

FAMINE AND FORCED  
RELOCATIONS IN ETHIOPIA  
1984-1986

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**MSF SPEAKS OUT**

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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.

April 2013

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# ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AICF</b>	Action Internationale Contre la Faim (Action Against Hunger)	<b>LSF</b>	Liberté Sans Frontières
<b>AP</b>	Associated press	<b>MDM</b>	Médecins du Monde (Doctors of the World)
<b>AFP</b>	Agence France Presse	<b>MOH</b>	Ministry of Health
<b>BBC</b>	British Broadcasting Corporation	<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>CA</b>	Conseil d'administration (Board of Directors)	<b>OPD</b>	Out-Patient Department
<b>CDC</b>	Comité de direction collégiale (Collegial Board of Directors)	<b>OAU</b>	Organisation of African Unity
<b>CIEL</b>	Comité des intellectuels pour l'Europe des Libertés (Intellectuals for Freedoms in Europe)	<b>PFLE</b>	Popular Front For the Liberation of Erithrea
<b>CRCA</b>	Compte-rendu du Conseil d'administration (Minutes of the Board of Director's meeting)	<b>PTE</b>	Parti des travailleurs éthiopiens (Ethiopian Workers Party)
<b>CRDA</b>	Christian Relief and Development agency	<b>RAF</b>	Royal Air Force
<b>DERG</b>	Provisional Military Administrative Council	<b>RFI</b>	Radio France International
<b>EEC</b>	European Economic Community	<b>RRC</b>	Relief and Rehabilitation Commission
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organisation	<b>SCF</b>	Save the Children Fund
<b>FPLE</b>	Front Populaire de Libération de l'Erythrée	<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>FLPT</b>	Front de libération du Peuple du Tigré	<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>ICRC</b>	International Committee of the Red Cross	<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children Fund
<b>IRC</b>	International Rescue Committee	<b>URI</b>	Upper Respiratory Infection
		<b>URTI</b>	Upper Respiratory Track Infection
		<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
		<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme



Extract from MSF archives or press clippings.



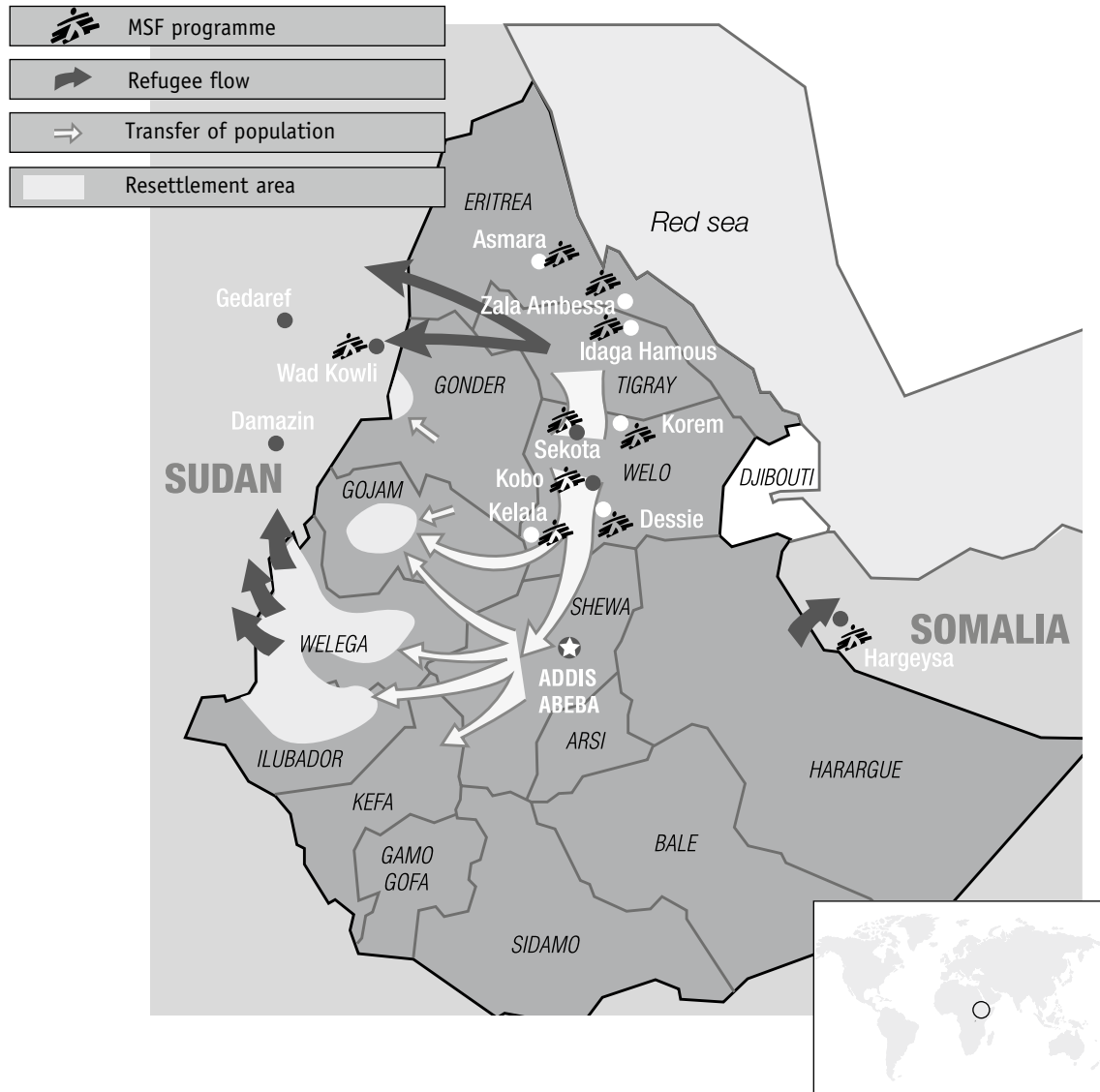
Extract from interviews conducted with people who participated and/or witnessed the events.



Click to access the reference material list.  
Then click on the referring number to access the full document.



Click to access the reference material list.  
Then click on the referring number to access the video.



# INTRODUCTION

In 1983, a famine began in Ethiopia's northern provinces that would affect millions of people. It resulted from the combined effects of a two-year long drought throughout the Sahel, the Eritrean war, and the forced agricultural collectivisation policy pursued for years by the pro-Soviet regime in Ethiopia led by Colonel Mengistu.

Tens of thousands of farmers fled with their families to food distribution centres set up by the authorities. Yet, the government waited until after the September 1984 celebration of the revolution's anniversary to officially acknowledge the famine's existence. The spirit of solidarity aroused by media coverage of the catastrophe made it possible to raise an unprecedented amount of international aid from institutional donors and individuals in the West.

However, the Ethiopian regime diverted a portion of that aid, to carry out forced population transfers from rebel areas of the arid, high altitude, northern plateaus to the more fertile and plains in the south of the country where the population could be more easily controlled. The famine prompted the rural population to head to distribution centres, where they were loaded onto trucks, often requisitioned from aid organisations, and transported like livestock. This further hampered delivery of aid to the south. Conditions en route were appalling and no preparations were made to resettle the families when they arrived in the malaria-infested regions. At least 100,000 people were estimated to have died in 1985 during resettlement operations.

From April 1984, MSF France teams opened medical programmes in the northern Wollo region, near the Korem distribution centre. Programmes in Kobo (September 1984), Kelala and Sekota (June 1985) followed. The authorities pressed for transfers to the south, regularly impeding the teams' work. On several occasions, the teams were forbidden to treat certain individuals or to distribute blankets. MSF teams also witnessed round-ups carried out by the Ethiopian army among the camp populations. Periods of accelerated population transfers alternated with periods when transfers were suspended.

On several occasions, the authorities refused to authorise MSF's request to open a therapeutic feeding centre in Kelala, which could have prevented the deaths of several thousands of children. In October 1985, MSF France publicly denounced the government's refusal to open a therapeutic feeding centre, along with its misuse of international aid for forced population transfers, and the shocking conditions under which transfers were being carried out. In the days that followed, the Ethiopian government expelled MSF France from the country.

The majority of the other aid organisations working in Ethiopia, some of which agreed with MSF's analysis, did not take a public position on the forced resettlements. Others criticised MSF's position, which they described as 'political'. Bob Geldof, founder and spokesperson for Band Aid and the organiser of the 'concert of the century' for Ethiopia, agreed with them. In 1986, following its expulsion, MSF France conducted a campaign in Europe and the United States to explain its actions, which received considerable media coverage. The Ethiopian authorities suspended the transfer operations temporarily.

MSF Belgium's teams had been working in Idaga Hamus in the Tigre since March 1985 and in Zambalesa since the summer of 1985. Team members did not witness forced transfers, and thus did not take a public position. They continued to develop their programmes with the agreement of Ethiopian authorities. Similarly, MSF Holland, created in September 1984, which was working with Ethiopian refugees in Somalia, did not take a public position either.

During the same period, the Belgian and French sections broke off relations over a disagreement regarding Liberté Sans Frontières (LSF), a think tank created by MSF France. MSF Belgium attributed political motives to LSF, linked to MSF France's analysis of the Ethiopian situation.

These events occurred within the context of an unprecedented humanitarian mobilisation and media attention and confronted MSF with a series of new dilemmas:

- What should be done if it appears that aid is being used against the populations for whom it is intended?
- Could MSF's denunciation endanger international aid operations in Ethiopia?
- By taking such positions, could MSF put its own existence and, thus, its other activities at risk?

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

<b>Rony Brauman</b>	MSF France President (in French), interviewed in 2000
<b>Georges Dallemagne</b>	MSF Belgium Director of Operations (in French), interviewed in 2000
<b>Pierre Harzé</b>	MSF Belgium Programme Manager Ethiopia (in French), interviewed in 2000
<b>Philippe Laurent</b>	MSF Belgium Executive Director (in French), interviewed in 2000
<b>Claude Malhuret</b>	MSF France Executive Director (in French), interviewed in 2000
<b>Brigitte Vasset</b>	MSF France Medical Coordinator in Korem, from April 1984 to May 1985, then MSF France Programme Manager Ethiopia (in French), interviewed in 2000

## FAMINE AND FORCED RELOCATIONS IN ETHIOPIA 1984-1986

In September 1974, Ethiopia's Emperor, Haile Selassie, was overthrown, largely because he had ignored the country's famine that killed 200,000 of his subjects in two years. After several years of 'revolutionary' turbulence that ended in what became known as the spring 1977 terror, Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, leader of the DERG (Provisional Military Administrative Council), set out to reshape Ethiopian society in the image of the communist USSR, an ally he made that year. [see chronology p.114]

The military rulers concentrated all their resources on the growing conflict with Somalia over Ogaden province, Eritrea's war of secession that had lasted more than twenty years and the uprising by groups seeking autonomy in the Tigre region. The fate of the rural population was thus subject to the interests of city residents, the army, and the national government. Land was placed under collective ownership, agricultural production was taxed and even requisitioned. Peasants were organised into groups closely controlled by the regime. Discouraged and unmotivated, they watched farm production fall steadily, leaving them no margin and increasing their vulnerability to drought.

In 1983, famine reappeared in the country's northern (Wollo and Tigre), eastern (Hararghe) and western (certain areas of the Wollega and the Illubabor) regions. Mengistu's authoritarian regime ignored it. Instead, they concentrated on the war effort, creating a labor political party, and preparing to celebrate the revolution's tenth anniversary. However, this regime did authorise the RRC (the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, a government agency created in 1974 to coordinate aid to famine victims) to open grain distribution centres in the most affected regions. In March 1984, the RRC launched an aid appeal. International donors responded with suspicion.



Bernadette Colson, 'Ethiopia: Following the Famine's Path - In a Camp for Famine Victims at the Edge of the Tigre,' **La Croix** (France) 16 April 1984 (in French).

### Extract:

We are headed for Korem, 630 km from Addis Ababa, located in the far north of the Wollo region close to the Tigre border. A food distribution centre has been set up there for people affected by the drought.

[...] People have described it as a camp for refugees from hunger. More than 10,000 people have been waiting just outside the village, some for three months, to receive a month's allocation of grain - around 21 kilos. It rained yesterday. In this mountainous country, where the altitude is above 2,000 metres, the temperature drops drastically when the sun sets. These refugees spent the night in the mud and the cold, shivering in their tattered clothes. Now the sun is out and they are too hot.

Where have they come from? Their villages are inaccessible by road. They have come on foot, some from as far as 160 km away, to reach this distribution centre. The local RRC official provides precise statistics: 60,576 people, including 26,000 children under 8, have come from Sagota, 5,382 from Dahana, and 25,531 from Wofia. But all these people were registered by their peasants' association, created under agrarian reform immediately following the revolution. After receiving permission from local authorities, they set out, having given up hope of waiting in vain for rain. They left their village once they had lost everything. They had no more animals left to sell to purchase seeds and no more seeds. Their ragged clothes no longer covered them. As of one month ago, 5,000 new victims were arriving every day in Korem. Today, 2,000 arrive daily.

[...] Aid comes from the capital on trailers. The only vehicles we passed on the northern road were trucks loaded with grain, often bearing the blue logo of the United Nations. But they weren't the kind of out-of-the-ordinary convoy one would expect to see in an emergency.

The Ethiopians traveling with me said repeatedly, "We do not have enough grain. There is still not enough inter-

national aid for our people.” So while ‘Marxist-Leninist’ Ethiopia may be arming itself by going to the east, it is looking to the west for aid.

Indeed, FAO [Food and Agriculture Organisation] mission staff in Addis Ababa says the country has grain, but only 150,000 tonnes could be distributed in the affected areas for lack of logistical resources. There is a severe shortage of fuel and truck engine parts and the road system is inadequate. Before the revolution, Ethiopia had only 8,000 km of roads over its landmass of 1.25 million square km. The system has since expanded, but the terrain is so uneven that only one road reaches into Wollo and Tigre as far as Eritrea in the country’s far north.

People in Korem are suffering the consequences. The distribution centre has no grain stocks. When a truck arrives, the cereal bags are heaped on the ground. Soldiers and armed militia guard them and use their clubs to keep order. When a distribution begins, the crowd rushes in wildly. An elderly man falls to the ground to beg for grain. He holds onto my legs as I pass by. Another gathers the individual grains of corn that have fallen out of a bag. A group of peasants who have just come to the centre remain removed and dignified, but when their patience is exhausted, they too will behave like animals.

The Korem distribution centre is well organised, but how can its administrators be effective without resources? There is a health station, but no medications and no doctors (only two nurses). There are not enough blankets to cover people ill with pneumonia, or washcloths to clean the newborns. In Korem, several children are born every day but eight people die.



François Jean ‘Making Good Use of the Famine,’ **Report**, Médecins Sans Frontières, October 1986 (in French). [D1](#)

#### Extract:

[...] With the situation worsening, on March 30, 1984 the RRC launched an urgent appeal to Western donors for 450,000 tonnes of food aid.

But neither that appeal nor RRC official Dawitt Wolde Giorgis’ tour of most of the western nations produced the hoped for effects. From March to August 1984, the international community’s new commitments reached only 87,000 tonnes of grain. Beyond the US hostility towards Colonel Mengistu’s regime and donors’ unwillingness to increase their contributions, this less- than stellar result reflects the skepticism of Western countries towards the RRC’s repeated requests. The contradictory evaluations of the situation in Ethiopia they are receiving only strengthen their skepticism. In early 1984, for example, the EEC delegation in Addis Ababa notified Brussels that no immediate shortages were anticipated, citing a stock of 200,000 tonnes of grain in Agricultural Marketing

Corporation’s warehouses. An expert mission of the UN’s FAO also cited that inventory in its February 1984 assessment placing the need at only 125,000 tonnes, a figure that accounted for tonnage already committed by donors and logistical problems.

[...] It would appear that the regime was not particularly concerned about supporting the RRC’s efforts to inform western countries that the situation was worsening drastically in the northern part of the country. However, the June 1984 meeting of the 10th Ministerial Session of the World Food Council in Addis Ababa provided an ideal forum for doing so. After Colonel Mengistu began his opening speech with a fragmented discussion of the archaic nature of African agriculture, the deterioration of the terms of trade, and the refusal of developed countries to reach an agreement on the price of agricultural products, he underscored Ethiopia’s efforts to move out of “feudalism and backwardness”. However, the country’s situation was hardly mentioned in a lengthy discussion of agrarian reform and the 10-year plan. Mengistu did say that: “Ethiopia is currently suffering from the serious drought affecting most African countries. The situation is continuing to worsen. The revolutionary government has taken concrete and immediate measures to rehabilitate the victims of a drought resulting from abnormal global climate conditions.”

That was the colonel’s only public reference to the drought prior to his report to the party’s inaugural congress on 6 September 1984.

**In the early 1980s, the MSF France section began organising clandestine surgical missions in Eritrea and Tigre as well as surgical and physical therapy activities for Tigrean refugees in camps in the Sudan. In February 1984, after waiting two years for authorisation, the organisation was finally able to conduct evaluation missions in several drought-stricken regions of the country.**

**In April 1984, a team of five MSF volunteers opened a programme in the Korem camp, located in Wollo province, one of the hardest-hit regions in northern Ethiopia. Built around a food distribution centre organised by the RRC, the camp then housed tens of thousands of people driven from their lands by war and hunger. The camp was located some 600 km north of Addis Ababa, on an arid plateau at an elevation of almost 3,000 metres. It took one-and-a-half hours to get there via a dirt path heading off from the large road linking the Ethiopian capital to Mekele, capital of the Eritrean province seeking to secede. The nearest airstrip, Alamata, was some 20 km away but was closed regularly because of the conflict. The camp was located in an area controlled by the Tigrean Liberation Front, in rebellion against the central government. At night, aid teams were quartered several kilometre**

from the camp in a compound under army surveillance.

At that time, MSF was still conducting only medical activities. Teams from the British groups, Save the Children Fund (SCF), were in charge of nutritional activities. The food supplies that arrived were inadequate. Every day, MSF volunteers and their Ethiopian Red Cross colleagues held medical consultations with between 200-250 people; 150 adults and 50 children were hospitalised. The team had only medicine to offer the starving population.



**Moral Report**, 1983-1984, MSF France 1984 General Assembly, May 1984 (in French). [D2](#)

#### Extract:

[...] Already confronting Somalian and Eritrean nationalist and minority movements, Ethiopia also faced a new armed struggle in the Tigre, while the drought forced huge numbers of people into the interior in search of food. Early this year, in the midst of this difficult context, we conducted an evaluation mission. With government help, the mission managed to reach several locations in the country. The first team is now on site in Wollo province, where tens of thousands of people have gathered because of the drought's intensity there. There too, major logistical difficulties are complicating assistance to these refugees suffering from hunger.



**Medical Report of MSF Team in Korem**, from 14 May 1984 to 14 June 1984 (in English). [this document has been edited] [D3](#)

#### Extract:

Extract:

Comments:

We have to insist:

- The high rate of starvation cases, and, especially for the old-aged patients: most of the time we are unable to save them because their degree of malnutrition is too high;
- On the hepatitis cases: we isolate them in a tent. Most of the time they arrive very late and the death rate is 50%;
- On the high number of dysentery cases: the water supply is sufficient, but a lot of people still get their water from a small river. The individual hygiene is very low. The new pit latrines are finished but new ones will have to be added. .

The health education concentrated on water supply, use of pit latrines, and individual hygiene has to be improved;

- Some of the URI [Upper Respiratory Infections], seem to be resistant to the penicillin treatment;
- Relapsing fever: the delousing program has to be continued. It will be one of our priorities.



**Medical Report of MSF Team in Korem**, from 7 June 1984 to 7 July 84 (in English). [this document has been edited] [D4](#)

#### Extract:

Expired cases [Deaths]: 95 cases

- 41 expired within 24 hours
- 27 expired within 3 days
- 27 expired after 3 days

Age of patients:

0-5 years	8
6-9 years	8
10-15 years	3
16-45 years	22
> 45 years	54

Causes of death (there might be additional causes)

malnutrition	48
dysentery	38
URTI	
[Upper Respiratory Track Infection]	20
PUO [Pirexia Unknown Origin]	12
Neurological	2
Injury	2

Average of admission stay: 2,387 days for 239 patients discharged or referred: 10 days.

b) Comments:

- During the last 2 weeks, the admissions increased due to the work of the youth volunteers working in the shelters;
- The number of dysentery cases increasing; we isolated some of the patients from the shelters into a tent. Most of them were referred later to the inpatients ward;
- Almost 50% of the expired cases died before 24 hours. When they arrive in the ward, it is already too late. We hope to decrease this number, thanks to the work of the youth who will follow the patients each day in the shelters. For those who remain outside, the problem will remain acute. More than 50% of the expired cases are patients over 45 years old. The old-aged population is the most critical and is very difficult to treat on time;
- The ward is always full with 2 patients per bed. Another health assistant is needed urgently.



**Medical Report of MSF Team in Korem**, from 1 July to 30 July 1984 (in English). [This document has been edited] [D5](#)

#### Extract:

[...] Comments:

Still the population of old-aged people is the most critical one. Most of them have a disease associated with a long course of malnutrition, and do not recover.

The number of patients dying within 24 hours decreased. This could be related to the better medical services provided in the shelters. On the opposite side, the number of patients who died after 3 days has increased.

The ward is really overcrowded now with 2 to 3 patients in each bed. We need to open a new admission ward as a result.



*In the beginning, MSF did not have any nutrition activities underway. At the time we weren't familiar with nutrition programmes. It was in 1986, working in Ethiopia and with Ethiopian refugees in Sudan, that we learned how important nutrition and water were. We created jobs for 'Madame Nutrition', 'Madame Vaccination' and 'Monsieur Water'. We weren't previously familiar with these activities. We just did medicine. Then we saw the SCF nutrition activities and realised that they were doing good work, so we learned about the programmes. At the end of the mission, we started providing nutrition services ourselves in Kelala.*

Brigitte Vasset, MSF France Medical Coordinator in Korem, from April 1984 to May 1985 then MSF France Programme Manager Ethiopia (in French).

**In May, the MSF France General Assembly adopted a resolution creating "a research centre on development, human rights, and minority rights issues." Presented in a deliberately innocuous fashion, the project was in fact, controversial. Its goal was to challenge theories of tiers-mondisme [third worldism] a political analysis that some would describe as holding (former) colonial powers primarily responsible for problems in the developing world. In 1985-86; This proposal occupied a central role in MSF's internal debate, particularly because of the link that some claimed existed between it and MSF's analysis of the Ethiopian situation.**



**General Assembly Newsflash, MSF France, May 1984 (in French).** [D5](#)

**Extract:**

With respect to the deliberation on problems of development, the General Assembly has, by a wide majority, adopted the following resolution:

- Given Médecins Sans Frontières' collective experience, gained from a wide range of situations offering a host of lessons;
- Given the intention expressed beginning more than two years ago to think more seriously about the context of humanitarian interventions

[Therefore] The General Assembly has decided to create a Research Centre to address these problems, specifically around issues of development and human rights.

Médecins Sans Frontières has decided to provide the centre with the necessary start-up resources. Its corporate status and public identity shall be separate from this organisation. The centre shall, as soon as possible, assemble the support, specifically from the humanitarian, university, and financial worlds, necessary to conduct and distribute its studies.

**In July, the displaced persons in the Korem camp returned home, hoping to cultivate their lands in expectation of the rainy season. But the rains didn't come. A World Food Programme representative visited the Korem site and reported the catastrophic mortality rates, provided by MSF, on the BBC. The authorities, who were planning the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the revolution, demanded that MSF not use the word 'famine'.**



**Medical Report of MSF Team in Korem, from 1 July to 30 July 1984 (in English).** [This document has been edited] [D6](#)

**Extract:** (conclusion)

The decrease of the OPD [Out-patient Department] consultations must be related to the decrease of the population in the surroundings. In June, there was a big distribution and the rains incited the farmers to go back to their villages.

But we must remain ready for another increase: already in the beginning of August new-comers were arriving, especially children in very bad condition. [...] To conclude, we have to remain vigilant. The general situation improved during the month of July. However, the lack of rainfall as well as the decreased grain distribution will create difficulties; for the next months, we must be ready for a massive influx of newly displaced.



*In July, we were expecting rain but it didn't come. We knew that if it didn't rain, things could get serious. Along with SCF, we were asking a lot of questions. We had gotten into the habit of looking at the fields and we knew that things were not going well. But we didn't imagine just how bad they were. Food was still not arriving. Very few outside visitors came, but a WFP representative did stop at Korem. I used the word 'famine' when I was talking to him and two or three weeks later, Tamrate, the RRC representative, said to me, "the head man wants to talk to you because you said 'famine.'" I went to Addis and saw the RRC commissioner. He said, "You must not talk about famine. There are only some problems of shortages and malnutrition. But there is no famine here." Remember,*

that at that time, they were preparing for the 10th anniversary of the revolution.

Brigitte Vasset, MSF France Medical Coordinator in Korem, from April 1984 to May 1985 then MSF France Programme Manager Ethiopia (in French).

**During the summer, increasing numbers of starving, displaced persons arrived in Korem. In early September, the MSF team warned the authorities that it could not control the situation if the flow of new arrivals grew. The mortality rate reached 25/10,000 per day (the emergency threshold is generally considered to be 2/10,000 per day).**



**Medical Report of MSF Team in Korem**, from 8 August to 8 September 1984 (in English).  
[This document has been edited] [D7](#)

#### Extract:

Since the end of August, a huge number of newcomers are arriving in Korem, most of them in a very bad nutritional status, specially children and old-aged people. After a few weeks, in September, if there is no important large grain distribution, the situation will become critical and we will not be able to keep the situation under control. That is our main problem and we are trying to solve it with the RRC representatives and the local authorities.



*If I remember correctly, in August 1984, there were 5 or 10 deaths every day, sometimes as many as 15.*

*In September, the numbers rose every day; from 15, to 17, 20, 25 and by the end of September, there were up to 100 per day. In the morning, we didn't really want to go there. The clinic just filled up, over and over again! People arrived and then they died. I think they used up all their energy to get there. They came from 3, 5, and 9 days walk away. They waited until the end. They even sold the wooden door to their houses or their window frames and they came. They were dying in front of our eyes because there was no food. Dominique, the nurse, and I felt like executioners. When people were admitted into the korkoros (shelters made of corrugated sheet metal) at least there they had something to eat. Since there were always people arriving, we had to move the people who were doing better out of the korkoros to make room for those who were doing worse. And we were the ones whose job it was to do that. I remember measuring the circumference of people's arms. The adults whose arms I couldn't get my fingers around, the ones whose arms were larger than this (she forms a circle with her thumb and middle finger); they went outside ... they went outside. Those whose arms were smaller, they went*

*inside. At the same time, there was an explosion of (bloody diarrhea). That was when a really hellish illness - typhus began. Then measles. Finally, there was some of everything and people were dying like flies. It was unbearable! We would give people pills and they would die of hunger. When we got back to Addis and talked about it, people couldn't believe us. They couldn't imagine such a situation.*

Brigitte Vasset, MSF France Medical Coordinator in Korem, from April 1984 to May 1985 then MSF France Programme Manager Ethiopia (in French).

**The MSF teams were forced to compromise continually with administrative authorities so that they could circulate and work. In September, MSF was authorised to open a paediatric clinic in Kobo, some 50 km from Korem. But during the first half of September, the four nurses and doctors assigned to work there and support the Korem team remained blocked in Addis awaiting authorisation from Ethiopian authorities.**



*We proposed to also open a medical centre in Kobo. The priests were conducting a few small distributions and offered us a medical centre for malnutrition. People were not staying in Kobo; it was mostly people who came to get food and would leave afterwards. Among them, there were malnourished. The additional teams for Kobo and Korem waited for 2-3 weeks before their travel permits. They obtained the permits a day or two before the anniversary of the revolution. We had no contact with Paris, except once a month when I went to Addis. It's more than 600 km from Addis back to Korem. We had to leave very early in the morning but we were required to stop in Dessié to obtain permission to travel up to Korem. The road from Kobo closed at 16h. I remember there were several times when the security agents in Dessié made me wait, on purpose for three hours at the door. I had to sleep in Kobo, even though it's one and a half hours from Korem.*

Brigitte Vasset, MSF France Medical Coordinator in Korem, from April 1984 to May 1985 then MSF France Programme Manager Ethiopia (in French).

**The anniversary celebration of the revolution began on 12 September . The Ethiopian Workers' Party was formed during the event. In his speech, the Ethiopian head of state quickly brought up "the drought" emphasising the necessity, in his view, of reorganising the means of agricultural production. Reporters were invited to the celebrations, but were kept away from the areas affected by the famine. They gathe-**

**red information from diplomats and the staff of aid organizations, who shared their questions regarding the Ethiopian government's neglect of the famine and expenses incurred for the war and the celebrations.**



François Jean, 'Making Good Use of the Famine,' **Report**, Médecins Sans Frontières, - October 1986 (in French). [D1](#)

**Extract:**

[...] There was no information in the Ethiopian press throughout 1984 about the famine. Addis Ababa residents did not learn about the breadth of the tragedy until after the festivities celebrating the 10th anniversary of the revolution. Likewise, Western journalists, alerted by information filtering out about the situation in the north despite the silence the regime imposed on humanitarian organisations on site, were systematically refused access to the affected provinces. This was particularly the case for BBC and AFP correspondents in Nairobi, who throughout the summer tried, in vain to reach the Wollo. It was also the case for journalists in Addis Ababa during the 10th anniversary celebrations. Their only option was to interview officials of humanitarian groups, also blocked in the capital for several weeks under vague security auspices.

[...] However, a close reading of the deluge of words delivered during the opening session of the congress did uncover a few allusions to the "drought," one that must be fought with "revolutionary determination." "Thousands of our fellow citizens have lost their lives as a result of recurring droughts... Our slogan: 'bring nature under our control,' must be implemented. We must unite to liberate agriculture from the threatening forces of nature." Those three little sentences appeared in a five hour-long speech in which the drought provided, at most, one opportunity among many to emphasise the need to change the means and relationships of agricultural production. This was to be accomplished by applying "modern and scientific" methods, strengthening the summer farm sector, organising peasants into production cooperatives and speeding the transfer of populations to "virgin, vast and fertile" lands. In short, the agenda was not the famine but achievement of the 10-year plan objectives.



'Ethiopia's \$150 Million Celebration...While Millions Starve,' **News Weekly** (USA), 3 October 1984 (in English). [D8](#)

**Extract:**

The regime of Colonel Mengistu in Ethiopia has just spent between \$150 and \$200 million on celebrating his Marxist government's tenth anniversary, while the death toll from starvation is expected to reach 200,000 before the end of the year, with up to another 5 million at risk.

The celebrations follow the \$226 million Ethiopian Airlines has just spend purchasing two new Boeing 767 200-ER passenger jets and associate repair facilities. Relief workers have complained that, although Ethiopia faced extensive logistical problems in transporting grain to isolated areas where people were known to be starving, neither the army nor its trucks had been mobilised to help distribute food aid.

[...] Most private relief agencies and diplomats have recently asserted that Ethiopia had failed to place a sufficiently high priority on feeding its hungry people. Relief experts also attributed the crisis to developed countries' failure to provide enough food aid fast enough. The relief experts agreed that whatever its cause, the death toll related to the famine probably would be even higher next year than this year, because the harvest this year is likely to be 20 percent to 30 percent below last year's.

In recent weeks the government has declined to discuss the drought. Despite repeated requests, the government refused to permit journalists to visit drought-affected areas during or after the anniversary celebrations. Travel permits, even for relief workers, were denied ostensibly for security reasons.

**In October 1984, a group of Dutch doctors who had worked with MSF Belgium in Chad created the Dutch section of Médecins Sans Frontières with support from the Belgian and French sections.**



**Minutes of the meeting of the MSF France Board of Directors**, expanded to include other sections, Geneva, 6 and 7 October (in French). [D9](#)

**Extract:**

MSF Holland: Jacques de Milliano introduced the new MSF Holland section, which was founded by a group of doctors, many of whom have worked with us, particularly in Chad.

**The government didn't want to stain the anniversary of the revolution with the famine. But once the celebration was over, on 3 October, they officially recognized the famine and gave journalists access to the displaced persons' camps. A BBC team interviewed MSF's medical coordinator.**

**On 25 October, the report from the BBC team in Korem was broadcast on the 6 o'clock news programme, one of the British network's most-watched broadcasts. MSF's testimony provided 'medical' confirmation of the images of famine. 425 television networks around**

the world broadcast the segment, mobilising public opinion worldwide.



**Interview** of Brigitte Vasset, MSF France Medical Coordinator in Korem, broadcast on BBC 'Six o'clock news', 25 October 1984 (in English). [V1](#) [V2](#)

**Extract:**

*"If nothing happens, I don't know what we are doing here. If there is no food, medical treatment is nonsense. Giving drugs, injections, and tablets to people if they don't have food is completely ridiculous. I am not a politician. I don't care about what's going on. I am just a witness in Korem, in Wollo, and Wollo is not the only place in Ethiopia where this is happening."*



*Around September 10, a number of journalists arrived but could not get authorisation to go to Korem. The Kobo teams and the additional Korem team had to wait two to three weeks before receiving authorisation, which they got one or two days before the celebrations. So everyone was in the field the day of the anniversary of the revolution. We were all invited to Kobo or Korem for the large demonstrations.*

*Several days after the 10th anniversary, Mengistu gave a four-hour speech, saying that there was a famine and that he wasn't getting any help and that that wasn't right. The BBC journalists landed. Then every day, there was a team of television or newspaper journalists. That's where I was used - but I did it willingly. The RRC agents told me when important people were coming so that I would be there and show them what was happening. Kurt Waldheim, the UN Secretary-General at that time, came with his wife. I remember that she wore high heels. A British minister also came with some Ethiopian VIPs. ... Claude Malhuret (MSF France's executive Director) came with four French deputies, two from the right and two from the left - Alain Madelin, Gérard Longuet, Michel Sapin and Jean-Jacques Queyranne. We distributed blankets with them. They were not very comfortable, especially Madelin. It wasn't our first time, but when the journalists came, they didn't feel comfortable... Every time I came back to Korem from Addis, it would hit me in the face again*

Brigitte Vasset, MSF France Medical Coordinator in Korem, from April 1984 to May 1985 then MSF France Programme Manager Ethiopia (in French).

**On 26 October, a National Committee for Natural Disasters and Rehabilitation composed of individuals**

**close to the regime, was established. It quickly took over aid administration from the RRC.**



François Jean, 'Making Good Use of the Famine' **Report**, Médecins Sans Frontières, October 1986 (in French). [D1](#)

**Extract:**

[...] On 26 October, the Derg announced the creation of a National Committee for Natural Disasters and Rehabilitation. The most significant aspect was the committee's composition, which included the most important members of the politburo, including Colonel Mengistu himself, who underscored the new importance of the situation in the country's northern region. This composition also spoke to the RRC's recent loss of influence in the area of organising aid and rehabilitation programmes; its role was reduced to technical support. The party's primacy was made known at all levels, with the founding of regional, provincial and district committees. According to the DERG's official communiqué, their role was to "overcome the problems caused by the repeated lack of rain, implement the party's program, and ensure that it is carried out throughout the country."

[...] The action program was then outlined: "in the short term, the plan provides for measures intended to increase productivity among peasants and on the summer farms, and to lay the foundation for permanently eliminating the drought. As a result, measures will be taken to ensure that our fellow citizens who receive emergency aid be rehabilitated in the context of a new resettlement program.



*We worked a lot with the RRC representative. But between October and January, the RRC was no longer responsible for handling the famine - the party was. The RRC representative spent some time in prison. Officially, I think it was because he had misappropriated aid. Unofficially, it was probably because he did not fully agree with the forced displacements.*

Brigitte Vasset, MSF France Medical Coordinator in Korem, from April 1984 to May 1985 then MSF France Programme Manager Ethiopia (in French).

**As international generosity was mobilised, a surge of aid resulted but its distribution came up against problems with transportation limitations, insecurity in certain areas, and aid diversion.**

**After another terrible 2 weeks, the MSF team in Korem was relieved to receive food supplies. However, the**

situation remained extremely serious and working conditions were subject to the authorities' dictates.



*We thought it was finished, that we were going to be able to practice medicine normally now that there was food and that people would stop dying; most of the time in the camp was spent chasing food. Dominique (the nurse) and I weren't practicing medicine. I remember one night when there were some biscuits left. We wanted to distribute them to the people in the tents. There was a riot. We never did that again.*

*So it was like a big sigh of relief, "whew" we said to ourselves, "OK, it's over!" We knew that Mengistu had given a big speech saying that the people who wanted to would go south where there was room for them because in the north, the land was completely eroded and could no longer provide enough food for that population. In any event, we weren't facing that problem. Food was arriving. All we did was work, sleep and eat. That's it. There were more of us so things ran a little better. That was what I would call the 'positive period'. We thought everything was going to go well.*

*It started getting cold. It freezes in October and November. We dug holes 50 cm deep so that people would at least be protected from the wind and cold. The lucky ones had a bit of green or black plastic sheeting on top of the hole. We began to get things set up. There were journalists around and supplies began to get through. We ordered tents and blankets, but we were not authorised to set up the tents. We went to see the party leader, Mr Nurtata, a very nice guy (the people we didn't like were the security forces). So this Mr Nurtata said to us "yes, the tents are here but no, you cannot set them up because we have orders from Addis Ababa - the camps cannot be comfortable so that people will go back home or go south." He didn't really explain what he meant by "go south." So with the exception of three or four tents, no more, we were not permitted to set them up. And those tents weren't to shelter people but to do the delousing. Since there was typhus, there was a huge amount of delousing to do. We were not authorized to distribute blankets in general, but only to people who really needed them.*

Brigitte Vasset, MSF France Medical Coordinator in Korem, from April 1984 to May 1985 then MSF France Programme Manager Ethiopia (in French).

**On 16 November, Colonel Mengistu announced that the national priority was to transfer 1.5 million residents from the northern provinces to fertile lands in the south and west. The operation was presented as "a technical solution that will bring the population back into balance" and "a more rational use of land"**

**carried out with respect for principles of voluntary participation, maintaining unification, and healthy physical conditions for participants.**



Jacques de Barrin, "We Will Never Negotiate With Terrorists," President Mengistu Says in Speech to PFLE,' *Le Monde* (France), 19 November 1984 (in French). **D10**

**Extract:**

Addis Ababa. "We will never negotiate with terrorists," confirmed Lieutenant Colonel Mengistu Haile Marian, Ethiopian Head of State, during a press conference on Friday, 16 November in Addis Ababa during the 20th summit of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). This refusal was addressed to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Eritrea (PFLE) which, in late October, had proposed a ceasefire to "allow food aid to be distributed" to all those suffering from hunger, whether in "liberated zones" or not.

[...] However, if Ethiopia is to combat the drought, it will need foreign aid that extends beyond the specific circumstances because, according to Lieutenant Colonel Mengistu, "radical environmental change" requires radical solutions. He estimated that in the short term, 100,000 heads of household, or some 500,000 people, must be resettled in more hospitable regions than the Wollo, Tigre or Eritrea. If we are to take him at his word, in the long term this will require displacing "several million people."

**Because not enough 'volunteers' came forward, the effort did not meet its quotas and forced transfers were organised. Peasants were rounded up early in the morning in their villages, in markets, during food distributions, or animal vaccination operations fabricated for this purpose. Families were separated. The displaced persons from the furthest provinces were crammed into planes and helicopters provided by the Soviet Union. The others were transferred in buses and trucks requisitioned from the public transit system, as well as vehicles seized from NGOs that were originally intended to transport food aid.**



'Ethiopia Forced Resettlement: The Evidence,' **summarised presentation** of Cultural Survival investigation for the meeting held at Survival International on 29 March 1985 (in English). **D11**

**Extract:**

[...]The Airlift to Addis  
The flights from Axum and Adwa were by helicopter down

to Mak'ale. The pilots were white. These flights took place after they had been kept captive for two or three days with only one piece of bread per day and water only twice. There were no facilities but they had to sleep on the ground in an open area. They were not allowed out even to urinate or defecate.

The refugees from Illubabor reported that once they reached Mak'ale, having been flown down from the north, they received blankets, one apiece, while a white man and woman took pictures. They were then told that the food would be given in another area and were put into trucks and were taken to the other area where they were encircled by troops. They were then told that they were actually going to receive the food in the resettlement areas. When the people protested they were told that if they did not want to go to the resettlement areas they would have to give their blankets back. So every single person returned the blanket and then they were sent to the resettlement area anyway.

From Mak'ale they were taken in Antonov jets to Addis Ababa. Peter Niggle's investigation reveals how they were able to get between 350 and 400 people into each flight. People were lined up against the back of the cockpit and those on the edges of the plane had to suspend themselves from bars running along the sides. The plane was then filled by packing more and more people in, in this way. Children had to be held above the adults' heads to avoid being crushed by the force of take off and landing. There were belaboured with a stick if they resisted. The doors were then closed by force, crushing the people up into the plane.

The flights lasted one hour and many people died. In one flight, four women miscarried, children were killed from being crushed. It may be that the lack of pressurisation in the planes contributed to the sickness that was generally experienced.

#### The Journey South

On arrival the dead were removed on stretchers while the others were marched out between rows of soldiers onto buses and taken off south. Two of the women who had miscarried died on the bus journey. The buses were loaded with 74 people sitting (the capacity) and a further 74 standing. After some time the people were made to swap over so that those standing might sit.

The people were not allowed out of the buses on the way south even when the drivers stopped to eat, not for water, food, urination or anything. At evening they were left at a big open space and provided with one piece of bread.

#### The Reception Centres

On arrival, the people who had died had to be buried by hand. Those arriving at Asosa were bitterly disappointed by the conditions. Though they had not wanted to be taken south they had nevertheless heard all the stories... that when they arrived in the south they would be pro-

vided for well, fruit, meat...etc. But when they arrived there was nothing. They were given only axes and told to build their houses and take care of themselves. Food grain was provided, 15 kg per person per month. Cooking pots had to be fashioned from what scrap metal they could scrounge. There was no organisation for them. The area was surrounded by the local militia. They were told that they would eventually be provided with arms to protect themselves against bandits who were in the area.

**One morning in December 1984, a round up took place in the Korem camp. When MSF protested vigorously, local authorities responded that it was a mistake and would not be repeated.**



Dr Claude Malhuret, 'Mass Deportations in Ethiopia,' **Report**, MSF Confidential, December 1985, p.15 (in English). **D12**


#### **Extract:**

[...] A relief centre was set up in Korem in Wollo province. By December 1984, teams from Save the Children's Fund and Médecins sans Frontières had been working there for months. Several tens of thousands of peasants had already come seeking food and/or to have a member of the family cared for. One morning at the end of the month, the MSF team found the camp half empty. The army had come in the very early hours of the morning to find 'volunteers' for resettlement. Thousands of inhabitants had fled into the country side to escape being taken. (Korem is at more than 7,500 feet [2,300 metres], and it freezes at night in December. Many of the sick die of cold). The ones unable to get away were caught. During the following days children were found wandering out in the open field by the doctors. They had no idea what had become of their parents.




*There was a transit camp in Korem where, obviously, we were prohibited from going. We passed by and saw the people packed in there. The Ethiopian bus system was doing nothing but transferring people to the south of Korem... I remember a doctor came one day to tell me: "They've taken the mothers and some children by force from the feeding centre and they've taken the young Red Cross volunteers to go fight in the war." The security services and the soldiers worked hand in hand to find them when we weren't there; either before we were authorised to go there in the morning, or after, at night.*

Brigitte Vasset, MSF France Medical Coordinator in Korem, from April 1984 to May 1985 then MSF France Programme Manager Ethiopia (in French).

In December, despite an improvement, the situation remained very grave. However, Ethiopia was the focus of a huge media mobilisation. The famine was on front pages around the world. The British organisation War on Want accused the Ethiopian government of diverting aid to starve the population in the rebel zones. Ethiopian planes bombed refugees from Tigre province fleeing to Sudan for fear of being forcibly transferred to the resettlement areas. MSF treated the survivors and spoke out in the press. Donor nations, aid organisations and reporters began to ask questions about the 'voluntary' nature of the transfers. [V3](#) 



Thomson Prentice, 'Ethiopia Accused of Misusing Famine Aid,' **The Times** (UK), 3 December 1984 (in English). [D13](#) 


#### Extract:

War on Want's General Secretary, Mr George Galloway, has returned from three weeks in Ethiopia convinced that the emergency efforts by Western countries are being misused by Addis Ababa in its war against rebels in Eritrea. "The case that Colonel Mengistu (the Ethiopian leader) is using British taxpayers' money to starve out rebel areas, indirectly to bomb innocent civilian targets in pursuit of his war aims and directly to oil the wheels of this bankrupt economy by selling food aid is overwhelming", Mr Galloway said yesterday. The "ruthless military Government" of Ethiopia is "deliberately starving out whole areas of its country, paying its militia 120 kilos of Western grain in a month and stepping up its bombing raids against civilians at a cost of £30,000 a sortie - enough to feed 3,000 people for a year", he said.

Mr Galloway said he and War on Want had been criticized by other charities for "rocking the boat", but he went on "I think there comes a time when to pretend that the famine relief effort is going well is to render a disservice to those people in Ethiopia who are most in need." Although he believed that aid by non-governmental organizations was reaching famine victims as intended, Mr Galloway said he was "deeply worried" that the massive programmes launched by the EEC and the United States were being misused by the Ethiopian Government. "I think it is strange that Western governments, including our own, seem so reluctant to state what they privately feel, that the Ethiopian Government is making a hash of the whole thing", he said. "More and more people are coming back from Ethiopia with eye-witness accounts of what is going wrong, but it is odd that no criticism is coming forth from the West.

Mr Galloway and War on Want are campaigning for the setting up of an international commission to supervise and control the famine relief operations.




Jacques de Barrin, 'Ethiopia: The Famine of the Century - Disaster Has Already Claimed Millions of Victims,' **Le Monde**, 10 December 1984 (in French). [D14](#) 

#### Extract:

[...] In those areas where food aid is arriving and medical aid is being organised, there is hope that the situation can be stabilised. "Mortality has fallen by half in Korem since food distribution began one month ago," said the local Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) official. "But people are still dying there from malnutrition and cold. At night, at an altitude of 2,500 meters, the temperature is between 2 and 5°C. We need 30,000 blankets."



Jay Ross, 'Ethiopian Planes Said to Bomb Refugees Heading for Sudan,' **The Herald Tribune** (Paris), 18 December 1984 (in English). [D15](#) 

#### Extract:

Paris : Ethiopian Air Force jets have bombed refugees from the northern province of Tigre who were trying to reach Sudan, relief officials say, compounding the miseries of thousands of people trapped between starvation and war...The bombing of a group of about 1,500 refugees on December 3 killed 18 persons, many of them children, and wounded more than 50. Asfaha Hagos, an official of the Tigrean People's Liberation Front, said in a telephone interview from London. An official at the Ethiopian Embassy in Paris denied the allegation, but it was independently confirmed by Western diplomats and relief officials, most of whom asked that they not be identified.

Dr Alain Moren of the French relief organization Doctors Without Frontiers [MSF] said he treated a number of the survivors for shrapnel wounds at a relief camp at Tekalubab, 10 miles [16 km] east of Kassala, near the border, before he returned to Paris last week... Relief officials say private organizations are managing to distribute only about 1,000 tons of grain a month in the guerrilla-controlled areas. Much more donated food is being distributed in the government-controlled areas. Relief organizations with personnel in Ethiopia have noted a decline recently in the number of Tigreans coming to the camps and suspect that the people are afraid that they will be forced to join the government's program for mass resettlement in the south. The officials say that could increase the numbers going to Sudan.

Dr Moren said there were already about 210,000 refugees in Sudan along the eastern border and 85 percent had to rely on relief rations amounting to 400 grams of grain a day, plus small amounts of oil and beans.



Blaine Harden, 'Some Ethiopians Get Cash Instead of Food', *The Washington Post* (USA), 19 December 1984 (in English). **D16**

**Extract:**

[...] Western donor countries question whether the resettlement, which has moved 100,000 peasants in the past four weeks, is 'voluntary', as the government maintains.

They also question whether the government program is moving too fast to provide adequate housing, food and medical care to the settlers, most of whom are malnourished and weak when they are loaded onto buses in the north for the five-day trip south.



Colette Braeckman, 'Christmas in Korem: Empty Stockings and Shivering Children,' *Le Soir* (Belgium), 25 December 1984 (in French). **D17**

**Extract:**

[...] "The people in the camp weigh between 35 and 45 kilos. Often, they are brought to us unconscious. They are suffering, quite simply, from hypoglycemia. They are given an injection, but what's the point? In general, they haven't eaten in five days." Serge Béchet and Inès Huberti, both Belgian, have been working with Médecins Sans Frontières for four months in Korem. The MSF team is made up of 10 people. In their corrugated sheet metal 'hospital,' three or four patients share 'beds' that are no more than boards. "Between 10 and 30 people die every day, compared to 100 a few weeks ago," Serge says. But the bronchitis, tuberculosis, infectious diseases and malaria are only variations on a theme. The real common denominator is hunger. According to Serge and Inès, most people "get only a quarter of an injera pancake, or four hundred calories per day. Everyone dreams of being admitted to the hospital, where they will receive more food, but we can accept only 400 people." RAF [British Royal Air Force] planes land occasionally in Alamata, in the valley. But despite the slight increase in aid, the Korem camp, located on a vast plateau at 3,000 metres, is one of the highest altitude sites of human pain.

In front of the health clinic, children throw themselves at me, hanging on and pleading. They are orphans. They are hungry. They are asking us to take them away...And then there are the ones left out. When the distribution is over, dozens of desperate people surround us. They reach out their hands to the RRC man, begging him. They haven't received anything in two weeks. They have only grass to eat. They have no shelter. A woman sobs in front of me. I give her a packet of biscuits, which only heightens her companions' desperation. They have come from somewhere else and their papers are not in order, the RRC official tells me. Soon, one of the camp guards disperses the crowd with a bullwhip.

[...] In theory, in Korem as elsewhere, the refugees are

supposed to be resettled in the south and west of the country. But while those who left in the beginning were volunteers, that no longer seems to be the case. Over a few days, 15,000 people out of 50,000 have fled to avoid being taken by force. The tension is palpable and the military has made its presence known. In addition, the RRC official, who is obviously also in charge of security, is nervous. He insists that I speak English with the Belgian and French doctors so that he doesn't miss any of the conversation. And the MSF teams cannot travel further than one km from their houses and the camps.

**By late 1984, 200,000 people originally from Tigre, Gondar and Wollo provinces had already been 'resettled' in centres located in the south of the country.**

**British singer Bob Geldof created 'Band Aid', assembling a host of rock groups to make a year-end charity recording whose profits were distributed to humanitarian organisations fighting the famine in Ethiopia.**

**V4** In France, a similar operation gave rise to 'Chanteurs Sans Frontières' [singers without borders] **V5** and 'Tam Tam for Ethiopia,' with revenues going to MSF. 'Ouest-France', France's largest regional daily newspaper, also organised a fundraising drive for MSF missions in Ethiopia. Political leaders and entertainers in the US and Europe mobilised. Food aid flowed to Ethiopia at a rate of 100,000 tonnes/month.<sup>1</sup> Throughout 1985, 1,200,000 tonnes of food aid were delivered to Ethiopia.



'The Kennedys' Sorrow and Pity,' *VSD* (France), 7 January 1985 (in French).

**Extract:**

Edward Kennedy has just criss-crossed Africa. After a stay in South Africa, where he angered the government by condemning apartheid and calling for freedom for black leader Nelson Mandela, he came to Ethiopia, visiting the camps where famine victims are gathered. Kennedy was accompanied by his daughter, Kara, and his son, Ted, Jr., 23, who lost a leg to cancer.

"I have rubbed shoulders with death for my whole life," the younger Kennedy told a US Senate Committee. "I have visited cancer wards. But what shocks me the most are the preventable disasters that we do nothing to prevent."

The three Kennedy family members fed children who were dying in Ethiopia, caring for them as if the US visitors were just volunteer nurses. Ted Kennedy asked the Senate

1. Source: François Jean, "Putting the Famine to Good Use," p.41, Médecins Sans Frontières 1986.

to send 50 percent of US food aid to Africa. This year, the continent will require \$750 million to address its food deficit.



English Rockers Unite to Sing Against Hunger,' *Elle* (France), 7 January 1985 (in French).

**Extract:**

A Chorus of English Rockers Sings Against Hunger  
The world's largest rock group assembled to record a 45 rpm. Culture Club, The Police, Paul Young, Phil Collins, Duran Duran, Spandau Ballet and many others participated in 'Do They Know It's Christmas?' to aid the struggle against the famine in Ethiopia. David Bowie, Paul McCartney and FGTH [Franky goes to Hollywood] also contributed. Earnings from the recording and performers' rights will be turned over to a charitable fund that will send medications and food to Ethiopia.



'Ethiopia, The Hope,' *Magazine* for MSF France donors, first quarter 1985 (in French).

**Extract:**

African Solidarity

Symbolising African solidarity with Ethiopia, some 40 musicians have come together to make a record and musical video clip whose earnings will go to Médecins Sans Frontières to help battle the famine there. In late December, all of Paris' best-known African musicians (Manu Dibango, Touré Kounda, Salif Keita, Mory Kanté, Ghetto Blasters, les Malopoets and many others) gathered in a studio to record 'Tam Tam for Ethiopia.'

[...] François Régis Hutin, CEO of West France (the country's largest daily newspaper), spent his New Year's holiday with Médecins Sans Frontières in Ethiopia.

Moved by one of the great tragedies of our time, he devoted many pages in his newspaper to it. But telling the story of Ethiopian peasants' despair, the generosity of European doctors and the daily struggle against hardship wasn't enough for him. He wanted to bring West France's readers closer to his emotions and bring new hope to those who had lost everything. The greatest generosity is required to confront the greatest hardships. That's how 'Operation West France: Aid for the Ethiopians' succeeded.

The newspaper issued an urgent appeal to all its readers. If every West France family contributed even the cost of a blanket, around 50 francs (\$10), they would reduce hunger and cold in the Korem camp. Médecins Sans Frontières pledged to oversee delivery of supplies, medication and specialised food, and to distribute it with its doctors monitoring the activities.

The sense of solidarity was admirable and thanks to the

remarkable generosity of West France readers, nearly 3 million francs (\$600,000) were raised. That money has already made it possible to purchase a seven-tonne Toyota dump truck (generously sold at cost by a Djibouti garage owner), which is part of the Médecins Sans Frontières team's transport operation leaving Addis Ababa for the Korem and Kobo camps.

Based on experience and caution, we have also obtained spare parts because the vehicles are subject to heavy wear and break down quickly on the rocky roads to the camps.



