brussels.

James Fraser, MSF Holland Shabunda explo team,  
26 March to 3 April 1997 (in English).

MSF New York office

 On the 18th, in the morning, just when I was entering, Antoine [Gérard, MSFUSA Programme development officer] got a phone call from the MSF Belgium Director of Opérations, who ordered that I was not allowed to go [to the US house of Representation], because we first had to revise the Shabunda report. Belgians were against the Shabunda report. Mario did not agree with some statements and he wanted them to be taken out. I was completely against it because it was not the way it was decided. And I was there, and I was going there. There were [sic] too much to report to this group of people, about what was going on. So we did it anyway.

Marcel Van Soest, MSF Holland Field Coordinator,  
Goma, January to March 1997 (in English).

 This information came in from MSF Holland and I saw the Shabunda report. I didn't know if it was for comments or for review. When I read it, I almost fainted. There was a sentence at the end of the Shabunda report that led me to understand that MSF and UNHCR were used as "sheep" to attract the refugees who were later killed..."

There were two things that shocked me. It was only in a tiny sentence at the end and they didn't even say, "Watch out, we're warning all the sections, cease operations with the AFDL." When I received this report, it included events that had occurred more than a month ago. That meant that it took more than a month for this kind of information to make its way up to an operational level and be shared. This meant that more than a month after the events, no concrete, operational, or public decision had been made on that basis of that information! I was appalled.

I went right downstairs to see Jean-Hervé (Bradol, Communications Director) and said to him, "This is a bombshell. It's extremely serious, it's awful. Why did it take so long to get this information? We can't leave the office tonight without doing something. This isn't just any information. We're stopping and we're going to do something."

*I think we held a meeting right away and then decided to take action. We called the Dutch and asked them, "Why? What's going on? We want to know more about this, etc." Not only is humanitarian aid no longer effective, but it's contributing to getting people killed. Furthermore, we have proof in this report that refugees certainly existed and that we were right even though we were attacked on this more than a month ago. Not only did we have the information to defend ourselves but, once again, to defend the populations and we didn't take advantage of it.*

Françoise Saulnier, MSF Senior Legal Advisor  
(in French).

 *I think the Shabunda report should have been published here in the US, but on a delayed basis. I'm not saying that we knew all about it when it was written, but as soon as we learned that MSF Holland had written a report, we put pressure on them to get the content and we said, "Come and present it if you think we can't do it ourselves." I remember the discussions I had with Françoise at that time. I think the timing was poor and, unfortunately, the report dragged on. At the time, we felt they had information that they didn't want to give out. That was obvious. I think we were late.*

Antoine Gérard, MSF USA Head of Programmes  
Department (in French).

 *What elevates this kind of issue above the level of rumour is when an organisation commits to saying that it believes it to be true and provides evidence backing up its convictions. None of the organisations involved – not UNHCR, which was saying practically the opposite, MSF Holland or ICRC – took a public position on a fundamental issue. So, no one agreed publicly to source that information or say, "We as an institution believe this to be valid; this is our official position." And then despite individual convictions, the information remained at the level of rumour - and dangerous rumour at that - because it was so vague that it didn't prompt the killers to moderate their actions. They knew their impunity was such that even the existence of the crime was denied.*

Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France programme  
manager then Communication Director (in French).

**On 18 April, the AFDL delayed indefinitely the repatriation of the refugees from the camps south of Kisangani, claiming that the cholera might spread. Zairian villagers blamed the humanitarian organisations, criticising them for aiding only the refugees.**



'Repatriation of Refugees in Kisangani Area Put Off Indefinitely,' **AFP** (France), Kisangani, 18 April 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

Local UNHCR official Kilian Kleinschmidt announced that repatriation of Rwandan Hutu refugees living in makeshift camps south of Kisangani, eastern Zaire, has been put off indefinitely.

"We must confirm whether there is cholera in the Biaro camp (41 kilometres south of Kisangani)," he told AFP, refusing to provide a date when repatriation would begin. "The tests have to be sent to Goma (500 kilometres east)."

The 80 unaccompanied children who were supposed to have been repatriated initially by plane on Friday are living in the Biaro camp. On Thursday night, local rebel authorities refused to authorise the operation to begin.

They fear that the cholera epidemic rife among the refugees in the neighbouring Kasese camp could spread. Between 80,000-100,000 Rwandan Hutu refugees in poor physical condition are living south of Kisangani. The area has been under rebel control since 15 March.



'Task Force Eastern Zaire,' **Update** from MSF Belgium, 18 April 1997 (in English). **D143** 

**Extract:**

Security incidents last night in Kisangani. Some refugees might have killed 7 Zairian villagers. To be confirmed. This morning, there is an organised demonstration with placards against NGOs. Zairians say they do not want any refugees neither expatriates/organisations providing assistance to refugees.

The problem is paradoxical. Zairians are fed up with refugees (they receive all the assistance, they loot their fields, they spread cholera) but at the same time, Congo-Zaire could use this situation to ask help for local structures. MSF brings assistance to local structures but it is of course far from [less than] the assistance brought to refugees. Our team does not have any access to the camps today. Idem for the other NGOs. They can cross the river but are stopped at the other side by the Zairian population. Presence of ADFL militaries but they do not do anything.

[...] Rumours say the stocks (MSF ?; WFP ?) would have been looted but no idea if some of them or all of them. We are trying to send a local logistician to check today. This day is lost from an operational point of view. The stocks in the camps would be enough for one day. Problematic supply of drinkable water if no expatriate [remains present] in the camp. Local staff (refugees) very weak, especially in Biaro.

[...] MSF's position on repatriation:

From a strictly medical point of view, we should be strict and say to wait a few weeks before sending back refugees to Rwanda. From a protection point of view, the presence of refugees definitively makes problems for local populations and creates security problems. Therefore, we recommend to speed up repatriation for the valid families and to ensure protection to allow proper assistance to the camps. Assistance to refugees should be coupled with assistance to the local population.

For assistance to the local population, ICRC is in charge of it as it is integrated with IDPs; however, it seems that this is not very satisfactory as the refugees referred by MSF to Kisangani health structures showed us that the patients were not properly treated. So still needs in local structures!

**On 21 April, aid operations in the refugee camps south of Kisangani were suspended after a train carrying provisions and a WFP warehouse were looted and following confrontations among villagers, refugees, and AFDL soldiers.**



'Operations in Kisangani Camps Suspended After Attack on Train and Warehouse,' **AFP** (France), Nairobi, 21 April 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

A train carrying provisions and a World Food Programme (WFP) warehouse were attacked early Monday morning south of Kisangani (eastern Zaire), provoking a new suspension of humanitarian operations in the Rwandan refugee camps.

[...] The train, carrying 120 tonnes of provisions intended for the Rwandan refugees, was attacked around 7 kilometres south of Kisangani after receiving authorisation to travel to refugee camps further south from rebel Alliance soldiers who have controlled Kisangani since March 15.

[...] Humanitarian aid sources say the looters are probably local Zairians.



'Zairians Villagers Attack Hutu Refugee Camps,' **Reuters** (UK), Lula, 22 April (in English).

**Extract:**

Zairian villagers armed with machetes attacked Rwandan refugee camps in eastern Zaire on Tuesday to avenge the killing of six Zairians, witnesses said.

They said residents of Kasese village 25 km (15 miles) south of Kisangani city left at dawn for two nearby camps for 55,000 Rwandan Hutu refugees to take revenge and shooting followed. "This morning at 6 a.m. the villagers

decided to go and take revenge and make the refugees flee. They took machetes," said Samy Janga, a Kasese schoolteacher. "Soon afterwards we heard shooting which went on for an hour and a half. Some villagers ran into the forest to hide," he added. Travellers said it was impossible to pass Kasese because of fighting.

Six Zairians were killed and two wounded at Kasese on Monday in an attack blamed on Hutu extremists by villagers, who stopped aid workers reaching the camp and looted the same day. But one survivor of the attack told Reuters she was shot by men who bore the hallmarks of ethnic Tutsi Alliance troops and witnesses said the attackers were uniformed. "The soldiers wore uniforms. They were tall and thin and I heard them speaking Kinyarwanda. They were not refugees," said Mayaza Apaijoma, 20, being treated at Kabonda Catholic hospital, after being shot in the thigh. A two-year old girl, shot in the stomach, was also being treated at the hospital.

The testimony is the latest in a series of signs of a concerted attempt to destabilise a repatriation programme by Alliance troops fearful of the presence of armed Hutu militants among the refugees. Zairians said they looted aid vehicles on Monday at the urging of Tutsi-dominated rebels, who have seized one-half of Africa's third largest country since October in a war to topple President Mobutu Sese Seko.

**The rebel radio station in Goma presented the absence of aid organisations as a failure of responsibility.**



'Rebel Radio Says Humanitarian Groups in Kisangani Abdicating Responsibility,' **AFP** (France), Goma, 21 April 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

Rebel radio broadcasting from Goma (east) said Tuesday that aid organisations' suspension of operations near Kisangani, in eastern Zaire, "was a failure of responsibility."

The radio reports did not mention that rebel military authorities in Kisangani were keeping international groups from entering Rwandan Hutu refugee camps south of the city, claiming security concerns.

"Food shortages could push these starving people [the refugees] to turn to any means [to feed themselves], including robbery and organised crime," the Voix du Peuple station warned.

"Wasn't this what led to the confrontations between humanitarian aid workers and Kisangani residents, who saw trains and trucks loaded with provisions roll by, while they were left to their own devices?" the broadcaster asked.

**On 22 April, several aid organisations mobilised to request access to the refugees and the launching of a repatriation airlift. The UN Secretary General and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees called on the rebels to immediately authorise an airlift to repatriate the refugees to Rwanda.**



'Rwanda Still Agrees to Refugee Repatriation,' **AFP** (France), Goma, 22 April 1997 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

On Tuesday, the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) announced that it had received assurances from Kigali that Rwanda "still agrees with the repatriation plan" for Rwandan Hutu refugees in the Kisangani region of eastern Zaire.

A mission composed of representatives of Rwanda, the Zairian rebel Alliance, and UNHCR is scheduled to leave Tuesday for Kisangani to discuss the repatriation process, delayed indefinitely because of security incidents and opposition from local authorities concerned about a cholera epidemic rife among the refugees.

UNHCR confirmed that there is no risk of the epidemic spreading and declared that it could begin repatriation operations immediately if security is guaranteed.

"On Monday, UNHCR was in contact with the Rwandan government," UNHCR's regional coordinator in Goma, Filippo Grandi, told AFP. "They agree that those most in need may be repatriated first by plane."

[...] GOMA (Zaire) – UNHCR's regional coordinator said that on Tuesday, UN agencies and humanitarian organisations had still not obtained access to Kisangani's left bank, which they must cross to reach the refugee camps. Humanitarian operations in the camps south of Kisangani were suspended after several episodes in which local residents looted large quantities of provisions intended for the refugees. The murder of six Zairians is said to have set off the looting. Residents accused the refugees of the murders.

[...] Michèle Quintaglie, WFP spokesperson in Nairobi, noted that around 32,000 refugees in the Biaro camp, 41 kilometres south of Kisangani, were to have received a food distribution on Monday, but the distribution could not take place because the humanitarian organisations' activities were suspended after the looting incidents. The refugees last received food supplies one week ago.

[...] On Monday, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata called on the Zairian rebels to immediately authorise an airlift to avoid widespread deaths among the Rwandan refugees.

According to UNHCR, the rebels said that the humanitarian organisations could not enter the camps "because of a security operation in the area."

**In May, the UN decided to send a commission of inquiry to eastern Zaire to investigate 'alleged massacres.'**



'UN Investigates Alleged Massacres in Eastern Zaire,' **AFP** (France), 22 April 1997 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

Spokesperson Thérèse Gastaut said that Mohamed Sahnoun, special UN and OAU envoy in the Great Lakes region, had obtained agreement from the Alliance, led by Laurent-Désiré Kabila, to allow the commission into eastern Zaire to examine mass graves.

The Human Rights Commission, which completed its annual six-week meeting on Friday in Geneva, had decided to launch an international inquiry after a preliminary mission conducted by the special reporter on Zaire, Chilean Roberto Garreton.

Early in the month, Garreton said that he was sure that rebels had committed massacres after fighting ended in the region and had seen what he called 'common graves' and had gathered witness statements.

He expressed his hope that a commission of inquiry made up of UN special reporters on human rights and experts would be formed to determine how many people may have been killed near former Rwandan refugee camps along the Zairian and Rwandan borders.

The commission includes Garreton, special reporters on extra-judicial, summary and arbitrary executions, the Senegalese Bacre N'Diaye and a member of the working group on arbitrary detention. They will be assisted by three experts from the UN Human Rights Centre and three forensic medical experts.

The first meeting is scheduled for 1 and 2 May in Geneva. The spokesperson announced that the commission will then go to Kigali, Rwanda, and, if security conditions allow, to Goma on 4 May.

The UN experts are expected to remain on site for one week and the forensic experts will stay for a month.

**Responding to criticism from MSF Belgium regarding the Shabunda report, MSF Holland sent a message to all sections explaining how it was written and what its objectives were.**



Reaction to MSF Brussels Comments on the Reconstruction Report Bukavu-Shabunda,' **Memo** from MSF Holland , 22 April 1997 (in English). **D128**

#### **Extract:**

##### **Regarding 'security'**

The report's allegation of the involvement of the Rwandan

government in the alleged mass killings is stated in such a way that it is not said by MSF directly but by others to MSF during its mission ("it was pointed out to MSF..."). Moreover, MSF on two occasions directly met with the Rwandan commander Jackson, who supports the allegation of Rwandan involvement. This allegation is not new and stated before by Human Rights Watch (HRW) in its report 'Zaire: Attacked By All Sides' (March 1997, Vol. 9, nr. 1) and by the UN Special Reporter for Zaire Mr Robert Garreton in its reports to the UN Commission on Human Rights (E/CN.4/1997/6, 28 January 1997 and E/CN.4/1997/6/Add.2, 2 April 1997).

Putting the findings on paper instead of only verbally communicating the confidential issues raised in the report, was done to facilitate the discussion on the alleged mass killings and to provide information as detailed as possible to relevant persons who might contribute to the facilitation of a quick and effective investigation into the reported human rights violations. Of course there is always the risk of confidential reports 'leaking' to people who were not initially targeted, which might create security risks. However, this risk is present with both written and verbal information.

However, the advantage of a written report (however confidential) in such a case is that it gives MSF a better ground for defending possible accusations made by others. If countered successfully, it even contributes to the credibility of the report and reinforces the seriousness of the alleged human rights violation(s), which in its turn enhances the probability of these allegations to be investigated. Moreover, as you know, verbal information tends to become distorted once it changes from person to person and in the worst case starts leading 'a life on its own'. Since such stories tend to be exaggerated this may even lead to greater and less controllable security risks.

#### **Regarding 'counterintelligence agency?'**

Regarding the 'military information' we would like to stress that MSF did not actively gather any such information. Most information which can be considered as 'military' was told to MSF during the trip or witnessed directly by the expats. Any such information serves no other purpose than to provide the report with a context in which the alleged killings took place. Moreover, it confirms the fact that AFDL is in control over the area described and as such, under international humanitarian law, bears legal responsibility for the human rights abuses that took place, for avoiding further abuses and to bring those responsible to justice. Whether the human rights abuses are perpetrated by the AFDL themselves or not.

#### **Regarding 'indirect witnessing/sources'**

The people who talked to both MSF and UNHCR during the explo mission were too scared to state their names, fearing reprisals upon discovery. And even if we would have names of witnesses we would not have put them in to protect their identity. This explains the phrasing of the report and the more general indication in the beginning

of the report on the sources of the information. However, also the UN Special Reporter, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch use such phrasing in their reports to protect the identity of witnesses.

We feel that the allegations made regarding human rights abuses in combination with the things directly seen and/or heard by the team during the explo mission give strong reasons to conclude that human rights abuses took place and are still taking place. Moreover, the actual presence of MSF and UNHCR in the area by means of this explo mission in our view provides sufficient basis for the credibility of MSF and this report. For remarks on direct/first-hand witnessing please see below.

#### **Regarding 'direct witnessing'**

In principal it is very rare to direct witness human rights abuses such as mass killings, since they occur mostly when there is no international presence (hence the need for such presence). Indeed direct witnessing is the strongest form of witnessing/advocacy one could wish for, but in this case was not available. Still we all agree that we cannot remain silent on the serious allegations made by refugees and the local population who claimed to have witnessed these abuses. Moreover, the indirect accounts seemed to be confirmed by locations, events and people encountered during the explo mission.

**The Kisangani team did not have access to the camps. In Brussels, the desk discussed what pressure it might bring to bear to resolve the situation without endangering expatriates.**



'22 April Task Force Meeting,' **Minutes** prepared by Dominique Boutriau, programme manager, to MSF Belgium managers, 22 April 1997 (in French). **D144**

#### **Extract:**

##### **8. Kisangani:**

- We received a summary from Francine: High mortality rate in the camps and no access to camps.
- Looting: WFP train, MSF supplies and MSF house at kilometre 25.
- WHO? IMPRESSIONS: Ex-FAR? Interahamwe? Civilians close to the Alliance? (this last impression seems the likeliest...). In any event, people realise that the governor is only a puppet whose movements are being manipulated from afar.

[...] 12. What pressure to bring to bear from here?

We can make contacts with other organisations here: Oxfam and UNICEF, to avoid isolating MSF. In fact, over the last week, MSF H has begun a lobbying effort with an advocacy plan focusing on non-access to the camps,

directed at the US and UK governments and the European Union and European Parliament. This document includes a mild accusation of the Rwandan government. It's a very sensitive matter - possible consequences for expatriate security. Eric and Bernard are supposed to meet with UNHCR on Friday or Saturday with a document focusing on medical issues. The medical department will provide the data. Not so simple because no access to camps. Vincent or Wilma must try to meet with the Alliance in Lubum [Lubumbashi].

**The Executive Director of MSF France proposed that colleagues from other sections send a summary of the Shabunda report to selected reporters, asking them to agree not to cite MSF. The writing of the document was assigned to an inter-section working group under MSF Holland leadership.**



'Fact-sheet for Zaire, suggest Ex Paris, Lobby East Zaire,' **E-mail** from MSF France Executive Director to MSF Holland programme manager and HAD, MSF Belgium Research Centre, MSF France Legal Adviser, 22 April 1997 (in English). **D145**

**Extract:**

Dear all,

I herewith send you a proposition for the LOBBY EAST ZAIRE:

- 1) The existing documents must be considered as back-up information for internal use and for limited distribution to human rights organisations (capable of dealing with the confidentiality of the information).
- 2) A concise report (3 to 4 pages) must be drawn up on the situation of the refugees in EAST ZAIRE, including:
  - South Kisangani (incl. Tingi -Tingi),
  - Masisi
  - Bukavu -Shabunda axis
  - Transit camps in Rwanda

Global analysis including:

- Access to populations
  - Health situation
  - Protection
- 3) Target groups:
    - Political authorities
    - Selected journalists (committed not to use the name of MSF)
  - 4) Internal organisation on this project:
    - Working group consisting of Theo Wijngaard (Amsterdam), Peter Caesar (Brussels) and Françoise Saulnier (Paris), coordinated by Theo
    - In collaboration with the PR departments and relevant desks or operations actors
    - Under the responsibility of Ton Berg/Pim de Graaf

- 5) Deadline: Monday morning (April 28th)
- 6) Distribution of draft report by e-mail to: General and Operational Directors in Brussels, Amsterdam, and Paris
- 7) Approval by General or Operational Director, either by e-mail or by conference call on Monday 12 am

Thanks for sending your comments or approval of this proposition before 5 pm today.



'Zaire Communication **Update** 20,' p1-2 - PR Amsterdam, 22 April 1997 (in English). **D146**

**Extract:**

(INTERNAL) Discussions on advocacy are still going on. An update on the MSF position is being drafted in Amsterdam. Consultation with desks and field will follow. It is intended to address the general problems in eastern Zaire: no access, manipulations of humanitarian organizations, and human right violations. Not clear how far we can go with media. Can we list some facts, proving the human rights violations? To what extent can we use the information from the report???? Please refrain from comments on this issue till something's been decided.

[...] Please don't give out the numbers of the field to all media. Select them carefully and insist they only make new appointments for interviews through PR department (you, or A'dam).

## "WHERE ARE THE KASESE REFUGIES?"

**On 23 April, the UN Secretary General declared that the rebels "were killing people through starvation". The US State Department called on the AFDL to grant humanitarian organisations access to the refugees.**



'Kofi Annan Accuses Zairian Rebels of "Killing Through Starvation,"' **AFP** (France), UN, New York, 23 April 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

On Wednesday, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan accused the Zairian rebels of "killing through starvation" and called on their leader to allow humanitarian organisations to reach the thousands of refugees abandoned in eastern Zaire.

"I am shocked and appalled by the inhumanity shown toward these refugees—most of whom are innocents—by those controlling eastern Zaire," the Secretary General added.

Speaking to the press after informing the Security Council of recent developments in the Zairian crisis, Annan said, "You can kill people by shooting them or by starving them. What is happening now is murder by famine."

Annan emphasised that despite promises to UN humanitarian organisations, the Tutsi rebels controlling eastern Zaire continue to prevent delivery of aid intended for some 80,000 Rwandan refugees currently in the Kisangani region (north-east).



'Washington Demands Rebels Provide Access to Refugees in Eastern Zaire,' **AFP** (France), Washington, 23 April 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

On Wednesday, the State Department again called on Zairian rebels to authorise "free and immediate access" for humanitarian organisations to the thousands of Rwandan refugees blocked in eastern Zaire.

State Department spokesperson Nicholas Burns referred to Washington's "deep concern about the information on the killings of refugees."

He warned the rebel alliance that if it sought a good relationship with the US, it "should act out of humanitarian concern".

Burns emphasised that the Rwandan government, which had previously refused to allow the refugees to enter, "is no longer a problem". Laurent Désiré Kabila's rebels "have no more excuses" for blocking the operation to repatriate refugees to Rwanda, he added.

**According to UNHCR, refugees from Kasese fleeing fighting were heading toward Biaro. The MSF team learned via a third party that one of its drivers reportedly saw 500 bodies at the site. However, the driver was blocked at the site and was delayed in returning to confirm the information. The information was not made public because of problems and delays in confirming the account and for fear of reprisals.**



'HCR Reports that 55,000 Refugees Have Left the Kasese Camp Where Fighting Was Reported,' **AFP** (France), Nairobi, 23 April 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

On Wednesday night, the UN High Commission for Refugees received "strong indications" that around 55,000 Rwandan

refugees in the Kasese camp (south of Kisangani) had left the camp, where fighting was reported to have occurred. Paul Stromberg, UNHCR spokesperson in Kisangani, told AFP by phone from Nairobi that, "Although we believe this information to be true, we cannot confirm it because we do not have access to the area south of Kisangani."

On Wednesday, the rebel Alliance, which controls Kisangani, had not authorised UNHCR to conduct over flights in the region. "They raised security reasons," Stromberg said. "We have thus been unable to locate the refugees."

Since Monday morning, security reasons have also prevented the humanitarian organisations from crossing the Zaire river to Kisangani to reach the south, where the Kasese and Biaro refugee camps (with respective populations of 55,000 and 32,000) are located.

According to information UNHCR has received, the refugees who left Kasese were headed towards Biaro, some 15 kilometres from Kasese, in the direction of Ubundu, a city located 150 kilometres south of Kisangani.



'Telephone Conversation with Vincent,' **Summary** by Dominique Boutriau, MSF Belgium desk to other sections, 23 April 1997 (in French). **D147**

**Extract:**

CONFIDENTIAL!!!!

THIS INFORMATION WAS PROVIDED BY VINCENT IN KISANGANI. TOTAL EMBARGO ON DISTRIBUTION FOR NOW. EXTERNAL DISTRIBUTION DECISION THIS AFTERNOON.

Information from Vincent this morning (Wednesday):

Monday morning: driver left on bicycle and a haulier on foot for Kilometre 25. The driver was going to get the MSF truck at Kilometre 29 (Kasese). The haulier spent the night at Kilometre 15. Driver spent the night at Kilometre 25; noted heavy military presence.

The haulier resumed travel on Tuesday morning heading for Kilometre 25. Along the road, from Kilometre 20 to Kilometre 25, only women and children. The army had commandeered the men to go to the camp.

The haulier reached kilometre 25 at 8:00 on Tuesday morning. Hardly any military personnel. Hauler heard gunfire in the distance all morning.

The driver finally arrived around noon, having come from camps at Kilometre 29. He asked the Colonel to get the truck but the latter refused because of insecurity. The driver did not see refugees at Kilometre 29, only bodies—he saw at least 500. The population was burying them and looting what the refugees had left behind. The driver recommended that the haulier leave because the population would be hostile (haulier seen as overly-cooperative with NGOs and had refused to transport populations' belongings last Sunday). The driver is still at Kilometre 25 waiting for his truck.

According to local sources, events began on Sunday when some 12 men in civilian clothing, wearing boots, killed 6

villagers in their homes at the entrance to the village at Kilometre 25, coming from the direction of the camps. UNHCR over flight yesterday: did not see refugees; however, the haulier did not hear a plane!!! UNHCR information this morning: the refugees were reported to have been sent back to Kilometre 95.

AP information: fighting between Ex-FAR/rebels and refugees caught in between. Non-access for humanitarian workers and reporters. Reuters information (Zairian based in Lula): camps attacked by Zairians following incident in a village at Kilometre 25.



'Information on Zaire,' **Information Bulletin**, MSF Spain, 25 April 1997 (in Spanish). **D148**

#### Extract:

Three days ago an MSF driver was requisitioned and abducted in the zone of Kisangani. It seems they forced him to bury bodies and to help the troops, but he managed to send someone to inform our teams.

**During a 23 April teleconference, the executive directors and operations directors from MSF Belgium, France, and Holland sections decided to speak out about the obstacles to preventing access to the refugees, preparing a more strongly worded statement should one be necessary later.**



'History of Communications on Zaire,' written during summer 1997 by Jean-Marie Kindermans, MSF International General Secretary (in French). **D149**

#### Extract:

23 April: teleconference (including directors of operations, executive directors, desks – depending on section). Proposal to proceed in two phases: speak out publicly on the fact that it's impossible to gain access to Kisangani – even as of now and; something stronger later if the killings are confirmed. Pim vetoed for a few hours, long enough to alert the teams ("It's a complete change in strategy for the Holland section"). Despite agreement in principle, later no agreement on a press release and no external communication.

**The US daily newspaper, *The New York Times*, published information from the Shabunda report without citing MSF.**



Howard French, 'Zaire Rebels Blocking Aid, UN Says,' ***The New York Times*** (USA), 23 April 1997 (in English). **D150**

#### Extract:

"What we have seen are examples of a clean-up campaign against the Interahamwe and against the refugees in general," said a senior official of one non-governmental international relief agency that has been active in central Zaire during the war. "Sometimes the rebels go in and shoot a lot of people based on the report that there were Interahamwe among them. And sometimes they shoot up a lot of people with no pretext whatsoever."

[...] According to the relief official, local people in several areas of eastern Zaire say that armed units of Mr Kabila's alliance have followed a strategy of lurking near relief operations in isolated areas, picking off and killing straggling groups of Hutu refugees before they can reach help. A confidential report by the relief group said that in one village, Kingulube, a mass burial site was found by locals near a rebel military post. At another spot nearby, locals said that about 200 refugees were executed in one day on February. 15.

At yet another site, the report said: "Refugees stated that boys and young men were separated from families and groups of refugees by the military in order to carry luggage for the soldiers. These persons were allegedly taken into the forest and have not been seen again."

Although the rebels have repeatedly denied attacking refugees, and have dismissed reports like these as propaganda, relief groups active in eastern Zaire say that they have been repeatedly denied access to areas where rebel military operations are under way or have recently taken place.

**On 24 April, aid organisations still did not have access to the camps, but there were increasing numbers of reports that they were now empty, while the rumours of massacres became more detailed.**



**Minutes** of Zaire Task Force meeting, 24 and 25 April 1997 (in French). **D151**

#### Extract:

-Kisangani: No access yesterday. This afternoon, a three-part commission: Alliance + UNHCR + reporters left for the camps. No feedback yet. They left fairly late and probably will not reach the camps before night. So not much to hope for.

- Rumour of massacre in the press. Weak information because not first-hand statements:

- 1 Zairian reporter for Reuters spoke to villagers who described what they reportedly saw or heard.
- The MSF driver has not yet returned.
- The parish priest [is] in the village.

Therefore, MSF as an organisation cannot issue statements on the massacre or the empty camps until these rumours are confirmed directly or by other reliable sources.

Yesterday, reporters tried to reach the camps by crossing the river in a canoe. They were turned back at k7 by openly aggressive villagers. The expatriates reportedly heard firing. But for how long? 1H hour? 4-5 hours?

In any event, the state of the Biaro refugees' prevented them from heading out and only 40 percent of the Kasese I and II refugees were strong enough to walk.

[...] Regarding advocacy:

- Peter is finishing a report on the region with Paris and A'dam.
- MSF does not have information with which to accuse Rwanda directly.
- Regarding security, we should condemn the Alliance's deliberate strategy of non-access to the camps. Vincent is supposed to meet Colonel Massissipi on this issue this morning.
- In any event, the Alliance is supposed to have gotten advice to do everything possible to make the humanitarian groups 'feel comfortable in the region' and promote a good image of the Alliance. Vincent was also going to talk with the Alliance about stopping anti-NGO propaganda in the local media (see the role that radio stations played in the Great Lakes in '94).

[...] Last minute: ... MSF will issue a press release tomorrow in conjunction with the other sections.

- MSF B is organizing a press conference for tomorrow noon after the three-part group returns from visiting the camps. Observation: The camps are empty
  - 1. Where are these people, most of whom were unable to walk?
  - 2. If MSF does not have access to them, they are receiving no assistance whatsoever.
- This press conference will also provide an opportunity to talk about the following documents:
- Overall report on the Kisangani situation, including medical data
  - The Shabunda report
  - The report on repatriations to Rwanda

**Amnesty International announced that 80,000 refugees in a state of overall exhaustion were wandering in the jungle, victims of AFDL violence. The organisation reported that it had several accounts of violence.**



'Amnesty Condemns Abuses Against Refugees in Eastern Zaire,' **AFP** (France), 24 April 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

The London-based humanitarian organisation announced that some 80,000 refugees gathered in several locations south of Kisangani, Upper Zaire were in a state of "overall exhaustion" as a result of famine and illness. "How many refugees must die or suffer human rights violations at the hands of Laurent-Désiré Kabila's AFDL soldiers before the world sends them a clear message that they are responsible for genocide?" an Amnesty spokesperson asked.

The humanitarian organisation has received numerous reports of 'arbitrary executions' and 'disappearances' of Hutu refugees, both Rwandan and Zairian, since armed conflict began in the region in September 1996.

Amnesty emphasised that Kabila's troops did not intervene to end the attacks against humanitarian aid convoys, adding that the rebels were quick to blame the refugees for the outbreak of the cholera epidemic in the camps.

**In Brussels, MSF Belgium's Executive Director and MSF Holland's Director of Operations met with the European Union's Commissioner for Humanitarian Action and representatives from the ICRC, UNHCR, and Oxfam. The elimination strategy was obvious to all.**



**Minutes** of Zaire Task Force meeting, 24 and 25 April 1997 (in French). **D151**

**Extract:**

Eric Goemaere debriefing at UNHCR this afternoon:  
Present: Bonino/McNamara UNHCR /Ayello/ICRC/OXFAM/  
Martin Griffith (DHA).

First observation everyone has the same view re:

- The strategy of eliminating refugees is obvious.
- This strategy plays into Kabila's hand and, more specifically, into Kagame's.
- Non-access is clearly a Kabila/Kagame strategy.
- These events are playing out against an expanded sphere of regional interests, from Eritrea to Zimbabwe to Angola. On that front, Kabila was a puppet no longer controlled by the puppet masters.

**Second:**

The people with a presence are grassroots humanitarian aid workers. At the European political level, the British and the Dutch are unwilling to acknowledge this. At

that level, European ministers have a veto right AND the Dutch currently hold the presidency. The US does not agree either and offers only polite smiles. However, this morning Washington issued a statement demanding that Kabila observe human rights, but did not include Kagame. There's still a certain 'post-genocide guilt syndrome' when it comes to Rwanda. Ajello and the US are sending a message that Kabila must also avoid tarnishing his image as a worthy alternative to Mobutu. He may thus be sensitive to pressure. However, he denies that there is a problem of non-access to the camps, either out of bad faith or because he doesn't have the necessary control over the region.

**Recommendation:**

**A/ Minimum policy (HCR and ICRC):**

- Remain operational and demand access
- Obtain protection guarantees
- Repatriation of refugees
- Establish a human rights inquiry commission.

**B/ In addition, MSF wants:**

- A European political presence including high-level representatives with monitoring of Kabila's commitments and sanctions if commitments not met
- Renew pressure on Kabila via [United] States.

**The Amsterdam communications department relayed the message from the 23 April teleconference to colleagues in other sections. In the afternoon, MSF's legal advisor announced via e-mail to all sections' executive directors and operations and communications directors that the prohibition on distributing the Shabunda report had been lifted. She provided several revisions to the final report, in cooperation with colleagues from the Belgian and Dutch sections.**



'No Press Release Kisangani,' **Message** from Ruud Huurman, MSF Holland Press Officer to Communication Departments, 24 April 1997 (in English). **D152**

**Extract:**

After consultation with Anouk and with the E-Desk, we concluded that the press release is not relevant anymore. Not only have several other organisations already spoken out on the Kisangani issue, their statements were also much stronger, than we could afford at this moment. Therefore the press release is cancelled.

We are now concentrating again on a much tougher, broader statement on the human right violations. It was promised by the E-Desk that we'll hear more by the end of the afternoon.

For your information: the teams in Zaire are preparing

for possible repercussions, once we speak out on the hr [human rights] situation. The team in Kisangani is already reducing and also Goma is preparing. Of course this is just INTERNAL info.



**E-mail** from Françoise Saulnier, MSF France, to all executive directors and operations and communications directors, and response from Ton Berg, MSF Holland, 24 April 1997 – 15:39 and 16:27 (in French and English). **D153**

**Extract:**

**Shabunda:** Message for operations directors, communications directors and executive directors.

The security veto imposed by the MSF B director of operations has been lifted on the new 'cleaned-up' version of the Shabunda report. This report may be distributed to reporters using MSF's name.

Best wishes and smooth sailing to all,  
Françoise Saulnier

Dear Françoise and Bernard ,

I am very sorry but this is not the way you can deal with a report from the HAD department of MSFH. We are responsible for this report, the contents and the distribution. I think this has to be respected. When there is an agreement on using a part of our report this up to MSFH to agree on the version to be used. I don't think it is up to MSFF to decide on the text of a 'new' summary. Of course we are happy that the veto is lifted and that we can continue with the agreed plan of action but I strongly stress the need to make this a combined agreement between the sections. It is not up to MSFF to take the decision and formalise it the way it is done now. My fax of earlier this afternoon is not respected.

So as stated before we are willing to take into account your remarks on our summary. But an agreement was made on who is in charge of what part of the new fact sheet.

Regards,  
Ton Berg.



**E-mail** from Françoise Saulnier, MSF France Legal Advisor to Peter Casaer (MSF Belgium) 24 April 1997, 17:06 (in French). **D154**

**Extract:**

To Peter Casaer (MSF Belgium),

Please find attached a draft of the drafts. I italicized the places where you can try to fill in yourself with the data you have, or don't have. In short, to move things along a bit faster, I'm giving you the text. Start by filling in the holes regarding the data. We'll talk about content

and form later. In any event, everything can be changed in this first draft and I've checked my pride at the door. However, I would prefer it if we first tried to get the statistics before rewriting and tearing the text apart. So if you can avoid it, don't let everyone else around you read it yet.

All best,  
Françoise



**E-mail** from Françoise Saulnier, MSF France Legal Advisor to Ed Schenkenberg (HAD MSF Holland), 24 April 1997, 17:06 (in English).  
**D155**

**Extract:**

To Ed Schenkenberg ( MSF Holland),  
To keep you posted on progress, I am sending you my current research. Holes are to be filled by the end of the day. As soon as it is done I will let you know so you and everyone else can begin to change or remove language. I hope we both feel confident and trust that whatever it will be there will be an outcome to such a work in such a desperate situation.  
Sincerely - Françoise



'Kivu Document Appended,' **e-mail** from Peter Casaer (MSF Belgium) to Françoise Saulnier (MSF France) 24 April 1997, 21:20 (in French).  
**D156**

**Extract:**

Hello Françoise,  
Everything that was added/changed is underlined and in bold... There are several passages we'd like to change or remove; we've already noted them (I went through it with Dominique Boutriau) in bold and also underlined.  
With love and goodnight,  
Peter.



*The HAD, which had written the draft report, said that it could not be released because of the MSF Belgium veto. The veto was lifted during a teleconference among operations directors, who had authority in the matter because it involved a veto related to field team security. I participated in the teleconference. So that the veto could be lifted, I suggested removing from the report any names that could endanger people and overly specific information. I made those changes later, working with my colleagues at MSF Belgium and MSF Holland. The HAD then challenged our authority to modify a report that they believed was theirs alone. To me, the report should have*

*been made public as quickly as possible and the publishing go-ahead should have come not from the research centre that had written it but from the operations directors... The whole experience left me with a sense of the extremely fragile nature of MSF's warning system. Information like that can circulate through e-mails for two months without prompting anyone to stop what they're doing – that just hit me in the stomach. For me, the worst was that although this information was known within the MSF network, no one stopped to call attention to the fact that it was at the heart of the fight that all sections had been leading for two months to make people understand that not all the refugees had returned to Rwanda and that they were in danger in the forest... I found it shocking that the Shabunda report would appear, by accident, several days before the fall of Kisangani and the Biaro massacres, while the operations it described - the use of aid organisations as bait to lure refugees - had been going on for several months and people knew about them... This wasn't some new abuse that happened along some road. This information jibed with all our fears for the population.*

Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF Legal Advisor  
(in French).



*I always knew what was happening on site. You're the desk, you know the situation, but it's not as if you have your own teams on site. You delegate to MSF Holland and they manage things. You have to operate like that, too. You have to accept a certain delegation of responsibility. The Dutch reports were good. The Shabunda report was good. As for the opportunity to publish the report and when to do it - --once again, I trusted them. From the moment they took charge, it was up to them to decide. They were the ones on site, with their teams, managing things. They were grown up enough to handle it. We were only three days out on this report. So what use was it? None! What was the goal of this report? We said what everyone already knew. What impact did it have? How was the information used? It had no impact! It happened, it was war, we were used in Rwanda by every means imaginable. I'm not saying that these things shouldn't be said, but whether you say them a day or a week later, that's not important. There's no need to make a scene because you don't agree on the date. I think it has to be said, we agree. But you shouldn't have illusions about its impact. This crisis lasted two years. There wouldn't have been anything more to do whether or not there was a Shabunda report. ... It has to be said, but in a professional way and I even think that it has to be said in a well-founded report because that's the only way it will make any impression. If you want to make a stink in the press with it on a one-time basis, it won't do any good. But if you produce a well-written report that you can distribute - the kind of thing MSF hates doing because we love spontaneous, heartfelt statements - at least the report might have a place in history and reach decision makers. I have to say that it was given to Garetton.*

*[Robert Garreton, responsible for the United Nations High Commission to Human Rights mission in charge of investigating on allegations of massacres in Eastern Congo].*

Dr. Dominique Boutriau, MSF Belgium programme manager (in French).



*The Department of Humanitarian Affairs wrote these reports and were very cautious in giving the reports. The problem was the internal fight. They wanted to be very precise. They would like to write very precise articles, checked and double checked. And they don't effect. The report had to be read by everybody here and it had to be decided if it was appropriate for publishing. So the whole process was lengthy. It had to do with the people in the Humanitarian Affairs department, who had a human rights background and who were very demanding. I cannot think of any other... It used to be the General Director who had one to two persons under him, this was during Jacques' [de Milliano] time, that were writing reports. In practical terms, operations were always involved. And even later when the department was part of a whole cluster, the Humanitarian Affairs department was linked to the operational directors. They were the ones asked to make a report on any particular area. The General Director and myself were not directly involved anymore, but we were linked to the report.*

Lex Winkler, MSF Holland Executive Director and Operational Director 1996 - 1997 (in English).



*Shabunda, as I remember, there was a very short 4-page version for public distribution, where for instance, a lot of the references to military positioning would be taken out. But I don't even know which versions in the end were distributed to public sources. It's still not well understood within MSF that if you give a document - even if you give it outside the section sometimes, you have to consider it a public document. It's just too big a movement to control communications.*

Leslie Lefkow, MSF Holland Human Rights Officer, on Mission in Goma from 18 March to 2 April 1997, then MSF Holland HAD officer (in English).

**The MSF Holland Press Officer announced to his colleagues that the new Shabunda report summary could be distributed to a targeted group of 'reliable' reporters, whose names he had on a list and who had to agree not to cite MSF.**



**Message** from Ruud Hurman, MSF Holland Press Officer to Communication Departments, 24 April 1997 (in English). **D157**

**Extract:**

Hi there.

It's been bit of a frustrating day, with too many changes and confusion. From my side sorry, but hey, don't kill the messenger. Serious now. The report on Shabunda as it was distributed by MSF-F (Françoise) today is now cleared for distribution to ONLY THE SELECTED LIST OF MEDIA and under STRICT confidentiality, meaning:

- They will never mention MSF as a source
- They will not refer to 'an aid agency' or similar phrasing as a source
- They will never refer to the MSF report as a source
- They will not quote from the report
- They will not share the report with others
- They will not mention MSF facilitating them

The media are:

UK: Daily telegraph, Guardian, and Economist; approached by Anne Marie

USA: Washington Post, NY Times; by Barbara/Samantha

Canada: Globe and Mail; by Tim Pitt Rolland

Holland: NRC by Ruud

Additions only to be made after consulting Amsterdam. Report each step to Amsterdam PR. Please understand that there's a serious reason behind all these rules; the security of the Bukavu team is involved.

MSF Belgium is drafting another press release on Kisangani, focusing on the medical condition of the people, when we last saw them, and the question will be: where are these people?

Procedure:

Draft in Amsterdam tomorrow early. By 10:00 CET everyone will be informed if the draft was accepted and if so, it will be distributed to all of you.



**Fax** from Ruud Hurman, MSF Holland Press Officer to Communication Departments, 24 April 1997 (in English). **D158**

**Extract:**

MSF has distributed a modified summary of the Shabunda report. This was not well-coordinated and some confusion arose.

Please note: this MSFF sent version is now available ONLY for the selected group of journalists on the already formulated conditions. No further distribution to other journos till further notice.

 *The targeted journalists were mainly Anglo-Saxon either from newspapers or TV networks. Some international newspapers, for example, French or Spanish or any other language were not included. If you think about lobbying, properly, then you should be orienting your media output to the lobby you want to make and probably you go to the UN. So, if you are not on the NYT or Herald Tribune or CNN or whatever, then you lose the point. In fact, this targeting was something much more related to a commitment in the way that the network probably was not so confident that this report could be well used by other journalists. It's not a good point to restrict the information to just a few papers. I remember that this was not said in a meeting but in a cc mail that I rejected completely. I said that as soon as I have the report I will be waiting for the green light for sure. There can be another criteria, which we use so much here in Spain. We think that on some issues—not all the newspapers will treat the news as we want. So we make a choice - which of these newspapers has a correspondent in the place that we are talking about or who has a specialist in this area. So we can discriminate a bit but not on an international area because it's very difficult unless you are just focusing on a lobbying strategy and not on a public opinion orientation.*

Rafa Vilasanjuan, MSF Spain Communications Director  
(in English).

**MSF Spain's Communications Director believed that he had received a go-ahead and explained MSF's position on the elimination of refugees in eastern Zaire to a reporter from the Spanish daily *El Pais*. However, he did not give the reporter the document. His Swiss counterpart did the same with the AFP correspondent in Geneva.**

**On 25 April *El Pais* published information from the Shabunda report, citing MSF. According to the chronology developed in summer 1997 by the Secretary General of the international office, the report was also posted on the Dutch section's website.**



'Médecins Sans Frontières Accuses Zairian Rebels of Massacres,' *El Pais* (Spain), 25 April 1997 (in Spanish). **D159** 

**Extract:**

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has accused the forces of Laurent Kabila of violations of human rights and systematic killings of Rwandan refugees and the populations in the conquered zones in eastern Zaire. MSF sent an

assessment team to southern Kivu to set up an assistance and repatriation centre for the refugees: there the team witnessed Kabila soldiers "intimidating and threatening" the local population so that they would help them bring the refugees out of the forest in order to "kill them." ... According to the MSF report "at first they only killed the men, whether young or old, but recently they have started killing women and children too." ... MSF condemns the Zairian rebel's use of international humanitarian organisations as bait to lure the refugees out of the woods and kill them on the roads. They force the village chiefs to help the troops 'clean up the roads'. Then, after conquering the zone, they warn the population that whoever "helps a refugee will be tortured and killed by the military."



'Information on Zaire,' Information **Bulletin**, MSF Spain, 25 April 1997 (in Spanish). **D160** 

**Extract:**

After two days of constant contact with the field and the rest of the sections, it was decided yesterday to distribute the MSF H report -with the agreement of MSF B and the corrections of MSF F. MSF E gave it to *El Pais* as it was the only one in the field. We told them it was a confidential report, but we agreed they could use it seeing as they have a representative in the zone. This morning we received a request to distribute the information, but without mentioning MSF. It was, of course, too late. We expect there will be calls today from various media. We can give any information that is in the report and that we have witnessed.

MSF has been accused by the Alliance over the last few days of arming the refugees as we have distributed machetes to cut wood. There is an anti-NGO demonstration to be held in Kisangani today. We should be prepared for possible reprisals against MSF (expatriates and national staff), which may have repercussions on the refugees. As a preventive measure, the team has been evacuated. The headline of *El Pais* this morning read: 'Zairian rebels are accused of massacre by Médecins Sans Frontières' which is not exactly what the report said (violations of human rights in the ADFL controlled zone), but it does reflect the situation we describe in the report.



*At a certain moment, in all the crossing of information between sections, there was also not a green light but, just about a green light or a mistake by saying that this is public. So at this moment I said: "Ok as soon as it is public, we go for that". We briefed one journalist, just one journalist, which was one of the few Spanish journalists who was there at the time. He had just returned and we started to talk by telephone. We commented on the report, we did not give him the report. But we said what our line of communication would be and then he published*

without having the document. So in fact it gave the green light to all the sections.

Rafa Vilasanjuan, MSF Spain Communications Director  
(in English).

**The Press Officer and the emergency desk officers at MSF Holland sent their counterparts at other sections a new version of the summary report, specifying that it could be distributed to reporters without restrictions and without confidentiality provisions. In the field, the teams were informed and took security measures.**



**Messages** from Ruud Huurman, MSF Holland Press Officer, Jules Pieters and Phil Doherty, MSF Holland programme managers to MSF sections Communication Departments and programme managers, 25 April 1997 (in English). **D161**

**Extract:**

We suggest you will not involve the field teams in the publicity on this issue. They have to be at their safe-guard already. Note that the teams are being reduced and withdrawn from the field. As a spokesperson on the human rights violations you can refer to our desk: Jules Pieters or Phill Doherty (native English)...

It is our considered opinion that MSF should openly publish the Shabunda report summary today and that the summary used should be from MSF-Amsterdam since that was the origin of the report. No restriction as to which journalists should receive it should be imposed.

Our rationale is in the light of the facts that:

- a. *El Pais* paper quotes MSF this morning and that
- b. MSF-Paris PR department circulated the Paris version of the Shabunda summary last night such that MSF is quoted in the Paris papers also.

The Amsterdam version of the summary is going to the PR departments. Attached is Microsoft WORD document that removes references to Rwanda, UNHCR, military bases, and the one reference to the ADFL is factual in that they approved the trip and controlled the road that we traveled on.

Best Regards,  
Jules and Phil.



**MSF Reports on Human Rights Violations in Zaire.** MSF Holland **Newsflash**, 25 April 1997 (in English). **D162**

**Extract:**

**'MSF REPORTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN ZAIRE.'**

Yesterday, the summary of the Shabunda report on human rights violations along the road Bukavu-Shabunda drafted by MSF-H has been released on a confidential basis to a select group of international media. MSF asked explicitly not to mention MSF as a source. This to express our worry about systematic human rights violations against refugees in the rebel held territory, without endangering the safety of our teams in eastern Zaire. This morning however the Spanish national newspaper *El Pais* brought [out] the information under the heading: MSF accuses rebels of human right violations. Confronted with this fact, MSF has decided to go public with the Shabunda report today. MSF B and H will organise press conferences this afternoon in Brussels and Amsterdam. Structural human rights violations and structural denial of access to the refugees will be the main topics.

The teams in eastern Zaire (Kisangani, Bukavu, Goma) are instantly informed on the *El Pais* article and the upcoming press briefings. They will take all possible security measures. Meanwhile the started decrease of the teams will be continued. The number of expats in Goma will be decreased to 11, in Bukavu to 4, and in Kisangani to 10. 13 expats will stay on stand-by in Kampala, the others will return home.

Humanitarian workers in Kisangani still have no access to the refugee camps along the railroad Kisangani-Ubundu. Various aid organisations and international politicians have expressed their worry on the lack of access. UNHCR has confirmed that the camps near Kasese has been found empty and that there is no trace of the 50,000 refugees that formerly lived there. Unconfirmed sources report traces of bulldozer activity near the Kasese sites.



**'Re Operational Precautions' E-mail** from Phil Doherty, MSF Holland programme manager to MSF France programme manager, 25 April 1997 (in English). **D163**

**Extract:**

Dear Colleagues,

The Goma and Bukavu teams report that they are comfortable enough with their security in the case of direct publicity from MSF (note the article in *El Pais* morning). Dominique - what is the situation with your team in Bukavu, I understand that they are back at base from Kalemie and Katana? And how many expats currently in Kisangani?

**The MSF US team participated in the communications efforts and continued efforts to put pressure on US authorities.**



**“Zaire human rights state department” Email exchange between** Françoise Saulnier (MSF Legal Advisor) and Antoine Gérard (MSF USA), 24, 25 April 1997 (in French). **D164**

**Extract:**

Gregory Stanton, Human Rights Officer at the State Department (global affairs-democracy, human rights and labor) called me today to get more details about our report and the content of Marcel Van Soest’s debriefing given last week in Washington. He couldn’t attend our meeting but got a ‘cable’ from the State Department.

He already had some details about the situation in eastern Zaire, but wanted to have more accurate data on the mass killings on Shabunda - Bukavu Axis and south of Kisangani. A State Department human rights officer is traveling this week-end to Goma and wishes to be in touch with our team in Goma and Kisangani. Content of our report can be given verbally to this special envoy as it has been done by Marcel while he was in US.

This envoy will have talks with Kabila. Greg’s position was very clear, “a real ethnic cleansing is going on in this region of the world and Kabila should be brought to trial for mass killings.” He recognised that pressure should be done on Kigali and assured that the State Department is worried about the human rights issue in eastern Zaire.

If we really want to influence the State Department policy on eastern Zaire in question, we should consider that human rights is a very sensitive issue among the American public and a good way to put pressure on the State Department and the Congress. [Antoine]

Hi there Antoine,

Great to talk to you again. I’m delighted that the Americans are sensitive to human rights issues. Perhaps my only contribution today is the two reports we finally managed to deliver yesterday and today (a difficult for-cups birth). Don’t hesitate to call if necessary. The two reports I’m sending are for external distribution to the press. That’s after multiple orders and counter-orders and thanks to some people who didn’t follow all the procedures instituted, that would’ve meant we still wouldn’t have the MSF report on the disappearance of Rwandan refugees in eastern Zaire. I think there’s one very important point in our communications. Even if the last camps disappeared in an apocalyptic scenario, refugees would still certainly be living among those hidden in the forest. We can’t throw in the towel. For them and for history, it’s not too late. Françoise

Dear Françoise,

I don’t know where to turn or which god to pray to. One of the lessons we’ve got to learn very quickly here at the

NY office when dealing with advocacy is to stay cool and calm in the face of multiple contradictory messages coming from different sections.

As you may have already heard from Catherine, we want to set up a workshop on advocacy activities and how we work here in New York. Starting from a general presentation, we would then like to go more in-depth into the kinds of advocacy and tools to develop on the Zairian crisis.



**‘Re: please stop the non coordination behaviour,’ E-mail exchange between** Phil Doherty, MSF Holland programme manager and Antoine Gérard (MSF USA), copy to MSF USA staff, MSF France, MSF Holland and MSF UK Director of Communications, MSF Legal Adviser, 26 April 1997 (11:52 Amsterdam local time) (in English). **D165**

**Extract:**

Following our latest conversation with Phil, the full report could be sent to reliable persons we know. Up to now, Friday, 17:00 (EST) the report has been sent to:

- US State Department Human Rights Officer Gregory Stanton
- US-UN Permanent Mission Ambassador Richardson
- Press News Day
- National Public Radio Foreign Editor (personally known to MSF USA)

It has been said every time that no public quotation of MSF as a source should be done. [Antoine]

Dear Antoine,

I was shocked at your message. Perhaps amid the voluble chorus from 2 of your colleagues in our phone call yesterday the messages seem to have got mixed. I am also amazed at the wide distribution that you have chosen, hence I must reply to everyone – this is counterproductive to good coordination...

1. My comments to you were specific to our earlier suggestion to lobby Gregory Stanton (HR specialist at the State dept). My expectations were that you would give the full report which Jules and I urgently faxed to you to the State Department and through Catherine to Mr Richardson the USA Ambassador to the UN. I did not expect that you would give the full report to any member of the press because you are not a PR person
2. As for the press contacts, after the chorus quieted I made it clear that the Amsterdam version of the summary of Shabunda report was being distributed to the press via the PR department in Amsterdam and that I expected the NY PR department to follow the direction from Ruud and Erwin here in Amsterdam (i.e. the usual coordination route). I repeated that the full report would not be given to the press, despite the protests from your PR colleagues that the summary was more dangerous than the report itself.

3. Unhappily we all suffered in the last 7 days following the Brussels veto of the lobby plan. In my opinion, MSF had no message during this period and then suddenly there is a bilateral output of the summary.
4. General Director Eric in Brussels and Operational Director Pim here, came to a joint understanding, yesterday 25th, that coordination of the lobby plan would return to Amsterdam. While the damage control exercise of publishing the Amsterdam summary and the holding of a press briefing here and a press conference in Brussels.

**MSF Belgium and MSF Holland each held a press conference in Brussels and Amsterdam. MSF France gave interviews to the press. Depending on the section, the communication emphasised either the question of access or the issue of the killings. Kabila announced that he was going to invite the UN and aid organisations to investigate the status of Rwandan refugees in rebel-held areas. [V8](#)**



'MSF Sounds the Alarm: "Where are the Kasese Refugees?"' Invitation to a **Press Conference**, MSF Belgium, 25 April 1997 (in French). [D166](#)

#### Extract:

Médecins Sans Frontières has been working in the camps along the railroad tracks south of Kisangani since 25 March, when access was closed to us last Sunday. The medical teams in the Kasese camp at that time were still recording 60 deaths/day, due primarily to cholera, malnutrition and malaria.

As recently as Sunday, 50 new cases/day were added to the 545 patients already being treated for cholera. No fewer than 437 people were hospitalized and 1,200 severely malnourished children were being treated in a therapeutic centre. The refugees had access to only 3 litres of water/day and no more food provisions were available.

The situation was even worse in Biaro. The death count was 60/day out of 30,000 refugees. 500 children were being treated in the therapeutic centre and 299 patients were hospitalized.

Médecins Sans Frontières believes that in light of the refugees' catastrophic health status, it is unlikely that they could have fled into neighboring forests. Most were unable to walk. Many rumours are circulating about massacres.

Médecins Sans Frontières demands that everything be done to restore and guarantee access to the 80,000 refugees.

MEETING WITH THE PRESS TODAY AT 2 P.M.

- Danny Decuyper, who returned from Kisangani yesterday,
- Dr. [...], Operations Director,
- Dr. Eric Goemaere, MSF Belgium Executive Director



'MSF says Zaire Rebels use Relief to Hunt Refugees,' **Reuters** (UK), Paris, 25 April 1997 (in English).

#### Extract:

International charity Doctors without Borders (MSF) on Friday accused Zairian rebels of using relief organisations to hunt down refugees hiding in the forest in eastern Zaire. MSF said denying humanitarian organisations access to the refugees was only one aspect of what it called a 'terror policy' waged against Hutu refugees by Laurent Kabila's Tutsi-dominated Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire.

"MSF senses that the humanitarian organisations' relief action is being used by the forces of the Alliance to track down groups of refugees who later come under attack," it said. MSF said a rebel commander in Bukavu told it the refugees were hard to find but came out of the jungle to the roads when they knew that humanitarian organisations were in the area.

"We have been barred for several days from an area where we had found refugees and were preparing to help them. When we were allowed to return, they had all disappeared," it said. "The consequences of this clandestine activity is an invisible, but excessively high mortality," it said. MSF said the death toll from starvation since last November among the refugees could be regarded as deliberate physical elimination. "It can be clearly considered that what is happening now is the last episode of this murderous exodus: the refugees death throes," it said. MSF also said that the rebels had banned Zairian villagers from helping the refugees. Some who had informed humanitarian organisations of the refugees whereabouts were later detained, beaten and even killed, it said. The rebels have come under increasing international pressure over their treatment of up to 100,000 Rwandan Hutu refugees whose plight is turning into a diplomatic and public relations disaster for Kabila.

The UN Security Council on Thursday harshly criticised the rebels for preventing aid from reaching the Hutu refugees south of Kisangani and obstructing their return home to Rwanda. Aid agencies in Geneva accused the rebels of trying to achieve a 'final solution' by condemning them all to death. But rebel officials in Kisangani accused the media of biased reporting and blamed UN agencies for not repatriating the refugees earlier.

Kabila told Reuters in Zaire's second city Lubumbashi that he would invite the United Nations and aid agencies to investigate the crisis over Rwandan refugees in rebel areas.



'MSF Accuses Rebels of Carrying Out a Policy of Physical Elimination of Refugees in Zaire,' **AFP** (France), Geneva, 25 April 1997 (in French).

#### Extract:

On Friday, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) accused

Laurent-Désiré Kabila's rebels of pursuing a strategy of "physical elimination" of Rwandan refugees in eastern Zaire.

