

Unsung heroes deserve a Nobel Prize

Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite, felt so guilt-ridden about his discovery that he endowed an annual prize for the promotion of peace. Originally intended to be impartial and humanitarian, the Nobel awards have been criticized in recent years as being overly influenced by the political left. Last year's choice of South African Bishop Desmond Tutu, for example, was viewed by some as an anti-apartheid propaganda ploy.

This year, by contrast, there is a nominee for the Nobel Prize that is truly worthy of international acclaim and our support here in Canada. The group is called "Medicins sans Frontieres" (Doctors Without Borders).

The Paris-based group was founded in 1971 by a group of physicians who had worked as volunteers in Biafra during the Nigerian civil war of the 1960s. It was dedicated to bringing medical aid to civilians in nations afflicted by war, famine or natural disasters — no matter what the politics of the victims.

Because of its small size and members ready to travel on a few hour's notice, MSF was able to send emergency teams into troubled areas much faster than larger international organizations. These medical "commando" teams were often able to penetrate war zones that were off limits to more conventional groups.

Today, MSF's most important deployment is in Afghanistan. There, high in the war-ravaged mountains, 22 MSF doctors and nurses are serving in six field hospitals. They, and their vital supplies, have to come in to Afghanistan by a long, dangerous trek from northern Pakistan.



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These courageous men and women have braved disease, cold, hunger and Soviet attacks to bring desperately needed medical attention to the Afghans whose terrible suffering is little known in the West. Short of medical supplies, working around the clock by the light of kerosene lanterns and flashlights, the French physicians try to treat Afghan children who have had feet and hands blown off by Soviet mines disguised as toys.

They give emergency aid to Afghan freedom fighters burned by napalm or cut open by shrapnel from cluster bombs. And they minister to women and children wounded by the widening Soviet terror bombing campaign that is designed to denude the countryside of people.

MSF, and a smaller number of volunteers from another French organization, "Aide Medicale Internationale" that has teams of two and threes operating in the Afghan mountains, are virtually the only source of medical help for four million Afghans living in guerrilla-controlled areas. Their scant supplies of drugs must be rationed and used on only the most seriously ill or wounded.

The MSF and AMI field hospitals have been tar-

geted for frequent attack by Soviet helicopter gunships and bombers. The Russians have long tried to close Afghanistan to any Western observers. Attacks on these doctors and nurses have enraged French public opinion against the Soviets.

Afghanistan may be the finest endeavor of MSF but it is not the only one. Volunteer medical teams are serving in such places as Sudan, Ethiopia — and its rebellious province of Tigre — Kurdistan on the Iran-Iraq border, Lebanon and Chad.

MSF teams aid both sides in the Nicaraguan war zone and help the Miskito Indians along the Caribbean coast. In Mozambique they are helping famine victims; in Zaire they care for refugees from Uganda. In Malaysia they treat Vietnamese boat people; in Pakistan they help some of the three million Afghan refugees crowded into disease-ridden frontier camps.

In short, *Medicins sans Frontieres* is precisely the type of group that deserves our support. It helps people without fanfare, without ideology and with an efficiency unknown to our own government-run aid programs.

I will be sending a letter to the Norwegian Nobel Committee, Drammensveien 19, Oslo 2, Norway, urging that MSF be given this year's Nobel Prize. Anyone sharing my feelings may also write the committee in support of this most worthy of causes.

Beyond this small gesture, we should take an example from the French nurses and doctors of MSF. Something has to be done for the millions of Afghans. Canada, that self-proclaimed humanitarian beacon, should stop whispering and start acting.