

Port-au-Prince / New York, 30 March 2010 – While the majority of the Haitian population is still extremely vulnerable, the UN donor conference to be held in New York on 31 March must not take measures that would limit the access to health care of the population, says international medical organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF).

Since the earthquake of 12 January nearly all public and many private medical structures have offered free of charge health care. Meanwhile plans have been disclosed to progressively reinstate hospital fees as early as mid April.

“Making access to health care contingent upon someone’s financial means would totally ignore the reality that we see in the streets and makeshift camps in Haiti,” says MSF emergency coordinator Karline Kleijer. “Hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced and live in rickety huts made of plastic sheeting, tents or ruined houses, with one latrine for a few hundred people on average. Shelter, hygiene, water and medical care remain a priority need. Short term humanitarian needs remain huge and unmet, and the arrival of the rainy and hurricane seasons threatens to cause further deterioration of the present living conditions. We have already seen large parts of camps collapsing during the recent rains. The collapse or flooding of shelters and tents could force many of the displaced to move again.”

Respiratory infections and diarrheal diseases are today the two main diseases that MSF treats. Earthquake victims continue to need post-operative and rehabilitative care, physiotherapy as well as psychological counseling. In addition, the population at large needs obstetric, pediatric, and trauma care.

“Haitians must have access to an efficient health system,” declares Dr. Christophe Fournier, MSF international president. “Necessary financial resources for the health structures to function can not be drawn from the extremely precarious population.”

International aid must consider a direct financial support to the health system in Haïti. Decisions at the New York conference need to allow the Haitian health system to continue to address the population’s immediate medical needs.

MSF has been assisting Haitian communities since 19 years. Today, some 3,300 Haitian and international MSF staff are supporting government hospitals and run facilities on its own. Since the earthquake, MSF teams have performed more than 4,000 surgeries, provided psychological counseling to over 20,000 people, and treated 53,000 patients. MSF has distributed 14,000 tents and close to 20,000 non-food item kits (including kitchen and hygiene kits, jerry cans, blankets and plastic sheeting). MSF is funding its activities in Haiti exclusively with private donations and is therefore no stakeholder in the donor conference in New York.