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SCHWEIZERISCHE VERTRETUNG
REPRÉSENTATION SUISSE

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EDA	14.05.91	11
Ref. 1311 Sri Lanka		

in/à

~~Colombo~~

Aide Suisse en Cas de Catastrophes

Att. Ch. Raedersdorf/R. Fankhauser

Ihr Zeichen
Votre référence

Ihre Nachricht vom
Votre communication du

Unser Zeichen
Notre référence

Datum
Date

773.0 - MI/BN

9.05.1991

Gegenstand / Objet

Véhicule de "Médecins Sans Frontières" attaqué
par l'Armée Sri Lankaise.

Comme je l'ai mentionné par téléphone à W. Hunziker le 7 mai 1991, un grave incident a eu lieu le 3 mai 1991 entre le camp de réfugiés de Madhu dans le district de Mannar et Vavuniya, lorsqu'un véhicule MSF dûment signalisé (drapeau, sticker MSF sur le toit et les côtés, gyrophare) a été attaqué par un hélicoptère puis par deux bombardiers de l'Armée de l'Air sri lankaise. Vous trouverez ci-joint les coupures de presse et les documents relatifs à cette affaire qui a fortement préoccupé le Corps Diplomatique, les organisations internationales et les ONG travaillant au Sri Lanka.

MSF a convoqué les Chefs de Mission, le HCR et le PNUD, pour un briefing le 7 mai, expliquant les faits en détail. Il s'avère que tout porte à croire que cette attaque a été délibérée, comme l'a souligné énergiquement l'Ambassadeur de France.

Le Président a nommé une Commission d'Enquête le 8 mai, décision transmise au journal télévisé du même jour. Rony Braumann, le Président de MSF, est attendu à Colombo ce week-end pour décider le futur de MSF au Sri Lanka. Nous vous tiendrons informés de sa décision.

Plusieurs incidents ont eu lieu ces derniers mois dans le Nord et l'Est impliquant des véhicules de MSF, du HCR et du CICR, qui ont été plutôt ressentis comme du harcèlement de la part des militaires dans une période de grande tension. L'incident du 3 mai est beaucoup plus grave, puisque*délibéré et il est miraculeux, comme l'a également souligné l'Ambassadeur de France, que le chauffeur et les 3 passagers n'aient pas été tués. Il s'agit du premier grave incident touchant des expatriés depuis 1987. Il a par ailleurs révélé d'importantes lacunes dans la coordination à haut niveau des autorités militaires

* probablement



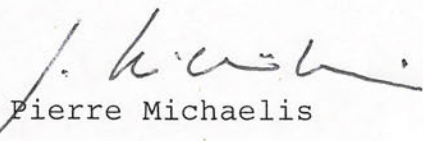
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Il remet en question les activités d'assistance ou de mise en oeuvre de projets dans le Nord et l'Est.

Cette question a été discutée avec M. R. Fankhauser lors de sa dernière mission et avec M. A. Schawohl, Chef du Projet ASC de Muthur dans le District de Trincomalee, actuellement en mission au Bangladesh. Un nouvel examen de la situation aura lieu lorsque la décision de MSF sera connue.

Quant au CICR (dont 2 délégués ont porté secours aux victimes de l'incident du 3 mai), il poursuit ses activités dans tout le pays, selon son mandat.

The Liaison Officer,



Pierre Michaelis

annexes: ment.



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PRESS RELEASE

FOUR MEDECINS SANS FRONTIERES WOUNDED IN SRI LANKA

Four members of a MEDECINS SANS FRONTIERES team (3 expatriates and 1 Lankan driver) have been wounded by helicopter gunfire and shrapnel from a bomb dropped from a plane on the afternoon of Friday 3 May, while the clearly-marked white MSF vehicle was travelling from Madhu Church to Vavuniya.

The exact circumstances of this attack have not yet been established.