*At that time, two records were recorded to benefit MSF, one by Manu di Bango and the other by Chanteurs Sans Frontières. With the money that West France raised, we paid for the first 747 cargo that arrived in Addis Ababa with a truck and milk. We gave the milk to the SCF and kept the truck. It was a yellow truck.*

Brigitte Vasset, MSF France Medical Coordinator in Korem, from April 1984 to May 1985 then MSF France Programme Manager Ethiopia(in French).

**In January 1985, the international press continued to publish extensive reports on the famine in Ethiopia. Much of this reporting came from Korem, where the MSF team spoke out on the situation.**

**While the journalists described the famine and the need to continue providing aid, they continued to question the Ethiopian government's management.**

V6 ▶ V7 ▶



Tony Walker, 'The Delicate Balancing Act of Col Mengistu' *The Financial Times* (UK), 3 January 1985 (in English). [D18](#)

**Extract:**

[...] At the same time its short-term response to the food shortages in the north may have as much to do with military strategy as humanitarian relief. The government plans to resettle thousands of northern families in the less drought-prone southwest. Critics allege that it is an attempt to thin out the population in the troublesome northern provinces, and Western countries have refused the service of their aircraft for the move.

[...] It is more likely, observers believe, that colonel Mengistu will embark on a balancing act. Assistance and expertise of the order desperately needed is not available from the Eastern bloc. Recognition of this may be leading to a slight softening in the regime's anti-American stance, while also allowing some of the reforms which are conditional on Western donor support.

But the bottom line, as one Western observer in Addis Ababa put it, is the security threat. As long as that persists, the Soviet foothold in Ethiopia appears secure.



Françoise Chipaux, 'Ethiopia: A Voyage to Hunger's Depths,' *Le Monde*, (France), 7 January 1985 (in French). [D19](#)

#### Extract:

This Christmas Day Monday morning - although who could still believe in the holiday here? The Médecins Sans Frontières team decided to distribute blankets to the most destitute. It's a delicate procedure, given the enormous needs and the minimal resources. The team is on site just before sunrise. "People are still in the tents then and it is easier to see whose needs are greatest," Brigitte says. Each person takes a stack of blankets and lays one over the shoulders of those who are nearly naked - that is, the majority. In the beginning, everything goes smoothly but the situation quickly becomes tense. Driven by hope, women in rags and emaciated children dashed out of the tents, pleading with their eyes or their gestures, grabbing the legs of the powerless donors.

By the time the sun's rays reached the mountain, people were close to rioting. The blankets that had not been distributed were folded up. "It's too late now," Pierre says. "We'll have to come back another morning." What can be done in the face of such destitution? "The best thing would be if every person registered as eligible for a monthly food distribution - when there is something to give out - received a blanket," Brigitte suggests. "But that's impossible. We don't have enough." Still, it's better than nothing.

[...] Every morning, the nurses try to keep the most serious cases alive. There are some 200 "hospitalised" patients in this 60-bed shelter; small rounds of wood laid out in squares. Dirt has been piled up in the middle. Three or four people share the same bed. The average adult weighs about 34 kilos. Their weakened organisms are easy prey for every disease: typhus, which along with the delousing centre set up to welcome new arrivals at the entrance, provides a distant reminder of other death camps, dysentery, malaria, pneumonia and recurrent fevers. The children get measles and chickenpox. Fatouma, 5, weighs about 9 kilos. Pressed close to her sister, whose too-thin arms hold her, the little girl stares vacantly into space. Her crumpled, old woman's face forgot how to smile long ago. "It takes a half-hour every day to get her to ingest something," explains Bénédicte, a young Médecins Sans Frontières nurse. The only thing she will swallow is the local injira, a flat pancake-like bread made of flour, which will not improve her condition.

[...] Ethiopia is currently the key focus of the international community and in theory, food reserves appear to be guaranteed until March. But the state of emergency will

last throughout 1985. How can the focus be maintained on the famine for all that time? Aid managers, Ethiopian and international, are asking that painful question in Addis Ababa. It is all the more pressing because while everyone agrees that humanitarian organisations are collaborating well, the same is not necessarily true for the Ethiopian administration. Its concerns are not limited to apolitical ones. There is no question that that context has affected the delivery of aid. "We know very well that we are under the microscope abroad and that many regard us with great suspicion," says Dr Tamrat, RRC supplies manager. "Some are waiting to see the dead bodies before they will help. That slows things down considerably." The accusation is not unfounded, but isn't this a matter of shared responsibility?



*In January, Françoise Chipaux, from Le Monde, came through Korem. I said to her, 'Something's wrong. Don't quote MSF, but you should know there's a problem. Recently, the transfers have stopped being voluntary.'*

Brigitte Vasset, MSF France Medical Coordinator in Korem, from April 1984 to May 1985 then MSF France Programme Manager Ethiopia (in French).

**During a press conference in Paris 10 January, MSF France announced the founding of Liberté Sans Frontières (LSF), a research centre focused on human rights and Third World development issues. The decision to establish the foundation was made during MSF France's May 1984 General Assembly. A colloquium titled 'Challenging Tiers Mondisme' [Third Worldism] was scheduled for 23-24 January.**



'Liberté Sans Frontières - Information on Human Rights and Development,' **Introductory Materials**, January 1985 (in French). [D20](#)

#### Extract:

Objectives - Administrative Operations --- Research

#### Objectives

Ideological assumptions today obscure the debate over human rights and development. When new countries emerged 30 years ago, it was quite reasonable for them to explore a range of paths to progress. But when it came time to draw lessons based on experience, these assumptions led too many observers to conclusions that contradicted reality.

Those countries whose development efforts were success-

ful stood condemned because their growth model did not match the tenets of ideological Third World advocates. However, in countries that adopted programs based on such prescriptions, the subsequent disasters were presented as models long after the facts should have dashed their hopes. Others followed; China's great leap forward, including Vietnam, with its new economic zones, Ujamaa's Tanzania, N'Krumah's Ghana, Cuba's Castroism and, most recently, Sandinista Nicaragua. This blindness in the face of reality is based on complex factors that cannot be summarized in a few lines. However, Liberté Sans Frontières foundation's objectives are to allow debate on the issues, free from preconceived notions; produce pragmatic research free from the idea that a single model exists and must be followed; analyse development and human rights problems unrestrained by the notion of a (non-existent) unified third world; and last, draw lessons for action from this research.

A considerable amount of work, free from conformism and ideology, has already been conducted and many experts are already working in that direction. However, their efforts are dispersed and their projects are uncoordinated. The response to their efforts is all too often, met by a complete lack of interest and virulent criticism. Their influence is still weak and, in the vast majority of cases, they are preaching to the choir.

We propose to increase their audience and bring back into the fold those who have moved away, suspecting these experts of seeking only to defend their own interests. The objective is not to strengthen existing convictions, but to bring together around these ideas, people whose generosity has been used to serve a cause that negates those same ideas. We have thus set ourselves a dual task: to coordinate and produce research on countries dealing with issues of development (economics, human rights, strategy, etc.) and to distribute this research to key opinion makers (media, the political community, groups and organizations).

[...] With help from the scientific council, the board of directors will establish the foundation's long-term objectives and define new interest areas based on changes in the movement and the world. At the outset, the board will be comprised of two groups of people:

- well-known intellectuals, recognized for their work and activity in the areas of human rights and democracy, development studies, and the struggle against totalitarianism
- official members of Médecins Sans Frontières

[...] Research

Research is the foundation's basic activity and is divided into several areas:

- topics related to current developments (for example: the war in Afghanistan, Central America, Southern Africa, etc.)
- general topics (economics, health, human rights, information, etc.)

Some activities on specific issues will be conducted in

collaboration with similar institutes or organisations in France or abroad.



Liberté Sans Frontières **Invitation** to the 23 and 24 January symposium, from Dr Claude Malhuret, Executive Director, Médecins Sans Frontières, 11 January 1985 (in French). [D21](#)

#### Extract:

I hesitate somewhat to invite you to the symposium we are organising for 23 and 24 January. The event will be widely repudiated because its goal is to challenge an idea shared by nearly all our contemporaries. The topic, *tiers-mondisme*, is one that promotes simple notions: the West has looted third world resources, terms of trade have deteriorated, and multinational corporations engage in evil actions.

Susceptible to the media's repeated hammering; the general public has adopted these notions. Today, many people take for granted notions like, 'the developed world's cows get fat off the developing world's grain,' or that 'a new international economic order' is the only solution to under-development.

However, despite the general consensus spanning left to right, we are not sure that they are correct. We believe further that where these notions have been applied, the impacts have hardly been uniformly positive. It is more important than ever to reconsider the field of development and to do so pragmatically, unencumbered by ideological presuppositions. We should not be afraid to challenge certain taboos.

I am writing to you because I believe that you are among those who believe that development issues are fundamental and must be addressed with complete freedom of thought. I would be delighted if you would join us, participate in the deliberations and enlarge our understanding.



'Médecins Sans Frontières' Officials Issue an Indictment, Calling Tiers-Mondisme A Sham, Patrick Forestier interviews Rony Brauman, President of MSF France, **Paris-Match** (France), 23 January 1985 (in French).

#### Extract:

We knew that *tiers mondisme* - a doctrine based on the notion that the west's riches were accumulated at the expense of poor countries - was vulnerable and in bad shape. But no one expected the final blow to come from *Médecins Sans Frontières*, the universally respected aid organisation whose officials, Dr Rony Brauman and Claude Malhuret, are thought to occupy the left wing of the political spectrum. They have established a new orga-

nisation, "*Libertés Sans Frontières*" to restore a sense of reason to Third World aid doctrines and strategies. Their experience in the field, in the midst of war and famine, gives them an advantage over Parisian theoreticians of *tiers mondisme*. They are disgusted by the fashionable current wisdom holding the west responsible for the Third World's destitution and that seeks to make us feel guilty about our standard of living. What they have seen in the Third World leads them to very different conclusions...

PM: In concrete terms, what future role do you see for Liberté Sans Frontières?

RB: We want to become a repository that shares ideas and projects with decision makers in order to build a new strategy for international cooperation. We must also work to ensure that we do not offer blind or irrational support to despotic and authoritarian regimes. We must not support a new Pol Pot or a new Vietnamese totalitarianism, but aid democratic forces in the Third World.



Pierre Haski, 'Médecins Sans Frontières' Crusade Against Tiers Mondisme,' *Libération* (France), 12 and 13 January 1985 (in French).

#### Extract:

*Libertés Sans Frontières* is the very seductive name given to a new foundation promoted by *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF), a group with impeccable credentials. With 12 years of varied experience on every Third World battlefield, MSF officials have embarked on a new venture that is starting to look like a crusade - taking on *tiers mondiste* ideas.

To that end, MSF is assembling historians, anthropologists, sociologists and a range of experts under the auspices of the new foundation. Its first activity will be to hold a conference on 23 and 24 January in Paris challenging *tiers mondisme*. Participants include Rony Brauman, Pascal Bruckner, Gilbert Etienne, Alfred Sauvy and Jean-François Revel.

*Liberté Sans Frontières'* directors held a press conference on Thursday. In an unfortunate choice of phrase, MSF's Dr Claude Malhuret described the framework of their activities as "halfway between the temptations of *tiers mondisme* and Cartiérism." Clearly, Cartiérism has no place here because " (1) MSF stands with those who believe in generosity," but they particularly reject *tiers mondisme* because it implies "simplistic, and often caricatured and false ideas." The foundation focuses the essence of its attack on *tiers mondisme*, which emerged from Marxism and Christian socialism. The charges describe those positions as "ideologically ready-to-wear" and "an obstacle to serious deliberation," and accuses *tiers mondisme* of "encouraging guilt feelings in our countries" and of being "a weapon against society." In short, the foundation seeks both to "break with this dangerous and rigid mode of thinking," while remaining open to Southern nations and avoiding an "inward-turning response."

A quarterly journal and a collection of publications will support its activities. If re-examining the common wisdom is a healthy exercise, what explains the malaise that certain people felt after the press conference announcing the foundation's launch? Was it the discrepancy between comments by MSF practitioners as well as by those with considerable field experience, like Geneva professor Gilbert Etienne, and the much more ideological remarks of Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie and Jean-François Revel? That gap caused the speakers to gnash their teeth. Was it also the fashionable 'free-market' flag the participants draped themselves in, eager to rehabilitate the west at any price? "We are not crusaders of the second democratic revolution," Rony Brauman said in an ironic tone. *Liberté Sans Frontières* was welcomed with interest but, also with a certain skepticism where its actions are anxiously awaited.

(1) In the 1950s, journalist Raymond Cartier gave his name to this notion with his famous expression, "la Corrèze avant le Zambèze" [the needs of France's rural areas (Corrèze is a French region) should be addressed before attempting to help Africa's poor (Zambèze is a region in Africa)].

**In mid-January, the Ethiopian government defended itself against UN authorities' attacks on its management of international aid and the forced population transfers.**



'Flight from Fear: Behind the Famine, The Grim Outlines of a Strategy to Win a Civil War' *Time* (USA), 21 January 1985 (in English). [D22](#)

#### Extract:

The Ethiopian regime has also launched a controversial relocation scheme that envisions sending up to 2.5 million northerners to government-controlled areas of the southwest over the next decade. So far, 60,000 to 70,000 people, mostly from Tigre and , have been moved. According to a guerrilla spokesman, those taken to resettlement are often ripped away from their families. When they arrive in the south, the refugees reportedly discover few reception areas, little shelter or medicine and scant food. The newcomers, residents of the arid highlands, are also susceptible to diseases of the low-lying south like malaria and amoebic dysentery.

The resettlement program has been criticized as "unwise" by Mr Peter McPherson, the White House's administrator for the Agency for International Development. Says he "it looks to us as though it may well be a situation of moving starving people from one point to another point, where they will just starve in a new location." McPherson's assessment has drawn a stinging rebuff from

the Ethiopians. In Washington, Chargé d’Affaires Tamene Eshete accused resettlement critics of attempting to “perpetuate starvation” in his country. The northern provinces, Eshete said, are “totally barren”, and there is no point in keeping those people there.” There may be some truth in that, but at the same time, Eshete claimed that no more than “100 or 50” Ethiopians had fled to eastern Sudan. He also denied that bombing attacks against refugees had taken place. Nonetheless, the Ethiopian government last week ferried two plane-loads of U.S., Canadian and west European diplomats to the south on an inspection tour of resettlement areas, in an effort to counter the skepticism of aid donors.

**On 17 January, the Ethiopian government seized the contents of a cargo plane carrying food from Australia for the population of Eritrea, a province in armed rebellion and seeking to secede.**



Clifford D. May, ‘Ethiopia Seizes Food Headed for Rebels,’ *The New York Times* (USA), 17 January 1985 (in English). [D23](#)

**Extract:**

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Jan. 16 - The Ethiopian Government has impounded a 6,000-ton food shipment from Australia that was intended for famine victims in rebel-held areas. A Foreign Ministry spokesman said late tonight that the Australians had made “an unacceptable challenge to Ethiopia’s authority.” He said the Australian chargé d’affaires had been called to the Foreign Ministry and told to tell his government that the Australian action constituted “an infringement of Ethiopia’s sovereignty” and was “tantamount to interference in our internal affairs.”

[...] People working in the relief effort here said the Australian food was on a ship that docked last weekend at the Red Sea port of Assab. The vessel was also carrying 3,500 tons of food for a relief agency here in Ethiopia. After the 3,500-ton shipment was removed, the Liberian-registered ship, the Golden Venture, left the dock and anchored in the harbor to await clearance to proceed to its next port of call, in the Sudan, Ethiopia’s western neighbor. There, it was to deliver 6,000 tons of food provided by Australians private voluntary agencies to the Eritrean Relief Association and the Relief Society of Tigre. The Australian food was worth at least \$1.2 million. Those organizations were to send the food to famine victims in areas under the control of the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front and the Tigre Peoples Liberation Front.

**On 20 January, the MSF Belgium Board of Directors noted LSF’s founding and expressed its reservations.**



**Minutes** of the 20 January 1985 Meeting of the MSF Belgium Board of Directors (in French). [D24](#)

**Extract:**

The Board of Directors acknowledges the founding of a new organization, Liberté Sans Frontières, in France. The relationship between this organisation and MSF France was defined at the 1984 MSF France General Assembly. The Board of Directors wishes to emphasise that it is not associated with this organisation, which clearly takes a position on the political debate over the Third World. The board is not debating the soundness of the ideas but in keeping with its role, seeks to ensure strict observance of one of Médecins Sans Frontières’ founding principles: to remain non-political.

The Board also wishes to emphasise its position, given the confusion and difficulty of distinguishing clearly between Médecins Sans Frontières France and Libertés Sans Frontières (identical leaders, similar name, MSF funding for LSF, LSF’s introduction by MSF, etc). The inevitable confusion between the two organisations cannot have positive consequences for Médecins Sans Frontières.



*Things were already getting tense during the Ethiopian period. Those events corresponded precisely with the launching of Liberté Sans Frontières. One day at La Closerie des Lilas [a Paris café], a somewhat symbolic, romantic spot, Malhuret gave me a document and said “that’s it, I’ve had it with communism, things are out of whack, the communist monster is tearing everything down,” and so on. “We’re going to create a foundation.” He was talking about a war machine like those that existed perhaps on the left, around the idea of tiers mondisme, and he was going to use it to fight for neoliberal ideas. It was all there in the document. You could see all of Malhuret’s firepower in it. It was really well conceived. I’ll read you some of the passages, like this one: “Furthermore, provide the machinery of ideological production with the resources it lacks today. The starting point is clear, since liberalism has proven itself and the objective is to defend it, why not apply the same approach to intellectual production - the production of ideas - that made free enterprise a success in the material realm?” Not bad, eh? He was riding the neoliberal wave of the early 1980s. Then he referred to “an organisation like some of the American foundations, the Heritage Foundation, for example.” The Heritage Foundation - that’s really the American right wing. It’s how Reagan beat Carter. Malhuret went to visit the Heritage Foundation... MSF France delivered its “Liberté Sans Frontières’ speech and created an extraordinary stir. It was an attack against the*

left, and all that, in spite of everything, in favor of a free-market right.

Philippe Laurent, MSF Belgium Executive Director  
(in French).



*Liberté Sans Frontières was a research centre dealing with issues of human rights and development in the Third World. It was presented in a neutral fashion. Malhuret didn't really intend to create a neutral project, but one that would get involved in the fight. I worked on the late January 1985 symposium. It really kicked up a tremendous reaction. We were the last ones to imagine that a colloquium could cause that big a stir.*

Rony Brauman, MSF France President (in French).

*Rony arrived in January 1985. That was when we were dealing with Liberté Sans Frontières and he came to tell us why it was a good idea. We had nothing to do with it. At that time, we were a fairly large group. He gave a big speech, no one reacted and so he thought that everyone agreed. Even so, he had a lot of arguments with people in the French community in Ethiopia, who had bought us a white truck. They argued about Liberté Sans Frontières, and especially about the people who were part of it, including Jean-François Revel (philosopher and advocate of a strict free market economy)*

Brigitte Vasset, MSF France Medical Coordinator in Korem, from April 1984 to May 1985 then MSF France Programme Manager Ethiopia (in French).

**On 21 January, the Ethiopian head of state mobilised the administration's cadres responsible for organising farmer resettlement in the south. Simultaneously, a visit was organised to the resettlement areas for several European diplomats and aid organisation officials. Opinions on the operation remained divided.**



'Colonel Mengistu's **Speech** to the Resettlement Officers,' 21 January 1985 (in English).

**Extract:**

Our party is doing all it can to ensure the successful implementation of all this work and will continue to do so in future. But the decisive factor is the strengthened activity of the settlers, who through a coordinated work force, will take on the responsibility of developing the area they live in. In this respect it is not difficult to see that the responsibilities given to cadres in ensuring

that our party's directives are correctly implemented in agitating and organising the settlers to ensure that they coordinate their force to carry out the work, will not afford them a moment's rest.

Above all, this requires relentless motivation and propaganda work and stronger and more mature organisational work in order to build the settlers' morale, uproot thorns in the mud [meaning 'hidden anti-people elements] who propagate anti-resettlement and anti-people talk, defend the security of the area they live in and getting them to participate, just like any other peasant in the administrative, judicial, social and political work of their area [applause]

In general, as the field of work you will be deployed in is one in which you will organise the new political system which we are struggling for, increase the leadership role of our party, and create a new [kind of] human being, and a new life, great sacrifices are expected from each one of you. You should be fighters who believe in [the task of] creating a fighter better than yourselves, when you pass away, to guarantee the continuance of the ideal that does not die. This is a communist precept [applause].

[...] Dear comrades, the areas selected for the resettlement programme are areas still covered by forests and where social services have not been established. Hence the areas where you will be deployed are those that will test your ability to work under difficult circumstances. Your efforts to teach the peasant and learn from him by studying the characters of those being resettled and their day-to-day activities may demand a different form of approach and patience. The task of making our compatriots self-reliant and sufficiently productive by working relentlessly day and night, clearing forests, building houses, transporting and resettling thousands of compatriots, is a difficult historical challenge. In order to emerge victorious, this demands putting the people's interests before one's own and a willingness and ability to make sacrifices without succumbing to problems.

As this programme is the first work deployment of our party, and because it should make a special contribution to the world's revolutionary movement, and be recognised as exemplary work in which people struggled against nature and emerged victorious under the leadership of communists for the first time in Africa, no excuse or weakness is expected [applause]. There could be a number of you who are not experienced in this huge task of (word indistinct) and organising people. Lack of sufficient experience might bring about limited problems but is not crucial per se. The important thing is your strong faith in the resettlement programme and your willingness to rally your knowledge and ability for the implementation of the programme.



Paul Vallely, 'Ethiopia Allows West into resettlement Areas' *The London Times* (UK), 22 January 1985 (in English). [D25](#)

### Extract:

A party of European diplomats and senior relief workers has, for the first time, been allowed into the remote provinces of Ethiopia which are the centre of Addis Ababa's controversial resettlement policy. Under the plans, the Government intends to move one and a half million people from the famine-stricken provinces of Tigre and Wollo. The programme has been under way for just over two months, and already it is estimated that 160,000 men, women and children have been resettled.

Until now the conduct of the scheme has been kept a guarded secret. Western aid agencies and even the Ethiopians' own Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) have not been involved. The refugees have been flown out of the desiccated Northern provinces in Soviet transport aircraft and then taken by lorry to the west and south of the country, where cadres of the Marxist Workers' Party have been establishing centres with the help of local peasant collectives.

In its early phase, the policy was regarded with great suspicion by the Western donor countries but, the situation in Wollo and Tigre has become steadily worse over the past two months. The relief workers realized that problems in 1985 would be even graver than last year and their attitudes towards resettlement have softened. "It's not an ideal thing but it is one of the harsh realities of Ethiopian life," Father Jack Finnucane, the Field of the Irish charity Concern, said after an inspection of the new settlements.

Mr Cliff Benzel, Vice-President of the American agency, Worldvision, the biggest charity working in Ethiopia, said the original opposition was based upon three factors. "When the Government first initiated it, the project had an ideological base - the new settlements were collectivist not individual: it split up families - only healthy men aged between 18 and 35 were resettled; and there was some question about whether it was voluntary or not. All of these things have changed. People are moving voluntarily. The government is moving whole families. Each family is being allocated a holding of about two hectares (five acres)."

The diplomats and relief workers were taken to Mekele in Tigre, and allowed to inspect the resettlement registration books, and then they were flown to the western provinces of Illubabor and Kaffa for a tour of the new settlements. "Admittedly we only saw a very small selection but there seemed no attempt to steer us away from any particular settlement", one aid worker said. "We were favourably impressed. Families in groups of between 15 and 50 were settled in between existing villages. The people seemed pleased with their new homes. But some of the larger settlements - we saw one of about 1,200 people - seemed a much more dicey business."

Greater reservations were expressed by an agricultural economist who maintained that the operation was precipitate and ill-thought out. "Colonel Mengistu (the Ethiopian leader) says these people will be self-sufficient within one year. There is no chance of that and there is no prospect of that happening for several years, for they will need enormous back-up on a scale the government cannot afford. Furthermore, they are moving from highlands to lowlands, from non-malaria areas to malaria areas, to areas with other diseases to which they have no immunity."

Brother Augustine O'Keefe, the Head of the Christian Relief and Development Association, which co-ordinates the work of all the voluntary agencies in Addis Ababa, feels that the correct response by Western donors ought to be to involve themselves in the resettlement and help find solutions to these problems. "When you have seen how desperate things are getting in Wollo and Tigre you realize there is no other option," he said. Whatever the response of the Western nations the resettlement will continue.

**At the 23 and 24 January, LSF launched a public debate and challenged theories of development, taking a somewhat iconoclastic position in the world of humanitarian action and development aid. [V8](#)**



Pierre Lefèvre, 'Questions Asked About Médecins Sans Frontières,' *Le Soir*, (Belgium), 25 January 1985 (in French). [D26](#)

### Extract:

What's gotten into MSF? That's the question on the mind of more than one observer. Is it a matter of fashionable provocative views, the influence of the New Right, or the trial-and-error deliberation of men faced with cruel and inexplicable realities? We've demolished lots of illusions that no one believes in anymore, says one Third World expert, and without the classic thinkers on development. But tiers mondisme is still very much alive, responds Dr Claude Malhuret, Director of MSF France, and there were more people at its post-mortem than could fit in the senate chambers. We are neither neo-liberal crusaders nor agents of a Mitterrandist move towards the center [referring to French president François Mitterrand], he says, defending himself. His Belgian counterpart, Philippe Laurent, quoting Jean-Pierre Cot, former French Minister of Cooperation, sees the undertaking as just a Parisian critique of tiers-mondisme, provoked by a few MSF officials and one he hopes will quickly disappear. Before the symposium, he said that "Médecins Sans Frontières cannot become involved in political debates or endorse one model against another. The key is to remain true to the group's apolitical character, as set out in its charter.

MSF Belgium, which is nearly as strong as its French sister organisation, also distanced itself -- without a hint of abstention. This 'Liberté Sans Frontières Foundation' represents an internal problem that MSF France will have to resolve internally. The situation must be clarified and," he concludes, "those who do not support the organisation's positions will have to leave."

Has ideological discord been sown or is this just a 'Parisian' flash in the pan? For now, this young foundation and its symposium have shaken up its sponsor more than it has unsettled the ideological positions it set out to challenge.



'Challenging *Tiers Mondisme*,' **AFP**, 24 January 1985 (in French).

#### Extract:

Tiers mondisme came under harsh attack in Paris during the Wednesday and Thursday symposium in the Senate, organised by the new Liberté Sans Frontières foundation. LSF was founded by the French humanitarian organisation, Médecins Sans Frontières. Many intellectuals and experts participated.

"We assessed tiers mondiste ideologies, reported on specific cases in the field and raised economic and political problems in Third World countries," foundation director Claude Malhuret told the AFP. Some participants contested the criticism that others delivered on tiers mondiste ideas. René Dumont, author of 'L'Afrique Noire est Mal Partie,' [Black Africa is off to a Bad Start] spoke of "a political campaign by the new right."

"Our goal is to examine what should be done to help developing countries," emphasized Claude Malhuret. "The slogans of the tiers mondistes have ended in failure, including the largest famine of the century in Africa." However, we are not proposing neo-Cartièrisme. He emphasized the risks of political 'hijacking,' given the French context of a pronounced left-right split. "The tiers mondistes assume that they have the monopoly on generosity. We accept the risk of being criticised because we want to express our point of view. The future will demonstrate that we were not seeking to mount a politically-motivated operation." According to Malhuret, participants believe that the problems of developing countries should be addressed pragmatically, on a case-by-case basis.

The foundation's officials stated: "We must create a space, somewhere between tiers mondisme and Cartièrisme, where generosity and critical thinking can co-exist in a reflective process, free of ideological presuppositions." They criticized tiers mondisme for its "narrow economic analysis, which attributes an economic basis to every event," and "dolorism [the notion that suffering brings salvation], which confines the residents of the South to the status of the eternal victim."

**The ideas presented at the LSF symposium brought together individuals interested in honest discussion, but attracted others with considerably more extremist positions.**



*I remember being greeted at the European Parliament in Strasbourg by Bernard Antony. In fact, he is better known as Romain Marie, of Christian Solidarity, representing the French 'Front National' [extreme right-wing French political party] in the European Parliament. He wanted to greet me and he headed towards me. Luckily, I recognized his face because I followed the far right closely so I went in the other direction. I didn't shake his hand, I didn't speak to him - nothing. But they were obviously trying to take us over.*

Rony Brauman, MSF France President (in French).



*Over a two to three year-period, a serious political shift occurred at MSF France... There was a huge difference between MSF Belgium and MSF France. The MSF France leadership was composed of people who came from, let's say, a certain political background. In the beginning, Kouchner was part of Jeunesses Communistes [the French communist youth group]. He was politically involved; he was a political activist, Emmanuelli too [one of MSF Founder member, then MSF France Vice-President]. Claude Malhuret was a radical socialist and Rony Brauman was a Maoist. So I would say that the MSF France leaders were people with political drive and political analyses. Even if, for all intents and purposes, they had left that world after May 1968 to work in the humanitarian setting, they maintained a political way of looking at things; in balance-of-power and East-West terms. Their vision of the world was still characterized by a 'communism versus free enterprise' analysis. Things were completely different at MSF Belgium. Even though we were pretty close in age, we were from another generation. When we established MSF Belgium, we brought together people who did not have that political history but instead came from a background in non-profits. MSF France emerged from a political society and MSF Belgium from a civil society. So you find a more technical orientation at MSF Belgium.*

Philippe Laurent, MSF Belgium Executive Director  
(in French).

**In February, the Ethiopian government denounced western criticism as part of a plot by "enemies of the socialist revolution." On 9 February, it publicly accused international aid organisations of embezz-**

ling aid. In a confidential report, it nonetheless acknowledged that more than three-quarters of Tigre province residents were not receiving food aid.



“Government Accuses International Organisations of ‘Embezzling’ Aid Meant for Famine Victims,’ *Le Monde/AFP/Reuters*, 12 February 1985 (in French). [D27](#)

#### Extract:

[...] In addition, Ethiopian minister of Foreign Affairs, Goshu Wolde, accused ‘irresponsible’ international aid organisations of embezzling funds raised on behalf of famine victims. Individuals and humanitarian groups have raised “very large amounts” of cash, particularly in Europe and in the US, Goshu Wolde noted, adding that most of the contributions “did not reach Ethiopia.” According to the Ethiopian Minister, the aid was either diverted or squandered. “We have even learned that certain NGOs have used aid money to rebuild their offices,” he added. Last December, Ethiopian aid official Dawid Wolde Giorgis accused a US religious organization of keeping several millions dollars intended for famine victims in Ethiopia for its own use. The organisation, International Christian Aid, responded that the \$20 million it collected in the US had been sent to the French group, Médecins Sans Frontières. Médecins San Frontières states that it did not receive any such funds.



‘Addis Ababa Acknowledges That Three-Quarters of Tigre’s Inhabitants Receive No Food Aid,’ *Le Monde* (France), 26 February 1985 (in French). [D28](#)

#### Extract:

On 25 February, the Times reported that it had learned of a confidential Ethiopian government report confirming, for the first time, that more than three-quarters of the inhabitants of Tigre province affected by the famine are not receiving food aid. According to this report, the population is receiving only 22% of western aid, primarily in the Makele region (west of the port of Assab on the Red Sea). In the rest of Tigre province, 1.2 million inhabitants are receiving 4,000 tonnes of food per month, while need is estimated at 18,000 tons.



Jacques de Barrin, ‘The Ethiopian Government and the Famine: Politics First,’ *Le Monde* (France), 4 March 1985 (in French). [D29](#)

#### Extract:

Nairobi - Over the last month, an avalanche of sensational statements has been streaming out of Addis Ababa. Ethiopian leaders are competing in their efforts

to denounce the major plot cooked up by enemies of the ‘socialist revolution’ under cover of the tragedy of the famine. This has forced the country to open up to the outside to aid. Head of State, Colonel Mengistu Hailé Mariam is assessing the limits and dangers of this foreign assistance. He has concluded that it is necessary to recapture the initiative or in other words, to banish the illusions of those who hoped the regime would soften, to silence those tempted to impose conditions and offer advice, and to put critics of his government’s approach to aid distribution and famine control, on the defensive.

“Our enemies thought they could achieve their goals today by using the situation created [by the drought] to their advantage,” Colonel Mengistu said in mid-February, during a public gathering in Addis Ababa. While western response to his aid appeal, even from the US, has been largely positive, he does not view that support as disinterested. The Ethiopian leader could not prevent donor nations and organisations from offering their opinions on the Ethiopian situation from showing equal concern for aiding all famine victims regardless of their relationship with the central authorities, from denouncing all obstacles - political and administrative - to transporting foodstuffs, and, from questioning the rationale of a massive population transfer to areas not yet suffering from drought.

On the defensive for the last several months, Marxist Ethiopia has found itself in the spotlight. Western media provided extensive coverage of the famine’s tragedy, and its support was essential in mobilising aid. News outlets took advantage of the Ethiopian case study to make judgments about a regime accustomed to operating in secrecy. In the end, the regime’s leaders realized that their country’s image in the outside world was not particularly flattering. That led them to toss the ball back into their adversaries’ camp and accuse them of every sin in the book, which explains Colonel Mengistu’s decision to return tit for tat. He is moving to and blaming “those who harshly criticise our on-going efforts to resettle our fellow countrymen affected by the drought.” In his view, this is because “some are displeased to see us becoming self-sufficient” and would be happy if “we were to remain destitute so that they could dominate us.”

[...] Ethiopian officials are now positioning themselves as redressers of wrongs and as irreproachable revolutionaries who have no lessons to learn from anyone. This is no longer a question of managing international aid on the basis of non-political criteria; these criteria which are poorly suited to the requirements of the revolution underway. The Marxist orthodoxy has returned. The Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RCC), which previously played a leading role in organising the distribution of supplies, has been demoted. The Ethiopian Labour Party, created last September, has been assigned the task and will handle it in its own way.

Every cloud - even the revolution - has a silver lining. The

tragedy of the drought has forced the country to undertake an economic reordering and, in the leaders' eyes, requires a massive population transfer. If this makes life difficult for its 'internal enemies', 'advance of socialism,' why deprive the people of this opportunity?

**On 10 February, MSF team members in Chad sent an open letter to MSF's management and members expressing their opposition to Liberté Sans Frontières.**



**"Open Letter** to the Management and Membership of MSF," from the members of MSF Belgium, France, and Holland in Chad, 10 February 1985 (in French). **D30**

We, the undersigned members of MSF, working with the Chad mission wish to express our indignation on learning of the circumstances of Liberté Sans Frontières foundation's creation.

It is obvious that this foundation is lapsing into the political realm. As a result, we condemn this violation of MSF's charter, with respect to the following:

- multiple functions
- use of MSF funds
- use of MSF's reputation as a springboard
- shared headquarters for MSF and this foundation.

As demonstrated by reactions in the international press, MSF is clearly being identified with the foundation. Such identification harms the work of MSF teams on missions. For these reasons, we demand that MSF's management and all members honor their responsibility to observe the terms of the charter; that is, maintain complete separation between MSF and this foundation and notifying the press of that action.

Signed by: the members of MSF Belgium, France and Holland in Chad.

**Despite massive aid provided by the international solidarity movement, the nutritional situation worsened yet again in Ethiopia. As a result, mortality rates in the camps increased because arriving food supplies were inadequate. While donors had made adequate provision for transportation, authorities were requisitioning vehicles to transfer people to the South. The authorities refused to analyse the first suspected cases of cholera, denying that the illness existed in the country. Relationships among the authorities, aid organisations, and representatives of donor nations became strained.**



Jean-Paul Dufour, 'Mission Impossible on Ethiopia's Plateaus,' *Libération* (France), 24 January 1985 (in French).

**Extract:**

[...] For now, the RRC (Relief and Rehabilitation Commission), the official agency that holds the monopoly over distribution of basic food aid, is doing what it can. Despite claims by certain opponents of the Ethiopian regime, officials of international organizations generally believe that the amount of food aid being diverted is insignificant. In addition to the 20 camps and 40 feeding centres, 195 RRC distribution centres have been set up in the country. Food arrives there irregularly. The situation appears better in the western villages and farms, where the government has moved people from the north to more fertile areas than those of Wollo, Tigre, and Eritrea, which are the areas most affected by the famine.

Epidemics threaten the camps.

MSF and other NGOs working in Ethiopia are dealing with the most pressing issues first. Their painstaking work is already bearing fruit. Last August in Korem, the daily death toll had reached 100. Today, it has fallen to below 10.

But nothing is permanent. Over the last few days, a sense of panic has set in in the camps. It is virtually miraculous that epidemics have been avoided -- until now, and that may no longer be the case. Doctors returning recently from transit camps in Arbo, a few miles south of Dessie, report 300 confirmed cholera cases. On 18 January 50 people died from the disease. Afar nomads from Assaita, a huge camp run by the Ethiopian Red Cross near the frontier with Djibouti, are thought to have spread the epidemic.



Clifford D. May, 'Relations Sour Between Ethiopia and Western Food Donors,' *The New York Times* (USA), 17 February 1985 (in English). **D31**

**Extract:**

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Feb. 17 - Relations between the Ethiopian Government and the Western nations and organizations involved in the famine relief effort here appear to have reached their lowest point since huge amounts of aid began to pour into this country last autumn. In recent days the two groups have leveled serious charges at one another, both in public and in private. "There is a lot of bile flowing," an international civil servant said. "This government has been very obstructive and very difficult to help."

An Ethiopian official said, "Maybe it's time the agencies learned that they are not the ones who run this country." Aid officials have generally conveyed their dissatisfaction discreetly, either directly to the government or in off-the-record conversations with foreign reporters. But

an increasing number of complaints are now being voiced openly.

[...]

Last week, for example, representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross complained that famine refugees in the northern region of Tigre had been forced - either by the withholding of food or, on at least one occasion, at gunpoint - to enlist in the government's resettlement program. As many as 1.5 million famine victims are to be moved this year from the northern regions, where rebel groups are active, to the south and southwest of the country.

Government spokesmen angrily deny that force is being used to recruit and that families are being separated, as the Red Cross and other relief workers have charged. The spokesmen said Red Cross officials had evidently witnessed soldiers trying to quell a disturbance and misunderstood what was taking place. Relief officials and international civil servants have also accused the government of making little effort to deliver food, blankets, medicines and other supplies to famine victims in Eritrea, Tigre and other areas where rebel groups are active.

[...]

A plan proposed by Kurt Jansson, United Nations Assistant Secretary General for Relief Operations in Ethiopia, to lead unarmed convoys under Red Cross flags into contested areas of the country was recently turned down by the Ethiopian Head of State, Lieut. Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam. As many as 3,000 starving Ethiopians a day are reported to be crossing from Tigre and Eritrea into neighboring Sudan. In an address to the country last weekend, Colonel Mengistu said "traitorous bandits" who had been "forcing the people from their homes at gunpoint" were to blame for the exodus.

Other spokesmen for the Ethiopian Government have accused the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees of "enticing" Ethiopians to cross the border by providing the relief services for them in the Sudan. Aid officials have also been concerned that grain that should be reaching famine victims has been piling up in warehouses or going to resettlement areas.

[...]

According to one senior relief official who asked not to be identified, only about one-third of the food arriving in Ethiopia is getting to the camps for famine victims. The Ethiopian Government has asserted that Western donors have not provided enough trucks and spare parts. Aid officials say that more military and government-owned trucks should be used for relief and that almost half the donated trucks in the country are in disrepair because of mismanagement and misuse.

Another frustration cited by aid officials has been the government's refusal to release the results of laboratory tests that would show whether a cholera epidemic has

struck in several camps and regions. Officials in the Ministry of Health had pledged to provide such results to Mr. Jansson several weeks ago. Instead, they have informed him that they have found no cholera in the country, and they have indicated they did not expect him to request further information or evidence.

**On 22 February in Korem, authorities prohibited the MSF team from distributing tents and blankets despite severe cold temperatures at night on the high plateaus. In early March, another round-up occurred in the Korem camp. MSF complained to the UN Special Mission in Ethiopia but received no response. In mid-March, the distribution of food supplies to people under 45 was forbidden to encourage them to leave 'voluntarily' for the South.**



Dr Claude Malhuret, 'Mass deportations in Ethiopia' **Report** MSF (Confidential) December 1985 p.15 (in English). **D12** [↗](#)

**Extract:**

Despite protests, despite promises by authorities that it wouldn't happen again ('it was all a mistake...'), the exact same thing happened again at the same place at the beginning of March, 1985. The army even came looking for 'candidates' in the hospitals where some of the people had taken refuge. Médecins sans Frontières directors complained to the UN representative, who in turn contacted Kurt Jansen, Head of the UN's Special Mission in Ethiopia. Jansen phoned the President of the RRC (the Ethiopian organisation that coordinates aid), Dawit Wolde Giorgis, who promised to investigate. The affair was hushed up, and Médecins sans Frontières has never received the results of the inquiry.

[...] On February 22nd, 1985 the directors of the Médecins sans Frontières team at Korem were convened in a meeting attended by a regional representative of the RRC and a representative of the department of health, who forbade MSF to distribute either blankets and clothing or tents, despite severe freezing conditions. And the night-time curfew, which was lifted at 6 a.m., was extended to 7:30 a.m.

In mid-March, the RRC's representative in Korem declared there would no longer be food distribution to those less than 45 years-old. (They seek to recruit above all young people to colonize [populate]the southern lands.) This restriction lasted for several weeks.



Blaine Harden, 'Playing Games With Starvation - Why Food Alone is Not Saving Ethiopia?' *The Washington Post*, 6 June 1985 (in English). [D32](#)

#### Extract:

In January and February of this year, the government stopped relief workers from Doctors Without Borders, the French voluntary organization, from distributing blankets in Korem. At the time, as people were dying of exposure to the highland cold, there were nearly 20,000 blankets in warehouses at Korem, according to a relief official who was there at the time. He said that the government told him that it did not want famine victims to get too comfortable. It wanted them, instead, to volunteer for resettlement in the south where rebels are not a threat, he said.



*The temperature was falling to below zero on the Korem plateau. People had only flour bags to cover themselves. I remember picking up a bag and finding a father with his two children, naked and trembling with cold, underneath it. There were a few stalks of grass on the plateau.*

Jacques Pinel, MSF France Logistics Director (in French).



*In town, it was called a 'kébélé.' In the country, they were known as farmers' associations. The RRC representative distributed food to each farmers' association. There were people arriving from Tigre and Maichew but they didn't belong to one and they had nothing. Along with the RRC guy, we tried to find something for them. But when he was no longer in charge, people were dying right on the spot. Because they didn't belong to a farmers' association, they didn't get anything to eat, even if there was food. They only got food if they left for the south.*

Brigitte Vasset, MSF France Medical Coordinator in Korem, from April 1984 to May 1985 then MSF France Programme Manager Ethiopia (in French).

**The sale of recordings and concerts to fund MSF's work in Ethiopia multiplied. On 4 March, some 15 French singers gave a concert. Revenues were turned over to MSF to help the Ethiopians.**



**Summary** of the 24 March 1995 meeting of the MSF France Board of Directors (in French). [D33](#)

#### Extract:

Media

Tam Tam for Ethiopia: 100,000 records sold. The postbox appeal raised 500,000 francs [77,000 euros] and according to estimates, record sales should raise 2.5 million francs [385,000 euros].

Following the same approach, a group of French rock musicians are preparing to make a recording and revenues from those sales will go to MSF.

Enrico Macias and Mireille Mathieu are planning a concert to benefit MSF. It will be shown on television.

MSF sent a press kit to 1,500 newspapers on Ethiopia with an offset to insert in their papers. As of now, 150 newspapers have used it. We expect a total of 200 positive responses.

**On 12 March, the management and board of directors of MSF Belgium sent its members a document on Liberté Sans Frontières, along with a letter expressing their concerns.**



**Letter + document**, 'Médecins Sans Frontières and Liberté Sans Frontières: Incompatible -- A Summary of the Analysis,' by the Director, President and Board of Directors to the Members of MSF Belgium, 12 March 1985 (in French). [D34](#)

#### Extract:

We are contacting you because this is a critical moment in the history of Médecins Sans Frontières and we felt it was important to share our concern before the organisation takes decisive steps towards a new and irreversible situation.

"Liberté Sans Frontières" is a political organisation and is being identified completely with Médecins Sans Frontières. We find ourselves in a position that contradicts the charter's fundamental principle: to remain non-political.

One could go on at length about this principle, but simple good sense should be enough to make it clear and, in any event, to establish a broad consensus. We believe that the organisation's apolitical character remains its cornerstone and that removing it would cause the foundation to crumble.

The detailed packet we have sent you reflects our analysis of the situation. Its objective is to oppose the problem that has recently been created. We hope it will serve as a basis for discussion throughout Médecins Sans Frontières

and as a rallying point for those who cannot accept the current ambiguity, which is why we are distributing it widely within the organisation.

We refuse to see the debate that is about to take place as a sign of confrontation between MSF France and MSF Belgium. The problem posed by LSF transcends the issue of a legally autonomous entity existing within MSF. Furthermore, we would like to restate our desire to maintain the cooperative relationship with MSF France that existed prior to LSF's founding and we renew our proposal to create an MSF Europe based on the Charter.

We look forward to hearing from you. With best wishes,

#### SUMMARY OF THE ANALYSIS

- The Liberté Sans Frontières foundation is a political organisation.
- The foundation is being associated with Médecins Sans Frontières.
- This confusion creates an unhealthy and ambiguous situation, putting MSF completely at odds with respect to the basic principle of remaining apolitical.
- This threatens MSF's continued existence.
- To protect our organization, we must clarify the situation immediately and take measures to separate two entities that should never have been brought together, Médecins Sans Frontières and Liberté Sans Frontières.

**Ethiopian farmers were transferred to unhealthy and malaria-stricken regions, quite unlike those portrayed in the propaganda distributed during film screenings organised by the authorities. There, they were forced to adopt a collectivised life combining forced work, inadequate food, and strict political supervision.**



Dr Brigitte Vasset, 'Visit to Two Resettlement Camps in the Kaffa Region, **Report** MSF Ethiopia, 17 March 1985, (in French). [D35](#)

#### Extract:

##### IMPRESSIONS

##### Positives:

- No overpopulation
- Administrative teams to take care of camps, relatively well-motivated
- Small-scale sanitary infrastructure:
  - water points (under construction)
  - latrines (inadequate in Kishe)
  - dispensaries (with staff but without adequate resources)
- Nutritional status of population is good (all those who were going to die are dead? as in Korem in September)
- Housing, mostly individual, but temporary

##### Negatives

- According to official statistics - provided at the local level in the camps (1,200 people for 450 heads of family) or at the general regional level (227,641 people for 9,276 heads of family) - there are no families with more than three people. This reinforces the impression that families have been dispersed, based either on what men told us in Kishe or what we saw in Korem. Saw only one man over 50 on the entire visit.

- Farming: few resources put to use to clear the land although the soil appears fertile: several head of cattle in Kishe; major supply effort if they want to be prepared for the heavy July/August rainy season.

#### Unknowns

- The two camps were opened in October and November 1984: that period corresponds to the first wave of resettlement that appeared to be relatively voluntary in Korem. One installation dates back about 4 months, with structures set up.
- Population has received adequate food over 4 months.
- The two camps are very close to Jima, so easy access for food, supplies, etc.
- No idea what is happening in the camps where people did not come voluntarily and where they arrived recently.



Paul Valley, 'How Mengistu Hammers the Peasants,' **The Times** (UK), 1 March 1985 (in English). [D36](#)

#### Extract:

It would be a mistake to aggrandize Mengistu's military regime with the suggestion that there was much any government could have done to prevent a natural catastrophe on such a scale. But, it would be equally mistaken to pretend that the Dergue's sense of priorities in its management of the country's resources would find acceptance in many of the donor countries, which the Colonel criticized this week for sending insufficient aid.

Perhaps the most offensive example to western sensibilities of these distorted priorities is the amount which the military regime spends on arms as its people starve. International observers estimate that 46 per cent of the country's gross national product goes on the armed forces. Certainly the regime is brazen in its demonstration that military hardware is more important than food aid.


[...] It is difficult to escape the conclusion that political factors also override humanitarian considerations in the government's policy to resettle 1.5 million peasants from the drought-affected regions of Tigre and Wollo in the north and Sidamo in the south.

It is not that settlement is a bad thing in itself - these areas are overpopulated and agriculturally exhausted, and a carefully prepared voluntary migration makes sense to many of the relief organizations. But the way the military regime is going about its current programme lends credence to suggestions from the Tigre People's Liberation Front that the government is taking advantage of the

famine to rob the rebellion of its natural supporters. For example, it withholds grain from refugee camps for weeks on end but provides two cooked meals a day at resettlement transit camps half a mile away, when this fails, families are split up and the men ordered at gunpoint into lorries and planes, even though provision for their resettlement at their destination is far from adequate.

Certainly the scheme has obvious advantages to the socialist planners. Until now many peasants have shown a marked reluctance to join in the government's latest reorganization of agriculture, which attempts to induce peasant associations to band together in producer co-operatives in a three-stage plan, offering increasing financial incentives. In one district I visited, Damot Wade, in Sidamo, only 240 of the area's 5,000 farmers had volunteered to participate at even the first stage.

But, resettlement will uproot these independent-minded farmers, well established in their individual holdings in the northern highlands and the Sidamo plateau, and replant them in an area of farmers' cooperatives in the west where they will become more amenable to collective manipulation, much as the Russian peasants did under Stalin's collectivization of Soviet agriculture. Stalin's stratagem produced few positive economic results but was a resounding success in terms of asserting control over politically recalcitrant peasants. [This policy] will cause few qualms to Colonel Mengistu's politburo.

 *A small pick-up truck arrived up in Korem to show footage of the South. There was an open-air screen and all these farmers from the north who hadn't seen water for two years came. I went to watch, both to look at the pictures and at people's reactions. Movies! There were pictures of the Blue Nile, with waterfalls and big, fat cows. The film was full of that kind of thing.*

*[...] I went, very discreetly, with Secours Populaire Français [French People's Rescue] to the place where people were being transferred. It was lowlands and they already had malaria. These people came from the north, where malaria is not a problem. They weighed only 32 kilos when they became infected [in the south]. Many families were separated. There was nothing there, so they had to use their hoes to build their houses. There were trees everywhere and they had to pull them out by the roots. There was no health centre. They had nothing. If no one was living there, it was for good reason. I could only spend less than 24 hours there.*

Brigitte Vasset, MSF France Medical Coordinator in Korem, from April 1984 to May 1985 then MSF France Programme Manager Ethiopia (in French).

**On 13 March, the RRC official issued a new call for international aid, while the international press continued to denounce the Ethiopian government's exploitative use of the famine.**



Marie Joannidis, 'Warning Cry from Ethiopia: More Than 10,000 People Threatened' **AFP**, Geneva (France), 13 March 1985 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

Relief and Rehabilitation Commission official Dawit Wolde Georgis stated that famine resulting from continued drought threatens more than 10 million people, or one Ethiopian out of three. Wolde Georgis issued a new appeal to the international community.

[...] "In March 1984, we sounded the alarm," he noted. "The number of people affected has increased from 6.4 million to 8 million. Today, with the lack of seasonal rainfall, we face an identical situation. The catastrophe could extend beyond 1986."

Ethiopia needs some \$380 million to address its food deficit and carry out emergency projects, such as improvements to transportation and water systems. "With 7.9 people affected, we need a total of 1.5 million tonnes of grain," Dawit says. "Half of that, around 700,000 tonnes, was promised and we have already received around 150,000 tonnes."

"We want aid to continue and we want the international community to help us resolve, once and for all, the hunger problem through emergency rehabilitation programmes estimated at \$300 million," he noted further.

He also stated that contact initiated on Sunday in Geneva between Ethiopian and American representatives would resume on Thursday. "We asked the Americans to specify the areas where, according to them, food aid is not reaching drought victims. We also want them to help us improve aerial and road transport and extend parachuting foodstuffs."

"Unfortunately, the US is placing Ethiopia in the East-West political context," Dawit said. US Vice President George Bush, who led the US delegation of the UN before heading to Moscow for the funeral of Soviet leader, Constantin Chernenko, had criticized the failure of food to reach all famine victims in northern Ethiopia, which is experiencing insecurity.

**In March, MSF Belgium opened a hospital near Idaga Hamous, close to Adigrat in the Tigre. It also took over care for the most affected children in the feeding centre managed by the ICRC.**



'Quarterly **Publication** for MSF Belgium Donors,' July/August/ September 1985, (in French).

### Extract:

In early 1985, with the situation in Tigre province worsening dramatically, MSF Belgium was able to launch a preliminary evaluation mission in that area thanks to increased public awareness and contributions. The Idaga Hamous region was chosen as the first programme site and the first five-person team arrived in late March. MSF has set up a temporary 70-bed hospital and is also providing intensive feeding for the most seriously affected children.



*I conducted the evaluation mission and then I directed the mission from the desk, going into the field once a month. On the map, the next big town past Korem is Adigrat. We went into the Tigre and afterwards to Eritrea. It was sort of a geographic progression. But the heart of the problem was further north in Wollo province, which Korem is a part of. MSF France was really in the very centre of things... In the field, we had good relationships with the French section. They put us up - until the clash.*

Pierre Harzé, MSF Belgium Programme Manager Ethiopia (in French).



*Pierre Harzé conducted a preliminary evaluation mission in Ethiopia in early 1985. He met Brigitte Vasset, who was very irritated and put out by the idea that we were coming to Ethiopia. I think that was because of existing internal conflicts between the two sections. It was during the Liberté Sans Frontières period. There was a lot of tension and, in fact, real antipathy, lack of communication, and contacts among the MSF sections. So, the analysis of each other's initiatives was hugely skewed.*

Georges Dallemagne, MSF Belgium Director of Operations (in French).



*We had a Belgian doctor on our team in Korem. He was quite good. Réginald Moreels showed up with, I think, Jean-Pierre Luxen [it was Pierre Harzé]. They came to do an evaluation mission and told me, "We're going to see what MSF is doing." I didn't know them; I didn't find them all that pleasant. They told me they were going to open a programme with the Belgian doctor who had finished his mission with us. They went to Adigrat, in the Tigre. We weren't friendly. They didn't live in our house. I*

*remember that we went for a drink at the Hilton, the place where you met everyone. I don't know if they were living at the Hilton or somewhere else. I don't think I liked them very much. I told them what was happening, just like I told all the NGOs that were interested. I think I was annoyed that they stole our doctor. I think that's it... It was between January and May. It wasn't so cold. I didn't know that MSF Belgium even existed. All the others arrived after the fight. They asked us to help them and I didn't really want to... De Milliano, from MSF Holland, came through. He was pretty nice, a funny guy. He's pretty funny, that guy. He arrived without a visa and he got into a mess at the airport. Dominique Leguillier, the administrator, managed to get him out of the airport without a visa. He was only passing through. He opened a mission later. But at that point, MSF Holland didn't have a presence in Ethiopia. When they arrived, things had already improved.*

Brigitte Vasset, MSF France Medical Coordinator in Korem, from April 1984 to May 1985 then MSF France Programme Manager Ethiopia (in French).

