

Medical charity slams indifference to major human tragedies

Philippe Coste

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PARIS, Jan 25 (AFP) - The French medical charity Medecins sans Frontieres has accused the world community of turning its back on major human tragedies and failing to provide the political clout to back up charity intervention.

In a scathing report entitled "Populations in Danger-1995", MSF whose 2,000 doctors intervened in nearly 70 countries in 1994, said humanitarian efforts were powerless unless they were seconded by "political action and justice".

The report released on Tuesday said that in just over two years, nearly 200,000 people had been killed in Bosnia and more than three million people had been turned into refugees.

"Humanitarian organisations still present in the (government-controlled) enclaves are totally powerless in face of the tragedy unfolding before their eyes. Aid to the victims is conditioned by all sorts of political

and diplomatic bargaining and they (aid workers) are reduced to running a social welfare service in what is a prison-town," MSF said.

In Burundi, between 50,000 and 80,000 people were killed in ethnic massacres and nearly 700 000 people have fled to Rwanda, Tanzania and Zaire. In August 1994, there were still nearly 250,000 refugees in the capital or grouped in camps, the report said.

"The crisis in Burundi is a good illustration of the double language and disengagement of the international community in emergency situations which get little media coverage," MSF said.

In Rwanda, systematic extermination of rival ethnic groups left between 500,000 and one million people dead "amid general indifference". "The campaign of extermination went on for nearly three months without the international community making any move to stop the carnage

and the feeling of impunity which resulted enabled the massacres to reach an unprecedented scale," MSF said.

The organisation said Zaire was "a prime illustration of a country with an economy in a shambles, a government which has collapsed and a state which is disintegrating".

MSF said Zaire was "bankrupt today, ruined by 30 years of repression, looting and corruption". In Shaba province (formerly Katanga) people from Kasai had been the target of "ethnic cleansing", the report said.

The report devoted one chapter to the anti-personnel mines which have mutilated or killed thousands of people in countries where long-standing conflicts have occurred.

It said that in Cambodia

there were 25,000 amputees, in Afghanistan between 20,000 and 30,000 and in Angola more than 20,000.

MSF denounced the "hypocrisy of international conventions" and called for a "total ban on the production, stocking, sale and use of all types of anti-personnel mines".

Another chapter dealt with the 25 million people displaced inside their own countries. It said the death rate among these people was "from seven to 70 percent higher than for people living in their own homes" because of a higher incidence of tuberculosis, paludism, AIDS and vitamin deficiencies.

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