In a five-page document distributed in Geneva, the humanitarian organisation stated that the Alliance, which has seized more than half of Zaire in close to six months, is carrying out a "policy of deliberate terror" with a goal of "physically eliminating" the refugees.

"They are using any and all means – military attacks, massacres, deprivation of aid," MSF said. According to MSF, Alliance forces particularly take advantage of humanitarian organisations' activities to identify evidence of the presence of groups of refugees and later attack them.

Of 1.1 million refugees at the Rwandan frontier in October, at the beginning of the rebel offensive, more than 700,000 have returned to Rwanda. Some 400,000 remain in Zaire and 100,000 were located in the last few weeks south of Kisangani. But on Thursday and Friday, UN agencies observed that the two camps housing 85,000 refugees were empty.

MSF and the other humanitarian groups condemn the rebels' refusal to grant access to the refugees. "The refugees are being made to disappear secretly," the humanitarian group's document stated. "We are observing today the last episode of a murderous exodus, the refugees' death throes," said MSF, which provided aid to refugees in camps south of Kisangani until access was cut off last week.

MSF has aided Rwandan refugees in their odyssey since last year. The organisations are calling for access to the refugees they have lost track of. Some may be in the forests south of Kisangani. In that environment, "death is invisible but excessively high," MSF noted.

**Humanitarian organisations were denied access to the camps for five days. At that point, the MSF team in Kisangani, which had been reduced for security reasons, denounced UNHCR's impotence and prepared to close the mission if it could not obtain access to the camps.**



**Sitrep**, Vincent Janssen, MSF Belgium Coordinator in Kisangani, to MSF Belgium, France and Holland programme managers, 25 April 1995 (in French). [D167](#)

#### Extract:

It's been five days since access to the camps has been cut off. Checking with the ferry, we learned that several agencies came to inquire but that no humanitarian vehicle has been able to pass. The response varies depending on where, to whom, and when access is formally requested. However, in practical terms the outcome is the same: no road access, no right to conduct over flights...

Air transport remains exclusively in the hands of UNHCR (unless you want to risk your life in the Bazair flying

[Bazair is the local flying company] ). They are confident that they will receive authorisation to conduct over flights and to land at Kilometre 95 tomorrow. They have reserved a place for us.

... Four comments. Very serious day.

Barely a few days after the shock of discovering the hidden military agenda, we were reminded today, once again, that humanitarian agencies, in general, and UNHCR, in particular, are impotent.

We are being encouraged not to believe that UNHCR is complicit in the tragedy now unfolding. We are ashamed to have to face up to our own powerlessness. Neither the number or tenor of the condemnations can make up for this third failure. Each time their number is reduced and so is the feasibility of repatriation.

With UNHCR powerless, we have only the to ask soldiers for authorisation and protection (the population remains hostile and unpredictable) to someday gain access to the refugees; nothing more cynical than after today's demonstration. The train is blocked and MSF has no independent air transport. So complete non-access: non-access to the refugees and non-access to information about the refugees.

Conclusion: operations are impossible.

To avoid sinking into despair, we are planning future response scenarios regarding the likely spots where the phantom refugees might be: Kilometre 82 (because there's a health facility), Kilometre 95 (because there's a landing strip), Ubundu (because it's a departure point for repatriation by road): shelter, milky bar, treatment, oral rehydration salt, primary health care, screening, water, latrines, etc. for approximately 50,000 refugees (figure provided by Rwandan delegation). We don't know whether we should expect a grouping or not.

If we have to take time to stabilise them or plead for a repatriation of those who can't be transported (counting on solid reception facilities in Rwanda)...

It would seem wise to ask MSF H about availability of nurses and logisticians on standby in Goma, but until when and how many??? Knowing that they are perhaps exposed after the statements. There's still the advocacy, of course. I have to admit that it's particularly unpleasant in our current situation to learn that, yet again, it's been hard to produce something on an international level. Of course, it's still important that MSF speak but given the medias' methods, the content seems more important than style and speed.

We realise that staying makes us responsible for non-repatriation - and without even a guarantee of being able to save individuals. We know that if we leave now we will face the unbearable prospect of not being here just when we would have access to the refugees again.

Either we try to carry out advocacy while staying on site or we make a massive retreat from the Great Lakes region and issue a political condemnation.

...6/ Last-minute additional information from this morning (extra UNHCR meeting)

... The aeroplane/no aeroplane issue started up again today (no authorisation). Someone from the Rwandan delegation rejected the agreement to give us a place on board, saying the flight is political and will continue on to Kigali. Dominique will say that we should plant ourselves on the tarmac to force the question. The team doesn't agree any more. We'll tell UNHCR that if we're not included, we're closing up shop. If this has now become a game to get to be included, you'll need to send other people to play. In this environment, we see no possibility for operations or advocacy.

We're now doing what we have to do to close the mission and we propose waiting for two pieces of information to conclude:

- Including MSF in the assessment flight
- Your feedback with a clear and feasible position for follow-up

For now, we're not trying to criticise anyone, it's just an observation that we've come to the end of the line.

Greetings from the biggest shit I've ever been in

Vincent

**The UN humanitarian agencies, which finally received AFDL authorisation to travel to the camp sites and then overfly the region, discovered that the 85,000 refugees from the Kasese and Biaro camps had disappeared.**



'No Trace of 85,000 Rwandan Refugees in the Kisangani Region,' *AFP* (France), Kisangani, 25 April 1997 (in French).

#### Extract:

According to a humanitarian agency source, during an over flight, aid organisations found no trace on Friday of approximately 85,000 Hutu Rwandan refugees in the area surrounding the camp where they had been housed, near Kisangani in eastern Zaire. According to Paul Stromberg, UNHCR spokesperson in Kisangani, the Kasese and Biaro camps, 25 and 41 kilometres south of the Upper Zaire capital which has been under Zairian rebel control since 15 March, were observed to be 'empty' during a UN afternoon flight over the area.

On Thursday, UN teams had already observed that the Kasese camp was completely empty. The refugees had fled after fighting broke out nearby. Many humanitarian aid officials privately confirmed that Laurent-Désiré Kabila's rebels, including many Tutsi, had driven the refugees from the camps to push them into the harsh, inhospitable rain forest. On several occasions, the rebels have denied US and UN accusations that they killed refugees. "The refugees have scattered," Stromberg said. "Perhaps they took the road west at Kilometre 52. We saw only a group of 20-30 people walking south to Kilometre 73 and two groups of some 20 people between Kilometre 52 and 82.

We saw no refugees and no movement at Kasese and then nothing between Kasese and Biaro," where 30,000 people were set up. Until early in the week, the Kasese camp had housed around 55,000 refugees.

UNHCR in Geneva had recently reported the disappearance of refugees who had been observed during Friday's over flight. "The Biaro camp is empty, completely abandoned, Stromberg said. "Between Kilometre 40 and 50, there are remains of fires and traces showing that many people had fled through the area. The Kilometre 82 camp appears intact. The refugees did not move. There were around 2,500. The plane then stopped down at Kilometre 95. The villagers said they had not seen refugees passing by. They said only that a group of 20-30 people had passed by two days earlier. They thought the group were ex-FAR.

"We are very, very worried, particularly concerning the fate of the 9,000 Kasese refugees who were too weak to walk... Around 5,000 people were severely malnourished and nearly 3,000 children were moderately malnourished. 167 refugees were hospitalized and 200 were being treated for cholera. Finally, there were 519 unaccompanied children, including 100 malnourished. We found no one at Kasese."

**The UN Secretary General condemned the policy of "slowly exterminating" the refugees, issued an appeal to governments influential in the region to allow aid to be delivered to refugees and announced that an inquiry commission would arrive in the field. The World Food Programme spoke of the refugees' "slow, cruel death". The US decided to send an emissary to eastern Zaire and to become involved in resolving the Zairian crisis.**

V9



Afsané Bassir Pour, 'The Tragedy of the Zairian Refugees Shakes Washington Out of Its Passivity,' *Le Monde* (France), 27 April 1997 (in French). [D168](#)

#### Extract:

Under international pressure, the US is reported to have decided to become "resolutely" involved in the Zairian crisis. Known for his gifts as a mediator, US UN ambassador William Richardson will travel to the region "very soon" to "facilitate," if not speed a meeting between President Mobutu and the leader of the rebellion, Laurent-Désiré Kabila, a reliable source reported Friday night, 25 April, in New York and Washington.

[...] The spokesperson for the World Food Programme, a UN agency, condemned the rebels' "cruelty." "We're witnessing a slow and cruel death," said Christiane Berthiaume. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan increased the pressure further, accusing Laurent-Désiré Kabila's forces on Friday of carrying out a policy of "slowly exterminating" the

refugees. Kofi Annan, whose 'firm and moral' approach to the Zairian matter has won considerable respect among non-governmental organisations, said that those responsible for atrocities should be prosecuted according to international conventions.

Another important factor figures into the American approach: the fear of future revelations regarding the fate of refugees in regions taken by the rebels since autumn. "The investigations into the killings are a time bomb," said a US diplomat in a telephone interview in Washington. "We might be able to use that bomb to put pressure on Kabila."

#### COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

The diplomat explained that neither the US nor Paris "has had a frank conversation with Laurent-Désiré Kabila and Mobutu Sese Seko in which their choices have been explained to them. This has never occurred because, frankly, no one wanted to commit that far. But I think the time has come." In addition to the decision to send Mr. Richardson to the region, it was announced that a commission of inquiry into the allegations of rebel massacres is expected to arrive in the field next week.

**Speaking before the French section's board of directors on the evening of 25 April, Dr Marleen Monteyne, who had just returned from a mission in Biaro, stated that Rwandan soldiers using AFDL cover had chased and killed refugees on the railroad track. Following a discussion on inter-section obstructions that prevent MSF from speaking out publicly, the board voted to remove the veto right and replaced it with a 24-hour 'advance security alert,' allowing the teams to evacuate before making a public statement. It also voted in favor of a position statement opposing the refugee repatriation to Rwanda, where board members felt they were in danger.**



**Minutes** of the MSF France board Meeting, 25 April 1997 (in French). **D169**

#### Extract:

##### MISSION UPDATE: GREAT LAKES REGION (Marlène)

Marlène Monteyne returned from Kisangani, where she worked for two weeks in the Biaro camp. The Kasese camp, located at kilometre 25, had a total population of 55,000 refugees and at kilometre 41, the Biaro camp population totaled 15,000. We left on 6 April.

I was at Biaro with six expatriates. The situation was catastrophic. Most of the refugees could no longer stand. They were exhausted and one after another, fell ill. The camps were in the middle of thick forest, so logistical conditions were very difficult (it was even hard to set up a tent). We were overwhelmed by medical work and all the refugees were very sick. The eight tents overflowed with

people who were very close to death. MSF opened a centre for those who were weak, alone, unaccompanied, and could no longer feed themselves. People were dying from exhaustion. The bodies were decomposing and the stench was unbearable. It was an apocalyptic scene.

[...] For about a week, we thought we could do something. We also thought we needed a palliative care centre for the majority of those close to death (resigned to death). There were too many patients. We had to recruit Zairian staff because the Rwandan staff couldn't manage (people were too tired).

Then the rebels blocked access to the camps and serious incidents began to escalate: the WFP food train, MSF reserves, and the MSF house were looted (six villagers killed, two wounded). We stayed for four days without being able to get to the site. And on Saturday/Sunday, when we went back, we counted the bodies. Medical activity had become impossible. We had to do something else; stop our work and condemn what was going on. There were 32 expatriates in all and not everyone shared this view. Most stayed on site with a 'passive advocacy' mindset... However, the context was very unusual and unmanageable. It would have been dysfunctional no matter who was there.

#### Discussion

What was the relationship with the authorities? (François) For two weeks, there was no military presence around the camps (only at Lula, 7 kilometres away). We never had problems with the rebels but the soldiers stirred up the local population to loot and fight. In the camps, there were no weapons so what's been said about fighting between Hutu and rebels is false.

#### The events

The analysis assembled by Bernard [Pecoul] from all contacts is as follows: they want to get rid of the refugee population, Kabila bears real responsibility, but Kigali is particularly involved. The current obstacles are not logistical and do not emerge from the local population but are the result of manipulation. With respect to advocacy, we obviously lost it. Normally, the people who have lived through a situation talk about it and MSF brings it all together. It didn't work that way this time.

For a week, we've faced a consecutive series of vetoes under security pretexts;

- \* the Belgian section blocked the report on the situation in the Shabunda region. The report certainly could not have been distributed as is, but instead of blocking it, it should have been adapted so the message could get out.

- \* Amsterdam imposed a security veto regarding the Goma and Bukavu teams.

We only got the green light last night. It's lucky that there were blunders along the way: the Spanish section gave the report to a journalist from El Pais.

In this kind of situation, if you start taking veto actions, everything is screwed. A blockage at one place is enough to bring everything to a halt.

#### Serious and intolerable dysfunction within MSF

•Jean-Hervé (Bradol) – very angry – asked that these events be put in context. This isn't a recent dysfunction. For two years, a part of MSF has been determined to hide this kind of information and not take a position. He calls for the board of directors to vote tonight to stop all international exchange until we know the results of the inquiry into what has just happened, with a statement regarding who's accountable and conclusions.

•Jean-Hervé says he can draft a guideline on how information is suppressed! If you are convinced that refugees are being exterminated by every means possible, how can you propose a 'silent advocacy' strategy in response? This is part of MSF's collective responsibility and is beyond the pale of what we are willing to understand, even while trying to be constructive.

This position led to the killing of several thousand people. He's tried several times to alert the board of directors to a serious problem. Operations blocked the communication. There was an official veto on Sunday and on Friday, Brussels (Eric Goemaere) vetoed the use of the Shabunda report in the form he had.

There are two operational policies that have been out of sync for a long time and a repetition of this kind of event in the Great Lakes area. We have to be able to learn lessons. Let's determine who's responsible and deal with it on the spot so we don't miss the boat yet again.

•Philippe (Biberson) thinks that in the face of this kind of operational pathology, it's almost like having to control a perversion. Doesn't this intent to hide/elude/conceal indeed hide other debates? Today, MSF has a team of communication professionals who know how to define a message and deal with timing. How can this team be paralyzed?

•It seems that fundamentally different policies lead to fundamentally different attitudes. We should lay out these policies and debate the ideas (Odile [Cochetel]).

•For Serge [Stefanaggi], the problem is the mindset that says we should 'save the international movement at any price.' We may be headed towards an international confrontation and have to start over from zero.

[...] On Monday morning, Vincent Janssens (MSF Belgium Coordinator in Kisangani) had said that if the teams couldn't work normally, MSF would withdraw and issue a condemnation. That night, he said that MSF would stay and reduce the teams. Who led him to change his mind so radically? Marlène felt very isolated. People were talking about not abandoning the refugees, but we haven't had access to them for four days. A coordinator even said that "We were talking about genocide here and we couldn't even manage to condemn their killings!"

•Bernard says that Vincent had been under pressure not to speak and that this new direction followed several phone calls. We know that a team in the field is easily influenced.

•Jean-Hervé thinks there's a policy problem. We have to rely on what the people coming back from the field say. We make mistakes and certainly we'll make more, but it's the intention that counts. Today in some areas, MSF's only policy is to keep things running.

•There are mindsets that oppose speaking out. That can't

be tolerated any longer. There has to be a break. We can't ignore this kind of thing. Silence has killed tens of thousands of people (Frédéric [Laffont])

•Brigitte Vasset and Bernard Pecoul refuse to agree that the veto has caused deaths.

#### Determining responsibility

•Are there individuals who hushed up this matter because of influence? If that's the case, they must resign or be removed from MSF. We cannot allow such people to hold positions of responsibility and there have to be sanctions. The system has been disrupted and we have to be able to make sure this kind of thing doesn't happen again. This raises issues of accountability and competence (Frédéric [Laffont])

•Does hiding information constitute malpractice that should be punished? This raises the question of professional responsibility. If there was bad faith or incompetence, you have to be able to impose sanctions (Françoise Saulnier).

•We have a professional responsibility and if we make mistakes, we have to be held accountable. There are incompetent people practicing medicine (Maurice [Nègre])

•A doctor's professional responsibility is to not abandon his patients. That doesn't mean anything in this context (Odile [Cochetel])

•Let's be careful when we use the term 'malpractice.' The idea of responsibility exists, but it's something else to stigmatize an individual. Who's going to define the misconduct? Going down that road is difficult and complicated. We are responsible--but as an organisation--for failing to condemn what was happening in Rwanda (Jean-Luc [Nahel]).

•Professional responsibility is more important than committing malpractice (Brigitte Vasset.)

•Let's try not to mix up objective and irrational arguments. If only one person out of 32 raises the issue of speaking out, that means the others are afraid. I can't understand the others' fear. Today there's a force at MSF putting pressure on people. That leads to a loss of free will. That's what's scares me. How can people stay silent when we don't have any financial interests at stake (Philippe Biberson)?

The idea of undertaking an inquiry to determine responsibility doesn't seem to me to be a solution. Who would have the right to investigate whom? Let's not make fools of ourselves. On the other hand, let's not hesitate to express our shock and then challenge the process, not people (Philippe Biberson).

-The people who voted for the veto didn't do so because they disagreed with the assessment, but out of concern for the teams on site (Bernard Pecoul).

#### [...] Violate procedures if necessary and recover the will to fight

•Procedures have always been what's blocked us, so to find a solution we have to ignore them permanently. When several sections are involved and one says we should speak out, let's not accept a 'security veto,' but

rather an 'advance security warning.' We inform the others that in 24 hours, we're going to speak out. We can't give in to the terrorism that says speaking out is no longer possible because there are teams in the field. (Françoise Saulnier).

- We have to stop pitting advocacy against our presence in the field. Today, when we don't agree, we lack the will to fight. We've got to get it back to be able to win. No one wants to argue anymore and we just chatter during the teleconferences. The person who thinks s/he's right should take his/her arguments all the way. We are suffering from a certain fatigue and we've got to get our energy back (Bernard Pecoul).
- It's true that you've got to win over a discouraging number of people when you're convinced of something. You don't even know who you need to talk to in when you're dealing with this cumbersome machine (Martine [Lochin]).
- We don't have a solution, but we've got to struggle (Brigitte Vasset).
- [...] Today, the forest is full of refugees and we don't know who's in charge, operationally, for Kivu. Let's have an in-depth conversation about the region in terms of operations and policy. We can't respond to Kivu if we don't address Rwanda. Kigali is behind the extermination policy and we have to talk about it among ourselves. Let's say loud and clear that the refugees can't go back to Rwanda (Françoise Saulnier).
- Shouldn't it be said that these people must be granted refuge, but somewhere else besides Rwanda? Everyone is giving up, but what we need is to propose something else. We need an initiative that breaks out of our current isolation and negotiates a space where these people will be taken in. Let's pressure the Dutch, the British, and the Americans to find a solution. Let's work with Oxfam, MSF-US, etc.

MSF has to move out of its traditional way of operating and move into a lobbying mode that will allow us to find a solution. If we lead an anti-Kigali campaign and get to the point of pointing fingers, that's different from what we usually do (Bernard Pecoul).

#### [...] The Board of Directors must take a position

This isn't a matter of criticising the field, but of seeing what's not working at the operational and decision-making levels. It's important that the board take a radical position and that that can help people resist pressure (Christiane).

[...] The motion passed by the Board of Directors:

- The Board of Directors of the French section of Médecins Sans Frontières expresses its outrage regarding the veto that prevented us from speaking out on the physical elimination of Rwandan refugees in eastern Zaire.

- It confirms the primary purpose of MSF action, which is focused on defending populations in danger. This purpose must guide MSF's action, giving absolute priority to principles of international consistency and internal functioning.

- On the latter point, the Board announces that security vetoes of advocacy actions will no longer be accepted, but only advance security warnings with a deadline to ensure team safety.



'Not to Work and Remain Silent—That's Cowardice,' **Statement** of Marleen Monteyne-Mansour, doctor in Biaro during the emergency mission in Kisangani, Upper Zaire, 31 March to 23 April 1997; **Messages** (MSF France internal publication), 26 April 1997 (in French). **D170**

#### Extract:

I went to work as an MSF doctor with a large population (85,000 people) of Rwandan refugees facing imminent death. There was no way out of the harsh and impenetrable forest where they were trapped. They were trapped, too, in the evil political spider web that envelops this region of the world.

In Biaro, we (expatriates, local Zairian staff and the few Rwandan refugees still able to help us) worked like dogs. It was a true heroic effort in the heart of the dense forest. Imagine the horrific sight of thousands of refugees, dying in atrocious, undignified, inhuman conditions after a long and perilous trek through torrential rains.

Barely two weeks ago, Kabila's Alliance rebels blocked delivery of all humanitarian aid through a series of increasingly serious incidents. We had to stop working.

We waited for four days during negotiations in Kisangani to obtain access to the refugee camps. Meanwhile, we knew that patients in our medical facilities in Biaro and Kaseseand everywhere in the surrounding forest – were dying by the dozen (74 bodies in Biaro out of around 15,000 refugees total on 19 April 1997). Four days of worsening tension and incidents.

The morning of the fourth day, we at MSF discussed withdrawing and issuing a condemnation. However, on the night of the fourth day, MSF officials decided to not to speak out but to stay on site in Kisangani, "not to abandon our refugees" and serve as silent witnesses.

For me, however, such advocacy rings completely hollow. It has no meaning, expresses only a misplaced pride and false heroism and speaks to a manifest lack of courage.

If MSF accepts the challenge of making a commitment to these refugees, we must dare to speak out and condemn. We must accept the consequences and not be satisfied with standing by passively, watching people being killed and counting the bodies.

That does not constitute genuine refugee protection, much less the effective continuation of the MSF teams' work.

If, as a doctor, I cannot continue to treat my patients for political reasons, I have a duty to speak out. I believe the failure to speak out in this context is a sign of cowardice and, even, betrayal of the populations in danger we sought to help.

I do not understand how one can remain silent in the face of such injustice and inhumanity. In Kisangani in April 1997, I felt very isolated and was tremendously disappointed by the desk supervising my team.

 I said internally, “We have to make space for negotiation and we can’t use security as a reason to block it. Otherwise, we just say there’s no security and we withdraw the teams.” At that point, I felt that the security argument was being used as an obstacle because some thought that the French section had been too outspoken. There was that sense of shock around the ‘numbers crisis.’ In Contact, MSF Belgium’s internal publication, I read articles about my presence in Goma. That was when people were settling accounts a bit. That was part of the whole game.

Dr. Jacques de Milliano, MSF Holland General Director and MSF International vice-président (in French).

**On 26 April, the French section distributed a press release stating that the AFDL forces were participating in the drive to exterminate refugees and that Kigali was supporting them. It rejected the repatriation of refugees to Rwanda and called on another country in the region (other than Rwanda or Zaire) to temporarily take in the refugees. News agencies picked up the press release.**



‘Three Proposals to End the Policy of Extermination of Rwandan Refugees in Zaire,’ MSF France **Press Release**, 26 April 1997 (in French). [D171](#)

#### Extract:

The policy of total liquidation of Rwanda refugees in the Kivu is gathering speed.

For a week, the 85,000 refugees assembled in the Kasese and Biaro (Kisangani) camps have been deprived of aid and subject to death at the hands of AFDL military forces. Today, the camps are empty and survivors are wandering in the forest.

Médecins Sans Frontières calls for immediate action so that the survivors can be found and provided aid and security guarantees.

We believe that three key actions are required:

1. Laurent-Désiré Kabila’s military forces must immediately halt the elimination of refugees, facilitate the search for them and their regrouping, and the resumption of aid operations.
2. UNHCR must no longer plan to repatriate refugees to Rwanda because:
  - Kigali authorities have imposed obstacles to providing medical treatment to refugees who, however, are returning to Rwanda with extremely serious health conditions;
  - Kigali authorities support AFDL forces that carry out the elimination of these refugees in Kivu.
3. These refugees should be sheltered temporarily in a country in the region other than Zaire and Rwanda where their security can be guaranteed.



‘MSF Urges Halt to Massacres by Zaire Rebels,’ **Reuters** (UK), Paris 27 April 1997 (in English).

#### Extract:

International relief group Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Sunday accused rebels sweeping across eastern Zaire of stepping up massacres of Rwandan refugees and said survivors should be granted asylum abroad. “The policy of total liquidation of Rwandan refugees in Kivu is accelerating,” MSF said in a statement, blaming forces of rebel leader Laurent Kabila of killings. Camps that once held 85,000 refugees were empty and survivors had fled, it said.

Kabila, seeking to topple veteran President Mobutu Sese Seko, has said the crisis has been blown out of proportion and is being unfairly blamed on his troops.

In a three-point plan, MSF (Doctors without Borders) said Kabila’s forces should immediately cease attacks on the refugees. Secondly, it said the UN refugee agency UNHCR should give up plans to repatriate the refugees to Rwanda, saying Kigali’s government was hindering medical and other aid and backed Kabila’s rebels. Thirdly, it said the refugees “should be provisionally welcomed in a country of the region where their security can be guaranteed, other than Zaire and Rwanda.”

The refugees, many of them Hutu, fled Rwanda after a genocide of Tutsi and moderate Hutus [SIC] in 1994. Some of them are suspected of taking part in the genocide.

Kabila said criminals among the refugees has transported their lawlessness to Zaire where his Alliance is waging a war against their allies.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan described rebel treatment of the refugees as “slow extermination” and a UN food agency spokeswoman, making a comparison with Hitler’s Germany, said, “the expression ‘Final Solution’ is not exaggerated”.



I drew conclusions. I had the Board of Directors’ support so I spoke out about the policy they had defined. Marleen had said to the Board, “We are sure that Rwandan soldiers are the ones who are killing people at Kasese-Biaro.” She considered herself a witness to those acts. Everyone in the room was in tears. The Board, which was not operating totally illogically, was obviously opposed to the refugees’ repatriation; repatriated to their executioners’ home territory. That was another way to describe the Rwandans as killers. In my opinion, that’s what needed to be done. Since we couldn’t carry out operations worthy of the name, we should at least be honourable enough to say why.

Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France programme manager then Communication Director (in French).

 Paris took a theoretical position: “We can’t require the refugees to return against their will to their torturers’ country. We need to be aware of what we’re doing.” I came back to that. I knew that these people had waved the white flag and that the few survivors who had come out of the massacre were exhausted. They couldn’t take any more, they had only one idea left - to die in Rwanda. They told me, word-for-word, “Doctor, even if it means dying, we’d rather die in Rwanda, in the land of our ancestors. We don’t want to die like dogs in the middle of this forest.” That’s what they wanted. You can’t go against their wishes. There were educated people among them. They dismissed the idea of going back to the torturers and to prison. They’d walked 100 kilometres and had survived I don’t know how many massacres. At that point, UNHCR didn’t want to charter planes to take them back and Kagame said, “They’ll come back on foot.” It was obvious that on foot, in their current state, they couldn’t make those 100 kilometres in the other direction. That suited Kagame just fine. It gave him even more time to liquidate them and it saved on bullets. We had to fight and issue press releases to get those planes and conduct an airlift. HCR was dragging its feet and the Americans were right behind them. And then there was a serious conflict among us. Once again, I took the side of the refugees who told me they wanted to go back. I pleaded for their return.

Dr. Éric Goemaere, MSF Belgium General Director  
(in French).

### Tens of thousands of refugees were spotted in Equator Province and in eastern Zaire, near Mbandaka, in areas inaccessible to aid.

 ‘75,000 Forgotten Rwandan Refugees,’ **AFP** (France) Kinshasa, 26 April 1997 (in French)

#### Extract:

According to ICRC reports from missionaries in Equator province, around 35,000 refugees are scattered between the villages of Boende and Bolonda, clustered in several groups.

Some 12,500 others are gathered in and around Ingenda, near Mbandaka, in eastern Zaire, very far from the Kivu camps.

They are thus spread all across Zaire, Africa’s third-largest country (after Sudan and Algeria) and nearly five times larger than France.

Mr Michel said that it will take several weeks for them to receive aid even if the organisations manage to locate them and keep them in one place. “It is almost impossible to reach them because of geographic, physical and security reasons,” he noted.

On 27 April, MSF Belgium decided it would stop transmitting information on the Great Lakes situation to MSF France managers while it waited for the latter to explain the 26 April three-point press release.



‘Kisangani,’ **Sitrep** from Dominique Boutriau, MSF Belgium programme manager, 27 April 1997 (in English). **D172** 

#### Extract:

*Lobby:* press coverage of the press conference of MSF B in Brussels last Friday is good in Belgium.

[...] MSF F communication: due to the deliberate incident of this week-end (press communiqué sent from Paris breaking security veto and without any previous consultation with other sections/field teams), we will not inform MSF F about Great Lakes region starting now...waiting for further explanations.

Laurent-Désiré Kabila gave UNHCR 60 days to resolve the question of the refugees’ repatriation, which he described as a “small problem”. **V10**  **V11** 



‘Kabila Gives HCR Two Months to Repatriate Rwandan Refugees,’ **Le Monde** (France), 29 April 1997 (in French). **D173** 

#### Extract:

On Sunday, 27 April, Laurent-Désiré Kabila, leader of the Zairian rebellion, gave UNHCR 60 days to repatriate Rwandan Hutu refugees in the Kisangani region (east). “This is more than enough time,” he stated during a press conference in Kisangani. “After 60 days, we hope they will have been evacuated. (...) There are between 30,000-60,000 refugees.” UNCHR regional coordinator Filippo Grandi responded to the ultimatum, telling AFP, “It’s short, but we’ll try.” Questioned by a local radio reporter on Saturday when he arrived from Lubumbashi (southeast), the rebel leader said, “We’re here to resolve the refugee problem. We’re going to take care of it. It’s a small problem.”

[...] The head of the Alliance denied all allegations of massacres, referring to a “campaign of lies” and even agreeing to an “impartial” commission of inquiry to shed light on the refugees’ flight from their camps early in the week. He called on UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to personally apologize for accusing his men of leaving thousands of refugees to die. Many humanitarian organisations have also accused the rebels of driving the refugees into the forest and thus to certain death after refusing to allow the UNHCR to repatriate them on 18 April.



'Zairian Rebel Takes Defiant Stance on Refugees,' *The New York Times* (USA) 28 April 1997 (in English). [D174](#)

#### Extract:

Responding to a firestorm of international criticism over his movement's handling of Rwandan refugees, the Zairian rebel leader, Laurent Kabila said today that he was giving the international community 60 days to evacuate the refugees from central Zaire... "This has gone on for too long and if it is not completed, we will do it by ourselves" Mr Kabila said of the refugee crisis and evacuation as he led a news conference in Kisangani, after a day of meetings with senior United Nations and European Union officials. "I have given them 60 days to get this problem sorted out. It must be done."

Mr Kabila's attempts to address the refugee crisis were seen as a response to criticisms from the United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan and international relief agencies. They have accused the rebel forces of waging a campaign of "slow extermination" and "final solution" against the Rwandan Hutu refugees in Zaire... Mr Kabila complain

ed that the United Nations had not done its job of protecting the refugees and demanded an apology from Mr Annan.

Nonetheless, even today, relief groups and journalists reported that Mr Kabila's forces had impeded their access to the heavily forested area south of Kisangani where the refugees are believed to be scattered. Despite the restrictions, accounts by foreign journalists in Kisangani quoted witnesses who described attacks on the Hutu by both villagers and troops from Kabila's - Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL).

**On 28 April, an MSF team, the UNHCR representative, reporters and the European Union representative were authorised to travel to the devastated Kasese and Biaro sites, where the stench of death hung heavily and bodies lay on the ground. Statements reported massacres. Several thousand exhausted and terrorized refugees began to emerge from the forest. The MSF team resumed its assistance in spite of on-going obstacles imposed by AFDL soldiers. [V12](#)**



Christophe Parayre 'Death and Desolation Hang Over Biaro,' *AFP* (France), Biaro, 28 April 1997 (in French).

#### Extract:

Death and desolation hang over Biaro, a former Rwandan Hutu refugee camp now nearly deserted. You can smell death, although only a few bodies are visible, which makes the scene even more disturbing.

Between 5,000-0,000 starving, exhausted and terrorized

refugees came out of the forest to gather at the camp, some forty kilometres south of Kisangani in eastern Zaire, AFP reported from the site.

These were the first groups whose exact location was determined since more than 85,000 people disappeared into the deep equatorial forest, without humanitarian aid, more than one week ago.

#### A Desolate Scene

All the huts the refugees built from branches are empty. Signs of a hurried departure are scattered on the ground: clothing, shoes, and bibles in Kinyarwanda.

A wedding photo of a young couple, smiling and happy, lies on the ground, faded and wrinkled by the rain. It had probably been stored carefully for nearly three years, since the couple's departure from Rwanda in 1994.

#### Death

Some 20 bodies lie nearby the former hospital set up by the humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières. It has been looted. The stench is unbearable.

The body of a young woman lies on the ground, facing upward. Her mouth is open and hundreds of flies swarm over her face. The body is beginning to decompose. She's been dead for just a few days. There is a deep gash in her skull, probably caused by a blow from a machete. A baby's body lies nearby, as if still clinging to its mother, who is dead, too.

There is a half-covered hole in the earth. Flies buzz noisily around the hastily-dug grave. How many bodies are inside? A dozen people lay inside the hospital's white tents. Some are alive, others are in their death throes, huddled beneath plastic tarps, or already dead.

Eyes eaten by flies, a child watches the 'white people' go by. He is too weak to move.

Officials from UN agencies and humanitarian groups, Aldo Ajello, the European Union's Special Envoy, and reporters stop and then move on. At the camp exit, three rebel soldiers - adolescents with Kalashnikovs strung across the shoulders - forbid the group from going further for 'security' reasons. The insistent odour of dead bodies floats nearby. A little earlier, a small group of journalists, including AFP reporters, had gone to this checkpoint and heard the sound of a mechanical shovel, which the rebels had requisitioned a week ago. Villagers had seen it pass by. What was a mechanical shovel doing here? The answer was obvious to the group of people gathered here: to bury the bodies and try to hide any traces of them.

According to some refugees, others were killed near Kilometre 52, just a bit further away. "I saw a Caterpillar digging holes and people were throwing bodies in it," a survivor told the AFP, after moving away from the crowd. Who committed these killings? The international community accuses Laurent-Désiré Kabila's rebels, including many Tutsi. He vehemently denies the charges.

Visibly moved, the European representative spoke up, saying, "We have proof of massive human rights violations," he told the AFP. "We must try to find out who designed and carried out this operation. They must be punished.

The international community must demand it. A commission of inquiry must be sent immediately. We are going to carry out a non-stop repatriation with all available means. The situation is unacceptable."

"We are calling for access as far as Ubundu (150 kilometres further south)," added UNHCR regional coordinator Filippo Grandi. "Kabila made us a promise (Sunday). We hope that this blockade (at the exit to the camp) will be lifted. The refugees are afraid. We have to reassure them." He paused, silent, and looked around him. "This camp was prepared for an organised repatriation. Now everything has to start all over again. It's frustrating."



'Zaire Communication Update 23,' MSF Amsterdam, 28 April 1997 (in English). **D175**

**Extract:**

Two MSF expats went together with a UNHCR team to the Kisangani-Ubundu axis. The Kasese site was empty. On the way to Biaro they met with small groups of people and then after the bridge, further into the Biaro camp they met with some thousands of refugees.

In the cholera centre, patients had apparently stayed over the last week, also elderly people who were sitting around had not moved in the last week. 21 very weak and sick people were selected and taken by a truck that MSF had sent on the road. They were transported to Kisangani. It's not sure if they will be still alive tomorrow.

(NOT FOR RELEASE) In Biaro soldiers (Alliance) were distributing medicines. Theatre?

The people seemed to be afraid for their future. They did not talk very openly. Soldiers were around. It is not sure if the team will go again tomorrow and possibilities of repatriation are yet completely unclear. Team in Kisangani was scaled down to 7 expats. So far no reports on intimidations or other insecurity for the team. Let's hope it stays that way.



Christophe Parayre 'Refugee Repatriation: The Countdown Has Begun,' **AFP** (France), Biaro, 29 April 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

The countdown began for UNHCR on Monday near Kisangani, eastern Zaire with the locating of more than 5,000 refugees who had come out of the dense tropical forest after fleeing their camps last week.

On Sunday, the rebel leader gave UNHCR 60 days in which to repatriate the more than 85,000 Rwandan Hutu refugees who had 'disappeared' a week ago near Kisangani, under rebel control since 15 March.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said the ultimatum, which officially began on 1 May, was "unrealistic". HCR regional coordinator Filippo Grandi also found it "short," but said that he would "try".

The task is huge. Before the end of June, authorities

must locate, treat, and repatriate thousands of starving, exhausted and terrorized people who for months tried to flee Laurent-Désiré Kabila's advancing rebels.

"We are going to conduct a non-stop repatriation using all available means," UNHCR regional coordinator told the AFP, after visiting Biaro a camp located 40 kilometres south of Kisangani.

Before the refugees' precipitous departure early last week, Biaro housed around 30,000 people. They had probably been attacked by villagers and Tutsi rebels.

Today, it is nearly deserted. However, groups of refugees are coming out of the forest to gather in the camp, hoping to receive humanitarian aid that has been blocked for a week by the rebels.

A man with a bundle on his head, wearing a torn and filthy T-shirt, says, "I heard gunfire in the middle of the night and fled into the forest, as far away as possible. I left everything in the camp. I have nothing left. Then Zairian villagers told us that there was peace again and we could go back to Biaro. We walked for two days before getting here. But there are still lots of people in the forest. They're afraid to come out. We often hear gunfire."

He turned toward a UNHCR official. "We are afraid. We want to go back to Rwanda. Are you going to take us?" The official said yes, but asked that they assemble so that authorities could help them.

A World Food Programme train with more than one hundred tonnes of provisions is supposed to leave Kisangani on Tuesday morning to bring them provisions. On Monday, a team from the humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) transported the sickest to Kisangani for treatment. The operation must continue. Time is running short. For many refugees, already weakened by long months of walking in the jungle, more time in this particularly inhospitable setting, without humanitarian aid, will be fatal.

**Human Rights Watch is asking for an inquiry into the Zaire massacres and the Organisation of African Unity is calling on the rebels to abide by international law.**



'Human Rights Watch is Asking for an Inquiry into the Massacres in Zaire,' **AFP** (France), Paris 28 April 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

The human rights defence organisation Human Rights Watch/Africa on Monday exhorted the international community

to exert pressure on both parties in the conflict to allow free inquiries into the allegations of massacres in eastern Zaire."

[...] "It is essential for the future of the country that the rule of law be restored. Peace will only again be possible if

those individuals responsible for the ethnic massacres and guilty of other atrocities are brought to justice," stressed Peter Takirambudde, Director of Human Rights Watch/Africa, quoted in the release.



'The OAU Calls on the Rebels to Abide by International Law Concerning Civilians.' **AFP** (France), Zaire, 28 April 1997 (in French).

#### Extract:

In a release published in Addis-Ababa, Mr Salim asked that negotiations be held immediately between the protagonists in the conflict in Zaire, in order to pave the way for a peaceful transition leading to elections in this country. The Secretary General of the OAU also expressed considerable concern over the deteriorating situation of the refugees and displaced persons in eastern Zaire, a region controlled by the rebels of Laurent-Désiré Kabila.

"I am particularly worried by recent information about killings of Rwandan refugees in eastern Zaire," he stated. "I am also troubled by information about a totally unacceptable situation threatening the lives of thousands of refugees, particularly women and children," added the Secretary General.

"These refugees, particularly the more vulnerable among them, are in a critical situation and need humanitarian aid immediately," he added. Mr Salim exhorted the protagonists, notably the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL), to "abide by international law in the areas under their control," in particular, "the right of civilian populations suffering from the conflict, especially women and children, to receive humanitarian assistance."

He asked the rebels to cooperate with the UN's agencies and the other humanitarian organisations, in order to bring aid to the refugees and facilitate their immediate repatriation in complete safety.

**On 28 April, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees declared before the United Nations Security Council, that refugees could be repatriated without their agreement and with no guarantee of safety on arrival, when their safety cannot be guaranteed in the camps or when they are denied asylum.**



'Re: Meeting with Madame Ogata of UNHCR,' **Message** from Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF Legal Adviser to Catherine Harper, in charge of MSF relations with the United Nations, 6 May 1997 (in French). **D176**

#### Extract:

Thank you for informing us about the meeting to be held

on 8 May between Madame Ogata and Interaction. I had no specific comments before this meeting until you sent us the text of the speech Madame Ogata delivered before the UN Security Council on 28 April 1997.

I read with great interest, Madame Ogata's speech to the Security Council, that you sent us. This text contains an exceptionally serious point that I will try to get across here in Paris. Among the lessons that her Office had learned from its experience in the Great Lakes region and in ex-Yugoslavia, Madame Ogata in particular makes the following point: when protection in the country of asylum cannot be guaranteed due to armed conflict, insecurity in the refugee camps themselves, or when asylum is denied, repatriation may have to be carried out under conditions which are neither strictly voluntary, nor strictly safe.

For a number of years now, the teams in the field have been warning us that UNHCR 'was not doing its job' to offer protection in certain countries or with regard to certain populations. In these situations, we usually intervene in Geneva so that those at the top can correct or influence the position of UNHCR personnel present in the field.

Madame Ogata's declaration constitutes a radical change in the situation. Until now we believed that the problems we were encountering with UNHCR in the field were due to a malfunctioning of UNHCR machine, and that it was possible to notify UNHCR authorities in Geneva to solve the problem.

Today, we can see that the High Commissioner herself has officially sanctioned a new doctrine.

This leads us to ask a number of precise practical questions.

1/ If UNHCR intervention is no longer based on the principles it is supposed to defend, how and on the basis of what arguments will UNHCR protect the refugees?

2/ How will UNHCR manage to get certain states to adhere to the principles of refugee protection, when it lets others violate them?

3/ How could it negotiate with the governments if it accepts in advance that the principles are up for discussion?

4/ How is one to develop an operational partnership with a partner who no longer has any active principles? On what basis could we define the roles of UNHCR and ourselves in any given situation?

5/ Will UNHCR consider us an enemy if in these situations (Great Lakes) we continue to ask for respect for the principles of safety, dignity, and voluntary action?

6/ Will it be necessary to create a new office for the protection of refugees?

These are just a few questions that Madame Ogata will obviously have to be asked when you meet.

**MSF's messages based on the Shabunda report and the 'three point' press release, continue to be discussed in the international press.**



'Zaire Communication **Update** n°23,' MSF Holland, 28 April 1997 (in English). [D175](#)

#### Extract:

NOTE THAT a press release is prepared and there will be a teleconference tomorrow morning. Should be agreed upon and become available in the course of the day. [There] will be a position towards the 60-days repatriation.

The Shabunda summary of findings at Bukavu-Shabunda, version April 25 is free for release to journalists. Note that we say we feel we have enough (indirect) evidence, from the reconstruction of the mission, to state that systematic killings are taking place and we fear we may even be used as bait.

#### UPDATE MEDIA:

Holland: Last Friday all TV stations covered the Shabunda story and all national dailies had a front page or major story on it. Since it has been quiet.

Strong angles: MSF being used as bait and stops activities; refugees being massacred by rebels; local Zairians intimidated and even killed if they help refugees.

Petra in Germany had a tough day with journalists who wanted more on the 3 points of the press release. Petra answered following the PR lines of yesterday. A Belgium newspaper (Het Belang van Limburg) is publishing an article on the Shabunda report tomorrow.

The Australian, was to Kate's surprise, front-paging with: "Masses of Rwandan Hutus ran into the jungle after Zairian villagers killed hundreds of their colleagues and rebels opened fire on others, survivors of the latest exodus from refugee camps in Zaire." This kind of prominence for an international story of this kind, is not common."

Some other newspapers too, but less prominent, journalists will definitely use the Shabunda report for background, Kate believes.



'MSF Holland **Newsflash**,' 28 April 1997 (in English). [D177](#)

#### Extract:

"The teams in Zaire are doing very well", says ET-desk coordinator Wilna Van Artzen who just returned from a trip to Zaire. "Within the Bukavu team there is frustration felt for months, due to a lack of access to the refugees and because it seems impossible to have a medical impact on the refugees the team manages to reach." The team constantly fears being used by the military to locate and attack refugees that then get cut off from humanitarian access or worse. The team for instance, is reluctant to provide aid to a group of 400-500 refugees in a worrying health condition, in Louisi, west of Bukavu, out of fear of being misused.

Wilna Van Artzen reports a strange atmosphere in Goma, due to an enlarged presence of young military in town. The authorities announced the introduction of a surveil-

lance system for aid organisations, in which a committee will check all project funding, expat résumés and other paper work; a tight system that is also used in Rwanda to keep control on aid activities and expat presence.

**In Goma and Bukavu, the MSF Holland teams who were worried about being used as bait by the ADFL are reticent to provide aid to groups of refugees. They are also feeling the weight of the new NGO surveillance system required by the new authorities.**



'MSF Holland **Newsflash**,' 28 April 1997 (in English). [D177](#)

#### Extract:

Last Friday, MSF released the Shabunda report. A report on the human rights violations; as witnessed by a MSF explo team along the road from Bukavu to Shabunda in eastern Zaire. Media in Holland picked the message up right away and quite well. The Anglophone media picked it up with some delay. The French media denied it. There have been no threats against the MSF field teams in the region following the strong advocacy message.

**On 29 April, the Rwandan president condemned MSF's declarations concerning the lack of security in his country. During a teleconference, the MSF director generals of the various sections agreed on MSF's position concerning repatriation and decided to 'keep a low profile' on declarations of a political nature. The Director General of MSF France spoke on Radio France Internationale, widely listened to in the Great Lakes region. In Kisangani, a representative of the Justice Ministry and the ADFL delegate to NGOs visited the MSF team. They asked that MSF retract its accusations of massacres. Failing that, MSF would be required to leave. Journalists, who are also finding it hard to work in the region, are reporting that MSF was right about violence on the part of the rebels.**



'Re - What is MSF calling for?' **E-mail** from Phil Doherty, MSF Holland programme manager forwarded to Françoise Saulnier, MSF France Legal Adviser, 29 April 1997 (in English). [D178](#)

#### Extract:

Upon reflection and in response to a point (among many) made by Samantha [Bolton], I wonder if we should have circulated a short list of MSF demands with our press output of the last days. The Refugees International Press release of April 24th is attractive in this regard.

Marcel's lobbying points in USA last week were [that] MSF is calling for:

1. Protection of the population (refugees as well as Zairians) during repatriation.
2. Adequate operational access to give humanitarian aid.
3. No abuse of that access. To ensure that INGO operations are not used as bait for refugees to come out of the forest to be ambushed.
4. Human Rights investigation to be started immediately.
5. Bi-Lateral pressure to be used by western govts on ADFL, govts of Rwanda and Uganda. (RI goes as far as calling for aid to be denied to Rwanda and Uganda).
6. Preparations to be made in Rwanda for the humane return of refugees.

The wording perhaps, needs to be cleaned up.

Could Ed be included in a discussion to produce a good clear text and the PR network be informed.



'Zaire Communication **Update**,' Van't Land, Communications Officer MSF Holland transmitted by Barbara Kancelbaum, MSF USA Press Officer from the Amsterdam office to MSF New York, 29 April 1997 (in English). **D179**

#### Extract:

Hi there,

This morning there was a teleconference of the MSF General Directors. They agreed on the MSF position towards repatriation and impunity. But then the MSF team in Kisangani was visited by armed ADFL. They demanded that MSF would either denounce its criticism on the rebels as expressed over the past few days, or leave. Therefore it was decided that MSF would for the moment refrain from more political statements. MSF F has been invited for a radio discussion with also UNHCR, MDM, Rwandan ambassador and possibly ADFL representative present. Bernard Pécoul will participate, but he'll be extremely low profile on political issues and focus on medical themes.

Summarizing where we stand this moment on external communications:

- We DO NOT communicate actively any more political messages.
- The information above on the security threat is classified.
- There will not be a press release today.

Tomorrow is a public holiday in Holland. You can reach me through the PR mobile -; 06 54394727. We'll work on a more extensive update tomorrow.

All the best from the Amsterdam office,

Erwin (under the cover of Ruuds log-in)



'**Account** of the phone call with Vincent [Janssens, MSF Belgium Coordinator in Kisangani] at 16:00 + task force [working group],' by the MSF Belgium programme manager, 29 April 1997 (in French). **D180**

#### Extract:

Following the interview with Bernard Pécoul on RFI, Misters Congolo and Kanandi, ADFL representatives to the UN, visited MSF in Kisangani and asked that MSF retract its claims, failing which it would have to leave.

But they did not specify which claims nor from where MSF would have to leave.

(NB: reaction by MSFB following MSFF press release of this WE: MSF Belgium director of operations wrote to MSFF.

MSFF broke 2 ethical rules:

- 1/ Report without being present in the field
- 2/ Report without consulting the teams present in the field)

Filippo Grandi interviewed refugees who claimed that it was the Alliance military who came into the camps and started shooting. But UNHCR told MSF that they would nonetheless keep a low profile to try to reach the refugees.

So, in fact, if the Alliance really wanted to expel MSF, they could do it right away. Therefore MSF can still negotiate with the Alliance. What to put on the table???

Arrival of the Senior Officer, Dominique Boutriau.... The declaration is from MSFF and not MSFB. What access will MSF have? Unconditional, satisfactory, or at a trickle? By the end of the week, we will have more information to help us decide whether to withdraw if access is not open enough.

(NB: getting expelled tends to cast doubt on any advocacy...) The Zairian NGOs in place, Omnis and EUE, do not have the right profile for advocacy. What about Oxfam?



'Zaire Communication **Update** n°24,' MSF Holland, 30 April 1997 (in English). **D181**

#### Extract:

On Tuesday morning the Rwandan president Kagame condemned the MSF statement on insecurity in his country on Network Africa. He added that his people would come to Zaire to collect the remaining Rwandans in case the international community would be too slow.

Last night Bernard Pécoul participated in a radio debate, with also UNHCR, the Rwandan Embassy, and MDM participating. ADFL turned down their invitation. In view of the security threats to our teams, Pécoul could not be outspoken. He therefore focused on the message that the refugees were in very bad condition when they were last seen

and that they should have full protection immediately. Bernard Pécoul was also in an interview that was repeatedly broadcasted, since last Saturday on Radio France International. This interview was very much in line with last Saturday's press release, condemning the rebels at Kisangani for massacring refugees and Rwanda for supporting the rebels.

[...] Reportedly BBC received several threats in Zaire from the rebel-side. CNN reporter Catherine Bond was expelled from Zaire (says MSF London).

 *The CNN journalist, who used to work for the BBC, was a very good journalist, had worked in Uganda, and knew the region well. But at the beginning of the rebel advance, she submitted a report that profoundly shocked me. A village outside Kisangani had been shelled as the front-line was advancing. All the TV pictures showed that when the troops arrived, the villagers were waving white flags to show that they were on the side of the attackers, who were relatively disciplined and it's true that few civilians were killed. This time however, there were problems and large numbers of civilians were killed. When the journalist described the events, she said, "When the saviours arrived, the villagers welcomed them with songs and white flags to show that they were all on their side and were happy to have some discipline at last. There had been a mortar attack, but this was a mistake." A good journalist will never say: "This was a mistake". He or she will say that people were killed and that those who did the firing said that it was a mistake. On hearing her, I said to myself, "They're completely fascinated by the myth of the victorious rebels who are out to save Zaire!" Later on in Kisangani, after the Tingi Tingi episode, the journalists began to realise that everything was not OK and that the refugees were in the process of being massacred.*

*When the rebel troops reached Kisangani, things began to get worse. This CNN journalist and her BBC colleague had problems with the SNIP, the intelligence services, because they began to be a little more critical about Kigali, about how the troops were behaving and so on. This CNN journalist was forced to leave Zaire and then come back in via Uganda. She was followed, harassed, and threatened by the secret police. The BBC journalist was beaten up.*

Samantha Bolton, MSF USA Communication Director,  
MSF Press Officer for the Great Lakes November-  
December 1996 (in French).

**On 29 April, UNHCR reported killings of refugees and the obstacles placed in the way of refugee repatriation by the rebels and asked for a commission of inquiry. Several thousand refugees were reported at the border of Zaire and Angola.**



'The UN Denounces Further Killings in the Rebel Zones,' **AFP** (France), Geneva, 29 April 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

[...]

"We are receiving increasingly shocking reports about the refugee massacres, both in the Kisangani region (eastern Zaire) and elsewhere," declared the spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Pamela O'Toole, adding, "these killings must stop and an urgent inquiry be launched."

UNHCR also accused the rebel Alliance of placing obstacles in the way of Rwandan refugee repatriation, after giving the humanitarian organisations two months in which to repatriate them.

UNHCR said that it was "appalled" by the kidnapping of 50 children and 60 adults from a hospital near Bukavu, on the Rwandan border, by armed soldiers on Friday. The 110 people have not been seen since and "according to certain sources, they have apparently been killed," said Mrs O'Toole.

The agency also declared itself to be "horrified" by Monday's discovery of the bodies of 20 refugees in the Biaro camp, 40 km south of Kisangani, some of which carried machete marks.

Refugees have given "horrible accounts" of their forced dispersal from the camp last week, of people slowly dying in the jungle of their wounds, of hunger, exhaustion and disease, said Mrs O'Toole.



'3,850 Hutu Refugees on the Northern Angolan Border, According to UNITA,' **AFP** (France) Lisbon 29 April 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

Some 3,850 Rwandan Hutu refugees fleeing Zaire are on the border between Zaire and northern Angola, reported the head of UNITA (formerly the armed Angolan rebellion) for Uige province, André Pindi, on Tuesday.

[...] "The situation is tense and we can expect a break-out of serious conflict between the population and the Hutus, most of whom are women, children and the elderly," he stated.

**On 30 April, the massacres, which took place in the Kasese and Biaro camps, were related in the press. In order to speed up repatriation, the rebels were themselves beginning to evacuate refugees from Biaro to Kisangani.**



Jean Hatzfeld, 'Zaire: Kabila's Mass Graves in Kisangani,' *Libération* (France), 30 April 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

Last week, for four days running, two mechanical diggers requisitioned by Laurent-Désiré Kabila's fighters were used to dig pits and bury the bodies of 'thousands' of Hutu refugees killed south east of Kisangani. According to consistent accounts from religious and humanitarian sources, the camps along the road between Kisangani and Ubundu, where some 85,000 Rwandan Hutu had found refuge after wandering for six months through eastern Zaire, were 'surrounded' on Monday 21 April.

"Two days previously, the Zairian troops which had been guarding the camps were replaced by Rwandan troops," confirmed westerners on the ground. On 22 April, the massacres apparently started with "indiscriminate shooting of the refugees, who panicked and fled into the forest". Some of them, unable to move owing to disease or exhaustion, were allegedly "finished off with machetes." As of the following day, a requisitioned truck was used to transport these bodies, "about 500" according to the driver, who was forced to perform this macabre task. Forest workers were also forced to help bury the bodies, in particular by operating the two mechanical diggers, weighing about fifteen tonnes each.

It was last Wednesday that the NGOs in Kisangani became certain that massacres were in progress in the camps, where they had no access. "We didn't find it hard to imagine what that meant," said one source. "In the Biaro camp, one third of the refugees were too weak to stand up. Even without violence, owing to their exhaustion, sickness or malnutrition, 500 of them died the previous week." Biaro camp (41 km from Kisangani) houses just under 20,000 refugees, with about 60,000 others in the two Kasese camps near the capital of Upper Zaire. According to several sources, "many bodies" had also been buried in mass graves, at a place called "La Collectivité," 52 km from Kisangani. Locally, this place is also known by the name of Bakumu Mangongo. Nearly all the satellite phones were confiscated, and precise information reached the United Nations Secretary General's office in New York and the headquarters of the High Commissioner for Refugees in Geneva through the UN's specialist organisations, leading to a virulent denunciation of the "policy of liquidation" and "slow extermination" being inflicted on the Hutu refugees by the "Zairian rebels".



'The Rebels Bring Several Hundred Refugees to Kisangani,' *AFP* (France), Kisangani 30 April 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

On Wednesday morning, the Zairian rebels brought several hundred Rwandan Hutu refugees by train to Kisangani

(east), where UNHCR trucks are taking them to the airport for repatriation to Rwanda.

On reaching the left bank of the town, the refugees are ferried in small groups to the other side of the Zaire river before being loaded into trucks, reports AFP. "This is the (rebel) Alliance's response to the untruthful accusations of the UN. We are accused of not facilitating the repatriation operations, just look," said the rebel leader in charge of relations with the UN's agencies, Emmanuel Kamanzi. "You can see that we are capable of running the repatriation operation. If the UN is incapable of doing it, we will ask for help from the local Zairian agencies. We'll do it without the UN," he declared to AFP.

## "PRECEDENCE OF ADVOCACY OVER ASSISTANCE"

**On 1 May, the MSF International Council Restricted Committee supported the joint position of the general directors and stressed that given the current situation in Zaire, advocacy takes precedence over assistance. Until the French section's proposal to modify the right of veto has been analysed, this right is only granted to the general directors, within the framework of the Executive Committee.**



'Minutes of the Meeting of the MSF International Council Restricted Committee,' Paris 1 and 2 May 1997 (in English). [D182](#)

**Extract:**

2) Great Lakes crisis

The crisis is exceptional and has been going on for several years. As it is so complex, it is actually very difficult to manage for MSF. As a consequence, it has been difficult for us to be coherent in our 'witnessing'. This happens at the very moment when it is of prime importance to co-ordinated as much as possible and speak with one voice. It reveals the lack of leadership in the international movement to manage the whole process, integrating/combining security problems and speaking out, in order to decide when it is necessary to opt for denunciation. Who decides? Who is accountable? To whom? Who has the right of veto? When can it be used? Besides that, several members of the IC complain that they do not get enough information to follow the situation.

After a discussion in which the need for witnessing is not really questioned, the RC makes the following statement unanimously:

The recent 'cacophony' in Zaire-'témoignage' [witnessing] damages the MSF efforts to best serve the populations in danger. Therefore the RC supports the position of the general directors for continued témoignage activity. According to the RC, in the current situation, témoignage should be given priority over direct assistance.

For future decisions on denunciations, the general directors of the Executive Committee shall possess exclusively the final decision. In the absence of a general director, the president shall replace him, for cases of major denunciation (since internal international cohesion or external image may be at stake). If consensus cannot be reached, the existing rules of the International Council require that the matter be arbitrated within the RC.

It must be noted that the detailed content of the message is not discussed in depth, but its principle. On top of that, the rule still applies that the general directors are responsible for the adaptation of the content of the MSF message, according to the evolution of the situation.