**In late March, the MSF Board of Directors discussed how to respond to the hardening of the policy regarding resettlement of Ethiopian farmers. MSF Holland initiated an evaluation mission in Somalia, where a cholera epidemic had broken out among the Ethiopian refugee population. Beginning in April, a team composed of members of the Belgian, French and Dutch sections began working with 300,000 Ethiopian refugees near Hargeisha.**



**Summary** of the 24 March 1985 Meeting of the MSF France Board of Directors, (in French).

**D33**

### Extract:

Given the context, MSF can respond in a variety of ways:

- Criticise the conduct of the resettlement publicly in the media, which would involve withdrawing the teams.
- Given that it's more important to continue to aid these populations, we could take a more pragmatic approach. At the same time, we would have to try to see other transfer areas. While working in the resettlement areas would imply that we supported this policy, it would also allow us to continue our aid and presence as witnesses to events.

In the meantime, a policy of discreet pressure, through the UN representative in Addis, appeared to be the most effective and was adopted by all NGOs present. In general, we should note that the media is refocusing its coverage on Sudan, the Tigre and Eritrea.

Naturally, launching a press campaign to force Ethiopia to accept direct aid in Tigre and Eritrea would not change

Ethiopian policy. It would be more effective to work to convince governments and international organisations to aid these two provinces from Sudan. To that end, Francis Charhon [MSF France Operations Director] is expected to meet with officials from the French Foreign Office soon.

[...] Somalia: following a request from the Somali embassy in France, an MSF Holland evaluation mission will leave soon for Somalia to evaluate the need for MSF involvement.



**Summary** of the 3 May 1985 Meeting of the MSF France Board of Directors, (in French). [D37](#)

#### Extract:

Somalia: on 27 March, a cholera epidemic broke out among a group of approximately 300,000 Ethiopian refugees, living in very unsatisfactory conditions, gathered near the town of Hargeisha.

A cargo plane carrying supplies (antibiotics, Ivs, disinfectants) and an MSF team arrived on 7 April. More than 3,000 cholera cases had already been diagnosed and 500 people had died. The Belgian-Dutch team, joined by two MSF France members for the epidemiological study, is now responsible for the treatment centre and will set up a screening centre to transfer refugees to new, better-organised camps, involving around 60,000 people.

**In April in Korem, 1,500 people died of cholera in a few weeks. The epidemic spread rapidly within the camp's weakened population. In Kobo, the MSF teams were authorised to treat only adults. The Ethiopian government continued to deny that cholera was present. Press reports carried the MSF team's alert, issued during a meeting with donors.**



**'Medical Report** of MSF Team in Korem,' 8 April to 7 May 1985 (in English). [This document has been edited] [D38](#)

#### Extract:

For the 3 last months, the general situation has been deteriorating gradually.... In March we began to see the deterioration for different reasons: new comers began to arrive in the camp, in a poor nutritional status. There was not enough grain to be distributed among them because of transport difficulties. Added to that, in this new population, an epidemic of measles arose among the children: 401 cases as well as an increasing number of dysentery. The total number of admissions increased by more than 1,000 ( total number : 3,165).

Unfortunately, with this increase of the total popula-

tion of the camp, plus this measles epidemic, we saw the death rate going up from 189 to 399 in the medical wards.

In April the situation was even worse. The total population of the camp was around 41,000 people. At the beginning of the month, an epidemic of acute diarrhoea began; the nutritional status was deteriorating, especially among children.

So the death rate was almost double compared to March (588). The measles epidemic was down as well as the number of dysentery cases.



Blaine Harden, 'Ethiopians are Said to be Dying of Cholera - Government Disputes Aid Official's Report of Camps' Epidemic,' *The Washington Post*, (USA), Addis Ababa 20 April 1985 (in English). [D39](#)

#### Extract:

An epidemic of cholera has broken out in the Korem feeding center in the Ethiopian highlands, killing 20 persons a day, said the administrator of Doctors Without Borders, the French voluntary organization that runs the camp.

"Right now, I have 50 new cases a day, and if I don't act very quickly in the next few days, I won't be able to avoid a disaster," said Dominique Leguillier. His on-the-record statement, made on the day of a meeting here between the Ethiopian government and aid donors from around the world, climaxed five months of rumors and not-for-distribution reports from relief officials here, that the highly infectious bacterial disease has broken out in several of Ethiopia's famine-relief centers.

The Ethiopian government has refused to acknowledge the existence in Ethiopia of cholera, which causes severe diarrhoea and vomiting and is spread primarily by human feces. Instead, government officials here maintain that the feeding camps are infected not with cholera but with "acute diarrhoea". While insisting on that distinction, the government asked donors today for an emergency airlift of "urgently needed medical items" of the kind that are normally used to treat infectious gastrointestinal diseases such as cholera.

[...] Five months of behind-the-scenes bickering over medical semantics broke into the open at the donors' meeting here when Leguillier addressed Dawit Wolde Giorgis, head of the government's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission.

"I have 20 deaths a day because of a disease that we cannot name. I am importing medicines, and I have to lie about the name of the disease," Leguillier said. Dawit then asked the French relief official what difference it made whether the disease is called acute diarrhoea or cholera. "If I can tell suppliers that it is cholera, I can get the drugs much more quickly," Leguillier replied.

Echoing off-the-record remarks of officials from two other major relief agencies here, Leguillier said in an interview that it was vital that the disease at Korem be called cholera so that the camp could be quarantined and

medical investigators brought into Ethiopia to track down the source of the disease.

"It is cholera, and we should call it cholera so we can isolate people at Korem. If we cannot call it cholera, these people can go where they want and will spread the disease," Leguillier said. He said cholera was first diagnosed at Korem 13 days ago, based on expert knowledge of the disease's symptoms and not on a laboratory test. The Ethiopian government says that many diseases are similar to cholera and that, lacking laboratory proof, there is not reason to declare a cholera emergency. Without quick action, Leguillier said, the disease will increase by hundreds of cases daily among the 25,000 famine victims at Korem. Emergency quarantines also are needed at two feeding centers near Korem - Alamata and Kobo - to head off an outbreak of cholera that threatens about 45,000 persons there, Leguillier said. He said that Kobo had 40 new cases of the disease daily, according to a week-old report, and Alamata had 1,000 cases, with 100 deaths.

Diplomats and relief officials here speculate that the Ethiopian government has been unwilling to use the word 'cholera' because of fear that news of the disease will scare off buyers of Ethiopian coffee and meat, which are major sources of hard currency for the financially strapped government.

Doctors here, however, say that fear is largely groundless. They say the disease is carried primarily by the water supply in places such as the feeding camps, where large groups of people lack adequate sanitation facilities.

"You will make medical history if you manage to acquire cholera through your coffee," said one doctor here, who spoke on the condition that he not be identified. Many relief officials here said this week that they fear their organizations would be expelled if they were to speak publicly about cholera.

There is speculation here too, that the government is unwilling to declare a cholera outbreak because resulting quarantines could interrupt its resettlement program, which has moved more than 330,000 people in the past five months from the northern highlands to lowland areas of the southwest.



*Cholera appeared in March-April and many NGOs set up along the major Addis-Korem road. Oxfam built a huge camp. The cholera began to spread in the lowlands, to Bati and Korem. Despite that, the authorities moved people with cholera. But things calmed down and there was no more talk about resettlement. The situation worsened because people were dying like flies of cholera, but people weren't being taken away by force to resettle them. It was the cholera period and we were authorised to stay [in the camps] through the night. The cholera was horrible. We had two or three metal sheds full of hospitalised patients. The average adult weight was 33 kilos. Along with Jean Rigal, we fought hard. Maybe we were wrong, but we didn't know it. We thought we were right. We had the*

*support of Alain Moren and all of MSF's scientific expertise. We treated people and recommended prophylaxis for the entire camp. That put us at odds with the RRC, which didn't want to use those methods. We didn't like that at all and we fought it to the end. You couldn't say there was cholera in Ethiopia. Even though they had halted the resettlement, it wasn't official because of the cholera. It was out of the question to talk about it. The entire export sector risked being compromised so no one said there was cholera. But during a meeting in Addis, Dominique, our administrator, used the word. Jean and I were furious because we were already fighting for prophylaxis. It was agreed that we could say it was acute gastroenteritis, and in the end, there goes Dominique saying 'cholera' Nothing serious happened but in November when we saw Priestly, the US Representative, he told us, "You know, I've already saved MSF from the Ethiopian government. If I hadn't been there, you would've been expelled. During the cholera period, it was very, very tense."*

Brigitte Vasset, MSF France Medical Coordinator in Korem, from April 1984 to May 1985 then MSF France Programme Manager Ethiopia (in French).

**On 28 April, the Ethiopian authorities evacuated 50,000 people from the Ibnet camp by force. The camp was burned to prevent them from returning. Reports were published in the international press and international reaction was very strong, particularly from the US, Ethiopia's principal funder. Early on, the Ethiopian government denied the reports, later confirming that people had left the camp, "freely, in good health and supplied with seeds and farming tools". In the end, they admitted that these events were the result of an "abuse" resulting from 'excessive zeal' on the part of local bureaucrats.**



Blaine Harden, 'Forced Evacuation in Ethiopia Confirmed by Relief Workers,' - *The Washington Post* (USA), 2 May 1985 (in English). [D40](#)

#### **Extract:**

Relief workers at Ibnet, which until last weekend was Ethiopia's largest famine relief camp, confirmed to two reporters visiting the camp today, that Ethiopian soldiers forced more than 50,000 people to evacuate the center and that while the people were leaving, the camp was set afire.

Two relief workers told one of the reporters that during the three days the camp was being cleared out, they saw two camp residents killed. Another relief worker, Danny Hawley, an American nurse for World Vision, told both reporters that she saw two pregnant women miscarry their babies while being chased by soldiers. World Vision is one of four private relief agencies working at Ibnet.

Jim Kinsella of Concern, an Irish relief agency, said he saw soldiers setting fire to the grass huts in which residents of Ibnet had been living. Concern relief workers confirmed that on Monday, the second day of the forced evacuation, they counted 17 bodies on the road outside the camp.

Hundreds of residents of Ibnet, in the central highlands of Ethiopia, resisted the evacuation by staying in their huts until the huts were set afire, according to an interview with Hawley, who said she witnessed part of the evacuation. "You see, the patients said, "We would rather die here than go back to what we know is nothing." "And so they wouldn't leave, and while the flames were going on there were still people who had hesitated. When things were burning around them they decided to bring their possessions out and at least come out of the flames. But I saw people coming from the hut that were being burned at the time they were still here, " Hawley said.

The relief worker's statements were made to two British reporters and other members of a United Nations and Ethiopian government delegation that flew by helicopter today from Addis Ababa to Ibnet. Their statements contradicted a series of official explanations given by Ethiopian officials today about how the evacuation was conducted. The statements also confirm an account of the evacuation that appeared first in Wednesday's editions of Washington Post.

Returning here tonight from Ibnet, Kurt Jansson, the United Nations Assistant Secretary General for Emergency Operations in Ethiopia, said the evacuation was "done with too much haste and with inadequate preparation. It is also clear that there has been and will be suffering as a result of the hastiness."

[...] At Ibnet, relief nurse Hawley said that "several of the people forced out felt that they had no chance to survive a walk home. It was their belief that they expressed to us that they would die on the way..." she told the reporters.

[...] Early today, the government denied the Washington Post's account of the evacuation, which was based on interviews with two senior western relief officials who visited Ibnet Tuesday and who asked not to be identified. Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Commissioner of the Ethiopian government's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, which is responsible for famine relief here, told the Reuters news agency that the story was a "fabrication" by a "cub reporter" trying to please his employers. At the Addis Ababa airport before noon today, Dawit denied The Washington Post correspondents request to accompany the party flying to Ibnet in a Polish relief helicopter.

William Shawcross, reporting for the London Observer and Rolling Stone magazine, and Michael Woolridge of the BBC were then allowed on the flight. Both reporters provided information on which this story is based...

During the course of the day, Ethiopian party officials provided reporters with three versions of how Ibnet was burned. All versions denied involvement of soldiers. One version described the burning as an accident, a second called it a sanitation measure and a third said it was the act of one misguided person who is now in jail. At the

camp, reporters learned that relief workers from World Vision had been told by local authorities not to talk about the evacuation. But under questioning from reporters and from Dawit, among others, they discussed the episode. The relief workers from World Vision and Concern said that there had been no mass departures from the camp before last weekend. They said they had first been informed of the party's decision to evacuate Ibnet on Saturday afternoon, after which time party officials said no one from Wollo and Gondar was to be given food, water or medical assistance.

[...]The two relief officials who first reported the evacuation of Ibnet on Tuesday, and who have asked to remain unidentified, said today that the presence in Gondar province of the giant camp, which mushroomed from 2,000 persons in January to about 60,000 before last weekend, had bothered Ethiopian military authorities, who were fighting rebels in the area.



Pierre Haski, 'Ethiopia: Forced Evacuation of 60,000 Refugees,' *Libération* (France), 3 May 1985 (in French).

#### Extract:

[...] This latest controversy fed the ongoing debates raging within aid organisations in Ethiopia on issues ranging from aid, to famine victims in the rebel zones of Tigre and Eritrea, to the Marxist Ethiopian government's massive population displacement programme. Humanitarian groups in the face of this dilemma, are forced to 'keep their mouths closed' if they want to help victims. As political considerations move to the fore, they often find themselves agreeing to accept violations of their principles.

[...] An Irish priest issued a formal accusation, saying: "On Saturday, the authorities decided that people had to leave the camp. On Tuesday, there was practically no one left." According to him, it was a forced move that certainly caused many deaths.

Father Jack Funicane, Director of Concern, the Irish humanitarian group in Ethiopia, went to the Ibnet camp on Tuesday. Yesterday, during a telephone interview with *Libération* after returning to Addis Ababa, he confirmed the information published the day before in the Washington Post. The US had responded by saying that the actions described were "brutal, barbarous and inexcusable," despite a formal denial by Ethiopian authorities. However, Father Funicane's statement was categorical. Ibnet is a refugee camp for Ethiopian drought victims located in Gondar province, around 500 km northwest of Addis Ababa. Its starving population increased from 2,000 in January, reaching close to 60,000 last week, when authorities proposed that the refugees be resettled in new development centres as part of a massive and controversial programme affecting 1.5 million Ethiopians. "Around 4,000 people accepted the offer and within a few days were taken to western Gondar by army helicopter," the priest said. On Saturday, the evacuation order arrived

for those who had turned down the offer. "On Sunday morning, the evacuation began with small groups. But the huts, made of branches and grasses, were burned to encourage them to leave and prevent them from returning. When I arrived on Tuesday, they were almost all gone, with the exception of around 3,000 people - the weakest and the elderly. Everything was burned." Who set fire to the huts? "Government officials or the army, I can't confirm which," Father Funicane responded.

According to the Irish priest, several thousand people face certain death. "For many refugees, who are in very weakened state, this will be an insurmountable ordeal. We are very concerned about the speed of the operation and the lack of preparation, which will undoubtedly cause many deaths." The refugees were sent, on foot, back to their home communities, most in Gondar province, around 35% in the Wollo and, according to Father Funicane, 1% further north, in Tigre. The Tigre and Wollo regions are two of the most severely affected by the famine.

"There was no violence against people," Concern's director stated, emphasizing, however, that, "they were told to leave, but in their condition they were very docile and unlikely to respond violently."

Whatever the motive, Father Finucane considers the Ethiopian government's action a "tragedy," partly because it was carried out so quickly and because the refugees who survived the trip are returning to abandoned and destitute regions, a situation that had prompted their first exodus to Ibnet. "They were promised seeds when they arrived, but there was a shortage throughout the country" he said with regret.

[...] While the U.N. has not yet made any public comment, the US reaction was harsh. This "brutal, barbarous and inexcusable action" constitutes a "death sentence" for 3,000 people, said Peter MacPherson, Director of the US Agency for International Development, yesterday. "We are distressed by the brutal manner in which the camp was evacuated," noted Chester Crocker, Deputy Secretary of State for African Affairs, saying there could be "no excuse" for the authorities' decision. The US is the leading supplier of food aid to the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist regime and has already argued several times with the government, specifically with respect to aid in the rebel-controlled areas of Tigre and Eritrea.

The Ethiopian government denied those accusations, describing them as "baseless inventions, concocted by a cub reporter trying to impress his editors." [The Washington Post has confirmed that the author of the article, Blaine Harden, is its bureau chief in Nairobi ....]

The official communiqué stated that 30,000 people left the camp, "of their own free will, in good health," and supplied with "seeds and farming tools." This idyllic vision hardly seems to match the statements gathered by humanitarian organisations. The 'blunder' puts Ethiopia's approach to dealing with the famine on the hot seat.

**Interviewed about these events, MSF France's president questioned, more broadly, whether it made sense for MSF to continue working under such conditions.**



Pierre Haski, 'Helping the Victims and Keeping Quiet,' *Libération* (France), 3 May 1985 (in French).

**Extract:**

[...] "This incident goes beyond the pale," Rony Brauman, President of Médecins Sans Frontières, said yesterday. Several MSF teams have been in Ethiopia for a number of months. "We strongly condemn it, which will certainly cause problems for us on site," he added.

Taking such a position is rare among humanitarian organisations. In general, their primary goal is to protect their ability to work in the country. Other controversies have posed problems for aid groups in Ethiopia. On the one hand, Ethiopian authorities take a particularly strict position regarding areas under Eritrean and Tigrean guerrilla control; excluded from the reach of international aid and subject to endless war...

On the other, the government has undertaken a massive transfer programme, sending famine victims to new settlement areas in the south and southwest. While the technical reasons offered in support may have some basis, the programme is also based on political considerations. In addition, many question whether it is voluntary. Nearly 300,000 people out of a projected 1.5 million have already been transported from the Tigre and Wollo regions by Soviet Antonov airplanes. Western groups have carefully kept their distance from the programme.

They are unlikely to be encouraged by the Ibnet episode, in which refugees were expelled after refusing voluntary 'resettlement'. "From the beginning, we've said, on a regular basis, this can't go on," Rony Brauman explained. "There have been times when we've said that the positive aspects of our activities cannot compensate for the ways in which the authorities have manipulated our work." As a result, the MSF president added, a month ago, "We were just about ready to pull out at the request of our teams on site." The authorities had withdrawn the doctors' right to identify which refugees required hospitalisation, reserving that decision for the country's only political party. "We have had heated confrontations with the authorities, but thanks to the RRC (Relief and Rehabilitation Commission), we were able to sort things out."

Other incidents have marked MSF's presence in Ethiopia, resolved at the last moment to avoid breaking-off of relations. "We have always managed to guarantee that our principles were respected," he says, though acknowledging that "In the field, there is a tendency, wrongly, to wear blinders with respect to what's going on outside." He concludes that, "On balance, our activity in Ethiopia is having positive effects, but that balance could easily shift."

**MSF Belgium continued to campaign against Liberté Sans Frontières. On 27 April, its General Assembly decided to end all contact with MSF France as long as the latter maintained ties with LSF. MSF France, which believed that the Belgium section had made dangerous political decisions in Angola and Nicaragua without warning MSF France, decided to sue MSF Belgium to protect the MSF name. The quarrel continued at the two sections' General Assemblies. The French section pursued legal action to withdraw the right of the Belgian section to use the MSF name. It also asked the new Dutch section (created in September 1984) to state in its bylaws that it was borrowing the MSF name from MSF France.**



Claude Julien, "Tiers-Mondisme, Destroy the Monster" - A Foundation Above Reproach,' *Le Monde Diplomatique* (France), May 1985 (in French) [D41](#)

#### Extract:

[...] While dishonesty is not necessarily stupidity and lying does not automatically imply lack of intelligence, those who attack *tiers-mondisme* surely possess their fair share of foolishness. Add a pinch of the arrogance that accompanies life's great certainties - arrogance displayed first by the Stalinists and then by the 'revolutionaries' of May 1968. They were going to use better fundamentals to build a new world, one they understood so poorly. And now, they've positioned themselves in the heart of the classic right wing.

But the arrogant have always known how to make themselves appear humble! "I've known the mud and refugee camps of Africa and Asia" says Dr Brauman, in the work already quoted. The attitude has hardly changed in more than 100 years. "The poor, I know them in their hovels and in their filth," the Restoration or Second Empire's lady bountiful said. Unruffled, her great-granddaughter displayed the same attitude when she returned from ladies' sewing circles during the Popular Front era. Indeed, she did know. She went to their homes bearing meal tickets, the warm clothes they could not afford to buy, a little money for the rent when their pay wasn't enough ...

Africa and Asia are more than 'mud and 'refugee camps'. They are a group of countries whose population works but barely manages to survive. They are countries in which multiple actors are involved in an interplay of complex forces: governments, the market price of zinc or cacao, the bank rate, production techniques of varying levels of advancement, the London market's mechanisms, speculation, capital outflows, corruption, and pressure from companies whose revenues are larger than the national budget. But they are also a culture and way of life, an attitude in the face of death, a dignity that all the 'missionaries,' secular and religious, know.

[...]

How humble that arrogance is. Indeed, says the president of Liberté Sans Frontières, the problems are so complex that "we had to bring in experts and surround ourselves with them." And pompous: "We must not judge their conclusions before they conclude their investigation." That's valuable advice for others, but it doesn't seem to apply at home. Without waiting for the investigation to be completed, Dr Brauman concludes: "Some say that the global economic system, the deterioration of terms of trade, and the unfair prices paid for producers for raw materials are responsible [for the tragedies in the Third World]. I think this diagnosis is incorrect." It sounds as though the experts know ahead of time what they have to prove. And which 'experts?' Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, shifting from Montailou to development economics, Jean-François Revel, fully informed on this subject, Pascal Bruckner, and the rest.

The experts can choose their own path of inquiry. What is important is that they end up where Dr Brauman thinks they should. "Our job is to challenge a perception of the problem in which their poverty [of the Third World] is a reflection of our wealth, and our liberties are based on the absence of theirs."

[...] We must, with hesitation, express our gratitude to the experts from Liberté Sans Frontières. At the end of their long travail, they will 'discover' how certain westerners, in the name of freedom and prosperity, have made an irreplaceable contribution to improving and impoverishing the Third World. But at least they won't hurt anyone while treading those well-marked paths.

[...] Dr Rony Brauman, who clearly does not consider the full import of his proposal, criticises those who dare to support the notion that what is "responsible [for the misery of the Third World] is the unfair price paid to producers of raw materials. This diagnosis is incorrect." He shares the positions of Thomas Sowell, quoted earlier, who rebels against "modern theories of imperialism and neocolonialism," according to which "labor and raw materials of Third World countries are undervalued and underpaid." This is an absurd claim, Sowell adds, because determining "the 'fair price' has defied economists for centuries."



'Relationships Between MSF France and MSF Belgium,' **Minutes** of the 3 May 1985 Meeting of the MSF France Board of Directors regarding the MSF Belgium General Assembly (in French). [D37](#)

#### Extract:

Rony Brauman reported on the MSF Belgium General Assembly, held on 27 and 28 April.

The General Assembly, which included only the members appointed by the Board of Directors (111 people), voted

(43 in favor, 3 against and 2 abstaining) to accept the president's annual report, which included the break with MSF France and associated responsibilities of the MSF Belgium directors.

A lively discussion took place on Sunday, during which MSF France officials presented their arguments, including the significance of human rights as part of MSF's image and activity, the need to deliberate and debate about the Third World, non-interference with field activity, and to recognise those who support our approach.

[...] In fact, Brauman explained, this break [with MSF Belgium] had occurred several months ago and there were already many problems.

MSF's uniqueness is based on that fact that we work in areas of high conflict. Contacts with various parties to such conflicts require both caution and coordinated efforts, which is especially the case in southern Africa and Central America.

As of some time ago, MSF Belgium has, without consulting MSF France, taken certain initiatives that could pose very serious security problems for people in the field.

For example, I am referring to:

- The Angola problem:

MSF has been working alongside UNITA for two years. Recently, MSF Belgium has contacted, and begun the process of working with, the government via the MPLA. MSF Belgium has not notified UNITA, placing MSF France and the people in the field in a very delicate and dangerous position.

- The Nicaragua problem:

[MSF Belgium mission] the teams have become extremely involved, threatening the stability of a very fragile framework that MSF has built over five years, by establishing contact with all parties to the Central American conflicts. The Guatemala expulsion may well have been the result, partially, of contacts that MSF Belgium had with certain parties without consulting MSF France. The CDC [Comité de Direction Collégiale] was very concerned about the dangers resulting from actions that could threaten team security and adopted the following motion: "In light of the difficulties and risks created in the field and in Europe as a result of the increasingly hostile and distant attitude of the Belgian section of MSF, a distancing leading to the MSF Belgium General Assembly's decision to cease all cooperation between the two organisations, the MSF France Board of Directors has unanimously voted to pursue any initiative, consultation, and procedures necessary to protect its name throughout the world. This includes the possibility of taking action to strip the Belgian section of the Médecins Sans Frontières' name, which it borrowed from the original French section when the Belgian section was created in 1981."



'Summary of the 31 May 1995 Meeting of the MSF France Board of Directors' (in French).  
D42

#### Extract:

Relations between MSF Belgium and MSF France:

- MSF France has requested that MSF Belgium change its name; interim relief measures will be sought in case of refusal.
- The Mali mission coordinated by MSF Marseille will continue.
- MSF France has asked MSF Holland to modify its bylaws to refer to the fact that its name is borrowed from MSF France.



*In 1985, the General Assembly was held in May. The May issue of Le Monde Diplomatique [a leading French monthly publication on politics] included a special section more than 20 pages long titled, 'Tiers-Mondisme: Destroy the Monster,' with a full two-page editorial by the then-editor, calling us right-wing extremists and racists. Philippe Laurent, President of MSF Belgium, came to the General Assembly to attack us on Liberté Sans Frontières, not about Ethiopia, because in May 1985, no one was talking about Ethiopia. They [[MSF Belgium management team] really wanted to have a go at us. They were almost sure that they could kick us out and they came pretty close to succeeding. But they blew it..*

Rony Brauman, MSF France President (in French).



*In May 1985, Le Monde Diplomatique published a long article devoted almost entirely to LSF! ... I felt like MSF France had betrayed me. Everything was in total confusion. In Belgium, we analysed things and made a decision. I had the document that said, "The Board of Directors notes that a new organisation, Liberté Sans Frontières, has been created; the relationships between this group and MSF France were defined at the MSF France 1984 General Assembly ; the [MSF Belgium] board of directors wishes to distance itself from this organisation, which is openly taking a position in the political debate over the Third World ; and so on." So we said, "OK, faced with this situation, we will separate. We no longer want any organic connection with MSF France as long as it is connected to Liberté Sans Frontières because we cannot be linked with LSF."*

*This clearly meant that we were suspending our relationship with MSF France until the ambiguous relationship between MSF France and Liberté Sans Frontières was clarified. I came to defend this position at the MSF France General Assembly, as the French came to defend theirs at ours. Everything was done quite openly, while we were eating together. At MSF*

*Belgium, this 'split', passed unanimously. At the MSF France General Assembly, those in favor of Liberté Sans Frontières carried the vote by 52 or 53% to 48 or 47%. It was, of course, a Pyrrhic victory.*

Philippe Laurent, MSF Belgium Executive Director  
(in French).

**In his annual report to the General Assembly, MSF France's president emphasised the organisation's 'moral imperative' and 'moral responsibility' to protest the position Ethiopian officials were taking towards the populations MSF was helping.**



'1984 Annual Report - 1985 General Assembly,' May 1985 (in French). [D43](#)

**Extract:**

Despite good cooperation with teams from the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (the government aid coordination agency), this difficult mission was marked by serious problems. On several occasions, the prohibition preventing our screening team from visiting certain areas of the camp, and the retaliatory measures taken against MSF's Ethiopian assistants nearly challenged the continuation of our activities. There was no room for compromise on these issues. The Ethiopian officials understood this. Each time, they reconsidered measures that were apparently taken in haste.

However, the general level of aid organisation is far from satisfactory. For more than three months, cholera outbreaks have been appearing in the north of the country. For obscure reasons, linked perhaps to the displacement operations targeting drought victims, the authorities refused to acknowledge that the epidemic existed, thus also prohibiting measures key to halting the spread of the disease. As a result, it exploded, as it had in Korem, where the team faced more than 1,500 cases. This epidemic surge has now reached most of the distribution centres, crossing the country's borders into Somalia. Based on the evidence, it will soon reach Sudan.

[...] Despite this unreal taboo about cholera in Ethiopia and despite the real risk of expulsion, given the scale of the epidemic we must protest the official position so that appropriate measures will finally be taken. This protest, like the one last week regarding the forced evacuation of the Ibat camp, constitutes a moral imperative and a moral responsibility that we must assume on our own behalf, as well as that of the people who place their trust in us and those we are reaching out to. Out of ethical concerns, as well as concern for the effectiveness of our activities, we cannot accept conditions that violate the very spirit that moves us.

**From 17 to 20 May, an MSF team conducted an evaluation mission at the authorities' request in the area around Sekota. Many of the displaced persons in the Korem and Kobo camps were from that city and the administration intended to repatriate them to their region. The MSF volunteers insisted on the need for anti-cholera measures, which they were careful not to refer to as such.**



Brigitte Lelin and Jean Rigal, 'Report from the Sekota Evaluation Mission,' 20 May 1995, (in French). [D44](#)

**Extract:**

Subject: A few weeks ago, the government army recaptured the historic town of Sekota, the regional administrative capital. The administration is now moving all Sekota's administrative structures from Korem back to Sekota. The Korem party leader invited us to conduct a preliminary survey in Sekota at the time of the 17 September 1985 convoy. Ato Bewenetu, the party's second in command in Korem, accompanied us.

[...] Meeting with Kassa, administrator; Bayenetu, party; Salomon, RRC; Shimbat, security, etc.; Gelataw, Ministry of Health.

MSF: What do you expect of an NGO like MSF in Sekota, given that MSF is a strictly medical organisation?

Administrators: provide medications and medical staff and respond to a possible epidemic.

Gelataw: a workplace, shelter, tents, or even the reconstruction of the health centre

Party: what are your comments regarding what you have seen of Sekota: have we shown you everything?

MSF: three suggestions:

1.You cannot handle and you do not want a new Korem in Sekota. If you continue to distribute grain rations in Sekota, you must be sure of your supplies.

2.There are people with serious malnutrition among the population we examined. We must discuss the possibility of opening a feeding centre for children at less than 70% [of their normal weight].

3.Several months ago, the government asked each town to set up an isolation site to deal with a possible epidemic of acute diarrhoea. We know that today, none of the villages in the Wollo have been spared. You must absolutely identify and prepare this isolation site.

[...] Conclusion: the possibility of setting up an MSF team in Sekota interests us, but several details remain to be resolved.

1.Is this a purely local initiative?

2.The epidemic problem must be clarified. Why would someone want to hide the cholera cases from us? Can we work under such conditions? We must be clear that if we work in Sekota, we will insist on working to prevent a possible epidemic. MSF's poorly-timed communication in Addis Ababa or the administration's fear of being criticised for its plan to displace large numbers of people during a cholera epidemic (Korem to Sekota) could

explain the silence imposed on the cholera issue. In theory, this displacement will be voluntary.



*We knew there was a huge famine. There was a wide-scale appeal for international aid. We went everywhere to see where the needs were. We said to ourselves: "We'll work [somewhere else] now that there's food." We conducted a major evaluation mission in southern Wollo, Kelala, and in western Sekota because the majority of the people in Korem came from that region.*

Brigitte Vasset, MSF France Medical Coordinator in Korem, from April 1984 to May 1985 then MSF France Programme Manager Ethiopia (in French).

**In late May, when the situation in the camps worsened dramatically once more, the international press again highlighted the scale of international aid diversions in Ethiopia and the extent to which aid was being manipulated in the context of East-West relations.**



Jacques de Barrin, 'Ethiopia: Aid Distribution to Ethiopian Victims: Diversions, Discrimination and False Statistics,' *Le Monde* (France), 21-23 May 1985 (in French). [D45](#)

#### Extract:

[...] In the Korem camp, in Wollo province, where Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is working, the daily death toll has risen again to 20 per day from 10 per day in early March. This is not the last time those grim statistics will have to be updated.

Mothers are worried that once their children are discharged, they will not be able to assume responsibility for maintaining their health. To avoid that impossible task, the mothers are carrying out a form of 'food sabotage,' limiting the children's food intake so that they will remain in the care of humanitarian organisations for as long as possible. Those groups are aware that their efforts to save the children are useless. They know that once the youngsters are no longer in their care, they will go hungry again. "We are wasting our time and other people's money," a doctor said. "It's better not to ask too many questions about the purpose of our mission, otherwise we'd pack our bags."

[...] Furthermore, some logistical resources are being diverted from the priority mission of distributing aid. Thus, 300 trucks, 12 Antonov airplanes and 24 MI-8 helicopters, along with their teams, provided by the USSR have been shifted to transferring drought victims to the Ethiopia's southwest region, or even engaged in purely

military operations against the Eritrean and Tigrean 'bandits.'

[...] All told, once current inventories are considered (around 200,000 tonnes) along with the total amount of food distributed to the drought victims, whether displaced or not, some 30,000 tonnes of food are missing. Officially, its whereabouts are unknown.

Although the Ethiopian regime treats every piece of information as an official secret, it is increasingly difficult to hide certain realities when some 50 NGOs and their several hundred 'imperialist spies' are working on the ground. The forced evacuation of the Ibnet camp offers a recent example. First, officials in Addis Ababa dismissed it as 'total lies' but later, the head of state himself acknowledged it and said that he regretted the event.

When food assistance is distributed to militiamen in Tigre to ensure that they remain vigilant, should that be considered a 'blunder'? How to explain that in Eritrean towns under tight government control, certain international aid items show up in the stream of commerce? Why do Asmara bakeries sell American and Canadian flour? Or, why Trigreans head to that same province in search of food?

[...] According to experts, the figure of 8 million people completely dependent year-round is incorrect. "At the outside, there are 2 million people who make up the core of the population that is starving and totally dependent on external aid," says an NGO official. This figure could climb to 3 million in August and September, which is the 'lean' period between two harvests.

The international community has fulfilled its duty of solidarity towards Ethiopia. But by neglecting its right to monitor distribution of the aid it agreed to provide, turning away out of some sense of guilt, it is unwittingly countenancing abuse and deception. This serves no one, especially not the famine victims watching a share of this long-awaited food disappear before their eyes.



Blaine Harden, 'Playing Games With Starvation - Why Food Alone is not Saving Ethiopia?' *The Washington Post* (USA), 6 June 1985 (in English). [D32](#)

#### Extract:

Driven by the intolerable, televised images of misery, donor nations and private relief agencies gave Ethiopia more food in less time than they have ever given any country - nearly a half million tons since January; 160,000 tons this month alone. Rock and roll superstars, touched by the pictures and singing about the unity of man, continue to raise millions of dollars that will dispatch still more food and development aid. Yet more than six months after the crusade was launched,

it is clear that free food alone cannot cure what ails Ethiopia. All that money is not changing the priorities of the government here, nor of the competing governments that prop it up, nor of the rebels that keep trying to take Ethiopia apart. In this, the world's poorest country and Africa's longest running civil war grinds on. Ethiopia's military regime, challenged by newly arrived hordes of Western aid givers demanding reforms that motivate farmers to grow more food, is sticking with rigid Marxist policies that tolerate no dissent. In the meantime, superpower gamesmanship has moved into the world of famine-relief policy. And Ethiopian children are still starving.

[...] While about 60 percent of the food shipped to Ethiopia sits undistributed at the ports, while the northern war keeps food from hundreds of thousands of victims, the United States and the Soviet Union (with Ethiopia as its surrogate) have settled into a game of famine one-upmanship.

Superpower rivalry has not prevented the US government from feeding millions of hungry Ethiopians. And, a recent easing in Washington of legal restrictions on the use of US food and money for development assistance was warmly welcomed by the government here. But suspicion remains, along with almost daily mutual accusations of bad faith.

The United States, the largest donor of famine aid, has succeeded in pressuring other Western donor nations not to support the government's resettlement programme which is desperately short of money for seeds, plow oxen and medicines. Many resettlers were moved by Soviet planes and trucks in a program that the United States argues is poorly planned and not voluntary - as Ethiopia maintains.

The cost of US non-support for the program, according to Kenneth King, Head of the UN's Development Program here, is being borne by the 360,000 Ethiopians who have been resettled. "These people will have a crummier life compared to what could have been, had resettlement not been politicized" King said.

**Most of the statements MSF gave the press came from volunteers who witnessed scenes of violence that accompanied the transfers. But while all the volunteers were aware of the famine's severity, most were focused on providing care. They found it difficult to step back and acquire the perspective necessary to analyse these isolated events, and reevaluate the political intentions underlying them.**



'Nine Months in Ethiopia With Médecins Sans Frontières: A Nurse From Lille Speaks Out,' *La Voix du Nord* (France), 24 May 1985 (in French). [D46](#)

#### Extract:

The west frequently criticises the Ethiopian government's position on this issue, where war's misdeeds mix with those of the famine. Some even speak about misappropriation of international aid. Joëlle Peckre has not seen anything like that. "I never saw a soldier carry off a bag of grain."

#### Still, Hope Persists

The nurse from Lille also saw thousands of refugees forced to leave for the south, said to be a more fertile region. The move was an authoritarian action, carried out by force, and generally against the will of the populations involved. However, Joëlle Peckre sees it as a lesser evil and an emergency solution. The nurse is convinced that Médecins Sans Frontières will be in Ethiopia for a long while yet. She believes there is still hope that the situation can improve. "It's been raining every day for a month. That hasn't happened for two years. If it rains again in the autumn, and if the farmers have seeds at that point, they may be able to harvest and pull out of the slump a few months later." For Ethiopia's sake, Joëlle Peckre continues to hope.



*The only things that were said came from the Korem team. Brigitte Vasset, Jean Rigal and the others unleashed all their disgust and revulsion in the face of the early morning abductions. MSF neither confirmed nor denied it. It was their personal statement.*

Rony Brauman, MSF France President (in French).



*The volunteers had 'their noses to the grindstone.' They were busy providing care. Apart from a few who sensed that something was going on, they were not particularly on the alert. It was very difficult to see things because it was done fairly discretely. When Rony went to the field, he realised what was going on. Reports from Clay and Niggli confirmed it."*

Claude Malhuret, MSF France Executive Director (in French).

**In early June, at the RRC's request, an MSF France team conducted an evaluation mission in the Kelala region. The team made a proposal to the authorities that a mission be opened in Kelala.**



**Draft for the Project, 'Medical Services and Feeding in Kelala, Borena Awraja,'** from MSF France to Dr Tamerate, RRC Addis Ababa, 22 June 1985 (in English). [D47](#)

#### Extract:

##### Project summary

We would like to establish a medical team to give the affected people of this area medical services, to organise a dry supplementary distribution, and to eventually open a feeding centre for children under 70% of their normal weight.

##### Background and justification

MSF teams have been working in the Wollo region for 14 months in the camp of Korem, in the Kobo distribution centre, and recently in the town of Sekota. We have been asked by Mr Haylu, the RRC representative in Dessie, to assess the medical and nutritional situation in the Borena Awraja. A first survey was made early May in Wayn Amba, a second survey was made in June in Kelala and other villages.

**In mid-June, aid organisations observed a slowing in transfer operations with the arrival of the rainy season, the difficulty of transporting food, and the need to supply the resettlement areas, which the authorities had not prepared for.**



Jonathan Steele, 'Ethiopia Calls Halt to Resettlements,' *The Guardian* (UK), 20th June 1985 (in English). [D48](#)

#### Extract:

Ethiopia's controversial programme of resettling famine victims in the less affected areas of the south and west has been sharply scaled down, and may soon come to a halt. This is the assessment of the main Western voluntary aid agencies, which have frequently criticised the programme.

The Ethiopian Government has not announced the end of the scheme, and the agencies do not expect it to do so, as a matter of official pride in not wishing to be seen to be reversing policy under pressure. But, they point to a number of signs which suggest a change of heart.

The shift in policy should release more resources for bringing food to the starving. It comes at a time when increasing numbers of people are coming into the emergency feeding camps, despite all the relief efforts made so far. The death rate at the camps had also risen, according to a report from Dennis Craig, the spokesman for the United Nations World Food Programme, caused not by hunger but by exposure to the rains which should have brought some relief.

The failure to deliver grain because of transport shortages has also begun to affect one of the country's most

important long-term development projects - the Food-for-Work scheme, under which the more healthy peasants are paid in food for building terraces and planting trees, to try to prevent soil erosion.

For a time, peasants continued to work on the promise of food but the scheme, the biggest Food-for-Work project in Africa, has come almost to a standstill as people become too hungry to carry on.

Faced with these new crises the Government appears to be on the way to halting the resettlement programme. Under the original scheme announced at the end of last year, the government said it wanted to move 1,500,000 people or 300,000 families from northern Ethiopia. When the programme started there were complaint that it was being handled inhumanely, with male settlers separated from their families and others being moved against their will. Aid officials were later told privately that the target figure for the resettlement scheme was no longer 1,500,000 people but 900,000.

[...] The problem with the resettlement programme seems to be that the government did not expect that the settlers would have to be fed for so long after they moved. It was wrongly thought that the more fertile areas to which they went would have sufficient supplies of grain to feed people until the first harvest.

**In mid-July, MSF France lost the legal action it had brought against MSF Belgium to strip them of the right to use the MSF name.**



Pierre Haski, 'Franco-Belgian War at Médecins Sans Frontières,' *Libération* (France), 10 July 1985 (in French).

#### Extract:

This morning, the Brussels judge responsible for ruling on urgent matters will hear a case marked by resentments and a settling of accounts. It follows the stir raised in the small Parisian intellectual and medical world after the founding of the 'Liberté Sans Frontières foundation ...The plaintiff, the French humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), has asked the Belgian court to order MSF Belgium to abandon the use of the famous acronym and change its name. Why? This year, the Belgian section split off - the summons refers to "dissident actions, rebellion and renunciation of allegiance" - and the use of the MSF name could lead to confusion. Rony Brauman, President of MSF (France), said it is "regrettable" to have to seek legal recourse but believes the leaders of the Belgian section should have "taken responsibility" for their decision to split off and changed the name themselves. He emphasised that the resulting confusion poses a problem, noting that the Belgian organisation had contacted the Angolan government while French volunteers were working in UNITA rebel

zones. That action, he said, created “uncomfortable and even dangerous” situations. The problem is similar in Nicaragua, El Salvador and elsewhere. When an MSF France official called the offices of an African liberation movement in Paris, he was told that contact had already been established - with Brussels.

Of course, the Belgians tell a different story. They counter the accusations of “rebellion” and “dissidence” by charging the French leadership with violating MSF’s founding charter and involving the humanitarian organisation in “an ideological and political struggle” by creating Liberté Sans Frontières. They also have an ace up their sleeve to present in support of their argument in court -- a letter signed by Bernard Kouchner, MSF’s founder and now head of Médecins du Monde, and Jacques Beres and Max Recamier, two other former MSF Presidents. The letter reads, “That is why, in the face of this breach of the ideals and ethics that motivated MSF’s founders, we support our friends at MSF Belgium in their dispute with the Parisian ‘apparatchiks.’ Faced with the moral and intellectual fraud perpetrated by the founding of LSF, we would, of course, support them in this matter. MSF Belgium continues to practice and pursue the ideals reflected in the charter and the bylaws. MSF France is corrupting them.”

Rony Brauman describes the involvement of Kouchner - one of humanitarianism’s media stars - in this inter-MSF conflict to be “comical”. He sees the Franco-Belgian dispute as a natural psychological event, the manifestation of “the child [MSF Belgium] turning against the parent’. MSF France’s President said that “differences in approach” and “a unique character” had already created “friction” in the past. “The story blew up when LSF moved into the public eye.”

Beyond the debate over the acronym, which the Belgian judge will rule on, the question over the founding of Liberté Sans Frontières remains. MSF France avoided an internal crisis after the leadership’s decision to set off on this ‘risky venture’. At the organisation’s last general assembly, they were obliged to shift the political balance among the foundation’s intellectual ‘patrons’ and refocus its activities in the area of development. And there would be no more ‘ideological’ colloquia, like the one held last January at the Senate, where third-worldism [tiers mondisme] was put on trial. But the deed was done. The Belgian doctors would not swallow the LSF pill.



Brussels Court of First Instance - Judges’ Public Hearing 15 July 1985 - MSF France, Plaintiff - MSF Belgium Defendant - Court’s **Decision** (in French). [D49](#)

#### Extract:

“Whereas...the issues addressed during the symposium [LSF’s 23 and 24 January 1985] were sufficient to demonstrate that Médecins Sans Frontières’ goal is completely distinct from the concerns and goals pursued by Liberté Sans Frontières...

“That the defendant [MSF Belgium] chose not to break off, but rather temporarily suspend, its collaboration with Médecins Sans Frontières France until the latter distanced itself from the Liberté Sans Frontières foundation, on whose behalf MSF undertook a range of initiatives in support of LSF, including using funds belonging to MSF France, creating shared headquarters for the two entities, and sharing management...”

“Whereas, having considered all information submitted for our review, we conclude that the parties’ shared charter constitutes the cornerstone of this complaint; that the complaint must be analysed in light of that document; that its clear and precise text strongly emphasise the principles to which the doctors have committed; ...

“Whereas, comparing this text to the goals pursued by the Liberté Sans Frontières foundation, which the plaintiff [MSF France] has agreed to join (see page 16 of its manifesto), the judge may, without exceeding his jurisdiction, find an apparent discrepancy between MSF’s philosophy and goals and those of LSF...”

“Whereas ... we find that the question of whether MSF France may join or should have joined with LSF is not relevant to the problem before us today, which the defendant [MSF Belgium] has placed in its proper context...”

“We hold the claim admissible but unfounded, and render a judgment of non-suit against the plaintiff [MSF France]...”

“We hold the plaintiff liable for expenses...”



‘**Editorial** to Members of MSF Belgium, from Philippe Laurent, MSF Belgium Executive Director,’ July 1985 (in French). [D50](#)

#### Extract:

[...] In a world shaken by arguments and cataclysms, we provide care for victims, whether or not they understand what is happening to them and whether they are ‘wrong’ or ‘right’.

We have a unique opportunity to witness events and, of course we reflect on our observations. Each interpreter speculates and creates his own truth. With that unique opportunity as witnesses, we have also observed many tragedies arising from the clash of these truths. And, we are suspicious of them.

Should we have followed Paris and the latest truth currently in fashion? We said, “No.” When MSF France founded Liberté Sans Frontières, that action violated the spirit and the letter of the charter. To express our disagreement, we distanced ourselves. Should we have given in to threats of litigation and abandoned our name, as MSF France demanded? We said “No” again. The name is ours. We are proud of it. Hundreds of doctors and

nurses have worked hard to forge MSF Belgium's reputation for generosity and effectiveness.

The judge decided in our favour.

We could have kept quiet about all this. (In the end, going to court is never anything to be proud of; you never emerge better off, even when you are in the right). But we thought it was better to be frank and open, as we have always been. After all, you judge your true friends based on how they respond in the hard times.

We are doctors and have plenty of work. Today, more than 100 of us are fighting famine. We want to continue our work as doctors without ideological hindrance or political manipulation.



'MSF Belgium Has A Right to Its Name,' *Le Soir* (Belgium), 17 July 1985 (in French). [D51](#)

#### Extract:

After MSF Belgium challenged MSF France's support for the Liberté Sans Frontières foundation, MSF France took the Belgian group to court in Brussels, accusing it of "rebellion" and "refusal of allegiance" to the "founding organisation" and demanding that MSF Belgium abandon the use of the shared acronym.

The Belgian court ruled in favour of MSF Belgium. Not only did the order hold that MSF France's request was unfounded, but the judge spoke out on the substance of the issue, as defined by MSF Belgium that MSF France violated the organisation's founding charter by taking part in the political debate launched by Liberté Sans Frontières. The judge cited Article 3 of the Charter, which states that MSF members, operating under conditions of strict neutrality and complete independence, are prohibited from all interference in internal affairs of nations, governments and parties. The judge found that there was an apparent discrepancy between the MSF's philosophy and goals and those of LSF. The judge also found that the basic conflict turned on the issue of whether MSF France could join LSF, but that that issue was separate from the current one, which was whether MSF Belgium could be denied the right to use the acronym for its act of 'rebellion.'

In the end, the judge found the request admissible but unfounded. In other words, Médecins Sans Frontières Belgium's legitimacy has been upheld and a debate over the heart of the problem - that is, the politicisation of 'independent' humanitarian organisations and the operation of the non-profit system - will surely begin soon in Paris or Brussels. The match is not over, but Belgium has won the first round.



'Summary of the 29 July 1985 Meeting of the MSF France Board of Directors' (in French). [D52](#)

#### Extract:

The MSF Belgium Problem:

Judgment has been rendered; our case was dismissed in this urgent procedure. The court found that because MSF Belgium did not breach the charter, it cannot be required to give up the name. For now, unless things change, Claude Malhuret recommends that we not pursue this on the substance for a variety of reasons:

Loss of energy and money,


Risk of problems with the media,

Little likelihood of winning; a judge would find it difficult to rule against a humanitarian organisation with projects underway in the field, compared to any injury to MSF France, which it could consider minimal.




*Malhuret, Brauman and Charhon [Executive Director, President and Operations Director of MSF France, respectively] said, "If you split off, you have to give up the name." We said, "No, we're keeping it." So there was a lawsuit here in Belgium. But they really regretted it because it turned into a trap that collapsed on them and it was quite severe. They went for summary judgment, telling themselves, "with summary judgment, you can get a suspension, they're trapped, they spent a year or two on the content, time goes by and then they're dead." They brought an intellectual property lawyer who deals with brand ownership. Our lawyer had been the president of Amnesty International and we prepared a case on the merits, even in a summary judgment proceeding. We spent days and nights preparing our defense. We produced a whole series of documents and got a very interesting decision. The judge said that even if it was unusual for her to address the content, she had read the documents and concluded that MSF Belgium was observing the charter, while MSF France was clearly not. So she dismissed the French. Normally, they should have requested a trial on the content after that. But they didn't go to the content.*

Philippe Laurent, MSF Belgium Executive Director  
(in French).

 *Liberté Sans Frontières was one of the major problems. MSF Belgium issued a very harsh attack on Liberté Sans Frontières and all of a sudden MSF France said, "Under those conditions, you no longer have the right to use the Médecins Sans Frontières name." And then there was a lawsuit that France lost. I think that during the court's deliberation, they clearly ruled that it wasn't MSF Belgium that had distanced itself from the organisation's values.*

Georges Dallemagne, MSF Belgium Director of Operations (in French)

 *At that time, MSF Belgium was like a bunch of Boy Scouts. All they wanted to do was practice medicine. They didn't want to know about what was going on around them. Most of them hadn't worked in poor countries before joining MSF. They wanted to show that they existed separately from us, whereas up to then, they had done most of their missions as part of MSF France. We made a mistake filing a complaint. The trial took place in Belgium before a Belgian judge. It was a kind of settling of accounts by the Walloons (not the Belgians) against the French. The tone was, "We're going to get those arrogant French." Everyone was against me, including the judge. And, then we had a lousy lawyer. At least it helped us realise that given the lack of international legislation on the legal status of non-profit organisations, we shouldn't harbour any illusions about the control we might maintain over an international MSF.*

Claude Malhuret, MSF France Executive Director, (in French).

**In summer 1985, MSF Belgium opened a second hospitalisation and feeding project in Zala Ambessa. In its donor newsletter, the group gave an optimistic evaluation of how international aid was being managed, emphasising the need to continue efforts in this area.**



Quarterly **Publication** for MSF Belgium Donors' - July/August/ September 1985 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

A second project has just been launched in Zala Ambessa with a team of doctors and one nurse who will be responsible for overseeing the hospitalisation of around 30 patients and a feeding centre for around 300 severely malnourished children.

Once we have obtained government support, other projects should quickly get under way. By extending our activities to increasingly distant locations, we hope to be able to avoid large population groupings, which are

always conducive to spreading epidemics. Of course, this involves significant logistical resources like trucks and planes. The situation is further complicated by security problems that require us to travel by convoy and prohibit us from leaving the major highways to assess the internal situation.

Recently, the organisation of international aid has improved considerably. The UN sent a Coordinator, Kurt Jansson who, with help from the Ethiopian government, is trying to stabilise the flow of food and aid required by the population. Food requirements for 1985 total 1,504, 775 tonnes for the 7.75 million people affected. From December 1984 to March 1985, the country received 420,000 tonnes and according to commitments, is still expecting another 540,000. The amounts still to be contributed should come in during the next public appeals.

Ethiopia is also in desperate need of transportation resources, primarily trucks to avoid bottlenecks at ports and warehouses. That situation has improved, too, but is far from perfect. Currently, 1,250 trucks are transporting aid. This has made it possible to increase unloading capacity at the Assah and Massawa ports from 3,000 to 5,000 tonnes/day. As a result, food should no longer be blocked on the quays.

Non-governmental organisations have also responded massively to the government's call and are currently operational in many locations. However, the outlook remains uncertain. The March-April 1985 short rainy season was irregular, often requiring the farmers to wait for July's major rainy season to work their fields and plant seeds. To ensure an adequate harvest, rain would have to continue until the end of September, which is not likely to occur everywhere. The awaited cereal harvest will not take place before November and people could not cultivate their fields because of a lack of seeds.

International aid will thus, have to continue until the end of 1985 and probably beyond. However, the infrastructure required to organise aid now seems to be in place. Last year's mortality figures have fallen sharply and the acute phase of the famine has been checked. But this does not mean that aid should end or be reduced, for fear of a new catastrophe.

**On 12 July, Bob Geldof organised a new two-way concert from the Philadelphia stadium in the US and the Wembley stadium in the UK, rebroadcast by stations around the world to more than a billion viewers. Record sales brought in more than \$120 million, used to purchase aid for Ethiopia. The celebrity musical focus on the Ethiopian famine even inspired comic artists.**



Roger Cans, 'Concerts - Marathon in Wembley and Philadelphia - Live Aid's Organisers Raise 600 Million Francs to Fight Hunger,' *Le Monde* (France), 16 July 1985 (in French). [D53](#)

**Extract:**

Nearly all of rock's royalty appeared at the UK's Wembley stadium and at the John F. Kennedy Stadium in Philadelphia (US) on Saturday, 12 July for the 17-hour Live Aid benefit for famine-struck Africa. More than a billion viewers around the world tuned into the live concert marathon that has already raised more than 600 million francs. Now that aid must be delivered safely to Ethiopia and Sudan. That's what concert organiser Bob Geldof is hoping for. The Irish prime minister has already nominated him for the next Nobel Peace Prize. Our special envoy's report covers the problems of delivering food to the starving populations.



