Doctors without Borders

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Question (Dr Sabahat Rasool): What are Doctors Without Borders /MSF—tell me something about their work?

Answer (Dr Omar Salim Akhtar): Doctors Without Borders/Medicins Sans Frontieres, better known by its French abbreviation – MSF – was first started in 1971 by a group of French doctors and journalists after the Biafra secession war in Nigeria. The core founding principles of the organisation were that every person had a right to health care, irrespective of race, creed, religion, or place of birth, at every time. MSF’s work is impartial and based on medical ethics and professionalism – enshrined in its Charter. MSF provides emergency health care in times of war, civil conflict, and natural disasters; it rehabilitates hospitals and health care systems, builds wells and provides drinking water, and runs feeding programmes for malnourished children, besides providing care to persons caught up in conflict suffering from chronic diseases like HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. MSF is able to retain its independence mainly because of its donors – more than 90% of donations come from individual donors, not political or government organisations. (http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/aboutus/?ref=main-menu-about. Cited on 05-01-12)

Q: Why the need for an organisation like this when there are so many others working in underprivileged areas?

A: MSF was born of the need for medical care in emergencies. Emergencies that arise from war, civil conflict or natural disasters, often leave the health care systems of the region in shambles. A functional health care system is an important component of any rescue, rehabilitation or reconstructive effort in a disaster-area. The physically weak, chronically ill, children and older people are the worst affected in any emergency. MSF strives to provide care to all, but with a focus on this section – especially in the form of nutrition programmes, HIV/AIDS care, campaigns against tuberculosis (TB) and malaria, among others. Millions of people have been killed in conflict since 1971, and thousands continue to die – as the events in Libya, Syria and Palestine recently have
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