Civilian Protection and Humanitarian Advocacy: Strategies and Dilemmas

Speaking Out, Access and Security
Approaches to Bearing Witnessing in MSF

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Semantic issues

- Témoignage
- Witnessing
- Bearing witness
- Advocacy
- Campaigning
- Speaking out
Expansion of Témoignage in MSF to...

1971 Charter: *respect medical confidentiality and refrain from publicly expressing opinions - in favour or against - regarding events, forces, and authorities*


1995 Chantilly Document makes témoignage an explicit part of MSF’s role
- 2 core activities: medical aid and bearing witness
- in cases of gross human rights violations *MSF may ultimately be forced to make public denunciations*
... limitations on it.

- Our actions ... have been concrete and led to significant results...but do not attempt to propose global or comprehensive solutions.

- ...we should speak out publicly, based on our eyewitness accounts, medical data and experience.

- La Mancha Agreement, 2006
Witnessing: why?

- Expose the nature / extent of suffering
- Address the direct causes of the crisis
- Increase protection of vulnerable populations
- Defend independent humanitarian action
- Combat MSF complicity and highlight the limited project of humanitarian action
- Moral imperative / outrage / identity
Defensibility I (content)

MSF Temoignage is...
- Focused through lens of field work
- Direct experience, not foreign analysis
- NOT speaking on behalf of populations
- In MSF’s voice and about populations
- Confronts political actors with their responsibility
- Highlights limits of humanitarian action
- Does not propose (political) solutions
- Wording – accuracy and local sensitivity
Defensibility I (content)

Therefore...
- It *is* our business
- Rigorously accurate
- Avoid unnecessary provocations
- Create distance from beneficiaries
- Safeguard neutrality + independence
- Avoid confusion with messages of political actors
Defensibility II (Strategy)

- Modes of Action
  - Witness
  - Persuasion
  - Condemnation/denunciation

- Tactics
  - Quiet
  - Intermediary
  - Semi-public
  - Public
Defensibility III (method)

Preparations to be made

- Nothing new to the authorities
- Nothing unknown to the authorities
- Presented and discussed with national staff
- Screening – political/local sensitivities
- Affect on *perception of* neutrality, independence
- Risk of manipulation
- Responses anticipated // preparations made
- House in order
Decision questions

How does speaking out...

- Impact on security?
- Impact on access?
- Improve situation of beneficiaries?
- Link to MSF activities/identity?
- Importance of activities
- Replacement possibilities
Decision procedures

- Discussion all levels: project to MT
- OPS “line” makes the call
- Other MSFs given notice/feedback
- Separation of national staff
- Draft report circulation protocol
- “Neutral” checks (e.g., HOD)
Decision difficulties

- How to calculate risks at various levels (staff, access, other actors)?

- How to measure future value of activities?

- How to gauge likely positive outcomes?
  - Dignity? Validation? Historical record?
Are we lucky or good?

- Relationship of decision-making process to reality = ???
- Are “they” so inclined to react negatively?
- Trading on our faces.