In addition to this statement, it was acknowledged that the crisis in Zaire was very complex and has been going on for several years; therefore it was decided that when the IC meets on September 19, a workshop will be organised with a view to reviewing MSF's experience of the Great Lakes crisis. The workshop will also be open to people involved in operations, and will address the responsibility of MSF, misuse of humanitarian aid, limits of assistance when populations are massacred, opportunities and necessities for witnessing. It will try to make links between the different stages in the crisis, in order to have a global retrospective analysis.

Finally, the RC discussed the statement made by the French board on the right of veto for security reasons, some of the RC members being very concerned with its content and with its consequences: who has the authority to break an international agreed rule?

Therefore, the RC considers the French board statement as a recommendation to be seriously analysed. It asks to the executive committee to present its proper analysis of this request and its propositions in the next IC meeting. In the meantime, the right of veto for security reasons still exists, but it can be used only by a general director within the executive committee.

 I bumped into Jacques (de Milliano, President MSF Holland) and Doris (Schopper, President MSF Switzerland) on their way out of the International Council meeting. They asked how I was and I said, "I'm fine, I don't have any work and can catch up on my shopping." They started to laugh and said, "Why don't you have any work?" I replied, "MSF is an institution which tries to communicate as little as possible about the Great Lakes crisis, at a time when unbelievable things are happening there. So, as Director of Communications, half the time I have nothing to do." They reassured me, "Don't worry, we just voted a resolution which will really give you room to work in." And, they had indeed voted a resolution, which

placed emphasis on advocacy. The International Council declared, "green light, priority for advocacy over assistance, which is meaningless in this situation." I therefore have a clear position from MSF's political/associative echelons, the International Council and the Board, as Director of Communications, I assume my responsibilities and will communicate along these lines. I am not working outside the bounds of internal discipline.

Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France programme manager then Communication Director (in French).

**MSF tells the press of the catastrophic situation of the refugees and the obstacles to aid, but does not stress the massacres.**



'Zaire Communication Update n°25,' MSF Holland, 1 May 1997 (in English). [D183](#)

#### Extract:

Rebels have started bringing refugees by train and trucks. Local NGO's are involved in the search for refugees and the transport. Also a local NGO is to select who is capable of being repatriated.

This of course is a worrying development. The rebels have completely taken the lead.

UNHCR have today, repatriated 700 refugees, but the concentration of people at the Kisangani-airport axis is growing. MSF is implementing medical support in the transit camp at km 11 on the road to the airport...

#### 2. Communications

Also yesterday, the general directors came to an agreement on the current MSF position on repatriation and impunity. The position was sent this morning. However, it cannot be communicated actively for the moment. NOTE THAT, ALTHOUGH THE POSITION IS IN PRESS RELEASE FORMAT, IT IS NOT TO BE ISSUED EXTERNALLY TILL FURTHER NOTICE!!! NOR FURTHER POLITICAL MESSAGES FOR THE MOMENT. Let's accept that the security of the teams is on the edge. We'll follow up closely. If security improves or urgent issues demand action, the strategy may of course be changed again. Still stories show up with accusations towards the rebels. Let's not reinforce those accusations for now. There's pretty much pressure already to Kabila, so we should watch the developments from here. Please ask the journalists for some understanding.

On Tuesday morning the Rwandan president Kagame condemned the MSF statement on insecurity in his country on Network Africa. He added that his people would come to Zaire to collect the remaining Rwandans in case the international community would be too slow.



'Médecins Sans Frontières Information Bulletin - Zaire Emergency: Situation on 1 May,' MSF Press Release, 2 May 1997 (in French). [D184](#)

#### Extract:

In Biaro camp, 10,000 to 30,000 refugees, including very few children - are massed together. The vast majority of them are in very poor shape and about 60% of the population is suffering from malnutrition. Dozens are suffering from cuts and gunshot wounds. The trucks, which come to transport the weaker ones to the transit camps, are besieged by the refugees.

At the only site where the refugees have been regrouped, the situation remains just as disastrous. The organisations can no longer work freely and bring assistance to the weakest. Food distribution is not authorised and the volunteers trying to set up medical structures are intimidated and have to leave the camp.

**On 2 May, the head of the MSF Belgium desk, acting as coordinator in Kisangani, met the AFDL heads, who had just fiercely criticised MSF during a press conference.**



'Sitrep from MSF Belgium Coordinator in Kisangani,' 2 May 1997 (the original document was in mixed French - English and has been edited for clarity). [D185](#)

#### Extract:

The local radio was describing how MSF had claimed that rebel Tutsi were exterminating the Hutu refugee populations. This follows the appearance on the web of the Shabunda report and last weekend's MSFF release, the combined effect of which was now beginning to be felt. Expatriate security needs to be beefed up.

1. Press conference of Counsellor Moise, General Secretary of the Presidency: Mr Moise has paid a visit to the transit camp, the airport, and had a meeting with UNHCR and the authorities.

According to UNHCR there are 20,000 refugees in Biaro. According to reports he had from other sources, there were 30 - 40 refugees. Although repatriation has started, there are demands UNHCR should do better.

Mr Moise expressed he has regrets regarding the amount of negative information circulating about the Alliance (AFDL). He said, "Last week the Alliance gave full access. Nevertheless, since then, the criticism has not stopped. The Alliance even decided to help in repatriation with the train, which was also criticised. According to the Alliance, repatriating refugees up to Kisangani would allow proper access to water, health care, etc.

The international organisations should care more for their

work and collaborate with the Alliance instead of doing investigative activities."

He criticised NGOs like MSF for stating that the Tutsi are exterminating the Hutu. He said, "Everyone is free to say what he thinks. But, these declarations should be made directly to the authorities, instead of going straight to the press." Also, Dr Zora spent her time picking up the ID cards of refugees in the camps instead of working as a doctor. He said that, "60 days should be enough to repatriate everyone. The first day was good with 1,500 returnees. UNHCR should make an effort to have better collaboration with the Alliance."

Regarding medical care: The refugees that are severely ill should not take the plane but should be hospitalised in Kisangani. There is criticism of UNHCR of not working properly.

Answering to journos, Moise said, "The incidents in the camps were due to attacks by ex-FAR and fighting with rebels." Concerning possible uncontrolled soldiers, he said, "The Alliance was unified and there is no fighting between different members. Also, it is utopian to think there would be no banditry in the rebel-controlled area. Goma is safe except for any banditry. No fighting between the different members of the AFDL." The Vice Governor and the consultant of the Governor attended the meeting. I introduced myself and expressed concern after a visit to Vincent last week by a representative of the Justice Ministry. I said, "I would like to clarify what the criticism was in our statements to the press." However, after the press conference I started to understand more what the subject of the criticism was about. I also proposed to explain the MSF programmes in the country.

Mr Moise wanted me to start with an explanation about the refugees' situation. Firstly, I briefly explained our programme in Shaba-Kasai and Katanga, and in the near future, Kalemie. I said that the Minister of Health had approved the programmes in writing in Lubumashi some weeks ago. I also explained my position in Brussels.

Then I explained the humanitarian situation of the refugees/death rates before the incidents, and the MSF response (with 700 in-patient beds in both camps). Now, there was a clear deterioration of the situation with 70% malnutrition and there is also cholera, dysentery, machete and bullet wounds, and the people are exhausted and terrified. I explained the difficulty of working when having to wait for an escort and if a doctor goes without an escort, as happened yesterday, there are incidents with the military.

I also expressed my concern regarding the presence of an anti-personnel mine at Kasese humanitarian facility (looted). At that point he seemed very surprised. I explained that American journos went there with the convoy yesterday and took pictures but I had not seen the mine. He was very surprised to learn that from me, as no one had told him before (It is true, I checked with UNHCR's Kilian). Then he said he was sorry that Vincent had left because he would have strong words with Vincent (who was present during the time of the incidents). I said I would appreciate it if he said what he was concerned about.

He said he was angry about the declaration of MSF, of

NGOs and the international community, who go to the press before talking to the Alliance. The Alliance has insufficient contact with us. If there is a problem, it should be presented directly to the Alliance and therefore, it will be solved. Regarding MSF, our attitude means that the problem of trust in us is raised and he wonders if our mandate is humanitarian, or if it is obeying other interests? There are people here who have interests in tarnishing the image of the Alliance by reporting only negative news.

In conclusion, the talks were frank and open. The dissatisfaction of the Alliance is clear. There is an urgent need that MSF has closer contact with the local authorities. The external message of MSF should reflect reality and not only bad things. No direct threat. No word about expulsion.

**On 3 May, while MSF Holland was developing its lobbying campaign, its Goma team informed headquarters of their doubts over the relevance of this type of activity and that of public communication. The debate over the last public announcement about eastern Zaire continued between the operations directors of MSF Belgium and MSF France.**



'Summary of the Advocacy Plan: for Protection of the Population and Humanitarian Access in Kivu, Eastern Zaire,' 2 May 1997 (in English). **D186**

#### Extract:

The MSF message: MSF should have a single concise and well co-ordinated message to the world be it within silent lobbying or the world public via the press. The message should be based on our medical expertise. Unilateral or bilateral press actions by MSF sections have not resulted in a clear, continuous campaign and we should all accept our roles in the mis-coordination in the last few weeks. Security for our teams in the field remains our priority of course, so all information flow to and between all the teams in the region needs to be optimal and headquarters need to be feeding context information and press coverage of the Zaire situation and in particular any references to MSF.

Throughout the lobbying campaign since Eric Goemaere and Max Glaser went to Goma in early April to try to see Kabila, and with all the meetings in New York, Washington, and London in the week of April 14th, the following six points have been emphasised:

- MSF demands -
- That full protection be afforded to both refugees and residents during the repatriation process.
  - That adequate operational access is afforded to humanitarian organisations to ensure good impact.
  - That the authorities do not abuse what access is given in

terms of obstruction or by using humanitarian operations to be used as bait.

-That an international human rights investigation be started immediately.

-That western governments use direct pressure on regional states to comply with humanitarian principles.

This message originated from the field teams in Zaire and has been the core message from the advocacy efforts as coordinated in Amsterdam.

#### INTERSECTION CONSULTATION:

Clearly this has been lacking, starting with the Shabunda report being used before due consultation. But, the rewriting of the Shabunda summary and the press release of last Saturday were further examples of poor coordination practice.

It has been agreed that the designated desks in each section consult with each other directly to make decisions on what to say and when to say it and to whom.



'Re: Immediate Lobby Plans,' Message from Phil Doherty, MSF Holland programme manager to other section desks, 3 May 1997 (in English). **D187**

#### Extract:

Dear Colleagues,

These are the lobby opportunities as of today:

1. The UN Human Rights investigation team departs Geneva today. They will be in Kigali today and Sunday and going on to Goma on Monday...We have had direct contact with them in Geneva and also with Physician for Human Rights who trained the Argentineans. They have been given confidential information as to where we saw mass graves...
2. Jules Pieters, MSF-H Emergency Desk has departed for New York and Washington. Jules has gone to attend the Action-Aid conference for INGOs and MSF-New York has arranged other meetings at the UN and with US govt. officials. I will forward his schedule later.
3. Next Thursday 8 May there is an INGO forum with Ms. Ogata, Catherine Harper will keep us informed.



'MSF Advocacy in Eastern Zaire,' Message from MSF Holland team in Goma to the programme manager, 3 May 1997 ( in English). **D188**

#### Extract:

After receiving information this afternoon that the MSF council is planning an advocacy campaign concerning the humanitarian situation, primarily in Kisangani, MSF in Goma held a team meeting. The following points were unanimously decided:

1. MSF committed itself to increased communication with ADFL authorities following last week's uncoordinated advocacy campaign. To launch another campaign without first addressing these issues to the ADFL will further erode our credibility. Without an open dialogue between MSF and ADFL, the rebels will have no opportunity to respond to our statements except to attack MSF.
2. Accusations that ADFL is manipulating aid agencies in Kisangani will be extremely difficult to substantiate. Based on reports from MSF Holland team members and sitreps from MSF Belgium, access to Kisangani camps is increasing slowly every day. Stable refugees are being repatriated, the transit camp is better established, and refugees too sick to move are allowed to remain in the transit camp. Although the situation in Biaro is dire, aid agencies in Kisangani held a medical operations meeting on 02.05.97 to coordinate their activities and inputs. It is not clear how MSF will defend public statements to the contrary.
3. The current security situation is precarious. MSF cannot assume that extreme elements within the ADFL of the militant local population will respond peacefully with simple denials in the press. Already, the local image of MSF is not positive. The accusations of last week by MSFF continue to circulate in eastern Zaire on radio France (...) and Voice of the People. Headquarters should take note of recent security incidents, such as aggressive statements towards MSF in Kisangani, the placing of landmines outside the MSF clinic in Kasese, and the hard-line ADFL response to previous MSF statements. There is no certainty that reprisals would take place only in Kisangani, which places the Goma and Bukavu teams at risk.
4. In light of these concerns, the MSF-Holland team in Goma is not convinced the current advocacy strategy is the best way to proceed.



**E-mail** from MSF Belgium Operations Director to the Operations Director and the Legal Advisor of MSF France, 4 May 1997 (in French).  
**D189**

#### Extract:

Hello Brigitte, hello operations in Paris,  
 I believe that on the whole we are in agreement. I would however like to go over the Kisangani/Shabunda story for the last two weeks.

#### 1. The Shabunda report

For me, this report is unsuitable for distribution because it is based on unconfirmed hearsay from third parties. However, the information is consistent and massacres are without doubt taking place! How many, by whom, where? That's not what's important. We must speak out about this dramatic situation and we have already waited too long.

At MSF B we used our veto, it's true, against the plan to distribute this report as it is, and even now, I'm not really in favour of open distribution on the web, but we never opposed speaking out about what was happening there. Quite on the contrary, it was Peter Caesar and Françoise Saulnier who worked on a new version...

#### 2. Non-access to the Kisangani camps

I believe that we were not quick enough to communicate about this. Between Friday and the Tuesday attacks, four days went by and we should have started talking about them as early as Saturday/Sunday. We do have our share of the blame.

#### 3. The attacks on the camps.

As soon as I became aware of events, I contacted the other sections, particularly Bernard. We tried to work on a message which I thought was quite good. See Thursday's release, which I feel should have been already released on Wednesday.

Incredible but true, an Operations Director in Holland was able to block such a vital and non-accusing message (it was toned down in relation to Thursday's). That the truck driver was able to reach Kisangani on Thursday is for me a total surprise and conflicts with the information we had...

Finally, and very belatedly, came Thursday's [statement] and [it was] effective.

I am unaware of how it was received in the French press, but here it was a success and we are continuing.

Those who take communication/advocacy decisions must now realise that technical progress means that we have to be ready to communicate within 6 hours following the events and that we have to take rapid decisions involving those in the field and at headquarters.

4. Then your Board of Directors meeting on Friday and your BoD's decision. We read your BoD's decision and if there is no problem with 99% of the fields, it is unacceptable with respect to people on the fields where safety is an issue. What would you say if tomorrow, Brussels communicated what it wanted in Sri Lanka?

It is therefore hard to continue to share information if the BoD - an emanation of the GA [general assembly] - releases this highly conflicting message. But we will continue nonetheless.

And then

#### 5. Saturday's release

We have already mentioned and repeated the reasons for which we cannot agree on this release and the messages it contains. We feel that they do not reflect the position of the people in the field, and are not based on a joint analysis by the operational centres. Worse yet, we disagree completely with these positions, which do not seem to us to be sufficiently thought out. Trust us...I can see that it's continuing this weekend (3 and 4 May).

I too would like to see the stereotypes vanish and for us not to waste time with in-fighting, but there must be a

minimum of dialogue in order to generate mutual trust. Since we agree on the content, why not try to reach an agreement on the format and on procedures for advocacy messages?

**On 3 May, MSF France denounced the 'media operation' by the ADFL and questioned the pertinence of the repatriation of refugees to Rwanda, which supports the rebels.**



'MSF Denounced the "Media Operation" by the Rebels in Biaro Camp,' **AFP** (France), Paris 3 May 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

On Friday in Paris, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) denounced the 'media operation' by the Zairian rebels organising the 'forced repatriation' of Hutu, Rwandan refugees in the Biaro camp (southern Zaire) while starving and terrorising them...

"The vast majority of them are in very poor shape and about 60% are suffering from malnutrition," according to MSF. Some of them have injuries from gunshot or machetes, according to AFP observations.

"[The rebels] are trying to convince the international community that the problem (of the refugees) is being solved" as negotiations begin between the head of the rebellion', Laurent-Désiré Kabila, and the President of Zaire, Mobutu, stated Jean-Hervé Bradol, Director of Communications at MSF.

In the field, "the rebels have blocked all distribution of food and water" in Biaro camp "and in Kisangani, they are pushing people into aeroplanes without us being able to give them anything to drink, even though the state of health of these refugees is alarming", he added.

"Where is the legitimacy for this repatriation? Is it reasonable to repatriate the refugees to Rwanda, where the power in place (Ed: Tutsi dominated) supports the rebels," he continued to wonder. He thus denounced "the silence of the international community, which closes its eyes because it does not know where to put these refugees," claiming that "the right of refugees is today threatened."

**The Biaro refugees, in a particularly poor state of health, are transported to the Lula transit camp, ten km from Kisangani, where an MSF team is attempting to care for them before they are repatriated by air. On 4 May, when the train arrived, this team discovered 91 bodies in the wagons, dead of asphyxiation. V13 ▶**



'We Can't Monitor the Refugees,' **Le Soir** (Belgium), 6 May 1997 (in French). **D190**

**Extract:**

"There is a tragedy occurring here," says Dominique Boutriau, Head of Mission for Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in the Kisangani region. All the refugees are in a terrible state and they are also frightened after the events of two weeks ago. On that Sunday, around 100 people suffocated on the train carrying them to the Kisangani transit centre on their way to board the plane to Rwanda. The tragedy explains their fear.

Later 85,000 refugees had 'disappeared' following an outbreak of violence. They wandered until reaching the outskirts of Kisangani, where they stopped, the Belgian doctor said. When they spotted humanitarian aid workers, they emerged along the road. But as soon as they had collected fresh supplies, they returned to the forest, fearing new attacks.

**EMPTYING THE CAMP**

That's what prompted them to crowd into the train on Sunday, Boutriau said. It left full. Along the way, new refugees came out of the forest, storming the train and stopping it. When the train reached Kisangani and the doors were opened, dozens of bodies fell out. We had to separate the dead from the living and infuse those who could be saved. Transport conditions are unacceptable. Yesterday, train transports were suspended but repatriation by plane continued with the emptying of the Kisangani transit camp. It was designed to hold 2,500 people but yesterday morning, Boutriau noted, there were 5,400.

From one day to the next, we don't know how many refugees will arrive, whether by train or by truck. In theory, the UN High Commission for Refugees is in charge of these refugees - the Alliance promised that - but the reality is completely different.

**BIARO IS THE WORST**

We set up a field hospital at this transit centre, the MSF international volunteer explained. Yesterday we saw 265 people, including individuals with two week-old bullet and knife wounds that had become infected, patients with diarrhoea and enteritis, and cases of severe malnutrition. The hospital keeps growing because there are not enough shelters, so the refugees sleep outdoors in the rain and become ill.

The situation at Kisangani is difficult, but it is much worse at Biaro and in the other camps along the road. We have access to those refugees for only three hours per day because the UN escort is the only one available. The convoys are composed of six or seven trucks and a dozen cars plus those of the escort's. All those vehicles have to cross on the ferry. It takes a ridiculous amount of time. On site, the only people left are the ones in the worst shape. They're not strong enough to go back into the forest. We have just enough time to distribute rehydra-

tion salts and body bags - because there are corpses everywhere. We try to stabilise the wounded but the most dehydrated would really need to be infused over 48 hours. There's no one to monitor that. The doctor says there are rumors about what's taking place at kilometre 82 and kilometre 50, but it's impossible to confirm them. The convoy doesn't go that far.



'Zaire/Rwanda Emergency Communication Update.' MSF Belgium, 6 May 1997 (in English). **D191**

#### Extract:

'The train' doesn't stop at this camp, it stops closer to Kisangani near the river bank where the refugees have to get out, cross the river with the ferry, and are then transported to Lola. Local NGOs Omnis and EUB are in charge of consultations (OPD), MSF is in charge of the hospital (IPD), nutrition, shelter and sanitary conditions.

On Sunday, the team of 3 expats (MD, nurse, and log) witnessed the arrival of the fatal train on their way back from Biaro. They immediately started helping with the stabilisation and transfer of the wounded to the University Hospital, distribution of body bags, etc. Dominique is convinced that crowd control measures taken prior to the departure are necessary to prevent too many people from getting onto the train. MSF is asking for better coordination between UNHCR and the Alliance in order to create humane conditions...

Biaro (41 km south of Kisangani): MSF has no permanent presence in Biaro. Local medical NGOs like Omnis and EUB and UNICEF work about 6 hours/day. MSF, UNHCR and Oxfam only stay 3 hours in order to benefit from military escorts. Today two expats are returning with 'the train' under UNHCR control.

In Biaro, the MSF team (2 or 3 expats with 2 or 3 Zairian nurses) is in charge of distributing Oral Rehydration Salts, screening the vulnerable, referring them to the trucks for evacuation, or to the basic health care structures of the EUB and Omnis.

Some of the refugees are anorexic, they don't want to eat anymore or get treatment. These people are so exhausted and depressed they don't seem to care anymore whether they live or not.

**The Kisangani team received numerous requests for interviews and complained that it was not notified about the content of messages sent by headquarters. On 5 May, in a press release distributed from Kisangani, MSF Belgium called for humanitarian groups to obtain access to the refugees, for refugees to be protected and for the AFDL-imposed 60-day repatriation deadline to be removed.**



'MSF Urges the AFDL to Ensure Humane Conditions for Refugees,' MSF Belgium **Press Release**, Kisangani/Brussels, 5 May 1997 (in French). **D192**

#### Extract:

After Sunday's shocking events, which led to the death of nearly 100 Rwandan refugees, the international aid organisation Médecins Sans Frontières is urging the Alliance to create the necessary conditions to help the refugees and repatriate them in humane circumstances. Aid efforts must be stepped up and coordinated to limit the number of casualties. The situation of the refugees in Biaro, 25 miles to the south of Kisangani, is deplorable. Aid workers are faced with a situation in which they have to separate those that can still be saved from those that are marked for death.

"Too many refugees in Biaro need intensive care and resuscitation. It is too late for perfusions, Biaro is a death camp," says Dominique Boutriau, MSF Field Coordinator after spending a day working in the camp.

The situation of the refugees is indeed desperate. Each day, at least 50 people die as a result of illnesses, malnourishment, and exhaustion. An estimated 60% of the refugees are malnourished, many of whom are too weak to travel. Moreover, for fear of new assaults and massacres, the climate is one of panic and chaos. In their struggle for life, the strongest refugees try to secure some standing room on the train and the trucks, which take them to a transit camp near Kisangani where MSF is in charge of the reception centre and the hospitalization.

Confronted with this grave situation in the field, Médecins Sans Frontières is outraged by the imposed conditions on the repatriation process and is urging the Alliance to:

- Lift the 2-month deadline for the repatriation of the refugees to their home country, Rwanda, allowing aid workers to stabilise the condition of refugees that are too weak to travel.
- Step up efforts to organise aid to the refugees in an efficient and coordinated manner.
- Protect the refugees and aid workers against intimidation and violence.
- Undertake efforts to find the missing tens of thousands of refugees in order to assist them.

If these claims are not met immediately, a great many refugees are sentenced to death and the aid worker's efforts will remain but a drop in the ocean.

**The Humanitarian Affairs Department of the Holland MSF section drafted a report called 'Forced Flight', which described the refugees' odyssey in eastern Zaire, supplemented by an analysis of medical statistics performed with the cooperation of the operational sections involved. The full report was intended for**

**distribution to donors, the UN, the US government, and possibly, as a background document for reporters.**



'Kisangani **Sitrep**,' Dominique Boutriau, MSF Belgium programme manager/Coordinator, 6 May 1997 (in French). **D193**

**Extract:**

3. Communications

Interviews last night, 4 May, and 5 May: France Info, RTL, Britain, German TV, Australian radio, Israeli TV, French BBC, *Le Soir*, *Times*. I also treated two reporters; that makes three altogether. I'm the only MSF doctor; it creates relationships.

4. The message

This is certainly not to say that repatriation should stop, as AFP broadcast tonight. That can only exacerbate tensions here and towards the refugees and aid workers.

I suggest that you read the Brussels press release, which corresponds to our thinking. Thank you.

Because I didn't have the Paris press release in advance, I was indeed surprised by the message that AFP broadcast, which put me in an awkward position with respect to the release. I'm starting to get fed up that we aren't informed about Paris press releases in advance. It's going to turn into a real mess, if not in terms of expatriate security, then in terms of the consistency of our public message and our credibility. Reporters keep calling but if you don't send them the press releases in time, well then, it's just too bad for you if we say the opposite of what you're saying at headquarters.

Please show us a little respect. I'm talking about Paris.



**Message** from Phil Doherty MSF Holland programme manager and draft of 'Overview of Refugee Flow Estimates in Eastern Zaire,' by Phil Clarke (MSF UK), 4 May 1997 (in English). **D194**

**Extract:**

- Total refugees before the conflict: **1,258,158** [IRIN 106 of 21.02.97]
- Total returns to country of origin to end-April 1997: **868,790** [From UNHCR data]
- Arrivals in third countries: **10,168** [IRIN 106 of 21.02.97]
- Remainder, total refugees still in eastern Zaire: **379,200 (1)**
- Portion of remainder with recorded deaths: **2,000** [Calculated below]
- Portion of remainder located in Ingende: **12,500** [IRIN 159, 28.04]

- Portion of remainder located in Opala: **10 000** [IRIN 150, 15.04]
- Portion of remainder located in Kisangani: **5 000** [IRIN 159, 28.04]
- Portion of remainder located in Kinshasa: **400** [IRIN 160, 29.04 ]
- Portion of remainder left by plane: **300** [IRIN 109, 26.02]
- Portion of remainder located in Mbuji-Mayi to Angola area: **11 000** [Calculated below]
- Portion of remainder located in Lodja-Mbandaka-Boende area: **79 300** [Info. Merlin and below]
- Total. refugees fully/partially accounted for: 119 500 (2)**
- Portion of remainder unaccounted for in Kisangani area: **75,000** [Calculated below]
- Portion of remainder unaccounted for in eastern Kivu: **186 200** [Calculated below]

**Total refugees unaccounted for: 261 200 (3)**

Adding (2) and (3) gives a total of 380,700, a discrepancy of just 1,500 compared to (1) because refugees repatriated from Kisangani (for which no precise data is available) are counted twice.

\*Assumes present figure same or marginally different from January figure

**INTRODUCTION**

The issue of the total number of refugees remaining in eastern Zaire remains contentious. However, the figure of 400,000 appears to have been consistently used by politicians and the media since the beginning of February when UNHCR published a summary of the total number of Rwandan and Burundian refugees still thought to be in eastern Zaire at the end of January (the original document has not been located by MSF, although a summary of this was published in the IRIN-DHA Emergency Update No. 106 on the Great Lakes, 21st February 1997). This figure appears to be reliable (analysis in a forthcoming document) and has since been quoted by Martin Griffiths, Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Great Lakes Region (IRIN 120 of 6.03), by IRIN-DHA (IRIN 124) and by the French Prime Minister Alain Juppe (IRIN 128. 17.03). This document aims to track refugee flows subsequent to that UNHCR summary in which an estimated 432,103 Rwandan and Burundian refugees were still believed to exist in eastern Zaire. At that time the location of only 197,000 were known, grouped in camps in Tingi Tingi (170,000), Punia (2000) and 'Shabunda' [i.e. Kalima, 25,000] at a time when refugee flows had temporarily stabilised. The subsequent fate of these refugees is hereafter divided into four main groups and treated separately, using 'published information sources' (i.e. from the internet) which can be cited, and which in theory lend credibility to these estimates. Estimates derived from unpublished information sources are given in italic font.



'Advocacy Paper Zaire,' **Message** from Hanna Nolan to MSF Holland programme manager and Communication Department, 5 May 1997 (in English). **D195**

**Extract:**

Today we agreed that as part of a broader advocacy strategy it would be useful to have a paper on the situation of the refugees in eastern Zaire of about 10 pages, for lobbying purposes, donors, UN agencies, US government officials, and possibly as background for journalists although no decision has been taken on this.

The paper needed to be produced by HAD, but HAD has no capacity to do so. HAD has found Sybille Kapferer who also wrote the Shabunda report, and is prepared to write this before Wednesday 14/5, but possibly even by Friday 9 May. She will do this on a consultancy basis and will send an invoice to Ed. Ed and Wilna need to discuss whose budget this should be put on...

The nature of the report:

- Would have a strong humanitarian character (not a HR report)
- Would contain medical data as much as possible
- Would contain eye witness reports by MSF medical staff if available
- Strongly based on field input
- Have a strong message (denunciation) on to what extent the actions we have witnessed, etc. are violations of human rights and humanitarian law

The message:

Is probably along the lines of the message formulated in our previous advocacy initiatives, but needs to be stronger in view of the RC decision (denunciation), further clarified, and specified to Sybille by Phil and Wilna. (Ed will only be able to give minimal support, sorry sorry!)



'Re: lobby activities in the coming few days,' **Message** from Phil Doherty, MSF Holland programme manager, 6 May 1997 (in English). **D196**

**Extract:**

1. Preparation of 10-page summary: Sybille starting today with deadline Thursday.

Input from files, Leslie Lefkow and Paul van Harperen. I will keep contact with Paris, Bxl, HAD, and desks. PR officers to discuss and edit for public distribution.

2. Numbers analysis: Finished by Phil Clarke in London Wednesday. PR officers asked to produce a covering page(s).

- Circulation to desks for comments and use.
- Circulation to UN Geneva and New York, US and UK governments
- Circulation to INGO colleagues, OXFAM, Merlin, SCF and ICRC.
- After discussion, to selected journalists.



'Kivu Updated Report,' **E-mail** from Françoise Saulnier, MSF France Legal Adviser to Phil Doherty MSF Holland programme manager, 6 May 1997 (in English). **D197**

**Extract:**

Following our phone call yesterday evening, I enclosed the revised general report on the situation in Kivu since October. Could you forward it to Sybille? I added a section on the attacks of the camps south of Kisangani, with the information of the debriefing of some team members. I will try to have all the other members' testimonies.

I left a place to be filled with the information from MSF H on the situation in your operational zone regarding health situation of refugees, mortality, denial of access, abuses of humanitarian activities to track and terrorize refugees. I remain on stand-by.

Sincerely

Francoise

PS: I underlined all what as changed compared with the previous text that you'd translated.



'Re-medical reporting,' **E-mail** from Phil Doherty, MSF Holland programme manager to MSF Belgium and MSF France programme managers, 7 May 1997 (in English). **D198**

**Extract:**

We have an urgent request:

As you know a report has been drafted in Paris by Françoise, which seeks to summarise the MSF understanding of the humanitarian situation associated with the Kivu crisis since November last year. Our contribution here has been to produce the English language version and to try to make the report somewhat more medical rather than a global summary.

Our request that you produce a weekly summary report of no more the 2 pages which would be circulated throughout the MSF section HQ offices. We have asked MSF-Goma to write such summary for Goma, Masisi, and Bukavu area. Can your medical depts. arrange soon as possible, within the next 24 hours for example?



*We decided to write 'Forced Flight' after the whole experience with the Shabunda report. We tried to create a process so that we could work together again. But we were looking back, not ahead in a preventive sense. That was a real problem because there was still that whole Biaro-Kisangani episode. There was a big mess, too; there was silence, a refusal to speak out. It was impossible to agree on a common position on repatriation. Biaro, Kisangani - that happened again over two weeks, which were two weeks of paralysis at MSF. Fabien and Pierre-*

*Pascal were on site and brought back information. We decided to use this information anyway; information that hadn't permitted us to save lives. We organised a work group. Dominique Boutriau (MSF Belgium Desk) agreed that I would be part of the editorial committee. There was a consensus and I worked with the MSF Holland team, representing the French and Belgian sections. The bulk of the Dutch information was the Shabunda report. In 'Forced Flight,' we added information on the events at Tingi Tingi and Kisangani. We compiled what we knew and unfortunately, what we were not capable of translating into action. We created a kind of explanation, a response to the debate over the numbers. We said, "You attacked MSF on the refugee numbers but MSF was right. Those people really did exist." It was better than nothing. It helped to rebuild MSF's credibility, which had been weakened by the debate over the numbers - but it couldn't save people.*

Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF Legal Advisor  
(in French).

**The UN denounced the AFDL's degrading treatment of the refugees. On 6 May, the European Commissioner for Humanitarian Action accused the rebels of carrying out massacres and of obstructing humanitarian organisations and the UN inquiry investigating the massacres in eastern Zaire, which remained blocked in Rwanda.**



'UN Accuses Kabila's AFDL,' *Le Soir* (Belgium), 6 May 1997 (in French). [D199](#)

#### Extract:

I didn't think people would even treat cattle like this... Yesterday in New York, the UN accused Laurent-Désiré Kabila's Zairian rebels of showing less concern for refugees than they would for cattle when it prevented humanitarian groups from repatriating the refugees to Rwanda. According to the UN spokesperson, yesterday the rebels loaded hundreds of refugees, more than twice the allowed load, into trucks. "This is absolutely, completely unacceptable. UNHCR has no control over how and where refugees board (the trucks). The dead and the living are crammed in together. The situation is worsening as we speak."

#### "DEATH CAMP"

The rebels continue to refuse the UN High Commission for Refugees access to the Biaro camp, where 30,000 Rwandans await evacuation. There is panic in the air after Sunday's tragedy. That day, 91 refugees died, suffocated and crushed, in an overloaded train evacuating them to Kisangani (40 kilometres north). UNHCR asked to be allowed to enter Biaro to organise the Hutu refugees' orderly repatriation to Rwanda. The UN insists that UNHCR supervise the evacuation so that this

large-scale effort is carried out properly. Yesterday, no trains evacuated refugees from Biaro. UNHCR announced that the trains have been suspended until the agency can supervise population movements. Things cannot continue like this.

The tragedy occurred along a 124 kilometre-long train track built in 1906. At the Zairian rebels' instigation, it was used for a week to transport Rwandan refugees to the transit camp. Forty-seven refugees hospitalized Sunday night, most with broken bones, remained in critical condition yesterday at the Kisangani University Hospital. Several are likely to die. According to UNHCR, three are already in a coma.

Médecins Sans Frontières urges the Alliance to create the conditions necessary to provide for effective aid and carry out repatriation under humane conditions. Many of the Biaro refugees need intensive treatment and high-level care. It is too late for infusions; Biaro is a death camp. More than 2,600 Rwandan Hutu refugees who were not as seriously affected were expatriated yesterday by plane from Kisangani. Ten flights carrying these returnees brought the number of repatriations since the airlift began last Wednesday to more than 7,500 (according to AP and AFP).



'Emma Bonino Accuses Kabila of Transforming Eastern Zaire into a "Slaughterhouse",' *AFP*, (France) 6 May 1997 (in French).

#### Extract:

"Massive human rights violations have been perpetrated in the rebel-controlled areas," Ms Bonino announced during a press conference. "Unimaginable carnage" has been wreaked there and "these regions have been transformed into a slaughterhouse," she added.

Either Mr Kabila's Alliance "is not in control of its troops or it is directly involved in hunting down Hutu refugees," she said, also accusing neighbouring countries, including Rwanda, of "doing nothing" to prevent these acts, "even encouraging them."

"Someone with this kind of record has no place leading a country," she said. "If we want peace in Zaire, the person who initiated this massacre should not be in a position of responsibility."

Ms Bonino stated that the Alliance was systematically "obstructing" humanitarian missions in eastern Zaire and the UN's inquiry in the area. She says the policy is intended to prevent humanitarian and international organisations from "witnessing human rights violations" occurring there.

The UN mission inquiring into the massacres in eastern Zaire has been blocked since Monday in Rwanda. According to a UN spokesperson in Geneva, Laurent-Désiré Kabila's rebels have still not authorised the mission to travel to Goma to begin its investigations in the field.

The mission, composed of special UN human rights reporters, arrived in Kigali last weekend. Members had hoped to travel as quickly as possible to eastern Zaire, specifically

to search for presumed mass graves. But the obstacles imposed by the rebels remain in place even after several days of negotiations in the region and in Geneva.

**On 7 May, MSF France again called for the repatriation, given the current conditions, to be suspended immediately. MSF Belgium was providing medical assistance to refugees on arrival in Rwanda. It also took over from MSF Holland the job of coordinating operations and distributing information within the MSF network regarding Rwanda, Kisangani and the area still held by Mobutu. MSF Holland maintained its position as outlined in the 5 May press release and recommended that other MSF sections do not follow MSF France's communication policy.**



Zaire Emergency: Given Current Conditions, Médecins Sans Frontières Calls for Immediate Suspension of Repatriations,' **Press Release**, MSF France, 7 May 1997 (in French). **D200** [↗](#)

#### **Extract:**

Given current conditions, Médecins Sans Frontières calls for repatriations to be suspended immediately. On Sunday 4 May, 91 Rwandan refugees suffocated while being transported from the Biaro camp to Kisangani.

In recent days, Rwandan refugees south of Kisangani have been repatriated under inhumane and unacceptable conditions.

#### **MSF calls for an immediate halt to the repatriations**

- Until a permanent UNHCR presence is established near the refugees in the camps, transit centres, and during transport
- Until aid activities can ensure that refugees receive medical treatment on site and during transport.

Given their medical condition, many refugees cannot be transported at this time.

More than 60 percent of the Biaro camp population is suffering from malnutrition. MSF calls on Alliance authorities to permit these refugees to receive treatment necessary for their survival immediately and before considering any repatriation.



'Zaire/Rwanda Emergency Communication Update,' MSF Belgium, 6 May 1997 (in English). **D191** [↗](#)

#### **Extract:**

As of now MSF Belgium is taking over as back-up section for MSF operations and for information on Rwanda,

Kisangani and Mobutu-controlled territory. We will try to get organised to get the most important information to you as soon as possible. Tomorrow an update on Mobutu-held territory will follow...

The repatriation to Rwanda continues at a rhythm of 2,000-2,500 per day. UNHCR is planning to step the rhythm up to 3,000 per day. The Kigali team is concerned by the number of people that are being taken on the Ilyushin aeroplane. According to them, 400 people were transported yesterday, when ideally it should be no more than 300. MSF in Kigali as well as in Kisangani warned UNHCR about the danger of putting too many people in the planes...

#### **3. Repatriation to Rwanda**

MSF is the official partner of the authorities for medical screening at the camps through which all returnees transit. Until now, repatriation is going relatively well. MSF teams have no problems referring wounded or ill to hospitals. MSF teams are currently working in Kigali, Gisenyi, and Butare and should start working in Cyangugu...

The message is still the one formulated in our press release of yesterday. We want the Alliance to take responsibility for the refugees on their territory; the ones in Biaro and all the others that are still missing. There has been some tension because of press releases issued by MSF France in which the field and HQ did not agree.

Because of the security strain in the field and the decision to stay in Kisangani, we will try to find the right balance between critical observations, communication of humanitarian info, and advocacy to try and improve the conditions in which repatriation is taking place.



'Zaire/Rwanda Emergency Communication Update,' MSF Belgium, 7 May 1997 (in English). **D201** [↗](#)

#### **Extract:**

We insist that the French line of communication should not be followed. MSF is not against repatriation since it is the only feasible way left to try and get the people out of the shit holes of Kisangani and Biaro and save them. Yes, monitoring activities in Kisangani and Rwanda should be stepped up; the Alliance should help protect the refugees, create conditions for efficient aid and help find the missing refugees. All suggestions, help, questions are welcomed (preferably via mail if not urgent urgent).



'Kisangani **Sitrep**,' Dominique Boutriau, MSF Belgium Desk/Coordinator, 7 May 1997 (in French). **D202** [↗](#)

#### **Extract:**

1.3. Following the third surprise press release from Paris, we reviewed the situation with the Vice Governor and pointed out the problem areas: lack of coordination

with UNHCR; the aid workers' job is not to control riots; it is impossible to treat refugees in the Biaro camp if doctors can only stay there for three hours; permanent teams need to be placed there around-the-clock, which cannot be done given the hostility of the local population. We think it is important to meet with the local population to try to counter the negative view of the refugees, thus easing the situation for aid workers.

The Vice Governor took note and will transmit the information to the soldiers, but he said that they don't like UNHCR, which does not cooperate effectively with them and does not operate transparently. I emphasised that images of Biaro and the death train presented a poor image of the country and that the UN was a well-known institution that could influence that image. The conversation was frank and friendly.

The first thing that the Vice Governor told me is that he had heard a MSF doctor's voice - a male voice - on the radio. It wasn't me...

- 1.8. Statements about the refugees' tragic situation are used increasingly by politicians to take in the Kabila-Mobutu wrestling match; watch out for the way in which our statements will be exploited politically because this has direct repercussions on the local population's attitudes. They are pleased with the rebels' arrival because it means they are no longer being ransacked by the FAZ.

**On 8 May, MSF asked UNHCR to negotiate with the AFDL to obtain access for aid organisations to the refugees and for refugee protection. In a press release, MSF France reported on the refugees' desperate situation at Biaro and on the difficulties in providing aid to them.**



'Médecins Sans Frontières **Statement** to the UNHCR Greater Lakes Crisis Update,' from MSF UN Liaison Office to Mrs Ogata, UNHCR, 8 May 1997 (in English). **D203**

#### Extract:

MSF Recommends:

1. That UNHCR ensure full protection of refugees during the repatriation process.
2. That the UN negotiate for adequate operational access for humanitarian organisations.
3. That the ADFL authorities neither obstruct access [n] or use humanitarian operations as 'bait.'
4. That an international human rights investigation be started immediately.
5. That UN member states use direct pressure on the Great Lakes states to comply with humanitarian principles.

6. That UNHCR and WFP ensure adequate protection and food distribution in the communes.



'Information Update/Médecins Sans Frontières Zaire Emergency: Situation as of 7 May,' MSF France **Press Release**, 8 May 1997 (in French). **D204**

#### Extract:

Rwandan refugees **in the Biaro camp south of Kisangani** remain in a desperate situation. The limited presence of humanitarian groups - a few hours each day - prevent them from improving the refugees' health. Some are so weak that they even refuse to eat or be treated.

In Biaro, the most vulnerable individuals cannot be monitored and life-saving medical activities like rehydration are difficult to establish because they require around-the-clock attention.

In the camp, an MSF team identifies the most seriously ill patients, tries to stabilise their health, and arranges for their transfer to the Lola transit camp. Yesterday morning, some 36 seriously wounded patients were transferred. An MSF team also accompanied the train transfer, organised by UNHCR.

**The Lola transit camp, 11 kilometres southwest of Kisangani**, houses the refugees to be repatriated. Yesterday, 150 patients were being treated in the hospital that Médecins Sans Frontières set up. The majority of them, both adults and children, suffer from severe malnutrition. Many patients do not even have a single item of clothing and are naked. The MSF team distributes pieces of cloth to them. Nearly all the 300 unaccompanied children in the transit camp are also seriously malnourished.

**On 9 May, the members of MSF Belgium's Board of Directors expressed their disbelief at their MSF France counterpart's decision to lift the veto and set up an 'advance security warning'.**



**Minutes** of the MSF Belgium Board meeting of Directors 9 May 1997 (in French). **D205**

#### Extract:

What about advocacy? The Board would like to receive the final version of the Shabunda report, which reports serious events (NGOs serving as bait so that refugees concentrate in one area, making it easier to eliminate them). Mario had held it back for several reasons (certain allegations regarding Rwandan soldiers and their involvement came from unreliable individuals, problem of form, security), but the report showed up nonetheless - via MSF Spain - on the front page of *El País* and on the Internet via MSF Amsterdam.

Strongly worded press releases from Paris, condemning authorities for participating in killing refugees, further heightened the insecurity of expatriates in the field. We can't go back. MSF must continue to demand access to the camps. But in the future, we have to improve coordination among sections because we can't be sure that a similar incident won't reoccur. The coordinators will hold a tele-conference soon on this issue.

During the last MSF France Board meeting, the Board voted to replace the security veto with a 24-hour advance security warning before a press release is issued so that teams have time to evacuate the field. Eric [Goemaere] and MSF Belgium Operational Director believe that after the sections' efforts to create a joint strategy on this issue, it is unacceptable for the MSF France Board to issue a blank cheque for such a plan. Marleen is writing a letter to the Paris Board expressing our disbelief at the 25 April 1997 decision regarding the 'advance security warning'. Marleen regrets the current 'mess' inside MSF International's management and the lack of strategy and coordination on advocacy matters. She notes that the 1 May international Board meeting confirmed that the security veto rule is still in force and that the decision by the MSF France Board should be considered as a suggestion for other sections to review.

[...] In conclusion, the board of directors confirms its support for management efforts regarding advocacy and statements of condemnation.

**In Mbandaka, western Zaire, the Zairian doctors on the MSF Belgium team provided supplies and medicines to the refugees that arrived in the area. In Kisangani, the MSF coordinator met with a French television team investigating the massacres. MSF France's legal advisor began collecting statements from expatriates who had returned from Kisangani to supplement the summary report on the refugees' flight since the attack on the camps.**



'Humanitarian Aid Groups Try to Maintain Contact with Fleeing Refugees,' **AFP**, (France) 10 May 1997 (in French).

#### Extract:

All are among the approximately 50,000 refugees who arrived in the region last month after travelling more than 1,000 kilometres through the Zairian brush.

According to missionaries, Alliance rebels currently surround the town of Ingende, around 100 kilometres east of the port of Mbandaka (northeastern Zaire). The same sources report that nearly 25,000 refugees, who were gathered there, as well as 10,000 more in the neighbouring town of Lollo, are believed to be heading south and west. Some are trying to reach Mbandaka via the Ruki

River, while others are heading south toward Bikoro. However, the terrain is too rough for the humanitarian groups to have a clear picture of their exact location.

MSF spokesperson Mit Philips estimated that 25,000 refugees have reached the town of Wenji-Sekli. Of that number, 15,000 are supposed to still be there but between 3,000 and 7,000 are said to have already crossed the river to reach Congo, near the towns of Lukolela and Liranga. The others have left for Irebu, in the south.

The local population is increasingly impatient with the starving and sick crowds. They try to spread rumours of the rebels' advance to encourage the refugees to continue fleeing.

Forced to move by Hutu militiamen and former Rwandan army soldiers, the refugees fear the Laurent-Désiré Kabila's advancing, Tutsi-dominated, rebel Alliance. They have been wandering through Zaire's mountains and forests since 1996 with almost no access to humanitarian aid.

"They are exhausted," Mit Philips says. "There is considerable malnutrition, illness, diarrhoea, ulcers, and swollen legs. Some are very weak and can barely walk any further." The refugees may receive food and medical assistance at Wendji-Sekli, "but all those who are able leave again," the MSF spokesperson added. "We have no figures, but the refugees say that many people have died on the road." MSF has stepped up its efforts to fight cholera in the region, where it is endemic. So far, there has been no epidemic.



'Zaire/Rwanda Emergency Communication Update,' MSF Belgium, 9 May 1997 (in English). **D206**

#### Extract:

Concerning the huge group of Rwandan refugees between Mbandaka - Zaire River, MSF has no access for the moment because of fighting and tension in the region. A group of 13,000 refugees would still be in Wendji, east of Mbandaka, on the river-bank. Our Zairian doctors have identified Rwandan medical staff among the refugees and provided them with medicine and material...

There are less and less journalists in Kisangani. Dominique has briefed 'Marche du Siècle,' a French high-profile news programme (FR3). Apparently journalists have been trying to go further than Biaro. Wait and see if they find out more about massacres or refugee situation...

Moreover, Françoise Saulnier is coming over on Monday to debrief all people that return from Kisangani, to collect all important data, and prepare a report (for advocacy, when, etc... yet to be seen).

**On 10 May, the AFDL finally authorised humanitarian organisations to travel by train to Kilometre 82 on the Ubundu-Kisangani railroad.**



'Kilometre 25 - The Stench of Death in Zaire,' *Le Monde* (France), 13 May 1997 (in French). **D207**

#### Extract:

But the Alliance obstinately refused to allow travel to Kilometre 82 because of conflict in the area with Hutu from the former Rwandan army. Saturday, they finally gave the green light. The team is composed of representatives from UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, MSF, Save the Children and Omnis, a local NGO.

[...] Lying on the black earth, four naked babies have even lost the strength to moan. Surrounded by general indifference, worms are eating at them. "Mother, you must not leave them like that!" yells Carole, from UNICEF. The team wraps the babies in anything at hand. Further on, near the 'hospital' - a death site housing around 100 patients beneath a tent - the bodies of two dead children rot in the gutter.

Surprised by the delegation, the village chief talks about "the dead we don't want to bury here" and the "damage in the fields". After a lengthy discussion, he authorises the humanitarian aid workers to do their work. It's late by the time the aid workers go to bed in one of the train cars. That way, they can keep an eye on the supplies and medicines the train has brought. At 06:00 on Sunday morning, the distribution is organised...

Around 14:00, the train sets off. Located between Kilometre 52 and Kilometre 41, the Biaro camp gives off a strong odour of decaying flesh. A bit further along, the air clears. But when the train approaches Kilometre 25 at sunset, the smell of death returns. There is no more camp at Kilometre 25. Are these the mass graves people often referred to, though without proof?

The train reaches Kisangani in the middle of the night. Illuminated by truck headlights, 361 unaccompanied children and 89 ill individuals are taken to the transit centre. Many had to be carried because they were too weak to walk. Their expression is lifeless and they moan.

**On 11 May, MSF objected to AFDL's ten-day deadline for evacuating the Biaro site. As rumors of massacres continued to circulate, the refugees remained in a precarious state of health and it was still difficult to provide them aid.**



'Médecins Sans Frontières Condemns Inhumane Conditions Surrounding Evacuation of Rwandan Refugees,' **Press Releases**, MSF France, MSF Belgium, MSF USA, 11 May 1997 (in French). **D208**

#### Extract (1):

[Paris] Kisangani, 11 May 1997: The Alliance (AFDL) is calling on humanitarian organisations to evacuate the Rwandan refugees from Biaro to Kisangani within 10 days. Médecins Sans Frontières is strongly opposed. Hundreds of the Biaro refugees are too weak to be transported and will not survive the trip to Kisangani. Thousands of others are hiding in the forest. On-going rumors report that soldiers are using intimidation to prevent refugees from seeking aid in the camps.

Will those refugees remaining in the region after this 10-day deadline be abandoned simply because they are too weak to walk or too frightened to come out of the forest? MSF fears this will occur if the area south of Kisangani is closed off to humanitarian organisations. MSF thus urges the Alliance to guarantee unrestricted access to the region for as long as the humanitarian groups determine is necessary.

Since 4 May, MSF has distributed 260 body bags in Biaro. Every day, the Zairian Red Cross collects close to 40 bodies. It is unable to do more. It is extremely important to stabilise these refugees' health before transporting them to Kisangani. 382 refugees are already hospitalized in the hospital near the Kisangani airport. 13 died on Friday alone.

Médecins Sans Frontières fears for the fate that awaits the thousands of refugees still missing and asks that an independent human rights commission be admitted into the region to investigate rumors of massacres and intimidation. This commission, as well as humanitarian agencies, must have unconditional access.

#### Extract (2):

Kisangani/Brussels, 11 May 1997:

[same text as MSF France Press release]

For the first time, a Médecins Sans Frontières team of two doctors and four nurses, all Zairian, remained at Biaro overnight to ensure around-the-clock care for the severely malnourished, dehydrated, and exhausted refugees. It is extremely important to stabilise their health before transporting them to Kisangani. MSF is currently treating 382 patients in the hospital near the Kisangani airport. 13 of them died on Friday alone. [same text as MSF France Press Release].

MSF is concerned about the fate of the thousands of refugees still missing [same text as MSF France Press Release]

#### Extract (3):

Kisangani/New York: May 11, 1997 - [same text as MSF Belgium Press Release]

"Will the refugees who remain in the region after 10 days be left to die because they are too weak to walk or too terrified to come out of the forest?" asked Dominique Boutriaux, MD, Coordinator for Doctors Without Borders.

"This is what we fear, should the region south of Kisangani be sealed off from international humanitarian organizations."

[same text as MSF Belgium Press Release]



'Information **Bulletin** 303,' MSF France, 12 May 1997 (in French). [D209](#)

#### Extract:

Lex Winkler went to Biaro yesterday. All that remains of the camp is a path with two rehydration stations and a medical station where candidates for repatriation are also selected. Evacuation conditions have improved since the tragedy on the train, when 100 refugees died. However, the situation remains catastrophic, with a mortality rate of about 25 deaths/10,000 per day. There are 40 to 60 deaths/day at Biaro, excluding those we do not see because not all the refugees have gathered at the site. Ten percent of the people at Biaro are still not in a condition to be transported and 20 percent of the children are severely malnourished. In addition, abuses are continuing. The refugees talk about massacres occurring at Kilometre 51 and make a long detour to avoid passing through that area.

**In Rwanda, MSF teams tried to provide medical assistance to the repatriated refugees, while authorities urged that they be sent to communes as quickly as possible. On 13 May, the French government condemned the rebels' massacres of refugees. On 14 May, the AFDL publicly criticised MSF for using Rwandan refugees to discredit the Alliance.**



'Kisangani **Sitrep**,' Dominique Boutriau, MSF Belgium programme manager/Coordinator, 11 May 1997 (in French). [D210](#)

#### Extract:

Transit centre:

... Screening is also a problem. Too many malnourished people go undetected and are shoved into planes. We will do an update with UNHCR and the medical agencies tomorrow. UNHCR medical coordinator visited Kigali and met our friend Fazil [Tezra, MSF Belgium coordinator in Rwanda]. That gave her a very good idea of the complexity of the problem.

Question: Is it safer to keep the refugees here as long as possible so they can recover their strength (and ability to do harm?) or send them to Rwanda ASAP, even sick and dying? That's a question UNHCR will have to deal with one of these days. McNamara and Sergio Vieira de Mello could help in making the decision. And you? Tonight, I'm a total cynic.

... Repatriation of 1,500-2,000/day. Repatriation by air is going fairly well. However, there are more and more malnourished people on the planes. The screening must be reviewed.

First incidents (two) in Kigali. The problems seem to have been resolved. See the Rwanda sitrep for details.



'Zaire/Rwanda Emergency - Communications **Update**,' 15 May 1997, (in English). [D211](#)

#### Extract:

Negotiations continue about the provision of proper medical and nutritional attention for returnees. There is strong pressure from the government to discharge patients from our facilities in order that the people return as quickly as possible to their communes. The fear is that we will only be able to stabilise the health situations of those arriving from Kisangani, without being able to do anything more than this.

The French government's denunciation of the orchestrated massacres of Rwandan refugees by the rebels two days ago has made security a more significant issue for French members of teams.

The AFDL held a press conference in Brussels yesterday and during this, expressed dissatisfaction with MSF. It was said that MSF is using the Rwandan refugees to create bad public opinion of Kabila.

**On 13 May, the AFDL seized the town of Mbandaka, in western Zaire. AFDL soldiers took 400 Rwandan refugees to the port by force, beat them and told the local population to finish off the survivors. The same day, another group was massacred at the site near Wendji. At that time, international humanitarian organisations were being kept from the region. These events were not made public until some ten days later.**

**Around 15,000 refugees fled to the other side of the river separating the two Congos. They set up in the swampy areas north of Congo Brazzaville at Liranga, Njundou and Lokoulela. With the ICRC's support, MSF teams provided them food and medical and sanitary aid.**



'United Nations, Department of Humanitarian Affairs, Integrated Regional Network, **Update** n°171 on the Great Lakes,' 14 May 1997 (in English). [D212](#)

#### Extract:

MSF-Belgium confirmed that AFDL troops took over Mbandaka in north-western. Zaire on Tuesday morning.

Zairian soldiers had already fled and the town fell without a fight. Missionary sources say they have received reports of rebel massacres of refugees in Mbandaka, who are trying to flee to neighbouring Congo. According to AFP, the French foreign ministry said on Tuesday [that] "totally reliable sources" had reported atrocities in Mbandaka carried out by the ADFL.

There are fears of another looming refugee crisis, as 20-30,000 Rwandan Hutus, who earlier fled Kisangani by boat, mass in Mbandaka. ICRC confirmed thousands have already crossed the river to Liranga, a swampy area in Congo inaccessible by land.

Emergency food has been dropped by helicopter. 3-400 more are crossing the river every day. Most are in a poor state of health and cholera is reported by aid agencies.



'New Killings Attributed to Alliance,' *Reuters-Le Soir* (Brussels), 26 May 1997 (in French). **D213**

#### Extract:

Priests, local officials, and residents said that AFDL men, now in control of the country, had killed more than 200 refugees assembled at the quay of the city's National Transportation Office in the Mbandaka port on 13 May. Mbandaka is an equatorial provincial river port around 600 kilometres north-east of Kinshasa.

The refugees were killed on the day the AFDL seized control of the town. Dozens were killed in the main street and along the road to the airport, witnesses said. According to witnesses, the refugees were arriving from the village of Wendji, 20 kilometres south, where residents, refugees and Red Cross employees reported that

AFDL fighters had also killed nearly 140 refugees on 13 May. The witnesses stated that some of the massacred refugees were former Rwandan soldiers and Interahamwe militiamen, but that they had already been disarmed by the former government's soldiers, and that there had been no fighting.

"I did not count the number of dead, but I am sure that more than 200 people were killed in the town and at the airport," a priest stated. When asked how many refugees were killed on 13 May at the Mbandaka quay, a local administration official said, "more than 200".

Witnesses said that the AFDL fighters forced the refugees to kneel or lie down on the concrete and then fired on them, struck them with bayonets or beat them to death with their rifle butts. Some were thrown directly into the river.



'Information Bulletin 305, MSF France,' 14 May 1997 (in French). **D214**

#### Extract:

Congo: End of the Odyssey.

40,000 Rwandans have arrived in the last few days in Mbandaka (600 kilometres north of Kinshasa, close to the Congolese border). Yesterday, the rebels seized the city. The Rwandan refugees scattered in several directions west to the Congo, where 3,000-3,500 are in Liranga, but also north and especially south, where there are only small groups. Some hid in the small islands in the Congo River that marks the border between the two countries. According to priests in the region, the rebels, now controlling the entire region, massacred the refugees.