'Doonesbury,' Comics - *International Herald Tribune* (Europe) 11 July 1985, (in English). [D54](#)

**Extract:**

Western Charity representative to Mengistu: Mr Chairman, as a representative of USA for Africa, I have to ask you a few direct questions."

- Colonel Mengistu to translator: "Get rid of this guy, will you? I've got a civil war to run. "
- Western Charity representative to Mengistu: "Why are you playing politics with famine relief? Why are you using valuable transport for forced resettlement? Why are you permitting food to rot on the docks of Assab?"
- Mengistu to translator: "What's the problem?"
- Translator to Mengistu: "He's been critical of the party's famine relief program."
- Mengistu to translator: "So, have him shot."
- Translator to Mengistu: "He's got two hit singles out comrade, there'd be a stink."
- Western Charity representative to Mengistu: "I hope you don't mind my frankness."

**In July, MSF France opened two medical aid programmes in Sekota and Kelala. The authorities repeatedly refused to agree to the teams' requests to open an intensive therapeutic feeding centre in Kelala. In fact, the RRC had opened therapeutic feeding centres in neighbouring areas that were disguises for regroupment centres preparing transfers of people to the south. Only children whose parents agreed to the transfers were admitted. The transfers were suspended during the rainy season and when they resumed, the MSF team learned about the violent methods used to force the families to migrate.**



'Letter from the Executive Director of MSF France to Dr Tamerate, RRC Official,' 29 August 1985 (in French). [D55](#)

**Extract:***Kelala*

The work in this region raises several problems for us. First, there is an immediate logistical problem regarding provision of food, but I hope it will be resolved with the funds we have obtained for helicopter flights during the last weeks of the rainy season. Also, the BRGM (Bureau of Geological and Mining Research) is expected to install water points, which will, of course, make it easier to provide food aid and improve sanitary conditions. On the other hand, the population's nutritional status is much worse than we anticipated at the outset and many more people are arriving at our distribution centres than at the beginning of the project. Clearly, the supplemental distributions are not adequate for this group. Unfortunately, if we want to help them recover, we must expect to keep them on site for some time. I know that the medical objectives may contradict the goals of the administration, which certainly does not seek a repeat of a Korem-type situation, but there must be an intermediary status that would prevent people from departing in terrible conditions and thus, facing certain death on the road. I know that these medical requirements are very important to you and that you will help us find a solution to these problems.

[...] I hope that you were able to get to know our organisation better during your visit to France and see that we are working strenuously on behalf of populations severely affected by the drought in other countries as well. Of course, we expect to pursue these efforts in the coming year in order to address needs, which I hope, are likely to decline rapidly, thanks to an improvement in the situation. Please understand that beyond our institutional relationship, we rely on you, as a colleague and friend, for advice and assistance in carrying out our activities in Ethiopia.



Dr Jean-Claude Desenclos, 'Kelela - Assessment, September 1985,' MSF France, September 1985 (in French). [D56](#)

**Extract:**

Beginning in July, following a request from the Ethiopian authorities, an MSF team (a doctor, three nurses and a logistician) initiated a food aid programme involving distribution of dry rations to the most severely affected children (below 70% of normal weight) from 73 farmers' associations in the Kelala region. Because of accessibility issues, 19 farmers' associations from the Lami region are not currently involved.

Information on the population drawn in by our team is not precise. According to different sources (party, admi-

nistration, RRC, etc.), the population ranges from 90,000 to 140,000. If the target population (children under 5) is based on the arbitrary figure of 15%, that number is between 13,000 and 21,000 children.

[...] Our information regarding the nutritional status of the population sampled is inexact because we were unable to conduct a representative survey (problems related to security, movements, and dispersion of populated areas). However, it is clear that the problem is very serious (on the same order as the problem in Korem a year ago).

[...] The large number of children older than 5 (1,678 d 70%) should be noted, as it underscores the severity of the problem (this age bracket is less vulnerable).

**THEORETICAL RESPONSE TO SUCH A SITUATION**

In this kind of nutritional situation, aid should be organised on three levels:

- General food distribution to the entire population in one form or another until the next harvest's lean period (January 1986).
- Supplementary nutrition for moderately malnourished children (less than 80%) in the form of dry rations to take away or prepared rations consumed at the distribution site.
- Nutritional recovery for the most affected children (regularly below 70% of normal weight) through an intensive renutrition facility. This can be effective only if the children are 'hospitalised' during the recovery period.

[...] We twice made a strong proposal to Ethiopian authorities for a supplementary feeding centre on purely medical grounds. The diagnosis is clear and unambiguous. The only way to save the greatest number of these children at risk of death in the coming weeks involves temporarily hospitalising the most malnourished. The Ethiopians' refusal was categorical, given the considerable disadvantage of concentrating a sizable group of people around Kelala that would result from creating a centre. We have even been told to stop treating orphans (the local administration has since taken over material aid from us).

Clearly, the dry rations (currently distributed every two weeks to families with children below 70% of normal weight so that they can be returned to a healthy nutritional state) are not achieving their goal. Other family members often eat the food; it is sometimes (regularly) stolen on the road home; malnourished children are often trafficked in order to receive rations and once they are obtained, the tiny, starving child is abandoned at the feeding centre exit... Abandoned children are often eaten by hyenas.

[...] This problem is an ethical one; can we continue to respond to the situation when we are denied authorisation to use all our resources to serve this population? Of course, our current aid is not useless. It prevents the nutritional status of moderately affected children from worsening but, does not respond directly to the most urgent problem.



'Should We Remain Silent?' **Account** of Benoit Tullen, MSF France Doctor in Kelala, in 'Why Were We Expelled?' MSF France Special Publication on Ethiopia for the and Donors, December 1985 (in French). [D57](#)

**Extract:**

We opened the MSF centre in Kelala in early July 1985. Over a period of five months, we treated 5,000 people and distributed 250 tonnes of food and 11,000 blankets to 12,000 children. All children in the district below 70% of normal weight had to be treated by MSF. We were never authorised to hospitalise these children or to keep them for intensive feeding treatment. Among the 9,500 children registered, more than 3,000 died because the dry ration we gave them was shared with the family, sold or stolen. They died because we were prohibited from providing consistent medical monitoring. As soon as we hospitalised dying children, despite the prohibition, the authorities immediately threatened to close the centre. Sometimes, we found abandoned dead children at our doorstep. Some had been eaten by hyenas.



'The Death House,' **Account** of Claire Couquiaud, MSF France Nurse in Kelala, 'Why Were We Expelled?' MSF France Special Publication on Ethiopia for the Media and Donors, December 1985 (in French). [D57](#)

**Extract:**

I wondered what 'resettlement' meant. We gathered statements but our mission in Kelala seemed to be removed from the problems. In the end, I finally understood and no longer had any doubts about the atrocity of the population transfers we witnessed and were powerless to act. These were the choices people faced; being hunted down, victimized by a settling of scores, pursued endlessly, or heading for transit camps! While in detention, they were crowded together without latrines. The crowding led to the rapid spread of disease, their already-scarce food rations shrank further over time, and armed men kept watch over them. In 10 days, the Kelala cemetery doubled in size. Our little MSF team was pushed aside from the beginning of the operation. Even so, we provided lots of advice regarding necessary hygiene and precautions in order to avoid epidemics. But the authorities seemed to have other things on their mind.

That is, until we decided to act without their authorisation. We discovered a death house. It was horrifying. The people who were still fit had been sent home temporarily to take care of their harvest, while waiting for the trucks to take them away. Only those who were unable to move remained on site. In the village community hall, naked women lay stretched out on the floor. They were extremely weak and covered with fleas and lice, lying in the midst of excrement. We were able to save these people, except for a marasmic woman and child. For them, as for so many others, it was already too late.



*In Kelala, we were asked to set up somewhere, but we noticed that we were just sitting around doing nothing and that there was another distribution centre. Indeed, we were there to provide cover for a government distribution centre. It was a trap for catching people. We were there to expand the trap.*

Rony Brauman, MSF France President (in French).

**In July and August, the International Federation of the Red Cross conducted a discreet evaluation in the resettlement areas. It sent the RRC its report describing the horrific living conditions of the people who had been transferred and resettled, but did not make the report public.**



David Blundy, 'Cover - Up,' *The Sunday Times*, 3 November 1985, (in English). [D58](#)

**Extract:**

The Red Cross League conducted a secret survey of the resettlement areas in July and August. It sent its findings to the RRC but did not make them public. In fact, the report was devastating. It said that people were resettled in appalling conditions, without medical facilities, sufficient food, or any infrastructure when they arrived at their destinations. Thousands of people from the highlands of Ethiopia succumbed to malaria when they moved to the mosquito-ridden swamps of the lowlands of southern Ethiopia. Red Cross field workers say they estimate that there was a 10% death toll, which means 50,000 people died. This figure is accepted as accurate by some Western governments although none of them would discuss it on the record.

**In August, the RRC asked people from the Maichew region, who had been transferred to Korem, to return home and authorised the Red Cross to provide them with regular cereal distributions.**



'Mass Deportations in Ethiopia,' Dr Claude Malhuret, Confidential MSF **Report**, December 1985, (in English). [D12](#)

**Extract:**

In August of 1985 the RRC asked refugees in the Korem camp who came from the Maichew region (about 12,000 out of roughly 50,000) to return to their homes. The International Red Cross correctly supported this initiative and handed out seeds, tools and food to everyone.

Furthermore, and this is essential, the Red Cross was authorised to distribute food every month at Korem so that the peasants who had returned home could come for regular re-provisioning.

**During the same period, the MSF France leadership learned that anthropologists working for the organisation Cultural Survival<sup>2</sup> were surveying Ethiopians fleeing forced resettlement who had taken refuge in the camps in eastern Sudan. These surveys confirmed the charges that MSF volunteers had been making for months. As the transfers were suspended temporarily, the team still hoped to gain authorisation to open a therapeutic feeding centre in Kelala. This hope prevented MSF from speaking out publicly.**



'Ethiopia Resettlement: The Evidence,' **Summarised Presentation** of Cultural Survival Investigation to the Meeting Held at Survival International on 29 March 1985 (in English). [D11](#)

**Extract:**

[...] The investigation had been titled 'Humanitarian Assistance and Development in the Horn of Africa' and had had a special emphasis on evaluating the effects of the resettlement programme in Ethiopia. The project was supported by individuals responding to a newspaper advertisement circulated in the US and also by aid agencies from the US with interests in the Horn of Africa.

A preliminary analysis of the results of the investigation will be presented as a Cultural Survival report in mid-April, while the final report is expected by the summer. What follows is no more than a first summary of the results of the investigation.

[...] The investigation was carried out by Bonnie Holcomb and Jason Clay for Cultural Survival who teamed up with Peter Niggle, a journalist who has also worked in Djibouti. Jason Clay interviewed Tigreans coming of Tigre, in the north. Peter Niggle worked in Damazin, where the Sudanese are congregating the refugees coming out of Wollega and Illubabor, and Bonnie Holcomb worked down in Yabus directly across the border from Asosa, an area where there were many Oromo.

[...] It was recognised that the interviewing of refugees would necessarily mean that the team only had access to information from those for whom the resettlement programme had been unsuccessful. Attempts to enter the

2. Several publications were based on these surveys: Peter Niggle, "Athiopien: Deportationen und Zwangsarbeitslager." Berliner Missionwerk: Mai 1985; Jason Clay and Bonnie Holcomb, "Politics and Famine in Ethiopia." Cultural Survival: Report n°20, November 1985.


area of the resettlement through Addis Ababa had been rebuffed. At present, access to the area through Addis Ababa is virtually impossible.

[...] Everyone interviewed claimed to have been involuntarily resettled and none of those interviewed had knowledge of settlers who had left the north voluntarily. On the contrary all had been taken from various different sites in the north by force. Some of those taken had not been suffering unduly from the famine and were actually abducted while engaged in threshing their grain. Men thus taken were separated from their families. Women had been taken in the market at nine months pregnant; others were separated from their babies.

It appears that in October 1984 populations had been lured to the feeding centres in the north by offers of free distribution of grain, oil, lentils etc. Once large groups had gathered at the centres, they were rounded up by soldiers and taken south. This pattern occurred throughout Tigre and in Wollo. The majority of those interviewed had been taken in November while the latest of those from the north had been taken in January.

[...] The practice had lately led to the peoples avoiding the feeding centres in the north as they feared being rounded up and sent off south. The details of the process of moving the people varied from area to area but followed a similar pattern.


In Wollo, which had been seriously affected by the famine, the men had been sent to the centres as representatives of the Peasants' Associations to gather grain. They had been told that strong young men with pack animals should be sent to carry the grain back to the Associations. The men were then taken and the animals left behind.

 *While I was on vacation, I received the Cultural Survival report from regions of the Sudan, plus some information from Ethiopia, but they hadn't carried out surveys in Ethiopia. I got it and I read the outlines. I said to myself, "It's quite clear." I began to think that this was equivalent to a Stalinist power. But at that time, the transfers had been suspended. I said to myself, "maybe they've chickened out; Maybe they're feeling the pressure. Maybe the Americans (this was during the Reagan years) and the European community are putting pressure on and they've postponed their project. We'll see later on. We can resume work under decent conditions. We're on a new operational footing; we'll expand the mission and do more." Everything was very confused. By September, they should have satisfied the conditions we had laid out in order to initiate the new site, but they had not.*

Rony Brauman, MSF France President (in French).

**On 17 September, the Christian Relief and Development Agency met with donor representatives. Father Jack Finucane, Head of Mission for the Irish aid organisation, Concern, was working in the resettlement camps in the south. He stated that in his opinion, " 15-20% of the farmers transferred had died during the transfer process and the first three months of resettlement." The MSF administrator noted these figures and sent them to Paris.**



Mass Deportations in Ethiopia,' Dr Claude Malhuret, MSF **Confidential Report**, December 1985 (in English ). **D12** 

**Extract:**

On September 17, 1985 a private meeting was held in Addis Ababa by many non-governmental organisations working in Ethiopia. In the course of the meeting, Father John Finucane, Director in Ethiopia of the organisation Concern, had closely followed the resettlement programme. He stated that he was of the opinion that at the end of three months, the death rate due to resettlement, based on the sum of deaths in the regroupment camps, during the journey and upon arrival, was in the order of 15 to 20%. None of the NGO representatives present seemed surprised by the figure. Given the fact that by then, more than 500,000 people had been transferred, this meant that the resettlement had already cost the lives of about 100,000 people. This estimate doesn't in any way seem exaggerated and agrees with statements by refugees who have made it to the camps in Sudan.

**On 7 October, the MSF medical coordinator in Ethiopia sent another written request to the Wollo province administrator requesting authorisation to open a therapeutic feeding centre in Kelala.**



**Telex** from Dr Bertrand Desmoulins to Comrade Shymalis, Wollo Administrator, 7 October 1985 (in English). **D59** 

**Extract:**

I would like to clarify a few points, concerning the visit of MSF mission in Kelala, on Friday 4 Octobre 1985. You gave MSF, the oral agreement on Friday, 21 June 1985 to open in Kelala, Borena Awraja, a dry supplementary food distribution programme. We were allowed to organise a wet feeding programme in order to avoid any gathering of people around the village. We were not supposed to do any general distribution. During the rainy season, the road from Akasta to Kelala was closed and no food arrived.

[...] The problem we faced was [due to] the lack of general distribution in town. The food was in fact, shared with the family members. We were aware of this. Now [that the] general distribution is about to start, the problems should be decreasing.

Even so, the children under 60% of W/H [weight for height] will have difficulties to gain weight, because they have to be closely looked after. The opening of a small therapeutic feeding centre for the children below 60% is a solution. Only 100 children could be admitted, at first, in order to avoid any gathering of people as you have mentioned this problem.

The MSF aim is to help the drought affected people.

**In mid-October, a debate began in the US regarding the abuses of the Ethiopian regime's famine policy. Jason Clay, Spokesperson for the Cultural Survival organisation, who had conducted a survey among Ethiopian refugees in Sudan, testified at a hearing in the House of Representatives.**



"Priority to Economic Rebuilding and in Africa," **AFP** (France), Washington, 5 November 1985 (in French).

**Extract:**

Testifying in mid-October before two subcommittees of the House of Representatives, a representative of Cultural Survival, a non-profit organisation based at Harvard and that includes several Harvard faculty members, spoke about its survey of Ethiopian refugees in Sudan. Jason Clay, the group's spokesperson, compared Mengistu Hailé Mariam's Marxist regime to the Khmer Rouge's Pol Pot regime in Cambodia. He also estimated that refugee resettlement in the south may have caused between 50,000 and 100,000 deaths.

**On 19 October, during a meeting of international aid organisations at the RRC's office, Father Finucane of Concern backtracked on his 17 September comments and minimised the number of deaths related to the population transfers.**



David Blundy, Cover-Up, **The Sunday Times** (UK), 3 November 1985 (in English). **D58** [↗](#)

**Extract:**

[...] Father Finucane was speaking on 19 October to

the officials of the Ethiopian government's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) in the capital, Addis Ababa. The commission's officials nodded vigorously. As members of the Marxist-Leninist government of Comrade Mengistu Haile Mariam, their relationship with Western agencies and governments is wary, often downright hostile. This was a rare moment of total accord.

Finucane was angry with the media. He said that they distorted the truth. Geldof had a copy of a Wall Street Journal report of an investigation by the American group, Cultural Survival, Inc. On the basis of 250 interviews with Ethiopian refugees, the investigation concluded that between 50,000 and 100,000 people had died as a direct result of the resettlement programme. "I've read it, I don't believe it," said Finucane. There had been problems, but nothing on that scale, he said. He had visited the areas - his own group worked in some of them - and he had seen no sign of the horrors the report described. One member of the audience, Michel Fiszbin, from the French medical group, Médecins Sans Frontières, listened to Finucane with what he described as disbelief and outrage. Fiszbin had been at another meeting exactly one month before where Finucane had addressed Western ambassadors about resettlement. The story he told at this private meeting, at the Hilton Hotel in Addis, where no press were present, was very different. Fiszbin's notes of Finucane's statement have been corroborated by Concern's head office in Dublin.

Finucane said that half a million people had been displaced in the first phase of the resettlement programme in "horrible conditions". He said that "out of 77 resettled areas, only two or three had succeeded." As a result, said Finucane, "100,000 people had died." Concern's head office in Dublin said that "Finucane's investigation of villages in the resettlement area showed that, in some cases, 25% of the people died." So which version is true?

**On 22 October, the MSF leadership was invited to a discussion at the British-American Press Club in Paris. The president of MSF France spoke about the difficulties the MSF teams faced in Ethiopia and the violent events they had witnessed since their arrival in April 1984. He specifically denounced the authorities' refusal to authorise the opening of a therapeutic feeding centre in Kelala and concluded by threatening that if the situation persisted, MSF would not be complicit in a criminal policy and would leave Ethiopia.**



David Blundy, 'Famine refugees Herded as Cattle,' **The Times** (UK), 27 October 1985, (in English). **D60** [↗](#)

**Extract:**

The row over Korem will add to the problems of Médecins Sans Frontières, which threatened to withdraw from

Ethiopia last week if restrictions were not lifted. The agency, which has 400 local staff at four feeding centres in Wollo, complained last week that the government had denied permission for intensive feeding for 2,000 children at the Kelala feeding camp in the province. The RRC official in Kelala, Negatu Yinam, told the agency that they could not set up intensive feeding because the government wanted the refugees to go back to their villages. The agency says hundreds of children are dying for lack of proper treatment because of this restriction.



'Interview with Rony Brauman, President of Médecins Sans Frontières: 'MSF Will Leave Ethiopia If...' *La Croix* (France), 1 November 1985 (in French).

#### Extract:

After four months, MSF has still not received the green light from Addis Ababa to open a nutrition centre in Kelala. Hundreds of children have already died for lack of treatment.

Journalist: Is it true that Médecins Sans Frontières is preparing to leave Ethiopia?

RB: MSF does not want to leave. We want to carry out our work appropriately. We have been seeking authorisation to open an intensive feeding centre in Kelala for four months, one of two centres in Sekota, Wollo province in northern Ethiopia. The other was opened thanks to funds from Chanteurs Sans Frontières. Since June, we have been asking the Ethiopian authorities to just give us the go-ahead because MSF will take care of everything in the field - from people to supplies. There is an intolerable bureaucratic blockage in the Ethiopian administration, meanwhile in Kelala, more than 6,000 children under 5 are suffering from very serious malnutrition. Several hundred children have already died for lack of treatment in four months. New deaths are recorded every day. How long will we stand by as children die? Things can't go on like this! Dying children - that's pretty tangible, isn't it?

Journalist: Is that why you are speaking out publicly about this?

RB: We tried to ease the situation quietly. In June, we notified the Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) of our request in writing. We also notified the Ethiopian national and regional authorities, the UN and the CDRA, the group that coordinates all the NGOs. We submitted a second request to the RRC last August, also in writing. In October, a new report was sent to Addis Ababa and, finally, we sent a telex, recently. Nothing happened! And now that we are speaking openly about the matter, the Ethiopian government is accusing MSF of using a disinformation campaign to undermine aid efforts for the famine victims. This is a question of basic ethics for MSF. We are in Ethiopia to work. We're not there just to pretend to be working and soothe our conscience by saying, "we are in the field! That's terri-

fic!" We believe that we have two contracts. The first is a moral one with the population we have come to help. The second is with our donors, to whom we are accountable. If we do not speak out, and if our message to the public at large is, "Move along, there's nothing to see here," we are violating those two contracts.

Journalist: So alerting the public is a moral issue?

RB: That's it: an issue of basic morality. Ethiopia cannot call on international aid, expect donors to close their eyes, and then do whatever it likes in the country! People will end up saying, "There are international teams in the field, so everything is fine." You've got to look beneath the surface. It reminds me of the Jewish orchestras in the Nazi concentration camps that were supposed to make it appear that everything was fine. That is not my idea of MSF. The confidence that people have in our organisation rests on its reputation for tangible and effective medical activity.

Journalist: But some people are already criticising MSF for using this for public relations purposes. Others, for playing the anti-Soviet card (Addis Ababa is known to have a close relationship with Moscow) and for moving humanitarian issues to the background.

RB: MSF is not some Narcissus, waiting for someone to hold up the mirror. Faced with the breadth of the Ethiopian tragedy, we had to mobilise public opinion so that resources would follow. Let me remind you that MSF has played a major role in the campaign for Ethiopia. Our first public alert dates back to 1982, on the BBC. As for those who criticise us for "putting politics first, they should put aside their grand principles, go out to the field and see the people working with MSF. I'm not the one launching a campaign against Ethiopia. Its MSF workers, on site, who wanted to quit over the last few days because they have been unable to do their work as health care providers in Kelala and in Korem. Did you know that as recently as the morning of Friday, 25 October, MSF found the Korem camp empty? The 25,000 refugees there had fled the militias who came to carry out the resettlement - that is, the deportation - of Ethiopians to the south. The militia managed to take 600 of them, including seriously ill people.



*We were invited to speak during a breakfast discussion with the Anglo-American Press Club in Paris. They usually invite top political figures, but someone cancelled. For months, Dominique Rigaud, our Communications Director, had been laying the groundwork to get us invited. She wanted to get stories in the New York Times. So we were invited. The Reuters journalist asked me about the key problems we were facing in the field at that point. I spoke about three situations: Sri Lanka, where the war was just starting and where we'd received death threats; the bombing of hospitals in Afghanistan, the maximum offensive, the total war, the attacks targeted at us to destroy people's morale; and Ethiopia. I told the Kelala story.*

"We were invited to set up, but we realized that it was purely cosmetic. We were there to draw people who were then carded off." No one cared about Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. But they were really interested in Ethiopia. I began to explain the situation. As I talked, I started getting excited. I know how I am when I start to get worked up, I get this buzz and I'm ready for a fight. I forget everything, as if it were something I already had in mind. Even as I was talking, everything became clear! It was like an epiphany! My road to Damascus! "It's so obvious - we're the 'useful idiots' [note: phrase attributed to Lenin to describe Westerners who would always excuse the Soviet Union's actions]." I put the whole puzzle together; the Cultural Survival report, the press conferences we were invited to with people who'd protested the population transfers and the brutalities and then retracted everything, the whole manipulation, all the humanitarian groups toing the line, the diversion of aid to the resettlement centres, and the mobilisation of logistical resources for transporting people. Everything was clear to me. And, that's when I let go; "if things go on like this, of course we will stop playing along with such a corrupt game, we'll stop being complicit in a criminal policy." I don't remember exactly what I said, but the basic idea was, "We need to leave."

[...] That's the power of telling a story, in the sense that it gives shape to a narrative to be recounted to people who aren't on the inside, who need you to lay out a chronology of the process and specific events. When we talked about it at MSF, we always took up the subject in the middle of things because we knew the whole story. We only talked about it with people who knew the story, whether in the field or here. We never went to the trouble of explaining the story from the beginning; to see how it developed over the 18 months we were there. It's the retelling after the fact that shed light on the entire story. I say, "shed light" because it wasn't a wild revelation or a hallucination. It was really what happened. For the rest, it was all there. The chronology and MSF's requests were there.

Rony Brauman, MSF France President (in French)

**The president's statement on MSF's possible departure from Ethiopia surprised the entire MSF France management team, which first reeled under the shock and then accepted it. The information quickly made the editorial rounds: "MSF Prepared to Leave Ethiopia."**

I was looking straight at Malhuret [MSF's Executive Director] and Dominique Rigaut [Communications Director] as I related all this. They had these shocked expressions on their faces. They couldn't image what had gotten into me and were absolutely furious that I would let myself go off like that, live, without our having talked

about it together. But as to the content, they didn't see any major disadvantages.

Dominique Rigaut was worn out because she had already prepared the women's press and the afternoon TV shows with "the smile of an Ethiopian child" for the December campaign. She didn't find anything funny in the situation. "What am I doing? I look like a jerk! I'm selling "the smile of an Ethiopian child" and you're talking about how aid is killing people! What are the funders going to say, etc. etc.?" "Well, yeah, we'll tell the funders, that's what's going on... Yes, I think that aid kills..."

Then Reuters sent out a wire story. By the time I got back to MSF, they had telexed it to us and AFP had picked it up. I grabbed the two stories and said to myself, "Oh my God, what did I say!" Malhuret's face was contorted with rage, his moustache was out of place and he said, "We are supposed to talk about all this beforehand!" I said, "Yes, but it just came out like that! ..." We argued for 15 minutes and then said, "Well, the die is cast, we've taken the plunge, we'll just try to keep our heads above water and we'll manage as best we can." In any event, we didn't have much time because while we were arguing, we were interrupted by phone calls from all the major French papers, *Libération*, *Le Monde*, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, asking for an explanation of what we'd just said. At the time, Ethiopia was an important news story. The British and American reporters were much cooler and detached. If you made contradictory remarks, they would call you on it; otherwise they just took it down. So they picked it up, quoting large passages of my speech. And then, of course, the right-wing French press, *Le Quotidien de Paris*, *Le Figaro*, etc. showed up. In any event, the leftist press was already anti-communist. By 1985, no one really cared about communism any longer, except the NGOs. So we got a very good reception from everyone and the story began to make a stir. *Libération* was very interested in it, particularly because Pierre Haski, the reporter who covered Ethiopia, came from Africa. He tried to find possible contradictions, but he was a decent guy.

Rony Brauman, MSF France President (in French).

Rony let loose during a lunch with the English language press. He didn't warn anyone. Everyone jumped on him, saying, "But what were you doing, saying that?" After two or three days, everyone agreed. I don't know whether there was a board meeting to discuss it, probably so.

Brigitte Vasset, MSF France Medical Coordinator in Korem, from April 1984 to May 1985 then MSF France Programme Manager Ethiopia (in French).

**On 23 October, the MSF France executive director again asked the head of the RRC, in writing, for autho-**

**risation to open a therapeutic feeding centre in Kelala and drew his attention to the problems supplying the Sekota site.**



'Telex from Dr Francis Charhon, Executive Director of MSF France to Dawit Wolde Georgis, RRC Chief Commissioner' 23 October 1985 (in French). [D61](#)

**Extract:**

[...] Despite major logistical problems, our programme in Sekota that has been operating since 15 June 1985 seems to have moved ahead according to objectives. The latest information suggests that the length of time between convoys is increasing. This creates growing problems with cereal supplies for general distribution, which is key to the population's overall nutritional status. For now, we have managed to bring in supplemental food for the intensive feeding centre, thanks to resources delivered by plane. We know the problems associated with transporting food, but we would like to call your attention to this point.

We were able to draft an action after an evaluation mission conducted at the request of and in collaboration with the RRC (Draft Project, 22 June 1985). After a delay resulting from local administrative problems, a preliminary team was able to get to work. Unfortunately, authorisation was granted only to distribute dry rations and it quickly became clear that this method would not address the catastrophic situation facing the children in this centre. Since then, we have requested authorisation to open an intensive feeding centre where we would provide around-the-clock care for severely malnourished children who cannot recover without receiving round-the-clock care. There are currently 6,127 registered children whose weight-height ratio is below 70% of normal.

When Dr Tamerat, the RRC's Medical Advisor, visited in August 1985, I personally informed him of this situation by letter, expressing our concerns. In September 1985, our Coordinator, Bertrand Desmoulins, went back to see Dr Tamerat in an effort to make progress on the problem. During that period, we provided 30 tonnes of grain to the Kelala administration to pay workers to rebuild the road so that aid could be moved by ground. That road is now passable. We also began developing water sources to improve drinking water supplies and, thus, sanitary conditions. During the Wollo administrator's two visits, we repeated our request to open an intensive feeding centre. We also sent a letter with a copy to the regional RRC.

The situation has become particularly critical. You will certainly understand that it is terrible for people, and unacceptable for doctors, to watch children - who could be treated and saved - die because care has been obstructed for administrative reasons. We have experienced problems in the past, and you have always helped us overcome them. That is why I am writing to you directly, knowing that you feel strongly about moving ahead on

these issues so that life can quickly return to normal in this region.

**On 24 October, the RRC accused MSF of conducting a disinformation campaign on the Ethiopian government's efforts to fight the famine and strongly suggested that the group leave the country.**



'Press Statement, RRC Ethiopia,' 24 October 1985 (in English). [D62](#)

**Extract:**

Allegations by Médecins sans Frontières (MSF-France) that the RRC had refused to permit it to open a feeding centre for 5,000 malnourished children in the Wollo region, have been widely disseminated by French and other Western media. The RRC has made its position on the issue clear in public statements refuting the charges made by MSF representatives. Following is a summary of the RRC's response for your information.

The allegation made by MSF that the RRC has refused to allow it to open a feeding centre near Kelala in the Wollo administrative region is both baseless and absurd. It is baseless because MSF has made neither a verbal nor a written request to the commission for opening a feeding centre for malnourished children there or elsewhere in the country. Secondly, it is absurd because the RRC's policy has always been and continues to be to encourage all those engaged in relief and rehabilitation activities in Ethiopia to expand the scope of their operations to the extent their resources permit, so as to meet the needs of as many families as possible in the drought affected areas of the country. It is therefore contrary to logic that the RRC is accused of acting to defeat its own ends - that of mitigating the suffering of millions of famine victims who are in dire need of emergency relief assistance.

MSF is one of the smallest of the 47 private charity organisations in Ethiopia and has made a useful but marginal contribution to the overall gigantic national and international relief effort with relatively less experienced and younger field workers.

As a result, MSF has always felt that its relief work is overshadowed by those of larger and more experienced charities and, therefore, sought to make its presence felt by making more noise than miracles. The threat by MSF to pull out of Ethiopia if it is not permitted to open a feeding centre (for which it has not applied in the first place) is just another clamour for media attention through which it hopes to gain credit that is not due.

Under the circumstances the RRC will accept its self-imposed resignation, of course, with reluctance, but

without question. MSF was not forced to come in the first place and cannot be forced to stay against its will. Its threat of withdrawal is, at best, a search for a 'cause celebre' for abandoning responsibilities it had assumed of its own volition and at worst, a malicious attempt to discredit the RRC. It is regrettable that MSF is waging a deliberate campaign of misinformation that would undermine an international relief effort which is widely acknowledged to be the best recorded in human history. By jeopardising the massive humanitarian undertaking in this manner, MSF is doing more damage than good and, in the final analysis, gaining less for the comparatively small contribution it has made to the overall relief effort.



'Aid Agency Pulls Out,' *The Guardian* (UK), Nairobi, 31 October 1985 (in English). [D63](#)

#### Extract:

The Ethiopian government accused a French-based relief agency yesterday of undermining the famine relief effort with a "campaign of disinformation" and suggested it leave the country. Ethiopia's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, which administers the international aid campaign, issued a statement saying, "Médecins sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders) had made baseless and absurd allegations against the RRC."

Last week, the director of Médecins sans Frontières, Dr Rony Brauman, said in Paris that Ethiopian authorities had rejected his organisation's request to open an emergency feeding centre for 5,000 children in the Kelala area of the north-central Wollo region.

The relief commission said it had received neither a verbal nor written request from Médecins sans Frontières to open the centre.



'Ethiopia: MSF', *Libération* (France), 31 October 1985 (in French).

#### Extract:

A running battle is underway between Ethiopia and Médecins Sans Frontières. The Addis Ababa government accuses the French humanitarian group of using a disinformation campaign to disrupt the flow of aid intended for famine victims. The Ethiopian authorities have even suggested that MSF leave the country. The authorities' anger was aroused by the MSF executive director's statement that the Ethiopians had denied the organisation's request to open a centre in the Wollo region.

**In Korem, authorities again prohibited aid organisations from distributing food to the people so that they would be forced to accept relocation, which had resumed.**



David Blundy, 'Cover-Up,' *The Sunday Times*, 3 November 1985 (in English). [D58](#)

#### Extract:

The government's other method of forcing people to move is more subtle but hardly less brutal. Médecins Sans Frontières says that a week ago the government banned the distribution of dry rations to 12,000 people who live near Korem camp. No reason was given. The agency has been prevented from giving intensive feeding to 5,000 children at the Kelala feeding camp in Wollo. Two thousand of these children are in desperate need, the agency says, and hundreds are dying.

Médecins sans Frontières can see only one reason why the government does not allow it to give humanitarian aid; the aim is to persuade people to resettle by depriving them of proper care in the areas in which they live. "The attitude is: resettle and you will be given food and assistance. Stay where you are and the government will not help you," said a senior British aid official who did not want to be named.



'Mass Deportations in Ethiopia,' Dr Claude Malhuret, Confidential **MSF Report**, December 1985 (in English). [D12](#)

#### Extract:

[...] But come October, the Ethiopian authorities' strategy became all too clear; the Red Cross is forbidden to distribute any more food to the people of Maichew at Korem. From that moment on, the people were in exactly the same predicament as before—that is—with nothing. There is no doubt that most of them will once again come looking for help and that they will be scooped up [for deportation] with impunity, well away from presence of foreign volunteers, who would certainly be outraged if the authorities came into the aid centres looking for 'candidates for departure.'

**In the middle of the night of 25 October, soldiers burst into the Korem camp, prompting 20,000 people to flee. In the morning, with MSF volunteers watching, 600 other people were forced, at gunpoint, to climb into trucks confiscated from Save the Children Fund and taken to the Dessie transit camp, awaiting departure to the south. The MSF teams do not have access to these transit camps. According to the SCF teams working there, living conditions are horrifying. In the following days, the international press reported on the violent events at the Korem camp.**



'The Difficulties of Carrying Out Humanitarian Activity in Ethiopia,' **Memorandum**, MSF France, October 1985 (in French). **D64**

**Extract:**

[...] A resettlement operation affecting 600 people was conducted on Friday, 25 October. The arrival of militia forces in the Korem camp prompted the majority of the population to leave for the nearby hills. They fled in a panic, leaving their few belongings behind (clothing and cooking utensils).

According to the Médecins Sans Frontières census, until the night of Thursday, the 24th, the Korem camp had housed some 25,000 people.

Note: The camp's organisation into four areas (children's feeding centre, groupings of huts, 190 green tents, 252 black tents), each with a known capacity, make it possible to assess the population quickly and regularly. The task was made even simpler because the same teams go to the different areas every day and are very familiar with them.

On the morning of Friday, the 25th, the camp seemed to have been emptied of its population. Only 6,000 people were there. The militia had gathered 600 in an enclosure for resettlement. Fifteen to 40 people were missing from each of the five hospital huts (150 patients per grouping).

On Sunday the 27th, after the BBC and RFI broadcast information about Friday's incident, a delegation came to Korem from Addis. It included David Alexander (Save the Children Fund), Dr Bertrand Desmoulins (Médecins sans Frontières), Tom Franklin and Paavo Pitkanen (United Nations), and Peter Zonderger (International Committee of the Red Cross).

The delegation noted that around 13,000 people were in the camp at the time of the visit. 6000 had remained and 7,000 had returned from the mountains.

A questionnaire survey conducted by United Nations staff confirmed that 20,000-25,000 people had been present until Thursday the 24th. On Tuesday the 29th, a Médecins Sans Frontières team counted 19,092 people. Around 6,000 people were still missing, compared to the number from the prior week. Among them were 42 hospitalised children and 64 hospitalised adults. At the conclusion of the Sunday, 27 October visit by the international organisations' representatives, the groups agreed to ask Ethiopian authorities the following five questions:

- 1) Were the population departures for the resettlement zones voluntary?
- 2) Was the ICRC authorised to distribute food to the people from Maitchew, as had been planned?
- 3) Why was there no consultation, as agreed, with humanitarian organisations?
- 4) Why were three Save the Children Fund trucks requisitioned for this operation?

5) Where are the people dispersed throughout the region? Are they authorised to return?

Other than a commitment not to use humanitarian groups' vehicles in the future to transport people to the transit centre (the step preceding actual resettlement), these questions remain unanswered.



David Blundy, 'Famine Refugees "Herded as Cattle,"', **The Times**, 27 October 1985 (in English). **D60**

**Extract:**

A thousand people were taken away from Korem last Wednesday, apparently for resettlement, according to members of the French group Médecins sans Frontières, which has 10 workers in the camp. The refugees were said to have been herded by local government militia men carrying sticks and whips on to a football field, then put in trucks and buses and driven away by government officials.

"There is no doubt that they were forced to leave," said a representative of the agency. "They were herded like cattle. Some of the people taken were still receiving medical treatment. Two of them were TB patients." The 10,000 refugees left the camp on Thursday and Friday because they feared a repetition of the raid, it was said. Last Monday when I visited the camp with Bob Geldof of Band Aid it contained 23,000 people. A government official said he hoped the camp would close in the next three months.

The resettlement of Ethiopians from Wollo and Tigre in the north to more fertile land in provinces in the southwest is the most controversial policy of the Ethiopian government's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC). In the past year, more than 500,000 have been resettled in terrible conditions. There has been a lull in the policy in the past five months but, an RRC official said last week that the resettlement would begin again.

There has been widespread criticism of the policy from Western governments and many of the 50 international agencies working in Ethiopia. The government maintains the motive is purely practical, but opponents say it is partly political; moving people from northern areas where the government faces an armed rebellion.



'Ethiopians Took Over Aid Trucks for Resettlement,' **Associated Press**, Addis Ababa, 30 October 1985 (in English).

**Extract:**

Local Ethiopia authorities commandeered trucks from a British volunteer relief agency for a resettlement operation that apparently caused thousands of famine victims to flee their camp, United Nations officials report.

Paavo Pitkanen, a UN official who inspected the camp

at Korem, said Monday that two trucks of the Save the Children Fund were among five used Friday to take about 600 people from the Korem camp to a transit facility in the town of Dessie. They were to be resettled in southwestern Ethiopia.

Relief officials said rumours of the impending resettlement prompted most of Korem's more than 20,000 residents to flee to the surrounding mountains late Thursday and early Friday. About half were back by Sunday, and relief officials predicted that most of the others would return in the next few days to the camp, which is 250 miles (400 kilometres) north of Addis Ababa in the Wollo region.

Local officials previously forced residents of relief camps in northern Ethiopia to return to their home areas. Desmond Taylor, acting Head of the UN Emergency Operations Office in Addis Ababa, said local Ethiopian officials who carried out the resettlement operation at Korem had not received authorization from Save the Children to use its trucks. He said the matter was being discussed "on a local level." Save the Children's Field Director in Ethiopia, David Alexander, visited Korem on Sunday but could not be reached for comment. An official of another relief agency, who did not want to be identified, said two Save the Children employees were asked to drive the trucks and were detained briefly because they refused.

Ethiopia's Marxist government has maintained that famine victims are cooperating voluntarily with the resettlement program, but critics say the government is trying to reduce the peasant population in the north to decrease support for rebel movements in the area. Peter Sonderegger, Deputy Head of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Ethiopia, said his organization received reports that some people were beaten as they were loaded aboard the outbound trucks. Mr Pitkanen said more of the people sustained bruises, but that there was no serious violence.



'By Accident,' **Account** of Catherine G., MSF France Nurse in Korem, MSF France Special Publication on Ethiopia for the Media and Donors,' December 1985, (in French). [D57](#)

#### Extract:

My six-month contract in Ethiopia had ended. On the way back to Addis Ababa, I stopped in Dessie, where there is a transit centre for the deported populations. A woman approached me in tears. I recognized her. Her mother, an amputee, had remained in Korem. She seemed frightened and terrorized and explained that she was leaving for "resettlement." From that moment on, she did not leave my side. An MSF truck leaving for Korem was going to take her back. I was terribly upset but reassured her about where she was going. Like so many others, this woman did not choose to leave. They were forced to leave, while the influx of international aid made it possible for us to help these people stay at home and recover from the famine's effects...



*All the transit camps were forbidden and there was a huge one in Dessie where they put all the people captured from the Wollo. That was one of the places, along with the Tigre, where the famine had hit hardest. People from Tigre were moved by plane. They were loaded like livestock in the Antonov planes, which had been arranged to transport food. We were not allowed to go around the planes. I don't know if I saw them or if I imagined seeing them. I think the planes were described to me because they were careful not to let anyone see what was going on. We certainly passed buses with people inside. In Dessie, the SCF teams were able to see the transit camp and they were the ones who told us about it and provided the mortality rates. It was horrifying. They told us that people were committing suicide because they didn't want to leave.*

Brigitte Vasset, MSF France Medical Coordinator in Korem, from April 1984 to May 1985 then MSF France Programme Manager Ethiopia (in French).

**On 28 October, observing that it was impossible to obtain the minimum conditions required to conduct humanitarian activities, the MSF France President obtained approval from the board of directors to speak publicly about the problems.** [V9](#)



**Summary of the Board Meeting**, MSF France, 28 October 1985, (in French). [D65](#)

#### Extract:


[...] The missions: 1) Ethiopia  
In Ethiopia, MSF works in four centres in Wollo province: Kobo and Korem since May 1984, Kelala and Sekota since June 1985. These latter two centres were opened thanks to money from the sale of the Chanteur sans Frontières record. For four months, the Kelala medical team's hands have been tied as they had to watch the deaths of hundreds of children, the vast majority of whom could have been saved by a nutrition centre. Despite MSF's many requests, the Ethiopian authorities have still not authorised the opening of this centre.

On Thursday 24 October, the Korem camp had a population of 24,000. The following day, it contained no more than 6,000 displaced persons, the others having fled into the mountains because of the threat of massive relocations to the south of the country.


Given the gravity of these difficulties and the impossibility of overcoming them through normal channels of dialogue, the situation was raised at a meeting with the Anglophone press in Paris. Rony Brauman announced that the situation was such that the minimum conditions for genuine humanitarian action were no longer respected, and called into question the presence of MSF

in Ethiopia. This declaration provoked a sharp reaction from the Ethiopian government. Taking advantage of the visit to France of Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Director of the Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC), Rony Brauman suggested that MSF alert the public to these difficulties.

The Ethiopian policy of resettlement was discussed. The transplantation of several hundred thousand people, undertaken in inhuman conditions, was indefensible. The events we have recently experienced in Korem are proof of this. In these disastrous conditions, the resettlement of the population - the forced integration of northern farmers into collective southern farms - poses a very serious problem for all humanitarian organisations. The administrative council unanimously decided to pull out all the stops to obtain this authorisation and stressed the importance that MSF attaches to condemning every obstacle that denies people access to care.

 *At the Board meeting in autumn 1985, we plainly stated the question of the physical existence of MSF and the position I have defended since I became president. This was: "We don't care about MSF. If we simply ignore what we know and think, then what is the point of our existence? If MSF can't get that across, we will create something else, another NGO. MSF is a tool, it's not a value." Everyone, the entire AC, accepted that MSF is risking its existence as an NGO. We thought that all the African heads of state would regard MSF members as spies, as a kind of medical Amnesty International, which went there for the purpose of denunciation. But strangely, this did not happen. One always anticipates too much. Before the fall of the Soviet Union, the Pope said: "do not be afraid." I found that much more profound. He was right. The Soviet system began to crack when fear itself cracked. When the pickaxe struck the Berlin Wall, we saw that it was only a wall crumbling under pickaxe blows, and people were not afraid anymore. Well, Ethiopia was our own little Berlin Wall; we were not afraid, we did it openly. I've always said that MSF managed to attract people with conviction because nobody went into it for the money or employment. We had nothing to lose.*

Rony Brauman, MSF France President (in French).

 *I think that MSF took an enormous risk in speaking publicly. We started biting the hand that fed us. There were the Chanteurs Sans Frontières, we were making the front page in lots of newspapers. Ouest-France had done a huge campaign. Everybody was giving us money and we were saying: "Oh no, it's not working out." It was an enormous risk in institutional terms. We discussed it. We wondered: "are we biting the hand that feeds us?"*

Brigitte Vasset, MSF France Medical Coordinator in Korem, from April 1984 to May 1985 then MSF France Programme Manager Ethiopia (in French).

**On 29 October, Kurt Jansson, the UN representative in Ethiopia, put the compulsory element of the transfers into a broader perspective and urged donors to finance the resettlement programme.**



Jonathan Steele, 'Appeal to Support Resettling of Ethiopia Families,' *The Guardian* (UK), 29 October 1985 (in English). [D66](#)

**Extract:**

Western governments should support Ethiopia's programme of resettling famine-stricken peasants because otherwise it would fail. Mr Kurt Jansson, the Head of UN operations in Ethiopia, said yesterday. Mr Jansson, who ended a year's tour of duty this weekend, told reporters in London that the programme had many problems, which he had mentioned to the Ethiopian leader, Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, at a farewell meeting last week. "I told him it was poorly planned, had been done haphazardly, and a lot of effort would be needed to make it succeed", he said. There was also a serious problem of families having been split. In one survey of settlers from Wollo province, 15% of families were without a parent or at least one child.

But, in spite of these difficulties, Mr Jansson urged Western governments to end their refusal to aid the programme, under which half-a-million people have been moved to more productive regions of the country. Wilder critics of the programme have compared it to Pol Pot's murderous effort to depopulate Kampuchean cities, but Mr Jansson, who served as UN Relief Coordinator in Kampuchea after the Pol Pot era, made it clear he had no sympathy for the analogy. He said that last week's sudden panic at the relief camp of Korem, when about 6,000 fled to avoid resettlement, was over. UN field monitors, with whom he went up there on Friday, his last day in Ethiopia, along with Mr David Alexander, Head of the Save the Children Fund's Ethiopian office, had told him by telephone on Sunday that the people were coming back. It appeared that assurances had been given that no more people would be resettled.

The original scare started when people were registered for resettlement and some 600 were put in lorries. But Mr Jansson stressed that it was not certain that all 600 were moved against their will. He saw it as a good sign that the problem had been defused so quickly, unlike an earlier crisis in May, when people were expelled from a camp at Ibat.

On wider issues, Mr Jansson said that all the donors' targets for grain delivery to Ethiopia have been met. The transport problem was close to a solution with the first of 100 Band Aid lorries arriving, 150 coming from US aid, 100 from Italy and 40 from West Germany. The target for distribution within the country was not yet up to the hoped for 100,000 tonnes a month, but the shortfall of 20,000 tonnes was due to transport difficulties and not to diversion by the government as was sometimes alleged.

**On 31 October, during a press conference to mark his visit to Paris, RRC director Dawit Georgis was asked about Kelala. He said that MSF would be allowed to open the centre in the next few days. In fact, this authorisation would never be given. Dawit Georgis did not return to Ethiopia and asked for political asylum in the United States several weeks later.**



'New Appeal for International Aid for Ethiopia'.  
*AFP*, Paris, 31 October 1985, (in French).

#### Extract:

On Wednesday, Dawit Wolde Giorgis, the official responsible for relief operations in Ethiopia, launched a new appeal for international aid to save approximately six million people who face starvation and malnutrition in 1986. "Despite the arrival of the rains, 5,800,000 people still need help," he stressed at a press conference during his tour to raise awareness in Europe and the United States. "The supplies we were sent in 1985 have already been exhausted. From 11 December, we will need 1.1 million tonnes of cereals," said Mr Dawit, who is also a prominent member of the Marxist regime in Addis Ababa. While praising the international response to the 1985 emergency, he stressed the importance of rehabilitation and reconstruction, and particularly the need for seed stock, equipment and medicines, as well as cereals, in 1986.

Mr Dawit held talks in Paris with an official from the ministry of cooperation and development and representatives from humanitarian organisations, including Médecins Sans Frontières. According to reliable sources, he indicated in his discussions with the latter that he would settle the problem of the opening of a childcare centre in Kelala, describing the recent controversy between MSF and the Ethiopian authorities as a "misunderstanding."

Dr Claude Malhuret from MSF made clear to Mr Dawit that since July, his organisation had "cared for malnourished populations at Kelala", and that he had been confronted with several thousand children, 600 of whom were 60% below normal weight. "Since August, we have been repeatedly asking, verbally and in writing, for authorisation to treat them, but have received no response", he added.



Christian Chardon, 'Médecins Sans Frontières: The Insidious Blackmail of Ethiopia,' *Le Parisien Libéré* (France), 1 November 1985 (in French). [D67](#)

#### Extract:

The running battle between Médecins Sans Frontières and the Ethiopian Government led by the dictator Mengistu flared up again yesterday morning. The French humanitarian organisation claims it is being prevented from assisting endangered people, as the regime in Addis Ababa refuses to allow the opening of an emergency feeding centre for 5,000 children in the Kelala region of northern Ethiopia. "If the Ethiopians do not accept our proposition, we will pull out," said Dr Rony Brauman, the head of Médecins Sans Frontières. Such a departure would likely please the Ethiopian authorities, who have already suggested that Médecins Sans Frontières leave the country... Then the miracle occurred.

During talks between Dr Brauman and Mr Dawit [Georgis], director of the Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC), at the Ethiopian embassy in Paris yesterday afternoon, a solution was found that guarantees the chance of survival for the 5.8 million Ethiopians who will still require food aid in 1986.

[...] Until today, he had been refusing to allow MSF to set up a feeding centre in order to avoid an excessive concentration of people around Kelala. But for once, good sense has prevailed. Médecins Sans Frontières has obtained the authorisation it sought and the centre should be opened in two days time.



*Dawit Georgis, the head of the RRC came to Paris. He held a press conference, which Rony and I attended. We attacked him over Kelala because that's where the controversy was centred: "MSF can't care for the people, the children are dying, it's not working out. Why aren't we allowed to?" The reason was that they didn't want this site to be too comfortable, because people were not supposed to stay in Kelala. We were not supposed to create a camp. Now, if we were setting up a therapeutic centre, we were going to create a camp. This was not to happen, the people were either supposed to return to their homes or move to the south. It was forbidden to open anything fixed. At the press conference we put the Kelala ques-*

tion to Dawit, who went green. The French journalists kept pressing him. He said that we had never requested authorisation; that everything was going very well. He then went on a tour of Europe and America and did not return to Ethiopia. That was the first defection. Dawit was a very, very important gentleman. He was probably part of the politburo. He was the general-in-command who had launched the great 'Red Star' offensive on Eritrea in the early 80s...I wouldn't say he defected because of Kelala, but he didn't go back after that visit.

Brigitte Vasset, MSF France Medical Coordinator in Korem, from April 1984 to May 1985 then MSF France Programme Manager Ethiopia (in French).

**The November issue of *Le Monde Diplomatique* returned to the subject of Liberté Sans Frontières and published the right of reply of the President of MSF France. This was a response to the dossier in the May issue and an article by the head of MSF Belgium.**



Rony Brauman, 'The Controversy over Humanitarian Aid and its Political Uses - Third-Worldism: Intentions and Results,' *Le Monde Diplomatique* (France), November 1985, (in French). [D68](#)

#### Extract:

The Liberté Sans Frontières foundation is alleged to be the 'offspring of two organisations' known for their adherence to the right: the Resistance of the International [Internationale de la Résistance], and Intellectuals for Freedoms in Europe [CIEL -Comité des Intellectuels pour l'Europe des Libertés].

No organisation of any description led to the formation of Liberté Sans Frontières. And while it is true that several members of the Liberté Sans Frontières administrative council belonged to CIEL (they distanced themselves from it several years ago) and to the Internationale de la Résistance (which they are still members), it should be recalled on the one hand that these movements, and particularly the Internationale de la Résistance, combine many personalities from across a political spectrum that defies easy definition. Are Arrabal, Olivier Todd and members of the Italian Socialist Party, among many others, to be classed as right-wing?

On the other hand, the stature of the members of Liberté Sans Frontières' administrative council that A. Gresh did not mention serve to refute the 'ideological choices' attributed to us. He could have included Jacques Giri [...] and Gilbert Etienne [...], experts in rural development; Joseph Klatzmann [...], professor of agronomy; Jacques Dupâquier [...], demographic historian; and

Michel Salomon [...], a specialist in health problems. As with the members of Médecins Sans Frontières, their engagement in the field makes them particularly attentive to the human consequences of the failures they have had to witness. Or Octavio Paz, the first member of the International Committee of Sponsorship (Comité International de Parrainage).

[...] All organisations of solidarity devote a part of their resources, sometimes considerable, to debate and information. As far as Médecins Sans Frontières is concerned, the choice is simple. Our General Assembly has decided to allocate a very small part of its resources to Liberté Sans Frontières: less than 5%. So far, the share of the budget allocated to Liberté Sans Frontières amounts to 0.35%. [...] By denying the relevance of the concept of the Third World, we are emphasising that there is no global approach or solution to the problems shared by the world's poor countries. Does the crisis that Argentina has been undergoing for the last ten years have any value as an example? Does it illustrate, as Claude Julien's article suggests, the cynicism of the western powers? Is it a model of the relation of dominance that the north continues to impose on the south?

