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To: Ms. Sandra Thurman

Fax #: (202) 456-2439

From: Randa Hassan

Date: February 17, 2000

of Pages Including Cover Sheet: 4

Dear Ms. Thurman,

I am writing to request an appointment for Dr. James Orbinski, President of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and Mr. Daniel Berman, Coordinator of MSF's Access To Essential Medicines Campaign. Dr. Orbinski and Mr. Berman will be in Washington on the 13th and 14th of March and would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the implications of the US Administration's new policy regarding the access of essential medicines.

I would be most grateful if someone from your office could contact me on (212) 655-3785 to advise me of your availability during these days.

Thanking you in advance,

Yours sincerely,

Randa Hassan
Program Officer

N.B. I include herewith some pages on MSF's Access To Essential Medicines Campaign.

Rachel Cohen
212-655-3762
(checking)



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**Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)/
Doctors Without Borders**

Access to Essential Medicines Campaign

Despite the progress made by twentieth-century medicine in the industrialized world, in developing countries, communicable diseases such as tuberculosis, meningitis, and pneumonia are still the leading causes of death. Moreover, the progress that had been made over the years toward lower mortality rates has actually been reversed by the AIDS epidemic. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) volunteers are often outraged by watching patients die of diseases that could be treated or cured—or that have been eradicated—in North America or Europe.

Three key reasons for the drug disparity are:

- Little research is being carried out on tropical and other communicable diseases that largely affect people in poor countries, because drugs for such illnesses are not profitable for drug companies.
- Many drugs patented in the developed world are simply too expensive for those in the developing world to buy. In addition, some pharmaceutical manufacturers have simply stopped making medicines for tropical diseases because they cannot make a sufficient profit from them.
- Most existing treatments for tropical diseases are old, and in many cases, the diseases have become drug resistant, reducing the treatments' effectiveness.

To address this far-reaching problem, MSF has launched the **Access to Essential Medicines Campaign**, a project to improve access to high-quality essential drugs worldwide.

The campaign's greatest success thus far has been to raise awareness of the "access deficit" to the point where pharmaceutical companies and policy makers have clearly begun to pay attention to the problem. Some of the campaign's key activities have included:

- organizing a conference on "compulsory-licensing"—an important tool to lower the price of drugs in poorer countries
- participating in the May 1999 World Health Assembly (WHA) meeting
- conducting proactive media work to raise awareness of the drug-access issue among policymakers and the general public.

The meeting on compulsory licensing, held in March 1999 in Geneva, brought together more than 120 delegates from 30 countries to examine this mechanism, which enables governments to issue licenses to local manufacturers to produce cheaper copies of patented drugs in a health emergency. At the WHA meeting, representatives from MSF and other partners successfully advocated for the adoption of a resolution on the Revised Drug Strategy that gave the WHO a formal role in helping countries to use international trade agreements to the benefit of their health systems. In the United States, a media campaign has resulted in articles and editorials on the issue of drug access in *JAMA*, *The Nation*, *Time Magazine*, *The New York Times*, and other publications; and, representatives from the campaign have met with such leaders as AIDS researcher David Ho to present the campaign.

Stimulating Research and Encouraging Production

While the commercial drug industry has produced many new products in recent years, new treatments for diseases that kill millions of people in poor countries have been sparse. Of the 1,233 new chemical entities that were registered by Western Health authorities between 1975 and 1997, only 11 were specifically indicated for tropical diseases. The globalization of the pharmaceutical industry, as well as international trade agreements, are putting access to essential medicines in ever greater jeopardy.

Using the data that we've gained regarding drug-price differentials among countries and various intellectual property situations, MSF has begun to support national advocacy projects that seek to make specific drugs or therapies available. In Thailand and Kenya, for example, MSF is working with local doctors and organizations to fight for authorization for local production or lower prices for specific treatments.

On October 14-15 in Paris, MSF sponsored a conference called "Drugs for Communicable Diseases: Stimulating Development and Securing Availability." The conference brings together representatives from academia, governments, industry, NGOs, and the press to discuss ways to address this ongoing problem.

On November 25-26 in Amsterdam, MSF will cosponsor a conference called "Increasing Access to Essential Drugs in a Globalized Economy: Working Towards Solutions" with Health Action International and the Consumer Project on Technology. This conference will bring together 300 people to address how access to essential medicines can be improved in an increasingly globalized economy.

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