Yesterday, there was a meeting of the Congolese government, UNHCR, ICRC, WFP and MSF to discuss refugee reception. The Congo Republic agreed to take the refugees and is sending a barge today onto the river to pick them up.

Three reception sites have been selected: one close to Brazzaville, another north of the capital (Inoni) and the third, northwest of Brazzaville (Mpé). We propose creating transit centres in this region before setting up in one of these three camps. Three organisations are currently present in the region: MSF, Oxfam, and ICRC, which is providing food while waiting for WFP to take over. MSF is sending a three- or four-person team on Thursday night and there will likely be another departure this weekend.

The ICRC asked the Congo Republic and UNHCR to separate the ex-FAR from the civilians, whom they have been holding hostage for months. The most able-bodied are the ones who came that far (2,000 kilometres from Goma) and they include many ex-FAR and Interahamwe.

## "FORCED FLIGHT" AND "MSF ACCUSES"

**On 15 May, the report, 'Forced Flight,' which recounts the forced flight of Rwandan refugees through Zaire, was completed. Lisette Luykx and Marlene Monteyne, two MSF physicians recently-returned from eastern Zaire, went to the US to speak to officials in the US administration and the UN regarding the situation of refugees in eastern Zaire.**



'Zaire/Rwanda Emergency - Communications Update,' 15 May 1997 (in English). **D211**

#### Extract:

*Advocacy/Lobbying*

The two internal reports being discussed today should be ready for use tomorrow. Recommendations for using

the reports will accompany the final versions. Today, in Washington, DC there is a Great Lakes Policy Forum (organised by Refugees International and Council on Foreign Relations) at which Marlene Monteyne, a doctor who was working in Kisangani/Biaro and Lisette Luyckx, who was Medical Coordinator in Goma are in attendance. No active communication will be done in response to the meeting, although a few interviews have been organised by the New York office...

The French government's statement two days ago, denouncing orchestrated massacres of Rwandan refugees by the rebels, has made security a more significant issue for French members of teams.

The Alliance held a press conference in Brussels yesterday, and during which, expressed dissatisfaction with MSF. It was said that MSF is using the Rwandan refugees to create bad public opinion of Kabila.



'Zaire and Témoignage,' E-mail from Catherine Harper, MSF Liaison officer with UN, 15 May 1997 (in English). [D215](#)

#### Extract:

Following requests to make appointments for Lisette Luyckx, Medical Coordinator in Bukavu, I arranged three meetings for tomorrow, Friday, in New York:

1. We will meet first with the 15 Representatives of the EC in New York at their weekly Ambassadors' meeting. This idea was suggested to me by the German Ambassador, whom I called to make an appointment with....

I think that this will be an excellent opportunity to share our concerns on the situation in the Great Lakes region, in particular in Zaire and of the refugees. Of the 15 Member States, four are sitting on the Security Council. I would also like very much to distribute our two last reports and I already consulted Wilna tonight on that possibility. Wilna told me that we could give them the reports. If you don't agree with her, please let her and us know asap!

2. We have an appointment at 15:00 at the UN with DHA [Department of Humanitarian Affairs], DPA [Department of Political Affairs] (including a representative from Sahnoun's office), DPKO [Department of Peace Keeping Operations], and possibly some other agencies like UNHCR, WFP [World Food Programme], UNICEF. Can I distribute the two reports to them as well??...

5. Please take note that an open debate on the refugees (global situation, not only the refugees in the Great Lakes Region) and the Security Council's role versus the situation of the refugees will take place on next Wednesday in the SC chambers. (CNN is already working on a story on it!).

Best regards, bisous,



As soon as we saw things moving in terms of communications on this problem, we appealed to the operational sections involved. We asked them to come. Various people made presentations. ... Each report - 'Shabunda' and 'Forced Flight' - was sent to officials at the White House or the Department of State who were involved in US policy in the Great Lakes region or in humanitarian policy. We had started this process when Marlène Monteyne, a doctor on the Kisangani team, and Lisette Luyckx, MSF Holland's Medical Coordinator in Kivu, visited. Marlène spoke about the Ubundu corridor south of Kisangani.

Antoine Gérard, MSF USA Head of Programmes Department (in French).

**On 15 May, at the end of the day during a teleconference, the executive directors of the MSF operational sections discussed how to use the 'Forced Flight' report that MSF Holland had produced. They decided to remove the section with estimates of the number of deaths and to distribute the report to targeted journalists, asking them not to quote MSF. On 16 May, the French section's emergency officer gave the amended document to a reporter from the French daily, *Libération*, whom he trusted. The document was also provided to the French evening paper, *Le Monde*. A controversy arose around the decision, made during the teleconference, about how the report would be distributed.**



'Forced Flight: a Brutal Strategy of Elimination in Eastern Zaire,' MSF Report, 16 May 1997 (in English). [D65](#)

#### Extract:

Introduction

During late October/November 1996, troops of the Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo-Zaire (AFDL) attacked refugee camps in eastern Zaire. In the camps, former members of the Forces Armées Rwandaises (referred to as ex-FAR) and Interahamwe had been living among the refugees, using the camps as a base for cross-border operations and intimidating the majority of the camp population. As a result of the attacks, humanitarian organisations were forced to leave Uvira on 22 October 1996, Bukavu on 28 October 1996 and Goma on 2 November 1996. These attacks marked the beginning of a period during which refugees internally displaced Zairians and local populations suffered a steady deterioration of their humanitarian situation. Throughout this period, they have been victims of serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, including intimidation, ill-treatment, and killings as well as the denial of adequate protection and assistance. Until the present time, their plight continues.

According to UNHCR data and other unpublished estimates, there were more than 1.2 million Rwandan and Burundian refugees in the Zairian camps at the outset of the AFDL attacks. At least 900,000 returned to their countries of origin. It is estimated that over 340,000 remained in Zaire, hiding in the hills and forests of the Kivu region, in areas controlled by the AFDL, or fleeing northwest, ahead of the advancing front-line<sup>1,2</sup>.

1. After several weeks during which the whereabouts of those who fled west remained unknown, groups of refugees resurfaced in mid-December and makeshift camps were set up at Tingi Tingi and Amisi. In February 1997, the AFDL attacked and emptied the camps at Tingi Tingi and Amisi. Most refugees forced out of Tingi Tingi and Amisi fled towards Ubundu/Kisangani. Another group took the road to Opala and western Zaire.

2. In mid-January, the AFDL attacked refugee camps that had been set up in Shabunda, South Kivu in mid-December, reportedly killing thousands of people. Large numbers fled into the forests in the Bukavu-Shabunda area, now under AFDL control. From there, thousands attempted to return to Rwanda on foot. However, it has become increasingly evident that the military in the area is carrying out operations directed at the elimination of refugees, including women and children, under the pretext of military operations against the ex-FAR and Interahamwe.<sup>3</sup>

3. Those who fled to the Masisi region of North Kivu found themselves in an area of long-standing ethnic violence, which was exacerbated by the fighting between AFDL and the Forces Armées Zaïroises (FAZ). The area continues to be a war zone with clashes between AFDL and supporting groups on one side and coalitions of ex-FAR, Interahamwe, FAZ (also referred to as ex-FAZ), and armed Hutu villagers on the other side. Hutu refugees and local Hutu residents appear to be coerced and targeted by both sides in the conflict.<sup>4</sup>

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) estimates that of the 340,000 refugees who remained in Zaire, the location of at least 190,000 refugees remains unknown. The majority of the refugees in Zaire remain dispersed and largely inaccessible to humanitarian relief organisations. In addition, an unknown number of Zairians have been displaced by the ongoing conflict between the various groups. Those who remain in their villages have also increasingly suffered oppression, intimidation, and even killings at the hands of

the AFDL, or by ex-FAR and Interahamwe as well as ex-FAZ and armed Hutu villagers.

The humanitarian situation in eastern Zaire has been, and continues to be, appalling. The medical status of many of those affected has progressively deteriorated. The delivery of food and medical care to those in need has been severely curtailed by limitations of access imposed on the humanitarian agencies. In part, restrictions are due to difficult physical conditions such as the lack of infrastructure or road conditions. Security concerns have also limited access; on repeated occasions, humanitarian organisations had to pull out of refugee camps or zones due to armed conflict in the area. Refugees could not be followed as they fled further into dense forests.

In many more instances, the AFDL has denied MSF and other humanitarian organisations access to populations in need of medical assistance. On some occasions, the authorities claimed that it would be too dangerous for international agencies to enter certain areas as military confrontations were taking place, or that the presence of ex-FAR and Interahamwe constituted a risk for humanitarian staff. On other occasions, however, it appeared that AFDL authorities simply did not want humanitarian organisations to see what was happening in the areas under their control. In addition, in the Shabunda area, where access was granted, humanitarian organisations realised that humanitarian aid was used as a lure by the military in order to attract refugees out of the forest onto the road, where according to witnesses, they were then killed.

Thus, throughout its programmes in Kivu, MSF constantly encountered difficulties of access and could provide assistance to those in need only on a sporadic and inadequate basis. Yet, the medical data obtained by MSF indicates that the health status of many groups in eastern Zaire, including the refugees, is deteriorating. Health checks performed by MSF at the transit camps in Rwanda (Nkamira, Musange, and Runda) also provided alarming results, particularly with regard to widespread severe malnutrition putting many lives, particularly those of children, at high risk. Furthermore, on the basis of information obtained by MSF staff in the area, there are strong reasons to believe that severe human rights violations have taken place and are ongoing.

The present report describes the humanitarian situation. Unless otherwise stated, information contained in this report is based on the direct experience of MSF staff working in the area as well as information made available to MSF in the field by reliable local and expatriate sources, as reflected in MSF's internal records. The following sections focus on the three main scenarios outlined above: the plight of the refugees forced to move towards Kisangani; the situation of refugees and the suffering of local populations in the Shabunda area; and the conflicts in the Masisi region. ...

### Conclusions and Recommendations

Since the AFDL attacks on refugee camps in eastern Zaire in October/November 1996, the humanitarian situation for refugees, internally displaced Zairians, and the local populations has been steadily deteriorating. At present, it

2. The exact number of refugees is almost impossible to ascertain, due to uncertainty about original camp censuses, possible multiple registrations, and the inexact estimates of returning refugees during the massive repatriation of November-December, 1996. MSF has attempted to compile the variety of data on the numbers of refugees in order to clarify the issue; MSF's conclusions are included in annexe I.

3. Details on the situation in the Shabunda area, including information relating to killings of refugees and an AFDL «ideological seminar» which took place in late March in Shabunda and marked a heightening in pressure on the local population on the part of the military, are contained in a report reconstructing an exploratory mission by MSF along the Bukavu-Kigulube-Shabunda road in late March/early April 1997. This report is on file with MSF Amsterdam.

4. Reports of MSF exploratory missions into the Masisi region are on file with MSF-Amsterdam.

can only be described as dramatic. To a large extent, this appears to be the result of a deliberate strategy by the AFDL, aimed at the elimination of all remaining Rwandan refugees, including women and children. The systematic obstruction by the AFDL of efforts by humanitarian aid organisations to provide the refugees with food and medical assistance amounts, in effect, to a denial of their right to adequate protection and assistance, as granted to them under the provisions of international law. Many refugees have died of hunger, exhaustion, and diseases. Others who have survived thus far remain in an extremely precarious condition. The AFDL has been insensitive to repeated demands and persistent lobbying for improved access to the refugees.

In areas where the refugees were dispersed and hidden in the forests, as well as during attacks on refugee camps, the strategy of elimination undertaken by elements of the AFDL has also taken the form of killing refugees, including women and children. Such indiscriminate killings do not occur in the context of combat. Humanitarian aid agencies have been used repeatedly by the military to either locate refugees or lure them out of the forest in order to eliminate them.

The local population and the displaced have also suffered large-scale infringements of their rights to life and physical integrity, freedom of movement, and enjoyment of property. Residents of areas where fighting took place saw their homes destroyed and their properties looted by ex-FAZ, ex-FAR, and Interahamwe. Once the front-line had passed beyond their villages, in many places that were now under the control of the AFDL, local populations were subjected to intimidation and threats not to help the refugees but rather to assist the AFDL military in their attempts to exterminate them. Methods used by the military include beatings and killings of local population. In the Masisi region of North Kivu, AFDL soldiers killed unarmed local Hutu villagers and destroyed their houses and villages during attacks directed against them because of their ethnicity and suspected support for ex-FAR, Interahamwe, ex-FAZ, and armed Hutu villagers in the area. The latter are also reported to intimidate Hutu civilians and coerce them into co-operation.

MSF is also deeply concerned at the general socio-economic disruption caused by the conflict and its aftermath. In particular, pressure on food resources and military harassment due to the presence of large numbers of refugees is a source of chronic destabilisation for the local population. Continuing insecurity and forced movements, as well as the destruction of local infrastructure, including health care facilities, puts constant strain on the population.

In view of the above, MSF urgently calls on all parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian and human rights law.

In particular, MSF calls on the AFDL:

- To immediately put a halt to elements within the AFDL killing and intimidating refugees and local populations
- To grant full access to populations in need so that adequate assistance may be delivered
- To allow refugees to remain in safe locations and in

conditions that permit their health status to stabilise

- To carry out investigations into alleged human rights violations perpetrated by AFDL personnel with a view to establishing the facts, identifying those responsible, and bringing them to justice, and to adopt adequate measures to prevent the occurrence of abuses in the future
- To facilitate and grant access to international investigations into human rights violations and fully co-operate with human rights investigators
- To facilitate the deployment of human rights monitors in areas under its control and to fully co-operate with them

#### MSF calls on the international community

- To exert pressure on the AFDL and, as appropriate, other influential actors in the conflict, to comply with international humanitarian and human rights law, and, particularly, the provisions contained therein for the treatment of civilians and ex-combatants during armed conflict as well as the international standards governing the protection of refugees
- To assist in identifying and bringing to justice those among the refugee population who bear responsibility for violations of human rights
- To exert pressure on states in the region to comply with humanitarian principles
- To support ongoing efforts for an international inquiry into human rights violations, particularly through providing financial and personnel resources as required
- To support efforts to establish a constant human rights monitoring presence in the area
- To support humanitarian relief efforts and provide necessary funds and expertise

#### MSF calls on UNHCR

- To effectively fulfill its mandate to protect both Rwandan and Burundian refugees as stipulated in its statutes and relevant international conventions
- To bring forward a plan with a view to assist the Zairian population victimised by the effects of the refugee crisis
- To implement their mandate for returnees in Rwanda i.e. not to proceed with repatriations to Rwanda unless there are guarantees for their effective protection in that country

MSF also demands that adequate preparations be made and international supervision ensured for the return of the refugees throughout Rwanda.



'Background on Zaire Communications,' written during summer 1997 by Jean-Marie Kindermans, MSF International Secretary General (in French).  
D149 

#### **Extract:**

Management teleconference (15 May): presented as debriefing of Lex [Winkler, MSF Holland Executive

Director]. Conclusions regarding the report: remove references to the 20,000 deaths; otherwise the newspapers will pick it up. This isn't the time to attack the AFDL; wait for aid operations to finish up in Biaro first. Wait for another time, after an unacceptable event, to hit hard again.

Conclusions (JMK's version): modify the report by removing the death estimates. Amsterdam will provide final version tomorrow. This report is for political officials and a limited, targeted number of journalists agreed to by Amsterdam. Impression that this report doesn't provide anything new, it won't be picked up once the number of deaths no longer appears. The idea is not to be quoted as MSF, but no formal prohibition against saying that MSF wrote it when Bernard Pécoul says he's going to do it.

16/5: Pim asked teleconference participants if anyone had a different interpretation; same for the exchanges between the Paris and Brussels dircoms.

19:00: Anouk Delafortrie [MSF Belgium Communications Officer] in the communications department: the lobbying policy for this report is as follows:

- Use it with a selected group of individuals
- Give it to a selected group of reporters you identify in your country, with the restriction that MSF may not be cited as the information source.



'Zaire/Rwanda Emergency - Communications Update,' 16 May 1997 (in English). [D216](#)

**Extract:**

Important media contacts can call the field directly. Spokespeople are: William Klaus [...] the Coordinator in Kisangani; [...] Fasil Tezra [...] the Coordinator in Kigali; [...] Mit Philips or Nicolas Van Bunnan in Kinshasa; [...] Philippe Petrieux, the Coordinator in Brazzaville.

Task force communications: Anouk Delafortrie [...] Interviews with [...], Director of Operations or Daniel De Schryver, Director of Communications in Brussels. Also Dominique Boutriau is back from Kisangani where she was working as Head of Mission. She is back in her office (Desk) in Brussels. If you want to arrange an interview, contact Anouk on the number above.

All information may be used externally, except where it is indicated otherwise. Be aware that information about military movements and other military strategic information is provided for context reasons and should not be communicated with MSF as the source. ...

The reports

Coming to you on cc:mail and if you have format problems with receiving attached files, now is the time to let us know.

Messages to be communicated to the press

Today at least 60 [??] Rwandan refugees are still dying in and around Kisangani. It is one of the most horrific scenes that we have ever witnessed as aid workers. The people left behind in Kisangani and its vicinity are often too weak to be transported. This is why we have been asking

the AFDL not to speed up the process of repatriation. We have to help them on the spot so that they can recover before being put onto trains, trucks, or planes. Otherwise, they will simply die.

We are concerned about what is happening to the refugees upon their return in Rwanda. Even if today we can keep and help the weakest at their arrival, there are still thousands of malnourished people to come. Refugees that are more or less healthy are immediately sent to the communes. Due to the insecurity in many regions of Rwanda, it is difficult to check how the newcomers are treated.

We heard about a large group of Rwandan refugees trying to reach Congo-Brazzaville and Angola. They are fleeing the rebel advance and are scattered. No one knows exactly how many they are and where they are, but estimates say 30,000 to 50,000. At the end of the refugee trail, you have the elderly, women, and children. They are exhausted and in very bad shape after having crossed the whole of Zaire on foot. We have to prevent these people from undergoing the same treatment as in Kisangani; the only thing we can do today is save those who can still be saved.



'Final Draft Reports,' E-mail from Anouk Delafortrie, MSF Belgium Press Officer to MSF Communication Officers, 16 May 1997, 18:57 (in English). [D217](#)

**Extract:**

REPORT DISTRIBUTION GUIDELINE

The communication policy with respect to the 10-page report and the refugee number analysis is:

1. To use them as lobby papers towards a selective group of people.
2. To give them to a very selective group of journalists which each of you can choose for your country (1, maximum 2), with the restriction that MSF cannot be mentioned as the source of information.

Since MSF-B is centralising and trying to follow-up on all contacts, we insist that for all lobby initiatives (1), proposals need to be submitted to the Director of Operations, [...] FIRST.

For both groups (1 & 2), we ask that they be approached in an individual way, that the report is handed over personally, and with the request to be discrete as to MSF being the source of information.

We need feedback on all initiatives you take and on the outcome of them (coverage in press -> fax us the articles). This policy has been decided yesterday by the directors of MSF-Belgium, France and Holland.



'Kisangani Press Communications,' E-mail from Brigitte Vasset, MSF France Operations Director, to MSF Holland and MSF Belgium Operations Directors and programme managers, 16 May 1997, 19:55 (in French). [D218](#)

### Extract:

Hello,

Before the insults resume, here's what we did yesterday and why.

During the conversation that MSF Belgium Operational Director, Pim [De Graaf] and I had on Wednesday, we agreed to give the report to a selected number of reporters. Pim wanted it to remain a lobbying document, asking that MSF's name not be used to avoid creating problems for the Biaro teams. Mario assumed that distribution to a limited number of reporters - but with MSF's name - was possible. I had used the term 'public distribution'. In the end, despite Pim's reticence, we agreed to target distribution of the report to certain journalists (I had mentioned *Le Monde* and *Libération*). Thursday morning, Marie-Christine asked that we wait 24 hours before giving it out so that the Kisangani team could read it. I agreed. Thursday night, Lex, Bernard and Eric had a discussion on this. I was not there but Bernard's debriefing was clear to me:

-This is not the time to attack the Alliance again, but the one new paragraph in the report is the one dealing with estimated mortality in the last six months. That's the one the reporters will use right away. For that reason, it would be better to remove the paragraph on mortality and rework the estimate for later when it might be a tactical necessity.

- Without this paragraph, the report can be distributed publicly to targeted journalists and they may use it.

- We have to communicate regularly "about the refugees dying in Biaro and Kisangani".

This morning we received the final version of the report and gave it out. After giving a document to a reporter, you can't take it back.

Apart from this procedural aspect, I think that speaking out about the refugees is more important than ever. In William's sitrep this morning, he told us that UNHCR wants to double the transport resources. Where are they going to put the people who are ill??? We've just written a press release about the deaths in Biaro and Kisangani and UNHCR's plans to double the transports.

Would you please send your comments by 11:30 tomorrow so that we can distribute it around noon. Thanks. Brigitte.



*I was involved but we had so many teleconferences in that period that I cannot recall what we agreed to. I think we had agreed to do it but to wait with it; to give people in the field the time to get prepared and to also be informed, which we already found a problem because our people in the field, especially in Goma and*

*Bukavu, were against it. They were against speaking out because they thought that we could do more when we are here. When we speak out, we risk that we have to stop our operations so then we can do nothing anymore.*

*We had discussed it - we shouldn't make a public statement on this. But then, the pressure, especially from MSF France was very big. So we said, "well - at least if you give us the time to consult our people in Bukavu and Goma, so that they can take the preparations." We still had people in the region of Shabunda and we said we have to make it possible to take them back and it will take a couple of days. And the same in Goma but it wouldn't take as much time; there it would be one day or so. In that period, I myself went to Goma. I was in Kampala and participated in this teleconference from Kampala. And I said: "We'll overrule the people in Bukavu and Goma who are against it, but you should give us the time to organise it."*

Pim De Graaf, MSF Holland Operational Director  
(in English).



*At that time, I think there was a real misunderstanding. If you consider the various positions, you can say we all agreed we should do something. But how to and when to do it, there was no real agreement. For me, I agreed to the content, but there was clearly no agreement on when and how. I think also what was very critical here was for the first time in that year, we were establishing an executive committee. So we had had one to two meetings and then in April we all met for the first time to discuss this. And a month later we had this incident. It can also be said that we were not used to working together. That is why a yes from Mr X can be completely interpreted differently than a yes from Mr B. So we did not know how to play the game. If we had been more fine-tuned to each other, this could have been avoided. And also the impact of this crisis asserts that we should have never have done this by telephone, but in person at Brussels. We have learned from this, because from then we were meeting very often in person at least once a month. So we learned but it was too late.*

Lex Winkler, MSF Holland Executive Director  
and Operational Director 1996 - 1997 (in English).



*We agreed to say that it was clearly Rwandan troops doing this kind of thing. But did we reach the point of attacking Kagame directly? Was this a matter of local abuses, pursuit manouvres, and local commanders' decisions, or would we suddenly attribute it to Kagame's own strategy? Today, I would be pretty comfortable saying, "Yes, it was Kagame who organised things." But at the time, the argument against saying that was that we didn't know; we weren't sure it was organised as such. The Shabunda report had just come out. It was hard to know.*

*It's one thing to say, "Kagame was the one who decided to have them killed," and another to say, "Those are local commanders' decisions." It's so complex. I was stuck with refugees who were telling me they wanted to go back to Rwanda. If we said that Kagame had decided to have them killed, there was no reason to plead for their return to Rwanda. If they were going to be killed in Rwanda or their plane was going to be shot down, they might as well just die in the forest. We kept tripping all over ourselves. Between the political scenario and the spontaneity of the advocacy, there was a serious conflict.*

Dr. Éric Goemaere, MSF Belgium General Director  
(in French).

 *In May, on the Thursday before the Whit Sunday weekend, there was a teleconference with Lex Winkler, Eric Goemaere, Jean-Marie Kindermans and Bernard Pécoul. I was on Bernard's side because I didn't quite trust how Bernard, Eric (Goemaere, MSF Belgium Executive Director) and Lex (Winkler, MSF Holland Executive Director) worked together. They acted as if they always agreed but they didn't really. I was Communications Director so I came to hear their positions for myself and to be sure about what everyone wanted. My position had been clear for a long time. I felt that Philippe (Biberson, MSF F President) and Bernard were drifting, not because they weren't convinced but because they didn't want to worsen their relationship with Amsterdam and Brussels. They didn't want to put MSF International's development at risk. This was a very important strategic direction for them at that time. It wasn't only a question of differences between sections. For some time, the general management and operations management at MSF France had not taken responsibility for the political problem that the Great Lakes raised. I argued with Bernard and Philippe, but the result was that they said to me, "You misunderstand us. We want to make diplomatic efforts along with the other sections, but we'll never agree to do that at the price of keeping silent. So you have our guarantee that you'll be able to communicate MSF's position as you understand it." In my opinion, Philippe and Bernard had clearly committed to the correct position. At MSF France, we had decided to put out the report. Bernard worked really hard to convince Lex and Eric. There was a teleconference that I participated in. Eric and Lex had some doubts, but in the end they said yes, very clearly. Before hanging up, Bernard said, "Let me go over the position we've agreed to one more time." It involved publicly communicating a position that Bernard didn't find very new and that he didn't think would get a lot of attention because it had already been published two weeks before as a press release with a little report. The position was: "Rwandan refugees in eastern Zaire are being subjected to an extermination campaign led by the AFDL. So the aid operations are a failure because it is impossible to provide medical aid to people who are being killed." We also saw this position as a way to explain the accomplishments of our aid operations*

*in those places. ... There were discussions on the question of citing the number of people who died, but I don't think there was a formal decision. We did have to give an order of magnitude ... On Friday, the day after the famous teleconference, Daniel de Schryver (MSF Belgium's Communications Director) called me. Eric Goemaere (MSF Belgium's Executive Director) hadn't told him about the conclusions reached at the teleconference. I'm the one who told him. He called me to find out where things were. It was Friday. Saturday, Sunday, and Monday went by. Three days passed and no one called us back, although they knew full well what we were going to do.*

*... The following decision was made during the teleconference: "The information is complicated and sensitive, so if one of us comes up with a plan with a reporter who understands the context and our limitations and manages to write a targeted, quality article, that's what we should do. This isn't about just throwing a press release out there." Marc (Gastellu, MSF France Emergency Manager found Stephen Smith [Libération reporter]. They'd known each other since Somalia. Marc said to us, "Since you're looking for targeted publications, Stephen Smith agrees to take the entire report and give the information at least two high-quality pages." Marc is the Director of Emergencies. He's at the heart of operations, with us. I said to him, "Go for it!"*

Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France programme manager then Communication Director (in French).

**On 17 May, the MSF Belgium General Assembly discussed the advocacy issue. The MSF Holland teams in Goma and Bukavu made it clear that they opposed distributing the report to journalists.**



**Minutes** of the MSF Belgium General Assembly, 17 May 1997 (in French). [D219](#) 

#### **Extract:**

Motion 15:

The GA asks that the nature of every advocacy activity be determined by the existence of aid activity in the field and that the objectives of such advocacy be clearly defined.

Vote for: 35

against: 107

abstentions: 100

The motion is rejected. ...

Recommendations:

Given that:

- Different stages in a given context can and must be identified and that different levels/forms of advocacy correspond to each
- Emotion is a strong indication that advocacy is called for but does not constitute adequate preparation

We recommend that the process become more professional, which would involve:

- Requiring that the advocacy objective be systematically defined for each context/time, and that means and methods be determined formally, as they are in the context of medical assistance projects, including an analysis of: feasibility, limits, etc.
- Choosing how we want to improve our skills in this area (basic training for everyone, expert reference people, etc.)
- Defining security guarantees (rules) for implementing advocacy initiatives.
- Making the most appropriate form of advocacy a systematic concern in all contexts (create reflex response - i.e. data gathering)
- Structuring the organisation to allow monitoring of contexts and incidents over time (create a record, network, etc.)



**Message** from MSF Holland teams in Bukavu and Goma to MSF Holland and MSF Belgium programmes managers and Executive Directors, 17 May 1997 (in English). [D220](#)

#### Extract:

We really are fed-up, frustrated, tired and demotivated by the way this report business is going on. It seems that we who are running the biggest risk have little or no influence in the process and that people sitting in offices at a 9,000 km distance, preferably from sections who don't have any projects in this country, are taking decisions of which the results are doubtful and which endanger our position.

We totally lost trust that HQ will control the information that is sent to them which puts serious question marks about the information we should send them anyway. Although the contents of the report seem accurate, why does MSF's name need to be all over it when you still have a sizeable team in the field trying to remain operational? Further, what is the use of talking about 'selected journalists' and 'confidential' if reports like this are still sent to MSF Paris who will send it straight to the international press anyway?

What did we learn from the last time, when it was made clear to Dominique that the Alliance will not accept reports in the international press, which are not discussed with them? It appears we learnt nothing.

The option given to us to present this report to the Alliance was a further indication to the field of how little comprehension HQ has of what is going on here. By opening a dialogue with the Alliance, we do not mean that we wish to march into their office and hope to discuss, calmly and rationally, that they are all mass murderers (and by the way, you have just passed the same message to the

press, again). That type of approach just doesn't cut ice here...

We are already experiencing difficulties with the authorities as fall out from the last statements, and certainly do not need to give anymore ammunition to people who are not known for their rationality, especially in the light of what happened to UNICEF earlier this week.

We appreciate that a lot of work went in to the report and that it contains a good summary of the facts: it is a shame to waste this by surrounding it with emotional hyperbole which we cannot use here. Would it be possible to edit a version of facts and statistics only which can be given to the alliance as a basis for our medical concerns?

**On 19 May, in its 20 May issue, the French evening newspaper, *Le Monde*,<sup>5</sup> published excerpts from MSF's report.**



Claire Tréan, 'In the East, AFDL Forces Pursue "Slow Extermination" of Rwandan Refugees,' *Le Monde* (France), 20 May 1997 (in French).\* [D221](#)

#### Extract:

After facing considerable difficulties, the humanitarian organisations authorised to respond in early April found people in a catastrophic state. "These aren't sick people anymore, they are pre-corpses," an MSF team reported. "They don't even have the strength to eat." Rwandan soldiers are among the escorts supervising the humanitarian groups' visits.

In mid-April, Kabila's men again prohibited the NGOs from obtaining access to the camps south of Kisangani. The camps were attacked between the 21st and the 23rd. "On 23 April, UNHCR and the reporters who were authorised to return to the Kasese camp found it empty," Médecins Sans Frontières noted in its last report. "All the refugees, including the sick and 9,000 children, had disappeared. The visit was interrupted when firing was heard. The AFDL attributed the shooting to "fighting". and it was impossible to examine the reported mass graves more closely.

On 28 April, the MSF team was authorised to return to the Kasese and Biaro camps. "All the health infrastructure had disappeared, as had all the refugees who were being treated there." 1,250 people had begun hospital treatment; MSF estimated that 5,000 others were unable to walk: "These 6,250 refugees were too weak or ill to flee and it is unlikely that they could survive for a week without medical assistance," the report noted. "MSF found neither any signs of them nor their bodies." ...

The NGOs were afraid they would be used as bait. "We

5. An evening newspaper, *Le Monde* goes on sale at noon of the day prior to its official publication. Thus, the 20 May issue of *Le Monde* was available on 19 May at noon.

obtained authorisation to go to certain places - and then that was it," a humanitarian aid worker reported. "In the meantime, the soldiers [AFDL] announced our arrival by calling people to assemble and when we went back there, we didn't find them." In this region and others, foreigners have noticed suspicious freshly turned squares of earth.

**On 20 May, the French daily, *Libération*, published long excerpts of the report under the title, '190,000 Hutu Refugees Missing in Zaire - MSF Accuse.' The main article noted that the report, dated 16 May and written in English, was jointly published by 'all MSF sections.' The Belgian and Dutch sections responded negatively to the publication.**



Stephen Smith '190,000 Hutu Refugees Are Missing in Zaire - MSF Accuses,' *Libération* (France), 20 May 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

190,000 Hutu Refugees Missing in Zaire *MSF Accuses*  
 A Médecins Sans Frontières report offers an estimate of the number of persons who have disappeared since November, fleeing from, or as a result of abuses committed by Laurent-Désiré Kabila's troops. *Libération* presents the report's contents here. The report condemns "a deliberate strategy aimed at eliminating all Rwandan refugees." MSF says that after experiencing the phenomenon of "the dead without name," the world must not become accustomed to, "the dead without number." ...

All MSF teams in the field and all the organisation's national sections contributed to the report on the fate of Hutu refugees in eastern Zaire. The document concludes that Laurent-Désiré Kabila's movement is pursuing "a strategy of extermination" and estimates the number of people missing at 190,000. *Libération* obtained a copy of this report, written in English and dated 16 May. The total number of Hutu refugees dispersed throughout the Zairian forest is estimated at 340,000. These refugees were attacked in late October-early November while assembled in camps near the Zaire-Rwanda border around Goma and Bukavu. They fled fighting, sometimes travelling as many as 1,500 kilometres across Zaire or hiding in the Equatorial forest. Some are still there. Based on specific witness statements, MSF charges the AFDL with "a deliberate strategy aimed at eliminating all remaining Rwandan refugees, including women and children."

[...]

Some of the MSF sections - France, Belgium and Holland - were not eager to issue a public report whose message would be damning for Zaire's new rulers. But in the end, they reached consensus on the "duty to speak out." Voicing his regret that no one has been able to determine a total count of refugee deaths in eastern Zaire, an NGO

official said, "we have to continue working so that we can at least establish an order of magnitude. Otherwise, after all those dead without names, the world risks becoming accustomed to the dead without number."



**Minutes:** Zaire Task Force, MSF Belgium, 20 May 1997 (in French). [D222](#)

**Extract:**

Following *Libération's* "outing" of the Doherty Report, two questions (among others...):

- 1 - What is MSF's reaction to the media?
- 2 - What should our security policy be for teams in the region?

1. Media

NB1: the 190,000 figure of the "disappeared" is a minimal estimate.

NB2: the *Libération* article reports the accusations against the Alliance and Rwanda.

**Timing:**

-The timing is poor because MSF will find itself identified politically as primarily anti-Kabila.

-The timing is good because in a week, it will be too late, particularly in Rwanda. We didn't want to speak out earlier so that there would be time to test the diplomatic route via direct contacts in the field.

-On the other hand, we wanted to speak out because too many people have disappeared and the mortality at the sites is too high.

- BUT IN FACT THE TIMING WASN'T REALLY A MATTER OF CHOICE.

**Basically:**

-The message must be focused on the refugees, mortality, and the refugees' condition - not on Kabila.

-The message has to talk about physical elimination of refugees as a result of lack of access (particularly in the communes) and non-protection; we have to talk about the "chain" of refugees stretching from Kisangani to Rwanda.

-We have to call for protection of the refugees and an international inquiry.

-And no backtracking like: Having become the sole authority, Kabila must be made to face his responsibilities and not forget human rights.

Operations Directors' message - it has become impossible to work after:

-The media onslaught

-The inconsistency between the guideline for distributing the message and the events.

NOTE: There was no consensus on distributing the report. Distribution? Limited distribution? But in reality, as soon as the report came out, via whatever channel, everyone had it.

## 2. Security

-There are the expatriates (60 in Rwanda+Congo) and local staff.

-Clearly, we're not sending anyone else to the field for now.

-Kisangani: William left today to meet with the Alliance and the governor. He'll also put Mbandaka on the table.

-Mbandaka: no expatriates, local team. No going back into William's sitreps, so information stays within MSF Belgium.

-Kinshasa: no travel. Mit will not meet with the Alliance on the subject of the report.

-Rwanda?

### Instructions:

-Take the authorities' pulse, gauge the impact of the advocacy

-Prepare for expulsion (Biara will be empty soon...)

-Take a proactive approach toward the Alliance and in Brussels, also toward the Embassy

-Prepare for withdrawal (total, not partial) from the region.



'MSF Accuses,' E-mail from MSF Belgium Director of Operations to Directors and programme managers of MSF France and MSF Holland, 21 May 1997 (in French). [D223](#)

### Extract:

Philippe, Bernard, Brigitte,

Dear Friends,

After thinking about this, I am writing to you regarding our advocacy on the Rwandan refugees.

Thursday night, management formally decided on a strategy that would not have the kind of repercussions we experienced with *Libération* (=distribution with warning not to quote MSF too much) because you agreed to use the report at a more opportune time (for example, other abuses in Mbandaka) and thus, not put our operations in danger last weekend. Meanwhile, the operations directors formally agreed (even if verbally) not to distribute the report's draft version but to send out the final one following their revisions issued on Friday morning.

I'm starting from the position that within the overall MSF movement, we want to do good for all the refugees, whether by using the 'shield' (intervention strategies) or the 'sword' (advocacy strategies).

But we obviously know that within each section and among sections, we have to agree on advocacy strategies because they are so varied. However, once a strategy has been chosen (in this case, Thursday night), we must honour that choice.

Your behavior completely contradicts the letter and spirit of that decision.

1. The report was distributed to a journalist who did not keep silent regarding MSF. On the contrary, *MSF Accuses...* Maybe Mr Smith did not get the message that he couldn't

cite MSF as he did...? A case of simple negligence? That's bad enough. Convenient oversight? That's worse!

2. The report was given to *Libération* and *Le Monde* on Friday MORNING, before the corrections were made and the final version printed ... and there were important changes to be made!

Today there are two versions of the report. Simple negligence or premeditated action? I find this all very exhausting! Why mobilize everyone around agreements that are basically ignored? If MSF's decision-makers don't agree on advocacy strategies, if they believe compromise is unacceptable and that we should not make agreements that seem shaky to them, then let them discuss things openly before making decisions. But I don't want to go through all this craziness again only to have to do damage control in the end.

We're playing with the lives of people in the field. We know that these newspaper headlines put their lives in danger and that they did not have a chance to prepare for the possible impacts of a highly condemnatory advocacy approach.

Today, we have around 60 expatriates and dozens of national staff on site across all sections (Lubumbashi, Kinshasa, Goma, Bukavu, Kisangani, Gisenyi, Butare, Cyangugu, Kigali, Kalemie, Katana, Mbandaka, etc.) and we can't continue to play this game.

I think that we must speak out forcefully, if necessary, and publicly. I find the timing unfortunate but I think we must also allow the field time to prepare and understand the message.

Today, the Congo's borders are closed and French nationals are in danger. I hope you understand fully your responsibility towards the sections that are today responsible for operational management and advocacy in the field.

I believe that this very serious incident demands that we meet to discuss and provide explanation, because we cannot continue like this.

We'll be in touch soon.

Regards,

Mario.



'Comments on the Report,' E-mail from Task Force Comm, MSF Belgium to all MSF communication departments, 20 May 1997 (in English).

[D224](#)

### Extract:

It has been decided between the field coordination offices and the desks here in Brussels that there will be no direct access for the press to the field teams specifically for comment on the contents of the report that came out on the weekend.

All enquiries, etc. should be handled by communications departments as it is too rough to ask of the field to provide answers in an already difficult local situation.

In case of questions about exactly what we want, a rough guideline is to say that we hope the new administration of

Zaire/Congo will be able to address the problems raised in the report. Try to take the emphasis away from the term 'I accuse' and as always, the primary concern is the health and well-being of the populations we are working with (including the fact that there are people missing).

The word 'genocide' has surfaced a couple of times, and it is important to know that we are not talking about a genocide, so no, that is not our statement.

Your comments and ideas and feedback are much appreciated.

*At least, we wanted to give the people in the field the chance to decide for themselves. I remember that we didn't feel as an organisation that we should leave. But that we should at least be open and say to the people in the field, "If you don't feel confident and safe, of course you can leave." That's normal. Everybody can always leave. That was not possible anymore because the report was on the front page the morning after the teleconference. I remember that after the teleconference, Lex (Winkler, MSF Holland Executive Director) came to me with some feedback (from the meeting) but it was not clear to me. I called Brigitte (Vasset, Director of Operations MSF France) because I had been working with these people for a long time so I knew her. She said, "It has already been sent to the Libération - this was the agreement in the teleconference-I don't know what your problem is." She didn't understand why I was asking.*

Wilna Van Artzen, MSF Holland Emergency Desk Officer (in English).

*Then, the very next day, it was in Libération, which to me indicated that at the moment that we were having the teleconference, the information had already been given to the Libération - or was being given, at that very moment. Then hell broke out. [...] Once this happened, there was indeed one line in MSF Holland. That this is destroying confidence between the MSF sections, and that it created a risk for people in the field. And the risk for the MSF people in the field was the biggest issue. Not so much the advocacy and the message, but the fact that it was done without consent of MSF Holland and MSF Belgian. About the message itself, there were mixed feelings here. Some people would say, "Well, the message is not helpful anyway because, what will it do? This is just emptying your own emotions." But other people would say: "Maybe we have to do it because we are not very operational, not very active in the field, so it's time to do this." So it was mixed but I think 100% of the people here were against the timing of it and the way that it was done.*

Pim De Graaf, MSF Holland Operational Director (in English).

*My major criticism of the article's publication in Libération, beyond the way things operated, the quality of the text, etc. was that this document appeared in a French newspaper when France was totally involved and it virtually backed up the French policy. In addition, it was picked up by Radio France Internationale and on the national radio station by Juppé (the French Prime Minister). We should ask ourselves whether MSF wasn't just a dupe of French policy?*

Alex Parisel, MSF Belgium, Human Resources Director (in French).

*"MSF Accuse," that's total hypocrisy. We made a decision, we sent the text. I spent the weekend at MSF Belgium's GA. I came with the report and announced that we were putting it out. During the weekend, I was questioned by Stephen Smith of Libération, etc. "MSF Accuse" came out on Monday morning. Think it was a surprise in Belgium? No way! I remember clearly that Lex Winkler was at the MSF Belgium GA. At that time, we'd lost Jacques de Milliano [former Executive Director and then President of MSF Holland]. So, quick advocacy was over for MSF Holland.*

Dr. Bernard Pécoul, MSF France Executive Director (in French).

*I have been covering both positions of Executive Director and of Director of Operations in 1996 and part of 1997. We had to change over and to appoint a new director for such a short time it was not a good idea. The transition from one to four Directors of operations was very difficult at that time and also there were many different opinions about it. Here, many people, besides me, did not approve the point of view of Jean-Hervé [Bradol, Communications Director, MSF France], did not agree with the opinions, making life more difficult.*

Lex Winkler, MSF Holland Executive Director and Operational Director 1996 - 1997 (in English)

*We all agreed about going public with this report. There was a week of careful negotiations on the content of what we were going to say, particularly whether we were going to accuse Kagame at this stage. I was against accusing the Kigali regime by name in this matter. Rightly or wrongly ... it's true that today, the picture would be clearer. I thought we had reached an agreement*

on that. Paris went its own way and, unknown to everyone else, published the report in *Libération*. We found out about it when we bought the paper at the news stand. Once again, they'll say, "The others are dragging their feet so slowly that it would never have come out!"

...The agreement among sections was that the report would come out the following week, Monday or Tuesday, and we'd have press conferences pretty much everywhere at the same time.

Dr. Éric Goemaere, MSF Belgium General Director  
(in French).



*I wasn't responsible for the title of the Libération article. I didn't choose it. Stephen Smith, the reporter, wasn't responsible for it either. He didn't choose it either. So we shouldn't be criticised for choices that weren't ours to make.*

*The day the report was published in Libération, I got a phone call from Daniel de Schryver [Communication Director, MSF Belgium] saying, "That's great what you did, we've also done some communications. It worked. It's great, I'm really pleased."*

*The same day, there was a phone call from the MSF Belgium Director of Operations to Brigitte Vasset (MSF France Director of Operations). "Congratulations, that's terrific." Brigitte came to see us in the glass room (meeting room at MSF France headquarters) and debriefed us on the call she'd just had from him. "Everything is going great, I just spoke to the MSF Belgium Director of Operations, he's pleased, etc." That's when Judith Pasquier was in the room filming her documentary on MSF. That scene is in the film. At that point, I hadn't heard from the Dutch. There was a big problem in Holland. Erwin, the Communications Director, didn't agree with the others at all. It was a mess. So the day ended like that and everyone was happy.*

Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France programme manager then Communication Director (in French).

**On 20 May, Laurent-Désiré Kabila arrived victoriously in Kinshasa, the capital of Zaire - now renamed Congo - and proclaimed himself President.**

**The 'Forced Flight' report was cited by the international press. Samantha Bolton, temporarily in charge of coordinating communications on the Zairian crisis within the MSF movement, informed all communication departments that all sections had agreed to go public with the report.**



Howard French, 'Kabila Reaches Congo's Capital after 7-Month Quest,' *The New York Times* (USA), 20 May 1997 (in English). [D225](#)

#### Extract:

In a voyage that marked the end of one of Africa's most spectacular campaigns for power, the country's new president, Laurent-Désiré Kabila, arrived here tonight from the southern city Lubumbashi to take over the capital, but did not announce his government as he had promised... While there was no lack of support for Mr Kabila in Kinshasa, there was criticism of his rebel movement from the outside. Reuters reported today from Paris that Doctors Without Borders, an international medical aid group, issued a statement saying that Mr Kabila's forces planned to kill "all remaining Rwandan refugees, including women and children" in Congo. The report also charged that the efforts of aid agencies had been manipulated by the rebels in order to find the refugees and kill them. "Humanitarian aid agencies have been used repeatedly by the military to locate refugees or lure them out of the forest in order to eliminate them," said the charity's report.



'AFDL Accused of Killing Refugees,' *The Guardian* (UK) - *Reuters*, 21 May 1997 (in French). [D226](#)

#### Extract:

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) accused the rulers of the new Democratic Republic of Congo, yesterday, of planning to exterminate Rwandan Hutu refugees remaining in the country.

It said that Hutu refugees, in what was Zaire, were being killed or starved and aid agencies' assistance was being systematically obstructed.

"To a large extent, this appears to be the result of a deliberate strategy by the alliance aimed at the elimination of all remaining Rwandan refugees, including women and children," it said..., and other agencies of failing to repatriate them.

MSF said it was told by an Alliance military commander that "all those in the forest are considered to be the enemy." The report said refugees had been indiscriminately killed in the forest or in attacks on camps as part of an "extermination strategy".

"Humanitarian aid agencies have been used repeatedly by the military to locate refugees or lure them out of the forest in order to eliminate them," it said.



'Congo-Zaire: Médecins Sans Frontières Accusés,' (extract from the report published 16 May 1997). **Four-page** document sent to MSF France donors, late May 1997 (in French). **D227**

**Extract:**

Our *témoignage* is meaningless unless it arouses solidarity. Our report has received wide coverage in the national press. We are pleased that our *témoignage* has received such publicity; the crimes perpetrated in Zaire will not be ignored. It is no longer possible to say, "We didn't know." It is up to the politicians to step in and put pressure on the authors of these crimes, so that they can be stopped and brought to trial. Médecins Sans Frontières will continue to fulfil its role - caring for the refugees, who are still being harassed and targeted for systematic extermination...

*"In late October and early November 1996, troops belonging to the Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo-Zaire (AFDL) attacked refugee camps in eastern Zaire... Since then, the situation of both Rwandan refugees and displaced Zairians has steadily deteriorated. Throughout this period, they have been subjected to serious violations of their human rights, including intimidation, violence and murder, and have been denied adequate aid and protection."* Our report retraces the itinerary of the Rwandan refugees who fled into the Zairian interior six months ago, as the AFDL troops advanced.

We came to help the refugees in the camps that line the route of their purgatory, from Tingi Tingi to Ubundu and Kisangani, from Shabunda (Bukavu region) in the south, and in North Kivu. In all these regions, we found that AFDL troops employ a variety of methods to eliminate the refugees...

1. The refugees are being harassed and their camps attacked. Thousands of our patients have disappeared...
2. Refugees - men, women and children - have been murdered...
3. Médecins Sans Frontières and other humanitarian organisations are being prevented from reaching the refugees, who need medical care and food.  
[...]
4. Médecins Sans Frontières and other humanitarian organisations have been used as bait to attract and murder refugees
5. We know that mass graves exist...  
[...]

"At present, the humanitarian situation of the refugees can only be described as tragic. To a large extent, this seems to be the result of a deliberate AFDL strategy aimed at eliminating all the remaining Rwandan refugees, including women and children. The AFDL's systematic

obstruction of humanitarian organisations' efforts to feed the refugees and provide them with medical assistance amounts to a de facto denial of their right to adequate assistance.

Many refugees have died from hunger, exhaustion and disease. Others have survived but are living in extremely precarious conditions. The AFDL has turned a deaf ear to repeated requests for improved access to the refugees."



'Sam's Message for All Sections,' **E-mail** from Samantha Bolton, MSF Press Officer, 20 May 1997 (in English). **D228**

**Extract:**

This is Samantha here - have been drafted over to MSF B to help for the next couple of days before the AGs [General Assemblies] to help coordinate messages.

QUICK UPDATE/ Eric Goemaere is in Kigali re returnees (so expect more tomorrow when Kabila and the AFDL will have taken Kinshasa) and more importantly today the full Confidential 10 page report (Forced Flight)... and numbers report has been released in Libération in France.

ALL SECTIONS AGREE TO GO PUBLIC FULLOUT TO SPEAK ABOUT THE REPORT - BOTH REPORTS ARE NOW PUBLIC !!!  
INTERVIEWS -This is the message to brief journalists with: Philippe Biberson in Paris and [MSF Belgium Operational Director] in Brussels are available for interviews. No one in the field is speaking today  
MESSAGE/THIS IS A CALL FOR ACCOUNTABILITY BY NEW AUTHORITIES

(the news is really in the numbers report).  
According to numbers compiled from UNHCR data, 190,000 refugees are still unaccounted for. Many have died of starvation and there are persistent accounts of massacres whether systematic or isolated; no one knows exactly what has happened to them.

Now that the war is officially over and the new authorities are in power and in full control, (Kabila and AFDL) they must assume these responsibilities.

Since October 1996 the refugees were forced to move with the front line and they were considered to be a military target - today the war is over and MSF requests that they be granted the protection they are entitled to and that they not be submitted to any attacks and that the sick and wounded be granted assistance and that security be granted by the forces; that the return be conducted with a minimum of dignity and choice and that assistance can reach those hiding in the forest.

Grant full unhindered access to independent international human rights commissions to investigate the massacres and to aid agencies to find and assist the missing refugees.

Médecins Sans Frontières reaffirms its commitment and availability to cooperate to assist the refugees and local population.

OTHER POINTS TO CONSIDER

-Under no circumstances are we talking about genocide; more about systematic and circumstantial killings - but more importantly where are the missing refugees?  
- We do not want a return to the Mobuto days - now is a chance to replace a bad government with an accountable one.

 There was one day when we didn't stop fielding telephone calls from all over the place - France, Europe, the US... We didn't think the report would get that kind of coverage because to us it was just a compilation of information; parts of it had already been published or had appeared elsewhere - there was no scoop. The report came out very late, and the fact that it was taken up in the way it was proves that journalists had wanted to publish this information earlier, but they didn't have the sources. They probably needed confirmation. It has to be said that journalists didn't find it easy to do their job in the field. It was almost impossible for them to obtain authorisations. Very few managed to get access and they didn't find it easy. They didn't get much cooperation from us at MSF, either. We didn't have the right to distribute the report because it was confidential. So we gave the journalists a verbal briefing on its contents. But as we were saying things like, "don't quote MSF, you'll just have to go and see for yourself... But we know that if you manage to get there you'll encounter huge difficulties." It was quite complicated!!! In principle, Kisangani seemed easier to deal with but there were still problems of access and MSF teams stuck to the facts. They had to be pressed before they'd talk about the stampedes during the repatriations and the people wounded by gunfire. The team's coordinators were worried about the threat to security even before the reports came out...

Anne Guibert, MSF France Press Officer (in French).  
Statement taken by Anne Fouchard-Brown in September 1997 (in French).

 This report caused a bigger stir than the others. The front page of Libération stirred things up. It was the first time that MSF had had a full page in Libération. I feel that on a certain level the international media already knew and accepted the reality of the refugees' existence. But they didn't know there was a massacre strategy and that the RPF was directly responsible for it... The English-language media didn't give it all that much coverage. But it's impossible to make the front page of Libération without the other media knowing about it. So for tactical reasons, some took it up and others didn't. But they all knew.

Dr. Éric Goemaere, MSF Belgium General Director  
(in French).

 MSF published a report denouncing the actions of the AFDL, which worried many of their colleagues. Personally, I used this report and got a very good result. We know perfectly well that if we acquire a reputation for always complaining, the complaints lose their impact. But when an organisation like MSF decides to say, at a certain moment, "We have seen too much, we are now forced to speak out," the decision to speak out has a certain impact. That statement meant something. The fact of being able to quote MSF gave that article more impact than other articles, where I'd had to quote anonymous sources. In journalism, open sources are always more powerful than anonymous sources. Of course, I can't see myself advising MSF or any other NGO to take such decisions. But as a journalist, I can state that both decisions, to speak publicly or not, are valid. MSF is a credible source, but it has to be said that as it's a European organisation, it's not so known to the American press. For the ordinary reader that newspapers are trying to reach, a statement by MSF carries less weight than a statement by Amnesty International, which has a higher profile in the United States.

Jim Rupper, Washington Post East Africa  
correspondent 1996-1997 (interview conducted by  
Anne Fouchard), 19 September 1997 (in French).

**The report's publication was greeted with anger by MSF teams in the field; some of them had not been warned that the document would be made public. They felt that it should have been shown to the AFDL, whose reactions they feared, before being given to the press.**



**Letter** from Pascal Vignier, MSF France coordinator in Kinshasa, to the General Director, Communications Director, and programme manager of MSF France, 20 May 1997 (in French).  
**D229** 

**Extract:**

Hello Paris,  
Absolutely delighted to see that the operational centres are capable of understanding and getting on with each other, in short, of denouncing the situation of the Hutu refugees in Zaire, shit, I mean the Democratic Congo. I note, however, that you seem to have forgotten the existence of the Belgian and French teams in Kinshasa, which amount to 40 people at the very least. This is both regrettable and dangerous.  
Regrettable, since at the very moment I'm supposed to re-establish contact with the new authorities, I'm totally unaware that you have decided to remind us of their presence in a more indirect way. You might think I'm a bit thick but frankly, I didn't envisage introducing myself

to the new government armed with such a discourse. Anyway, I'm prepared to have a change of heart, as long as I'm kept informed of the communication policy you decide for us.

Apart from that, I'm the first to follow you on the facts of the dossier for, I may remind you, not so long ago I was one of those who directly witnessed what was happening to the refugees. You know, Tingi Tingi! You could have talked to me about it, my name's not [...], General Director MSF B- I think I would have understood... twigged...

[...]

Imagine the liberation of Paris in 1944. The Parisians are out on the streets, armed with their clippers, and MSF denounces the bombing of Dresden. Then a small team sets off through the streets in a gas-powered Citroen duly festooned with the regulation stickers and flags, because they've been told that these accessories will contribute to their security.

That's more or less the situation you've placed us in, only here the clippers are more effectively replaced by a burning tyre around your neck. Luckily, the press is there to tell us what's going on but as for you, you won't be winning the Prix Albert Londres this year.

But finally, if some of you think that communication with the field doesn't matter, I'll give you a tip so you can really fulfil your potential. Young and Rubicam are recruiting creative staff who report their projects directly to the commercial director, last door at the end of the corridor, on your right...



**Letter** from Frédérique Marodon, MSF France in Kinshasa, to the directors of MSF France, 20 May 1997 (in French). **D230**

#### Extract:

Who are they trying to kid? At the last Board meeting, the communication veto was withdrawn but a 24-hour security window was maintained so the teams could be warned.

It seems that in the euphoria of your entente between operational centres, the field workers have become pawns - they can't understand the operational centres' high strategy so why bother telling them? Yet at the same time, they are told to get on with making contacts so the work can continue.

I can only hope that during coordinators' week you won't propose, for the 26th year, a debate on team security because these days, if we want to evaluate the risk, all we have to do is listen to RFI.

Although I'm in complete agreement on the facts in the dossier and I think we would have been capable of supporting it, I'm totally disgusted by our casual attitude.

Fred - the management pawn.



**'Re: Media Coverage on Leaked MSF Position Paper on Zaire,' Message** from MSF Goma to MSF Holland programme manager and Director of Operations, 21 May 1997 (in English). **D231**

#### Extract:

The media coverage of the leaked MSF position paper on Zaire continues to grow. Besides the front-page coverage in *Libération* and *Le Monde*, which you informed us about, MSF was directly quoted in repeated broadcasts of TV5, RFI, and BBC, including interviews with MSF France. Each of these programmes is heavily listened to here.

An overview of the coverage follows:

- BBC: Françoise Saulnier at MSF- France was interviewed about the MSF report. She stated that MSF has seen corpses [resulting] from the AFDL strategy to kill refugees, that the AFDL has denied our access to the refugees, and that MSF received threats from the AFDL. Referring to the systematic killing/massacres of refugees, Saulnier admitted that MSF does not have proof of the massacres in the form of bodies or other forensic evidence probably since the AFDL got rid of the bodies.

In a good counter-offensive backed up by the BBC correspondent in Kinshasa, the AFDL denied responsibility. AFDL stated that Kisangani was a newly liberated area and therefore difficult to control. Moreover, so-called hard-core or rogue elements of the multi-factional AFDL, particularly the Tutsi, are hard to control in their search for revenge. The BBC correspondent added his view that for all these accusations, there is still no evidence of atrocities on the ground.

- TV5: Citing the MSF paper and information from 'les responsables sur place' [people in charge in the field], TV5 interviewed Marc Gastelu at MSF France, although the editing made it appear that Gastelu was speaking from Zaire. He stated that the AFDL was killing the refugees with disease, malnutrition, and direct attacks.

- RFI: several times in both the morning and evening broadcasts, RFI is reporting on the same using MSF's accusatory and political language. This morning, Philippe Biberson at MSF France was interviewed.

-Please note that today is one of the worst possible days for this to be happening for Goma and team security. First, operations were just getting underway again after the last communications debacle. Second, public expectations and tensions are high given the celebrations and military display in this morning's AFDL victory parade. (HCR, MSF, and aII other NGO's are invited to join the parade, which we are not going to do).



'Field Response from MSFH Zaire/Congo to Leaked Report of MSFH to French Press on 19th May 1997,' **Message** from MSF Holland Zaire teams to Directors MSF Holland, MSF France, MSF Belgium and to MSF UK, MSF Canada, MSF USA, MSF Germany, to MSFB Kisangani, Gisenyi, Kigali, Lubumbashi, to MSFH Kampala, LCN Kenya, to MSF H co-days, 21 May 1997 (in English). **D232**

#### Extract:

The report "Forced Flight: A Brutal Strategy of Elimination in Eastern Zaire," has been circulated by MSF-H and leaked by MSF-F to the French press. It has now appeared on the front page of major French newspapers, including the *Libération*, and is widely covered in eastern Zaire by Radio France International, the BBC World Service and French satellite TV5. The report is attributed to MSF in the most explicit way possible. It is directly sourced on the radio/TV in Zaire to "les responsables de MSF sur place. [people in charge in the field],".