[...] The existence of economic links between the various countries of the world does not imply that these links are at the origin of the crises or catastrophes that strike one or several of these countries.

Liberté Sans Frontières is alleged to be the champion of unbridled liberalism as a remedy for under-development.

No Liberté Sans Frontières document promotes the idea that market forces are the only dynamic on which to rely, or that private enterprise is the only way forward for poor countries.

What we are saying, on the other hand, is that the burden of human error and bad local political decisions, rather than external elements, is the determining factor in a number of tragic situations.



Philippe Laurent, 'The Controversy Over Humanitarian Aid and its Political Uses - Solidarity and Ideological Non-alignment,' *Le Monde Diplomatique* (France), November 1985 (in French). [D68](#)

#### Extract:

When it stridently launched the Liberté Sans Frontières foundation at the beginning of this year, Médecins Sans Frontières not only succeeded in fanning the controversy over Third-Worldism, it also provoked the fragmentation of the Médecins Sans Frontières movement itself. The initiative was paradoxical, to say the least. Médecins Sans Frontières presents itself as an apolitical organisation. Four of the five articles of its founding charter

develop this principle. Its goal is to bring rapid medical assistance to distressed populations. The Liberté Sans Frontières foundation, on the other hand, directly situates its non-medical activities in the political field.

Therefore, there is an incompatibility between MSF and LSF. Now MSF France provides LSF with funding, premises and senior staff; it provides the foundation with logistical support and a moral guarantee, which invites notoriety. In the light of this ambiguity, MSF Belgium decided in April 1985 to cease all collaboration with its French counterpart as long as there was no clear distinction between the latter and LSF.

[...] The use of the term 'apolitical' often provokes the reaction; 'but there is no such thing; every act has a political significance.' Yet common sense allows most people to use the word to make the distinction with politics and still understand each other. What is important here is the intention; is the act fundamentally ideological? This sometimes allows us to distinguish between the distribution of electoral pamphlets and a consultation in a clinic in the bush. Some would say that ensuring medical care can help to strengthen a power. We would reply that improving the health of a population has never prevented changes taking place. The discussion can go on forever.

[...] At a time when society is generating a powerful current of solidarity completely divorced from any fundamentally ideological position, when this current is being nurtured by a global community that is increasingly mastering its possibilities, MSF France is turning to politics. Is this a matter of chance or necessity? Is this an isolated accident linked to the random action of a few individuals? Or is it a significant event, which indicates that an apolitical movement is by nature unstable, and can only anchor itself by turning to politics? Has MSF France, at the peak of its fame, found itself at an impasse?

However, there is plenty of space for the new adventurers to explore the 'field of the possible.' The techniques of rapid medical assistance must be further improved, it is imperative to establish a system that would give early warning of famine, more attention should be devoted to the formation of an expatriate medical corps to work in the Third World. The creation of a European university focused on the problems of developing countries - and in collaboration with them - could help such countries to emerge from the feudalism that currently afflicts them.

The acquisition and improvement of techniques are perhaps more mundane. It is tedious, self-effacing and, in the eyes of some, second-rate work. But it is effort of this kind, rather than the resort to grand gestures, that will allow the impulses of the heart to find legitimacy in effective action.

**On 3 November, the *Sunday Times* published an article on the scandal of forced transfers and the silence of aid organisations. Contradictory statements by Concern's Head of Mission concerning transfer and resettlement conditions angered the MSF administrator in Ethiopia. The article depicted MSF as the only relief organisation prepared to speak out publicly.**



David Blundy, 'Cover-up,' *The Sunday Times* (UK), 2 November 1985, (in English). [D58](#)

#### **Extract:**

At least 50,000 and possibly as many as 100,000 Ethiopian peasants have died this year as a direct result of their government's resettlement programme, according to the secret evidence of international relief agencies and Western government sources in Addis Ababa. The relief agencies, however, have refused to publish this evidence because they fear that Ethiopia's Marxist government will expel them and that such horrific news may dry up donations from the West.

But an American organization, Cultural Survival Inc, will shortly publish the results of its interviews with 250 Ethiopian refugees in Sudan. This report has already been condemned by the Ethiopian government and, publicly at least, by some aid agencies in Addis. The government in Addis Ababa maintains that it needs to resettle more than 1m people to the south because the land they farm in northern Ethiopia is eroded and useless.

However, the *Sunday Times* had reviewed unpublished evidence from three international aid agencies, based on interviews carried out in Ethiopia, which strongly suggests that the Cultural Survival report is true. A secret report by the League of the Red Cross shows that conditions in the resettlement areas of southern Ethiopia have been appalling. The peasants have lacked food, housing, tools, seed and medical facilities. The sanitation of their villages has, in many cases, been non-existent. Those resettled from the Ethiopian highlands have died in their tens of thousands from malaria, in the mosquito-infested swamps of the lowlands.


Many people died in transit because they were sick and malnourished when they set out. They had hopelessly inadequate medical facilities and traveled in overcrowded conditions. There is also evidence that thousands of people were forced to move by Ethiopian militia-men. They were herded 'like cattle' into trucks and buses at feeding centres and villages in the north, according to a member of the French organization Médecins sans Frontières.

[...] There is no doubt that the international agencies and Western governments covered up the horrors that occurred during resettlement earlier this year. They have two fears: that the Ethiopian government, which is extre-

mely sensitive to criticism, will stop co-operating with them and even expel them; and that stories which reflect badly on the Ethiopian government will help to dry up the donations from the West. Publicly, aid officials refuse to discuss the issue.

[...] But in private conversations with other aid workers, the dark side of resettlement begins to emerge. A senior member of a British agency said that, according to his statistics from transit camps and resettlement areas, about 50,000 people died earlier this year.

[...] The only agency which is willing to speak out about the terrible death toll and the conditions of resettlement is Médecins sans Frontières which now faces expulsion by the Ethiopian government. As the head of the RRC said 'Médecins sans Frontières has the biggest mouths and they do the least, I am showing them the door and they can go straight through it.'

 During a meeting of the CRDA [Christian Relief and Development Association], the guy from Concern quoted a mortality figure and Michel Fizbin repeated it in public. That was the start of hostilities. Concern said that it was not normal practice to repeat that figure.

Brigitte Vasset, MSF France Medical Coordinator in Korem, from April 1984 to May 1985 then MSF France Programme Manager Ethiopia (in French).

**On 4 November, MSF recommended a three-month moratorium on the transfers so that a commission of enquiry could clarify three points: the viability of the northern territories and the possibility of local resettlement; resettlement conditions in all the areas concerned; freedom of choice and the non-separation of families.**

**These recommendations were contained in a report written by Claude Malhuret, General Director of MSF France, whose descriptions of mass deportations in Ethiopia were based on all the information collected by MSF including witness' and medical observations by volunteers from the various organisations working in the camps; data provided by Concern; a report by anthropologists from WFP and USAID; and texts and keynote speeches by the Ethiopian authorities themselves.**



Pierre Haski, 'Ethiopia: Médecins Sans Frontières Condemns the Population Transfers' *Libération* (France), 5 November 1985 (in French).

#### **Extract:**

Rony Brauman, president of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), has called for an international commission of enquiry to be sent to Ethiopia. His demand comes at a time when fresh accusations are being leveled against the Ethiopian policy of population transfers. By advocating such a step, the president of MSF is taking a risk; his organisation is already under threat of expulsion from Ethiopia after several run-ins with the authorities in Addis Ababa.

On Sunday, the London Sunday Times caused a considerable stir in international aid circles by publishing a sizeable dossier entitled 'Cover-up'. Its investigation, which relied heavily on a secret report drawn up by the League of Red Cross Societies and an assessment by the Irish organisation Concern, seems to confirm that between 50,000 and 100,000 people have died in Ethiopia because of the government policy of population resettlement.

While not endorsing these figures, Rony Brauman told *Libération* yesterday that the government policy of "resettlement" has caused "tens of thousands of deaths." He claimed that Ethiopian peasants, taken for the most part by force to resettlement areas in the south of the country, are "arbitrarily" rounded up when they are "psychologically weak", and eventually transported to regions where "acceptable conditions are non-existent". Moreover, in ethnic terms, these regions are foreign to them. In short, he added, "all the ingredients are there for a terrible human disaster."

[...] MSF and Ethiopia were already at loggerheads over another issue: The humanitarian organisation, one of the first to arrive in the country, has been clamouring loud and long since June for the opening of a children's feeding centre at Kelala, where an MSF medical team is operating thanks to the proceeds from Chanteurs Sans Frontières. Given the absence of official reaction, MSF, under pressure from its teams in the field, decided to speak out, believing that if the "minimum conditions for genuine humanitarian action are no longer respected", the organisation's presence in Ethiopia could be called into question. "We are not forcing you to stay here," replied the Ethiopians.

Are such 'outbursts' appropriate? "You can't cover up everything forever on the pretext that it's necessary to save what can be saved", replies Dr Brauman, who fears that Ethiopia will become a future scandal. "I'm setting a date for the next famine in the south", he said.

Keep quiet and get on with the aid? The eternal debate over aid to Ethiopia is all the more delicate as everyone

agrees that it is necessary to continue to assist its populations, who still need at least one million tonnes of cereal from international aid sources this year. An independent commission of enquiry would clear the air, but the chances of Addis Ababa agreeing to this are almost non-existent.



'Tens of Thousands Died During the Transfers,' *Le Monde* (AP, AFP), 8 November 1985 (in French).

#### Extract:

On Thursday 7 November, Rony Brauman, President of the humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), called for the opening of a commission of enquiry into the resettlement programme in Ethiopia. According to witnesses, including members of MSF, these transfers are enforced "by the threat of arms", and living conditions in the transit centres are "appalling." According to the Irish humanitarian organisation Concern, quoted by MSF, about 20% of those displaced die or are dead on arrival. Moreover, the British weekly *The Sunday Times* estimates that at least 50,000 Ethiopian peasants - perhaps 100,000 - died in 1985 because of the resettlement programme organised by the government in Addis Ababa. On 3 November, *The Sunday Times* published an article by its correspondent in the Ethiopian capital, which referred to confidential information held by international relief organisations. A secret Red Cross report is alleged to suggest that populations from the north were transferred to the south in 'frightful' conditions, and that tens of thousands have died from malaria in the marshes.



Dr Claude Malhuret, 'Mass Deportations in Ethiopia'. MSF Confidential **Report**, December 1985 (in French). [D12](#)

#### Extract:

##### Introduction:

For over two years, the international community has been mounting a massive effort to assist the people of Ethiopia, victims of one of the worst famines in history. Hundreds of thousands have succumbed over the course of these two years. But the extent of the efforts under way and the return of the rains allow for some scope to view the future with cautious optimism.

Now it is precisely at this moment of renewed hope that the Ethiopian government has chosen to forge ahead with its gigantic transfer of populations. This operation, which has already resulted in tens of thousands of deaths, runs the risk, if it is pursued to its conclusion, of claiming as many victims as the famine itself. Public opinion, like the western governments that have done so much for Ethiopia, is doubly concerned.

longer has any connection with a natural catastrophe, but stems from a human decision. On the other, this operation is unfolding in conditions that constitute one of the most massive violations of human rights in recent years, and is being conducted thanks to the material and financial means provided by international aid, which has been crudely diverted from its objectives.

The huge resettlement operation began in the winter of 1984-85, after an interruption it resumed on a large scale two months ago. It has already resulted in a disaster of considerable proportions; various observers have put the death toll at between 50 and 100,000. Its continuation can only swell the number of victims and continue to hinder the distribution of aid in the affected areas of the north.

The principle of resettlement itself is probably debatable, given the paucity of studies conducted up to the present as to the possibilities of improving existing agriculture and to the real possibilities of farming lands in the west and southwest. But for the moment, the essential point lies elsewhere. The essential point is to put a stop, as soon as possible, to the conditions under which resettlement is currently taking place. In order to achieve this, it seems to us that the only conceivable proposition is a moratorium of at least three months. This should be urgently requested of the Ethiopian government.

A moratorium would allow a commission of international experts to go into the field and question the peasants who have been displaced, as well as those in the departure zones. The commission should also study the viability of lands available on the high plateaus of the north as well as the possibilities of suggested areas in the south and west. Finally, it could, if the principle of resettlement appears justified - which is quite possible - suggest solutions so that it can be conducted properly, notably on the matter of ensuring that candidates are willing to leave from the outset.



*Malhuret shut himself away in his office for three or four days, putting together all the information from Michel Fizbin, our administrator in Addis Ababa, and the Ethiopian documents, which were full of indications on the way they were envisaging the management of international aid. He produced this very clinical report on the transfers and stamped it 'confidential' so that it received widespread coverage... Three times a week, the BBC published comprehensive accounts of the speeches it recorded from various public radio stations throughout the world in their original languages, then translated and circulated them. There were these little books with hundreds of pages of speeches by Mengistu, Party cadres, etc ... François Jean made great use of these documents when he wrote 'Du bon usage de la famine'. They were the basis of his work.*

**On 14 November, Paris-Match, a widely circulated French magazine, published an interview with the president of MSF France in which he condemned the misappropriation of aid and its use for forced transfer operations.**



'In Ethiopia, Your Money Finances Massive Deportations', **Interview** with Rony Brauman, Paris-Match, 14 November 1985,(in French).

#### **Extract:**

Fifty to a hundred thousand deaths in Ethiopia! Not through starvation, but through deportation! Mengistu Haile Mariam ordered the relocation of over three million people from the high plateaus of the north to the so-called fertile plains of the south. Hundreds of thousands of starving, half-dead people were herded like cattle onto convoys of lorries. A massive deportation financed by international aid lost in the maze of administration cooked up by the Marxist-Leninist Workers' Party. Taking advantage of western donations, Mengistu chose the moment when famine is ravaging his country to empty the north of its inhabitants in order to isolate the rebels operating in Eritrea and Tigre, who have been threatening the regime in Addis Ababa for more than twenty years.

The Party's Secretary General has reversed Maos theory, stating 'revolution is to the masses as a fish is to water,' but he now intends to drain the river in order to catch the fish. Even if, as in Pol Pot's Cambodia, thousands of his people lose their lives. By dumping these peasants on the plains, which are easier to control than the mountains, the 'Red Negus' [Negus is the title given to the Ethiopian Emperor] to create the 'new man,' with the assistance of the ten thousand Soviet and Cuban military advisers supporting his regime.

Rony Brauman, the president of Médecins Sans Frontières (which has several teams working in the Ethiopian refugee camps), has broken the silence surrounding this massacre in the hope that western democracies will finally be forced to act.... Because they have already killed between 50,000 to 100,000 people! So far, 512,000 of the 6 million refugees affected by the famine have been relocated to the south.

The Aid Minister, Dawit Wolde Giorgis, told me that he intended to resettle as many as possible. The official reason is that the southern lands are fertile and sparsely populated, unlike those of the north. This argument does not stand up because the north has had rain and the soil has not suddenly become exhausted over the course of two years! A few areas are effectively unproductive, but the vast majority of the land is still capable of feeding millions of people...

At Kelala, 25,000 people will shortly be resettled. Now this region has had rain and the cereal harvest looks

promising. The authorities have forbidden Médecins Sans Frontières to erect a feeding centre for the 8,000 children who are dying of starvation there. The Party is afraid that a centre will encourage the population to stay in the area, who are marked for evacuation to the south.

Christine Meunier, a Médecins Sans Frontières nurse, and John Mitchell, an administrator from the United States, met a group of one hundred and fifty people in this region; they had no food or baggage and were surrounded by ten armed militiamen. One of the refugees told them: "they forced me to leave... I had to abandon my pregnant wife and my children. What's going to happen to my oxen and my harvest?" Here is proof indeed that it is possible to survive in the north. The deportees are selected at random during the course of brutal round-ups, they are destined to fill the blind quotas fixed by the government.

PM: In what conditions is this exodus taking place?

RB: Under duress, in a climate of violence. At the end of October, in the Korem camp where Médecins Sans Frontières is working, the militia suddenly turned up just before dawn. They were there to collect refugees. People were being terrorised and fled into the mountains in total panic, abandoning what little they possessed. A third of the patients in our hospitals also fled. Only the disabled stayed behind! Six thousand people were surrounded and 600 were sent to the Dessié transit centre that same day. When they got there they were herded into an enclosure guarded by militia armed with clubs and Kalashnikovs. Party officials even requisitioned three lorries belonging to 'Save the Children,' the English humanitarian organisation, because they were short of vehicles! The Médecins Sans Frontières official asked Nurtata, the local Party official, for an explanation. "It's a perfectly normal resettlement operation which has nothing to do with you" he replied. Then they used clubs to force the people onto dump trucks...

PM: Why is there such a high mortality rate during the journey?

RB: People were already very weak from the hunger they had been enduring for two years. When we arrived, the average adult weight was 32 kilos. They even loaded several people who were suffering from tuberculosis! Physically, they couldn't stand the shock. Families were permanently separated. The government claims that wives will rejoin their husbands, but this is false because no register of departures is kept and nobody is in a position to say where the transplanted individuals may be found! You have to understand that these poor people have lost everything. They cling to their emotional environment, their family, and humanitarian teams like Médecins Sans Frontières. They rely on us. Our presence is their only hope for the immediate future; they know they'll be looked after and that thousands of children will be saved thanks to the intensive feeding centres. When refugees are torn from their environment, they lose the last landmarks that define their existence. They are psychologically broken by the journey into the unknown. People from Tigre travel for three days, five

days for those from Wollo (600 -1,000 ). They stop for regrouping in transit centres which lack even the basic facilities, including sanitation. At night, the temperature falls below 10° [centigrade] and they have to sleep on the bare ground, lying on top of each other to keep warm.. Often, they have no blankets. They never know if they'll get anything to eat the next day; the distribution of grain is irregular and always insufficient. They are given a handful of corn every day, but they might not receive anything for half the journey... They have a right to one or two cups of water a day! On this type of diet, the weakest inevitably die. In the Dessié transit centre, there are 20-30 deaths a day (no foreigners are allowed into this centre) but they are also dying en masse in the lorries and buses. I repeat: 50,000 to 100,000 people have already died in appalling conditions.

PM: What happens to the survivors at the end of the journey?

RB: We are certain that there is no infrastructure for receiving the refugees. The 200 resettlement centres, to the west and south of Addis Ababa, are in fact no more than uncultivated plains that the 'deportees' have to clear by hand. Before departure, party officials organise compulsory meetings; they depict the south as a kind of California or El Dorado. They watch propaganda films showing tractors and combined-harvesters reaping the maize harvest on fertile plains. In fact, the LIubbabor and Kefa regions are wild plains, which will need two or three years' work before they are capable of feeding people. Hans Humi, a Swiss agronomist who has spent 15 years at the Soil Conservation Institute in Addis Ababa, claims that much of this land will be exhausted in a generation. If it is not properly irrigated, prepared and farmed with appropriate means and equipment, the seeds will be washed away by the violent rains that fall every year.

PM: But does the situation of these displaced people improve once the journey is over?

RB: At present, nobody knows exactly what is happening in the south of the country. These regions are forbidden to foreigners, apart from rare, limited and closely supervised visits. Visitors are introduced to 'happy peasants' who willingly answer questions under the watchful eye of party members. On one occasion, a group of foreign visitors noted that these 'peasants' were militiamen disguised as farmers! They carried pistols under their tattered clothes! In fact, the 'deportees' have to construct everything themselves. And, they have to build the Party headquarters before putting up the sheds that serve as communal living quarters. With two exceptions, none of these centres have doctors. The deaths on the journey are augmented by those which occur on arrival at the site. We are particularly concerned as this is not the first time that the government has applied this method. In 1978, several thousand Eritreans were moved to the south. They were supposed to be self-sufficient, in terms of feeding themselves, after three years. It was a total failure. Yet the same measures are now being applied again, thanks to international aid and the use of the famine as a pretext.


PM: Don't the donors control what happens to international aid in the field?

RB: Only independent humanitarian organisations like Médecins Sans Frontières can ensure that control is exercised by volunteers in the field. This is not the case with the aid provided by the European Community, the United Nations and the western governments, who provide the bulk of aid to Ethiopia. 1,5 million tonnes of grain, hundreds of lorries and tens of millions of francs have been placed at the disposal of the Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC). Bob Geldof, the organiser of the 'Live Aid' concert, which collected 600 million francs for Africa, went to Ethiopia in October. He paid a brief visit to the Korem camp, where he was surrounded by a virtual cordon of Party members. Nobody from our organisation could get near him! We don't know how the money from the concert will be used. Since the DERG (the provisional military committee) founded the Workers' Party last year, our collaboration with the RRC has deteriorated. We had always worked alongside Ethiopian teams, motivated and dynamic people but, the Party gradually whittled away the Commission's prerogatives and took over relief operations. The Party is responsible for bringing the population transfers to a successful conclusion.

[...] PM: Are you prepared to withdraw the Médecins Sans Frontières teams if the Ethiopian government does not stop the population transfers?

RB : We can't exclude that possibility. Our presence in the field is currently being called into question by the authorities, but we'll do everything we can to continue our work, while always remaining vigilant. That's what thousands of men, women and children, the victims of both famine and summary justice, expect of us.

**That same day, the president of MSF France arrived in Addis Ababa to support the teams and hold talks with other NGOs, representatives of western governments, and the United Nations. The ICRC delegate in Ethiopia was the only person to totally agree with the form and substance of MSF's position. The other aid organisations, while approving the substance, remained circumspect as to the form through fear of expulsion. The MSF President told the French ambassador to Ethiopia, who declared himself resigned to the totalitarian nature of the Ethiopian regime, that while the MSF teams were not resigned to the situation, MSF intended to continue its work in Ethiopia.**

 *I went to Ethiopia to talk to the teams and meet the authorities. I couldn't get out of Addis Ababa because I had no travel permit. Everybody came to the capital and we had a meeting. We agreed... We went to have coffee with the French ambassador. He was worried about the reasons for my visit. I said, 'we've got to get involved, we can't accept what's happening anymore, we*

*can't accept the role we're playing in this population transfer business.' I also told him I'd come to collect the latest testimonies, especially from other NGOs, and he said, "look, the other day I was coming back from Diredawa. I saw hundreds and hundreds of poor souls out in the pouring rain and freezing wind with their meagre belongings, surrounded by militia. They'd just razed their village, burnt it to the ground. They were forced to go to another village 20 km away." He concluded by saying "those people (the Ethiopian authorities) are Nazis." I said: 'I don't know if they are Nazis or not but one thing is certain - at MSF we don't accept this kind of thing.' I noticed that he tensed a bit at that, and he said "you should know when you come here that they are Nazis. You either accept it or don't accept it, and if you don't accept it, you shouldn't come." I replied 'that's not the way I see it. We are here and we don't accept it, we do both at once*

Rony Brauman, MSF France President (in French).

**On 15 November, an envelope was slid under the door of the MSF office in Addis Ababa. It contained a report written by a field officer for the World Food Programme and described in detail the deplorable conditions in the transit camps, where peasants were awaiting transport for resettlement in the South. Armed with this fresh evidence, the MSF team went to see the new UN representative in Ethiopia, who claimed to have no reason to believe that the transfers were forced...**



John Joseph Mitchell, 'Wollo Situation Report: August-September 1985,' WFP Field Monitor, 6 November 1985, (in English). [D69](#)

#### **Extract:**

Wegedi RRC transit camp (Borena Awraja)  
The most acute problems in Wollo during August and September appeared in RRC transit camps. The reported camp population at Wegedi as of 28th September was 9,164. There was no clean water supply, overcrowding, no sanitation facilities, a disorganized feeding programme, inadequate dry ration distribution, and a crippling lack of drugs and health personnel. Consequently shigella was evident in epidemic proportions and typhus was also common. During August and September records showed an average death rate of 16 per day (highest = 25, lowest = 7); most dying from shigella. Most of the population in and around the camp were due to be resettled.

Lemi RRC transit camp (Borena Awraja)

A similar situation to Wegedi was found in Lemi. Out of a population of 894 (September 28th) the average recorded daily death rate was 7. As in Wegedi, this resulted from an inadequate water supply, no sanitation facilities and

virtually no medicines. Shigella and measles accounted for the majority of deaths but typhus, pneumonia and relapsing fever were also common. A feeding programme was in operation but in the absence of health care and sanitation, this was rendered virtually ineffective. As of 28 September 4,323 had left Lemi for resettlement via Dessie or Kombolcha.

[...] Discussion

The RRC and MOH reacted to the situation in Wegedi and Lemi when the seriousness of the situation had been underlined. In Wegedi, many people were sent home with a dry ration, I.V. fluids were sent, and OXFAM responded quickly to the water problem by installing a temporary clean water supply. However, to prevent such situations emerging in the future serious questions must be asked concerning the lack of prior preparations, particularly with regard to public health.

It appeared that no organisation had clear, designated responsibilities concerning transit shelters. In other words as they were considered temporary, little or no public health measures were taken by the MOH and unlike more fixed shelters, the RRC seemed to view them as secondary considerations.

In view of the fact that resettlement quotas are said to have been increased there is a clear need for a relevant organisation(s) to be responsible for public health measures.



**Summary of the board meeting, MSF France, 25 November 1985 (in French).** [D70](#)

#### **Extract:**

[...] UN

Heated interview with Priestley (assistant to the Secretary General for Emergency Operations in Ethiopia). He feebly disputed the facts and condemned our "media circus," which was "increasing the tension and ruining negotiations." He singled out the Paris Match article, which seemed to be burning his fingers as he held it.

When Rony reminded him of the principle of a free press and the UN Declaration of Human Rights, the 'discussion' was abruptly terminated. Priestley stated he had "no reason to believe that the transfers are forced." (See letter to Michael Priestley).

It should be remembered that Jansson, Priestley's predecessor (he has only been in post for a week) and the UNDP representative were in post in Cambodia in 1980 and congratulated themselves on the effectiveness of the model that food aid to Cambodia represented at that time!



One or two days after our arrival, Brigitte, the Addis team and myself went to see Michael Priestley, the UN Representative in Addis. I explained the MSF position, stressing the scenes MSF staff had witnessed, like the roundups, the use of aid as a means of blackmail at Korem, and the problem of Kelala. He listened to it all with a sour expression, and became increasingly annoyed. I was not really surprised by his hostile reaction, given the more than friendly position the UN had adopted vis-à-vis the DERG, but even so, I was beginning to get annoyed myself. After twenty minutes, the atmosphere was becoming electric. It was obvious that he was casting doubt, without openly saying so, on everything we were telling him. To clarify matters, I asked him if, in his opinion, the people in the transit camps and 'resettlement' zones had left of their own free will or had been forced out. He went bright red, shoved back his chair and replied almost word for word, "I have no reason whatsoever to think that these people leave the camps against their will." I had to stop myself from overturning his desk. We got up and left, slamming the door behind us.

Rony Brauman, MSF France President (in French).

**On 16 November, at a supposedly private meeting with the RRC deputy commissioner, the representatives of MSF France found themselves in the presence of journalists, the deputy to the UN representative for relief in Ethiopia and the French ambassador. Called upon to refute his remarks about forced resettlement, the president of MSF France instead confirmed them and renewed his request for a three-month moratorium on the programme so that an international commission could investigate the situation. After the meeting, he repeated his remarks in a letter to the RRC Deputy Commissioner, in which he suggested an exploratory mission to the south in order to select a place where MSF could work. He said the organisation could double or triple its teams in order to help resettle the drought victims in appropriate conditions. Copies were sent to the UN representative and every relief organisation working in Ethiopia. The teams in the field supported these approaches.**



**Summary of the board meeting**, MSF France, 25 November 1985 (in French). [D70](#)

#### Extract:

[...] RRC

The RRC had let it be known that it did not want an interview with Rony and Brigitte. But probably as a result of a discussion with Priestley, Rony was called to a meeting with Berhanu Deressa, Deputy Commissioner of the RRC. This interview was not a simple one-to-one between MSF and RRC, but a kind of press conference attended by:

MSF

Four members of the RRC, including Berhanu Deressa

The French ambassador

Three UN representatives

Four journalists

It was a tense and heated discussion. Rony gave a point-by-point summary of all the accusations he had already put into the public domain. The UN representatives, who had probably given the Ethiopians the Match article and graciously translated it for them, supported the RRC position.

The French ambassador, who began the meeting in a conciliatory tone, became violently angry with MSF towards the end. He maintained the opposite line to the one he'd taken in private and accused us of "insulting the host country in a scandalous magazine," etc.

The Ethiopians were probably hoping that MSF would retract its statements at the meeting, a ploy which had apparently been used successfully four or five times already when someone had denounced certain Ethiopian practices.

MSF

Two meetings were held with the coordinators of the camps where we are working in order to gauge the situation in the field and how the teams feel. All have agreed to take it as far as it will go, at the risk of being expelled, as intolerable conditions have already been exceeded.

The aim of MSF

To obtain from decision-makers and the biggest providers of aid to Ethiopia the conditionality of their aid i.e., to decide what aid to provide in '86, after a three-month moratorium during which all population transfers will be suspended. This period will allow an in-depth study of the possibilities of rehabilitation in the north, reception conditions in the resettlement zones and the conditions under which population transfers take place.

If this is to happen, we need to show that transfer conditions provide:

- Freedom of choice
- The non-separation of families
- Satisfactory physical condition (currently disrespected)

Claude Malhuret is in the process of compiling a 'black book' on the deportations, using information from various sources. Some steps have been taken at EEC level. The European Parliament is the organisation most likely to vote for a resolution subjecting aid for 1986 to a delay of three months. The position of the EEC could have a domino effect on various governments.



Françoise Chipaux, 'Ethiopian Government Expels the NGO Médecins Sans Frontières'. *Le Monde* (France), 3 December 1985 (in French). **D71**

**Extract:**

[...] Dr Rony Brauman, President of MSF, was summoned to Addis Ababa two weeks ago by the Deputy Head of the Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC), Berhanu Deressa, who is in charge in the absence of Mr, Dawit. Confronted by a carefully selected audience of representatives of humanitarian organisations, RRC officials and journalists, Dr Brauman had to reiterate the accusations his organisation has levelled against the policy of resettling famine-stricken populations from Wollo, Gonda and Tigré in the south of the country. MSF was particularly critical of the forced resettlement of these populations, the conditions of transport and the lack of infrastructure at the reception sites.



**Letter** from Dr Rony Brauman, President of MSF to Mr Berhanu Deressa, RRC deputy Commissioner, 20 November 1985 (in English). **D72**

**Extract:**

Dear MrBerhanu DERESSA,

I was very glad of the opportunity you gave me during my recent visit in Addis to voice the concern felt by Médecins sans Frontières and to state what our organization wants in front of representatives from the United Nations and the international press.

As I told you during the meeting, MSF is pleased with the results of its cooperation with the RRC staff, whose competence and devotion are acknowledged by everyone.

However, we are very worried about the recent turn of events concerning the emergency relief and rehabilitation operations in the provinces affected by the drought. Moving the population from the north to the south has now, it appears, become an absolute priority. I am not in any way seeking to comment here a decision which is within the power of a sovereign government only, but what I am doing is underlining the very grave problems connected with this population's resettlement and the conditions in which it is taking place.

1. As this operation is now an absolute priority, the emergency work being carried out by MSF and the rehabilitation projects in the northern are becoming more difficult, even to the point of becoming impossible.

At KELALA, in spite of several demands during the last four months, we were not authorized to open the feeding centre needed to treat the 8,300 children whose weight for height ratio was below 70 percent of the normal.

Despite the verbal agreement which I received from R.R.C. Commissioner Dawit during our interview in Paris on last October 31st, permission has still not been given. Today, those of the children who had the greatest need for this centre, particularly the children below 60 percent, are dead, whereas we could in fact have saved the vast majority of them.

In the same region of Kelala, attendance at our centre has dropped by 75% in the past month, as 25,000 persons were due to be taken for resettlement from that area and people were afraid of being picked up during a medical consultation or food hand-out.

The situation is worsening at Maychew, where 12,000 persons from Korem were voluntarily relocated last August. There was to be a monthly food distribution until such a time as these people were able to become self-supporting. Together with the R.R.C., Save the Children Fund and I.C.R.C. we enthusiastically supported this return to the land by 12,000 people, and actively participated in it.

Unfortunately, hand-outs of grain which will still be essential for several more months yet have been forbidden as they would, we were told, jeopardize the resettlement process to the southern parts of the country.

A similar situation exists in SEKOTA, where 60,000 people were supposed to be given general food on a joint programme and where no regular grain delivery is made even though it was supposed to be brought in by the R. R. C. on a regular basis. The R.R.C. trucks usually moving to Sekota are now being used for resettlement programmes. Even if the N.G.O.'s and I.C.R.C. truck fleets are now trying to move grain on their own, the delay has held up the return of the population from Korem to this area. In addition, M.S.F. Staff can hardly discharge convalescent children from its feeding centre if no general food is available outside.

How is it possible, in these conditions, to plan the evacuation of the camp and foster a return home? A return home in the region I have mentioned is possible. The R.R.C. has expressed a wish for it and it is strongly desired by the population. As I have already stated, we are very surprised by what appears to be a total change of direction, the immediate consequences of which are the dashing of numerous efforts aimed at long-term rehabilitation and development.

2. In Korem, most people being dispatched to resettlement zones are taken away against their will and without regard for their family ties. More than 15,000 people fled into the neighbouring mountains when the militia arrived in the Korem camp last 25th of October. A third of our patients also fled. The M.S.F. Staff in Korem saw 600 persons selected and taken away on that day. Our staff are categorical; the vast majority of the people were forced to leave under duress and were escorted by armed militiamen.

One of our nurses travelling on the road to Dessie with a United Nations Field Officer met a group of about 150 young men escorted by militiamen. One of them managed to inform them that the militia had taken him from his home just when he was preparing to gather into harvest, separating him from his wife and children. Although the militia moved in very quickly to break up the conversation with this group of persons, this testimony leads one to wonder what the selection criteria are for resettlement.

The same holds true for Kelala area, where many of those assigned to leave wanted to stay on their land as they thought they would be able to live off it again because a promising harvest is arriving.

We might add that we saw the departure for the resettlement lands from Korem in November 1984. Those leaving at that time were volunteers wanting to migrate to more hospitable territories. But here too, there appears to have been complete change in direction; the 3 unanimously accepted criteria - freedom of choice, non-separation of family units and suitable state of health - have in most instances, been completely forgotten. I have also spoken about this very serious problem to Mr Priestley and Mr Franklin, representatives of the United Nations.

3. The way in which people are transported to the resettlement lands provokes extremely high mortality rates. The average weight of an adult in our hospitals at Korem last year was 32 kg. Happily, the situation has improved but the physical condition of people who have undergone such an ordeal is still very precarious.

Already physically debilitated, many persons have been torn away from their near relations for a journey to an unknown destination in an atmosphere of duress and even violence, all of which adds up to a traumatic psychological shock. This exaggerates the physical effects of their ordeal and helps to diminish the physical resistance of the individual even further.

Finally, whereas some transit centres function properly, there are some with no sanitation facilities and with insufficient water and food. This also aggravates the harmful effects of the road journey.

All these factors explain the very heavy mortality rate attendant upon relocation of the disaster victims. There is a common denominator linking all the separate factors that have created this extremely grave situation; the absolute priority given to the very fast relocation to the resettlement lands in the south-west. It is not MSF's role to give an opinion on whether this plan is well founded or not. Nor does MSF in any way seek to dictate to the Ethiopian government how it should go about its business. However, the scale of the operation, involving as it does several hundreds of thousands of human beings, has become incompatible with compliance with the elementary rights of any individual.

3 to 4 months would no doubt, be sufficient to improve transport and accommodation conditions for the displaced people. It is also highly probable that, were this situation to improve, the number of volunteers would increase.

Regarding MSF, we are, as you know, quite ready to play our part in this project. You suggested that I go out on an exploratory assignment to the regions involved. I would, in reply, like to confirm that I would be very happy to be able to do so. The staff of thirty or so persons kept by us in Ethiopia could be doubled, or even tripled, in order to help with relocating the drought victims. But, as I told you, we cannot function in a way that is contrary to what people want. MSF would like to continue its work in Ethiopia and to extend it. Thanks to an amazing surge of solidarity, it has been possible to mount an emergency relief operation that has no precedent in history, but serious doubts over the way the relief operations are currently being conducted might put it into jeopardy.

That is why I should like to repeat the request I put to you at our meeting: MSF would like the competent Ethiopian Authorities to proclaim a 3 months moratorium in order to allow a commission of enquiry to clarify certain issues, as hoped for one and all:

- The viability of the northern territories and the scope for local rehabilitation.
- Accommodation facilities in all the resettlement lands,
- Freedom of choice as regards relocation and the possibility for separated families to be able to reunite.

At the same time, I renew my offer to carry out an extended survey in the resettlement sites in order to select in close cooperation with R.R.C a project where MSF could be involved.

Your desire for openness, which you reaffirmed recently by inviting the international press to attend our interview, is to my mind a very encouraging sign.

Hoping, wholeheartedly, that you will be able to accede to this request,

Yours very sincerely,

Doctor Rony BRAUMAN  
President of Médecins Sans Frontières

cc: to all individuals and agencies involved in the relief and rehabilitation projects.



**Letter** from Dr Rony Brauman, President of MSF France, to Michael Priestley, Assistant to the Secretary General of the United Nations for Relief Operations in Ethiopia, 21 November 1985 (in French). **D73**

**Extract:**

Dear Sir,

I was very glad to meet you and have the opportunity to discuss relief and rehabilitation operations in Ethiopia. When we approached the specific point of the relocation of populations to resettlement sites, you told me that, to your knowledge, there was no reason to believe that these departures were being made against the will of the people concerned.

I expressed my surprise at this, a large body of witness testimony, particularly from Médecins Sans Frontières teams, indicates that the majority of population movements are currently being conducted under duress.

We therefore feel that the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state, guaranteed by Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is being violated on a large scale. This is the reason for which I wanted to bring these facts to your attention.

Moreover, I expressed the concerns of Médecins Sans Frontières on this subject at the time of my interview with Berhanu Deressa, Deputy Commissioner of the RRC, and also in a letter to him, a copy of which is attached.

Three criteria for departing for resettlement sites have been unanimously adopted by all relief operations in Ethiopia, including the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission:

Freedom of choice  
Non-separation of families  
Satisfactory physical condition

In effect, these three points are considered by all as the basic conditions.

It appears to us that these conditions are not being fulfilled. Now I received the impression at our interview on 15 November last that you disagree on this point. Given the importance that we all attach to this issue, I would like to be sure that it is not a matter of a misunderstanding between us, and I would be most grateful if you could clarify your position concerning respect for these conditions of departure.

I look forward to your response concerning this problem.  
Yours faithfully,

Dr Rony BRAUMAN  
President, MSF France



Blaine Harden, 'Ethiopia Still in Need But No Longer Starving,' Washington Post Service for *International Herald Tribune*, 30 November 1985, (in English). **D74**

**Extract:**

[...] Last week the president of Doctors Without Borders, a French voluntary agency that works at Korem, had an angry exchange in Addis Ababa, the capital, with the deputy director of the government's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission.

"When people are taken away against their will, when the militia come to offer resettlement, obviously this is not a political problem; it is just a human problem," said Rony Brauman of Doctors Without Borders. We don't feel that our role here in Ethiopia is to keep quiet."

"Why do all these people run away to the mountains?" Dr Brauman asked Berhane Deressa, deputy director of the commission. "Because members of Doctors Without Borders agitate them," MrBerhane replied tartly. Then, in an indignant tone, MrBerhane made a broader statement that underscored the uneasy, distrustful alliance that famine has forged between Western donors and Ethiopia: "I will not accept your insistence on setting conditions. You will be humanitarian if you do your job. You are not competent to comment on any other aspect of our program. We have different ways of doing things in Ethiopia. We cannot be dictated to."



'Médecins Sans Frontières Calls for a Three-month Moratorium on Population Transfers'. *AFP* (France) Paris, 18 November 1985(in French).

**Extract:**

The humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is calling for a three-month suspension of the transfer of populations from northern Ethiopia to the south of the country, MSF President Dr Rony Brauman announced in Paris on Monday. Dr Brauman told AFP that this moratorium "should provide an opportunity to assess the problems posed by the relocation of populations to the south of Ethiopia". MSF, he added, will be sending a letter on this subject to the Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC), which is responsible for population transfers. Dr Brauman pointed out that these relocations must, in conformity with Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, respect three principles: freedom of choice, the non-separation of families and physical fitness before undertaking the journey. "According to the evidence, these principles are no longer being respected", he said. For several months, it has been noted that there has been an "intensification of resettlement operations" on the one hand, and a "growing hostility among the populations concerned" on the other.


Since operations began about a year ago, some 500,000 people from the northern provinces of Ethiopia have been resettled in the south of the country. Dr Brauman confirmed that 100,000 people (15-20% of those displaced) have died during the transfers or within three months of their arrival.

For the last month or two, says Dr Brauman, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) operating in Ethiopia, including MSF, have encountered increasing difficulty. Populations are increasingly reluctant to enter refugee centres like Korem, Sekoto and Kelala for fear of being forcibly transported to the south.


The origin of this attitude lies in the stories they have heard concerning the often precarious reception conditions in the south, said the MSF president, while recalling that relocation had often been voluntary during the early days.

Dr Brauman claims that, between now and the end of the year, the Ethiopian authorities intend to resettle about 1.5 million people from the northern provinces in the south. Now, he adds, some displacement is not or is no longer necessary; some northern regions enjoyed abundant rain last spring. If others were supplied with pesticides, harvests would not be destroyed by parasites and famine would be avoided.

In many areas, according to Dr Brauman, a well-boring and irrigation programme-in a "region which is not lacking in water"- would allow northern populations to remain where they are. He indicated that MSF is prepared to support this type of project, although the Ethiopian government has so far refused to consider it.

 I was summoned to a meeting with Berhanu Deressa (Deputy Director of the RRC). In fact, it wasn't a meeting, but a press conference. That's where I made my final speech. At the press conference I said everything I'd intended to tell him in his office. There was an altercation with the French ambassador. I called him a Pétainist. I said: "you would be a Pétainist under Pétain and a Gaullist under de Gaulle. I've got absolute contempt for you - fuck you." I didn't pull my punches! We returned to Paris a few days after that press conference. I immediately sent Deressa a detailed letter combining the facts, the position and MSF's demands.

Rony Brauman, MSF France President (in French).

 We were confronted with Deressa's gang. We'd asked for a meeting with the RRC and we found they had also invited the press and the French ambassador.

*They wanted us to go back on everything we'd said before, to retract our statements and admit that things were not so bad, etc. It was a kangaroo court... Eventually, the French ambassador said: "This is unacceptable, you are not worthy of being French", or something like that. "You are less than nothing, you can't stop lying." When Rony heard that, he nearly hit him! I had to restrain him. I swear he was going to belt him. That's when he called him a "collaborator". That's when we thought "this is a disaster."*

Brigitte Vasset, MSF France Medical Coordinator in Korem, from April 1984 to May 1985 then MSF France Programme Manager Ethiopia (in French).

**On 20 November, the spokesman for the New York-based United Nations Office for Emergency Operations in Africa said that the UN could not comment on the subject of forced relocation.**



'The UN Has No Facts Concerning the Alleged Victims of Resettlement Operations in Ethiopia,' **AFP** (France), United Nations New York, 21 November 1985, (in French).

**Extract:**

[...] the United Nations indicated that it possessed no information confirming the allegation that tens of thousands of Ethiopian refugees have died in forced resettlement operations in the less arid regions of the country. According to the heads of the humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières, 50-100,000 Ethiopians have died during the course of these operations.

Djibril Diallo, spokesman for the United Nations Office for emergency operations in Africa, said that his office was unable to comment on this subject. He recalled that the Ethiopian government has repeatedly emphasised that all resettlement operations are voluntary, and that the incidents that sometimes occurred were due to unauthorised local officials acting on their own initiative.

**On 21 November, Berhanu Deressa, Deputy Director of the RRC, accused MSF of lying and conducting a defamation campaign whose goal was political rather than humanitarian.**



'Ethiopian Official Accuses Médecins Sans Frontières of Mounting a "Defamation Campaign"'. **AFP** (France), Addis Ababa, 22 November 1985 (in French)

**Extract:**

Addis Ababa, 22 Nov (AFP). The argument between the Ethiopian authorities and the French humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) intensified on Thursday, with a statement by Berhanu Deressa, Deputy Director of the Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, accusing MSF of having stepped up its 'defamation campaign' against Ethiopian efforts to help the victims of the famine.

He was responding to the statement made last Tuesday in Paris by Rony Brauman, President of Médecins Sans Frontières, who had called for a three-month moratorium on operations to transfer famine victims from northern Ethiopia to the more fertile regions in the south of the country, claiming that these operations have so far caused the deaths of 100,000 people.

Faced with MSF's accusations - inadequate transport conditions and insufficient infrastructure in the south to accommodate the new arrivals - Mr Berhanu replied that the Ethiopian authorities were doing everything they could with the means at their disposal, while pointing out that Ethiopia was a poor country.

"It is better to transport people in poor conditions and ensure that they have a future than to let them die of starvation", Mr Berhanu said. [...]

Mr Berhanu believes that the MSF campaign is motivated by political, rather than humanitarian, goals. He accuses the organisation of seeking to dictate the behaviour of the Ethiopian government and of being quick to resort to lying in order to gain public support for its accusations. Moreover, he rejected the French organisation's accusations, including the claim that its operations in Ethiopia were restricted by the authorities. The only limits to MSF activity are those imposed by its resources, said Mr Berhanu, adding that new projects should first be submitted to the government for approval.

**As the lorries had been requisitioned for the forced transfer operations, cereals were not delivered to the Sekota site, which eventually attracted 60,000 displaced people. Many of these had returned from Korem in the belief that the situation had improved. The MSF team kept children in the feeding centre after their recovery, in order to avoid sending them back into the spiral of famine.**

**On 25 November, soldiers brutally assembled 100 people from the Sekota camp, including several mothers and children who were being cared for at the**

**MSF feeding centre. The MSF team demanded that the local authorities have them released. The soldiers explained that they were not being deported but were going on a 'hygiene training course'. Most of them, a good number of whom should have been in hospital, were receiving aid from MSF and the RRC.**

**On 26 November, two MSF nurses discovered two hundred people shut up in a small church on the outskirts of the village without food or water. These events were reported in a letter to the RRC deputy commissioner on 29 November.**



**Letter** from Dr Bertrand Desmoulins, MSF France medical Coordinator in Ethiopia to Berhanu Deressa, RRC Deputy Commissioner, 29 November 1985 (in English). **D75**

**Extract:**

Dear Sir,

I am enclosing for your information a short report written in French by our team in Sekota. They mentioned that one of our nurse's, Françoise LEDUC, got hit by one of the militiamen while she was doing a screening in order to recover children from the MSF Feeding Center, who were parked in the old church for the resettlement pre-selection.

[Adults and children had been gathered in a church awaiting resettlement pre-selection. The team describe how one of our nurse's, Françoise LEDUC, was hit by a militiamen while she was screening children in the church in order to return MSF's patients back to the MSF Feeding Centre.]



**Report** by the MSF team at Sekota, 26 November 1985, (in French). **D76**

**Extract:**

Monday 25 November 17:30

In the open field near the MSF isolation, part of the population (100 people) were forced into assembly. We were there (Brigitte, Françoise and Yves) and we realised that among these people were two employees of the feeding station plus some of the mothers and children from the MSF feeding centre.

We intervened, asking for permission to retrieve our staff and the people from the feeding centre. We can testify that the militiamen were hitting people and that some of the government officials were extremely aggressive towards us. We were finally able to leave with our two staff and some of the mothers and children from the feeding centre.

Our intervention provoked yet more movements in the middle of the crowd who were trying to escape. We immediately went to see Comrade NURTATA in the village. We

relayed our concerns to him and asked for an immediate screening in order to retrieve the people from the feeding centre.

After obtaining verbal consent, we went to the feeding centre, accompanied by a government official, and with the aid of the population we established a rapid and incomplete list of the adults taken away (wristbands facilitated the identification of children). The official told us he did not know where those we were unable to account for had gone.

As nightfall prevented further searching, we went back to Mr NURTATA, showed him the list and obtained his verbal assent to conduct a screening at 08.00 the following morning.

Tuesday 26 November -06:30

When Philippe and Marie-Joe went for their morning jog near the abandoned Italian church, they heard shouts and moans coming from behind the church door, which was roped shut and guarded by five armed militiamen. Philippe, unobstructed by the militiamen, undid the knots and entered the church. Inside, about 200 people (adults and children) were standing because there was no room to lie down. They surged towards him, trying to get out.

Leaving Philippe inside, Marie-Joe went to alert the rest of the team. Inside [the church] men and women were shouting and crying and pointing in the direction of the feeding centre where their children were. Inspecting the interior of the church, he found a woman lying unconscious with a pulse rate of 40/minute. Her child was lying by her head.

The rest of the team arrived, closely followed by the officials from the town and the ICRC delegate, alerted by shots fired outside the church. Thirty minutes of negotiations with the party boss followed, while inside the church Françoise and Philippe identified children wearing MSF wristbands.

They were then molested; Françoise was struck on the neck and fell to the ground slightly stunned. Yves and Philippe picked her up. Negotiations continued outside the church, the MSF team demanding to stay on site and await the promised screening. The instruction within the team was to stay as calm as possible.

Mr NURTATA refused, despite the insistence of MSF and the ICRC delegate, to stay near the church. He summoned us to a meeting in his office, in the company of various officials.

#### ACCOUNT OF THE MEETING.

The administration's position is that we are interfering and creating problems when it is simply a matter of sanitation measures, evacuation of the OF [open field] and sanitation lessons for the people. There is absolutely no question of resettlement. They even went as far as accu-

sing us of assaulting the militiamen. Intervention of the ICRC delegate, whose presence has been challenged by the administration: there are beneficiaries among these people. Note that during the events, a government official tried to take an ICRC card from a beneficiary.

Faced with the accusation that we were deliberately stirring up trouble, we defended ourselves by citing the chance discovery of the captive population and also cited the duty of assistance to people in danger. We refuted the accusation that we had assaulted anyone, but stressed the reality of the chief of police's assault on one of our nurses. We repeated the demand for an immediate screening but this was emphatically denied. The screening will be carried out by the health centre official. End of meeting.

We gave the incomplete list of absentees to the health centre official. Ninety minutes later everyone returned to the feeding centre, including two sick women admitted to the MSF hospital.

Then we heard that all the detainees had been released (information not verified). Note that the ICRC delegate was able to conduct a screening in the church and retrieve 30 beneficiaries. According to information collected from the people detained, it appears that we foiled a resettlement convoy, particularly as several empty lorries left Sekota in the morning. However, we should make it clear that our interventions came about purely by chance.

MSF STAFF: Brigitte, Françoise, Yves, Philippe.

**However, with the exception of the ICRC, the other NGOs, western ambassadors and the UN, did not rush to support MSF.**



**Summary of the board meeting, MSF France, 25 November 1985, (in French). D70**

#### Extract:

##### 1) NGOs

Generally speaking, NGOs like Concern and Save the Children are in complete agreement with us on the substance of the problem but diverge at the level of the form. They favour cautious diplomacy, trying to settle specific problems through negotiation as they arise, and admit that they do not want to risk expulsion.

##### 2) Embassies

For the Canadian and British ambassadors, "things in Ethiopia are not so bad." Clear refusal to discuss the underlying problems.

##### 3) ICRC

Léon de Riedmatten, the ICRC delegate in Ethiopia,

totally agrees with our position and actions. Completely revolted by the situation for several months, he intends to compile a comprehensive dossier in order to provoke an interview with Mengistu and, as this has little chance of succeeding, to organise a press conference to denounce what is going on.

But this is the local delegate's position and it is difficult to gauge the attitude at HQ in Geneva. Therefore, the ICRC has not yet adopted an official position, but communicates information in confidence.

**On November 25th an official declaration by Berhanu Deressa, Deputy Commissioner at the RRC, accused the president of MSF of waging a slander campaign against Ethiopia and reiterated the accusation of politicization of the organisation with links to Liberté Sans Frontières. On November 27th, in another official communiqué, he denounced the 'allegations' published in Western media and described all the qualities of the relocation programme.**



**Official Statement**, Berhanu Deressa, Deputy Commissioner (RRC Ethiopia), 25 November 1985 (in English) [D77](#)

**Extract:**

The president of MSF F, Monsieur Rony Brauman, in violation of the spirit and the letter of the agreements and acting against all norms and disregarding the advice of French diplomats, UN officials and even some of the organization doctors that disagree with the politically motivated nature of his crusade has persisted in his propaganda campaign.

The false allegations made by the self-righteous president of MSF France range from such trivialities as charges of denial by Ethiopian authorities of MSF's rights to have an "audience" with Bob Geldof to preposterous assertions of premeditated murder of 50-1000,000 drought victims; From claims of heroic deeds for his staff to criticisms of donor governments and other NGOs of failure to properly do their job. In the same vein he has continued to fabricate and politicize issues, making unfounded charges, threats of withdrawal and inflammatory statements intended to mislead public opinion. [...] Because of the political fixation of its leadership, MSFF is reportedly facing serious difficulties especially with other humanitarian organizations in Europe and more particularly in attracting mature and competent medical personnel as humanitarian volunteers despite the abundance of trained manpower and the vast reservoir of compassion and goodwill in France. Consequently most of its "volunteers" in Ethiopia today are unexposed and inexperienced young individuals, admittedly highly spirited, but with misplaced enthusiasm and confused priorities.



**Official Release**, Berhanu Deressa Deputy Commissioner [RRC Ethiopia], 27 November 1985 (in English). [D78](#)

**Extract:**

Ethiopia has been following with concern certain Western media allegations that it is pursuing a policy of forceful eviction of people from the north to be settled in the north-west, west and south-west parts of the country. Such allegations and unfounded charges would only help prolong the agony of victims of natural disaster and undermine the collective international humanitarian endeavours as well as the government's genuine efforts to make them not only self-sufficient but also be part of the productive force of the nation.

Considering the persistent nature of these allegations and the orchestrated political motives behind them, it has become necessary to once again reiterate the government's policy of resettlement.

[...] As for the implementation of the programme, it has been awarded the highest national priority and under the guidance of the politburo of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia; several ministries and government agencies are jointly responsible for its effective implementation.

[...] After registration, the settlers are transported to focal dispatching points where rescreening is carried out by the joint staff of the RRC, public health and the Red Cross to ensure that the selection has been carried out in accordance with the set criteria. Those that have passed the screening process are transported by bus and air to their respective settlement areas and transit stations are established at several points to provide settlers with shelter, food, medical and sanitary services and other necessities during their travel.