But contrary to a report appearing in a local newspaper, no other vehicles were in the vicinity at the time of the incident, and no shooting had taken place before the MSF vehicle came under fire. MSF had received permission from the Joint Operations Command in Colombo to travel from Madhu to Vavuniya on the 3rd May.

The MSF team has been transferred to Colombo, and the three expatriates - Catherine LEFEVRE (french nurse), Jean-Frédéric LOBSTEIN (french gynecologist) and Marie-Patricia BYRNE (Irish nurse) will be flying back to Paris this week-end.

MEDECINS SANS FRONTIERES (MSF) has been working in Sri Lanka since 1986 under an agreement with the Ministry of Health and Women's Affairs, the Ministry of Rehabilitation and the Ministry of Policy Planning and Implementation, providing surgical teams in Government Hospitals in Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Mannar and Point Pedro. Since June 1990, MSF has implemented medical programmes in the refugee camps in the Northern and Eastern Province, and it is working in Madhu Church as part of the programme run by the UNHCR. There are no medical facilities available in the mainland Mannar District apart from those provided by MSF.

Made in Colombo on Saturday 4th 1990
Dr Anne VINCENT
Medical Coordinator
MSF SRI LANKA

EDA - DEH

DAILY NEWS 4.05.1991

French nurse injured by 'copter gunfire

A French nurse suffered gunshot injuries on her hip yesterday when a Medicines Sans Frontiers (MSF) vehicle was accidentally hit by helicopter gunfire near Nochchimodai north of Vavuniya yesterday, well informed sources said.

She was one of three passengers - the others were a French and a British doctor - being driven by a Lankan chauffeur from Madhu to Colombo via Vavuniya and Anuradhapura in a pickup truck that had strayed 10,000 metres off the authorised route.

The sources said that the vehicle had been hit when the helicopter had been fired at by another vehicle that had driven to the location of the incident - Puttukulam, three miles West of Nochchimodai - and had drawn return fire.

"Maybe they engaged the helicopter taking cover of the presence of the MSF vehicle", these sources said.

There was no word on why the MSF vehicle had gone off the approved route. A military operation was on at Nochchimodai.

EDA - DEH

THE SUNDAY ISLAND 5.5.1991



Four French medical workers shot and wounded

Four members of Medicine Sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Frontiers — MSF) were shot and wounded in Vavuniya on Friday, the Paris-based international volunteer medical organisation said in a statement.

It said the four were driving between Mannar and Vavuniya in a clearly marked car when they came under fire. The wounded were brought to Colombo and are to be flown to Paris this weekend. MSF has 25 members working here.

Military sources said the MSF vehicle had strayed about three miles off their authorised route at the time of the attack and that its markings were not observed by Air Force helicopter pilots. The helicopter had also come under fire.

MSF had got permission to move to Colombo and had been asked to follow a certain route, they said.

The incident took place in an area where a curfew had been declared to assist military operations against the Tamil Tigers, they added.

They said the Army had received intelligence reports that the Tigers were transporting ammunition and reinforcements in vehicles to the battle area.

They said helicopter pilots had noticed two vehicles in the area where the Tiger movement was suspected and had opened fire damaging both vehicles.

The sources said the helicopter had come under fire from one of the vehicles.

Meanwhile a BBC news report yesterday evening said "French medical relief workers were injured in Sri Lanka when the vehicle in which they travelled came under attack from the Sri Lanka Air Force in the town of Vavuniya, which Sri Lanka government forces are defending against the Tamil Tiger guerrillas.

"International relief organisations in Sri Lanka regularly cross the military lines to take supplies and other forms of assistance to thousands of refugees to the war-zone. The French team was returning from a refugee camp in a church when their vehicle which was armed with Red Cross

flags came under fire. The MSS is not releasing any of the details as yet.

But it said four members of the team were wounded by helicopter fire and shrapnel from bombs dropped by planes.

The MSS refuted an account of the attack by a state-run newspaper this morning, which said that the helicopter had been fired upon by another vehicle in the vicinity. They said there were no other vehicles in the area and that no shooting took place before the attack.