The MSF-H field operations in eastern Zaire have ceased completely. Security for the teams is on high alert and discussions will be held this afternoon on team reductions from Goma and Bukavu. We are forced to acknowledge the current hopelessness of our attempts to achieve access in this region, not simply because of the Alliance but because of MSF's press policy. Damage control with the new authorities is not seen as a realistic option in the near future. The continued press debacles prevent us from establishing a dialogue with them until the leaked reports are a fait accompli. If this press policy continues, field operations will run a serious risk of reprisals aimed specifically at an MSF-H team member in eastern Zaire. These reprisals will be dismissed by the Alliance as committed by 'hardcore elements beyond its central control.' It is known by the Kivu teams that certain people within the MSF international [movement] do not consider MSF Holland teams in Zaire to be at risk of retaliation from the Alliance. "They will not touch us," we have been told by the Emergency Desk in Amsterdam. We have the feeling that we are seen to overreact to these press releases. We wonder, here in the field, if anyone is reading the security incident reports coming from the field? The teams here consider that they can remain operational in the future only if there is no further public exhibition by MSF.

The MSF-H teams in eastern Zaire would like to receive, direct from Paris, an explanation of how they can behave so irresponsibly and in such reckless disregard of another section's field-level security by constantly leaking MSF-H reports. In view of the decisions that have been taken, it appears that Philippe Biberson, Jean Hervé Bradol, Marc Gastellu and all in MSFF have not considered our position here before they shoot their mouths off, and we are forced to listen helplessly to their comments in the press and deal with the consequences here in Zaire.

MSF assumes a mantle of an a-political, impartial organisation. There are atrocities in Zaire from every side,

at every level. This is a war zone. Our public advocacy is painting a very one-sided picture when the reality is overtly complex.

On the issue of maintaining local contacts and pressure on the Alliance, the point has been missed. MSF is not looking simply to bash the Alliance over the head with our reports. The strategy is to have a 2-way, non-political dialogue based on hard medical data. The leaked policy paper and the Amsterdam response to our complaints dismissed this strategy (one that the Zaire Desk agreed to while in Goma in April.)

The MSFH Zaire teams would like to see the General Director and particularly the Zaire Desk of MSFH in Amsterdam assume responsibility for what has gone wrong. We do not accept that no one is prepared to do this yet. MSFH HQ should not expect any confidence from the teams here if this continues.

To expel any myths in general circulation, the field teams are never informed of any press statements until after the fact. Amsterdam's reaction to our message of complaint of 17 May ("we are fed up..."), was full of sympathy, but not an adequate response. Open communications with other sections to bring disagreements to the table has been tried before. It has been proven that other sections lack the professionalism and dignity to follow through on their commitments and make any compromise given the local operational and security priorities.

Until we have assurances that the field matters at all in this press policy, and that there will be no further information passed to MSFF or press releases without the field's consent, there will be no further inclusion of human rights information in any sitreps or reports coming from MSFH in Zaire.



**Minutes**, Task Force Zaire, MSF Belgium, 21 May 1997 (in French). **D233**

#### Extract:

-MSF is on standby, everyone has stayed at the office, only local staff are working at Lola. The local staff have wind of problems between MSF and the AFDL and are asking each other questions. William called a meeting with the local staff to reassure them and check security.

-William will start a "propaganda" campaign in the local press telling people what MSF is doing throughout the Congo.

- William requests that MSF restricts its dealings with the media.

-AFDL counters the accusations: "there are uncontrollable Tutsi elements in the region."

-UNHCR is also on standby and there will be no flight today...

-Message from the Congolese authorities to two German journalists who crossed the frontier at Goma: "Don't go and see MSF, they are enemies of the Alliance..."

[...]

Some Kinshasa newspapers are publishing anti-NGO arti-

cles: "It is not for NGOs to dictate policy. That might have been all right in Mobutu's time, but it is not the case with Kabila."

-A ship from the CAR, chartered by the WFP and MSF loaded with food for Kin, was not granted clearance to cross the CAR-Congo frontier

Rwanda:

- Eric Goemaere has to meet the Health Minister today.
- Local doctors do not want to treat the refugees. They make no secret of their disgust.
- Mortality: 15-10,000/day. -Only 2,000 people in the transit camps. The refugees are being packed off to their communes.

Security:

-More and more incidents in the north.

Communication-Rwanda:

- Very touchy from the security point of view.
- Or else Eric handles communication.

General communication:

- To avoid each section saying different things, we can appoint contacts in the field to whom all journalists can be referred. Be careful because there are direct threats in the field.
- Besides, this doesn't stop the sections from communicating.
- Dominique, who hasn't stopped giving interviews in Kisangani and Paris, has also issued three press releases in the same period.
- Do not yield to the pressure from Paris to communicate on Rwanda.



**Letter** from Olivier Antonin, MSF Belgium team in Kinshasa, to the Heads of MSF France, MSF Belgium and MSF Holland, 22 May 1997 (in French). **D234**

**Extract:**

To the "Fanfans la Tulipe" [kind of French "Robin Hood" ] "Rain in November, Christmas in December,"" (Belgian proverb) "In May, do what you like," (French saying).

Open letter to any idiot who would like to read it. But especially to all our idiot managers. Please forgive me, ladies and gentlemen of the management, but once again you have just proved to us poor idiots in the field that when it comes to something as serious as testimony, there is no dialogue between the field and the operational centres.

Made much stronger by the glorious international victory of uniting three sections on this theme, you quite simply forgot that there were teams doing the dirty jobs.

-In Kisangani with 5,000 refugees; in Mbandaka (local staff, admittedly) with 2,000 refugees; in Kinshasa, collecting 200 corpses and treating 200 injured.

But the harsh law of the media-humanitarian calculus being what it is, these figures lack a few zeros and pale

into insignificance when compared with the 200,000 missing people. Once again, forgive this misplaced cynicism - it's my field worker's stupidity that's trying to express itself here.

So seen from a distance, despite cell phones, fax, satellite and other forms of instant communication - which apparently were not working before the testimony (but not to worry, everything was repaired by Tuesday morning) - it looks as if the Dutch delayed sending out the corrected report, while the Belgians fucked around between various departments trying find out who was really responsible for what. This meant that when the Zaire Desk learned about the leaking of the report on Tuesday morning, it had trouble warning the teams that the French had stooped to the level of using this testimony in the press.

However, technically speaking, it's a success: RFI repeated this resounding testimony every fifteen minutes on Tuesday and Wednesday. Bib [Biberson, MSF F President] compounded the damage when he said on Antenne 2 that they didn't have access to the refugees in Kisangani six months ago because of the AFDL troops, whereas at that time it was still the FAZ and the FAR who were blocking them! Even Juppé, chasing re-election, repeated on A2 Wednesday night that France had been the only country to denounce the suffering of these 200,000 refugees - any allusion to the MSF report was purely accidental...

"Anyway," as they say here in Congo (former Zaire), the confusion has not gone unnoticed amongst the population.

The result? Cessation of activities in Kisangani and surveillance of expats; expulsion of French MDM staff from Goma; no expat access to Mbandaka; and in Kinshasa, we are so proud of belonging to MSF that we don't display its logo any more. As our "leaders" can only deal with the problem of populations in danger from European capitals, they are jeopardising the safety of the expats and even the so-called "local" staff...

Finally, I would like to alert the MSF General Assembly in Paris, because the gravity of our directors' irresponsibility, involving three sections, is one thing, the political opportunism of the French section before the GAG is another.

Was the French decision to put pressure on Kabila the right one? No way, absolutely not, given the history of French policy in the area and given that three-quarters of the country has already been sold to American interests.

Was releasing the report on the day Kabila entered Kinshasa going to make him think more carefully? That question still hasn't been answered...

On the other hand, it was inevitable that journalists would pounce on it, and that therefore the French press would pick it up. Then the Director of Communications could open the floodgates, and the other Directors could blow their own trumpets at the AG, astounding everybody by proving that there are still some people at MSF who have the balls to bear witness... albeit from a great distance!! ...

Olivier Antonin  
Male, white race  
French nationality

- Ex MSF-B in Mali in 86-87
- Ex-MSF-F in Kurdistan in 91
- Ex-NDPP (ne doit plus partir) [black listed for future missions] MSF-F from 91 to 96 for having opened his big mouth too much in Iraq
- Emergency MSF-B and AEDES 92-95 (Somalia, Zaire, Brussels Operational Centre, Tajikistan)
- Member of the MSF-B Emergency Pool for two years
- Would very much like to take on a new NDPP encompassing all sections so as to be politically incorrect.



**Letter** from Nicolas Van Bunnem, MSF Belgium Administrator in Zaire, to the programme manager "For Transmission to All Concerned," 22 May 1997 (in French). [D235](#)

#### Extract:

As soon as we got up on Tuesday morning, we had the "pleasure" of hearing on the radio that MSF had issued a press release accusing the AFDL of the worst atrocities against the Rwandan refugees in the former Zaire.

Our first reaction was, "This is another low blow from MSF France which, as it has no team in the field, thinks it's OK to shoot its mouth off all over the place and broadcast its classic and melodious cock crow without the least concern for the shit in which it drops the other sections that are actually working in the Democratic Republic of Congo."

You can imagine how astonished and offended we were when we realised that the MSF team in Kinshasa knew nothing about it, and then found out that the press release came not only from MSF France, but also from MSF Holland and, to cap it all, from MSF BELGIUM!!!

As if that wasn't enough, when we contacted the Congo Desk to obtain an explanation, they told us they didn't know anything about it...

In order to clarify the origins of this massive blunder, I fervently invite the various MSF sections to organise a tripartite commission of inquiry whose job it will be to find out who was responsible and determine the causes of the malfunctioning, or rather non-functioning, of the communications system. We will thus have all the elements at hand to avoid a repetition of such mistakes. And don't forget that a mistake admitted is a mistake half-forgiven.



**Zaire/Rwanda Emergency - Communications Update,** 22 May 1997 (in English). [D236](#)

#### Extract:

Damage control on the Report

William met the Governor in Kisangani yesterday to discuss the negative effect of the report on the Alliance. The response of William was that the report had appeared before the fall of Kinshasa and that it was the press who took profit of the timing for accusations against the Alliance. He also said that MSF is interested in working with the Alliance in assisting the refugees and stabilising

their health in preparation for repatriation to Rwanda.

The Governor requested that we actively communicate on the fallacy of the accusations, but William suggested that the best strategy would be silence. The Governor accepted this suggestion of a low profile.

Goma security incidents:

-MDM has decided to remove its whole team of six expats, following an attempted arrest of their logistical coordinator at the airport. He was reputedly accused of being a spy. He was freed after the intervention of UNHCR security, he and the team will leave for Kampala by car.

Oxfam has suspended its activities for this week following an incident in which one of their staff was beaten up. MSF will reduce its team by seven expats in the following days. In the mean time, two expats waiting to go to Kisangani and two others heading for Kigali are with the team in Goma.

Kigali request from the Head of Mission:

"Due to the crucial stage at which negotiation regarding the return of refugees to their home communes, and the extremely high tension in the country, please be selective in communicating on Rwanda, if saying anything at all. Use only factual information."



**'Letter of Explanation'**, from Philippe Biberson, Bernard Pécoul, Brigitte Vasset, MSF France President, Executive Director and Director of Operations to All Teams of All Sections Working in DR Congo (ex-Zaire), to All programme managers in Europe, 23 May 1997 (in English). [D237](#)

#### Extract:

Dear all,

Firstly we would like to apologise to all of you. As directors of MSF, the security of our teams is extremely important to us. If a lack of clear information has put you in a very difficult and even dangerous situation, we would like you to know that we feel very sorry.

Because we think that there is no disagreement among us with regard to the analysis of the facts (le fond), we would like to give you some explanations concerning the way things occurred (la forme):

1. Thursday 15 May: agreement on the final version of the report entitled "Forced Flight: A Brutal Strategy of Elimination in Eastern Zaire."

2. This report is the follow-up of the report entitled "MSF témoigne de l'élimination physique des réfugiés Rwandais du Kivu," [MSF testimony to the physical elimination of the Rwandan refugees of Kivu] which has been largely distributed since Friday 25th April (amongst other places it is available on the MSF website).

3. During a conference call between the General Directors of the Belgian, Dutch and French sections on Thursday 15 May, it was decided to distribute the report to a selected

group of journalists. The objective was to have leading articles on the situation of the refugee population in Kivu since November 1996. It was furthermore decided that the communication concerning the day-to-day events in the region of Kisangani, was going to be coordinated in Brussels.

4. In Paris, the report was given to 2 journalists, one from *Le Monde* the other from *Libération*. In *Le Monde*, a leading article appeared at page 3 in the Monday edition of the newspaper (dated Tuesday 20 May). On Monday, 19 May, the journalist Stephen Smith of *Libération* interviewed several people, to complete the information covered in the report. We were all very much surprised to find out on Tuesday morning that the Editorial Committee of *Libération* had decided to make it a cover-page article, which resulted in yielding considerable weight for the advocacy.

We hope to be able to discuss the above in more detail in the near future with you

 We made a very bad mistake. The Paris Desk has admitted its stupidity because the field was not alerted. We could not imagine that the people in Kinshasa had not been told about what was being prepared. We forgot to establish a link between operations and communications. Some people thought that what was happening in Kisangani would not have any repercussions in Kinshasa... On Monday morning, the Kinshasa team had a go at us. Frédérique Marodon [MSF France coordinator in Kinshasa] did not attack us on the content but she said, "You are reckless." She was right to say so. On the other hand, Mit Philips [MSF Belgium coordinator in Kinshasa] accused us of factual errors.

Bernard Pecoul,  
Executive Director, MSF France (in French).

 I had a discussion with the field. I felt that we should not only release the report but confront the authorities on the ground with it - we should give it to them and say: "How is this possible?" Not accuse but ask: "How is this possible?" And I had a discussion with the person in charge in Goma who said, "Are you crazy? We could never do that here." I thought that we should. But they refused to do it. Of course the people were angry. After the release of the report - the team in Goma had agreed, but then when it was released, they were very angry with me as well - extremely angry with me, and quite a few people resigned. They said they resigned not only from MSF in Goma but also from MSF in total. That changed later but I got several letters from people saying that I had not dealt with it in the correct way. There was the person in charge in Kinshasa that resigned too. And they all sent letters all over the MSF network. It was a total mess. After that-in June - I

wanted a holiday. I had the feeling that I didn't know what was going to happen to me. I felt that I was the guilty person. I wasn't sure.

Wilna Van Artzen, MSF Holland Emergency Desk  
Officer (in English).

 This aggressive communications campaign had been running for a month, since the day after the Board meeting with Marlène. There had already been an MSF report denouncing the extermination etc... If they wanted to withdraw their teams because we were practicing this type of communication, they had had a month to do so. If they did not do so, it is because they did not want to withdraw them. The proof is that they left them until the end, until Kasese and Biaro, until they could cover the massacres. In any case, they were determined to stay in the field, whatever the cost. All operations sectors knew that we were going to release the report in the next few days. Some of them did not warn their teams because they had only half assumed their policy position. Nor did MSF France warn the team from the French section, which was in Kinshasa at that time. The *Libération* article came out at the very moment Kabila was retaking Kinshasa and all the international radio stations were saying, "MSF is attacking Kabila." The MSF team was obviously worried! Some of them came to see me and we had a discussion. They said: "We are happy with the position but we would have appreciated being warned because it is rather dangerous for us." I told them, "I understand your point of view very well, talk to your Programme Managers and the Directors of Operations. It's their job. But don't come to me, the Communications Director. It is not for me to take these decisions with you." Brigitte, the Head of Operations, had the decency to admit: "I wasn't very clear in the way I warned you. I didn't warn you specifically about that, although I knew about it. It's my fault. I admit that it was a mistake."

Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France programme  
manager then Communication Director (in French).

 The teams in the field wanted to be protected. The general position at MSF Belgium was - we stay and we bear witness. On the whole, we are not afraid of bearing witness because in a way it strengthens our position and our security, contrary to what is usually thought. Our volunteers in the field did not have this experience of bearing witness at first. Vincent Janssen [coordinator in Kisangani] had never worked in a similar situation. They were sending out new volunteers every month, a Head of Mission every three weeks. They released the report and then it broke in the press and nobody in the field wanted to talk to the operations centre after that. Every decision the Operations Centre took on this subject was brushed aside by the French, Belgian or Dutch sections, but especially the Belgian and Dutch sections. The teams in the field also

wanted the reports to go the Congolese authorities, and to Kabila in rebel territory, before anyone else. I disagreed with them about that. There was also a heated debate in the field about proof. The teams wanted proof of the killings before communicating anything. And that was unacceptable. It's true that there wasn't much proof at that time because there was no access... But anyway, there were stories. We didn't have much direct testimony at that time, but I believe they had a lorry driver who had said something when he came back from the camps, that he'd heard machine gun fire and he'd had to bury people etc... What more did they need? And it all dragged on. There was a discussion in the field about gaining time, evacuating people, etc... All these procedures for the testimony are stupid! I don't agree with them. In my view, you can't create procedures for it. You have to match the strategy to the situation. You have to sensitise the authorities at the outset - if they are capable of being sensitised. But Kabila was not. All the same, there were quite a few people who did not agree with this testimony. But the decision had been taken so it had to be applied... There were provocations. etc. I think they should have been more cautious. We did not get direct threats; they were more indirect: passing lorries with passengers chanting anti-foreigner slogans, etc...

Dr.[...], MSF Belgium Operational Director  
(in French).

Many Country Managers are afraid of approaching the local, regional, or national authorities directly. But if you do not do that on a regular basis, you will have to keep completely silent altogether. Otherwise, you put your team in danger. Coming out with statements without initially talking to the authorities themselves will mean that they will suspect you of spying. And spies get killed. Therefore you should avoid speaking out if direct contact with the authorities has been insufficient... Once you're in, you're in. Of course, you need the right tone in these conversations. "We are very interested in the changes you have promised. Now could you help us out with a couple of problems we have?" The message, meanwhile, can be very direct... I don't have any moral problems with developing direct relations with authorities. Talking is not the same as collaborating... Once you have built these contacts, you can in some cases, choose to speak out publicly, like we did on the plight of the refugees south of Kisangani. It helped to save the lives of possibly 50,000 refugees... I suppose we just have to live with that big gap between the Dutch, who write solid, UN like reports, and the French who are very médiatiques. But to be honest, however angry I am at the French for their behaviour during the crisis, at the end of the day I feel closer to them than I do to the Dutch, in terms of approach to advocacy.

Dr. Dominique Boutriau, MSF Belgium programme manager. Interviewed by Erwin Van't Land in "The Advocacy Interviews" September 1997 (in English).

They stopped the operations immediately. It took a couple of days to get the people out of Shabunda, but nothing happened in terms of attack by the Congolese or Kabila. It was immediately on the air - the radio - in the Congo. People in Congo knew before MSF in some cases. But, in terms of security, there was no reaction. We were called to the Governor in Goma and later, I think, in Bukavu; and MSF was threatened, but not physically, only verbally. But after some time, it disappeared.

Pim de Graaf, Director of Operation MSF Holland  
(in English)

I had had holidays. I came back and then there was this huge panic here about the Libération... I was not upset with the content or the title. It was great. It was just that, "Why now?" It was so late! ...here the biggest debate was... I mean about the denunciation, was about the front page accusation, "MSF accuse". Should we accuse? I think we can. For me that was not the issue. For me it was more the issue like, "Jesus! A month later!" ...And the big upset in Amsterdam was mainly because MSF Holland was in Bukavu. There was still an interest to be in Bukavu and Goma. They did not even have the time to inform the people, to prepare the security, or reduction of [the] team. We agreed that it needed to be done. As for me, I was more on the line that, "What's the point after such a time?" That was more my problem. But here, it was more because the procedures were not followed, and risking expats safety. ...The danger was more in the title, 'MSF accuse Kabila for killing.' And, it was moreover, if you make that statement as an organisation, then you are an enemy for Kabila.

Marcel Van Soest, MSF Holland Field Coordinator,  
Goma, January to March 1997 (in English).

**On 22 May, *The New York Times* revealed that the AFDL had received significant support from Uganda, Rwanda, Angola, and Zambia.**



James C. McKinley Jr, 'Congo's Neighbors Played Crucial Role in Civil War', *The New York Times* (USA), 22 May 1997 (in English).  
**D238**

**Extract:**

When Laurent Kabila's rebels captured this country's capital over the weekend and catapulted him into the presidency, they did not do it alone. From the onset of the

war last autumn until the fall of Kinshasa on Saturday, Mr Kabila's forces received heavy support from several neighboring countries with an interest in toppling the long-time dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko, diplomats and United States officials said.

The military aid came in many forms from Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia and Angola - all of which have denied involvement. It ranged from military advisers to training, from air transport to supplies. In a few instances, foreign troops even crossed the border to fight alongside the rebels. And thousands of Tutsi volunteers from Uganda and Rwanda joined the rebellion in sympathy with their Tutsi kinsmen here.

The motives of Mr Kabila's silent backers vary widely. Many Tutsi in Rwanda wanted revenge on the Hutu militants who fled to Zaire, as Congo was known under Mr Mobutu, after taking part in the 1994 massacres of Tutsi in Rwanda. Uganda and Angola were both tired of Mr. Mobutu's harboring guerrilla groups on their borders. And the entire region was being dragged down by the abysmal economic performance of the country under Mr. Mobutu's corrupt leadership.

Because the foreign military aid has been covert, the extent of the foreign interference in the civil conflict that has produced a new Government and a new name may never be made public.

But diplomats and United States officials say Congo's neighbors have played crucial roles in bringing Mr Kabila to power, especially the Angolans and the Tutsi-led Government in Rwanda. It remains to be seen what debts Mr Kabila owes them.

"The rebel alliance has a guilty secret," a Western diplomat in the region said this week, insisting on anonymity. "Zairians didn't win the war. The Rwandans won the war for them. We don't know how they will be paid back."

Last October and November, Uganda and Rwanda played an active military role. On occasion both countries sent troops across the border to help secure a strip of the eastern part of the country, United States Government officials say.

For the Ugandan President, Yoweri Museveni, the insurrection in this country was an opportunity to remove two rebel groups who had been mounting raids into Uganda. To that end, in November and December, several thousand Ugandan soldiers, backed with tanks, took part in conquering the entire north-eastern corner of the country next to the Sudan.

Rwanda's motive for aiding Mr Kabila's forces was a desire to close refugee camps on the border that had become bases for Hutu guerrillas attacking Rwanda's Tutsi-led Government. Revenge was also a factor.

Many Hutu militants in the camps had been involved in the 1994 massacres in Rwanda, and some also began stirring up anti-Tutsi feeling in what was then Zaire, which led to the killings of thousands of Tutsi in Zaire. Tens of thousands of other Tutsi fled into Rwanda for safety...

Paul Kagame, the Rwandan leader, has consistently denied that his troops fought in Zaire at the beginning of the war, though he says Rwanda supports the rebellion in spirit. He has acknowledged only that some Rwandan regular troops

crossed the border into Zaire during the battles for Goma and Bukavu after shells were lobbed across the border.

But a senior Rwandan defence official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Rwandan military advisers had operated in Congo since then, helping Mr Kabila's commanders with strategy. "The advisers are there," the official said. "We helped them morally, financially and militarily as well."

### **The United States Ambassador to Rwanda told the MSF team that he believed their organisation served the interests of the French government.**



**Sitrep** from MSF Belgium team in Rwanda to the programme manager, 22 May 1997 (in English). **D239**

#### **Extract:**

American Ambassador: the gruelling meeting of the day... two hours of 'engueulade' [rowing] [because of their] total mistrust on our figures for eastern Zaire. Nothing is proven so nothing is right. Seen the last declaration in the French press, MSF has, for him, now a clear political agenda in Zaire alongside the French government and is totally discredited in the area.

Nice meeting... we have to think about increasing our channel of information to them, no need to say that the Ambassador is quite influential here. We invited the USAID representative to visit Runda camp today...

Communication with press: please no communications on repatriation process except factual situation. Very tense for the moment with Gisenyi team in a hotel for the night and arrestations [arrests] of local staff was stopped in Gisenyi and Kigali yesterday.

Thank you

### **At the Coordinators' meetings and General Assemblies in the last week of May, the controversy over the publication of the report in *Libération* intensified.**



"MSF Announces: 19,000 Hutu Refugees disappeared in Zaire," **Plagiarism** of the front page of *Libération*, joke from MSF Belgium to MSF France, 22 May 1997 (in French). **D240**

#### **Extract:**

"Despite the chaotic state of French foreign policy, we will continue to actively support it. That crook Kabila will not get any support or cash from us. We denounce the deliberate strategy aimed at eliminating the French section to the detriment of the vassal sections."

 I remember the Coordinators' meeting to which Philippe Biberson was invited, that was in May. The Field Coordinators gave Philippe a very hard time. I was strongly supportive of MSF France at that time. I've always said that the teams should be withdrawn when those kinds of security problems arise... As the meeting went on, we focused on internal controversies. I thought, "This can't be happening, if there are problems, we sort them out."

Dr. Jacques de Milliano, MSF Holland General Director and MSF International vice-président (in French).

 I am quite happy with the major arguments it aroused within the MSF movement because I think we learned a lot from it. Contrary to what some people are still saying, it did create a delayed reaction effect for those who were in Goma in the summer of 1994. I remember the Dutch AG during which I was showered with abuse... We had released the report and people said we had jeopardised the safety of the teams in the field. They had also come to our AG and had publicly stated that they were in favour of *témoignage*, but when it put teams in danger, they considered that it was a disgrace, that we let the movement down. All the same, I think there was a trigger effect, even if they are still angry with us. It triggered the idea that *témoignage* [testimony] is above all about the necessity for transparency, that it can't be totally controlled, totally calculated, that it's not something that can be precisely measured beforehand, weighed against the possible side effects etc... That was the argument they used against us, "What impact will our *témoignage* [testimony] have if we are obliged by this or that? Is it going to stop the fighting?" In the end, I disposed of the impact issue by saying: "It doesn't matter! If we make all these calculations we run the risk of not saying anything at all [...] These are press attaché's remarks".

Dr. Philippe Biberson, MSF France President (in French).

 I was shocked by what I saw during the co-days because I am educated in MSF with Jacques de Milliano as a director. The co-days are very special because we are all together and we discuss a lot of things. And now, I saw a MSF director lying to his people-this is a dirty thing... The Coordinators said that MSF France had published a very big article in the newspaper and it brought the expats in danger and they did not advise the sections beforehand so that they would be able to evacuate or stay at home, organise themselves, whatever. They said: "you know how dangerous it is-and, These fucking French they are always with their press releases and always screaming to

the press. They are not even on the spot. They are not working in the area so they were not entitled to speak out because their expats are not in danger." I thought that I had to do something - but I didn't know what. So I flew to Paris and spoke to Jean Hervé and said that this and this is going on and what the hell is this? Jean Hervé told me that it was not at all like that. There had been a teleconference and Brigitte and Bernard Pécoul were there and that they had explained what they were going to do and Lex did nothing. He was not against it. I asked Jean Hervé if he was in the teleconference and he said no, but he was listening since he was the Director of Communications. So I went to Brigitte's office and Bernard Pécoul was there and I explained to them what was going on and that it was a big stink: "I was part of a very unpleasant event within the sections, during the 'camps' issue. And I think that by talking to each other, we should not have those kinds of wars anymore. We should fight and criticise, it will keep us awake, but not this type of nasty backstabbing." Bernard then asked, "What should we do?" And I said: "Well-you should call Lex and ask him how it's going - don't tell him that I've mentioned this to you." That's what Bernard did - I don't know what they discussed but they spoke for an hour and Bernard came back and thanked me and said that it was good that he had called Lex. It had been a good conversation and they agreed on a couple of things.

Wouter Van Empelen, MSF Holland Programme manager until 31 October 1996 (in English).

 Wouter told me that Lex had been obliged to confess in front of everybody that he'd given his approval. He had tried to deny it at first, he had lied, but many of the coordinators and especially the Programme Heads [Desks] could see that he was lying to them, that in reality he had given his approval. A few months later, Lex invited me to lunch in Amsterdam, just the two of us, so he could offer his apologies... At the MSF France AG, Alain Devaux (member of the MSF France Board) denounced me as a killer of field teams (he later acknowledged that he'd been manipulated). I told him I found that extremely offensive and asked him to substantiate his statement. I said, "There are two witnesses to that teleconference in this room." I asked Bernard Pécoul and Jean-Marie Kindermans, in full view of everybody, to tell the General Assembly what the position of the teleconference had been and what those present had thought. They had to do it because they felt that the situation between us was getting out of hand.

Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France programme manager then Communication Director (in French).

 I was very much supporting the article of Jean-Hervé, although we had a big fight on how the posi-

tion was taken. This is typical MSF. If I were to do it all over again, I would take more of a different approach. Many people are inclined to agree about the positions taken years ago. And, if only they were inclined to agree four years ago, it would make my life easier. I am not sure what people blame me for. The position which we had, according to some people, placated the field people enough. When I visited Zaire that time (this was 1997 before the 'J'accuse'), I felt that we were missing out in trying to address the issue more vigorously. Because there were many rumours around Goma at the time about massacres. And we were present there; we should have tried our utmost to reveal the content of what was happening. People were resistant, partly because of security reasons. But it was like "This is not our work if we do not investigate." I visited one of the woman doctors, quite a nice person, and she did not agree with what we were advocating. I said, "This massacre that we hear about is only one hour away, why do we not go there?". She said, "Because it is not our role." "But it is our role," I said. "We are working in the clinic and we should try to reveal the context." But if you talk to her now she seems to be much more accepting about our position.

Lex Winkler, MSF Holland Executive Director and Operational Director 1996 - 1997 (in English).

It went beyond quarrels between sections. With MSF Holland it became quarrels between the operations centre and the field, and personal quarrels with Jean-Hervé... I sometimes felt that MSF was descending into farce. But I forgave us these lapses because what lay at the bottom of crises, like the Rwandan crisis, was the expression of a malaise. It showed that we were living through this malaise, that we were not completely disconnected from the events. Here in New York, we felt bad about not being able to get this information out; it was barely mentioned in the newspapers. That's the form our malaise took. In Europe, the malaise took the usual form of controversy but basically it was a way of realising that we were on shaky ground. What was the disagreement? The French had not managed to get into the field whereas the Belgians had, but they didn't want to talk about it. It's not a matter of agreement or disagreement. The sections were not working together; they were not in the same places. As the French were not in the field, it was easy for them to talk. It was more difficult for the Belgians and that was only to be expected. Since 1994, MSF Belgium has demonstrated a certain spontaneity - take the denunciation of genocide at Butare. On the other hand, that section has such a paranoid way of functioning when it comes to poorly timed statements from Paris, that it sometimes withholds information. I don't know if it's a voluntary practice or if it's quite simply that they don't have the reflex to go and get this information whereas with MSF France, it's a kind of instinct.

Joëlle Tanguy, MSF USA Executive Director (in French).

## THE DILEMMA OF REPATRIATION

**In Rwanda, the MSF Belgium teams were concerned about the health of the refugees who had been repatriated to their communes.**



'Report on Medical Services Provided by MSF Belgium to the Repatriates from Eastern Zaire,' 27 April - 25 May 1997 (in English). [D241](#)

### Extract:

#### 1. Introduction

As of the end of April, UNHCR has started its repatriation by plane of the Rwandan refugees from eastern Zaire back to Rwanda. An estimated 80,000 refugees are anticipated to benefit from this repatriation since most of the other refugees returned en mass at the end of last year or were transported by trucks in the beginning of this year from the camps of Masisi, Tingi Tingi, and North Kivu, among others.

This repatriation however has only been granted permission by the Alliance during a period of 60 days. After this no more movement of refugees will be allowed. Another constraint surrounding this repatriation exercise is the general condition of the people which has worsened due to the deplorable conditions in which they had to live during the last months (lack of food, water and sanitation, shelter etc...), as well as the violence they had to experience.

In view of this, MSF has increased the medical services it continued to provide to the returnees since November last year (dispensary at Nkamira and Musange transit camp); with the following activities:

- Surgical assistance to the wounded at Gisenyi hospital
- Nutritional assistance to the severely malnourished
- Medical assistance through the establishment of field hospitals
- Surveillance for epidemics through epidemiological data collection, isolation, and treatment of patients presenting with cholera.
- Screening of the new arrivals at the airport (Kigali/Gisenyi) and at the border for those arriving on foot (Gisenyi)...

#### . Conclusions

-Daily mortality figures observed at the transit camp are unacceptable and have been increasing since the beginning of the repatriation. This is partly due to the poor conditions in which the refugees appeared from the forest and the speed of the transfer from Kisangani to Kigali (this due to several factors).

-Comparing mortality figures in week 4 of the repatriation, from Kisangani (71/10,000/day) to where our teams provided the first medical care at Runda which is the first transit station in Rwanda (30/10,000/day) and

Musange which is the second transit stop (9/10,000/day), we observe that the figure continues to be very high (although declining since the weak are already dead), even after passing through several medical stops. This should alert us to the fact that among the population already arrived in their communes, a high mortality is more than probably still present, which means a quick action in the communes is necessary if we still want to save some lives.

- Nutritional surveillance set up did not really provide the information needed concerning malnutrition rates and percentage of children under 5. But, the moderately malnourished, detected at the transit camps, were not really taken in charge during their transit; this will result in severe malnutrition unless nutritional centres at community levels are strengthened.
- The bad nutritional and medical condition of the new returnees will continue to be a burden on the existing health services (in terms of workload, impossibility of financial participation) for quite some time.
- One should be very careful to follow the reporting of contagious diseases (cholera cases) at the health centres, especially in those communes that received a high number of returnees.

**In the Republic of Congo, the MSF France Communications Officer and a doctor seconded to MSF from Médecins du Monde collected testimony from the camps at Njundu and Loukolela. The refugees described their travel history since the attack on the camps in eastern Zaire in autumn 1996.**



**Draft** of a report from Anne Guibert, MSF France Communications Officer, to the programme manager, Legal Adviser and Communications Department of MSF France, early June 1997 (in French). [D242](#)

#### Extract:

Here is a draft of a compilation of testimonies collected by Guy at Njundu. What do you think? We await your comments.

Rwandan refugees, Congo, May/June 1997. From the various testimonies collected from refugees in Njundu, we note that:

- Throughout their journey, the Zairian population has done as much as possible to help the refugees hide from the rebels, flee, and find food.
- On several occasions, rebels have forced the Zairian Red Cross and the local population to participate in acts of violence (cf. Mbandaka, Wenji).
- The rebels have pursued and attacked the refugees right up to the banks of the Congo River.
- Massacres have been committed, targeting children (cf.

Mbandaka) and supposed intellectuals (cf. Mbandaka) in priority.

- The routed Zairian military have engaged in looting and have committed acts of violence against refugees (Ubundu, Ikela).
- The vulnerable (women, children, the sick) have died in great numbers. Unable to continue, they were abandoned along the road and killed by the rebels.
- Every family has been broken up. There is someone missing in every family - a child, a father, a mother... Women and children are under-represented among the refugees who have arrived in the Congo...

The testimony concerns refugee populations at the Njundu site. The vast majority of these refugees, as well as those who regrouped at Loukolela and Liranga, took the same road.

**On 25 May, MSF Belgium's Congo Task Force discussed ways of dealing with the refugees arriving in Mbandaka.**



**Minutes** of the MSF Belgium Congo Task Force Meeting, 26 May 1997 (in French). [D243](#)

#### Extract:

MBANDAKA...

MSF is currently working with the refugees at the airport. There are many soldiers and it looks like large contingents are en route from KIS[angani] to MBAN[daka] (the start of a major cleansing??). MSF has not received permission to build additional structures at the airport.

We keep coming back to two basic questions:

- What means do we employ to take charge of the refugees (and what refugees, those in the camps, the forests)?
- What are we to make of the information that we'll collect, what *témoignage* [testimony]?

In operational terms, there are two approaches: the refugees and the Congolese population. Can we contemplate combining the two? Or keeping to the long-term programmes on the grounds that they will also reach the refugees?

The refugees still in the forest - how do we find out if they're still alive? How many are there? And how many have died? Given the conditions of access (extremely dense forest), actively tracing them is not an option. If we started tracing, would our aim be to find the living or look for mass graves? (NB: MSF-F had suggested doing this tracing independently of MSF-B - we said no).

If we base ourselves solely on the long-term programmes, how can we manage the (second-hand) information that we'll collect on the massacres, mass graves, cleansing? We can't just shelve it. But at the same time, MSF statements about the disappearances will be directly interpreted in the press as an accusation against the AFDL.

This handling of information must be clearly set out in a clear and widely (internally) distributed action plan! It should take into account the fact that we won't be able to focus international attention on this region for very long, and that Mban[daka] was belatedly affected by the influx of refugees.

There is also someone collecting testimony at KIS[angani]. At the operations centre, they don't even know what they'll do with this information. Communication in this context is so "fucked up" that it constitutes a textbook case.

THERE MUST be an inter-section meeting about communications, internally prepared to fix the position of Brussels (between shouting and saying nothing), an expanded meeting (more than the Task Force) in Brussels.

**On 26 May, a press release from MSF Belgium and MSF France called for a logistics operation to evacuate the refugees from the swamplands in the Republic of Congo and separate the civilians from the armed leaders.**



'Rwandan Refugee Emergency in Congo-Brazzaville,' **Press Release**, MSF France and MSF Belgium, 26 May 1997 (in French). [D244](#)

#### **Extract:**

Brussels, 26 May 1997. Hundreds of Rwandan refugees are still crossing the Ubangi-Congo River every day, seeking shelter in Congo-Brazzaville. These refugees are fleeing the Mbandaka area; some of them are stranded on islands halfway between the Congo (former Zaire) and Congo-Brazzaville.

Four sites along the river have been identified - Loukolela, Liranga, Ndjundu, Makotipoko - accommodating up to 15,000 people. They are located in swampland, are difficult to reach, and the exhausted and starving refugees cannot receive the attention they need. There are more refugees in the forests and swamps, beyond the reach of the aid operation.

The situation of the Rwandan refugees is once again disastrous; they are suffering from malnutrition, dysentery and injuries to their lower limbs. The latest arrivals are shocked and terrified and have no possessions at all.

On the Loukolela site, for example, where 4,200 people have already gathered, 500 new refugees arrive every day. According to an inquiry conducted by teams from Médecins Sans Frontières, 80% of the children in this camp are severely malnourished. Many children are suffering from ulcerations of the mucous membranes and lack the strength to swallow. Some of the adults also display signs of malnutrition. One case of shigellosis dysentery has already been identified. We fear an outbreak of cholera.

MSF demands that humanitarian organisations are provided with the logistical means, particularly ships, to

evacuate the women, children, and sick from these sites as soon as possible and resettle them in the Bilolo camp near Brazzaville, where they can receive proper care.

13 volunteers from Médecins Sans Frontières are providing medical care and sanitation. New teams must be sent to reinforce them. The ICRC is also on site and is ensuring the distribution of food.

**Repatriation to Rwanda was being conducted against a shameful background of AFDL intimidation in the Kisangani transit camps, UNHCR eagerness to evacuate the refugees, and the dangers facing the latter in their communes of origin. MSF national sections were divided on what position to adopt.**



Danielle Rouard, 'Humanitarian Organisations Debate Operational Conditions in Congo (the former Zaire). Médecins Sans Frontières criticises the Policy of Repatriating Hutu Refugees,' **Le Monde** (France), 28 May 1997 (in French). [D245](#)

#### **Extract:**

Officials from UNHCR, ICRC, various NGOs including Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and the Ministry of Defence met today to discuss the "the inaccessibility of victims and security for organisations working in the field" in the Great Lakes region. They also discussed the "possibilities and limitations" of international humanitarian law and the "complementarities" of the organisations involved...

MSF researcher Dr Rony Brauman did not mince his words, although he was careful to avoid any suggestion of "moralising". UNHCR, which is managing the repatriation for the UN, was singled out for criticism. "Instead of proclaiming the right to asylum and guaranteeing protection for the refugees in Rwanda itself, UNHCR is bowing to international pressure and rushing this repatriation," said Dr Brauman. He launched a scathing attack on the "understanding" with the Rwandan government, whose members are "destroying the refugees by the thousands. Should UNHCR be returning these refugees to the very country of their oppressors in the name of humanitarianism?"



**Sitrep** from MSF Belgium in Kinshasa, 28 May 1997 (in French). [D246](#)

#### **Extract:**

Of course, MSF could not pass up such an opportunity to be manipulated by the press and French politics, not even after the cries of outrage from the people in the field (after all, there had been no press release for a whole week!!! Far too long for egomaniacs). So tomorrow, we will once again

be able to enjoy the repercussions of an article in *Le Monde*, inspired by the words of who else but Rony Brauman! And there's me thinking that he'd left MSF! That he was working on his political career! Or is he? Read in the sitrep, the day after tomorrow, how the MSF team once again spent its day removing the stickers it had surreptitiously dared to replace, how the Health Minister refuses to grant us the meeting he'd agreed to, how the expat MSF team left in a group on a flight to Europe leaving the office keys with the caretaker for when Mario and Brigitte arrive, how the operations centre is surprised that it can't find people who are motivated and naive enough to replace us...



'Some notes on Kisangani,' **Report** from the field by Fabien Dubuet, MSF Information Officer, 31 May 1997 (in French). [D247](#)

#### Extract:

UNHCR "repatriated" just over 40,000 refugees to Rwanda in May. There are two routes:

-From Kisangani to Rwanda - refugees from Ubundu, Obilo and Biaro. The "fittest" make a brief stop at the Lola transit camp, 11 km from Kisangani. It is a mixed population in a pitiful state.

-From Mbandaka to Rwanda - mostly male population, about 80%, whose arrival in Rwanda seems closely monitored by the Kigali authorities, according to the MSF teams there. When the first two or three flights from Mbandaka arrived in Rwanda, many of the refugees went missing between the airport and the transit camp. According to the MSF-B team in Rwanda, they fled as soon as they got off the plane (???)

As I was leaving (the 31st), repatriation was suspended for two or three days.

#### Transportation rather than repatriation

The term "repatriation" is an abuse of language. Admittedly, the refugees are not forced onto the planes - so UNHCR can talk of "voluntary" departure - but the basis of this transportation (a more appropriate term) is sinister:

- Direct or indirect threats: the powerful military presence in Mbandaka (the Rwandan Tutsi cleansing operation, which had become notorious in Kasese and Biaro, seems to have moved on to Mbandaka) is enough to incite the refugees to return to Rwanda. Although there had been no shooting around Ubundu, Obilo and Biaro since 17 May, the refugees were urged to take the train to Kisangani. Tickets were so expensive that UNHCR local staff set up a black market; the refugees had to pay between 40,000 and 100,000 New Zaires for a guaranteed seat on the train (information confirmed by the infirmary and one of the MSF logisticians working in Biaro). In the Lola transit camp, although there had been no military presence inside the camp or hospital since 13 May, the vast majority of refugees I spoke to said they feared a new attack: "What happened at Biaro and Kasese can happen here too." Most of them also expressed anxiety about the expiry of Kabila's 60-day ultimatum.

- Absence of other options proposed by UNHCR: all the refugees I talked to were fully aware when they left Biaro, Obilo and Ubundu that they were going to be repatriated to Rwanda (although Pierre-Pascal told me he'd met some refugees at Obilo who knew nothing about it). But they all made it clear that their agreement to return to Rwanda was based on resignation. They could see no other solution and they were tired after three years on the road and the same scenario every time: construction of a camp, stabilisation in the camp, attack on the camp. However, most of them asked me if there was another possible destination.

- Transporting refugees to another source of danger: UNHCR is quite simply sending the victims back to their executioners. We know that Rwandan government soldiers have actively participated in the massacres. Fearful refugees have often asked me if humanitarian actors were present in the communes and if we had information on the security of those who had already returned. They told me that even if it means death, they would rather die in the land of their birth. According to ICRC, there are 300-400 arrests every day in the Rwandan communes

- UNHCR local agents came to the hospital (especially to the parts where the malnourished and vulnerable are treated) almost every morning to ask if certain patients or their companions were fit enough to return to Rwanda. These UNHCR pests, full of their own self-importance, were particularly annoying and had to be constantly resisted; a lot of energy was expended every day repeating the same explanations: "No, these patients are not fit enough to return to Rwanda today and we can't medically programme their departure for a specific day." We had to be vigilant so that UNHCR, in its zeal, did not repatriate our patients (some of the malnourished were probably transported to Rwanda on the morning of 24 May). The MSF nurse in charge of the nutritional centre noted the absence of many of these people and in fact a little later that morning, three of them came back to us from the airport. How many had been flown to Rwanda? Did they escape or did they succumb to the UNHCR siren song?



"UNHCR meeting in Geneva," **Summary** from Dominique Boutriau, MSF Belgium programme manager, 5 June 1997 (in English). [D248](#)

#### Extract:

Herewith some personal minutes of UNHCR in Geneva about Great Lakes. Maybe an official summary would come out...

So, cc the will of UNHCR protection I do not think MSF can make more criticism... towards UNHCR itself but more on member states who do not support UNHCR.

2. cc operational capacity of UNHCR our feeling is that due to lack of "competency" of some UNHCR staff in the field, there is consequently a certain lack of coordination of operations between agencies. etc...

There are factual incidents, and these incidents have of

course consequences on the fate of the refugees. Our point of view is that we should collect all the problems we encountered and try first to have an open dialogue about these problems with UNHCR delegate in the field and also raise that issue directly with key UNHCR person[nel] (who appreciate MSF) in Geneva.

3. I am convinced that we will not gain anything in going public against UNHCR and they are in the same bullshit as us in front of what is happening in Congo-Rwanda. What can do humanitarian people do in front of military!!! I am convinced that we should have an open dialogue with UNHCR as a partner in the refugee crisis to try to solve the problems we meet in the field.

**The General Director of MSF France suggested a conference on the Congo *témoignage* [advocacy]. The crisis of confidence between MSF sections continued. The Belgian and Dutch sections tried to stop MSF France's Director of Communications being interviewed on French television. V14**



'Distribution of the Kivu Report,' **E-mail** from Brigitte Vasset, Director of Operations, MSF France, to MSF Belgium Operations Directors, 25 May 1997, (in French). **D249**

#### Extract:

Paris, 25 May 97

Hello,

After talking to some people from Brussels over the weekend, I would like to pass on details on the people responsible for releasing the report to French journalists (*Libé* and *Le Monde*) on Friday 16 May. During the AG, Marc Biot read Olivier Antonin's letter in which Jean-Hervé Bradol is portrayed as the big bad wolf of MSF in Paris.

After the two teleconferences between Operations Directors and General Directors (see the attached email which I sent to Mario, Marie-Christine, Pim et Wilna on the night of Friday 16 May), I received an email of the 'final version' of the Kivu report. I was the one who sent it to comm.[unications department] for distribution, making it clear that the General Directors had agreed to a NON-confidential distribution. Marc Gastellu faxed it to Stephen Smith (they'd known each other well since a trip to Somalia).

By the time I'd received the "final version" of the report by email in the late afternoon, the first version had already gone out around midday. If mistakes were made, anger should therefore be directed at the people who were participating in the teleconferences, at Marc or me.

We sent our apologies to the teams in the field for any security problems that the distribution might have caused them [(copies to Eric, Mario, and Dominique)] and

explained how the situation had come about. I made a big mistake in not warning Frédérique and Pascal in Kinshasa.



'DR Congo: Thoughts on the *Témoignage* [testimony],' **Memo** from Bernard Pécoul, General Director, MSF France, 26 May 1997 (in French). **D250**

#### Extract:

- Consolidation of figures and conditions of repatriation in view of the pressure on UNHCR (meeting of Friday 30 May on protection; participation Françoise Saulnier, Dominique Boutriau?). Write a paper [...]
- Pressure on the facts with UNHCR (cf. result of Ogata's intervention at the Security Council: UNHCR lowers its arms with regard to its mandate).



"Re: Report Telephone Conversation with William," **E-mail** Dominique Boutriau, MSF Belgium programme manager, 28 May 1997 (in French). **D251**

#### Extract:

*La Marche du Siècle* [a French television programme] did a report in Kisangani. This will be screened 04/06. Invited to the studio: - J.H. Bradol. We are trying to get this cancelled.



**Message** from William Claus, Coordinator MSF Belgium in Kisangani to MSF Belgium, MSF France, and MSF Holland President, Executive Director and Director of Operations and all Teams present in the Great Lakes region, 29 May 2003 (in English). **D252**

#### Extract:

I am addressing this letter especially to those 3 people who wrote the letter of explanation. After doing the 'damage control', which was the result of the article in the *Libération*, again MSF Paris succeeded in being in the newspapers. I have to congratulate you. I think that it is the first time that the press coverage in Paris is so high without being present on the field. If this [is the situation] the insecurity in the field is secondary to the interest of Paris.

The co-ordination team in Kisangani has lost confidence in Paris. We hope that it will not be on RFI this morning. We know also that Mr Bradol (well known for his declarations in the past) will be attending a discussion on TF1 on the 3/06. Knowing the reputation of Mr Bradol we are obliged to take some preventive measures in order to limit the damage.

1. From today no information from Kisangani will be given to Paris.
2. All the lobbying that was undertaken (with the agreement of Marie Pierre Allie) to introduce Paris and prepare the field to set up a long-term programme will be stopped.
3. Although I still support the last report that was published and the importance of it, I will no longer defend Paris when I will [SIC] called by the Governor to give an explanation on the press articles.
4. We will reduce as much as possible expats coming from MSF Paris as we don't want to be responsible for their security.

I regret to take such measures but for this [SIC] time being it is the only solution. Thanks for your comprehension and collaboration.

William Claus and co.

"*Marche du Siècle*": Bradol is still due to appear on the programme. This means a break with MSF-F. Dominique can no longer guarantee the security of the expats in Rwanda.



**Letter** from Mit Philips, MSF Belgium coordinator in Kinshasa, to MSF Directors, Presidents, Board, Secretary General MSF International, 31 May 1997 (in French). [D253](#)

#### Extract:

I am writing to you about the incident that we have just experienced in former Zaire following the Médecins Sans Frontières statements about the Rwandan refugees that appeared in the press. I consider that the way you have handled this reveals a lack of seriousness and an overwhelming professional incompetence.

Let no one start moralising by saying that the cause of the massacres is so grave that it justifies what has happened, because I am not even questioning the contents of the report or the duty of bearing witness on this issue. I repeat - my concern is your carelessness and incompetence over the way this témoignage [testimony] was handled ...

-Kinshasa: Both the MSF-B and MSF-F teams learned through RFI that MSF was denouncing [the AFDL]. To make things worse, the MSF-B Kinshasa team was not even told that such a report was being prepared.

-Mbandaka: No information.

-Kisangani: Information on the report but no warning about its distribution. The AFDL official tells the Coordinator what MSF has been saying.

-Goma: Information on the report, but no agreement on releasing it at that time.

-Furthermore, MSF-B's Zaire Desk for Kinshasa, with which we were in contact throughout the weekend, was not informed...

The day Kabila arrived in Kinshasa, after we spent a weekend indoors to avoid being bumped off by the FAZ, when the situation in Kinshasa was extremely volatile and totally insecure: who could have chosen a better moment?

And don't tell me that you could not have foreseen the fall

of Kinshasa and that Kin[shasa] would already be under AFDL control (as somebody told me over the phone), because in that case you are all the more stupid for not even doing a basic analysis of the way things might develop...

As for me, I've had it. I'm sending you notice that I don't trust you. I feel scorned these days - my personal security scorned, my views scorned, my work in the field scorned, my very existence scorned.



"Re-interview," **E-mails** between Wilna Van Artzen, MSF Holland programme manager and Dominique Boutriau, MSF Belgium programme manager, 4 June 1997 (in English). [D254](#)

#### Extract:

Hi Dominique

I think that Jean Hervé Bradol's interview is not appropriate at this time, and should not take place. Although we can assume that a lot of the things he is going to say might have been said already, it will, at least in Goma, work as oil on the fire.

Secondly we cannot have confidence that he is taking into account the precarious situation some of our teams are in at the moment. MSF Paris has other priorities (right or wrong, not the discussion now) than to preserve the mission and give priority to the security of our teams.

Thirdly, although the reports have been handed over [to] the AFDL in the various locations, insecurity is not only coming from AFDL official [s in] various locations, insecurity is not only coming from AFDL official levels, but maybe more from the so called uncontrolled/undisciplined fractions[SIC]. One more interview on local radio/TV will only assist a possible uncontrolled response from these sides.

And, SCF and UNHCR have sent out a press release yesterday evening in relation to the murder of SCF national staff member and the refugees, strong one.

[Dominique's answer to Wilna]

Hello Wilna

I am afraid that the interview of the Marche du Siècle is going to take place.

I do agree that MSF Paris has shown a lack of responsibility towards our team in their external communication of last month, this on 5 separate "incidents" ... and I do think that due to the frequency of these "incidents", they are not hazardous incidents.

Our General Director has vetoed the passage of Bradol ... without success. Eric Goemaere has had a phone conversation with Bradol yesterday and Bradol will maintain his interview ... as he mentions he is not able to convince

the Marche de Siecle to accept somebody else from MSF. I believe it is true because I have been called by the journalist of The Marche du Siecle to check the figures of war wounded in our Kisangani hospital ... and the journalist said that the organiser of the Marche du Siecle wants to have the person who was in charge of the famous Libé report...so Bradol !!!

Anyway, following what Eric told me, Bradol will concentrate on two subjects:

-The implication of the French elements in the Rwandese [SIC] refugees crisis ... supporting existence of the camps and therefore facilitating the remilitarisation of the camps... using the civilians as a human shield. I am not against that... although I do feel personally that MSF should not be involved in such kind of political issue ... it should not either affect our field teams.

-The refugees missing: Bradol wanted to talk about massacres; Eric asked to stress also on their medical status... not allowing them to leave without humanitarian assistance... as this would lead to death.

Eric expressly said that the word "extermination" should be avoided, that Rwanda should not be accused, and UNHCR either. Bradol agreed.

Our teams have been informed in the field.

I understand that the security is very touchy especially in Goma after the SCF incident in which one local staff was killed on purpose. Security is also very tense in Rwanda... and starting to be tense in Kisangani. I hope that this time the discussions in Paris will be respected...

**At the request of its team in Rwanda, MSF Belgium decided not to send the French section any further information on the Great Lakes context and suspended all communication concerning the refugees in eastern Zaire until further notice.**



'Silence Does Not Mean Consent,' **Message** from the MSF Belgium team in Rwanda to the Directors and programme manager of MSF Belgium, MSF Holland, MSF France, 29 May 1997 (in French). **D255**

#### **Extract:**

We have been equally dismayed, distressed, disappointed and angered by the whole episode. We try to understand why MSF France adamantly insists on being reckless and nonchalant about the lives of so many volunteers in the region. We also try to understand how on earth it is again possible that apparent differences in approach of advocacy can lead once again to another intersectional crisis ... Going back to last week: we tried to open a dialogue with the major players in the country, we discussed the report, we handed over these reports to the various embassies, we promised to give them time to study and analyse the

report. Most were critical of the method we chose to discuss this matter in public; they proposed to have this discussed internally with those responsible and promised to apply diplomatic pressures using our data and info. We said we would open dialogue to express our concern and for the time being, no more publications and discussions would take place through the media. Astonishing therefore that only a few hours after our final meeting and discussion with the German embassy, all we had just said went up in smoke due to the latest press release of Paris. This put us in a funny situation not knowing what to say next.

This approach put us in a difficult position. We have lost confidence again. MSF will be taken as one who sells lies or as people who don't know what they are talking about, as jokers, and unreliable. What a nice image to have in the diplomatic circle and the international community...

#### **Proposals for the long-term:**

We should review our approach to humanitarian aid, we don't think it is only a question of the Great Lakes region; it is a question of probably the new era of human rights and humanitarian aid. It is a question of our ethical value and its implications. We have to bring our acts together and come up with plans and strategies [relating to] where and how to go about it.

#### **For the short-term:**

1. We should cut off our link with Paris, stop providing any information since they repeatedly refuse to co-ordinate their press communiqués.
2. We think it is imperative for all payers involved at headquarters level to get together and come up with a genuine coordination. What happened to Chantilly? Please let us put our acts together.



**Message** from Eric Goemaere, General Director, MSF Belgium, to the Management of MSF France, 29 May 1997 (in French). **D256**

#### **Extract:**

This is not a hasty emotional reaction. It is a decision taken following countless warnings issued over the course of the great many discussions we have had, and the past agreements that you consciously flouted from the day after that famous Board meeting, through what now very clearly appears to be a deliberate attitude and not a "lack of understanding".

All in all, the priviledging of domestic and personal interests over those of the movement has resulted, beyond the risks mentioned above, in a profound loss of credibility for MSF on the international stage. It is now seen as the plaything of the French media and other interests.

Given the gravity of the consequences, we have unilaterally taken the following decisions:

- No further information on this context will be sent to the French section.
- The possibility of publicly dissociating ourselves from the

positions adopted by the Paris Operations Centre; a policy that applies to local authorities as well as to the media and western political players.

-Cessation of the approaches begun on site [in DRC] to obtain accreditation for the French section.

-Refusal of joint representation with the French section for any move concerning this context.

As for the expatriates sent by Paris and currently working in the field, we will ask them to respect the decisions, operational methods, and communications policy as defined by Brussels. It is clear that it would be better if those who are not happy with these methods return to Europe, as the situation does not allow for continual differences over decisions.

We take no pleasure in writing this, for we are well aware that there is a great risk of dealing a severe blow to the movement's internationalisation, but spare us the deceit of making us take the blame for it.

Nothing is immutable at MSF but it seems to us that if trust is to be restored, the following minimum conditions should be fulfilled:

-Cancellation of the Board's decision of 25 April affirming more nor less that nothing can stop the will of an individual section to engage in denunciation, which totally disregards all former commitments.

-Respecting a total silence on denunciation from the French section, with the exception of the careful resumption of messages issued by Coordinators designated by Brussels and Amsterdam.

-Willingness to accept the operational coordination mechanisms as defined for the region by the Directors of Operations.

On our side, we undertake to put in writing by Monday the oft-repeated arguments justifying such an operational policy. This is in order to avoid any blockage of critical dialogue on the background.