When the settlers arrive at settlement sites, by and large they are provided with ready-made dwelling units built by community effort which they improve as they see fit in time. The few who are not provided with ready-made dwelling units are temporarily accommodated in shelters for a maximum of two weeks during which time they are assisted to build their own dwelling units. They are also provided with grain and supplementary food, clothing, blankets and utensils by the RRC until their first harvest. Similarly the Ministry of Public Health has mobilized and deployed its staff to provide health services at the various settlement sites. The Ministry of Education has also assigned its teachers to conduct basic education programmes in all the sites.

[...] To date over 185,000 heads of families totaling with their dependents, 555,000 individuals have been moved and resettled in Illubabor, Wellega, Gojjam, Keffa, and Gonder administrative regions. Contrary to the politically motivated reports that have been circulating in some western capitals, no individual has been moved from Eritrea for settlement. As for Tigre, the number of people

that are settled comprise only 21% of the total settlement population while in comparison 64% are from Wello, 14% from Shoa and 1% from Gonder.

To sum up, as pointed out, the settlement programme was launched on account of the pressing need for a durable solution to the plight of drought victims of the north in the absence of any other viable alternative. In spite of their constant criticism, those who have been opposing the government's settlement programmes have not come up to date, with any viable alternative.

In light of this reality, the government is determined to continue implementing its settlement policy, mobilizing all the material and human resources at its disposal. The fact that Ethiopia is among the least developed countries and that it has limited resources is obvious. International donor community, western governments and unspecialized agencies have been invited to observe the process and assess the need of the settlement programmes and those that have visited the settlement sites such as EEC parliamentarians, FAO, WFP representatives and the like have realized the objective necessity of the programme.

While extreme care has been taken to ensure the unity of families during the resettlement process, the RRC, in collaboration with the Ethiopian Red Cross, has launched a family tracing and reunification programme in cases where inadvertent separation of families could have occurred.

It is obvious that in a drought situation where close to 10 million people have been affected that thousands of untimely deaths take place. No one can deny the toll on human life caused by the recent natural calamity. It is acknowledged worldwide that Ethiopia's current drought has been one of the worst in recent history.

As it stands, life expectancy in Ethiopia like in all other least developed countries is low. The high mortality rate in general and particularly that of children is well known. Needless to point out the human lives the severe famine has already claimed and its residual impact are tragic realities being dealt with. To relate the death toll of the drought and normal mortality to the settlement programme is a deliberate distortion of facts designed to undermine the growing support the settlement programme is gaining from the international community.

Positive support for the settlement programme has come from members of the international community including the Italian government, the Irish Concern, the Lutheran World Federation, Meschen Fur Menschen and others who are actively supporting these schemes.

**On 2 December, the MSF team in Addis Ababa received a notice from the RRC ordering it to cease operations**

**and leave the country. MSF's Ethiopian bank accounts were frozen and the money mysteriously disappeared. The administrator and the logistician were provisionally refused exit visas.**



**Letter** from Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (The Provisional Government of Socialist Ethiopia) to Bertrand Desmoulins, Coordinator, Médecins Sans Frontières France, 2 December 1985 (in English). [D79](#)

**Extract:**

Dear Sir,

In view of the politically motivated false allegations made by your president and his refusal to follow norms and procedures established with the other NGOs as well as the repeated statements he has made to withdraw MSF-France from operations in Ethiopia, and the negative consequences these have had on the organisation's relief activities, and more particularly on the plight of drought affected people in the shelters, we are obliged to inform you of the following:

1. The RRC has accepted your organization's repeated offer to withdraw its operation in Ethiopia and, therefore, has decided to discontinue the services of Médecins Sans Frontières - France as of 2 December 1985.
  2. The Commission has accordingly instructed its Relief Department and Health Division to take over forthwith your on-going programme at relief shelters in Kobo, Korem, Kelala and Sekota districts of Wollo Administrative Region.
  3. Matters related to all programme commodities and project assets will be dealt with in accordance with the basic agreement signed between the RRC and MSF France.
- Sincerely,



Françoise Chipaux, 'Ethiopian Government Expels Médecins Sans Frontières,' *Le Monde/Reuters* (France), Addis Ababa, 3 December 1985 (in French). [D80](#)

**Extract:**

In a press release issued on Monday, the Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) justified the decision on the basis of the "politically motivated and groundless accusations" MSF had levelled against the Ethiopian authorities.

"The RRC has accepted MSF's repeated offer to cease its operations in Ethiopia, and has consequently decided to terminate MSF's services from 2 December 1985."

[...] MSF claimed that it had submitted several requests to work in these zones but had never received a response. "We did not want to give way on a fundamental principle: the humane conduct of international aid. The public we

appealed to has a right to know what is going on," said Mr Brauman.

MSF, which has made great efforts to alert the public to the tragedy of the famine in Ethiopia, worked in four centres: Korem, Kobo, Sekota and Kelala. It has persistently been denied permission to open a feeding centre in Kelala. According to Mr Brauman, the Ethiopian authorities did not want populations to establish themselves at Kelala because they were destined for transfer to the south. MSF has sent 74 staff to Ethiopia since March 1984. On the eve of expulsion, 25 of them were still working there, including seven doctors and eleven nurses, as well as 250 local workers.

Mr Brauman believes the emergency situation is nearing its end, but claims that the Ethiopian authorities would rather concentrate on development in the south and are not allowing northern populations to return to their homes. This is the first time that MSF, which operates in many countries, has been expelled. Since the beginning of the famine crisis, the Ethiopian government has been repeatedly criticised over its management of international aid.



'Ethiopia Closes French Relief Agency,' *International Herald Tribune* (AP), Addis Ababa, 3 December 1985 (in English). [D81](#)

#### Extract:

[...] Berhane Deressa, the Deputy Head of the Commission, said the French agency's staff members "are not doing their work since they started this campaign," a reference to the criticism. "The people they are supposed to be serving are suffering as a result," he added. The commission called criticism of the government by Doctors Without Borders "politically motivated" and its "refusal to follow norms and procedures" had "not only cast doubts on the motives of the organization but also seriously undermined their field work."

Because of this, the statement said, the commission "decided to discontinue the services" of the organization as of Monday. Mr Berhane, in a telephone interview, said the government did not intend to expel individual staff members and indicated that they would be permitted to join other relief agencies.

The statement denied charges that tens of thousands of people had died as a result of Ethiopia's resettlement program and that an application by Doctors Without Borders to open an emergency feeding center had been rejected. Michel Fiszbin, Director of the Doctors Without Borders office in Ethiopia, said earlier Monday that the government had grounded an airplane used by the organization and indicated it might bar the entry of replacements for its current staff.



'Médecins Sans Frontières Expelled From Ethiopia,' *Libération*, 3 December 1985 (in French).

#### Extract:

The decision, which had been expected for several days, was announced by the government in Addis Ababa yesterday. The Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) had prepared the ground for the expulsion on Sunday, when it published a nine-page statement constituting a ruthless indictment of MSF, which was accused of producing "more noise than miracles." The document also accused the French organisation of conducting a "pernicious" media campaign against Ethiopian government policy.

An Ethiopian official quoted by the Associated Press added: "I don't see much of a future for them here..." The indictment was swiftly followed by concrete measures: the MSF aircraft was grounded at the beginning of the week and the authorities also blocked the arrival of a replacement team. Fifteen MSF staff are still awaiting the renewal of their visitor's permits, which expire at the end of the week. [...]

The dispute between MSF and the Ethiopian government chiefly centres on the latter's policy of transferring 1.5 million refugees from the drought to the south of the country, and particularly on the methods employed to achieve this ambitious project. MSF leaders have severely criticised the policy, claiming that the authorities are using force to transfer the refugees. Just a few days ago, an MSF team was involved in a scuffle with militiamen after stumbling across 200 people who were waiting to be forcibly transferred to the south.

For the leaders of the French humanitarian organisation, which has done much to publicise the tragedy caused by the famine in Ethiopia, "what is happening in this country is barbaric and unacceptable." Following the revelation in the London Sunday Times that 50-100,000 people might have died during the population transfers, MSF President Rony Brauman told *Libération* (05/11) that an international commission of enquiry should be set up. Shortly afterwards, he visited Addis Ababa in a vain attempt at reconciliation. On his return, Dr Brauman called for a halt to resettlement operations. The punishment swiftly followed: expulsion!

MSF is the only organisation to publicly denounce what many others condemn in private. How the latter react to this measure remains to be seen.



**Letter** from MSF France Administrator in Ethiopia to RRC Deputy commissioner, 3 December 1985 (in English). [D82](#)

#### Extract:

Dear Sir,  
We learnt today from our Bank, The Ethiopian Commercial

Bank, that our account was blocked by order of the RRC. As we are under the process of leaving the country, we have to face some expenses, especially to give salaries, severance pay and compensation for service, to all our employees, to pay the rents and charges of our houses, and to pay the last expenses for the trip back to Addis of our medical staff and their accommodation into an Hotel before they take the plane.

As the money of our bank account was given to MSF by the French donors, I am convinced that you will understand the need to give us access back to our account as rapidly as possible.


Our estimated need of money to close our mission in Ethiopia is: 115,000 Birr.

We are facing a problem of communication with our team, not being allowed by RRC to fly to Wollo, which unable [prevents] us at the time being to send the requested money there.

According to arrangement made with RRC Aid Coordination, in case the payment of our employees is made through the RRC of Wollo, we will communicate to you the lists of our employees and the money we owe them, with the corresponding amounts.

Thank you for your ultimate help and cooperation.

Sincerely yours,

**On 3 December MSF France held a press conference in Paris. That same day, the RRC announced that it had accepted MSF's offer to terminate its operations in Ethiopia. Over the next few days, the news of the expulsion reverberated around the world. [V10](#)  Representatives of western donor states abstained from comment or aligned themselves with the position of the Ethiopian government. France, however, officially deplored the expulsion and announced that it would not provide any assistance for the resettlement programme.**



Pierre Haski, 'Ethiopia: MSF Escorted to the Border,' *Libération* (France), 4 December 1985 (in French).

#### Extract:

In Paris yesterday, Rony Brauman, President of Médecins Sans Frontières, reaffirmed that "aid is not being used to save, but to oppress." These are the kind of remarks that led the Ethiopian government to expel the French organisation on Monday.

This marks the end of the 'fine romance' between Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and Ethiopia. The term comes from Rony Brauman, MSF's young President, rather than from the Ethiopian Government. The break-up was acrimonious (see *Libération*, 03/12).

At yesterday's press conference at the MSF office in Paris, adorned with a map of Ethiopia and posters appealing for emergency aid, Rony Brauman vehemently reiterated the accusations that led the Ethiopian authorities to announce the expulsion of the French humanitarian organisation on Monday. "There is an incredible diversion of aid going on in Ethiopia. They are in the process of turning an extraordinary movement of solidarity against the very people it is supposed to help... the aid is being used to oppress them, not to save them."

In Addis Ababa yesterday, the official Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) took the opposing view and blamed MSF for the split. As the expulsion notice stated, not without a touch of humour, "The RRC has accepted MSF's repeated offer to cease its operations in Ethiopia, and has consequently decided to terminate the services of MSF from 2 December 1985."

[...] MSF's president once again quoted the figure of 100,000 deaths, which had occurred "not because of the famine, but because of human actions supported by international aid," in the application of the policy of "resettlement." 100,000 deaths out of the 520,000 people displaced between October 1984 and August 1985. The policy seemed to have slowed down but, according to MSF, it has resumed on a grand scale over the last three months. "The multiplication of incidents since September has forced us to denounce what is unacceptable," said Rony Brauman. He cited a UN internal report which reveals the "shocking and documented mortality rate" in a North Wollo transit centre, where 16 people a day die while awaiting transport to the 'promised land' in the south.

Dr Brauman restated his conditions yet again: respect for the right to choose (as opposed to the armed threats experienced by the majority of displaced people, according to MSF), non-separation of families, and physical fitness to travel. These three conditions are being "systematically violated," he said. He also repeated his demands for the formation of an international committee of enquiry to investigate government practices and a three-month moratorium on resettlement, which is hardly likely to please the rulers in Addis Ababa.

Might not MSF discourage the public, who are still being solicited for aid to Ethiopia? Dr Brauman replied that aid must be "transparent." He expressed anger at the UN, whose attitude he described as "incomprehensible", and at the French ambassador in Addis Ababa, who is "overtly complicit in a murderous operation."



Blaine Harden, 'France Assails Ethiopia for Ejecting Relief Group That Saved "Thousands",' *AFP/International Herald Tribune*, Paris, 4 December 1985 (in English).

#### Extract:

[...] The Foreign Ministry issued a communiqué Tuesday deploring Ethiopia's decision to expel representatives of Doctors Without Borders, a private French humanitarian group. The French ministry said the young doctors had performed "admirable" relief work under difficult conditions of Ethiopia, and it deplored that the agency would be unable to continue a mission that already has saved "thousands of human lives" in that country.

[...] The ministry also said that France had no intention of contributing in any way to the Ethiopian government's program of transferring refugees from the north where there is drought to more fertile areas in the south.

#### [...] Expulsion Was First

Blaine Harden of the Washington Post reported earlier from Addis Ababa:

The expulsion of Doctors Without Borders marks the first time since the famine emergency began last year that the government has ordered a relief agency out of the country. The group was one of 47 private relief organizations operating in Ethiopia.

Berhane Deressa, the Deputy Director of the Government's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, said the group's members "are wasting our time and they are wasting the resources of the French people by spending their money on political activities." Mr Berhane declared Monday night that Doctors Without Borders "does not exist anymore in Ethiopia" and ordered the government to take over the organization's four medical and feeding operations.

The agency's medical coordination in Addis Ababa reacted angrily to the expulsion, which he said had been anticipated by the group. "We are not a blind humanitarian organization. We do not work in a country at any price," said Dr Bertrand Desmoulins, who oversees the group's doctors, nurses and logistics officers in Ethiopia. "It is much easier to do your work and not look around at the things that are wrong," he said. "We have been speaking out to emphasize the needs of the Ethiopian people."

In a series of statements that were highly publicized in Europe in recent weeks, Doctors Without Borders had accused the United Nations' emergency operation in Ethiopia of covering up abuses of the government's resettlement program.

The claims of Doctors Without Borders, however, are disputed by the United Nations and by donor governments such as the United States, which often criticize Ethiopia's famine relief efforts.

Ethiopian donors say that Doctors Without Borders has no evidence to back up its charges about the deaths of thousands of resettled people. Several donors, both private and governmental, also have remarked recently that the French agency appeared to want to be expelled from Ethiopia. Doctors Without Borders, which operates in 30 countries with 350 doctors and nurses, had demanded a "moratorium" on the resettlement effort. The program is a priority of the Marxist government. When Ethiopia announced the program last fall, it promised that resettlement would be voluntary and that families would be kept together. But according to reports from relief workers, the program has not been voluntary in thousands of cases, and many families have been split up.

During the past year, Doctors Without Borders has been willing to say publicly what many relief agencies would say only anonymously. In April, the agency declared that a cholera epidemic had broken out in several northern feeding centers. Other relief agencies confirmed the report but refused to do so publicly, fearing expulsion from the Ethiopian government.



'French Group Chastised by Ethiopian Relief Agency' *The Japan Times* (AP), 3 December 1985 (in English).



'Médecins Sans Frontières Expelled from Ethiopia' *La Tribune de Genève* (Switzerland), 3 Decembre 1985 (in French).



'French agency expelled' *Irish Times*, 3 December 1985 (in English).



'Group Expelled from Ethiopia Says Resettlement Policy Kills' State - *Times* (USA) 2 December 1985 (in English).



'Arzte müssen Athiopien verlassen' [Doctors Have to Leave Ethiopia] *Braunschweiger Zeitung* (Germany), 4 December 1985 (in German).



*I was shocked to see the camps in Korem, Ethiopia. It was clear that there was a policy of forced resettlement going on. We didn't have any guidelines on advocacy, but there was a lot of direct action. The*

Coordinator in Addis Ababa would phone Rony Brauman in Paris, who would happen to be in the company of a BBC reporter. This reflected what advocacy was like in those days; we saw horrible things, so we talked about them. We gave no thought to security or to the risk of being expelled. So, what we did was give information step by step to the media, telling them, for instance, that people were dying in front of our nutrition centers. We were very outspoken.

One day, we heard on Radio France Internationale that MSF was expelled from Ethiopia. We were stunned. A bit later, we got a little note from another MSF mission stating that we had to leave before the following Tuesday. By that time, the situation was already so tense that it was not possible for us to work properly any more. Since we were on the verge of reconsidering our intervention anyway, we left. As a result of the deadline, we had to just let everything fall, which was a terrible experience for the staff, who left our projects crying. Back in France, we were even more outspoken than before. We held a press conference in Paris, and did lots of interviews.

Bernard Lapeyre, MSF France logistician in Korem,  
Interviewed by Erwin Van't Land in 'The Advocacy  
Interviews,' September 1997 (in English).

**On 4 December, the MSF France Head of Mission informed the official responsible for UN operations in Ethiopia that the organisation was terminating its activities, and asked him to ensure that other medical agencies continued its relief work in the camps.**



**Letter** from Dr Bertrand Desmoulins, MSF France to Mr Priestley, Assistant Secretary General United Nations, 4 December 1985, (in English). [D83](#)

**Extract:**

Dear Sir,  
RRC has officially stopped our activities on December the 2nd, 1985. We shall soon be leaving Ethiopia. I am still concerned about the drought-affected people we have been taking care of, these last months. We have medical programmes in Korem shelter and in Kobo distribution center, and medical and nutritional programmes in Sekota and Kelala.

I want to inform you to make sure that these programmes will be undertaken as mentioned on the dismissal letter, by the Health Division of the Relief Department or any other medical agencies.

**On 7 December, at a press conference in London, the President of MSF France reported the testimony of MSF volunteers concerning compulsory resettlement and repeated his call for a moratorium.**

**A nurse who had worked for OXFAM in Wollo province stated that resettlement was not conducted on a voluntary basis. OXFAM officials admitted their concern over this matter, but said they had no plans to withdraw from Ethiopia.**



Richard Hall, 'OXFAM in Protest at Forced Migration,' **Sunday Observer** (UK), 8 December 1985, (in English).

**Extract:**

Methods being employed by Ethiopia to resettle 1.5 million people are causing "extreme concern" to Oxfam. The famine relief charity admitted this yesterday after one of its former medical workers claimed that coercion has been used systematically to enforce mass migrations.


Carol Ashwood, a 28-year-old nurse and midwife, worked for Oxfam in a remote district of Wollo province from which villagers are being moved hundreds of miles to southern Ethiopia. "Half of the 250,000 people in the district were earmarked for removal," she said. "Grain was deliberately denied by the Ethiopian authorities to force people to agree to leaving their homes. We found that hungry children to whom Oxfam was distributing food were losing weight, not gaining it. This, we discovered, was because the children were taking the food from our centre and sharing it with their entire families, who were getting nothing else."

Oxfam says it respects Ms. Ashwood as an "accurate witness," but did not agree with her that it should pull out of the area because of what was going on. "We protested to the Ethiopian Government," said Oxfam spokesman Paddy Coulter. "We have also told the British Government of our anxieties."

Oxfam's decision to speak out against the "haste, scale and timing" of the mass migrations comes immediately after the expulsion from Ethiopia of the French relief agency, Médecins Sans Frontières, because it has complained about the use of violence to make people move. Dr Rony Brauman, president of MSF, said in London yesterday that many aid workers had seen people being driven at gunpoint and beaten. He estimated that 100,000 had died because of resettlement. "Now that there has been a good harvest in much of Ethiopia, famine will not be the main cause of death in 1986. Instead, it will be forced resettlement." He appealed to the Ethiopian Government to allow a three-month moratorium on migration. "There must be an independent commission to investigate in the field just what is going on."

MSF believes that the northern regions of Ethiopia should

be rehabilitated rather than drained of much of its population. There have been repeated allegations that the regime in Addis Ababa has a strategy for emptying areas sympathetic to guerrilla movements opposing the central government. Oxfam's spokesman said it is refusing to allow its vehicles to be used for resettlement. One driver had been beaten for resisting party officials trying to make him move villagers. [...]

**Shortly after the expulsion notice, MSF's bank account in Ethiopia was blocked, the aircraft it used were grounded and the movements of its staff were restricted. Local staff, who had long been under pressure from the authorities to leave MSF, received no further wages. On the morning of 8 December, the MSF volunteers returned to Paris and were interviewed by the press. [V11](#) **



Peter Godwin, 'Ethiopians Persecute Expelled Aid Group,' *The Sunday Times* (UK), 8 December 1985, (in English). [D84](#) 

#### Extract:

[...] Michel Fiszbin, administrator of the 30-strong agency of doctors and nurses, told the Sunday Times that the way the agency had to end its relief act was "horrible; there was no respect for our teams." The agency's four medical and nutritional camps and one support centre were summarily taken over by the Ethiopian Relief Commission on Monday. The next day, said Fiszbin, their bank account was blocked, their plane grounded and movement of their personnel restricted.

According to Fiszbin, there was "a rush to share out our belongings." Agency employees coming in from their camps had to be driven in government vehicles by government drivers after their own cars had been impounded. Two agency nurses were seriously injured last week when the government truck bringing them into Addis Ababa overturned. They were flown into the capital by another aid organisation and on to Paris for medical treatment.

Fiszbin, who will stay on for one more week to wind up the agency's programme, is particularly worried about the fate of 270 Ethiopians it employed in the field. They have become caught up in the row and are now regarded as hostile by the Ethiopian government. Many of them have been beaten, sometimes in front of French doctors, some have been jailed and others have been caught up in the enforced resettlement programme. Fiszbin has sent a list of the local employees to the head of the United Nations delegation in Addis Ababa, with a request that their safety is monitored. But he is not hopeful.

The agency's row with the Ethiopian government came to a

head over its distribution centre a Kelala, where they were distributing food to 10,000 children and providing medical treatment to the surrounding population. Although 8,300 of the children were seriously malnourished to below 70% of the normal height-to-weight ratio, the agency was allowed by the Ethiopian authorities to distribute only take-away rations and forbidden to provide the children with shelter. According to the agency, children have been dying in the bush around the camp, and they estimate that of the 8,300 children on the scheme, at least 3,500 are now dead. The agency believes that the Kelala centre was in direct conflict with nearby government pre-selection camps for resettlement, to which the Ethiopian administration wished to lure the local people.

Fiszbin says his agency does not regret its public criticism of the resettlement programme. "We are proud (we reacted to a lack of respect of human dignity) and our actions were based on solid field information. We would do the same again, even at the price of being kicked out." He also points out the responsibility that any charity has to its donors to ensure money is being used in the people's interest.

At a press conference, on Friday, the agency President, Rony Brauman, said that it was now proposing a three-month moratorium with the Ethiopian government during which the conditions of the resettlement programme could be re-examined. The three conditions that are supposed to be met before resettlement goes ahead are: that those being resettled must be genuine volunteers, that families must not be split up, and that the people must be in good health.



'Testimony of Médecins Sans Frontières,' *AFP* (France), Paris, 9 December 1985 (in French).

#### Extract:

[...] "We had a simple choice: either speak out or carry on as if nothing was happening," said one of the doctors at a press conference held when MSF staff returned to Paris. "We were revolted by what was going on in the field. People talked to us and we knew that many families had been forcibly separated and taken south," another doctor said.

The field workers (the four MSF camps were located in Wollo and Tigre provinces, to the north of Addis Ababa) were shocked when they learned of their expulsion through the BBC or RFI (Radio France Internationale). According to their testimony, local authorities also seized their equipment (which they hope the International Committee of the Red Cross will be able to retrieve) and forced them to leave, subjecting them to considerable harassment in the process. The Kobo team suffered a serious car accident, while the Sekota staff, treated as spies because they had taken photographs of a raid, were assaulted. Three staff members, a doctor, an administra-

tor and a logistician, are still in Addis Ababa. According to the same source, they also face expulsion but have not yet been granted exit visas.



Yves Thibord of MSF France, interviewed by Jean-François Moruzzi, 'Ethiopia: the Accusations of a Médecins Sans Frontières Doctor,' *Le Quotidien de Paris* (France), 11 December 1985 (in French).

**Extract:**

Yves Thibord: There were four MSF staff at Sekota. We were listening to Radio France Internationale on Monday morning and learned that the Ethiopian government had expelled us. I'd been more or less expecting it, but even so...Then we thought that we would have at least two weeks to 'wind things up.' We simply stopped admissions but carried on working. But the next day, party officials and the chief of security arrived at the camp and asked us to hand over the keys and stocks of medicines immediately. It was a very peculiar situation at Sekota. I phoned headquarters in Addis Ababa and was told that a Red Cross plane would be coming in the afternoon and that we should take it. But when I went back to the authorities, they said, "no way!" They wanted us to use our car to get to Dessie. This began to cause us serious concern; it was more of a 92 kilometre track than a road. It's a six-hour journey. And it's only done by military convoys because attacks are frequent.

Q: Do you seriously think that the Ethiopian authorities tried to get you killed?

Yves Thibord: It's hard to say. Wubei, the Chief of Security, was in the habit of hitting people, especially in the prison. He was very violent and he knew that we knew what he was doing, so perhaps he didn't want us to tell anyone about it. During the day, we shared out what we had between the local staff, because we had no money left to give them; the bank account in Addis was blocked. But we also had to play hide and seek in the town, try and negotiate and get on the plane. In the end, I decided to go to the airport, despite the ban, to give the Red Cross pilot a letter. I met him on the way and he came back to negotiate with me. It's doubtless thanks to him that we secured the agreement of the authorities. But the suspense lasted right to the last minute. On the way to the airport, Wubei, who had already appropriated our car, made us unload all of our luggage in the middle of the countryside and then rummaged through it. He knew that one of us had no 'travel permit', but in the end he let it pass.

[...] Q: Did the same thing happen in all the camps?

Yves Thibord: Not for doctors and nurses like us. But the locals who worked with us were always under threat. At Kelala, a young man had his leg broken by baton-wielding militiamen. Working with MSF put them in a very compromising situation.

Q: Were relations with the authorities always tense?

Yves Thibord: Not at all. There was a totally cooperative relationship when I arrived in July. But it deteriorated when they started forcibly resettling people in the south. At Sekota, they would take anyone, even people who were working with us. They took a kid who went to get something to eat while his mother was in our hospital. When we said that we'd seen militiamen hitting people, they had the cheek to say that it was us who had hit them. In Wollo, three of the four camps were hit by these round-ups. The authorities would falsely announce a distribution of oil or grain and everybody who turned up was taken away in lorries. We did once see about 40 people who had volunteered to leave for the south, but they were the only ones. It's a virtual deportation. People should be aware that these days part of food aid is being used to facilitate this deportation.

Q: Aren't you afraid that such remarks might have the effect of stopping aid to Ethiopia?

Yves Thibord: That's a risk, but we can't keep silent any longer. It's very important that the aid continues, but other governments should have the right to monitor what is happening in Ethiopia. Otherwise, there will be as many deaths as those caused by the famine.



'MSF: the Return of the Ethiopian Brigade,' *Libération* (France), 10 December 1985, (in French).

**Extract:**

[...] "We can't remain silent," said Philippe Labalme, repatriated from the Sekota camp. "We were revolted by what we witnessed in the field. We have to speak out, even at the risk of expulsion, it's only natural." "We will never forget the faces of those people, we have to speak out on their behalf," added one of his colleagues. This involves describing the way families are separated during their forced deportation to the new resettlement zones in the south of the country; the way refugees awaiting transportation are left to lie in their own waste in virtual death-traps; the way the MSF team set off for their morning jog and discovered 200 people locked in a derelict church, awaiting forced departure. Such images are still fresh in the minds of these young volunteers, and they are not prepared to let go of them.

Nor can they stop wondering about the fate that awaits these populations, especially the children they have been forced to abandon. What will happen to their feeding centres and clinics? "We don't know," they reply. Another cause for concern is the 400 local staff MSF had employed. The main risk is that they will become the targets of 'political reprisals', particularly conscription or worse. For some time now, the one-party Ethiopian state has been organising political meetings at which MSF is attacked and its Ethiopian staff incited to leave. Official harassment has forced many of them to leave without waiting to be paid.

MSF's denunciation of the Ethiopian government's policy of population transfers is supported by hard evidence gathered 'in the field.' The French organisation has also compiled a 'red book' on the 'mass deportations' to support its demand for a three-month suspension of transfer operations. Meanwhile, the Ethiopian mission is being wound up. There are only three MSF staff left in Addis. Plus one who is waiting to marry an Ethiopian interpreter she met in a camp. Love is impervious to politics.



Christiane Chombeau, 'Médecins Sans Frontières Returns from Ethiopia - Shocking Accounts of Forced Population Transfers,' **Le Monde** (France), 10 December 1985 (in French). [D85](#)

#### Extract:

[...] As soon as they got off the plane, each carrying no more than a single canvas bag, they held a press conference to deliver the stark narrative of their abrupt expulsion (Le Monde 7/12/85), and especially to reiterate their accusations; the Ethiopian government is diverting food aid and is continuing its forced population transfers in barbaric conditions. The aim of the operation is to resettle famine victims in the south. MSF does not want to take a stand on this policy, Mr Brauman said on Monday, but it cannot close its eyes to the way in which it is being applied... Population resettlement is the major cause of mortality in Ethiopia today. Several former field workers talked of witnessing scenes of great violence at Korem, Kelala and Sekota.

[...] The story is eerily reminiscent of others relating to another continent. Although Philippe Labalme did not mention Cambodia, everything evoked it; the families torn apart, the forced displacements, the dying transported in appalling conditions to destinations devoid of any means of support... But why, given the circumstances, have other organisations remained silent? "In any case," Philippe Labalme acknowledged, "they want to maintain a low profile, they prefer to stay in the country whatever the price. That doesn't mean they accept the situation, but they apply pressure in different ways, in direct discussions with the authorities. As for us, we believe it's urgent to speak out; we can't do our work properly. In my view, humanitarian acts have no value if I ignore such excesses." So the field workers have no regrets about the way MSF approached the Ethiopian problem. But they certainly feel bitter when they think of the centres they have been forced to abandon. These will probably be closed, apart from one, which will be taken over by another NGO.



In December 1985, everyone was expelled. Bertrand Desmoulin, the Head of Mission, and Michel Fiszbin,

*the Administrator, stayed on for a while to settle affairs with the bank and send in the last financial details. About thirty people returned together. A press conference had been organised for them. They had travelled overnight from Djibouti; the offices had been opened around 08:30 to welcome them back. We didn't go to fetch them from the airport; they made their own way back. In fact, journalists from AFP and Libération were waiting for them at the airport; they wanted the background to the story. Pierre Haski from 'Libération' told me several years later that he had questioned all the volunteers one by one. They had not been briefed. I didn't want to fetch them because I didn't want any ambiguity, any "they have already been briefed, there has been a secret meeting" kind of thing. They were rumpled and travel-stained from their night on the plane. They landed and talked to the journalists. I spoke for thirty seconds; "all these people have come back from different parts of Ethiopia. We haven't had a chance to talk. I know what their general impressions are but not the detail, but we'll come to that." I was absolutely sure of my ground, of the veracity of their accounts, of the soundness of our position. I didn't have to cover myself. All thirty of them had an opportunity to speak. Everybody had different stories from different places. They hadn't seen the same things; they didn't have the same perceptions, but everybody was in total agreement that it was no longer the famine but the population transfers that were killing people, and that the aid was indirectly supporting the transfers, so we were indirectly supporting this crime against humanity that the deportations represented. Everybody was absolutely convinced that we should not play any part in that. They didn't feel that they had abandoned people. After a press conference like that, we didn't have to telephone journalists anymore... They were great! Some of them even said that if MSF had not taken a firm stand, they would have resigned. From that point of view, it went remarkably well. It was a very great strength to have an entire team which supported the MSF position. That never happened again.*

Rony Brauman, President of MSF France, (in French)

**The heads of MSF Belgium acknowledged that populations were being rounded-up but said that such operations were conducted more discreetly in the areas in which their volunteers were working. In consequence, they had not witnessed the same scenes of violence as their colleagues from the French section, and saw no reason to condemn anything or interrupt their work.**



*We were not in the eye of the storm. We were working on the margin, in a place that never made the news, which had no political significance. We had total peace and quiet. We worked with the local authorities; we did our job. Punto basta. And in terms of nutrition, the situation was not as tragic as it was at Korem.*

[...] MSF France was in the eye of the storm, in those huge camps in Korem, those terrible death-traps. I visited Korem. That was an 'eye-opener'. Everybody was on edge. They were very hard missions. The volunteers there were tremendously energetic! MSF logistics were not what they are today. It was a complete mess! The volunteers fought like crazy, worked like crazy to save two or three kids... In cases like that, the slightest obstacle placed in your way is totally unbearable. But in this instance, after the accounts I later had from people in the field, the obstacles took on quite considerable dimensions... As a result, I had more talks with people who worked with MSF France in Ethiopia, who told me what they had done there. They were reliable people; serious, level-headed and honourable. And I later thought that there were grounds for serious concern. It was obvious; there is no doubt about that. The problem is that when you want to take a stand on that kind of situation, you are obliged to be a bit of a caricature, to really hammer your point.

Pierre Harzé, MSF Belgium, Programme Manager  
Ethiopia, (in French)



We never had big round-ups in the camps in Tigre and Eritrea. So the situation in the north was objectively different to the one in Wollo. The people of Tigre and Eritrea were never subjected to massive deportations to the south. .. I never went to Korem, but obviously I have complete faith in everything MSF France said about Korem, and what they condemned after that. I think those kinds of operations were taking place in Tigre as well, but they were less visible because they were on a smaller scale. Nobody ever raided our camp or our hospital, as happened at Korem.

Georges Dallemagne, MSF Belgium  
Director of Operations (in French).



Perhaps some of the teams had seen certain things... So we knew, we knew that there was...we didn't need to see it, to witness it, to know whether it existed or not. Yes, there were forced deportations in Ethiopia. That's clear, that's obvious. Nobody is denying it. So yes, we knew about it... Personally, I didn't see anything in Ethiopia. OK, maybe somebody from our teams... things like that don't always happen in broad daylight; but we knew perfectly well that there were problems with the population transfers. Anyway, the Ethiopian government was not hiding it; it was publicising it. It wasn't done in secret... In Ethiopia, we were not targets; we did not have any problems as far as work was concerned...

You can't say to doctors and nurses "come on, you are leaving." You need to have worked in the field to understand

the impossibility of that. You can take a decision at headquarters and say: "Listen, we are sorry but that's the way it is, you have to do it." But in the field, you never get anyone saying: "We are leaving." Never, if they really care about the people, except if they don't have access to the victims, but that wasn't the case - we had access to the victims; there was no problem. We were not prevented from looking after people... The teams wanted to stay; none of our people said that we should leave. We didn't exaggerate or pile it on or stir it up. We were not pestered by journalists saying "but why are you sanctioning these crimes, etc?" No, there was none of that, so people understood. So we carried on with the mission, there were no problems on site. And MSF France left. I don't think it made much difference and things were back to normal two weeks later. Concerning Ethiopia, there were never any discussions; we never hesitated about whether to stay or leave. Nobody said: "We should follow MSF France." Everyone agreed that we should stay, everybody. There were absolutely no internal problems on that issue. Like any organisation, MSF Belgium had its internal tensions, its tendencies. There might have been power struggles in which things got blown up out of proportion and people took sides. But even in those battles - which go on anywhere - it was never a question of staying in Ethiopia or leaving the country. It was never an issue. Everybody was unanimous - we had to stay. And we never regretted it; we did not think: "We should have left as well." Never!

Philippe Laurent, MSF Belgium Executive Director  
(in French).

**The heads of MSF Belgium also had felt that the Ethiopian famine was no worse than that which affected the rest of the Sahel, and that the behaviour of the Ethiopian authorities was no worse than the authorities in Sudan or Chad.**



The problem of famine throughout the Sahel, including Ethiopia, began in 1983. It should be remembered that during the year that preceded the Ethiopian famine and during the famine itself the number of displaced people and the scale of the famine was greater in Sudan than in Ethiopia. People always forget that. Ethiopia attracted more attention, but conditions in Sudan were much worse. In '83, we launched big appeals in the media... What is surprising is that there was no similar reporting about other countries. You could have had exactly the same reporting from Sudan, for example. Not everybody agrees, but I personally think chance had something to do with it. We knew about the famine in other countries, but in Ethiopia it was rather new. And as for the other countries, their governments were - as ever - information and saying "no, there are no problems"... [...] The government of Ethiopia was not like the government of the Soviet Union, or France or

Belgium. It had very few resources and it was overtaken by events. So in my view, they effectively said at the onset "OK, there is a famine, this might be a good opportunity to transfer populations." So there were political stakes, but this was the case in Sudan and Chad as well. But there could not have been a systematic policy. It was impossible; they did not have the means to carry out a systematic policy.

Philippe Laurent, MSF Belgium Executive Director  
(in French).

**Some members of the MSF Belgium team were convinced that their colleagues in MSF France had deliberately exaggerated events in Ethiopia in order to justify the existence of Liberté Sans Frontières. Conversely, MSF France believed that the deportations enforced by the Ethiopian government were enough to justify the questions that Liberté Sans Frontières was designed to raise. The conflict between the two sections, formalised by the proceedings of July 1985, would continue for another two years.**

We were not totally convinced, particularly since they [MSF France] were in the process of setting up Liberté sans Frontières. We said: perhaps they are using this situation to try and score points with Liberté sans Frontières and therefore score points in the political arena. The argument seemed to be a bit of a 'Parisian' thing... But, once again, the problem was not so much due to what was said, but rather to what remained unsaid, to the other sections' lack of support for this policy. And also, in my view, to certain mistakes in Paris, where they were mixing all sorts of agendas - the hostility of other sections, the Liberté Sans Frontières agenda, etc. It didn't allow for a clear situation in ethical terms, in terms of values or the charter. So I believe that it has to be acknowledged once again that, basically, MSF France was completely right to pursue that strategy and that MSF Belgium was probably too timid in its support for this position. But at the same time, the climate in Paris was not favourable to a cohesive approach to the problem. I personally think that MSF Belgium feared a hidden agenda. And that created caution, a wait-and-see attitude... And Malhuret... he went into politics at that time<sup>3</sup>... I think that yes, there was a certain kind of hidden agenda. Was it using Ethiopia? I wouldn't go that far. In any case, at a given moment the problem of Ethiopia symbolised certain things that Liberté Sans Frontières intended to condemn

Georges Dallemagne, MSF Belgium Director of Operations (in French).

What happened over Ethiopia in 1985 and the major disagreement we had, because MSF Belgium stayed on while MSF [France] left; all that can only be envisaged within the framework of Liberté Sans Frontières, of course. You can't separate the two; it's impossible... Médecins Sans Frontières launched Liberté Sans Frontières. It was all prepared with a 7-8 page cover feature, 'The Sham of Third-Worldism', in Paris Match. And it continued with 'The Crimes of the Red Negus' (an article by André Glucksman, who had nothing to do with MSF, which appeared a year later). All that came before the expulsion, so it all linked up... I mean that's the climate in which the Ethiopia story unfolded. So I knew through Malhuret's documents that a dossier like that hadn't been put together overnight. It was something that had been prepared several months earlier. So we knew perfectly well that they were preparing this trump to play at press conferences, we knew perfectly well what lay behind it. It was obvious. The mindset was the same. There was more to it than that, there was all the confusion. It was obvious that there was a total, total, total confusion of interests! After they rewrote the story, we mended things but the confusion was total, total. So I'm not saying they were wrong, that Mengistu was not a bastard. They had had enough experience of communist regimes to know what he was, but they also knew that Sudan, which had a right-wing regime - and the Hezbollah mob was already beginning to appear - was no better. But Brauman and Malhuret were pursuing this anti-communist agenda for two or three years. Brauman certainly reacted afterwards; he realised that he should not continue down that road and did a u-turn. Liberté Sans Frontières lasted for two or three years then suddenly disappeared. We don't even know what really happened to it. But at the start, I'd say, they were in the grip of an anti-communist fever. I remember the conversations I had with Brauman in Maho, in Chad. It was incredible; he was consumed by politics. He felt invested with a mission to combat communism.


Philippe Laurent, MSF Belgium Executive Director  
(in French).

We were not on the same wavelength as MSF France at all. Now, looking back on it, I think we were wrong. We thought they had certain intentions... I tended to go along with Philippe Laurent's interpretation of all the positions they were taking, etc... This was 'confirmed' for those of us in the interior when we saw Claude Malhuret go into politics. It was all part of the same thing. We thought Claude was under the influence of the neo-liberals, very close to the American foundations who wanted to settle accounts with the communist regimes. We felt very strongly that we were being manipulated by Claude. We hadn't really understood why Rony was so quick to follow his lead. So there you have it! ... We saw Revel and all the others hanging round LSF. They were not the kind of people you like to associate with. So it all meant that we didn't really follow the LSF line. And that was the start of a major


3. In March 1986, General Director Claude Malhuret left MSF France to take up the post of Minister for Human Rights in the new French government.

disagreement... And then there was probably the desire of a growing section to assert itself...there were various things.

Pierre Harzé, MSF Belgium, Programme Manager  
Ethiopia, (in French)

 The quarrel with MSF Belgium intensified because the ferocious opposition to *Liberté Sans Frontières* on the part of Philippe Laurent and the Belgians in general was mixed with a ferocious opposition to the position we had taken in Ethiopia. They saw, understandably, that the two were closely connected. That was the way I saw it; there was no contradiction between what I said at LSF and what I said about Ethiopia, and more broadly, on the way MSF expressed itself on that issue.

Rony Brauman, MSF France President (in French).

 No, we did not 'use' Ethiopia to justify *Liberté Sans Frontières*! *Liberté Sans Frontières* was conceived in 1983 and created at the 1984 General Assembly in order to condemn the effects that totalitarianism and the ideology of Third-Worldism had on populations. Ethiopia was a totalitarian regime hiding behind a 'Third World' facade, so it was natural to condemn it.

Claude Malhuret, MSF France General Director  
(in French)


**After the expulsion of MSF France from Ethiopia, MSF Belgium distanced itself from the position adopted by its counterpart.**




**Telex** from MSF Belgium to press agency Belga, December 1985 (in French) [D86](#)

#### Extract:


Following the departure of 'Médecins Sans Frontières France' from Ethiopia, we would like to specify that: the current problem only concerns Médecins Sans frontirières France, Médecins Sans Frontières Belgium continues to carry out its activities unhindered in Adigrat, Idaga Hamous and Zalambessa situated between Eritrea and Tigray. We regret the form the controversy has taken and the excessive statements which inevitably led to an impasse that is ultimately detrimental, above all, to the populations in need.

 Of course, it was disturbing. They bore the same name and they were waging a campaign... The Belgians said that we had broken the principles of the charter, that we had adopted political and ideological positions, that we were abandoning the victims, that Ethiopia was a reasonable place in which to work and worth the investment. In short, they dismantled all the explicit or implicit arguments one by one. They did it openly. I remember one occasion when I was confronted by their counter-lobbying. I'd gone to the European Parliament for a hearing or a press conference. They had got there before me. There were two-page leaflets arguing against our position, signed by MSF Belgium, in every MP's office, because they had very strong support from the head of the DG VIII [European Commission Directorate-General for Development], a German 'fellow traveller'.<sup>4</sup> He had got them access and they had obviously received help from the communist MEPS. It was quite funny because Philippe Laurent is quite close to the hard right.

Rony Brauman, MSF France President (in French).

 No, that really surprised me, we never did that. That surprised me. It was not Médecins Sans Frontières Belgium. Not all Belgians belonged to Médecins Sans Frontières. I would never, never have accepted that! And what's more, to distribute leaflets in the European Parliament, no, no, never! But the provocation of the launching of *Liberté Sans Frontières*, the conference, which unleashed an extraordinary controversy, is concomitant. So this charge triggered all sorts of articles in the newspapers. The Third-worlders were attacked so they counter-attacked, etc. Of course, as the European Parliament is a 'Third-worlders' lobby', they defended themselves, that's clear enough. So material was circulating, but it wasn't MSF Belgium who organised it, no way. We had no contact with the Third-worlders, with the European Parliament. We'd never, never, had any contact...

Philippe Laurent, MSF Belgium Executive Director  
(in French).

 We had all come to believe that MSF France was determined to mount a coup. They didn't want any interference from us and we were *persona non grata*. So from the start we said: "Look, MSF France is MSF France. In any case, we don't have a lot to do with them, all you have to do is ask them"... I think we took the following line: "they were confronted with an unacceptable situation; they assumed their responsibilities in relation to a situation in which they were totally manipulated, a truly deplorable

situation. We are not in the same type of situation; we have decided to stay in the hospitals; we are allowed to work; we have been able to set up a series of missions”...

But beyond that, I think there was a communication problem. At no time were we able to strengthen and assist each other, because of the adoption of different strategies. One could leave while the other could stay, as it had done in other situations. But at no time were we capable of mounting a coherent communications strategy together. There was an enormous problem of coexistence. In Paris at that time, there was already a desire to pull out, and to stop calling ourselves MSF as well. I remember that at the time, MSF France, which was a major NGO established in Addis Ababa and which had the logistics, was helping out every NGO in the place - apart from MSF Belgium! We were very small and I was struggling because we didn't have the means. That certainly did not contribute to a proper understanding of the political context and an efficient strategy, which might have been possible at other times...

The Ethiopian Government clearly tried to get us involved by telling us “look, at MSF there are some political firebrands who want to harm Ethiopia, that's MSF France; and there are reasonable people who come to work with us, that's MSF Belgium.” At the time, that line had some influence in the aid community, etc. We didn't respond to it; we didn't have to. Simply, with hindsight, I think that objectively there was an unusual situation, particularly with regard to the animosity between the sections. In any case, we didn't want to think about it together, or try to understand each other's positions, or try to work out a common strategy and therefore make ourselves stronger. And ultimately, what weakened one section might - why not - be to the advantage of the other section... I think that basically, there was probably no need for us to leave Ethiopia as well, because after all it was a tragic situation. But we could have made ourselves stronger in terms of communication and témoignage. We never went as far as saying that MSF France was obviously wrong. But we were not very... aggressive on that subject. We never went as far as saying “in their place, we would have left too.”

Georges Dallemagne, MSF Belgium  
Director of Operations (in French).

**The other aid organisations working in Ethiopia privately admitted the reality of the violence condemned by MSF France, but publicly distanced themselves from the MSF France's position. In December 1985, forty NGOs met at the CRDA (Christian Relief and Development agency) and issued a statement claiming that MSF had accused them of compromising with the Ethiopian government.**



'Ethiopia - MSF reactions,' **AFP** (France), Paris, 3 December 1985 (in French).

**Extract:**

[...] Following a statement from the Foreign Ministry, which deplored the decision, the Socialist Party spokesman and Deputy for the Rhone, Jean-Jacques Queranne, who is also president of the Groupe d'Amitié Franco-Éthiopie (the Franco-Ethiopian Friendship Association), expressed his “strong disapproval.”

In a telegram to Getachew Kebreth, the Ethiopian ambassador to France, Mr Queranne expressed the fear that the decision would “jeopardise the vast international movement of solidarity with Ethiopia.” Action Internationale Contre la Faim (AICF/Action Against Hunger), which operates in Tigre, claims that while it has seen “no evidence of such practices” (regarding the transfers), it shares MSF's concerns and has asked the Ethiopian government to allow all relevant organisations to freely monitor the conditions under which displaced persons are resettled. Aviation Sans Frontières, who were working for MSF, have stressed their “apolitical position” in an attempt to secure the release of their aircraft, which was grounded on orders from Addis Ababa. They hope to be allowed to continue to assist MSF and any other NGO working to relieve the victims of disaster.



Pierre Haski, 'Ethiopia: MSF Escorted to the Border,' **Libération** (France), 4 December 1985 (in French).

**Extract:**

[...] Rony Brauman is straining his vocal chords but finds himself largely isolated on the NGO stage. Out of 47 NGOs working in Ethiopia, not a single one agrees with him. His former Belgian “branch” has even criticised the “hype” emerging from MSF Paris, and has declared itself unconcerned by the expulsion. “There is no question of turning a blind eye to the violence, but this kind of attitude blocks everything. All we know is that things are not exactly a bed of roses,” says Philippe Laurent, President of MSF Belgium.

In Geneva, the cautious International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the main organisation working in Ethiopia, stated that it had made several formal protests to Addis Ababa over the series of “irregularities” and advises that disagreements should be settled through “dialogue” with the authorities. It has to be said that MSF is partly responsible for its own marginalisation: politicising its action through the forum of Liberté Sans Frontières has attracted little sympathy from other NGOs. MSF has stuck its neck out and is in danger of losing its head.

[...] Reactions

On Tuesday, the Foreign Ministry “deplored” Ethiopia’s expulsion of the humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières and said it took a “very serious” view of the decision, which was announced by the authorities in Addis Ababa on Monday night. A press release from the Foreign Ministry states that “MSF doctors have accomplished an admirable mission of relief and assistance in Ethiopia under difficult conditions. The Ministry deplores the fact that they cannot continue their humanitarian mission, which has already saved thousands of lives in this country.”

The Ministry says that France does not envisage providing any form of assistance for the regime’s programme of transporting drought victims to the south, which is the principle bone of contention between Addis Ababa and MSF.



Christophe Naigeon (Addis Ababa), ‘Addis Ababa Accuses Médecins Sans Frontières of Meddling in Politics,’ *Libération* (France), 4 December 1985 (in French).

#### Extract:

[...] According to the Ethiopian government, “Rony Brauman’s Little Tarzans produce more noise than miracles,” while the actions of Médecins Sans Frontières in Ethiopia are chiefly motivated by political considerations. These, in substance, are the main charges it is levelling against the French humanitarian organisation.

In a carefully constructed dossier, which began circulating in Addis Ababa last Thursday, Berhanu Deressa, Deputy Director of the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC), articulated the arguments that would justify the expulsion of MSF three days later. The dossier, which is extremely critical of Rony Brauman, head of MSF France, and of local director Michel Fiszbin, takes a more lenient view of those MSF staff who confined themselves strictly to field operations and eschewed political considerations. For that is where the roots of this business lie. The Ethiopians, who stress the links between MSF and the Liberté Sans Frontières foundation, are convinced that “all the noise made by Rony Brauman, who is trying to attract more media attention than the situation merits,” has only one objective: to prepare for the elections in France.

Such an allegation is doubtless unfounded, but it is supported by a series of balanced arguments to which MSF in Ethiopia has difficulty responding. Indeed, the mortality figure arising from operations to transfer populations from the north to the south, the figure of 100,000 that Rony Brauman has given to several newspapers, is totally unverifiable and is not extrapolated from the hard facts noted by MSF teams, which amounts to 27 people. The area concerned is twice as big as France; half the inhabitants live in the south, in villages, which are often diffi-

cult to reach; nobody has been in a position to verify the figures. Furthermore, Ethiopia is the realm of statistical approximation par excellence; nobody knows the figures for agricultural production or GDP.

“MSF uses localised events to discredit the policy of resettling peasants in the south,” the RRC dossier concludes, and its author, the organisation’s Deputy Commissioner, states that: “MSF has never asked me to visit the resettlement camps and verify its claims.” Nobody from the 47 NGOs who have established themselves in Addis Ababa since the famine, or from government circles, seriously disputes the fact that the transfer of populations often creates atrocious conditions. The three principles of displacement - freedom of choice, non-separation of families and physical fitness to undertake the journey - are, all the witnesses agree, often violated. In fact, as for freedom of choice, militiamen can often be seen wielding batons as they embark people who are too weak to begin several days of travel, although in the resettlement sites we have been allowed into we have seen entire families who appear to be happy with their new situation, Nobody is in a position to say precisely what is going on, or whether massive and brutal deportations are in fact taking place, as Rony Brauman claims.

Given the lack of facts, the other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in Ethiopia are keeping quiet. This is not simply because they cannot, in all honesty, go as far as MSF, but also because the general rule is ‘work and keep quiet’ if there is no way to communicate information through more discreet channels.

In any case, even if every humanitarian organisation is ready to share some of the fears of MSF’s fieldworkers, the world, including the French ambassador and the United Nations, has cooled considerably towards Médecins Sans Frontières. MSF has violated the universally accepted obligation to maintain a low profile but beyond that, Rony Brauman and Michel Fiszbin may be reproached for having tried to impose their own views on a sovereign state, as well as for behaving like ‘champions of human rights’ while having little regard for the truth.

Remarking that it was the “the smallest NGO which made the most noise,” the RRC, relying on the neutrality of the other organisations, therefore decided to risk making a martyr out of MSF. It is certainly a calculated risk. Even if France withdrew after this incident, which is not likely to happen - the French ambassador has been distancing himself from MSF for some time - Ethiopia does not stand to lose a great deal; this year’s French aid amounts to a three-day distribution of food.

While the expulsion is fuelling conversations in the bars of the Addis Ababa Hilton, main headquarters of the NGOs working in Ethiopia, the departure of MSF will create a gap, which may or may not be quickly filled by others. Ethiopia is the scene of fierce rivalry between NGOs and each defends its own territory as best it can, even if

that sometimes means having to close its eyes - and its mouth.



'At Least 100,000 Dead,' **AFP** (France), 19 December 1985, (in French).

**Extract:**

Asked why officials of the other humanitarian non-governmental organisations operating in Ethiopia - there are close to 50 of them - have so far not aligned themselves with MSF's campaign, Dr Brauman said it was a "difficult decision" for other NGOs to take. He explained that their priority was to continue to assist populations and this holds them hostage to silence.

"One of the reasons why MSF adopted this attitude," said Dr Brauman, "is that three of our four centres were in Wollo province. Our teams were direct witnesses to forced displacements involving the separation of families and the forced loading of the sick on stretchers. They would not have accepted that we hide the truth."

On this point, Dr Brauman remarked that it is impossible for independent foreign observers, particularly diplomats, to move freely in Ethiopia. Moreover, despite claims to the contrary, journalists experience great difficulties in obtaining visas. The government is reluctant to issue them and only does so according to criteria, which remain obscure.



"Open letter to NGOs in Ethiopia" Bertrand Desmoulins, Medical coordinator, Michel Fiszbin, administrator, MSF France, 13 December 1985 (in English) **D87**

**Extract:**

[...] In this current recovery and development phase, we believe the donors must be informed of the ways their contributions are to be used so that, aware of the facts, they may decide what they will support and what they will not. They should know too that relief operations are being hampered by new political priorities, such as at Kelala, where thousands of deaths could easily have been avoided, or as in the south Welo and north Shoa lowlands, where a severe epidemic is ravaging the population unchecked. No medical care has so far been authorized. Freedom of action and movement for NGOs has been reduced to such an extent that the mutual confidence on which international private assistance is based is now in jeopardy. For these reasons, we believe it is indispensable to open up the aid operations in Ethiopia, both for the good of the Ethiopian people and out of respect for all those who donate financially to our cause. The whole international movement of solidarity runs the risk of finding itself undermined by the climate of secrecy that shrouds the aid problems in Ethiopia.