The team was transferred to Colombo.

According to hospital sources one of the four, a nurse had to undergo emergency surgery, but is now out of danger. The vehicle was travelling to an area which was under military curfew, but the organisation had received permission to travel from the military authorities in Colombo.

EDA - DEH

DAILY NEWS 6.05.1991

Injured MSF workers to be flown to Paris

COLOMBO, Sunday (Reuter) - Officials of a Paris-based medical charity are due in Sri Lanka on Sunday for talks with the government on the future of their work, after four members were injured in an airforce bomb attack, a spokeswoman said.

Dr. Anne Vincent, medical coordinator in Sri Lanka of Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), said the shooting incident was a "very, very serious matter"

and prompted the charity to suspend the work of its mobile clinics in the north and east.

"Our officials arriving today will be making a formal complaint to the government," she told Reuters.

The four workers - a French doctor and nurse, an Irish nurse and a Lankan driver - were wounded by helicopter gunfire and shrapnel from a bomb dropped by a plane on Friday, an MSF statement said.

The statement said the incident occurred while the clearly-marked MSF vehicle was travelling east from Madhu church in north-western Mannar district, to Vavuniya.

The four were treated at a hospital in Colombo. The French nurse and the driver needed surgery on bad leg wounds. "they are out of danger," Dr. Vincent said.

She said the three foreigners would be flown to Paris on Sunday night and re-admitted to hospital.

A military officer in Colombo said the team was shot at after driving into an area where a military operation was underway.

Other military sources in Vavuniya said another vehicle, carrying Tamil rebel fighters and travelling behind the MSF vehicle, had shot at the helicopter.

(Contd on page 10)



Injured MSF...

(Contd from page 1)

MSF denied the report. "...no other vehicles were in the vicinity at the time of the incident and no shooting had taken place before the MSF vehicle came under fire," it said.

MSF said it had permission from Colombo military authorities to travel from Madhu to Vavuniya on May 3.

The charity has had a presence in Sri Lanka since 1986, and since last June has been providing medical facilities to refugee camps in the north and east.

Dr. Vincent said the Lankan incident was the third attack on MSF workers in the organisation's 20-year history.

She said four workers were killed when an MSF plane was shot down by government troops in Sudan in 1989 and a logistics officer was killed in Afghanistan last year, by unknown gunmen.

About 30 rebels were believed killed and 20 wounded in an army offensive launched in Vavuniya on Thursday.

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MSF incident probe

The government has decided to appoint a one-man Commission of Inquiry to investigate the incident in Vavuniya on May 3, in which four workers of Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) were wounded allegedly by helicopter gunfire and shrapnel.

The following is the text of the official release:

Consequent on a formal complaint made to the Government by Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) that four of their workers - A French doctor, 2 nurses and a Sri Lankan driver were wounded by helicopter gunfire and shrapnel near Vavuniya on Friday May 3, the Government has decided to appoint a one man Commission of Inquiry to investigate the incident and to make recommendations regarding procedures which need to be followed to prevent a recurrence of such incidents.

In their complaint to the Government, MSF representatives have stated that the vehicle in which the four persons were travelling was on a journey from Madhu to Vavuniya and that permission had been obtained from JOC, Colombo for the vehicle to proceed on a prescribed route and within a specific time period on May 3. The aerial attack had caused the destruction of the vehicle and serious injuries to their personnel, three of whom had been evacuated to France. They had consequently suspended all mobile operations as from May 3.

The MSF have claimed that the vehicle was clearly marked with a Red Cross sign on top of the vehicle and with their logo. It also had white flags on it and a flashing amber beacon.

The security forces state that the incident occurred at a time when the army was engaging in operations against the LTTE in the area with aerial support. A helicopter engaged in the process had observed the vehicle moving towards the Kokkuveliya junction on the main Vavuniya-Jaffna highway. On an appraisal of the ground situation, the helicopter pilot had been requested to take on the vehicle which appeared to be unauthorized in the battle zone. The security forces maintain that the vehicle was in an area under curfew about one mile west of the main road and therefore well in sight of the battle field in an area hostile to the ground forces.