A meeting of General Directors is already planned for 4 June in Brussels. It could be an opportunity to avoid recourse to the International Council. The ball is in your court.



'Update on Comm[unications] Policy,' E-mail from Communications Task Force Brussels to all communication departments, 30 May 1997 (in English). [D257](#)

#### Extract:

As promised yesterday, below is an explanation of what we are doing about the communications problems faced over the last few weeks. Yesterday evening, a letter from Eric Goemaere went to the Paris office, at the level of the executive, expressing dissatisfaction with the way that communications about the Congo region has been handled in recent times.

For the moment, there is an all-stop on information flow to prevent further damage to the situation on the field as well as in relations between the Brussels/Amsterdam and Paris offices, in regard to the refugee crisis and advocacy on this subject. In the mean time, there will be discussions to solve the organisational problems.

By the end of Monday, or early Tuesday, a document detailing our involvement in Congo and explaining the operational basis of our presence in the country will be sent.

The Brussels Backup Section wishes to emphasise that advocacy is firmly on the agenda, and it is the methods and content of advocacy that need to be clearly defined. Agreement on the line of communication and advocacy has to be found quickly. You will be kept up to date on the process, so please do not hesitate to call Michel Villée, Daniel De Shryver or Chui Hsia for further clarification.

**In a special report in *Messages*, the MSF France in-house magazine, the Communications Director questions the advocacy policy of the MSF movement in the Rwandan refugee crisis in Zaire. He recalls that during the genocide, the team in Kigali, even though at the mercy of the militias, did not oppose the public denunciation of the massacres by the team in Butare. The former Butare coordinator replied later in *Contact*, the MSF Belgium in-house magazine.**



'I Keep Quiet, You Keep Quiet, They Die,' Doctor Jean-Hervé Bradol, Director Communications MSF France, *Messages* (MSF France in-house magazine) April-May 1997 (in French). [D170](#)

#### Extract:

For several months now, everyone - be it in government offices, the United Nations, or the press - has been aware that an implacable process is underway to liquidate the largest possible number of refugees still present in Zaire, or about 250,000 people. In late March 1997, one of our teams in Kivu drafted a report on the fact that our work - the roadside first aid posts to help the refugees coming out of the forest - is being used by the ADFL, backed up by Rwandan military, to attract the refugees and then massacre them.

At the end of April, we began to release this information unofficially to governments, the United Nations and a few journalists. Meanwhile, in Kisangani, refugee massacres were beginning. The Rwandan-speaking troops took over from the Katangans, mechanical diggers were sent to the camps to dig mass graves, and of course, access to the camps remained closed to the aid organisations.

What was the reaction from Médecins Sans Frontières? First veto from Brussels - prohibiting any release of information, even unofficial, about the fact that our work is being used to make refugee massacres more efficient. Second veto from Amsterdam - prohibiting discussion of the massacres in progress in the Biaro and Kasese camps south of Kisangani.

So what's left of our so-called policy of advocacy? The right to release information confidentially to officials and journalists already perfectly aware of the facts, and already publicly proclaimed by other aid organisations, usually reluctant to speak out? The right to describe the situation of the survivors, without explaining what really happened to them? The right to count the number of corpses for which we supplied body bags?

A glaring example is this account, transmitted by the MSF field desk, of a discussion between the aid organisations and the Vice-Governor of Kisangani. For information, two weeks previously, these authorities were massacring the refugees. We are now collecting eyewitness accounts of the massacre of our patients by the troops following the orders of these same political leaders. The killings continue south of Biaro, which is still off-limits to us.

"The Vice-Governor, accompanied by Kamanza (ADFL/UNHCR liaison officer) and the Mayor of Kisangani, also deplored the poor image given to the Alliance in the outside world, feeling this image to be unfair because it failed to mention the good things done by the Alliance, such as authorising the transit site, providing escorts, ferrying the refugees over to the right bank, and so on. MSF was mentioned as a good example on three occasions after my particularly frank but friendly conversation with the Vice-Governor. They are probably playing a sort of game in denigrating UNHCR while applauding others, aiming to drive a wedge between us, so we shouldn't be too happy to hear about these feathers in the MSF cap.

There is certainly more than 'a sort of game' in the dedication employed by the butchers to silence the victims. But to realise this, we have to open our eyes rather than congratulating ourselves over 'frank but friendly' conversations with the monsters who have just exterminated our patients.

#### Butare, 1994, for information

The MSF team stands by powerless as the Rwandan militia kills 200 patients in Butare hospital. It was decided to close the mission and accuse the Rwandan authorities of the time. Another team was in Kigali at the mercy of the militia. This team decided not to oppose the approach adopted by the Butare team and stayed in Kigali. I was a doctor in the Kigali team and Rony Zachariah was a doctor in the Butare team. More than ever, I can only thank Rony for having opened his big mouth and enabling me to continue to be able to look at myself in the mirror.



'On Behalf of the MSF Butare Team, 1994,' Doctor Rony Zachariah, *Contact* n°48 (MSF Belgium Internal publication), June-July 1997 (in English). [D258](#)

#### **Extract:**

I must clarify, that there were the following distinct differences in the general context:

- a) April 26th 1994 was the day that we had left Rwanda, an evacuation from Butare via Bujumbura by road. There was nothing more to do. We had no more MSF local personnel, and no more victims to treat. The patients that we had treated and saved during the past weeks had all been killed in front of our own eyes (Butare hospital 22-23 April 1994). In a larger context, we had been witness to a genocide of over one million Tutsis. The entire expatriate staff had been evacuated and the local MSF staff had either been massacred or had already fled to Burundi. International press declarations and a press conference were then decided on by the team while in Burundi, in collaboration with the head offices. It is therefore important to note that the decision to go to the press was taken by the team itself and not by individuals at the head offices.
- b) As there were neither expatriate nor MSF Tutsi personnel present in Butare at the time of our declarations, there was no possible repercussion on the 'security' of individuals.
- c) The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) had already taken over control of a good part of Kigali and the former Hutu government (of Habyarimana) was already fleeing to neighbouring Zaire towards the end of April. There were MSF teams present in Kigali (MSF-International) and further north of the country (areas controlled by the RPF). Therefore, the international declarations made against the Hutu government were of relatively no risk to the MSF teams, and in fact were clearly welcomed by the new RPF rebels.
- d) In conclusion, the press declarations and testimony of the team of Butare 1994, were therefore made, in the context of a genocide, in circumstances where there was no potential risk to the security or lives of MSF personnel, in a situation where there was no risk to operations, and the declarations were well accepted by the authorities/rebels in Kigali and other RPF controlled areas. Furthermore, the initiative was primarily a decision taken by the field teams in collaboration with the head offices.

**A report commissioned by the Lutheran church and several articles in the international press detailed the violence directed at Rwandan refugees in the Congo. The**

**UN called for its immediate cessation. Laurent-Désiré Kabila described all such claims as irresponsible.**



“In Congo, Forbidding Terrain Hides a Calamity,” Donald G. Mc Neil Jr *The New York Times* (USA), 1 June 1997, (in English). [D259](#)

**Extract:**

The European group Doctors without Borders has accused Mr Kabila’s guerrilla Alliance of using humanitarian agencies as bait, leading them into the jungle with food and medical care for refugees, but really to lure the Hutu out of the forest so they could be killed. In some areas, notably on the roads west to Goma and in Biaro and Kasese camps near Kilometre 42, south of Kisangani, Rwandan Tutsi Alliance troops are accused of methodically massacring refugees, including women and children, and burning the bodies.

The Alliance has angrily denied that. Some refugees estimate that half their number have died in the jungle - some from bullets, most from starvation and disease. But there is no way to know, because they are scattered over an area nearly the size of Western Europe. Thousands have turned up in Mbandaka, 750 miles west of Lake Kivu, and many have been spotted on the Angolan border, 600 miles to the south. The United Nations says it knows of 125,000 refugees repatriated since January and the whereabouts of 53,000 more still in Congo or neighbouring countries. That leaves 222,000 unaccounted for. For all practical purposes, if they are alive and with ex-soldiers, they are still at war.



Tension and Violence in Eastern Congo (the former Zaire),’ *AFP* (France), Kinshasa, 2 June 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

Violence, reprisals, inter-ethnic tensions and violations of human rights are still prevalent in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, the former Zaire), a local commission of inquiry in Kinshasa said on Monday. In a report released to the press, a commission of inquiry organised by the Lutheran Church in the Congo (the former Zaire) stresses that the new government is inheriting “a particularly alarming situation with regard to human rights”.

“AFDL leaders have had little control over the behaviour and thirst for vengeance of many of their combatants. Large numbers of these are very young and had already actively engaged in inter-ethnic battles,” according to the report. “Moreover, this justifies the great number of reprisals, which may become common practice if they are not dealt with in the eastern region and the country as a whole,” the document continues...

The situation seems particularly serious in this province, notably in the Uvira region, where the rebellion started

last October. “Much of the population of the Uvira zone has fled. Some are still in Tanzania, while others have gone north or south. Those who dared to return have been subjected to torture,” the report reveals...

The provinces of North and South Kivu were the first to be taken by Kabila’s men in October and November. “The daily life of the populations of these zones is characterised by a generalised climate of anxiety. Many are convinced that the war is not over and that the future looks bleak,” according to the document.



‘Accusations of Massacres of Refugees are ‘Particularly Irresponsible,’ According to Kinshasa,” *AFP*, (France), Kinshasa, 2 June 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

On Monday, the authorities of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, the former Zaire) described the fresh accusations of massacres of Rwandan Hutu refugees issued by a senior UN official as “particularly irresponsible.”

“All these officials are supposed to be impartial; they should not make such statements lightly. Have they seen the massacres? They should think carefully and check their facts before making such allegations,” government spokesman Raphaël Ghenda told *AFP*.

The UN Under-Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs, Yasushi Akashi, claimed that massacres are continuing in the former Zaire, despite the assurances given by DRC President Laurent-Désiré Kabila. “Despite the official statements given by President Kabila to several officials including the UN representative and Mohammed Sahnoun of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the massacres continue,” Mr Akashi wrote in an opinion column in the *International Herald Tribune* (IHT) on Monday, as the OAU’s 33rd summit opened in Harare.

Moreover, he claimed that UN staff assisting in the repatriation of Rwandan refugees from Mbandaka, on the Congo-Brazzaville border, learned from “reliable local informants that the killings are still going on in the forests”. According to these informants, “the refugees are hunted down despite the opposition (to these kinds of practices) of some non-Tutsi units of the ADFL (Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo).”

Last Thursday, the UN Security Council appealed to the new government to stop the massacres. Kinshasa replied by accusing the UN authorities of backing a “campaign of intimidation”.

**On 3 June, MSF Germany announced that after receiving the MSF report, the German Foreign affairs Minister addressed an EU meeting and called for an end to the massacres. MSF Holland described this approach as a model of “quiet diplomacy”.**



"Advocacy on Zaire Reports," **E-mail** from Petra Meyer, MSF Germany Director of Communication to MSF Holland Press Officer, e-mail from Max Glaser MSF Holland Context Unit to Operation Directors, 3 June 1997 (in English). **D260**

#### Extract:

This is what silent diplomacy can do, greetings Wilna... This is just to inform you that after handing over the two reports (Zaire) to the German government, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Klaus Kinkel, yesterday said on the occasion of a meeting of the EU Foreign Ministers in Luxemburg, "I've got information that massacres have been carried out on the Rwandan Hutu population in Eastern Zaire." He also said that aid agencies ought not to be used by the military as a lure in order to trace and kill refugees. Kinkel called on Kabila to stop these killings immediately. He announced that next Wednesday (tomorrow) a mission of the EU together with representatives of the USA would present their protests to Kabila's government.

MSF was not quoted as source of information. This message was on the main TV current affairs programmes yesterday evening.

Best regards, Petra

**Some of the refugees at Loukolela in northern Congo-Brazzaville (4,800 people) began to be transferred by barge or aircraft to the Bilolo camp near Brazzaville. From 5 June, fighting in the city prevented MSF teams from gaining access to these refugees.**



'Rwandan Refugees in Congo-Brazzaville,' **Press Release**, MSF France 7 June 1997, (in French). **D261**

#### Extract:

For the last two days, street fighting in Brazzaville has forced humanitarian organisations to suspend aid operations to the Rwandan refugees in Bilolo camp, 25 km from the Congolese capital. No food has been distributed since Thursday morning and medical staff have not had access to the camp. The registration of refugees volunteering for repatriation to Rwanda has also been stopped.

The impossibility of free movement in Brazzaville has also prevented assistance to the Congolese wounded in the fighting. 13 Médecins Sans Frontières volunteers are now trapped in Brazzaville. Two MSF teams are still working with the 10,000 refugees regrouped in two camps in the north of the country. But the impossibility of reinforcing the missions with provisions from Brazzaville will soon create shortages of food and medical supplies.

The mortality rate is very high at NjoundouNjundu and

Loukolela. We record six deaths per 10,000 per day at NjoundouNjundu and four per 10,000 at Loukolela (we estimate that the critical point is generally two per 10,000 per day). The Médecins Sans Frontières teams have installed a dispensary at each camp (one hundred consultations a day), a therapeutic nutrition centre, latrines, and a drinking water supply. Many refugees are suffering from dysentery. The main problem on these sites remains the supply of drinking water, access being very difficult. Eighty percent of the refugees are male, and some are ex-Rwandan militia or army. Although separating militia and army veterans from the refugees was supposed to be a priority, no measures to achieve this have yet been taken.

**On 8 and 11 June, the Washington Post published details of the massacres, particularly those at Kasese and Mbandaka, perpetrated by troops loyal to Laurent Kabila.**



'Massacres Became a Weapon in Congo's Civil War,' John Pomfret, *The Washington Post* (USA), 11 June 1997 (in English). **D262**

#### Extract:

This hamlet of straw-thatched mud huts in the heart of Congo's vast rain forest harbors a dark secret. In mid-April, urged on by military officers loyal to rebel leader Laurent Kabila, its villagers tore through a camp of mostly Rwandan Hutu refugees, hacking and spearing groups of men, women and children.

Armed men among the Hutus fought them off. But a day later, Kabila's rebel forces stepped in and, according to survivors and local residents, ravaged the refugee community of 55,000 for seven hours, firing wildly into the encampment in a grove of palm trees straddling a rutted jungle road. Again local villagers joined in the fray, wielding spears and machetes against the refugees.

The local residents and refugee survivors say hundreds died. Many of them were buried in a mass grave 500 yards up a dirt path that now is guarded by Kabila's troops.

The story of Kasese is just one of numerous tales of mass killings of refugees carried out by soldiers loyal to Kabila, now president of Congo, during his seven-month push to topple Mobutu Sese Seko, then leader of what was called Zaire...

"Outside there was a river of people, of refugees, fleeing Wenji. Some went into the forest, others stole canoes and went to the river. Many were wounded. There was blood and dying people everywhere," he said. "They killed many refugees that day."

In the afternoon, when the shooting stopped, Eale was directed to a pile of wounded women. He said he found a woman and her daughter, about 10 years old, dead. Two others were wounded but alive.

In Wenji that day, Red Cross workers buried 116 people

and pushed dozens more bodies into the river, they said. Killing continued in Mbandaka on May 13 as the soldiers moved in. They chased refugees through the small riverside town, gunning down about 15 people who had hidden behind a large fresco of Mobutu, witnesses said...

"The army came onto the docks and started spraying the port with bullets. All of the soldiers just loaded their guns and shot at the boat, killing everybody. Bodies fell into the river. Bodies fell onto the quay. Bodies fell into the barge," he said recently as he stood by the water and angled for catfish.

"I was in the warehouse and saw it all. We have never seen anything like that. The smell, all the blood, the crying. And the soldiers were so cold. Then they called the Red Cross to clean up the mess. They came and they pushed the rest of the bodies into the river," he said.

#### **On 12 June, the MSF France team was evacuated from Brazzaville as the violence escalated.**



'Briefing on Médecins Sans Frontières, Congo-Brazzaville,' **Press Release**, MSF France, 12 June 1997 (in French). [D263](#)

#### **Extract:**

The Médecins Sans Frontières team in Brazzaville was evacuated this morning. Fighting in the city is now so intense that it cannot treat the injured. Three volunteers have remained in Kinshasa, ready to set up a surgical unit in Brazzaville as soon as the situation allows.

The team spent several weeks assisting the Rwandan refugees in the Bilolo transit camp, 30 kilometres from Brazzaville. The 5,000 refugees there have received no help for a week because of the fighting.

The refugees arrived in the Congo after trekking through the Democratic Republic of Congo for several months. There are still 10,000 people in northern Congo, in the camps at Njundu and Loukolela, where six Médecins Sans Frontières volunteers continue to look after them. Other refugees are crossing the Congo River every day. They are in very poor health. The mortality rate in the camps for the week of 2-8 June rose to 6.4 per 10,000 per day (Loukolela) and 8 per 10,000 per day (Njundu); we estimate that the critical point is generally 2 per 10,000 per day.

**MSF France sent MSF Belgium and MSF Holland a first draft of the recapitulative report containing new testimony, particularly on the massacres at Mbandaka, collected from refugees arriving in Congo-Brazzaville.**



'Re: *Témoignage* Text,' **E-mail** Exchanges Between MSF France Legal Adviser and MSF Holland programme manager, 12 June 1997 (in French). [D264](#)

#### **Extract:**

The report you have received is made out of testimonies collected in the field by MSF people according to a previous agreement between MSFF and MSFB. I have added refugees testimonies on Mbandaka massacres collected in Congo- Brazzaville. The MSF team in Mbandaka has witnessed these events but cannot be quoted as source of information for security reasons. So it is not simply refugees' testimonies.

The report has been made in such a way that it does not quote MSF nor identify the MSF people as the source of information. This is the best possible compromise between advocacy and security. At this moment, such testimonies are of central importance to maintain the awareness and the pressure on the international community that the troubles and massacres are still going on.

The draft text of the report has been sent to you yesterday evening (11.6). The massacres related in the document dated back to one month 15.5. The final text that incorporates remarks from the Belgium and French field teams and desks is annexed (minor textual changes but important detail adjustment).

This text has been conceived and worked on for the following distribution:

-Give it to UNHCR, ICRC, DHA, M. Richardson (UN USA representative), M. Ian Marteen (Great Lakes area UK Government Adviser).

-Hand delivery, to some targeted journalists for briefing (MSF is not mentioned in the report and would not be mentioned as source of the report). Priority would be given to US and UK people and journalists. They would be given the text six hours or more before the others.

Pierre Mounier [MSF logistician] is briefing some targeted journalists and US and UN people in Washington and New York. As for now the testimonies have not been released. If we want to maintain this strict line we have to agree on it quickly.

The normal process is still the approval of the desks who have previously channelled the appropriate information to the field teams. Until now, Dominique and Marie-Pierre have agreed on the text and the distribution line that is written above. To avoid long discussions, delays, and foreseeable vanishing consensus, I propose that Marie Pierre, Wilna, and Dominique, send their written OK on this proposal personal [via] mail reply. Otherwise we will have to go to a General Directors meeting again.

Sincerely Françoise

...It is agreed that it will be discussed tomorrow between

the desks. We like to hear the reasons for the lobby activity- so far I do not see added value.

Wilna

**After discussions with the MSF France team, the MSF Belgium team in Kinshasa opposed a communications operation involving the Mbandaka team. The task force replied that the report would not be presented as a public position.**



**Message** from the MSF Belgium team in Kinshasa to MSF Belgium, Brussels, 11 June 1997 (in French). [D265](#)

**Extract:**

We were all impressed by the power of the *témoignage* [accounts] collected at Loukolela. The horror of these stories surpasses anything we could have imagined. However, we were surprised when the possibility of a *new témoignage* operation was raised. We have had a local exchange of views on this subject with MSF-F. Here is what we (MSF-B) consider a summary of our respective points of view.

**MSF-F**

*Témoignage* is an activity dictated by the MSF charter. Remaining silent would amount to complicity in the current violence. In this particular case, *témoignage* should pursue two objectives:

- To protect the MSF-F expats still present in the Loukolela and Njundu camps (Congo-Brazzaville).
- To reduce the intensity of the atrocities currently being committed.

Will the violence increase before the commission of inquiry is set up (20 June)? Perhaps. In any case, the impact of the *témoignage* cannot be measured.

Request from MSF-F: Are there going to be arguments over not releasing the Loukolela testimony? It concerns Congo-Brazzaville; the testimony comes from the refugees themselves; the source will not be identified.

**MSF-B**

Any testimony from 913 [name of radio code], Loukolela and/or Njundu, even when anonymous, would still draw attention to MSF. There are no multiple sources possible. The solution proposed by Marc C. - to invite journalists to Congo-Brazzaville - would probably be more acceptable. *Témoignage* would place our 913 staff in danger, chiefly the Congolese staff (one expatriate). Would this danger be reduced if the testimony did not mention Loukolela? It is hard to say, given that we don't control the possibilities of combining it.

*Témoignage* requires preparation: A withdrawal of 913 would require at least two weeks. We have approached the new authorities with a dialogue of "transparency" (cf. Mario). Could we withstand the shock of a second report if there is a leak? (The question goes beyond the risk of expulsion - it concerns the protection of our staff, chiefly national)...

Although the danger of expulsion is not a definitive argument (there's not much risk of that, anyway), the MSF-B team in DRC still thinks it has a certain responsibility, given the scale of the programmes. Moreover, the risk of expulsion may be slight but there are other, more administrative, ways to limit our room for manoeuvre. They are already affecting our freedom of movement.

**In conclusion:**

-We are not in favour of an MSF *témoignage* operation. We are against an operation involving 913, for it is impossible to ensure the swift protection of our teams. We request that the case of Loukolela be sub-contracted to reliable people. We would also like better coordination with bodies possessing similar information to ours. On the one hand, in the interests of accuracy (there aren't many potential sources but we are not the only one), and on the other hand, not to [miss] the opportunity to increase our impact.



**"Conclusions of the Task Force re the Distribution of the Report with Collected Testimony in the Process of Development," Message** from MSF Belgium's Task Force Congo to the Teams in Kigali, Kinshasa, Kisangani and Bujumbura, 12 June 1997, (in French). [D266](#)

**Extract:**

- 1/ Necessity of constructing a final version in collaboration with Kinshasa.
- 2/ The report will only be given to human rights organisations - (UN Human Rights to constitute a history which can be used as documentation by the commission of inquiry), and Pierce Gerety, UN Representative in Kinshasa.
- 3/ The information it contains is old (13 May) and the expat and local MSF teams will be at risk if it enters the public domain. Moreover, the report suggests no solution. Given these circumstances and what has happened (and may yet happen), the report will not be released to the press or political authorities. In fact, releasing it to political authorities or journalists, even without mention of MSF, means releasing it publicly.
- 4/ We may verbally and discreetly brief certain journalists on the atrocities committed in the region as a way of urging them to go into the field themselves and do their job. We can verbally brief Congolese and interna-

tional politicians on the information in our possession (the contents of the report).

- 5/ MSF-B suggests taking a stand on public testimony at some point in the future - what form should it take? A press conference with experienced field workers stressing our medical actions would certainly be of great value, would improve public perception, and would distance us from the image of a human rights or information agency. Public testimony would probably force us to evacuate at least part of our teams and must therefore be prepared. This topic should be discussed within MSF-B ASAP. We can invite people from MSF-H and MSF-F.

**The MSF Belgium desk continued to refuse MSF France's requests for information about the plight of the refugees in the Mbandaka area, where massacres were still occurring.**



'Re: Mbandaka,' E-mail exchange between MSF France programme manager and MSF Belgium programme manager, 11 and 12 June 1997, (in English). [D267](#)

**Extract:**

From MSFF to MSFB  
- 11/6/97 16:09

Hello; Today more than 8,000 Rwandan refugees are in Congo along the Zaire river and the Ubangi River, stuck there, between Loukulela and Njundu. Two MSF Teams (6 people in Loukolela and Njundu) are present with these people in these camps, delivering assistance to them. There is also a MSF team, coming down from Bangui, on the river, to deliver food, infusions, and fuel to the 2 camps.

We know, from the refugees themselves, from Pierre Mounier who came back last week from Mbandaka, that massacres are still going on, (even USAID officials speak about it), that refugees are pursued by the AFDL soldiers. We fear that these soldiers attempt to cross the river to finish their work on the other side. There is an MSF team on DR Congo side, in Mbandaka, but we do not have any information about what is happening there. Circulation of information has been stopped some weeks ago and still is because in MSF we spend more time discussing internal problems than refugees ones (at least since a few weeks). In the best interests of the refugees, (if anybody cares), and for the security of our teams (which seems to be a main concern for anyone, so, prove it!), I am asking this black out imposed on what is happening in the Great Lakes is stopped and that all information can circulate freely between the different sections on the field and at the head quarter level.

Greetings, MP.

**Extract:**

From MSFB to MSFF - 12/6/97 18:30

Hello Marie-Pierre;

As you know, there have been several breaches of rules over the last 6 weeks, concerning security rules and advocacy. These have broken the confidence we have in MSF Paris.

I would like to be clear, MSFB is in favour of the "témoignage"... and I would just like to remind you [about] our press briefing of the 25th of April...before the start of the unacceptable attitude of Paris. Therefore I do not understand at all the meaning of your board meeting of the night of 25th April... and the decisions that have been taken there.

For us, a MSFF board decision that *témoignage* is a priority on operations and that a warning of 24 hours on MSF teams (from other sections!!!) is sufficient for MSF (France !!!) to make *témoignage* is not a sign of an international attitude.

This means that we are asking [for] some positive signs from Paris to review this board decision and to restore the confidence. Up to now, the Directors meetings of last days have not been successful (as far as I understand). Therefore, it is not possible for us to feed you with detailed info from the field in the Great Lakes region and believe it or not, I regret it deeply.

You might know that this does not mean for us a blockade on Paris... as I am collaborating with Françoise Saulnier on the testimony reports, trying to find an acceptable solution for all of us. The door is still open from our side, waiting for a sign from yours.

Kind regards  
Dominique.

**On 13 June, the Rwandan Foreign Affairs Minister publicly named the "six parties" he believed responsible for the plight of the refugees. Laurent-Désiré Kabila was not on the list.**



'Rwanda Names Those Responsible for the Plight of the Refugees,' **AFP** (France) Kigali, 13 June 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

On Thursday, Anastase Gasana, Rwandan Minister for Foreign Affairs, named the "six parties" responsible for the suffering of the Rwandan refugees who are still trekking through the former Zaire. France was at the top of the list. However, Mr Gasana exempted Laurent-Désiré Kabila, President of the new Democratic Republic of Congo, on the grounds that "Mr Kabila's priority was not to ensure the security of the refugees" ...

"The chief culprit", said Mr Gasana when he addressed the diplomatic corps in Kigali, "is the one who created

the famous Turquoise Zone in 1994. This allowed the government which had planned and carried out the 1994 genocide and massacres in Rwanda to literally deport huge numbers of people to Zaire and use them as hostages, as a political and military human shield" ...

The second party responsible for the migration of "these tens of thousands of people is composed of actors from the international community who were not able or willing to enter the refugee camps and separate innocent refugees from the criminals who conducted the genocide and massacres in Rwanda in 1994" ...

"The third includes those who trafficked arms in former eastern Zaire and armed the refugees in the camps; the people who transformed refugee camps into military camps."

Fourth on the minister's list are the former Rwandan politicians and military leaders and the regime of the ousted Zairian President Mobutu Sese Seko, who all held refugees hostage for political ends.

In fifth place lie "elements of the former Rwandan armed forces (FAR) and Interahamwe militias (Hutu) who planned and carried out the genocide of a million human lives in Rwanda and who, having decided to flee, took their families and friends with them and forcibly abducted innocent Rwandan citizens, most of them children, girls and women" ...

Finally, Mr Gasana pointed to the "armed refugees, ex-FAR and Interahamwe militiamen who fought alongside Mobutu's soldiers in Zaire."

**That same day, the programme managers from MSF Belgium, MSF France, and MSF Spain held a meeting and decided to release the report to the English language press and key diplomats, and later to the international press. The text was finalised and approved that night by MSF Belgium and MSF France. MSF Holland blocked the release until the next General Directors' meeting, scheduled for two days later.**



**Minutes** of 'International Meeting of Great Lakes programme managers,' 13 June 1997 (in French). **D268**

**Extract:**

The compilation of refugee witness reports from Kisangani and Mbandaka has now been finalised. This meeting was called to decide what was to be done with it if anything. Amsterdam doesn't think it can work with this document for various reasons:

- The whole process in Europe is a mess...
- All the information contained in the report is second hand
- Solely from refugees (none from local population)...
- The topic is already making the front pages...
- Doesn't understand what is to be gained with this report. Do you think the refugees should be repatriated?...

Barcelona:

- It is part of MSF's responsibility to speak out on behalf of the refugees...
- This report complements all the advocacy we have done before...

Paris feels that it is their duty to pass on what the refugees have told them:

- The intention is to distribute it to key political figures and selected journalists (who will be asked not to mention MSF.)...
- Would like to distribute the report containing both the reports from Kisangani and Mbandaka. The report from Mbandaka may cause security problems for local staff. If this risk is considered to be too great it is agreed that they will be taken out of the report...

Brussels does not want the part from Mbandaka to be included: ...

- Agrees that the process was a mess, but we can't just stop now
- MSF should advocate on these shocking stories...
- Field agrees with distribution to key diplomatic persons...
- English speaking press should be given the report 24 hours in advance of others...
- Try and meet officials in Kinshasa to discuss the report...

Conclusion:

Wilna [MSF Holland Desk] will discuss the issue once again with Lex and Pim [MSF Holland Executive Director and Director of Operations], but for the moment Amsterdam does not want to be involved. Paris, Brussels and Barcelona will distribute the report on Monday to the English speaking press and key diplomatic persons and 24 hours later to other press.



'Teleconference,' **E-mail** from Jean-Marie Kindermans, MSF International General Secretary to MSF Belgium, MSF Holland and MSF France Executive Directors, 13 June 1997, 16:16 (in English). **D269**

**Extract:**

As agreed with all of you, I propose a teleconference next Monday 16 June, at 12:30 (number 0033149574929). When Dircom [Director of Communications] from Belgian section sent the document, he said: Goal of this advocacy campaign is not to convince the public opinion and decision makers that the refugees are systematically being massacred (everyone seems to agree by now) but to insist that action needs to be taken to stop this practice.

Therefore we are supposed to answer to the following questions:

- 1/ Is there an agreement on the final version of the attached document, whose translation should be ready by Monday? Testimonies collected in the field by MSF people. It includes testimonies on Mbandaka massacres

collected in Congo Brazza[ville]. As the MSF team in Mbandaka has witnessed these events, MSF cannot be quoted as source of information.

- 2/ Do we agree to distribute it to UNHCR, ICRC, DHA, US representative at UN, UK government adviser?
- 3/ Do we agree to distribute it to targeted journalists, especially in English speaking countries, with the condition not to be quoted? Do we want to do it through visits to these people?



'French Draft Version,' **E-mail** from Dominique Boutriau, MSF Belgium programme manager to Françoise Saulnier, Legal Adviser, MSF France, 13 June 1997, 18:20 (in French). [D270](#)

**Extract:**

Here's where we are. The Mbandaka part (testimony of Pierre Mounier) has been rearranged and approved by MSF Kin[shasa] for the strategy proposed (see results of Desks meeting of today).

The "fautes d'orthographe [spelling mistakes]" have been (totally?) removed. The Red Cross has been transformed into a humanitarian organisation. The looting of the villages... is made by FAZ and Ex-FAR (see introduction). This is on this version that Hui Shia is translating into English together with Caroline in Paris.



'Témoignage Text,' **E-mail** exchange between Françoise Saulnier, MSF France Legal Adviser, Dominique Boutriau, MSF Belgium programme manager and Wilna Van Artzen, MSF Holland programme manager, 13 June, 21:43 (in English). [D271](#)

**Extract:**

Response from Dominique

After the phone conversation with Marie Pierre and Wilna, MSF B agrees with the strategy you propose. We want to make clear that handing the report to Journo should be done by hand and with briefing cc the OFF the record of MSF.

Also Pierre Mounier makes a briefing OFF the record to selected journos.

We accept IF there is at least 24 hours between the distribution to English media and French media to avoid losing our credibility in case the report is once more taken in priority by the French media.

Also, herewith the LAST French version, that is the corrected version sent by Françoise Saulnier yesterday with the paragraphs cc Mbandaka testimony re-written and approved by MSF Kinshasa (in order to protect our sources)...

Response from Wilna

Well I guess it is clear to everybody that I do not agree. No added value, no confidence in the process (51 addressees on the mail of Daniel de Schrijver in which he states incorrect things), MSF at the moment can not handle such a process apparently and it is unfortunate. I want to stress that I want to continue with the advocacy specially on the ground in Kivu. We are on top of the UNHR investigation, we do advocate to the different delegations passing by. On Monday the testimony issue will be discussed between the sections on director's level.

Have a good weekend, Wilna

**That same day, the Boards of MSF Belgium and MSF France discussed the testimony concerning Rwandan refugees in the Congo.**



**Minutes** of the MSF Belgium Board meeting, 13 June 1997, (in French). [D272](#)

**Extract:**

The same violation of human rights scenario is being played out in the Mbandaka, Boende, and Shabunda regions. Squads track down the fleeing refugees, slaughter them, and bury the bodies in order to hide the evidence. MSF observers believe Kabila is fully aware of the extreme violence perpetrated by Alliance soldiers and certain Rwandan militias, his own son having led such operations in the Kisangani region. The Alliance strategy seems clear: extermination of the Rwandan Hutu refugees. In Rwanda, the villages to which refugees have been repatriated are obviously being targeted for attack. Dominique stresses the extraordinary work done by local staff despite the current obstacles to humanitarian aid.

*Témoignage* - here's a brief recap of recent developments: The MSF France Board meeting in April unilaterally challenged, i.e. with no international consultation, the *témoignage* security veto that applies to all sections. The Board announced that from now on the security veto would be replaced by a 24-hour security warning to ensure the safety (in other words the withdrawal) of the teams. The IC [International Council] sitting of 1 May refused to ratify this unilateral abrogation and reaffirmed that the security veto rule still applied. Moreover, the IC asked the DGs to examine whether a change to the existing rule was appropriate. In terms of *témoignage*, the implicit message from the Paris Board seems quite counter-productive. The incidents that followed did not help matters at all. The emergence of the Shabunda report and "*MSF accuses*" splashed all over the front page of *Libération* (20 May 97) was like a bomb exploding at the centre of MSF.

The Board's evaluation of repercussions in the field benefited from the return of Mit Philips (Kinshasa). The teams

first heard the news on local radio stations; the message “MSF accuses” was repeated every fifteen minutes by RFI in Kinshasa, which was under attack from the Alliance at the time. For Mit Philips, this “clash” is inexcusable. The situation is all the more unacceptable because it has jeopardised the safety of the teams and destroyed all trust between local staff and the operations centre. The staff thought that giving the field prior notification in the event of *témoignage* was an established rule. The field makes a heartfelt plea for the professionalisation of *témoignage* and its harmonisation with the policy of the international movement, because it is obvious that different sections apply different strategies when it comes to communication.

On this topic, Daniel De Schrijver thinks it is important to stress that the “clash” with Paris is not a “mere” professional failing but stems from a far more serious and fundamental problem - a blatant intentionality.

Agnès Delahaie also draws attention to the impact of increasing insecurity is having on recruitment. Fewer candidates are coming forward; some delay their departure in order to “see what happens”, others resign. Field workers are neither professional mercenaries nor pawns who can be moved around according to circumstance and left to deal with the fallout from the disastrous communication strategies devised by operations centres.

Anouk Delafortie expresses concern about the “international memory”, and particularly the absence of note taking or recording of what is discussed at international teleconferences. In the circumstances, it is not surprising that the same problems keep cropping up...

Eric’s comments on various incidents: since the start of the crisis, MSF has done its best in terms of assistance but has not been efficient in terms of protection. Now, the recent *témoignage* might not have been done in a very professional manner but it turned out to be very efficient.

In any case, it helped to save about 50,000 refugees and led to the US finally acknowledging the reality of the massacres. Several international authorities also took more notice after that report.

However, what did it cost? MSF admits it made a huge communications blunder over Kinshasa (Kigali was informed that the Shabunda report was coming out). It thinks *témoignage* is more important than the international movement, even if that implies increased insecurity and the withdrawal of teams. The IC’s power of arbitration must be strengthened; the IC will have to adopt a firm and unambiguous position in September.



**Minutes** of the MSF France Board Meeting, 13 June 1997 (in French). **D273**

#### **Extract:**

Philippe B. suggests setting up a workshop in September, conducted on the case study model - the Great Lakes crisis in this instance - to examine the issue of *témoignage* and the ways it is approached. The workshop would include members from the IC, Boards, Operations Departments and the operations centres of different sections. Its aim would be to produce a study. Although MSF sections have the same philosophy, there is little room for public testimony in operational terms.

Now vital questions should not be ignored. Does *témoignage* endanger the missions? Does it help the political process? Does it endanger populations? Its integration into complex crises like the Great Lakes presents obvious difficulties, but if we are to come to grips with the problematic it might be better to deconstruct the case rather than produce theoretical statements or expositions, to work on the material so that we all learn the same lessons from it and forge a “common culture”. The MSF group possesses all the elements necessary for such a debate. We are one of the few organisations to have taken the discussion forward (re-examination, in-depth analysis) and to have practiced *témoignage*. There is enough material for us to move forward together so that everyone emerges from this crisis with a more mature outlook.

We must revitalise this debate internally and between sections. Odile thinks it sounds a bit like a high mass and wonders if so many participants might not dilute the process. Odysseas thinks that we should be wary of the attraction of conflict. We all agree on the main principles and if such serious conflicts exist, it is because political and cultural approaches vary greatly from one section to another. It therefore seems pointless to talk of principles but essential to examine the nature of these different approaches (perhaps with the help of people from outside MSF).

Bernard agrees that the differences are essentially political and cultural. All that can be modified by a periodic exchange of views and not by declarations. Let’s get away from caricature. Let’s compare different approaches, analyses and methods and learn from each other.

When a problem arises, we should see what reactions and lessons we can learn from it. What methods do we use for *témoignage* and which of them have produced the best results? (Alain)

If we are to create an MSF culture, there should be broad participation by MSF field workers (François). Input from those who were directly affected by the problem is essential (Jeroen).

There are many ways of approaching the matter and we should drop the pretences and the clichés. *Témoignage* poses a permanent problem, a fact that can't be disguised. We can't exempt ourselves from accepting the commitment and the risks (Françoise)...

Congo/Former Zaire: Marie-Pierre Allié [MSF France Desk]  
When we were able to return, there were no refugees in the camps and we were afraid we'd find mass graves. We tried to get back into the field and repatriate people. The mortality rate at Kisangani was 70/10,000/day... At present, there are very few refugees emerging from the forest. 15,000 must have gone on to Congo-Brazzaville. We are working on the northern camps. We have collected testimony of large-scale massacres and have every reason to believe that they will continue... MSF is still collecting testimony on the refugees' odyssey. A document has been prepared and we want to use it to put pressure on major political players. We have still not agreed on how to use it. There is resistance from the Dutch section; they say that as these massacres are now common knowledge, it is not worth doing anymore...

What are the consequences when humanitarian organisations speak out? Marie-Pierre does not think the report's publication led to major security problems. Médecins du Monde in Goma does not see much confirmation either way, when all existing factors are taken into account. There were attacks before and after the report's publication and tension in the area is very high. On Kisangani - no particular consequences.

**On 15 June, the MSF Belgium Coordinator in Kisangani conveyed the team's comments on the report and suggested strengthening its medical component.**



'Stanley the Easterner and the Bridal Couple from Year One after One Year of Marriage' **Message** from Stephan Oberreit, MSF Belgium Coordinator in Kisangani to MSF Belgium Congo Task Force, 15 June 1997 (in French). **D274**

**Extract:**

-13/ The report, muy bien, very good work, although it's a bit of a downer to read, especially on the facts but also on the format (the capsat [satellite transmission] form doesn't help) - leaps in space and time, mixture of genres (description of general events, narration of personal stories...).

At the start of the document, the story's not very clear when they arrive 100km from Kis[angani] and cross the Lualaba (another name for the Congo?) Just after that it talks of passing Ubundu as if nothing had happened, whereas apparently the refugees crossed the Congo at Ubundu in atrocious conditions that led to the drowning of hundreds of people.

One detail which applies not only to the report - are we going to keep on saying Kasese when we're referring to Kisesa? Kasese was in Kivu.

It's annoying that the report makes the extremists of both sides look good - those who are directly responsible for all this suffering - it does not sufficiently highlight their role. It gives a grossly misleading impression of the Alliance and the army. We don't understand why villagers attack the refugees in the Kisangani region and protect them in the Mbandaka region.

Finally, the testimony does not bring out - and the report doesn't take into account at all - the fact that these refugees are almost always surrounded by FAR elements operating with FAZ elements who are conducting a war against the Alliance. In this respect, it can give the Alliance leadership the impression that we're just messing about and that we're dishonest. As a result, it's much more difficult to defend our position as impartial witnesses.

What is clear is that after reading this document, you're not going to be too keen on shaking hands with the local chiefs around here and suggesting that you improve their clinics. I know it's really journalists' work, but have we collected testimony from the villagers?

**On 17 June, the Belgian and French programme managers and Directors of Operations and Communications met in Brussels in an attempt to seek common ground on the question of a public position.**



*At a meeting in Brussels, Marleen Van Bollaert, President of MSF Belgium, as a favour to me and with my agreement, tabled the question, "Who is Jean-Hervé Bradol really working for?" In fact, there was a rumour going round Brussels claiming that I worked for the French secret services, along with Stephen Smith, a journalist for Libération... There are limits to everything. MSF France had already been expelled from Rwanda following accusations of espionage, etc... At the time, I was in charge of programmes and I often travelled in the Great Lakes region. With a reputation like that, I was risking my neck. Moreover, I had just spent the summer of 1996 replacing the coordinator in Burundi. And my colleagues tailored such a reputation for me that I virtually had a blank cheque to get myself killed! It might have been forgotten, but quite a few expats were murdered in Rwanda, Zaire, and Burundi during those years. Many Rwandans worked closely with MSF. Anyone tainted by a reputation as a spy in the pay of the génocideurs is risking his neck when he is in the field... So I was quite annoyed and decided to fight back because I felt that the people who were spreading these rumours were putting me in physical danger.*

Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France programme manager then Communication Director (in French).

**The General Directors could not reach agreement on releasing the report. The decision was postponed until the next meeting of the International Council's Executive Committee on 20 June. Wich decided to release the report confidentially to three human rights organisations, on condition that MSF was not named as the source.**



Atrocities Against and Massacres of Rwandan Refugees in the Territory of Democratic Republic of Congo: Refugee Testimonies,' MSF Report, 18 June 1997 (in English). [D275](#)

**Extract:**

The large majority of Rwandan refugees arriving in the territory of Congo-Brazzaville at the camps of Njundu, Loukolela and Liranga in May and June 1997 had taken the one same route in their flight from the advancing forces of the Alliance. Following the attack on Tingi Tingi camp on 28 February 1997, they went in the direction of Congo-Brazzaville, passing Ubundu, Obilo and Ikela.

The various testimonies collected from these refugees in June 1997 speak in a consistent manner of the atrocities and massacres that were suffered by the refugees during this period. These testimonies are also consistent with those collected from the refugees and the local population within Democratic Republic of Congo.

A separate group of Rwandan refugees was evacuated to the transit camp in Kisangani after the attack on the refugee camps situated along the Kisangani-Ubundu line, between 22 April and 27 April 1997. They were then repatriated to Rwanda. The testimonies collected from some amongst them retrace the abuses and the massacres carried out on this group. Their testimonies also agree with those which have been made public by the humanitarian organisations present in the region at this time...

These testimonies bring to light the following facts:

- AII along the way, the Zairian population did aII they could to help the refugees to hide them from the soldiers of the Alliance, to escape, to find food.
- Humanitarian workers and the members of the local population were on several occasions required by the rebels to take part in the atrocities (cf Mbandaka, Wendji).
- The refugees were pursued and attacked by Alliance soldiers to the banks of the Congo River.
- Massacres were carried out by Alliance soldiers targeting also children (cf Mbandaka) and supposed intellectuals (cf Mbandaka).
- Soldiers of the Zairan Armed Forces (FAZ) in disorderly retreat robbed and committed atrocities when they encountered refugees (Ubundu, Ikela).
- FAZ in disorderly retreat and ex-FAR robbed and committed atrocities when they encountered local residents (Mbandaka).
- The vulnerable (women, children, sick people), unable to keep up, were abandoned by the refugees all along the way. They died of hunger or of sickness, or were the victims of massacres.

-Every family has been broken up, aII families are missing a child, a brother, a mother... women and children are under-represented in the numbers of refugees arriving in Congo-Brazzaville. Men account for 80 percent of the population.



'Do Not Use Testimony Report,' E-mail from Anouk Delafortrie, MSF Belgium Press Officer to MSF sections, 17 June 1997 (in English). [D276](#)

**Extract:**

Following two teleconferences of the General Directors yesterday, the testimony report prepared by Paris & Brussels CANNOT be distributed. In the document sent to you on 11 June, we informed you that a final decision had to be taken by the DG's. In yesterday's teleconference, no unanimous decision was reached with regard to the distribution of the report. The issue will be taken up again Friday in a restricted committee of the International Council.



'Decisions of the Teleconference of the Restricted Committee,' Message from Jean-Marie Kindermans, MSF International Secretary General, 20 June 1997 (in English). [D277](#)

**Extract:**

The report made of information given by refugees in Congo-Zaire is not a typical MSF *témoignage*, but much more of a human rights report. The objective of releasing it is to respect and transmit the *témoignage* of these refugees, and not let these events remain unknown, as well as to guide the work of the UN Commission of inquiry.

It was unanimously agreed to release confidentially this report to three organisations: Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the UN Commission of Inquiry. Each time this report will be given, it will be done personally to an individual that we know from each of these 3 organisations, with the condition that MSF not be identified as a source. Nevertheless, before giving the report to the UN Commission of Inquiry, we will get information to make sure it is a reliable body. We will especially analyse the composition of this commission and its status and functioning, in order to be sure it is not a cover for a political or diplomatic body, on the model of the Kibeho Commission. For Amnesty International, we will try to make sure that they are ready to monitor the work of the UN Commission.

It was decided that somebody in MSF would be responsible for this process and ensure that the principles recalled above are respected. The RC recommends to the Executive Committee that E. Goemaere be in charge.

In addition, it could be decided to release the report to ICRC but it is less likely that we will pass it to UNHCR. It would be a second step after having tested our capacity

to keep it confidential with the 3 previous organisations. It will be up to the Executive Committee to take this decision.

Finally, the RC:

-Expresses its big concern and lack of acceptance of what happened recently in our communications on the Great Lakes, especially after the last RC meeting on May 1.

-Asks the General Directors to come up with other mechanisms for co-operating on assistance and advocacy in the Great Lakes region.

-If another advocacy question comes up in a complex emergency before the September IC meeting, asks the General Directors to have a case by case approach and, each time agree on the content, the distribution and the process of advocacy.

-Asks the General Directors to come up with a proposal for *témoignage* in general, and its links with assistance and security for the next International Council meeting in September.

**On 19 June, following claims in *The Washington Post* that Laurent-Désiré Kabila had ordered the obstruction of the UN Commission investigating allegations of mass killings in eastern Congo, the US State Department reminded the Congolese President of his promise to cooperate.**



'Washington Reminds Mr Kabila of his Promise to Cooperate with the UN,' *AFP* (France) Washington, 19 June 1997 (in French).

#### Extract:

On Thursday, The State Department reminded Laurent-Désiré Kabila, the former rebel leader and now President of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, the former Zaire), of his promise to assist the UN Commission of Inquiry into the massacres of Rwandan Hutu refugees.

Citing Mr. Kabila's assurances to American Envoy Bill Richardson and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, State Department Spokesman John Dinger added, "We expect Mr Kabila to keep his word and cooperate fully with the UN inquiry... We have no reason to believe he won't." Mr Dinger made it clear that the United States also expects "full cooperation" from the Rwandan and Ugandan leaders on this issue.

When asked about *The Washington Post* claim that Mr Kabila had instructed Congolese local officials not to assist UN investigators, Mr Dinger insisted that there was "no information from an independent source" concerning orders issued to local officials by Mr Kabila.

According to *The Washington Post*, which quotes both western and Congolese sources, the instructions were issued last week at a meeting in Bukavu (eastern Congo). *The Washington Post* claims that Mr Kabila is under intense pressure from Rwanda and Uganda to obstruct the UN

inquiry because they forced him to allow their troops to massacre Rwandan Hutu refugees who had fled to Zaire in 1994. In exchange, the two governments supported his overthrow of the Mobutu regime.

**On 20 June, Laurent-Désiré Kabila publicly denied that refugees had been massacred. The UN Commission of Inquiry arrived in the Congo but was not authorised to begin identifying and questioning witnesses until the beginning of July.**



'John Pomfret: Congo Leader Bars Helping UN Probers,' *The Washington Post* (USA), June 19, 1997 (in English). [D278](#)

#### Extract:

Congo's new president, Laurent Kabila, has told local officials here to do as little as possible to aid a UN investigation into alleged refugee massacres by his troops, Western and Congolese sources said.

At an unusual meeting here last weekend, Kabila and other representatives of his Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo warned government officials from Kivu Province, on Congo's eastern border with Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi, not to direct human rights investigators to any mass grave sites or potential witnesses, the sources said.

The sources said Kabila and his new government are under intense pressure from Rwandan and Ugandan security officials to stymie the UN probe. Rwandan and Ugandan security forces formed an important part of Kabila's armed uprising against President Mobutu Sese Seko, who fled into exile May 16.

In exchange for help in toppling Mobutu, Kabila was forced to give those units a free hand in gunning down thousands of Hutu refugees, who had been living in what was then Zaire since 1994, the sources said. The refugees came mostly from Rwanda after radical Hutu leaders masterminded the killing of an estimated 500,000 Tutsis in Rwanda. A Tutsi-led Rwandan uprising drove them out of Rwanda.

The officials, both Congolese and Western, said Kabila held the government meeting in Bukavu because it is the capital of Kivu Province, where many of the massacres are alleged to have taken place. A team of UN investigators is due to arrive in Congo on Friday and scheduled to begin work on July 7...

Over the last six months, UN aid teams have travelled across Congo looking for refugees, although they were barred from some areas by Kabila's military units. Since April 27, about 50,000 Hutu refugees have returned to Rwanda from Congo in a UN airlift. But the UN refugee agency says between 200,000 and 250,000 refugees are still missing in Congo. Some US officials have said those numbers are inflated...

On Sunday, Alliance-run radio called all Alliance party members to another meeting in the centre of town. There the party members were also instructed that they were not to help the UN team find gravesites or witnesses. "We were told to do as little as possible," said one participant. "We were told to stall the UN team and make everything go very, very slowly."



'President Kabila: "There Were No Massacres of Refugees,' *AFP* (France) Kinshasa, 20 June 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

[...] When questioned on Kinshasa television about accusations in the American daily *The Washington Post* that he had ordered the obstruction of the UN investigation into the massacres, President Kabila replied, "These are lies." "In the first place, there aren't any more Rwandan refugees, most of them have gone home. There were no massacres. The international community wants to distance itself from the fact that it helped France to bring Habyarimana's army [Hutu troops loyal to the late Rwandan president] to this country," he claimed. This army, "massacred Tutsis in North Kivu [eastern Congo]. It is common knowledge. They were not refugees." "They are trying to shift the blame onto someone else. These massacres [of Hutu refugees] never took place," said the former rebel leader. A preliminary team from the UN Commission of Inquiry arrived in Kinshasa on Friday morning. The investigation will not begin until 7 July, when a second and final team of investigators arrives in the capital.

**At the end of June, MSF Belgium's Head of Human Resources produced an internal document designed to clarify MSF's practice of *témoignage*.**



'MSF *Témoignage* in Crisis?' **Internal document**, Coordination Alex Parisel, June 1997 (in French). **D279**

**Extract:**

MSF has experienced some stormy weather in terms of *témoignage* in recent months, including a series of denunciations and accusations over the tragic plight of Hutu refugees in the former Zaire. We cannot ignore the flood of frustration, bitterness and accusation, nor everybody's incessant questioning: what MSF *témoignage*? What is it for? Who is it addressed to? What methods do we use? What is its relevance? What causes us to do it and what stops us from doing it? And what about security??

MSF practices three forms of *témoignage*:  
 - Information explaining the delivery of aid in a critical situation (MSF is dealing with malnutrition).

- Denunciation (malnutrition is due to the displacement of populations).
- Accusation (these displacements are caused by the authorities in charge).

It is this last form that often causes problems (and which will be chiefly dealt with below), particularly when it is public and jeopardises action in the field (limitation of the humanitarian space) and the security of the teams. I am suggesting several reference points, taken from our original position and International Council texts, so that we can initiate a discussion that should result in a better definition of *témoignage*, as well as better coordination between HQ and the field in this respect.

The subject concerns us all, whether through our responsibilities or our sensibilities, whether we work in the field, the capital or the operations centre, whether we are medical staff, sanitation specialists or work in human resources.

The main idea behind this document is the protection of *témoignage*, which remains one of our most relevant and original modes of action, as long as we do not abuse it or divert it from its original objectives.

It is a broad domain and the present document is certainly not exhaustive. It has two purposes. The first is to create a breathing space after our media exposure over the last few months and the fallout from the "*Libération episode*". The second is to initiate an in-depth examination which should result in a (re)definition of *témoignage* at an International Council debate in September. We should also note that Thierry Coppens, Head of Research at MSF-B, is organising a seminar and workshops on MSF's *témoignage* policy for mid-October '97.

This instalment is the result of a decision taken at the May management committee. It has been put together hurriedly, as always, with the help of Brigitte Gaignage and Sabine Vanhuyse (document research), Monia (typing) and Edouard Vercruysse (editing). The texts are in French and English; a translation is planned.

Give your critical faculties free rein and let's have your informed comments. Send it all to Thierry Coppens before the end of August '97.



*I had just been appointed director of human resources here and I was so disgusted to see people from MSF Belgium, people like Dominique Boutriau, in tears. To some of them, it represented a break with MSF France, with *témoignage*, with trust. Those people felt that their deepest beliefs had been attacked. It was my duty as head of Human Resources to engineer a kind of catharsis so that people could say what they felt and not repress it. I asked the Heads of Mission for their views and did a fresh analysis. I included the decisions taken at the Executive Committee and the teleconferences in the dossier. Bernard Pécol acknowledged that at some point in the decision-taking process, he had made a mistake, etc... that data had been obscured. People will say that of course that's the Belgian version. OK, but I'm talking about international*

documents. I think there was a kind of loss of control there, which did a lot of harm. I am very curious to see how you are going to present this because you can only rewrite the story against one section or the other.

Alex Parisel, MSF Belgium, Human Resources Director  
(in French)

**On 5 July, the new Congolese government forced the UN to remove Robert Garretton, the Special Reporter mandated by the Human Rights Commission, from the inquiry. It also demanded that the inquiry cover the crimes committed by Mobutu.**



Danielle Rouard 'Mr Kabila's Regime Blocks the Investigation into the Massacres of Hutu Refugees,' *Le Monde* (France), 5 July 1997 (in French). [D280](#)

#### Extract:

The inquiry into the massacres of refugees in the former Zaire, set up at the beginning of April by the UN Human Rights Commission, will not begin its work on 7 July, as planned. The commission sent a seven-strong preparatory team to Kinshasa on 20 June. However, on Thursday 3 July, Etienne Mbaya, Minister for Reconstruction and Emergency Planning, who liaises with the UN emissaries, told the press that disagreements had arisen and blamed the preparatory mission for the blockage. "The mission was supposed to provide us with a report. It did not do so. It is not in a position to answer our questions" ...

[...]

Roberto Garretton, the reporter, mandated by the Human Rights Commission, has been declared persona non grata and will not be granted a visa, said the minister. Mr Garretton visited the Congo in late March and submitted a devastating report concerning massacres of refugees on his return to Geneva. He and his team had tried to conduct investigations in the Kivu region in early May, but Mr Kabila's forces had put a stop to their work. The UN is resigned to the removal of its Chilean human rights expert....

Mr Mbaya also disputes the period covered by the investigation. He is insisting that it covers the period from March 1993 to May 1997, which encompasses the genocide perpetrated by Hutu extremists in Rwanda in 1994, but does not go back as far as the invasions of the country (in 1990 and 1993) by the Tutsi of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). At present, the mission's mandate only covers events occurring after September 1996. "We don't want the violence perpetrated during the Mobutu regime to be hidden and take all the blame ourselves," warns Mr Mbaya.

**On 9 July, in an interview for *The Washington Post*, Rwandan Vice-President Paul Kagame, publicly acknowledged for the first time, planning and supporting AFDL operations in eastern Zaire.**



John Pomfret 'Rwandans Led Revolt in Congo, Defense Minister Says Arms, Troops Supplied for Anti-Mobutu Drive,' *The Washington Post* (USA), 9 July 1997 (in English). [D281](#)

#### Extract:

Rwanda's powerful Defense Minister, Paul Kagame, has acknowledged for the first time his country's key role in the overthrow of President Mobutu Sese Seko in neighboring Congo, saying that the Rwandan government planned and directed the rebellion that toppled the long-time dictator and that Rwandan troops and officers led the rebel forces. Rwandan forces participated in the capture of at least four cities - the Congolese capital, Kinshasa; the southern copper-mining town of Lubumbashi; the key western crossroads of Kenge; and the diamond centre of Kisangani, which fell on March 15 in what was considered the key battle of the war, Kagame said in an interview here Monday. He added that Rwandan "mid-level commanders" led Congolese rebel forces through out the successful rebellion and that Rwanda provided training and arms for those forces even before the campaign to overthrow Mobutu began last October.

Kagame, a Tutsi, also responded to allegations that Tutsi officers of the Rwandan army ordered massacres of Rwandan Hutu refugees inside Congo... Rwandan officers interviewed in Congo said the Tutsis were given a free hand by the Congolese rebels to attack the Rwandan Hutus - many of whom were former Rwandan soldiers and militia-men who participated in the 1994 genocide - in exchange for backing the war against Mobutu. While not denying the possibility of individual atrocities, Kagame accused UN officials who have levelled massacre charges against Rwandan army and Congolese rebel forces of fallaciously trying to equate their behavior with the genocide that Hutu extremists carried out in Rwanda. "It is my strong belief that the United Nations people are trying to deflect the blame for failures of their own making onto us," he said. "Their failure to act in eastern Zaire directly caused these problems, and when things blew up in their faces they blamed us. These are people who want to be judges and nobody can judge them."

