Session 3: People on the Move: Causes and Consequences

Mr. Mario Stephan, Executive Director of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), UAE Regional Office

1. What can be the strength of different perspectives on humanitarian action to address displacement?

- The MSF perspective is one of Medical action coupled with Témoignage (baring witness)

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<th>To address displacement, we need to address the current migration policies</th>
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<td>• Regardless of why people left their place of origin, they need protection from violence and exploitation.</td>
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<td>• Across the world, tens of millions of people are on the move. They will not just disappear. : Those trapped in legal limbo by state restrictions; those trapped in arbitrary detention; those abused by traffickers.</td>
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<td>• From the borders of South Africa and Mexico, to the shores of Malaysia, Indonesia and Europe. From Libya, to Nauru, to the Red Sea: MSF medical teams come face to face with the brutality of current migration policies. These official policies are deepening the suffering of millions, thus informing our action.</td>
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<td>• We must face reality: inhumane policies designed to deter migration do not stop people on the move. These policies strengthen the corrupt officials and criminal gangs who profit from vulnerable people. These policies criminalize and throw vulnerable people into the hands of those who ruthlessly exploit them.</td>
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<td>• Whether these policies are simply ill-informed, or are the manifestation of deliberate collusion with corruption and criminality, the result is the same: they fail to stop migration -- and they kill people.</td>
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<th>Humanitarian action addressing displacement needs to be informed by current witnessing of the plight faced by people on the move.</th>
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<td>• In detention centres in Libya MSF saw desperate people, packed into filthy rooms, trapped, and robbed of any hope. Men and women spoke of extreme violence and exploitation endured during their journeys. Women spoke of being raped and then forced to call their families to beg for money. Unaccompanied minors and pregnant women, locked in basements without medical</td>
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care. Tears in their eyes; begging for their freedom. And those are only the centres we can access, what about clandestine jails...

- MSF speaks out on the contradictory behaviour of European governments and the EU: while officials admit that people should not be sent back to Libya, they conspire against search and rescue. They formulate policies and train and equip coast guards to force people back.

2. How do MSF’s priorities adapt to the contexts of different conflicts, including those in MENA?

   **Our Priority never changes: Saving lives**

- In **Mexico and Central America**, where people flee violence and threats at home, only to enter a nightmarish cycle of exploitation and abuse. The people there know of the suffering they will experience as they take to the road. But even the knowledge of such risks does not deter them.
- Women and girls seek contraception because they simply expect to be raped during their journeys. People are forced to choose between the violence of home, and the distant possibility of a future with hope.
- In Mexico, 68 percent of the migrant population cared for by MSF report being victims of violence during their transit towards the United States. One third of the women reported being sexually abused. A quarter of MSF medical consultations for migrants and refugees in Mexico are related to physical injuries or intentional trauma.

- There is a relative novelty in the current migration crisis for MSF (adapting to changing routes, new patterns, scale of emergencies...) We see the following: Injuries sustained at home/ on the way / consequences from lack of access to health care (Non Communicable Diseases for instance)
- In Lesvos, Greece, a quarter of the children attending our group therapy sessions has self-harmed, had suicidal thoughts or has attempted suicide. For more than one year our teams have spoken out about the ongoing mental health emergency - but nothing has changed for the better

   **Saving lives in the Mediterranean is a prime example of MSF adapting to the migration crisis**
MSF wants to highlight the criminalisation of Aid:

- Saving lives is not a crime. Assisting people in need is not a crime. Yet, across the world, our medical projects are met with bureaucratic obstacles, legal harassment, and even violence. Those seeking to help people on the move have been smeared, bullied and threatened.
- MSF was forced to stop search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea. A concerted, sinister campaign of legal challenges and administrative obstacles means the ship we were working aboard—The Aquarius—is no longer authorized to leave port, let alone rescue people at risk of drowning in the Mediterranean. With the sabotage of the Aquarius, gone is the most basic humanitarian and legal commitment: saving lives at sea.
- In October, MSF was given 24 hours to leave the island of Nauru, abandoning many people in the grip of mental health crisis. Of the refugees and asylum seekers we cared for on Nauru, 30% had attempted suicide, and 60% had considered it. Attempts of telemedicine also rebuked

3. How can humanitarian NGOs better engage with development actors in protracted refugee crises?

- NGOs need to understand the complexity of every refugee crisis as a prerequisite, then looking into how do refugees are weaved (or not) within the social fabric.

- Complementarity of NGOs with existing actors is key. You need to identify the missing support then rely on complementarity with the said actors for an exhaustive response and comprehensive solutions. Keep in mind development actors often provide knowledge and a Modus Operandi lacking sometimes with NGOs.

- Beyond Development actors, we increasingly find citizens, mayors, and civil society more generally mobilising in support of refugees. Many individuals and communities across the world are taking a stand for humane policies— and taking action to reduce the suffering. Mayors are offering support in their towns. We’ve seen people who open their doors and welcome migrants into their homes. We’ve seen them organize communal kitchens to feed those on the move.
Conclusion:

People on the move are not issues that countries & organisations can deal with in isolation. It must be tackled collectively, and—crucially—humanely.

I leave you with a quote from Joanne Liu- MSF International President: *Saving lives is non-negotiable. Saving lives is what we do, what we will continue to fight for, and what we urge you to defend.*