CRDA Member's **Statement** on Resettlement (Draft), 18 December 1985, (in English). **D88**

**Extract:**

1. In recent weeks various CRDA members have been publicly and privately attacked by MSF for 'supporting' the government's policy on re-settlement and for not publicising alleged abuses of this policy.
2. CRDA's position is that it does, through its members, support the general policy of resettlement, as this remains a defensible policy in the light of the chronic drought conditions of Northern Ethiopia.
3. However, CRDA members are aware that the resettlement policy may be given a bad name both if it is implemented by compulsion, or if too many resources are diverted away from programmes of relief and rehabilitation in which CRDA members are collaborating with the RRC.
4. There is further the very real risk that the bad publicity stirred up by MSF will cause major aid donors to reduce both their immediate and long term aid commitments to Ethiopia in 1986.
5. Therefore CRDA members assert their long-term commitment to assisting the RRC in meeting the tremendous needs of Ethiopia in 1986, where members face difficulties in their programmes, they will continue to discuss these difficulties with the relevant officials both at a regional and national level, with a view to resolving them.
6. As regards the specific allegations of MSF that thousands of deaths have been 'caused' by resettlement, CRDA members would point out that it is impossible to prove or disprove this allegation, as many of the resettlers might have died of starvation or related diseases if they had stayed either in their own villages or in the relief camps.

CRDA members would like to make it clear that they do not intend to be diverted from their relief and development activities by the problems arising from the Ethiopian Government's resettlement programme. Given the continuing food deficit in Ethiopia, only a major effort by all its members combined with multilateral and bilateral aid programmes can prevent further starvation becoming evident by the middle of next year.

CRDA feels that in spite of all the problems caused by resettlement, it can achieve more by involvement rather than by boycotting it. As humanitarian agencies our first concern must be to assist the people of Ethiopia wherever they are.




Summary of MSF France **Board Meeting**, 4 January 1986, (in French). **D89**


**Extract:**

[...] The CRDA (Christian Relief and Development

Association) is composed of more than 40 NGOs working in Ethiopia. It recently issued a press release claiming that MSF has privately and publicly accused NGOs of compromising with the government in Addis. Rony Brauman states that we have never made such accusations. A letter was sent to every organisation, asking them what their respective positions were in relation to the press release .


 *We were the only ones to speak out. Everybody spat on us. The SCF people had exactly the same information as us. They gave us stuff about the transit camps. They knew the transfers were not voluntary, that families were separated and people were dying. On the other hand, they thought that if they said anything in public they would risk expulsion and they did not want to take that risk themselves. They thought it was more important to carry on working, because things were improving in some places. ICRC never said anything in public. They never said to a journalist: "we agree with MSF." They said: "we do agree, but we don't want you to say that." They said nothing at that time. They wouldn't speak out publicly. A year or two later, they were expelled. They had 90 to 100 lorries in a depot and they were all confiscated. Anyway, everybody was robbed blind. As for Concern, I think they were the ones who kept insisting we were liars. First of all because they were working in the resettlement camps and they didn't want to come out and say things were not going well. Secondly, because they can't have appreciated the fact that Michel Fiszbin repeated in public something they had said at the meeting. Most of the others found it easy to turn a blind eye to what was going on. They just focused on the little dying child.*

Brigitte Vasset, MSF France Medical Coordinator in Korem, from April 1984 to May 1985 (in French).

 *Only MSF France left the country. The other members of MSF Belgium and MSF Holland did not leave. And the 200 other NGOs did not leave either. In any case, whether MSF France left or not made no difference to the level of assistance the population was receiving. MSF France contributed, I don't know, 1% of the aid, so it did not change anything. It would be completely different in a situation where you're providing 100% of the aid and then decide to leave... But MSF France took the 'we do not want to sanction a government' line. I think everybody knew what was happening. The press was already talking about it. The organisations that carried on working there were saying, "something is not right". But they did not say, "you are communists, therefore you are bad, therefore all your decisions are bad." Which was pretty much the position MSF France took: "You don't have the means to carry out your policy. Even if your intentions are good, you can't make it*

*work. You are transferring people, but there is no infrastructure ready for them. You are transporting them in appalling conditions. It's not working and you don't have any solutions." But there were no solutions for retaining people either. It was a terrible headache. So the common position of the NGOs was not to follow MSF France. There was even a petition against MSF circulating among the NGOs in Addis Ababa. I don't think MSF Belgium or Holland signed it, but most of the NGOs condemned the attitude of Médecins Sans Frontières France .*

Philippe Laurent, MSF Belgium Executive Director  
(in French).

 *I am absolutely convinced, though I can't prove it, that if in November, after all the media commotion that had already taken place, we had succeeded in creating an NGO front in Addis, we could have turned the situation around. MSF would not have been expelled and the government would have been forced to stop the transfers again. I'm absolutely certain of it. Besides, it did stop them six to eight months later, but during those eight months hundreds of thousands more people were deported. We really had the power to make them backtrack but we couldn't do it alone. Obviously, MSF does not count for much. Even today, MSF on its own is no big deal. But it is infinitely more than it was at the time. There would have been MSF, AICF - Oxfam was unthinkable - SCF and several others, people like IRC, they made them withdraw, because the press had agreed to support that vision of Ethiopia. That's the saddest thing about that business, apart from the cruelty of the transfers themselves.*

Rony Brauman, MSF France President (in French).

**On 12 December, MSF requested the support of the European Parliament to help in obtaining a three-month moratorium on the forced resettlements. The Parliament criticised Ethiopia's policy of resettlement and asked it to allow MSF to resume its work.**



'Ethiopia: MSF Appeals to the European Parliament,' **Le Quotidien du Pharmacien** (France), 12 December 1985 (in French).

**Extract:**

Dr Rony Brauman, President of Médecins Sans Frontières, has just asked the European Parliament for help in pressing the Ethiopian government to suspend its resettlement policy for at least three months. "These arbitrary displacements, which are conducted in appalling conditions, have become the major cause of death in Ethiopia,"

he claimed. "We can estimate the number of deaths they have caused at nearly 100,000."

Dr Brauman has also challenged the commitment of the missions of enquiry sent by the United Nations and said that 22 members of Médecins Sans Frontières had recently been expelled from Ethiopia for doing their humanitarian duty. Several political groups have already announced their intention of opening a debate, which should begin today, with the hope of encouraging all the member states to support MSF.



'Ethiopia: European Parliament Criticises the Policy of Deportation,' **AFP** (France), Strasbourg, 12 December 1985 (in French).

#### Extract:

[...] The Strasbourg Parliament has appealed to the Ethiopian government to allow Médecins Sans Frontières to resume its humanitarian activities in Ethiopia. The organisation was expelled after revealing the appalling conditions in which these population transfers take place. According to the European Parliament, the 'resettlement programme' is essentially inspired by political motives, particularly the desire to depopulate regions controlled by autonomous governments.

It has requested the immediate suspension of the transfers so that a commission of enquiry can collect information concerning living conditions in the north and the situation in the 'resettlement' zones. The commission would also examine whether or not relocation was conducted on a voluntary basis, and whether it involved the separation of families. The Parliamentary Assembly concluded by condemning abuses in the distribution and use of Community aid and demanded stricter controls.

The European Commissioner, Lorenzo Natali, observed that a systematic challenge to the fundamental practicality of the 'resettlement programme' was less important than an assessment of the conditions in which it was conducted. He said that details of recent developments in the Ethiopian situation would be made available next week.

**On 16 December, the international press reported the defection of Dawit Wolde Giorgis, the RRC Commissioner, who failed to return to Ethiopia after a trip to the United States.**



'Ethiopia: the Mysterious "Disappearance" of Dawit Wolde Giorgis,' **Le Monde** (AP) (France), 17 December 1985 (in French). **D90** [↗](#)

#### Extract:

Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Director of the Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC), which controls international aid to Ethiopia, 'disappeared' during a tour of several western capitals three weeks ago. According to the London Sunday Times, the director was "seeking to obtain political asylum in the United States." Mr Dawit left Addis Ababa on 25 October on a trip to solicit aid in Great Britain, Belgium and the United States. He should have returned to Ethiopia three weeks ago. He has a residence in the UK and another on the US West Coast and had travelled to Washington at the beginning of November, before visiting the UN. According to one of his close contacts in Nairobi, he then went to California, before moving on to Brussels. He disappeared shortly afterwards.

Appointed director of the aid commission two years ago, Mr Dawit is a commander in the Ethiopian army. He is one of the regime's foremost personalities and is a personal friend of the Head of State, Lieutenant-Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam. He has been at the centre of several controversies, notably concerning the forced transfer of about a million and a half people from the northern provinces to the more fertile southern and western regions of the country. These massive deportations are alleged to have caused the deaths of up to 100,000 people (Le Monde, 4 and 11 December). Last May, the RRC was accused of misappropriating international aid and distributing it in a discriminatory manner.



Frank J. Prial, 'Ethiopian Aid Chief Said to Seek Asylum in USA,' **The New York Times** (USA), 20 December 1985 (in English). **D91** [↗](#)

#### Extract:

[...] But a highly placed Washington source said Mr Dawit was in the United States and had made it known that he intended to stay in this country.

[...] Officials here and in Washington said Mr Dawit's defection would be embarrassing to Ethiopia's Marxist Government, which has close ties to the Soviet Union and other nations of the Eastern bloc. The reported defection was also viewed with some irony by relief officials who noted that Mr Dawit had criticized the United States role in supplying aid to Ethiopia.

**On 18 December, the heads of MSF France held a press conference in Geneva. This was attended by the UN representative for Ethiopia, who claimed that MSF had**

**been expelled for interfering in the country's internal political affairs.**



'MSF Calls for Ethiopia to Respect the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,' **AFP** (Geneva), 18 December 1985 (in French).

**Extract:**

On Wednesday, the humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), speaking in Geneva, the headquarters of many international organisations, called for Ethiopia to respect Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which forbids the forced transfer of populations.

At a press conference, Dr Rony Brauman, President of MSF, which has just been expelled from Ethiopia, added that the massive programme to resettle northern famine-stricken populations in the south had caused the deaths of at least 100,000 people. These transfers, he said, are carried out against the will of the population, who are confined in transit camps which "resemble concentration camps", and are the "chief cause of mortality in the country."

Dr Claude Malhuret, General Director of MSF and author of a report on the 'mass deportations in Ethiopia,' claimed that the plan to resettle 1,750,000 people would lead to another 300,000 deaths. "We are witnessing the biggest deportation since the Khmer Rouge genocide," he added.

These statements were denied by Mrs. Kongit Sinegiorgis, the Deputy Permanent Representative for Ethiopia at the UN in Geneva, who attended the press conference. She said that MSF was "one of 48 non-governmental organisations working in Ethiopia and had been expelled for interfering in the country's internal political affairs." She added, "the figures quoted are totally without foundation and we invite every journalist present to come to Ethiopia and verify this for themselves."

Dr Brauman, who was meeting an Ethiopian official for the first time since his expulsion, formally acknowledged the invitation, while pointing out that when the members of his organisation worked in Ethiopia, they were forbidden to go beyond a strictly limited perimeter around the camps where relief operations were taking place.

**On 19 December, the president of MSF France travelled to Nairobi, where the last volunteers who had been detained in Ethiopia were due to arrive. At a press conference, he called for humanitarian organisations to create a united front.**



'MSF Claims at least 100,000 People Have Died During the Forced Resettlement Operation,' **AFP** (France), Nairobi, 19 December 1985, (in French).

**Extract:**

The principle cause of mortality in Ethiopia today is "neither famine nor drought but the forced population resettlement organised by the government," Dr Rony Brauman, President of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), claimed in Nairobi on Thursday.

Dr Brauman, whose organisation was expelled from Ethiopia on 4 December after working in the field for over a year, also claimed that at least 100,000 people had died during forced transfers from the north to the south of the country. These operations have had a particularly detrimental effect on the inhabitants of Wollo and Tigre provinces, which were stricken by the drought of 1984. The Ethiopian government maintains that the south is more fertile.

Challenging the Ethiopian government's principal accusation that it was meddling in internal politics - a pro-Soviet regime has been in power for eleven years - the president of the French humanitarian organisation stated that he was "not criticising the resettlement programme itself, but rather the conditions in which it takes place."

Dr Brauman had arrived in Nairobi on Thursday to welcome the last two members of MSF from Addis Ababa, but they were still entangled in "bureaucratic red tape," according to MSF. They were still in the Ethiopian capital Thursday night, waiting for their exit visas.

Claiming that he was making this information public "in the name of humanitarian principles and out of respect for the donors," Dr Brauman expressed the hope that a "united front" of humanitarian organisations working in Ethiopia could be formed so that pressure could be applied to the government in Addis Ababa. "Our goal," he said, "is first of all to obtain an immediate suspension of the resettlement programme. We can then study the real possibilities of rehabilitating populations in their home regions and, finally, improve the resettlement sites."

**MSF France published a four-page document explaining its actions in Ethiopia and the reasons for its expulsion. This was circulated among donors and the press.**



'Why Were We Expelled?' MSF France Special Document on Ethiopia, for Donors and the Press, December 1985 (in French). [D57](#)

#### Extract:

Médecins Sans Frontières has decided to speak out and reveal the truth about the conditions surrounding population resettlement in Ethiopia. Rony Brauman, MSF President, also responds to all the questions that have arisen.

The unacceptable!

We can no longer say, as some did after the Second World War, regarding the incredible passivity of Europeans when they were confronted with the deportations: "We didn't know!" We can no longer say, following the example of many western commentators when referring to the genocide committed by the new regime in Cambodia between 1975 and 1979: "We didn't know!" We can no longer say it and we will not say it! Because there are always ways of knowing when crimes are being committed on this scale. In Ethiopia, everyone knows it.

The vocation of Médecins Sans Frontières is to provide, as efficiently as possible, aid, assistance and protection to populations who are victims of natural disasters or war. And we have done so - to the best of our ability - since the beginning of the terrible drought, which galvanised the whole world into action. We have done so by sending doctors and nurses to death-traps like Korem, by sending nutritionists to set up and run feeding centres for children in places like Sekota and Kelala, by sending nutritionists and internists to the hellish hospital at Kobo. Logisticians in Paris, Addis Ababa and the camps worked tirelessly to deliver food, equipment and medicines by road, or by plane or helicopter when guerrilla activity prevented delivery by normal methods.

The 74 personnel who have worked in Ethiopia over the last 19 months are haunted by the frightful vision of people reduced to a zombie-like state by hunger, by the morning collection of the corpses of children who died during the night. Such sights made the battle against cold, typhus and cholera that much harder. But we accepted it because we had made a commitment.

What we cannot accept in Ethiopia in 1985, as in Cambodia in 1980, is that a government is diverting aid in order to pursue a policy that is grinding down and destroying human beings: the very human beings who should have benefited from solidarity. That is why we organised a march for survival on the Cambodian border in 1980. We testified to the cruel conditions that were being deliberately maintained by the victorious authorities, while many organisations and journalists remained sceptical - until William Shawcross denounced the organised famine that was actually common knowledge, although nobody had ever dared to admit it in public. That is also why, five years later, we described the conditions of deportation in Ethiopia as unacceptable. Unacceptable. And we

have made it known - the sacrifice of this mission has a meaning!

**At the end of December, the United States government finally issued a formal condemnation of the Ethiopian government's deportation policy, citing the alarming mortality rate in the resettlement villages.**



Clyde H. Farnsworth, 'US Calls Resettlement In Ethiopia a "Tragedy",' *The New York Times* (USA), Washington, 26 December 1985 (in English). [D92](#)

#### Extract:

The top American foreign aid official has said the United States had accounts from witnesses of shocking conditions in two resettlements villages in Gojjam Province in western Ethiopia, suggesting 'a vast human tragedy of historical proportions.' M. Peter McPherson, administrator of the Agency for International Development, reported that since March "hundreds have already died" in the villages in the swampy Pawe area, about 150 miles (240 kilometers) northwest of Addis Ababa. Death was due mainly to malaria, typhus and other diseases, he said. The two villages, designated Pawe 5 and Pawe 7, have a total population of 1,000.

Mr McPherson said Monday the information came from American government personnel on the scene who speak the local language and had interviewed the villagers. The villagers had been forced, "often at gunpoint," into the Pawe area from provinces in the arid northeast, Mr McPherson said. He added that the villagers were not barred from leaving. He said the Reagan administration was making a public disclosure of the situation because it was symptomatic of a much broader problem - what he called the "human tragedy" associated with forced resettlement of hundreds of thousands of people in Ethiopia, which was being ravaged by famine. "The problem is that we don't know where the other Pawes are located," he said. "Neither the press nor relief workers have free access around the country. I firmly believe that other Pawes do exist, where people are dying unbeknownst to the world."

He said the disclosures would not cause any change in American policy on food aid. The United States supplied about one-third of Ethiopia's food needs this year and is committed to contributing the same amount next year, he said.

More than 500,000 people have been moved in recent months from the arid northeast to more fertile areas in the southern and western parts of the country. The Ethiopian government is planning to resettle almost three times that many people as part of its effort to pre-

vent future food shortages. In some of the north-eastern provinces such as Tigre and Wollo, rebels are fighting the Marxist-led government of Lieutenant Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam. Some critics of resettlement, such as the Tigre People's Liberation Front, have charged that the government is trying to rid the region of rebels and those who support them.

Last month the French private relief organization Doctors Without Borders sharply criticized the resettlement program and said as many as 100,000 people have died in the operation. The Ethiopian government expelled the relief organization this month. Mr McPherson did not discuss these accusations and confined this criticism to the conditions he said had been revealed by the witnesses. Several telephone calls were made to Abebe Beyene, first secretary of the Ethiopian Embassy, to obtain his reaction. He declined to return the calls.

Mr McPherson said the situation in the two Pawe villages "has been brought to the attention of the Ethiopian government." He added, "we have reason to hope that some steps to reduce the suffering will take place in this particular area."

**On 13 January 1986, MSF Belgium announced that it had signed an agreement with Ethiopia to provide one million dollars' worth of medical aid. The director of operations said that this decision posed no ethical problems for the Belgian section.**



'MSF Belgium Commits 1.75 Million Dollars to Ethiopia in 1986,' **AFP** (France), Brussels, 14 January 1986, (in French).

**Extract:**

On Monday, the humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières Belgium announced that it had just signed a contract with Ethiopia to provide one million dollars' worth of medical aid. This brings its total aid to this country in 1986 to US\$1.75 million. Three teams composed of four doctors and three nurses will be sent to Eritrea and Tigre provinces said Dr Georges Dallemagne, an official from MSF Belgium, adding that his organisation had already planned a US\$750,000 programme in Tigre for 1986.

In April 1985, MSF Belgium broke off relations with MSF France, whose personnel were recently expelled from Ethiopia after condemning the government's resettlement policy. Dr Dallemagne told AFP that as far as the Belgian organisation was concerned, it had "no ethical problem. We are collaborating with the Ethiopian government in the implementation of sanitation aid. The resettlement programme does not concern the provinces of Eritrea and Tigre, the only areas where MSF Belgium operates," he said.

Under the terms of the agreement signed with the Ethiopian health minister and the Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC), MSF Belgium will help to rebuild the hospital at Barentu. The total cost of this programme is estimated at US\$ 990,000. MSF Belgium teams have been operating in Tigre, Zala Ambassa and Idaga Hamus, where 15 doctors and nurses are currently working, since 1984. This programme is costed at US\$750,000 dollars for 1986.

**On 21 January, the US government again criticised the Ethiopian policy of forced resettlement.**



'Washington Describes the Ethiopian Policy of Forced Resettlement as "Brutal".' **AFP** (France), Washington, 23 January 1985 (in French).

**Extract:**

On Tuesday, the US government criticised the Ethiopian government policy of forced population resettlement, describing it as "brutal." Mr Kalb stressed that while the programme of forced resettlement had resulted in deaths, the American authorities were not in a position to put a figure on them.

"From America's point of view, there is no doubt that this policy is conducted in a harsh and brutal manner," said State Department spokesman Bernard Kalb. "The United States has repeatedly criticised the human rights violations associated with this compulsory programme and will continue to do so."

At the end of December, the Americans had pointed to an alarming mortality rate in two villages in the Pawe region to the northwest of Addis Ababa where peasants had been forcibly resettled. They expressed their conviction that similar situations existed elsewhere in the country.

**In January 1986, MSF France took its campaign condemning forced resettlement in Ethiopia to Canada and the United States.**



'MSF Challenges Ethiopia's Resettlement Policy,' **AFP** (France), 23 January 1986 (in French)

**Extract:**

[...] MSF President Rony Brauman is in the United States, pursuing the campaign he began in Europe calling for a three-month suspension of the population transfers. This would allow a commission of experts to examine whether

such operations are in fact necessary. He should be meeting officials from the State Department and Congress during the next few days, before moving on to Canada.

According to Mr Brauman, if a moratorium is not applied, aid organisations and western governments will be guilty, "through weakness," of supporting what might come to be described in the near future as "one of the greatest massacres in the history of the twentieth century."

Mr Brauman estimates that these forced migrations could result in another 300,000 victims if all the inhabitants of the northern provinces (1.5-1.8 million people) are effectively resettled. Mr Brauman, whose organisation was expelled from Ethiopia last December, said that the forced transfer of northern populations to the south had resumed two months ago. He claimed that the first of these forced operations, launched by the regime in Addis Ababa a year ago, had cost up to 100,000 lives. In cases where experts judge these transfers to be necessary, MSF has recommended that they should be voluntary, that families are not separated, and that transport and reception conditions do not pose a threat to health.



**Suzanne Garment** "West's Live Aid Digs Graves In Ethiopia" *The Wall Street Journal* (USA), 24 January 1986 (in English).

**Extract:**

Ethiopian famine workers and researchers arrived in Washington this week bearing news so grim that people are going to walk around with their hands over their ears trying not to hear it. The visitors say the Ethiopian government's program of forced relocations, already troubling to the US and other food donors, has become so monstrous that it rivals the famine itself. Even worse, the government is using our food aid to help carry out its ghastly scheme.

The researchers carrying this message belong to a group called Cultural Survival, staffed mainly by Harvard professors, which has interviewed many Ethiopians refugees in neighboring Sudan. The famine workers sounding the alarm are with a French organization called Médecins sans frontières - Doctors without borders. [...]

By the end of 1985, MSF volunteers in Ethiopia saw that while the famine was raging, the government was forcibly resettling large numbers of people from the northern part of the country to sites in the southwest.

[...] As the famine waned this fall in Ethiopia, MSF workers felt freer to make their charges. This past November, MSF President Rony Brauman was in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa. Dr Brauman got his start in France's radical politics of the late 1960s, and during his visit he publicly challenged an official about an instance of forcible resettlement, asking, "why do all these people run away to the mountains?". "Because members of MSF

agitate them" the officials replied. The Ethiopians expelled MSF in December.

Now the Ethiopian government is asking for more aid. In considering this request, says Dr Brauman, "the only morally responsible position is to pressure the Ethiopian government to permit an independent fact-finding mission. If the government does not accept, aid should be cut off-not in retaliation, but for the good of the people."

We in the US, left and right, think we are more realistic than the mush-heads who used to favor our giving aid. We recognized, as we forked over our Live Aid money, that Ethiopia's rulers were no Mr Nice Guys. We knew that they killed people, that some of our grain would rot on the docks and that more would be skimmed off for the party and the army. Dealing with them, we thought, was the price for saving Ethiopians' lives.

But the price of higher than we knew, and harder to accept: By now our aid, given liberally, may be costing more lives than it saves. This proposition strikes at the heart of assumptions about human behavior that have governed our foreign policy and, indeed, our politics as a whole since World War II. But we may have to get used to it if we do not want our development policy to degenerate further into sentimentalism.

Last year, when famine workers told us that we are the world and asked us to put our money where our sympathies lay, we responded well. But now a tougher contribution is required, and many people are just not going to want to make it.



'MEP Defends Resettlement Programme,' *AFP* (France), 25 January 1986, (in French).

**Extract:**

[...] After visiting a camp in western Ethiopia, Socialist MEP Michael McGowan declared that the resettlement programme was a "positive step" given the serious environmental problems in the northern province. Mr McGowan expressed his anger at the French humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières, whose "deplorable accusations" concerning the resettlement of populations had made European countries more reluctant to help the Ethiopian government.



'MSF President Condemns Ethiopia: the Forced "Resettlement Programme" has Created More Victims than the Famine,' *Le Devoir* (Canada), 28 January 1986 (in French).

**Extract:**

[...]


At a press conference, Mr Brauman said that given the accumulation of direct testimony (from doctors, nurses and refugees), he found it impossible to continue to

sanction aid that is being used to “support the Ethiopian executioners” who are planning to resettle up to 1.5 million people in the south. The ‘resettlement’ map allegedly follows the lines of the coffee plantations.

MSF is a French organisation founded in 1971. The Mengistu regime expelled it in December. MSF elected to oppose a situation in which huge numbers of people from the northern provinces are ‘taken captive,’ - lured by false promises or blackmail - subjected to violence, and sent in convoys to transit camps where, according to official figures, 15% of them lose their lives. Dr Brauman says that this situation has stimulated even greater anger within MSF than that aroused when Bokassa was slaughtering children, or when Guatemala was using extreme violence to control its indigenous population.

Will Dr Brauman’s organisation go as far as to suggest that aid to Ethiopia should be stopped? He will discuss this possibility in Toronto today, where he is due to meet David MacDonald, the Canadian Coordinator of Emergency Aid to Africa. Dr Brauman offers a cautious summary of the goals MSF is seeking to achieve. First, that every country involved in aid to Ethiopia applies pressure in order to obtain a three-month moratorium on the ‘resettlements’ (this is the basis of a recent resolution from the European Parliament initiated by Simone Veil). Second, that the regime opens its borders to a commission of enquiry. Otherwise, according to MSF, doubts will remain that the massive amount of aid (over US\$2 billion in 1985) is being diverted from its primary purpose: to relieve the suffering of the Ethiopian population.

Footage shot in November 1985, by journalists from the Sigma agency, was used by MSF yesterday, to establish that many Ethiopians are fleeing a country whose leaders are violating the conditions they claim to respect: voluntary relocation, non-separation of families, and the physical fitness to undertake the journey. Given the present circumstances, MSF believes that “aid is doing more harm than good.”

 I began working with MSF in 1978. When Ethiopia came up, I had been part of the humanitarian aid circuit for almost nine years. Ethiopia was a major turnaround for me. Aid, in general, can be an instrument of death or oppression, although the people involved in it may be unaware of this. The revelation appeared, in all its harsh brutality, during the Ethiopian crisis, but it was a long process. Besides, we wittingly or unwittingly risked the life of the association and for me; it was a frenzied expenditure of energy. That’s when I started to write. Before that, during Cambodia, Malhuret usually handled anything controversial. Then it was my turn. I’d been President for three years, but Malhuret was still in charge. At the time, I was convinced of my own ability. I assumed the leadership of the operation because I felt so strongly about it. There was a

*somewhat pathological Jew/Nazi aspect to that business which went back to peculiar ideas which I’ve since dealt with, but they were there. You need to take my psychology, my personal history, into account...*

*That business made me a bit crazy. For almost a year, I would seize any opportunity that arose - or provoke one if I had to - to talk about Ethiopia and the diversion of aid, not for enrichment but, for political reasons. I held press conferences. I’d only done one before, for the march for survival in Cambodia (in 1981), but now I was doing two a month - in Africa, Italy, England, Germany, Belgium, Paris, at several American universities, in Washington, the Refugee Policy Group, any of the various think tanks I could get hold of. It was like war. We had many, many, many enemies; there were so many attacks on us. It was quite clear that aid had been used for the forced transfer of populations. Nobody was in a position to deny that. For a start, journalists had reported it before we did. To put it in simple terms, all we did was collect all the information available and present it from our own point of view, in our own language, and through the prism of our own principles. But this information had already come out, although not in any great amount, after the ‘Grande Fête de la Solidarité/ [Big Solidarity Party]’. What had been overturned was the image of Ethiopia as a success story. I came along afterwards and said that it was a human and moral disaster. The American and Canadian sections of World Vision, SCF, Oxfam, etc., gave me a very hard time.*

*In England, nobody would speak to me directly. Ten times I asked for meetings with John Simon, the Head of SCF. He wouldn’t even talk to me on the phone. From Paris to London, he wouldn’t have it. Oxfam was even worse. On one occasion, I went to Oxford to see World Vision and met Jason Clay. He had returned from Somalia for a kind of symposium in a big university centre dedicated to the rights of refugees, the rights of man, humanitarian rights, etc. We spent a day in this kind of seminar, taking abuse and responding to everybody as best we could. The majority of the hall was against us because Ethiopia is a country that exercises a kind of fascination. There was an old English family, from the upper middle class or the aristocracy; some of them had been in Ethiopia since the end of the last century and they sucked up to the regime. One of them was a scientist, a sociologist, and he really tore into me.*

*In America, I did a somewhat improvised conference at the State Department. They knew I was in town because I’d spoken at a conference the day before. They called at my hotel and asked me to come and give them a briefing, which I thought was rather nice. They cancelled their lunch so we would have an hour for the briefing. I gave it and saw that I’d upset them, even physically. I saw the looks of consternation on peoples’ faces. Some were obviously happy with it, they asked questions, they said, “That’s very important, an NGO that questions what it’s doing,” etc. But others said, “In the final analysis, you are engaging in politics! Have you any proof of what you are talking about?” They wanted everything, the principles and the proof. They had a juridical, philosophical view; humanitarianism in the abstract. There were so many attacks on us. On the other hand, the press broadly supported us. I think that was what enabled*

MSF to emerge in one piece. [...] A rock music monthly in France had done a big piece on MSF and the question of funds. They were basically pro-Ethiopia and said "All that money MSF raised - 'Chanteurs Pour l'Ethiopie/ [Singers for Ethiopia]', 'Chanteurs Sans Frontières/ [Singers without Borders]', etc. - we wonder where it went." They aroused a lot of suspicion about the management of MSF. I sent them a registered letter telling them that they could either send an expert accountant to check MSF's accounts within 48 hours and then base their articles on his findings, or they could stop their slander because I'd drag them before a court and the next letter would come from my lawyer. There was complete silence after that. I'd written the letter in my office and once it was posted I thought "I'd better warn the financial director!" That's the way I tend to work! I went to see her and she nearly fainted. She said, "But you're crazy! You don't realise what you've done!" In effect, I didn't know what accounting was about! I thought it was all on a computer, you just clicked and the balance sheet came up! You just updated it from day to day. She said, "You're crazy! We're eighteen months behind! If the auditors turn up, I'm in the soup!" "OK," I said. "So they'll go through the bills. Anyway, we haven't done anything wrong; they'll just be doing their job. It will take a bit longer, that's all."

Rony Brauman, MSF France President (in french).

**On 30 January, the Executive Director of the United Nations Office for Emergency Operations in Africa rejected MSF's findings, while the UN representative in Ethiopia said that statistics were impossible to obtain.**



'Ethiopia Famine Toll Unknown, Says UN Expert,' **The Daily Telegraph** (UK), 3 February 1986 (in English).

#### Extract:

Claims by a Paris-based group that more Ethiopians die as a result of the government resettlement policy than of famine have been rejected by Mr Michael Priestley, UN Aid Co-Coordinator for Ethiopia. Commenting on reports by Doctors Without Borders, Mr Priestley said: "Here is no way to determine how many people actually died, because there is no data on which to work. It is impossible to come up with any figure." But we said that the situation could get worse by May.

In a report called 'Mass Deportations in Ethiopia', the Paris-based group said in a recent study of a programme of Ethiopia's Marxist government that as many as 300,000 people are likely to die in the process of resettling 1,500,000 famine victims. The report spoke of thousands being resettled "at gunpoint", that families had been separated, that food and blankets donated from abroad were being "used as bait" that conditions during trans-

port and in the resettlement areas resulted in widespread disease and death. The resettlement programme was "one of the most massive violations of human rights we have seen", and was being "carried out with funds and gifts from international aid".

[...]

In another account of the situation in Ethiopia, published by the Wall Street Journal, the resettlement programme being organized by the Soviet-backed Government in Addis Ababa was likened to the holocaust under Nazi Germany. Mr Priestley, a Briton, said he took exception to this view and was "horrified" by some of the reports he had read about how the outside world viewed what was happening in Ethiopia.

"The contentiousness of the resettlement issue is something which I have to choose my words carefully about. I think it's more seen from the outside than from the inside. I'm absolutely horrified. We don't get papers very readily in Ethiopia they come late, and maybe they don't always get there. But frankly, I've been horrified by some of the reports I've read since I've come into New York about the outside view of what is happening in Ethiopia."

[...]

Mr Priestley pointed out that he was new to Ethiopia and that it was indeed possible "to be misled." But, he defended the Ethiopian government against allegations that it prevented UN personnel and other observers from entering the resettlement areas. "We have total access to anywhere we want to go on the direct instructions of the chairman," he said, referring to Col. Mengistu, Head of the Ethiopian government.

Mr Maurice Strong, of Canada, of the UN's Office for Emergency Operations in Africa, supported Mr Priestley's views and said "The government (of Ethiopia) has admitted that certain mistakes have been made, but any attempt to liken this to the holocaust is just an absolute travesty of the truth." Mr Priestley also warned that the famine in Ethiopia this year "is going to be as bad as 1985" and that between six and seven million people "will need feeding, and we will need 1,200,000 tonnes of food this year."



'French Aid Agency is Accused of Bias,' **The Guardian** (UK), 6 February 1986 (in English).  
D93

#### Extract:

Dr Francis Charhon, the Director of Operations at Médecins sans Frontières, the French agency expelled from Ethiopia in December, has no regrets that it spoke out vigorously against government policies. But, the expulsion has revived controversy among Third World specialists in France over MSF and heightened the feeling that it has abandoned its original position of political neutrality.

[...] Dr Charhon says that its neutrality is clear from the fact that it works in countries with a variety of regimes, and on both sides of conflicts, if it can.

When Iraq invaded Iran, MSF offered to help the wounded on both sides, but was accepted only by the Iranians. A few months later, when Iranian relations with France went sour, MSF withdrew. It offered to work with both sides in Angola, but was accepted only by the South African-supported rebel group, Unita. It works with the two main anti-government movements in Ethiopia. It has sent 250 doctors deep into rebel-held areas of Afghanistan.

Last year, MSF doctors were expelled from Guatemala when they tried to move their work into areas close to where the army was fighting guerrillas. MSF cites the Guatemalan case - an expulsion by a rightwing government - as evidence of its neutrality. The government of El Salvador has also forced it to pull back from conflict zones where it aided peasants wounded by the army.

In contrast to other aid agencies, which tend to keep silent on political conditions, Dr Charhon says, "No longer can we give 'blind' aid. You must not just aid. You must witness." MSF says it works in conflict zones because usually no one else wants to work there. On conditions in Ethiopia, Dr Charhon denies allegations from other agencies; that it "provoked" its expulsion. "We only provoked it in the sense that we spoke up. You always hope things will improve, and leaving isn't easy. But no other organisation said our criticism of resettlement was false. That's the point. We could not go on working at any price," he said.

MSF's quiet acceptance of Salvadoran government pressures and its work with Nicaraguan refugees in Honduras prompted a row with its branch in Belgium. They provide most of the volunteers in Nicaragua, and they felt the Paris headquarters was moving to a right-wing stance. But, the main controversy centres on MSF's creation last year of a new organisation, called Liberté Sans Frontières. LSF, whose board contains many well-known 'New Right' figures such as Jean-François Revel and Jean-Claude Casanova, aims to counter 'left-wing Third-Worldism' which it accuses of feeding on a European guilt complex that blames all the problems of the Third World on Western economic dominance.

Jean-François Revel is a pillar of the recently formed Resistance International, a strongly anti-communist organisation, and Jean-Claude Casanova is a member of the American New Right journal 'Commentary', and the Committee of Intellectuals for a Europe of Liberties (Ciel), which has called for an end to the Helsinki process of East-West détente, until Soviet troops leave Afghanistan.

**In February 1986, the Ethiopian government announced a brief suspension of resettlement operations in order to initiate a phase of 'consolidation'. But, the large-scale 'villagisation' - effectively an exercise in collectivisation - continued. In March, thousands of Ethiopians fled from resettlement villages and sought refuge in neighbouring Somalia. On 22 March, the**

**Ethiopian head of state announced that in the future, transfers to the south would be conducted only on a voluntary basis.**



Jacques de Barrin, 'Thousands Flee the New Collective Villages and Cross into Somalia,' *Le Monde* (France), Nairobi, 6 March 1986 (in French). [D94](#)

**Extract:**

Between 500 and 1,000 Ethiopians are seeking refuge in Somalia every day. Over the past ten weeks, about 27,000 have flocked to Tugwagale camp, near Hargeisa in the northwest, according to a local official of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). These farming families, who are far from destitute, are predominantly ethnic Oromo from the Harrar and Jijiga regions. They would rather cross the border than accept Addis Ababa's 'invitation' to resettle in [new] villages. It has been pointed out that these people - UNHCR expects tens of thousands more in the months to come - are 'political refugees' rather than victims of famine. Apparently, most of them are in good health, although some are carriers of cholera. [...]



Blaine Harden, 'Ethiopians Risk Lives Fleeing Resettlement,' *The Washington Post* (USA), 10 March 1986 (in English). [D95](#)

**Extract:**

[...] As Ethiopia's famine abates, the resettlement program continues, with a goal of moving 1.5 million people by the end of this year. The program has become, by far, the most contentious issue between Marxist Ethiopia and the western governments and private relief organizations that supply most of its famine assistance. The Ethiopian government temporarily suspended the resettlement program at the end of last month in response to criticism from western aid donors. The suspension, to last an indefinite period, was ordered "for a period of consolidation and to digest what they have already done," a senior western aid official in Addis Ababa told United Press International last weekend.

According to western aid officials in the Ethiopian capital, the final 1,000 resettlers arrived in Asosa from Welo Province in the last week of February. Ethiopian government officials, while not officially announcing the suspension, said last week that internal and external criticism have forced a government review of resettlement. But, western aid officials say that it was primarily outside donor criticism that forced the suspension.

[...] While Italy and Canada have given money specifically to support resettlement, most other donors have expressed reservations. [...] The Ethiopian government

has admitted to some abuses in the program by 'overzealous local officials.' But, it maintains that the idea of moving famine victims from the drought-razed northern highlands to the fertile southwestern lowlands is sound. The Soviet-supported rulers have dismissed most criticisms of resettlement as motivated by western, anti-Marxist ideology disguised as humanitarian concern. At the same time, the Ethiopian government strictly restricts outside access to resettlement areas.

The stories told here in this two-month-old refugee camp come not from outsiders but from peasant farmers from the Welo and Tigray regions of northern Ethiopia. In 13 separate interviews here, they told a consistent story, details of which are supported by earlier interviews in Ethiopia with relief officials. Most of the refugees said they were 'tricked' into gathering in northern villages by government-circulated promises that the 'Red Cross' would be distributing free food. Many left their children behind, thinking that they would soon be coming back home. However, they were surrounded by Ethiopian soldiers and loaded onto buses or helicopters bound for transit camps. Several refugees said they saw soldiers shoot and kill farmers who tried to run away. The settlers described several weeks in transit camps, with shortages of food, water and medical care, as well as many deaths from illness. They then were packed into Soviet Antonov transport planes or buses for the 600 to 700 mile [900-1,200 km] journey south to resettlement sites near Asosa and Gambela. Several said that people who became critically ill during the bus ride south were hauled out of the buses and abandoned at roadsides.



'Addis Ababa Renounces the Use of Force in its Population Transfers.' *Le Monde* (France), Addis Ababa, 26 March 1986 (in French).  
D96

#### Extract:

On Saturday 22 March, Colonel Mengistu, the Ethiopian Head of State, assured members of a Canadian parliamentary delegation that the relocation of drought-stricken populations to the South would, in the future, be conducted on a strictly voluntary basis. Halted at the beginning of the year to allow a period of 'consolidation,' the programme of population transfers has attracted harsh criticism from many western countries. 205,000 families (594,190 people) were resettled between October 1984 and December 1985. According to David MacDonald, Leader of the Canadian Delegation, President Mengistu attributed past 'violations' to 'overzealous officials' and said they would not occur again. According to several witnesses, these population displacements, which sometimes took the form of forced marches, were organised by means of threats and physical violence. Ethiopian government sources maintain that the programme's temporary interruption is due to its considerable cost, rather than to western accusations of human rights violations. The initial programme, which provided for the relocation

of 300,000 families (1.5 million people), represented a burden of US \$1.2 billion on the Ethiopian budget, or US \$4,000 per family over a five-year period.

**In March 1986, Claude Malhuret, MSF France Executive Director, left the organisation to take up the post of Human Rights Minister in the new French government.**

**On 11 April, President Mengistu announced that nearly three million people had already been resettled. The 'villagisation' programme came under increasing fire from aid agencies, Ethiopia-based diplomats, and the press. However, the figures advanced by MSF France continued to attract criticism, while the position it had adopted was regarded in some quarters, as a 'media coup' .**



'Nearly Three Million Peasants Displaced,' *Le Monde-AFP* (France), Addis Ababa, 11 April 1986 (in French).

#### Extract:

On Thursday 10 April, President Mengistu of Ethiopia revealed that more than 2.8 million people have been concentrated in new villages since the government launched its programme to relocate rural populations. The programme, which has accelerated since February 1985, is designed to resettle 30 million Ethiopians by 1995. The figure quoted by Mr Mengistu surpasses all recent estimates by international organisations. The Ethiopian Head of state describes the programme as a "revolutionary activity" which will provide farmers with a higher standard of living.

In reality, the ultimate goal is the collectivisation of the land. Coercive measures are used to force the peasants off their traditional lands. According to many humanitarian organisations and western diplomatic sources in Addis Ababa, the scale of the operation, which affects almost the entire rural population, constitutes an unprecedented threat to the country's future, particularly in terms of food security. International financial organisations fear that by depriving farmers of an economic incentive and ignoring the natural cycles that govern agricultural production (cultivation in the new zones is too intense), food crops - which are already insufficient for the country's needs - will fall to dangerously low levels.



Angus Deming with Ray Wilkinson, 'Masterplan - Or Misery?' *Newsweek* (USA), 5 May 1986 (in English).

#### Extract:

[...] Mixed reviews: Some American officials hope that adverse publicity may prompt Ethiopia to halt the program, much as international pressure seems to have caused the government to suspend its controversial drought resettlement efforts. In late 1984 and in 1985, Ethiopia moved some 600,000 peasants from the north to new farmlands in the southwest of the country. The enterprise got decidedly mixed reviews. Father Jack Finucane, Head of Irish relief in Ethiopia, says he has been encouraged by what he has seen during visits to 35 resettlement camps. "I am no apologist," he says, "but I see potential and a good chance these people will eventually become self-sufficient, perhaps in four years." But the program was buffeted by hostile publicity after the French aid organization Médecins sans Frontières (MSF), or Doctors Without Borders, charged late last year that as many as 100,000 died in the relocation and that another 300,000 were in danger of death.

Ethiopia denied the charges and expelled French MSF volunteers from the country, saying the report had been keyed to the recent French parliamentary elections (MSF General Director, Claude Malhuret, has in fact been named secretary of state for human rights in France's new right-wing government). But MSF President Rony Brauman denies any political motivation. He says that some 150,000 Ethiopians may have died in resettlement, and that he is "absolutely convinced" his estimate is a conservative one. Some experts believe otherwise. Philippe Laurent, President of Doctors Without Borders Belgium - a separate group - says the French figures represent "an extrapolation of a very localized situation", and that they are "probably exaggerated."

From interviews with donor agencies and dozens of Ethiopian drought refugees, NEWSWEEK'S Ray Wilkinson concluded that the MSF report was based on insufficient evidence and that the findings were indeed exaggerated. But the unvarnished reality was grim enough. The refugees all told tales of hardship and suffering.



Philip Revzin, 'French Doctors Battle Relentless Enemies In the Third World,' *The Wall Street Journal* (USA), 27 May 1986 (in English).

#### Extract:

Over the years, MSF's politics have shifted away from unquestioning support of Third World regimes to an increasing emphasis on human rights as well as medical care. MSF Director Claude Malhuret is now Secretary of State for Human Rights in Jacques Chirac's conservative government. "We are a human rights organization, not just doctors giving tetanus shots," says MSF President Rony Brauman.

#### Unafraid to Speak Out

This self-image is one reason MSF spoke out in Ethiopia, Dr Brauman says, while the other organizations there stayed silent. "We deal with human beings and promote certain ideas of the rights of human beings, for example to live and farm where they want. The Ethiopian government disagrees."

Brashness and a pendant for publicity not shared by the other aid groups give MSF a distinctive and, not always popular image. "Impulsive" says a United Nations official. "Better at emergency room stuff than long-haul development work," says an official of another aid organization. "They're French," says a British aid worker. "That's all you need to know."

**The Ethiopian government accused Dawit Wolde Giorgis, the former head of the RRC who defected in December 1985, of misappropriating aid funds and demanded his extradition.**



Yves Breheret, 'Ethiopia Asks the US to Extradite Dawit Wolde Giorgis,' *L'Aurore/Le Figaro* (France), 8 May 1986 (in French).  
D97

#### Extract:

The Ethiopian government has asked the United States to extradite Dawit Wolde Giorgis, the former Head of the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC). Mr Dawit is accused of appropriating 'hundreds of thousands of dollars' for his personal use.

[...] The DERG (the ruling Provisional Military Administrative Council) is seeking the extradition of its former collaborator and asking "all those who stand for truth and justice to cooperate with the Ethiopian people so that this hunted criminal can rapidly be brought to justice." However, it should be remembered that the now disgraced former director of the RRC was one of the government officials who declared the French section of Médecins Sans Frontières persona non grata. The organisation was dedicated to relieving the suffering of the Ethiopian people, but refused to accept the massive deportations to the south.

**On 21 May, the head of the UN Office for Emergency Operations in Ethiopia launched an appeal for funds to finance the transportation of international aid and issued an optimistic bulletin on the long-term effects of the resettlement programme. The former head of the RRC told the press that the famine was due to a political problem and criticised his government's management of the crisis.**



'The Drought is a "Political Problem", Says Ethiopian Former Official,' **AFP** (France) (New York), 21 May 1986 (in French).

#### Extract:

Ethiopian government policy is responsible for both the famine and the drought, according to Dawit Wolde Giorgis, the former Head of the Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission who defected to the United States. "We call it a drought problem but it is more a political problem," he told the New York Times in his first interview since leaving Africa last October. Mr Dawit said the drought of 1984-85 simply complicated the situation; "If our policies do not change, millions of people in Ethiopia will continue to starve."

The most ruinous policy, he claimed, was the discouragement of individual initiative, productivity, and self-sufficiency. "For the farmers, the revolution was first and foremost a question of land. They wanted us to take it from the landowners and give it to them. But instead of giving everybody his own piece of land, we collectivised it."

The government continues to squander huge amounts of money on collective or state farms which are "proven failures." Hunger and malnutrition had already spread to rural areas some years before Ethiopia was afflicted by drought, said Mr Dawit.

[...]

According to the former official, only a very small part of western aid for famine relief is diverted through corruption or used by the military. He also denied Ethiopian government allegations that he betrayed the revolution and misappropriated relief funds.

Food aid is usually reallocated to the resettlement programme, which is designed to transfer millions of northerners to the south. According to Mr Dawit, Washington stipulates that American aid is not to be used for this programme. He described the estimate that 100,000 people (the figure quoted by the French humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières) have died in resettlement operations, as exaggerated.

The former Commissioner claims that he would have been executed if he had dared to speak openly about all these problems when he was still in his country. The Ethiopian leaders," he concluded, "live in an imaginary world created by our own political fantasies. We do not realise how much our people suffer."



'Ethiopia: the UN Appeals for Funds to Transport International Aid,' **Le Monde** (France), 23 May 1986 (in French). **D98** [↗](#)

#### Extract:

Speaking from Addis Ababa on Wednesday 21 May, Michael Priestley, UN Deputy Secretary-General and

Head of the Office for Emergency Operations in Ethiopia, appealed to donor countries for more aid. He said that food aid for 1986 was guaranteed, but US \$40 million was still needed for its transportation. "There will be no widespread famine in 1986, but there will be pockets of malnutrition, particularly in Wollo, Gondar, Llubabor and Harrar provinces," he said.

Global aid of US \$600 million for 1986 is much lower than the total for 1985, but the future looks better as the price of coffee, the main export, will practically double, said Mr Priestley. Moreover, the cereals shortage might be reduced to between 100,000 and 400,000 tonnes if the rains continue, which would be one of the best results in ten years.

Commenting on the 'villagisation' that is taking place in several provinces, Mr Priestley felt that it was "too early to make a judgement," but said it represented "an obvious advantage in the long term." Resettling famine-stricken populations in the southern and western provinces, he added, "has been the Ethiopian response to famine for centuries." [...]

**In his moral report to the general assembly, the president of MSF France placed both his section's position on forced resettlement in Ethiopia and its expulsion from that country, within the broader context of the humanitarian's responsibility when confronted with crime.**



'President's Moral Report to the MSF France General Assembly,' May 1986 (in French). **D99** [↗](#)

#### Extract:

[...] However, natural indignation aside, what happened in Ethiopia takes us back to a number of fundamental questions. First of all the question of témoignage - not the principle, the precise definition of which has long been accepted at MSF, but its practical application - at what point does it become legitimate to speak out and risk the expulsion of medical teams? What values do we employ to assess the interests of the people we are there to assist? In what circumstances does silence, the natural accompaniment to neutral action in the field, foster blindness, or indeed complicity?

In fact, these questions are more appropriate to an examination of our action and its scope than to témoignage itself; to an analysis of the events which give rise to them. The extremely detailed reports published last year, particularly by Cultural Survival, threw light on the logic of these acts of violence, and consequently on the considerable and completely new role that humanitarian organisations have had to adopt in this process. It is certainly not the first time in the history of the world, and most certainly not in its recent history, that

a government strove to ruin its own country. We can wager, however, that one day, perhaps in the not too distant future, people will express astonishment that this demolition, which is costing so many lives, was financed by the international community in the name of solidarity.

**In June, RRC Deputy Commissioner Berhanu Deressa also defected and criticised his government's policy.**



'Another Ethiopian Aid Official Defects,' *AFP* (France), New York (United Nations), 7 June 1986 (in French).

**Extract:**

For the second time in recent months, a senior Ethiopian official responsible for famine relief has chosen to defect on the grounds of political differences with his government. Berhanu Deressa, Deputy Commissioner for Relief and Rehabilitation, announced in New York on Friday that he had decided not to return home. He claimed that the situation in Ethiopia had "reached such a stage that I can no longer fulfil my duties in a way that my conscience will accept."

[...] He said that the effectiveness of the organisation in which he had worked as deputy commissioner for two years had been compromised by the growing interference of incompetent party ideologues (Ethiopia is a one-party state) who had "turned its humanitarian efforts into a farce."

Mr Berhanu, aged 46, also said that the "political situation in Ethiopia is going from bad to worse. The revolution that sprang from the aspirations of the Ethiopian people has been perverted to serve the political and ideological interests of a clique that continues to trample on all human values. Death has become a common phenomenon in Ethiopia," he went on to say. "Thousands of people are in jail. Arbitrary arrests without the slightest regard for justice have become the norm. The proof is in the imprisonment of numerous citizens who have served their country with honesty and devotion."

**On a visit to the United States, the president of MSF France argued that the Ethiopian authorities were misappropriating the money raised by the Band Aid solidarity movement. The argument with the leader of Band Aid gained fresh impetus.**



'Misuse of Live Aid Funds Charged,' *The Washington Post* (USA), New York, 10 June 1986 (in English). **D100** [↗](#)

**Extract:**

The Ethiopian government is misusing Live Aid proceeds and other western relief money to fund a massive resettlement program leading to the deaths of thousands of people, a panel of African relief workers charged today. "These institutions make themselves accomplices of genocide. The magnitude of the famine and human rights violations in Ethiopia can only be compared to the Khmer Rouge," said Dr Rony Brauman, President of the French medical relief group Médecins sans Frontières. Another panel member called the Live Aid effort "Blind Aid" and "Naive Aid".

The panel was organized by the rock'n' roll magazine Spin, published by Bob Guccione Jr, the son of the Penthouse publisher, which this month is running an 'exposé' on the misuse of Live Aid funds. Live Aid, organized by Bob Geldof, collected \$100 million from a 'global concert' in Wembley, England, and Philadelphia as the music industry's response to the famine. Geldof, in a written statement issued by his New York publicist, denied the French group's charge that Live Aid money was going to the government and accused it of helping prop up the rock magazine's circulation.

Médecins sans Frontières sends doctors and nurses to struggling nations but was thrown out of Ethiopia in December when it objected to the resettlement program. Brauman and two anthropologists who specialize in the problems of Africa charged that the relief stations set up by such groups as UNICEF and Save the Children are used as "bait" to draw starving Ethiopians away from their homes. They said militia troops then swoop down on and force the people to climb aboard trucks as part of the nation's massive resettlement program. The Marxist government's resettlement program, they charged, is moving people first to concentration camps and then to state-run villages in uninhabited areas where they cannot engage in the country's civil war. They said the people die of starvation, exposure, and disease. "The evidence of misuse of assistance by the government is overwhelming," said Jason Clay, an anthropologist and research Director of Cultural Survival, a non-profit group that investigates human rights abuse in tribal societies.

**On 17 June, Ethiopia's foreign minister visited Paris. MSF France held a press conference and condemned the diversion of international aid. The president of MSF France compared Ethiopia to Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge.**



'Médecins Sans Frontières Condemns Diversion of International Aid in Ethiopia,' **AFP** (France) Paris, 17 June 1986 (in French).

**Extract:**

On the occasion of the Ethiopian Foreign Minister's visit to Paris, Médecins Sans Frontières condemned his government's use of international aid to further its repressive policies. According to the French medical humanitarian organisation, the evidence suggests that Ethiopia is currently undergoing a situation comparable to that of Cambodia under Pol Pot. MSF believes that under the guise of combating hunger, the equipment and funds provided by international aid, which amounts to several million dollars, are being used to brutally and systematically oppress the population.

MSF, which held a conference on this issue on Tuesday, took the opportunity provided by Goshu Wolde's visit and the beginning of UNESCO's Human Rights Week to demand a "halt to the forced population transfers in Ethiopia and an independent commission of enquiry to investigate the use of aid. Everybody's money, from private or public sources, from the EEC or the United Nations, is now being used to deport populations, to restrict their freedom, and to regiment them under the banner of the party. Food is being used as an instrument of blackmail," MSF President Rony Brauman told AFP.