Kagame, who holds the titles of Vice President and Defense Minister and is Rwanda's most powerful leader, said that months before war erupted, he warned the United States that Rwanda would take military action against Mobutu's regime and the refugee camps in eastern Congo that were being used as a base by the Hutu troops Kagame had defeated. As many as 1.1 million Hutus were housed by late 1996 in camps in eastern Congo.

While Kagame said he was unaware of any American military support for the rebellion, he commended the United States for "taking the right decisions to let it proceed" ...

In early August 1996, Kagame travelled to New York and Washington, where he said he met with State Department officials and "other people" in the Clinton administration. "I was looking for a solution for them," he said. "They didn't come up with any answers, not even suggestions." Kagame said he returned home sensing that war was inevitable [a State Department official said Tuesday that Kagame told officials during his visit that the camps had to be dismantled and that if the United Nations would not remove them somebody else would have to do it, staff writer Thomas W. Lippman reported from Washington].

The Rwandan army had already begun training Tutsis from Congo who had been the target of attacks by Congolese Hutus for more than three years. Meanwhile, Rwandan agents started making contact with other Congolese rebel forces opposed to Mobutu. Slowly, the organisation that would be known as the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo began to take shape...

"These are some of the things we had to do," Kagame said, summing up the war he planned. "They may not be popular, but we are more interested in the results than with the stories about the results."

### The MSF movement focused its efforts on thinking and communicating about the repatriation of refugees to Rwanda.



'Rwanda: **Mission report**, 23-28 June 1997,' Dominique Boutriaux, programme manager, MSF Belgium, 28 June 1997 (in French). [D282](#)

#### Extract:

Following the repatriation of over one million refugees from Zaire and Tanzania between November '96 and March '97, more than 50,000 refugees were flown back from Kisangani and Mbandaka in May and June '97. These 50,000 people returned in a deplorable state of health and nutrition after being hunted through eastern Zaire for nearly six months. In Zaire, they had been constantly surrounded by former FAR soldiers and their stooges. As no screening took place before the repatriation (about 100,000 of the 150,000 refugees who fled Tingi Tingi spontaneously decided to return), the Rwandan authorities have reason to suspect the recently repatriated of hiding former FAR and Interahamwe members.

We won't go back over the strong suspicions that Rwandan militias were involved in the waves of massacres that occurred in Kisangani, Shabunda, Mbandaka and other locations. There is no doubt that the refugee populations in the Congo have been deliberately cut off from humanitarian assistance, although it is available, and that non-voluntary repatriation amounts to a de facto evacuation of populations. After the massacres at Kisangani, for example, we can understand why the refugees are desperate to be evacuated from the Congo and sent back

to Rwanda (because they have no choice?). Despite the Rwandan government's fears that the transit camps are again serving as sanctuaries for Hutu extremists, it is unacceptable in humanitarian terms that as soon as the repatriated arrive in the Rwandan transit camps, they are put under constant pressure to return to their communes immediately. Most of these communes are in insecure zones, where international organisations cannot directly monitor distribution of aid. In addition, it is obvious that the precarious nutritional state of the most recent arrivals (25% 'visible' malnutrition), and the absence of any serious nutritional programme in most Rwandan communes, will further weaken these people. The Rwandan authorities' attitude to treating the sick and injured in the transit camps can only accelerate the decline in the returnees' health and it is hard to believe the authorities are not aware of this!

Moreover, it is a fact that serious security incidents have occurred in the prefectures of Gisenyi, Ruhengeri, Gitarama, Kibuye, Gikongoro because of infiltrations of armed bands (ex-FAR and militias) on this north-south axis. According to various local sources, armed bands circulate in groups of 300 and demand that local populations replenish their supplies. These bands, which some believe amount to around 25,000 men, are currently targeting military positions and certain communal lock-ups. It appears that the RPA conducts "cordon and search operations" a few hours after they have left the vicinity, operations which ended up as in massacres in the two prefectures, north of the area. In Gisenyi, only the town is relatively secure, although incidents are beginning to occur there.

Finally, we note that there are 115,000 detainees in the country: 60,000 in prisons and the rest in communal lock-ups. Moreover, those repatriated in November '96 and particularly those who arrived this year, still do not have the right to employment. Decisions about employing the repatriated are being delayed at government level...

[...]

The insecurity in the northern prefectures is a disturbing development in the situation in Rwanda. MSF will probably be able to play a role through surgical actions and support to the accessible health centres.

The latest waves of returnees are no strangers to this rampant insecurity. Their reintegration into the communes is not monitored. Apart from their protection (very haphazard!!! 50% of recent arrests are returnees, according to ICRC), nutrition will probably be one of the big problems in the months to come, while national protocols on that issue have yet to be prepared. There is a role for MSF here.

Projects still need long-term planning, while the situation in two of the districts where MSF is working is more like an emergency intervention. Potential donors for such schizophrenic projects are hard to identify!!! It is hard for MSF to set up projects - administrative difficulties are hindering the work (expats coming for two months only, etc.). MSF's *témoignage* activity will have to be limited to objective facts and undertaken with the greatest caution.



'What is our Position on Repatriation?' Eric Goemaere, General Director, MSF Belgium, written 18 June 1997 and published in **Contact** n°48 (MSF Belgium internal publication), June-July 1997 (in French). **D258** [↗](#)

**Extract:**

The issue of our participation in the repatriation of Rwandan refugees is probably one of the most complex the organisation has faced in recent years. We are confronted with a new dilemma with direct parallels to the great episodes of hostage taking in humanitarian history...

[...]

In practice, what operational position can we adopt?

**A. Repatriation**

1. Aid the repatriation of those who indicate a desire for it and prolong the procedure for a minimum of 3 months.
2. Adapt the pace of this repatriation to medical conditions to avoid transporting those close to death: in and out decisions [should be] entirely the responsibility of an MSF expat team.

**B. In the regrouping centres**

3. Ask for active protection in the regrouping and transit sites: The presence of expat UNHCR protection officers and written agreements from the government.
4. Ensure that UNHCR proceeds to an individual and confidential registration (at least an expatriate team) of those unsuitable for return and sets up ad hoc screening procedures in order to distinguish the categories.
5. Push for a political lobby to seek asylum for category 3, including those who cannot return to war zones in Rwanda and Burundi.
6. Insist that UNHCR provides 'objective' information on the security situation in Rwanda in order to facilitate individual choice.

**C. For the refugees still dispersed**

7. Maintain a main transit centre at Kisangani to ensure reference, registration, classification, and protection, as well as satellite reception centres in the main towns and refugee concentration points.
8. Do not actively search but establish reception centres coupled with existing health structures that offer the possibility of medical care, initial registration, and means of transfer (light aircraft) to Kisangani (passive strategy):
  - On the Kisangani-Mbandaka axis: Kesese, Biaro, Obilo, Lubutu, Opala, Ikela, Boendé.
  - On the Bukavu-Shabunda axis: Shabunda, Lulinga, Katshungu.
9. Ensure that no regrouping centre is set up unless the conditions outlined above are met.

**D. Collaboration with the Commission of Inquiry**

10. Maintain, in principle, that collaboration with the commission of inquiry is possible, provided that strict

and previously understood conditions chiefly concerning the protection of witnesses are respected.

Eric Goemaere, 18/06/97



"Update on MSF Meetings in Geneva on 8th of July 1997, 10 July 1997 (in English). **D283** [↗](#)

**Extract:****1. Meeting with UN Human Rights Department.**

We asked about witness protection and they said they are insisting on individual and confidential interviews. However, there is nothing signed yet and they recognised all this might be very theoretical. Whilst they were in Kinshasa, they have already interviewed 30 to 35 people in their office. They suggested we send our "witness" now, before the inquiry actually starts, because they feel now less under scrutiny. Mr Fenish is the permanent person in Kinshasa. They believe the inquiry could start very soon (within a week) and would take months (mentioned 6).

On the whole they gave an impression of not being at all "ready on the practical aspects of the inquiry (protection of witness, where the refugees are, logistical problems, ...). We said we would wait to see the *protocol d'accord* signed and the security condition before we suggested to our staff to testify. We also suggested to do a lot of volume in terms of interviews (like all the humanitarian staff that worked in the areas of massacre) rather than seeing just the volunteers.

They insisted on the fact that if the inquiry had gone this far (!), it was a lot thanks to all the efforts, lobby, and information MSF has provided. In conclusion and after talking with UNHCR and ICRC, the Kibeho syndrome is very strong...

**2. Meeting with UNHCR**

[...]

They recognise that they have very little information on what is happening in the *collines* [hills]. Agree on the feeling of clear worsening of the situation. However, the *arbitrage* [ruling] for them still in favour of pursuing the "repatriation" because they will still be safer than in Congo. In Congo they recognise they are unable to protect the refugees. "It's a rescue, evacuation operation."

UNHCR will not oppose the arrest of returnees (can all be "legitimate"), but recognised the "terrible state of the justice system." The prisons are in a distressing situation and someone (?) needs to attract attention to them.

In DR Congo, UNHCR operations are planned until end of '97. There should be 5 to 6 expats remaining in Kisangani. They will re-evaluate in September for 98. Cc our worry on protection, registration, and *triage* [screening] of the refugees:

"Yes there will soon be a protection officer in Kisangani." For the registration, they still have 3 major problems:

- Lack of human resources (MSF offered legal experts if that was the only problem ...).
- Registration needs to be done with government officials, and they have not yet reached an agreement in DRC.
- In Congo-Brazza, they do not know who to talk to; in Central African Rep., it should be OK.

**At the beginning of July, UNHCR estimated that 230,000 refugees had still not been located. In Rwanda, a quarter of the returnees who had required hospitalisation had died, half of them in the 48 hours following their arrival. UNHCR could not protect those who returned to the communes.**



**Minutes** of the MSF Belgium Board meeting, 11 July 1997 (in French). **D284**

#### **Extract:**

Some figures from UNHCR: In '96, there were about 1.1 million refugees. 600,000 returned in November '96, 54,000 have been flown back in recent months (80% from Kisangani). The further one goes from Kisangani, the less the refugees desire to return to Rwanda. We must respect their choice but what about their status? 180,000 returned by road, which gives a total of 834,000. Of the remaining refugees, we have located 26,000 people. About 1,700 of these are in the Lola transit camp. They don't want to return; the situation is deadlocked. We know practically nothing about the refugees dispersed in the forest. The position of MSF and UNHCR is not to search for them in the forest anymore because it's their last form of protection. We estimate there are about 20,000 refugees in Congo-Brazzaville; barely 300 of these have expressed a desire to return to Rwanda. Thus, according to UNHCR estimates, 230,000 people are unaccounted for...

At present, ex-FAR and *génocideurs* are mixed with innocent people. MSF made it clear at a recent press conference that as long as those sought by the Arusha Tribunal are not separated, the situation will remain blocked - no country wants to accept the *génocideurs*.

Tension in Rwanda is reaching dangerous levels: the entire eastern part of the country is currently inaccessible to MSF teams and foreign observers, including UNHCR, which constitutes a serious infringement of the requirement to monitor the returnees. The government has been asked to allow the establishment of humanitarian corridors and let military observers into this zone. The mortality rates are frightening: at the hospital in Kigali, for example, it is 24.9%.

RCN [Rwanda Citizen Network] has temporarily suspended its work in Rwanda: it supports structural efforts, which are not achievable under present circumstances. It received a request from the Ministry of Justice to resume training but RCN is reluctant to train people (many have gone into exile and asked for asylum in Europe) as long as

the judiciary remains subservient to the military. What is MSF doing in this heightened crisis? It presents the press with testimony. It informs as many people as possible. It meets the authorities (Eric went to Geneva two days ago) because we have to act at the highest level now. It is a dramatic situation for Alex but MSF, which has never been so active (*témoignage*, raising awareness, maintaining teams, meeting politicians and high-level authorities), has perhaps gone as far as it can go and, if nothing happens, should perhaps admit it has failed. Concerning *témoignage*, we should "mark the occasion" at the IC of 19 September next by presenting it with our thoughts so far. To this end, Alex has already done some basic research (what methods? For what objectives?) and is writing an internal 'white paper' on the subject. UNHCR should also take a position on this issue. Janek also thinks we should approach Mary Robinson, the new UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

**On 11 July, MSF Belgium gave a press conference and denounced the plight of the refugees who had been forcibly repatriated to Rwanda in appalling conditions and given no guarantee of protection. The other sections took the message to the media. That same day, the UN Human Rights Commission released its report on the massacre of refugees in eastern Zaire. According to its authors, the killings committed in eastern Zaire could be described as "crimes against humanity". They advised their successors to investigate the probable planning and setting in motion of "genocide".**



**'Info For the Field' - Note** on the Press Briefing, 11 July 1997, MSF Belgium internal document (in French). **D285**

#### **Extract:**

Given the development of the refugee situation in the Great Lakes region and the recent meetings with our partners (UNHCR, UNHR, ICRC), it seems important that MSF clarifies its position. Ideally, the other sections should take up this message, particularly New York...

MSF requests:

- That the screening of refugees we have been calling for since '94 begins as soon as possible.
- That genuine refugees are offered a genuine choice between repatriation and asylum and that they are sufficiently informed about these options.
- Sufficient security conditions in Rwanda so that we can provide basic monitoring of the returnees' medical and nutritional situation.
- That light be cast on the massacres committed in the Democratic Republic of Congo; that those responsible are identified and action taken in order to break the cycle of impunity that is the region's greatest scourge.

The commission of inquiry will be able to complete its job properly if:

- The judicial process in Rwanda and the region is hurried up; all states involved in the crisis should focus on breaking the logic of impunity; transparency of information; stop actively or passively guaranteeing the cycle of impunity.
- There is a critique of the states who could do more: absence of support; feeding UNHCR disinformation.
- An approach that displays rather more respect for the principles is essential.

To be avoided:

- The direct responsibility of the Rwandans and of our friends Kagame, Kabila and others
- The communal lock-ups and prisons - no first-hand info.
- The insecurity, which has a direct bearing on the refugees insofar as it would be to recognise their guilt.
- UNHCR's major blunders. We should be sure who the enemy is. UNHCR is aware of the dilemma; the member states don't give it the scope for another policy (perhaps it doesn't push hard enough...?).



'Democratic Republic Congo/Congo Brazzaville /Rwanda: Fundamental Refugee Rights Violated: No Protection, No Right To Asylum and the Question of Impunity Unresolved,' **Press Release** MSF Belgium, 11 July 1997 (in English). **D286** 

#### Extract:

The situation of the Rwandan refugees who have stayed behind in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in Congo Brazzaville is at risk of deadlock. Essential issues such as the protection of refugees and asylum rights are currently not being addressed. Therefore, MSF calls on the relevant authorities and UNHCR to respect minimal standards of protection, such as the systematic registration of all refugees and a protection against physical violence. MSF also requests that those refugees not suspected of crimes against humanity during the 1994 genocide be provided with the opportunity to ask for asylum. Finally, MSF appeals to the international community to do everything it possibly can to ensure that a neutral UN mission to investigate alleged mass killings of refugees is allowed to go ahead. As things stand MSF fears that the truth may never surface.

Three years after the mass exodus to Goma, the Rwandan refugee problem is as pressing as ever. The International Community has done little to ensure that the question of impunity be resolved and that innocent civilians be separated from former militia and perpetrators of the 1994 genocide. The hopes that were raised on 14 June in Kinshasa when Vieira de Mello, Assistant High Commissioner for Refugees, announced that separation would shortly begin, have been disappointed. MSF teams on the ground in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Mbandaka, Kisangani, Shabunda) and in Congo

Brazzaville (Loukolela, Njundu, Liranga) are concerned that there has not been any attempt to implement this promise. To date there are no signs that separation will take place, nor that innocent refugees who refuse to be repatriated to Rwanda, can apply for refugee status in another country of asylum.

Since the beginning of refugee repatriations to Rwanda more than two months ago, no alternative has been offered to those who refuse to return. Their only choices are either to stay in Congo and hide in the forests or be taken to Rwanda, where there is a continuing climate of insecurity. Due to this insecurity, it is currently impossible to monitor the nutritional and medical situation of the refugees once they have returned to their home communes.

Stéphan Oberreit, MSF Field Coordinator back from Kisangani says: "I'm shocked by the total absence of choice given to the refugees. It is a humanitarian trap. The refugees are not registered, not protected and before being put onto the plane to Rwanda, they receive no clear information on the insecure situation there. On top of that the innocent have never been separated from the criminals, but have been used continuously as a human shield for more than three years. Nothing is being done that might encourage them to feel more optimistic about their future."

In order to break the cycle of collective stigmatisation, it is vital that all individuals suspected of crimes against humanity are tried by the International Tribunal in Arusha. Finally, MSF fears that further postponement of the UN investigation into the alleged massacres of refugees by local populations and AFDL soldiers will prevent the truth from surfacing. As long as those suspected of such acts are not brought to trial, there is no guarantee whatsoever for the safety of the remaining Rwandan refugees, whether in the camps or still hiding in the dense forests.

Since the beginning of the repatriation operation at the end of April an estimated 54,000 refugees have been taken back to Rwanda by air. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, MSF teams continue to work in reception centres in Mbandaka and Kisangani. In the latter, fewer than 1,500 refugees remain, including 400 hospitalized patients. In the region of Mbandaka, small groups seek refuge in the reception centre.

In Congo Brazzaville, MSF teams are dispensing medical care and distributing food to approximately 8,000 refugees gathered in Loukolela, Njundu and Liranga. Small groups of refugees still continue to arrive from Congo Kinshasa. They are in a very poor condition as a result of malnourishment dehydration and exhaustion. Some refugees seem to be fleeing further afield to Cameroon and Gabon, in order to avoid repatriation to Rwanda. Since a few days about 260 have been sent back to Rwanda.

In none of the above locations are civilians separated from militant criminals, nor is any systematic registration carried out as a minimal protection guarantee, nor are alternatives to repatriation proposed.



'The Rwandan Refugees Tragedy Drags On,'  
Véronique Kiesel, Interview with Eric Goemaere,  
General Director, MSF Belgium, *Le Soir*  
(Belgium), 12 July 1997 (in French). [D287](#)

#### Extract:

Médecins Sans Frontières has been present since the begin of this massive population displacement, particularly at times of crisis, and has often tried to alert the public to the situation. On Friday, MSF Belgium drew attention to the fate of these almost forgotten refugees.

#### THE TRAP

According to Stéphan Oberreit, a Field Coordinator who has just returned from Kisangani, "All the refugees in the Congo are trapped. Yes, we offer them flights back to Rwanda, but they have no alternative. They are neither registered nor protected and are given no clear information about the insecurity in Rwanda. Now most of them do not want to stay. This is a dangerous time, we are approaching the end of a repatriation operation and the international community is losing interest in the problem. Those who remain face grave difficulties as there are officials and *génocideurs* among the refugees, everyone is considered guilty, whereas the majority are innocent and held hostage by the others."

The solution? For Eric Goemaere, Head of MSF-Belgium, "The United Nations High Commission for Refugees must forge agreements with the Congo and finally come to grips with a problem that has been devastating the region for the last three years. On the basis of the list drawn up by the Arusha international tribunal, those believed to be responsible for the genocide should be identified and arrested. The others will thus be relieved of the reputation of guilt they have been dragging like a chain and could obtain, if they wanted, proper political asylum in the Congo or elsewhere."

Eric Goemaere, just back from Rwanda, says the situation of the repatriated refugees is far from simple. "MSF had been charged by the government with managing the medical facilities in several transit camps. A quarter of the people who had to be hospitalised have died, half of them within 48 hours of their arrival. The government has already closed some of these transit centres: we think they should stay open to receive the new arrivals. Those who have found their way home face many problems: their houses and fields have been taken over by others and they have no resources. UNHCR is supposed to monitor the returnees for a year in order to help them overcome these classic problems. However, insecurity due to the actions of Hutu guerrillas, who are gaining strength in the west, the region most of the refugees come from; makes this impossible. Former refugees are also endangered by the retaliations conducted by the army. The international community does not have the right to abandon these people to their fate."



'Report Condemns Kabila - Three Experts Denounce Crimes Against Humanity in the Former Zaire,' Marie-Laure Colson, *Libération* (France), 12-13 July 1997 (in French).

#### Extract:

Crimes against humanity, see genocide. The report of the UN team which, in early May, investigated the disappearance of some 200,000 Rwandan refugees in the former Zaire between September 1996 and May 1997, accuses President Laurent-Désiré Kabila's regime of deliberately massacring thousands of Hutu refugees and abandoning thousands of others to their fate. Oral, photographic, and video testimony collected from refugees who returned to Rwanda reveals evidence of massacres and common graves. Although the reliability of the work carried out by the three reporters - Roberto Garretón (Chile), Special Reporter on Human Rights in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, the former Zaire), Bacre Waly Ndiaye (Senegal), Special Reporter on Extrajudicial, Summary and Arbitrary Executions and Jonas Foli (Ghana), member of the working group on forced or involuntary disappearances - cannot be challenged, Kinshasa denied the investigators access to the field.

A new UN mission should soon be able to visit the actual sites of the disappearances. The DRC authorities have given their agreement but have exerted pressure on the UN to exclude Garretón, whose April report contained a devastating indictment of Kabila's forces. The report, released in New York yesterday, claims that all available means were employed to eliminate the refugees. They were killed in the camps, killed after being lured out of their hiding places in the forests, or deliberately deprived of humanitarian aid, which condemned them to death by starvation and disease. The investigators do not provide a detailed breakdown but indicate that there were a great many women and children among the victims. The team found that, "Given the large-scale and systematic nature of these crimes, they qualify as crimes against humanity." Besides Kabila's forces, the testimony also implicates the former Zairian army, the armed Hutu militias who surrounded the refugees, Serbian mercenaries, and the Rwandan and Burundian armies. The Reporters stress the urgency of establishing the truth through other "thorough and independent" inquiries in the DRC. Meanwhile, refugees from Kisangani and Mbandaka continue to be airlifted to Rwanda in conditions Médecins Sans Frontières describes as disastrous. "The mortality rates are frightening", says Stéphan Oberreit, MSF Mission Coordinator at Kisangani, speaking from Brussels. After six months in the forest, the people who climb aboard the aircraft are so exhausted they resemble the living dead.

The 13-14 July weekend edition of the French daily *Le Monde* contained testimonies collected from refugees at

**Njundu and Loukolela by the MSF France Press Officer and a doctor seconded to MSF from Médecins du Monde. MSF had cancelled publication of these testimonies in June following disagreements between sections. The collection, together with the testimonies collected by MSF from refugees at Kisangani from 13 to 31 May, was published under the name of Médecins du Monde. It was also sent to the United Nations Commission of Inquiry, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International.**



'Scenes of Massacres in the Former Zaire,' Guy Mérineau, Médecins du Monde Bureau Chief in Central Africa, *Le Monde* (France), 12 July 1997 (in French). [D288](#)

#### Extract:

The conquest of the former Zaire by Laurent-Désiré Kabila's rebels has resulted in considerable carnage, including attacks on Hutu refugee camps and massacres of those fleeing on the roads. Guy Mérineau, Médecins du Monde Bureau Chief in Central Africa, has collected testimony from the survivors. Guy Mérineau worked in Congo-Brazzaville as part of a Médecins Sans Frontières mission. In June, he talked to Rwandan refugees in the camps in the Congo. Below, we publish some of their accounts of their trek across the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, the former Zaire).

#### Male, student, aged 28.

"I got married in the Kashusa camp in 1995. It was attacked in September 96. The people cutting wood in the Inera forest were killed. Then came the shells and machine gun fire. We had a little corn, some clothes, and twelve dollars. We walked into Kahuzi-Bega forest, through the mud, without sleeping. Then we kept to a road with 30,000 others. We were held hostage by Zairian soldiers dressed in civilian clothes. About ten people who resisted the pillaging were killed. We lived on plants. Five to six thousand people were massacred at Shambusha. I found my father, two sisters and a brother at Tingi Tingi. Then we moved on. One night, we stopped at Lubutu Bridge. When the bridge opened, some people fell in the water and drowned. I lost the bundle I was carrying on my head. I put my wife on my back and forded the river.

We kept walking. People died of sickness and hunger. We had to give a pair of trousers to get across a river in a canoe. One group, including my father and brother, decided to go to Kisangani so they could be repatriated to Rwanda. We went in a different direction. My other brother had malaria and stayed by the side of the road. I heard that those who took the Boende road were killed and I went back into the forest again. At Wendji, a pastor told us that Kabila was coming. Some people turned back to cross Lake Tumba and go directly to the Congo [Republic of]. We had no money so we waited for a free boat.

Mid-May: the rebels arrived. There were 75 heavily armed soldiers in three vehicles. They fired Kalashnikovs into the refugee camp. I fled to the river. An old Zairian took us down the river, then we returned to see Wendji. About 20

people had been shot dead, almost all of them women and children. The rebels had gone. We found a canoe to take us to the Congo. We paid with a blanket. In the forest I found a blanket, a Bible, and a handkerchief."

**At a US House of Representatives hearing on 16 July, the human rights organisation Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) accused the US army of providing the Rwandan army, which supported Laurent-Désiré Kabila, with technical assistance. This information also featured in a report published that same day by PHR and in a 'Chronological summary of Rwandan military activity in Rwanda since 1994' supplied to the House of Representatives by the Pentagon on 19 August.**



'Rights Group Blames Rwandan In Attacks on Civilians in Congo, Neil A. Lewis, *The New York Times* (USA), Washington 17 July 1997 (in English). [D289](#)

#### Extract:

Human rights investigators told a Congressional Committee today that Rwandan troops were responsible for most of the atrocities in the eastern half of Congo over the last several months. The investigators from the group, Physicians for Human Rights, based in Boston, said they had incontrovertible evidence that the widespread atrocities directed against both Rwandan refugees and local Congolese civilians are continuing.

Dr Jennifer Leaning, a professor at the Harvard Medical School who led a three-week investigation in the Central African region, told the House International Relations Committee that soldiers from the Rwandan Army are committing murder, rape, and robbery every day. She estimated that more than 2,000 people have been killed in the last few months by the Rwandan forces.

Dr Leaning said her conclusions were based on interviews with witnesses and with international aid workers who said they could not press their complaints because they wanted to remain in the field to distribute food and other forms of aid. Dr Leaning's account comes on top of numerous accounts that similar atrocities occurred throughout the year-long military campaign of Laurent Kabila, the rebel leader, to seize control of Congo...

Another investigator for the physicians' group, Kathi Austin, said the Rwandan troops who she said were responsible for the atrocities had received intensive training by United States forces in counter-insurgency. But two senior State Department officials who testified earlier, said the training of Rwandan troops was limited to teaching military justice, the role of the army in a democracy, and an appreciation of human rights. One official, William P. Twaddell, acting Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, denied the United States is engaged in counter-insurgency training.

## THE RETROSPECTIVE REPORTS

 In fact, it will emerge that the Americans were directly involved in the operation. Congolese doctors working for MSF spotted American military personnel in the Kisangani area. I saw planes; disguised with civilian markings but with American pilots, take charge of all the logistics of Kabila's operation. It is clear that the Americans had planned this operation a long time ago; they had ensured its logistics and had no desire to see any kind of UN troops in the field. They applied enormous pressure in order to conceal operational mistakes.

Dr. Éric Goemaere, MSF Belgium General Director  
(in French).

 The Americans had decided to turn a blind eye. [...] The US Ambassador was perfectly aware, we told him as well. But politically, they had decided it was better not to know. Worse still, the Americans were at Kabila's side when he invaded. They were right there in the forests with all the necessary equipment - infra-red gear, the whole shebang. Our local staff saw them stealing our cars at Lubumbashi. They were based in Zambia, a military base just nearby. They had sided with Kabila; they had sided with Kagame; there was no question of them changing their minds. This was the "new African order" the Americans had decided to establish. You might say that they were mistaken, denounce this or that... It was good that the American media knew, but the de facto impact was not enough.

Dr. Dominique Boutriau, MSF Belgium programme manager (in French).

 Someone - I won't tell you who, but someone who had a friend in the CIA - showed me an intelligence report his friend had forwarded him that talked about 10,000 Hutu fleeing to the Angola border and helicopters came and dropped off Tutsis before and after them and sandwiched them.

James Fraser, MSF Holland Shabunda explo team,  
26 March to 3 Avril 1997 (in English).

**At the request of MSF France, a representative of the Epicentre Office of Epidemiological Studies conducted a study in Njundu camp between 17 and 20 July. The object was to reconstruct the travel history of the refugees who had left the camps in eastern Zaire nine months earlier, through a study of retrospective mortality.**



'History of the Rwandan Refugees who Fled the Kivu Camps in Zaire, September 1996 to June 1997 - **Results of an Investigation** Conducted among the Survivors of the Njundu Camp in the Congo,' Dr Pierre Nabeth, Dr Camille Ndayambaje, Dr Alice Croisier, Mirdad Pédari, September 1997 (in French). [D290](#) 

### Extract:

#### Methodology

This survey was conducted by random sampling undertaken from 17 to 21 July 1997 in Njundu, Congo. The sample-base was drawn up from the list of families who were on the register for general food distribution, i.e. around 1,650 families.

#### Size of the sample

266 families. One person from each extended family was interviewed. This person was chosen at random.

#### Methods

Between their flight from the Kivu camps in October 1996 and their arrival in Congo around May-June 1997, the Rwandan refugees stopped in many places along the way, sometimes for several weeks. Each person sampled was asked the following questions:

-From which prefecture in Rwanda do you originally come from?

-Which camp in Kivu were you staying at?

-How many family members were resident in the camp in Kivu? Give details of their sex, age, profession in Rwanda, family background/ties.

-What date did you leave the camp?

For each place on the journey where they stopped for a few days, we asked:

-Which members of your family were still with you and on which date?

-Which members of your family were not with you - explain what happened to each one.

Events documented were divided into the following categories:

- Killed, death from accident, or illness
  - Repatriated to Rwanda
  - Spontaneous return to Rwanda
  - Disappeared - the interviewee did not know the fate of their family member
- Only deaths personally witnessed by the family member being interviewed were registered as such. We considered the more familiar concept of extended family rather than the western definition of immediate members only. Before all questioning, we were careful to ensure that people were not being included twice.

#### Analysis

We calculated:

- The proportion of refugees who reached the Congo
  - Their distribution by sex, age, and prefecture of origin
  - For those who did not arrive in the Congo: their distribution by sex, age, and the original camp where they took refuge in eastern DRC
  - We reconstructed the routes taken by the people present in the Kivu camps at the time of their attack.
- Using the reconstructed families as the denominator, we calculated the number of incidents (different causes of death, repatriation, spontaneous return, and disappearance) which occurred between the Kivu refugee camps and their arrival in Njundu. For each important stop along the way, we estimated the waiting period, the number of people who passed through, the date when that location was attacked, and the proportion of people who disappeared or were killed. We calculated the crude mortality rates and the infant-juvenile mortality rates for the entire period and for each month of their passage. The comparisons between the sample and the original population were made with a "comparison test for the qualitative variables and a variance comparison test for the quantitative variables. Confidence intervals of 95% were calculated for the rates and estimated proportions. The data were collected and analysed with EpiInfo software (WHO, CDC).

**On 30 July, an international meeting to assess MSF activity in Central Africa facilitated the resumption of dialogue between the sections.**



**'Draft Memo** Following the International Meeting on Central Africa in Brussels', 30 July 1997. Stephan Oberreit, Foundation, MSF France, 1 August 1997 (in French). **D291**

#### Extract:

This meeting had a limited objective: "identification, inventory, no decision taking". The aim was to resume dialogue, examine contextual changes, and review our situation and activities in Central Africa. The meeting achieved its goals and we took a step forward. Now that the diagnosis has been made, we have the responsibility

to act. I hope we continue this dialogue and above all expand it so we can emerge from our impasse...

a) The enormous malaise surrounding "*témoignage*":

We are all agreed on the fact that *témoignage* is an intrinsic part of our activity, but that we don't inevitably interpret it in the same way in terms of form or content. It is therefore urgent that we debate what we mean by "MSF's duty and action of *témoignage*" at international level.

b) The dilemma over the urgency-development debate:

Amsterdam, Barcelona, and Paris focus on the desperate plight of some of the region's populations. Development programmes are therefore secondary and increasingly limited given the evolution of the context. Brussels does not think that a regional approach is necessary and pursues the national strategies established in '96, namely:

- Rwanda: "We will stay in Rwanda at all costs! In Rwanda as elsewhere, the problem stems from operational criteria; these are not the same from one section to another. Discussing this or trying anything is absurd and a waste of time as long as it has not been previously clarified" (William) [Claus, coordinateur MSF B].

There is an effective consensus on the inevitable necessity of agreeing on operational criteria. An internal debate on Rwanda is nonetheless URGENT, not to "force out the Belgians" - a presence in this mess is vital - but to decide what the movement as a whole can and should do for endangered populations in Rwanda, given the context and our principles.

- DRC: Our strategy in the former Zaire involves three levels of priority. These are complex programmes, which took years to mount under Mobutu's regime. Given that Kabila's regime is, for the moment, more or less the same, the strategy does not need to be reviewed:

1. Support to the health zones
2. AIDS and Trypanosomiasis
3. Emergencies of all kinds

The Rwandan refugees are therefore in 3. (Vincent) [Janssen, Kisangani Coordinator].

Some participants feel that this strategy poses an enormous fundamental problem and should be re-examined as soon as possible. There is no opposition in principle to the long-term programmes in the region, but they have to take into account the context and constraints, which are currently not sufficiently clear - always these infamous operational criteria.

**On 26 August, the UN Commission of Inquiry, which had been given no guarantees concerning freedom of movement or the confidentiality of collected testimony, began investigating the violence perpetrated in eastern DRC (former Zaire). It took March 1993 as its starting point, rather than the launch of the AFDL offensive in autumn 1996.**



'A UN Mission Will Again Attempt to Investigate the Massacres of Hutu in the Former Zaire,' *Le Monde* (France) 28 August 1997 (in French). [D292](#)

**Extract:**

Uncertainty over working conditions continues to impede the International Commission of Inquiry, eight of whose 23 members are in Kinshasa. It still has to negotiate guarantees concerning freedom of movement and the confidentiality of collected testimony with Mr Kabila's government. Kinshasa is insisting that its own pathologists accompany the investigators to the mass graves. Although officially they are now awaiting the "green light" to begin work, the investigators have yet to travel to the eastern provinces of Kivu and the Kisangani region, where the killings took place.

**At the beginning of September, the retrospective mortality survey drawn up by Epicentre at the request of MSF France was finalised. Some sections disputed its reliability and its release was postponed.**



'History of the Rwandan Refugees who Fled the Kivu Camps in Zaire, September 1996 to June 1997 - **Results of an Investigation** Conducted among the Survivors of the Njundu Camp in the Congo,' Dr Pierre Nabeth, Dr Camille Ndayambaje, Dr Alice Croisier, Mirdad Pédari, September 1997 (in French). [D290](#)

**Extract:**

The Kivu region in Zaire has sheltered over one million Rwandan refugees since 1994. Half of them returned to Rwanda in October and November 1996, following the onset of a rebel offensive against the government in Kinshasa. The remainder fled westward, deeper into the Zairian interior. In May 1997, some of these refugees reached the Congo, particularly the village of Ndjundu, where Médecins Sans Frontières tried to treat them. They claimed they had been pursued by rebel troops and had escaped the many massacres perpetrated by the latter. We then decided to conduct an epidemiological study, with the aim of documenting the events they had lived through since their departure from the camps in Kivu.

**Principal findings**

A total of 266 families were questioned, which corresponds to a sample of 530 people present at Njundu and 3,121 people initially present in the Kivu camps. Only 17.5% of the family members initially present at Kivu had reached the Congo. At Njundu, the M/F sex ratio was 2.6%. The median age was 24 years. The proportion of children under

five was 7.9%. Distribution of the events that occurred during the flight was as follows: disappeared 59.5%; murdered 19.7%; other 3.3%. Most of the disappearances and deaths occurred at Sake, Shanje, Obiro, Tingi Tingi and Wenji. From 1 October 1996 to 31 May 1997, the crude mortality rate (CMR) and comparative infant-juvenile (CIJ) averages were respectively 15.5 per 10,000 per day and 18.2 per 10,000 per day. The highest rates were reported in November '96 (TCM=34.6/10,000/d), March 97 (TCM=26.4/10,000/d) and May '97 (TCM=60.7/10,000/d). [...]

**Discussion**

A small proportion of the Rwandan refugees who fled the camps in Kivu reached the Congo. Most of them disappeared during the numerous attacks perpetrated by the "rebel" soldiers who were pursuing them. The disappearance rates increased synchronically with the mortality rates, which indicates that many of the missing may be dead. The mortality rates, murder being a major causal factor, were probably under-estimated, for only the deaths actually noted by the interviewee were recorded as such. However, they were extremely high.

The study therefore confirms that the Rwandan refugees who fled the camps in Kivu, Zaire, were subjected to extreme violence.

**On 4 September, the UN denounced the obstacles the new Congolese regime had placed in the path of its investigative team.**



'The UN denounces the Persistent Obstruction of its Investigation into the Refugees'. *AFP* (France) Kinshasa, 4 September 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

On Thursday night, the UN mission charged with investigating alleged massacres of Rwandan refugees in the former Zaire denounced the persistent "obstruction" of its investigation by the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

**On 5 September, MSF condemned the forced repatriation of the last few hundred Rwandan refugees in the Kisangani camp as UNHCR stood by, powerless to intervene.**



'Ogata Will Alert the Security Council to the Refugee Crisis,' **AFP** (France), 5 September 1997 (in French).

**Extract:**

UNHCR was examining its options after the expulsion of 700 Rwandan and Burundian refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) on Thursday, the latest in a recent series of serious violations of humanitarian principles, said spokeswoman Pamela O'Toole...

Mrs O'Toole criticised the DRC for its army's "scandalous" expulsion of 779 Rwandan and Burundian refugees from Kisangani, in the eastern part of the former Zaire, on Thursday. Most of the refugees (586 people) were women and children, while the majority of the others had been traumatised by the atrocities they had witnessed, according to UNHCR.

Among the violations of humanitarian principles in the DRC, Mrs O'Toole cited the attacks on refugee camps, the persistent killing of refugees, attacks on members of humanitarian organisations, and denial of free access to refugees.



'MSF Supports UNHCR's Condemnation of Refugee Expulsion from DRC - Former Zaire,' **Press Release**, MSF UK, 5 September 1997 (in English). **D293** [↗](#)

**Extract:**

The international medical aid agency Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) sent a message of support today to High Commissioner Mrs Sadako Ogata following UNHCR's strong condemnation of the forcible repatriation of Rwandan and Burundian refugees and asylum seekers from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). UNHCR denounced the pre-dawn expulsion operation by DRC troops yesterday as a "blatant breach of international refugee treaties."

In a letter to Mrs Ogata, MSF Secretary General Jean-Marie Kindermans supported UNHCR's "brave attempt to defend the most basic refugee rights in a region that has seen the most appalling abuses of human rights and humanitarian law in the last months and years. We believe that it is essential that the entire humanitarian community be unambiguous in its joint condemnation of this latest violation of refugee conventions, in order to counter the continuing and systematic erosion of international law in the region." MSF is extremely concerned about the safety of this group of refugees, particularly those originally from the Gisenyi area, which is in a virtual state of civil war. The fate of the Burundian refugees now in Rwanda is also a matter of great and urgent concern. "We fear that this appalling precedent may pave the way for further expulsions from other parts of DRC," Kindermans added today. Many refugees still on DRC territory are potential witnesses to the killings that have allegedly taken place in the east of the country in recent months, and which a United Nations human rights mission is about to investigate.



'Fundamental Rights of Refugees Ignored,' **Press Release**, MSF Belgium, 5 September 1997 (in French). **D294** [↗](#)

**Extract:**

Brussels, 05/09/97 - More than 600 Rwandan and Burundian refugees were expelled from the Kisangani camp yesterday. They were forced onto several aircraft and flown to Kigali. These people were supposed to be under the protection of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees.

Humanitarian organisations were powerless to prevent the forced repatriation of refugees who had clearly indicated their unwillingness to return to Rwanda or Burundi. As UNHCR was unable to fulfil its mandate, these people had no protection whatsoever. MSF supports UNHCR's formal condemnation of yesterday's events.

526 refugees arrived in Kigali. Most of the Rwandan refugees will be sent to western Rwanda, a zone currently afflicted by civil war. Moreover, it is imperative that a solution be found for the many Burundian refugees.

MSF is concerned for the fate of the refugees who are still in the Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as those who were forcibly repatriated. There is a strong possibility that yesterday's events, which could have been predicted given the statements made by local authorities, will be repeated in other localities where refugees are to be found, particularly as the UN Commission of Inquiry is about to begin its work.

**On 12 September, the Boards of MSF Belgium, MSF France and MSF Holland met to discuss the movement's public response.**



"Médecins Sans Frontières, **Summary** of the Board Meeting," 12 and 13 September 1997 (in French). **D295** [↗](#)

**Extract:**

The differences between sections were discussed. Although fundamental differences were not stressed, the discussion brought to light differences over the philosophy of *témoignage*. MSF-F is inclined to give it greater priority because of its publicity value. Moreover, intervention criteria in contexts of crisis do not appear to stem from the same logic.

MSF-B tends to focus on delivering aid directly to the victims and maintaining a presence in order to exploit any change in the situation. On the other hand, MSF-F will be particularly careful to avoid an inadmissible situation. Moreover, MSF-B places great emphasis on long-term preventive measures. That is why, unlike other sections, we were active and had a strong presence in the Congo ten years before the crisis.

The unilateral decision to remove the “security veto” taken at the French Board Meeting of April 97 was discussed. The administrators insist on the fact that external communication is a separate issue. That decision was taken in order to allow MSF to continue its work of denunciation. The Board was aware of deliberately jeopardising the rules of the international movement, so that the movement could fall back on other, more appropriate rules.

However, Marleen stresses that field workers are aware that they are risking their lives. She therefore finds MSF-F’s decision incomprehensible, because it erodes both their trust and security. She can’t see anything positive emerging from such a decision. Françoise Saive, returning from the field, also stresses that such a decision reveals a lack of trust in the field. The field is willing to engage in *témoignage*, but cannot be forced to do so to the detriment of its security.

In conclusion, Jean-Marie Kindermans stresses the importance of dialogue between the sections - daily, non-hierarchical discussions - and of restoring trust between Boards, field-posts and Operations Centres. Inter-section thinking on *témoignage* and the need to professionalise it should continue.

The meeting took note of immediate projects in this domain: workshops in Brussels in October and a vote at December’s IC for a new international “Code of Conduct” for *témoignage*.

**From 7 October, all MSF sections began discussing a public response to the Congolese government’s expulsion of UNHCR’s mission in Goma in early September. On 8 October, two human rights organisations, Human Rights Watch and the Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l’Homme (FIDH), confirmed, with supporting testimony, the violence committed in eastern Zaire by the rebel troops currently in power and their Rwandan and Ugandan allies. They claimed that the United States had been informed of Rwandan plans to attack the camps and that American military personnel had accompanied the Rwandan army into Congolese territory.**



“Washington Denies HRW and FIDH Accusations,” *AFP* (France), 9 October 1997 (in French).

#### Extract:

On Wednesday, Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the Fédération Internationale des Droits de l’Homme (FIDH) claimed that the United States “knew Rwanda intended to attack refugee camps in eastern Zaire” and called on Washington to suspend its military aid to Rwanda. The accusations appear in a 40-page report made public in New York.

The US government “received no advance warning of this hideous violence,” said State Department Spokesman James Rubin, who also described the organisations’ allegations as “completely false”.

However, when pressed, he did not exclude the possibility that Washington might have known, possibly through its satellites, of Rwandan troop movements in the vicinity of the camps. But he denied that Washington had “given the green light”.

The United States condemned the massacres of refugees and was striving to resolve the situation, said Mr Rubin. He also insisted that the United States “had not provided deadly weapons” to the Rwandan armed forces and that its military aid was confined to training the Rwandan army in humanitarian operations like clearing mines in the Rwandan interior. The United States had stopped training the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA); the last session had ended in August, he added.

The United States “has not played a secret role in this affair”, the spokesman repeated, and dismissed any suggestions that it might have as “ridiculous”. The massacres denounced by HRW and the FIDH took place during the successful offensive against the regime of Mobutu Sese Seko conducted by forces loyal to Laurent-Désiré Kabila, who took power on 17 May.

“Credible witnesses have claimed that American military personnel trained and provided assistance to the RPA on Congolese territory,” according to the report. The two organisations have asked the Pentagon “to make public the nature of American engagement” in its aid to the various forces that operated in the Congo. They have also called on Washington to suspend all “tactical support, assistance in the field or provision of arms to Rwanda immediately”.

**On 13 October, the General Directors and Operations Directors from the Operational Centres met to discuss the situation in the Great Lakes region. They decided to confront the Congolese authorities over the expulsion of UNHCR from Goma at the beginning of October, but postponed taking a public position until a later date. However, they did decide to release the retrospective mortality report the following week.**



“Decisions of the Executive Group re. the Situation in the Great Lakes” - Brussels, 13 October 1997 (in French). **D296**

#### Extract:

1. Following the expulsion of UNHCR, we will mount a defence of humanitarian space by conveying our response to the authorities in Kinshasa and Goma. A public statement will probably be issued later re. the defence of principles but its form remains to be defined.

2. The Epicentre report will be released next week, in accordance with the methods already decided by Dircom. A letter has also been sent to *The Lancet*.
3. The teams in the field will be strengthened in order to maintain a flow of information from the field and facilitate analysis and synthesis of the regional situation.
4. The informal joint working group (with Human Rights Watch, Oxfam, etc.) will be activated.
5. The scenarios described in the Amsterdam analysis will be submitted to the teams for discussion, especially when Hamel arrives. The Executive Group has decided to orchestrate MSF action according to scenario B.

**At the beginning of October, the British medical journal *The Lancet* published an Epicentre/MSF article based on the retrospective mortality study conducted among Rwandan refugees in the Congo in July.**



'Were Acts of Violence Committed Against Rwandan Refugees?' Pierre Nabeth, Alice Croisier, Mirdad Pedari, Jean-Hervé Bradol, Epicentre, and Médecins Sans Frontières, *The Lancet*, October 1997 (in English). [D297](#)

#### Extract:

Between July 17 and July 21, 1997, we conducted an epidemiological survey in order to assess the recent history of the refugees. We randomly sampled families in the list of refugee families present in Njundu. One person per family was interviewed. Each interviewee was asked to describe all family members that had been present in Kivu camps by sex, age and relationship to the interviewee. For each family member, the dates and places he/she had travelled through were requested. When a particular event had happened (repatriation or return to Rwanda, death by killing, accident or illness, disappearance), the date and place were indicated. Proportions of each event were calculated as well as crude and under-5 mortality rates.

A total of 266 families were selected, representing 3,121 persons previously present in Kivu camps, 530 of whom present in Njundu at the time of the survey. Of the 530 persons in the sample, the sex-ratio M/F was 2.6, the median age was 24 years and the proportion of children aged less than 5 years was 7.9% (see figure below).

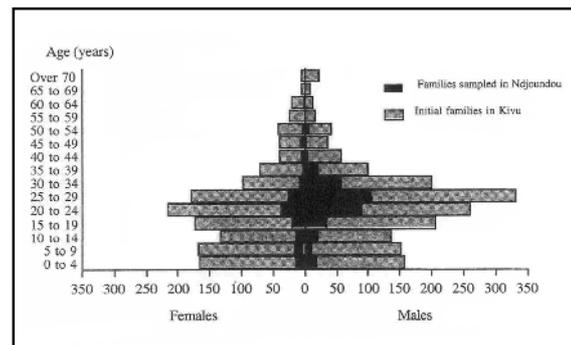
According to our survey, of the 3,121 family members present in Kivu in September 1996, 19.7% were reported killed, 59.6% disappeared during the flight and 17.5% reached Njundu in May-June 1997, after a 1,500 kilometre trip. Most disappearances and deaths took place in Sake, Shanje, Obilo, Tingi Tingi and Wenji. Between October 1, 1996 and May 31, 1997, the average crude mortality rate (CMR) and the under-5 mortality rate were 15.5 per 10,000 per day and 18.2 per 10,000 per day. The highest rates were seen in November 96 (CMR=

34.6/10,000/d), March '97 (CMR=26.4/10,000/d) and May '97 (CMR=60.7/10,000/d).

From our survey, only a low proportion of the Rwandan refugees who fled Kivu camps in Zaire have reached the Congo. Most of them disappeared during the numerous attacks conducted against them. Possible causes of disappearance may have included repatriation or killing. Thus, mortality rates, and proportion of deaths due to killing were probably under-estimated as only observed deaths were recorded as such. Nonetheless, they were extremely high.

Refugee interviews might have given misleading information. Nonetheless, the places and dates of transit they declared in our survey correspond to those given by other sources. The results can probably not be extrapolated to all the refugee populations that were present in Kivu camps. However, the study suggests that acts of violence were committed against groups of Rwandan refugees who fled Kivu camps in Zaire.

Distribution by sex and age of the sample of refugees interviewed in Njundu Congo compared to their initial families in Kivu. September '96-June '97.



**During the days that followed, field teams and Operational Centres discussed opportunities to publish the retrospective mortality study. On 3 November, the study was finally made public when MSF appeared before the US House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee.**



'Statement of Doctors Without Borders For the Hearing at the House of Representatives House Committee on International Relations,' delivered by Marcel Van Soest, Epidemiologist, November 5, 1997 (in English). [D298](#)

#### Extract:

Confronted this past year with severe impediments to providing assistance to both local and refugee populations in areas of the Democratic Republic of Congo (Congo) and in Rwanda, we have also been vocal in expressing our concerns about security and protection of civilians, especially in light of:

- Attacks on civilians in Congo, which prompted the UN Human Rights Commission investigations,
- Attacks on civilians and relief workers in Rwanda and Burundi,
- Severe restriction of movement imposed on relief teams in eastern Congo and western Rwanda,
- And, even the recent announcement of an imminent expulsion of the UNHCR from Goma.

I need not repeat - since it was stated in this forum in a previous hearing - the damaging impact of statements by the US representative in Kigali almost one year ago denying the existence of more than 300,000 refugees fleeing westward from the Rwandan refugee camps under attack. In our 'Forced Flight', report of May 16, 1997, we documented the fate of the refugee groups trekking across the Congo and shed some light on the complex situation in the North-Kivu/Masisi area. The latter has been a site of ongoing ethnic violence since 1993, still provoking attacks on and displacement of the local Congolese population.

As a medical organisation, Doctors Without Borders believes that all humanitarian efforts should be aimed at stabilizing the health status of populations so as to reduce mortality and minimize risk for diseases and epidemics. Since November 1996, despite numerous appeals to the parties to the conflict, to the UN, and to the US Administration, which maintain de facto foreign diplomatic leadership in the region, our teams have been prevented from having continued access to the refugee and local populations in need and in danger...

Doctors Without Borders conducted a retrospective mortality survey among a group of refugees last July in a refugee camp in Congo Republic ('Epidemiological Survey of Rwandan Refugees in Camp, Congo, July 1997'). Those refugees had fled the attacked camps in Kivu Province and had undertaken a forced march over a distance of some 1,500 km under the control of elements from the old Rwandan army (FAR) and various militia-men. The study was conducted through individual interviews of a random sample of refugees, and reconstructed the size and history of the original group.

The survey shows that, of every five people from the original group who left the Kivu camps in October 1996, only one arrived in Congo Republic; one did not survive repeated military actions; and three could not be accounted for. Of those reported killed, 95% were the result of violence, and 5% died from disease.

These figures cannot be extrapolated to all of the refugee population, particularly because the group contained especially high numbers of armed former militia members. Yet it is interesting to note that the proportion of deaths was the same for children under age five as for the entire population, and 41% of deaths by attack were of women. These figures also confirm the experience of our field teams, who in May 1997 reported on attacks on refugee camps in areas where this group and other refugee groups had briefly settled, the presence of mass graves in these areas, and "catastrophic" rates of mortality from disease and malnutrition ('Forced Flight')...

It is our firm belief that one of your first recommendations

to the Administration should be to make use of our presence in the region, and the degree of access and flexibility of movement generally offered to relief organisations, as an early-warning indicator of humanitarian conditions. Of course we, relief workers, cannot protect populations from genocides or massacres: that was amply proved in April 1994. But lack of access and other obstacles to providing assistance are signals of serious developments in the region...

#### CONCLUSION

I have been candid in exposing our concerns and exploring opportunities for a more effective policy in Central Africa, one that upholds both principle and pragmatism. New approaches are needed that will address adequately the state of war in eastern Congo and western Rwanda, the plight of civilians in the region, and the need for a halt to the ongoing impunity that has pervaded in the region for more than four years has been a significant factor in the explosion of various "epidemics" of violence. As we stand before the US government once again, telling you what we've seen, we cannot deny our frustration that our past efforts in this regard have been made without response. In fact, humanitarian agencies are often asked to put ourselves on the line - not only in the field, but at home - to tell governments about massacres, health catastrophes, and the general state of threatened populations. Respectfully, we ask you for an official and systematic way to address conflict together so that our hard-won information does not fall on deaf ears.

As long as politicians do not take the first line of responsibility for establishing the truth, both at-risk populations and humanitarian actors remain endangered. Lack of impunity has a price, whether paid in political terms or human life. But the pursuit of truth is not the sole province of humanitarian agencies. Given the choice, we would prefer to be in the field saving lives and providing medical care to people rather than compiling reports and speaking about them, even before such an esteemed audience. We look forward to your leadership in the region, which we are sure will save lives in the future.



'Former Zaire: MSF Quantifies the Extent of the Massacres,' Stephen Smith *Libération* (France), 7 November 1997 (in French).

#### Extract:

Thanks to a Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) scientific study into the causes of death, the horrifying persecution of Rwandan Hutu refugees in the former Zaire between September 1996 and July 1997 is no longer unquantifiable. Although the study covers a relatively small group, the scale of the persecution can be calculated in precise detail.

[...] Post-mortem inquiry. Yesterday, speaking on behalf of all MSF sections at a House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee hearing in Washington, the Dutch

doctor Marcel Van Soest unveiled the fundamental data of this “post-mortem inquiry”. He conveyed the “impression” that the investigation of these large-scale human rights violations was an “embarrassment” for the Clinton administration. He also accused the American ambassador to Rwanda of “deliberate disinformation” for having denied last autumn that at least 300,000 Hutu refugees “had fled to the west when the camps were attacked”. The criticisms were similar to those advanced by the American NGO Human Rights Watch and came at a time when Bill Richardson, the American Ambassador to the United Nations, had just been to Kinshasa to renegotiate the UN [com]mission of Inquiry’s working conditions. Richardson claims to have persuaded Kabila to stop blocking the mission, which had been prevented from doing its work since its arrival on 24 August. According to one American source, “Richardson advised Kabila to adopt a more intelligent attitude. By permitting a census of the massacres that had occurred in the region since 1993, the slaughter of Hutu that his troops are accused of would become indistinguishable from others.” In effect, one mass grave is the same as another and in “massacre country” all corpses are equal.

Eye-witness testimony. It is precisely this reduction of all the victims to a banal statistic - their second burial - that the MSF investigation is designed to combat.

[...]

Genocidal killing. However, the fresh data emerging from the personal accounts allows the MSF inquiry to confirm, with figures in support, that the persecution of Hutu refugees was organised, systematic and indiscriminate - apart from the ethnic origin of the victims. Therefore, we are dealing with genocidal killing and not “mistakes” and spontaneous acts of vengeance or violence, although these were frequent and widespread. The UN mission of inquiry proceeds from these grave suspicions and is mandated to shed light on the exact extent of the persecution, how it unfolded and who was responsible for it.



*We are talking about both North and South Kivu. We are asking the US government to clarify the extent of its participation in humanitarian aid, etc... We are pointing to the difference between their discourse and their practice. We are summarising the many discussions we have had with the US government, and the letters we have exchanged, and saying, “We have been constantly warning you since November 1996 and you have only just begun to listen.” And even at this stage, we are saying, “We would have preferred you to be a lot more receptive at the end of ‘96 instead asking us in late ‘97 what we think of the situation... “As soon as an hearing starts, it is recorded in the minutes of the proceedings in Congress; it is in the public domain.” I went with Marcel. There were 80 journalists from the national and international press. I was interviewed by Libération’s Washington correspondent. He wrote an article in Libération titled: ‘MSF Confronts the US*

*Congress Over their Lack of Reaction to the Humanitarian Tragedy in South Kivu.’*

Antoine Gérard, MSF USA Head of Programmes Department (in French).

**On 17 April 1998, The United Nations Secretary General announced the abandonment of all efforts to investigate the massacres in eastern Zaire. The investigative team had encountered too many obstacles to its freedom of movement and the confidentiality of testimony.**



‘UN Investigators of Congo Killings to be Withdrawn’, *The New York Times* (USA), 16 April 1998 (in English). [D299](#)

#### Extract:

Secretary General Kofi Annan has decided to pull a team of United Nations human rights investigators out of Congo after months of harassment and obstruction of their work, officials here said today.

The team of 26 foreign experts and at least as many Congolese has been looking into reports that tens of thousands of Rwandan refugees were massacred in 1996 and 1997 by troops loyal to Laurent Kabila, now President of Congo, the former Zaire. The investigation was suspended last week after Congo officials detained one investigator and photocopied his documents.

The decision to pull out, expected to be announced in the next day or two, would effectively end a year of abortive efforts to conduct thorough, on-site investigations in a country that human rights groups say has been steadily sliding back into repression since the overthrow of Mobutu Sese Seko last May...

Reliable information on the extent of the Congo killings and identification of the victims rests on exhumation of graves, forensic examination, and interviews with witnesses. The United Nations team’s expertise became a threat to Congolese officials who did not want a full accounting of the deaths, human rights groups say.

The team faced its biggest problems trying to excavate a mass grave-site in Mbandaka, north of Kinshasa in last December and again in March this year. Organised crowds turned the investigators back with threatening demonstrations, and forensic evidence could not be collected.

But investigators have been able, since last August, to interview many Congolese witnesses, representatives of local and international relief agencies, and diplomats and military attaches at many embassies in Kinshasa.

United Nations officials have approached governments

with influence in the region to ask them to urge restraint on Mr Kabila so the team can be withdrawn safely with their evidence intact. Officials are concerned about the dangers facing witnesses who talked to the investigators and who could have been identified in documents seized from the team member detained last week, Christopher Harland, a Canadian.

