

His Excellency Thein Sein
President
Republic of the Union of Burma
Ministry of the President's Office
Naypyidaw, Burma

3 April 2014

Dear President Thein Sein:

We, the undersigned health care professionals, are alarmed that Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) was forced to cease its humanitarian operations in Rakhine State, and we urgently call on you to reverse the order expelling the organization from the region, as you did for other parts of the country. Removing MSF from the health infrastructure in Rakhine State is an inexcusable act that will have devastating consequences. Therefore, we also urge you to commit the relevant authorities at the national and state level to join nongovernmental organizations in effectively delivering health services in an impartial manner to all those in need.

MSF was the leading health service provider in the state, conducting nearly 500,000 consultations each year. Members of the Rohingya community, who are rendered stateless under Myanmar law, were especially reliant upon health services provided by MSF because they face significant obstacles in accessing such services elsewhere.

Humanitarian organizations, including MSF, operate under the principle of impartiality. They administer care based only on medical need, not ethnicity, race, or religion. MSF provided unbiased care, treating stateless Rohingya, ethnic Rakhine, and others in need of medical assistance. They should not be expelled for adhering to this professional ethical obligation. The expulsion of humanitarian assistance agencies and health providers where populations are in need of basic and essential services violates international norms of governance, and suggests disregard for the lives of the vulnerable, particularly women and children, who suffer the greatest losses of life and health when such assistance is denied.

Refusing to allow MSF to continue treating those in need in Rakhine State will leave hundreds of thousands of people without necessary health care, and – in the long term – MSF's expulsion may create a public health disaster. MSF was forced to cease administering anti-retroviral treatment to an estimated 850 people living with HIV/AIDS. Interrupting this course of treatment is dangerous to the patient and increases the risk of building drug resistance. The estimated 30,000 people reliant upon treatment for tuberculosis will also face severe consequences if they can no longer turn to MSF for care. Malaria is endemic in Rakhine State, and over the past 10 years MSF has treated 1,240,000 individuals suffering from malaria in this state alone. In addition to the resistance concerns with interruptions of HIV treatment, both drug resistant tuberculosis and malaria have recently emerged in Myanmar, and are widely considered threats to regional health and security. The expulsion of MSF and the interruption of

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HIV, TB, and malaria treatment programs are of ASEAN and Asian regional concern, as well as national ones. Internally displaced people in Rakhine State will likely face heightened vulnerability to these and other diseases, and providing accessible health care to displaced populations should be a priority for regional and national authorities. Myanmar risks undermining the tremendous work of her health professionals in attempting to control drug resistant TB and malaria through the reckless expulsion of MSF.

Again, we reiterate the need for you to immediately reverse this order, as you did for the rest of the country and region, and ensure all people living in Rakhine State enjoy access to health care services.

Sincerely,

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