Dr Brauman went on to say that in regions like Harrar, where the farming community is not destitute and can still feed itself, villages are being razed or reorganised and property seized. "In Harrar province, one-and-a-half of the four million inhabitants have been relocated to cooperatives or state farms. This cannot be justified in economic terms since they produce enough to feed themselves and can even produce a threefold surplus," he said. MSF claims that over 50,000 people have fled to Somalia in the past four months. They are not escaping the famine or the drought, but the violence perpetrated by their own government (villages attacked and destroyed, forced labour, religious persecution, murder, theft, repeated rape, forced conscription, etc.). The "forced collectivisation" and "agrarian destruction" that is leading Ethiopia into poverty is being financed by international aid, added Dr Brauman. "This tragic situation must be opposed by donors and the international community," he concluded. MSF, recalls Rony Brauman, was expelled from Ethiopia in December for condemning the appalling conditions in which 700,000 people were deported, an operation that resulted in 100,000 deaths.



Claude Kroës, 'Anti-Humanitarians: MSF Resumes its Campaign Against Aid for Ethiopia,' **L'Humanité** (France), 19 June 1986 (in French).

**Extract:**

On Tuesday, Rony Brauman, President of Médecins Sans Frontières, gave a press conference in Paris. The aim was two-fold. Thrown out of Ethiopia last December for

having mixed humanitarian aid with propaganda, he pledged to relaunch his campaign against the government in Addis Ababa at a time when international organisations, including UNICEF, are initiating new projects to help the Ethiopian people.

Moreover, Rony Brauman was deliberately diverting attention from a major UN conference on sanctions against Pretoria. This is currently taking place at UNESCO in Paris, and the government is remaining aloof from it. Only his friend Claude Malhuret, the Human Rights Minister - and another MSF dignitary - put in an appearance for form's sake. On Tuesday, Mr Brauman got his priorities mixed up and said he was speaking "at the very moment when UNESCO's Human Rights Week is under way." The head of MSF doesn't believe in half-measures. According to him, the population transfers in Ethiopia, from the arid north to the fertile regions of the south, involve "attacks on and destruction of villages, forced labour, religious persecution, murder, theft, repeated rape, forced conscription," and so on. Last December, he put the death toll at 100,000, at which point Addis Ababa finally lost patience with his organisation.

**On 20 June, the former head of the RRC urged the United States to continue its aid to Ethiopia, and to ensure that it was not supporting the policies of the Mengistu regime, which he accused of wanting to establish a Soviet-style regime.**



David B. Ottaway, 'Ethiopian Defector Says Mengistu Prepares Communist State,' **International Herald Tribune** (Europe), 20 June 1986 (in English). **D101**

**Extract:**

Dawit Wolde Giorgis, former Head of the Ethiopian famine relief agency, urged this week in an interview with The Washington Post that the United States take a "very clear, strong stand" against the government of Lieutenant Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam. Mr Dawit, who defected in October during a tour to raise famine relief funds in the United States and Europe, said that he still favored continued US humanitarian assistance if it were strictly monitored and did not support Colonel Mengistu's socialist policies.

[...] Mr Dawit broke his silence after Ethiopia accused him publicly of embezzling more than \$300,000 donated by US private relief groups and deposited in bank accounts in the United States. He denied the charges and said that the contributions in dollars had been used to buy relief supplies in the United States, while donors were credited with an equivalent amount in Ethiopian currency in their accounts in Addis Ababa.

Mr Dawit said that he disagreed with the way the Mengistu government tried to resettle hundreds of thou-

sands of starving peasants from northern Ethiopia in new southern villages.

**In the following months, MSF continued its campaign against the policy of 'villagisation'.**



Pierre Haski, 'Doubts Over French Aid to Ethiopia,' *Libération* (France), 16 July 1986 (in French).

**Extract:**

At regular intervals, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) sounds the alarm over Ethiopia: 'genocide!' In government circles, this is also the line taken by Dr Claude Malhuret, Human Rights Minister and himself a former leader of MSF. Dr Malhuret is trying to obtain a revision of the policy of aid to Ethiopia, and has initiated a 'period of reflection' on this subject at the Foreign Ministry. He later hopes to launch it at European level.

MSF's campaign, six months after its expulsion from Ethiopia for having condemned the policy of massive population resettlement and forced 'villagisation' has not received unanimous backing. More recently, Rony Brauman, the organisation's President, held a press conference at which he condemned the policy of the regime in Addis Ababa. It received little coverage in the print media. Moreover, none of the 50 humanitarian organisations working in the country followed his line, nor did they support MSF when it denounced the threat of a 'new Cambodia' in Africa.

However, UNICEF has recently launched an appeal for aid for 15,000 orphaned children, many of whom were separated from their families during resettlement operations. MSF's accusations are also supported by statements from the Head of the Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, Dawit Wolde Giorgis, who fled, followed by his deputy, to the United States.

Rony Brauman justifies the continuation of his campaign by the acceleration of 'villagisation,' the new appeals for aid, and the flood of refugees into Somalia. "Over 50,000 people have crossed the border. They say they were not fleeing famine or war but the destruction of their villages, the seizure of their land, and widespread and repeated rape," he claims.

[...] Is MSF conducting a crusade against Ethiopia's 'Marxists?' "MSF is partly responsible for the movement of solidarity with Ethiopia," says Rony Brauman. "We can't let it grind to a halt. After arousing solidarity, we are obliged to tell the truth. On the other hand, we are acting in the name of human rights. This is one of the century's great massacres, on a par with the Khmer Rouge." MSF's President believes that aid should be conditional on the halting of population transfers: "Aid is doing more harm than good; it is killing more people than it saves."

The latter claim provoked a fierce response from Jean-Manuel Piétri, General Secretary of Action Internationale

Contre la Faim (AICF), the main French organisation working in Ethiopia. In the areas where AICF's volunteers are working, "aid has not killed anybody," he says. AICF, which is led by Françoise Giroud, firmly believes that it should not "abandon Ethiopia." Mr Piétri says that his volunteers refused to work in Makale, one of the main transit centres, after witnessing forced transfers.

On the contrary, the AICF works to settle northern populations in their [own] region, in Rama, where there is no 'resettlement' or 'villagisation'. "In Ethiopia," he adds, "non-governmental organisations are constantly up against a state that wants to organise and control everything. However, we confront it with our own determination to control the destination of our aid. Every international aid partner has this problem. AICF is not naïve; it is extremely realistic and has chosen to work in a way that keeps our options open. Anything is better than Cambodia and Afghanistan, which are closed to all contact with the West. A tight network of individual counter-influences is currently developing in Ethiopia. It can't stop Ethiopia's history from being forged under the fist of a party, which wants to strengthen the nation, establish a state, and organise its farmers. But, at least we can avoid an irreversible slide into generalised collectivisation and barbarity." [...] After generating a huge wave of solidarity, Ethiopia is now at the centre of controversy. Some donations received by AICF are marked 'not for Ethiopia,' and there is an animated debate within the organisations working there. In the absence of a 'commission of enquiry' or any real freedom of movement in the country's interior, many have found it difficult to sustain their commitment. The only certainty is that the Ethiopian people are still suffering, and it is hard to turn one's back on them.



Laurent Zecchini, 'Humanitarian Organisations in Ethiopia: Witnesses or Accomplices?' *Le Monde* (France), 25 July 1986 (in French).  
D102

**Extract:**

Has Ethiopia exhausted the international public's capacity for indignation and mobilisation? When the humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) sounded a new alarm on 17 June, citing the "appalling conditions" in which hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians are being transferred and the diversion of international aid, it aroused very little reaction.

On 11 July in Addis Ababa, Professor Jean Doresse claimed that the government's resettlement programme was "historically and legally grounded and deserves broad international support," and accused its critics of simply engaging in "propaganda". Nobody reacted. Who is right? MSF President Dr Rony Brauman, who readily compares President Mengistu's Ethiopia to Pol Pot's Cambodia? Or the eminent expert who sides with the Ethiopian government? [...] MSF was the only humanitarian organisation that refused to accept the "virtual slaughter," which it alleged has resulted in between 50 000 and 100,000 deaths. And,

they chose to expose it, a position, which resulted in its expulsion. But, almost all the 40 or so organisations still working in the field remained silent in the belief that their role is irreplaceable. "Anything," said Dr Jean-Manuel Piétri, General Secretary of Action Internationale Contre la Faim (AICF), "is better than Cambodia and Afghanistan, which are closed to all contact with the West."

MSF's contribution to the temporary suspension of the transfers was doubtless important but its figures are dubious, as they are based on estimates, eye-witness accounts and haphazard mathematical projections. Dr Brauman is quick to acknowledge this. But the fact remains that thousands of Ethiopian could have been saved if the resettlement operations had not been conducted with such haste and brutality. It is also certain that some international aid is diverted from its purpose, which leads to more deaths.

**On 8 September, the Ethiopian ambassador to France defected. He was followed by the Foreign Minister, who resigned on 28 October and accused his government of leading its people into poverty and destruction.**



'Ethiopia: Mr Getachew Justifies his Defection on the Grounds of his "Conception of Democracy,"' *Le Monde/AFP* (France), 10 September 1986 (in French). **D103** [↗](#)

#### Extract:

On Monday 8 September, the Ethiopian Ambassador to France, Kebreth Getachew, who defected last week (*Le Monde* 7/9/86), announced in a telephone call to AFP, that he had relinquished his post voluntarily and would not be returning to Addis Ababa. He justified his decision on the grounds of his "conception of democracy and respect for humanity". Refusing to say what country he was speaking from, Mr Getachew described his decision as "very painful," and said that it marked the end of a "very long period of loyal and devoted service" to his country.



'Ethiopian Foreign Minister's Public Resignation,' *Libération* (France), 28 October 1986 (in French).

#### Extract:

Goshu Wolde, Ethiopia's Foreign Minister, announced his resignation at a press conference in New York. Colonel Goshu, who had held the foreign affairs portfolio for four years, conveyed his decision to a small group of reporters in a hotel opposite the United Nations building. "I cannot continue in good conscience to serve a government who's rigid and doctrinaire short-term policies are leading the country and its people into poverty and destruction, and

which has quite clearly lost the confidence of the people and the moral right to govern," he said.

The resignation of Mr Goshu, who studied law at Yale University, follows those of the Ethiopian commissioner and Deputy Commissioner for international aid. He is also the highest-ranking official to protest against the policies of the current Marxist government. Aged 45, he has not indicated whether he will seek political asylum in the United States.

**In October, the international magazine Reader's Digest published an article by Rony Brauman on the political exploitation of the famine and the forced resettlement in Ethiopia. In December, the same article was published in the French editions of Reader's Digest.**



"Famine Aid : Were We Duped?' *Reader's Digest*, October 1986 (in English). **D104** [↗](#)

#### Extract:

At first, Dr Rony Brauman was thrilled by the arrival of Western-donated aid to famine victims in Ethiopia. As director of Doctors Without Borders, a group struggling to help Ethiopian famine victims, he knew well the extent of suffering in that troubled land. Now Dr Brauman reveals the shocking truth of how Western famine aid has been used to force the resettlement of the population of that country's northern provinces - a resettlement campaign that is now killing more people than is famine. Here are excerpts from his exclusive report in the October issue of Reader's digest. [...] "I am convinced that it is morally wrong for us to assist Mengistu and his callous functionaries in carrying out this murderous policy. During the famine, millions in the West responded with unequalled generosity, and no doubt saved many people from starvation. Now, however, the main cause of death in the northern provinces is no longer famine but forced resettlement. It is tragic, but what I am saying is this: We have been duped. The best way to save lives now is for the West to demand an end to the forced resettlements. Unless they cease, further food aid will only grease the gears of Mengistu's killing machine."



Peter J. Daviet, 'No, the Famine Aid Got Through,' Peter J. Davies, President of InterAction, a coalition of US private agencies working in the Third World *The Washington Post* (USA), 4 October 1986 (in English). **D105** [↗](#)

#### Extract:

[...] 'Famine Aid: Were we duped?' was the banner headline over a full-page ad in The Post on Sept. 23. The ad,

promoting an article in October's Reader's Digest, alleges that donations to famine-ravaged Ethiopia were "massively misappropriated" by that country's government, which "hijacked money, food and equipment intended for the starving."

This is not true. It is a great disservice to allege that it is. We know from first-hand experience that virtually all of the donations made to voluntary agencies by millions of generous Americans were not "misappropriated" but put to good use, paying for food, transportation and medical supplies.

[...] This is not to say that events have not occurred that should be condemned by the world community. Yet these abuses in resettlement have been exaggerated and allegations made that are untrue in the report of 'Doctors Without Borders'. The judiciary report concurs, saying that it is 'founded too much on hearsay, is outdated, and has been criticized by every American voluntary agency and church group working in Ethiopia, by United Nations officials, as well as by officials of the United States Embassy. It is clearly a polemic on which no wise government should now base its policy toward Ethiopia...'

*I did a hard-hitting article for the Reader's Digest. They published it in 30 languages, so it went world-wide. All the donors cut off their aid. AICF, World Vision, and SCF USA's fundraising efforts collapsed because the piece was a huge success in the United States. There were television and radio reports, interviews. There was a New York magazine that had it in for Geldof for somewhat dubious reasons. They invited me to come to New York for a day and give an interview. I really tore into Geldof. I wanted it to end up in court. You see what state of mind you can get into! I wasn't afraid of a court case - I wanted it! ... In France, MSF emerged stronger from that business. First of all we had a greater strength of conviction, then with the donors. I don't know why, probably because we had said something different[...]. One of the reasons I find it so hard to respect Bernard Kouchner is because as far as this story is concerned, the only thing he could see was that Médecins Du Monde [NGO created by Bernard Kouchner after his leaving MSF] wouldn't last the winter. While we thought that MSF was going to hit the rocks, all he could see, and it has to be admitted that he was a better judge, was that MSF was firing in all directions, because we were also lashing out over Afghanistan. Several times he said, "MSF will devour MDM. MDM won't exist in two years time." He wrote a big piece, which Le Monde published on its front page. I can still remember this sentence from it, "After marketing its entrance, MSF organised the marketing of its exit from Ethiopia." That's the only thing he said. Whereas we had gone into Ethiopia in April '84, at a time when nobody was talking about it, eight months before all that commotion over the famine, while our exit was completely disorganised.*

*We received a lot of money. We had an obligation to explain our actions to the public. At the time, there were a lot of pieces in the newspapers to explain why we had said all that. Fundraising techniques became a lot more sophisticated after Ethiopia. Claude Malhuret had launched the mailings a few years previously. The fundraising department had grown from two people to four or five by '86. We had to employ a marketing director.*

Brigitte Vasset, MSF France Medical Coordinator in Korem, from April 1984 to May 1985, then Programme Manager Ethiopia (in French).

*With the messages in the media, the fundraising campaigns and the mailings that went out before the denunciation, MSF Belgium and MSF France had raised more money than they ever had before. Public donations for Ethiopia were two or three times greater than anything we had had before. I mean, we cannot appeal to the generosity of the public on a basis of apoliticism and neutrality, which is implicit, and then go and do that [denounce]...*

Philippe Laurent, MSF Belgium Executive Director (in French).

*The public gave for relief action, not for political action. Barely 1% of French people were aware of what we denounced. They gave to combat famine. The denunciation was intended to alert governments and international organisations, the decision-makers, the bodies that could force the Ethiopian government to change its policy of forced transfers.*

Claude Malhuret, MSF France Executive Director (in French).

**On 29 October, MSF France organised a conference in Paris entitled 'Ethiopia: A Deadly Compassion - From Aid to the Victims to Aiding Their Executioners,' and aroused debate and controversy in the media and within the aid community.**



Conference - 'Ethiopia: A Deadly Compassion - From Aid to the Victims to Aiding their Executioners,' **Press File**, Committee of Vigilance for Human Rights in Ethiopia/ [Comité de Vigilance sur les Droits de l'Homme en Ethiopie], 29 October 1986 (in French).

**D106**

### Extract:

Summary and presentation

Ethiopia, which has become a new symbol of solidarity through the massive mobilisation and volume of aid that its famine has stimulated, is now presenting the international community with some hard questions. 600,000 people from the northern provinces have been forcibly transferred to the lowlands of the South in appalling conditions that have resulted in 100,000 deaths. Vast amounts of international aid have been used as bait to lure and trap disaster-stricken people, who are then deported to new 'populated zones'.

So far, three million people have been torn from their villages in a massive operation to confiscate the farmers' land, cattle, and possessions. According to Ethiopian government officials, this accelerated collectivisation, which is known as 'villagisation', will extend to the entire country and encompass 33 million people who live off the land. The stated aim of these measures is to "create the new man" and "radically transform the landscape".

The effects of this programme are already apparent. Tens of thousands of people have fled to neighbouring Somalia and Sudan. There is still a shortage of food. The demand for food aid is as great today as it was at the height of the drought (1.2 million tonnes for 1986), although the region has experienced abundant rain recently and neighbouring countries have produced a food surplus this year. An extraordinary movement of international solidarity, unprecedented in human history, has thus been turned against those it should have benefited. What is happening in Ethiopia today takes us back to Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge. A deadly utopia is on the march. And its progress is being accelerated by blind aid.

### Conference - 'Ethiopia: A Deadly Compassion - From Aiding the Victims to Aiding Their Executioners'

Part 1 - Famine: A User's Guide.

09:00 - 11:00

Chair: Claude Sérillon, Rony Brauman (President, Médecins Sans Frontières), Jason Clay (anthropologist, author of *Famine and Politics in Ethiopia*), François Margolin (journalist and film-maker, director of the film *Falashas*), Peter Niggli (author of the report *Deportation and Forced Labour Camps in Ethiopia*), and Thierry Wolton (journalist and writer, co-author of *Silence, On Tue*).

11:00 -11:45 Discussion

11:45 -12:15

Terfa Dldaba (Oromo Liberation Front), Ande Micael

Kahsal (Eritrea Peoples' Liberation Front), and Inqual Salomone (President of the Relief Society of Tigre (UK).

12:15 Closing speech: Laurent Fabius (former Prime Minister)

Part 2 - Silence: We are Helping.

14:30 - 17:00

Chair: Ralph Pinto, André Glucksmann (philosopher and writer, co-author of *Silence, On Tue, Grasset*), Gilles Hertzog (journalist and writer), Bernard Kouchner (Honorary President, Médecins du Monde), Bernard-Henri Lévy (philosopher and writer), Jean-Christophe Rufin (doctor, author of *The Humanitarian Trap/Le Piège Humanitaire, Lattès*), William Shawcross (journalist, author of *The Quality of Mercy/Le Poids de la Pitié, Balland*) and with the participation of Simone Veil (former President of the European Parliament)

17:00 -17:45 Discussion

17:45 Closing speech Claude Malhuret (Minister for Human Rights)

By invitation: Wednesday 29 October, Maison de la Chimie, 28 Rue Saint Dominique, 75007 Paris.

Organised by Le Comité de Vigilance sur les Droits de l'Homme en Ethiopie.



Bernard Kouchner, 'Humanitarian and Political Action: There are No Good and Bad Deaths,' **Le Monde** (France), 23 October 1986 (in French).

**D107**

### Extract:

[...] Some of us were amused but all we can do now is express contempt and deplore the way that the current arguments and the conferences in preparation are demeaning our aims. The excessive abuse published by a complacent press all too often takes the place of argument. The temperamental French public dislikes all this confusion and clowning and it instinctively distrusts exotic solidarities; since humanitarians are fighting amongst themselves, let's stop giving them the means to work in undeveloped countries! An essential debate is being transformed into an editorial free-for-all. This is not what Glucksmann, Wolton and Rufin wanted; they opened the floodgates in their recent work and now they are being swept away by the torrent.

Are we helping the ruthless Ethiopian dictatorship by saving the lives of Ethiopians? Have we served the cause of human rights by stirring up world opinion and urging people to feed the starving while refusing to denounce the forced displacement of populations? This was the course adopted by Bob Geldof, who came close to winning the Nobel Prize, and who now causes apoplexy among the would-be Nobel laureates on the banks of the Seine. Note that most international aid organisations, like

UNICEF or CARE, are pursuing the same course. And note also that Bob Geldof is no dictator's lackey, although he does demonstrate more flamboyance in action than in thought.

Are the activities of these meek, mild, and mute Samaritans indeed reinforcing the oppression of African Marxism, under the impregnable guise of tending to the sick and wounded? Was Médecins Sans Frontières - which turned its arrival in Ethiopia into a major marketing event - right to denounce the violence of the regime in Addis Ababa, and then make a marketing event out of its exit?



Laurent Joffrin, 'Charity Holds a Conference,' *Libération* (France), 30 October 1986 (in French).

#### Extract:

Marxism creates famine. Humanitarian aid strengthens totalitarianism. These are the two axioms around which the Comité de Vigilance sur les Droits de l'Homme en Ethiopie organised a conference in Paris yesterday. Boldly entitled 'A Deadly Compassion: From Aid to the Victims to Aiding their Executioners,' it was partly funded by Claude Malhuret's Ministry for Human Rights.

Throughout the day, the stars of the 'charity business,' Rony Brauman for Médecins Sans Frontières and Bernard Kouchner for Médecins Du Monde, debated the issues in front of four hundred people. Other speakers included polemicist André Glucksmann, philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy and political luminaries like Laurent Fabius and Simone Veil. The violence of the arguments tended to overshadow the issues surrounding humanitarian aid.

Thierry Wolton, co-author with Glucksmann of the pamphlet *Silence, On Tue*, opened the discussion by asserting that Marxism had produced the great famines of the century: the Ukraine in the 1920s, Mao's China, Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge and now Mengistu's Ethiopia. This stark introduction attracted several critical responses along the lines of "How can you talk seriously about a country in which you have only spent four days?"

By denouncing the use of aid by the Ethiopian armed forces, Rony Brauman also upset militants from the humanitarian organisations, which his accusations implicitly involve. "How many children has your departure from Ethiopia killed, because they have not received the care you could have given them?" they shouted from the floor, evoking the departure of Médecins Sans Frontières from Ethiopia, expelled last year following its public criticism of Mengistu's regime.

[...] "We could not carry on working," explained Rony Brauman. "If we had stayed and kept quiet, we would have been accepting the unacceptable." However, even today, MSF's decision is still controversial. Lionel Rotcage of Band Aid went straight for the throat, "the MSF people knew perfectly well what was happening in the country when they took the decision to work there. They turned their arrival in Ethiopia into a big media event and they did the same with their exit. But what happened to the

people they had been looking after? Moreover, the population displacements have now stopped."

[...] The vehemence of the remarks from some quarters reveals that the argument goes far deeper than simple disagreements over methods. In France especially, radical ideological revision has been taking place for several months. In early 1985, the creation of *Liberté Sans Frontières* by the eponymous doctors, including Claude Malhuret, the former Head of MSF, caused considerable disquiet among NGOs. Third-Worldism was equated with neo-liberalism. A virtual ideological war between NGOs has been going on ever since.



'President's Moral Report to the MSF France General Assembly,' May 1987 (in French).  
D108 [↗](#)

#### Extract:

To try and make sense of apparently contradictory facts and movements; to attempt to clarify the complex relations that humanitarian action forms with a totalitarian regime; to mark out the indistinct but very real limit beyond which aid to the victims is unwittingly transformed into support for the executioners. These were the aims of the 'Ethiopia: A Deadly Compassion' conference in Paris last October [1986].

[...] It is striking that a fundamental reflection on the role of aid has begun during course of this year, and at a time when humanitarian aid appears as a new form of engagement; the last worthwhile human adventure. At a time when humanitarian initiatives are multiplying, some are crying "Look out! This is dangerous!" They are not advocating some form of French withdrawal or isolationism. On the contrary, they are acting in the name of solidarity and human rights. The idea that humanitarian aid is automatically a good thing will prevail for a long time yet. It is not a question of disenchantment or disaffection, but of lucidity, a fundamental interrogation that could be reduced to two questions: what is the nature of the problems that we, as members of the humanitarian movement, are confronted with, and how do we deal with these problems? In other words, what results can we expect? We must provide answers to these questions, which I have posed in a deliberately simplistic manner, as precisely and as concretely as we can, rather than content ourselves with parroting the eternal litany about the future of the world, the duty of solidarity and morality of extreme urgency. These are not answers but empty variations on conventional themes, and bear no relation to the problems before us.

**In December, the leader of Band Aid visited Paris and accused MSF of having become a political organisation. However, the press observed that on the fifteenth anniversary of the organisation's foundation,**

its public image had apparently suffered no damage from the political quarrels.



Bob Geldof interviewed by Christiane Chombeau, 'Our Duty is to Stay in Ethiopia,' *Le Monde* (France), 11 December 1986 (in French). [D109](#)

#### Extract:

CC: What about the thousands of deaths mentioned by Médecins Sans Frontières?

BG: I'm not saying it's true; I'm not saying it's false. But I note that the only people who made such accusations and quoted the figure of one hundred thousand victims are from Médecins Sans Frontières. Even the Americans, who have a representative over there, said nothing. Everybody is happy to quote MSF. I saw the convoys. I flew in Russian Antonov planes with English journalists. We were free to go where we wanted and nobody supervised our movements. We talked to people, but we did not see what MSF described. But even if it is true, I think we have a duty to stay in the country to prevent more deaths. What happened to the people MSF were helping after they left? It is true that the reception the refugees got in the resettlement zones was very badly organised. Some organisations immediately realised what was likely to happen. There was a report on the problems of moving from the north to the south because of overpopulation in a certainly fertile but limited area. Then they pinpointed the flaws and began to plan investment for infrastructure and development. The crime would have been to do nothing. I understand the argument that goes, you are helping in the zones where this resettlement is taking place, therefore you are helping the government in Addis Ababa, but I think that is childish and pathetic.

CC: How do you explain the argument that is currently raging in France?

BG: Your French philosophers have grown older and more conservative. They have lost that spark of humanity that the young have and they are betraying their youth. As for Médecins Sans Frontières, which even paid for Bernard-Henri Lévy to go to Ethiopia, it has become a political organisation. It supports the Liberté Sans Frontières group, which makes no secret of its anti-communism. I will say it again: we want to be where people need us, without making any distinctions. It is a duty. And morality is always above politics.



Pierre Haski, 'Médecins Sans Frontières is 15 Years Old and Cares About its Image,' *Libération* (France), 22 December 1986 (in French).

#### Extract:

Surprisingly, the public image of MSF seems barely tarnished by the political controversies - admittedly a very Parisian phenomenon - that surrounded the organisa-

tion's creation last year of the Liberté Sans Frontières (LSF) foundation with its clamorous indictment of Third-Worldism, Malhuret's entry into the government and of the rows over Ethiopia. In their small, cramped office, the heads of LSF acknowledge that at the start they were "out of step" with the MSF team. Since then, a 'technical reconfiguration' has dispersed the malaise. LSF is preparing another conference, this time on health, which seems likely to generate less arguments.

As for Claude Malhuret, still seen in the corridors of MSF (his wife still works there), if he looked into a certain office he would see a cartoon from *Libération* pinned to the wall. It depicts the moustached minister clinging to a fat policeman's belt. The caption reads "We are so insignificant!" On the whole, the public seems indifferent to the 'ideological reconfiguration' and is more interested in the organisation's increasingly professional image.

## EPILOGUE

**In 1987, Ethiopia was again hit by drought. 'Villagisation' continued to break up the country's agricultural system and famine reappeared. MSF France expressed the desire to return. The Ethiopian authorities agreed but imposed a condition: the organisation had to recant the position it had adopted in 1985 and guarantee its future silence. MSF France refused and did not return. The Belgian section, which never left, increased its activities in Ethiopia.**



*For two years running, 1986 and 1987, there was a famine alert in Ethiopia. I went to see the Ethiopian ambassador to suggest that we return to the country. I had no trouble getting an interview. He said, "There is no problem in you returning but you must give me a letter signed by Médecins sans Frontières, saying that everything you said was untrue, and another letter saying you will keep silent if you go back." I didn't see him again. And MSF France did not return.*

Brigitte Vasset, MSF France Medical Coordinator in Korem, from April 1984 to May 1985, then Programme Manager Ethiopia (in French).

**Liberté Sans Frontières organised two more conferences and published several texts on development issues. The foundation was finally dissolved on 28 April 1989, as its ideas had achieved broad recognition in the public sphere.**



**'President's Moral Report** to the MSF France General Assembly,' May 1987 (in French). [D108](#)

**Extract:**

We remember the rather strident entry onto the stage of Liberté Sans Frontières, that conference on Third-Worldism at which the vigour of the arguments ceded nothing to the tone. After the initial controversies, the arguments gradually died down, although their muted echoes continued to resonate here and there. LSF is no longer a source of scandal. We can welcome that and we can also deplore it. In fact, what is striking is that the dissipation of that odour of sulphur owes nothing whatsoever to any renunciation of our arguments, but on the contrary to their astonishingly rapid dissemination. I resist the temptation to claim that LSF is responsible for this reversal of tendencies. Looking at the current movement of ideas, it is clear that the tentative discussions of the early days have become much more widespread and profound thanks to this initiative, which had the advantage, it has to be agreed, of arriving at the right moment. A conference on 'Health, Medicines and Development' was organised last February in order to pinpoint issues of primary care strategy. But it was also a matter - if you will forgive me - of setting the record straight on the myth of the village health agent as the pivot of the health system, as well as on the Third World, that famous dustbin for our medicines. Not for the simple pleasure of knocking down a few skittles, but on the contrary to promote constructive thought. There is unanimous agreement - including agreement from some who were not exactly sympathetic in the past - that the objective has been reached.

[...] And finally, I can give you advance notice of the autumn publication of two important books currently being written under the aegis of LSF. The first, entitled 'The Third World in Questions' - note the 's' - uses clear and precise language to examine the great problems of under-development... The second is an essential account of Cambodia today, of the attempt to annihilate an entire population, while most people remained indifferent and some lent their support. Anyone who has closely followed the controversy over the diversion of aid in Ethiopia will encounter familiar language, methods, and protagonists.



**Summary of the MSF France Board meeting** Council, 28 April 1989 (in French). [D110](#)

**Extract:**

Dissolving Liberté Sans Frontières  
Rony Brauman is sounding out the ground on Liberté Sans Frontières. The Liberté Sans Frontières foundation had been inactive for two years. Médecins Sans Frontières was not ready to accept more quarrels, and this meant that LSF was not free to act. Moreover, the Médecins Sans Frontières financial committee had decided to reduce the sums allocated to satellite organisations. It had been planned to dissolve the foundation. The mem-

bers of its administrative council would not accept this but, recommended allowing it to lie dormant so that it could be reactivated if the need arose. If Médecins Sans Frontières has something to say, it can say it under its own name. Besides, we do not have to hide behind LSF. It is Médecins Sans Frontières that catches the flak.



*We realised that our ideas no longer shocked anyone. They had become commonplace. Third-Worldism was dead. Whereas in 1985 there were still people who thought that World Order and multinationals were to blame for the famine in Ethiopia, a few years later this type of analysis was no longer possible. Today there are very few people left who try to defend Mugabe, the dictator in Zimbabwe! Of course LSF was only a symbol of this evolution, not the cause. And as we didn't want to become a mini Sciences-Po [Political studies institute] of the Third World, our 'raison d'être' had disappeared.*

Rony Brauman, MSF France President (in French).

**Meanwhile, dialogue between the various sections of MSF gradually resumed. The first Médecins Sans Frontières European Convention was held in Toulouse on 3-4 June 1989. However, each section had its own ideas concerning the adoption of public positions.**



**Summary of the Board meeting** of MSF France, 27 March 1987 (in French). [D111](#)

**Extract:**

On 28 February, a meeting of the existing sections of Médecins Sans Frontières (Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, and France) took place in Amsterdam. The aim was to harmonise the work of the different groups and renew contact between the French and Belgian sections. The meeting was amicable and favoured the resumption of normal relations between all the sections.



**'President's Moral Report** to the MSF France General Assembly, 19-20 November 1988 (in French). [D112](#)

**Extract:**

Liberté Sans Frontières was one of the reasons for the disagreement - to use a delicate euphemism - with Médecins Sans Frontières Belgium. I think I can say that this is now a closed chapter in our common history, as misunderstandings have been ironed out at a number of work and coordination meetings. That does not mean

that the different sections of Médecins Sans Frontières are now carbon copies of each other - which would not be desirable - but simply that with a common goal, a common language and genuine bonds of friendship, the sun is once again shining over the Europe of Médecins Sans Frontières.



**Minutes** of the Médecins Sans Frontières International Convention, 20 December 1988, (in French).

**Extract:**

Some divergences appeared, chiefly between France and the other sections, on the issue of MSF engagement in the field of human rights. In France, the image of MSF is closely associated with the defence and promotion of human rights in the broad sense of the term (civil and political liberties). MSF France assumes this position by claiming for itself a double affiliation: to human rights and to medical action.

All sections agreed on the necessity for action when their teams are confronted by serious attacks on human rights. There are two necessary conditions: the absence of other observers (human rights groups, media) and the physical presence of MSF. There are differences between MSF France and the other sections as to what kind of action should be taken. MSF France 'signs' its témoignage whenever possible, and prefers to act through diplomatic and media channels simultaneously. The other sections prefer to use 'silent diplomacy' and lobbying, without publicly attaching MSF's name to the denunciations.

Each section has taken note of these differences. MSF France stresses the necessity of analysing the different situations on a case-by-case basis so that the témoignage policy can be adapted. The examples of Ethiopia (MSF long-term press campaign), Sudan (MSF denunciation of 'genocide'), and Sri Lanka (indirect, unsigned denunciations) demonstrate the existence of a broad range of options.



**Minutes** of the Médecins Sans Frontières European Convention, Toulouse, 3-4 June 1989 (in French).

**Extract:**

The first Médecins Sans Frontières European Convention was held in Toulouse on 3-4 June. It included the maximum number of people from each section who are involved in the running of the association: employees, volunteers and senior staff.

[...]Témoignage on human rights and publicity: "To sign or not to sign, that is the question." Médecins Sans Frontières France said, "Yes, without exception." Médecins Sans Frontières Belgium and Holland said, "No, with exceptions," which sums up the discussion. The group acknowledged the polarisation on this issue. Médecins Sans Frontières France will continue to pub-

licly denounce human rights violations. Médecins Sans Frontières Belgium and Holland will do so only when 'silent diplomacy' and feeding news to the media fail to work, when the situation is considered to be extremely serious, and no other organisation is present to publicise it. Although all sections would like more cooperation and integration, this can only happen when they have come to certain agreements, which will prevent interference in each other's work. This is seen as a matter of mutual concessions by all sections.



*We officially buried the hatchet at Toulouse, in the south of France. We all got together, embraced each other, and said that we would work together from now on. It was a great moment.*

Georges Dallemagne, MSF Belgium, Director of Operations (in French).

**In June 1991, MSF France sent an assessment mission to Ethiopia. At the end of that year, it launched a programme at Sekota and Lallibella.**



'Ethiopia 1991-1992,' **MSF Annual Activity Report 1991-1992**, 29 May 1992 (in French). **D113**

**Extract:**

Following the fall of Mengistu, an assessment mission was sent to Ethiopia in June 1991. The dictator's overthrow had released centrifugal forces that threatened to ultimately fragment the country. Eritrea was already on the verge of independence and a referendum on self-determination was planned for June 1993.

Activities: the assessment mission identified North Wollo as one of the zones at risk from destabilisation. MSF then suggested a programme to restore health services at Sekota and Lallibella. This programme began in late 1991 and was completed in June 1992 at Sekota and in September at Lallibella [...]. An assessment mission conducted among the displaced populations at Moyale in April 1992 revealed the precarious nature of their situation. A mission to provide nutritional assistance will be organised in the near future.

**In 1991, the Mengistu regime was overthrown and the dictator fled to Zimbabwe. In 2006, an Ethiopian court verdict found him guilty in absentia of genocide. Following an appeal on 26 May 2008, he was sentenced to death in absentia by Ethiopia's High Court.**

## **CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS - 1973-1986**

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	Ethiopia	MSF
<b>1973-74</b>	Famine in Ethiopia (200,000 deaths) - RRC (Relief and Rehabilitation Commission) created.	
<b>1974</b>	<b>September</b> Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie overthrown.	
<b>1977</b> USA refuses to supply arms, Ethiopia becomes USSR's ally. USSR breaks its alliance with Somalia, a strategically less important country.	Colonel Mengistu's DERG (Provisional Military and Administrative Council) imposes a reign of terror.	
<b>1978</b>	Eritrean independence fighters clash with the Ethiopian government.	MSF conducts clandestine surgical missions in the Eritrea and Tigre provinces of Ethiopia. MSF begins surgical and physical therapy activities for Tigrean refugees in camps in the Sudan.
<b>1982</b>	<b>Late 1982</b> Drought and famine in the northern (Wollo, Tigre), eastern (Harargue) and western (Wollega, Illubabor) regions. Mengistu denies the existence of the famine but authorises the RRC to open food distribution centres for the 'drought'.	<b>Late 1982</b> MSF makes unsuccessful request for authorisation to conduct an evaluation mission.
<b>1984</b>	<b>Early 1984</b> Report from the Commission for the Organisation of the Workers' Party: 'Ethiopia Can Deal with This on its Own.'  <b>30 March</b> RRC appeals to international aid donors for 450,000 tonnes of food ; 87,000 tonnes provided initially.	<b>February</b> At the RRC's request, MSF conducts an evaluation mission in Korem.  <b>April</b> MSF France opens a mission in Korem (Wollo); five volunteers. <b>May</b> Liberté Sans Frontières (LSF) created at MSF France General Assembly. - MSF alerts WFP of high mortality rates in Korem. WFP speaks about it on the BBC.

International	Ethiopia	MSF
<p><b>1984</b></p> <p><b>June</b> Mengistu tells the World Food Council that Ethiopia's food situation is under control.</p> <p><b>23 October</b> BBC broadcast reports on the famine in Ethiopia rebroadcast by 425 stations around the world.</p> <p><b>October</b> Fundraising campaigns for Ethiopia around the world.</p> <p><b>3 December</b> The British NGO, 'War on Want,' accuses the Ethiopian government of diverting aid to starve the population in the rebel zones.</p>	<p><b>12 September</b> Celebration of the revolution's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary and founding of the Ethiopian Workers' Party - major media coverage.</p> <p><b>3 October</b> Mengistu delivers speech acknowledging existence of the famine.</p> <p><b>26 October</b> National Committee for Natural Disasters and Rehabilitation (CNDR) is created. It is close to the regime and supplants the RRC.</p> <p><b>16 November</b> Mengistu announces that national priority given to transfer of 1.5 million northerners to the south.</p>	<p><b>July</b> MSF France opens a mission in Kobo. Displaced people return home, hoping for rain.</p> <p><b>September 1984</b> Starving farming populations arrive en masse in Korem (no rain).</p> <p><b>Beginning September 1984</b> MSF team talks to many journalists visiting Korem.</p> <p><b>Early October</b> MSF Holland is founded.</p> <p><b>October</b> The situation for the MSF mission in Korem improves.</p>

International	Ethiopia	MSF
<p><b>1984</b></p> <p><b>December</b> Immense media mobilisation to aid Ethiopian famine victims; Band Aid and Chanteurs Sans Frontières recordings. 100,000 tonnes of food per month delivered to Ethiopia.</p>	<p><b>Late 1984</b> 200,000 people resettled in the South.</p>	<p><b>December</b> Korem (Wollo): MSF and SCF discover camp is half-empty after a raid.</p>
<p><b>1985</b></p> <p><b>January</b> International press questions the Ethiopian regime's management of aid.</p>	<p><b>17 January</b> Ethiopian government seizes a food cargo heading to the rebel zone.</p> <p><b>21 January</b> Diplomatic counterattack by Ethiopian government regarding criticism of its handling of aid. Cadres mobilised for resettlement operation in the South.</p> <p><b>9 February</b> Ethiopian government accuses aid organisations of squandering aid.</p>	<p><b>January</b> MSF team in Korem speaks to visiting journalists. MSF team prohibited to circulate in the Korem camp. Grain and blankets requisitioned for 'volunteers' at time of departure for transit camps.</p> <p><b>10 January</b> <b>MSF France press conference</b> as Liberté Sans Frontières (LSF) is launched.</p> <p><b>20 January</b> MSF Belgium expresses reservations about LSF's founding.</p> <p><b>23-24 January</b> 'Challenging <i>Tiers-mondisme</i>' symposium organised by Liberté Sans Frontières.</p> <p><b>10 February</b> Letter from MSF teams in Chad (all sections) opposing LSF.</p> <p><b>22 February</b> In Korem, authorities prohibit MSF from distributing blankets, clothing and tents. Curfew extended.</p>

International	Ethiopia	MSF
<p><b>1985</b></p>	<p><b>13 March</b> RRC issues an international appeal for aid.</p> <p><b>14 March</b> <b>National Committee</b> for Natural Disasters and Rehabilitation (CNDR) holds press conference claiming that negative stories about resettlement programmes have been exaggerated and invented.</p> <p><b>8 April</b> Mengistu speaks to the Central Committee of the Ethiopian Workers Party: <i>"There is no alternative to the collectivisation of farmers."</i></p> <p><b>April-May</b> Cholera in Korem and Kobo but, use of the word "cholera" prohibited; gastroenteritis is used instead.</p> <p><b>28 April</b> 57,000 displaced persons in the Ibnet camp (Gondar) are dispersed violently.</p>	<p><b>Early March</b> MSF and SCF teams discover the Korem camp half-empty after soldiers conduct a raid. Soldiers also entered the hospitals.</p> <p><b>12 March</b> MSF Belgium's management and board send members a packet of information opposing LSF.</p> <p><b>March</b> MSF Belgium opens a programme in Idaga Hammous near Adigre (Tigre).</p> <p><b>Late March</b> MSF France board raises questions about the forced resettlements. MSF Holland conducts evaluation mission among Ethiopian refugees in Somalia.</p> <p><b>Early April</b> Combined MSF teams (Belgium/France/Holland) work with Ethiopian refugees in Hargeissa (Somalia).</p> <p><b>5 April</b> MSF Belgium's board decides to break relations with MSF France.</p> <p><b>19 April</b> MSF talks about cholera in an international meeting and narrowly avoids expulsion.</p> <p><b>27 April</b> MSF Belgium General Assembly decides to break all relations with MSF France as long as the latter remains connected to LSF.</p>

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<p><b>1985</b></p> <p><b>29 April</b>  <i>Washington Post</i> article on the Ibnet events.</p> <p><b>Late May</b>  International press criticises diversion and manipulation of aid in the context of East-West relations.</p> <p><b>12 July</b>  Concert in London (Wembley) and Philadelphia organised by Band Aid, to benefit Ethiopian famine victims.</p> <p><b>July-August</b>  International Federation of the Red Cross conducts a discreet evaluation in the resettlement areas.</p>	<p><b>29 April</b>  Mengistu says that the Ibnet events are just an exceptional blunder.</p> <p><b>1 May</b>  Mengistu denounces the "imperialist forces' criticism of the resettlement project."</p> <p><b>July</b>  Government temporarily halts transfers and resettlement.</p>	<p><b>3 May</b>  After the Ibnet events, MSF France president speaks to <i>Libération</i> (France) about the problems of continuing to work in Ethiopia.  MSF France board of directors decides to initiate legal action to withdraw MSF Belgium's right to use the MSF name.</p> <p><b>Early May</b>  MSF France's General Assembly: MSF Belgium questions LSF's existence and the responsibility of the management team.  MSF Belgium attacks LSF in <i>Le Monde Diplomatique</i>: "A Foundation above Reproach."</p> <p><b>17-20 May</b>  MSF France evaluation mission in the Sekota region.</p> <p><b>Early June</b>  MSF France evaluation mission in the Kelala region.</p> <p><b>July</b>  MSF France opens medical assistance programmes in Kelala and Sekota.  MSF's first request to open a therapeutic feeding centre in Kelala.  MSF Belgium opens programme in Zalambessa.</p> <p><b>15 July</b>  MSF France loses lawsuit filed in a Belgian court to deny MSF Belgium use of the MSF name.</p>

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<p><b>1985</b></p> <p><b>Mid-October</b></p> <p>Discussion in the US regarding Ethiopian regime's famine policy. Jason Clay (Cultural Survival) testifies before Congress.</p> <p><b>26 October</b></p> <p>Korem events reported in the international press.</p>	<p><b>August</b></p> <p>The RRC asks farmers from the Maichew region, living as displaced persons in Korem, to return home and authorises the Red Cross to distribute cereal to them.</p> <p><b>17 September</b></p> <p>At CRDA meeting: Father Jack Finucane of Concern states that the death rate during population transfers was 15-20%.</p> <p><b>Early October</b></p> <p>Forced transfers resume. Red Cross prohibited from delivering food to starving Maichew residents who, upon returning to food distribution centres, are rounded up.</p> <p><b>19 October</b></p> <p>At CRDA meeting: Jack Finucane (Concern) downplays his 17 September comments regarding the number of deaths during population transfers.</p>	<p><b>August</b></p> <p>MSF France receives the Cultural Survival reports including statements by Ethiopian refugees in Sudan who fled during the forced resettlement operations.</p> <p><b>7 October</b></p> <p>MSF makes new request to open therapeutic feeding centre in Kelala.</p> <p><b>22 October</b></p> <p>MSF France president speaks at the British-American Press Club in Paris. He denounces the blockade on the opening of a centre in Kelala and says if MSF does not receive authorisation, it will pull out.</p> <p><b>23 October</b></p> <p>MSF makes new request to open therapeutic feeding centre in Kelala.</p> <p><b>24 October</b></p> <p>RRC accuses MSF of conducting a disinformation campaign.</p> <p><b>25 October</b></p> <p>20,000 people flee Korem camp in the middle of the night. 600 forced into trucks as MSF team watches.</p>

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<p><b>1985</b></p> <p><b>29 October</b> The UN representative in Ethiopia urges donors to fund the resettlement programme.</p>	<p><b>November</b> At Kelala, the MSF team discovers 800 people rounded up in an open field. They had been there a week, awaiting their forced transfer by lorries.</p> <p><b>7 November</b> Official visit to Kelala by the RCC, a UN representative and ambassadors. They refuse to meet 'departure candidates', despite MSF's warning.</p>	<p><b>28 October</b> The board of MSF France decides to publicise the difficulties of working in Ethiopia.</p> <p><b>31 October</b> <b>Press conference</b> and discussion in Paris between the MSF France President and RRC Commissioner Dawit Georgis, who promises to authorise the opening of a therapeutic centre at Kelala.</p> <p><b>November</b> MSF France replies to <i>Le Monde Diplomatique's</i> criticisms of LSF.</p> <p><b>3 November 1985</b> MSF quoted in a <i>Sunday Times</i> (UK) article: 'At least 50,000 people dead during Ethiopian population transfers.'</p> <p><b>5 November</b> In <i>Libération</i> (France), the President of MSF France calls for a four-month moratorium on the transfers. Distribution of the MSF confidential report 'Mass Deportations in Ethiopia.'</p> <p><b>14 November</b> Interview with the President of MSF France in Paris-Match: "In Ethiopia, your money finances massive deportations."</p> <p><b>15 November</b> Meeting in Addis Ababa between the President of MSF France and the new UN representative, who says he has "no reason to believe that people are being forced to leave the distribution centres".</p>

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<p><b>1985</b></p> <p><b>20 November</b></p> <p>The UN Office for Emergency Operations in Africa states it has no information to confirm that tens of thousands of Ethiopians have died during the transfer operations.</p>	<p><b>November</b></p> <p>At Kelala, the MSF team discovers 800 people rounded up in an open field. They had been there a week, awaiting their forced transfer by lorries.</p> <p><b>21 November</b></p> <p>The RRC Deputy Commissioner tells AFP: "MSF is conducting a defamation campaign. Its aims are political rather than humanitarian."</p> <p><b>27 November</b></p> <p>The RRC issues a document denouncing the allegations in the media and extolling the benefits of resettlement.</p> <p><b>3 December</b></p> <p>The RRC says it has accepted "MSF's offer to terminate its operations in Ethiopia."</p>	<p><b>16 November</b></p> <p>A meeting between MSF and the RRC is unexpectedly transformed into a press conference and informal court.</p> <p><b>20 November</b></p> <p>Letter from MSF to the RRC Deputy Commissioner, suggesting an assessment mission in the resettlement zones.</p> <p><b>21 November</b></p> <p>Letter from MSF to the UN representative in Ethiopia, requesting his thoughts on the fact that the departure criteria for the resettlement programme are being ignored.</p> <p><b>25 November</b></p> <p>The MSF team fights to stop the forced transfer of 100 people from Sekota.</p> <p><b>26 November</b></p> <p>The MSF team discovers 200 people locked in a church at Sekota, awaiting transfer.</p> <p><b>29 November</b></p> <p>Letter from MSF to the RRC condemning the incidents at Sekota.</p> <p><b>2 December</b></p> <p>MSF in Addis receives notice of its expulsion from the RRC. This is followed by the freezing of bank accounts, restriction of staff movements, and the grounding of aircraft.</p> <p><b>3 December</b></p> <p>MSF France <b>press conference</b> in Paris: "Aid is not being used to save people, but to oppress them."</p> <p><b>4 December</b></p> <p>MSF asks the UN representative in Ethiopia to ensure that other agencies continue MSF</p>

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<p><b>1985</b></p> <p><b>7 December</b> An OXFAM nurse claims that resettlement is not voluntary. OXFAM expresses concern but says it does not envisage a withdrawal.</p> <p><b>18 December</b> The UN representative in Ethiopia declares that MSF was expelled for interfering in the country's internal affairs.</p> <p><b>Late December</b> Agency for International Development officially condemns the Ethiopian government policy of deportation.</p>	<p><b>16 December</b> The international press reports the defection of Dawit Wolde Georgis to the US. He was the RRC Commissioner.</p> <p><b>18 December</b> Declaration from the members of the CRDA (40 NGOs working in Ethiopia) criticising MSF for the bad publicity it has generated for aid agencies in Ethiopia.</p>	<p><b>7 December 1985</b> <b>Press conference</b> held by the President of MSF France in London: testimony of MSF volunteers, appeal for a moratorium on forced transfers.</p> <p><b>8 December</b> <b>Press conference</b> given by MSF volunteers on their return to Paris from Ethiopia.</p> <p><b>12 December</b> MSF asks the European Parliament for help in obtaining a moratorium on the forced displacements. The European Parliament criticises the deportation policy and asks the Ethiopian government to allow MSF to resume its activities.</p> <p><b>18 December</b> MSF France holds a <b>press conference</b> in Geneva on the dire situation of forced transfers.</p> <p><b>19 December</b> <b>Press conference in Nairobi.</b> MSF France calls for humanitarian organisations in Ethiopia to create a 'united front.'</p> <p><b>December</b> MSF France supplies donors with a document detailing the circumstances of its departure from Ethiopia.</p>
<p><b>1986</b></p>		<p><b>January</b> MSF France takes its campaign against the forced displacements in Ethiopia to the United States and Canada.</p> <p><b>13 January</b> MSF Belgium signs an agreement with the Ethiopian government to provide one million dollarsworth of medical aid.</p>

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<p><b>1986</b></p> <p><b>21 January</b> The US government criticises Ethiopia's policy of forced resettlement.</p> <p><b>April</b> The villagisation programme is criticised by diplomats, aid organisations and the international press.</p> <p><b>21 May</b> The UN Office for Emergency Operations in Ethiopia launches an appeal to finance the transportation of international aid in Ethiopia. It also issues an optimistic bulletin on the long-term effects of the resettlement programme.</p>	<p><b>February</b> The Ethiopian government announces the temporary suspension of resettlement operations in order to begin a "period of consolidation." Villagisation continues.</p> <p><b>March</b> Thousands of Ethiopians flee villagisation and seek refuge in Somalia.</p> <p><b>22 March</b> Mengistu announces that future transfers will be conducted only on a voluntary basis.</p> <p><b>11 April</b> Mengistu announces that three million Ethiopians have already been 'resettled.'</p> <p><b>Early May</b> The Ethiopian government demands the extradition of Dawit Wolde Georgis, the former head of the RRC, and accuses him of diverting funds.</p> <p><b>21 May</b> Dawit Wolde Georgis tells the press that the famine "arises from a political problem" and criticises his government's management.</p> <p><b>June</b> Berhane Deressa, Deputy Commissioner of the RRC, defects and criticises his government's policy.</p>	<p><b>30 January</b> The Executive Director of the UN Office for Emergency Operations in Africa rejects MSF's findings on Ethiopia. The UN representative in Ethiopia says statistics are impossible to obtain.</p> <p><b>Late March</b> Claude Malhuret, MSF France's General Director, leaves the organisation to take up the post of Minister for Human Rights in the French right-wing government.</p> <p><b>June</b> The President of MSF France visits the United States and says that the money raised by Band Aid is being diverted.</p>

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<p><b>1986</b></p>	<p><b>20 June</b> Dawit Wolde Georgis urges the US to continue its aid to Ethiopia. He insists that US ensure that aid is not misappropriated by the government, which he accuses of attempting to establish a Soviet-style regime.</p> <p><b>8 September</b> The Ethiopian ambassador to France defects.</p> <p><b>29 October</b> The Ethiopian Minister for Foreign Affairs defects.</p>	<p><b>17 June</b> MSF France holds a <b>press conference</b> in Paris. It criticises the diversion of international aid and compares the Ethiopian régime to the Khmer Rouge.</p> <p><b>Summer</b> MSF continues its <b>campaign</b> against the policy of villagisation.</p> <p><b>October</b> Article by Rony Brauman, President of MSF France, in the English-language editions of Readers' Digest: "Famine Aid-Were We Duped?"</p> <p><b>29 October</b> <b>Conference</b> entitled "La pitié dangereuse: de l'aide aux victimes à l'aide aux bourreaux" [A Dangerous Compassion: From Aiding to the Victims to Aiding Their Executioners] organised by <i>Liberté Sans Frontières</i>.</p> <p><b>December</b> Rony Brauman's article is reprinted in the French-language editions of <i>Readers' Digest</i>: "Faut-il encore aider l'Ethiopie?" [Should we Continue to help Ethiopia]. Bob Geldof (Band Aid) accuses MSF of being a political organisation. 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of MSF's foundation. According to the press, the political quarrels have not damaged its image</p>
<p><b>1987</b></p>	<p>Drought returns to Ethiopia. Villagisation has devastated the agricultural system.</p>	<p>MSF France refuses to recant the position it had adopted in 1985 and to guarantee its future silence, conditions imposed by the Ethiopian government for its return to the country. MSF Belgium continues its work in Ethiopia.</p> <p><b>28 February</b> The MSF sections meet in Amsterdam and resume dialogue.</p>

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1989		<b>3-4 June</b> The first MSF European Convention is held in Toulouse.	
1991	The Derg falls. Mengistu flees to Zimbabwe.		
2006	An Ethiopian court verdict finds Mengistu guilty, in absentia, of genocide. He is sentenced to life imprisonment.		
2008	Following an appeal, Mengistu is sentenced to death, in absentia, by Ethiopia's high court.		