**In April 1998, the journalist Nick Gowing interviewed Paul Kagame, the Vice-President and Defense Minister of Rwanda, who admitted to having planned and led an information war in eastern Zaire. Gowing conducted another interview in which a Rwandan political official claimed that NGO volunteers were intelligence gatherers and that MSF spied for the French government.**



'Dispatches from Disaster Zones - New Challenges and Problems for Information Management in Complex Emergencies - Ominous Lessons from the Great Lakes and Eastern Zaire in Late 1996 and Early 1997,' **Report** from Nick Gowing, May 1998 (in English). [D300](#)

**Extract:**

[Paul Kagame]  
 "We used communication and information warfare better than anyone. We have found a new way of doing this... I learned from the field that the media and NGOs would be a problem. For a specific amount of time these people have to be kept out. We managed to keep them out. They leaked information. They were very damaging... They are not neutral, as many claim to be. To allow a free hand will not bring (us the Rwandans) the best results."

[...]

A senior Rwandan official:  
 "NGOs serve interest. They are not doctors, but intelligence gatherers... We have not the slightest confidence in the NGOs. They can't be neutral. It is impossible. There has not been a single NGO that has been impartial... There are those who are paid to serve other interests. MSF is a vehicle for the French government."

Nick Gowing adds: "In private, however, Rwandan officials do not make the same connection. They pay tribute to MSF's engagement with the RPF in the early '90s and MSF's swift recognition of the genocide against the Tutsis in 1994. They also acknowledge the very limited French backing for MSF."



*We compromised our impartiality too much. We were always there where people wanted us to be for a very specific motive: to control populations, confine populations. We were always walking into some kind of trap. We have a kind of cult of access - we are humanitarians, therefore we must have access. Now in the Great Lakes region, everything came down to manipulation and displacement of populations, to regrouping, purification, screening, separation of populations, etc. We did what they told us to do. I think we always found it too difficult to say no. I believe that MSF Belgium's persistence in wanting to stay in Rwanda, to accompany the repatriated, etc., was too obvious and the Rwandan government found that very easy to manipulate. They knew that MSF was too interested in staying for operational reasons, institutional, and sentimental reasons. They knew that we would not leave, that they could make us swallow all the lies, that they could keep us waiting as long as they liked, denying us access for much of the time, then letting us in when they felt like it - we were ready to swallow anything.*

Dr. Philippe Biberson, MSF France President (in French).

**On 29 June 1998, the report of the investigative team created by the UN Secretary General in July 1997 was sent to the Security Council, which made it public. It described the "killings perpetrated by the AFDL and its allies" as crimes against humanity.**



'Letter from the Secretary General addressed to the President of the Security Council of the United Nations,' 29 June 1998 (in English). [D301](#)

**Extract:**

It is a source of deep regret that, between its first deployment in August 1997 and its withdrawal in April 1998, the Team was not allowed to carry out its mission fully and without hindrance. Nevertheless, in spite of the difficulties outlined in the report, the Team was able to reach a number of conclusions that are supported by strong evidence. Two of these conclusions stand out.

The first is that all the parties to the violence that racked Zaire, and especially its eastern provinces, during the period under consideration have committed serious violations of human rights or international humanitarian law. The second is that the killings by AFDL and its allies, including elements of the Rwandan Patriotic Army, constitute crimes against humanity, as does the denial of humanitarian assistance to Rwandan Hutu refugees. The members of the team believe that some of the killings may constitute

genocide, depending on their intent, and call for further investigation of those crimes and of their motivation.

**On 13 July, the UN Security Council condemned the atrocities committed in the DRC and called on the DRC and Rwandan governments to investigate them and punish the guilty. It requested the cooperation of all member states to this end.**



**'Statement** by the President of the Security Council,' 13 July 1998 (in English). **D302** [↗](#)

#### **Extract:**

The Security Council recognizes the necessity to investigate further the massacres, other atrocities and violations of international humanitarian law and to prosecute those responsible. It deplores the delay in the administration of justice. The Council calls on the Governments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda to investigate without delay, in their respective countries, the allegations contained in the report of the Investigative Team and to bring to justice any persons found to have been involved in these or other massacres, atrocities and violations of international humanitarian law. The Council takes note of the stated willingness of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to try any of its nationals who are guilty of or were implicated in the alleged massacres (S/1998/582). Such action is of great importance in helping to bring an end to impunity and to foster lasting peace and stability in the region. It urges Member States to cooperate with the Governments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda in the investigation and prosecution of these persons...

The Security Council urges Member States, relevant United Nations bodies and agencies and other international agencies to provide the necessary technical and other assistance, as requested, to the Governments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda in the development of independent and impartial judicial systems...

#### **ÉPILOGUE**

**On 1<sup>st</sup> October 2010, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights published a mapping report on the violations of human rights committed in the DRC from March 1993 to June 2003. The investigators consulted over 1,500 documents, among them 14 MSF reports that the organisation released at the time of the events.**

**the time the word of those who alerted was doubted. It stated that it would carry on raising alert in serious situations but would not engage in present or future judicial actions. This press release was not distributed by most of the other sections. They questioned the relevance of reminding that at the time MSF had received no support.**



**"United Nations' report on the crimes committed in Zaire: MSF reaffirms its duty to alert"** MSF [France] **Press Release**, 29 September 2010 (in French - in English). **D303** [↗](#)

The report published by the United Nations' High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Mapping Exercise documenting the most serious human rights violations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) between 1993 and 2003 will be made public on 1 October 2010.

This document refers, amongst others, to reports published by Médecins Sans Frontières at the time the violations were committed (see [www.msf.fr/publications](http://www.msf.fr/publications)). MSF would like to clarify its position as a humanitarian actor facing these types of events.

Beyond denouncing the violence and non-discriminate attacks on the refugee and civilian populations in the region, the MSF reports denounced the criminal use of humanitarian activities, particularly between 1996 and 1998. Humanitarian aid was used by armed factions to locate, group together and massacre civilian and refugee populations. In these exceptional circumstances, to remain silent would have been synonymous with complicity: it is the humanitarian actor's direct responsibility to raise a public alert.

At the time, and for years later, the word of those like MSF who alerted the international community on these massacres was doubted. Whatever the impact of this report, it is crucial to analyse the reasons for this denial and the absence of support to aid organisations who were facing these events.

War continues in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo with ceaseless violence against the population. MSF's essential role is to gain access to victims by negotiating with the armed factions present. In order to do this, the organisation cannot be perceived as a witness for the prosecution in legal proceedings as this would endanger its actions and team members.

MSF will, therefore, continue to raise immediate alerts in serious situations, but refuses involvement in present or future judicial actions.



"UN Mapping report - **Talking points & Q&A**"  
MSF International, 30 September 2010 (in  
English). **D304**

#### Extract:

2. What does MSF not want to say?

MSF does not:

- Comment in any way on judicial processes
- Qualify crimes (war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide)
- Comment on the role of Rwanda in DRC during the period described in the report nor speculate on any current involvement today. We will not discuss Paul Kagame or the current DRC government
- Comment on quality and or timing of the report
- Call for justice / end of impunity

There is disagreement among OCs [Operational Centers] on whether we should elaborate on the fact that MSF and other's alerts were questioned and on the lack of support to aid organisations at that time (see OCP press release)



**Report** of the Mapping Exercise documenting the most serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed within the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo between March 1993 and June 2003, August 2010, published on 1st October 2010 by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (in French - unofficial translation into English by UNOHCHR). **D305**

#### Extract:

[...]

**I. Inventory of the most serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed on the territory of the DRC between March 1993 and June 2003 [...]**

**B. July 1996–July 1998: First Congo War and the Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la libération du Congo-Zaire (AFDL) regime**

18. The second period concerns violations allegedly committed during the First Congo War and the first year of the regime established by President Laurent-Désiré Kabila. With 238 listed incidents, this period has the greatest number of incidents in the whole of the decade under examination. The information available today points to the significant role of other countries in the First Congo War and their direct implication in the war, which led to the overthrow of the Mobutu regime.<sup>18</sup> At the start of the period, serious violations were committed against

Tutsi and Banyamulenge civilians,<sup>19</sup> principally in South Kivu. This period was then characterised by the apparently relentless pursuit and mass killing (104 reported incidents) of Hutu refugees, members of the former Armed Forces of Rwanda (later "ex-FAR") and militias implicated in the genocide of 1994 (Interahamwe), allegedly by the *Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la libération du Congo-Zaire* (AFDL). A proportion of the AFDL's troops, arms and logistics were apparently supplied by the *Armée patriotique rwandaise* (APR), the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) and by the *Forces armées burundaises* (FAB) throughout the Congolese territory. Hutu refugees, who it appears were often rounded up and used by the ex-FAR/Interahamwe as human shields during their flight, began a long trek across the country from east to west towards Angola, the Central African Republic or the Republic of the Congo. This period was also marked by serious attacks on other civilian populations in all provinces without exception, in particular allegedly by the *Forces armées zairoises* (FAZ) retreating towards Kinshasa, the ex-FAR/Interahamwe driven back by the AFDL/APR and the Mayi-Mayi.[...]

#### NGO reports [...]

##### MSF (Médecins Sans Frontières)

- *Populations en danger au Zaïre, rapport MSF, 1995*
- *Ethnic cleansing rears its head in Zaire, 1 November 1996*
- *Traque et massacre des Rwandais au Zaïre-Congo, 1996-1997*
- *Unofficial translation from French original*
- *Forced flight – A brutal strategy of elimination in eastern Zaire, 30 April 1997*
- *Histoire des réfugiés rwandais ayant fui les camps du Kivu, Zaïre, de Septembre 1996 à June 1997, September 1997*
- *International Activity Report, 2001*
- *Special Report - Confronting catastrophe in the DRC, 30 November 2001*
- *La guerre me suivait, 2002*
- *Giving voice to untold human suffering, 2002*
- *Quiet, we are dying, 2002*
- *Report on the DRC 1992-2002, 2002*
- *I have no joy, no peace of mind; Medical, psychosocial and socio-economic consequences of sexual violences in eastern DRC, 2004*
- *International activity report: DRC I took my children and fled, 2003*
- *Ituri – Unkept promises, 2003*

## CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS 1993-2010

The main purpose of this chronology is to help the reader by reconstructing MSF's actions and public statements in regional and international news reports of the period. It is intended as a tool for this specific document, and not as an academic reference.

International	Great Lakes	MSF
<p><b>1993</b></p>	<p>Violence involving Rwandan-speaking minorities and local civilian militias in the Kivus - between 7,000-14,000 dead; hundreds of thousands displaced.</p>	<p>MSF Holland health care assistance programmes operating in the Kivu.</p>
<p><b>1994</b></p>	<p><b>April-July</b> Genocide of Rwandan Tutsi and massacres of Rwandan Hutu opposed to the genocide; more than 1 million Rwandan Hutu flee to Tanzania, Zaire and Burundi.</p> <p><b>July</b> RPF takes power in Rwanda; thousands of Banyamulenge from Zaire flee to Rwanda; some are already registered in the RPF army.</p>	<p><b>18 June</b> MSF calls for armed international intervention to end the genocide against the Rwandan Tutsi.</p> <p><b>July-August</b> All MSF sections respond to a cholera epidemic in Zaire's Rwandan refugee camps.</p> <p><b>November-December</b> MSF France withdraws from Rwandan refugee camps in Zaire and Tanzania, issues a public explanation: refuses to help strengthen the power of those responsible for genocide by providing aid in the camps.</p>
<p><b>1995</b></p>	<p><b>April</b> Zaire's High Council of the Republic (Parliament) passes a resolution forbidding refugees (including Banyamulenge) from acquiring Zairian citizenship.</p> <p><b>Autumn</b> With material support from the US, the RPA intervenes in Zaire against the ex-FAR and militias from Idjwi (Lake Kivu) island.</p>	<p><b>March</b> MSF submits its 'Diagnosis of the Situation in Rwandan Prisons' to Rwandan authorities.</p> <p><b>April-May</b> MSF publicly condemns the RPA massacre of at least 4,000 displaced persons in Kibeho (Rwanda).</p> <p><b>July</b> MSF publishes updated 'Diagnosis of the Situation in Rwandan Prisons'—MSF Belgium and MSF Holland decide to withdraw from Rwandan refugee camps in Zaire and Tanzania.</p> <p><b>December</b> MSF France and MSF Switzerland expelled from Rwanda.</p>

International	Great Lakes	MSF
<p><b>1996</b></p> <p><b>June</b> In the US, Paul Kagame, Rwanda's Vice President and Defense Minister explained that Rwanda can remove the threat from the Zaire camps on its own.</p>	<p><b>13 February</b> UNHCR repatriates 250,000 Rwandan refugees from the Kibumba and Kashusha camps in Zaire to Rwanda.</p> <p><b>12 May</b> Massacre of Tutsi refugees in the Mokoto monastery.</p> <p><b>End of May</b> Local and international organisations evacuate threatened individuals in Masisi.</p> <p><b>August</b> Four movements opposed to the Mobutu government, including Laurent Desire Kabila's PRP come together within ADFL.</p> <p><b>9 September</b> Residents of Uvira (South Kivu) demonstrate and attack Banyamulenge houses. They are ordered to leave the country.</p> <p><b>22 September</b> Bukavu: Zairian and Rwandan soldiers exchange mortar fire.</p>	<p><b>January</b> Several thousand Tutsi refugees gather at the Mokoto monastery and the village of Kitchanga (Zaire-Masisi), where MSF Holland manages the clinic.</p> <p><b>Mid-May</b> MSF Holland evacuates some of the survivors of the Mokoto massacre. MSF pressure on UNHCR to evacuate the 3,000 others.</p> <p><b>21 May</b> <b>MSF Holland press release:</b> <i>Three Thousand People Threatened in the Masisi Region – MSF Calls for Their Immediate Evacuation.</i></p> <p><b>23 July</b> <b>MSF Belgium press release:</b> <i>Three Deaths During Forced Repatriation to Rwanda – Thousands Seek Refuge in the Burundian Hills.</i></p>

International	Great Lakes	MSF
<p><b>1996</b></p> <p><b>11 October</b> UN report predicts explosion of violence in Eastern Zaire.</p> <p><b>27 October</b> UNHCR commissioner calls for creation of humanitarian corridors.</p> <p><b>29 October</b> In agreement with the US and the UN, France proposes that the countries of the Great Lakes region hold a meeting.</p>	<p><b>8 October</b> South Kivu: local authorities accuse rebels of attacking Rwandan Hutu and Interahamwe; 200,000-500,000 given one week to leave the country.</p> <p><b>16 October</b> Zairian Prime Minister anticipates closing Rwandan refugee camps before the May and July 1997 elections.</p> <p><b>18 October</b> Official founding of the ADFL.</p> <p><b>20 October</b> Fighting between Zairian Armed Forces (FAZ) and Rwandan army from the Uvira region - 110,000 refugees flee to Bukavu - ADFL attacks the area around the Katale camp (north Goma).</p> <p><b>22 October</b> Fighting between Zairian forces and the ADFL extends into the entire Kivu region: 250,000-400,000 refugees flee. Rwandan and Burundian armies supporting the ADFL.</p> <p><b>24 October</b> ADFL takes Uvira.</p> <p><b>25 October</b> ADFL objective to overturn President Mobutu - state of emergency in the Kivu.</p> <p><b>26 and 27 October</b> ADFL attacks Kibumba and Katale camps (North Kivu) - hundreds of thousands of refugees flee and gather in the Mugunga camp.</p> <p><b>28 October</b> ADFL captures Bukavu - Rwandan President says Eastern Zaire previously belonged to Rwanda.</p>	<p><b>Mid-October</b> MSF Holland Uvira mission converted into ET mission (emergency team-all MSF sections) coordinated by MSF Holland.</p> <p><b>28 October</b> MSF teams begin treating refugees in the Mugunga camp.</p>

International	Great Lakes	MSF
<p><b>1996</b></p> <p><b>Late October</b> Humanitarian organisations are primary information source for western media, which refer to a 'humanitarian crisis.'</p> <p><b>3 November</b> European Union Commissioner for Humanitarian Action calls for emergency humanitarian action in Zaire; calls on Rwandan government to open humanitarian corridors to the Mugunga camp without delay.</p> <p><b>5 November</b> ICRC and UNHCR raise the issue of armed international intervention. Security Council representatives of the nations in the Great Lakes region request deployment of a 'neutral force' (UN-OAU) in Zaire to set up corridors</p> <p><b>6 November</b> UN: Zaire favorable to the dispatching of an international force.</p>	<p><b>30 October</b> Rwandan army acknowledges engaging troops in Zaire - Kahindo camp attacked.</p> <p><b>31 October</b> ADFL takes Goma - Laurent-Désiré Kabila declares himself President of the ADFL and Head of the Army for the Liberation of Congo.</p> <p><b>1 November</b> Zairian government: forced and gradual return' of all Rwandan and Burundian refugees - rebels take Bukavu.</p> <p><b>2 November</b> Rebels take international press on a guided tour of Bukavu.</p> <p><b>4 November</b> ADFL announces 3-week ceasefire. Rwandan government claims it is not involved in the conflict underway in Zaire. ADFL takes international press on guided tour of Goma.</p> <p><b>5 November</b> Goma is open to journalists but closed to NGOs.</p> <p><b>6 November</b> Kigali refuses to allow a 'neutral force' on its territory.</p>	<p><b>31 October</b> <b>MSF France press release:</b> <i>Médecins Sans Frontières Accuses Western Nations of Non-Assistance to Populations in Danger. MSF Calls for Creation of a Reception Area for Rwandan Refugees from Zaire.</i> MSF team evacuated from Mugunga, remains blocked in Goma. MSF teams evacuated from Uvira and Bukavu and gather in Cyangugu.</p> <p><b>1 November</b> <b>MSF International press release :</b> <i>MSF Demands Creation of a Humanitarian Corridor. Humanitarian Aid Workers Still Blocked in Goma.</i> MSF Holland's report on ethnic cleansing in the Masisi is distributed.</p> <p><b>2 November</b> All humanitarian organisations, including MSF, evacuated from Goma.</p> <p><b>4 November</b> <b>MSF International press conference in Gisenyi:</b> <i>Médecins Sans Frontières Calls for Armed International Intervention to Create Safety Zones.</i> <b>MSF USA press release:</b> <i>The Crisis Worsens in Zaire: MSF Prepares for a Medical Disaster.</i></p> <p><b>5 November</b> <b>MSF France press release:</b> <i>Two Cargo Planes Bound for Zaire.</i></p> <p><b>6 November</b> Executive Directors and Operations Directors agree to call for armed intervention. Operations assigned to an ET coordinated by MSF Holland.</p>

International	Great Lakes	MSF
<p><b>1996</b></p> <p><b>7 November</b> EU Cooperation Ministers, UNHCR and ICRC call on UN Security Council to authorise an urgent intervention in Kivu province.</p> <p><b>8 November</b> ICRC is favorable to armed intervention in Zaire. UN Secretary General to Security Council recommends deployment of international force in eastern Zaire.</p> <p><b>9 November</b> Interim UN Security Council resolution on the principle of a multinational force 'for humanitarian purposes,' intervention decision postponed.</p> <p><b>10 November</b> EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Action says the Security Council's slow reaction is an international scandal.</p> <p><b>13 November</b> US Department of State: <i>'the US is ready to participate in an intervention in Zaire in a limited fashion (1,000 men)...</i></p>	<p><b>8 November</b> Rwandan government: ready to accept an Afro-European force; calls for return of refugees.</p> <p><b>10 November</b> Kabila announces the creation of humanitarian corridor and places conditions on NGOs to obtain access to Mugunga camp. Humanitarian organisations confined in the Goma stadium.</p>	<p><b>7 November</b> <b>MSF announcement:</b> Five evaluation teams blocked at the Rwandan, Burundian, Ugandan and Zairian borders. MSF sends letters to European and US political leaders asking for international intervention.</p> <p><b>8 November</b> <b>MSF France press release</b> <i>'13,600 Unimportant Deaths,' estimates the number of deaths likely if humanitarian agencies do not have access to the camps and calls for creation of safety zones and international military operation.</i> <b>MSF UK/OXFAM press release:</b> <i>Military Intervention is Necessary to Save Lives and Ensure Peace and Justice in the Long Term.</i> <b>MSF USA/InterAction press:</b> <i>US Aid Organizations Call on the US to Take Action in Zaire.</i> <b>MSF Holland press release:</b> <i>MSF Sends a Cargo Plane. Rwanda Authorizes Humanitarian Aid to Goma.</i></p> <p><b>9 November</b> <b>MSF France press release:</b> <i>Burundians Repatriated To Conflict Zones Without Protection or Medical Aid.</i> <b>MSF France press release:</b> <i>Each Day of Non-Assistance to Refugees Could Mean Death for 1,200 People.</i> <b>Open Letter from MSF UK and OXFAM in The Times:</b> <i>Dead Refugees Cannot Be Saved.</i></p> <p><b>11 November</b> MSF Executive Directors hold a teleconference and decide to continue to condemn inaccessibility.</p>

International	Great Lakes	MSF
<p><b>1996</b></p> <p><b>15 November</b> Security Council resolution 1080 authorises deployment of a 10,000 to 15,000-strong multinational force in Eastern Zaire and the Great Lakes region to aid the refugees. Use of force authorised.</p> <p><b>22 November</b> US aerial photos provide negative results (no refugees 'found' but insufficient overflights in the west, where refugees have been reported).</p> <p><b>23 November</b> UNHCR says 700,000 Rwandans still in eastern Zaire.</p>	<p><b>15 November</b> Rebels attack Mugunga camp: 400,000-700,000 refugees return to Rwanda between 15-18 November.</p> <p><b>16 November</b> Rwandan Vice President assumes support for rebels and declares that NGOs should help Rwandans in Rwanda rather than as refugees in Zaire.</p> <p><b>17 November</b> Rebels kill 320 refugees in Chimanga, south-west of Bukavu.</p> <p><b>18 November</b> First news articles criticising NGOs for exaggerating refugee statistics.</p> <p><b>19 November</b> UNHCR announces 500,000 refugees returned to Rwanda, 700,000 remain in Zaire. Rwandan authorities assert that all have returned.</p> <p><b>23 November</b> Rwandan Vice President tells The Economist (UK) that there is a relationship between the refugees' return and preparations for the multinational force thus the Rwandan government. It requests \$700 million in aid for the refugees' return.</p>	<p><b>14 November</b> MSF conducts a 'sit in' at the Rwanda/Zaire border. <b>MSF declaration:</b> <i>'MSF Issues an Urgent Call for Action, as a Thousand People Die Every Day in Eastern Zaire, and Warns Against "Band Aid" Solutions in the Region.'</i></p> <p><b>15 November</b> <b>MSF France press release:</b> <i>'Half-Measures Bear Heavy Consequences.'</i> <b>MSF France and MSF Holland press release:</b> <i>Call for Immediate Intervention by an International Armed Force to Protect Civilians.</i></p> <p><b>16 November</b> <b>MSF Holland press release:</b> <i>MSF Calls for Immediate Opening of Goma Airport.</i></p> <p><b>19 November</b> Rwandan authorities close an MSF health station for refugees between Gisenyi and Ruhengeri.</p> <p><b>20 November</b> Medical screening centre set up in Kisangani; MSF supports Upper Zaire general hospitals in Walikale and Lubutu.</p>

International	Great Lakes	MSF
<p><b>1996</b></p> <p><b>24 November</b> UN is concerned about confrontation between Rwanda and Zaire and announce that the threat of the emergency is as serious as that of the 1994 genocide and exodus.</p> <p><b>27 November</b> Canadian government proposes to parachute food supplies to refugees in eastern Zaire.</p> <p><b>28 November</b> EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Action states that parachuting food supplies is 'shameful.'</p> <p><b>30 November</b> International force formally constituted.</p> <p><b>5 December</b> Canadian Defense Minister asks 'is an armed international intervention relevant?'</p>	<p><b>28 November</b> Rwanda agrees to a 10-day humanitarian corridor. Zaire opposes parachuted food drops onto its territory. BBC, Reuters and Amnesty International report on the Chimanga massacre.</p> <p><b>4 December</b> A 'human tide' along the Walikale-Kisangani road.</p>	<p><b>25 November</b> MSF team exceeds the ADFL-authorized 30 km range around Bukavu. They are reprimanded and an ADFL facilitator is attached to MSF team.</p> <p><b>26 November</b> MSF organises its response to press criticism regarding refugee numbers and their health status. MSF discovers survivors of the Chimanga massacre in Bukavu.</p> <p><b>1 December</b> 5,000 refugees arrive in Bukavu - MSF, ICRC and UNHCR temporarily halt denunciation of ADFL for using humanitarian groups to lure refugees. Statements by survivors of the Chimanga massacre sent to MSF Holland headquarters.</p> <p><b>2 December</b> MSF Holland delivers statements by survivors of Chimanga massacre to Amnesty International.</p>

International	Great Lakes	MSF
<p><b>1996 6 December</b> Canada declares that given the return of 500,000 refugees to Rwanda, there is no reason for an international force.</p> <p><b>12 December</b> The proposed international armed intervention force is abandoned.</p>	<p><b>6 December</b> Thousands of refugees and displaced persons arrive in Lubutu.</p> <p><b>12 December</b> 70,000 refugees congregate at the Tingi Tingi landing strip near Lubutu.</p> <p><b>17 December</b> Mobutu's triumphant return to Kinshasa after four months' absence. UNHCR arrives to evaluate the situation in Kisangani, Walikale, and Lubutu.</p>	<p><b>15 December</b> MSF responds in Tingi-Tingi. 38,000 refugees arrive in Shabunda. ICRC calls on MSF for help. <b>MSF press release:</b> <i>'There are Currently Hundreds of Thousands of People in Eastern Zaire Whose Fate is Unknown.'</i> . <b>MSF Letter to International Criminal Tribunal Prosecutor:</b> Requests support of the call to expand the international force's mandate.</p> <p><b>18 December</b> MSF Holland evaluation mission in Masisi (North Kivu).</p> <p><b>Late December</b> MSF Holland fundraising director is misquoted, exaggerating the number of refugees: MSF faces credibility crisis in the Dutch media—MSF ET coordinator in Bukavu to MSF Holland executive director: <i>'Should we close the mission so that the ADFL can't use us as bait anymore?'</i></p>
<p><b>1997 7 January</b> UN claims 1.3 million refugees returned to Rwanda. UNHCR announces 120,000 refugees in Tingi-Tingi area, 60,000 in Amisi and 150,000 in Shabunda.</p>		<p><b>7 January</b> Tingi Tingi mortality rate of 50% among children under 5.</p> <p><b>14 January</b> <b>Press conference:</b> MSF France /UNICEF in Paris, supported by MSF Belgium and MSF UK: <i>'On Average, 20 People Die Every Day in the Tingi Tingi Camp in Upper Zaire.'</i></p>

International	Great Lakes	MSF
<p><b>1997</b></p> <p><b>22 January</b> Mohamed Sahnoun, special OAU and UN envoy travels to the Great Lakes region.</p> <p><b>February</b> 'Direct testimony' by a European priest circulates, telling of massacres committed by the ADFL in Eastern Zaire.</p>	<p><b>Night of 19-20 January</b> Three Médecins du Monde volunteers killed in Ruhengeri, Rwanda.</p> <p><b>21 January</b> 15 journalists in Tingi Tingi report starving refugees are hostile; 100 families describe killings in the forest. Counter-offensive underway carried out by Zairian government forces.</p> <p><b>30 January</b> Zaire: Uganda and Rwanda deployed forces in eastern Zaire with ADFL. Zairian troops include mercenaries.</p>	<p><b>20 January</b> MSF team in Tingi Tingi reduced for security reasons</p> <p><b>22 January</b> <b>MSF Belgium press release:</b> <i>'Rwanda: MSF Condemns Murderous Mindset.'</i></p> <p><b>23 January</b> <b>MSF France press release:</b> <i>'Situation Still Critical in Tingi-Tingi, Upper Zaire,' taken up by MSF US, 'Refugees Face Catastrophe in Tingi Tingi, Upper Zaire. Last month, 526 Refugees Died.'</i></p> <p><b>26 January</b> Tingi Tingi: Daily death rate: 21 per 10,000.</p> <p><b>Late January</b> MSF headquarters and field sites debate the objectives of an MSF presence in the Great Lakes region.</p> <p><b>January 30 to 1 February</b> MSF Holland evaluation mission in the Saké region concludes that the nutritional situation is catastrophic.</p> <p><b>31 January</b> <b>MSF France and MSF Belgium press release:</b> <i>Over Two Months, Tingi Tingi Refugees Have Received Less Than One-Third of Their Basic Food Needs.</i> <b>Repeated by MSF USA:</b> <i>175 additional Deaths in a Zairian Refugee Camp. Two Months of Food Shortages have Cost 719 Lives.</i> MSF Holland in Goma criticises headquarters for too much publicity on the refugees and not enough about Masisi.</p>

International	Great Lakes	MSF
<p><b>1997 1 and 2 February</b> EU's Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid, in Zaire admits that some 200,000 refugees are still roaming in the forest.</p> <p><b>3 February</b> Rwanda's ambassador to the UN declares there are no more Rwandan refugees in Zaire.</p> <p><b>5 February</b> US Secretary of State asks Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi to stay out of the conflict.</p> <p><b>7 February</b> UNHCR calls for opening of safe passage zones so that refugees can be repatriated to Rwanda.</p> <p><b>9 February</b> UNHCR commissioner calls for refugees to return to Rwanda. 500 refugees call for her resignation.</p>	<p><b>Night of 4-5 February</b> 30,000-40,000 refugees from Shabunda camps flee heading south-west ahead of ADFL troops' arrival. Four UN human rights observers killed in Rwanda.</p> <p><b>5 February</b> Rebels take Shabunda and Bunia.</p> <p><b>8 February</b> ADFL takes Amisi camp, forcing refugees to flee to Tingi Tingi.</p>	<p><b>1 and 2 February</b> MSF has no access to Shabunda or Masisi.</p> <p><b>3 February</b> MSF/ICRC meet refugees beyond authorized Walikale-Bukavu road. French Foreign Affairs Ministry official for Africa to MSF France says that '<i>France believes Zaire is responsible for the presence of ex-FAR and Interahamwe.</i>'</p> <p><b>4 February</b> Refugees aided the night before they disappear: MSF Holland and ICRC suspend search and aid operations in the area. <b>Letter from MSF</b> to UNHCR and ambassadors of western nations in Zaire warning about the gravity of the situation in the Kivu.</p> <p><b>6 February</b> Following the killing of UN observers, MSF Belgium withdraws from Cyangugu and Kibuyé 'prefectures' [Counties] (Rwanda).</p> <p><b>7 February</b> MSF permanently ends presence in Tingi Tingi because front line draws near.</p> <p><b>10 and 11 February</b> Operation directors from all sections decide MSF should remain in Rwanda.</p> <p><b>12 February</b> MSF, OXFAM, and Care testify before the UN Security Council urging that '<i>humanitarian assistance cannot replace political initiatives.</i>' <b>MSF France, MDM, ACF press release:</b> '<i>ACF, MDM and MSF</i></p>

International	Great Lakes	MSF
<p><b>1997</b></p> <p><b>18 February</b> Security Council resolution 1097 adopts Mohamed Sahnoun's peace plan:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Cease hostilities,</li> <li>2) foreign troops leave,</li> <li>3) national sovereignty restored,</li> <li>4) refugees and displaced persons receive protection,</li> <li>5) international arbitration and dialogue to resolve the crisis.</li> </ol> <p><b>19 February</b> 'Direct testimony' of European priest regarding mass killings in Kivus delivered to Security Council.</p> <p><b>28 February</b> Proposal from new UN Secretary General to reactivate the multinational force but the US and the UK oppose.</p>	<p><b>Mid-February</b> ADFL attacks Shabunda refugees forcing 40,000 to flee: 30,000 to Angola and 10,000 into the Zaire forest.</p> <p><b>17 February</b> Zairian government: bombs eastern cities held by ADFL.</p> <p><b>2 March</b> Kabila announces that Tingi Tingi was taken, he promises 'security corridors' for repatriation to Rwanda. 160,000 refugees in flight.</p>	<p><i>Say Rules of Humanitarian Law Must be Observed.'</i></p> <p><b>13 February</b> <b>MSF France press release:</b> <i>Security Council Hears Statements From Médecins Sans Frontières, OXFAM and CARE on the Great Lakes Crisis.</i></p> <p><b>Mid-February</b> ICRC declares to MSF Holland and UNHCR that it is ceasing its aid operations to refugees in the forest because they are used to lure refugees out. ICRC calls on MSF and UNHCR to do the same.</p> <p><b>17 February</b> <b>MSF Holland Announcement:</b> <i>At Least 9 Dead and 37 Wounded in Goma Bombing.'</i> <b>MSF France announcement:</b> <i>Reduced Team Returns to Tingi-Tingi.</i></p> <p><b>28 February</b> <b>MSF France press release:</b> <i>'MSF Calls for Immediate Transfer of Vulnerable Groups.'</i></p> <p><b>1 March</b> All humanitarian organisations, including MSF, evacuate Kisangani.</p> <p><b>2 March</b> <b>MSF France press release:</b> <i>'The 120,000 Tingi Tingi Refugees Abandoned Again.'</i> Debate over the 'figures battle' resumes among MSF sections.</p>

International	Great Lakes	MSF
<p><b>1997</b></p> <p><b>7 March</b> Security Council calls on Kabila to accept UN peace plan referring to “allegations concerning international human rights violations” in the rebel zone.</p> <p><b>10 March</b> <i>The New York Times (USA): ‘UN Searches for Rwandan Refugees Lost in the Zairian Jungle (Tingi Tingi).’</i> <i>Libération (France): ‘Zaire: “A Witness Describes Massacres.”</i></p> <p><b>21 March</b> 200 US soldiers in Zaire to evacuate their nationals.</p>	<p><b>13 March</b> 1,000 refugees in Tingi Tingi and 10,000-20,000 refugees in Ubundu.</p> <p><b>15 March</b> ADFL takes Kisangani.</p> <p><b>18 March</b> Kabila authorises humanitarian organizations to travel for one week in a radius of 20 km around Kisangani. Zairian Prime Minister dismissed by Mobutu.</p> <p><b>21 March</b> President Mobutu back in Kinshasa after several months in France.</p> <p><b>26 March</b> UNHCR announces 18,000 refugees in Lula (7 km from Kisangani). Access to city denied.</p>	<p><b>4 March</b> MSF USA Director urges no political declarations from MSF to the press, only medical information.</p> <p><b>6 March</b> MSF France issues warning on the fate of refugees and obstacles to providing aid.</p> <p><b>14-22 March</b> Death rate at Tingi Tingi is between 12% and 18%. - MSF negotiates to evacuate refugees to Goma.</p> <p><b>18 March</b> MSF Holland’s nutritional surveys begin north of Goma.</p> <p><b>20 - 23 March</b> MSF Holland evaluation mission in Masisi. Villagers describe ADFL abuses and show the teams mass graves.</p> <p><b>26 March</b> MSF Holland’s ex-coordinator in Bukavu debriefs Amnesty International.</p> <p><b>26 March-3 April</b> MSF Holland evaluation mission along the Bukavu-Shabunda corridor (South Kivu) confirms ADFL’s use of aid organisations as bait.</p>

International	Great Lakes	MSF
<p data-bbox="145 293 209 327"><b>1997</b></p> <p data-bbox="252 902 644 994"><b>30 March</b> UNHCR plan to repatriate Rwandan refugees in two to three months.</p>	<p data-bbox="676 902 1075 1028"><b>30 March</b> ADFL refuses to allow refugees to transit through Kisangani and turns back Lula refugees.</p> <p data-bbox="676 1350 1075 1442"><b>1 April</b> WFP says more than 100,000 refugees are 150 km from Kisangani.</p> <p data-bbox="676 1608 1075 1700"><b>4 April</b> Rebels take Mbuji Mayi, capital of Eastern Kasai.</p> <p data-bbox="676 1955 1075 2110"><b>7 April</b> Kabila agrees to repatriate 100,000 refugees south of Kisangani. UNHCR predicts they can repatriate 1,500-2,000/day over three months</p>	<p data-bbox="1102 297 1501 517"><b>27 March</b> MSF Holland Goma meets with Roberto Garreton, UN investigator in Goma. MSF Holland Coordinator on the first Kisangani-Ubundu train reveals that tens of thousands of refugees in terrible states all along the railroad line.</p> <p data-bbox="1102 555 1501 741"><b>28 March</b> Aid operations begin in Obilo, Kasese, and Biaro. <b>MSF press release:</b> <i>'Aid Activities Set Up.'</i> MSF Holland informs other sections of its silent lobbying campaign to gain access to refugees.</p> <p data-bbox="1102 779 1501 871"><b>29 March</b> MSF Holland's Masisi evaluation team evacuated from Zaire.</p> <p data-bbox="1102 1066 1501 1319"><b>31 March</b> <b>MSF Belgium press release:</b> <i>'Exhausted and Underfed: Rwandan Refugees' Situation is Tragic. MSF Sends Reinforcements to Kisangani.'</i> <b>MSF France press release:</b> <i>'Zaire Emergency-Rwandan Refugees in Eastern Zaire Are Exhausted and Starving.'</i></p> <p data-bbox="1102 1480 1501 1572"><b>3 and 4 April</b> Masisi evaluation team debriefs in Amsterdam, writing of report begins.</p> <p data-bbox="1102 1733 1501 1919"><b>6 April</b> Shabunda evaluation team debriefs in Bukavu. MSF Belgium Medical Coordinator in Kisangani tells press <i>that given the refugees' health status, they cannot be repatriated for several weeks.</i></p>

**International****Great Lakes****MSF****1997****8 April**

ADFL agrees to allow the Kisangani airport to be used for refugee repatriation.

**9 April**

Kisangani-Ubundu train blocked after 100 dead on arrival in Obilo. Rebels take Lubumbashi (Shaba capital).

**15 April**

Death rate of 16 per 10,000/day among refugees south of Kisangani. 200 cholera cases (15% deaths) in Kasese.

**16 April**

ADFL agrees to repatriate Rwandan refugees. Rwandan Vice President prepared to cooperate with the UNHCR on repatriation.

**18 April**

ADFL indefinitely delays Rwandan refugees' repatriation because of cholera.

**Nights of 19-20 April**

Villagers attack train carrying WFP food supplies.

**9 April**

**Press conference** with MSF Belgium Executive Director who returned from Biaro and Kasese: *'it's a real death house. 20,000 refugees need a month's treatment before being repatriated.'*

**10 April**

25 MSF volunteers in Kisangani, 17 in Bukavu and 20 in Goma. First cholera cases in Kisangani camps.

**11-14 April**

'*Shabunda evaluation*' team debriefs in Amsterdam and report is written.

**14 April**

MSF Holland to other sections' Communications Directors declares that the advocacy plan is confidential and therefore not to be distributed. Later, MSF Holland Emergency Desk visits Zaire where teams agree to public distribution of Shabunda report.

**16-18 April**

Former MSF Holland Coordinator from Goma in New York (UN) and Washington, DC but does not deliver Shabunda report.

**17 April**

MSF Holland informs other MSF Communications Departments that the *"media lobbying strategy was accepted. Information to be strictly controlled. Those who will be involved in this action have been informed."*

**18 April**

MSF Belgium Director of Operations vetoes all public distribution of the Shabunda report.

International	Great Lakes	MSF
<p><b>1997 21 April</b> UNHCR and UN secretary general call on ADFL to immediately authorise an airlift to repatriate Rwandan refugees.</p> <p><b>22 April</b> UN decision: To send a commission of inquiry to Eastern Zaire in May to investigate 'alleged massacres.</p> <p><b>23 April</b> UN Secretary General accuses ADFL of killing by starving and demands access for humanitarian organisations to refugees. US Department of State calls on ADFL to authorise humanitarian organisations' access to refugees.</p> <p><b>24 April</b> <i>The New York Times</i> publishes extracts of Shabunda report without quoting MSF.</p>	<p><b>21 April</b> A train carrying provisions and a WFP warehouse are looted. Confrontations occur among villagers, refugees, and ADFL soldiers around the camps.</p> <p><b>21-23 April</b> ADFL suspends humanitarian organisations' access to camps. ADFL attacks Kasese 1 and 2 camps, refugees killed.</p> <p><b>24 April</b> UNHCR and journalists, supervised by ADFL, go to camp sites and find that the 55,000 refugees from the Kasese and Biaro camps are gone.</p>	<p><b>22 April</b> MSF France's Executive Director proposes a concise report to political leaders and selected journalists with commitment not to quote MSF. Report writing is assigned to an inter-section workinggroup coordinated by MSF Holland with the aim of getting an agreement on the text by 28 April.</p> <p><b>23 April</b> MSF Kisangani driver sees 500 bodies near Kasese. He informs Kisangani team which leads to intersection tele-conference and two options: 1) speak out publicly regarding refusal of access to Kisangani the same day or; 2) speak out more strongly later if massacres are confirmed. MSF Holland Director of Operations vetoes warning period for teams.</p> <p><b>24 April</b> MSF Holland Communications Department announces to other sections that no press release is to be made but broader and stronger message on human rights violations are needed. MSF Belgium, MSF Holland, UNHCR, ICRC, and OXFAM meeting with the EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Action <b>4 p.m.:</b> MSF France legal advisor to all sections: <i>Security veto has been lifted on the new version of the Shabunda report, which may be distributed to journalists in MSF's name.</i> <b>8 p.m.:</b> MSF H Communications Department to other sections approves MSF France's version of the Shabunda report to be distributed to a selected group of media representatives (cleared by MSF Holland) and under conditions of strict confidentiality.</p>

International	Great Lakes	MSF
<p><b>1997</b></p> <p><b>25 April</b>            UNHCR declares thousands of dead refugees around Biaro and Kasese. UN Secretary General announces that ADFL is conducting a policy of "slow extermination" of Rwandan refugees and that the international community is "indifferent."</p> <p><b>28 April</b>            Human Rights Watch calls for inquiry into the massacres in Zaire. OAU warns the ADFL to observe international laws. UNHCR Commissioner to UN Security Council states <i>"when camp security or the right to asylum cannot be guaranteed to refugees because of armed conflict, they may be repatriated against their will and without security guarantees upon arrival."</i></p> <p><b>29 April</b>            EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Action declares that <i>"the rebels are making it impossible to carry out any humanitarian efforts; 400,000 refugees cannot be located."</i> UNHCR denounces the slaughter of refugees and the ADFL-imposed obstacles to providing assistance.</p>	<p><b>25 April</b>            Humanitarian organisations go to Biaro camp to find that 30,000 refugees have disappeared.</p> <p><b>26 April</b>            Around 45,000 refugees located in Equator Province (Western Zaire).</p> <p><b>27 April</b>            Kabila gives UNHCR 60 days to repatriate Rwandan refugees.</p> <p><b>28 April</b>            ADFL begins forced repatriation of thousands of refugees to Rwanda.</p> <p><b>29 April</b>            Rwandan President condemns MSF's statements regarding insecurity in his country.</p>	<p><b>25 April</b>  <b>Morning</b> : <i>El País</i> (Spain) and AFP Geneva quote MSF's accusations of rebels in refugee massacres. MSF Holland programme manager tells sections that the Shabunda report may be distributed to all journalists without restriction. MSF Holland version of the Shabunda report posted on MSF Holland's website.  <b>Afternoon: Press conferences</b> in Brussels and Amsterdam. <b>MSF Belgium press release:</b> <i>'MSF Sounds the Alarm: "Where are the Kasese Refugees?"'</i>  <b>Evening:</b> MSF France board of directors vote to remove the veto right and replaced it with a 24-hour advance warning requirement.</p> <p><b>26 April</b>  <b>MSF France press release:</b> <i>'Three Proposals to End the Policy of Extermination of Rwandan Refugees in Zaire.'</i></p> <p><b>27 April</b>            MSF Belgium decides to withhold further information regarding Great Lakes to MSF France.</p> <p><b>28 April</b>            MSF, UNHCR, journalists, and the EU go to Biaro and Kasese and witness devastated sites, a smell of death, and bodies. MSF resumes assistance to the 5,000-10,000 survivors.</p> <p><b>29 April</b>            ADFL threatens MSF in Kisangani: MSF will be forbidden to travel unless it withdraws statements on killings. Executive Directors hold teleconference and agree on MSF's public position on repatriation, impunity, and keeping a low profile on political statements. MSF France Executive Director interviewed on Radio France International.</p>

International	Great Lakes	MSF
<p><b>1997 30 April</b> International press publishes description of killings in Kasese and Biaro.</p> <p><b>5 May</b> UN admonishes that the ADFL treats livestock better than the refugees.</p> <p><b>6 May</b> EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Action declares that Kabila has turned Eastern Zaire into a slaughterhouse.</p>	<p><b>4 May</b> 91 refugees die in train heading from the camps to Kisangani.</p>	<p><b>1 May</b> International Board restricts MSF in Zaire with a priority to advocate on aid in Zaire. Executive Directors must implement a communications strategy.</p> <p><b>2 May</b> <b>MSF France press release:</b> MSF Information Update. 'Zaire Emergency: Situation as of 1 May.' Frank and open conversations among the Coordinator, MSF Belgium programme manager and ADFL in Kisangani.</p> <p><b>3 May</b> Kisangani and Goma teams react negatively to the International Board's decision. MSF France condemns the ADFL's 'media operation' in the press and questions whether repatriating refugees to Rwanda is still relevant.</p> <p><b>5 May</b> <b>MSF Kisangani press release:</b> 'Zaire Emergency: Under Current Circumstances, MSF Calls for the Immediate Suspension of Repatriation.' MSF Belgium assumes coordination of communications and of all MSF sections' communications on Zaire. MSF Belgium does not adopt the MSF France position.</p> <p><b>6 May</b> MSF UK prepares a statistical analysis of the refugee exodus.</p> <p><b>7 May</b> <b>MSF France press Release:</b> 'Zaire Emergency: Under Current Circumstances, MSF Calls for the Immediate Suspension of Repatriation.' MSF Belgium assumes coordination of communications of all MSF sections on Zaire. MSF Belgium does not adopt the MSF France position.</p>

International	Great Lakes	MSF
<p data-bbox="140 297 201 331"><b>1997</b></p> <p data-bbox="252 1317 643 1413"><b>13 May</b> French government condemns the rebels' massacres of refugees.</p>	<p data-bbox="678 555 1070 741"><b>10 May</b> ADFL authorises humanitarian groups to travel to km 82, between Kisangani and Ubundu. They are given a 10-day deadline to evacuate Biaro refugees to Kisangani.</p> <p data-bbox="678 1032 1070 1283"><b>12 May</b> Biaro: 25 deaths per 10,000 per day. 10% cannot be transported, 20% children severely malnourished. 400 patients in the Lola transit centre (km 11), 6,600 refugees at km 82 and the situation remains tense for humanitarian groups in Goma.</p> <p data-bbox="678 1317 1070 1413"><b>13 May</b> ADFL takes Mbandaka and 400 refugees killed. Survivors flee to Congo (Brazzaville).</p> <p data-bbox="678 1447 1070 1543"><b>14 May</b> ADFL publicly criticises MSF for using Rwandan refugees to discredit the ADFL.</p>	<p data-bbox="1102 297 1495 517"><b>8 May</b> MSF calls on UNHCR to negotiate with the ADFL for access to refugees and for their protection. <b>MSF France press release:</b> <i>Rwandan Refugees in the Biaro Camp Remain in a Desperate Situation'</i></p> <p data-bbox="1102 775 1495 994"><b>11 May</b> <b>MSF Belgium, MSF France and MSF USA press release</b> <i>'MSF Condemns the Inhumane Conditions in which Rwandan Refugees are Being Evacuated. MSF Opposes the 10-day Deadline Imposed by the ADFL for Evacuating Biaro.'</i></p> <p data-bbox="1102 1574 1495 1825"><b>15 May</b> Two MSF volunteers return from Zaire to testify before UN and US authorities. Executive Directors' teleconference on the <i>'Forced Flight'</i> report agree to: 1) Remove the death estimates. 2) Distribute to political officials and a limited, targeted, number of journalists.</p>

International	Great Lakes	MSF
<p><b>1997</b></p> <p><b>22 May</b> <i>The New York Times: 'Congo's Neighbors Played a Crucial Role in the Civil War.'</i></p>	<p><b>17 May</b> Rebels take Kinshasa, Kabila pro- nounces himself Head of State, and renames Zaire the Democratic Republic of Congo.</p> <p><b>20 May</b> Kabila arrives in Kinshasa.</p> <p><b>23 May</b> 38,000 refugees repatriated by UNHCR since 28 April. In Kisangani camp death rate is 70-80 per 10,000 per day.</p> <p><b>26 May</b> In Mbandaka, UNHCR carries out direct repatriation of refugees and (like the ADFL) refuses the presence of interna- tional organisations.</p>	<p><b>16 May</b> <b>Morning</b> : Communications Directors say "we're moving forward" <b>7 p.m:</b> MSF Belgium tells Communica- tions Departments that "distribution is for a selected group of people and tar- geted journalists; MSF may not be cited as source." MSF France provides 'Forced Flight' to <i>Libération</i> and to <i>Le Monde</i>.</p> <p><b>17 May</b> MSF Holland teams in Goma and Bukavu oppose distributing the report to jour- nalists.</p> <p><b>19 May</b> <i>Le Monde</i> (France, 20 May) quotes MSF: "In the East, ADFL Forces Pursue Slow Extermination of Rwandan Refugees."</p> <p><b>20 May</b> <i>Libération</i> (France) publishes excerpts from the report: "190,000 Hutu Refugees Missing in Zaire MSF Issues Accusation." MSF interviewed on major French tele- vision news programmes. MSF teams in Zaire are angry that they haven't been notified of the report's distribution.</p> <p><b>21 May</b> Information from the 'Forced Flight' report picked up throughout the press.</p> <p><b>23 May</b> Biaro is empty but every day MSF finds refugees wandering in the forest. In Kisangani: 530 people receiving renu- trition before being repatriated. MSF France president sends letter of explanation to MSF teams in Zaire.</p> <p><b>25 May</b> MSF Belgium in Rwanda concerned about health of refugees repatriated to their communes. MSF Belgium task force raises questions regarding actions on behalf of Mbandaka refugees.</p> <p><b>26 May</b> <b>MSF France and MSF Belgium press release: 'MSF Calls for Making Logistical Means Available to Humanitarian Aid</b></p>

## International

## Great Lakes

## MSF

1997

### 1 June

Report from Lutheran churches and the international press condemn violence against Rwandan refugees in former Zaire.

### 2 June

UN Undersecretary for Humanitarian Affairs in the *Herald Tribune* claims that “the killing continues” in the former Zaire.

### 8 and 11 June

*The Washington Post*: publishes articles recounting the ADFL’s killings.

### 2 June

Airlift transport of refugees between Loukolela and Brazzaville begins. Kabila announces that accusations of refugee killings are irresponsible.

### 7 June

Kabila agrees in principle to UN Commission of Inquiry into the killings in Eastern Zaire.

*Organizations so that Women, Children, and the Ill can be Evacuated from these Sites and Resettled as Quickly as Possible in the Bilolo Camp, Where they Can Receive Assistance.’*

### 28 May–4 June

MSF Belgium tries to cancel MSF France’s participation in a televised debate on the Congo to be broadcast on a French TV network.

### 29 May

**MSF Belgium Executive Director declares to MSF France counterpart:**

- Information on the Great Lakes will not be provided to the French section
- MSF Belgium may publicly dissociate from MSF France positions
- Procedures underway to accredit French section will be halted
- No joint representation with the French section in any activities regarding the Great Lakes.

### 5 June

Fighting begins in Brazzaville and 13 MSF volunteers blocked without access to Bilolo refugees.

### 11 June

Draft version of a report with new statements (from Mbandaka) circulates among sections. MSF Belgium Zaire opposes all public communication involving the Mbandaka team.

International	Great Lakes	MSF
<p data-bbox="145 293 209 327"><b>1997</b></p> <p data-bbox="252 1093 347 1122"><b>19 June</b></p> <p data-bbox="252 1126 651 1312"><i>The Washington Post</i>: claims that 'Kabila gave instructions to obstruct mission of inquiry into killings in eastern former Zaire – US Department of State reminds Kabila of his promise to cooperate.'</p> <p data-bbox="252 1473 368 1503"><b>Early July</b></p> <p data-bbox="252 1507 651 1570">UNHCR announces that 230,000 refugees have not been located.</p> <p data-bbox="252 1890 328 1919"><b>9 July</b></p> <p data-bbox="252 1924 651 2078"><i>The Washington Post</i>: "the Rwandans led the revolt in the Congo. According to the minister of defence, weapons and troops were supplied to the anti-Mobutu uprising."</p>	<p data-bbox="676 454 772 483"><b>13 June</b></p> <p data-bbox="676 488 1075 580">Rwanda Minister of Foreign Affairs names the six people responsible for the refugees' fate. Kabila is not among them.</p> <p data-bbox="676 1346 772 1375"><b>20 June</b></p> <p data-bbox="676 1379 1075 1442">On Zairian television, Kabila denies refugee massacres.</p> <p data-bbox="676 1473 793 1503"><b>Early July</b></p> <p data-bbox="676 1507 1075 1637">One-quarter of those repatriated to Rwanda and hospitalised have died, half of them within 48 hours of their arrival (source UNHCR).</p> <p data-bbox="676 1668 753 1697"><b>5 July</b></p> <p data-bbox="676 1702 1075 1856">At Kabila's request, Roberto Garreton is taken off the UN Commission of Inquiry on the killings. Kabila further demands that the inquiry also cover Mobutu's crimes.</p>	<p data-bbox="1102 293 1198 322"><b>12 June</b></p> <p data-bbox="1102 327 1501 418">MSF France evacuates Brazzaville. MSF Belgium desk refuses to provide MSF France with information on Mbandaka.</p> <p data-bbox="1102 454 1198 483"><b>13 June</b></p> <p data-bbox="1102 488 1501 674">MSF Belgium, MSF France, and MSF Spain approve contents and distribution methods for summary report but MSF Holland blocks it. Discussion over public statements among the MSF Belgium and MSF France boards of directors.</p> <p data-bbox="1102 710 1198 739"><b>16 June</b></p> <p data-bbox="1102 743 1501 866">No agreement among Executive Directors regarding distribution of summary report so the decision is postponed until 20 June.</p> <p data-bbox="1102 902 1198 931"><b>17 June</b></p> <p data-bbox="1102 936 1501 1059">Programme managers, Directors of Operations and Directors of Communication meet to discuss MSF's public statements on the Great Lakes.</p>

## International

## Great Lakes

## MSF

1997

### 11 July

Report from the UN Human Rights Commission (Garreton) urges that killings committed in Eastern Zaire deserve to be called 'crimes against humanity' and recommends that there should be an investigation on the possibility they were planned.

### 16 July

Physicians for Human Rights testifies before the US Congress and in a report that the US army provided technical assistance to the Rwandan army, which supported Kabila.

### 19 August

Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) information (16 July) included in a chronology the Pentagon provides to the US House of Representatives.

### 4 September

Congolese authorities impose obstacles to the UN Commission of Inquiry.

### 15 July

Kisangani declares that the Lula transit camp will close despite the fact that 2,000 people, including many who are ill, are still there. No UNHCR response.

### 26 August

UN Commission investigation begins.

### 11 July

**MSF Belgium press conference and press release:** *'Refugees' Basic Rights Flouted: No Protection, No Right to Asylum and the Issue of Impunity Remains Unresolved.'*

### 12 July

*Le Monde* (France) publishes accounts from Njundu refugees gathered by MSF France and an Médecins du Monde (MDM) volunteer but reported as 'based on a MDM source.'

### 17-20 July

Epicentre conducts an epidemiological investigation for MSF on Rwandan refugees in Njundu (Congo-Brazzaville).

### 30 July

Report on MSF activities in Central Africa and intersection dialogue re-established.

### Early September

Retrospective mortality report (Njundu report) concluded. Some sections challenge its reliability, thus distribution is suspended.

International	Great Lakes	MSF
<p><b>1997</b></p> <p><b>8 October</b> HRW and FIDH reports include statements on abuses committed by the ADFL, Rwandan, and state Ugandan soldiers, and that the UN authorities had been informed.</p> <p><b>9 October</b> US government rejects HRW and FIDH accusations.</p>	<p><b>Early October</b> UNHCR expelled from Eastern Zaire.</p>	<p><b>5 September</b> <b>MSF Belgium press release:</b> <i>Yesterday, more than 600 Rwandan and Burundian Refugees were Expelled from the Kisangani Camp, Forced to Board Several Planes, and Flown to Kigali. These People were Under UNHCR Protection.</i></p> <p><b>12 September</b> Boards of directors of MSF Belgium, MSF France, and MSF Holland meet to discuss the Movement's public positions.</p> <p><b>Early October</b> <i>The Lancet (UK): Article by Epicentre/MSF France based on Njundu study.</i></p> <p><b>13 October</b> Executive Directors and Operational Directors of MSF operational sections agree to: 1) A response to Congolese authorities regarding UNHCR expulsion 2) Publication of Njundu report the following week.</p> <p><b>5 November</b> Former MSF Holland coordinator in Goma testifies before the Foreign Affairs Committee of the US Congress. Public distribution of the Njundu epidemiological report.</p> <p><b>6 November</b> <i>Libération (France):</i> Quotes the Njundu epidemiological report reporting. The Former Zaire: MSF Quantifies the Scope of the Killings.</p>
<p><b>1998</b></p> <p><b>17 April</b> UN Secretary General abandons inquiry into killings in Eastern Zaire.</p>		

International	Great Lakes	MSF
<p><b>1998</b></p> <p><b>30 June</b>            Inquiry mission delivers its report to the UN Security Council, which releases it publicly declaring that <i>the killings committed by the ADFL and its allies, including elements of the RPF, constitute crimes against humanity.</i></p>		
<p><b>2010</b></p> <p><b>1<sup>st</sup> October</b>            Official publication of UNHCHR mapping report on the violations of human rights committed in the DRC from March 1993 to June 2003.</p>		<p><b>29 September</b>            MSF France <b>Press release:</b> United Nations' report on the crimes committed in Zaire: MSF reaffirms its duty to alert.</p> <p><b>30 September</b>            MSF Talking points &amp; Q&amp;A on UN mapping report: "MSF does not comment on judicial process, on Rwanda role in DRC, on quality &amp; timing of the report, does not qualify crimes does not call for justice/end of impunity."</p> <p><b>1<sup>st</sup> October</b>            14 MSF reports consulted by the UNHCR mapping report team.</p>