Since it is likely that this regrettable incident affecting French nationals of a Non-Governmental Organization rendering humanitarian services in the North and East could have occurred as a result of a gap in communication between the MSF and the JOC, the Government deems it necessary that a high-level inquiry be conducted to ascertain the facts of the case and make recommendations to Government regarding the steps that should be taken to prevent the recurrence of any such or similar incidents.

It is expected that the Report of the Commission will be made available to His Excellency the President within a period of 10 days. In the meantime, Government has expressed its profound regret to the MSF and to the Government of France for the injury caused to the French nationals by this unfortunate incident. MSF which has been active in Sri Lanka since November, 1986 has been assisting the Government of Sri Lanka in providing medical and surgical services in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Rehabilitation in the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

Commissioner to probe attack on MSF team

The government has decided to appoint a one-man Commission of Inquiry to investigate the incident in Vavuniya on May 3, in which four workers of Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) were wounded allegedly by helicopter gunfire and shrapnel.

An official release said the report of the Commission will be made available to the President within 10 days.

Meanwhile, the government has expressed its profound regret to the MSF and to the Government of France for the injury caused to the French nationals by this unfortunate incident. (See text of the official release on page 14).



EDA - DEH

THE ISLAND 8.05.1991

French medical team shooting incident to be discussed

(by Rohan Gunasekera)

A delegation from Medecin Sans Frontiere (MSF), the Paris-based international volunteer relief organisation is to hold talks with the government today about last Friday's incident in Vavuniya in which four MSF members were wounded in an air attack.

Dr. Anne Vincent, the medical co-

ordinator of MSF here, said the team will be headed by Dr. Olizier Roulear who has come from Paris to gather information about the incident. Dr. Roulear is in charge of MSF's programme in Sri Lanka.

She said they hoped to hold talks with the Ministers of Health, Rehabilitation and Plan Implementation with whom MSF has signed

an agreement to work here.

MSF also hoped to have meetings at "the highest levels" of government later on, she added.

She said MSF has stopped their mobile clinics which catered to about 1,500 people daily, since last Friday's air attack on the MSF vehicle.

They had discussed

the incident with Air Force officials, she added.

She said they were continuing their work in hospital but had suspended their mobile clinics because of security problems until they were sure of the kind of security they could get.

Four MSF workers — a French doctor and nurse, an Irish nurse

and a Sri Lankan driver — were wounded by helicopter gunfire and shrapnel from a bomb dropped by a plane last Friday.

The Air Force said the helicopter was fired upon by Tigers travelling in another vehicle behind the MSF vehicle, but this was denied by the relief organisation.

EDA - DEH

THE ISLAND

9.05.1991



Govt. to probe helicopter attack on MSF

The Government announced yesterday that it would appoint a one man Commission to investigate the helicopter attack near Vavuniya May 3 which wounded four workers of the *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF).

MSF representatives complained to the government on Wednesday

that a French doctor, two nurses and a Sri Lankan driver were wounded by helicopter gunfire and shrapnel in the incident last Friday.

The President's office in a statement said the government had expressed "its profound regret" to MSF and to the French government for what it described as

an unfortunate incident.

MSF representatives arrived in Colombo from Paris on Wednesday and made an official complaint about the incident which occurred in the north where Tamil rebels seeking a separate homeland are fighting security forces.

The three foreign workers were flown to

Paris for medical treatment.

The MSF consequently suspended work of its mobile clinics in the north and east where guerrillas of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam are fighting for an independent state for the minority Tamil community.

The MSF said the

four were travelling from Madu to Vavuniya on a route with the permission of Sri Lankan military authorities.

It said the vehicle was clearly marked with a red cross and the MSF logo, had white flags and a flashing amber beacon.